

# Paths of Damnation, Paths of Salvation

Karol Tarnowski

Translation of „Drogi potępienia, drogi zbawienia” [Paths of Damnation, Paths of Salvation], in: *Między potępieniem a zbawieniem* [Between Damnation and Salvation], ed. Władysław Zuziak, Kraków: Znak 2004 pp. mmm  
Translated by Artur Rosman.

Karol Tarnowski (b. 1937) is a philosopher and a pianist. He holds the Chair of the Philosophy of God at the Pontifical Theological Academy in Kraków and is a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University. He is a member of the editorial team of the monthly *Znak* [Sign]. He specializes in the philosophy of God. He is the author of *Ku absolutnej ucieczce. Bóg i wiara w filozofii Gabriela Marcela* [Towards the Absolute Escape: God and Faith in Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy] (1993), *Człowiek i transcendencja* [Man and Transcendence] (1995), *Wiara i myślenie* [Faith and Thinking] (1999), *Bóg fenomenologów* [The God of the Phenomenologists] (2000).

**T**he concept of drama—the main category of Józef Tischner's philosophy—condenses the heart of human existence, where the essence of drama is the possibility of ruin or salvation. “By taking part in some drama, man knows more or less clearly that, metaphorically, he has his ruin or salvation in his hands... Man might not know what in the final analysis makes up his ruin or salvation; despite that he can have awareness that something like this is at stake in life.” If that is the case, then the problematic of ruin and salvation is crucial for the dramaturgy of man and must envelop the totality of drama's structure. Drama, for Tischner, is a composite structure that covers all of man's elementary references in which his existence takes place. Tischner distinguishes three “openings” within it: opening up to the other person, the opening up to the scene of the drama (that is, the world), and the opening onto the flow of time. We should add to all of this the

fundamental opening up to God and also the subject of the drama itself: <sup>19</sup> existence, or rather the “axiological-I.”

What is the essence of the dramatic essence of existence? On the fact that existence or being in itself can be both good and evil, he says: “For man, existence itself is a problem. This is because it can be both a good existence, just as it can be an evil existence... An evil existence is evil. Only a good existence is good. Man experiences a problem with his existence, because he desires that it be a good existence.” This is why man desires to justify existence, especially his own. “The project of being is not just the project of how to be, but above all to be, that is, to exist in a justified existence.” This thesis which goes both beyond the classic theory of the [20] transcendentals, as it goes beyond Heidegger’s philosophy, and finally, despite similarities, beyond Lévinas, says that ontology, the philosophy of being, must be subjected to agathology, the philosophy of the good, but at the same time it says that the good must direct itself toward being, in order to justify it. Precisely this moment of tension toward justification gives existence its dramatic rhythm. In the final analysis it is this way because evil hides in the human heart: “This is the basis of the human drama, darkness slumbers within him at the sources of light.”

Yet, for Tischner, the philosophy of good and evil must be sharply distinguished from ontology, without regard of its possible connections with being. Precisely that evil is, that it is not just a lack of being, paradoxically causes the orders of good and evil to be independent of being. Yet, there is a place for a specific “ontological evil,” which Tischner names misfortune, which differs from evil in the strict sense. For ontology, existence is the basic good, and as a consequence, the greatest evil for it is death. Misfortune summarizes within itself the fragility of existence, its vehicles are accidents, like a thunderbolt hitting a home, floods, earthquakes, and so on. Misfortune fundamentally comes to us from the side of the scene, “Evil appears on a level different from that of misfortune. The proper place of evil is the dialogical I-thou relationship, and not the intentional relation man versus the scene of the world. This conclusion is crucial for our understanding of evil.” Evil flowing from the other can tempt man to consider it the result of fate, metaphysical misfortune or archaic betrayal, and precisely not as evil that is associated with fault; it can also throw one into misfortune, suggested to be the highest evil.

Evil happens, above all, between people—it is a dialogical phenomenon par excellence—but it radiates one’s relationship to oneself, to the scene, and, above all, to God; this is why, for Tischner, from a certain angle “there is really only one drama—the drama with God. Every other drama and other dramatic thread is only a fragment of that drama.” But in the center of the drama [21] evil and the good occur, and they are the “axioms of the drama,” which means that within the drama they are experienced as that which permeates and conditions the reciprocity between human beings, or what makes it impossible, “The good, if it really is to be the good, cannot be rationalized, it has to be experienced.” Evil is also given, it is

20 “an axiom of our experience,” manifold in its manifestations of making the realization of the good impossible. Since the justification of existence is accomplished through these chief “values,” called transcendentals by metaphysics—which rather “have to be” than “are”—it is understandable that the good interweaves itself in a specific, dialectical relationship with the truth, and also with beauty. However, since evil exists in relation to these highest values, their caricatures sneak into existence in a process Tischner labels wandering: “wandering in the heart of beauty, truth and the good.”

We should say right from the beginning that the fundamental form of evil in relation to the other (man and God) is betrayal, whereas the subject is threatened mainly, but not exclusively, by despair. In both of these forms the most formidable tool of evil is temptation. In both of these there is threat of damnation and only against this backdrop does the necessity of salvation become understandable—in Christianity it is the free gift of God. We will attempt to organize, in accordance with the map of the transcendental, what we have called “the paths of damnation,” leaving to one side the analysis of evil in relation to the scene, and also the philosophy of totality. The paths of damnation will open themselves up through this to the paths of salvation. We will analyze them by utilizing *The Philosophy of Drama* and *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man*.

## The First Wandering: Substituting Beauty for the Good

Because good and evil occur between subjects, beauty for Tischner is above all human. His keen hermeneutics applied to texts of Tolstoy, Kierkegaard and Plato, show the way in which beauty seems to justify existence. [22] It is the totally disinterested light of grace: “Beauty stands before us as a gift, as a grace freely given.” Yet, human beauty is deceptive. By carrying away the viewer, it seems to justify existence in its totality—in its light man “is, because he is beautiful; beauty exists, or existed, within him.” The disinterestedness of beauty is the flip side of its tragic nature. On the one hand, beauty slips away, it is always transcendental, does not let itself be possessed; on the other hand, it is fragile, dependent on the viewer, who in enchantment treats it as the highest good and therefore introduces a disharmony into interpersonal relations, and also into the self-valuation of the beautiful person. Man is like a sovereign work of art, which is not obligated to anything, in particular, “beauty is not obligated to any faithfulness.” This is why it is ambivalent; it can be for someone mature, like in Kant or Kierkegaard, a “symbol of the good,” opening him up to a wider ethical and religious horizon, or it can lead to an absolutization of beauty at the expense of the good and truth. In such a situation, “Man believes that he has become a work of art. To believe that one is a work of art means to entangle oneself into the opposite of being and into not being someone’s. It could be called the tragedy of appearances... The

only consolation is wonder in the artist's eyes—a splendid discoverer. But <sup>21</sup> within this wonder there is lack of feeling for the pain of the other. This is the reason why the aesthetic mode of experiencing the other becomes a source of hell—a hell which is none the better for being an aesthetic hell.”

But hell does have its place in freedom: hell liberates from the chains of causality, simple determinism, which is something that Tischner tracks using the example of dance, predictably highlander dance, and also the leap of a deer: the spontaneous beauty of living nature. This is the reason why in the final analysis, as the philosopher writes, “without beauty every ‘why being?’ would remain without a clear answer.” It also participates—in its ambivalent way—in the work of salvation (a key thought for the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar).

## The Second Wandering: Psychology and Philosophy of the Lie

“Wandering in the heart of the truth” is not in the least, despite appearances, an epistemology of falling into error, but instead a reconstruction of the psychology and philosophy of lying, a lying which falls into its own nets. This reconstruction opens up with telling quotes from Nietzsche which justify lying as a value that serves “the will to power.” Nietzsche voices an apology of philosophers who are tempters, who glorify appearance and tempt with various promises. Lying introduces a twofold drift: particular dialogue as a form of pressure and the intention of creating delusions and appearances. Analyzed along the lines of the interrogation of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, lying unveils a double-game system that waits both for the interrogator and the one being interrogated. The two of them are ordinary conversationalists in the Thou mode, just as they are hidden opponents in the You mode, they simultaneously must relate to the truth—and the murderer must know it—and throw upon the other a net of appearances and traps; this is why, as Tischner puts it, “the dialogue of an interrogation is a perpetual wandering along fragile, breaking and changing axiological axes. On the shaky ground of dialogue words change their ordinary sense.”

However, the substantially demonic element in lying is something totally different. Tischner shows that lying—especially modern lying, as in totalitarian ideologies—tries to introduce a duality right into the meaning of truth. It distinguishes *de facto* the ordinary objective sense of the truth as “common sense,” to which it must continually and secretly refer, from “political reason” which justifies lying for the sake of the happiness of future generations. For political reason, which absolves crimes in the name of power, “referring to ‘objective reality’ would be contrary to the idea of axiological radicalism. This is why Nietzsche must speak of seduction... And in this there is no infringement of the innate rights of the human person. If everything is a material, then so to is the human person.” This is because, “in order to gain power, one must present oneself as righteous

22 among the unrighteous. Victory relies upon self-justification.” This is the nerve center of all ideologies.

The mystery of lying and the truth finally inheres at the center of the religious drama. It is in the name of the supposed truth about the immanent evil of the world, as we shall see, that the battle against God takes place. However, since falsehood and lying must presuppose the truth, then in this sense, “the liar pays tribute to the values from which he deviates.” Therefore, even the crooked world of interpersonal lying is covertly open to “the ideal of absolute truthfulness, in which the absolute truth can appear of the sort that can only unveil itself before the eyes of God. This ideal is the hope of those who have been lied to. It is also the despair of the liars, because they have to presuppose it, in order to deviate from it.”

### The Third Wandering: In the Circle of Enslavement and Betrayal

“Wandering in the heart of the good” obviously has a crucial meaning. Tischner divides it into a series of sequences which gradually lead to the problematic of radical evil. The key concepts here are enslavement and betrayal.

Tischner’s basic thesis is contained within disengaging the problematic of good and evil from ontology and by crediting it with a dialogical reality; this is the reason why his fundamental figures of evil are dialogical phenomena: threat and temptation, which occur between subjects. For Tischner these phenomena also have a specific phenomenal ontological status; they decide that evil is as realistic as it is deprived of ontological weight: it is a specter, a kind of interpersonal phantom, which frightens and pulls in, but whose real effects can be truly frightening.

As one can easily surmise, the models of dialogical evil are the main figures of the Book of Genesis. Tischner sees their essence in a controversy between man and God about possessing the earth, whose symbol is the prohibition against eating the fruit in the garden. But at the core of all these various projects of rights of property lies a rejection of the right to existence, “The principle you have no right to possess leads right down the road to the following stance: you have no right to be. From the stance of ‘do not steal’ we move on to the following stance: do not kill... To kill means to: first of all, and above all, to deprive of the right to exist... The man who reaches for what is divine deprives God of the right to exist in that which is divine.” The snake tempts, but behind the temptation lurks a vague threat, which causes an anxiety, “makes man face some future evil,” and in this way it strives to “deprive man of his space on the scene of the world.” Evil threatens with enslavement through anxiety in the face of death—as in the master-slave relationship in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*—or through “the suffering of a slow dying” in a meaningless existence, as in Dostoevsky’s “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor.” Enslavement in Hegel

and Dostoevsky reaches the most fundamental strata of humanity. In <sup>23</sup> Hegel the master not only enslaves as a physical ruler, but also as an “ethical principle of life,” that is, “he becomes something like a father for the enslaved.” In the project of Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor there is a fundamental enslavement of consciences, and thus of dignity: “To relinquish one’s conscience means to lose one’s sense of dignity.” The consequence of this is the drive toward enslaving others, “The pain of one’s own suffocated freedom slowly transforms itself into the joy that comes from suffocating the freedom of others.”

In this way we move into the circle of contempt and derision, the circle of demonism and damnation. The threat of damnation “directly touches the sense of one’s own value.” It comes from someone who says, “If you will not surrender to me, I will condemn you and force you to condemn yourself. When man condemns himself, the path toward enslavement opens itself right before him.”

With all of this said, the key to damnation is above all betrayal, that is, the problematic of trust and faithfulness, “evil as evil appears on the horizon of faithfulness and betrayal.” The tempter tries to arouse trust in his listener, and at the same time undermines his trust in the good and finally in God as the highest Good, “The man touched by temptation states a radical questions such as: How is it really?... Who is worthy of trust? Who is God and who is the tempter?... The main question of the dialogue is the following: is the tempter trustworthy?” An analysis of the dialogue between Gloucester and Anna from Shakespeare’s *Richard III* wonderfully demonstrates the movement and direction of temptation. Gloucester—who murdered Anna’s husband, and thus somebody in whom evil has come home to roost—tempts, because evil craves mutuality; to reach this goal he attempts to present himself as an unfortunate victim of the fate that is Anna’s beauty, which pushed him to crime. Temptation must utilize the lie in the sphere of values—it is all about presenting evil as misfortune, and more concretely the good as evil. A typical example of such a lie is the Nietzschean philosophy of resentment, for which “every virtue is a semblance of a virtue,” and the Christian “love of one’s enemies shows itself to be a substitute for revenge.” The essence of temptation depends upon the occurrence of a “radical change in the space of trusts,” so that the tempter appears as worthy of trust and empathy, so that the tempted forms a community with him. This is the reason why, by definition, “evil pulls you in.” When it accomplishes this, the evil betrays and pushes away, as can be seen in Shakespeare’s dialogue. The basic questions remains, “Why does it do this?” Why does it promise faithfulness and then push away? This is the point where Tischner’s analyses take on the whole of their depth.

Above all, dialogical evil lies within the possibility of hatred expressed by the stance of revenge—revenge is the radical evil. Whence does it come? Tischner sees two possible reasons for the birth of hatred. The first is the suppression of the pain connected to the other side of evil which

<sup>24</sup> is suffering; as Nietzsche wrote, “I suffer: someone must be to blame for it—thus thinks every sickly sheep.” The second, which is crucial, is the experience of living within something that can be called metaphysical betrayal, “I am a betrayed creature. Everything which I experience here confirms the truth about betrayal to me. In the garden of paradise the snake puts me on trial, and so I have not been trusted. The land produces thorns and thistles for me, and so I live on a denied land... Life hurts: cold, hot, tiredness, misunderstandings with others. I am condemned to life, like a traitor. The sentence came before the betrayal. I would not be a traitor were it not for the sentence.”

Tischner describes a world close to the Heideggerian “thrownness,” which experiences the land as “denied.” The pre-betrayal understood in this way is the fundamental source of revolt atheism, “And so my existence is the fruit of a lack of trust, the fruit of betrayal. I am on this denied land. I have the right to revenge. Someone might ask, ‘What is this revenge for?’ So that the truth is exposed.”

These key sentences acutely express revolt atheism, but they also contain the venom of lying, and in spite of everything, the possibility of change, because they refer to the value of truth, and therefore to some good: “The most direct experience of evil expressed in the need for betrayal is based upon an unacknowledged valuing of truth. Thus evil shows itself as a shadow, the good as light.” Is this enough for actual change? We must take a look at a second form of radical evil: despair.

## In the Shackles of Despair

The subject of good and evil for Tischner is the “agathological-I.” It means that the “I” is in a substantial manner given to itself primordially as a privileged value, but one which at the same time is endangered and needing justification. Endangerment and justification cannot be accomplished without a subject who is free. This is why, unlike Lévinas, Tischner will not indicate that “the other within me,” meaning my substantial relation to the other, condemns my freedom as always at fault; instead, he will ask under what conditions my freedom can be liberated and become truly good. The deadly enemy of liberating freedom toward the good is “the sickness unto death,” that is, despair, which is so acutely analyzed by Kierkegaard. [28] Despair puts man in danger of the final death of man.

Tischner says, “It would be a serious misunderstanding if we were to include despair in the category of moods, experiences, or acts of consciousness... Despair reaches deeper; it delves to the “bottom” of the person. What does it tell the person? What does it want to convince him about? That he is evil... We should say that in the drama what is at stake essentially is not despair, but evil.” Yet, despair is not a passive state: “The state of despair is a chosen state. It does not befall man without his own permission.” What this evil might be Tischner analyzes not only through Kierkegaard’s texts, but also through copious quotations of “The Letter

of the Unkown Woman”, a frightening document about falling into a<sup>25</sup> murderously low self-esteem and the guilt that comes from it, and finally despair, hopelessness. Being here is being-against-oneself, which in an “I egotistically twisted” destroys the proper being-for-oneself and being-for-others; it produces a “monad with its windows slammed shut.” Yet, for Kierkegaard despair, at the same time, is connected with the choice of oneself as an absolute value, and thus, with freedom. However, tying valuing oneself with despair in this way is to propose being-oneself-against-oneself, “Being oneself here means: to carry within oneself the misfortune of despair and to see one’s absolute value within that. But is not this choice the choice of a new dependency? Is it not a fall into the demonic?”

It actually is, because despair condemns its own being, closes itself radically off from others and only leaves space for revenge. “The crack within the soul through which despair seeps in destroys any thought of gratitude... Whoever is not capable of reconciling himself with himself is also not capable of reconciling himself with the world and God... Is it possible that in despair of being oneself, the temptation to want to be like God is born? It seems that another possibility is more likely—the possibility of a radical, ethical and metaphysical revenge. Since my being myself is cursed, then let every other being-oneself be cursed.”

It is out of despair that hatred and the lust for revenge, the “ethos” of totalitarianism, emerge.

We can ask what comes first in evil: betrayal or despair. Tischner suggests that first comes temptation, whose quintessence is the lie of the “archaic betrayal,” the cursedness of existence, the Manichean vision of the world. Its consequence is the ethos of revenge and despair—nothing can force our freedom to choose this situation. It is a fact that in practice all of us today participate in it in some sense. From this perspective Tischner, so permeated with faith in man, puts a question mark before the Augustinian vision of searching for God, which remains optimistic despite its awareness of evil: “But did Augustine know all the names of despair? Did he not write his *Confessions* in the mood of the deepest gratitude? We are in a different situation: we know despair and we know the might of revenge rooted in it... The thing is that the consciousness paralyzed by revenge and subjected to the fatalistic power of self-destruction also destroys its own direction toward the good. Evil becomes its goal—evil as a personal interest, as a personal pleasure, as a personal rapture.”

In this situation even the inevitable orientation toward the truth is not enough. We need a Wholly Other who would come to us from beyond me with a gesture of help.

## Paths of Liberation

Man needs hope above all since he is threatened by despair, but he cannot extract this hope from himself. This is the point where the concept of grace becomes anchored in Tischner’s thought—theologically, but philo-

26 sophically justified. “The good acts like grace. The idea of grace serves to explain the possibility of the impossible—the movement from despair to hope. It should not be dismissed in analyses of the human drama. If we dismiss it, we are left with only the concept of fate.” But the concept of grace inscribes itself into a wider context of the philosophy of justification, which we must discuss.

[30] What is damnation? “Damnation is the consequence of a particular dialogical situation which occurs when the calling of the Good does not awaken in man a response that chooses the good, but instead causes an even more decided choice of evil.” In opposition to this, “The path of salvation is a path of a continually renewed faithfulness to the Good which calls. It is incarnated in me thanks to my choice, the good goes through a situation that is a trial... In this manner, step after step, in flights and falls, faithfulness is born—absolute faithfulness, meaning faithfulness without regard for any circumstances. It opens up the path of salvation... The state of salvation lets itself be thought of as a state of justification, which is the opposite of the state of damnation. Damnation means despair. The opposite of despair is happiness... But happiness is only an approximation of the state of salvation... However, it does not seize man against his will—in this choice happiness is not the object of the choice. The object is the Good.”

What are the conditions of possibility for justification and salvation? The first is the consciousness of being “evil,” i.e. guilty, instead of being good by nature. “This point of departure differs substantially from the point of departure of Socrates’ thinking. Socrates’s consciousness is sure of its innocence.” However, evil is, above all, despair: “For the damned there is no hope. Why? Because despair was preceded by radical doubting—doubting of values, of the good, which hope could take under its protection.” Lack of hope is a fall into some bottom, which can only be escaped through a reconciliation of man and God, but “exclusively upon the path of a free choice of God and man, and not upon a path of analyzing concepts.” Justification is not only forgiveness, “Justification strikes man as a trusteeship. God entrusts himself to man. The value of man changes, his dignity. Justification means that man is worthy of hope.” The relations between God and man exclusively belong to the order of the good and the order of freedom—this is why they have nothing in common with the so-called natural desire of God, nor with categories of the metaphysics of being, “The essence of the drama with God depends upon God being Goodness and man being a sinner. The abyss dividing the good from evil is greater than the abyss between infinity and the finitude of being. This abyss is conquered by justification. Justification does let itself be ontologized. It does not have a sufficient reason, only insufficient reasons.”

Justification is the fulfillment of the history of revelation, which unveils the deepest essence of God. For Tischner God is Goodness *par excellence*, which exists because it is the absolute Good, and not vice-ver-

sa. Tischner does not shrink from his own daring interpretation of St. <sup>27</sup> Anselm's proof, "The relative good can come into being, but it does not have to. It is different with the absolute Good. Its power derives from its absolute power—being omnipotent... The absolute Good in which the absolute imperative to exist 'dwells,' cannot not exist... God is not the absolute Good and the absolute freedom and consciousness, because He exists in an absolute manner; rather He exists in an absolute manner, because He the absolute Good, consciousness and freedom."

God, since He is the Good, reveals himself; that is, He entrusts Himself to man. This presupposes, as Lévinas wrote, a separation between God and man. "Separation conditions revelation; revelation confirms and deepens consciousness of separation. Only when you confided did I know how far we were." Revelation is not simply enlightenment, but the engagement of a personal relation, which, as in Franz Rosenzweig, is first of all the question: "Adam where are you?" Tischner writes, "Where is this Thou which can say 'no'? That 'real Thou' in which you can confide." This primordial question which calls man to life has two substantial ingredients. Above all, there is a lack of compulsion, "Where there is no compulsion, there is freedom." Then there is reasonability, "The question is an acknowledgment of a reasonable freedom, because the second rule of asking questions is reason. The project of reason and freedom appears within the question itself... in the 'quality' of questioning." This is why for Tischner dialogical reason precedes philosophical reason, but does not exclude it in any way. Asking is above all else an event of election: "There comes the feeling of an alien freedom, the freedom of the Other, who did not reject, instead He elected. Why did He elect? For what cause? He chose, because He chose. This freedom is not a freedom that is illuminated, it is a freedom in the twilight." It is finally only this way that gives birth to the possibility of participating in the good, "A person appears in the world from the depth of participation. Participating is questioning, choosing, and assenting to the good, establishing a non-objective community." This is how Tischner's basic thesis says: to God's questions man responds with an flight from freedom into a world of values, and above all into ontological thinking. "The world and man lock into objectivizations, into chains of causal relations. Everything that happens within them has its sufficient reasons, everything is necessary, and as necessary, it finds itself beyond good and evil. Man abandons the project of freedom and falls into the level of ontology." This is why the choice of the quality of philosophical thinking is not at all indifferent.

However, man can also convert. The concept of conversion already appears in Plato and for him it means "setting off upon the road of wisdom toward the ideal of man as a thinking creature." Things are different for St. Paul: "He uncovers his primordial untruth not as illusion like Plato, but as a lie. In order to convert you must 'de-lie' yourself... It is not curiosity that leads Paul into the heart of the matter. It is the ability to entrust. Conversion is a substantial change of 'systems of entrusting.'" It does not

28 lead to discovering nature—what man already really is, which he already knows somewhere deep down—instead it leads to a radical questioning of hitherto held certainties of someone who discovers his guilt, “‘Why do you persecute me?’... The why-question threatens his present axiology. Behind that comes the presupposition that the foundation of his axiology is not only error, but simply evil.” However, much philosophical doubt is only, “part of man’s drama just with himself, conversion is part of the drama with the Other... The question of conversion is a question of the whole person, a person who has found himself on the threshold of despair. As Kierkegaard writes, ‘Doubting expresses the despair of thought, despair expresses the despair of individuality.’” This is why the answer to despair is not so much certainty, but hope. Hope is not expecting something, because “it lies deeper, it builds upon that which is fundamental, upon the absolute... Hope is the expression of a fundamental experience of the good as a partial good which completes itself in man through time... Hope is possible only for a finite being, touched by Infinite Good. How can a finite being assimilate the Infinite Good? Only through time... A part, a share—participation—in the good is accomplished through the entrusting of hope. ‘I entrust my hope to you,’ writes Gabriel Marcel. Conversion is a passage from ‘you oppress me,’ to ‘I entrust my hope to you.’”

Hope for salvation, and salvation itself, presuppose at least two basic conditions of possibility. One of them is the question about the essence of subjectivity, which despite its alienation, and despite the despair of the lie which lies at its bottom, would not be a “monad without windows,” but in its center it would be in relation with the other; then what’s at stake is the discovery of a space, “in which it is possible to think being-for-one-self as being-for-the-other.” The substitutive-subject of Lévinas is such a subject, dominated by an “obsession” with the other, in which “the other makes me his own, before I am capable of making myself my own.” But Tischner modifies Lévinas’ thought in a direction partially staked out by Paul Ricoeur: the subject must have within itself the possibility of a free relation toward the other, must be a relational subjectivity without excluding its own identity and possibility of opening up to the other, and therefore also of conversion, and at the same time to be able to freely distinguish in others “masters of righteousness from accusers and torturers.” Only thanks to this can Lévinas’ “hostage” become a subject capable of making an actual sacrifice for the other, and at his zenith he can be a messianic subjectivity. Messianism is a doleful necessity of a world substantially marked by evil, from which no one is free; “if there were no guilt, then sacrifice would not be needed.” Messianism is the idea of someone who takes upon himself, and redeems, the whole evil of the world, since, as Tischner writes, “only a ‘pure sacrifice’ can atone for evil.” The subject of an actual messianic sacrifice can (unlike Lévinas’ subject) at the same time regain his being-for-oneself through becoming a being-for-others, thanks to which his sacrifice is offered to God: “To acknowledge God signifies an absolute acknowledgment. God, who is Good, does not reject a

sacrifice out of goodness. On the contrary, he acknowledges it and raises <sup>29</sup> it above everything else.”

However, conversion presupposes one other condition of possibility: a healed freedom, because “nothing happens out of compulsion, but everything out of freedom.” Tischner’s philosophy of freedom culminates in an understanding of freedom as “self-liberation.” The core of this concept depends upon the relating this concept with the couplet “assimilation / dissimilation”, or as he wrote later, “solidarization / de-solidarization.” The subject “assimilates” some good, which he can “dissimilate” in the name of a higher good; freedom can crystallize around many different axiological axes. “Thanks to ‘assimilation / dissimilation’ conversion is possible and so is a new beginning. In a ‘new beginning’ the person enters a new drama and constitutes himself anew as a person of that drama. From that moment on he is different from before. St. Paul speaks of a ‘new man.’ One can shed the old man and clothe oneself in the new one.” This, in turn, is possible because “every man, every person is a ‘beginning,’ and at the same time ‘has control over beginnings.’ Man can continually start anew. However, beginning anew does not signify a total break with the past. The ontological identity remains, it is the dramatic and agathological identity that undergoes change... To put it more simply: ontological continuity is countered by agathological otherness.”

What is the phenomenology of liberating freedom like? Freedom is not simply characterized by “rationality” or logic, but rather by the ability to rise above oneself and by risk. Risk causes freedom to be sometimes accompanied by the anxiety that was so often analyzed by Kierkegaard; when facing possibility, when “dissimilating” the perspective one has held hitherto “... anxiety calls you back. Instances are known where a mutinous slave backs out in the last moment and goes back to yesterday’s servitude.” Anxiety is tied to the opening up of an unknown future, “What’s coming? We don’t know precisely.” However, freedom as control over beginnings is capable of authentic creativity, whose motor is the tension between the ideal and real, as analyzed, for example, in Hegel’s philosophy; in Hegel the phenomenology of the spirit occurs through “searching and creating freedom.” The fundamental element here is unearthed by the French thinker Jean Nabert—it is faith in freedom. One must believe in freedom. Thus Tischner writes, “Freedom is possible only thanks to an opening up to the ideal. The opening up depends on faith. Faith is a form of assimilation. Man assimilates freedom through faith in freedom and through that same faith he assimilates freedom. Freedom is ‘fertilized’ and ‘born.’ Along with it a subject of freedom is ‘fertilized’ and ‘born.’” These are key sentences, because as we remember, the main threat to the subject is not so much moral evil, as it is despair: despair petrifies and closes the subject within itself, makes it incapable of lifting itself up to change its axiological axis, and incapable of faith in the possibility of change. This is why the answer to despair must move the person strung between faith and hope. How is this *de facto* possible? The answer seems to reside on two levels.

First, freedom is born in an “I don’t have to.” “To have to and not have to—this is the new expanse of the drama. This is also the ‘new man,’ the man who has accomplished the annulment of yesterday’s necessities, yesterday’s ‘I must lie.’” Tischner speaks here of an atmosphere of “generosity, in which the assimilation of the new space of participation is accomplished.” This is connected to the discovery, so accentuated by Kierkegaard, of the absolute value of individual freedom. If a man is steeped in despair “then how is such an ‘ascent’ possible, a rising up out of the state of despair? Is man capable of doing this all alone?... Freedom means that man can. On the other hand, freedom also comes from the outside. Within the unintelligibility of this passage from despair to hope, the experience of grace anchors itself. Freedom is a grace that opens up to grace.”

Can a philosopher go any further? However *de iure* it might be, let’s follow Tischner’s steps to the end. It is grace that makes gratitude possible, a gratitude that forms a unity with faith, and is something more than the wonder of Greek philosophy: “Gratitude is set upon consciousness of the gift: everything is a gift of God. The existence of the world, the existence of man in the world and the freedom of man, all of it is a gift... The world of values is mediated through the experience of faith. Faith discovers God as the Creator of the world and man. Faith leaves a sowing of gratitude in the soul. Thinking which seeks understanding, acts according to the fundamental intuition of faith.”

Gratitude goes through the trials evil makes it undergo. “The crucial thing is that in the trials it undergoes, gratitude comes out victorious in the end.” Gratitude, surrounded by no more than freedom, opens up to hope, “Wherever there is freedom, there is hope. What is hope for? What kind of hope? Hope for divinization. Because God made himself human, the path to divinization has opened itself to man.” What does it consist in?

Connecting to the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Tischner once again returns to the idea of assimilation, which is more important than choice: “Assimilation gives meaning to choice... We only choose because we can assimilate something to ourselves, but also ourselves to something. Assimilating is always mutual.” Within the environment of faith and from within conversion, assimilation is no longer a gathering up, “The correlate of freedom is disinterestedness, or better, generosity. Freedom not only differentiates the world according to preferences, it also gives birth to generosity within man’s soul. In generosity freedom comes closest to its deepest truth. This is a judgment of fundamental importance for the analysis of the nature of freedom.” Generosity lets the other be. “Actually, possession of oneself is only possible when one resigns from striving to possess the other. Possessing oneself lets the other be. Letting the other be, we experience the good of our freedom and in the experience we have ourselves ‘more deeply.’ The idea of generosity is based upon this. Only in generosity does man become himself, and freedom becomes freedom; only from freedom, too, can true gratitude be born.”

This leads to the deepest insight of Christianity, the Trinity. “The 31  
persons of the Holy Trinity possess themselves. Their freedom is based upon this... In order to be a gift, freedom alone is not enough, love is also needed. The internal life of the Persons in the Holy Trinity is an act of love. In turn there would not be this act, if God were not the absolute Good.”

Let’s return to the mystery of the truth, which is so fundamental for Tischner—and for all of philosophy.. In Tischner’s work, especially in his two main works, the Cartesian metaphor of an evil genius and of a truthful God, maunder through his works like some loadstar. As we might recall, Descartes allows for the possibility that we live in a world that is totally deluded by a demon, from which we can only be rescued by discovering the truth, and definitively by a truthful God. The heart of evil, in the final analysis, is lying. The world of totalitarianism is, above all, a world of lies. “The figure of the evil genius is a symbol of totalitarian power, which creates a world inverted through lying and makes everyone pillars of this world. The evil of the world depends upon everyone being simultaneously an ‘evil genius’ and its victim.” This is why we can never overestimate the role of a thinker who believes in the truth and is truthful. “The thinker touched by lying responds with radical truthfulness... Why does he go beyond the principle of revenge?... We do not have satisfactory answers to this. Truthfulness in a world of lies is a risky leap into another world—into a world of a new principle. In a certain sense it is an irrational act. This act does not let itself be justified by any necessities of life; life, as Nietzsche teaches, does not demand the truth, but rather illusion and lying. To what end does Descartes struggle with the evil genius? Descartes himself does not know. He knows one thing: he can give a different answer, since he is free. He has not been enslaved by lying. As a free man he can give expression to a different experience of the good—a generous acknowledgment of the truth and truthfulness. His new freedom is the manner of existence for the new good. Now he can say, ‘I am truthful.’”

In the final analysis things are this way because Descartes discovers the truthful God within himself, “The self-deception of freedom is not capable of liberating itself from untruth. Only God can throw light onto the darkness of such deception.”

Let’s allow ourselves some commentary to close off this essay. Tischner’s philosophy of the human drama is not, despite appearances, a dressed up theology nor an example of a Christianization of Lévinas’ thought. It is a religious way of thinking that tracks the logic of freedom within the light of the philosophy of good and evil, of an evil which out of a dark depth of an always possible despair and revenge spreads a totalitarian lie and hatred and metaphysically accuses the work of creation. Precisely only such an abyssal evil, which Nabert called ‘unjustifiable,’ can call for a justification through the rebirth of freedom and hope for the victory of absolute good. As Tischner writes, “There is something

3<sup>2</sup> natural in the formulation of the absolute good” and at the same time “The Highest Good, pure and absolute, cannot remain indifferent toward such a calling.” However, the philosopher, at the very least through indicating the value of the truth and through the spirit of truthfulness, can play his modest part within this justification.