

Etika

ETIKA KAIP PIRMOJI FILOSOFIJA: SENAMADIŠKA AR ŠIUOLAIKIŠKA?

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Straipsnyje glaustai aptariama E. Levino etikos kaip pirmosios filosofijos samprata. Parodoma, kad pati etikos galimybė XX ir XXI amžių sandūroje yra kompromituojama teoriškai postmodernistinio mąstymo prielaidų, o praktiškai paties gyvenimo tragiškų įvykių. Nepaisant to, E. Levinas ne tik stengėsi pagrįsti etiško elgesio prasmingumą, bet etiškumo perspektyvoje performulavo pačios filosofijos pamatinį siekį. Jis atkreipė dėmesį į tai, kad iškiliasi filosofijos klasikais – Platonas, Descartes, Kantas – vienaip ar kitaip nurodė į etiškumą kaip į filosofavimą apibrėžiančią galutinę instanciją. Viena opiausių nūdienos žmogaus dvasinių problemų yra žmogaus autentiškumo problema. Logiškai šią problemą provokuoja garsioji Descartes'o ištara 'cogito ergo sum'. Veido fenomenologijoje atskleidamas etinių imperatyvų kilmę arba, jo paties žodžiais tariant, besiaiškindamas etikos prasmę, E. Levinas pagreičiui nurodo ir minėtos problemos sprendimo būdą. Santykiyje su Kitu užsimezganti atsakomybė, besiskleidžianti žinomais etiniais imperatyvais, daro žmogų ypatingą, nes šiame subjektyvybės mazge žmogus yra nepakeičiamas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: protas, laisvė, būtis, autentiškumas, gėris.

Gal ir keista būtų kalbėti apie praeito šimtmečio pabaigos filosofo šiuolaikiškumą. Vien laikmetis, rodytųsi, jam jau garantuoja šiuolaikiškumą, kurį dar neapibrėžtai būtų galima traktuoti kaip žengimą koja kojon su laikmečiu. O kas gi filosofą daro nūdienišką? Į ką jis turėtų lygiuotis, kad būtų savojo laikmečio mąstytojas? Ortega y Gasetas, matyt, pasakytų, kad filosofas turėtų žinoti ir byloti laikmečio temą. O kas gi galėtų būti nūdienos laiko tema?

Postmodernistai vienu balsu išvardytą daugybę dalykų: fragmentiškumas, epizodiškumas, neapibrėžtumas, pliuralistiškumas, aporiškumas ir t. t. Ir visi tie nūdienos (ne)apibrėžtumai, regis, niekaip nesiderintų su tradicine etikos kaip žmogaus elgesį normuojančių taisyklių rinkinio samprata. Ne itin su tradicine etikos samprata rezonuotų ir pati nūdienos žmogaus elgsena, kuri kartais jau peržengia bet kokias proto ribas. Ar dar galima kaip nors

pagrįsti ir pateisinti, pavyzdžiui, 2004 m. rugsėjo 11 d. įvykius Niujorke ar kiek vėlesnes vaikų žudynes Beslane? Ir ar ne paikai atrodytų tokiose aplinkybėse etiška nuostata, reikalaujanti atsukti kitą veido pusę dar vienam antausiui? Ar bėra prasmės žaisti etikos „žaidimą“ su tokio „žaidimo“ taisykles atvirai ignoruojančiais žaidėjais? Ar taisyklių nesilaikymas neatpalaiduoja tokiai pat nuostatai? O gal viską išlaisvinusioje postmodernybėje kaip tik būtų racionaliausia teroristų nuostata, numatanti žaidimą be taisyklių su tais, kurie dar paikai laikosi taisyklių? Šiame kontekste Levinas su savo etikos prasmės paieškomis, su savąja nežmoniška absoliučios atsakomybės samprata tikrai atrodytų senamadiškas. O juk Levinas tikrai žinojo etiką kompromituojančius dalykus, nes buvo žydas, ir labiausiai žmoniškumą sukompromitavęs praeito šimtmečio įvykis – Antrasis pasaulinis karas – jo tikrai neaplenkė. Ir vis dėlto Levinas pakylėtai kalba apie Kito akivaizdoje susimezganti subjektyvybės mazgą – atsakomybę už Kitą, prasismelkiančią iki atsakomybės už visą žmoniją. Tokią atsakomybę demonstravo Kristus, apie tokią kalbėjo Dostojevskis ir teoriškai tokią atsakomybę galima išmąstyti, t. y. tokios atsakomybės samprata iš principo yra galima. Bet taip pat teoriškai nesunku išmąstyti, kad tokios atsakomybės iš tikro kaip ir nėra. Juk ji nėra ontologiškai būtina, t. y. bet kokios atsakomybės galima išvengti. Kokia galėtų būti atsakomybė, jei, anot Nyčės, Dievas miręs? Prieš ką atsakyti ir už ką, jei viskas ar beveik viskas galima? Jei vertybių, taigi ir prasmės, jau nėra, tai logiškai išplaukia dar Camus suformuluota išvada apie žmogaus laikyseną absurdo akivaizdoje – išgyventi kuo daugiau. Ir etiškumą tada gal dar būtų galima interpretuoti vien kaip ypatingų emocijų teikiančių žmogiškojo žaidimo atvejį, kurį galima rinktis greta kitų, tikintis vien to paties –

išgyventi kuo daugiau. Tačiau gyventi vien kiekybės chaosu žmogus negali. Jei ir gali, ir gyvena, tai kai kam to vis maža. Juk podekartinis žmogus jau išdidžiai taria: *ogito, ergo sum*, t. y. veikia ir kalba pirmuoju asmeniu, ir jo „aš“ vienaskaita bent jau formaliai jį įpareigoja siekti būti vieninteliu ir ypatingu. Todėl, kasdienio gyvenimo pasmerktas daugybei vaidmenų ir jau jam pačiam akivaizdžiai suvokiamam teatrališkumui, žmogus ilgisi tikrumo, t. y. vienintelio tikro vaidmens, kuriuo galėtų gal net patikėt nesant vien vaidmeniu. Šios autentiškumo vilties, šio noro turėti savo uostą pasaulyje ir galimybę nuleisti jame prasmės inkarą nenumalšina net iš pažiūros toks patrauklus išgyvenimų kiekybės užmojis. Nenumaldo šios vilties savo pesimistiškąja išvada – viskas žmogiška pernelyg žmogiška – viską peršviečiantis ir dėl to suprastinantis protas. Mat žmogus, pats dažniausiai to net nesuvokdamas, pasak Herakleito, vis linkęs gyvenime miegodamas pasišviesti mirtimi, t. y. kartkartėmis pabudęs savo laikinumo akivaizdoje stvertis prasmės gelbėjimo rato. Nes kas gi jam lieka, kai jį totaliai neigia mirtis, jei ne gintis prasmės viltimi. Levinas jaučia šį žmogaus alkį ir mėgina nurodyti vietą, kur nūdienos žmogus dar gali tikėtis prasmės.

Levinas tartum nekreipia dėmesio į visas praeito šimtmečio antrosios pusės insinuacijas etikos atžvilgiu ir tarsi imasi gaivinti numirėlį. Ir ne šiaip gaivina, o kelia ant aukščiausio pjedestalo. Etika jam yra pirmoji filosofija arba metafizika. Taip pasakyti galėjo nebent graikai, tačiau jie dar nemokėjo taip kalbėti. Tačiau ar kita sako nūdienos žmogui garsioji Platono išlara *Valstybės* šeštojoje knygoje: „...pažiniems daiktams gėris suteikia pažinimą, buvimą ir esmę, nors pats gėris nėra būtis; reikšmingumu ir galia jis pranoksta ją“ (Platonas 1981: 240)? Matyt, tą patį sako, bet tik kita, antikvai specifine kalba. O Levinas – ar jis tik įsmeina

platoniską ištarą? Ar jis teatlieka hermeneutinį judesį – tik išskleidžia jau ten slypėjusį turinį? Ar duota dar kas nors pograikiškajai filosofijai, išskyrus pastabų gausinimą Platono filosofijos paraštėse? Ar tokia jau drastiška atrodytų A. Šliogerio taip dažnai kartojama frazė, kad tik graikai filosofavo? O paskesnieji? Tik mokėsi, interpretavo, hermeneutizavo ar jau kur kas blogiau, pametę kelią dėl kokio nors siauro takelio, pavyzdžiui, pozityvistinio takelio, vis iškraipydavo graikiškąjį mąstymą. Argi filosofija vis ne apie tą patį žmogiškąjį gyvenimą? Taigi, anot Levino, ar nereikėtų „suprasti filosofijos problemą kaip žmogaus prasmės problemą“ (Levinas 1994: 13)? O ir graikiškosios filosofijos eudaimonistinis siekis – argi jis nėra prasmingos žmogaus pilnatvės siekis? Ar kas nors kita rūpi paskesniems filosofijos klasikams? Jei net šiuolaikiniam mąstymui pamatus klojantis Descartes, kuriam tiesiogiai rūpėjo, rodytūsi, vien įtikrinti dviejų pažinimo alternatyvų išprovokuotoje abejonėje suspenduotą žinojimą, jei net jis veikiai savo samprotavimais atsiremia į Dievą kaip begalybę, argi tai neliudija filosofijos etinio pašaukimo? Juk ir čia filosofuojantis mąstymas konstatuoja savo priklausomybę nuo jį viršijančios esybės, kuri vėlgi yra etinė savo esme. O ar ką kita numato Kanto užmojis apriboti protą, taip paliekant vietos tikėjimui? Kitaip tariant, jei filosofija, besiaiškindama savo prigimtį ir paskirtį, veikiai ir galiausiai atsiremia į etinės prigimties dalykus, argi tai neliudija tos nepaprastai lakoniškos ir tiek pat talpios Levino frazės: etika yra pirmoji filosofija. Bet pamėginkime išskleisti šios lakoniškos tezės turinį. Pirmoji filosofija arba metafizika jau minėtų graikų palaiminimu reiškė ne ką kita, o filosofijai pamatinių dalykų teorinį apmąstymą, t. y. apmąstymą tų dalykų, kuriuos filosofija veikiai pasiekia ieškodama galutinių „priežasčių“. Net Aristotelis kalba

apie tuos dalykus kaip apie „priežastis“, nes antika dar mąsto šiapus tikėjimo, o todėl dar šiapus ontologijos ir aksiologijos, taigi teoriškai pasiekiamas esybes dar apmąsto su tikėjimo primestomis ontologinėmis ir vertybinėmis priemaišomis. Todėl net Aristoteliui ta instancija, kurią galiausiai pasiekia filosofuojantis teorinis mąstymas, yra tą mąstymą tematizuojanti ir išjudinanti galutinė „priežastis“ – „nejudantis variklis“, kurio prigimtis vėlgi yra gėris. Mąstymui jis yra tik „formų forma“ arba absoliuti forma, t. y. visiškai netematizuojamas dalykas, kurio atžvilgiu mąstymas tegali konstatuoti savo visišką teminę ir funkcinę priklausomybę. Ar ne apie tą patį, tik kita, jau mūsų amžiaus kalba šneka Levinas? Juk ir jo požiūriu mąstymą išjudina ir tematizuoja pačiam mąstymui netematizuojama „priežastis“ – veidas. Veidas steigia etinį savo esme santykį arba sakymą, o filosofijai teduota apmąstyti tik tai, kaip tas sakymas nutinka mąstyme, t. y. tik tai, kas pasakyta. Descartes’ui legalizavus *cogito ergo sum* formulę, žmogus jau ima abiem kojomis remtis ta formule numatomu vienaskaitiniu ego. Tai neišvengiamai pareikalauja peržiūrėti ligtolinio santykio su Dievu, arba gėriu, pobūdį. Kol žmogus viena koja rėmėsi į tikėjimą, o kita – į mąstymą, ir teikdamas prioritetą tikėjimui menkino savąjį aš, tol Dievas savo universalia ir dėl to anonimiška prigimtimi tarsi vertė žmogų išsižadėti individualumo. Individualumui pasidarius radikalia ir konstituciška žmogaus apibrėžtimi, neišvengiamai turėjo keistis žmogaus santykis su Dievu. Kadangi Dievas savo prigimties keisti negali, tai santykį su juo individualumo siekiantis žmogus turi įtarpinti sau gimininga esybe, t. y. tokiu pat individualiu žmogumi. O jau tada Dievas tarsi atsiduria šalia žmogiško santykio, ir kai kurie filosofai ryžosi padaryti išvadą, kad ir apskritai nuošalėje. Teisę į pilnakraujį gyvenimą atgavęs

žmogus iš pradžių tarsi atkeršija Dievui už tai, kad šis dėl savo anemiškos prigimties taip ilgai vertė žmogų bjaurėtis kūnu ir kasdieniu gyvenimu, o todėl išstremia Dievą iš savo gyvenimo. Tačiau žmogišką santykį reabilituojantys ir giliau žvelgiantys filosofai randa Dievui deramą vietą anapus tarpžmogiško santykio: Dievas lieka tą santykį normuojančia galia, o jo žmogiškasis įvaizdis tampa ženklų, primenančiu žmogui žmoniškumo misiją. Mat kasdienis gyvenimas vis perša mintį, kad žmogus žmogui yra tarsi vilkas, o Dievo įvaizdis vis primena – žmogus yra žmogui. Tai į tą įvaizdį reikia reisykiais pakelti akis, tarsi pasitikrinant, ar aš vis dar žmoniškas savo artimui. O ir savąjį gerumą – žmoniškumą – tada jau galima skirti vien artimui – Kitam, kuris širdyje yra vargšas ir reikalingas tavo rūpesčio. Žmogus yra reikalingas vien žmogui, o ne Dievui ar kokiam stabui. Tik stabai išgyvena saulėlydį, tačiau ne tai, ką jie liudija. Visos revoliucijos savo įkarštyje griauna senus paminklus ir taip pat entuziastingai stato naujus, tačiau atvėsus revoliucijos įtūžiui, vieni ir kiti paminklai jau stovi greta ir liudija žmogaus dvasios polėkį. Levinas tarsi reabilituoja nūdienos žmogui tuos be galo reikšmingus dalykus, kurių kai kurie filosofai vos nepradangino kartu su žmogaus pasitikėjimo nustojusiais stabais. Mat jį išlaisvinusiu protu pernelyg įtikėjęs žmogus, tarsi užsidaro protingoje būtyje ir esmėje. O būtyje viskas yra protu aprėpta, nusavinta, o todėl bent jau iš principo įvaldoma ir sava. Čia žmogus jaučiasi saugiai, jaukiai, taigi – namie. Todėl jis jau ir nebenori suprasti ir pripažinti, kad yra dar šis tas ir netgi reikšmingesnio anapus, nes jis nenori prarasti, kaip jam rodosi, taip nelengvai išsikovotos laisvės. Tačiau dar Paskalis labai poetiškai kalbėjo, kad širdis turi savo protą, kurio protas nepajėgus suprasti. O jau visiškai nedviprasmiškai apie tą širdies protą prabyla M. Buberis, atskirdamas protui

taip pažįstamą, t. y. atpažįstamą kaip savą, *aš-tai* ir tik negatyviai iš proto pozicijų apibrėžiamą *aš-tu* bei nurodydamas ir pabrėždamas to netematizuojamo *aš-tu* – individualaus autentiškumo galimybę žadančio santykio – viršenybę buhalteriskai tvarkingo *aš-tai* atžvilgiu. O Levinas patikslina prieigą prie tos esybės, atkreipdamas dėmesį į tai, kas visada buvo tarsi šešėlyje ir likdavo nepastebima pernelyg į save įsigilinusiam ir tik sau giminingų dalykų ieškančiam protui. Juk neišreikšta pažinimo prielaida yra manyti, kad tai, ko siekiama pažinti, turi būti protinga. Kaip čia neprisiminti Hegelio, kuris šią proto nuostatą tiesiog suabsoliutino: viskas protinga, kas tikra, ir viskas tikra, kas protinga. Šitai protas neišvengiamai save hermetizuoja, arba, kaip pasakytų Levinas, totalizuoja ir darosi aklas ir kurčias tam, kas nemažtoma. Pažintiniu požiūriu ši nuostata labai optimistiška, nes teikia viltį aprėpti ir be nuosėdų sugerti visą pasaulį. Tačiau ši viltis kartkartėmis subliūkšta, kai protas susiduria su netotalizuojamais dalykais, pavyzdžiui, kai protu besivadovaujantis „individas neįveikia mirties baimės ir nesusitaiko su ypatinga savo lemtimi“ (Levinas 1994: 76). Proto ribotumą jautė ir nepasidrovėjo konstatuoti jau ir kai kurie minėti klasikai. O Levinas ne tik nepasidrovė, bet sukritikuoja protą bene radikaliausiai ir adekvačiausiai po Kanto. Ir ne tik sukritikuoja, bet neišsižadėdamas teorinio mąstymo požiūrio sugeba išsamiai aptarti ir tai, apie ką po radiklios proto kritikos net Wittgeinsteinas patartų tylėti. Levino veido filosofija, nurodanti į etinio savo prigimtimi žmogiško santykio autonomiškumą ir prioritetiškumą teorinio mąstymo atžvilgiu, yra būdas atverti protingam, perfrazuojant Nietzsche, pernelyg, t. y. iki kvailumo, protingam neregiumi įžvalgą anapus regėjimo, t. y. anapus vien mažtosios būties ir esmės. Kito veidas išmuša žmogų iš

saugaus proto balno, nes veidas prašo, klausia, verčia atsiliepti ir veikia atsakyti. Pro proto uždangą prasprūsta etinis reikalavimas, ir žmogaus pečius užgula atsakomybė. Apie šios atsakomybės mastą net neįtaria totalizuojantis nūdienos žmogus, kuris kartais, patikėjęs savojo proto visagalybe, nejučia ima taikytis į Dievo vietą. O juk Dievas tai ir dar nežmoniška atsakomybė. Kaip galima taikytis į Dievo vietą, nebūnant nežmoniškai žmoniškam? Tačiau net tas, kuris nesitaiko į Dievo vietą, negali išvengti tos nežmoniškos atsakomybės, nes etinis pašaukimas užgula kiekvieno žmogaus pečius. Jei mes nebetikim ir nebepasitikim Dievu, tai kuo tada belieka pasitikėti, jei ne savimi pačiais? Bet tada Dievo reikalas virsta žmonių reikalu. Ir kas iš mūsų turi atsiliepti? Kas, jei ne aš, kalbantis ir veikiantis pirmuoju asmeniu? Ir kiek aš turiu užsikrauti ant savo gležnų pečių? Kiek, jei ne viską? Ar gniuždo mane tokia atsakomybė? Ar aukština? Niekas man negali atsakyti. Tik aš, nes esu vienintelis ir nepakeičiamas. Levinas atskleidžia anapus būties ir esmės slypinčią atsakomybę, kuri bekraščiamame postmodernizmo informacijos sraute dreifuojančiam nūdienos žmogui teikia individualumo ir autentiškumo

viltį. Susitikdamas kitą žmogų, esi užklašiamas ir priverstas atsiliepti, o atsiliepdamas jau ir atsakyti. Akistatoje su veidu pasirodančios atsakomybės nepajėgus suprasti kasdienis protas, nes ši atsakomybė neartikuliuojama pagal to proto principą „aš tau, tu man“. Mat tai yra atsakomybė, kuri nesirenkama, bet kuri pasirenka žmogų ir kuri kaip tik dėl to gali jam pasidaryti tikru inkaru pasaulyje; inkaru, kurio jis negali pakelti kada panorėjęs, kaip kad jam įprasta proto sferoje. Tačiau ši proto negalia virsta žmogaus triumfu, nes žmogus tik taip gali neatšaukiamai apsibrėžti pasaulyje ir tapti ypatingas. Juk pats žmogus yra atsakingas. Sunki ta našta, nežmoniškai sunki, tačiau tuo pat metu ir saldi jos žadama autentiškumo garantija. Gal ir paburnoja motina ant jai rūpestį keliančio vaiko, gal net kartais pasibaisėja suvokdama, kad visam gyvenimui yra tapusi įkaitu to, kuris visiškai negyvena taip, kaip jai norėtusi. Bet susvyravus tam neatšaukiamam ryšiui, ar kartais jai neišsprūsta nevalingai keisti žodžiai: kam aš būčiau, jei tavęs vaike nebūtų. Protas to nesupranta, bet širdžiai tai tikra, nes pirmoji filosofija yra etika, o ne ontologija.

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ETHICS AS THE FIRST PHILOSOPHY: OUTDATED OR MODERN?

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Summary

The article deals with Emanuel Levinas' conception of ethics as the first philosophy. It is shown that the very possibility of ethics is compromised both theoretically by presuppositions of postmodern thinking and practically by tragic events of life itself. Regardless of that, Levinas not only substantiated the meaningfulness of ethical conduct, but also reformulated the fundamental goals of philosophy in the ethical perspective. He paid due regard to the fact that the most outstanding classical philosophers – Plato, Descartes, Kant – in one or another way indicated ethical matters as fundamental instances that constituted philosophy. The problem of the uniqueness of a person is one of

the fundamental spiritual problems faced by man nowadays. The problem is logically presumed by the famous Cartesian formula 'cogito ergo sum' which substantiates ego as a thinking thing. Levinas revealed the origins of ethical imperatives in his phenomenology of Face at the same way presenting a solution of the problem mentioned above. The responsibility that emerges in relations with Other and reveals itself in the fundamental ethical imperatives makes a person unique, because a person is unsubstitutable in this knot of subjectivity.

Keywords: reason, freedom, being, authenticity, good.

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THE SUBLIME ACTION

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In the measure that we become intimate with persons, other animals, ecological systems, artworks, or buildings, we develop perceptual and conceptual sensitivity, logical acumen, breadth and depth of comprehension, and the capacity to distinguish the important from the trivial. The recognition of the importance does not derive from any justificatory procedure. Importance is intrinsic, it is perceived in a perception and feeling of scope, sway, and pathos of distance. Things and events reveal themselves as sublime when they demonstrate that before them man is not the measure of all things. Importance is not ascribed to things. It is given. Importance is descriptive rather than prescriptive category, contrary to some ethical theorists the followers of David Hume. We discover what we want to do only when we discover what we have to do because of the importance of our actions that awakens inclinations and goals that were latent in our character or awakens new desires. Kant is wrong to suppose that there is a pure free will that activates us, that something is not hypothetically but categorically imperative when it does not depend on a freely selected project or goal of the agent but is imposed as an imperative on our thought to formulate the universal and the necessary. We are not just surviving; we are devoted to, sacrifice ourselves to, repair, raise and produce what is important to us and what is important in itself. To have lived our life without ever having stood for something noble consigns us irremediably to a wretched evaluation of the life we have lived.

Keywords: *sublime, sublime action, importance, immediacy, freedom.*

1. The Sublime

Importance

In the measure that we become intimate with persons, other animals, ecological systems, artworks, or buildings, we develop perceptual and conceptual sensitivity, logical acumen, breadth and depth of comprehension, and the capacity to distinguish the important from the trivial. Understanding is all that.

Importance is one of those words which are clearer than any set of words suggested to paraphrase it or from which it could be deduced. Other such words are grand, noble, magnificent, sublime, transcendent in the Spanish sense.

Importance is not simply a term in a code or an abstract category. Everyone who acquired the concept of importance acquired it from experience with some human or other animal, ecological system, artwork, and building. Im-

portance is seen on the baobab tree, the Borobudur stupa, the condor soaring over the glaciers of the Andes, the fervor and incorruptibility of Steve Biko. To see them with perceptual and conceptual sensitivity, logical acumen, breadth and depth of comprehension is to see their importance. The recognition of their importance does not derive from any justificatory procedure. It does not derive from generic statements about the importance of human life, or the importance of forests for the chemical composition of the atmosphere.

Intrinsic Importance

Importance does not simply mean important to the speaker or user. To obtain a certain stamp may well be important to a stamp collector, but even he will not claim it is *important*, important *überhaupt*. Importance does not mean important to outside reality – as though the Louvre, the human species, or planet Earth were important to the universe.

We distinguish between what is important for me, and also what is important for an industry, an institution, a culture, or an ecosystem, from what is simply *important*, what whose importance is perceived in it, whose importance is intrinsic. It is important that Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* be rehearsed to perfection. An unnoticed act of honesty by a woman in an old folk's home is important.

There is grandeur in the size of the pyramids of Teotihuacán. For when one climbs to the top of them, experiencing one's own insignificance with all the effort in one's body, one sees how their low-rising forms correspond to the distant hills, such that they express not the will and ostentation of a human ruler but the immemorial presence of rock, sun, and moon. There is no grandeur in the great size of the palace of Charles V in the Alhambra,

whose square bulk brutally disrupts the harmony of the Nasrid palaces, terraces, and gardens, and snow-covered mountains behind.

There is dominion in the erratic lines and forms of a cliff, which demonstrate the boundless creativity of forms in mineral forces. There is sovereignty in the turbulent forces of a storm in the ocean, which demonstrate that the regular forms we see dominating, and that we use to dominate, forces are limited and perishable. There is something sublime in the pale white filament-roots of a mushroom which has hoisted up a slab of the sidewalk.

The sublimity of the sequoia forest shows itself in the skyward thrust of the trees which elevates our eyes and lifts us from all that is heavy and depressed; it shows itself further when we come to understand their immense age, their force that withstands all other forces – for nothing, not lightning which has struck them all and burnt out of the dead wood of their cores, not disease, not drought, nothing until men invented chain-saws, can kill a sequoia. The splendor of a hummingbird shows itself in the elegance of its form and the intricacy of its movements, in its incredible force – hummingbirds, fluttering their wings seventy times a second, have a muscular strength exceeding by far any other known organism – and in the extreme vivacity of their sensitivity, visibly seeing and tasting what our crude senses can only guess at.

Importance is perceived in a perception and feeling of scope and sway, in what Friedrich Nietzsche called the pathos of distance. Things which are important are things which exert their influence across a broad field of space and time. The Hagia Sofia in Istanbul is the place where the dimensions of the Byzantine world, its sense of the heights and depths of reality, its directives toward triumph and toward abjection, were first set up and can be seen

and grasped yet today. The great ruby-red rock Uluru commands the endless flat deserts of central Australia like the very heart of the continent. One person, the one he loves, illuminates with her appreciating, graceful, and exhilarating gaze everything that he sees and touches. Minute things that are frail and vulnerable are important in the measure that we catch sight of the unending emptiness of time about them. We envision the unending desolation of time deprived of a species of hummingbird in imminent danger of extinction. Before a frail wildflower in the forest we sense, with pathos, the immensity of forces about it that threaten it.

The Sublime

Things and events reveal themselves as sublime when they demonstrate that before them man is not the measure of all things. Martin Heidegger replaced a substantive account of things with a relational account; things, he said, do not have “properties,” that is, traits that belong to them; instead they have appropriatenesses – concrete ways they fit into or resist other things about them and fit into our projects. But the sublimity of things and events is recognized in the way they exceed concepts that measure their appropriateness to our projects. Their size, force, splendor, wild freedom, nobility make them insubordinate to the uses we may devise for them. “That’s not just timber – that’s a sequoia forest!” declares the utter disproportion between the concept which subordinates the trees to human uses and the perception of all their reality. “Hey put that broom down; that’s a hummingbird that got into the living room!”

Disagreement

But is there anything more subject to dispute than importance? The way these disputes are resolved is by knowledge of the thing to which

importance is attested. We broaden, deepen, enrich our knowledge of it.

– “You can’t do that! That’s a child!” – “A child? this brat, this gangster!” – “You can’t do that! She’s a human being!” – “Her? That witch! That wild animal! That kaffir!” The shopkeeper, beating up an adolescent thief, claims knowledge – of slum kids, of this kid. The social worker, in protesting, claims knowledge – of feelings and drives in this child that will not respond with the cowed obsequiousness the shopkeeper aims to produce with his beatings, and also of feelings and drives in this child which, just as in other children, in the shopkeeper’s own children, can be elicited by humane actions.

To argue for an end to witch-burnings, slavery, the oppression of gays and lesbians, we argue that the information that is broadcast about them is false and we seek to replace it with true. “Come to my schoolroom for an hour, and I will show you how Papuan kids can master mathematics and physics as well as Caucasian or Chinese children.” How do we argue for an end to the extermination of the most magnificent of all fish – sharks? We increase knowledge of them: “Humans are not a natural food of sharks. Fatal shark bites on humans on the beaches and reefs of Australia are less than one a year. Some species of sharks do eat seals. Sometimes sharks, who have poor eyesight, mistake surfers in wetsuits for seals. But when they take a bite, they spit it out and do not bite again.”

To convince people that the wetlands must be protected, we lead them to compare a geological and biological diversity that maintains itself and thrives with a laterite wasteland left after a few individuals got their short-term private gain. To convince people that the sequoia forests must be protected from loggers, we invite them to come see the awesome force of

these trees and see the outrageous disproportion between the grand reality of these trees and the grubby private gain the rich logger aims to get from putting his chain-saws to them.

Ascribed?

But isn't importance *ascribed* to things? Ordinary language analysis shows that importance is said to be ascribed when it is deemed that what is taken to be important is not really important. "He acts as though ingratiating the higher-ups is the most important thing in the world." "What importance she is attributing to a mere diploma!"

We recognize that these are not just faults of individuals; people may find themselves in situations in which virtually everything has only putative importance. They are wired onto the Internet, cellular phones, and computer games; the only access they have to the outside world is through the media which broadcasts only infotainment; the only friends they have are air-heads. They are driven by corporate managers desperately trying to outwit the competition and make their company survive, a company which is manufacturing Elvis Presley t-shirts. They live in a country which for a generation has devoted all its industry to a war for a cause no one any longer believes in.

Some ethical theorists, however, have come to think with David Hume that values cannot be derived from facts, and hence all importance is ascribed by agents to persons, other animal species, ecological systems, artworks and buildings which cannot strictly speaking be said to have importance. Importance then is not a theoretical but a practical category, prescriptive rather than descriptive.

This supposes that we have available a perception and a description of the surroundings in which we act and refrain from acting which is value-free. These ethical theorists assume

that such a description exists in the discourses of the various natural sciences. But the alleged pure facts formulated in chemistry, astronomy, or biology are constructed with inevitable elements of theory, and implicate theoretical values such as simplicity and scope, as well as predictability and technological usefulness. In addition, the environment as formulated by chemistry or biology is not that in which we act, and is not that in which a chemist or biologist acts when he drives his jeep down a path to try to locate some ore-bearing rocks or a wetlands. The notion of importance includes an original perception, a perception of importance in things, and is enriched by subsequent such perceptions.

Hume's project of separating all values from facts reduces all outside reality to merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly. "The mind in apprehending also experiences sensations which, properly speaking, are qualities of the mind alone," as Alfred North Whitehead explicated. "These sensations are projected by the mind so as to clothe appropriate bodies in external nature. Thus the bodies are perceived as with qualities which in reality do not belong to them, qualities which in fact are purely the offspring of the mind. Thus nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent, the nightingale for his song, and the sun for his radiance. The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellence of the human mind. Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless: merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly".¹

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 54.

The Given

But all that is given on the planet, the things that are sublime! What is not just the best on a continuous scale, but a level utterly above all the others of their kind, as well as incomparable with one another. The sequoias are not just another degree higher in the realm of forests. You can't just say, well I saw the virgin pine forests of the Canadian Rockies, so I got close to what the sequoias are, all I have to do is imagine another hundred or five hundred degrees. When one day you get to the sequoias, you see the unimaginable. And then incomparable with the sequoias the baobabs await you in Africa, the banyans in India!

Among the sacred places one immediately locates on this transcendent level are Rheims cathedral in France, the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the temples of Khajuraho in India, Teotihuacán in Mexico, and Borobudur in Java.

Anyone who has done it knows that it makes sense, if it is all you can manage, to save up for years and take off the only few days from work and responsibility for others you can in order to fly to France just to see the Mona Lisa and come back, to fly to Japan just to spend a morning in the Ryongi Zen sand garden in Kyoto, to fly to Peru just to spend, if that were all that was possible, a day in Machu Picchu.

There are transcendent encounters with living nature: the day you came upon a leopard, free, in the jungle in Sri Lanka, sprawled over the limb of a tree not ten feet over the ground, the leopard opening one eye when your feet rustled the leaves, and then, with lordly disdain, closed it again. The night when, seated in a small whaler over shallow waters with pure white sand thirty feet below illuminated by the moon, you watched the sharks pirouette in the transparent waters under you. The day you came upon, in a cactus plant in the mountains of Nicaragua, the

nest of a hummingbird woven of spider webs and containing one minuscule egg and one new-hatched hummingbird chick.

There are transcendent moments when fellow humans turn to us and give us access into the hitherto unsuspected nobility that surges in our species. When we hear the laughter of Guatemalan campesinos gathered about a juggler, like a rainbow arched over the desolate mountains. When we see the beggar share some of his crust of bread with a vagrant dog.

There really are, in Salvador de Bahia, capoeira fighters. There really are, in Bali, women of consummate grace. There really are, in the corridas of Mexico, Peru, and Spain, toreros of breathtaking artistry and flawless courage. There really are, in Ethiopia, Nuba women elegant as gazelles, bold as lionesses. There really are, in Niger, transvestites courtly as cobras. There really are, in the slums of São Paulo, adolescents with fiery eyes and flashing knives, proud and beautiful as bandit chiefs in India's Uttar Pradesh.

There are transcendent collective events. There is anger spreading through the streets of Port-au-Prince in Haiti, anger marking in black the unallowable, the intolerable, anger that casts itself from the first beyond all that can reasonably be expected or demanded. Anger – offered as the most precious gift of the disinherited to tourists and academics who have imprisoned their hearts through so many years of well-paid compromises and betrayals.

2. Actions

Our Action

What we call our action, in the intense sense, is not simply an adjustment to compensate for what passes and passes away – an inhalation that compensates for an exhalation, a stabilizing step forward that compensates for the de-

stabilizing of the gait, a day that brings a job, a day's work to be done equivalent to the day's work that was done. Our action rises upon an interruption, a break, of the continuity of operations, biological, physiological, and also laborious, that go on in us.

Its bound of energy comes from a cut in the continuity of skills and habits. Each moment of awakening is a return to youth, to the insolence, impetuosity, brashness of youth. In our action there is festivity, license, and puerile pleasure. There is an element of lubricity, of wickedness in the innocence of action.

Our action breaks with the past, with the morose succession of mortifications, subjugations, enslavements, those of childhood and of colonialism and capitalist exploitation, from which we rise up to stand as a man and as a woman. Our action breaks with the present and its future, to give the forces of our care and our protection to an ancient tree, a species of animal life endangered by industry and urbanization, an ancient sensibility surviving in an old Guatemalan town.

My action arises when I wake up to *what I have to do*. In the action the I awakens.

What Has to be Done

Our action is mobilized by the perception of something to be preserved, repaired, rescued, or brought about – including our own lives. What is important in our own lives. But also what is important of itself. The importance recognized in a person, other animal, inert object, or artwork directs our action, prohibits some actions, perhaps imposes non-action. To see that things and events are important is to recognize that it is important to see them, to safeguard, maintain, nurse, or rescue them, or to bring them about.

Their intrinsic ephemerality may be impor-

tant to them. One sees that it is important to let the old elephant, who has withdrawn from the herd and stopped eating and is patiently waiting for the end, die. At the stroke of midnight of Shrove Tuesday, it is important to leave in the street all the extravagant costumes which have taken months to conceive and create and in which one has so glamorously danced the samba in the Carnival of Rio. It is important, as Walt Whitman wrote, to greet everyone with passionate kisses of parting. One day we will see that it is important to let our own life expire.

The Appeals and Demands of Things

In what people do they respond to directives that are visible in things. For craftsmen there is a right way to make something and a right way to use each thing. Hanggliders learn from the winds and the thermals and from the materials the right way to make and to fly a hang glider, as the composer learns from the symphony emerging before him which are not yet the right notes.

Explorers of microcosms and macrocosms devote their minds to them like dancers to the score and calibrate their sense organs and manual skills to their instruments like performers to the keyboard and pedals of a cathedral organ or synthesizer. The more vast and baffling the problem – armed conflicts between peoples that have lasted for generations, global warming and the destruction of Earth's ozone shield, the formation of galaxies millions of light years from our own and in the first seconds of the cosmic Big Bang – the more there arise, exultant and proud, people who find in it a summons for their minds, their feelings, and their skills.

As for performers there are the right feelings to find for every turn in the score of the concerto and dance, there are the right feelings to find for an ancient ritual in a sacred

place, for the Colca Canyon, and for an endangered animal species, for condors and lemurs. Every sensualist knows that there is a right way to savor the wine and the perfumes of a tropical garden, a right way to move in the rain forest and see the moths dance and to watch the night come upon the mountain town.

The importance of earth, light, air, warmth for themselves, the immediacy of their oncoming to us, determines *what we have to do*. The glory of the light summons us to exotic spaces where we wander illuminating with delight things we will never possess or put to our uses. The light which floods our eyes when we awaken summons us to lose our egoism in it, summoning our eyes to become crystals radiating its warmth and delight back to it and to strangers. The night summons us to an ecstatic, nocturnal and impersonal, destiny.

Do we not find offensive the one who, when the landscapes fade out before the epiphany of the cosmic light, puts shades over his eyes so that he can read his papers or peer at the pale light of his computer screen; do we not turn away from the hubris of the one who persists in that hour to myopically fiddle with his implements and gear? We turn away, as from a disordered and distempered organism, from the one who pulls the blinds of his windows against the glory of high noon to crawl into his bed and cover his head with blankets, only to then offend the night with his fidgety agitations under the glare of incandescent wires. We avert our eyes, as from someone leprous, from the one who is rigid and cold in the midst of the languorous immensity of the summer. We quickly move out of earshot from the one who prattles shallowness under the vaults of the Hagia Sophia in whose stones the gravity of Byzantine glory has come to rest. Do we not avert our steps from the one whose ears are scabbed with a Walkman when the winter arrives tinkling in

on snowflakes, when the autumn leaves about the Silver Pavilion of Kyoto fall in frail music, when the down of white birds intones the skies over Madagascar? We shudder before the temerity of the one who stalks resolutely after his own prey through the day when the light and the green waves of springtime themselves are dancing. We flee from the contumacy of the one who looks with dry eyes and arid soul over his affairs when the spring rains return all things to their oceanic origins. Do we not smell violence and violation in the desiccating sarcasms of the one who holds on to his mast when the whole landscape streams, undulates, rushes into the dawns beyond dawn, the auro-*ra borealis* beyond every north or south pole?

The Universal and the Necessary

Immanuel Kant believed that all the cases where what I have to do is imposed can be identified with formal characteristics. They require action, but also thought. Thought finds itself under an imperative to conceive concepts coherently, with universal extension, and relate them consistently, in necessary laws. (In reality, our contemporary experience of thoughtfully representing the world theoretically in an ever growing multitude of scientific disciplines has revealed to us the need for regional concepts, radial concepts, statistical concepts and graphs.) But for Kant, conceptual thought would recognize, in what has to be done, traits that recur in an unending series of like situations. Thought then recognizes that situations that show certain general traits make necessary actions that have a certain general form.

But Kant illegitimately conflates the way we have to envision objects theoretically and the way I have to envision them practically. When I envision them practically, I envision them as things that have to be safeguarded,

secured, repaired, healed, or nourished in specific ways – or cleared away to give place to something more important. When I step back from the situation to deliberate about which action to undertake and how, I envision it not with my theoretical intellect only, but in the perspective of my position before them and my skills and resources.

Envisaging the situation in general terms may well suggest that the kind of action and the kind of implements that resolved a similar situation may work here. It may even determine a certain kind of action to be necessary: if this child has cholera, immediate rehydration is required. But ad hoc thinking is required to determine if this child has cholera and how the means of rehydration are to be acquired and administered. Effective action requires not simply abstracting and generalizing conceptualization, but perceptual and conceptual sensitivity, a flair for making sense of a situation at a glance, the capacity to distinguish the important from the incidental, perspicacity in detecting what has to be blocked, removed, or repaired, and skills in effectively managing the required resources and implements.

What I Have to Do

Of the range of things that can be done, *what has to be done* is dictated by the importance of the human, other animal or tree or ecological system, artwork, or building to be preserved, repaired, or rescued. Of the things that can be done now, what has to be done is dictated by the urgency of need. Ancient burial vaults that surface when I begin to plow this field dictate what has to be done now.

What makes what has to be done *what I have to do* is immediacy. I am the one who has the resources, and I am the one who is there. I am the one who came upon the open gas jet in

the empty building; I am the one who has a car who can bring the injured one to the hospital in time. Running as I do each day in the forest, I have the strength, which the old couple who stopped me do not have, to free the deer caught in the branches of a tree in the flooding river. This hitchhiker in Morocco is not clad for the night cold now descending, and I am the only car on the road. How often this element of chance determines what I have to do!

A dancer heads for the studio for the day's work, ignoring all the tasks and pleasures she could share with others and that solicit her on the way. In the studio *what I have to do today* is clear to her and undeniable. It is also clear that she has to be a dancer – not because she wants to get rich and famous, but because dance must exist and her body is made for dancing. Paul Gauguin abandoned his family in order to pursue his art. "I am moving next month to Fatu-iva, a still almost cannibalistic island in the Marquesas. There, I feel, completely uncivilized surroundings and total solitude will revive in me, before I die, a last spark of enthusiasm which will rekindle my imagination and bring my talent to its conclusion."

Everyone who is engaged in a work that is important knows the clear sense of *what I have to do* – a fireman in a city and a guard in a lookout in the Himalayan forest during the dry season, a retired person living by the sea where the sea birds are engulfed in an oil spill, an Aymara in Peru caring for the patch of land and pair of llamas given him by his father.

What I have to do is not determined only by what results can come from my skills and resources. I have to stay with a dying friend, though the doctors and nurses have done everything that can be done. I have to stand for a minute of silence during the burial of children killed by a gunman in another country. I have to grieve for the plundered forest.

Rational Action

A “rational action” can mean an action for which someone can supply a rational justification, or it can mean an action done for reasons – that is, the agent is driven by a desire to have beliefs he has supplied reasons for, and wants these beliefs to be the cause of his action.

When we review cases of practical necessity, however, we quickly see that practical necessity, which imposes *what I have to*, does not require the second kind of rational action, which may indeed be quite obstructive. Passion, not beliefs, dictates that this lovesick man in Haiti get to Souvenance, and it is my rented jeep he has stopped. To insert a reasoning between that imperative and my action is only to dally and hold up the urgency of what I have to do. This passion sovereignly demands that I cease elaborating beliefs and reasons for them behind my initiatives.

For someone, or myself later, to be able to supply a rational justification too may be pointless and even always falsify the imperative involved. It is the intrinsic importance of what had required action to conserve it, rescue it, or repair it that intruded with the imperative force of what I had to do. I come upon a cigarette smoldering in dry leaves in the sequoia forest. Someone, in cramps or panicking, is in danger of drowning, and I am the one who can swim. For someone later, or myself, to recast the situation as an action derived from principles falsifies it. The sequoia forest, this stranger in danger of drowning, are contingent realities and not principles, nor derived from further reasons². The sequoias came into existen-

² “In the ethical case, I do think, and I think it is warranted to think, that a person who has a sense of human brotherhood is better than a person who lacks a sense of human brotherhood. A person who is capable of thinking for himself about how to live is better than a person who

ce by random genetic mutation. Behind the birth of this stranger I could not find his existence programmed in the laws of nature, but only extremely improbable accidents. I could only find the chance encounter of that woman with that man – out of the two and a half billion men – on the planet, the happenstance that she pleased him and he her and that they disrobed and copulated, and then the fluke chance that of two hundred million spermatozoa repeatedly ejaculated into her vagina this one met with and got absorbed into this ovum, and, since the number of possible combinations of the human DNA molecule is ten to the 2,400,000,000th power, the odds that this stranger was conceived with the genetic makeup that makes him this individual was one out of ten to the 2,400,000,000th power.

Hypothetical and Categorical

What I want wakes me up to what I have to do. I have to collect wood and clean and skin the fish if I am to cook them. I have to buy lumber if I am to build this house. I have to work out these mathematical data if I am to know how much lumber I will have to buy. In working out this mathematics, I have to follow the rules for calculation.

But what I have to do may conflict with what my desires and even my needs induce me to do; it may postpone or interfere with what I want to do and with the urgency of my hunger and thirst. I wake up to the intrinsic importance of the reality in front of me which is in dan-

has lost or never developed the capacity to think for himself about how to live; but, whether the question be about single-case probability or about ethics, I don't *know how I know* these things. These are cases in which I find that I have to say: 'I have reached bedrock and this is where my spade is turned'." Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1987), p. 85.

ger or to the intrinsic importance of what needs me in order to exist. In Kant's terminology something is not hypothetically but categorically imperative when it does not depend on a freely selected project or goal of the agent. It is imposed, and imposed on *me*. Kant recognized as categorically imperative only the imperative thought finds on itself as soon as it thinks – to form coherent concepts and relate them consistently, an imperative to formulate the universal and the necessary. But are there not innumerable cases among our actions when *what I have to do* does not derive from my own projects? Strolling in the sequoia forest, I come upon a discarded, still smoldering, cigarette butt in the dry leaves. I am here, and what has to be done has to be done right away. But also *I must do it* – because I can.

“There's a child trapped in that burning building!” “The fire is spreading toward the sequoia forest!” “The promontory where the hotel chain is requesting a building permit is where the last of the Illini Indians starved to death!” These utterances are more compelling than any generic statement about duty for the sake of duty, the greatest good of the greatest number, or the imperative to perform only rational acts. These utterances give reasons that are more compelling than any reasons for these reasons one could adduce.

Wanting to Do What I Have to Do

Kant identified as categorically imperative the case where we find we have compelling and urgent reason to do something whatever we happen to want. For him then *what I have to do* is hypothetical when it depends on my inclinations, desires, and goals and categorical when it is disinterested and requires the suppression of my inclinations, desires, and goals.

Kant then supposes that there is a pure will

that activates us. When we say we are doing whatever we want, it is because our will has created inclinations and desires in us and set up goals. But whenever we do what we have to do, our will acts alone, and suppresses our inclinations, desires, and our own goals.

This is a false dichotomy. It is not our pure will that creates inclinations and desires to act in us; it is the importance of things we encounter that have to be protected, nurtured, or rescued. And if we not only recognize what we have to do, but do it, it is because the importance of what has to be preserved, repaired, or rescued fits into a broadened sense of our goals, and our action is energized by our own inclinations and desires.

What we want is not determined by a fiat of our free will. How often is what we imagine we want determined by training, habit, lack of imagination, or obscure and unconscious fears! How agitated, or how indolent, we are, without ever getting a sense of *what we want!* How much of what we do we do only to make the time pass! We do things to make the time pass until a friend comes, until we get sleepy enough to go to bed, to get through the summer, to fill up retirement – and find we never did anything we really wanted to do. Is it not that I discover what I want to do only when I discover what I have to do?

It is in conducting the diving expedition with all the knowledge and skill the piloting of the boat and the Scuba equipment require, and in ensuring that those on the expedition are reassured against mishaps and shown how to see the marvels of the ocean, that the divemaster finds that being a divemaster is what he really wants to do. A woman finds in her heart a song that is hers alone to sing, that the world has never heard, that if she does not sing it will never be heard. A man finds in the surface and depth of his body the excesses of a passion to

love, kisses and caresses to squander upon strangers, upon animals and hills and clouds, such as never before has been felt in the heat of the whirling universe, and that if he does not pour forth this passion and this love no organism ever will. It is in leaving overpaid private nursing for the pampered rich to care for the wounded and the famished in a refugee camp that a nurse finds that she is doing what she really wants to do.

Kant is also wrong to suppose that doing what we have to do involves a free will that suppresses our inclinations, desires, and goals. If we not only recognize what we have to do, but do it, it is because the importance of what has to be preserved, repaired, or rescued awakens inclinations, desires, and goals that were latent in that long-range orientation of our life which is what is called our character, or awakens new inclinations and desires in us.

If I recognize that I have to give a lift to this lovesick man in Port-au-Prince, this recognition comes from the passion his passion enkindles in me, from the inward vision cherishing a life sovereignty driven by passion, a vision which is stabilized as my character. The doctor on vacation who identifies himself when a child suffers an epileptic seizure does so because he wants to be a healer more than he wants to lie idly on the beach. The woman who wants nothing but to be kept in finery and leisure and who returns the wallet she has found does so not because her will is disconnected from her desires but because it is bound by fear of discovery or the long interiorized fear of parental and social blame.

We put only women and children on the lifeboats, and we stay on board as the Titanic sinks. Is that not because care for the weak and a sense of honor have long been integrated into our character? And because the courage of our mates strengthens us to subdue our ter-

ror? We refuse to lie, even to save our life. A captured guerilla does so to save his comrades and because he has consecrated his life to his cause. A arrested rapist does so out of disgust with his own act.

Of course a single mother whose welfare is cut off and who has to work in a minimart at minimum wage has to suppress her desire to raise her child so that he will not grow up in the streets. But she goes to work because she desires that her child at least have food to eat. A father in Palestine has compelling and urgent reason to abandon their home and flee to the wintry hills. He does so lest his family be massacred.

Freedom

From the importance of freedom from hunger and sickness, of freedom from tyrants and exploiters, a dominant tradition in Western thought had erected freedom itself as the supreme value sought in all human action! To find oneself not directed, not ordered from the outside would be the most spiritual state, and the condition for independent thought, artistic creation, personal work, and personal feelings. Yet thoughts are not produced by freely willing them; they occur to a thinker when they will. When a thought does come, a thinker follows when and where it leads, its exhilarated servant. A thinker, said Nietzsche, "is a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes, and dreams extraordinary things; who is struck by his own thoughts as from outside, as from above and below, as by *his* type of experiences and lightning bolts; who is perhaps himself a storm pregnant with new lightnings; a fatal human being around whom there are constantly rumblings and growlings, crevices, and uncanny doings."³ It never

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 230.

occurred to Beethoven to want to be free to compose or not compose the music he continued to compose long after he could no longer hear it. It is his craft to which the craftsman finds his resources and skills destined that he prizes supremely, not the freedom that allowed him to practice it. Someone who falls in love prizes this love supremely. To find oneself in love is to find oneself not free but captivated.

The Sublime

In much of what we have to do, we safeguard, repair, raise, and produce what we need just in order to live. We view in what we safeguard and nurture only the means for our own subsistence; we view in what we produce the anticipation of our needs as we conceive them. We view plants and other animals as food, as meat; we view cars as transportation and houses as shelters. It does happen that people think that just in order to live they need an exceptional amount of security, they need resources so vast that no contingency would leave them vulnerable, they need exceptional social status and celebrity to maintain their sense of their own reality: they view vast tracts of farmland, multi-dwelling high-rises and factories, and the resources of hundreds of people just as means for their own subsistence.

But in how much of what we do, we safeguard, repair, raise, and produce what we need for what is important in our lives! We are not just surviving; we are devoted to a lover or a child, we are working to support an invalid mother, we are working day and night to maintain a family farm or a health food restaurant in this community, we are studying medicine or music. This seventy-five-year-old man is still out on the street-corner winter and summer, to stop traffic and help schoolchildren cross

the street. His wife has filled the house with exotic plants, and spends immeasurably more time looking after them than at them for her own pleasure.

We labor, we exhaust our energies, we sacrifice ourselves to safeguard, repair, raise, and produce what is important in itself. The fathomless expanse of unpolluted skies, the wild beauty of exotic plants, the harmonious haven a farm is for domesticated and undomesticated animals and plants, the secret dreams of a child and his adventures in years ahead which we will never know, the absolute existence of a perfectly executed sonata by Bartok – for them we harness our energies, subjugate our egoist and hedonist inclinations, make all the resources of our minds and hearts their servant.

When we contemplate the Maya pyramids in the midst of the Yucatan rain forests, the great stupa of Borobudur, the monasteries of Lhasa, the Serengetti flourishing with giraffes and antelopes, the 40-foot-long sperm whales leaping from Antarctic waters, and the clear skies, the mighty forests, the cascading rivers, we already dedicate our efforts and our lives to them.

How strange the notion that the extraordinary is not required! Why do we say that heroic or very fine actions go beyond what is obligatory or demanded? That they may be actions that from an ethical point of view it would be agreeable or worthwhile or a good idea to do, without our being required to do them? That people may be greatly admired, or merely well thought of, for actions they would not be blamed for omitting?

We may well refrain from blame because we recognize the uselessness, indeed the harm, of inflicting guilt on the one who failed to do the extraordinary thing, or because we fear we too may fail when the time comes. Yet the death in hideously painful disease that may well

await us will require no less heroism than that of the guerrilla in battle or before the firing squad; the accompaniment of our dying lover or child may require of us the unimaginable strengths and resolve of those who go on rescue operations in glaciers or medical missions in refugee camps. And when the time for these deeds come, though all the others be silent and without reproach about us, we will know that the heroic had been obligatory for us⁴.

This reproach will be waiting on our lips one day – the day of our dying if not before – even if we have spent our whole lives ensuring that no extraordinary or grand demand was

ever put on us, that we could answer every situation with ordinary decency. To have lived our whole life doing only the comfortable and secure way what work we had done, having only put forth to a measured and prudent extent the powers and energies and feelings we had – this extends throughout our years an inner desolation that will become irremediable when old age irreversibly diminishes those powers and energies and feelings. To have lived our life without ever having stood for something exceptional, noble, consigns us irremediably to a wretched evaluation of the life we had live.

DIDUS ELGESYS

Alphonso Lingis

Santrauka

Susipažindami su žmonėmis, gyvūnais, ekologinėmis sistemomis, meno kūriniais ar pastatais, mes išsiugdomė perceptinį ir konceptualų jautrumą, loginį išvalgumą, aprėpties plotį ir gylį. Visa tai sukuria gebėjimą atskirti svarbius dalykus nuo trivialių. Svarbūs, reikšmingi dalykai yra tokie ne dėl mūsų požiūrio į

juos ar mūsų įrodymų, kad jie tokie, – jie reikšmingi savybingai, jų reikšmingumas atsiskleidžia užmojyje ir galioje, bekraštybės patose. Net akimirkos reikšmingumą mes suvokiame tik laiko begalybėje. Didingų daiktų ir įvykių akivaizdoje suvokiame, kad žmogus nėra visų daiktų matas. Didingumo negalime pri-

⁴“After spending fifteen years of my life working closely with these patients, I think them the most afflicted and yet noblest persons I have ever known. Whatever ‘awakenings’ have been able to hold out for them, their lives have still been shattered and irreparably broken. But I have found singularly little bitterness in all the years I have known them; instead, somehow, beyond explanation, an immense affirmation. There is an ultimate courage, approaching the heroic, in these patients, for they have been tried beyond belief, and yet they have survived. Nor have they survived as cripples, with the mentality of cripples, but as figures made great by their endurance through affliction, by being uncomplaining, and undaunted, and finally laughing; not succumbing to nihilism or despair, but maintaining an inexplicable affirmation of life. I have

learned from them that the body can be tortured far more than I thought possible – that there are some Hells known only to neurological patients, in the almost inconceivable depths of certain neurological disorders. I used to think of Hell as a place from which no one returned. My patients have taught me otherwise. Those who return are forever marked by the experience; they have known, they cannot forget, the ultimate depths. Yet the effect of the experience is to make them not only deep but, finally, childlike, innocent, and gay. This is incomprehensible unless one has oneself descended, if not into post-encephalitic depths, into some depths of one’s own.” Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* (London: Picador, 1991), p. 288–89.

skirti daiktams ar įvykiams, dažniausiai jis yra jiems jau duotas. Didingumo kategorija, skirtingai, negu mano Davido Hume'o sekėjai, yra daugiau deskriptyvi, o ne preskriptyvi. Tai, ką vadiname veikimu, iškyla suvokus, ką turime daryti siekdami kažko, kas yra reikšminga bei svarbu mums ar reikšminga savybingai. Šis suvokimas skleidžiasi tiesiogiai, todėl ne visuomet kreipiamas į pragmatišką rezultatą. Praktinės būtinybės atvejais aistra, o ne racija lemia mūsų veikimą. Mes suvokiame, ką norime daryti tik supratę, ką turime daryti dėl to, kas reikšminga, kas sužadina mūsų charakteryje naujus arba latentiskai tūnančius polinkius ir siekius. Kantas klysta

manydamas, kad esama kažkokios grynos mūsų veikimą aktyvinančios laisvos valios, kad kažkas yra ne hipotetiškai, bet kategoriškai imperatyvu, atsietu nuo veikiančiojo subjekto laisvai pasirinkto projekto ar siekių. Mes ne šiaip kovojame dėl išlikimo, mes esame atsidavę, aukojamės, keliaujame, taisome, gaminame tai, kas svarbu arba mums, arba savybingai. Jei niekada nesiektumėm to, kas kilnu, tauru, didinga, galiausiai tektų pripažinti, kad nu gyvenome nepataisomai apgailėtiną gyvenimą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: didingumas, didus elgesys, reikšmingumas, betarpiškumas, laisvė.

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