

Phenomenology of the Encounter

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To have an originary experience of another human being is to have an encounter.¹ Long before it was taken up by philosophy, the mystery of the encounter with another was explored through art. In classical drama, whether Greek or European, encounters and the sequences of events resulting from them constituted the basic building blocks of narration; without them, drama seemed simply impossible. The bulk of classical European novels also focuses on encounters as events that form the foundation of the plot. To mention but a few, Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky come to mind, as well as Prus, Żeromski, and Dąbrowska² here in Poland.

¹ This is a fragment of a greater whole entitled *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man]. The section preceding the present text was published in *Analecta Cracoviensia*, 8 (1977) under the title “Przestrzeń międzyludzka” [Interpersonal Space].

² Bolesław Prus — the leading Polish late 19th century writer; between 1884 and 1895 he completed four major novels

40 Up until quite recently,³ artists seemed convinced that there was nothing that could reveal the truth about man as deeply and explicitly as the event of people meeting and its dramatic consequences.

This fact should be borne in mind as one looks at contemporary literature and finds quite contradictory testimonials on the subject. Pieces are written where people do admittedly interact, talk with each other, and observe each others' behavior, but in fact never truly meet. Real encounters are not to be found in the writings of Kafka, Beckett, Frisch, Sartre, and a number of other authors. The characters' actions are governed by a logic of structures that are external to their will and their reason. The heroes of these dramas march on from person to person, from one situation to the next, simply monologuing in pairs and continually missing their chance for an honest encounter. Yet, simultaneously, such an encounter becomes the focus of their longing — a longing doomed from the outset.

At about the same time, the problematic of encounter turns into one of philosophy's basic issues. It is taken up by many: Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger, Lévinas — to name only the most familiar. The experience of the encounter unveils that lost wellspring which gives rise to our experiences of the objective world and of God. Husserl's old catchphrase of "back to things themselves" is recast into "back to other human beings."

To encounter — what does it actually mean?

To encounter is always to be "face to face" with someone. Encounters enable us to gain an intuition (*Anschauung*) of another human being's face. But what, then, is a face? A face reveals a truth about the other. It tells us what the other is like. A face is not equivalent to the other's appearance, and it is not the same as a veil or a mask. Objects and bodies of animals and people are given to us through their appearances, but the appearance of a human being does not reveal who that human being is. Nor is the face a mask: a mask only aims to create an illusion of a face. And it is not a veil: a veil only covers the face. Masks and veils cannot tell us who a human being is. Only a face can tell us that. Thus the basic task of the phenomenology of the encounter is to present a phenomenology of the face.

We must shed light on the mystery of the encounter from two different perspectives — the essence of the face on the one hand, and the essence of the experience of the face on the other. Two questions are important: What is a face? And how do we experience a person's face? These are in fact inseparable, since the only way to come to an understanding of a face is to experience it. Any theory of the face "in itself," detached from the ways in which a face is experienced, is in danger of hovering

on "the great questions of our age": *The Outpost*, *The Doll*, *The New Women* and his one historical novel, *Pharaoh*. Stefan Żeromski — Prus's younger colleague, who was tied to the Young Poland movement, was sometimes called the "conscience of Polish literature." His novels include *The Spring to Come* (1925), *The Labors of Sisyphus* (1897), and *The Ashes* (published in 1902, notably filmed by Andrzej Wajda in 1965). Maria Dąbrowska — one of the most talented Polish novelists of the 20th century, best remembered for her tetralogy *Days and Nights* (1932–1934) (Translator's note).

³ It ought to be noted that this text was first published in 1978 (Translator's note).

in a vacuum. But taking into account the number of issues that need to be discussed here, it will make our presentation more lucid if essence and experience are considered separately. So let us now focus entirely on the issue of essence, saving the question of experience for later. 41

What is a face? The answer to this question, as we shall soon see, cannot be formulated in a definition. The face escapes definition. Nonetheless, it is possible to provide a description to direct us toward “seeing” the face, or “reading” it. This kind of description is rather peculiar: it presents less what exists than *where* it exists, where it comes from, where it is to be found. So the face is not “the essence,” but “essencing” — it is the “place” where the truth of another human being unfolds. The face is a certain liveliness centered around a truth. To avoid distorting this movement through description, we often have to resort to the language of metaphors and symbols — we have to point more than to define. Emmanuel Lévinas, who has recently focused on the “epiphany of the face,” often discards the existential “is” in favor of the demonstrative “here is” (*voici*). Because it is not certain that the face “is”; what is certain is that there is a human being, and the face is only an elusive glimmer of light in which his existence shines for us.

The plan of this analysis is as follows: first, we will discuss the essence of the encounter, while also explaining the meaning of certain crucial terms; next, we will describe the face by comparing it to the veil (of shame) and the mask; and finally we will attempt to “see” or “read” the face.

The Encounter as Opening a Horizon

An encounter with another human being is, in the deepest sense of the word, an event. It is through this event that the experience of another and the thus mediated experience of oneself reach the highest peak of intuition. It is also here that the power of persuasion inherent to experience is at its highest. Starting from the moment of encounter everything in a person’s life seems to start anew. The encounter marks a breach in the space of being with another.⁴ The encountered other does not fit into any of the basic planes of interaction: he appears neither as a partner-collaborator presented by the utilitarian structures of the surrounding world, nor as an opponent to be fought; neither as my master, nor as my subject. The one I encounter is *different*. “What he then saw was like an apparition” — thus Flaubert describes Frederick’s first meeting with Madame Arnoux.⁵ Even when the other is awaited and familiar, his difference takes us by surprise. “Kitty was standing talking to a lady at the opposite end of the ground. There was apparently nothing striking either in her dress or her attitude. But for Levin she was as easy to find in that crowd as a rose among nettles. Everything was made bright by her. She was

⁴ See “Przestrzeń międzyludzka,” *Analecta Cracoviensia*, vol. 8 (1977).

⁵ In Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*.

42 the smile that shed light on all round her” (Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*). In encountering another we feel that we are searching for a new, different plane of being. We will have to start everything anew. Old gestures and old words will have to take on new meanings. Even more: my entire way of being becomes problematic.

Every experience, whether of things or of oneself, is marked by its own power of persuasion. This is what more or less clearly delineates the limits of possible doubt. In this respect, the encounter with another cannot be compared to anything else. The other we encounter persuades like no object can persuade. The other *is*. The other comes and leaves, the other talks and looks, the other obliges. This persuasion might be verbal or non-verbal. In some situations non-verbal persuasion might be even more piercing and binding than its verbal mode. Antoni Kępiński⁶ stresses that the most important cognitive evaluations of another human being are generated in the initial phase of the “information metabolism,” when contact with the other is limited to non-verbal communication. It is in this phase that the decision is made to draw closer or to withdraw—that “yes” or “no” directed to the other that is the key to the future of our relationship.⁷ An apt illustration of this concept is provided by Tolstoy in some of his descriptions of encounters. That which is crucial to the fate of the characters occurs in silence; people understand each other without words, and even when there is dialogue, it does not touch the heart of the matter. All that Frederick hears during his meeting with Madame Arnoux (Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*) is “Thanks, Monsieur,” yet it is from this moment that their drama begins. The encountered other is in some respects like the Kantian thing-in-itself — he is transcendent, existing radically and inscrutably beyond me. But at the same time he is someone who is not a thing-in-itself — he is close to me, somehow related to me, alien and yet familiar at the same time. I cannot doubt that he exists: I lose my self-confidence all too soon.

An encounter is always “face to face.” It is in the encounter, and only in the encounter, that the face becomes perceptible. Its perceptibility, however, like the perceptibility of anything else, is given to us within a particular horizon which illuminates and lets us “see” the face. This horizon within which the face is experienced and the face itself are in fact inseparable. Admittedly, during an encounter our attention is focused on the face, but without the surrounding background of the horizon, seeing it would be impossible. The encountered other is *different*, because the horizon that makes the experience of the other possible is *different* — as compared to the things around us, animals, our own emotions and experiences, even

⁶ Antoni Kępiński (1918–1972), a prolific Polish psychiatrist and one of Tischner’s favorite sources. Best remembered for his theories of information metabolism and axiological psychiatry, Kępiński published over 140 papers and several books, including *Schizophrenia*, *Melancholy*, *Fear*, and *Psychopathology of Neuroses* (Translator’s note).

⁷ See *Melancholia* [Melancholy], Warsaw 1974, 182–254. The same subject is addressed by A. Kowal in “Metabolizm informacyjny A. Kępińskiego” [Kępiński’s Information Metabolism], *Znak*, 254 (1975).

the people with whom we make only superficial contact. What marks the difference between these horizons? 43

The difference becomes palpable when we realize that the presence of another's face demands that I also make my own face present to him. Looking at a tree I do not need to show my face; if I want to see it better, I simply walk up to the tree, walk around it. The same occurs when I come across a dog or a horse. Even when, acting as a representative for a certain cause, I have contact with another such representative of a related cause, I do not really need to reveal my face. But when the other shows his face to me, I must respond: either reveal who I am, or hide myself, put on a mask — I have to do *something* with my face. When Jesus reveals his face to Pilate, Pilate does the same. The horizon of encounter is not only a horizon for encountering another, it is also a horizon for encountering oneself.

What is this horizon of experience? It is, above all, a horizon of certain projected possibilities. It delineates the limits within which the appearances of a given object, or even a theme, still remain the appearances of the same object, of the same theme, despite changeability and variety. But as Edmund Husserl showed in his analysis of external experience,⁸ the horizon is not only a space of possibilities; it also sets the norm for the ways an object may appear. It determines what may appear as a manifestation of a certain object, as well as what cannot be considered such a manifestation. The data of experience at once fulfill the projected possibilities and open up new ones. Through this fulfillment we know what the object is like in its aspect we experience, and thanks to the opening up we know what the object is or might be like in its aspect that is not experienced. The horizon of projections ideally separates the possible from the impossible, excludes those sequences of manifestations which “do not belong to the object,” and accounts for those that do belong. The idea of a horizon is also applicable to the experience of another human being. But this horizon of encounter is quite different: its content is different, the logic that holds this content together is different, and, most significantly, my attitude toward reading that content must be different. After all, to encounter another is also to encounter oneself in a new way.

How else does the horizon of an encounter differ from the horizon of the experience of things?

The horizon of an encounter is the horizon of a possible drama, of a dramatic sequence of events, taking place in a dramatic time and a dramatic space. What is drama? To pin down the essence of the dramatic we must refer back to certain fundamental concepts which have retained their basic sense despite the different meanings attached to them throughout the centuries. A drama is a logical sequence of events at the end of which lies the possibility of either tragedy or victory. Something is always happening in a drama, it has to be happening: words happen, events happen, life goes by. The logical space of the drama includes two extremes: final

⁸ See especially “Analysen zur passiven Synthesis,” herausg. M. Fleischer, *Husserliana* Bd XI, den Haag, 1966.

44 victory and final defeat. It is within this space that human life takes its course. This does not mean that one or the other extreme must necessarily find its fulfillment in the drama. Often, as in Beckett's and sometimes even Wyspiański's⁹ writings, neither actually happens. All this means is that victory and defeat are the possibilities among which life happens. Literary drama is not always a depiction of real-life drama.¹⁰ But what, in fact, is victory, and what is defeat? Whatever they are, in a victory we always find the strengthening of some good, and its destruction in a defeat. In describing the essence of human drama we cannot do without the concepts of good and evil. We use them even when we cannot clearly tell what they mean.

While encountering another within the horizon, which at once makes this encounter possible and is the first thing to emerge from it, we know that this encountered other and I find ourselves in a space where something is better and something is worse, where something is good and something else is bad. This space is not the ordinary space of Euclidean geometry, but a hierarchical space. The good is called "agathon" in Greek; "logos" is what is rational and wise. Let us then say that an encounter is an opening up of the agathological horizon of interpersonal experience. The agathological horizon is where all the manifestations of the other and of myself are ruled by a certain logos — the logos of good and evil, of what is better and what is worse, of rises and falls, victory and defeat, salvation and damnation. How does it work? When I first encounter another, I do not yet have the answer to this question. Yet I do know that whenever there is an encounter, something like this comes into play.

Drama opens up the possibility of tragedy. The essence of tragedy consists in the victory of evil over good. If we probe the essence of tragedy, we might come closer to understanding the nature of evil. As Heidegger reminds us,¹¹ the drive toward self-annihilation originates in the very nature of evil. To destroy evil would be to mete justice to that evil. But this is not what happens in a tragedy: the tragic weave of events is characterized by evil being triumphant instead of being destroyed. Prometheus is punished for his deed of mercy; King Oedipus falls victim to the fate he is so desperately trying to escape; the Righteous One dies crucified between wrongdoers. A tragedy is the event where goodness proves helpless in

⁹ Stanisław Wyspiański — (1869–1907) a Polish playwright, painter, poet and interior designer. A member of the Young Poland Movement, he wrote a series of highly symbolic national dramas, joining modernism with traditionally Polish themes, including *The Wedding*, *Varsovian Anthem* and *November Night* (Translator's note).

¹⁰ This can easily be seen in the classification of the various dramatic literary genres. For Hegel, for example, the genre which stands opposite tragedy is comedy (while in our understanding it should be the apotheosis of the victorious good — a genre clearly neglected in literature). This same opposition is to be found in modern studies on the topic. See: E. Miodońska-Brookes, A. Kulawik, M. Tatar, *Zarys poetyki* [An Outline of Poetics], Warsaw 1978: pp. 102–114. For Hegel's remarks on drama see his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, pp. 1193–1205.

¹¹ I am alluding to the short but insightful reflections in his "Letter on Humanism." See *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 272–274.

the face of evil. “The tragic” is the term we use for the possibility of tragedy. 45
A drama always carries the germ of the tragic in that it opens up the way
toward tragedy as one of its possibilities. Whoever plays a role in a drama
has a brush with tragedy, participates in the tragic in some way. That is
why the perspective of the tragic forms the inseparable background of any
encounter. This is not to say it ever becomes the focal point.

This is where we must raise an objection against Max Scheler and his understanding of tragedy. First, Scheler notes correctly that, “All that can be called tragic is contained within the realm of values and their relationships. In a universe free of values, such as that constructed by mechanical physics, there are no tragedies. Only where there is high and low, nobleman and peasant, is there anything like a tragic event.”¹² Scheler’s remark acknowledges the difference between the two horizons: within the horizon of things there is no possibility of tragedy, it is to be found only within the horizon of values, human values. But when he tries to capture the very essence of the tragic, he seems to go too far in narrowing the scope of this term. Scheler writes, “The tragic is apparent only where the strength to destroy a higher positive value proceeds from an object possessing this positive value. The manifestation is, moreover, purest and clearest where objects of equally high value appear to undermine and ruin each other. Those tragedies most effectively portray the tragic phenomenon in which, not only is ever one in the right, but where each person and power in the struggle presents and equally superior right, or appears to fulfill an equally superior duty.”¹³ Here the essence of the tragic seems to lie in a clash between two goods, two laws, two just causes, as a result of which one of these subjects of goodness is destroyed. Does such a summary truly reflect the essence of tragedy? I do not believe so. The essence of tragedy, even in Scheler’s description, still lies in a clash between good and evil, but this evil seems detached from any subject. Evil is to be found in the very fact that otherwise good people stand up against each other as if they were enemies. What, or who, makes them take such a stance? Fate, blindness, a demon? It is tragic that Prometheus gives people the gift of fire, yet the gods “have to” punish him, because such is Fate; just as it is tragic that Jesus is righteous, and Pilate knows it, and yet he “has to” wash his hands. Before one good opposes another good, evil must force its way into one or the other, and the moment of this invasion constitutes the tragic, the very foundation of tragedy.

Many different kinds of tragedy are possible, but they can all be traced back to two basic ones: impotence and ignorance. The tragedy of Prometheus chained to the rock is a tragedy of impotence — the tragedy of a freedom in fetters. For Prometheus there are no secrets, there is no darkness: he suffers in broad daylight, perhaps even in an excess of light. He knows the why, and he knows that for him there is no escape. With

¹² M. Scheler, “On the Tragic,” trans. B. Stambler, *Cross Current* 4 (1954). Reprinted in: *Tragedy: Vision and Form*. ed. R.W. Corrigan, Harper & Row, San Francisco 1981, p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*

46 Oedipus, things are different. His tragedy turns out to be caused a lack of knowledge. Oedipus is strong enough to escape his destiny, but since he is surrounded on all sides by illusions, he ultimately falls victim to fate. Some tragedies combine the element of impotence with the element of ignorance, sometimes leading to a situation where knowledge itself becomes the main source of defeat. The wise man may die from an excess of truth. Nonetheless, these and other types of tragedy are derivative, as they are built upon specific concepts of good and evil, man, and human fate. But an encounter does not require these concepts. All that is needed for an encounter is the discovery, made “in the blink of an eye,”¹⁴ that somewhere in the background, behind my back and the back of the other, there lurks the possibility of a more or less shared tragedy.

Yet the possibility of tragedy goes hand in hand with the possibility of triumph. In opening one, the drama also opens up the other. Triumph is the victory of goodness over whatever pits itself against it. The idea of triumph reveals something of the “nature of the good.” Thus the good is that which by its very nature strives to come into being. To allow a good to be is to do it justice. A good that comes into being despite the opposition of evil is a heroic good. As Hegel aptly notes, “The general background of a tragic action is provided in a tragedy, as it was in epic, by that world-situation which I have previously called the ‘heroic’ age.”¹⁵ The triumph of good over evil can take many shapes: it might be the triumph of strength, proving the indestructibility of the good; it might be the triumph of truth, proving that all illusions have their limits. The highest ideal would be a synthesis of these, when the good proves to be both indestructible and evident. *Bonum, verum, ens convertuntur*. This, however, should be understood only as an ideal which, at the moment of encounter, proves problematic.

I have mentioned above that an encounter with another is an encounter with that which is truly beyond me. The other is simply a transcendental. The other forces me into a situation where even ignoring him is a form of acknowledging that he exists. At the same time, the presence of another is the presence of the intuition of existence. Yet the existence that the other carries with him is not a “neutral” existence or a “pure” existence, it is not perfection manifesting its essence. In other words, this existence is problematized by the irremovable prospect of tragedy. This existence cannot be separated from the evil which threatens it, from the suffering with which it threatens others, or from the good it has to fight for and which it has to demand of others — even without being sure what the one and the other consist in. The existence of another is a continual event. However, it is not time that is the key issue here, but that toward which time is running. In encountering such an existence in another, I know one thing: *this existence is not what it should be*. This is my first

¹⁴ A term (*Augenblick*) used by Karl Jaspers, among others.

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, p. 1208.

and most fundamental encounter with existence; I find that “true life is absent.” The horizon within which the other’s existence appears to us makes this existence both contestable and contested. But this is true not only of the other’s existence, but of my own as well — after all, the horizon of the encounter is a horizon we share. 47

Prometheus suffers chained to a rock, left as easy prey to the vulture, condemned to be eternally dying, with no hope of actual death. The myth of Prometheus, as we have been reminded recently by Paul Ricoeur, is a proposed interpretation of every human existence. Why is human life like this? What is the punishment for? What is the source of our guilt? Oedipus is running away from fate, and yet he still becomes its victim. This can be a means of understanding every human life. We ask Why? What for? It was said about Judas, “better for that man if he had never been born.” What this means is that human existence, placed within the agathological horizon, reveals its radically problematic nature.

In Plato’s *Republic* we find a symbolic description of the human condition inside a cave. There man has been deprived of his freedom and his ability to truthfully assess the world. Thomistic ontology proposes a theory of the contingency of all encountered being, according to which the very essence of being, differing significantly from existence, forms the basis of the finitude, imperfection and accidentality of beings. Pascal develops the idea of man trapped between two infinities, infinite minuteness and infinite immensity, and yet unable to comprehend either. I believe all these theories can be seen as re-interpretations of the experience of encounter. They are poetic, ontological and mathematical conceptualizations of the basic situation of human existence, which is nowhere as clearly set forth as in the encounter. They not only describe, but are the first step toward elucidation. They reveal what is, reveal it in relation to some measure. This measure of being can be either full freedom, full clarity, a pure act of being, or infinity. But before reaching the measure, we have to locate measurability. In this context, we ask, “How is this possible?” And this is what happens in every encounter.

At present we are not analyzing the means of experiencing another human being; we want to concentrate on the very “content” of the experience. Yet there is one issue that cannot be overlooked. As we discover through the encounter that “the true life is absent,” we are struck dumb with amazement. This is not admiration. Admiration is the joy of seeing goodness, beauty, and truth that have emerged triumphant. But nor is it the opposite of admiration; it is not the indignation of seeing evil triumphant. The one we encounter at the heart of the agathological horizon in neither the victorious good, nor the victorious evil. It is someone in whom the good has been exposed to the workings of evil. This is where our stupefaction comes from. And out of this amazement the question is born: How is this possible? How is it possible that Prometheus suffers because of a good deed; that Oedipus, in running away from destiny, still becomes its victim; that Judas betrays and the Righteous One has to die

48 on the cross? In such questions, rebellion is mixed with acceptance. We rebel against leaving the good at the mercy of evil, and accept the good despite the evil mixed into it. The question conceived in this context touches the very core of the problem of existence: to be — is it good or evil? Existence is a category which can combine goodness and evil. And so is it better to be, or not to be? “The existence of a negative value is itself a negative value,” Scheler would say. Is existence capable of eliminating this negation? The encounter becomes the source of the deepest metaphysical and ontological questions.

According to Lévinas, the true horizon of the encounter is the *ethical* horizon: “We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics.”¹⁶ But an ambiguity lurks in the concept of ethics. Usually ethics is understood as a certain *praxis* of man with man — one or more. Ethics is at once a wisdom and an art guiding one’s actions, one’s way of being, one’s interactions with others; readying reprimands and praise. In some cases it takes the form of a system, in others that of an aphorism, a morality play, or a confession. But the agathological horizon is more fundamental than any planned actions. It is a horizon of light rather than power. In encountering another, I do not yet know what I should or should not do, I do not know if I *should* do anything, or if there is anything that *can* be done. All I know is this: things should not *be* this way. And I know this thanks to a growing intuition of good and evil. That is probably what brings ethics to mind. On my part I would prefer to say: not ethics, but simply metaphysics. We shall return to this topic.

Let us then differentiate, and follow this differentiation — the agathological horizon and the axiological perspective within it. The basic function of the agathological is to reveal, to show as problematic. This function resembles that of light, and of silence. It is through the agathological that amazement and questionings become possible, and that the space of possible actions opens up. The agathological is thought-provoking; the axiological reveals paths for action, for seeking, building, and rebuilding. The agathological shows existence itself as a problem. The axiological shows how to salvage the goodness of existence, what can be fulfilled, and what needs to be abandoned. The agathological forces man out of his present rhythm of day and night and into a limit situation, where freedom either rejects or accepts itself, reason does or does not want to be reasonable, conscience renounces or acknowledges itself. The axiological is then the space in which freedom, reason, and conscience function. The dimensions of this space depend on one’s sense of empowerment; at times it is smaller, and at others larger. The agathological contains all of one’s power; it is where one can touch the limits of one’s own humanity.

¹⁶ E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Kluwer Academic Publishers 1991, p. 43.

When we encounter our other, we happen upon his face. What is a face? We have already said that the question thus stated will not find an adequate answer: all we can do is approach the vision of the face by pointing to where it appears. The face emerges not from the axiological, but the agathological horizon. Thus we will now attempt to show the face, which truly reveals to us who our other is — unlike the appearance, emotional expression, veil, or mask. 49

Veil – Mask – Face

The human face reveals the truth of the human being — in other words, an encounter with the face is an encounter with the truth of that human being. The face might seem to be that which is most elusive and impossible to define; yet despite this vagueness, once captured, it serves as the profoundest point of reference in our relation to the other. We cannot understand the other's face; we do not know what to call it but with a proper name. And yet, everything we know of the other we see through the prism of his face, a face somehow captured, or at the very least surmised. It is noteworthy that Lévinas, who has devoted so much attention to “the epiphany of the face,” clearly avoids establishing what the face is. Instead, he prefers to discuss how a face is experienced. “The face is present in its refusal to be contained (*contenu*). In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed.”¹⁷ The French “contenu” can be interpreted in two ways: it can indicate the act of something being contained within certain limits, or the content of those limits itself. For Lévinas the face is “a depth which reaches beyond what we can understand of it;” it is a movement toward infinity. That is why it cannot be comprehended, contained, grasped, or possessed. Yet it seems that despite this, and despite the other meaning of “contenu,” the face is not completely devoid of content. The face is another human being's truth made visible to us. The face speaks, persuades, casts us into unique limit situations.

The fact is that we have no advanced philosophical descriptions of the phenomenon of the face. We can, however, find numerous such descriptions in works of literature. Even though not everyone accepts such testimony as proof, it would seem unwise to reject it *a priori* at this juncture. Let us then turn to literature, less for proof than for examples, for illustrations. In doing so, let us choose texts written at times when people's sensitivity toward the human face and its expression had not yet been dulled by technology.

In the gospel texts there are a number of scenes where “the face of Jesus” is revealed to his disciples and listeners in a convincing manner. This happens, perhaps, when Peter says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and Jesus answers him, “Simon son of Jonah, you are

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 193–194.

50 a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.” The same is true of the transfiguration on the mountain, when Jesus’ face “shone like the sun.” And of his conversation with Pilate — a conversation where both Jesus and Pilate reveal who they are. And finally on the cross, when he says, “forgive them; they know not what they do.” Each of these situations was a revelation of the face. Such instances were many and each was different, but the face they revealed was one and the same. Of all of these, the crucifixion is perhaps the most thought-provoking. In the very design of a crucifixion, regardless of the executioners’ intentions, there seems to be a certain aim tied directly to the human face of the one condemned to death. The aim is not only to kill, or even to cause pain — this death is meant as a spectacle, as part of a well-planned drama. What is this drama about? It is about creating a situation in which the convict publicly “loses his face.” To crucify is to immobilize, to strip a man of his freedom, hope, and strength, and thus to remove all the masks, illusions, veils, revealing the very “depths” of the man. Crucifixion was for the slaves — faceless beings. But even in such a situation the tables could be turned: the crucified Jesus does not lose his face, he reveals it. It is rather those thirsty for spectacle who lose their faces.

The question of the face is significant from the point of view of both the phenomenology of the experience of another and the metaphysics of human existence. Hegel’s and Sartre’s influences in turn have recently popularized the use of the phrase “being-for-itself” to describe a conscious being. At the same time, Sartre’s “being-for-others” is coming into wider use, supposedly revealing the essence of a human being’s attitude toward another human being. Yet these terms need to be viewed with a critical eye, as they seem to verge on contradicting one another: If I am truly a “being-for-itself,” how can I truly be a “being-for-others”? If we assume that the truth of another human being is to be found in the experience of his face, we can expect that this truth will indicate some way of solving the dilemma that arises: Is the person I encounter a “being-for-itself,” or a “being-for-me”? And who am I in relation to him?

In asking about the face, as we have said, we ask where to look for the face. But before this question, there should come another: Where should we *not* look for the face? It is not to be found among veils or masks. But what are these veils, and what are these masks?

The Face and the Veil. The face should not be identified with a veil, but nor should it be identified with a mask. A veil only hides the view, whereas a mask — as we shall soon see — proceeds to introduce illusions, deformations, games. There are many ways to cover or veil one’s face, and one of the most natural and spontaneous is shame. We will try to capture the function of veiling with the example of shame. But in order to better understand the essence of shame, a few words need to be said about the widely-discussed structure of expressive emotions, among which is shame.

Elzenberg¹⁸ thus defines expression: "... for a given observer, it is either a real or illusory disclosure, by means of certain perceptible physical objects (here called 'symptoms' or 'manifestations'), of certain 'contents' or psychological 'objects' belonging to some being actually in possession of a psyche. For example, one's inner energy might be revealed in giving a short, clear command, or a child's happy mood might show itself in her sparkling eyes, squeals, and hops."¹⁹ All expression is marked by intentionality — it is a kind of sign which, by its very nature, points beyond itself. But shame holds a special place among expressions by way of its two-stage intentionality. Firstly, shame becomes visible as such through its primary manifestations: the turning of the head, the blushing, the sudden silence. But at the same time, this shame becomes a veil, which, through its distinct visibility, testifies to the invisibility of something beyond. This something, we can justly say, pertains to the face. The intentionality of shame is quite paradoxical — it is the visibility of the invisibility of something else; a perceptible mystery.

Shame would be impossible without others. In taking into account another's point of view, we must differentiate between emotional expressions characterized by monological and dialogical intentionality. No other is necessary for monological intentions: they are what they are, even when there is no one else. One can experience sadness just as well on one's own as next to another human being; sadness by itself does not engender dialogue. Dialogical emotions, on the other hand, require an other; the very logos of such intentionality demands it. These intentions and the emotions upon which they are based shape interpersonal dialogue even before words do; they connect people by the sheer fact of their existence. Jealousy, feelings of superiority, solicitude (Heidegger's *Fürsorge*), and shame are such emotions. In feeling ashamed, we are ashamed of something *before* someone's presence.

It is well known that the way we experience another through shame is one of the key problems in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. For Sartre, the "being-for-others" that reveals itself in the intentional structure of shame is the foundation of "being-for-itself." In other words: who I am for another determines who I am for myself; the other makes me feel ashamed, and my shame makes me who I am. The other is hell, and hell cannot be escaped. I am sentenced to a loneliness that is the absence of the one I desire and for whom I exist. Let us take a closer look into some aspects of Sartre's thought.

His point of departure is a famous and telling example, the choice of which is not a coincidence but the result of Sartre's conviction that general

¹⁸ Henryk Elzenberg — (1887–1967) an eminent Polish philosopher mainly interested in ethics, aesthetics, axiology and the history of philosophy. Educated in Switzerland and at the Sorbonne, Elzenberg stands in the tradition in the philosophy of values which was initiated by late Stoics and elaborated by Nicolai Hartmann (Translator's note).

¹⁹ "Ekspresja estetyczna i pozaestetyczna" [Aesthetic and Non-aesthetic Expression], in: *Wartość i człowiek, rozprawy z humanistyki i filozofii*. [Values and Man: Theses on the Humanities and Philosophy], Toruń 1966.

52 truths stand behind a particular event. I feel shame before another, because I am caught peeping through a keyhole at someone else.²⁰ The look the other gives me is the direct source of my shame. The look accuses me. The other feels contempt toward me, makes me into an object. And this is when I discover that the other exists. My shame before him is my way of experiencing this other. This scheme is repeated again and again: we are all accusers for one another.

How can we comment on this description? Much has already been said about it, and the influence of Hegel's master/slave relationship has been stressed.²¹ For us, one thing is of crucial importance: Sartre is not describing an encounter, but a moment of parting, and he is not describing the moment of putting on a veil, but the moment when a mask is torn off. Both the parting and the tearing off assume the validity of a certain plane of human interaction, namely, the plane of conflict. Whoever approaches me when I am peeping through the keyhole must be assumed to be an enemy, someone in whom I can suspect contempt. In such a situation the moment of the meeting is, at the same time, a moment of parting ways. Just as there is no encounter between the master and the slave — as this relationship is ruled by the dialectical principle of the unity of opposites — so there is no encounter between the one who feels contempt and the one who is its object. Contempt forms an intransgressible barrier to encounter. At the same time, just as the master is bound to the slave and the slave to the master, so are the watched and the watcher bound to each other. This is how hell is created: it is the place where people are at once closest and furthest away from each other. Closest, because they can be touched. And furthest away, because encounter is impossible.

Let us perhaps try and reverse Sartre's example by adjusting it to the logic of the encounter, as seen by the one who encounters. How will our examination of shame look then?

Seeing another become ashamed on account of my presence, what I learn is this: the other wants to cover or veil himself from my look. What is veiled becomes hidden, invisible, but the gesture itself can still be observed. The other's expression of shame when I appear is a form of dialogue; it is speech with a refusal at its core. Shame here plays the role of a veil. A veil is not the same as a mask: a mask is meant to create a false illusion, whereas the function of shame is simply to hide. Shame holds a clue to something that the other sees as a personal value, but which is so fragile, and perhaps even ambiguous, that a look can destroy it. This hidden value resides somewhere close to the face. It is only when a human being feels that he already has a face that shame can appear; putting on a veil signifies that it is better to hide this value rather than expose it to possible destruction. This makes shame a mark of preference.

²⁰ J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H.E. Barnes (2003). London: Routledge, pp. 260–261.

²¹ Cf. P. Kampits, *Sartre und die Frage nach dem Anderen*, Wien–München 1975.

At the same time, within the feeling of shame lurks a wish to reveal this value, to let it be judged by a friendly eye. The requirement of some greater or lesser recognition is essential to the concept of value. That is why shame is painful — the pain is tied to the need to hide; it actually hurts to keep the value hidden. Thus shame reveals the misfortune of those desires whose validity remains unquestionable for the desiring human, but which another can easily put into question. Shame is at once a refusal and a request. “Please acknowledge the value of what I am not showing,” it asks. The essence of this refusal/request is reflected in the expressions “through the fault of” and “thanks to.” Shame is always through the fault of the one who is looking. Yet he can always win the gratitude of the one looked at: thanks to his respect for the shame he encounters, the one being looked at begins to have faith in people. Shame serves as a reminder that my knowing another ought to be preceded by my accepting his value.

The phenomenon of shame draws our attention to the one who feels ashamed, and then to the subject of shame. What is this subject? Being ashamed, the shamed one is concerned with a value. This makes shame possible only in a human environment. A subject that is concerned with values is the axiological Self of which I have spoken elsewhere.²² This Self does not transcend the world, but is deeply rooted in it. This Self, a personal Self, as the subject of all the experiences of values in the world, is also a value in itself. And this value is the subject of shame — a personal value existent in the world, a more or less defined sort of human dignity.

What, then, is the difference between a veil and a face? It is not a “quantitative,” but a “qualitative” difference. Namely, it is a difference between the planes on which the two phenomena manifest themselves: the veil makes sense only on an axiological level; the face, on the other hand, reaches the level of agathology. Yet the veil does hold the potential to pass from one sphere to the other: by reading shame, I can enter the horizon of the face. Let us investigate further.

The veil belongs in the sphere of action and its economics in their widest definition; the face takes no part in such matters. The veil signifies an attempt to escape a situation from which there is no exit; the face does not try to escape. The veil is something a human being *has*, while the face is something a human being *is*. This makes it possible to differentiate between another’s “having” and another’s “being.” This last detail is particularly noteworthy. Dialogical emotions are something we “own,” but at the same time, they also “own” us. When we “own” a given dialogical emotion, we also in some way “own” the person who inspires this emotion in us. It is this dialogical aspect of human beings that allows them to belong to another, to own and be owned, to abandon and be abandoned. Within the agathological horizon there is no relation of ownership. We are on the plane of existence. The other is. And his existence is

²² *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* [The World of Human Hope], Krakow 1975, pp. 162–182.

54 problematic — the true life is absent. How is this possible? Nothing more, but nothing less.

At the same time, as we have already said, the veil offers a chance to pass from the axiological to the agathological sphere. This chance is to be found in the experience of the other's freedom.

The first freedom ever experienced is the freedom of another. The veil is a manifestation of this freedom. The other can do this or that, in one way or another, and in the light of what the other can do and how, I can as well. But *can* is an ambiguous verb: it can function both in terms of axiology and of agathology. In terms of axiology it means "you can this way, or that way." But at the junction of axiology and agathology it means "you cannot, you are forbidden, you are put into question." This is where Sartre's description seems particularly accurate: "It is for and by means of a freedom and only for and by means of it that my possibles can be limited and fixed. A material obstacle can not fix my possibilities; it is only the occasion for my projecting myself toward other possibles and can not confer upon them an *outside*. To remain at home because it is raining and to remain at home because one has been forbidden to go out are by no means the same thing. In the first case I myself determine to stay inside in consideration of the consequences of my acts; I surpass the obstacle 'rain' toward myself and I make an instrument of it. In the second case it is my very possibilities of going out or staying inside which are presented to me as surpassed and fixed and which a freedom simultaneously foresees and prevents. (...) Thus in the look the death of my possibilities causes me to experience the Other's freedom. This death is realized only at the heart of that freedom; I am inaccessible to myself and yet myself, thrown, abandoned at the heart of the Other's freedom."²³ Here the other's freedom is experienced as plunging me into helplessness. At the same time, it reveals that the other exists *in relation to me*, but not *for me*. I cannot own him, I cannot comprehend him. I am thrown off the familiar plane of relations with others, where I somehow "had" them and they "had" me, where we understood each other. I cannot *have* their faces, just as the gods could not *have* the face of Prometheus, or Jesus' enemies could not *have* his face. What, then, can I do? I can — if I know how to read — experience painful amazement, a metaphysical awakening, and ask: "How is it possible that...?" This, the deepest of questions, testifies to my freedom.

The other, in putting on a veil, is not manifesting a way of "being-for-others," that is, for me. It is quite the opposite: the other is *for himself*, he is a freedom, a self-containedness, a transcendence. Yet at the same time the other exists "through me": his shame is on my account, and his sense of dignity can come about thanks to me. Thus, contrary to Sartre's formula, what turns out to be important is the "structure": the "being-(through the fault of/thanks to)-another."

²³ J.-P. Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp. 270–271.

The Face and the Mask. A mask is not a veil, and it is not a face. A veil only hides the face, a mask lies. A mask, like a veil, only appears alongside another human being — in solitude both masks and veils lose all meaning. A mask is a mask *through the fault* of others — the veil appears simply *on their account*. What does it mean that a mask “masks” something? The intentionality of the mask is quite twisted: it tries to create an illusion completely unlike the real state of affairs. The dishonest man tries to put on a mask of honesty, the lazy man pretends to be hardworking, the unjust one wants to seem just, the unfaithful one pretends to be faithful, etc. Something like a relation of axiological opposition is established between the mask and the truth: a negative value wants to look like its positive counterpart. It is also possible to imagine the reverse situation, where the mask is used to make the better look worse, but such cases will not be investigated here.

Sometimes the concept of a mask adopts a less radical meaning. This happens when a mask is understood not as the axiological opposite of truth, but as a bringing out of a characteristic that is particularly important to the person, while ignoring the rest. This was the meaning of the mask in Greek theatre; this is still its meaning in puppetry today. We often find this use of the concept in Kępiński’s texts, but this does not seem fully justified — in fact, in these instances the mask becomes “a profile of the face,” i.e. the expression of one’s truth adapted to the requirements of the situation.

The intentionality of the mask branches out in many directions. The mask emerges from the person; it is this person’s more or less free manifestation. But at the same time, the mask is about others: it exists for others and through the fault of others (at least in the mind of the wearer). Let us first focus on the former relation.

It is not easy to explain how the other’s mask and the other’s face can be told apart. An ideal camouflage excludes the possibility of differentiating between the two. There are situations, however, when putting on a mask becomes pointless, and this is when the other might start to make us suspect that he is wearing a mask. Then the process of unmasking begins. What factors might be the source of our suspicions? Kępiński points to manifestations of dissatisfaction with oneself, Hegel mentions self-deprecation, and we can also add a pained consciousness to the list.

Kępiński partly ties his concept of a mask to his understanding of schizophrenia. He stresses, however, that the mask phenomenon is much broader in scope: only occasionally is it a symptom of the disease. In fact, social life itself demands that masks be put on. He writes, “In observing oneself, one adopts the point of view of one’s environment, and one’s own point of view at the same time. One is an actor, observed by strangers in the audience and by colleagues in the wings. Dissatisfaction with one’s own activities grows proportionally to the increasing discrepancy between the chosen role and the ones we have rejected, between the plan and its realization, and between the expected and the actual response of

56 the environment. This discrepancy can be observed in patients even before the onset of full-fledged schizophrenia. They are troubled by a sense of dissatisfaction with themselves; they would rather be something other than what they are in reality. And in the role they are forced to play nothing goes according to plan — thus they feel all the more alienated from it. They feel that the mask is continually chafing their face, that to the outside world they are not what they truly are, that people around them can see their bad acting and read what hides behind it.”²⁴ This self-dissatisfaction is a symptom of the growing desire to rebel against oneself and against those by whose fault the mask had to be worn. In another work I have described this type of rebellion using the concept of desolidarisation of the ego,²⁵ and pointed out the conditions in which it occurs.

Another manifestation of the disappearing mask is self-deprecation. Self-deprecation is also a special case of desolidarisation, where one adopts a comic or even mocking attitude toward oneself. Hegel ascribes a history-making significance to self-deprecation. He examines it as a manifestation of the “Contrite Consciousness,” the literary example of which is to be found in Diderot’s *Le Neveu de Rameau*, a book aptly characterizing the state of consciousness before a revolution. Man is conscious of his oppression and his dependence on the master; but since he can still benefit from this relation economically, socially and aesthetically, he continues his servitude. When the oppression increases further and the consciousness of one’s debased state reaches its limit, then a revolt against the oppressors becomes the only option. Self-deprecation reveals man’s dual attitude toward others: for some I wear a mask of submission, for others a mask that gently pokes fun at my seeming submission to my masters and my true dedication to other values — aesthetic, economic, and social. Self-deprecation is a non-ethical justification of deception; shamelessness is an inseparable attribute. Hegel writes: “The content of what Spirit says about itself is thus the perversion of every Notion and reality, the universal deception of itself and others; and the shamelessness which gives utterance to this deception is just for that reason the greatest truth.”²⁶ Of course, self-irony does not signify a complete unmasking, but a game played with at least two masks — the mask of submission in front of some, and the mask of mockery at one’s submission in front of others. Thus self-deprecation can perhaps be understood as an expression of “being-for-others” brought to its limit.

There remains one more example of the weakened mask — the contrite consciousness. The situation is approximately this: a person knows that she is wearing a mask and senses that others know it as well, or are at least close to knowing. Yet she cannot get rid of the mask permanently.

²⁴ A. Kępiński, *Schizofrenia* [Schizophrenia], Warsaw 1972, p. 154.

²⁵ J. Tischner, “Aksjologiczne podstawy doświadczenia ‘Ja’” [The Axiological Foundations of the Experience of Self], in: *Logos i Ethos* [Logos and Ethos], Krakow 1971.

²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Motilal Banarsidass Publ., Delhi 1998, p. 317.

The mask makes it possible to stay afloat in the world, but at the same time it is a source of anxiety and suffering. As Kępiński notes, “The paradox of the mask lies in the fact that wearing one achieves a result quite contrary to the original aim. We put on a mask in order to have some peace and to reassure the people around us, whereas what we achieve is a growing anxiety, both in ourselves and in others.”²⁷ Hence another ambiguity: for some a mask, for others a pained, martyrlike satisfaction from wearing a mask. The thinking behind this attitude is this: “If I am not happy with my mask, if wearing it brings me pain, then this suffering is a reason to pity me, to show me mercy: after all, one shouldn’t try to finish off the wounded.” In showing another the wounds suffered from the mask, we hope to earn his forgiveness. The presence of the mask is then accompanied by a number of contrite expressions of the “I don’t want to, but I have to” type. Suffering turns into its own opposite: it no longer kills, but by arousing pity and mercy it allows one to stay afloat on the surface of one’s world. Attempts at desolidarisation with one’s mask go hand in hand with solidarising with pain. This can perhaps be interpreted as “being-for-itself” taken to the level of absurdity.

The mask also contains a reference to other people. It happens by dint of another, but it also happens for another. The one camouflaging himself is convinced that the mask comes as a result of man being alienated by his peers. As such, the mask testifies to one’s decreasing sense of responsibility for oneself: it is the work of those who have not, in the words of Henri Bergson, “claimed ownership of themselves.” Here the process of masking oneself goes hand in hand with attempts to blame and accuse others. The logic of the mask emerges from the logic of the sense of guilt: one judges others when one does not want to be judged. Putting on a mask is not only about misleading others, it is also about punishing them — “Here you have me the way you want to have me, so you do not have the real me, but that is *your* fault, no one else’s.” The mask expresses subordinates’ unrealized wish to rule over their superiors. This can be achieved by subtly pushing others into an pre-prepared space of interaction — a space of feigned humbleness and feigned elevation, a space of hysterical games, etc. The main source of the mask is fear (Antoni Kępiński). It puts man within a space of interaction where the structure of oppositions is dominant: the other is chiefly my enemy, and to protect myself from him I must find a “hiding place.” The mask is all a human being shows us through the window of his hiding place.²⁸ This explains the gaudiness of the mask (G. Deleuze): the *how* always turns out to be more important than *what* is actually being said.

In speaking of shame I pointed out the axiological subject of shame — a human existing in the world. What, then, is the subject of a mask? Here answers are provided by the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” the main aim

²⁷ A. Kępiński, *Poznanie chorego* [Understanding the Patient], Warsaw 1978, p. 56.

²⁸ See Tischner’s “Ludzie z kryjówek” [People from Underground], *Znak* 283 (1978).

58 of which is to tear down all the illusions masking the truth of man. And the answers are many. For Marx, the dark subject behind the mask is the class subject, whose being is concerned with achieving the best interests for its own class. In this case, the “foundation” of the mask is class egoism, and the “superstructure” of interest is culture, morality, and religion. These form the content of the mask. For Nietzsche, the subject of the mask is the subject of the *ressentiment* of the weak against the power exercised over them by the strong. The mask is an attempt to give the victors the moral blame for one’s own defeat; its content is an ethics where defeat becomes the value and all victory the anti-value. Freud puts forth the idea of a libido suppressed by cultural requirements. Deleuze speaks generally of the “larval subject.”²⁹ This “larval subject” is a synthesis of the ability to degrade oneself, to contradict oneself, of perversion, egoism, and treachery; it is the dark seat of the darkest desires. But most importantly, it is the subject of the art of lying. The mask, it turns out, is this art’s greatest achievement.

What, then, is the difference between a face and a mask? This difference is much greater than that between a face and a veil: even though both the veil and the mask appear within the axiological horizon, the veil does not introduce lies to this horizon the way the mask does. The face constitutes a man’s truth — a truth from a horizon beyond the axiological. All that the axiological horizon can bring is different “profiles” of the face (an issue requiring further investigation), depending on what is required by the activity at hand; what it cannot show us is the face in the simplicity and directness that are its essence. A face is a face, independent of the projections required to operate or cooperate.

The discovery of a mask forces us to interrogate the truth of the other: Who is he? Who is he truly? But what does the word “truth” refer to in this context?

Initially it would seem that the truth is what is hidden behind the mask, something that stands in opposition to the mask — the liar, as it turns out, was only pretending to be truthful. But it is said sometimes that a mask can be used to hide the absence of a face. Let’s suppose that this happens: all illusions, appearances, and decorations fall; what remains is a “faceless” man. But can “facelessness” really be taken as the truth of a human being? I am determined to support the position that it cannot. Unmasking does not and cannot lead to “facelessness.” Rather, it leads to the source of the need for wearing a mask, which lies somewhere close to the face. Even if we assume that facelessness is possible, we cannot identify it with the truth of a human being. Facelessness is sheer indifference to truth and falsehood; it is beyond both. Without a face, one is already a corpse. The face is the very essence of a living human being.

Seeing a mask, we ask about the face. What is this truth understood as a human face?

²⁹ G. Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris 1972, pp. 355–356.

The face has something ideal about it. And everything ideal can be either given directly, inspiring awe or obligation, or through its very opposite, negation, illusion. Falsehood itself makes manifest the presence of truth, just as darkness reveals the need for light. By the same token, a mask reveals the existence of a face. When we ask where the mask came from, what it is for and why it is necessary, then we respond to the summons of the ideality of the face. This ideality we call truth. This does not mean that the face is embodied. The crux of the matter is that, even for the one masking himself, the face can only be such an ideality, and different masks may serve as attempts at finding one's face. 59

We shall return to the question of truth when we discuss the issue of thinking.

The Face. It appears as a gift of the agathological horizon, where the basic ruling factors are a nameless good and an evil opposing it. But these are not the only categories: in describing the veil and the mask we have discovered two more — freedom and truth. The other is free, and the other is the bearer of a truth. All this plays an important part in the experience of a face. Another's face is a freedom and a truth living in the light of goodness and in the darkness of evil.

It is usually believed that the greatest difficulty in talking about the face is posed by its individuality, its uniqueness, its radical concreteness. The concepts we use to give a description of the face will always, sooner or later, turn out to be too general. Yet this difficulty should not silence philosophers. We agree that the face is individual, unique, and radically concrete. But every individuality has something general and unspecific for its background. We hear a specific sound against a backdrop of unspecified silence, just as we see a certain hue within a horizon filled with unspecified light. The face is the same: a particular face appears to us as a gift of an unspecified horizon. A phenomenology of the face must accomplish its task by following an unusual path: by describing the conditions of the possibility for the appearance of a face, it guides us toward seeing one. We do not say what a face is; we only want to show where it is to be found.

The face emerges out of the agathological horizon — a horizon where the existence of good and evil takes on the form of a drama, thus opening up the possibility of either tragedy or victory. In a drama good and evil are not as far removed from each other as they are in the conceptual sphere; rather, they intertwine within the same space, the same time, the same man. And thus intertwined they provide a backdrop for and a perspective onto the history of man. They form the horizon of the face — the human icon. What silence does for sound, what light does for color, they do for the human face. They reveal the face. They reveal it because they form the agathological coordinates for the movement of human existence — a movement that always somehow participates in ideal victory or in absolute tragedy. Rising and falling, coming close to something and moving away, walking a straight or a twisted path — this is the movement of human existence. The symbolism of movement is not unjustified here:

60 after all, the face never abandons the body. Yet the movement of which we speak is not the ordinary movement of the body; it is the spirit and the heart that are moved.

There is a logos behind this movement. What logos? This is where we touch the very heart of the matter, the question of the logos of the face. What does it consist in? It is a means of overcoming the perspective of tragedy which has barged into a human existence in the form of a personal evil, pain, or injustice. The face is a form of human refusal to accept that the true life is absent. The face is a manifestation of neither personal evil, nor of personal goodness. The face expresses the existential movement by means of which and through which man gives a radical justification of his existence. He does so by putting this very existence under the protection of some good: only goodness has the power to save.

The logos of the face has something ideal about it — it is an idea tailored to the requirements of time and space, closed within one moment and rooted into one place.

One cannot look at a face without seeing a cross as part of the background. Yet the face is not a reflection of the cross itself, but of the glory connected with how one bears one's cross. The biblical scene of crucifixion clearly illustrates this in the three particularly significant utterances Jesus made from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"; "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they do;" and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." The first of these reveals the tragedy of the situation, the second the heroism of a victory, and the third the saving power of the act of entrusting oneself. *That* is a face.

Man's existential concern with the possibility of his own tragedy, expressed in the face and through the face, is known as existential pathos. The idea of pathos points at once to the pain of experience and to a way of overcoming that pain, to passivity and to the most intimate activity,³⁰ to the tragedy of stumbling and to the effort of rising up. Hence, what we observe if we trace the metamorphoses of existential pathos is the face itself and its history. We can see into the truth of human existence.

But the logos of a face is also paradoxical. This is because a face constitutes an ideal refusal and an ideal promise at the same time. Let us trace these moments.

"The face resists possession, resists my powers," writes Lévinas.³¹ There are different forms and levels of this resistance. Shame experienced by the other upon seeing me is one such form; I have no power over his shame. The mask is also a means of resisting possession; I have no control over the other's masks. The time lived by another before our encounter also resists possession: no matter how much he confides, I will never be master of his past. The same goes for the very space the other occupies — we can never stand together in the same spot; at best, we can stand next to each other. And there is rejection of possessing in the fact that

³⁰ Ingarden's *Aktualitäten*.

³¹ E. Lévinas, op. cit., p. 197.

the appearance of another's face breaks apart my world as it was, especially the world of things at hand. The face is not something we can have handy. Lévinas writes, "The presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world."³² The logic of deduction, induction, and all rules of inference fail to capture the face in its freedom; the face is free by virtue of the freedom of its logos. 61

But its logos is at once the logos of a promise. The face contains a glimmer of ideal beauty, ideal good, ideal truth. The face is a form of superiority, a concrete glory, something uniquely sublime and magnificent. The face can captivate, enthrall, raise us up above the ordinariness of this world and toward a pure poetics of being. But it is also fragile, lost, wretched, wronged. Upon it one finds the marks of past sufferings and the signs of future pain; it is the place where beauty slips away, where charm passes — a land of tears and dying. This tangle of capabilities for happiness and misery inspires in us a painful reflection: "How is that possible?" we ask, thus touching the deepest mystery of significance.

The face keeps us at a distance: it is at once a refusal that wants to push us away and a promise that wants to keep us close. Out of this refusal and this promise comes a plea: be differently. To be before a face is to exist differently.

What is in the promise of the face? It promises possibilities — and possibilities only. It promises the possibility of ideal rapture at the magnificence of a victorious face. It promises to allow me to take part in the endeavor of saving, of freeing the face from tragedy, thus it promises the possibility of ideal heroism. It also promises a chance to find the answer to our question of "How is this possible?" — the ideal truth about the mystery of being. But all these are just a possibility. And this possibility is bound to its opposite, the possibility that none of this will come to be, that it will all end in an absurd nothing. A promise is only an indication.

Nonetheless, it is there; the face speaks. It says, "Thanks to you, I can be myself;" "Thanks to me, you can be yourself." This "You-can/I-can" holds the secret: you can, but you do not have to. "If you want to, you can..." The face, by revealing itself, urges me to reciprocate and reveal my own face. A face for a face: from here springs the logic of dialogue.

The face is the presence of a promise. The essence of any promise is a partial gift: today all you have is the promise, proper values will come at the proper time. Their actual coming depends primarily on whether you answer the other's face with your own. This is why our experience of time is so distinctive: on the one hand, we would like to stop time, so that the presence of the other lasts; on the other, we are already thinking of the next encounter, the one which is to bring the fulfillment of promises. Encounters between mortals are always too short, and the time between them is always too long. Yet despite this fact, the present is of

³² Ibid., pp. 75–76.

62 greater importance than the future. This is because the absolute value in an encounter turns out to be not what is being promised (and when), but the very presence of the promise-maker. His face is the guarantee behind the promise. There is faithfulness in the face, there is truth. Even though we do not know what the face promises, even though we make numerous mistakes in interpreting that promise, the face wins us over with its truth, its faithfulness, its ever-new embodiments of the ideal.

The face plays a fundamental role in man's existential promotion — the effort to raise oneself above one's present level.

Let us now bring together what we have said with concision. Without the ideal, without the agathological, the face is not possible. Neither are encounters. We see the face of the other as his existential pathos, i.e. that which reveals his concern for his own tragic potential, and indirectly for all tragedy in general. This concern for one's tragic potential becomes a means of saving one's existence if one decides to put it under the protection of the good. The face is also an inexplicable promise, a promise in which the only certainty is the presence of the promise-maker.

"Being-through-each-other." The experience of encounter can only be complete if it takes place within the agathological horizon. This is not a horizon of action, but a horizon marking out the sphere of existence. From the moment we encounter a face, we know: now we can exist differently, even if we act the same as before. It is through the encounter and through the structure of the agathological horizon that we are able to define the existential situation of one man next to another: how people *are* together, regardless of how they may possibly act together. As a result of the encounter, I learn that the other is not a "being-for-me," and that I am not a "being-for-him"; we are free; the face resists possession. But nor are we "beings-in-themselves," like the Leibnizian monads without windows. We are open onto each other. We encounter, we long for encounters, we carry memories of encounters with us. What, then, is our situation in relation to one another?

Not being "for-others," and not being "in-ourselves," we can still be "through-each-other." This means that there are ontological foundations for both gratitude and blame. Our coexistence runs its course between these two perspectives: guilt and gratitude. And from this there is no escape.