

HOW MANY ‘NO’S? BILLIONS. HOW MANY ‘YES’ES? JUST ONE!

• Jörg Splett •

“Knowing is an act of making one; the red
of roses is thus the fruit of myself and the rose.
‘*Opus duorum unum.*’ Yes to the Yes.”

The theme comes from a discussion between Sergiu Celibidache and Jan Schmidt-Garre.¹ How many of our contemporaries will contradict this and explain that the opposite is true? With a Not and a No, everything is cut off. The god *Kairos* (=of the right moment) only has hair on the front of his head. Whoever does not seize the opportunity by the tuft of its hair sees the smooth scalp behind it slip away in the blink of an eye. Whoever has caught it can consider in peace what he can make of his prisoner and which of his wishes he will put him to work for. It may be that not every wish can be granted and so possibilities are not unlimited; yet, they are often countless enough. At the very least there are two, that is, the

¹J. Schmidt-Garre, “Celibidache. Man will nichts—man läßt es entstehen,” *Paket Buch-Film* (Munich, 1992), film dialogue (=C), 22f: “Eine Probe ist nicht Musik. Eine Probe ist eine Summe von unzähligen ‘Nein’... ‘Nein, nicht so! Nicht, nicht, nicht!’ Wieviele ‘Nicht’ gibt es? Billionen. Und wieviele Ja? Nur eins!” [A rehearsal is not music. A rehearsal is a sum of countless ‘no’s. . . . No, not like that! Not, not, not!’ How many ‘no’s are there? Billions. And how many ‘yes’es? Just one!]

ostensibly “last one”² and its opposite. And even if this were only—on the second level now—a No; one can also let the prisoner go free.

In other words, nothingness, being dead, is one; life is colorful and multiform. And its intensification, freedom, is all the more so. Freedom means possibilities—room for play.

I. Freedom?

1. On the other hand, of the two or more (and more might mean billions) possibilities, only one can become actual in any given “now.” All the others were once possibilities, but they did not come true; in fact, now they are not even possible any more.³ So there is a Yes—and many Nos? This precisely with a view to life: the one who lives is you, and not the (again one) sibling that would be alive if another one of the many spermatozoa had been the first.

But what is true of life, one might reply, is precisely not true of freedom. For freedom is nothing other than having at one's disposition imagined possibilities, which always exist only in the plural. Yet here the same “introduction into limitation” [*Engführung*] returns: by becoming active, freedom repeals itself, and not in the twofold and threefold sense of Hegel's dialectic, but very simply: it consumes itself, as a fire burns its own material. For this reason, it is easy for us to conserve it through waiting and procrastination. However, not acting is also an action, and abstaining from a choice means to choose.

But what to choose in the face of the many possibilities? This difficulty explains why people clamor for freedom on the one hand and on the other would rather (although quietly) be rid of it by having others think and act for them. Or, not so much someone else, as something else. For as intently as many people are on the lookout for a guide—or, to use the contemporary English term—a (trend-) “leader”—the more demanding would like not to have anything at

²Marianne Gronemeyer, *Das Leben als letzte Gelegenheit* (Darmstadt, 1996).

³Without prejudice to the fact that precisely through one realization, countless new possibilities are simultaneously opened up again. Of these, many resemble the ones before (continue them, in a certain sense), and yet none of them is identical to a possibility that has been passed over.

all to do with freedom, but rather with the necessities of nature, laws,⁴ evolution, genes, or the stars

In fact, to choose always means to renounce. I mean to say that there is no Yes without countless No's and Nots. With regard to Yes and No, in no way do we stand simply before an alternative between the two. Rather, whoever says No, says Yes to the No and No to many Yeses. Whoever says Yes, says No to the No and, on top of that, No to many Yeses.

Let us leave aside for the moment that radical negation by which a person also and above all says No to himself.⁵ That would be a theme in itself. Let us remain with the aporia of the Yes: How do we deal with the mass of unavoidable No's/Nots when everything still "has something to it"?

2. If there is to be an answer to this question, then obviously it can only be that reasons [*Gründe*] can be adduced for a Yes and its Nos that justify this Yes over and against other Yeses. Self-determination—in contrast to mere "happening," which follows from its *causes*—is supported by *reasons* [*Gründe*] (this bespeaks "autonomy"—self-realization [*Selbst-Gesetzlichkeit*]), whereas "chance" and "arbitrariness" ultimately can be traced back to causes: either someone does what he *must* (underneath what he thinks he can and will do), or what he should (because he believes that he *may* not do otherwise). There is no third possibility.

At the basis of the selective choice the postmodern consumer has in mind (as something once longed-for and now, as we said before, rather bothersome because it requires too much effort)—we find a freedom of *decision*. The word is used here in its specific sense (common parlance scarcely differentiates between choice and decision): as distinct from a *choice* between goods, a *decision* describes that situation in which *one* claim, *one* request is made of us. In the

⁴Thus Aristotle, too, in his *Politics* (III 15 [1286–8ff], 16 [1287–4ff]), raises the question, "whether it is better to be ruled by the best man or by the best laws," and decides, in spite of the considerable grounding of the contrary position, in favor of the law, since "it is the sense of justice that allows one to seek an impartial instance, as the law is."

⁵Not the least of the implications of this is that he says a No to a Yes that has always already been uttered, a Yes without which he would not be. Purely formally, this can already be recognized in the fact that, in response to the question whether he truly wants to say No, he would have to answer Yes. (Hence Buddha's reference to an extinction behind [or before] every Yes/No.)

face of this, there remains only the alternative of Yes or No. This claim or request, for its part, leaves us no choice; it compels us to make a decision, according to the measure, “true/right—untrue/wrong.”

In this way, haven't we come back to Celibidache's thesis? In a mathematical calculation and in problems (not only of chess), one thing is correct: *the* answer. Everything else is wrong, *not* right. However, neither mathematical problems nor chess have to do with freedom. So to what extent does a Yes to a claim (which is obviously a No to the No) forbid the person asked from realizing his consent in a myriad of ways, in quite different Yeses?

3. For an adequate answer to this (and the answer cannot be calculated) it may be necessary to delve once again into the fundamental understanding of freedom. Once we see that freedom's situation of decision is at the basis of choice, the question arises: How do we conceive of decision? We have bid farewell to the sovereignty of the choosing consumer because we have seen that the person of whom choice is demanded stands under “compulsion.” But this new situation, too, can be understood in (at least) two ways: Is it the situation of the sovereign judge or of the recipient of a command?

We cannot confuse the freedom of a judge with arbitrariness. The judge is not the lord of the law; he is bound to it, similarly to the way in which, as we say, someone “masters” playing the violin. Karl Kraus makes the first point clear with regard to language: “He has mastered the German language—that can be said of the clerk. The artist is a servant of the word.”⁶ Nevertheless he creates new things, just as the administration of right is at the same time a creation of right. Therefore, such a service—in independence—must be distinguished from the service of someone who receives a command.

Would the latter then not be free? That is precisely the question. Can we understand the artist in this sense? Either a person does what he must or what he ought, we have said. Ought and command thus do not contradict freedom; to the contrary, they are its only “place.” To quote the famous words of Immanuel Kant (regarding the “categorical imperative”): “A free will and a will under ethical laws are one and the same.”⁷

⁶Karl Kraus, *Beim Wort genommen* (Munich, 1955), 116.

⁷Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, ed. W. Weischedel (Darmstadt, 1963), IV, 82.

Freedom is not to be conceived merely from the point of view of sovereignty, be it the sovereignty of the consumer or that of the judge. Freedom is not merely the beginning of something, the first power of initiative; it is just as much the capacity to answer. In other words, we must not think that passive and active are opposed as unfreedom and freedom. The classical languages also contain the middle voice (doing something to oneself and letting something be done to oneself). This is, according to my thesis, not the third, but the first “kind” of action.

The German language requires paraphrase to express the classical middle voice. *Sich . . . lassen* [to let something be done to oneself].⁸ Here, I will maintain that phrases such as “*sich gesagt sein lassen*” [to let something be a warning to one] or “*sich-ergreifen lassen*” [to let oneself be seized] are not merely the prerequisite of freedom (what is someone supposed to say if nothing “says” anything to him?); beyond this, they are actually freedom’s maximum realization, in the ethical and erotic, religious and aesthetic fields.

II. Being

1. Where someone wills, the result is “willed,” where someone seeks, it is “sought.” And what more disparaging thing could be said of a work or art or a performance than this? Gottfried Benn thought that “word had gotten around that the opposite of art is not nature, but ‘well-intentioned.’”⁹ It is not even a question of finding. *It* must find itself. Or, still more correct, the artist must be found: by his material, by a theme, by a figure that wants to step into the light (C: “one wills nothing . . .”).

In fact, even the “ought” still has to be overcome. For Friedrich Nietzsche, the spirit must transform itself from Ought to

⁸Jörg Splett, *Gott-ergreifen* (Cologne, 2001), especially the introduction (“*Sich ergreifen lassen*” [letting oneself be seized]). There are, to be sure—to balance out the grammatical lack of a middle form—“medial” words, such as “*dulden*” [to tolerate]. No one can be made to tolerate, only to suffer. The sufferer himself, however, has the ability to tolerate.

⁹Gottfried Benn, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. D. Wellershoff (Wiesbaden, 1968), 1333ff (“Roman des Phänotyps”).

Will (from the camel to the lion).¹⁰ We have reversed the order here: if it is really I who am supposed to will and not something in me or through me, then I must follow an Ought. But we unreservedly take the step to the third figure with him: to the child who is simply there.

Freedom is fulfilled in identity. Paul Claudel, whom France seems to be rediscovering, turns in the second of his *Five Great Odes* ("The Spirit and the water") to the Creator, with a cry for identity:

I see many ways of not being, but there is one way only of being
...

O my God, I see it now, the key that sets free,
It's not at all the one that opens, but the one that closes!¹¹

First of all, that requires discipline (C 29ff). So we are brought back to the theme of obedience, which is not easy for anybody. It must be learned. Christians even read of the "leader of their faith," their "Lord," in the letter to the Hebrews, that "although he was the Son, he learned obedience through suffering" (5:8). So obedience is a "goal" of learning and not just a perhaps unavoidable step on the minor's developmental path to being himself.¹²

Obedience contains this aspect, too. "Socialization" includes unavoidable moments of drilling and training. How else could one come to master playing an instrument? In the meantime, the instructor needs to accompany these exercises with more and more rational explanation. Yet, besides the fact that training and drilling can never simply be got rid of and set aside, they are not obedience in the strict sense. Nor is acting by one's own lights.

Obedience means, rather, letting oneself be convinced and acting on the basis of another's word. To obey means to trust, *sich verlassen* in both senses ["to rely on," "to abandon oneself"]. This is another reason why the goal of the spirit's transformation is the

¹⁰Friederich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari, KSA IV, 29–31.

¹¹Paul Claudel, *Oeuvres poétiques complètes* (Paris: Pléiade), 238–240. "Je vois bien des manières de ne pas être, mais il n'y a qu'une manière seule d'être . . . / O mon Dieu, je la vois, la clef maintenant qui délivre, / Ce n'est point celle qui ouvre, mais celle-là qui ferme!"

¹²Jörg Splett, *Der Mensch ist Person* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), chapter entitled "Gehorchen ist menschlich."

child. That is, not for Nietzsche, who astonishingly enough calls the child a wheel turning itself, but in reality. For what characterizes the child before all else is his gaze upwards. “This is the most childlike thing about the child: the direction of its gaze.” “The cup of its existence is open upwards” (Heinrich Spaemann).¹³

By the way: Can one seriously trust a “something,” or can one trust only a someone? That is, the one obeying *gives someone* an “authority,” this trust that the latter *instills* in him (what a depth of meaning there is in language!).

But authority (from *augère*) is had by that person who “multiplies” and “brings forth.” Thus, in music, people first give their trust to the creator of the work, to its master—trust that he deserves to take the decisively un-multipliable thing we mortals have at our disposal: time. What begins with the simple listener holds true all the way to the seasoned orchestra and its director. In the same twofold happening (which happens in the middle voice), the student trusts the teacher. Lastly, having become himself a master, the servant of the work trusts “the spirit,” as Michelangelo expresses in poetry:

The greatest artist does not conceive of a single form
that a block of marble does not contain in itself alone
with its excess; only the hand
that obeys the spirit attains to it.¹⁴

2. One does not come out of the first negative moment of the self-undoing [*Selbst-Aufhebung*] of lived freedom in such a way that, once endured, it is then left behind. (For its part, the moment is “preserved” [*aufgehoben*] in the fullest sense.) Nevertheless, it is already true—and in the unadulterated earnestness of this word—that this moment is a stroke of good fortune [*ein Glück*].

¹³Heinrich Spaemann, *Orientierung am Kinde. Meditationsskizzen zu Mt 18, 3, 5th* ed. (Einsiedeln, 1983), 23. See Jörg Splett, *Freiheits-Erfahrung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), the chapter entitled “Kind-sein.”

¹⁴Hugo Friedrich, *Epochen der italienischen Lyrik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1964), 39 (Sonnet 83):

Non ha l’ottimo artista alcun concetto
c’un marmo solo in sè non circoscrive
col suo superchio,—solo—quelle arriva
la man che ubbidisce all’intelletto

There is, after all, nothing forcing trust to establish itself on the basis of the word in which (toward which) it trusts. Rather, the fact that it can and may do this is experienced as its good fortune [*sein Glück*]. Hence it has reason for a twofold thanksgiving:¹⁵ first for having found and been found, second for letting-oneself-be-found (for the trust of a child in place of a self-protecting distance).¹⁶

But happiness [*Glück*] is the coincidence of willing, “ought”—in a certain sense also of “must”—and being in precisely this. It is the *kairos* of the Yes, an encompassing Yes and Amen.¹⁷ Can this be any better expressed than with Celibidache’s, “It is so”? “Not, ‘It is beautiful, wonderful—there are a thousand expressions like that that do not hit home—but ‘it is so.’ I could not have put it any better, and to this day I think that that is the most beautiful thing I have heard from another person that has played music with me” (C, 16).

It is so—exactly as it is and not otherwise, in one of the billions of ways in which it might be different than it is. Unique—and one *among* others that it is not: in its limits—finite.

It is as form [*Gestalt*]. “Form” here means not the exterior outline, but rather an event of power, the figure in a texture in

¹⁵“Das einzige Verhältnis des Bewußtseins zum Glück ist der Dank: das macht dessen unvergleichliche Würde aus” [Consciousness’ only relation to happiness is thanks: that constitutes its incomparable dignity] (Theodore W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* [Frankfurt am Main, (1951) 1962], 144).

¹⁶“Einsicht beflügelt den Willen. Aber die Liebe/findet ihr Glück im Gehorsam” [Insight gives the will wings. But love/finds its happiness in obedience] (E. Mitterer, *Entsühnung des Kain. Neue Gedichte* [Einsiedeln, 1974], 66).

¹⁷“Um Freude irgendworan zu haben, muß man *Alles* gutheißen” [In order to take joy in anything, one must approve of *everything*] (Friederich Nietzsche, KstA VII, no. 2, 160 [26 (47)]). Compare in *Schlechta* III, 893: “Gesetzt, wir sagen ja zu einem einzigen Augenblick, so haben wir damit nicht nur zu uns selbst, sondern zu allem Dasein ja gesagt” [Granted that we say Yes to a single moment, we have, in doing this, said Yes not only to ourselves, but to all existence]; Bernhard Welte: “Sinn [meint] die mögliche Übereinkunft meiner mit mir selbst als Übereinkunft mit meiner Welt” [“Meaning” means “the possible agreement of me with myself as agreement with my world”] (*Auf der Spur des Ewigen* [Freiburg i. Br., 1965], 20); “Etwas hat Sinn heißt also: es führt in die mögliche Übereinkunft meiner mit meinem Sein im Ganzen als eine Übereinkunft mit dem Seienden im Ganzen” [That something “makes sense,” has meaning, means that it leads to the possible agreement of me with my being as a whole as an agreement with being as a whole] (22).

which powers and tensions are woven with each other, against each other, in each other. Form fulfills its law in density such that its *limits* are wholly and completely the *contours* of itself. Thus the form is neither arbitrarily chiseled from the outside nor does it flow out into a vague whatever-you-may please: it fulfills itself. Its tension is the tension of a wave of melody that realizes its own end for itself. In the conversations of Schmidt-Garre, we hear again and again of the beginning in the end and the end in the beginning. Rainer Maria Rilke praises this in Friedrich Hölderlin:¹⁸ “The line ended like fate, was a death—even in the gentlest, and you crossed its threshold” [*Die Zeile schloß sich wie Schicksal, ein Tod war—selbst in der lindesten, und du betratest ihn . . .*].

Only such a letting oneself go to the end, in a readiness for leave-taking [*Abschiedlichkeit*] as intense as it is detached, can receive the gift of *completion*. In this completion, a work testifies that finitude and perfection do not necessarily contradict each other (although we like to think so as a way of covering up imperfection). A poem of three stanzas with four lines each, and each line only half a line of print long—it would be a crime to demand the poem to go on for another 24,000 lines because it is so beautiful. A painting in its frame, a sculpture, a tower are in their contours what they are. This holds true most especially, however, for a song, a sonata, an evening concert, which only *are* while they pass away (just as we die for as long as we live), or, put differently, which only are *as something past*, because they first attain their completion in the end. (G. W. F. Hegel proposes as food for thought the fact that *Wesen* [being, essence, entity] is linked to *gewesen sein* [having-been].)¹⁹

And the measurefullness of this completion (its authority to measure) strikes us as a bringer of such happiness and pain—above all in the temporal arts—because, in our lives and in our action, we ourselves mostly break off too soon or go too far and then unravel in approximations.²⁰

¹⁸Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. E. Zinn (Frankfurt am Main, 1955ff), II, 93.

¹⁹G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Moldenhauer and Michel (Frankfurt am Main, 1969ff), VI, 12; VIII, 231. See Aristotle’s term for the form of a being [*Wesensgestalt*], “*to ti ên einai*” (*Met* VII-1032-1): “that which it was to be.”

²⁰“At a hundred concerts per year, if there are three at which you are more or less present, that is a lot” (C, 37).

3. If, however, there is completion only at the price of a genuine end, we must at the same time ascribe the “genuine” also to the completion. If it is seriously a matter of “crossing the threshold of death,” then we must take just as seriously Rilke’s continuation: “*aber—der vorhergehende Gott führte dich drüben hervor*” [but—the God who went before led you forth from there.] That sounds—inevitably?—spatial, as if it meant a “beyond” that could simply be “crossed over to.” But then, how could a work [of art] affect us in our daily dying? Its answer is “*bleibend—im Nirgend*” [remaining—Nowhere].²¹ This is especially powerful in complaint, accusation, and protest.²²

What is meant is a new, transformed life. In the sense of a “timeless having-been” (Hegel), the German language used to call the dead *die Verewigten* [the deceased, lit. “the eternalized”]. This means that we may not suppress the third meaning of *Aufhebung* [lifting up, removal, preserving]: being preserved. The liberation from one’s freedom and self that Claudel called for does not mean a disappearing; Claudel meant a way (the only way) of being. “I don’t need to be dead so that you might live!”²³ But, if I may add something to this, perhaps it is he who needs death: in order to live? Liberation *from* the yearning of freedom is, as we have seen, a profound liberation *into* its essence [*Wesen*], that is, into freedom—a freedom of being and of identity.

But with this, the opening question posed to Celibidache returns. To be liberated for freedom—doesn’t that also have to mean standing in the space of new possibilities? Won’t obedience that is not servile be imaginative and creative?²⁴ Won’t it be the opposite

²¹Hölderlin: “*Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter*” [But the poets bestow what remains] (SW [Kl. Stuttg. Ausg.], II, 198); Rilke: “*Bleiben ist nirgends*” [to remain is nowhere] (SW, II, 687); Paul Klee: “*Einst werd ich liegen im Nügend—bei einem Engel irgend*” [Someday I will lie in Nowhere—by some angel or other] (Gedichte [Zürich, 1960], 9).

²²Franz Kafka: “Die Kunst ist ein von der Wahrheit Geblendetsein: Das Licht auf dem zurückweichenden Fratzensgesicht ist wahr, sonst nichts” [Art is a being blinded by truth: The light on the receding grimace of a face is true, and nothing else is] (*Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden* [Frankfurt am Main, 1994], VI 186 [Oktavheft G]).

²³46–239: “Il n’y a pas besoin que je sois mort pour que vous viviez!”

²⁴Compare Dorothee Sölle, *Phantasie und Gehorsam. Überlegungen zu einer künftigen christlichen Ethik* (Stuttgart, 1968).

of that anxious worry that buried the talent entrusted to it (Mt 25:18, 25)? This obedience *lives* the life that has been given to it. This means that it risks this life: *in the game of the risk of life*.

Freedom and play belong together, from “inanimate” technology (where a piece of machinery has “free play” if it is not inhibited or blocked) to the highest possibilities of human life. Of the latter, Friedrich Schiller said, “Man only plays when he is man in the full meaning of the word, and he is only fully man when he plays.”²⁵

Often, play is seen in contrast to seriousness, but such an opposition does not do it justice. Certainly, a game can be “spoiled” if it is taken “too seriously,” but also if someone in a “playful” mood lacks the “necessary seriousness.” Play shows itself, so to speak, to be the structure of a figure suspended between these two poles. As something human, it introduces—above and beyond the measuring and the playing through of possibilities—the constitution of a new, unique world, which only when looked at from the outside appears to be a mere snippet of space and time cut out from the day-to-day and ordinary.

Things as playthings, partners as “play-actors,” have been transformed, but not as the result of a morbid confusion and mix-up of “appearance” and “reality”—rather in a knowledge (again suspended between two poles) of their double meanings. The world of play is a *symbolic* world. By “symbol,” moreover, I mean neither a sign nor an allegory.²⁶

For this reason, we need to give due weight to the power, actuality [*Wirklichkeit*], and double meaning of the symbol, both to reject its devaluation over and against “reality” [*Realität*] and its aestheticizing or idolizing absolutization.²⁷

²⁵“Der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Worts Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt” (Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 5th ed., Letter 15, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. G. Fricke and H. G. Göpfert [Munich, 1975], 618).

²⁶Goethe’s poem “Über allen Gipfeln. . .” is neither a report on the weather nor an anthropological emblem (an “interpretation” of existence). The “peace” mentioned in the poem is itself, and in this way it is “meaningful.” Goethe on “symbol”: “*Indem es vollkommen sich selbst darstellt, deutet es auf das Übrige*” [By presenting itself perfectly, it points to everything else] (to K. E. Schubarth, 2 March 1818).

²⁷Compare Jörg Splett, *Spiel-Ernst* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); “Spiel,” in *Lexicon*

The spirit of such play is expressed in the apostle's advice: "From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who make use of the world as though they did not use it" (1 Cor 7:29–31).

This saying can be misunderstood if its dialectic is suppressed. Paul is not suggesting any sort of lack of seriousness; he is speaking of a spirit-given freedom and lightness, in all seriousness. To clarify this with an old monastic saying (which also applies to rehearsals) "Sleep short nights, make every hour of the day count, don't spare yourself, and then know it is all a jest—that is to be serious indeed."²⁸

There is seriousness in play, because play implies not only "that someone is playing with something, but also that something is playing with the player."²⁹ Play is risk. And the spirit the master obeys prods him to take himself so lightly that he can let himself go.³⁰ With this, we come at last to the cosmic and even—why not?—to the religious. For, when we speak about the world, we come sooner or later to "God and the world." Seen thus, the freedom of play reveals itself to be that stern happiness at being included in God's world-play.³¹

The Dutch physiologist and psychologist quoted above, Frederick J. J. Buytendijk, who represents an "understanding phenomenology," wrote in an essay on man as player: "The human being still has the possibility of being, instead of the player, the one played, the one concealed in play. Then a mysterious transformation takes place. The human being experiences that the all-encompassing,

der Bioethik.

²⁸Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play*, trans. B. Battershaw and E. Quinn (New York: Herder and Herder 1965), 58.

²⁹Frederick J. J. Buytendijk, *Wesen und Sinn des Spiels* (Berlin, 1933), 117.

³⁰A supreme form of this play of life is the "point-less" liturgy; and it does this completely where, as in the rule of St. Benedict, it becomes the "point" of life.

³¹"Es ist sehr schwer, etwas Gutes zu tun, wenn man nicht den Blick hat. Wenn ich diese Sicherheit, die ich im musikalischen Gewebe habe, im Leben hätte, wäre ich woanders. Ich hab' sie nicht.—Zu spät angefangen mit der Liebe zu Gott" [It is very hard to do something good when you don't have a view. If I had the security in life that I have in the warp and weft of music, I would be someplace else. I don't have it. Started too late with loving God] (C, 46).

loving ground of his existence is playing a marvelous game with him. The name of this game, as the poet Charles Péguy has told us, is ‘*Qui perd gagne.*’ The one who loses, wins.”³²

But with this, haven’t we arrived yet again at a multiplicity of Yeses?

III. Co-one

1. Let’s start again with happiness. What is it experienced as? “Agreement with myself as agreement with the world as a whole,” we heard above: being sound (*heil*) and whole.

What Goethe in his *Faust* describes theatrically as a journey through (or also around?) the world, appears in depth psychology as the inner journey of the soul to maturity: traversing day and night, light and shadows, true to itself alone (although not without the pain of partings and regret), to integration. This is equally true for the *Bildungsroman* of German classicism. Hegel raised it to the absolute: “to the path of the world-spirit through history—“*tantae molis erat*” [it was so hard].³³ In every case what is at issue is the evolving consciousness’ transformation into itself, its appropriation of itself. In the ascent to his self, man is on the path to his wholeness and perfection, to his salvation [*Heil*].

The image of this is a sphere, the perfect form. Perfect also and precisely because in it, the diameter has apparently become indifferent. From the borderline case of the point (of the tiny and colorful pearls of sugar for which children, delighted both by the sweets and by their game, shoot marbles) to our blue planet gliding through space or the golden, flaming sphere of the sun, we encounter the same thing: not infinity,³⁴ and yet, in the world of finitude, the happiness of unlimitedness: limit-less happiness.

³²Frederick J. J. Buytendijk, *Das Menschliche. Wege zu seinem Verständnis* (Stuttgart, 1958), 229 (“Der Spieler”).

³³“... *se ipsam cognoscere mentem.*” With a view to his history of philosophy (WW 20, 455), Hegel adapts Virgil’s programmatic line about the difficult founding of Rome in the *Aeneid*, 33 [“It was so hard to found the race of Rome”]: “It was so hard for the spirit to recognize itself.” See Jörg Splett, “Selbstverwirklichung,” [self-realization] in a Christian sense, in *Die neue Ordnung* 56 (2002): 359–368.

³⁴“Whoever desires infinitude does not know what he desires” (Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, ed. W. Rasch [Darmstadt, 1971], 12).

“In 1777, Goethe had the ‘good luck stone’ placed in his garden. It is still there to be seen. On a stone cube rests a stone sphere, silent, like a lingering happiness that has sworn to stay.”³⁵ (Is this a counterpart to that glimmering work lamp in Görlitz, before which the “Mysterium Magnum” opened up for Jakob Boehme?)

The philosopher asks stubbornly, one more time: all-alone? Alone? We could cite Wilhelm Busch, who constantly and humorously makes absurdities rhyme: “*Wer einsam ist, der hat es gut,—weil keiner da, der ihm was tut*” [Whoever’s lonely has it good,—because nobody’s there who can do him harm].³⁶ But what if you only “have it good,” and thus are happy, when you have someone with whom you can share all that?

One sphere can touch another, however, only on a point: in an existing nothingness. And it is nothing(ness) that is conjured up by the image of a sphere. This can already be seen in the influential myth that Aristophanes recounts in Plato’s *Symposium*, according to which we are halves in search of completion. Aristotle already notes in this regard that, “in order for a single thing to grow anew out of both, both or one must perish.”³⁷

“‘Who are you?’ asked the salt-doll to the sea. Smiling, the sea answered, ‘Come in and see for yourself.’ So the doll waded into the sea. The farther in it went, the more it dissolved Before the last bit disappeared, the doll cried out, astonished, ‘Now I know who I am!’” (though, instead of “who,” it ought after all to say “what”).³⁸

The consequence of such dreams of totality is in fact nothing. The only possible fulfillment of the search for happiness lies in a renunciation of meaning. The void reveals itself to be the goal of the “search for the oxen.” All work [of art], too, has disappeared.

³⁵“1777 ließ Goethe in seinem Garten den ‘Stein des guten Glücks’ errichten. Er ist noch heute dort zu sehen. Auf steinernem Kubus liegt still eine steinerne Kugel wie ein sich verweilendes Glück, beschworen, zu verbleiben” (Ursula Ziebarth, *Hexenspeise* [Pfullingen, 1976], 293).

³⁶Wilhelm Busch, *Der Einsame: Werke*. Collected works in four volumes, ed. F. Bohne (Wiesbaden), IV 324 (“Zu guter Letzt”).

³⁷*Politics* II, 1262, 11. At the symposium, Socrates himself contradicts the myth, in Diotima’s name: instead of to wholeness, love tends toward the good. “But men are ready to let even their own feet and hands be cut off if these seem to be harmful to them” (205e). We find something similar (counter to C. G. Jung’s integration?) in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:29).

³⁸Anthony de Mello, *Warum der Vogel singt* (Freiburg, 1984), 75.

Where does this search for the sphere come from? Why its enduring fascination? Because it is really a search for the absence of suffering, a flight from pain. Love, in contrast, happily “suffers” someone.³⁹ And while the “happiness” of the sphere is really only the lack of pain,⁴⁰ the happy man is grateful to *someone*.⁴¹

2. Whoever is happy is grateful. This can perhaps be seen most clearly when contrasted with the thesis of a “right to happiness.”⁴²

It’s easy for contemporary man to deduce rights out of needs. This is understandable, since the hard-heartedness of some is always there to frustrate the basic needs of others. And it is a fact that the person who does not get his rights is unhappy. But does getting one’s rights make one happy (however much it may fill one with relief, contentment, joy, even triumph, and perhaps a scathing satisfaction)? A person is happy only when he receives more than what is his due. For this reason the happy man is grateful—and conversely, only the truly grateful man is happy.

You may need the sympathy of at least one other human being just in order to live,⁴³ but does this give you a right to have

³⁹Maurice Blondel, *Die Aktion* (1893) (Freiburg-Munich, 1965), 405: “Suffering is the seal of an other in us.” Hence beatitude (contrary to “happiness”) does not even preclude suffering. “We need not suppose that the necessity for something analogous to self-conquest will ever be ended, or that eternal life will not also be eternal dying. It is in this sense that, as there may be pleasures in hell (God shield us from them), there may be something not all unlike pains in heaven (God grant us soon to taste them)” (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* [London: The Centenary Press, 1942], 140).

⁴⁰A line from a song has remained with me: “*Le bonheur n’est pas grande chose; c’est le chagrin, qui se repose*” [Happiness isn’t a big deal; it’s chagrin resting]. (A. Schopenhauer, French?). Already Socrates declared at his trial that hardly anything can come close to the happiness of a dreamless, uninterrupted night of sleep (*Apol.* 40 d–e).

⁴¹Or, if he did not know anyone to whom he could be thankful, this bothered him—in his happiness: “Das Schwerste für den, der an Gott nicht glaubt: daß er niemanden hat, dem er danken kann” [The hardest thing for a man who does not believe in God is that he doesn’t have anyone he can thank] (Elias Canetti, *Das Geheimherz der Uhr* [Frankfurt am Main, 1990; Munich, 1987], 126).

⁴²See, for example, Gerhard M. Martin, “*Wir wollen hier auf Erden schon . . .*” *Das Recht auf Glück* (Stuttgart, 1970).

⁴³Max Frisch, *Tagebuch*, entry from 1 January 1949: in the collected works (Frankfurt am Main, 1976), II, 635ff.

any particular person want to give it to you? It's simply a matter of logic. But it also has to do with the logic of the matter. For what would I gain from someone's showing me love if I could legally oblige him or her to do so? If his or her love were not a gift, but something I had "coming to me"? The idea of a "right to happiness" actually destroys happiness itself.

So what is important for us is the non-coercible, *free* initiative of the other. This means, however, that we are dependent on *grace*, and this in a thoroughly double sense:

First of all, we cannot find, procure, or hunt down what we need by ourselves; nor can we buy it or win it from someone in a court of law. A clear awareness of this would spare our contemporaries much disruptive pain and worry.

But then—and on a deeper level—what matters to us is precisely this unachievability. The point, then, is not that we are looking for something that, unfortunately, happens to be unavailable or unenforceable. Rather, the happiness we seek is precisely the free gift, the unavailable that guarantees its unavailability by its own massive presence. We don't only want something that we cannot attain on our own; on the contrary, we want it *to be* unreachable, because we yearn to be permitted to receive it as a gift of love: the one Yes.

We also (and perhaps first of all, but is this so certain?) want our rights. But beyond this and more than this, we hope for what does not belong to us, for that which we have no right to, for what can only be granted to us uncompelled. Here we have found our way back to the earlier insight regarding twofold thankfulness. But as we have already said, the happy man is always grateful to someone, and not really to a faceless fate.

This, however, compels us to think of the unity and wholeness of form [*Gestalt*], of work [*Werk*] and happiness otherwise than with the mono-logic of the sphere. We have already heard an echo of the notion that a work of art is not simply word, but is in its essence response ("what is someone supposed to say if nothing 'says' anything to him?"). Response out of a being-struck and being-seized.

In other words, in the work, hearing and understanding have taken on form. (Here "understanding" [*Verstehen*] does not at all have to be the same as "comprehending" [*Begreifen*];⁴⁴ I can, after all,

⁴⁴This is how I would like to clarify well-known sayings such as, "Music isn't understood but experienced."

understand a person—like music—without comprehending, and again I can understand this incomprehensibility itself.) A work of art is the recognition of something and someone become form. In it, the truth of whatever or whoever wanted to be “named” shows itself; to put it another way, this reality shows itself in its truth—whether directly in celebration or indirectly (“dialectically”) in protest. But is there such a thing as a real understanding [*Verständnis*] without a last ground of—however hidden—agreement [*Einverständnis*]? Is there such a thing as recognition without love?

The work of art is the fruit of understanding. It embodies therefore the willingness to understand. It testifies to attentiveness, openness for. This is why the work has the power to liberate the beholder so that he, too, might turn his attention away from himself and towards something else. It itself is response become form. Paul Celan explained his poetry, for so many hermetically sealed, thus: “The absolute poem . . . cannot exist.” He calls the poem a conversation (although often a desperate one). Writing to Hans Bender, he says, “I see no fundamental difference between a handclasp and a poem.”⁴⁵

Naturally, this is true not only for poems, but for every work of art. In his acceptance speech for the Büchner Prize Celan cited Nicolas de Malebranche (199): “Attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul.” That led me to think of a similar definition of Simone Weil’s: “At its highest level, attentiveness is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love.”⁴⁶

What takes shape in the work, then, is anything but self-sufficiency. The successful work is no sphere. Even less essential aspects of the work show this. Here are two.

⁴⁵Paul Celan, *Collected works* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), III 198f; 177. Abstractly formulated, a text becomes poem, the musical score becomes a “sculpture of sound,” when everything becomes unreserved communication (Gert Kalow, *Poesie ist Nachricht* [Munich, 1975], 69f). “Einfache Sprache. Sprache einfach. In die Terminologie . . . der Informationstheorie übersetzt, heißt das: Gedicht—redundanzfreier Text” [Simple speech. Speech simply. In the terminology . . . of information theory, that means: poem—the redundance-free text].

⁴⁶Simone Weil, *Schwerkraft und Gnade* (Munich, 1952), 209. Thus, before the work of art is an informing imparting [*Anteilgabe*] (Kalow, 69f, quotes Ezra Pound: “simply speech, burdened with meaning to the limits of possibility”), it is—and no less totally—a participation [*Anteilnahme*]. The redundancy it is free from is the “murmuring” of itself: It shows. What is.—“It is so.”

First of all, every work of art is one among many: one Yes next to many Yeses. A typical concert is proof: several pieces are performed in the same evening, several poems are read in one poetry reading, though neither contains so many works as there are paintings in a museum (where the visitor himself must “compose”).

Secondly, no work of art is simply perfect. So what happens with the “It is so?” We might say, à la Hegel, that the difference between “in itself” and “for me” is already inscribed in the “for me” as such. To every recognition belongs the knowledge of its disproportion to what is recognized. This is obviously true not only for “interpretation,” but for experience, seeing and hearing itself.⁴⁷

It would be false—and ungrateful—to deny that recognition took place (think of the moving scene with the Schleswig-Holstein Academy Orchestra, after the successful performance of the choral, “with tears in their eyes”: C, 38). Yet at the same time, no huts are built on Tabor. Precisely in happiness, the “I” exceeds itself. For the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, this can be seen in the fact that “beatitude is not given in any experience; it is only pointed to in an awareness of direction The events that speak of beatitude are of the sort that sweep away obstacles, that open up a broad landscape of existence; the excess of meaning, the too much, the immeasurable, that is the sign”⁴⁸

Here on earth, perfection is finite. This is the source of its ambivalence, here its questionlessness becomes questionable ever anew: “indwelling the soul is a Logos (meaning, word, insight) that multiplies” (Heraclitus, 115).

The work of art becomes, instead of a sphere, a mediator, and its contours are as if raised [*aufgehoben*] to the level of the function of being, not merely a point of contact (which, as we considered, is the only form of contact between spheres), but, to coin a neologism, a “line” or “plane” of contact between the creator [of the work] and the comprehending listener, between the I (in such a We) and its (our!) world. Wholeness no longer means completeness, but rather undividedness (as in the Hebrew

⁴⁷Luke 17:10 sheds a sober light on this: “When you have done all that was given you to do, you should say, ‘We are useless slaves’”

⁴⁸Paul Ricoeur, *Die Fehlbarkeit des Menschen* (Freiburg, 1971), 96. This verifies, moreover, that transcendence is not first a phenomenon of flight or compensation for losers or failures. Rather, it inheres originally in happiness.

tam/tamim).⁴⁹ The work is whole and, carried away by it, man can be whole in collected, undistracted turning-towards: *all eyes and ears*.

3. Artist, work, and beholder: all eyes and ears. Whoever is all eyes and ears has in fact forgotten to “interpret” “creatively.” He is seized. One cannot make oneself be addressed and not “bind” oneself. (A “strained attentiveness” would be none at all, but one of the clearest signs of disinterest.)

On the other hand, neither seeing nor hearing is purely passive. Neither a photographic plate nor a cassette recorder utters a Yes. Hence, Celibidache’s “It is so” cannot be interpreted as a replica, however much it may be “exactly as” the original. Rather, it can only be something unique. This latter is of course not the “shorthand” (C, 19) of the musical score, but its “interpretation,” but now in a different sense from the way that interpreting a Chillida sculpture or a Hegel text means to talk about it. To interpret music is to realize it.⁵⁰

All eyes and ears? The place of the word is not the mouth, but the ear, or, better, the listening heart.⁵¹ But as the listener is, so does he listen. Hence, a word is always an event of community [*Gemeinschaftsereignis*], a conversation. Colors, even shape and size, are such events [*Gemeinschaftsgeschehen*]. It has been asked: Are roses red if no one sees them? The answer is: “In and for themselves, they are such that they are red *for and with us*.” Knowing is an act of making one; the red of roses is thus the fruit of myself and the rose. “*Opus duorum unum*.” Yes to the Yes. And if the work succeeds, then here and now it is this one, this and no other—and at the same time this among the billions of others.⁵²

⁴⁹The contrary term here is not “imperfect,” as it is for the Greek *téleios*, but rather “divided,” “dispersed.”

⁵⁰Theodore W. Adorno: “Sprache interpretieren heißt: Sprache verstehen, Musik interpretieren: Musik machen” [To interpret speech means to understand it, to interpret music means to play it].

⁵¹By which I do not mean emotionality, but rather, according to a tradition that extends from the Bible to Pascal, the person’s center. (See Solomon’s plea: “Give thy servant a listening heart, that he may understand to govern thy people and discern between good and evil” [1 Kgs 3:9].)

⁵²See the clarification offered by Schmidt-Garre (41). As a creature of the word [*Wesen des Wortes*], man is essentially response [*von Wesen Antwort*]. As response, we are in conversation—we even are one. Hölderlin: “Seit ein Gespräch wir sind . . . (Versöhnender, der . . .)” [Ever since a conversation we are . . . (reconcilers, who

There is no “pure experience” (William James). Precisely the selfless is not un-selved.⁵³ If this is not recognized, a double threat looms: either we think of ourselves as a cassette recorder with the dictatorial claim that not only here and now—in this *kairos* “between us”—but in principle there is only a single word; once and for all only our own grasp of something [*Auffassung*] can hold true. Or we think that we can permit ourselves “transpositions”/“interpretations” of the raw material at will. Both temptations miss the point that “reality” only comes to be together.

In a successful conversation, “one word leads to the next,” to the single right and fitting word. This, too, can appear in two ways: one word leads to the next in a bitter argument, narrowing, compelled—or in a fulfilled “communication of the self,” since we do not only communicate something, but ourselves. In the latter case, each shares himself with the other, and the partners, instead of cutting off each other’s words, reciprocally “take the words out of their mouths.”

I find such “plucking” presented with particular beauty in the third act of *Faust II*, in the inner courtyard (if the musical layman is permitted once more to choose a literary example). Helen has heard the watchman Lynkeus speaking in verse. Fascinated, she asks (9377): “Then tell me how I too can learn the art.”⁵⁴ Faust answers with a rhyme: “It’s simple: let the words well from your heart.” Then he gives her three one-and-a-half verse lines, and effortlessly, she finds the rhyming response. Does she find it? It finds itself. “*Er ist das Ufer, wo sie landen,—sind zwei Gedanken einverstanden*” [He is the shore where they land,—two thoughts are agreed], we hear in a rhyme by Karl Kraus.⁵⁵

. . .), (*SW*, 3rd ed., II, 143, note 21).

⁵³Henry James, *The Writings of Henry James*, ed. J. J. McDermott (Chicago, 1977), 208: “. . . a simple that” (A World of Pure Experience); Nishida Kitaro, *Über das Gute. Eine Philosophie der reinen Erfahrung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 29: “Erfahren bedeutet, das Tatsächliche als solches zu erkennen; ohne alles Mitwirken des Selbst nach Maßgabe des Tatsächlichen zu wissen . . . kein Subjekt und kein Objekt” [To experience means to recognize the actual as such; without any cooperation of the self to know according to the measure of the actual . . . no subject and no object].

⁵⁴*Faust I & II*, trans. Stuart Atkins (Cambridge, Mass.: Suhrkamp/Insel, 1984).

⁵⁵Karl Kraus, *Worte in Versen* (Munich, 1959), 80 (Der Reim).

Faust

There is no past or future in an hour like this,
the present moment only

Helen

is our bliss.

Faust

It is all things we ever could demand.
What confirmation does it need?

Helen

My hand.

Again the key that, instead of opening, closes, to a fulfilling closure.
To that end that already was in the beginning and in which, now,
the beginning is encompassed.

But Euphorion dies and Helen vanishes. The Yes of a performance fades away. His/her end leaves us in a grateful remembrance—and in the future form of such thanks: the hope for a new Yes. This was the first thing.

The second thing I addressed was the inner limits of each and every Yes: When is one open, attentive, loving enough?⁵⁶ When are we really at the goal?

★

So, are there many Yeses, after all? On the page, when all is said and done, of a last (still) “Not so”?

In the immanent, horizontal perspective, the question probably remains undecided. The key words that have surfaced,

⁵⁶Ranier Maria Rilke in the face of the anemone and its “*in den stillen Blütenstern gespannte[n]—Muskel des unendlichen Empfangs*” [stretched in the still starbud—muscle of infinite reception] (SW, 753f [Sonette an Orpheus II, 5]):

Wir, Gewaltsamen, wir währen länger.
Aber, wann, in welchem aller Leben,
sind wir endlich offen und Empfänger?

We, the violent, we last longer.
But, when, in what life of lives,
are we at last open and receivers?

however—attentiveness (being collected, *An-dacht* [thinking on, devotion and prayer]), have made it clear that in continuing to think about freedom as questioned and being called to respond, philosophy would have to become the philosophy of religion. In his essay on freedom, Schelling translates “*religio*” as—active—“conscientiousness” [*Gewissenhaftigkeit*].⁵⁷ Or, as we said earlier: heart. And since we are speaking of activity, I would like at least to mention again another basic term, “to let arise” [*Entstehenlassen*], in order to make it perfectly clear that when we commend it we are not arguing for doing nothing—and neither is Celibidache.⁵⁸ That is, one can genuinely “do nothing,” but only the man who works remains awake: for the moment in which “something does itself.”

With this, the look out [*Ausblick*] becomes a look up [*Aufblick*]: to a Yes that is not our Yes, but that (as we touched on above) is said *to* us, to our Yeses with their Nos. And again, that is *one* Yes.

We should, we are allowed to, be in our imperfections. And again and again we are permitted to experience that a perfection happens that is beyond us—also and precisely when we receive the gift of it happening *through* us. It is given to us—as the “down payment”⁵⁹ of a feast whose “It is so” (“Yes and Amen”) will at last be final [*end-gültig*: good to the end]—“*finis sine fine*.”⁶⁰ C. S. Lewis

⁵⁷F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart, 1856–1861), VII 392–394.

⁵⁸Reception-conception is not at all passive, but—as we have considered—belongs to the “middle voice.” It is an opening oneself up for and letting oneself be grasped. “[I]n this context, we are allowed to remember that the word “*Erfahrung*” and the Latin term *experientia*, which it seeks to translate into German, speaks of ‘going through to the end’ (*ex per ire*). Whoever does not find his way to the continuity of a path he can go through to the end has experiences [*Erlebnisse*], but no experience [*Erfahrung*]. The Greek word *empeiria*, however, refers to that which one brings in when, at the end of a long journey to the haven (to *empóron*), one comes home: the harvest, so to speak, that one brings in when one has seen much, but also and at the same time ‘made a poem’ about it. And it is clear: this must be learned” (Richard Schaeffler, “Fähigkeit zur Erfahrung,” in *Was ist Erfahrung? Theologie und Naturwissenschaft im Gespräch*, ed. J. Audretsch and K. Nagorni [Karlsruhe, 2002], 35–74, 42).

⁵⁹*arrhabón* (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14), which is more than a “pledge.” It is a payment, a first installment.

⁶⁰Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, the second to last paragraph. Already at this point, a not-too-modest thinking through of the experienced “It is so” would have to get to the bottom of things: to the unfathomable, original “is” that appears in it.

describes it as the eternal dance, which “makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.”⁶¹

Dream? Of course, Lewis does not mean sleepiness (no “eternal rest”), but rather the blessedness of the goal: the eloquent silence. According to Lewis, Hell hates music and silence.⁶² Indeed. In the words of Joseph Pieper, both [hellish] “noise and total silence destroy all possibility of mutual understanding, because they destroy both speaking and hearing . . . music is alone in creating a particular kind of silence, though by no means soundlessly It makes a listening silence possible, but a silence that listens to more than simply sound and melody. (As a basic condition, anyone must be quiet who wants to perceive sound) Far beyond this, music opens up a great, perfectly dimensioned space within which, when things come about happily, a reality can dawn which ranks higher than music.”⁶³—*Translated by Michelle K. Borrás.* □

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Compare the sentence with which Maurice Blondel ends his great work, *L'Action* (1893): It has to do with a word that is itself a doing, “*une action, il faut le dire: ‘C’est’*” [“an action, one must say: ‘It is.’”]

⁶¹Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 141.

⁶²“Music and silence—how I detest them both!” (C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* [New York: Macmillan, 1943], 113).

⁶³Joseph Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*, trans. Lothar Kraus (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 55–56.