

The Offroads of Encounters

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Let me briefly recall our discussion thus far.¹ To encounter is to experience a face. The experience of another’s face reveals his truth. This does not mean that every experience of another’s face is in itself an encounter.

¹ The following article is a continuation of two texts from *Spór o istnienie człowieka* series (the book of the same title — *The Controversy over the Existence of Man* — was published years later) which previously appeared in *Analecta Cracoviensia* (nos. 9 and 10, 1977 and 1978). It refers directly to the analyses of the experience of the encounter (“Phenomenology of the Encounter”) from the previous issue and attempts to present the encounter from a somewhat more negative angle, considering the aspects of deception and simulation in an encounter. For this reason I have taken into consideration the experience of the other in his beauty and have tried to show where and why a unilateral fascination with the beauty of the other only creates the illusion of an encounter, and not a true encounter. This text should be treated as a fragment of a greater whole. Therefore, it would be a mistake to try to see it as the resolution of all matters related to the experience of the other, including the experience of the other through his beauty. Beauty plays a great role in a human being’s experience of

64 Other conditions are also necessary for an encounter to take place, and foremost among these is reciprocity: the experience of the other's face must be accompanied by a revelation of my own face, and the other must want to receive what has been revealed. Nevertheless, it is precisely the awareness that some truth is being revealed which constitutes the foundation and the source of the unique "persuasive force" which emanates from an encounter. The revelation of the other's truth during the encounter is intertwined with a growing awareness of the need to reveal my own truth. When I encounter, I know that I am not being deceived and that I likewise am not deceitful. At the same time, there is an experience of a certain freedom in this. The other reveals his face without coercion, as do I. And one more thing: the face emerges as a means for man to refer to a tragedy which threatens him. The face is given in the horizon of the tragic. It is given as "pathos." This word should be understood according to its etymology. "Pathos" signifies both pain and a means to overcome the pain. And it is precisely in each man's special, individual, and particular way of overcoming existential pain that the human face both reveals itself and is constituted at the same time.

A person's attitude towards existential pain can vary greatly. This is why there is such a variety of human faces. The person touched by tragedy can shut his eyes to the tragic in his life and in human life in general: he believes that there is no tragedy when there is no awareness of the tragedy. Like the mythical Oedipus, he too can flee his tragic destiny in the hope that he will be able to escape it. Or, like Prometheus, he can accept his tragic fortune with the conviction that he is right, without any guilt and without attempting to escape from himself. Or then again, he may follow in the biblical Adam's footsteps, admitting his guilt, accepting penance, and patiently awaiting the coming of salvation. And lastly, like Jesus of Nazareth, a person can put his trust in the love "which can do all" and search for the hope of resurrection within it. These are just the most well-known examples of "faces" constituted as replies when tragedy threatens.

So far we have mainly considered the "objective" side of the experience of an encounter. We have discussed the concept of the tragic, the horizon on which the face is revealed, and the very phenomenon of the face as opposed to a mask or a veil. Now it is time to consider more closely the "subjective" aspect of this experience, i.e. the ways of experiencing and living the tragic of the other and of opening and closing oneself to it. The "objective" and "subjective" sides of an encounter cannot be separated, though it is possible to accentuate certain aspects more than others. In this chapter the accent will be on the subjective aspect. However,

a human being, and this role can be both negative and positive. At this moment I am not speaking of the positive role; I am only interested in the question of the offroads. Understanding comes much easier when we use the principle of contrast. By contrasting the illusory encounter with the true encounter we will be able to grasp the difference and to describe the essential. As it turns out, the next problem which requires consideration is the experience of the other through his "ugliness" or, more broadly speaking, through the visible "negative values." Do these values make an encounter radically impossible?

we will begin by reflecting more deeply on the “objective” aspect, which seems to govern what we call “interior,” “experiential,” and “subjective.” 65

1. The Aretetic Function

A man’s face reveals itself when he is faced with a “limit situation,” in which a foreign power threatens to destroy values dear to him. He knows a tragedy is taking place. A heartless and violent force is poised to destroy that which by its very nature has a right to exist. What can be done? No matter what he does, he will reveal his face. Veils fall, masks disappear. But is it only about “revealing”? The concept of revelation presupposes that the face pre-existed, and has now only revealed itself. But this is not so: the face at the same time reveals and constitutes itself. The face is born from the tragic. How is a face born? Or in other words, what is this process by which the face is constituted?

It is ironic that none of the philosophers who examined the phenomenon of the face, of human truth, put forth the question about the constitutive genesis of the face. Heidegger mentions it indirectly, but without introducing the concept of the face. I am referring to the sections of *Sein und Zeit* in which he reflects on the “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*) of the human being. Resoluteness is the manner of being of the *Dasein* in which being exists according to its own truth and manifests itself according to this truth. We see that at least a seed of the theory of the genesis of the face can be found in the theory of resoluteness.

Let us consider Heidegger’s thought more closely. He writes, “The most primary truth about human existence, because it belongs to that existence, can be reached through resoluteness.” And further on he adds, “resoluteness is a ... mode of disclosedness of human being” (§ 60, 62). Resoluteness connects two moments: the moment of truth and the moment of disclosing oneself. Truth becomes disclosedness and disclosedness becomes truth. Moreover, a close relationship exists between resoluteness and dying. For the human manner of being, dying is the realization of the most personal possibility of losing all possibilities. The possibility of death as the most private of all a human being’s possibilities places him before the prospect of being or not being. Seeing this tragedy one can escape oneself or one can remain in oneself and by oneself. Resoluteness is the rejection of the option of flight and choosing to remain by oneself. This constitutes the interior identity of the *Dasein*, his *Selbst*. Death is a tragedy for a human being, but without this tragedy, the human being could not be himself. The face can emerge from this threat of being turned to ash.

This conception must be corrected. Where do I see its deficiency? First and foremost, the man of *Sein und Zeit* does not know any tragedy save that of death. His axiological horizon is quite narrow: life is a good and death is an evil. Thus the face is a manifestation of man’s attitude toward death. Yet, it seems — and this should be fully stressed — that

66 the tragedy of death and dying is neither exhaustive nor inclusive of all of human tragedy. Death is a final tragedy only then when man regards life as an absolute value. Kierkegaard writes, “When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life; but when one becomes acquainted with an even more dreadful danger, one hopes for death.”² Where there are goods more important than life itself, there are also dangers greater than death. In his reflection on resoluteness, Heidegger does not venture beyond the horizon of the master and slave from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. One can be master of himself or he can escape himself, but one cannot logically claim that death is the greatest possible human tragedy. Heidegger’s analysis is carried out in fidelity to the axiological axioms of the entire German *Lebensphilosophie*. Only the master preserves his face. Why? Because he disregards death. As if those who hold death in disregard were no longer threatened by masks.

This is interesting. Fundamentally, the idea of resoluteness is, for Heidegger, a lingering echo of Kantian formalism which has not been touched by the fire of Max Scheler’s critique. “Fulfill your responsibility,” wrote Immanuel Kant. And Heidegger writes, “be resolute in the face of death.” But neither one nor the other explains what he is talking about. What is my responsibility here and now? What must I be determined to do in the face of death? Krzysztof Michalski makes a good point when he writes, “We cannot state what exactly the authentic *Dasein* will decide, which possibility he will choose. This question must be answered each time by a decision, by a choice taken at each concrete moment.”³ Under close inspection, one can see that there is a fundamental disproportion between Heidegger’s concept of resoluteness and the concept of the face. The face is man’s “what” and resoluteness is the “how” of his way of being. The face is the content and resoluteness is the form. The form of resoluteness allows for a variety of content, of faces. Therefore, one cannot say that resoluteness generates the face, the truth of the person. The “how” of the way of being could never engender the “what” (“who”) of the face. Quite the opposite. A concrete “what” demands a concrete “how.” The process of the constitutional genesis of the face must be seen as a content’s pursuit of the proper form, a “desire” for values to permeate the way of being, as an “essentialization” of that which is the essence.

Let us take a more concrete approach. There is Prometheus in his limit situation; there is Antigone, King Oedipus, and Jesus. The growing awareness of a tragedy is accompanied by the revelation of one’s face. I am who I am. My name is what it is. My name is not something else. Prometheus maintains a proud silence. Oedipus flees in fright. Antigone buries her brother’s body. Jesus commends His spirit to the Father. Each of these attitudes is a choice in the face of tragedy. Surely we can assume

² S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. by W. Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1941.

³ K. Michalski, *Heidegger i filozofia współczesna* [Heidegger and Contemporary Philosophy], Warsaw 1978, p. 135.

that there is a resoluteness behind each of them. But to say “resoluteness” 67 is to come up short. One must ask: Resoluteness in what? In the resolute attitude there is the echo of a choice of values; in it one may glimpse a desire to save that which should be saved, under any conditions. It forces us to surmise that there is an act of overcoming obstacles, perhaps even of overcoming oneself. It comes as no surprise that we speak of virility, courage, and boldness in such situations. The process of the genesis of the face is much richer than what the concept of resoluteness would suggest. How can its essence be summarized?

The Greek word *areté* comes to mind, along with its possible derivatives. Let us listen to the expert in this matter. Daniela Gromska writes:

The Greek word *areté* underwent certain modifications in its historical development. In its early use it signified fortitude, heroism; later (a much more general meaning) the inclination of individuals and of each thing to fulfill its own individual task, and therefore... their courage; finally, a stricter meaning, more commonly used in the Hellenistic (for example with the Stoics) and Christian periods, where it referred to man’s morality, his virtuosity, his virtues.⁴

The signifying intention of the word *areté* points to something fundamental.

However, it is not a virtue among virtues, but rather the basis of virtue. This basis does not disappear where specific virtues reside, but permeates each one of them. *Areté* is the condition of any virtue being possible. It is a condition that is both dynamic and that lends dynamism. It is a sensitivity to the agathological horizon of a human being, but also a dynamic readiness to actively respond to the axiological. It is valor in the deepest sense of the word. “Valor” suggests a participation in what can be gained by a victory. A victory is the fulfillment of a task, a responsibility, a service. A free fulfillment, without external coercion. *Areté* is like man’s continuing choice of that which portends the hope of salvation. It is something more than resoluteness, which could be directed toward either good or evil. *Areté* participates in the good. Its participation is apparent. For this reason it can generate a face, as the face is the external appearance of man’s truth. Thus I will say that the face is born and revealed through a special function of self-aware freedom, which we will call the “aretetic function which constitutes the face.”

One more moment must be brought into relief — the moment of freedom. The theory of the constitutional genesis of meaning comes, as we know, from Edmund Husserl. He considered many variations on the constitutional genesis of meaning in terms of the passive/active functioning of the cognitive faculties. Here the leitmotif of his analysis was the concept, or the idea of objectivity. For him the constitution of meaning is above all a constitution of objective meaning. This explains why the concept

⁴ D. Gromska, “Introduction” in: Aristotle, *Etyka nikomachejska* [Nicomachean Ethics], Warsaw 1978, p. LVII.

68 of freedom did not appear in most of his analyses. However, the concept of freedom is necessary when describing the constitutional genesis of the face. The face is not only a manifestation of truth, but also of freedom. The freedom which reveals itself in the face is a concrete freedom. “To be free is to take possession of oneself,” Henri Bergson wrote. The face reveals both the manner and the degree to which one is possessed by another, seen with equal clarity in Oedipus’s flight, Prometheus’s pride, Antigone’s brotherly love, and Jesus’ hope. To experience the face is to encounter another’s freedom. Not as an undetermined freedom, a “freedom as ‘I don’t know what the other is doing,’” but as a meaningful freedom. Here freedom is revealed as man’s rising above the tragic, as a “higher aspiration.” The aretetic function of the face’s constitution does not depend on the passivity of interior associations, but on the independence of taking possession of oneself in the name of the truth which is being drawn.

Let us therefore repeat: to encounter another one must experience his face. The existential pathos of man, his most private attitude towards the tragic which threatens him, is made evident in the face. The face is born through the aretetic function. *Areté* becomes tetic as it constitutes the face. Constituting presupposes choosing. Where there is no choice, there is no face. This may mean that pain has deprived a man of his face, killing the aretetic function in him. The man “resembles a man,” but he no longer has a face. One last thing: to encounter another one must also show his own face. It is not only he who sees a face that encounters another, but also he who is capable of revealing his own face. The face engenders a face. The aretetic function of constituting a face is the deepest core of the dialogue between men.

Now let us turn to what is more “subjective,” internal, and intimate in an encounter, so that we can later again focus on what is external and transcendent.

2. The Horizon of Wonder

The encounter of man with man has such persuasive force that it is capable of radically changing a person’s attitude toward the surrounding world, to refashion his way of being in this world and to call into question the hierarchy of values he hitherto professed. An encounter leads man into the depths of the great mysteries of existence, where questions are born about the meaning and meaninglessness of everything that is. Is there one key concept with which we can describe the types of emotions that an encounter engenders? It seems that this might be an oversimplification. We should rather look for many words to describe the various aspects of the mystery. Among these one of the most obvious is the word “wonder.” “Wonder” contains something of reverie and of admiration; it is also familiar with a bit of suffering. Plato and Aristotle believed that wonder is the birthplace of philosophy. Wonder is capable of engulfing the entire

person, of touching his existential depths; it can wound with pain and delight with hope. Yet we should remember one thing: as is universally accepted, wonder can spring from another person and an encounter with him, but it can also spring from the extra-human world, for example, from some extraordinarily beautiful landscape. What is the existential structure of wonder? Does the wonder which accompanies an encounter differ in any way from the wonder of objective experiences? 69

Wonder has a very special existential status. Strictly speaking, it is neither an act of the consciousness, such as an act of attention, nor is it a mood [Heideggerian “attunement”], such as boredom. Conscious acts are necessarily acts of the conscious subject. They are, therefore, among those experiences over which the subject has absolute authority: I can freely govern my attention, I can think about this or that, I can decide or not decide to do something. I do not have such authority over wonder. Wonder testifies to the violence of something which touches man from the outside. It means being subject and docile to something, not exerting one’s authority and force of action. In this sense, wonder is like a mood. A mood also involves being subject and docile. But a mood lacks the dimension of thought, reverie, of inceptive questioning of that which is. As if by virtue of its own nature, wonder engenders thought. And thought, as I have already stated, is nothing more than motion beyond that which is given, toward new possibilities.

So what is wonder in contrast to acts and moods? I will focus only on the “qualitative” aspect of wonder. Wonder is a way of opening human existence to the dramatic dimension of every being, but especially of a human being. The pain of wonder best articulates its essence. It is true that there is also an aspect of hope hidden within wonder, but it is there precisely to overcome pain. One can wonder at this or that, but one will always repeat the same thing: “Until now you have been living under such an illusion!” That which reveals itself to man is different, special, extraordinary; it contradicts the world in which I live. This always hurts a little. But what may happen is also painful. Uncertainty and ignorance are dangerous in and of themselves. The threat is all the more intense when the “externality” which has instilled me with wonder proves ever more to be a force capable of destroying and undermining me. The pain of being stripped of one’s illusions, the pain of uncertainty and the growing prospect of danger display a general horizon of evil before me, of an evil which is all the more dangerous because it is unknown. Man defends himself from evil by fleeing. This is also a flight from the source of wonder. For this reason, many would prefer to safeguard themselves from wonder. This is, of course, only a “negative” aspect of wonder. Wonder also manifests to us an extraordinary sublimity of the world, which will overcome all and can save all. Therefore, wonder carries hope. The more possibilities the thought which lives in wonder reveals to us, the greater the hope becomes. Illusion can become truth, uncertainty can become certainty, sublimity need not destroy; it can also bring salvation. In this way,

70 wonder itself presents human existence with a path opposite to the previous one: a path toward that which is good and capable of saving man. This is the source of the moment of joy or even happiness. The meaning of joy and happiness takes root in its opposite, in the living possibility of tragedy. Thus, wonder throws man into the very center of the drama of existence delimited by the possibility of final perdition or salvation. Wonder reveals that man participates in the drama of good and evil. Through wonder I know that I am and how I am. My “am” means that I am suspended between opposites. Blaise Pascal’s words come to mind:

We sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty, driven from end to end. When we think to attach ourselves to any point and to fasten to it, it wavers and leaves us; and if we follow it, it eludes our grasp, slips past us, and vanishes forever. Nothing stays for us. This is our natural condition and yet most contrary to our inclination; we burn with desire to find solid ground and an ultimate sure foundation whereon to build a tower reaching to the Infinite. But our whole groundwork cracks, and the earth opens to abysses.⁵

The opening of this dramatic horizon of existence before man reveals the fundamental issue of the human being. What is an “issue” here? It has at least two dimensions. The first dimension, the one most often noticed and described, is that man can be or not be, that he lives, but might as well not live. This “ontological” fragility of human existence, however, is not its deepest issue. The key question is: “Does man have a right to exist at all?” Are there values which could justify his existence? Wonder reveals the ambivalence of human existence, the ambiguity of the axiological I, the agathological uncertainty of man. The fact that death hurts demonstrates that man possesses a certainty that it is “good to exist.” The fact that man rejoices in his hope directed towards the sublime demonstrates that he is not fully certain of his worth, that he awaits its confirmation and fulfillment. Man “has an issue with himself.” This is the root of his sense of responsibility for himself.

The concept of wonder points to “reverie” and thus to thought. What does this mean?

Wonder brings man to participate in the drama of the meaning and meaninglessness of existence, and thus facilitates man’s existential responsibility for himself. Man sees that his life confronts possible evil and possible perdition, as well as possible good and possible salvation. He continually finds himself at a crossroads. Man is free, and as such, he carries with him a projection of free space. He is continually accompanied by a stage with a crossroads, representing his individual drama. Wonder adds another dimension to this drama. In addition to the dimension of good and the dimension of evil, there is a dimension of truth about good and evil which cannot be reduced to either. In this way man’s drama obtains

⁵ B. Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. J. Krailsheimer, London 1966, no. 72, p. 17.

a meaning of its own. Man can be mistaken about what is good and what is evil, but also about his own participation in good and evil. There exists not only a fear of evil, but also a fear of the illusion of good and evil. To overcome this fear, one must dare to think. Wonder creates a need in man for thought, and in this way it expands his existential freedom. 71

Thinking is man's capability of transcendentalizing the entire facticity of the world which lies before him, toward the possibility of another world and another way of participating in the drama of meaning and meaninglessness. In wonder it is made evident that the given situation and the world are only one out of many possibilities. At the same time, there emerges the liberating thought that man's current responsibility for himself is also only one possibility out of many. Thought opens the path to transcending oneself, one's own past, one's hopes, the possibility of rebuilding oneself from the inside out. Wonder does not pass without leaving a mark. The space of freedom it entails remains. This is why wonder, if it is considered in its entire existential structure, is not an act or a mood, but rather a form whereby man participates in the drama of meaning and meaninglessness.

One of the witnesses to such a vision of the beginnings of thought is Hegel. This is not the place to enter into a detailed interpretation of his philosophy, so I will only recall the following text:

It [the Spirit] wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.⁶

Leaving aside Hegel's language and the fact that he is speaking here about the dialectic of the negative, I would like to focus on one thing: What inner experiences are at the basis of this description? The key is the experience of the dramaticity of the world. Man stands before something to which he is radically opposed: evil. The thinker does not flee from the sight of evil but rather inquires into the truth of evil. In this way he transcends and eliminates the danger. Unfortunately, this idea of transcendence is lost on many other philosophers, who otherwise allude to Hegel, despite the fact that every philosophy lives from transcendence. Thus, for Jean-Paul Sartre for example, the philosopher is hopelessly lost in one dimension of wonder: in the fear of negativity. Sartre discovers the cognitive value of the emotion of fear and walks the path of this discovery to the very end. However, he does not reach the level of radical inquiry in which fear itself and its conditions are called into question. The same goes for the early Heidegger. His preoccupation with his "own being" transforms into a philosophy that

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, New York 1979, p. 19.

72 is preoccupied with preoccupation itself, a philosophy that is doomed to an inevitable absolutization of death.

Hegel's text suggests that another experience exists. The fundamental horizon of wonder in which, among others, the perspective of truth takes shape, is the inception of a new order among all of man's pains. For apart from all the pains caused by sickness, death and all other evils, there is a pain caused by falseness and radical uncertainty. The pain of radical uncertainty: that is the proper ground for thought. He who decides to think about his drama, to look directly into the eyes of "negativity," *ipso facto* creates an order of hierarchy among his pains. He knows and feels that "first" he must tend to his own uncertainty and only afterwards take care of the rest. For the thinker, uncertainty worsens every situation in which he might find himself. Where there is uncertainty, any hope, any flight, might prove to be only an illusion.

Thus the imperative of the inquiry into truth, of the question, "How is this possible?" The inquiry into truth becomes one of the first consequences of the feeling of responsibility for oneself that wonder elicits.

The experience of the encounter is to a certain degree an experience of wonder. Encountering someone means, in part, "being amazed" by the other. It also means perceiving the other in the agathological horizon, and grasping his face, that is, his own response to the tragedy that threatens him. By making the inquiry into truth possible, wonder makes it possible to encounter the truth of the other. Nevertheless, an encounter is something more than pure wonder. One can also experience wonder at a thing, an object, a landscape. The key to an encounter is the experience of responsibility. As long as the experience of responsibility present in wonder remains a responsibility for oneself, there is no encounter. Only when responsibility for oneself becomes an inseparable component of responsibility for the other can we speak of an encounter. The "intertwining" responsibility for myself with responsibility for the other is the fulfillment of the existential structure of being-for-the-other. Thus, the essence of an encounter is fulfilled not so much on a cognitive as on an ethical level.

Wonder places man at a crossroads. One of these roads leads to a "paradise," to speak metaphorically. By inciting wonder, an object, a landscape or another person can bring salvation. The spontaneous reaction to the perspective of salvation is fascination, admiration, enchantment. The way to admiration and enchantment is paved by astonishment. Astonishment is the beginning of the participation in the revelation of the splendor of things and people. A question arises: "Is the road of emotional development from astonishment to admiration and enchantment the path of a possible encounter?" In other words, is being astonished by the other and then admiring him and allowing oneself to be seduced by his charm the same as encountering? And at the same time, we should inquire further: "Can a philosophy which draws its vitality from astonishment and admiration be a philosophy of the encounter, or does this most moving of human experiences elude this form of thought?"

Astonishment, admiration, and enchantment taken together in all their variants share the fact that they can be incited by both experiences of people and by experiences of things. These experiences are intentional. By their nature they are directed toward a certain object which is their objective reason for being. For admiration to arise, the object must possess a form of perfection, be it in good or in evil. Admiration is an opening of a person to perfection caused by that perfection itself. But there is more. Astonishment, admiration and enchantment reveal something of the object, but at the same time they “attach” the person to that object. Man “attaches himself” to objects which are perfect in certain respects. Likewise, he attaches himself to “perfect people.” Perfection draws attention, commands one to remain close by, to delay departure. Those who have perceived “perfection” are prone to say that they have “encountered perfection.” Could the path of astonishment, admiration, and enchantment be the path of encounters?

We should take account of the difference between astonishment and admiration. It is, above all, a temporal difference. Astonishment is an event which fulfills itself in one and the same present moment, while admiration and its various manifestations are states of consciousness which endure in time. Usually we pass from astonishment to admiration, while we call the abandonment of a state of admiration disenchantment. Abandoning a state of astonishment is also disenchantment. The object of astonishment is something that is not yet fully determined; it is “different” in relation to what was before, but we still do not know what it is in itself. This inspires curiosity. The world of astonishment is an intriguing world. For this reason, it is sometimes thought that astonishment is the root of philosophy. If this were the case, it would mean that astonishment and admiration were the sources of radical thinking.

The logic of time requires us to begin by reflecting on the essence of astonishment, and then to proceed to the admiration of the splendor of the world, and lastly to consider enchantment. However, I do not consider these three questions to be of equal importance. The matter of astonishment and admiration only prepares us to consider the matter of enchantment.

ASTONISHMENT. The fundamental elements of any drama are the actors and the stage. In order to exist, a drama needs actors among whom a dramatic intrigue develops and plays itself out, and a stage with a backdrop to create the necessary space for the dramatic action to take place. It should be noted that there is an essential difference between the relation of an actor to another actor and an actor and the stage. In principle the stage is just a setting for the drama, because the essence of the drama is played out between actors. Of course, this is only “in principle,” because it is always possible to treat another person as merely part of the stage, and the stage as if it were an actor in the drama.

We are faced with a question: Does the experience of astonishment arise from associating with the stage or from associating with other people? We all know that experience can be elicited both by another person, as well as by the stage as a whole or a part of it. At the core of astonishment, we find no difference in the way we relate to others and to the stage. Yet, if we consider texts describing the essence of astonishment and, as we shall see, the essence of admiration, we find that in each and every one of them, only the relation to the stage plays a key role. Moreover, in these texts astonishment and admiration are presented not only as possible human experiences, but also as the source of the radical questions, i.e. of philosophy itself. Thus, these texts indirectly bear witness to how much the experience of the other person has ceased to be the source of philosophical thought. Philosophy that inquires into astonishment and admiration has cast the person and all his relations with the other into the shadows. It has deemed it sufficient to theorize on the relation of the person with the stage, and on the stage itself. Therein, the stage has become a “being as being.” Thus it is not surprising that ontology, that is, the science which is nothing more than the general theory of the stage, has become its fundamental component.

Hegel wrote:

The man who does not yet wonder at anything still lives in obtuseness and stupidity. Nothing interests him and nothing confronts him because he has not yet separated himself on his own account, and cut himself free, from objects and their immediate individual existence. But on the other hand whoever wonders no longer regards the whole of the external world as something which he has become clear about, whether in the abstract intellectual mode of a universally human Enlightenment, or in the noble and deeper consciousness of absolute spiritual freedom and universality, and thus he has changed the objects and their existence into a spiritual and self-conscious insight into them.⁷

To be astonished, therefore, is to experience a rupture of the immediate connection and accord with nature. Who is to be blamed for this? At first, it seems to be nature. It is not that man decides to be astonished, and therefore is, but rather that something external thrusts him into a state of astonishment. The experience of astonishment is proof of human finiteness. That which elicits astonishment is the “other.” Something which does not conform to our expectations. Is it this the “something’s” fault, or is it mine?

The world revealed by astonishment is still neither fundamentally wonderful nor fundamentally “evil.” It still offers hope; it still promises something. Objects of astonishment, according to Hegel, “are an ‘other’ which yet is meant to be for his apprehension and in which he strives to find himself over again as well as thoughts and reason...” He continues, “...there is present a contradiction between natural things and the spirit,

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, vol. I, Oxford University Press, New York 1975, p. 315.

a contradiction in which objects prove themselves to be just as attractive as repulsive, and the sense of this contradiction along with the urge to remove it is precisely what generates wonder.”⁸ 75

Hegel contrasts astonishment with the state of “obtuseness and stupidity” and to “complete enlightenment.” In both of these cases man’s ties to the “objective world” are absolute. The world does not regard man as an intruder, and man feels at home in the world. At some point these ties break. The rebellion of the stage ensues. The stage appears as foreign. The logic of the stage’s life is shrouded in darkness, although all hope has not yet been lost in this darkness.

Despite the great separation of time, thought and philosophical systems, Aristotle sees the matter of astonishment in a similar way. The source of strangeness is the aporeticity of the world. Above all, it is objects and not other people that inspire the philosopher’s astonishment. They incite this astonishment because they appear to be internally contradictory, contrary to themselves, incoherent. Aristotle gives examples: a river overflows its banks, the sun is eclipsed, fire springs from clouds.⁹ There is no doubt that Aristotle interprets the radical astonishment of philosophy as an astonishment at the disorder of the stage.

In astonishment the object presents itself simultaneously as attractive and repulsive. As such, man does not aim to destroy the object, but to improve it, or possibly to improve his own position in relation to the object. Man’s essential problem is to find harmony between himself and the outside world. Man knows that the world is not perfect, and that he too is not perfect, but that despite this it is possible to find an equilibrium between himself and the world. Astonishment is a sign that this equilibrium has been disrupted and that a new equilibrium must be established.

Astonishment forces us to think not only about the world, but also about ourselves. Who am I for the world and in relation to the world? Kant writes:

Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track, the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might.”¹⁰

Kant seems to go a step further. Astonishment is not just a sign of a broken equilibrium, but also of a crisis in man’s perception of his own strength. I am astonished because I am not able to do something, I am incapable, I am weaker than I thought I was. In the face of the rebellious stage all

⁸ Ibid., p. 315. [The Polish translation of Hegel’s work which Tischner quotes here has the word “astonishment” instead of “wonder” — translator’s note].

⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. J. Sachs, Green Lion Press.

¹⁰ I. Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, trans. J.C. Meredith, Oxford University Press, New York 1924, p. 159.

76 the projections of my actions, all act structures must become suspended. The world is different, and I am different. The stage is threatening, but also fascinating.

In the Old Testament, God speaks to those who have discovered the hostility of nature for the first time: fill the earth and subdue it. This invitation assumes a “thesis” about the fundamental situation of man on earth. The earth, despite being strange and threatening, is “below” man, even when it overcomes him in a struggle. The earth is a stage and a stage is a space in which man must tread. Man’s vocation is to construct a system of sign-posts on this stage. Through these sign-posts the earth will, so-to-speak, belong to all, will be that which people can remember, speak about, possess in their actions and habits, in science, in ontology. When astonishment overcomes us, we see that we have now changed places with what was “below us.” The relation of belonging disappears.

These are also the wellsprings of thought: thought in the context of astonishment. This thought attempts to soothe the pain of powerlessness before the stage. All pain, writes Hegel, is “an experience of contradiction.” The pain of astonishment is an experience of contradiction between the basic project of a way of being in the world (the stage) and the concrete act structures which can no longer continue to execute this project.

However, at the same time, hope lives alongside this pain. This hope emerges from a premonition of the limits of the pain. Where there is astonishment, pain has not yet enveloped all of man’s space. There is still space for thought. Through thought we rise above our pain and free ourselves of its slavery. Let us listen to Kant once again:

Now in just the same way the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature, but at the same time reveals a faculty of estimating ourselves as independent of nature, and discovers a pre-eminence above nature.¹¹

Thought is revealed as a perfection out of pain’s reach. I am but a reed, yet I am a thinking reed. Through my thought I am superior to everything else on the stage. Through thinking about the stage I establish a new relation between myself and it. Even if the objects that fill the stage are able to obstruct my movement, they are incapable of preventing me from thinking about them as objects, that is, as things which, because they are *for me*, are inferior *to me*.

Astonishment places man at a crossroads. However, it is not the same crossroads as that which wonder placed before him. In the latter case, the horizons of the agathological drama were crossed; here the paths of the experience of superiority and inferiority are crossed. Man realizes that he is simultaneously “above the stage” and “below the stage,” that he governs and is governed. Man then attempts to escape this contradiction which has become pain by means of incited thought. This thought

¹¹ Ibid., p. 159.

inquires into the essence of the world, i.e. into the essence of the stage: 77
Where and what did it come from, and why? These questions give rise to ontology.

The ideal to which this thought aspires is to discover a new harmony of objects and a new principle of equilibrium between man and objects. The path to attaining this ideal is abstraction. What is the basis of abstraction? What is abstraction as a particular process arising from and responding to a certain self-knowledge? Abstraction is usually conceived as setting aside what is singular in favor of what is common and universal. One aspect of abstraction is “separating.” Yet, before I can “separate” a particular from a particular, and a particular from a universal, I must first separate the object from myself, as the source of all irrepressibility. Therefore, I myself am the first victim of abstraction, insofar as I am the subject of an individualized passivity, that is, a suffering subject. The experience of suffering and the experience of the disharmony of beings related to it is at the root of abstraction. When we omit the singular we overcome pain and pass above the disharmony inherent in the pain. We seek a new harmony of things. The goal becomes to construct an ontology in which a new harmony of beings would become manifest. In this way admiration of the world becomes possible. Evil becomes only a lack of being, the illusion of a concrete immediacy. Abstraction rescues the natural innocence of the stage for our admiration.

Can astonishment become the source of radical thinking?

I have previously said that the source of radical thinking is wonder, as a path of existential participation in the agathological horizon of being. Certain analogies exist between wonder and astonishment. In both cases there is the experience of a “cross-roads”; in both cases thought is focused on the situation of man in the world and on the situation of the world as a whole. Still, the differences are more fundamental. The failure to recognize these differences reduces the task of philosophy to reflecting on objects in their possible relations.

Let us imagine the drama of Prometheus as he observes the rebellion of the stage: the eagle tearing out his insides, his shackled hands and feet, the scorching sun. Prometheus has reason to be “astonished,” because that which is “inferior” appears more powerful than that which is “superior.” In astonishment, the good and evil of the world is reduced to what endangers man’s life and what is beneficial to it. The final drama becomes that of life and death. When man thinks about himself, he thinks about what he must do in order to avoid destruction. Man’s only hope is his power, his ability to confront an opposing power. “*Dasein* cares about its own being,” writes Martin Heidegger. This maxim, which presents the truth about man from the point of view of the entire philosophy of life, is also the final discovery of the act of astonishment carried to completion. I am astonished, and therefore I fear, and allow myself to be astonished. I lose and recover the hope of being myself. Though I bear a responsibility, I am only responsible for myself. My conscience only tells me about

78 myself. My “determination” is only determination in relation to my death. Thought in the midst of astonishment isolates. I say, “Me and my world.” The entire dimension of responsibility for others and of dialogue with others loses its deepest significance. If the other exists and is needed, it is only as being, as a thing, an objective relation, as one more source of astonishment, and not as an object of responsibility. Prometheus does not know the essence of his drama. Prometheus does not recognize that he is being-through-others. Looking into the eyes of his death, he remains alone. In his situation, any ontology of the stage is not the result of radical thought, but rather of existential prejudice.

ADMIRATION. In admiration the ambiguity of astonishment disappears, and what remains is an appreciation for the perfection of being, and for the perfect harmony between me and the objects upon which it is based. The perfection of being can be twofold: it can be given directly through the senses or indirectly as a result of thought and the subsequent stages of abstraction. When provided directly, perfection is called “beauty,” and is the subject of aesthetics. Perfection provided indirectly has no proper name.

Let us focus now on perfection provided indirectly. We consider the general outcome of thought which occurs in the midst of admiration. This thought has a specific goal, which is to show the perfection of being and to defend it from the immediacy of reality.

What does it mean that being is perfect? Let us examine G.W. Leibniz’s answer to this question. The world is the best of all possible worlds. The being of the world and the good of the world are equal. A manifestation of this equality is the universal harmony of things. The world deserves admiration because of its pre-established harmony. That which is harmonious is truly deserving of admiration. But the harmony of the world is not immediately provided to us. To discover it, we must venture outside of the sphere of immediacy. The act of crossing this threshold is achieved with reason and with thought, following the principles of rationality: the laws of identity, non-contradiction, and sufficient reason. Thought that follows these principles is capable of inspiring and justifying admiration.

The concept of harmony owes its original meaning to music. Harmony allows melody to exist in the fullest. It is an example of an excellent solution to the problem of multiplicity and individuality. For harmony to exist, there must be a multiplicity of sounds. At the same time, every individual sound must be itself and must remain as itself. Harmony is only created through these sounds which want to be themselves. An individual sound in a musical harmony is analogous to a monad in the sphere of being. The monad exists and grows in accordance with the law of identity; it is faithful to itself and only to itself. The monad has no windows: it does not need windows. The monad neither acts upon other monads, nor is acted upon. And yet, it remains in harmony with all the other

monads. Because of the “pre-established harmony,” a reasonable order that deserves admiration exists in the world. To discover this order, one must use the principle of sufficient reason. Each monad possesses sufficient reason for its being and each place occupied by a monad also possesses sufficient reason. This means that each monad, by being itself and only itself, contributes to upholding the universal harmony of the worlds. Everything aspires to harmony. Everything in the person is to be crowned with admiration. What is thought in this world? It is the capacity to derive admiration from everything man lives and experiences. Even Prometheus should admire the perfect harmony of things which he carelessly disturbed. Is the punishment for a crime not a sign of harmony?

Thought in the midst of admiration can move in two directions. It can pass from astonishment to admiration, or from admiration to astonishment. The first of these paths entails a more or less difficult construction of admiration, despite the growing difficulties of suffering, sickness and death. It is a searching thought which struggles to obtain a vision of the world that can no longer be touched by disappointment. Therein, admiration is less the substance of experience than the object of desire. The second direction of thought has already reached admiration and now strives to know the path to admiration better. The object and source of admiration becomes not just the harmony itself, but also the path which leads to the discovery of that harmony. The reconstruction of past adventures presents no danger, because one knows beforehand that there is harmony to be found. What remains is to rejoice at the path traveled, to recognize the artistry of thought which has prevented one from being cast into the abyss of disappointment. Admiration consolidates all the more through these meanderings of thought.

And what is the noetic aspect of admiration? What is admiration as a state of admiring?

Most often, we talk of admiration as “rising above” the prosaic, miserable, and limited. Admiration brings a departure from everyday worries, from bodily suffering, from daily cares about food and drink. To admire is to experience inner emancipation, to lose oneself in order to find oneself. Admiration is like a walking cane which gives a person a new dimension of freedom. Everyday life turns out to be skin deep, whereas the truth of the world is its hidden perfection. Emancipation, however, is only a negative aspect of admiration. The positive aspect is the act of axiological recognition, which causes the mediated to become the center of a person’s life, instead of that which is immediate. The meaning and the hidden organization of the stage of the human drama change. This new organization is no longer based on pain, but on the order I should respect to be able to use the freedom which has been granted to me within its framework. This axiological recognition also affects me insofar as I am an actor on the stage of the world. My sensibility, my sensitivity to pain and my susceptibility to being wounded cease to be the centers of my spiritual life. This allows me to discover a new harmony, which is my thought in

80 the midst of admiration. It is this sort of thought which makes it possible to comprehend the movement of objects on the stage, and among that movement, to find for oneself a space of inviolability.

Thought in the midst of admiration usually presents itself as “objective thinking,” meaning that it is devoid of prejudice. However, this is only an illusion. Prejudice is inherent to this form of thought. It is found in the preference for the perfect over the imperfect, a preference for admiration over disappointment and even over wonder. In this thought, everything tends toward admiration, and admiration strives to be nothing more than a faithful response to the perfection which reveals itself to reason. And it is precisely in the name of this fundamental preference that thought in the midst of admiration makes an important shift of values: that which is immediate, accessible to the senses, and visible becomes illusory, while that which is indirect, accessible to reason, and invisible becomes real and true.

Is there room for the encounter in the thought that develops in the midst of admiration?

The end result of thought in the midst of admiration can only be an ontology of the stage, but it cannot be a theory of the encounter. Anything that is true is also remote from experience and only accessible through levels of abstraction, whereas an encounter constitutes the peak of experience. If so, then it must also be the peak capability of illusion. Thus, in order to participate in the truth of the person, it is better not to encounter him. A philosophy in the midst of admiration does not know a theory of encounter. An encounter is too great a trial for admiration.

The mythological symbol of the philosophy of admiration is Prometheus. I have already spoken of this and will only repeat now what is important here: Prometheus gave people fire, but the people have nothing to give him in return — nothing, that is, except admiration. Prometheus does not need people. People admire Prometheus but they do not need him. Their business with Prometheus is limited to admiration. No one feels responsible for Prometheus’s fate. They see all too well that his fate concurs with the “ontology of the stage.” The stage can also become an object of their admiration. Charmed by the harmony of things, they do not perceive the essence of the Promethean drama, a drama of tragically unilateral responsibility. They live on such a different level that any possibility of an encounter with Prometheus is ruled out in advance.

But is this perspective on ontology the only possible perspective on admiration and its horizons? Can we never directly experience perfection in another person? Passages from literature provide clear evidence to the contrary. These texts suggest that there is no encounter without some form of admiration. What is the usual object of this admiration? It is beauty in another person. Beauty is harmony exteriorized; it is visible and audible perfection which eliminates the need for ontology. Does the ontology of beauty not destroy beauty? Does beauty not connect people? Does it not cause them to yearn for one another; does it not make it

impossible for them to forget each other? Can beauty permit one person to betray another? 81

4. The Adventure with Beauty

Even though we do not know the exact essence of beauty, there are situations in which we swiftly and confidently proclaim: he (she) is beautiful. We are charmed by the person we see. The force of persuasion with which he presents himself to us even abides comparison with the force of objects and landscapes. Allow me to recall Leo Tolstoy's description of Lewin's encounter with Kitty:

He knew she was there by the rapture and the terror that seized on his heart. She was standing talking to a lady at the opposite end of the ground. There was apparently nothing striking either in her dress or in 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 the smile that shed light all round her. 'Is it possible I can go over there on the ice, go up to her?' he thought. The place where she stood seemed to him a holy shrine, unapproachable, and there was one moment when he was almost retreating, so overwhelmed was he with terror. He had to make an effort to master himself, and to remind himself that people of all sorts were moving about her, and that he too might come there to skate. He walked down, for a long while avoiding looking at her as at the sun, but seeing her, as one does the sun, without looking.

And further on he writes:

...not for one second losing sight of her, he did not look at her. He felt as though the sun were coming near him. She was in a corner, and turning out her slender feet in their high boots with obvious timidity, she skated towards him... When she had got round the turn, she gave herself a push off with one foot, and skated straight up to Shtcherbatsky. Clutching at his arm, she nodded smiling to Levin. She was more splendid than he had imagined her.¹²

Our task is to apprehend the relations which occur between the experience of the beauty of the other (enchantment) and the encounter with him which is the existential experience of his face. There is no theory of beauty at the basis of the analysis that follows. Let the experience of beauty itself suffice us, the conviction that the person we see and hear is beautiful. This is how Levin experiences beauty. Before we examine this experience more closely, let us focus on several somewhat more general points.

BEAUTY AS LIGHT AND JUSTIFICATION. Encountering the beauty of the other, becoming subject to his charm, enthrallment with him, all this is so difficult to grasp with reflection and yet touches us so deeply that it

¹² L. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. C. Garnett, Barnes & Noble Books, New York 2003, pp. 29–30.

82 must be recognized as being not just an act of everyday human life, but rather as an event which is, in a sense, similar to what Martin Heidegger understood by this word. Events are always “meaningful events.” Through them and beginning with them our life and the world which surrounds us change their values, their meaning. The word “event” seems to connote a gift.¹³ That which is “given” in an event is a new sense, a new meaning of basic words, a new order of the space surrounding the person. Through the “event of beauty” man touches something which has the power to justify his presence on the stage of the world with the very core of his existence.

Literary descriptions of the experience of beauty, such as the Tolstoy passage which I just quoted, often use the metaphor of light. Light is both a literary and a pictorial description of meaning. Light symbolizes meaning. The meaning of things is, to human reason, what light is for the human eye. It is true that light can also be blinding, but only through light is it possible to see anything at all. The same goes for the meaning of things. Things become intelligible through their corresponding meaning. I understand what the sheet of paper lying before me is because it is found in the meaningful space delimited by the capacity to read and write. Meaning is a hidden beginning which determines my way of understanding things from in hiding. Something similar is done by the beauty encountered. It too is a beginning from which my interest in the other flows. From that moment on anything I think, feel, or see, I see, feel, and think because the other is beautiful.

Light symbolism was used back in Plato: “But of beauty, I repeat again that we saw her there shining in company with the celestial forms; and coming to earth we find her here too, shining in clearness through the clearest aperture of sense.”¹⁴ Levin feels that the sun has begun to shine by his side: “Everything was illuminated by her. She was the smile that shed light all round her... He walked down, for a long while averting his gaze from her, as one would the sun, but seeing her, as one does the sun, without looking.” The other person presents himself to us as shining with his own light, whereas all the objects surrounding us only shine with reflected light. Light, however, does not only shine outside of man; it also delves inside, where it thus uncovers experiences and feelings which had hitherto remained hidden. Note how beautifully Kierkegaard writes of the encounter between Johannes and Cordelia. I will permit myself to highlight the cognitive moments of the radiant light.

A beautifying solemnity suffuses the situation, a soft morning radiance. She is silent; nothing disturbs the stillness. My eye glides softly over her, not with desire, that indeed would be shameless. A delicate, momentary blush fleets over her, like a cloud over a meadow, rising and receding. What does this blush mean? Is it love? Is it longing, hope, fear? Because the heart’s color is red? Not at all. She is surprised, she marvels — not

¹³ In the Polish language the word for event, “wydarzenie,” has a semantic connection to the word for gift, “dar” (Translator’s note).

¹⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. B. Jowett, The Echo Library, Middlesex 2006, 250D.

at me, that would be too little to offer her; she marvels not at herself but inside herself, she is transformed within. This moment demands stillness, so no reflection must disturb it, no noise of passion interrupt it. It is as though I were not present, and yet my presence is precisely what furnishes the condition for this contemplative wonder of hers. My being is in harmony with hers. In a condition like this, a young girl is to be worshipped and adored, like some deities, in silence.¹⁵

A mysterious radiance unearths man's usually invisible turn toward his untapped richness experienced as an astonishment at oneself, at one's own richness, which one realizes through the other person. However, this vision and discovery would not exist were it not for beauty. Beauty is the communion and beauty uncovers the communion.

Light makes vision possible, while remaining invisible itself. This is a special type of vision. It is not just an ordinary "reflection" of things and events according to their respective structures, but rather a preferential "reflection" according to a hidden hierarchy of values. For Tolstoy's Levin the world illuminated by Kitty's presence is less a visible world than a "sublime," "important," almost "holy" world. The same can be seen in Kierkegaard's text. Johannes sees and discovers not just what merely is, but what is valuable and important. His empathy for the depths of the other's soul seems to bypass the assumption that this might be love, longing, hope, and fear, and comes to rest in astonishment at oneself, where the delicate and intimate relation between Cornelia and him is rooted. Light illuminates what appears most priceless at the moment: that I have made the other is who he is, and so gratitude should be the price for this astonishment.

A similar experience is inherent in the symbolic of the "ascent" used by Plato, and in folklore and legend. Beauty enraptures man and sweeps him up the invisible rungs of a hierarchy of values. By flying high, one is not only able to gain a more far-reaching and broader perspective, but above all, one is able to see what is most important. This ascent grants participation in the wisdom which knows the location of events. Unfortunately, the ascent also entails a danger. Whoever approaches too close to the sun will burn his wings. The symbolism of light entails a symbolism of sacrifice. To see the true order of things, one must participate in the light, but to participate in the light, one must sacrifice something of oneself.

When we stand before the beauty of the other, we place ourselves before something which is not and cannot be predicted. Beauty cannot be "predicted." It is always different — from the surrounding world, from the people one has previously encountered, even from the memories one may have of this person. Levin knew Kitty. He carried a picture of her in his memory, and yet he is startled by the reality. This means that beauty is transcendent. It not only surpasses everything that is not in it, but it is different from other types of beauty. It is unique and unrepeatable. This

¹⁵ S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. A. Hannay, Penguin Books, London 1992, p. 316.

84 person whom I see and am encountering right now is beautiful in this way only once. Tomorrow he will be beautiful in a different way. The unrepeatability of each beauty increases its value all the more. It introduces an alternative into the experience of beauty: now or never. It incites a painful longing to change the present “now” of experience into an eternity. To eternalize beauty is to eternalize my own admiration, my own enthrallment, my own happiness.

Another important quality of beauty is its gratuitous nature. Beauty presents itself to us as an absolute gift, as a grace freely given. Not only is it true that nothing can predict beauty, it is also true that beauty cannot be retained. Beauty cannot be bought, or had, or taken into possession. It is priceless. It is irrevocably capricious. No one owns beauty. It appears because it wants to. It leaves even when the person enchanted by it does not want it to go. Kant wrote, “...beauty evokes disinterested love.” In this sense we may speak of “disinterested beauty.” The word “interest” is derived from “*inter-esse*,” from “among-being.” Beauty is not “among” objects. It is above the structures which delimit and determine the sphere of being. It is necessary to distinguish between what is a condition *sine qua non* for the appearance of beauty, and the beauty itself. Beauty is neither harmony, nor proportion, nor rhythm. It is something different and something more. Beauty reveals and transports us (sometimes we say it enraptures us) to a new and extraordinary level of being. Through beauty the “prose of life” is left somewhere behind us and the “poetry of life” extends before us. Beauty determines a new center for our spiritual life. This can be seen with a particular force when one is infatuated with another. It is only from the experience of beauty that the “interest” in the entire dimension of the other’s facticity begins — for example, with his name, where he lives, what he does for a living.

One more thing: whosoever has experienced the concrete beauty of the other, who has been touched to the core by this beauty, knows from the very beginning that this beauty is a human beauty. It is a person, and not an object or a thing which manifests itself to me in his beauty. It is not that first we perceive a beautiful body and then, only upon taking a step further, do we realize that this is another person’s body. The beauty of another person is human beauty from the outset. “Human” is a trait of beauty as such, and beauty is a trait of “humanity” as such. The other, whom I see and hear, is beautiful in his gaze, his freedom of movement, his sensitivity to the world, his speech, his sadness, his joy, his thoughtfulness, his tears, his inner astonishment, his sublimity, his humility, and his disdain. Revealing beauty reveals man’s “soul” from the beginning. “The basic concept of man is the spirit, and one should not be confused by the fact that he is also able to walk on two feet,” Kierkegaard said. This means that beauty possesses a special dramatic profundity, through which all of man’s gestures, words, and actions are expressed. Human beauty forces us to think about the drama, to feel the drama. Furthermore, beauty participates in the drama and has a special role to play in its fulfillment.

At any moment it can become a tragic beauty or a triumphant beauty. At any moment it can incite despair or the feeling of happiness. It can save or bring to ruin. It is sometimes said that “beauty leads to madness.” There is no exaggeration in these words. Madness appears where the experience is greater and more profound than the capacity of the human spirit. And beauty, precisely the beauty of the other person we encounter, is sometimes greater than the human capacity to comprehend its richness. 85

JUSTIFICATION. Beauty is the beauty of a human being. Beauty makes it possible, in part, to comprehend human mysteries. It is a grace which allows us to live differently and to die differently. Is that all? What significance does beauty have for one who is beautiful? What is the relationship between beauty and its “subject”?

First we must take note of one thing: no being insofar as it is a being justifies itself in its own being through what it is and what it is for. That which is does not obtain its “right to exist” from itself. Existence alone does not exclude absurdity. It is always a value that can justify the existence of a subject. It is only in the presence of values, absolute values, that we ask cease to ask “why”? Beauty is among these absolute values. A person’s beauty embodied in him thus presents itself from the beginning as a value which justifies his existence. When we see the other in his beauty, we know not only that he is, but also why he is. The other is because he is beautiful. When we stand before him we do not ask “why?” We have the answer in advance. Rather, we ask what we should do to have the other nearby so that the beauty will remain. Therefore, we can say that an “allusion to existence” is contained in beauty. Beauty contains an allusion to being in the sense that in itself it justifies the existence of the subject which it designates. Only this existence and this type of existence is a justified existence. In other words, this is an existence which should truly exist.

Here we have inadvertently touched upon the key issues of aesthetics. Thus, for example, Roman Ingarden’s aesthetics explores the relation between beauty and that which is beautiful. Ingarden follows Kant in believing that beauty and the world constituted through beauty are indifferent to existence and non-existence. A literary work is made up of quasi-judgments which refer the reader less to the real world than to the depicted world, to the world which is only intentional. Beauty achieves a “de-realization” of the subject. It places the subject beyond the realm of existence. Kant wrote:

If we wish to discern ... whether something is beautiful, we do not want to know, whether we, or anyone else, are, or even could be, concerned in the real existence of the thing, but rather what estimate we form of it on mere contemplation (intuition or reflection).¹⁶

¹⁶ I. Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, op. cit., p. 43.

86 If this were true, art would be no more than creating illusions. Raymond Polin writes in a similar vein, “The aesthetic universe is not the universe in which I live, but an unreal universe in which one dreams.”¹⁷

I think they could not have been more mistaken. The aim of every value is to justify, or to deny justification to that which is or could be. Positive values justify being. Negative values deny justification to beings. Existence, being, a thing, and an object are gravitational centers for values. Art’s task is to act in accordance with the laws of axiological gravity. The point in art is to constitute justified being in the light of which the entire so-called “real world” could manifest itself as an illusion of real being, as a metaphor of truth. Therefore, there are no quasi-judgements in literature, but real judgements, judgements which determine what the truth of the world should be. Then it is not the depicted world which becomes an illusion of the real world, but the real world, the world which is partly justified and partly devoid of justification, that is an illusion of truth. The work of literature strips the truth from sociology, science, and history, which absolutize the existing reality; and this literary reality is elevated to the dignity of being the sole truth. This is especially apparent in terms of another’s beauty. The persuasive force of this experience consists in the very fact that it presents us not only with the fact that something or someone exists but also that that “something” or “someone” possesses a justification for its/his existence.

All of these experiences — of light, of ascent, of justified existence — lead to the fact that the experience of the human beauty we encounter adopts an existential significance. The enchanted person feels more or less strongly that there is an opportunity to experience a one-of-a-kind adventure of participation in the very source of the sense of being. It appears that nothing has changed after the encounter with beauty, and yet everything has changed: the world and the person. The person’s life somehow becomes more pure, innocent, and holy. And though the enchanted person’s own existence is not beautiful at all, it can find justification in the beauty of the other. Existential hope is born. But how is it that the other’s beauty justifies my own existence? What is the intimate bond between two people that is built by the enchantment with the other’s beauty? Surely it is a human bond, and thus unlike the bond between a spectator and a work of art. What is the human character of this bond? Moreover, what is its non-human character? I have stated that beauty can inspire madness. Where, then, is this moment of cruelty found in beauty, this moment which leads from enchantment to madness?

The person enchanted by the beauty of another attains a special self-knowledge. Beauty surpasses man. It reveals another, inaccessible world to him, and thus, involuntarily, as it were, it repels him, and keeps him at bay. Approaching beauty would, in a way, be an act of desecration. Beauty does not allow itself to be touched. Even when it does give itself, it always

¹⁷ R. Polin, *Du laid, du faux, du mauvais*, Paris 1949, p. 93.

demands a sacrifice in return. Mingling with beauty occurs more from afar, not up close. When one discovers beauty, what can he say, save that he is unworthy? And yet his greatness lies in this very awareness of unworthiness, for he may say of himself thus: “It is I who has truly discovered your beauty.” This is profoundly meaningful. Beauty is not something to be kept for oneself, it is something for another to see, to admire, and to be enthralled by. Beauty inherently demands recognition. It cannot be a light shining for no one, a cry in the desert, a word spoken in solitude. Discovery of and enchantment by beauty constitutes the fulfillment of beauty’s very significance. What would beauty be without being discovered? It would be a wasted beauty, a beauty which is “beautiful in vain.” He who discovers it delivers it from vanity. I am the discoverer. I am the one who became enthralled, who fell silent with admiration, who “prays with his eyes” (Plato). Hitherto you have been surrounded by a crowd of barbarians, but I am not one of them, and because of this, I am worth more.

Kierkegaard says that to become a discoverer one needs the “genius of sensuality.” Only sensuality brought to perfection can perceive the exceptionality of the other person’s beauty. But the genius of sensuality is only a step away from madness. All possibility of precise description ends here. That which can be universalized disappears. The enchanted is bound to singularity, uniqueness, irrepressibility. Our speech becomes one of allusions, metaphors and symbols. Kierkegaard himself uses the metaphor of “musical lyric.” The grace of beauty which flows upon the enchanted person is both lyrical and musical. “Were I to characterize this lyrical quality with a single predicate, I might say ‘It sounds.’”¹⁸ It is light, it flows, it constructs a bright space around me, it brings tears to my eyes, it brings me to my knees. It should be eternal... But it only sounds! Since it sounds, it must also pass, elapse; it is frail. Beauty is incredibly fragile. Fragility foreshadows a tragedy. Beauty is both absolute and fragile. It justifies being, but it also needs being to reveal itself. I am a discoverer, and it is I who knows the tragic nature of beauty. I am the genius of this one discovery. I hope that the beautiful person will take notice of it because beauty is happiest when it can construct its own genius.

A slight digression. This is not the moment to delve into the details of the theory of sensual perception developed by modern philosophy, at least since Descartes. Let us just take a look at one of its aspects. As we know, this theory has developed toward trying to identify what is most elemental in the totality of perception, in attempting to dissect the whole into its parts, which led first to the separation of the senses (for example, John Locke separates the sense of space from sight, hearing, or taste) and then to distinguishing basic impressions within the framework of the sensory data of each sense. These basic impressions would possibly then correlate to the quality of the sensory data or something of the kind. Even Husserl’s theory of perception followed this course. An attempt to

¹⁸ S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, op. cit., p. 181.

88 reconstruct perception as a whole was only made starting from its elementary components. But, as Gestalt theory has brought to evidence, attempts to build a whole from its parts will not lead us to our goal. One would not be able to obtain anything in conglomerate data which was not already contained in the elementary data, and yet it turns out that the content of even the most simple of perceptions far exceeds what is contained in the elementary data.

Kierkegaard's theory of sensuality to which I have been alluding walks the opposite course. Man's entire sensuality strives for synthesis. This synthesis is to be fulfilled in one unique discovery — the discovery of the singular beauty of the other. The purpose of the senses is brought to fulfillment in this discovery. But the singular beauty of the other cannot be derived either from the data of any single sense, nor from the totality of impressionary data from all the senses combined. Beauty transcends a sensual quality. And yet it is rooted in it. This is where its paradox lies: it forces the discoverer to recognize its sensuality, and at the same time to transcend it.

The discovery of another person's beauty, the enchantment caused by this beauty, and the resulting dignity of the unique discoverer presents just one aspect, of what I would call a joyful enchantment. But enchantment also has a second aspect. One must pay for the discovery of beauty with suffering. The peculiar nature of this suffering determines the specificity of the bond that is born between the two people. What is the source of this suffering? It is the very nature of beauty. "True sublimity is a value for all," says Kierkegaard. This means that to discover beauty as such also means renouncing possession of beauty. This is because beauty, like light, cannot be had for oneself. Beauty tends, by its very nature, toward universality. We all know the stories of medieval knights who would travel from city to city, everywhere singing the praises of their most beautiful damsels, and ready to duel other "geniuses of sensuality" who would dare claim otherwise. There is no doubt that such behavior lies within the logical framework of the phenomenon of beauty. Beauty allows itself to be discovered, but it does not allow itself to be touched, embraced or possessed exclusively. Kierkegaard is an excellent witness to these things. For Kierkegaard, beauty is not a thing's lifeless appearance, but rather light which gives and takes life; a flame which warms but also burns; the value from which man's true drama begins. The drama is not about becoming enthralled or not, but rather about saving or losing oneself. In light of Kierkegaard's texts, any purely aesthetic treatment of beauty, like those contained in handbooks of aesthetics, treats the matter in a deplorably superficial way.

The adventure with the beauty of the other, for Kierkegaard, begins by assuming the position of a page. (He develops his reflections on beauty as a commentary to Mozart's *Figaro* and *Don Juan*.) Beauty makes a page of the enchanted person. The page admires and serves; he remains silent because he is at a loss for words. "The sensual awakens though not to

movement but to motionless rest, not to joy but to deep melancholy.”¹⁹ 89
Enthrallment is first a “motionless rest” at the beautiful one’s side. Beauty does not allow one to speak. Words are insufficient, and it is better to render homage to beauty with silence. Beauty also does not allow one to leave its side. It promises too much. A paradox arises, because beauty also does not allow itself to be approached. It is too great, too far beyond reach, too fiery. Beauty demands sacrifice. The first sacrifice to beauty is the freedom to move at will. One must constantly remain nearby. And in this way, beauty takes its discoverer into possession. “Desire possesses what will become its object but does so without having desired it, and in that way does not possess it. That is the painful, but in its sweetness, also captivating and fascinating contradiction which resounds with its sadness, its melancholy, through this stage.”²⁰ It possesses without possessing... Beauty has already taken possession of its discoverer, but its discoverer has no right to take possession of beauty. He must remain but a discoverer. The pain of this contradiction finds its proper expression in a sigh. The page’s desire, writes Kierkegaard, “does not indicate a relation with to the object but is identical with its sigh, and this is infinitely deep.”²¹ The sigh bears testimony to the pain of unfulfilled possession. Yet it bears testimony for someone. Someone should hear it. Who? Of course this is the one who is causing the pain, the beautiful person. In this testimony lies a hidden petition for mercy. Because beauty, even though it is enchanting, can also be cruel. It possesses, but it escapes being possessed itself.

Let us go one step further in our investigation of the pains born of beauty. Beauty possesses, but does not allow itself to be possessed. Beauty is not bound to fidelity. It may look or not look, listen or not, take into account or not, draw near or go away. But should the one who has discovered the beauty be faithful to it? Yes, but only until he discovers a greater beauty and a sweeter enslavement. For this reason Kierkegaard writes, “... desire aims at discoveries. The delight in discovery is what pulsates in it, is its animation. It does not find the real object of this search, but it discovers the multiplicity through searching within it for the object it seeks to discover.”²² We will call one more witness, Plato:

He who would proceed rightly in this business must not merely begin from his youth to encounter beautiful bodies. In the first place, indeed, if his conductor guides him aright, he must be in love with one particular body, and engender beautiful converse therein; but next he must remark how the beauty attached to this or that body is cognate to that which is attached to any other, and that if he means to ensue beauty in form, it is gross folly not to regard as one and the same the beauty belonging to all; and so, having grasped this truth, he must make himself a lover of all beautiful bodies.²³

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

²¹ Ibid., p. 86.

²² Ibid., p. 86.

²³ Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. H.N. Fowler, Cambridge, MA 1925, p. 210 A–B.

90 Enchantment does not create a problem of fidelity. The possession of the enchanted one is relative, as is the authority of the enchanters over the enchanted.

At this point we touch upon the tragedy of beauty.

The meaning of the tragedy is determined by the experience of possession. This possession itself, an unfulfilled and unfulfillable possession, pulls toward tragedy. We recall that astonishment has already led us to the depths of the experience of possession. Astonishment is born there where the relation of possessing the world is broken. Something appears to be different, foreign to the person, because of its sublimity or its hostility. Astonishment has proven itself to be the work of recovered familiarity. The perfect world becomes the foundation for a perfect harmony with man. And what about beauty? The beauty of the other is visible perfection. But beauty is both familiar and unfamiliar. It attracts and repels, promises and refuses, delights and saddens. It is both cruel and gracious. The desire to possess beauty is brought to its culmination. At the same time, however, this desire is radically called into question. Beauty is precisely that which one would like to possess, and yet which cannot be possessed. Enchantment becomes the misfortune of the enchanted. At the same time, it is his good fortune which he cannot relinquish. A misfortune is hidden in this boon: he who is enchanted is made happy, but incompletely happy, we could almost say “badly happy.”

This could be described as an “illness of the senses” or, more succinctly, “madness.” This illness consists in destroying the structure of intentionality. By surpassing the heights of genius, sensuality no longer tends toward the external world, it seeks rather the experience of itself, concentrating on its own sensations of longing, memories, dreams, desires, imaginations, and fantasies, in which every “you are mine” turns out to be an illusion. The pain of illusory possession which is present above all in longing is the framework of the enchanted one’s self-knowledge. It is as if the entire person has become a painful sigh, a constant attempt at attaining the unattainable, at grabbing a fistful of light. The pain of self-knowledge hinders perception of the truth about the other. Who is the other? For the self-knowledge stricken with madness he is only beauty, nothing less and nothing more. Whom does this beauty need? No one! What then is the enchanted doing basking in its rays? He himself does not know. And for this reason he lives on the verge of an encounter. There are times when he would rather die. Dying becomes the fulfillment of enchantment.

Is there any solution to these contradictions?

THE MYSTERY OF THE FACE. I have said that beauty is a promise of which only the presence of the promisor is beyond doubt, whereas the substance of the promise itself does not pass the threshold of ambiguity. Ambiguity — this is the key to our problem. What does “ambiguity” mean? Kant

says that, “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good.”²⁴ The full meaning of those words will only become apparent when we relate it to the situation of enchantment. 91

We are in the middle of a drama with another person. We constantly find ourselves at a crossroads. The beauty of the other person which presented itself to us at the crossroads has something absolute. The other truly *is*. The other is as someone beautiful; he is in his beauty. He approaches, and he might create a new path for my freedom. He is an absolute promise for me. Yet right behind the discovery of his absoluteness comes the discovery that his promises are not univocal. What does beauty promise me? It promises me something good, but in the same way a symbol does: ambiguously. “Praying with the eyes” to the beauty, I stare into the depths of the promise, but I do not see what it brings.

And here two possibilities and two possible directions of further analysis take form.

The first possibility is that we pass from the aesthetic dimension of experiencing the other person to the ethical dimension. This is what the above-mentioned Kant quotation refers to. Beauty promises moral good. Beauty does not disappear, but is rather “abolished” by good. Ethics begins after aesthetics. Aesthetics is an introduction to ethics. Enchantment is an introduction to the encounter. The role of beauty has come to a conclusion. The meaning of beauty is to open a deeper horizon of moral good and evil before man. This is the first path and first direction of possible analysis.

The second possibility is more complicated. It consists in identifying beauty with good. Then, beauty itself, insofar as it is beautiful, becomes the good. Beauty becomes the only absolute. Good exists only inasmuch as it corresponds with beauty, and the same goes for truth. Outside of beauty there is only evil and falsehood. As we know, a poetic expression of beauty experienced in this way is found in Baudelaire’s *The Flowers of Evil*. For example, we read:

Is it not sufficient for effulgence that you are illusion?
My heart, disdaining truth for pretense, kneels.
Are you indifference, stupidity, or boredom?
Be you a mask or a painting, I salute you! I adore you in your beauty.²⁵

From this perspective every evil which creates beauty or which is needed by beauty is no longer evil. Suffering is not killing. Betrayal is not disdain. There is no more boundary between truth and untruth. Only beauty counts. The beautiful have no fault.

Let us examine this second possibility. Our reflections here are devoted to the “offroads of encounters.” The question that interests us

²⁴ I. Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, op. cit., p. 223.

²⁵ Adapted from the Polish translation of Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal* by H.W. Bieńkowski, as quoted by the author (Translator’s note).

92 is, “Why do those enchanted by beauty walk the verge of an encounter?” We will leave the analysis of the first possibility for when we deal with the encounter from a positive point of view. We will then consider how it is possible to pass from the experience of the other’s beauty to an experience of the other’s good. For now, let us continue to dwell on the “adventure with beauty.”

The adventure with beauty is, above all, a specific “adventure” with someone else’s face. It appears along with the problem of crossing the enchanted circle of “being possessed by beauty” and “possessing beauty.” How can one have beauty for himself?

Take note that both the page and the discoverer are moved by a desire for beauty to take them under its care. To find oneself under beauty’s care is to be possessed by beauty, and to be possessed by beauty is to find justification and salvation in beauty. Beauty’s warmth extends wherever its rays reach. This creates a hope for saving the value of one’s life: my existence receives value and meaning when it is near that which is meaning itself. Beauty has been recognized as an axiological absolute which justifies and does not necessitate justification itself. This is the reason for the desire of the enchanted to remain near to the beauty, to possess it and to be possessed by it. As we can see, the stakes are fairly high. Man’s beauty creates a limit situation for him. But there is a problem. How can we be possessed by someone else’s beauty and at the same time possess the beauty?

Here we once again see the difference between human and non-human beauty. Beyond human beauty there is the beauty of human freedom. The other person, the beautiful other person, can, should, and could wish something for himself. Thus both the page’s sigh, the discoverer’s pain and the enchanted’s suffering, as well as their deepest joys, are permeated by one and the same intention: the unending petition for the other to recognize in his beauty his true face, and through this recognition to recognize my recognizing him in his beauty. The issue with the other’s beauty does not end with pure enchantment. The other must also discover and see in himself what I have discovered and seen in him. In this way my being enchanted by him becomes his inner reality. His face will bear my seal. It will become my masterpiece. This special masterpiece of drama and not just of visual art will be the fruit of an enchanted genius in my senses. His freedom will take a step on the path I have thought up for it. In this way, and only in this way, will I be someone else’s possession, but my possessor and owner will also be possessed by me. We will accompany each other like shadows in mutual aesthetic entanglement.²⁶

²⁶ The philosopher who fully appreciated the significance of man’s “recognition” of man for his humanity to be truly fulfilled was Hegel. What I write here is fundamentally an application of Hegel’s concept. Hegel’s influence can also be seen in Kierkegaard, despite the contradiction between their two styles of thought. Kierkegaard, for example, believed in the Hegelian concept of “creative negation,” and this belief is at the base of many of his analyses. It would be interesting to more closely examine this influence and relation, which might lead to a change in how the relation between the two philosophers is commonly portrayed.

What then is for me “my” beautiful person? He is a work of dramatic art. What am I for him? I am an artist who has brought his beauty to completion. I share a destiny with him in the same way that a plot is shared on stage. I only have one desire: that the end of the play will be as beautiful as this person is. 93

Once again let us look to Kierkegaard for a concrete example. Kierkegaard speaks of “seduction” (the title of his work is “The Seducer’s Diary”), though here seduction is understood in a purely aesthetic sense, as a form of artistic creation. The pain of creation is twofold: the pain of the creator and the pain of the created. Pain must not be feared. The true work of art must accept pain. “Don Juan,” writes Kierkegaard, “not only seeks happiness with girls but also gives them happiness or unhappiness; but what is singular is that they do not desire anything else. It would be a bad girl who would not want unhappiness in order to be happy just once with Don Juan.”²⁷ But before she will find her possible unhappiness (who knows if it will come), it is the hour to experience beauty, the beauty which delights and reveals. What should he who has discovered beauty do? “She is rich even though she does not know that she owns anything. She is rich, she is a treasure.”²⁸ She should therefore be made aware of who she is, so that she will make of her beauty her face. In this way her beauty will make her innocent.

What does the artist expect from his work of art? He expects it to be complete, that is, to be an independent work of art. The artist acts in accordance with the logic of beauty. Beauty does not need anyone, not even the artist. The artist knows this. Kierkegaard writes:

She must become stronger in herself before I can let her find repose in me. It may look in flashes as though it were here I would make the confidante in my freemasonry, but it is only in flashes. She herself must be developed inwardly; she must feel her soul’s resilience; she must test the world’s weight... She must owe me nothing, for she must be free; love exists only in freedom, only in freedom are there recreation and everlasting amusement. For although I intend her to fall into my arms through, as it were, natural necessity, and am striving to bring things to the point where she gravitates towards me, it is nevertheless also important that she does not fall as a heavy body, but gravitates as spirit towards spirit. Although she is to belong to me, it mustn’t be just in the unaesthetic sense of resting on me like a burden. She must neither be a hanger-on physically speaking nor an obligation morally. Between the two of us must prevail the only the proper play of freedom. She must be so light for me that I can take her on my arm.²⁹

This exceptional text contains no more or less than an aesthetic justification of infidelity.

The artist must strive for his work of art to become independent of him. He has no moral obligations toward his work of art, especially not

²⁷ S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, op. cit., p. 113.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 299ff.

94 fidelity. The perfect work of art is completely independent. If creating is an act of pure magnanimity, then there should be no gratitude. To create is not to possess. But this is something that the artist is incapable of. In the end, something must exist between him and his masterpiece, even if it is only “free play.” This is why the artist demands that his work of art recognize him as the artist. This is no small request. Through this recognition the artist enters the inner reality of his masterpiece. Therefore, he desires both to have and not to have. He embraces what he cannot embrace and releases what he cannot abandon. Magnanimity struggles with jealousy. The genius of his senses becomes the inception of his madness.

Cordelia is a work of art. She suffers, but it is no common pain. Only the uncommonly beautiful may suffer uncommon pain. Through Johannes, Cordelia’s pain becomes uncommonly beautiful suffering. Who does not admire Cordelia’s feelings?

I do not call you ‘mine’, I realize very well you never have been, and I am punished enough by this thought having once gladdened my soul; and yet I do call you ‘mine’: my seducer, my deceiver, my foe, my murderer, source of my unhappiness, grave of my joy, abyss of my ruin. I call you ‘mine’ and call myself ‘yours’...³⁰

This text reveals the essence of aesthetic tragedy, the contradiction in the soul of the person who has recognized that his true face lies in his beauty. This person is aware that he has become a work of art. To be aware that one is a work of art is to become entangled in the contradiction of both belonging and not belonging to someone else. This situation can be called the tragedy of appearances. Apparently one has the freedom to decide for himself, but in reality this freedom has not been obtained. Apparently the artist owes his masterpiece fidelity, but in reality his own masterpiece frees him of that obligation. Apparently there is no loneliness here, but in reality the work of art is the loneliest of all works. The only comfort which remains is the admiration in the eyes of the “genius discoverer,” though there is a blindness to the true drama of man in this admiration. In this way the aesthetic path of experiencing the other becomes the source of people’s beauty, a beauty which is in no way superior for being aesthetic beauty.

Kierkegaard does not let Johannes have the last word, but rather describes the matter himself with laconic objectivity. He alludes to the conscience thus: “For him conscience takes the form simply of a higher level of consciousness which expresses itself in a disquietude that still fails to accuse him in a deeper sense, but which keeps him awake...”³¹ The artist does not feel guilty. He is kept awake not due to the voice of his conscience, but to the fear of revenge. The figures created by artists can visit them in their sleep to seek justice. Johannes is armored. He does not really believe Cordelia’s accusations. The artist impoverished Cordelia because of her

³⁰ Ibid., p. 255.

³¹ Ibid., p. 252.

beauty and so acknowledged that in beauty the contradiction between good and evil, between truth and falsehood disappears. Even Cordelia's ingenuity becomes beautiful, the ingenuity of a woman who initially did not know what adventure she was getting into, and now does not know why and of what she makes accusations. The accusation is nothing more than an element of the drama, which enhances its dramaticity. If in so doing she causes Johannes to suffer, this is not a moral, but rather an aesthetic suffering, rooted in the "striking power" characteristic of every great beauty. Johannes can say, "you are too beautiful for me to feel guilt." No matter what he does, whether he comes or leaves, it will always be justified by the beauty of the idolized other. 95

IDOLIZATION. Our analyses have revolved around the experience of offroads. Let us take another step in this same direction. Let us ask ourselves: What is the result of the final enchantment? What is the ultimate goal of that special appeal for the other person to recognize his greatest worth in his own beauty? What is the end result of enchantment?

As we have said: the end result is the idolization of man. In the depths of his heart the enchanted one recognizes that the person who has enchanted him is his idol. The godliness of that idol is the violence flowing from his beauty. Idolization is an aesthetic act (or process?). It has three dimensions — the other person, myself before him, and third parties.

By idolizing the other, one raises the other above himself. The other is not of this world, and has no paths in this world. Idolization is carried out according to the intentionality of astonishment, admiration and enchantment, that is, according to the offroads of encounters. The other is elevated so high that I am not able to help him, and moreover, I do not need to. Enchantment is what connects us. One other thing constitutes the nodal moment in the process of idolization. It is the acknowledgement that the other, because of his beauty, is beyond good and evil. At this point idolization abolishes ethics. It creates the principle of a new morality and simultaneously of a new religiosity. The good is that which is beautiful insofar as it is beautiful. The absolutely godly is that which, by enchanting, abolishes freedom. The beautiful person is a hero. He is holiness. If I lose him, I lose everything.

Idolized beauty abolishes freedom in man, and in such a way that man is not aware that his freedom is being abolished. He is convinced that this is the way it should be, and that it is good. The idol exacts a sacrifice of one's freedom. There is a difference between sacrificing one's freedom and fulfilling an act of freedom. The fulfillment of an act of freedom is a realization of freedom just as a word is a realization of speech. The sacrifice of freedom is a choice of slavery. Idolized beauty abolishes man's freedom without fulfilling it. Freedom becomes unnecessary because man attains his happiness without it. In this way, by renouncing his freedom, man attains a state of irresponsibility. He is no longer responsible

96 for either his good or for his evil acts. The enchanting violence makes him amoral. Man's entire "ethos" revolves around one axis — the inner experience of enchantment. Enchantment by the other becomes food for the soul, and tasting the enchantment is his conscience. Idolization is an manifestation of immature responsibility.

But the idol, despite its transcendence, demands witness before others. The errant knight must go into the world to sing the praises of the idolized. It is a matter of constantly enlarging the idols' kingdoms. The idolization of the idol consists not only in making the enchantment grow, but also in contributing to making it an idol for others.

Here I cannot enter into reflections of a religious nature, but for the sake of contrast I will just say a few words. Because Christianity has been a religion of the encounter from the very beginning, it has become an antipode to the religion of beauty. Christ was flagellated, and then died on a cross. One of the key events of the Gospels took place against a backdrop of ugliness, or even monstrosity. One of the conditions for killing a person was to renounce all attributes of beauty. It was only afterward that artists began to change the appearance of the crucifixion, and attempted to find elements of rhythm, harmony and color in it. But the original meaning was different: salvation does not always tread the paths of the experience of beauty. This has a profound significance for the entire concept of the encounter. He who would wish to encounter Christ must be ready to look for him beyond the paths of astonishment — admiration — enchantment. St. Paul would write that Christ is a "scandal for the Jews and a folly for the pagans." But it is precisely that moment of scandal and folly which is incredibly important, because it is conducive to the birth of a true feeling of responsibility, through which man not only receives something from the other, but is also disposed to give something of himself to him.