

Freedom As a Manner of Existence of the Good

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Translation of “Wolność jako sposób istnienia dobra,”
in *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over
the Existence of Man], Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków
1998, pp. 291-318.

Translated by Anna Fraś.

The descriptions of the order of good and evil conducted above could not do without the notion of freedom. It is time to give a clearer explanation of its meaning. Right from the beginning, one meaning which has become almost universal needs to be excluded—the ontological interpretation. Freedom cannot be interpreted in terms that serve to describe being as a being, e.g. the categories of force, powerlessness, cause, effect, a relatively or absolutely isolated being and, finally, nothingness. Accepting the thesis that freedom can be described within ontological categories sooner or later leads to a rejection of the idea of freedom. We come one step closer to the truth when we describe freedom in terms of gnoseology as a particular type of self-knowledge coming from a special cognition and understanding of reality. But even then we lose the essential sense of freedom, reducing it almost utterly to an act of reason. Freedom regains its meaning only when

90 it is conceived beyond being and non-being, as a manner of existence of the good—man is free because the good finds its being in man.

Let us think for a while upon the ontology of freedom. By reflecting on freedom through the categories of being as a being, we face only a limited range of possible solutions. Ultimately it is wisest to acknowledge that freedom is some kind of force capable of opposing other forces and beings. The whole concern with freedom, however, then becomes a concern for power, the will to power. It was not only Nietzsche who conceived of freedom in this manner; Descartes also wrote:

[Freedom] simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward, we are moved to affirm or deny or to pursue or avoid it in such a way that we do not feel ourselves to be determined by any external force.¹

Some hesitation can be seen in the above description, “our ability to do or not to do... or rather... we are moved to affirm or deny.” All possible doubts are yet erased by the words “we do not feel ourselves to be determined by any external force.” So we remain on the plane of a struggle of forces. What is the implication of this? Having defined freedom in terms of force, as Descartes proposes, we cannot abstain from recognizing that the being that is the most powerful is as well the most free being. Such a being can influence other beings and remain unaffected by them. An essential manifestation of freedom would be then a being’s causality directed outwards. What is left to other finite beings that are not as powerful in front of such a being? Their freedom would be reduced to the understanding of necessity. By recognizing in which direction power acts and marches through the world, and by joining the direction of its action, a finite being, man, might have the consciousness that there is some of that power in him and be convinced that his freedom consists in this. Then being free would mean being able to do everything one wants, but one must want only what can or should be wanted.

Many objections can be raised to this conception of freedom. Ontologization is problematic from the start. Is it possible to isolate any being from the stream of causal bonds? Can the notion of being as a being contain the notion of choice? These objections aside, one thing should be underscored: this conception of freedom totally misses the immanent aspect. Freedom rendered in this manner becomes action defining what is other to it, but it ceases to be action that defines the agent. An act of freedom is then like water spurting from a punctured tank. It is a manifestation of power that acts only outwards. Such power is violence, and as violence it affirms itself in what is other to it. Meanwhile, the idea of freedom involves something opposite. Freedom can hold back all pursuit

¹ R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 58. Cf. also J. Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* [The World of Human Hope], Kraków 1994, p. 130 ff.

directed outwards, it is able to act or not to act; freedom is an ability to perform inner acts, a self-definition. Thanks to freedom, man, a free being, defines himself (gives birth to himself) toward this or that. An act of freedom “cleaves” a being into two halves, which allows the being to define the being [that he is]. Freedom is not only the matter of acting outwards but, above all, the matter of acting inwards, and doing with oneself what seems to be impossible. How is it possible that a being, which as a being is the same as itself, resigns from its already attained identity, preferring cleavage and a mirage of a different identity? Is the loss of identity not death to a being? Ontology lacks words to describe and express this. But does a lack of words not often go together with a lack of sensitivity toward what those words indicate?

One more difficulty appears. Some ontologization of freedom—defining freedom in terms of force—would be understandable when one takes into consideration the relationship of man to things, to an object, to the stage of the drama in general. The type of the object always determines the manner of the subject’s referring to the object. Things and objects act through power and violence. However, the power of things always provokes man’s violence and the violence of things releases man’s power. But is a similar ontology acceptable on the level of the relationship of one man to another? Is a dialogical relationship an appropriate plane for the display of power? Is the expression of freedom not both action and non-action, thinking and not thinking, dreaming and not dreaming, etc., on this plane?

On the dialogical plane new problems and new categories of description emerge which are unknown to ontology. First of all, the problem of responsibility—what does it mean and how is it possible? Responsibility means substitution, a situation in which a person takes the place of another person and takes on their tasks. Where do the ultimate reasons for substitution lie? How is it possible? How is it possible that one being plays another being’s role? What justifies it? And further: what is the relationship between freedom and responsibility? Is freedom the foundation for responsibility or is responsibility the foundation for freedom?² Can freedom be described without reference to good and evil? And above all, is freedom an essential and immanent feature of the person, or the other’s gift—in other words—is it freedom or liberation? I formulate these questions not to mark out a precise direction for studies on freedom, but to show that the conceptual framework used in these questions leads us far beyond ontology.

The category of nothingness is also ontological. Jean-Paul Sartre made use of this notion. From a certain standpoint it was logical: defining his analyses as ontology, Sartre had no other choice but to make use of a borderline ontological concept to describe something which lay beyond

² Cf. J. Filek, *Ontologizacja odpowiedzialności. Analityczne i historyczne wprowadzenie w problematykę* [The Ontologization of Responsibility. An Analytical and Historical Introduction], Kraków 1996. Cf. also J. Tischner, “Odpowiedzialność – powrót do źródeł” [Responsibility—A Return to the Origin], monthly *Znak*, issue 6 (1997), p. 119 ff.

9² ontology. What did he achieve by doing that? He achieved an understanding of freedom as a source of negation. Hegel wrote, “freedom is negativeness”; Sartre unraveled the riddle. What can be the reason for negativeness? Only nothingness. But what did he achieve in this manner? I believe nothing other than the possibility of destruction and self-destruction. Such freedom is merely a destroying power that says no. This power is predestined to operate within the area of ontology as power (powerlessness?), annihilating that which is only because it is.

In another pursuit—as I have already mentioned above—it is attempted to reduce freedom to cognitive categories, terms of consciousness. It is said that one is free when “one feels oneself at one’s place.” The measure of taming the world is the measure of freedom. We tame the world by knowing it. As the result of cognition, the world ceases to frighten us—we understand it, we know what can be put to what use, what we can and cannot expect from the world and in the world. While learning about the world, we get to know ourselves. Cognition reveals the rationality of the world and our own rationality. Freedom reaches as far as rationality spreads. Rationality is prior to action, it even makes action possible. It is at the foundation of the sphere of force and powerlessness, it is being in the light, it is a consequence of the truth that makes one free.

A doubtless achievement of this rendering of freedom is transporting it beyond the limits of ontology. Freedom as a manner of understanding the world is beyond this world. Freedom lends wings to man to allow him to look from above at everything that limits him. Thanks to freedom, man is not in the world but over the world. However, a certain limitation goes together with the gains. In the proposed conception solely man’s reason is truly free, the rest is free only insofar as it participates in the reason. Freedom warns man against irrationality—irrationality turns out to be the same as slavery. Truth makes one free, as it roots man amidst that which is familiar. And yet, does this not mean some reduction of the idea of freedom? Is rational slavery impossible? Is freedom not bound to some risk? Does being free not mean going beyond the tamed world and undertaking the risk of conquering a different world? Common sense sees freedom as bound to choice. Is not choice itself a risk? Does risk not appear wherever rationality ends and uncertainty and darkness begin? Is it not the case that not only does the truth make one free, but also freedom opens one up to the truth? Can freedom open one up in a different manner than risk?

In order to understand the nature of freedom, one needs to rise to the agathological level. Freedom is beyond being and non-being.

Situating the problem of freedom on an agathological level, we must agree that being free means, above all, being free in relation to good and evil. Freedom has two main rays: with one of them it faces out, the other is directed inward. Thanks to the former ray, freedom accomplishes something in the world. Thanks to the latter, freedom accomplishes something in the self—first of all, it determines the person either as directed toward

the good or toward evil. Freedom affects being in some sense. But it does 93
so in the same way as what is above affects what is below. The proper
area of the action of freedom is the person. Freedom affects the person
so that they choose their freedom. But the whole paradox of freedom lies
in choosing one's own freedom—to choose freedom one needs first to
be free, but one is not free if one has not chosen freedom. The paradox
proves that we have abandoned the sphere of being and we find ourselves
beyond being and non-being.

Let us explain, if only partially, the sense of the agathological con-
ception of freedom. Freedom is first and above all a category of drama—it
appears between people (to be more precise, between persons). It is pri-
mordially in neither me nor you, but between us. We are free in relation
to each other—you are free in relation to me, I am free in relation to you.
There is no problem of freedom in relation to the stage of our drama; on
this level there appears the problem of power or powerlessness: I can or
cannot bear up tiredness, I can or cannot endure hunger, I can or cannot
lift this stone. The problem of freedom means to answer or not to answer
a question posed to me, to follow or not to follow the call I have heard, to
share or not to share bread, to kill or not to kill.

Yet, the basic question refers not to me but to you. What are you like?
Whatever you are like, you are unpredictable. Will you answer my ques-
tion, will you follow my call, will you share your bread, will you not kill
me? Freedom is, first of all, the other's freedom. First of all, it is the other
who will do whatever he wants. He is dutiful or capricious, responsible or
frolicking, predictable or unpredictable. My freedom becomes crystallized
within the horizon of and according to the other's freedom—it is of the
other's caliber or it surpasses his, it is a freedom with him, for him, against
him, besides him. Abstract freedom isolated from the drama, freedom as
freedom, exists only on paper.

Freedom sketches the space between me and the other. It is the space
of distancing oneself and coming close, the space of being beside, above,
under the other. The sense of our freedom is defined by the structures
of the space of drama. Freedom would be empty without those "toward
you" and "away from you," "with you" and "against you," without "beside,"
"under" and "how." It cannot be forgotten that there is a feeling, experi-
ence and attitude towards the other behind each word used. One can
read love, liking and interestedness behind the words "toward the other."
Behind "away from" lurk fear, repulsion or perhaps even hatred. Between
the words "with you" and "without you" one can sense hope and longing.
Pride lurks in the structure of "above," and there is obsequiousness in
"under." These structures are permeated with the consciousness of good
and evil. Something is "good" for the other but "evil" for me, something
is "evil" for the other but "good" for me. But maybe there is something
which would be good for me and the other. Freedom enters into intimate
bonds with experiences, especially axiological experiences and through
them sketches a preferential space where it is possible to prefer something

94 and neglect something else. In this space choice is possible. Choice is a fundamental expression of freedom. But choice is twofold: primary and secondary. The primary choice consists in choosing the choice itself—by this choice freedom chooses itself. The secondary choice is accomplished within the framework of the primary choice.

Two ways of studying freedom come into focus. One of them is a study of the other's freedom—a different freedom. Here the means is observation. The other way is a study of my freedom; most generally speaking we use reflection in this way. One reaches the complete idea of freedom by comparing the results of observation with the results of reflection.

Freedom as a Spectacle

I will formulate a risky thesis: the other's freedom is problematic, yet observable. The sheer unpredictability of the other's behavior augurs freedom from the start. Will the other answer or not answer the question posed? Will he approach me or will he turn his face away? Which words will he use, what will be the tone of his answer? Freedom manifests itself already through the way man moves in space. Nietzsche said somewhere, "a light step is a sign of divinity." One might add that it is not only a sign of divinity, but also of freedom. There is a difference between the manner of moving slaves and the manner of moving free people. Movement—the external movement of a person—is in some sense a summary of a person's truth. Free people build a different space around themselves, and a different one is built by slaves. They enter it differently, they move in it differently—these as captives of space, those as its inhabitants or conquerors.³

Observable, 'spectacular' freedom shows itself like a dance. What is an indication of freedom in dancing? Dancing is a body movement undertaken disinterestedly. It means it is not *inter esse*, between beings. The rules of dancing are not the rules of being. They are rather a continuous attempt at overcoming the rules of being. In dancing one runs and moves, but one doesn't run or move to get something. Dancing suspends the basic purposefulness of body movement, transforming it into a different movement and a different purposefulness. Dancing liberates. Observing a dancer's movements, her unpredictability and gracefulness, we see liberation.

The disinterestedness of movement is one side of dance—to a certain extent a negative one. Yet, dancing also has its positive side. It is defined by music.

A translation of music into movement is accomplished in dancing; dancing is music for the eye. The body strives to overcome physiological laws and submit to the values of beauty. Dancing charms and seduces. It seduces and charms by simultaneously inviting and rejecting, promis-

³ I wrote about it in reference to Antoni Kępiński's findings. Cf. "Ludzie z kryjówek" [People from Underground], in *Myslenie według wartości* [Thinking in Values], Kraków 1993, p. 437 ff.

ing and denying, its ceaseless play with possibilities in whose range one 95
can choose. However, one cannot choose arbitrarily. Beauty remains the
principle of choice. Dancing liberates beauty. The possibilities projected in
dancing are the roads of liberation. Liberation is here mutual. In dancing,
we dance with somebody. Dancing brings out something special, which
happens between the dancers. Dancing is an enchantment, a promise, a
project and also a trial of possibilities. In dancing there is particular com-
munity constituted through liberating beauty. Dancing is a realization of
community in liberating beauty.

I speak here of freedom as a spectacle observable on stage between
dramatis personae. One can ask: does a similar spectacle not happen within
living nature as well? Does nature not accomplish a great liberation of beauty
every day and all by itself? Does it not testify its disinterestedness? Does
the being of nature itself not reveal something which is beyond being and
non-being? If we accept that beauty is a transcendental, then each manifes-
tation of beauty in nature should lend itself to being defined as liberation.
Nature is and liberates its transcendental. The spectacle of freedom would
encompass also the world of nature, especially the animate nature.

I am not quite original on this issue. It is enough to recall the role
the word "*élan*" (translated as "leap" or "bound") played in Henri Bergson's
works. This word puts before our eyes a picture of a deer jumping over
an obstacle. In Bergson this picture is an image of life. Life surmounts
obstacles. There are moments when life, like a deer, relaxes in the for-
est thicket, when it calmly lives itself, when like a deer drinking water
it imbibes warmth, heat, coolness; but there are also moments when it
flexes its muscles and jumps over obstacles, it faces danger, showing its
beauty in the blink of an eye. Beauty surpasses necessity. It appears as the
liberated. Despite cruelty and death, there is something in nature which
makes us think of freedom.

Obviously, this does not mean that nature, like a free being, chooses
the shape of its beauty all by itself. When we speak of liberation, then it
is in a special sense of the word. Liberation is not an emanation; beauty
does not flow out of a deer surmounting obstacles like a stream of water
flows out of a rock. One would rather say that beauty hovers over nature in
such a way that it is rather nature that flows out of beauty. It concentrates,
makes an effort to become transparent for beauty. As if beauty and beauty
alone were its justification.

I realize that modern natural sciences are indifferent to the phenom-
enon of beauty. All thoughts of liberation are alien to them. Science strives
to capture the natural processes within a framework of strict necessity.
Where this is impossible, the notion of probability is introduced. This no-
tion indicates nothing more than an ignorance of necessity: something
becomes acknowledged as probable when essentially it is necessary, and
it is only we who do not know about it. They say that a deer jumps for it
must, that puppies play with each other for they must; males frolic in
front of females as they are made to by reproductive forces. Everything is

96 predefined by the necessities of life. On the other hand, all of that is not predefined at all. Beauty still remains indefinite: there are neither two identical leaves on a tree, nor two identical leaps of a deer, nor the same frolicking of puppies or males that want to draw the attention of females. With all the repetition of phenomena and events, nature is a place for inimitable liberations of beauty.

Yet, the perennial question remains: is the discovering of beauty in nature—and especially capturing the moment of liberation in nature—not an imprint of our own state of consciousness on nature? Is this not an anthropomorphism? Do we not find in nature something that we ourselves have introduced there?

One needs to recognize the difference between notions. We do not grant nature an act of choosing beauty. Bergson's deer that jumps over a river does not do so to make its leap a work of art. The notion of the liberation of beauty carries the meaning that the phenomenon of beauty does not find explanation within the laws of ontology; however, it would not be possible without ontology. There occurs a disproportion between the anatomy and physiology of nature and the set of qualities and their shades that make up the phenomenon of nature's beauty. Yet, the moment of justification is most essential. Beauty liberates itself from being as a value evidently justifying being. Without beauty the question "why being?" would be left without a clear answer.

Freedom as Liberating Oneself

Freedom has yet another immanent side. It is usually believed that freedom expresses itself through an act of choice. He who is free can choose, and can choose especially between good and evil. Undoubtedly, choice is not inessential. But what is choice in itself? What is its essence? I propose to consider the following answer: choice consists in making something one's own. To choose means to assimilate. Bergson said, "To act freely is to recover possession of oneself."⁴ In other words, to assimilate oneself. To assimilate something is to make it mine, to make it a part of myself. We choose in order to assimilate. Assimilating is an act that appears in the agathological order. Only what is good lends itself to assimilation. By assimilating what is good, I make myself assimilated by the good; it is a mutual relationship. Freedom is what makes assimilation possible—freedom assimilates and lends itself to assimilation. Freedom which chooses assimilates not only the chosen, but it also assimilates into a particular figure, a definite form of freedom. Freedom is a freedom in assimilating.

If we speak of assimilation, we can also speak of dissimilation—of relinquishing what has been a part of myself. Meister Eckhart even speaks of taking leave of oneself. He writes:

⁴ H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson, Courier Dover Publications 2001, pp. 231-232. Cf. also J. Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* [The World of Human Hope], Kraków 1994, pp. 154-156.

Start with yourself therefore and take leave of yourself. Truly, if you do not depart from yourself, then wherever you take refuge, you will find obstacles and unrest, wherever it may be.⁵

What does “take leave of yourself” mean? How is it possible to become oneself in taking leave of oneself? Regardless how we answer this question, the moment of assimilation-dissimilation remains an essential moment of the immanent experience of freedom.

Thanks to assimilation-dissimilation, conversion and new beginnings are possible. In a new beginning, a person enters a different drama and constitutes himself anew as a subject of this drama. From this moment on, he is different from what he has been. St. Paul speaks of the new man. One can “shed the old man” and “put on the new man.” In St. Paul change is possible through meeting the Other—Christ.

Let us think for a while about the new beginning. Hannah Arendt writes about the notion of beginning, *initium*, in her commentaries to St. Augustine’s writings:

He then gives a very surprising answer to the question of why it was necessary to create Man, apart from and above all other living things. In order, he says, that there may be novelty, a b e g i n n i n g must exist; “and this beginning never before existed,” that is, not before Man’s creation. Hence, that such a beginning “might be, man was created before whom nobody was” ... Augustine distinguishes this from the beginning of the creation by using the word *initium* for the creation of Man but *principium* for the creation of the heaven and the earth.⁶

This comment can be interpreted in two ways: Man’s creation was a beginning of absolute novelty, and man as a person was granted the power of beginning. Certainly St. Augustine has both meanings in mind. Each man-person is a beginning and at the same time has the power of beginnings. Man can continuously start from the beginning. Starting from the beginning does not mean a complete break with what has been before. The ontological identity remains, it is the dramatic, agathological identity that changes. An ontological break would mean an annihilation of all identity bonds and, thus, the death of one being and the coming of another. To put it simply, ontological durability is juxtaposed with agathological otherness.

I want to reflect on a thesis: the beginning is a beginning of the good and the end of evil. The beginning of the good is the work of freedom—it is the agathological horizon that opens up the possibility of a beginning. In other words, in order to capture the dimension of freedom and beginning that freedom constitutes, one should look closely at the drama of the good and evil.

Let us start with the example referring to the Cartesian metaphor of the malign genius. Let us imagine the situation of a thinker who has

⁵ Meister Eckhart, “The Talks of Instruction,” in *Selected Writings*, trans. O. Davies, Penguin Classics 1994, p. 6.

⁶ H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Willing*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1981, pp. 110-111.

9⁸ become a victim of the malign genius's lies—such was the situation of Descartes. But Descartes' situation essentially touches everyone, as in the age of religious wars it might seem that an evil demon has taken over the world. The malign demon lies. The world that is built around man is a world of pretended truth, for the essence of falsehood is pretence of truth. Where is the borderline between falsehood and truth? No one can say. But in the world where the borderline is not known each man becomes not only a victim of falsehood, but also its participant. He who is lied to by another himself becomes a liar to others. The figure of the malign genius is a symbol of the totalitarian power that creates a world inverted by falsehood and makes each person a pillar of this world. The lie of the world is in the fact that each is both a malign genius and its victim.

The awareness of participation in evil brings freedom out of its slumber. Man faces the borderline either/or situation. Two directions for the development of the drama become visible: confirming one's participation in falsehood and liberation from participation in falsehood. Doubtless, this is about choice. But above all, this concerns assimilation—an assimilation of one of the worlds and an assimilation of oneself into a given world.

The first possibility seems to be the simplest: to answer a lie with a lie. If I am a victim, let others be victims too. We adopt, assimilate this attitude, discovering that it is justified by a particular logic of justice—the logic of revenge. For by the same measure it is measured to me, I will mete it out to others. As I have been lied to, I will lie to others. The act of falsehood arises out of a quietly assimilated dramatic logic of justice—the logic of revenge. That's why the assimilation of falsehood is possible. I am not a liar because I love falsehood, but because others have lied to me. At the bottom of choosing falsehood, a moment of justice has appeared. The lie directed towards others is evil, but it is a just evil. That is why I am a liar.⁷ I am a liar because of the moment of just revenge that I discover in this. Freedom entangled in falsehood is a manner of existence of the good in me—the good which is a just revenge.

Yet, here is another possibility: a protest against falsehood. Hegel repeats that freedom is negativeness. It is a negativeness that becomes a barrier against negativeness. In this sense freedom is positiveness. The thinker answers the lie that has affected him with radical truthfulness. Why does man, a thinker, answer the proposition of falsehood with truthfulness? Why does he go beyond the principle of revenge? Why does he act against justice? Why does he overcome evil by good? We do not find a satisfactory answer to these questions. In the world of falsehood, truthfulness is a risky leap into another world—a world of a new principle. In some sense it is an irrational act. This act does not lend itself to justification with any necessities of life; as Nietzsche teaches us, life does not really require truth, but rather illusion and falsehood. What, then, does Descartes dispute with the malign genius for? He himself does not

⁷ Cf. J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu* [The Philosophy of Drama], Kraków 1998, p. 170 ff.

know. He knows one thing. He can give a different answer because he is free. Falsehood has not enslaved him. As a free person he can do justice to another experience of the good—a magnanimous recognition of truth and truthfulness. His new freedom is a manner of existence of the new good. Now he can say, “I am truthful.” 99

The idea of freedom is often linked to the idea of the unpredictability of future events. It is said that freedom is where unpredictability is. It allows not only man to be encompassed by the notion of freedom, but also some natural processes. On the other hand, such a broadening of the notion of freedom becomes source of additional objections raised against freedom. It is said that if there were freedom in nature, the same cause in the same conditions would produce different effects, and then science would be impossible; science should be defended at the cost of freedom. It is also said that man is part of nature and, thus, he must be subject to the rational law of necessity. But such a combination of freedom and the world of nature is a big misunderstanding. It does not follow from the fact that some events cannot be predicted that they are free; freedom and chance are two different matters. As far as man is concerned, man is indeed part of nature, but at the same time as a person—a subject of the drama of good and evil—he transcends nature. Unpredictability does not concern whether man will go to sleep in the evening or not, whether he will eat when he experiences hunger, whether he will drink when he feels thirst, but whether he will answer with a lie when he has been lied to, whether he will answer with violence when he has been hurt, whether he will hate when he is hated. If he does what is demanded by the logic of revenge, he will undoubtedly be rational and predictable to some extent. When he rises above this logic, he ceases to be rational and predictable, and yet he turns out to be wise.

Søren Kierkegaard devotes much attention to the moment of risk inherent in freedom. The risk of choice is the risk of assimilation and dissimilation. Man knows what he is and has been like. What will he be like? This is why man often retreats, holds off momentum, puts off the choice:

You are like a woman giving birth and yet you are forever putting off the moment and remain constantly in pain. Were a woman in travail to get the idea that she might give birth to a monster, or were she to wonder what it really was she was about to give birth to, her case would be not unlike yours.⁸

Putting off the moment manifests itself in the mood of melancholy. Freedom has withdrawn from itself and nestled in a standstill. It chooses not to choose. In this manner it becomes sinful freedom:

[M]elancholy is sin, really it is a sin as great as any, for it is the sin of not willing deeply and sincerely, and this is a mother to all sins. This sick-

⁸ S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. A. Hannay, Penguin Classics 1992, p. 506.

ness, or more properly, this sin, is extremely common in our time, and accordingly it is under this that the whole of German and French youth groan.⁹

The past prevails in melancholy. Whatever is happening is a repetition of something that has already happened. According to our interpretation, this is remaining within the drama of revenge. This makes birth impossible. But melancholy too is a manner of existence of the good—the good that has once been against the good that is to come.

To choose means to give birth. Is such identification plausible? Or perhaps is it about some more or less accurate similarity?

Doubtless, both choosing and giving birth are endowed with a moment of negativeness. Birth and choice say no to what has been so far. The moment of dissimilation is present in both. Something is not mine any more, I am not into something any more. What? A new concept that has not been mentioned must be introduced here—the concept of anxiety. Each dissimilation is accompanied by anxiety. In truth, it is only dissimilation that reveals the whole dynamics of anxiety. It is only now that anxiety really becomes anxiety. So far anxiety has been me. It has been me to such an extent that I was not able to say, “I experience anxiety.” My I has simply been anxiety. In this anxiety, falsehood has been hidden together with the heavy load of participation. When freedom says no to falsehood, when it takes the first step on the path of dissimilation, when it blindly searches for another participation, anxiety tears away from I and becomes an independent internal power. It is then that anxiety calls to fall back. There are a few known cases when a rebellious slave withdraws in the nick of time and returns to the slavery of yesterday.

There is one more moment of analogy: the time. He who seeks to be born must turn away from the past toward the future. Choice is similar—all choices are choices toward the future. Including those whose main reference is the past, when for instance one says, “from now on I will regard my past in a different way.” Both birth and choice contain a project of a more or less defined future: what is departing is dissimilated, what is to come is being assimilated. But what is to come? This is not entirely known. In the example considered here the perspective of truthfulness becomes assimilable.

What is to be born is a truthful subject. Yet, only what already is can be born. The truthful subject already is, but in such a way as if it were not. It is about to become through choice. What does it mean that it is as if it were not? What does this expression refer to? It is obvious that it does not refer to being. It refers to the good. Only the good is and is not. In the world of falsehood truthfulness is and is not. It is not as falsehood is everywhere. But somehow it is as—if chosen—it does not come from nothingness but it emerges from the depths of a person. Let us quote from Meister Eckhart again:

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 499-500.

Goodness is not created, not made, not born; rather it is what gives birth and bears the good man, and the good man, insofar as he is good, is unmade and uncreated, and yet he is born, the child and the son of goodness. In the good man goodness gives birth to itself and to everything that it is. Being, knowing, loving and working—goodness pours all this into the good man, and the good man accepts all his being, knowing, loving and working from the innermost heart of goodness, and from it alone.¹⁰

Let us attempt to reveal respective moments belonging to the experience of birth of freedom and its subject. He who makes a decision to be truthful in a world of falsehood is conscious that he stands above that world. The moment of standing above is linked to all those metaphors of freedom that describe it as a flight upward, rising above, man growing wings. Here is imprisoned man—man enclosed within the cage of his body and his anxieties—who stretches his wings and rises up above his prison. The consciousness of flying upward goes together with the consciousness of depth. The higher a value, Max Scheler wrote, the deeper the manner of feeling it. The metaphor of depth was also used by Henri Bergson: a free act emerges out of the depths of consciousness, breaking through the solidified crust of the surface. Does the metaphor of depth render the exact sense of the experience? Can one not say that freedom comes, in some sense, out of nowhere? That nothing really—even inside of man—precedes it?

Hegel speaks of searching and producing instead of bringing out from the depths. We read:

[B]ut philosophy teaches that all the qualities of Spirit exist only through Freedom; that all are but means for attaining Freedom; that all seek and produce this and this alone. It is a result of speculative Philosophy that Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit.¹¹

This is a description of freedom with the help of the notion of spirit and a description of spirit with the help of the notion of freedom. This search for freedom through the qualities of spirit is significant, and as well as significant, productive. Hegel does not say “seek and find,” he says, “seek and produce.” It would seem that once one seeks, one either finds or does not find, but never creates. But here it turns out that one seeks and produces. Surely, producing in the ontological sense must be out of the question. This is rather about bringing out the effects of the idea of freedom within the person and through the person; thanks to the person (self-knowledge), an idea causes effects in the real world, and by doing that it acquires a realistic meaning. Freedom as real and acting in the real world has its part in the ideal.

Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind* spoke about this in more detail. This work was totally devoted to the history of self-knowledge of freedom that con-

¹⁰ Meister Eckhart, “The Book of Divine Consolation,” in *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. E. Colledge, B. Mc Ginn, Paulist Press 1981, pp. 209-210.

¹¹ G.W.F Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, Batoche Books, Kitchener 2001, p. 31.

102 stitutes itself. Each time freedom arose from a historical situation created by a system of power and a level of knowledge that man was born into. It was not only political power that mattered, but also the power over nature and the tradition of the family, clan and nation. Each time freedom took a leap to abolish these conditions and to establish new ones in which it felt more itself and more at home. Freedom needed two arms: rooting itself in the concrete and referring to the ideal. It was a form of overcoming the concrete to achieve a possible ideal. Freedom sought and produced its own form. It rose from the ground that needed the seed.

We find a similar vision of freedom in Jean Nabert. Nabert, in accord with the tradition of the French philosophy of reflection, concentrates on studying the faith (*croyance*) in freedom. Real freedom is preceded by faith in freedom. It may be said that our being free relies on the kind of freedom we believe in:

Becoming a history of faith, the inner experience of freedom becomes as well a history of ideas through which this faith reveals the category of freedom, in this way avoiding the pure subjectivity of feeling. Each of these ideas or these categories functions as a crystallization of faith.¹²

There is no freedom where the dramatic time is a repetition of what has already happened. Freedom is possible only through opening up to the ideal. Opening up consists in faith. Faith is a form of assimilation. A person makes freedom his own through believing in freedom and through this same believing he makes himself one of freedom's own. Freedom is conceived and born. The subject of freedom is conceived and born together with it.

A significant feature of slavery is participation in fear that overwhelms the whole of the consciousness and, in much the same way, a significant feature of freedom which is being born is the atmosphere of magnanimity in which the assimilation of a new field of participation is fulfilled. What lends itself to assimilation does not have to be assimilated—although it can be. Man does not have to be truthful. Being able to without having to defines a new plane of the drama. It means also the presence of a new man, a man that has accomplished the act of abolition of the necessities of yesterday, of yesterday's "I have to lie."

Let us think with Kierkegaard again. Kierkegaard speaks about the state of melancholy, a state that precedes the act of choice. The choice itself indicates despair. The situation is as follows: a person puts off the moment of giving birth to despair and falls into the trap of melancholy. To get out of the trap, one must choose despair. There is yet something special in the act of choosing despair—it is rising above despair. He who chooses despair turns out to be above despair. Let us once again look at *Either/Or*:

¹² J. Nabert, *L'expérience intérieure de la liberté et autres essais de philosophie morale*, Paris 1994, p. 139.

In general, one cannot despair at all unless one wants to, but in order truly to despair one must truly want to, but when one truly wills despair one is truly beyond it; when one has truly chosen despair one has truly chosen what despair chooses, namely oneself in one's eternal validity.¹³

Freedom that has entered into a game with despair has risen above despair, and revealed myself as a bearer of an absolute value. I am an absolute value in the sense that I no longer depend on external values. If I can escape despair, who or what else can endanger me? Freedom presupposes a value, to be more precise, a new manner of existence of the good.

Kierkegaard writes:

In choosing absolutely, then, I choose despair, and in despair I choose the absolute, for I myself am the absolute, I posit the absolute and am myself the absolute. But, as amounts to exactly the same, I must say: I choose the absolute which chooses me, I posit the absolute which posits me.¹⁴

Kierkegaard creates paradoxes. He leads the text to the limits of understanding. I confess that I do and do not understand at the same time. I do not understand when I do not know what exactly chooses me when I choose the absolute. I begin to understand when I set the text within the horizon of the good. What is despair in the end if not a manner of experiencing evil that touches me? What is the absolute choice if not choosing the good? After its setting within the horizon of the good, Kierkegaard's text begins to enter into harmony with the already cited passages from Meister Eckhart.

Once again Kierkegaard:

What I choose I do not posit, for if it were not posited I could not choose it, and yet if it were not posited through my choosing it I would not choose it. It is, for if it was not I could not choose it; it is not, for it only comes to be by my choosing it, otherwise my choice would be illusory.¹⁵

And let us remind ourselves of Meister Eckhart's words for the last time:

Goodness is not created, not made, not born; rather it is what gives birth and bears the good man, and the good man, insofar as he is good, is unmade and uncreated, and yet he is born, the child and the son of goodness...¹⁶

Referring here to Kierkegaard requires some explanation. The point of departure for our analyses was a dramatic situation taken from Descartes: a game between truthfulness and falsehood. Yet for Kierkegaard, the Cartesian drama is not radical enough: it is a drama of uncertainty and certainty, a drama of reason entangled in uncertainty. The Danish philosopher writes, "doubting belongs to the area dominated by differences, diversities of opinion, while despair to the realm of the absolute."

¹³ S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, op. cit., p. 515.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 515-516.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 516.

¹⁶ Meister Eckhart, op. cit., p. 209.

104 Kierkegaard does not wish to slide on the surface of things. He faces despair that attacks the whole of personality. In Descartes a person of the drama achieves the dignity of a truthful person, in Kierkegaard—they achieve the absolute dignity. Does this mean that, in drawing from Kierkegaard's writings, we have slid from the road taken at the beginning?

I do not think so. My intention is not to support a presupposed thesis on freedom as a manner of existence of the good with texts taken out of other contexts. The cited examples and passages serve me rather as a didactic help to elucidate, and not to prove, the thesis stated. I wish to say only that freedom as a force of assimilation assimilates a person into the good, and the good into the person. Truthfulness is one such good. Other examples are possible too, e.g. justice, faithfulness, devotion. Kierkegaard speaks about the absolute value. In some sense all values mentioned are absolute, and so is the subject who chooses and assimilates them. "Absolute" comes from *absolvere* "to absolve." Freedom absolves man from something and binds him to something—it dissimilates and assimilates. In its action, it is not subordinate to anyone. And if it is subordinate then only because it wants to be, and not because it has to be. Freedom never prides itself on being the highest value, because it is always suspended between the concrete and the ideal. Despite that, it feels absolute because there is no power over it.

The passage from imprisonment to freedom entails a particular change of experience. The feelings and experiences that characterize the state of imprisonment disappear—the experiences of fear, melancholy, sadness, hopelessness and despair—and in their place appear joy, certainty and hope. Hope has a special meaning here. Freedom is a power that releases hope. It also releases joy and a sense of dignity. But how is the passage from despair to hope possible? How is it possible to overcome sadness with joy? How is it possible to overcome contempt and release the sense of one's own dignity? If freedom is a kind of taking flight, how is this flight, this rising from the state of despair, possible? Is man able to do it on his own? If he were, he probably would not have fallen. Yet he has fallen; therefore, he cannot rise all by himself. Freedom means that man can. But on the other hand, freedom also comes from without.

The experience of grace is anchored in the incomprehensibility of the passage from despair to hope. Freedom is a grace that opens one up to grace.

Guessing freedom from human behavior—so in a different manner from what is usual—leads to a question referring to the essence of the good: is it possible for the good not to be free? No, the good cannot be not free. The good cannot be good by force, by necessity. One who is good by force is not good. The good, in order to be good, must want to be good all alone. Similarly, evil also, in order to be evil, must want to be evil. The word "must" does not mean a logical necessity here, but a dramatic one. Freedom cannot be inferred from the notion of the good in an analytical way, as the three sides of the triangle follow from the notion of the triangle.

To capture the dramatic “must,” one needs to use the example of personal willing. The inner life of the person is a concrete image of the drama of the good. It is the person, a concrete human being who, in order to be good, cannot fail to want to be good. Willing the good must be free. Freedom expresses and assimilates the good. ¹⁰⁵

The good that cannot be not free cannot be self-unconscious either. It must be reflexive. It must know how and for whom to be good. In this respect the metaphor of light shows its shortcomings: light cannot fail to shine, the good cannot either, but this is because it wants to be unable to. The good is *difussivum sui* in the sense that all by itself it wills itself. This is what its independence consists in. Independence differs from autogeny. An autogenous being does not need any other being to exist; an independent being does not need any other goodness to be good, it is good through its own goodness.

The good that is free does not want to take freedom away from other goodness; it is unable not to recognize the other’s goodness. Freedom is in the same way a manner of existence of both my and your goodness.

What about evil? Evil is not free. It hinges upon the hatred of the good.