

The Silence of History

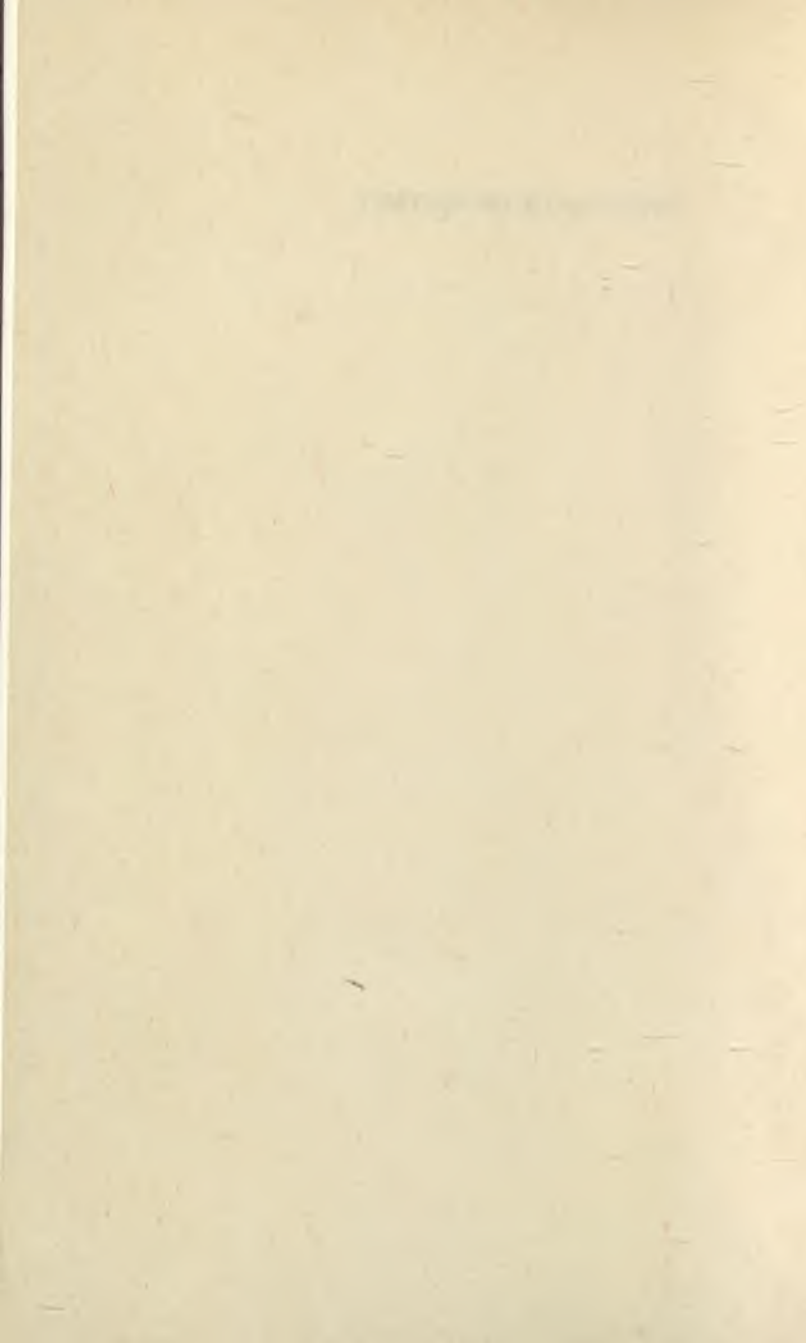
by Éva Ancsel

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Akadémiai Kiadó
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BY
ÉVA ANCSEL

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Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest

Translated by Zsuzsa Béres

MAGYAR
TUDOMÁNYOS AKADÉMIA
KÖNYVTÁRA

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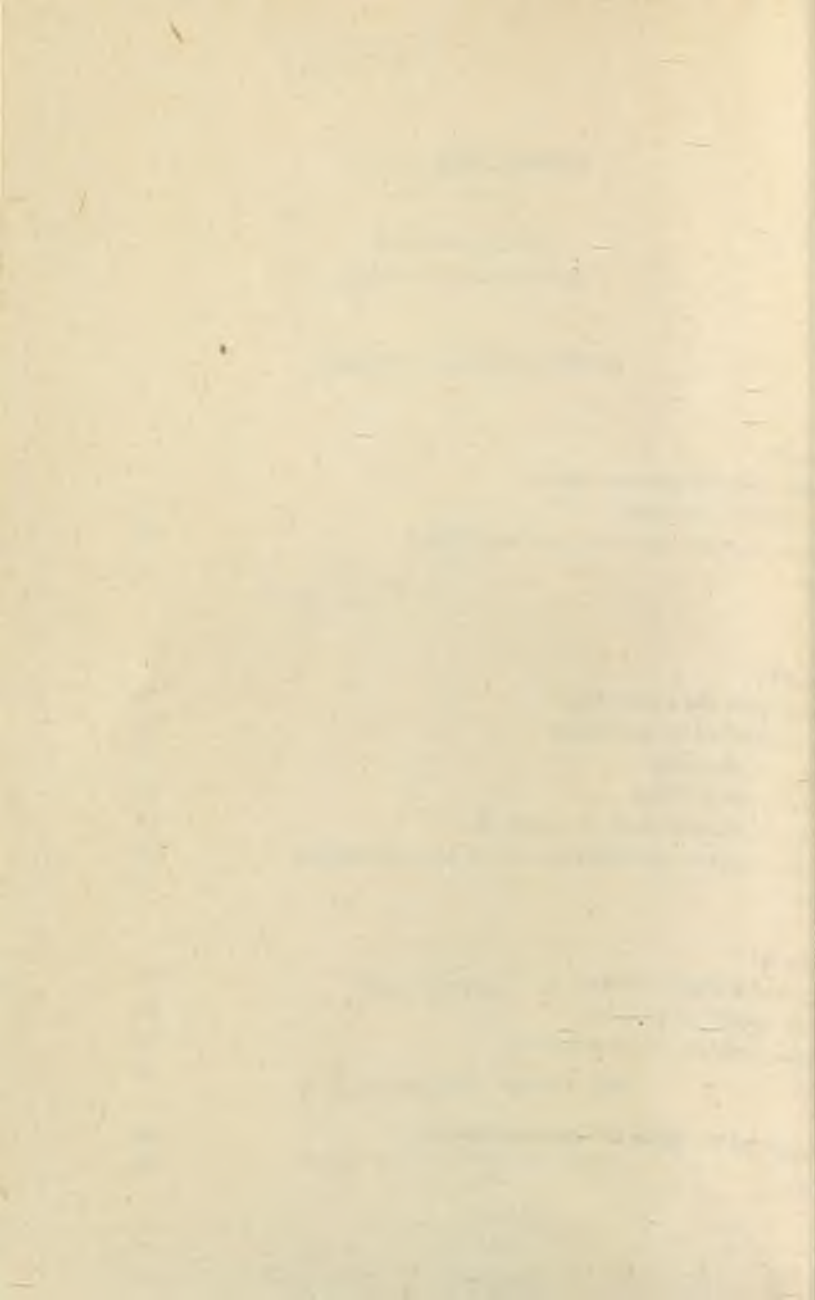
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CHAPTER I

HISTORY DOES NOT GIVE ANY ANSWER

Like any other metaphor, the metaphor hidden in the title of this book is none other than an indication and, at the same time, an exposure of the insurmountable fallibility in our understanding of the world. One expresses oneself in metaphors in order to conceal one's embarrassment in connection with what one cannot quite fully grasp, of which one has only an inkling, since it is not accommodated to a life-size idea and passion, as indeed world history for the time being certainly is.

I am fully aware that to speak about the silence of history is merely a clumsy allusion to Pascal's hallucination of the silence of God. Nevertheless, I stand by the analogy because I believe that in several respects our everyday consciousness has still not, in our relationship with history, gone beyond seventeenth-century Jansenists and their like, whose gods or one single God was created in their own image. It is hardly possible to rid ourselves of the habit, as is usually the case with transcendencies, to anthropomorphize, indeed, to personify history. Thus the irresistible temptation to try to communicate with it, to enter into dialogue with it, endures even after we have succeeded in penetrating its silence.

It is not its quietude that is the subject of discussion, since that is non-existent. Possessing neither language nor grammar, its silence is clamorous. Obviously, therefore, we must articulate its alarming cacophony—after all, it is of our own making—and

hope that we can tame it somewhat with our familiar concepts of human dimensions. We describe it as progressing, stopping, calling for action and, of course, there are those who, lifting an admonishing finger, severely rebuke and warn it on grounds that "this was something they really had not expected". Finally nodding their heads in disapproval, they turn away and turn their back on it—moreover, they would, given the change, slam the door in its face in anger. The latter is usually done by those who had at one time deliriously identified with it and thought it was quite tame: only the wheels had to be turned diligently.

It does not matter if it turns out that we cannot communicate with history. It does not matter if it turns out that reality does not conform to our expectations. Walter Benjamin is right when he says that "Das Staunen darüber, daß die Dinge, die wir erleben, im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert 'noch' möglich sind..."¹ this derives from an untenable conception of history. At least it is the remnant or reemergence of a Messianic or Messianized concept of progress, one that treats history almost as a kind of secularized deity concept. It does not matter, therefore, if we begin to suspect that our life-span standards are useless: our human doings and those of history cannot be compared. Similarly, one cannot use a mercury thermometer to measure every degree of frost and heat.

Whence the enormous hiatus that language itself is unable to penetrate? Why are all our attempts to establish any form of communication absurd? The problem rests with the concepts of good and evil both of which are asserted with an elemental force in the understanding or misunderstanding of our human life, that is, with the obscure *ēthos*, as soon as we try to deal with history one way or another. There is no place for *ēthos* in history, even if people usually die for good or evil, just or unjust causes, even if in the prisoner camps they live what is left of their lives preserving their dignity or yielding to suffering. History does not lend itself to comparison with either human truths and moral

values, or with our notions of them. And it is when we discover this that we "give it a piece of our mind".

Even Nietzsche, who allegedly succeeded in getting beyond good and evil, was compelled to admit that there was something odd about this "getting beyond". For, as he writes, "... imagine someone who takes the very passions—hatred, envy, greed, domineering ... such a man suffers from the inclination of his judgement as though from seasickness!"² Whence Nietzsche's suffering if not from the fact that he, too, was unable to break away from the pull of the *ēthos* of human life, despite the fact that the laws of this sphere were irretrievably different from those of the realm of history.

And whence the belated brooding of the scholar of Antiquity over the issue of why the Greeks of the Pericles era had to slaughter the whole male population of the island of Melos, when he ought to know that history is silent because it has no answer to his question.

All of this is not merely a characteristic trait of the fallibility of everyday consciousness. After all, even Kant, who before Hegel was perhaps the first to recognize that history was propelled forward by Evil, went on to write *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, (Critique of Practical Reason) which, ultimately, also means that even the most philosophic of philosophers was unable—did not even try—to break with *ēthos*, the in practice weak and intellectually invincible spiritual power of human life.

He who knew that knowledge requires daring, dared not know every consequence of the fact that "ohne jene an sich zwar eben nicht liebenswürdige Eigenschaften der Ungeselligkeit ... würden in einem arkadischen Schäferleben bei vollkommener Intracht, Genügsamkeit und Wechselliebe alle Talente auf ewig in ihren Reimen verborgen bleiben: die Menschen ... würden ihrem Dasein kaum einen größeren Wert verschaffen, als, dieses für Hausvieh hat".³ He dared to know that ambition, the thirst

for power, covetousness were the driving force of development and that it was *thanks* to malvolently competing vanity and *thanks* to Providence, who, being wiser than man striving to achieve understanding, took care of the necessary feuding so that the development of abilities could take place. Then Kant wrote an ethic, and, disrespectfully, one would like to ask him whether or not he had any qualms about possibly obstructing progress. In his spirit, albeit ironically, we may say that *thanks* to the weakness of philosophy, his experiment did not turn out to be historically dangerous.

The Kantian, Hegelian and Marxian knowledge pertaining to the role of evil in history is most probably the least bearable truth. To understand trouble in the world generally, including evil, was perhaps possible, but to reconcile the negative with the thinking mind,⁴ was a problem that even Hegel himself was unable to fully resolve. However, what is primarily involved here is not how the subject himself bears this truth, but, rather, how the role of evil can, and must, be known without fatalizing *every kind* of evil and using it as an apology of existing conditions. "Obviously, this knowledge cannot be decomposed" in a way that enables one to nod approval resignedly of everything that is evil presuming that it is the driving force of development.

The voracious appetite of capital for surplus labour is, for instance, an obvious case of evil that aroused the indignation of Marx, the level-headed anatomist of capitalist society, and not merely out of humanistic considerations. (Notwithstanding, sheer indignation occasionally played quite an indispensable role in history.) Marx, however, went beyond indignation and waged a systematic struggle to subdue this voracious hunger—and not merely out of humanitarian considerations, but also, among other things, because he was aware that wherever and so long as capital had the opportunity to satiate its thirst for profit, so long, therefore, as it was able to increase absolute surplus value, it

would not be forced to develop the forces of production. The "civilized horror",⁵ as Marx called it, of overwork is thus not a driving force of progress, does not advance anything, but rather leads to a decline of the nation's life force, to recurring epidemics and to annihilation. There is, therefore, no conceivable reason why a thinking intellect should ever become reconciled to the torturing of nine or ten-year-old children making veils and collars in lace factories. At this point Marx's tone and style change: here the anatomist becomes an advocate of history, of the oppressed. He not only analyses but also defends and accuses.

A categorical definition of the Marxian concept of the meaning of negativity—which ensures progress—is not possible simply because doing so would require the citing of all of Marx's and Engels' life work, beginning from the progressive role and significance of the appearance of private property to their concept of capital. The same Marx and Engels who recognized that the appearance of the free plot of land in Antiquity constituted great advance also staked their whole life on the eventual abolition of private property.

It was also them, the most consistent opponents of capitalism, who wrote the peculiar "apology" of capital in both the *Manifest der Kommunisten* (The Communist Manifesto) and *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy). And here it is also important that the familiar passages can also be read in *The Communist Manifesto*, for this, among other things, also demonstrates that they did not resort to a *duplex veritas*, and there did not exist for them another truth to be used in the mobilizing theoretical work and another in the *Grundrisse*.

Additional examples could be brought up to demonstrate that Marx and Engels liberated the idea of progress from the understandably emotive notions that had become attached to it.

Marx and Engels regarded as one of Hegel's greatest discoveries that he recognized the role of negativity in historical progress. According to Engels a dual meaning was hidden in this negativity. On the one hand progress as such emerges, or necessity, as a sacrilege, as progress in face of the old conditions sanctioned by custom. On the other hand, ever since the emergence of class antagonism, it is precisely people's darkest passions—greediness and lust for power—that become the driving force of development. I believe that it is not these wicked passions as such, but the laws of the commodity world that impart movement to them.

Engels' discovery cannot be interpreted in a way that concretely, every form of greediness and lust for power was bound to enhance progress at any time. Yet, the Marxist public consciousness is far more vulnerable to the romantic mythicizing-Messianic conception of progress.

Terminology itself divulges the resistance put up by the consciousness in the face of this realization—whenever progress is described in negative terms at all, albeit it should in actual fact be described in positive terms. After all, we are unable to break with the conceptual scale of our habit of thinking and passing judgement, which is traditionally based on human time dimensions. If consciousness puts up resistance, this is bound to be all the more forceful where future evil ought to be *foreseen*!

Herein rooted is one of the most stubborn, albeit not the sole obstacle in the path of the ability to *foresee*. It is because of this that it is so difficult to accept Walter Benjamin's great vision which he expounds in his philosophy history theses as a peculiar interpretation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. He compares to and identifies progress with the storm that drives the angel of history—an angel that spreads out its wings and turns its back on the future—towards the future, while the heap of ruins grows sky-high at its feet.⁶ And this storm sweeps it irresistably toward

this future, on which it is turning its back. One may well say that the paroxysm of despair speaks from these lines. One may also say that Benjamin's comparison is exaggerated, albeit this does not alter the fact that no one in world history, which is moving along its course as natural history, can look confidently to the future with open and perceptive eyes. One may find fault with the words that evoke irrationalism linguistically, but one cannot deny the essential truth of the idea.

Kant says that had we been able to foresee the consequences of the French Revolution our hair would have stood on end—yet, even with our hair standing on end we would have had to support it. However, this peak is not accessible to all. People who, for instance, simply entertain dreams of a beautiful future, as in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, this motionless classic, would be unlikely to bear it if anyone told them that, for the most part, this future existed in the present. But it is not in the least attractive, rather wicked, cruel, indeed beastly because it is embodied by Natasha. How could they, who console themselves with the future, be capable of noticing that it was "a beautiful future", which expelled them from their home and which drove away Anfisa, the old nurse.

Chekhov—more precisely the play itself—knows what is going on. The church bells toll when Anfisa's expulsion is announced: the tolling of the church bells indicates that the "beautiful future" is here. When Natasha says "Why you keep that old woman . . .?" the world turns black for Olga, and it is no use saying that she is just a representative of a patriarchal past, for *ethos* is one her side.

In none of Chekhov's other works do people talk so much about the future as they do in *Three Sisters*. All they ever do, while they are sitting playing cards and drinking tea or trying to live, is to wait for a future that has long begun their

displacement. And Natasha's figure is none other than the future embodied.

Yet knowing all of this, can the church bells be tolled—and can judgement be passed?

IS JUDGEMENT POSSIBLE?

Does it not follow from the aforesaid that consistency can only be found in the view of history where *ēthos*, and together with *human judgement*, falls silent? After all, if we understand that progress would have ground to a halt, if long ago, during the era of the accumulation of capital, a humanist epidemic had broken out instead of the plague, if we understand that there must be money-changing, then how can we pass judgement over the money-changers?

It is indeed important *how* we pass judgement. It is by no means possible to do so in a way the perhaps least Christ-like of all Jesuses passes judgement—on Hieronymus Bosch's *Carrying of the Cross*. Embracing his crucifix, closing his eyes, not wanting to see anyone, this utterly exhausted Son of Man regretted that he had come to the Earth, among the snarling money-changers. Therefore he wants to go away for good, with a sinful finality. He wants to go away because he who does not want to see a human face does not want to live and to him the crucifix is synonymous with salvation. I do not think that Bosch's Jesus is right. Similarly, Kant, who transposes evil—which drives history forward—into man only to the extent of an ambiguous gesture, is not right either, just as anyone who projects all kinds of money-changing characteristics onto empirical individuals. What simply happens here is that the edge of minds turns and, having had enough of the silence of history, the moralists begin to lay out againts those who, as it were, reverse the turning points.

history proclaimed great, marvellous and heroic. This is how philosophical anthropologies, or, rather, "misanthropologies" eliminate the aforementioned hiatus, since where evil engenders evil there is harmony and order.

Can man be man's own judge?—asks Dostoyevsky in his writing on *Anna Karenina*. *Man* cannot, under any circumstances—he says. Only *he* exists who says: "Vengeance is mine and I shall get even". But it happens even to God *himself* that, seeing the fall of the human soul, the predominance of evil, which "ties up his every movement, paralyses his entire power of resistance, his every thought", paralyses all fighting spirit in the face of the darkness enveloping man. With weights and pans in his hands he cries out in fear and shock: No, vengeance is not always mine and I do not always get even.⁸

A frightened, shocked God—in whose hands the scales tremble, who himself revokes his own privilege to pass judgement—is no longer identical with the one-time law-maker.

There are, indeed, people over whom neither God, nor man can pass judgement. Yet neither Dostoyevsky, nor Nietzsche, nor even history can strip man of the scales. It will do no harm, indeed it is extremely useful to allow the scales to tremble in our hands. There is no danger, however, that the moralists—and almost everyone is a moralist in fact—who operate the scales with peculiar dexterity will be capable of eliminating the driving force of progress, evil, from history. It is unlikely that money-changing and, together with it, the money-changers will become extinct before their existence became superfluous. If this be the case is ineffectiveness the only excuse that can be brought up in the favour of scales and scale-bearers? Can awareness of the fact that, to use Hegel's term, the course of the world prevails over virtue—the essence of the latter being abstraction without presence, high-flown rhetoric, "this pompous talk about the best for mankind and the oppression of humanity about sacrifice for

goodness' sake and the misuse of gifts"⁹—can silence be judgement? Could it mean that moral indignation automatically made every indignant person a paragon of morality?!

I believe there is nothing more impossible than to imagine that it is possible to exist in the midst of human life without being shocked by human vileness, despite being aware that, "ultimately", it is of no importance whatsoever from the viewpoint of world historical development—unless it actually acted as driving force. This is just as impossible as the opposite, namely to apply the criteria of human life to something that we usually call history. For, as Marx says, it is a cornerstone of alienation that political economy and morality employ a contradictory yardstick in relation to man. But what can and what should man himself do? He cannot apply the standards of his human existence to history, but neither can he relinquish them entirely. In other words *ēthos* can and must be applied in the dimension of life.

Human existence possesses an *ēthos minimum* at the level of both everyday and broader experience. Without this people would turn into the snarling figures or the self-blinding and suicidal Jesus of Hieronymus Bosch's aforementioned painting.

The scale trembled in the hands of Dostoyevsky's aforementioned God—albeit, admittedly, this occurred in response to the fate of only a single person. But judgement must be passed and it matters how. Not the way Thomas Mann's God had done in *The Law*. Only Moses, a far wiser person of a superior *ēthos*, can persuade this irate God of the Old Testament not to abandon the "mob", not to pass final judgement over them, not to destroy them. For this God has lost patience. As he says to Moses: "du sollst sehen, eines Tages kenne ich mich nicht mehr und fresse sie unterwegs auf".¹⁰ Also, it is telling which of Moses' many arguments are eventually effective. He finally succeeds in frightening God and in making him change his mind by saying

that if he slew all those who had worshipped Belial in the Wilderness, people will say that he had done this because he was unable to lead them to the Promised Land. This will be the argument which—thank God!—induced the ambitious God to yield to Moses' request—in fear of possible heresy questioning his omnipotence.

What and how much Moses knows is not to be underestimated. He knows that there is a need for law, but he is also aware that the commandments will not be obeyed, that people would sin repeatedly everywhere. It is not transgression that he really forbids, but, rather, that anyone should question their validity.

One could say that he is of the view that *it does not matter* if they are transgressed so long as "an icy fear grips" the heart of the transgressors. As he sees it, transgression is not the greatest, the ultimate problem, but, rather, when this is done without fear, with total disregard of the law. For *ēthos* must at least be preserved in this icy fear so that the Earth should not become the land of "ignominy". For that it shall become if sin is committed, can be committed, without an awareness that it had in fact been

History does not adjust to the life of those who are capable of thinking about it. But with *ēthos*, those who want to change history face an even more serious problem. Even in the 20th century progress has not ceased to resemble the bourgeois fetish Marx so often referred to,¹¹ just as private property has not ceased to exist, together with all its baseness.

Only deciding what is necessary and possible in the interests of progress can serve as a guide to meaningful historical action. This holds true even if this is not, because it cannot in the given case, be in harmony with the principle of *ēthos*. Hence the inevitable choice of force in a given situation or else the mobilising of interests which do not directly facilitate the

strengthening of confraternity amongst people. Only, all of this must be done *knowingly* for only this awareness, that of the inevitably undertaken contradiction in such cases can ensure that the sheer pressure of necessity should not become habitual. Even more importantly, that it should not be stylized into a heroic deed, the criterion of revolutionary behaviour. Temporary suspended *ēthos*, the validity of which has not been refuted should not fade into oblivion. The clashing of the requirements of historical progress and human *ēthos* must be reformulated precisely because the illusion of possible harmony is a common source of misdirection. What is progressive does not in itself involve *ēthos*—but neither does it vice versa.

Belief in the hegemony of *ēthos* as a maxim, as a fundamental principle leads to Tolstoyanism in one form or another, while belief in the opposite could mean blind submission to the constraint that only the instruments of class society can be used against class society conditions. There are historical moments, days or even longer periods when the masses are capable of acting out of conviction and their sense of justice. But one must be aware that the driving forces behind interests predominate on a mass scale and in the long run. This is why Lenin said that "relying on firmness of convictions, loyalty, and other splendid moral qualities is anything but a serious attitude in politics". But ought not he, who does what he must do fully aware of all this, possess special characteristic traits? He who marches along with the rejoicing flag unfurlers, perhaps as their leader, without rejoicing with them. He who bears the burden of *synchronous* knowledge besides his implements of war. He who is not characterized by "he doesn't know but he does it", but, rather, by *he knows and he does it*—he knows and he does it regardless.

Nothing is more difficult than to know the worst about history that it needs *evil* and that it will not relinquish this necessity for quite awhile—to know this and yet not turn one's back on it

Only he is capable of this who handles his own *ēthos* in historical action as a "birth defect" which, of course, is not a defect at all—just as lameness is not—because its bearer cannot be blamed for either in a positive, or in a negative sense. In other words he who is clever enough not to even attempt to apply the criteria of his own *ēthos* either to world history, or to other people, and is tough enough to bear the inevitable suffering arising from his birth defect. It is as though someone born with serious and painful lameness would undertake to take part in a life-time of long distance running or, rather, in long distance walking, which, moreover, did not lead to any tangible finishing tape.

ON SYNCHRONOUS KNOWLEDGE OR ISAAC BABEL

Anyone who writes about Isaac Babel "the four-eyed", in order to exemplify the phenomenon of synchronous knowledge, will himself be forced to submit to double vision. To see, on the one hand, the awkward and alarmingly lonely writer depicted by the author of *Red Cavalry* as one character among the rest, and on the other, Babel whose bright and resolute look is reflected by the whole of the world he has re-created.

This bespectacled Red Army soldier, every inch a civilian, knows too much and too little to fight together with the others, yet this is precisely what he does. God only knows why he insists on marching with them when it is obvious that he is entirely unsuited to it, that he has no business at all to be there on the battlefield, for he cannot even kill properly. Naturally he knows this, *even this*, and so kills a goose with a sword to make the Cossacks take him on. In a writing *After Battle* he entreats fate to bestow on him "the simplest thing, that I should at last be able to kill a human being".¹³

For synchronously he knows that to kill people is the simplest and most common occurrence in this historical situation and also knows that, notwithstanding, this will remain the most absurd occurrence in this world. To be capable of killing people is a necessity beyond doubt for history, for the individual person; however, it is a scandal that lends itself to no explanation whatever. It is highly probable that it is precisely because of this that he begins an apparently insignificant writing, *The Zbruch Crossing*, with the delineation of this "simplest" thing. This is a prologue, without the pathos of epic undertones, or, rather, with the type of pathos which cannot yet be expressed in words.

Nothing in the world happens on the occasion of the Zbruch crossing, nothing special that would not occur in any war anywhere and any time. Soldiers take up quarters with strangers, lie on the floor, but by chance one of them finds himself lying next to a corpse. The alien soldier falls asleep, but is awakened by a pregnant woman in the middle of the night who tells him she would rather make a bed for him in the other corner than watch him constantly touching the dead body in his restless sleep. The corpse in question happened to be the pregnant woman's father. The day before he had been slain by other soldiers and now his daughter is asking the narrator where "in this whole world" she would find "such a father?"¹⁴

With this unanswerable question in his mind the cavalryman marches on, to appear "as an aggressive stranger" in the church of Novograd, which had been deserted by its priest. Keeping the memory of the Zbruch crossing and that particular question in mind he will eventually answer Gedali's question with self-assurance worthy of a Red agitator. For synchronously he knows that the alien woman's question was justified, and that he must, after all, learn to kill.

Is it possible to fight properly in the Red Cavalry when someone pays this sort of attention to an unknown dead person?

and his story, a story which is no more than a wish that he should not be killed in the presence of his loved ones?

Is it possible to fight with so much *superfluous* knowledge, at least with knowledge which is definitely superfluous for the charge of the next day? Can the burden of this be borne?

First of all, wherein rooted is the exceptional knowledge of this "four-eyed" person, or rather, what lies at the core of that which he sees?

Essentially, his assessment of what—or all that—the Red Cavalry is not capable of is negative. However, he possesses this knowledge in times when people are experiencing a historical season of Messianism and he, too, is familiar with the unparalleled attraction of this. Indeed, not only is he familiar with this, there is no one with a better understanding of Gedali, with a deeper sympathy for him despite knowing that he is wrong. Gedali, this bespectacled junkman, philosophizes amongst buttons and dead butterflies:

"The good things are done by good people. Revolution is the cause of good people. But good people do not kill". History has no answer to this peculiar, imperfect syllogism. In fact premisses of this kind hinder thinking about history; only one thing can be done, to throw oneself down before the men of Zhitomir, who cry out in unison: "Woe is us, where is the gentle revolution?!" Where is the revolution which will achieve that "every soul be given consideration and first-class treatment"?¹⁵

If there is a person who, in his own way, does make an attempt to tackle the impossible task of giving consideration to all souls, and, on the artistic level, succeeds, it is, once again, Babel. He understands Gedali but in a way a major mistake is understood by people. Notwithstanding, he is unable to help the junkman who is philosophizing in a floor-length green coat. It is only for the sake of justice that he tells him the truth and not in order to, say, convince him. Accordingly, he speaks only very succinctly

about the revolution: "he must shoot, Gedali . . . , because he is the revolution"¹⁶. What else could he say to an old man walking up and down amongst gilded slippers, ropes, old compasses and stuffed eagles when he has just appealed to him to bring a few good men to Zhitomir and they will give all their gramophones to them.

Gedali walks up and down amongst the junk he wants to see and, later—this slightly peculiar and late descendant of Count Tolstoy—being tiny, lonely, he leaves for the synagogue dreaming, dressed in a black top hat and carrying a large prayer book.

Babel is a sad and tight-lipped person. He is sad because at the same time he knows that Gedali is both right and wrong and also, he understands both Gedali's and the Red Cavalry's case. Essentially, however, he knows far more than this and is tight-lipped because knowledge of this nature isolates people. He knows that although what is happening is inevitable, it will not bring any direct form of salvation either for the Russian or for the Novograd people.

This is why Isaac Babel is an alien everywhere; not on account of his spectacles, neither because of his suspicious profession as a writer, but, rather, because he indeed possesses double vision: he sees what everyone can see and also that which only those with synchronous knowledge can see, and who, moreover, does what must be done despite this. Even though the Red Cavalry does not carry salvation anywhere it knows that unfolded flags and cries of rejoicing are necessary if they want to capture Berestechko, and Berestechko must be taken.

Isaac Babel himself marches into this small town exuding the fear of the petite bourgeoisie, where division commissar Vinogradov delivers an enthusiastic address to the concerned inhabitants and the robbed Jews. He explains to them passionately that: "You are power. Everything here belongs to

rou.”¹⁷ While he is speaking Babel wanders amongst the walls of the deserted palace and his lonely knowledge is the only bridge between the unfolded flags, the trumpet-blowing marches and the closed shutters secured with iron bars.

The sadness of his knowledge is underlined by the fact that he understands even people's need for salvation. He knows that impossible scales are operating, the pans of which cannot be balanced. In one pan there is history which just happens to be crossing at Zbruch, the dead father in the other; no scales can measure weights like these.

Scales of this kind do not exist and no actual bargaining takes place, but even if the contrary were true the anonymous woman in the Zbruch crossing would not understand what those who would say that she should give her father's life to history wanted of her anyway.

Gedali and Afonka Bida are, in all likelihood, the two people who stand closest to Babel. This despite the fact that the former rejects revolution because it is not “gentle”, while the latter rejects Babel because he is unable to kill—indeed almost kills him.

If Tolstoy raised the question: “What do people need?”—Babel, too, raises it in his own special way, and not only once. Only, his answer is not as simple as that of Tolstoy's had been. For he also knows that *people do not know what they need*, the disheartening secret just became known when, for instance, Pan Apolek, the migrant icon painter, appears among them. It immediately becomes obvious that this was what they needed: to see themselves extolled.

Pan Apolek's “beautiful and wise life” goes into Babel's head like a fiery vintage wine. It goes into his head because Pan Apolek does what he cannot do, because his task is to tell the truth, but what is to be done in the future is as attractive as to form a fairy-tale International. Babel is filled with the temptation of the desire

to give people what they need. Momentary, albeit false salvation so that the Pan-type Elizas be able to recognize themselves in the rosy-cheeked Blessed Virgin. Yes, Babel envies Pan Apolek, who populates the neighbouring villages with angels and saints, who canonizes even the lame Janek who had been converted to Christianity. He is intoxicated by the gathering of rejoicing and simple, silver-bearded, silk-clad old men, veiled in the magnificent night, by the idea that there exists somebody who redeems—for a few zloties—immediately and with absolute efficacy. Pan Apolek is a more effective redeemer than any Christ could ever have been or will be. And it is not by chance that Babel rewrites the Gospel in precisely this piece.

There is no redemption—this is at the core of Babel's knowledge. This is why he is able to rewrite the story of Christ more audaciously than anybody else. His Jesus, more precisely the person Pan Apolek talks about, has slept with Deborah in order to save her from the shame of a disastrous wedding night. The child born of this union—the possible future Redeemer—is hidden by high priests. There is no crucifixion and there is no resurrection. The first, the "original" Jesus departs for the desert, just as Pan Apolek himself must go, and indeed Babel himself—on his own once again.

As always, his sole companion is the likewise homeless moon. Babel is the knower of incomparable and ever-divergent things, who, together with Khlebnikov, regards the world as a big spring field, a field where only women and horses go. And there is no irony in this self-characterization, for, after all, why would someone regard the world as a battlefield where people kill each other, where people must kill because there is no such thing as a gentle revolution—and the silent people who used to drink hot tea from a samovar will go mad as though they were Aias whose bed the gods had enveloped in mist.

Isaac Babel likes Khlebnikov with his tea-drinking; however he does not delineate him as a saint, but passes judgement over him as he passes judgement over Afonka Bida. Possibly, the scales tremble in his hand, but he passes judgement notwithstanding.

He loses Afonka Bida, his best friend, twice. First, when he refuses to facilitate Dolgushov's death and, second, when, upon the death of his horse, Afonka Bida's mind becomes deranged. How he would be able to kill even for a horse, even though earlier he would feel sorry even for the bees, to feel sorrow for killed bees, to say that "the bee must be understood"; yet "the bee tolerates it somehow. For we suffer for it too..."¹⁸

Babel's knowledge is judgement based on vision, but his glance never turns away from anything and anybody.

We know a great deal—thanks to Marx, among others—about the tragedies or comedies of premature or belated cognition. We are less familiar with knowledge synchronous with history and the life state accompanying it. This is, we could say, the person without a false consciousness. Moreover, in Babel's case synchronous knowledge does not derive from passivity, but, rather, from the distance of being an outsider. There is in fact distance, but this is created by knowledge itself and not the other way round. Compared with those, therefore, who "don't know it but do it", Babel is the paradigm of the apparently simplest case: *he knows and he does it*. Indeed, he knows and does it regardless—ie. his business. He makes revolution even though he knows that it would not conform to Medali's wishes, neither to Vinogradov's ideas or to Baulin's, this revolutionary to whom the entertraining of doubt is alien. And he also makes etchings of the revolution—but *etchings* instead of an Apolek's extolling paintings.

Two kinds of light permeate *Red Cavalry*: that of the author's glance and that of the fighting writer. And the etchings cannot

appear on the pages of either the Red Newspaper, since they not romanticize the revolution, or over the private alt. ornamented with paper flowers because they advocate revolution without romanticizing it.

Babel remains sober amongst the people intoxicated history—and occasionally by alcohol. He remains sober—eg. Saint Valentine—where Afonka Bida, just back, half blind, from his private war of extermination, plays the organ of the Berestechko church. Here, hurt in his religious faith, and before the most unusual delineation of reality, Pan Ludominski, the green-coated sacristan, fanatically and hysterically curses the Cossacks.

Babel, the soldier, reported the violation of the religious feelings of the local population to the division commander. Isaac Babel, the writer, reported the revolution to mankind as seen by a man with “double vision”.

NOTES

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen*. Ausgewählte Schriften. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/M., 1969, p. 272.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1955, p. 27.

³ *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*/Hrsg. v. d. Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vol. 8., Georg Reimar Verlag, Berlin, 1912, p. 21.

⁴ *G. W. F. Hegel's Werke*, Vol. 9, Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, Berlin, 1840, pp. 3–98.

⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I., Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 22.

⁶ Cf. I, p. 272.

⁷ Anton Chekhov, *The Plays of*, Caxton House, INC., New York, N.Y., 1945.

⁸ Dostoyevsky, *Tanulmányok, levelek, vallomások* (Studies, letters, confessions), Magyar Helikon, 1972, p. 137.

⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, George Allen and Unwin LTD, London, 1910, p. 409.

¹⁰ Thomas Mann, *Das Gesetz*, Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden, Vol. S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt/M., 1974, p. 873.

¹¹ Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979, p. 222.

¹² Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 7.

¹³ *Iszaak Babel Művei* (The Works of Isaac Babel), Magyar Helikon, 1964, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Chapter II

TO GIVE BACK THE NAME OF SIN

Who says how we are guilty and what 'guilt' signifies?¹—ask Heidegger. A scandalous question one might say, but one must immediately add: scandalous as it may be, it is not unfounded. And Heidegger was not the only or not even the first who was perplexed by the phenomenon of sin.

We would have to go very far back into the past of ethical thinking if we wanted to trace the prehistory of this uncertainty. Although it is not even clear whether merely uncertainty was involved here instead of, at the same time, a realization of perhaps the sensing of a new problem. For in reality it is even justified to raise the question whether or not *sin existed at all*—more precisely *individual sin*, if evil can and does operate as a driving force in history, ignoring our human standards.

ON UNPUNISHED SIN AND ETHOS

The question does not really arise sharply and definitively in such a general sense, but concretely and, historically, in the era of fully-fledged commodity exchange, that is, in the world of *anonymous sin*. I think that we can characterize this sinfulness, which became widespread in the bourgeois period, with *anonymity* rather than with the Fichtean term of completeness. More precisely: it is *anonymity which becomes complete* during the

period. And this means that *unpunished and unpunishable* sins predominate, indeed *sins sanctioned by silent public consensus*. This is how the status of individual sin, which however has a name in a number of senses, becomes questionable. It bears the name of the sin and that of the sinner who committed it and who stepped out of anonymity precisely in this way. Hence the origin of the alarming Raskolnikovian and Dostoyevskyan idea that individual sin is perhaps none other than braveness—in opposition to the cowardice of ordinary people who do not dare transgress the law.

Is there, and can there be, sin where even a *criticized* political economy can continue to rule over life, where sheer cash payment strips every moral trimming from human relations, and where every person has his price?

Can there be sin where there is no community to which it could be confessed, unless to those who listen to these confessions during working hours since they persecute crime as a paid occupation? And if somebody tried to confess his sin simply in front of people instead of a non-existent public, people who just happened to be around him would think he was drunk, just as they had thought about Raskolnikov.

Does, then, sin exist? What must be done in order to turn a deed into a sin? Why is it *difficult* to commit a deed which could be given the name of sin?

Paradoxical as it may be, it is *not easy to violate* morality to make a deed a sin and it is not *sufficient* to violate it. It is not easy because, in addition to the norms and taboos of morality, there exists—albeit illegally—a code of instructions on how splendid the *semblance* of adhering to them must be ensured and in what way. For in this world—as the poet Attila József says—morality “schools me in cunning”.*

* Reckoning. Transl. by Christine Molinari

The *ostentatious* observance of rules, the zeal, often excessively shown in the complying with nonessential rules is in all likelihood a very old, indeed ancient trick to conceal sins. The violent protest of Isaiah's god against false food sacrifice festivities and a multitude of prayers is probably an expression of this twofoldness. But is this not the case just because the dominating morality does not suit *everybody's* interests? No, this is not the explanation. For although every class has its own morality it transgresses even this, its own morality, as soon as it can do so unpunished—writes Marx. In any case: "... am I not acting in keeping with political economy if I sell my friend to the Maroccans? ... but see what Cousin Ethics and Cousin Religion have to say about it." Anonymous sin which is thus ensured and becomes widespread—albeit made slightly more presentable by Cousin Ethics' head-shaking—hinders, indeed makes individual sin almost impossible, not to mention its undertaking and the assertion of the *human right to and the need for punishment*.

And if we "succeed" in transgressing morality regardless, then we are still left standing perplexed, and it is possible that we are unable to decide whether or not a sin had been committed at all. For it is not easy to violate even the taboos of bourgeois morality in a way that an undeniable sin should arise from this violation, these taboos being of a peculiar nature. One unspoken taboo which is nevertheless known by everyone is none other than *not to call a sin by its name*: to stand up among other people and tell them in a loud voice what they had done. He who does this does not commit a sin, but something worse, more precisely something that is more serious in this world. Namely, he commits the sin of improper behaviour and this is a far more serious transgression because it is the violation of a tacit and *general public consensus*. And this is a scandal, so much so, that he who commits it can easily find himself in the Chekhovian war of six. For a person who fails to become accustomed to customs, or

orse, does not become accustomed to life itself and its claimed order and cannot bring himself not to mind them, will be considered insane.

Gromov, the hero of ward six is the paradigmatic representative of an entirely 20th century modern deviancy. Being a thinker amongst non-thinkers he is a lone protestor against the entire human *status quo* which, all the signs seem to indicate, cannot be changed, or cannot even be touched.

Even sentenced to death, Gromov is the living embodiment of the contradictions of human life: he is at once a philanthropist and a misanthrope, gently considerate and absolutely impatient. He was drawn to his fellow-mortals . . .", writes Chekhov about him, but spoke contemptuously about them, unable to bear their gross ignorance and drowsy animal existence". Accordingly, he had no friends albeit the inhabitants of the small town liked him in spite of his irritability and sharp judgements, because his moral purity—and shabby coat—stirred up feelings of sympathy for them.³

Gromov is a helpless redeemer and is therefore damned—for he does not break away from a life-style sanctioned by some community, but from the "order" of basically impossible forms of behaviour regulated only superficially and so he has nowhere to return.

(Mention must be given here to Thomas Mann's account of the impact of Chekhov's work on Lenin, on the basis of his sister's recollections. "Last night after finishing that story I felt very uneasy. I couldn't sit still in my room. I had to get up and go out. I felt as though I myself were locked up in Ward Number . . ."4)

Understandably, only exceptional individuals—or average individuals only in exceptional situations—are capable of openly transgressing the moral taboos of the day. (This exceptionality has nothing whatever to do with elite in the sociological sense.

On the contrary! Similarly, it has nothing to do with any kind of "moral genius".)

It is possible that even Descartes was thinking of this when he wrote the following: "The greatest souls are capable of the greatest sins, just as of the greatest virtues".⁵

Obviously, only *special* sins can be involved. The idea seems to indicate in any case that ever since human co-existence became a chronic problem the recognition had haunted people that the *observance* of morality, interpreted in any sense, was not the real and fundamental ethical question of life, but *something else*.

This idea occurs to everyone who does not balk at an ethical naiveté—which perhaps culminates with Holbach—or more precisely blindness which considers the creation of simple moral rules accessible to everyone possible, from which, moreover, everyone can draw the conclusions appropriate to their needs and social position. And all of this is based on the fact that people would like to be happy and it is precisely in this way that they can achieve this.

Only, what is virtue worth—asks the contemporary Rousseau—if reality is full of sins decked in the name of virtue and if in the realm of morals such vain and deceptive unity prevails as though every soul had been cast in the same mould.

Here we are not dealing with a paradox, but, rather, with a reality in which *morality is corrupted*. To an extent, sooner or later, as the ether of fully-fledged commodity trade imbues human relations and makes sin anonymous. Therefore ethical relativism cannot be regarded merely as a mistake; it deserves to be criticized on account of its being an *uncritical* mirror and therefore a justification of social conditions which legitimize sin.

Anonymous sin is *permanent* sin—because it remains within the framework of morality and observes its norms. For this reason it differs from, indeed must be distinguished from, single non-recurrent individual sin. The latter raises one from anony-

y, or in a certain situation it alone can raise one from it. This is how sin, together with the misfortune which accompanies it, becomes—according to Walter Benjamin—a *force constructing fate*.⁶ For fortune and innocence do not create a fate. Indeed, they turn out to be so light on Walter Benjamin's imaginary scales that the *pans swing upwards*. They are no longer even weight—their *weight* can be expressed in minus values. Fate arising from sin and misfortune proves to be superior in comparison with the life of those “fateless”—to use Hölderlin's term—who bear anonymous guilt without inner conflict and misfortune.

If Kant regarded the relationship of virtue and happiness as being contradictory, Walter Benjamin confronts virtue and happiness *together* with fate, which cannot be a *bad* fate, which would be tautology in this case. Admittedly, the road between Kant and Walter Benjamin is long and the distance is great.

For Kant had not given up to at least presuppose a world in which—albeit utopian—merit and happiness could become naturally linked. Even Hegel had unequivocally broken away from this. As he saw it, the supposed experience according to which moral people often have a bad fate with immoral people doing well, only conceals the truth: this is none other than the vice of envy enshrouded in the veil of morality! For according to Hegel morality is incomplete, that is, it *does not exist* and therefore there is no substance in the experience according to which he is doing badly.

Anonymous sin does not derive from a multitude of individual sins, it is not the sum total of private sin, but a social state, more precisely a permanent process, a mode of existence which follows from the inner structure of historical reality and not from the transgression of an almost epidemic, mass scale of moral norms. For instance, sins described by Kant as diabolical, which—as I put it—are grafted onto jealousy and rivalry, *do not signify a violation of norms*. For does there exist a rule which prohibited,

which could prohibit the covert animosity present even in the most intimate friendship which Kant too talks about, and how could that perfidious, albeit naturally never-formulated maxim of cleverness in communication which prescribes the reduction of confidence be even spotted, let alone invalidate it?⁷

Whilst sin is committed, guilt as it were happens to people—mostly silently and without any self-reflection, permeating the personality. If however morality is corrupted and, on its basis, sin can no longer be defined—just as the special sins which belong exclusively to great souls—then we must postulate that there exists *something else* on the basis of which human deeds can, after all, be judged, moreover with lasting validity. Below, I shall call this something else *ēthos*.

The well-known distinction between legality and morality can hardly be helpful since we know that there exists—to use Marx's words—"zahlungsfähige Moral" and "ehrliche Unehrlichkeit", indeed even "niederträchtige Ehrlichkeit", of which neither the early Christian communities, nor the Jacobins' Club and not even the "Bund der Gerechten" could keep entirely aloof.⁸

Obviously, honourable, but at least respectable vileness is a privilege of the idle classes. These classes have the means, the time, the sophistication and cunning to clad their sins in moral clothing. This too is a privilege of which the dispossessed do not partake, but to which they do not even aspire. Their moral practice is thus more or less free of *this* sin, the sin of disguise and vileness, and this difference is extremely important even if the peculiar covert "redistribution" of social injustice appears in the form of sins in their lives as well. *Repulsion*, as depicted by Attila József, for instance,—the torturing of a child by another child—is so gruesome precisely because the origin is so far away and barely recognizable. This phenomenon is therefore aggravated, in addition to the repulsion it generates, that which one experiences upon observing this cruel metastasis.

At the same time the total lack of self-deception and hypocrisy, the profound, direct knowledge of raw human existence, the manifestation of this knowledge is a decisive momentum of the moral superiority of the oppressed classes. Woyzeck, the protagonist of Büchner's plebeian drama, gives precise characterization of his situation when he says that the poor man has no virtue, just as he does not have a hat or curly hair.⁹ He is a man of *ēthos* and therefore he has the ability to judge his own world, which is indeed like an "overturned pot". But where does he derive the strength from to punish sin like a plebeian Othello and to attempt to mete out justice single-handed?

As they say, *there is not a single grain of virtue* in Woyzeck. Those who come to this conclusion, the captain and the doctor, do not instruct him in morality to make up for this deficiency, *do not possess a grain of ēthos*. They do not kill, but they are permanently guilty.

Woyzeck represents *ēthos* in the face of the captain who rambles about morality, who, just for the fun of it, plays the role of a mediocre Iago. This captain is also an unpunished sinner, as is the doctor who keeps Woyzeck on peas for the purposes of an experiment, regarding him as no more than a fascinating case, a mere collection of symptoms in his suffering and agitated condition. A being who is not worth getting angry with, because he is not a human being. "Wenn es noch ein Proteus wäre . . ." ¹⁰—says the doctor, one of the virtuous!

And the captain who maliciously draws Woyzeck's attention to the hair of the regiment drummer, and thereby fulfils the role of instigator, naturally—or, rather, unnaturally—also remains innocent.

And this is a world overturned—as the aforementioned example shows.

Essentially *everything* which belongs to the phenomena of ethics is created in the process of the redistribution of social injustice or the remonstrance against it. This is one reason why ethics lacks independence. Moral phenomena do not constitute an independent sphere in social existence also because they are imprints of dominant social tendencies—without this eliminating the sin character of sin and the meaning of *ēthos*. This is why the conception of society of any given period could appear in the form of moral philosophy or in metaphysics prior to Marx, albeit for this reason this path of approach is not incompetent and unviable.

The aforementioned sins listed by Kant are all a reflection of social order, more precisely of the essential lack of moral order. Envy is still the offspring of inequality—together with malice—when it extends to assets the possession of which has no direct, indeed often even indirect, link with the private ownership of *material* assets. It is precisely here that it becomes clear how—use Marx's words—stupid private property has made us, for we are capable of extending the urge to possess to such an extent that people start to compete and experience jealousy on account even of the greater dose of suffering which befalls others as well as the compassion to which they are entitled to because of this. They can thus compete in who has had to sustain more blows of fortune—to mention but one absurd example. When Kant describes sins attached to competition and jealousy as diabolical, he does so not on the basis of contemporary morality, but rather, on the basis of *ēthos*.

It is perhaps worth giving special mention to one of the oldest and entirely futile and basically *unfounded* complaints of moral philosophy: ingratitude. Ever since Aristotle's time the complaint and indignation reoccurs that people are not only ungrateful—according to numerous signs this is the least—but they *come to hate their benefactors*. I consider it unfounded

preover wrong, to complain about this because this judgement would—wittingly or unwittingly—send those who were *forced* to accept the benefaction of others “into the prison of moral debtors”. For it is always the benefactor who is in a privileged position and who, moreover, would like to extend this privilege to the fundamentally false demand of gratitude and thereby increase the vulnerability of those who accepted their assistance unguardedly or under constraint.

Ingratitude and the feeling of animosity against the benefactor is not the “ignominy disgrace” of human nature, but, rather, an unconscious remonstrance against any inequality which puts people under obligation to others, at the same time making them their *moral vassals*.

The requirement of gratitude is the norm of every morality which transfers the laws of commodity trade to human relations, even if this may be an unconscious process. This is how morality, even in its “noblest” principles, remains the prisoner of the conditions which had created it. Only *ēthos* is capable of freeing itself from this field of force.

ETHOS AND MORALITY

Use the term *ēthos*¹¹—in the first approach—in contrast with historically changing morals governed by prevailing norms and guaranteed by tradition, in a distinguishing meaning.

The word morality *does in fact* have a plural, indeed it exists only in the plural. On the other hand *ēthos*, essentially, does not have a plural, except in its forms of manifestation.

Morals determine and regulate the entire realm of human life, their principles cover every detail. *Ēthos* regulates only those situations which affect people in their entirety,¹² it does not provide rules, but, rather, a law which must be repeatedly

unravelling and, still more importantly, which must be created

—Morals can be observed—thereby guaranteeing “innocence”, provided such a thing existed at all, and that Hegel was wrong when he wrote that “innocence is an attribute merely of . . . a stone and one which is not even true of a child”.¹³ On the other hand *ēthos*, as far as we know today, is not in the least synonym of *guiltlessness*.

—Morality is the generally used and comprehensible language of everyday life and for this reason it can in fact be taught. (This is why ethical intellectualism cannot be regarded as an absolute mistake.) *Ēthos* cannot be taught, but must always be *re-created*.

—Morals are guaranteed by expectations whilst not only are there no expectations in relation to *ēthos*, but it in fact engenders remonstrance itself. (At the same time *ēthos* is not remonstrance in the everyday sense, it does not take on its easily recognizable forms, but signifies opposition only in regard to its inner content, meaning and source.)

—*Ēthos* is rooted—if at all!—in the rift that has come about as a result of the separation of labour and property. Its creation impulse is the rejection of the fact of the injustice thus created albeit this is not tangibly perceptible in the acts of *ēthos*.

—*Ēthos* is an attempt to administer justice at the expense of violating the rules—by transgressing the dominating moral traditions.

—The social time medium of *ēthos* is not ordinariness, but a time-sphere filled with tensions where human life, the life of the individual, comes into contact with a common human existence which exceeds the individual. It comes into contact even if this does not signify an actual encounter, or if this *encounter* takes place in the form of a *clash*. On the other hand morality measures, regulates and judges in terms of a “now-time” narrower than the entire human existence from morning until evening.

—The principles of morals function after being broken down to social roles. On the other hand a person acting on the basis of *ēthos* can reject the prescribed behaviour deriving from his social role. He ceases to be a tax collector or prison chaplain, and this is also why he usually turns out to be deviant. His deed however differs fundamentally from “ordinary” deviancies. First because *even though it is a violation of the rules, at the same time it is also adherence to tradition*; on the basis of historical tradition of cohesion *ēthos* negates conventions. Second, even though *ēthos* is individual, in its content it is entirely universal and without mediation.

Individual sin—regardless of how “complex” it is—is the *repetition* and continuation of social injustice or tyranny—it is its individual reproduction. It regards this as its basis for justification, it is to this that it returns independently of the conscious motives and considerations of the sinner.

—Whilst, therefore, morals are guaranteed by conventions, *ēthos* originates from a single “primaeval” and indestructible tradition of human belonging together. On the other hand it appears precisely where this is no longer functioning, but is an *uprooted tradition*, because communities either no longer or do not yet exist. Accordingly, *ēthos* is the act of practical remembrance of these—and of reminding. Perhaps this is why it often emerges, after a long period of forced absence, with the elemental power of a long repressed “natural” phenomenon. The “homelessness” of tradition does not mean that it is not reproduced, in a mutilated and inert form, in the life of the individual, that it is not present in it at least to the extent and at least in the sense that its lack be perceptible. Belonging together is not the same as togetherness. It occurs, one could say flares up, amongst those with no traditionally known bonds, indeed it is precisely in this that *ēthos* asserts itself with elemental power.

—Morality is a power over people. *Ēthos* is *power without*

power because it is created where historical motion becomes confronted with humanization. Naturally it cannot alter the overall movement of history, it cannot force it into harmony with humanization, but it can act as a spark if there exists a detonating fuse which is capable of transmitting it to groups of people capable of societal action.

—*Ēthos* possesses far more powerful constancy than morals, despite the fact that it is subjected to historical changes.

—*Ēthos* is the offspring of remonstrance albeit not on any basis but on the foundation of the historical tradition of togetherness. Its constancy thus does not signify supra-historicity or unhistoricity. On the contrary! *Ēthos* is more deeply rooted in history than morality—partly because it is not chained to the present.

We have seen that Woyzeck's *ēthos* source is, for example, the New Testament. More precisely an obscure, barely defined *tradition*—rolling as it were—rootless in the present, which, transferred here, precisely for this and precisely through its exceptionality, promises strength and a peculiar meaning. This is not tradition in itself, but its arbitrary transference into a world where it can no longer strike roots and where it can no longer live as a convention.

It becomes the basis of negation precisely in this way, in the case of Büchner's Woyzeck the basis of being able to speak at all among the people who speak other languages. His rebellion begins when the captain instructing him in morality condemns him for having a child without Church blessing. It is here that he first gives voice to biblical tradition: "Der liebe Gott wird den armen Wurm nicht drum ansehen, ob das Amen drüber gesagt ist, eh er gemacht wurde". Then follows the reference to Jesus who had said: "Lasset die Kleinen zu mir kommen."¹⁴

—Morality, in its various historical forms, is attached to and adjusted to class society without this becoming explicit in its

principles. Albeit in a different manner, the morality of the oppressed classes is also attached to this basic structure. Ethos however "gives notice"—in apparently the "smallest" deeds, at various levels of consciousness—to every barbaric determination, or at least this is what it attempts. (Naturally it remains determined; inasmuch as what it negates determines every action.)

—Ethos does not eliminate, but suspends the determining role of interests.

—Ethos is mostly the *first* and *last* word of a person. Word and language because it does not possess an applicable system of rules. It is single and unrepeatable, but lasting in its value and presence, is repeatedly comprehensible and valid at all times.

—Morality regards itself as the solely and singularly existing morality. Ethos does not have ethical consciousness.

—Like any negation, *ēthos* bears the stamp of what it negates. In this case this stamp is the sin of hubris, more closely the *hubris* of sovereignty. For he who acts in accordance with the law of *ēthos*—regardless of who he is—executes an exceptional deed, withdraws himself from the community even if such a community does not exist empirically, or "does not deserve" the individual. He who acts in accordance with the law of *ēthos* dares to dare more than others, this is why he deserves the judgement of the choirs of the Antiquity as well as of modern times if they existed at all.

Pride is the hubris of independence, of sovereignty. This voluntarily chosen isolation from a community is a sin even when there is no empirical community and, further, when it was not, strictly speaking, the individual himself who chose this state of being. This is for instance the case when Ervin Sinkó says of Ady: "He did not seek loneliness, the door was closed on him from the outside..."¹⁵ A similar situation arises when somebody finds himself outside every human community like Attila József did,

albeit this was not of his choosing; all he chose was to face everything, to express and undertake total knowledge. The inevitable consequence of this is however his isolation.

Attila József's example is also extraordinary because on the basis of his poetry it is unequivocally clear that despite causes beyond his control, or stemming precisely from his chief virtue he experiences his situation as sin, supplemented with the unresolvable paradox of this guilt, and, further, with the awareness that in this world "innocence is sin". And this the poet orders God himself to proclaim:

"Beat into me
your mercy and revenge:
innocence is sin."

*(Topple from the Flood)**

Ethos is the counter-force of forgetting, of man's self-forgetting. As such it is a preserver of value and a force which from time to time holds—although in a rather fallible way, temporarily and only presumably—in check, constrains the forces distorting man.

The safe-guarding of value memory is not inconsiderable. Hannah Arendt is right when he regards the polis essentially as a power against forgetting. Since however such a power did not exist later on, the human species ensures its own memory with other forces because its very existence depends on this.¹⁶

The lack of a collective memory is devastating. This is what Marquez says in his novel, where Macondo ultimately dies because its inhabitants forget their dead. And not their ordinary dead, but the two thousand people who died in the struggle for the survival of the community.

*Bukj föl az árból. Transl. by Christine Molinari

The internal schism of deeds conceived in *ēthos* demonstrates the contradiction of the natural history character of history and humanization; this tension flares up in them, occasionally turning the acting subject. Hence the question: is there any point in it at all?

ON THE SENSE OF *ĒTHOS*

The well-known question of Georg Lukács's Heidelberg *Esthetics*, namely: there are works of art, how are they possible?—is mostly considered by Max Weber to be complementable with the still more serious question whether or not works of art were necessary at all.¹⁷ This question is also valid for *ēthos*.

Nothing is more natural than that the answering or even approaching of the meaning of *ēthos* is not only problematic in the era of the practical and theoretical domination of bourgeois rationalism, but it is not even possible amid its framework. Not least because in many cases *ēthos* signifies remonstrance precisely against rationality which tends to ascribe minor importance to so many things by the declaration of for all that which is not rational but has a sense in life.¹⁸

Compared with the interests of self-reproduction *ēthos* is not rational, but, often, neither is it in comparison with the goals of historical progress. From this, however, it does not follow that it is irrational. These characteristically antinomic concepts of thinking are useless in the approaching of *ēthos*. The tribunal of reason as evoked by Engels, before which everything at one time had to justify its existence, proved to be a forum of bourgeois reason the validity of which was curtailed by history. *Ēthos* never appeared before this tribunal and in any case such an appearance would have been futile, since it possessed a sense only in life.

Its position outside the law, as well as its homelessness in the bourgeois world stems, among other things, precisely from this.

For consistent rationality based on interest "liberates" man—in accordance with Nietzsche's wish—from his moral prejudices and this cannot be otherwise. The domination of rationality based on interest can only be surpassed if life loses the meagreness—not strictly in the economic sense—of which Attila József speaks in the aforementioned quotation. Without this there can be no scope for human things which are autotelic because they have a sense in life.

The affirmation of *ēthos* does not signify the negation of the morality which is indispensable to the regulation of human coexistence, just as it does not, naturally, mean the rejection of reason or every kind of rationality. It does however signify the conviction according to which the fact that man "has reason does not in the least raise him in worth above mere animality if reason only serves the purposes which, among animals, are taken care of by instinct". Man being "not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to everything which reason says on its own and to use it merely as a tool for satisfying his needs as a sensuous being".¹⁹

Ultimately, rationalism postulates isolated and independent individuals who do not reckon with each other and recognize only their own reason as a judge and superior forum of appeal. This is why Goldmann is right when he writes that only a morality which makes possible the attainment of the absolute, of harmony by individuals who rely only on themselves and their reason can suit dogmatic rationalism. According to him this can only be stoic morality whilst utilitarian morality corresponds to sceptical empiricism.²⁰ Although this conclusion is, in this form, perhaps inflexible and unverifiable, it does however seem certain that *ēthos* has no place either in consistent rationalism, or in empiricism, if for no other reason that both trends take the isolated individual as their point of departure. For *ēthos* postulates the possibility that the individual step beyond his

isolation, that he shift his centre of gravity to an entirely different dimension.

The possibility of ethos is not however excluded solely by classical or dogmatic rationalism. On closer scrutiny we can see that the basis of Nietzsche's negation of morality is also a rather strikingly thought-over rationality. In his conceptual system morality is a sub-specie of tyranny against nature and reason,²¹ one could say a biological irrationality. Or a mask, a symptom, a *Sturftüffel*, and, essentially, an *illness* which will, according to him, cease entirely with the advent of total atheism, to inaugurate the era of "second innocence". For *ultimately sin does not exist*, only a guilty conscience, and this Nietzsche ascribes to the "sin" of Christianity in general and to Paul in particular. (Albeit Karl Löwith is right when he says that Nietzsche's atheism is not complete either, inasmuch as, ultimately, he too seeks a substitute for religion in the idea of perpetual return.)

It is a peculiar consistency of social reality that not much after Nietzsche, specialists of the curing of the "guilty conscience disorder", the psychoanalysts, appeared on the scene. Without making a value judgement we can say that in its own way Freudianism adapts itself well to the world of anonymous sins, as its product and complement. At the same time, and this is no less important, the need for psychoanalysis is a peculiar proof that it is not easy or it is not possible to silence the conscience—while it is not easy to make it speak either.

Ultimately, Heidegger, whose question I have cited in the introduction to this chapter, claims that existence itself is sinful and this claim endorses *the death of sin, anonymity*. At the same time it calls conscience a *primaeval* phenomenon, which, according to him, speaks solely and exclusively in the mode of silence—in the "unheimlich" mode of silence.²² More precisely it does not speak, but shout, and in the case of man this cry corresponds to a silence. There is no sin for existence itself is

sinful; yet according to Heidegger, the sinner is nevertheless the predicate of "I". Accordingly, his train of thought ends up in a paradox. But, we could ask, is it not from anonymous sinfulness that this speaking out in silence arises?

It thus appears that the isolated individual is still forced to acknowledge the superior forum of appeal and judge because its reason is not, after all, a sufficient guarantee for the toleration of anonymous sinfulness.

Despite its superficial characteristics psychoanalytical assistance says a great deal about a social situation in which it could come into being. I consider it a peculiar "merit" of Freudian analysis for instance that it does not wish to put on the guise of personal human assistance, that one must inevitably pay for it even on the basis of theoretical considerations. The analyst who checks the time allocated to therapy on his watch and who interrupts his patient's speech even at the most serious point, naturally also knows and brings it home that the attachment to him is merely the transference of emotion and thereby designates his place in the world in an adequate manner. Wittingly or unwittingly he thereby also qualifies the society which engendered its possibility and necessity.

The relationship between analyst and patient is paradigmatic. For the therapist does not want, in the traditional and only possible meaning of the word, to become acquainted with the person he treats—since acquaintance presumes personality and mutuality—but wants to decipher his patient, who is not so much an enigma, but, rather, a puzzle to which there are clues and codes. And solving it involves no stakes—it only has a price.

Solved, transilluminated and delivered from his guilty conscience, *not transparent man*, whose original sin, according to Kierkegaard is precisely this, can, at best, continue his course of life. He has become transparent to a specialist and to himself.

These however are, after all, superficial traits. Freudism is reached to anonymous sinfulness with a substantive thread when it traces the *individual's* guilty conscience back to an ancient collective-mythical sin. Obviously, this retracing automatically contains the possibility of acquittal, absolution. But not only this, but also the postulation of mythical collectiveness in which the isolated individual, albeit through his guilty conscience, can feel bound to and this is more than acquittal. Wittgenstein justly writes that the same force of attraction is exerted in Freudism which mythological explanations generally possess, because according to these everything which takes place is the repetition of something which has already occurred earlier. Things will become clearer and more easily tolerable if people are allowed to think that the "primaevial pattern" returned in everything that is happening.⁴³

The appeal of Freudism is perhaps located at an even greater depth than this. Its mythological explanation presupposes a *collective*—albeit empirically committed by a single person—primaevial sin. In this way it does not only *give absolution* but also *leads* to a mythical community. Thus together with the act of acquittal it also offers an imaginary collective to the isolated individual. It is even more interesting, although it is almost obvious, how Freud himself explains the attraction of *religion*. According to him Paul's successes were rooted in the fact that he alleviated the guilty conscience of humanity with the idea of redemption.

On this side of Freudism and beyond: the affirmation of *ēthos* does not tolerate psychology. More precisely: it is not psychology as a scientific discipline that it does not tolerate, but the *one-sidedly* psychological approach to human deeds. It does not tolerate this because, as we have seen, in the era of the spreading anonymous sinfulness *ēthos* signifies precisely the aspiration *to give back the name of sin*, while a psychologizing approach, of

necessity, negates sin. Everyone who, wishing to safe-guard *ēthos*, had insisted that *sin does exist*—from Kant to Dostoyevsky and so on—remonstrated against psychology for this reason. For if it can, on one occasion, be satisfactorily explained “retrospectively” why a person did what he had done, then, wittingly or unwittingly, the outlines of a fatal predestination point *ahead* emerge. On the other hand *ēthos*, essentially and in all its manifestations contradicts predestination. If for no other reason that it constitutes remonstrance; transgression of rules on the basis of the oft-mentioned *primaeval* tradition, by resurrecting it. That *ēthos exists*—not only the *ēthos* of deeds but that of behaviours, gestures and ideas as well—is proof that the human being is not complete, or finally determined or predestined for something, but perpetual incompleteness is part and parcel of its essence.

The most typical deed—and ultimate content—of *ēthos* is always the administration of justice, which at the same time never corresponds, and cannot correspond, to its concept because practically speaking it cannot administer justice, it can only demonstrate *what justice would be*. Nevertheless the process of the redistribution of injustice is caught by it and in this sense it does, after all, administer justice; creating but a molecule of space into which the fluid of sinfulness arising from the structure of society cannot penetrate. This is how it becomes an obstacle to forgetting—taking the amnesia of *historico-human* value in its broadest sense.

On the basis of all of this the act of *ēthos* can be called futile for it aims at the *singular* restoration of that which, on a social scale, cannot be restored. But that which is perhaps futile measured with the yardstick of world history—since it fades into oblivion without leaving a monument—is not automatically meaningless. For, though not in a world historical dimension but only in human-size space and time, *ēthos* can, nevertheless

store, as it indeed does, an order, *which remains an order even if it is regularly transgressed*. It restores order by giving back the name of sin—through its very existence—by questioning the hegemony of interest-rationality, the rather objective semblance of the absoluteness and “perpetual validity” of this hegemony. It further disrupts, indeed temporarily halts, the bourgeois mechanism which is propelled by the functioning of the *identical* goal aimed at the mutual destruction of isolated individuals.²⁴

Concerning this *identical* goal Kant cites a satirical song which parodies the psychological consensus between a married couple who are just about to ruin each other, adding the anecdote about King Francis I who wanted to capture Milan before Emperor Charles V did, saying: that which my brother Karl wants, I want also.²⁵ This historically excessive source of sin can perhaps be regarded as the no less rational core of Kantian radical evil.

It is with this identical goal that *ēthos* is confronted, as the temporal transcendence of mechanisms derived from it, the root of which is that there does, after all, exist an *absolute tradition*—be it a million times repudiated though indestructible—of human existence: that of togetherness. A kind of togetherness in which there is, indeed cannot be, an instrument character. There exists such togetherness moreover a high-tension of togetherness which invalidates the historically raised boundaries that separate people. When the fact that one is the accused the other is the judge or prison chaplain does not isolate people from other people. *Ēthos* eliminates, though not for good and not even ultimately, the acute social situation, role and status. This is why a moral law cannot be drafted even at the example level, for the exemplary, as Kant does, for *that* cannot be valid for every person, only for those who carry out the function of safeguarding the money.

I am speaking of transcendence because going beyond occurs here in several senses—beyond the reigning norms of now-time,

just as beyond the interests of the individual. But, above all, *ēthos* imparts transcendence to class society and inasmuch does not in point of fact lend itself to rational solution, within the present framework of rationality. This is not even possible as *ēthos* discards class society rationalism, does not know laws of exchange and does not respect particular interest. It imparts transcendence to all of this. And some kind of latent need for this transcendence always remains. This is why there exists no form of moral weakness which would terminate people's *ēthos* needs for good—in biblical terms the need to be “delivered from evil”. And this need can survive because moral distortion is never merely the *personal* deviation of people.

But do we not thereby negate the existence of sin with the latter remark and did not Marx himself negate it when he considered it necessary to point out in the famous lines of the preface to *Capital* that in his work people are only involved to the extent inasmuch as they personify economic categories and embody determined class relations and class interests? Characterizing his stance he writes that since he regarded the development of the economic social formation as a process of natural history, the individual can hardly be blamed for conditions of which he, socially, remains a product, regardless of the extent to which he can transcend them subjectively.²⁶

Obviously, the sheer raising of the moral question of individual responsibility in the creation of the anatomy of a society is incompatible with scholarly analysis. Simply because persons *are not involved here at all*, they are genuinely the personifiers of economic categories. Once again we are dealing with incomparable dimensions. That, however, which does not exist in one dimension, that which is irrelevant there, exists in the other. But can this doubling of the world—into the world of *ēthos* and into another in which people, move about as personifiers of economic categories or in accordance with the

acute demands of historical struggles—be accepted on the ground that in empirical reality individuals exist and establish contact with each other as individuals? I think that, strangely enough, there is no danger of this. For *ēthos does not possess a separate world of its own*, and even if it does create such a world, this is short-lived, existing so long as *ēthos* did. However, it is not, after all, entirely mortal, because it can be preserved eternally by the collective memory.

Ultimately, does sin exist for a 20th century Marxist? The answer can only be that sin must exist!

Sin must indeed exist in a social structure where on a *mass scale*, it is impossible to reject the tradition of togetherness and therefore anonymous sin will become predominant.

There must be sin and this also means that all mechanisms which make sins anonymous and sanction them must be rejected.

The name of sins must be given back one by one. As regards type, *anonymous sin* is the gravest because its nature can be grasped in its being unpunished and unpunishable and in its being hypocritical in its need for the moral attire of the day, which amplifies its amorality. *Individual sin* involves possible punishment because it breaks out of the sanctifying belt of morality. He who commits an ordinary sin is compelled to break away by particular driving forces.

Finally, assessing the *sin of ēthos* involves a terminological difficulty. For we have said that *ēthos* is not in the least a synonym of innocence. If, however, every sin arises from the transgression of human togetherness, how can *ēthos* have a sin when what it does is precisely to breathe life into the tradition of togetherness? We can only reply to this question by saying that *ēthos* does this at the cost of relinquishing empirical hic and nunc togetherness and this is a sin, *regardless of the kind of bonds it breaks*.

This is why *ēthos* inevitably becomes antinomical in character; *the administering of justice which brings no justice*.

All we can safely say, therefore, is that *ēthos* gives back the name of sin. And although this might seem trifling compared with moralists' utopias, in reality however it is the indispensable act of creating a certain "moral world order". Inasmuch as it is not even less utopistic, or at least distant, if we search for ways of eliminating the anonymity of sins rather than eliminating them altogether, because this presupposes new kinds of real communities which embrace people's entire life, and call every deed by its name and answer every one of them.

Not possessing an ethical consciousness, *ēthos* is incapable of—indeed it does not wish to—justifying itself. Neither with tradition, nor with ideology. Admittedly, it does not even search for justification and does not in fact need one. It does not seek justification in great and distant goals either, but—and this is very important—that which we call *ēthos* *does not regard itself as an objective either*. In this respect it demonstrates protest—against the *tyranny of goals*.

The recognition of the teleological nature of human activity does not mean, and cannot obliterate the fact that it is *precisely for this reason* that something which was once an instrument only can rise to the status of goal or transform into a goal. However, this already signifies the creation of new needs and the appearance of *autotelism*. And autotelism is no less human than the teleological character of the activity. If, nevertheless, it drifts to the periphery of investigation and attention, indeed if it acquires a pejorative connotation in everyday consciousness, this, once again, is the consequence of the reign of terror of goal-oriented rationalism.

When I speak of the tyranny of goals I am thinking not of any kind of tyranny, but that of forcibly narrowed-down goals. The despotism of bourgeois rationality which strives to liquidate everything that is "meaningless" from the point of view of profit.

self-reproduction or other, entirely short-term practical considerations.

Progressive historical movements, including the working-class movement, also confront bourgeois goal and interest-rationality with—absolutely necessary—objectives which demand the *subjection* of every human force and ambition, that is, they inevitably qualify a great many things as instruments. They cannot do anything else. Autotelisms must indeed be removed, allocated secondary importance, since, as the commonplace goes, “energies must be concentrated”, and this is, indeed, true.

If beyond this on the other hand historical goals also carry a Messianic sheen—and this is often the case—then this intensified sheen can make people ethically blind. As all rationality, community interest rationality too, the superiority of which is indisputable, can make sin anonymous, or even sanction it for unquestioning faith. By erecting an “altar for the Cause”, unquestioning faith sanctifies the sacrifices made there without exception, even if they are superfluous. Here we must, however, make a brief digression. If it is the epistemological “sin” of all fanaticism that it refuses to hear of objectivity, of the thing itself, then the aforementioned critical assertions concerning fanaticism can be similarly condemned. A utopistic vision of the future does not carry intensified Messianic sheen because those concerned failed to regulate the lighting installation in people’s heads, but because the inadequacy of objective conditions inevitably produces unquestioning faith as a form of compensation.

There are relations which can paralyse the seer, but thanks to the unequal distribution of the ability to see, not everyone becomes incapable of action. At the same time one should not forget the distinguishing traits of fanaticism arising from the working-class movement. For the blindness of faith is not in this case complete since—in accordance with its essence—the

working-class movement makes solidarity the law of action and thus carries and promises an unprecedented potential for *ēthos*.

It is possible, indeed certain that with all of this and despite all these *ēthos* does not weigh enough in the pan of any scales to move it at all. But the scales are not even metaphorically a device which could make a decision regarding the judgement of the meaning of the elemental mode of human manifestation called *ēthos*.

SIN: FROM RASKOLNIKOV TO JOSEPH K.

Does sin exist?—asks almost the entire lifework of Dostoyevsky. Does sin exist or is it just that man is a miserable trembling creation who does not dare transgress the law? And because it is also not very easy to answer the question where the boundary of transgressing the law lays, Raskolnikov's—and Dostoyevsky's—experiment requires an axe and bloody brutality, an obviously innocent victim alongside the usureress, so that experimental conditions should be optimum, as it were.

The optimum character of conditions requires the presentation of those introductory episodes which prove that Raskolnikov is, literally, a man of good intentions, as he tries to help others constantly, even meaninglessly, to help the unknown drunken girl, and Marmeladov, "as though he were his own father". As one of his dreams reveals he was unable to bear even the torturing of an animal. Hume calls man "that does many benevolent actions; relieves the distressed, comforts the afflicted, and extends his bounty even to the greatest strangers"²⁷ as more virtuous and more worthy of love than others.

Raskolnikov fully meets these requirements which is also highly important from the viewpoint of the experiment, as had he been wicked and insensitive his deed would have stemmed from

his nature and would thus not have given an answer to the question—can man transgress the law?

Raskolnikov chooses himself for the purpose of the experiment. As Bakhtin writes, he is, indeed, in his own way unselfish. However, regardless of how obvious it is that what he is carrying out is an *experiment*, in fact more was involved for him than merely deciding upon an intellectual or even anthropological problem. Raskolnikov is after something else too, namely, he wants to create a fate for himself so that he should not remain amongst the fateless ordinary and the nondescript. And perhaps it is precisely this pride which is Raskolnikov's "original sin", just as this is the root of his conviction that he is a chosen man.

The question: does sin exist?—is naturally raised wherever the life of Luzhin and his like is legal life. Luzhin, who cites the modern sciences, is the typical representative of unpunished and unpunishable sins. And it is in vain that Dostoyevsky's entire lifework testifies to Raskolnikov's guilt, he depicts him as superior in comparison with Luzhin throughout. Raskolnikov haughtily despises people, but is capable of recognizing that man is inferior. . . . and he who calls him inferior for this is himself inferior.

—Does sin exist there where Katerina Ivanovna says—and can say—to the priest at Marmeladov's death bed that God's mercy does not reach people? And in response to the remonstrating exclamation "God. . . . God would never allow such a horrible thing!" she can reply that "But he lets it happen to others".²⁸

—Does sin exist where man's use-value is that he produces value, where man is commodity, where the duration of his operation, that is, his life span, is of no interest since it is replaceable?

—Does sin exist where, according to Nietzsche, "one is best punished most for one's virtues"?²⁹ And even if sin does exist,

can sin be called sin where there is no one to judge it, or there are only people appointed to carry out this task in an official capacity?

—And does sin exist where it is in vain that Raskolnikov complies with Sonia's pleading command, it is in vain that he takes up position at the crossroads to fall to the ground in order to kiss the ground which he has soiled, it is in vain that he stands there to bow before the whole world, towards the four cardinal points, telling everyone that he had killed, nobody is interested in his sin, they do not even give credence to the confessor. They laugh, ridicule him and move on.

Dostoyevsky denounces Raskolnikov's superiority and isolation, but, unintentionally, thoroughly justifies through the delineation of "innocent" who stand below him. In Dostoyevsky's works—with perhaps the exception of Smerdiakov—those people commit sin who are entirely unsuited for it. Even Svidrigailov is not vicious *to the core*, for his guilty conscience drives him to death.

In *Crime and Punishment*, especially in its final chapter, Dostoyevsky decides that sin *does* exist and from this it follows that there is also redemption. The decision is rooted in Dostoyevsky's view of the world. It is, however, debatable whether or not he succeeds in presenting Raskolnikov's redemption with full artistic authenticity. His solution is ultimately uncertain, at least unfinished. This is demonstrated by a no less serious factor than the volumes of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

This work is a *retrial* in the course of which the problem of sin and redemption is reformulated—more sharply and more many-sidedly than before. While in *Crime and Punishment* the question whether man is a being capable of transgressing the law is raised as an anthropological problem as it were, in *The Brothers*

Karamazov the existence or non-existence of sin is raised as the question of a whole world order.

Everything Dostoyevsky presents to us is far more complex and more convincing here.

According to the intended solution of *The Brothers Karamazov* sin does not necessarily have to be committed, it is sufficient just to undertake it, in order to ensure redemption, as Mitja's fate demonstrates. The question whether or not sin exists is made questionable only by words. Admittedly, these are words with significant weight. For if there is no God then anything is possible—this is a thought reiterated in the text in several varieties, albeit this “anything is possible” never means that sin should not be sin. Notwithstanding, the text, primarily that of Karamazov, cannot be automatically “believed”. It cannot be believed because in Dostoyevsky's world view and in this work the existence or non-existence of God is decisive in his judgment pertaining to sin. Nietzsche's atheism leads to entirely different conclusions, for instance—despite the partial conceptual kinship which exists between them. (It is worth mentioning here that in the case of the atheist Nietzsche and the religious Dostoyevsky God appears in the text in the form of an identical metaphor—that of the spider and his web.)³⁰

What is at stake in *The Brothers Karamazov* is not that anything is possible if *there is no God*, but that if God has created *such* a world then there is something wrong with his sense of justice, then he cannot, therefore, be good, indeed in Karamazov's words he appears as the arch criminal, as it were. It is on the basis of this that every human norm becomes questionable. Thus, here too, the real question is that which has been formulated so often before: “How could the Almighty create an ethically impossible world?” The entire work raises the question: If the suffering of children is possible in a world created by a God, if, inferring from the world, *God is like this*, then what

about mortal beings? The real issue is not therefore the existence or non-existence of God, but God's guilt which is not expressed directly, and which can be derived from the world created by him. Ivan is not godless, but the *opponent of God*.³¹

It is not by chance that murder in this work can, though not empirically, be essentially blamed on the same person from whom the recognition mentioned above originates, that is, from Ivan Karamazov. The man who transformed the issue of God's existence, radically, into an immanent question pertaining to the unacceptable set-up of the world.

A misanthrope, Ivan represents a powerful and genuine humanism in his *rejection* of God's world and its motives, as well as in his remonstrations against suffering. More powerfully than Aljosa who is occupied with micro-redemptions—in which he finds self-entertainment—and who faces Ivan's problems perhaps only once.

Dostoyevsky is faithful to the Christian tradition according to which there must be sin in order that redemption be possible. *The Brothers Karamazov* is full of sinners, and redeemers also practice in large numbers. From Aljosa, ever busy and unaware of dilemmas, to Zosima, who knows far more than he and to the great inquisitor born of Ivan's imagination and created in his mind.

A more peculiar redeemer has hardly appeared in human culture. For this inquisitor, who burns heretics and commands silence from Jesus does everything for people driven by his faith, and not without suffering. He believes that freedom is an awesome, indeed unbearable gift, and he would bring relief to people if he rid them of it. "That accused old man who loves mankind so obstinately in his own way."³²

Is not, perhaps, the figure of the inquisitor related to Nietzsche's superman, for he lays a claim to decide what people need? No, he is not related to him primarily because he does what

he does suffering, because he arrived at his decision struggling with himself and also because he fails to break with Christianity, modifying it instead. He is at once a despot and a martyr who has *undertaken* to be a despot and was not made one by his ambition for power. This is why the great inquisitor has nothing in common with Nietzsche's superman. He has far more in common with Bulgakov's Pilate, another sufferer, he is the precursor of this hegemon who is prone to headaches, even though the descendant had to wait far longer for the meeting with Jesus whom he had condemned.

The great inquisitor knows an alarmingly great deal. Naturally he too is a man of conception and, accordingly, Bakhtin's idea of the "unselfishness" of Dostoyevsky's characters is valid even for him. The great inquisitor's fundamental principle is that people must be oppressed because *this is what they need*, for they loathe liberty. Indeed, nothing could be more horrendous for them than liberty. Only, a vast, silent counter-argument is, probably unwittingly, incorporated into this chapter of the work. Not even a counter-argument, but, rather, a striking contradiction. For the fire of the stakes erected for the heretics asks: where is the *universal* aversion to freedom valid for everyone if stakes are still necessary? What else do they prove than that after all, there are people who want to use their freedom, in this case the heretics?!

It can hardly be disputed that the great inquisitor is one of the weightiest and most complex characters not only of Dostoyevsky but of the end of the 19th century as a whole; an unbelieving high priest, an heretic redeemer—who is not, after all, so faithless as not to expect one word from Jesus, be it a monstrous one. He is an heretic who burns heretics, or, more precisely, *the only heretic who was not burnt*. A peculiar favouritism, indeed! For the great inquisitor even gains absolution from the silent Jesus and, what is still more, the privilege of pardoning Jesus also befalls him. True,

he is also unique as a "simple" inquisitor for—and this must be said without any irony—he undertakes his deeds suffering and out of a conviction that he is being *considerate* to mankind.

If Ivan Karamazov is unable to accept *God's* world because it is an ethical impossibility, Dostoyevsky, in his work, creates a no less unacceptable world.

This, too, is an ethically impossible world, for if there exists a being in creation who, though he does not win, *supersedes all*, then it must obviously be Smerdiakov. That Smerdiakov who is far from Raskolnikov as he kills without trembling and it is not in fact for this that he commits suicide, but because he does not want to live *among these*, whom he despises. Although he retains his superiority over Ivan, who knows an extremely great deal, perhaps the most—for he is terrified of him and is at his mercy. He is forced to listen to his condescending praise according to which he is a clever man and also to tolerate that he calls him the fool of the world. Smerdiakov supersedes everybody; even his departure is far more "elegant" than that of Ivan's who goes insane in public. And what difference could Aljosha,—who knows so little and who, on the last pages of the book, rejoices over the prospect of eventual resurrection and is cheered by the children,—make to this world, the world of Smerdiakovs, Ivans, Zosimas and the great inquisitors? Read today, there can hardly be a more obtuse and more short-sighted person than this sinless Karamazov.

The antinomies are not united in Mitja either. If the theologian Doerne³³ nevertheless sees in him the embodiment of *conditio humana* then this is nonetheless totally understandable. With his undertaken sin and redemption this Karamazov is the book's most conservative and most didactic figure—at least that is the intention. His "resolved" fate does not, however, change the unacceptable arrangement of this world at all. Just as the Sonias, Aljoshas do not and cannot change it. And they do not represent

ēthos but merely goodness. A goodness is incapable of demonstrating protest against an unacceptable world order, indeed with the sheer fact that it exists it arouses the illusion that more Aljoshas were needed and nothing else.

THE KAFKAESQUE REFORMULATION OF SIN AND PUNISHMENT

Kafka's attempt to answer the question whether or not there is sin is in all likelihood the most fascinating attempt to resolve the issue in the 20th century. Although a solution is not, naturally, proffered by his works, nevertheless an entirely original, bizarre, albeit telling vision emerges despite all its uncertainty and ambiguity.

Ultimately, almost without exception Kafka's works are variations on the subject of sin. In his diary he himself regards only Rossmann, the protagonist of his first novel (*America*), as sinless, while, on the other hand, he is firm in his judgement when he calls Joseph K. guilty. But why?

A distinguished Kafka scholar, Günther Anders, writes about *The Castle* that in this work life is no more than the process of the self-accumulation of sin.³⁴

Obviously, Kafka does not have an unequivocal stance and still less an unequivocally interpretable judgement regarding the question of sin. Yet his works expose this problem and expound it in extraordinary depth. *The Trial* offers a number of answers to the question of the existence of sin. What I consider the most important is that it makes an attempt to provide an answer that is at least as new as Dostoyevsky's. For in Kafka's case—in whose works none but the top-hatted executioners kill—the whole trial says: *there must be sin*, even if there is not, or even if it is anonymous. And because there must be sin, it must be

constituted by the trial. If, therefore, sin does not exist, or if it is not possible, in the classical sense, to rise from the state of anonymous and unpunishable sinfulness, then this rise or removal should occur via punishment, which is none other than the court procedure itself.

Everybody is guilty, but is so unpunished. Yet if there must, after all, be sin then this must—for otherwise it is not possible—be verified by the fact of punishment. There are, thus, *chosen people amongst the guilty: those chosen for indictment, for court procedure and consequently for judgement.*

There must be sin and punishment also because otherwise there is not even the slightest chance of any kind of redemption. Even Kafka is unable to relinquish this, albeit his attempt to solve the problem is in this respect so novel in comparison with Dostoyevsky that it is barely recognizable. In *The Trial*, for instance, it is a sign of “mercy” if a procedure is instigated against somebody. This peculiar *negative mercy* characterises above all, the situation of the defendants. If one can speak of the proof of an interpretation at all then I regard the overly peculiar external distinguishing trait of the accused as being such—in fact this is the only way in which I consider it interpretable. For they are distinguished from everybody else by the shocking trait that they are *beautiful*. This is why the defendants can be recognized even in the greatest crowd, at least by those in the know. Namely, about that “Die Angeklagten sind eben die Schönsten. Es kann nicht die Schuld sein, die sie schön macht, denn—so muß wenigstens ich als Advokat sprechen—es sind doch nicht alle schuldig, es kann auch nicht die richtige Strafe sein, die sie jetzt schon schön macht, denn es werden doch nicht alle bestraft, es kann also nur an dem gegen sich erhobenen Verfahren liegen, das ihnen irgendwie anhaftet. Allerdings gibt es unter den Schönen auch besonders Schöne. Schön sind aber alle, selbst Block, dieser elende Wurm.”³⁵

This is the absurd and yet not entirely absurd case of mercy—in a world in which not only the lack of punishment, but, as Attila József put it, “innocence” is also “sin”. Kafka’s solution is not very far from tradition. For this conception of punishment and procedure as the purging from sin is traditional.

If Raskolnikov elected himself for sin, Kafka’s Joseph K. is picked for the procedure by unknown powers. For when Joseph K. first appears in court the other defendants immediately see on his mouth that he will not come to an ordinary end—and not in the average time, either. Naturally, the book contains no explanation for the chosen and neither for mercy in the theological sense.

According to Günther Anders in Kafka’s works we are confronted with the inversion of sin and punishment; sin tramples on the heels of punishment, in this artistic world the furies fly in front of the deed, preceding the deed.³⁶ This reversal of crime and punishment does not, according to Anders, lack a realistic motive as destitution of declassé status—ie. punishment—is in the real world almost never the consequence but the cause of crime. This is how punishment precedes crime. But even beyond this, inversion corresponds to society’s substantive judgement inasmuch as it regards destitution as “deserved”.

It is not easy to demonstrate this inversion in concrete terms for from the text of the book we have no reason to conclude that Joseph K. was less guilty or more guilty than anyone else before the trial. The more difficult question is, however, what, before or after, his crime actually is.

He himself speaks about this in the book. Directly before his being killed he says: “Ich wollte immer mit zwanzig Händen in die Welt hineinfahren und überdies zu einem nicht zu billigenden Zweck.”³⁷ Naturally these words cannot be decisive in passing judgement. It is more likely that a more important word is said

about the sin he has in common with everybody else, when the prison chaplain tells him in the cathedral: "Laß das Nebensächliche".³⁸ This probably pertains simultaneously to the communication according to which Joseph K. came to show the cathedral to an Italian, the bank's guest, but also, literally, to the album of city sights which he is holding in his hands.

Kafka's texts are indeed to be understood literally, as every Kafka scholar, from Adorno through Walter Benjamin to Hauser, has stressed. This is also demonstrated by the fact that following these words Joseph K. does in point of fact throw the album away. The summons however pertains, literally too, to every irrelevant thing. And Joseph K. is unable, even in this totally extraordinary situation — probably the greatest moment of his life—to break radically with these irrelevant things. This despite the fact that in all likelihood—according to the probability proffered by the scene—his redemption is at stake.

In a life such as Joseph K.'s there do in fact exist irrelevant things only— particularities and quasi-human relations subordinated to these as instruments. Inasmuch as Joseph K. is an entirely typical figure and not extreme in the least. Rather, he belongs to the line of Ivan Ilyiches.

To link crime with punishment is a "pagan" tradition. The linking of sin and redemption is, however, a Christian tradition. If there is no sin there is no redemption. Basically, Kafka does not break with this Christian tradition insofar as he relinquishes neither sin nor redemption.

We have seen that *The Brothers Karamazov* is full of sinners—even though the book is dominated by the oppressive doubt whether or not sin exists at all. At the same time however it is also full of several kinds of rather strange redeemers.

Redemption is also present in Kafka's life work, but in a far more concealed and more complex manner. In *The Trial* two possibilities of redemption emerge. First the procedure itself, the

process of Prozess, one could say, in which the accused grow more beautiful. This redeeming function of the trial is, however, not only questioned by the manner and form of the killing, the actor character of the executors of the sentence, but is in fact *revoked*.

There is however another concrete and perceptible redemption attempt: finding the way back, on a single occasion, to human communication in the cathedral scene. The conversation between the prison chaplain and Joseph K., while they walk up and down *closely alongside each other*, recalls some kind of "golden age" of human contact, one which no longer exists though can, as we see, be conjured up. Their extraordinary togetherness creates—despite the immense distance between them—a separate world in this chapter; indeed a characteristic *human centre* within a book, which nonetheless is striking.

If we subject the scene to very close scrutiny and search for an answer why it is striking, indeed why it is separated from the world of the book, then the simplest thing to say is that because this dialogue is a reminder of how *people talk to each other* when the spoken word still signifies contact and communication. Nothing of the sort ever occurs again in *The Trial*.

The intonation itself is unique. Joseph K. arrives at the cathedral at ten in the morning, yet it soon becomes dark and only candles provide any light. He stops before an altar picture which depicts a sturdily built knight in armour standing beside his sword, which is stuck in the barren ground as though it were his task to be on the alert. A reference is thus made, and this too is a separate intonation which projects the parable on the law.

It is at the side pulpit that Joseph K. first sees the priest and *smiles amazed* at the sight of the smooth, dark-faced young man. This smiling in amazement is also without precedent and continuation. Afterwards, Joseph K. starts to leave, the stone floor thudding under his step. This noise is gently but unceasingly

echoed, with a law-governed continuity. Walking toward the exit he feels slightly abandoned and it appears to him that the huge size of the cathedral *borders on the limit of what man can still bear*. And it is this boundary which "redemption" crosses: it is at this point that the call of the priest takes place. He calls him *by the name* and Joseph K. runs to the pulpit with *long, soaring strides* (mit langen, fliegenden Schritten).³⁹

If not being transparent is one of people's original sins then during these minutes two people become transparent and they shed sin. The dialogue itself signifies, more precisely executes, this transparency, the shedding of the veil of fog.

"'Du bist Joseph K.', sagte der Geistliche... 'Ja'. ...

'Du bist angeklagt' ...

'Ja'. ... man hat mich davon verständigt'.

'Dann bist du der, den ich suche' ... 'Ich bin der Gefängniskaplan'.

'Ach so'", replies Joseph K., and he is right, for the priest's words are almost the only words in the book to which this reply can be given, being, as they are, completely understandable and ambiguous so that they have some liberating force.

The unequivocal conversation continues.

"'Ich habe dich hierher rufen lassen' ..., 'um mit dir zu sprechen'" says the prison chaplain.

"'Ich bin hierhergekommen, um einen Italiener den Dom zu zeigen'" says Joseph K.

And now comes the summons!

"'Laß das Nebensächliche' ... 'Was hältst du in der Hand? Ist es ein Gebetbuch?'

'Nein' ... 'es ist ein Album der städtischen Sehenswürdigkeiten.'

'Leg es aus der Hand' ...

'Weißt du, daß dein Prozeß schlecht steht?'"⁴⁰

At this point ambiguity finds its way back into the conversation. Although Joseph K. throws the album far away and doing so

obediently breaks with irrelevant things, but then he says that he has not yet completed his petition. This at the same time indicates that he has not yet been able to push those irrelevant things aside after all, even now when he faces a man who, at long last, talks to him without mincing words and from whom he could find out what he wanted to know and that which he must know — perhaps not even just about the trial.

He is standing *before* the opportunity of transcendence — he could break out of the trial as he himself had thought earlier. This earthly transcendence does not mean stepping beyond the world, but, rather, the return to an existence in which people can still talk to each other in a way people do.

Just as it is true that Kafka's world — to use Günther Anders' words — is a "ver-rückt" world, that is, it is a world pushed aside, pushed further and dislodged, it is at least as true that in the cathedral scene the ceremonious restoration of the world order, more precisely of the order of human communication, takes place. Here this is a "zurück-gerückt" world in which people's words once again reach one another.

The merciful state in the cathedral is, however, revoked by the last chapter of the book. Thus, the book ends twice, indeed taking the ending of the parable into account it ends three times, more precisely *it does not end* three times.

Not only does the author's hesitation characterize the work throughout, it dominates it like a nightmare. What is oppressively incomprehensible is not why this death sentence takes place at all, but something else. The man who could speak the way he did in the cathedral, who was able to ask — autotelically, irrespectively of his trial and everything else — "Bist du mir böse", and when upon receiving no reply he was able to say "Ich wollte dich nicht beleidigen"⁴¹ — why does this man, a person capable of establishing contact and of smiling amazedly, die like a dog?

There is no answer to the question how this is possible and why this is happening.

I do not however wish to claim that the ending inside the cathedral would perhaps have been "better", all I am saying is that the varieties of ending create the book's ineradicable, unresolvable ambiguity—of both meaning and judgement. What is involved here is not multivalence, but, rather, *two* meanings which constantly cross each other out.

Minor "revocations" can also be demonstrated in the text even *within* the final chapter. Here it is the absolute determination of the opening of the chapter which is revoked, among other things in the motive of the window opened at the last moment, a motive not free of romanticism at all.

It is no less difficult to interpret the sin of the protagonist of *The Castle* than that of Joseph K.'s—also on account of ambiguity. For we are justified in asking: is K. guilty purely because he is an alien? In this case the fact that he is trying to eliminate his alienism would be a mitigating circumstance; for he wants to master the order of this world, even if he does not succeed. At the same time he produces extremist—at least here they are branded as such—rebellions. What, then, is his sin: is it that he rebels, that he dares to sit even in Klamm's car, that he dares touch his drink, or perhaps that, after all, he wants to adjust, to conform to customs to which it is impossible to get used to? This cannot, more precisely should not be decided because this is not decided in the book—this ambiguity is part and parcel of its essence. This is demonstrated by the fact that two protagonists of the novel, Amalia and the innkeeper's wife of the manor house, are the embodiment of two opposing forms of behaviour, rebellion and indiscriminate identification and devotion. These two women form the axis of the book, everyone else can be interpreted in relation to them.

If it is true, as indeed it is, that pride, separation from a community on the basis of free decision is a sin, then K. is not guilty. For—as Anders aptly characterized him—he is a negative prisoner inasmuch as he is not locked up, but is shut out of this world. And he does not give up the effort to find his way in. He first and foremost wants to find a place in the world of the village even though directly we only know that he wants to reach the castle. He wants to get there but his ultimate goal is to consolidate his status in the village up there. Why is it his sin, rather than his tragedy that he does not get anywhere? Even his attempts are ambivalent.

According to Anders K. has to go through the various stages of this torturous roundabout of morality because he feels excluded from the world, and because of this he does not know where his commitments lie. This not knowing turns into a bad conscience and, therefore, does not require rights from any quarters. And since he has no rights, but exists in “unlawfulness”, his pangs of conscience intensify and place him outside the world. A person who does not know whom he belongs to does not know where his commitments lie either. Moral hunger (that is, man’s need for “the circumscribed space of his commitments”) struggles without an object. This is how life becomes the process of the self-accumulation of sin.

And Kafka is after redemption—still in the 19th century meaning—which he creates through the calligraphic registration of destitution, with the instrument of art.⁴²

Kafka’s characters do not kill and no one is redeemed in a way they were in Dostoyevsky’s works. But as the human order of communication is restored temporarily in the cathedral in *The Trial*, similarly, one recognizes the words of human *ēthos* in the chapters on Amelia’s secret and punishment in *The Castle*.

Thus this work, too, has a human-centre or *ēthos*-centre, which is not rational, albeit the life-meaning illuminates the

entire work. It is around Amelia's figure that this *ēthos*-centre emerges—around her sin, secret and punishment.

Amelia's sin is the only manifest form within the book of human protest carried through to the end. At the same time this sin stands in an underground, albeit undeniable connection with a completely traditional historical life fact: *jus primae noctis*. What she does, ie. her sin, is none other than to refuse to comply with the right of those in the castle to the first night. This is a clear case when sin constitutes a person's individuality or that its inevitable separation is manifested in it, even if—or precisely for this reason— her contacts are more human-like than those of anybody else in the book. What she does is none other than the rejection of a somewhat modified form of *jus primae noctis*. This is all, but this is not little. Fearless Amelia does not go to the Manor House, indeed she tears Sortini's letter into pieces.

Upon hearing Amelia's story, K.'s first reaction is peculiar. As though he fell out completely of the village order he asks whether or not Amelia's father had lodged a firm complaint.

Amelia's *ēthos* proves to be "contagious" — although not incurably. It spreads slightly to her family, almost just like the punishment, like the curse. This is manifested in the fact that Amelia's father never spoke a word of remorse to him. And — as Olga says — "Und das nicht etwa deshalb, weil er Amalias Vorgehen gebilligt hätte; wie hätte er, ein Verehrer Sortinis, es billigen können; nicht von der Ferne konnte er es verstehen; sich und alles, was er hatte, hätte er Sortini wohl gern zum Opfer gebracht, allerdings nicht so, wie es jetzt wirklich geschah, unter Sortinis wahrscheinlichem Zorn."

Amelia's influence also spreads to Olga who, although she regards the village's contempt as natural, is nevertheless capable of a self-reflection the like of which we cannot find in the book. When characterizing her family and her own behaviour she says that they had done something "wofür wir gerechter hätten

verachtet werden dürfen, als wofür es wirklich geschah: ... wir begannen, jeder auf seine Art, das Schloß zu bitten oder zu bestürmen, es möge uns verzeihen".⁴³

The siege naturally proved to be hopeless. For to forgive would have required the definition of crime, but the officials simply would not hear of crime.

Olga condemns this behaviour which pleads forgiveness. Amelia, on the other hand, is silent. She does all the work around the parents, looks after her father and mother who, waiting in the snow, fell ill and this too is verisimilar in a noteworthy manner. Altogether, everything that is happening around Amelia is a slice of reality in a phantom world, even if this is the most phantom-like story in the book.

As in *The Trial*, here, too, punishment is a process. As Olga says: "Wir fürchteten nichts Kommendes, wir litten schon nur unter dem Gegenwärtigen, wir waren mitten in der Bestrafung darin."⁴⁴

Amelia's *ēthos* "infects" K. as well, albeit not lastingly. According to him for everything that happened "bewundern oder verurteilen könnte man Amelia deshalb, aber verachten?"⁴⁵ Thus, K. regards Amelia innocent and Sortini as vile. He regards the punishment as unjust and monstrous despite the fact that he is entirely on his own with his opinion in the village. For the time being K. feels that no kind of tradition should blunt a person's sense of judgement when the appraisal of something is involved.

Olga knows that Amelia is an exception amongst people, but according to her even she not to the extent as not to love Sortini—even though she did not go to him—moreover already beforehand because that would be intangible.

Soon, however, the moment comes in the novel when K. "sobers down", as it were, after which he feels that Amelia interests him only because she is the sister of Barnaby, the messenger in the castle, and her fate is perhaps linked with his

future service. But now he says of Amelia's act that, although it is worthy of admiration, it cannot be decided whether it is great or trivial, clever or stupid, heroic or cowardly. And finally he, meanly and stupidly, condemns Amelia for riding the high horse, as it were, instead of asking her family to forgive her.

A kind of island forms around Amelia since she rises as human-like reality over the world of the castle and the village. She rises from this non-human-like environment in every detail, naturally in her language as well. And this cannot be withdrawn. Here, when people catch a cold, when joints become painful to the extent that they need to be undressed, there is someone who helps them, who looks after them, because *here everything that is human can happen*.

With Amelia's figure Kafka proves, as it were, that man, as Kant has so wonderfully put it in parentheses: (is nevertheless not entirely incapable of good).

In addition to the aforementioned similarities, there are others too between *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Indeed there are repetitions which follow a regular pattern: the recurrence of a highly important motive. In *The Castle* Burgel, the castle official, explains to K. the dangers which accompany the night interrogation of clients, namely the threat of the infiltration of human criteria and behaviours. Unwarranted considerations may influence certain judgements such as the situation, cares and problems of clients. In *The Trial* when the prison chaplain explains why he had to go up to the pulpit, to ensure his distance from Joseph K., he gives essentially the same explanation.

"Ich mußte zuerst aus der Entfernung mit dir sprechen. Ich lasse mich sonst zu leicht beeinflussen und vergesse meinen Dienst,"⁴⁶ he says, later adding "Sieh du . . . ein, wer ich bin' . . . 'Du bist der Gefängniskaplan', sagte K. und ging näher zum Geistlichen hin."⁴⁷

This parallel, or recurrence of motive is also significant because it, too, recalls that consciousness, human togetherness is indestructible. Tricks are required, even on the part of prison chaplains and castle officials, to make people forget it. For this is what they repress and forget and it is for this reason that they lead a miserable existence like the inhabitants of the villages.

If the forgetting of this human-state gives rise to horror in Kafka's works, then, peculiar as it may be, it satisfies that Brechtian requirement according to which social conditions must be divested of "the seal of intimacy" which holds them back from interference, considering that no one feels distrustful to a person whom he knows intimately.⁴⁸

Kafka's lifework leaves sin undefined—Joseph K's and the land-surveyor's alike. But despite obscurity and ambiguity he postulates that there must be sin even if we cannot define what it is exactly. The figure and fate of Amelia is the most obvious proof. The demonstration of the fact that there can be Amelias in any world! And this does in fact break the fate of the castle world because, like any semblance of fate, this, too, can be dispersed by the deed, conceived in *ēthos*, of a single person.

NOTES

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Harper and Row, New York, 1962, p. 326.

² Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, 1961, p. 120.

³ Chekhov, *Short Novels and Stories*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 125.

⁴ Thomas Mann, *Last Essays*, Alfred A. Kupf, New York, 1959, pp. 187-188.

⁵ Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, Garnier-Flammarion, 1966, p. 33.

⁶ Cf. I, Chapter I, pp. 49-50.

⁷ See, Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Bloßen Vernunft*, Verlag von Felix Meiner, Hamburg, 1956.

⁸ See, Marx an Ferdinand Freiligrath. 29. Februar 1860., *Marx-Engels Werke*, Vol. 30, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1962, p. 492.

⁹ *Georg Büchners Werke und Briefe*, Insel Verlag, Leipzig, 1949, p. 146.

¹⁰ Cf. 9, Chapter II, p. 152.

¹¹ "We come across the first differentiation between *ἦθος* (ethos) and *ἦθος* (ēthos) in Plato and later in Aristotle's work. In their text ethos denotes customs and the morals manifested in them, while ēthos signifies character and moral make-up. (I do not use the term ēthos in this sense, but I have taken over one aspect of its meaning, the momentum of the independence from customs.)

¹² I use the expression "man in his own entirety" in the sense Georg Lukács did in *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*.

¹³ Cf. 9, Chapter I, p. 488.

¹⁴ Cf. 9, Chapter II, p. 146.

¹⁵ Ervin Sinkó, *Szemben a bíróval* (Face to face with the judge), Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1977, p. 57.

¹⁶ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago, 1958, p. 197.

¹⁷ Max Weber, *Soziologie. Weltgeschichtliche Analysen. Politik*, Alfred Kröner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1956, p. 324.

¹⁸ *József Attila Összes Művei* (The collected works of Attila József), Vol. 4, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, p. 22.

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Bobbs-Merill Company, INC., New York, 1956, p. 63.

²⁰ Lucien Goldmann, *Introduction à la philosophie de Kant*, Gallimard, 1967, p. 219.

²¹ Cf. 2, Chapter I, p. 94.

²² Cf. 1, Chapter II, pp. 312, sqq.

²³ See also, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures. Conversations*, Barrel University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, p. 43.

²⁴ Cf. 19, Chapter II, p. 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See Cf. 5, Chapter I, pp. 20–21.

²⁷ D. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Vol. 2, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London, 1911, p. 185.

²⁸ Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1951, p. 336.

²⁹ Cf. 2, Chapter I, p. 83.

³⁰ Cf. 28, Chapter II, and *Nietzsches Werke*, Vol. 10, Naumann Verlag, 1906, p. 377.

³¹ See Maximilian Braun, *Dostojewskij*, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht in Göttingen, 1976, p. 249.

³² Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, The Modern Library Publishers, New York, n. d., p. 321.

³³ See Martin Doerne, *Tolstoj und Dostojewskij*, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht in Göttingen, 1969.

³⁴ Günther Anders, *Pro und kontra Kafka*, Verlag C. H. Beck, Munich 1951, p. 28.

³⁵ Franz Kafka, *Die Romane*, S. Fischer Verlag, pp. 408-409.

³⁶ Cf. 34, Chapter II, pp. 37-38.

³⁷ Cf. 35, Chapter II, p. 442.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

⁴² Cf. 34, Chapter II.

⁴³ Cf. 35, Chapter II, pp. 665, 669.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 665.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 659.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 439-440.

⁴⁸ Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater*. Vol. 7, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin und Weimar, 1964, p. 36.

Chapter III

ETHOS AND UNEQUIVOCALNESS

Everybody knows the hard hours of weakness when it is in vain that we have an infinite number of wise principles if there is nothing we can do with them, if there is not *one* among them, a *single one*—at least in the given situation.

If one can act on the basis of *ēthos* only in case he is capable of overcoming the prevailing customary morality, the force of gravity of everydayness, someone who can resist the attraction of generally accepted norms and is able to undertake the solitude of his deed, then no one can be capable of this without nurturing some form of unequivocalness inside, without a certainty striving for reality in his behaviour and deeds living in him.

Any ambivalence which recognizes transitions in acts and character threatens the resoluteness and stability of maxims, as Kant himself has warned. But was he not the last who in building up his conceptual system was able to adhere to this realization?

The cracks in unequivocalness, which are still almost invisible in Kant's case, deepen into a gulf with Hegel and reach a solution of overly dubious value with Kierkegaard. As he saw it, unequivocalness was accessible at the cost of self-renunciation. However, this ultimate peace, which comes about in the religious phase, does not originate from some form of earthly certainty, but from submission to the unquestionable superiority of a God found or construed, whilst even its existence is not a certainty.

The young Georg Lukács also grapples with this problem in 1910 in an essay entitled *Sören Kierkegaard and Regina Olsen*. "... weil der Mensch, der 'ehrlich' sein will - he writes "... dem Leben die Eindeutigkeit abzwängen, diesen ewig gestaltwechselnden Proteus so stark anpacken muß, daß er sich nicht mehr rücken kann, wenn er ihm einmal den Spruch offenbart hat".¹

Lukács is searching for the point where reality and opportunity, matter and air, finite and infinite, form and life meet. In other words, he is searching for the movement, the gesture which unmistakably expresses that something. "Wo die Psychologie beginnt, da gibt es keine Taten mehr, nur Motive der Taten; und, was der Gründe bedarf, was eine Begründung verträgt, das hat schon alle Festigkeit und Eindeutigkeit verloren."² - writes Lukács, too.

However, the young Lukács also writes that "... die Menschen hassen das Eindeutige und fürchten es. Ihre Schwäche und ihre Feigheit wird jede Hemmung, die von außen kommt, jedes Hindernis, das ihre Wege verstellt, lieblosen."³

Their weakness and cowardice spoilingly loves every inhibition which comes from the outside and every obstacle that comes in their way.

It is difficult to question the truth of these early thoughts. It is especially difficult because they cannot be *unequivocally* rejected and therefore the threat immediately arises that the uncertainty that is manifested in his deliberation will automatically verify the very claim he wants to dispute. We can hardly say that every person would hate *everything that was unequivocal*, if only because several kinds of unequivocalness exist.

Just as fear of unequivocalness—if such a thing exists—cannot stand in fatal interconnection with external inhibitions, the love of obstacles in one's path. The blaming of helplessness or impotence on objective circumstances as the basis of self-acquittal in a certain situation and with certain people is indeed

typical, albeit it is not general and not in the least an "anthropological" generality.

In all probability there are people who are afraid of unequivocalness which demands resolute action, but there can hardly be people who were afraid of a certainty—on imaginary or more or less justified grounds—that justified their existence. Thus, there can be no answer to the question whether or not, *generally speaking*, people wanted unequivocalness. It must, however, be stated that—as Lukács himself said both earlier and later—without *some kind* of unequivocalness there is no honesty, or, to use our own term, *ēthos*.

The question is raised by the uncertain adjective "some kind of". And it is not by chance that the young Lukács used this word. For to answer *what kind of* unequivocalness is required for *ēthos* is not in the least simple as this is no less than a decision over the truly great issues determining life.

The recognizing and distinguishing of true and false does not in itself serve as a guide, for even amidst the framework and limitations of a false consciousness an unequivocalness may emerge that can serve as a source for *ēthos*, while an adequate, or an almost adequate consciousness cannot guarantee this automatically.

It is not only difficult *to find* unequivocalness in spite of a constantly changing Proteus, but, in a changing situation, it is still more difficult *to locate it* and to accept it. And it is difficult precisely because, sometimes, history seems to be forcing open, breaking open unequivocalness. (This is an appearance only because certainty earns its name from the fact that the *acute* developments of history cannot affect it.) Thus, to find unequivocalness is the most difficult task for those who require a life-guiding principle not only within the boundaries of their individual existence.

The realization that *ēthos* and history cross lies behind Georg Lukács's 1918 crisis and subsequent decision. With Lukács, fear of sins and falling into sin constitutes the basis of his rejection of revolution. Subsequently, radically casting aside these reservations, he eventually adopted a pro-revolutionary stance.

Naturally, Lukács still knows that there will inevitably be sins, but these he calls—at least in one of his sentences—*ethical deeds*, he thereby sanctions sins committed *in the service of a cause* almost *in advance*. This is indicative of his Messianism.

This treatment of sins, more precisely this first sanctioning of sin in the interests of historical progress in general and in those of revolution in particular, in this case signifies a veritable ethical "sommersault". As Lukács put it, "die ethische Selbstbesinnung weist ja gerade darauf hin, daß es Situationen gibt—tragische Situationen—in denen es unmöglich ist zu handeln, ohne Schuld auf sich zu laden", and this is true.

It is after this that the famous Hebbelian sentence, which was subsequently quoted so many times and which stated the inevitability of sin, followed, as a conclusion to this famous writing: "Und wenn Gott zwischen mich und die mir auferlegte Tat die Sünde gesetzt hätte—wer bin ich, daß ich mich dieser entziehen könnte?"⁴

Since Lukács connected morally correct action to the adequate recognition of a given phase in the philosophy of history, the antecedents of the idea explain why decision demanded the sanctioning of sin in Lukács's case. The moralizing character of his behaviour and way of thinking will, nevertheless, be long-lasting, despite the turn accompanying the leap, only now he is almost obsessed in his negation of his former views in relation to ethics.

History, however, has also created another instance of the sanctioning of sin, one which many raised among the facts of the show trials, or perhaps everyone who regarded this as inevitable

amid conditions of the struggle against fascism. The difference is so great between the two instances as to preclude the possibility of any kind of comparison. Yet, the circumstances of the second instance, and from the aspect of the historical tragedy which created it, one reads Lukács's words on the transformation of sin into ethical deeds differently.

In truth, there can arise situations—as indeed they do—in which action demands sin, but under no circumstances *can sin cease to be sin*; conscience can never ever justify itself with world history, not even if the latter proffered infinite instances of justification.

The characteristic radicalism of Lukács's famous pronouncement is explained by the sudden leap by which he broke with a moralizing world view in order to throw himself into politics.

The either-or solution is unfeasible. It must be accepted that history and *ēthos* exist as incomparable dimensions. History does not change sin into an ethical deed, only into a necessary one. At the same time however, *ēthos* cannot justify the "break" with history either. On the other hand, it depends on *ēthos* to prevent the disappearance of the *boundaries* of necessary sin.

The Lukácsian decision replaced the absolute hegemony of an abstract *ēthos* with that of politics. Admittedly, Lukács, in these same writings, on these same pages, warns that "Keine Ethik kann zur Aufgabe haben . . . , die-unüberwindbaren, tragischen Konflikte des menschlichen Schicksals einzuebnen und zu leugnen."⁵ Indeed we read in the same writing that someone who decides to opt for communism undertakes individual responsibility for every human life.

Only, this consideration, in this form, is both too much and too little. Fate is invincible, not to deny its tragic conflicts is too little because it is totally abstract. To assume responsibility for every human life is too much, excessively so, and is, therefore, ethically weightless.

Knowing today that during the forties hundreds of thousands of communist revolutionaries and bourgeois humanists sanctioned phenomena which had been unacceptable to them and the political meaning of which they could only presuppose, one cannot regard historical unequivocalness that produces the sanctioning of sin as constituting a purely speculative problem. All the more so because it seems that this second instance of sanctioning was possible on a *mass* scale because the possibility of the first instance had already been raised (albeit not in the manner Lukács had, but in an entirely different situation). Many—though not everyone—employed this method in a completely new situation, while entirely different motivations were also present. We cannot remove the problem from the agenda, no one can do so in fact, for even today we would stand helpless when asked: what else could anyone have done? In this form, which suggests fatalism, the question must, nevertheless, be rejected. For, even if it is empirically true that no one could have done anything else, even then this behaviour cannot, on the basis of this, be unequivocally justified as the only one possible, especially if we know that, moreover, it survived the world historical border-line situation and tolerated 'continuously' the scandal of the show trials.

But if history sanctions sin irrevocably in any case—not devoting attention to *ēthos* which affects mortal individuals only—then is it worth meditating on this?

We *must* ponder over it, indeed there must exist an unequivocalness which does not destroy *ēthos* by sanctioning sin—even if we must, albeit reluctantly, accept the Hebbelian words about sin.

No one can set his mind at rest by thinking that the higher forums of appeal—among them history—will relieve him of the burden of sin. Even the Messianic belief in a perfect future cannot free one of the problems of *ēthos* on the grounds that it

regards sin as inevitable, but at the same time insignificant as well, because he attributes the power of total acquitting and sanctioning force to the Cause. Fanaticism makes people blind to the realization where and when a deed becomes unnecessary and consequently unequivocally sinful. This is why the explanation of the aforementioned second instance of sanctifying sin requires the consideration of the role of Messianism.

One, albeit by no means the only, dangerous consequence of Messianism is that it regards the entire revival and purification of this earthly world as absolute and imminent. Consequently, it inevitably plays down the temporary consequences of the means employed to this end—meaning that its influence was perhaps exerted over the life-span of a single generation. The fact that Messianism also promises full moral redemption is of special significance. So long as the cause allows scope for making sacrifice, religious and emotional mentality continues to function even without religion, and, in accordance with its structure, it has the opportunity to sanctify everything, to demand sacrifices, to give absolution and the rest. It was the fanatical faith stemming from this that induced the accused to make full admissions of guilt in the show trials, without which *such* trials could not have taken place and without which *this* second sanctioning of sin could not have come about, either.

This second instance of sanctioning sin was followed by a third—of entirely different, indeed opposite character. Here I am thinking of the “we have committed a mistake together and are serving a good cause” motive. This tacit absolution is the inevitable breaking of a cruel chain reaction. It does not, however, exempt anyone from facing up to and turning against his mistakes or sins, because otherwise this too would make responsibility anonymous and obscure individual.

People who are following historical goals are forced to subordinate a great many things to their effort, but it is

impossible to get used to, to accept and to regard this necessity as natural.

Being familiar with the tragic situation which developed in the thirties, the, in reality, never-thought of lapse into sin, one must say that even the extraordinary situation brought about by the war against Hitlerism cannot justify, *theoretically* and entirely, the general fall into silence at the time on the part of those who were advocates of socialism. Not even if there is no way of proving that it would have been possible to create a counterforce against the distortions which would have been capable of repressing them. The meaning of deeds in history is never qualified purely by demonstrable effectiveness. What is, however, certain is that the Messianistic absolutization of the Cause and the uninhibited use of class society instruments, or the neglecting of their importance, continues to hinder the retrieving of responsibility to this very day.

If the attempts of the moralists of all times to "improve" morals had been futile, indeed had to be so, then one could say that to find one's way back to *ēthos* is or will be possible only through an imaginary "back door": in point of fact "rehabilitating" sin, giving back its name and raising it from the anonymity of "we have committed it together".

There are deeds which *ought not* be done, but which must be done. The conscious and tragic undertaking of sin—in which the stress is not on *undertaking* but on *sin*—can to some extent be a guarantee of the recognition of unjustifiable deeds. Therefore—among other things for this reason!—the show trials can in no sense be described as the inevitable concomitants of any kind of revolutionary terror.

Unequivocalness which determines life, deciding what a person should do with his life, does not appear as a problem so long as there exist communities and, together with them, traditions. Under such circumstances the *past* guarantees

unequivocalness. In the case of Messianism the *future* does the same. Where neither solution is present a hiatus appears—imparting a particular attraction to paradox.

ON THE APPEAL OF PARADOX

Thinking in paradoxes sanctions, as it were, the renouncement of unequivocalness, even though it does not eliminate the tormenting uncertainty which accompanies it. The bad interminableness seals off the path of every solution, not like some wall which can ultimately be toppled, but, rather, like a labyrinth.

One of the most noteworthy works of recent Marxist thinking, Lucien Goldmann's book on Pascal expresses the appeal of paradox, and at the same time its temptation, in a peculiar way. Goldmann seems to find a solution in paradox, which he describes as being related to dialectic, and at the same time to find unequivocalness in a re-interpreted Pascalian bet. (As he sees it the substance of Pascal's idea is that one must live *as though* God's existence were certain.)

How can paradox be the direct antecedent of dialectic when in Goldmann's interpretation it is characterized precisely by the fact that it depicts opposites rigidified, independently of each other, excluding their motion and postulating their meeting only in man's consciousness? And this meeting can only result in a kind of intellectual stalemate, mirroring genuine historical stalemates.

When Goldmann makes an attempt to connect Pascalian paradox with dialectic regardless, he clearly sees that although Pascalian thinking stresses, in the face of rationalism and empiricism, the truth of opposites, it is nevertheless separated from dialectical thinking by its essentially static, tragic and paradoxical nature. "Pascal sees no possibility", he writes, "for

man to achieve progress in human time. . .". It is therefore a *paradox* because "he looks upon all reality as consisting of a clash between opposites, and a conflict that cannot be transcended in this world. He is a tragic thinker because he sees man as unable either to avoid or to accept this paradox, and yet as being man only in so far as he makes the impossibility of achieving any genuine synthesis into the very centre of his existence."⁶

We must regard it as a necessity in the history of ideas that in well-nigh every age sooner or later doubt is cast over that which, until then, had been taken for granted. These in turn produce further and further new—albeit not really entirely new—variants of scepticism.

This is not merely the immanent necessity of philosophical thinking. In critical social situations the everyday consciousness is also familiar, or is compelled to become familiar with the effort to protect things formerly taken for granted, with the elemental compulsion that is taking place for the preservation of unequivocalnesses against the doubts threatening and flooding them.

In such cases the possibility arises that ambivalences or paradoxes prevail over all certainty. In substance it is this victory of the paradox that Lucien Goldmann presents in his book on Pascal and who in doing so naturally passes judgement on his own age.

But why does Goldmann seek a link with paradox? Does the Marxian conceptual system really possess an affinity for this?

One is tempted to begin at once with a paradox statement which immediately demonstrates the peculiar attraction of this train of thought. It would say: a world image, which is oriented conspicuously to action, collective practice, cannot be built on paradoxes. But since one undertakes to become familiar with this prehistoricity *in prehistory*, and to search for ways of surpassing

it, he cannot do without paradoxes, more precisely he carries paradox, or at least a thorn of it, in himself. In what sense? Is it, in point of fact, true and characteristic that dialectics is related to paradox just by not revolving around the rigid poles of 'yes' and 'no'?

Linking paradox and dialectics, Goldmann refers to an assertion made by Engels that to say "yes, yes", or "no, no" means that we are creating metaphysics. On the basis of this he asserts that all dialectical thinking is accompanied by this deadly sin, which must by all means be avoided. This sin is the one-sided choice between yes or no.⁷ Instead, Goldmann recommends the Pascalian solution: the conciliation of the two conflicting extremes—yes and no.

We have no reason to raise Engels's afore-quoted sentence to the rank of absolute truths; this was not in fact the author's intention. For there exists a situation, and not even an exceptional one, when it is a deadly sin, or at least a serious offence to say *neither yes, nor no*. Goldmann knows that dialectical thinking is separated from Pascalian paradox by important differences, yet, in all probability, it is precisely the Pascalian paradox that is tragic; its nature, namely that it retains the uncertainty between 'no' and 'yes' is the greatest attraction for it. Goldmann's conception is the product of a world situation in which the negation of the existing, namely, capitalism, and the affirmation of the idea of socialism is no longer capable of shaping an unequivocal behaviour, but a yes or no must be said in regard to the "earthly counterpart" of the idea as well. It is probably in the face of this dilemma that Goldmann chooses *the motionless uncertainty of paradox*. *At the same time he counterpoises the lack of yes and no with the unequivocalness of betting on the future. The relationship with the present remains paradoxical—unequivocalness drifts towards the future.*

Paradoxes—whenever they propel the mind to their orbit—enthral and disarm. The offsprings of helplessness, they, at the same time, further intensify helplessness, because they verify it. Precisely thereby does Goldmann's paradox interpretation become entirely ideological.

Undoubtedly, however, the appeal of paradoxes lies not only in what has already been said above, but, simply, in the fact that, by nature, they cannot be rejected and are not even disputable. Only an assertion or negation can be disputed; paradox, however, which conciliates these in its own way, cannot be denied.

When Marx says that every scientific truth is a paradox he is thinking of something entirely different. Not about the realization itself, not about the content of truth, but that, for everyday consciousness, scientific truth contradicts *experiences*, it is paradoxical *in comparison to them and not in itself*.

For the everyday consciousness it is naturally paradoxical to state that capital is not a thing but a relation, that the value is not inside the diamond but must be sought in something entirely different—in point of fact in the sensuous supra-sensibility of a characteristic social relation. Admittedly, this Marxian term, at the same time, expresses and uncovers an objective paradox as well. Here however paradox does not signify the static axis of motionless ontic conflicts but the recognition and scholarly "winding up" of an *objective* appearance created by reality and invincible via recognition only.

In the paradox of the Pascalian pattern it is not scientific truth that clashes with simple experience, but two assertions are hovering in the state of weightlessness of indecision. Accordingly, in addition to its important discoveries it is destined, first and foremost, to exempt from decision-making. For if a person is destined to remain at an equal distance from both poles, recognizing the "truth" of both, then, to put it simply, there is

nothing for him to do. Just as a body which is effected by the same force from both sides is unable to move.

Thus, the misleading truth suggestion and appeal of paradox have several sources. It is misleading because it does actually express a reality segment, being a form of manifestation of the antinomies that permeate reality. On the other hand, paradox, by nature, holds out promise of the smallest risk of error.

This appeal is valid especially for "ordinary" ambiguities, which exempt from all intellectual and practical decision-making in an even more obvious and more profane manner. In all probability—precisely Goldmann's work gives grounds for such a conclusion—the *objective* lack of alternative of the nobility of the official apparatus had been the basis of the eventual predominance of paradox. It is not the objective existence of being unresolved and of the impossibility of resolving, or of unresolvable ambiguities, the philosophical generalization of which is doubtful, but the absolutization of this, indeed, in a certain sense, its stylization into a solution.

Objective antagonisms emerge and will continue to emerge in the antinomies of philosophical thinking, and this will be totally unavoidable so long as the discrepancy between progress and humanization exists. The very fact that culture, for instance, produces the concept of that humanness which can never be alien to us, but, inseparably from this, it has also produced the concept of inhumanness, is indicative not only of poles, but, on closer inspection, the internal contradiction of both poles.

For not paradox but a cruel contradiction lies in the fact that we can raise the question at all, that we learnt to ask—for history has taught and is still teaching us—how, for instance, to die humanly before a firing squad or to remain human in the concentration camps.

Reality presents the unnatural consequences of profit-oriented production in the mode of existence of the idle classes, in its

excessive distortions, simultaneously with forced heroism of inhuman proportions in the activists of the movements waged against oppression. Recognizing the contradictions of social-human existence, it is not paradox that Marxian thinking arrives at, for that, in its own way, qualifies collisions as set and perpetual.

Goldmann's work also raises a number of particularly important questions that point beyond his topic. The problem arises that, when a Marxist thinker wants to assert the principle of deriving an attitude from reality, to what extent does his own social position, indeed the "now-time" in which he lived at the time he wrote his work, determine himself in the overall approach to his theme. More broadly speaking, this question touches upon the role of self-reflection in Marxist thinking. The Marxian warning of "ask how you have arrived at the question" does not, nevertheless, indeed cannot, mean that we should remain stuck in the web of the ideological criticism of our own thinking and forget that problems must also be answered.

Goldmann's train of thought also raises the question of the place of scepticism in Marxist thinking—more precisely, how he saw this during the mid-fifties.

His train of thought signifies an attempt to emphasize, in his conception of communism, the significance of human action and, which is connected with this, to allow scope for the factor of uncertainty. Notwithstanding, the faith-character remains, even if he writes that "Marxist faith is faith in the *future* which men make for themselves. . ."⁸ His attempt is nevertheless ambiguous. It is a step towards the reinterpretation of the necessity concept that was mythicized during the years of the personality cult and toward the overcoming of Messianism that had lost its rank of a world historical error. It is, however, an *uncertain* step, because the extension to the future of the Pascalian idea of betting is highly problematic.

For Pascal God exists, albeit his existence is not unequivocal. Why would a person bet on something of which he possessed certain knowledge? God, to Pascal, exists *sufficiently* for a person to bet on him and to live *as though* he existed. Lucien Goldmann transfers *this concept* to communism the historical probability of which is sufficient for people to stake their lives on it.

Only, regardless of how great historical probability of communism is, it is not this that will determine whether or not people will stake their lives on it—if this wording, which evokes ascetism and which can only characterize exceptional revolutionary personalities, is correct at all.

People, more precisely the members of the oppressed classes, are spurred to struggle by the pressure and unbearableness of the antagonisms and injustices of the present. In the course of this struggle emerges their conviction that a classless society can be created.

We can regard Goldmann's idea of betting as a step forward in comparison with dogmatic conceptions of communism, it is, however, a set-back in comparison with Marx and, accordingly, it is in vain that he makes a "concession" to scepticism, as it retains its attached faith character alien to Marxism. In the final analysis this is still Messianism gnawed by Messianism.

Goldmann writes that "with Pascal, three elements essential to any action make their way into philosophy, and consequently into the whole of human existence: the elements of risk, of the danger of failure and of hope of success."⁹

What is involved here, according to Goldmann, is that as soon as philosophy is aimed at the embodiment of values in an objective reality, human life assumes the form of a bet placed on the success of action and consequently the existence of a force that is beyond the individual. The help (or contribution) of this force must complement the individual's effort and ensure

its success. This is "a wager that God, Humanity or the Proletariat exists and will triumph."¹⁰

In this passage the analogy with Pascal is already entirely arbitrary. Wherever does Pascal talk about the embodiment of values in an objective reality, in an earthly reality?

Moreover, Goldmann's list of the objects of the wager reveals that it is impossible to transfer the Pascalian wager to the working-class movement without reducing its theory to faith. A Marxist thinker cannot operate with the all-important Proletariat thought of as united and indivisible, but neither with the concept of triumphs because he cannot mythicize and, thinking in terms of processes, he knows that there is no victory that would, as it were, terminate history.

How can the postulation of help beyond the individual be interpreted in Goldmann's bet concept? Undoubtedly, the individual cannot create authentic values on his own, but neither can he accomplish anything else. There is, however, absolutely no need to bet on the existence of assistance beyond the individual, as a future possibility, because this force is none other than the *other individuals*, more precisely individuals who have associated freely and consciously.

Goldmann's idea is certainly an important challenge. Must a person, when he stakes his life on something, believe in its success? To stake our lives on something means that we make the realization, or the facilitating of the realization of a certain social and human alternative, our main aspiration. It is "good" to believe in the success of such an enterprise but, as I see it, only the conviction is necessary that this is the only alternative which offers a way out of the miseries of the present, an order unworthy of human nature.

This is both more and less than the bet. In the idea of the bet stress is on eventual fruition rather than on action in the present. What is still more important than the hope of success is the

conviction that it is *worth* doing something only for a classless society. That which can be done and he who does this has, in a certain sense, been freed of it.

To say that the outcome of the future *can depend on us* is not the same as saying that *it depends on us*. In other words a person may not necessarily be able to "bet" on things working out *the way* he imagined they would, but he can place a bet on the fact and extent of success or failure which by all means depends on him as well. He places the greatest stakes on his disposal not because he *believes* in its probability, but because he is convinced that it is worth staking his bet only on this, and the greater the chance of its realization is, the more people will do the same. Undoubtedly, nothing else can signify a guarantee, more precisely nothing can increase its probability, except the consistent and steadfast operation of the force beyond the individual. The latter arises from the association of individuals and *inasmuch* as this is a force beyond the individual but not beyond *individuals*. It is also certain that even in a retreating troop, one just at the point of laying down its arms, perhaps still marching toward defeat, the behaviour of the individual and of individuals is also important.

Marx adopted the chief criteria of tragic thinking—writes Goldmann. Only—precisely according to him—all historical perspective is alien from a tragic world view. Being basically ahistorical, future, the main time-dimension of history, is missing from it. In Goldmann's reasoning a common trait between tragic mentality and revolutionary mentality is the realization that the world is not tailored to suit humans. But there are great differences. We cannot state that Marx can be characterized especially by the fact that he realized the inadequate and limited character of all the possibilities in this world. It is the conditions of *class society* that the revolutioner considers to be tailored to suit humans because its substantive forces are restricted or

distorted, for which reason they are unacceptable albeit not unchangeable.

Irrespective of the extent to which the concept of tragedy is vulnerable to arbitrary interpretations, it is certain that what is missing from it is the resignation, reconciliation and tranquility which Tolstoy, with definitive conciseness, called vileness of the soul. For this reason alone, the tragic world view cannot be based on paradox, but at least on a single, perhaps hidden, unequivocalness on which a person cannot only bet, but in point of fact stake his life.

The question however is where the stress lies. Is it on the fact that one needs values that point beyond one, regardless of whether one such exists or not, or that there *exists* something on which it is worth staking one's life, and *there is* someone to do this, there exist those who will do this? What should and, ultimately, what can this value which points beyond us be? Goldmann's reasoning shows close connection with Pascal's when it turns its attention to *what*, as he sees it, *people* need, and compared with this it is of secondary importance whether or not what they need possesses an objective basis.¹¹

UNEQUIVOCALNESS—IN THE PRESENT

Goldmann follows tradition when he raises the future to the rank of unequivocalness. Yet I think that the future, *exclusively*, cannot provide unequivocalness. There can be no responsibility for the future; in any case it neither "arrives", nor "will be", but it is we who make something of it, but this means invariably crossing deeds which lead to a historical origin—and not to "triumph", which would mean the absolute synchrony of goals and historical achievement.

The future itself cannot constitute an unequivocalness, for one reason because "Menschen ist Gegenwärtiges lieb.", as Hölder-

lin put it.¹² Essentially this thought is developed further by Walter Benjamin when he states the simple truth that “Glück, das Neid in uns erwecken könnte, gibt es nur in der Luft, die wir geatmet haben, mit Menschen, zu denen wir hätten reden, mit Frauen, die sich uns hätten geben können.”¹³ This is why we do not yearn for a different age even when we sometimes delude ourselves with this. This is a web more powerful and irrecoverable than language—one that even silence cannot loosen.

In any case, *ēthos* cannot exist independently of empirical individuals even if the concrete stake is precisely their indignation. *Ethos* can and does feed on tradition, it can exist drawing upon an imaginary past for energy, but if it drifts past the living, if it does not even communicate with them, its existence is not real.

“I was born, mingled and stood out . . .”¹⁴ writes Attila József. His “standing out” was never an aristocratic isolation not only because he had *at one time* mingled but because he mingled again and again, one could say *re-mingled*—including his last poems. The two thousand million people who bound him and who existed in the present for him is the same humanity the entirety of which fitted into his palm. This is why he was able—as long as he had the strength and even beyond that—“hold their world to the light”.

Unequivocalness requires a mind “which to adjust points to itself”. Yet, are we not witnessing precisely here the poetic admission that he is giving himself up?

“I won’t hold their world
to the light
like a doctor
examining a tube;
I’ll give in to abandon . . .”*

*Flora. Transl. by Christine Molinari.

In this stanza the poet presents himself as someone who is no longer able to continue that which is his job, as someone who is preparing to put down the glass dish in which there was room for the entirety of two thousand million people and in which the latter could be investigated. But at this moment, interrupting as it were the imminent gesture of capitulation, the gesture is instantly revoked. It is revoked by the fact that the poet—almost in the way in which the top student recites his homework—lists, as it were, the fundamental slogans of the working-class movement. We can ask, we could ask: whence in this late Attila József poem the flood of almost commonplace slogans of the movement? Whence, precisely here, where the “I give myself up at your mercy” has been said?

I think the poet takes stock, almost with the humility of the repentant, of—yes—the commonplaces of the movement and precisely those because he thereby reminds himself of unequivocal and *elemental* truths, as though he were doing penance for his sinful intention of resignation by saying the Lord's Prayer. Hence the homework recital character of this listing, which in the final lines already swings towards a new formulation. In the concluding part, in the after all of “an intellect is needed in great light”, the leading motive of the poet's *ēthos* emerges victorious. Forgetting and making forget, as it were, shedding the assertion “I no longer know”: underlining *the ēthos of undertaking*.

I think, therefore, that for *ēthos* there can exist an unequivocalness outside *ēthos*, one that is yet attached to it, which is simultaneously affirmation and negation. The affirmation of human consociation, which presupposes the negation of any class society tearing this apart. In this case I am thinking of a characteristic type of negation. Not the *direct* political negation of class society because this could lead to anarchist and utopian

behaviour as well, but *negation through ēthos* which questions all injustice positively, by its very existence.

So long as social inequalities dominate human relations moral law of general validity cannot be created. Or, even if they no longer dominate them, they are ineradicably present. Yet, "laws" of action are created for those who have a stake in the elimination of inequalities or for those who cannot bear it owing to a lack of direct interest.

Does, then, Marxism provide unequivocalness for ēthos—and does this not go further than the promise of communism?

I regard unequivocalness as a certitude operating as a principle which signifies a basis of judgement and determines action, but not as an obligatory goal—for others or for everyone. This is a certitude which does not exclude scepticism. I think *it is possible to seek and find metrios (mean value) between unequivocalness or certitude and scepticism*. This is in fact necessary, lest certitude turns into a rigid obsession and transforms into faith. For certitude is neither knowledge, nor faith. It may stem from knowledge, but is not synonymous with it even then. It is essentially on the basis of certitude that we say yes or no, accept or reject something. But does there exist, can we find, certitude in Marxism? Does it possess a thought which can be a certitude determining behaviour and life style? I think it does have an unequivocal and simple certitude of this kind, one based on knowledge, which is neither negation, nor postulation, but realization that implies practical demand and attitude and can become a principle determining life style. This simple realization can be described as follows: the dispossessedness and subordination of the creators of material affluence cannot be the order of the world but is a historical state that must and can be done away with, which signifies the basis of a host of contradictions and sufferings. It is difficult even to speak about another, ineradicable, paradox of human existence—if one such exists!—until we do not know how

deeply social antagonisms are rooted and whether or not there exists a boundary, and if so where human miseries of a different origin begin.

This unequivocalness could determine human life style and behaviour and because it uncovers the foundation of anonymous guilt it also defines the place of *ēthos*: *in opposition to all class society*. It defines, albeit does not guarantee, this place, and here, after all, we have a paradox: because those who live in it cannot negate class society with full consistency even if they take action against it—and this historical situation is not free of tragedy.

In reference to Pascal, Goldmann presents in his book the social situation which served as a basis for the tragic world view. On the other hand, as a 20th century person, he, as a Marxist, puts forth a standpoint in regard to the truth content and validity of the Pascalian problems. He does this without investigating how and to what extent he himself feels this way, precisely in this way, in the determining force of the reality of a given era, about either paradox or the problems of betting.

One who comments on his work almost two decades later cannot think that their attempt to solve the problem constitutes the ultimate truth.

Ethos stems from some unequivocalness and yet it cannot look only in *one* direction. Admittedly, it is rooted in the tradition of togetherness but this tradition is worth resurrecting only for empirical individuals, for the human administration of justice. The practical preservation of a tradition as the basis of *ēthos* cannot exempt anyone from at least trying to find a place amongst the empirical individuals with whom they live together, because whatever they do, they do for them too, even if they will not realize and acknowledge this.

Ethos, as we have seen, does have a meaning, albeit *autotelism* is part of its nature, which does not contradict this and which Marx, hardly by chance, links with the concept of human

affluence. This human affluence only deserves its name if it does not stand *in the service* of something—because this mode of justifying existence also mirrors the structure of class societies.

Ethos is the core and meaning of all human affluence. And ēthos is always possible, even if its chances of occurrence are determined.

Ethos creates a separate world about itself, an open world which for its creator will, in prehistory, inevitably become the environment of his solitude.

Ethos does not cling to the future because it transcends that which exists in the present as well. And therewith it also signifies—admittedly, a mostly tragic—victory; the victory of man's inner substantive forces over those conditions which do not adjust to ēthos.¹⁵

NOTES

¹ Georg von Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen. Essays*, E. Fleischel und Co., 1911, Berlin, p. 64.

² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 329–330.

⁴ Georg Lukács *Werke*, Frühschriften II. Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein, Luchterhand, 1968, Neiwied und Berlin, pp. 52, 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶ Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, New York, 1964, p. 195.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹¹ See, *ibid.*, p. 82.

¹² Hölderlins *Werke in zwei Bänden*. Vol. I, *Gedichte*, Volksverlag, Weimar, 1963, p. 243.

¹³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961, p. 268.

¹⁴ *Poems* by Attila József ed. by Anton N. Nyerges, Buffalo, New York, 1973, p. 164.

¹⁵ This is an attempt to approach the controversial between the relationship of historical progress and *ēthos*. It is however obvious that only further theoretical work can uncover the deeper interconnections of the problems touched upon here.

EPILOGUE ON THE ETHOS OF HUMAN RELATIONS

' "There is no
single personality
everybody possesses
several personalities"

Endre Ady

I described *ēthos* as doing justice. But is there anyone who does justice purely for the sake of justice, without this having anything to do with people—even if unnamable persons are involved? Can one think, make decisions and act in the name of togetherness if one has had no opportunity of experiencing it (or the lack of it)?! The answer must obviously be no.

Ethos is rooted in human relations, regardless of what they are like. In the realization or premonition that although man is a singular being, its existence in its sheer singularity is unbearable.

I am speaking of relations, including every form of conflict-ridden human contact—not therefore about love. When the young Marx speaks about the need for the other person as the greatest affluence, this, in his case, is not a synonym for love, since—despite its moving undertones—it does not carry a normative—ethical meaning. Indeed it cannot, for one cannot discuss what the needs of man should be in the imperative mood. Similarly, love cannot be discussed as an obligation or norm.

In *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason) Kant, too, rejects the possibility of love being a moral maxim, on the grounds that no one is capable of feeling it on command.¹ Admittedly, in another of his ethical works, Kant describes love as the maxim of goodwill thereby making it the duty of man², albeit here, too, he adds that this is not a matter of volition.

Naturally, contacts between people come about in every society; however, they do not necessarily create either the realization of togetherness, or *ēthos*. Without them, however, *ēthos* cannot be created.

As long as contacts are of an innate character, as they are in *primaeval* societies, special and distinctive attraction aimed at individuals does not appear, only in the form of sympathy, which, in all probability, is entirely ancient.

Love mythologies and love as a norm appear where the *natural* bonds of human togetherness begin to break up. The need for the other person is *engendered by the want*. And, like needs in general, people become aware of this when its satiation runs into difficulties. As long as the community of blood, language and customs exists, there is not—there cannot be—a trace of the love of others as a norm, but neither would it have any meaning. It appears—most obviously at the emergence of Christianity—where human isolation begins, but where traditions are still capable, albeit in a radically transformed form, to create a counterforce.

Max Weber writes that in Jewish religion the relationship between Jehovah and Israel never meant a love-*community* as well. Faith, not love, was the predominant requirement.³

The demand for love enters in the intermundium created by isolation, and, albeit exceptionally, this is what happens to the reality of love as well. For what we call the reality of love must probably possess the attribute that it is independent of the innate nature of the relations, or dissociates itself from it, for it transforms the other person into the *chosen* object of its need, and transforms the bond into a need which, so long as it had *originally* existed, did not provide scope for any kind of sovereignty. We cannot even say of this bond that it had been a constrained one—nobody had experienced it as such because people were born into it and it was available to them just like the air they breathed.

The idea of love as it appears in early Christianity is, of necessity, accompanied by the requirement of the repudiation of the ties of blood; another new phenomenon is the human-like love towards God, as, for instance, no such emotion was attached to Zeus, just as the cult of Apollo did not carry a similar content either.

Loving, which is probably a late phenomenon of human history, is not the same as *ēthos*. But without its existence—even lacking its object—or without the abstract ability to love there is no *ēthos*.

Love—when it does come about—breaks the innate character of togetherness, thereby repressing the natural limitations of human relations. Amid the conditions of loving the “radical-human”, rather than *ēthos* is created, the former eventually manifested in the latter. That people, on a mass scale, exercised and developed this ability of theirs in their feelings towards their transcendent, albeit human-shaped Gods, does not make any difference.

The cult of abstract man and that of love emerged among whom, according to Paul, there are neither Greeks, nor slaves, nor freemen, neither men, nor women, but “they are all one”, on the pedestal of abstract equality. Naturally, this cult cannot, in practice, be extended to the “neighbour”, but creates man’s characteristically new cultic ability to love, which had been missing from the previous religions.

Dionysus could be admired, or loved rapturously, Apollo could be feared and respected—but only Jesus, who showed his tortured body, could be loved, only he who became human-like precisely in his suffering, a suffering that reached his body and was indisputably human suffering for this very reason; only Jesus, who called for God in his desperate loneliness.

If people preserve the infinite multitude of carved and painted images of Christ’s body along almost unpassable roads, in barely

habitable homes, they thereby leave traces behind them so as, having eventually found their way back to tradition, to re-create it in their earthly conditions.

Love has been a norm, or can be a norm, since natural togetherness *is lacking*.

Love commands and love mythologies are born where and when the togetherness of people breaks explosively. This is why Christian texts, as soon as they speak of love, are imbued with the *pathos of want*, guiding that which does not find a place in earthly communications ultimately to the love of God, still more so, to the love of Jesus.

Ethos and human contacts are related in a way that, without the experiencing of human togetherness forced underground, without the corroboration of historical tradition, man would be incapable of acting in accordance with its unwritten laws.

But this is true vice versa as well: the homelessness of *ēthos* is connected with the withering away of people's ability to establish contact—with the reification of relations. The point of departure of this reduction process is that people no longer want to and are no longer able to know each other, without which contacts, communications no longer signify a real bridging of distances.

Hölderlin is right when he complains that we call each other by the name, but we often do this just casually: "wie die Menschen sich nennen, / Als kannten sie sich."⁴

Why do we not know who the other person is? The basis of this awkward phenomenon is obviously not that it is difficult or perhaps impossible to know entirely. We can hardly blame this on our difficulties of getting to know each other, on the fact that calling by the name for the most part covers desparately little, one-sided and distorted knowledge, which either makes contacts impossible or fundamentally distorts them.

We cannot seek the cause of the serious and almost permanent disruptions of contact in the fact that "we are complex"—this

would be too simple an explanation. Or else this kind of complexity is itself only a consequence. It is far more likely that at the root of the phenomenon lies that cruel order of—or, rather, the disintegration of order—contacts where people rather than sphinxes set riddles for each other and, as in the myths, woe betide him who does not know that he is faced with sphinxes and does not move among the others with the degree of circumspection this requires.

The order of relations—which can only be based on the fact that people know who the other person is—was historically disintegrated together with the communities, and to the extent as particularization intensified.

In their relations to each other people assume a ciphered form. The parties who enter into relations of exchange—even though they are not exchanging goods in the strict sense of the word—do not, understandably, know who the other person is and do not even want to know, not having any actual need whatever for this. The more contacts are shaped—albeit mostly unconsciously—in the image and similarity of the exchange relation, the greater the likelihood becomes of the awareness, as well as the need for and capability of awareness of the other. Searching looks are not after the being of the other person, for that, in its own entirety, possesses no relevance, the curiosity of the eyes is, instead, motivated by narrowly and dismally pragmatic goals. What they seek in the other is that which is dangerous to them, that, therefore, which they must ward off and that which can be used. Accordingly, it is inasmuch and only inasmuch that this affects or can affect those who enter into quasi-contact with each other.

This is how people, in the social sense, begin to suffer from tunnel vision which, incidentally, is an eye disorder, who only search for and see that which can be seen through the mouth of the pipe shaped by their interests. Although there are pipes with

broader and narrower mouths, this essentially makes no difference at all.

As the subjects of an observation of this kind, people do not want—for they cannot want—that their being should be easily cognizable to others because this could mean being put at the mercy of others.

Admittedly, in a certain sense naked interest sharpens the eye, but precisely such looks compel people to hide—at least those who still have something to hide. This is why Simmel is right, albeit only in this bourgeois sense, when he describes full familiarity as danger and the secret as an internal private property.⁵

Thus, behind the banal admonition that “one must know how to handle people, one must know them in order to be able to *deal* with them” usually lies the warning that one must know how to *see through* them. This includes the usually justified and yet still inhuman suspicion that one must look through artificial and thick curtains, guises. It is perhaps because of this that Kierkegaard thinks that the lack of transparency is the original sin itself. “. . . das ethische Individuum sich selbst durchsichtig ist”—he writes.⁶

It is not certain that Thomas Mann is right when in *Joseph and his Brethren* he writes that even from the earliest times people saw through each other *painfully*, it is however certainly true that whenever the human eye is forced to resort to this *probing* look the knowledge of others thus attained, seeing through, does indeed cause pain. Unless an “independent” and passionate schemer or misanthrope is involved, or generally speaking, a person whose eyes have deteriorated into an insensitive, if precisely working, *sense organ instrument*, in a certain sense “recovering” the sharpness of the eagle’s sight.

A typical source of the serious disruptions of communication is revealed unmistakably by the commonplace according to

which "one must know whom one is dealing with". The position of confrontation, or indeed the pose taken up by fencers, obviously not only makes it more difficult for us to know who the other person is, but makes this impossible. For, understandably, this situation prompts, indeed forces everyone to wear a helmet and a beaver on their face and to take care not to lower it before anyone in an unguarded moment. This is done either out of sheer defence, or precisely in order to cover up an intention to attack. On the other hand, this posture requires that those facing each other turn all their attention to the vulnerable points of the other party. All of this requires self-control, but for this purpose—self-control exercised for the "unnoticed" scrutinizing of others and for the unveiling of our own true being—is no longer in the least a human value.

If this talent is coupled with sharp sight with which people can discover and aim at the most vulnerable points of their opponents, then the success of such *private campaigns* can be taken for granted.

The most effective way of hiding and investigation in communication between isolated individuals, albeit one which, in regard to the personality, is not in the least unpunished, is when people hide behind the most stereotype forms and texts of behaviour. Even in its unnaturalness this continues to be "natural" so long as they think, with justification and reason, that the scrutinizing looks are not in search of them; and in the stereotypes they seek refuge from the investigative, or rather cross-questions.

Another reason why people locked into their own particularity do not know, do not *want* to know, who the other person is, is because this hinders the execution of their strategy; more than the necessary amount of knowledge is not only superfluous, but can, at the same time, be an impediment to influencing and utilization. For one reason because in the given case cruel, but at

least uninhibited utilization demands insensitivity, which in turn requires a lack of knowledge. For someone to be able to be cruel without the least trembling of his hands, without any flutter of his eyes, it is not enough to merely regard the other person as an instrument. In any case, to regard somebody as a "*mediating*" instrument is entirely different—in the sense of the German expression *Mittel*—than to use him as an instrument, a material means. It is only in the latter case that cruelty can be uninhibited in the literal meaning of the word, that is, transgressing every human obstacle. In other words, human relations cannot be split in a way that the other person is *either* the goal *or* the means, but utilization as a material instrument can and must be separated; the latter is indeed unequivocally inhuman. But he from whom we learn, for instance—in the broadest meaning of the word—is, at the same time, regardless of who he is and whatever he means to us, our instrument; the question is to what does it mediate.

If we do not know who the other is, we cannot even explain this by saying that looks judging each other are superficial. One must realize that this superficiality is *intentional* even in its *unintentionalness* and is therefore cruel in itself. It presupposes "summary" eyes—with the finality and irrevocability of summary sentences. Moreover, a person who is haughty enough to feel that he possesses the infallibly sharp sight required for this.

The look which judges on the basis of impression and usually forms a final image—i.e. a preliminary image that *acts like a prejudice*—reacts. It distorts and tarnishes the faces, for one reason because the compulsion of fear and hiding drives people deeper and deeper into the cavity of their individual existence.

Can people know each other?—People know each other by the name or without names so long as they communicate as members of a community and not as the "castle dwellers" of their own private interests. They can find out who the other person is not on the basis of merely being together, but on the basis of

essential, realistic collective activity, in everyday, practical interdependence.

Sheer coexistence does not in itself, even in love or quase-love relations, ensure the knowing of each other; social solitude inevitably infiltrates relations between men and women. As Danton says to Julia in Büchner's play:

"Wir wissen wenig voneinander. Wir sind Dickhäuter, wir strecken die Hände nacheinander aus, aber es ist vergebliche Mühe, wir reiben nur das grobe Leder aneinander ab,—wir sind sehr einsam." Because "...wir haben grobe Sinne. Einander kennen? Wir müßten uns die Schädeldecken aufbrechen und die Gedanken einander aus den Hirnfasern zerren."⁷

If a relationship does not signify mutual knowledge of each other, it cannot signify a source of joy either. Indeed, essentially, isolated individuals become the *illiterates of joy* in love as well because they lose their ability to this. Without this the intimacy which is the indispensable basis of direct personal freedom—freedom from the general regulatedness of behaviour—and the disappearance of the fear of perpetual misunderstandings, cannot come about. But more is involved here than the exceptional familiarity with each other which is possible in love. A person finds joy in *everything* that is familiar, and naturally even more so in another living being.

In the Old Testament the Lord says to Moses: "This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name."⁸

The unhabitableness of the bourgeois world cannot be entirely understood without the distorting and torturous effects of the speech which assumes the form of allegorical communication and riddles. Even those who make the world what it is feel awkward in it, as do those agonizing in the web of the suspicion or total lack of interests on the part of others—deprived of the indispensable joy of the mutual knowledge of each other.

Calling by the name, knowing someone by name is good so long as we really know who the other person is—unless we have forgotten what it means to know this. To know each other at a certain level is a *necessity*: the precondition of the basic communication between people. This is why we form an image of people for ourselves, which, for the most part, means that in concrete situations we should be able to calculate in advance our own optimum behaviour. And we do this in order to calculate our own optimum behaviour in advance. As Brecht writes, we create essentially *final, complete* images, to which similar forms of behaviour belong.⁹ These are not observed, only imagined behaviours which, being only likely, can also be false. And such images can lead to false behaviours, all the more so, because the whole process is not a conscious one.

Naturally, from the observed forms of behaviour conclusions can be drawn as to the likely ones, but whether or not these will contain false ones largely depends on the forming of the image and on the person who forms it. People who want to know only that which is indispensable about the other in order to be able to “deal” with them, or worse, *to serve them a dirty trick*, will form an arbitrary and naturally negative picture simplified to the utmost. But there is another possibility! Brecht warns that people are not as completed as the images formed of them. For it is not enough to think how people would suppose *that the images must resemble our fellow people*, but it is also possible that *sooner or later they resemble the image, provided that it is not an ordinary one! For not only the image can and must be changed, but people themselves are changeable—considerably so—precisely by not holding an ordinary portrait.*

If, for instance, we love someone, then from their observed forms of behaviour and from the knowledge of their position we can derive forms of behaviour which for them—and not only for them!—can be satisfactory; the portrait can thus contain positive

proposals. In this case the likely forms of behaviour will be objectively desirable. Neither are these requirements illusory because such an image can become *productive*, can contain feasible proposals, and can transform those whom it mirrors. To form such an image—says Brecht—this is love (Solch ein Bildnis machen heisst lieben).¹⁰

Togetherness is not yet *ēthos* in this sense either, just as the ability to establish contact is not. Without it, however, *ēthos* cannot be born because, even in the deed of the loneliest human being, it is the negation of the alienness of others, the breaking down of boundaries. The manifestation of the fact that class society is not omnipotent is still less natural. This is how *ēthos* preserves the human essence, this is how it points beyond the boundaries of the present *in the present*, releasing life—from the chains of moral meagreness—do not ask for how long.

NOTES

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Verlag Reclam, Leipzig, 1978, p. 102.

² *Immanuel Kants Werke*, Vol. VII., *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, Verlag bei Bruno Cassirer, Berlin, 1916, p. 211.

³ Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Vol. III., Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1923, p. 333.

⁴ Cf. 12, Chapter III, p. 137.

⁵ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie*, Duncker und Humblot, Berlin, 1958, pp. 264—266.

⁶ Sören Kierkegaard, *Gesammelte Werke*, 2. und 3. Abt., *Entweder/oder*, Vol. II, E. Diedericks Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1957, p. 275.

⁷ *Georg Büchners Werke und Briefe*, Insel Verlag, Leipzig, 1949, p. 9.

⁸ *The Holy Bible* (The Second Book of Moses, 33:17).

⁹ Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften von Politik und Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp Verlag 1967, pp. 168, 169.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.





Éva Ancsel
The Silence
of History

Like any other metaphor, the metaphor hidden in the title of this book is none other than an indication and, at the same time, an exposure of the insurmountable fallibility in our understanding of the world. One expresses oneself in metaphors in order to conceal one's embarrassment in connection with what one cannot quite fully grasp, of which one has only an inkling, since it is not accommodated to a life-size idea and passion, as indeed world history for the time being certainly is.

It is not its quietude that is the subject of discussion, since that is non-existent. Possessing neither language nor grammar, its silence is clamorous. Obviously, therefore, we must articulate its alarming cacophony—after all, it is of our own making—and hope that we can tame it somewhat with our familiar concepts of human dimensions.

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