

THE APORIA OF SADNESS

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Both as an "empirical" as well as a metaphysical feeling of life, sadness has an aporetic configuration: in both these states it coincides with a conflictual affective situation. Sadness is a specific form of the conflict of opposites. Undoubtedly the individual who lingers in sadness as a kind of affective conclusion to a series of events of a strictly personal character will never feel the need to theorise about it thus giving it a more profound and more general sense. He will never define sadness in aporetic terms. Yet, he will perceive it as an aporetic tonality - an inner affective contradiction, an affective dissatisfaction, a malaise of the soul. He will perceive it ultimately as an expression of the lack of fulfillment of his inner life. The (average) man who experiences sadness does so because he is halted in his aspiration toward happiness. His sadness (his empirical sadness) stems from the fact that in his propensity toward happiness he meets the opposition of an outside force. The result of this tension and struggle between opposites is not necessarily an emptying of the soul, a psychological "void". Even if the person does not undergo the mortification of his soul, dominated by the feeling of empirical sadness, he will experience the variegated gamut of regrets and will even enter, for a certain period of time, a state of inactivity, of immobility as he allows his being to be permeated by the poisonous perfidy of the lassitude of the soul.

Philosophical sadness is a much more complex feeling and yet, it also originates from an irrational infrastructure. There is a melodious sadness, a sweet and "abstract" sadness, an unhappiness which is diminished as it is captured and made part of the reassuring world of solitary reverie. This irrational feeling overlaps, as does the feeling of philosophical sadness proper, an attitude of global appreciation of

existence. Its irrepressible inclination towards a global perception of existence allows us to see in it a philosophical feeling *in nuce*, but this is not sufficient for us to identify a plenary philosophical feeling in it. A philosophical feeling proper is something that has been filtered through reflection, meditation, through critical reason (i.e. philosophical evaluation). A feeling becomes a philosophical feeling when we conceptualise it, rationalise it and give it an explicit meaning. Consequently, we can speak of the philosophical feeling of sadness only after defining the feeling of sadness in aporetic terms.

Undoubtedly, characterising sadness in this way coincides with the act of conceptualisation of an irrational feeling lodged in the substructure of the individual consciousness, but it can only be done by taking into consideration the whole life experience of that consciousness. This means that we cannot attempt such a definition before acquiring the idea that the “being” of our subjectivity is aporetic by nature, before realising that subjectivity is a field of irreconcilable forces. The philosophical characterisation of sadness occurs in the final stage of the philosophical reflection upon the aporetic nature of subjectivity. This characterisation is performed upon a delimited affective content - the irrational feeling of sadness - but the specificity of its object is only revealed in the light of the philosophical analysis of the “being” (essence) of human subjectivity. It commences from the “abstract” perception of the feeling of sadness as a “disharmony” of our inner life and, based upon the knowledge provided by the philosophical meditation on the essence of human subjectivity, it terminates in its concrete and explicit comprehension, i.e. its definition in aporetic terms, either as an unhappy happiness or as unhappiness rendered happy by our reconciliation with destiny. Both in its irrational form as well as in its rational (philosophical) form, the feeling of sadness expresses first of all the tonality in which the subject perceives his/her inner life (in the former case we speak of a purely affective tonality whereas in the latter an affective-rational tonality). But the self-knowledge of the subjectivity under the form of sadness is never restricted to the knowledge of a strictly subjective content; subjectivity is not a monad closed in upon itself

but rather an existential structure open to the world around it, a form of life that interiorizes and totalizes the determinations of the surrounding world. This self-knowledge is always an act in which the subjectivity perceives itself as being firmly grounded in nature and society as subjectivity projected upon the canvas of the existence of the world, as a subjectivity which subjectivizes this existence for itself. The self-comprehension of the subject under the tonality of sadness does not simply mean its pure self-comprehension (under the respective tonality) but also the subjective assumption (under the domination of this state of mind) of external existence in its totality.

To be sure, this form of subjective assumption of the world is nothing else but an implicit type of perceiving it. Yet, our consciousness has the capacity to aim the feeling of sadness outside, turning it into the conclusive feeling in and through which it intends to encompass the totality of its relationships with the world. When consciousness is directed towards the external existence, through an act of reducing and concentrating all its energies to and respectively into the feeling of sadness, surely it carries out an explicit perception of the world. We do not intend a detailed analysis of this type of perception of existence now. Neither do we intend to take on the problem of the knowledge of the world according to the model offered by the self-knowledge of the subject. We shall only state that as a feeling that accompanies, totalises and concludes the process of knowing the world, sadness retains the aporetic structure of that form in which it expresses itself as a specific kind of self-knowledge of subjectivity. And how could it be otherwise, when it is the final stage of a knowledge that discovers the configuration of the world, an endless series of irreconcilable contradictions? How could it be otherwise, when this “philosophical” sadness originates in that irrational sadness which is perceived as an effect of our inner disharmony, of our incapacity to reach - once and for all - a state of inner fulfillment?

But let us return to the main topic of this study, i.e. to the analysis of the feeling of sadness perceived as a particular way of self-revelation of inner life, as well as to the study of its consubstantial

aporia. What do we mean by saying that sadness indicates the self-cognitive experience of the subject? We shall begin by recalling that there are two kinds of sadness: the so-called prephilosophic or irrational sadness and the philosophic sadness. To these two specific forms of self-knowledge correspond: one of them is "abstract" and imprecise; the other one is "concrete" and exact. Abstract self-knowledge indicates the fact that the feeling of sadness is a totalising feeling of (subjective) life, but that does not uncover the hidden roots of this phenomenon; it operates as if these causes did not exist at all. Likewise, this form of self-knowledge does not explicitly refer to the aporetic content of the irrational feeling of life. Concrete self-knowledge, on the other hand, reveals the causes for which sadness can become the conclusive feeling of inner life in its totality, which allows it, at the same time, to go on to an explanation and a correct definition of the aporia that is consubstantial to sadness. Doubtlessly, concrete self-knowledge is preceded by abstract self-knowledge. In other words, authentic philosophical reflection upon sadness starts from the realisation that following the impact with existence, there appears in the consciousness of man a first form of uneasiness, a first form of unhappiness - irrational sadness - and it is motivated by the desire to reveal the cause of this "indisposition", of this "unhappiness", of this "sadness". It discloses to us the fact that the "original" sadness stems from the thwarting of the original aspiration, to happiness, which is present implicitly in every individual's soul. But its mission does not end here. The philosophical meditation goes beyond this somewhat tautological explanation to seek out the more concrete causes of the feeling of sadness. It arrives at the question: why is man's desire to be happy in the absolute sense of the word something that will never be fulfilled? However, a strange phenomenon appears during the investigation which tries to find the answer to the above question and thus discover the truth: sadness itself evolves, becoming more profound and complex, becoming a "philosophical" sadness. This is to say that by identifying the reasons for which the fundamental feeling of man can only be a feeling of sadness, we turn the irrational sadness into a self-reflexive one, that

is, into a feeling aware of the motivations which have determined it to be constituted in its pure specificity - in other words, as an aporetic feeling - and which perceives itself as a feeling with such a content. The self-reflexive sadness is the sadness that has become aware of its own aporetic structure and consequently of its own "idea", of its own "logic" (i.e.. of man's inability to be happy in the absolute sense of his exigency) and which realizes that these self-revelations have been made possible by another series of self-revelations of consciousness: by the self-revelations that have disclosed the aporetic nature of the "being" of our subjectivity.

This whole problem can be restated in relatively different terms. We shall commence by stating that the existential "metaphysics" that we are advancing originates, like every "metaphysics" of this type, in a fundamental feeling of life; in this particular case, in the feeling of sadness. Philosophical reflection starts with (or as) an interrogation concerning the source and the sense of the irrational sadness. The source is quickly identified: it resides in the conflict between existence and consciousness. The sense of sadness is somewhat more difficult to decipher. In order to name the sense or idea of sadness we first have to know the sense or idea of the modes of existence of our subjectivity. This does not mean that the sense or idea of sadness copies or imitates the other sense or the other idea; it only means that the former are helped in their self-revelation through an underscoring of the latter. The idea of sadness - which indicates the fact that the feeling of sadness has an aporetic configuration - can only be formulated completely clearly after we have been able to state the idea of the specific manifestations of our subjectivity, the idea, in other words, that the "being" of our subjectivity has an aporetic nature. The self-revelation of sadness as unhappy-happiness (in the first place) or as happy-unhappiness (in the second place) depends on the self-revelation of our subjectivity in its aporetic essence. The discovery of the deep structure of sadness is an act made possible only by the discovery of what is essential in our subjectivity, i.e. its aporetic onfiguration. The revelation of the fact that our inner life is an aporetic process stimulates within us the desire to understand

better the feeling of sadness in its inner becoming. By apprehending the specificity of our subjectivity we are given an impetus to seize the specificity of sadness itself (as a feeling that accompanies this subjectivity). We might say that noticing the first specific element represents in a way the reason that generates the activity of noticing the second specific element. This does not mean however that the latter form of perceptive activity reproduces or copies the former. It is true that both emphasize - as being essential - the same principle of spiritual existence: the aporia principle. But each of them does so by processing its own "material" which is available and by discovering in this and only in this the embodiment of the principle.

Through introspection the individual can master the idea that his own subjectivity is made up of a cluster of aporias: existence and the nothing, the finite and the infinite, time and eternity, reason and sensibility, purity and impurity, contemplation and action. The discovery of any of these aporetic pairs brings about an acute state of sensitivity of the consciousness. However, there is a clear gradation as far as their effect of sensitivisation is concerned. The idea that our being is the arena where the clashing of the life instinct and the death instinct happens has a more powerful effect upon our feelings than other "subjective" ideas (except probably the correlative idea that there is an aporetic combination between the time and eternity of individual life, the former, i.e. the finite duration being its concrete reality, and the latter being only the aspiration, the ideal goal of consciousness¹). But other existential ideas also have a destabilising influence upon the affective life of the individual: the idea of the contradiction between reason and sensibility (i.e. of the contradiction between the static perspective and the dynamic perspective upon life), the idea of the contradiction between purity and impurity (i.e. of the contradiction between the tendency to render moral life selfless and the inclination towards domination and aggression) and the idea of the

¹ These two terms - time and eternity - can be replaced by two other terms - finite (temporal) and infinite (non-temporal) - so that we can say that an identical aporetic relationship is established between the (temporal) finite and the (non-temporal) infinite of individual life.

contradiction between contemplation and action (i.e. of the contradiction between a metaphysical view of existence and the practical concrete attitude towards it).

One thing is certain: the discovery of even one of these aporetic pairs in the very substance of our subjectivity is capable of giving one an existential shock. The discovery of all of them, or in other words of the fact that the being of our subjectivity has an aporetic structure, however, is capable of producing a cascade of existential shocks. These shocks amplify the intensity of the feeling of sadness and fill the consciousness with a painful lucidity, which will allow it to decipher the aporetic configuration of this feeling. The intensity of the feeling of sadness depends on the number and intensity of the above mentioned "shocks" and these "shocks" in turn depend on the aporetic pairs which subjectivity reveals to itself. As the number of existential shocks and of the aporetic pairs which generate them increases, we become sadder and sadder. Following this onslaught of sadness, consciousness asks itself the question, with all the sharpness it is capable of: what does sadness represent in itself, after all? Faced with a series of aporetic pairs and having acquired the certitude that its inner determinations are almost always locked in an irreconcilable contradiction, the human subject is driven irresistibly to experience the sadness that accompanies its life as representing the spiritual embodiment of the impossibility of ever reaching true happiness. The philosophical conclusion that can be drawn by the man who finds himself in such a situation can only be that his attempt to become impregnated with the absolute positivity of existence, to acquire - *pour toujours* - the plenitude of inner harmony, and thus, to attain true happiness, is doomed to fail. We could say that his life is placed under the sign of failed happiness. But this failed happiness is nothing, at least in a first approximation, but unhappiness itself. "At least in a first approximation" is a shade of meaning that we should do well to retain; indeed upon delving more deeply into these matters we realise that assimilating unhappiness with failed happiness cannot be the equivalent of absolute unhappiness, because its content has been penetrated by the feeling of happiness (if only as an aspiration, a

yearning for...). But even assuming that this was not the case - which is impossible - the unhappiness that flows from the failure of the attempt to be happy, will never be able to take on the form of absolute negativity and to be absorbed into the world of non-existence, into pure nothingness, as it is a dynamic element of inner life, an element in constant flux. The individual who has experienced the non-absoluteness of happiness will also experience the non-absoluteness of unhappiness. He who has discovered that the aspiration to happiness is irredeemably degraded upon contact with reality, will also discover that unhappiness will also be subject to degradation: eventually life will muzzle it and send it into involution. The human soul tends towards a diminishing of unhappiness, such is its nature. One of the ways of diminishing unhappiness - probably the most important one - is the one whereby the human being absorbs it into the feeling of reconciliation with destiny. Viewed from the perspective of reconciliation with destiny, unhappiness loses its absolute value, which otherwise man tends to attribute to it. If all forms, processes and acts of life have a limit - as destiny indicates - why should not unhappiness have a limit too? Since the consciousness of our existence is a consciousness of the limits of existence, why should the consciousness of unhappiness not be also a consciousness of the limits of unhappiness? If our destiny is bounded by limits, why should we not make our peace with a given situation, thus making (the original) unhappiness retreat into something less than (the original) unhappiness and fixing it a limit. By our reconciliation with destiny we have not annihilated unhappiness, we have not excluded it from the life of consciousness, but we have diminished it considerably, we have disactivated it and turned it into a harmless reality. We might even say that this harmless unhappiness is a happy one.

Failed happiness (unhappy hapiness) and failed unhappiness (happy unhappiness) - these are two expressions in which the aporetic content of the concept of sadness are reflected. The (philosophical) feeling of sadness contains a unique spiritual substance - of an aporetic nature - which is, however, embodied in two relatively different forms. It appears either under the form of failed (unhappy)

happiness or of (happy) failed unhappiness. Finally, it is evident that genetically, the state of failed happiness precedes the other one.²

The philosophic reflection upon sadness thus seeks to lift sadness out of the implicitly aporetic state of its irrational form, to make irrational sadness explicit and to conceptualise it, to define it in aporetic terms or, which is ultimately the same thing, to define the aporia of sadness in clear, unambiguous terms. The substance upon which it is exercised comes from the affective understructure of consciousness. Originally, sadness is nothing but an indisposition of the soul, a calm, restrained unhappiness of the soul. Originally, it represents a deprivation of positivity, a “no” opposed to an implicit “yes” (to a hidden positive aspiration), the expression of an invisible conflict of contraries, of something that has no solution and is ultimately an aporia. But the aporia of original sadness is a latent state. Furthermore, this fact is revealed later, by philosophical reflection. Our initial perception, our “abstract” perception is content to signal a fairly confused feeling of life, a kind of indisposition or calm and restrained unhappiness. Only philosophical reflection is capable of distinguishing the presence of a latent aporia in the original feeling of sadness. But it is not limited to the exploration and reconstruction of a hidden architecture. Philosophical meditation goes further: it makes manifest a latent content which then it refines and enriches. Both these successes can be explained only by the use of the data in which the knowledge concerning the aporetic nature of the “being” of our subjectivity is finalised - as tools and incentives. The description of the cluster of aporias of human subjectivity stimulates the interest of our consciousness in the transformation of the latent aporia of the feeling of sadness into its manifest aporia, that is, in the explanation of the inner mechanism of sadness which ultimately comes to its understanding (of sadness) either as an expression of

² The relationship between the two forms of philosophical sadness is complementary: one manifestation is not simultaneous with the other. No one can experience the two states of the feeling of sadness simultaneously. But if we cannot undergo them concomitantly, the individual can undergo them consecutively, thus making possible the global comprehension of this feeling.

failed happiness or as an expression of an unhappiness that failed through our reconciliation with destiny.

The transformation of the latent content into manifest content in this case coincides with a lifting of the feeling from the domain of the irrational into that of the rational, of the conceptual. This new feeling is not only rationalised but it is also refined and more complex, because it makes subtle reference to man's concrete knowledge of the "being" of his own subjectivity. The new feeling of sadness is a philosophical one. Its formation is closely connected to the investigation of the aporetic structure of human subjectivity. In a way, it is the affective or affective-rational conclusion to the discovery and knowledge of the cluster of aporias sitting in the very heart of this subjectivity. To be precise: the very statement of the idea of the feeling of sadness (i.e. of its aporetic nature) depends on the statements concerning the aporetic essence of subjectivity. Yet, we should not think that the sum of our knowledge concerning the aporetic "being" of our subjectivity is the prime impulse of our meditation on sadness. We have already stated that the prime impulse is the irrational feeling of sadness. It must be said, too, that the mental operation through which the concept of sadness is defined uses for its raw material, to be refined later, the irrational content of the above mentioned feeling. The definition of sadness in aporetic terms means a process of abstractization of (irrational) sadness - and not that of a different affective or spiritual substance. Irrational sadness is the original factor of the philosophical meditation on sadness. Then what is the role of the ideas in which the process of knowledge of the aporia of our subjectivity is finalised? They act as catalysts; they help the feeling of sadness to escape the obscurity of its latent state and to undergo self-revelation to reach the plenitude of its manifest state. By emphasising their own inner model, their own pattern, they allow self-reflexive sadness to discover its own inner model, its own pattern. It is true that the pattern of the former is identical with the pattern of the latter (both belong to the class of aporetic models). But this does not mean that the former lend their own specific pattern to the latter; it does not mean that the latter copies the inner model of the former, that

the pattern of the latter is a reproduction, an imitation of the pattern of the former. The inner model of sadness is its own model. The philosophical reflection upon sadness pushes it "outside", brings it to the light of day, cracks the shell in which the "kernel" has been hidden and reveals the archetype to our eyes. And yet, in order for it to be able to realise the proper object of its work, it needs the sum total of the suggestions offered by the investigation of the aporetic pairs in which the life of human subjectivity is reproduced. By analysing the aporetic categories of subjectivity it takes on the full vigour of the decisive gesture which it initially lacked and comes to be permeated by the imperious necessity of a precisely directed approach. The discovery of this sense in which it must continue this approach follows upon the discovery of these aporetic categories. Undoubtedly, the philosophic discourse upon sadness cannot end in the description of the model which circumscribes this feeling. We must take into account, as it were, the historical dimension of this feeling. Through meditation upon the irrational ground of sadness, as well as through comparing its structure to the aporetic structure of the "being" of human subjectivity, we have turned it into a philosophical feeling. As such, it radiates out towards the manifestations of the "being" of our subjectivity - manifestations which have helped it to constitute itself and whose conclusive expression it is up to a point - to fill them with its own content, to saturate them and absorb them within itself and thus introduce them into its own conclusive substance. Consequently: if our subjectivity is in its essence a form of existence confiscated by the aporia principle, how can we help being sad? But the reverse is also true: if (philosophical) sadness is a feeling occasioned, nay, produced in a sense, by certain states of consciousness, how can we forbid it to return to them and infuse them, each in its turn, with its own content? And this is how, after a time, the inner life of man - viewed as a *summa* of various acts and states - comes to be dominated by this feeling of sadness.