

The Embodied Encounter: The Aporias of the Concept of the Encounter in Józef Tischner's Philosophy



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Tischner began writing about the encounter in the late 1970s. He combined these early conceptions with Lévinas's philosophy of the face in *The Philosophy of Drama*. During his last years, influenced by Rosenzweig and Meister Eckhart, he reformulated the key elements of his original vision of the encounter, subordinating it to the religious category of the Good. I will endeavor to justify that Tischner's early texts encompass a vision of the encounter which is not only independent and original, but can also constitute a challenge for contemporary philosophy.

I call Tischner's vision the encounter embodied; by "embodiment" I mean to signify that those who meet are concrete people with lives and individual histories. These histories of personal victories and defeats are given in their faces. The I and Thou are not the making of the encounter, as Buber had it.¹ The Other does not

¹ Cf. M. Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. R.G. Smith, Scribner's, New York: 1958.

130 show the unfamiliar face of a stranger or widow, as in Lévinas. Even if it changes an individual's identity and his world of values, the embodied encounter remains an event that is part of the narrative of his life. The encounter takes place within dramatic time, but forms part of individual histories: encounters occur, transpire, and end.

THE CONCEPT OF THE EMBODIED ENCOUNTER IN TISCHNER'S EARLY WRITINGS

In the late 1970s Tischner began to describe the encounter between people.² For years on end this problem was the central point of his thought. His audiences understood the encounter in a romantic and naïve manner: an encounter was seen as the fulfillment of our dreams of true closeness and understanding, sought for in relationships full of blunders, fears, and misunderstandings. Moreover, the encounter radically changes people's lives; not only does it reveal the truth about them, but it allows people to save themselves from the evil of the world. This picture is a good match for Tischner's examples: Levin and Kitty's love at first sight, for instance.

Quite a different picture emerges, however, in studying "The Phenomenology of the Encounter" and "Thinking in Values" — Tischner's depictions are of a much darker tonality. Instead of stressing the marvel of mutual (re)cognition, these texts underscore that the backdrop of the encounter is possible tragedy. Evil may triumph over the good. The face unveiled during the encounter is exposed to perdition and calls for help. Seeing oneself in truth reveals, first and foremost, the dangers of human existence. The Other is worth admiring, yet primarily he desires to be delivered from evil.

Reading descriptions of the encounter more carefully, one is struck by a fundamental aporia in Tischner's thinking. On the general level of images used, the encounter is radically dynamic. The face of the Other emerges from within the tragic horizon, calling for deliverance from evil. The encounter is forcefully persuasive: something has to be done, one has to reveal oneself and come to the Other's rescue. The encounter changes human existence radically, it is a turning point in relationships with people and the world.

And yet, the encounter is principally described in passive terms. The encounter is, primarily, a cognition, an originary experience of the Other and values: it means revealing a person's face, manifesting a human truth, exposing the tragic dimension of the world. It is only clear that "something should not be there" — the actions taken are of

² Cf. J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości* [Thinking in Values], Krakow 1982; J. Tischner, "Fenomenologia spotkania" [The Phenomenology of the Encounter], *Analecta Cracoviensia* vol. 10 (1978), pp. 73–98.

lesser importance. Apparently, the encounter more entails sustaining intimacy than taking radical action. And in spite of the encounter starting with a call, little is known about how to rescue the Other. In fact, can one really be surprised? What is the use of it? Even if we see each other in truth, face to face, will we change the tragic dimension of existence? Is our only concern to express indignation with the world in which evil can gain victory? 131

The aporia of dynamics and passivity touches the core of the theory of the encounter. Can its dynamic quality be preserved without falling into naïve activism? It seems that the only chance lies in revealing, step by step, the hidden dynamics of the apparently static concepts that describe the encounter.

How to Approach Tischner's Writing?

Tischner's work is saturated with metaphors and suggestive images, and hardly lends itself to critical analysis. The philosopher himself wished to underscore the force and weight of the encounter instead of focusing on conceptual analysis. He believed the metaphor to have a fundamental function in thinking, and not to be a purely literary embellishment. It seems that seeing the forcefulness and weight of the encounter in images is more important to how we think about it than terminological precision.

The task is a challenging one: metaphors and images surely cannot be removed entirely from Tischner's work. A reserved critical analysis may not only lead to an impoverishment of a beautiful vision, but also to the loss of a major thread. It seems that metaphors and images are a principle linking the concepts. It might be that an attempt at comprehending Tischner's thought with utmost precision will leave us with a handful of notions which are ambiguous, poorly connected, and sometimes incoherent. On the other hand, there is a strong temptation to make Tischner's thought a beautiful object so precious that it cannot be used for fear of breaking it. Yet, reading him and interpreting by underscoring what is already underscored means contenting oneself with the shallow and flat surface. Ultimately, a knowledge of anatomy does not disrupt the aesthetic contemplation of veins pulsating under the living skin.

In solving the aporia, I will endeavor to demonstrate that the concepts used to describe the encounter can be interpreted dynamically. A precise analysis will show the concepts' internal links, leading us to a coherent conception of the encounter.

Tischner claims that the encounter is the originary cognition of another man as the face, and that the truth of man manifests itself in it. Values are originally given in the encounter. However, it seems that an encounter is a dramatic event between people and not cognition, which — even if originary — naturally seems to be passive.

People show themselves to one another, face to face, discarding masks and veils. The images Tischner uses have a cognitive character. Showing the face suggests that what was once hidden becomes known. Such a revelation of man's truth apparently means that, in the end, one has access to the essence of another man, to something permanent and hidden. In a way, this might prompt a malicious stance, a wish to catch somebody out, to finally know the other for who he is.

Yet, let us discard these natural associations. Man's truth manifested in the face is not a set of unchanging features, once concealed under a mask or a veil, but now emerging. Man's truth is his way of being, an attitude of authenticity. To put it better, man is in truth while acting and feeling. Revealing the face does not divest it of its spontaneity, letting it express an unchanging and solidified essence. Tischner means that showing the face signifies authentically being oneself in relationship with another man and the world. A mutual revealing of the face is not a cognitive operation, but the authenticity of existence achieved in the encounter.

Tischner writes that the encounter is an originary cognition of values which were previously outside of our experience. This claim is astonishing. Does only the encounter give us access to values crucial to our existence? Were we previously blind and deaf to the call of values? Again it seems that the description of the encounter is static, for it stresses the passive cognition of objective values.

Still, Tischner does not see the originary access to values as passive cognition, but as a change in the participation in values. This is a double change: What was only an element of the objective world of values becomes my value, my own quest. On the other hand, one has a free relationship with values that have become one's own — one may keep faith in them or abandon them.

Man's authentic truth is given in the encounter as we see each other face to face. Authenticity is not the hidden true nature of man coming out, but acting and feeling according to one's own — that is, interiorized — values. The way we participate in values changes in the dramatic time of the encounter: new values manifest themselves in calling for their realization, and we answer this call or not. Tischner beautifully writes that man is like a melody playing itself out on a score of values. Values that have become our own are part of the core of our being. The transforma-

tion of values during the encounter radically alters not only one's actions, 133
but also one's very existence.

The Self in the Encounter

In the common understanding of Tischner's work, the encounter is a turning point in life. However, Tischner writes that those participating in the encounter reveal their truth. Does this suggest that the encounter does not change people — it only shows who they really are?

A simple question arises: Who is the self in the encounter? There are no easy answers. In his early texts, Tischner writes about various kinds of selves or I's: somatic, personal, and axiological.³ The axiological-I is seemingly best suited to the description of the encounter, as it constitutes man's core. Its structure is exceptional. The axiological-I is a value. It is beyond the world, but it enters (through the bonds of solidarity) many social roles, identifying itself with values. Tischner's suggestive analysis shows the axiological-I as inclined by hunger towards the world, and yet capable of distancing itself from the world. This original concept suits the description of the face, in which values and man's deepest content are manifested. In a sense, the axiological-I is immune to the evil of the world. If so, however, it does not lend itself to change in the encounter: it is people who change, but what is enduring in them seems unchangeable. Still, perdition and salvation are at stake in the encounter. Is it possible for the axiological-I, to lose the value it constitutes?

Another interpretation of the self-in-the-encounter must be sought. In a later text, "U źródeł pojęcia osoby" [At the Source of the Concept of the Person],⁴ there is another possible description of the self in the encounter. It is the person, the being-for-oneself, who expresses one's "measure." This concept goes back to the Romantic vision of a person as an expression of an individual essence. Thus understood, the person is subject to existential change. One can forego one's dignity, lose oneself, but also save oneself.

These two descriptions of the encounter-self might be complementary. They can indicate two phases of the self: from the initial axiological core to the mature and developed one. Yet, the relations between them remain very intricate: people are not plants that sprout from their seeds according to natural laws; the development of a person involves creativity and unpredictability. The description of the encounter-self does not exclude the possibility of a radical existential change. Tischner always distanced himself from the vision of man as a substance; he would point

³ Cf. J. Tischner, "Fenomenologia świadomości egotycznej," [The Phenomenology of Egoistic Consciousness], in: J. Tischner, *Studia z filozofii świadomości* [Studies in the Philosophy of Consciousness], Krakow 2006, and *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* [The World of Human Hope], Krakow 1975.

⁴ Cf. J. Tischner, "Sprawa osoby — wstępne przybliżenie" [The Issue of the Person; A Preliminary Description], *Logos i Ethos* 2/1992, pp. 5–21.

The Other in the Encounter

Who is the Other in the encounter? The face of the Other emerges from within the agathological horizon — the horizon of good and evil. He is threatened by perdition and needs help. Still, he is not defenseless, for he has hope that the good will prevail over evil. This evokes my admiration, which seems to testify that the Other can save himself. Yet, the Other's face calls for help.

My neighbor's face reveals tragedy, but also a chance to overcome evil: an encounter commences with a call for help. Therefore, the encounter should radically affect the Other. This, however, seems impossible. First of all, the self appears to be helpless in the encounter. The self can express indignation with a world where evil prevails, but is it capable of taking the unbearable burden from the Other's shoulders? In addition, should it desire to do so? Should everyone not carry their own cross? Secondly, the Other's face is not defenseless, as it contains the hope of victory. His attitude towards tragedy evokes admiration and respect. Tischner writes that salvation or perdition is in man's hands.⁵ Is it possible that the encounter has essential significance for the Other?

Still, it must be emphasized that frantic action is not the key to the encounter. The transformation lies in an altered relationship to values: Suddenly, different values become the self's quest. It is as if the whole backdrop has changed — the encounter plays itself out against our shared values, which have become such only during the encounter.

However, it has not yet become clear how values become one's own. It is not a matter of focusing one's attention, of discovering values in one's spiritual life. The originary finding of values does not take place through solitary contemplation, but during the encounter with the other. Values are confirmed by us, we let them take root in us and nurture them; this is not passive reception.

Hope Generating the Encounter

In the embodied encounter a face emerges from within the horizon of the tragically entangled good and evil. The face expresses and strives for hope. Hope is staked either on values or on people who can help in

⁵ Cf. J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu. Wprowadzenie* [The Philosophy of Drama: Introduction], Éditions du dialogue, Paris 1990, p.13: "Taking part in a drama, man knows more or less clearly that, figuratively speaking, his perdition or salvation is in his hands. To be a dramatic being is to believe, correctly or falsely, that perdition or salvation is in man's hands."

realizing values. He who has seen the face becomes a bearer of hope. His first task is not to destroy it. This is the meaning of the “thou shalt not kill” that Tischner repeats after Lévinas. 135

What is the connection between hope and values? Man lives in the world of values, recognizing, sensing, and admiring them. But only those in which he has placed his life-hopes become his own values. Among one’s own values, two are essential: the value of the self as a person (the axiological-I), and the value in which one sees one’s salvation.

Tischner writes that, indeed, the value of the person is absolute but it demands absolute confirmation.⁶ In the encounter we make each other bearers of our hopes, so we confirm the value of the Other and the value in which the Other seeks salvation.

Hope and despair are not additions to human life. According to Tischner, man lives only when he has hope. If he falls into despair, he dies. Therefore, having hope is a matter of life and death. The encounter allows us to revive and sustain the most important hope: it confirms the value of the Other and the value that saves him.

It is no extraordinary occurrence that the encounter reveals the truth and forms close bonds between people. This belongs to its essence: the fundamental values of the Other become the self’s own values. The fact that someone else’s values have become one’s own lets one exist in harmony with oneself — one is authentic in the encounter. Taking the values of the other as one’s own also signifies that values essential to life have come to be shared.

Revealing the Agathological and Axiological Horizons

The connection between values and hopes does not explain the specificity of the embodied encounter. Values are found within the axiological horizon, but Tischner also claims that the agathological horizon is revealed in the encounter. It manifests itself when experiencing the face of the Other, for he is in danger of tragedy, of evil prevailing over good. But when intending to do something, we find ourselves within the axiological horizon of concrete values that should be realized.

In describing the encounter, Tischner prefers to speak of the agathological horizon, which always reveals the inescapable possibility of tragedy inherent to existence. Again, this seems to imply some passivity: one may feel bound to helplessness, asking how something is possible and lamenting over the imminent evil.

First of all, we must understand the relationship between the horizons. They seem to be mutually independent. One opens the realm of good and evil, the other — the objective hierarchy of values. Does this mean that good and evil are not values? In his later works, Tischner was to

⁶ Cf. J. Tischner, “Sprawa osoby — wstępne przybliżenie,” *op. cit.*, p. 16.

136 write that goodness is a child of the Good, following Lévinas and the tradition of Christian mysticism. There is goodness in the face of the Other, which cannot be reduced to any concrete value.

The combination of the two horizons seems to be an accidental fact. Only one of them should be of interest, because the face of the Other reveals itself in the agathological horizon: masks and veils, which belong to the axiological horizon, are discarded in the encounter.

Still, I suggest a different interpretation of the relationship between axiology and agathology. Both horizons are combined in me. Agathology takes a perspective on the whole of my values, a perspective of perdition or salvation. How does this affect concrete values? The order of ordinary values is saturated with the order of good and evil; through the latter, one can see whether acting and thinking in values favors or thwarts salvation. This general horizon manifests itself in the encounter with another man — fundamental matters are at stake here: religious salvation and condemnation, life and death, blossoming and wasted life. The relation between the two horizons resembles that of a global and local perspective. The combination enables us to look from a central standpoint, to see that some minor actions and gestures have a great “global” significance, and to assess that some great works have little significance for perdition and salvation.

The two horizons depend on each other. Through the agathological horizon, I can see concrete values from the general perspective of perdition and salvation; through the axiological one, good and evil are incarnated in the world, involved in everyday actions and choices. Good and evil live through values and shape them. This has interesting consequences: it may come to pass that the realization of values, which are noble in themselves, can be a form of betrayal. The encounter puts one off the beaten tracks of axiology: everything is considered from a perspective of essentials — perdition and salvation. The general is immersed in the concrete.

Man nurtures various hopes. In the encounter the hope seen in the Other’s face is fundamental and peculiar. It defines the standards of thinking in values. It does not annihilate one’s prior life, but adds a further, deeper dimension to it. The encounter reshuffles one’s hopes. They become bound together: the most important one and those that previously shaped my life. The work of the encounter is the re-binding of earlier hopes with the hope opened up by the encounter itself. They are combined, and one’s life in the encounter and thereafter achieves unity. Perhaps conversion or a radical change are needed, or perhaps the re-binding of hopes will suffice.

This leads to a radical transformation of identity — the change affects the structure of values, the principles of behavior, the general standpoint, and one’s perspective on reality. My existence is shaken. Sometimes this happens through little gestures and actions or refraining from

action, as these little gestures or words have immense significance for the hope that they hold. 137

“[H]ope is perhaps the very stuff of which our souls are made,”⁷ wrote Gabriel Marcel; for Tischner, this is not just a beautiful figure of speech. These words indicate how hopes can inform the identity of an individual and that the game for the greatest of hopes, the hope of salvation, allows a person to integrate. It is characteristic for a person to pass from the general dimension to the particular, and vice-versa, and in the encounter one is led to radical perception in light of good and evil.

The Dynamism of the Encounter

Our analysis has uncovered the dynamic structure of the embodied encounter. The encounter is a reciprocal co-formation of existence. Firstly, there is a transformation of fundamental hopes, hence a change in the manner of participation in values toward which hopes tend. Secondly, the encounter means taking an authentic attitude toward this participation: taking on responsibility for the Other.

The dynamism of the encounter is not manifested in great and spectacular acts, but in the transformation of existence. The encounter requires the hopes cherished by its participants to be nurtured and set in order. Simple actions and even small gestures of faith have immense significance if seen from the general agathological perspective of perdition and salvation.

In the encounter the whole of the human being undergoes a transformation. He exists authentically, according to his own values — that is, those presented to him originally — as they are his own quest, and are confirmed by the Other in the relation of the encounter. If the encounter constitutes a confirmation and loyalty to one’s own values, this means that an individual can reach freedom and fullness of life in the encounter. This explains why the encounter — although always within the horizon of a possible tragedy — fascinates and attracts human dreams.

THE EMBODIED ENCOUNTER AND TISCHNER’S LATER PHILOSOPHY The fascination with Lévinas, *The Philosophy of Drama*

The early descriptions of the encounter are overshadowed by the influence of Lévinas’s philosophy of the face. In *The Philosophy of Drama*, the earlier descriptions appear against the backdrop of long passages cited from the Jewish philosopher; Tischner adopts Lévinas’s basic notions and images: the face, desire, and goodness. Loyalty to historical truth thus

⁷ G. Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. K. Farrer, Dacre Press, Westminster 1949, p. 80.

138 requires us to acknowledge that Tischner's philosophy of the encounter is just a variation or a commentary on Lévinas's fundamental solutions.⁸

There are several striking similarities between their images and metaphors, yet the differences give food for thought. Firstly, in Lévinas, the face is naked and passive; in Tischner, the face speaks of the tragedy of one's own existence and, at the same time, is full of glory. Secondly, Tischner's encounter is symmetrical — we stand facing one another, face to face. On the basis of such images Tischner builds a totally different philosophical conception. One is reminded on many occasions that his reading of classic philosophers is often a radically transformed in light of his own assumptions.

Another fact is very suggestive: the passage about the encounter in *The Philosophy of Drama* is a juxtaposition of descriptions and quotes from Lévinas with earlier conceptions rewritten intact. Tischner did not change his vision, he only showed it against the backdrop of Lévinas's philosophy. It cannot be denied that the latter was a key inspiration. Still, Tischner's vision of the encounter has an independent significance.

The Theme of God's Goodness, *The Controversy over the Existence of Man*

In Tischner's later philosophy,⁹ descriptions of the encounter between people are almost absent. This is not easy to comprehend, as the encounter was meant to be the originary cognition of another human being and values; without the encounter our descriptions are stripped of experience.

In *The Controversy over the Existence of Man*, Tischner begins to place greater emphasis on the religious dimension of the encounter. At the core of the true encounter is the birth of the good in man, while the source of this good is the Absolute Good. The condition of the encounter being possible is man's conversion and opening up to the eternal Good. It can be seen that the key to understanding the encounter between people is in the encounter between man and God.

Both versions of the meaning of encounter as used by Tischner — Lévinas's and the religious one — have something in common. Both of them transcend everyday conditions and tend toward the Infinite or toward the Good. Because of this, the encounter is liberated from finite conditions — inauthenticity and enmity of human relationships — and reaches toward the metaphysical or the theological realm.

Tischner recognized, following Lévinas, that the face of one's neighbor engenders a disinterested desire for goodness. Then relationships

⁸ Cf. E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1969.

⁹ Cf. J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man], Krakow 1998.

between people are cleansed of the contingency inherent in concrete life stories, which always burden us with illusions and misunderstandings. Only the most important thing remains: man's existence from the perspective of good and evil. 139

It seems that only through acknowledging the phenomenon of transcending the finiteness of relationships are we able to solve the aporia of the encounter: how knowing the Other's face can radically change the existence of people encountering each other. In light of this conception, it seems naïve to maintain that two people's encounter, in its autonomy, may have such powerful metaphysical consequences. And yet there is something so appealing in the early conception of the encounter, which shows that two people can create a relationship that changes their world. The early description speaks of the encounter that is incarnated in our human stories. Perhaps the source of its power lies deep in God's goodness or in the desire for the Infinite, though the human encounter has its autonomy and independence. It might be naïve to believe in this picture but, undoubtedly, it has a great power of attraction.

Discarding Axiology?

The above thoughts may confirm the postulate of separating agathology from axiology. The encounter requires disinterestedness, which means abandoning our interest in the values of the world. Disinterestedness is possible only within the agathological horizon.

Only when seeing goodness in the Other's face as a reflection of the true good do we liberate ourselves from immersion in the world of everyday values. The dynamism of the encounter lies in the passage to the order of the good. Concentrating on axiology would be an error, as it leaves people fixated on themselves, and fulfilling their own needs in the encounter. This attachment to one's own axiological-I and values related to it prevents one from encountering the goodness of man and God. A person immersed in the world of axiology needs to convert and turn towards the good.

In his *Controversy Over the Existence of Man*, Tischner sharply contrasts agathology with axiology, which suggests that the earlier texts bear the stamp of aestheticism — being focused on values that pull one away from the good. However, closer analysis shows that Tischner only discards the self-sufficiency of axiology: He who concentrates solely on values dissociates himself from the dimension of good. This underscores the quest for the good that is from beyond this world and is reflected in the Other's face.

I defend the conception of the embodied encounter, whose specificity stands out against the backdrop of other philosophical visions that advocate the dialogical encounter. The encounter — as described in the dialogical tradition — is an unprecedented event that cannot be predicted or comprehended. Indeed, it is difficult to call it an encounter in the usual sense. It excludes all needs and is radically disinterested. It is an acceptance of the responsibility field that unambiguously defines individuality.

According to Tischner, the encounter is symmetrical, has its own dynamics, and goes beyond the world, while keeping its roots in the world. The encounter signifies the re-binding of a structure of hopes: it binds the newly discovered hope for salvation with the hopes that constitute our everyday life.

In this article, we have developed a cohesive structure of concepts to explain the dynamics of the encounter. This covers the greatest problem found in Tischner's early writings: the *aporia* of a dynamic image combined with the passive notions used in its description.

The final result, however, seems quite modest. Even if it is possible to extract his own independent conception of the encounter, one is struck by the fact that Tischner changed his views, abandoning axiology. He focused on the religious encounter, for which the paradigmatic example is being chosen and conversion: man immersed in mundane values needs to convert and change radically. Everything plays itself out on a grand stage — being chosen, conversion, salvation — and the axiological order seems an obstacle in the unfolding of the good.

Did Tischner forego the idea of the embodied encounter? Even if he did, one can assume that the religious encounter — the birth of the good — makes all kinds of human encounters possible. It might also be claimed that encounters taking place in our world are only a preparation for the true encounter, which will change man radically. In both cases, the religious encounter does not obliterate the embodied encounter which preserves its distinctness.

It may be assumed that disinterestedness is an experience of goodness in the other's face, where his or her individual history or our common history is inscribed. The encounter reaches toward eternity, but it commences here on earth. That is why the orders of agathology and axiology are constantly intertwined. What exactly are perdition and salvation if axiology is not possible from the outset? Are they the same for everyone? Indeed, how can one oppose an abstract perdition? Does this not require facing an individual in his individuality? And how is this passage from pure goodness to individual destiny possible — does the face suddenly acquire its features and history? The elimination of axiology introduces the danger of abstraction in pursuing the good. The agathological horizon encompasses and infuses the encounter between concrete people, but it does not obliterate its autonomy. This is also suggested by the fact that

Tischner's examples of the encounter are always very concrete, relying on characters found in literature or on real people. The various examples that show encounters which do not take place are equally concrete. 141

The encounter is fragile — even if it remains in recollection or in anticipation, it preserves its fragility. It is just a fragment of life-in-the-world, which is full of joys and sorrows, an intersection of two existences. It does not constitute a break from concrete life but adds to it a deeper dimension. He who revels in the marvelous moments of the encounter may easily lose them. The time of the encounter is when a drama plays itself out in transforming some hopes, and in abandoning others. This is a moment that reaches toward eternity, but it is also a thread that ties the intersecting histories of two people.

I do not think that Tischner changed his views on the encounter. He showed its religious grounds, which allow the good to be born in us, the good for the Other. But the embodied encounter is capable of saving man, who is born when he can confide his hope to another.

The embodied encounter signifies that radical disinterestedness is a culmination and perfection of the close relationships between people. Focusing oneself on the Other's face in a fragile encounter is the sole way to go toward the good that transcends being. The embodied encounter is impossible without the agathological breath of the good. On the other hand, the good can only descend to earth through the solicitous face of the Other; the good is given only through concrete forms. And only now is the depth of meaning attributed to the face manifested. For Tischner, the face speaks of one's existence, that is, a concrete drama playing itself out between good and evil. What gives food for thought is the fact that dialogue commences with a question about the way — a passer-by has his concrete concerns, his own history, and one is faced only with a part of it.

Hope that manifests itself in the encounter is truly essential — it defines the structure of values. For if the bindings of hope are changed, the axiological order is altered: I do what used to be strange or unfamiliar, but has become radically my own through my relation with another human being.

If one does not disentangle oneself from the existing order of the world, then what will guarantee that the encounter is true, that it is not an illusion, a game of needs, a struggle for power, or that we do not deceive each other? It is obvious that the embodied encounter has no external guarantees — we can be mistaken, taking our dreams for reality. What one is given is not certainty but confirmation: I confide in somebody the hope which is the most important for me. This is the gesture that confirms the authenticity of the encounter. On the other hand, the risk remains, as I have faith in the Other, but not certainty that I will not be hurt. Is there no truth in the naïve dream that Tischner's audiences once had of the encounter as the fulfillment of all hopes, achieved through taking all the risks and revealing oneself and another human being?

Tischner's attitude toward the philosophical tradition is complex. He uses multiple historical sources and copiously cites many of his predecessors. However, he adopts their legacy and modifies it greatly by choosing metaphors and threads of thought that interest him, and by employing them in his own unique narrative.

In reading him, one is led to comparisons with philosophers that were his sources of images and inspiration. Tischner is close to the tradition of dialogue philosophers and Christian mystics, from St. Paul to Kierkegaard. Still, reading him against such a background, though it seems to have been indicated by the philosopher himself, is not a true comparison of various concepts. Reading Tischner, one juxtaposes him not with otherness, but with the tradition filtered through his thinking. At most one can wonder at the originality of his interpretation: sometimes the reader is astonished when an apparently faithful analysis of Lévinas, for example, leads to the discovery of Tischner's totally different roots and sensitivity.

On the other hand, Tischner's thinking is very solitary in contemporary philosophy. Against the trends of contemporary culture, he provocatively believes in the possibility of authentically encountering another human being. He states that people strive towards the fundamental good, and are open to hope and closeness with the other. His views seem very beautiful and naïve in our times of radical criticism and skepticism, which force one to part with the great illusions.

In light of the above comments, it is surprising that Tischner's conception of the embodied encounter may have strong analogies to a wholly different stream of philosophy: analytic philosophy, in its broadest definition. A comparison with this tradition may show the innovativeness and modernity of the thinking of the Polish priest.

I realize that this thesis may seem eccentric. How can Tischner be compared with English-speaking philosophers that he knew little about, and did not hold in particularly high esteem? Nevertheless, the similarities are astonishing. If one takes into consideration that both traditions are virtually unknown to each other — there are no common sources, quotes and juxtapositions — then the only link is the thing itself. If the similarity is substantial, then this must give us food for thought.

It is a great pleasure for a historian of philosophy to discover a community of thought where none has searched for it. Still, we are not interested in purely erudite juxtapositions.

Contrasting distinct philosophical views may a) show that Tischner's thinking was inherently dialogical, which is often questioned, b) bring out his originality, in the sense of standing out against other conceptions, c) last but not least, reveal the problematic field of Tischner's philosophy. The last point is of the greatest interest for me. What is a problematic field?

Each thinker, solving problems, faces a range of possible solutions, studies them, copes with various options, and reaches a final result. The reader usually has access to this final product, whereas the work of thinking has taken place beforehand. Juxtaposing Tischner with philosophers who considered similar problems may lead us to a range of problems within which the philosopher's thought was born. (Of course, we are concerned with possibilities related to the problem, and not the thinker's psychological biography.) Philosophical dialogue begins when a problematic situation is revealed — this allows us to better explain a particular thought, showing its limitations or originality.

The following presents no more than a sketch for the project of juxtaposing Tischner's thought with the philosophy dominant in English-speaking countries. It is not possible to enter into detailed analyses; let us focus, therefore, on the notions discussed above.

The Authentic and the Originary

Analytic philosophy is interested in the mechanism which makes thoughts, values, and actions “my own,” which is called *identification*.¹⁰ Identification is not a matter of theoretical discovery but practical confirmation, decision-making, or confessing. Even recognizing the content of the self — one's own thoughts, values and desires — is not a passive contemplation of one's own mind, but an identification. In a similar manner, values become “ours” when they are confirmed in action, not when perceived in reflection.

The practical dimension of the identification of what is one's own in analytic philosophy can be seen as a counterpart to Tischner's analysis of the role of hope. The confirmation of values, thoughts and desires is, however, not achieved through personal action, but by weaving a web of hopes, which occurs during an encounter with another human being.

The Self in the Encounter

The above-presented vivid interpretation of the self in the encounter does not stand alone in contemporary philosophy. Tischner's vision of the dramatic existence of man falls within the range of “narrative conceptions of self-identity.”¹¹ Nonetheless, it is intriguing to see the peculiarity of Tischner's solution.

Firstly, it is the past that usually defines the key meanings in narrative conceptions. Tischner focuses on the hope for salvation; that is, he

¹⁰ Cf. H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1988.

¹¹ Cf. D. Hutto, *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, Cambridge University Press 2007.

144 underscores the role of the future in shaping the drama of existence. Secondly, narrative conceptions find it difficult to define the role of the individual in the narration. On the one hand, an individual tells the story of his life; on the other, his power is limited, for he less authors than acts in the tale of his own life. Tischner solves this problem unusually, by reversing the direction of dependence. He thinks that since the narrative of a life is only comprehensible as a tale in which good and evil are at stake, encounters with another human being are the key moments in the tale. These are the places where human dramas connect: we are essentially bound to others, that is, we enter the middle of each other's tales. Only in light of these statements is it possible to see the crucial role of the individual. In Tischner's view, the individual preserves his autonomy: perdition and salvation are in his hands.

The Other in the Encounter

Analytic philosophy allows us to solve a real problem of the encounter. A relationship with another human being has to preserve a delicate balance, for the concern to save the Other may encourage paternalism, the temptation to deprive the Other of self-sufficiency.

Tischner believes that reciprocally confiding hope guarantees the independence of the other, allowing us to resist the temptation to save the other through adopting *his* concern, which would mean the illusory replacement of someone in his existential drama. Lévinas provided a great solution to this problem. In his view, the Other's face is defenseless and, at the same time, powerful; it grants rights and limits the subject's freedom. The face simultaneously requests and demands.¹² However, accepting Lévinas's view is costly: it requires us to adopt the philosopher's radical assumptions.

Analytic philosophers' solutions are paradoxically closer to Tischner than Lévinas's radical view. Stephen Darwall¹³ states that another human being can stake out a claim to me because of their dignity. This engenders a dialogical relationship, which involves reciprocal respect and a concrete demand laid on another human being. The attitude toward the other should be respect for a person's claims, rather than care, which always carries the temptation of paternalism. Darwall's solutions facilitate limiting the noble, yet injurious endeavors of our care. They testify to the common intuition that one must not live others' lives for them.

Tischner's solution seems to be similar, but it has a deeper dimension. Respect for the Other does not result from an abstract vision of a person, but from confiding hope in each other. For Tischner, even placing hope in God has its analogy in God placing hope in people. Respect for

¹² Cf. E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit.

¹³ Cf. S. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2006.

Agathology and Axiology

The exceptional differentiation between the axiological and agathological horizons also has its counterparts in analytic philosophy: these philosophers underscore the difference between a usual choice of values, which depends on circumstances, and an absolute choice, where good and evil are at stake. They speak of desires and volitions of the first and second order (Harry Frankfurt)¹⁵ and evaluations in a weak and strong sense (Charles Taylor).¹⁶

A comparison shows striking affinities. Frankfurt and Taylor claim that the second-order volitions and strong evaluations define the identity (or the individual essence) of an individual. Much as in Tischner, the encounter playing itself out within the horizon of agathology shapes not only the order of values and hopes, but also who one really is, since the encounter changes a person's identity.

The English-speaking philosophers demonstrate that radical choices affect the individual's existence, because one's identity depends on one's position in relation to moral sources that give the power to realize values. Still, they cautiously limit themselves to this thesis. Tischner shows that striving towards the good, which grows out of the experience of someone's being endangered by evil, has its roots in the order of the Absolute Good. Human desire for good finds its fulfillment in the encounter with God.

Freedom of the Self in the Encounter

Through analytic philosophy, one can better understand the role of freedom in the encounter. Tischner believes that the encounter is the original experience of freedom: another human being is free in his unpredictability and mystery. The encounter involves the highest values that do not coerce: the self can always refuse an encounter. Yet, there are doubts: If the self freely decides to enter the encounter, does it not lose its freedom? The encounter imposes obligations in relation to the other, axiological strictness: the limits for action and existence, which, if breached, signify a betrayal of the encounter. Do we not sacrifice our freedom for the sake of other values?

¹⁴ J. Tischner, "Filozofia wypróbowanej nadziei" [The Philosophy of Tested Hope], in: *Myślenie według wartości*, op. cit., pp. 394–411.

¹⁵ Cf. H. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXVIII (1), 1971, pp. 5–20.

¹⁶ Cf. C. Taylor, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, *Human Agency and Language* (vol. 1), Cambridge University Press 1985.

Analytic philosophers come across a similar problem. The solution is clear: one needs to distinguish between external limitations that constrain, and inner limitations that are a manifestation of freedom. The limit ceases to constrain when I willingly choose not to violate it. It can be said that he who acts according to his own values is authentic and acts in accordance with himself. This reminds us of Luther's words: "Here I stand, I can do no other" as an example of inner freedom.¹⁷

A Dialogue between Disparate Philosophies

The above dialogue with contemporary analytic philosophy unquestionably opens new perspectives for our way of thinking about the embodied encounter. Tischner fits perfectly into discussions on the problems of values, authenticity, and freedom in contemporary philosophy. He speaks in a characteristic voice, capable of pushing the discussion in a new direction. To sum up, let us look once more at the results of preliminary analyses that show some aspects of Tischner's innovation:

A. The embodied encounter signifies that the identification of values, thoughts and desires, which is a condition of speaking about the person in contemporary philosophy, requires a practical confirmation in dialogue with other people.

B. Tischner takes as given man's susceptibility to another man's influence and the call of values. However, if contemporary philosophers show an individual as threatened by the over-influence of others, an influence reaching to the core of existence is possible in Tischner, and one which does not damage an individual's freedom and authenticity. In his terminology, the relations of power and surrender dominate on the level of being, while on the level of the good the other's influence enriches the individual and strengthens his freedom.

C. Narrative conceptions of the self are commonly associated with the solitary creation of narrative threads about oneself where others occasionally appear. But the key to understanding narration in Tischner is not the tale of a person or a community, but a dramatic weave of threads of a life, defined by another's questions and one's own answers.

D. The uniqueness of Tischner's thinking lies, first and foremost, in his claim that relations with people and values grow out of human pain and tragedy. In order to understand man, one has to consider hope, which develops against being endangered by evil. The desire for salvation consolidates man and turns his values into means of saving himself. Hopes

¹⁷ Cf. H. Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," in *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 80–94, p. 86; G. Watson, "Volitional necessity," in S. Buss & L. Overton (eds.), *Contours of agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2002, pp. 129–159; and B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Collins/Fontana, London 1985.

are not expectations of people who are satiated and secure, but lifelines thrown when evil threatens all around. 147

CONCLUSION

The embodied encounter is a relation between people, fragile and delicate like all relations that are based on hopes that we place in each other. We know from Tischner that the embodied encounter takes root in goodness, which is born out of God's goodness. This engenders a constant temptation to found the encounter on the absolute and divine. Yet, even though the encounter is imperfect and only draws before us a project and dream of the True Encounter, it remains an autonomous meeting of two people, which is a fleeting miracle. And the key to the embodied encounter lies precisely in this combination of the extraordinariness and fragility of the encounter, and the immense influence it has on its participants.

Solving the aporia of the encounter has demanded deep reformulation of its fundamental notions. I have tried to refute the objection that Tischner's philosophy is not dialogical. Tischner should be juxtaposed not with those philosophers with whom he shares the same images, metaphors, and notions, but with those who solve similar problems. Such thinkers are to be found in contemporary analytic philosophy.

I have broken two unwritten rules of reading Tischner. Firstly, I have not put him alongside the tradition that he himself chose and cited. Secondly, instead of describing the encounter in Tischner's language and images, I have critically analyzed the concepts, and the relations between them.

Has this led to the destruction of a beautiful image? Focusing on the imagery — faces, masks, veils — led us astray, and distracted our attempts at understanding the encounter. Perhaps one must systematically crack the existing images to show the movement of thought, to prevent the vision from becoming a childish picture book.

Tischner's audiences held on to his images of the encounter as the ultimate closeness with the other, images that were not really suggestive of deprivation, awe, and tragedy, of the hardships when keeping faith with one's hope, of an arduous search for the sources of hope in the good being born in the mysteries of the Holy Trinity. Now, despite knowing that the encounter is painful and hardly possible, the conviction that the encounter embodied between people is a great matter still remains deeply ingrained. It is found even in the sudden wonder at what may follow when someone asks me a question.