

The Agathological Man

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My speech will deal only with those views of Tischner's that he included in the book entitled *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man]. I do not intend to analyze it, as Aleksander Bobko and Tadeusz Gadacz have already made analyses in their articles.¹ I will only refer to several theses that served the author as the point of departure in his vision of man, the vision that he himself calls agathological. But I will refer to them not in order to develop or comment on them. On the contrary, drawing on Tischner's inspirations, I will look at his theses from quite a different perspective. For I must admit that from almost the first pages of the book I was overcome by manifold and serious doubts.

¹ T. Gadacz, "Bóg w filozofii Tischnera" [God in Tischner's Philosophy], *Znak* issue 550 (3/2001); A. Bobko, "Poszukiwanie prawdy o człowieku" [Searching for the Truth of Man], *Znak* issue 550 (3/2001).

122 The first one concerns agathology itself: What is it? How can it be defined?

I do not know whether I read the author's intentions well. One could assume that agathology – to which the word itself would indicate – is a branch of philosophy and its subject is the good. It could be ontology or rather: the phenomenology of the good, which is suggested in the Introduction by the words referring to Ingarden. However, from the whole statement one can infer that the author does not have in mind a separate philosophical discipline, that in speaking about agathology, he means man, man around goodness, that this is a kind of anthropology. He once began with “thinking in values,” here he would like to think in terms of the good. This kind of thinking – often evading the phenomenological method – does not oblige one to any systematics. It becomes a free reflection, sometimes more suggestive than scholarly disquisitions. However, that does not mean that it lacks consistency. All in all, I think that Tischner's reflections cut themselves off, on the one hand, from ethics focused on duties and norms, and on the other from axiology, that is, from all discussions on values, their source, hierarchy, always connected with the matters of the concrete world. Thus understood, agathology is perhaps the only way of speaking about the matters so unclear, diverse and changeable in man's experience, matters that cannot be forced into accurate notions. Therefore, its project seems interesting to me, and surely important. However, Tischner's reflections develop via two significant assumptions. The first, with which I may entirely agree, states that man is freedom, and as a free being he is fully responsible for his actions. The second is not so obvious: in man there is “longing for what is truly good” (p. 65).² The good is to be always present on his horizon and the question is how it is attainable; this is the condition of man's deliverance from evil. Tischner devoted the whole book to this great question.

Another doubt concerns the outlined structure of man's being. In this structure the author distinguishes two orders: one, which he called ontological, runs from creation through revelation to salvation. The second, agathological, runs through the following questions: Why was I created? Why was I chosen? Why was I saved? The categories used in this description clearly indicate that the author does not intend to speak about being, about existentials, but that he transfers all the issues concerning man from a philosophical to a religious level. From this level he engages in a discussion which well illustrates the line of the author's thinking, in which he juxtaposes revelation – and revelation in Tischner, which he underscores many times, is the experience of “being chosen” – with Hegel's “recognition.” Tischner cannot accept “recognition,” although it would seem that this part of Hegel's phenomenology should be close to his way of thinking. For, as he reminds us, “to recognize means: to accept the other and to be accepted by the other. Thanks to recognition I discover

² I mark all pages from *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man] in brackets in the text.

myself, my place with others and next to others in the sensible space of the world.” (p.181) Recognition in Hegel is the harbinger of dialogical thinking, it is the moment in which the other consciousness begins to exist for [my] consciousness, in which the self ceases to be closed in itself and goes beyond itself. The other is for me, and I am for the other. At last, thanks to recognizing the other, consciousness becomes self-consciousness. And Hegel states directly: “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another.”³ At the same time, he states that it is through this act that the kingdom of ethics may open. And yet, for Tischner, these theses are unacceptable for at least two reasons. First, he explains that according to Hegel, the longing for recognition and striving to be recognized are expressed in often fierce competition. As a result, two independent beings immediately come in conflict with each other, fight a battle which is to be the driving force of the human drama. Tischner explicitly rejects this Hegelian motive of the fight, although this fight, as he himself admits, “reveals to man his own and the other’s freedom, his own and the other’s truth, his own and the other’s salvation – with others or against them.” (p. 183)

Second, in Hegel only reason brings the solution to conflicts caused by this fight for recognition. Only reason is capable of transforming a negative attitude toward the other, as it gives man the ability to understand the meaning of the world. Therefore, all that is subjective is submitted to the objectivity of reason, and ethics itself is submitted to the objectivity of the law established. Herein, Tischner sees the greatest difference between Hegel’s recognition and his own concept of revelation as being chosen. Recognition is made entirely objective and rational. In Hegel there is always reason beyond man, and reason leads to “the logic of being.” On the other hand, revelation tells me that I have been chosen, which implies that the other has trusted me. The other calls me, asks a question and trusts himself to me. According to Tischner, who follows the steps of Lévinas, it is only in this context that dialogical relations reign. And these dialogical relations are neither cognition nor recognition, but commitment toward the other, and as such, they are higher than “the logic of being.” They are all oriented toward the good, and only the good justifies being. Therefore “freedom which revolves on the level of dialogical relations, happens in the element of the good and evil, and not being and non-being. ... The person confides and accepts confidences.” (p. 187)

So when I read Tischner’s words I am willing to undertake agathological reflection on a purely philosophical level. I feel like asking whether such an agathological man can exist at all. This question leads to another: what shows in man when we look at him from the perspective of the good? While asking such questions I cannot evade the most significant one: the question of the good itself. Undertaking a reflection of this character, I must liberate it from religious references and, as a

³ G.W.Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1998, p. 111.

¹²⁴ consequence, make radical changes in the structure of being proposed by Tischner. In man's being there is always a beginning and end, and this being always has a course, though this course may be defined in many ways. It is often treated as an unceasing struggle to survive. Others see it as a fight for happiness or the aspiration to excellence or advancing knowledge etc. But the whole construction is determined by the choice of the first moment, as this decides, in a way, the vision of each individual life. And the category of creation immediately involves the Creator. And since He created man, then all man's being depends on Him and to Him it should lead. Salvation becomes the only sensible aim. In this Christian perspective, in which Tischner moves so faithfully, divine grace means more than all man's efforts. Even freedom is not a complete freedom, for as Tischner admits, "the closing [of freedom] in the limitations of the finitude results in a situation where it is tempted by nothingness and sin" (p. 345).

Passing from the religious level to a purely ontological one, I prefer to follow Heidegger's path, distinguishing between moments of being thrown into the world, revealing and fulfillment. I have been thrown into the world because of thousands of different events and circumstances, thrown into a specific time and place, into a situation which has become for me a point of departure on this difficult path of life. There is no room here for asking why. Every existence is a fact. I live – only this can I say. All the events that brought about my birth will never be elucidated, nor will be the past no longer present. Biologists say that I owe a great deal to the genes of my ancestors, but do they determine everything? Did they determine my fate? Can the vices and failings which perhaps I inherited justify my actions? Agathology cannot dismiss these questions, and they immediately lead to the attempt to analyze the experience which gives rise to the ethical order. What is significant for it? Is it the aspiration to be recognized that Hegel wrote about? The necessities of life? Social requirements of agreement? Or is it an unspecified, spontaneous desire for goodness? Is the good born within us? Does it reveal itself somehow? And if so, then when? In what moments? What is the role – to make it possible for the good to occur – of our critical look at ourselves, at the self, at its passions, desires and weaknesses? In this agathology the main category would not be salvation, but revealing both the solemnity of goodness as well as my self, and heading for – if it is at all possible, in the Hegelian way – a more and more complete self-knowledge, to the plenitude in thinking (about which I spoke in another essay), i.e. to wisdom which is always connected with ethical values. This revealing would lead not to salvation – for it is difficult to conceive – but only to the possible dignified fulfillment of life. So I sketch a picture of the path into the heart of the matter, though I perfectly realize that few people choose it, that our life is usually more mundane, and I remain in the sphere of postulates rather than reality.

However, if I am to continue presenting such an agathology based on categories of being thrown into the world, revealing and fulfillment, I

cannot omit the basic question: the question of the monad, about which ¹²⁵ Tischner wrote at great length. For this old term is dangerous, and may lead us astray. First of all, it seems that it does not favor reflection on ethical questions. As the monad is closed, and as such it is separated not only from the surrounding world – and other people as well – but also sentenced to solitude, to being in itself and for itself. So the monad not only annuls the problem of recognition but also – or rather above all – of dialogical relations. For a long time the adherents of the monadic concept have faced problems that could not be solved easily. For if every man is such a monad, how can he encounter the other, how can he get in touch with the other? Can one do good while closed off? The good is born not in the solitude of the Self but among people. A way out of this predicament was sought. Leibniz found it in pre-established harmony and in God's will. He tried to prove that both the cognition of another monad, as well as all the influence exerted upon it are possible, for every monad contains the whole world. However, it is an entirely ideal influence, which can be exercised only due to God's intervention. "For since one created Monad cannot have any physical influence upon the inner being of another, it is only by this means that the one can be dependent upon the other."⁴ Thus Leibniz grants God's will with the power which – as long as the monads give in to it – enables all man's actions to adapt the perfect harmony. He also states that the more perfect this adaptation is, the stronger the monads strive after infinitude and the higher level of clarity they attain in cognition. Thus ethics was made dependent both on God and the changes happening in the monad itself, not on movement toward the other, since this always requires divine mediation. In Leibniz there is no room for even the idea of dialogue.

It is otherwise in Husserl. We know that his views were changing greatly in this regard and we can clearly see certain theses almost analogical to Hegel's. For Husserl could not have passed over the question of how to reconcile the pure transcendental consciousness with other conscious subjects, which due to the phenomenological reduction can only be recognized as immanent transcendents. Here again the great problem of intersubjectivity was born, which Husserl undertook in his "second" *Ideas* and later works. As a result, he reached the conclusion that though a monad is something quite separate (which implies that its experiences cannot belong to another monad's stream of experience), it contains the whole of conscious life together with the whole horizon of the surrounding world. Thus it is something in itself, and yet it opens itself to the world. Moreover: the pure Self is constituted only through contact with others. Now, since, in the unity of the total apperception, "man," the psychic, which is attributed to the Body "in empathy," is apprehended as really united with this Body, then it is understandable that Bodily events are apprehended as properly belonging to this human

⁴ G.W. Leibniz, *The Monadology*, trans. Robert Latta, Forgotten Books 1968, p.12.

126 subject, i.e. are apprehended as “mine.”⁵ The monad ceases to be closed. And Husserl added:

I apprehend myself as dependent in my behavior, in my acts, on the things themselves, on their beautiful color, on their special form, on their pleasant or dangerous properties. ... The same applies in an even more striking way to the dependencies in which persons know themselves as dependent on others, and not merely on individual persons but on communities of persons, social institutions, the state, morals, the law, the church, etc. The apprehension of the man as a real personality is dependent is determined throughout by such dependencies. A man is what he is as *a being who maintains himself* in his commerce with the things of his thingly, and with the persons of his personal, surrounding world, and who, in doing so, maintains his individuality throughout.⁶

Thus Husserl could speak about “the community of monads” and “the harmony of monads.” Though Husserl remained on a cognitive level in his reflections, he opened the possibility of various paths toward ethics – it suffices to recall his opposition to treating other people as objects, overlooking a moral person in them, which to some extent – he added – can be justified: when we treat man purely theoretically, as an object of cognition, a subject of a scientific research. However, if man’s self is entirely unacknowledged, this becomes unlawful. In contact with the other, “the bonds of agreement” are decisive. Understanding and agreement are needed. In such relations the persons “are given to each other as “companions,” not as *opposed objects but as counter-subjects* who live “with” one another, who converse and are related to one another, actually or potentially, in acts of love or counter-love, of hate and counter-hate, of confidence and reciprocated confidence, etc.”⁷ The monad in Husserl abandoned its “egoistic world” and at the same time it entered the world of the “spirit of community,” the world of culture.

The rules of the constitution remained valid, it only rose to a higher level, whose peak is the substitution of I with We. At the end of his life Husserl said the following: “I, ego ... on the one hand constitute themselves and their horizon of others and at the same time the homogeneous community of ‘us.’ This constitution is not the constitution of the world but the achievement that may be called monadization of ego: achieving personal monadization, monadic pluralization.”⁸

The dialogue opposes constitution. The dialogue is directness of contact, the result of the encounter. Here I agree with Tischner and Lévinas. The latter often showed that the constitution treats others as objects, that it makes other monads depend on noetic-noematic structures, and thus in a concrete life it leads to various abuses, usurpations not only of

⁵ E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. R. Rojcewicz, A. Schuwer, Springer 1990. p.102.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.148.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.204.

⁸ K. Świącicka, *Husserl*, Warsaw 1993, p.88.

reason, but politics as well. Lévinas added that it is true that Husserl understood the thought in the intentional act to reach horizons that gave it unexpected meaning, so that it transcended itself. However, he drew no conclusions from this. He did not notice that in this constant transcending themselves, the structures of the constitution become blasted, that they cannot contain all intentional acts, and especially the acts of the source experience, i.e. ethical acts. The description of the constitution hide what is more primordial than constitution: the moment in which I turns “to the absolutely Other,” turns on “the call from the Other.” And Lévinas added: “The absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation.” Elsewhere he said: “*Revelation* constitutes a veritable inversion *objectifying cognition*.”⁹

It is beyond doubt that the dialogue takes place not in the world of theory but in real and direct contact. However, in speaking of this I would rather refer to the category of disclosure than revelation and its religious connotations, which neither impoverishes the dialogue nor deprives it of its significance. Contact is born spontaneously, in an unexpected situation, but it immediately means something to me, as does the other. Something reveals itself to me in him or through him, something in him captivates me, forces me to speak to him; and he speaks to me. But what is needed for a real dialogue to appear is – as Husserl put it – the plane of mutual desire for understanding and agreement. It is when we want to understand the other that bonds form, and these are always of the ethical character. In dialogue we are not indifferent, we offer something, we receive something from the interlocutor. That is why if the dialogue is not to be an exchange of empty words, but is to move the interlocutors deeply, the monad must open. Yet the problem remains to what extent this opening is possible. And if it is possible, surely it is not easy. Sometimes Hegelian recognition is enough here, for it does not have to be some rational evaluation as the point is not in rational cognition but in a spontaneous expression of respect.

Every monad has the privilege to be capable of closing itself. But is it also capable of opening for the other in the whole radicalism of this “for”? Here a new range of problems appears. For one of the principal questions that can be posed deals with this “for”: How far can it go? What danger can it possibly bring? In a monad with the door closed everything seems easier, though I would not say trivial. On the basis of a few examples, Tischner tries to show that this for-itself of a monad transforms into against-itself. In the closure, he states, a monad remains “without the feeling of friendship, it expels itself from the community of sadness and joy. Who is there to talk to? Who to laugh with? Who to dance with?” (p.240) The monad is being overcome with helplessness, and it is only hope that protects the value of a person. Devoid of hope, a person discovers that he is bad and longs for only one thing: to become a “thing,” that is to say, to destroy oneself.

These are dramatic words, strongly underscoring the drama of our existence, to which Tischner was always very sensitive. However, a drama

⁹ *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis; Kluwer Academic Publishers. Dordrecht/Boston/London. pp. 65-66; 67.

128 appears in other circumstances as well. I am not at all convinced that this radically egotistic monad perceives evil inside itself, and even if it does, it does not imply that it wants to annihilate itself. Unfortunately, it often closes its eyes to evil, and moreover: it draws satisfaction from it. Most often it puts itself beyond good and evil, though perhaps such a position is only a mask for evil. Indifference – this is the drama in the being of our societies. Speaking about the monad which is wholly “for,” Tischner abundantly quotes Lévinas and follows him in using categories such as: proximity, pity and compassion. He also assimilates the category of a hostage as one who was “chosen” or “assigned” so as to suffer and die for the other. All these categories lead to the presentation of subjectivity as a being which hears the call and responds: Here I am. This call, Tischner writes, permeates my darkness. “Now you – for him. What do I find in the depth that reveals itself? Not Kant’s pure subject of consciousness, not Husserl’s transcendental I, and much less Freud’s libido. I find subjectivity in which the other lives from the beginning.” (p.251) And elsewhere, while quoting Lévinas, he writes: “Subjectivity is the Other-in-the-Same. The Other-in-the-Same of the subjectivity is the anxiety of the-Same made anxious by the Other.” (p.252) However, it turns out that the one who is wholly for the other is ready to lose oneself, to negate oneself. He acts against himself, much like the monad with the windows closed. This is what one can seemingly infer, for in reality, as Tischner proves, sacrifice is the confirmation of the self. The act of giving oneself over has its reverse: being-for-oneself through the sacrifice-for-the-other (p.261) “Nothing happens here under compulsion, but of one’s own free will ... Everything is happiness. The only friction which disturbs the primordial joy of happiness is the fact that the pivot around which the kind exchange of gifts revolves is death.” (p. 262)

Indeed, the sacrifice is surely this absolute “for.” Man is endowed with the peculiar and great ability to sacrifice oneself. Thus, we usually bow our heads before voluntary sacrifice. I entirely agree with Tischner that the desire to give oneself over to the other cannot be understood as a sign of self-negation. To the contrary, through the sign of sacrifice man confirms oneself in his inalienable identity, as he is aware that he himself decides to choose death. Why does he do it? Why does he make such a drastic resolution? Everything complicates here. For Tischner it is the sign of being touched by the good. But experience does not confirm this thesis. Unfortunately, the reasons may be manifold, not always fully realized and not always beautiful: is it not love for a concrete person, family, homeland? Certainly. And perhaps a sense of duty, Kant’s categorical imperative is this reason? This may be true as well. But sometimes this reason is a strong attachment to a certain idea, occasionally one that is misleading and stupid. Has a terrorist aboard a plane full of people that he blows up also awoken to the good? This “for” of Tischner’s requires a more precise analysis, a look at the victim from various viewpoints.

However, I do not want to go into this problem, as to consider it one should start with Abraham and all the doubts that his sacrifice raises. Let

us then come back to the monad. For with the question on the monad's full opening we reach the most difficult issue: the question of the good. The Good which Tischner writes with capital G, the Good which chooses the monad, as for the author of *Spór* [The Controversy...] it is more than a Platonian Form. The Absolute Good is God. And if one proclaims such a thesis, a second one immediately comes to mind. The Absolute Good cannot not exist, the Good requires existence. This statement resembles not only such thinkers as Meister Eckhart, whom Tischner cites as an authority, or pseudo-Dionysius, but also Leibniz, who wrote that "the good encourages God to creativity, to give Himself." This statement leads to another double conclusion: that not only existence is good, but that in every existence there is the desire for good. This desire is to belong to the very essence of man. And man knows it, Tischner says, from his own experience. "I want the good, not the evil. I participate in what I want, and I want what I participate in." (p. 270) This does not mean that man is good. For he is imperfect, he goes astray. Still, "Good lives in him," and the deeper man goes into himself, becoming himself for himself, the better he understands that his essence is love. "Love is the fundamental means of participating in the good." (p.214)

I do not know what the good is. Nor do I know how to speak about it so as to avoid banal words repeated for ages. In everyday usage the good appears in so many different contexts. We speak about a good medicine for the flu, good results at school, and a good beating. Man, actions or anything else may be good. In each case this word has a different meaning. I do not know whether one can define it at all. A nominalist would say that it is only a general notion which is illegally substantialized. It can only be considered as a property of man's actions whose evaluations are binding according to the moral and legal norms accepted in a given culture. These are based on observations of man's behavior and their selection in accordance with their usefulness in social life. However, the good thus understood will only be, as Bergson once wrote, "a column in which we write down actions that are useful in a certain way, and to which we feel inclined by the forces of drive as well as attraction defined earlier." So I admit that this ethical pragmatism does not convince me, I even notice certain dangers in it that may seriously shake the life of an individual, as well as the society. For each time and each place define different views on what is useful. And useful for whom? For a given authority? A social group? For this or that individual? Then we would have to agree that Soviet camps and Nazi crematoria were extremely useful. While propounding ethical relativism, one cannot avoid such consequences. It seems, then, that reason compels us to follow in the footsteps of the great metaphysicians, who always saw something more than just a notion in the good, something that transcends us, that opens new horizons before us. Kant said that the good is of "highest dignity" and added that it does not allow itself division into parts; that is, if something is good then it cannot be partially good. The word "good" defines plenitude. Hegel said even more:

130 The good is something that demands to be realized, for it in itself is the highest objective. One can infer from this that the good is not subordinate to anything. One does not do good for salvation, it is the salvation that is the condition of reaching the highest good. Similarly, one aspires to justice in order to reach the greater good – one does not do good to aspire to justice. Since the time of Plato, the good is to exceed all Forms. But here, too, one is overcome with doubts, for we still do not know what the essence of good is, and on what grounds one can attribute metaphysical status to the good. Did man not create the form of good? When we start speaking of the good, we find ourselves at the crossroads. The solutions proposed by religion or philosophy incessantly give rise to problems.

And yet, in general, everyone knows that one has done something wrong in a certain situation – though one could have done otherwise. In such a situation something awakens within us: pricks of conscience, a feeling of shame. So we ask ourselves whether it must have happened that way. This question immediately compels me to reflect on what is inside of me. Why did I give in? Why did I choose evil instead of going the other way? Perhaps it is a sense of guilt followed by the feeling of shame which are the first experiences that reveal to me the presence of good as something other, something that I cannot articulate, but which obliges me to give a hand to another man. And when I think about this experience, so rare and yet so moving, then I am ready to repeat after Lévinas and Tischner that there are moments in which man would like to follow the traces of good, that the desire for the good is born within him. Even if the good is only an idea, is it not that man created it because he was in deep need of it, he longed for it, not accepting the parochialism of his everyday, corporal existence permeated with egoism and meanness? And later he cultivated this idea as he found out how important it was for people's coexistence? Actually, ideas that have been cultivated for ages in a given culture often gain exceptional power. I have already said that one can discern in the idea of the good the moment of a specific alienation. Hegel was right to state that what man created can wield great power over him. Various ideas have had control over man. When we look at our existence, when we see how full of wickedness and crime it is, we almost dream of the rule of the good. And at such a moment we disregard its definitions. It exists for us. It exists though we so rarely experience its power, though it is almost absent. Paradoxically, however, we would forget about it constantly, were it not for the evil. And the evil, contrary to the good, is facticity, and we perceive it everywhere. It accompanies us incessantly and we cannot deal with it. I should finish my statement with this grim observation. However, another thesis imposes itself upon me, though I realize how problematic it is: the good and the evil are incommensurable, the good is not something opposed to the evil. It is something beyond, as if it had its origin in another ontic dimension, in the metaphysical sphere. So there is a radical difference between the good and the evil which does not allow for any dialectic synthesis.

Who would the agathological man be, if one can at all speak about such a man? What words are needed to describe him? According to Tischner, he is so vulnerable to the possibility of evil that when he discovers it inside himself, he does not want to see it, does not want to acknowledge his gloomy actions; he cries: It is not me! It is not us! However, when he cannot negate the presence of this evil, he is overcome with despair, and despair, as Tischner writes, is the radical negation, and that is why it can only be – as in Kierkegaard – the sickness unto death, the desire of death. Despair then touches the “core” of a person. And the only cure for it is hope. Hope comes out toward the other, it is positiveness itself, it is understanding that the Good is near by, one must only give in to it. “Here is the Other to whom I confide my hope. And the other way round: here am I who accepts his hope” (p. 289) ¹³¹

Reading these beautiful words, one would like to ask the author whether despair always expresses evil? Is not the one who loves overcome with despair because of death of someone close – (though it is difficult to think of death as evil)? For it is the natural end of our existence. Both despair and hope need not have an ethical sense. Sometimes they are totally neutral. One can also doubt whether someone who perceives evil inside oneself succumbs to despair and wants to annihilate oneself. Much more is needed for this to happen. This Tischnerian man is so permeated with the good that any shred of evil seems to throw him off balance. He is constantly within the orbit of Revelation and Salvation.

I look at this agathological man from a different perspective. Surely he should be somehow sensitive to evil, though I am not certain what “sensitive” means here. However, I cannot accept this path that leads the author of *Spór* [The Controversy ...] through the category of revelation (identified with being chosen) straight to a specific understanding of both subjectivity ready for the call and moral elevation of passivity. Following in Lévinas’s steps, Tischner constantly tempts us with this passivity. I did not choose – I have been chosen, called to do good. This revelation established the order between persons. For the justification comes from above as a gift of grace – just as conversion does (p. 191). As a result, the latter, religious in spirit, whose example is St. Paul, Tischner juxtaposes with the philosophical conversion he finds in Plato. The encounter with God converts Paul; he is overcome with the desire for good out of God’s will. A philosopher, on the other hand, sees the origin of improvement and conversion in man himself, in his wisdom and his own free will. A man from Plato’s cave saw that the truth lies elsewhere, so he moved from illusions to exploring the heart of the matter; He became a thinking being by himself. So Tischner sums up: “The will has two sides: active and passive. The will of man is finite. In a finite will – contrary to the infinite – the passivity of participation precedes its activity. When this order turns, the will of man becomes “lawlessness.” And the basic error arises from here.” (p. 215)

I do not accept this idealized passivity. I also doubt whether good lives so deep within man. For we know how difficult it is to attain, how

¹³² strongly man is entrenched in his natural egoism. There is everything in man: wickedness and nobleness, egotism and devotion, the greatness of creativity and the desire to destroy. So little good. Perhaps that is why a little shred of good encountered unexpectedly means so much to him. Maybe this is the moment when he starts to understand that this good is not so far away, that a small gesture is enough, but it must be born out of his own sincere will.

Only from this sincere will, from this moment of revealing, can the agathological man be born – a man directed toward the good. Here a closed monad suddenly opens its windows, not because of the call of the other, but without this call, out of its desire to give, to offer something, to help and to serve, that is to do good. I underscore this word: to do. For each gift of goodness is an action, not passivity. Passivity may be characteristic of someone who accepts a gift, but one who gives is not passive, he acts, he creates this good. And this act of goodness requires inner strength. The monad leaves its being for itself, and gives in to something other, something which can be alien to it. To muster the courage to do it, the monad must discover strength inside itself, must awaken the desire. So everyone among us should be aware that his life and its fulfillment depend on him/her alone. In this being that was given to me, I choose, I confide to myself, I decide and no one is able to absolve me of responsibility. This is why it is so crucial for the course of life to be filled with reflection on oneself, on who I am, and on what surrounds me. And that in this reflection I look for myself as I would like to be. In this reflection I cannot escape from an examination of conscience, my faults, my crimes. The one who seeks, thinks. And as Aristotle taught us, and after him Hegel: “The purer thinking is for itself, the more it is thinking about what is the most perfect.” It is through thinking that the path toward wisdom opens, and wisdom, as the Greeks taught us, is sensitive to the traces of the good and leads to the life of dignity. Tischner himself said, referring to Husserl, that: “A thinking man thinks not only for himself, but to some extent, and perhaps even above all, for others.”