

THE STOIC PHILOSOPHY
OF EPICTETUS

IN FIVE DIALOGUES

Dialogue 1

The Proairesis

A few weeks ago Muriel was back from her vacation on a small island of the Cyclades, in Greece. She told me that she had met there two of her dearest friends: Raniero and Irene. Raniero and Irene are in the habit of meeting almost every day in a small amphitheater that Raniero built in the land surrounding their home. From there the view of the sea and of the neighboring islands is extraordinary, and this has become for them the ideal place for any discussion of ideas. Invited by Raniero to spend an afternoon with them, Muriel had then visited the small amphitheater. Their conversation had touched on various topics, and then fell on the art of living. Intrigued as I was by Muriel's hints, I asked her to tell me as accurately as possible how the conversation had taken place. Muriel gladly accepted my invitation and, with an effort of memory, reported that Raniero, as if it were a movie script, had begun to depict three scenes to which he wanted to bring the attention of Irene.

The first scene, Raniero said, might be called 'The scene of the wind' and is set on an Aegean island like this one in which we are now. A man, facing the sea, notices with concern that the wind blows hard, and having to leave with a small boat, asks: "Which wind is blowing?" A voiceover answers: "Boreas". The news doesn't make the man happy and he replies: "When will the Zephyr blow? When will it blow?" He then gets more and more worried, agitated, and thinks in anguish about his journey, wishing for it the best wind conditions. Unable to sit still, he goes to and fro on the beach and here he meets a man of indeterminate age and of very pleasing and even intriguing aspect, who asks him: "Why do you care so much about something over which you have no power at all? Whichever wind will blow you cannot choose; only Aeolus can do this, the master of the winds. This is the nature of the wind. If you rebel against this truth, you'll get only irritation, anxiety and even despair, but you will not succeed in changing the wind. You can decide to leave or not by boat, but you can decide nothing more. So remember that yours is only the faculty to control what is in your exclusive power, and accept to use the rest as it's by the nature of things".

Irene, at this point, asked Raniero if this short story had any reference to some philosophic text. Raniero nodded, touching his head with the index finger of his right hand and said that the text to which it referred was the 'Discourses' of Epictetus. In fact, while doing his work as a molecular biologist in many different countries of the world, Raniero had also engaged himself in the translation

from the ancient Greek language of the works of this philosopher. He also added that it was his intention to accompany Irene in reading and understanding this important, indeed crucial text for his life.

The second scene that Raniero proposed also had Epictetus as reference, and Irene, if she wanted, could easily find its origin in the first Chapter of Book I of the 'Discourses'. This second scene could be called 'The scene of the soldiers sentenced to death'. We are in the courtyard of large barracks, during one of the wars that humankind experienced in the last century. Whether it's the First or Second World War, it doesn't matter. The firing squad is ready. The poles to which two of the convicted soldiers will be tied are already in place, and the inmates go across the courtyard between two wings of deployed soldiers. It's a kind of procession because the two people are followed by a priest who reads his litanies. It's his duty to do so and he seems to do it more out of habit than of anything else, because you don't notice any emotional involvement on his face. The first condemned soldier moans repeatedly with a desperate voice: "Why should I die? I don't want to die! I don't want to die! I'll never see my mother again! I'll never see her again! No! I don't want to die!" Next to him, the second condemned soldier is completely silent. To express his thoughts, a voiceover full of calm says: "I must die. This is inevitable and I have no choice. Perhaps it is also necessary that I groan? Is it perhaps mandatory that I complain? Who can prevent me from laughing, from being in a good mood, from being peaceful? No one! So let me choose this attitude".

Irene was very impressed with the story. Then Raniero proposed a third scene on which they could reason.

This third scene could be called 'The torture scene', and has its origin in paragraph 23 of the first Chapter of Book I of the 'Discourses' of Epictetus. A man is questioned in order to force him to reveal some secrets that he is supposed to know. We are in a torture chamber, but it's not important to know where this happens or who the torturers are. The dialogue takes place between the prisoner and his torturer. At the first question the man replies: "I have nothing to say". And so begins the torture. "You have nothing to say? Then I'll put you in chains". But the man is not startled and says: "What do you say? Chaining me? You will chain my leg, not me". "I'll throw you in jail and then we will see if you continue to have nothing to say!" And the prisoner objects: "In prison? You will throw my body in jail, not me". The torturer, who feels teased and is increasingly angry, shouts: "I'll cut your head off!" To this threat the man replies: "Did I ever tell you that my neck cannot be cut off? You can behead me, but be aware that neither you nor Zeus can master my proairesis. I'll reveal no secrets because this decision is in my exclusive power".

At this point Irene opened her eyes wide and asked: "Proairesis? What does this word mean?" Raniero looked at her tenderly and smilingly said: "We really need to pick up the First Book of the 'Discourses' of Epictetus and read a quote. Then I'll try to give some examples so that the concept of proairesis,

which is not of immediate comprehension, may be clear; and also be clear that we use our proairesis in everyday life. In fact our proairesis works not only in critical situations such as those I have shown in the three scenes, but even in very trivial ones.

The quote was: “Among the other arts and faculties you will find none that is able to know its own general principles and therefore none able to evaluate itself positively or negatively. To what extent is grammar able to know general principles? To the extent of checking what we write. Music? To the extent of checking what we sing or play. Does either of them know its own general principles? Not at all. But, if you need the appropriate words when writing to a fellow, these grammar will tell you; yet whether you must write or not to a fellow, grammar will not tell you. This is true also in the case of melodies, because music will not tell you whether you now must sing and play the lyre or neither sing nor play the lyre”.

-You then mean, asked Irene, that our proairesis is our ability to decide?-

-It's not exactly this, but a faculty not very far from the ability you are mentioning, answered Raniero browsing his book. You'll see that everything will become clearer when we shall later talk about our mental representations. For the moment it's enough to think of our proairesis as a logical faculty able to evaluate itself and having the understanding of its own use, something that no other art or faculty is able to do. Grammar can indeed assess the correctness of what is written, and music assess the harmony of what is played, but they don't tell us when it's time to write or when it's time to sing and play. If it's not music, what chooses when to sing and play?-

-I don't know, ventured to say Irene. Maybe I?-

-Let's call this thing that can choose: 'proairesis'-

-I don't understand yet, confessed Irene. But I would like to know immediately if you are talking about something that all men have or only some of them have- -Yes, said Raniero. All human beings have a proairesis, but few of them realize that they have it and even less know how to use it-

-Why does this happen?-

-Look, continued Raniero. Your mind is full of images or, to say it better, of an awful variety of representations. You know very well how to play music. You correctly speak Italian and German and you know their grammars very well. But there is something that connects your skills and tells you when and how it's appropriate to use them. That is our proairesis, and temporarily we will define it in a sufficiently accurate way as the faculty that allows us to use our representations-

-But, objected Irene, if we are all equipped with proairesis and we are all capable of using our representations, why are we so different, why do we do different and very often opposite things?-

-The reason is that there are various ways of using our proairesis, pointed out Raniero, and in particular that there is a correct and an incorrect use of it-

-And how can I know which is the correct use?-

-When you are born and up to a certain time of your teens you don't know that you have this faculty. The proairesis is a faculty that you naturally acquire around the time of your sexual maturity, when you start to realize that there are things that depend solely on you and things that do not depend solely on you. To summarize, the things that depend solely on you are the following:

1- the ability to 'impel', that is instinctively to push yourself towards something or someone; and the ability to 'repel', that is instinctively to get away from something or someone;

2- the ability to 'desire', that is rationally to push yourself towards someone or something; and the ability to 'avert', that is rationally to get away from something or someone;

3- the ability to 'assent', that is to say yes to something or someone; and the ability to 'disagree', that is to say no to something or someone. Is it enough for you to have power only over these things, which have the character of being exclusively yours, in your exclusive power?-

-No, protested Irene, no! This is not enough for me! I don't care, I don't find any comfort in them. It is of no help to me to have these skills if I cannot have what I need right now. That is to say: a comfortable home, a decent job, a sufficient amount of money, the satisfaction that comes from what I do and especially from love! Do you understand what I mean? What I want to know is how I can achieve these things that can make me happy-

-So, replied Raniero in a serious tone, you rate the things you've said much higher than your proairesis, that is the faculty itself that allows you to evaluate and say the things that you are saying?-

-Yes, because you're talking about an abstract concept, namely the power to evaluate, while I talk about concrete things. And you'd better pay attention to what I say because I don't speak only for me, since we humans all think in this way!-

-You really consider what makes you say what you're saying now an abstraction? The proairesis is an abstraction? This is a very interesting statement indeed! As for the rest: yes, I know. You really are a large crowd. And you all think you are right only because you are so many? You can believe me or not, but I assure you that there exists something that is entirely independent of the opinion of the crowd, that does not change according to people's wishes, that is valid for us all and whose name is 'the nature of things'. This is the only nature we have to confront ourselves with and if you don't acknowledge its existence I will not tell you any more words, because it would be a useless effort. You must get the point yourself, and get it gradually-

-Maybe I need some more examples or some more explanations, said Irene. I don't understand why you are now so severe and why I should know something with which I'm getting familiar only now. You should not be surprised of the fact that I don't know something, but if you no longer want to talk to me we can stop here ... I am curious, though. Tell me: who decides which is the nature of things when there are different opinions? For example, if you and I have a different perception of a certain reality, how can we decide which is the nature of that thing?

- Come with me, Raniero invited her, and let's carefully analyze the three scenes. In the first scene, what is the fellow complaining about? Is he perhaps complaining about the wind? His proairesis has chosen the departure, but the departure is countered by the northern wind. Ask yourself what happens if the proairesis of that fellow chooses not to leave the island anymore. Would he still have the same opinion of the strong wind? The cause of his behavior is therefore the wind, as he says, or rather his plan to sail in those circumstances? Don't you think that in this way he is condemning himself to anxiety and perhaps to despair, and that neither will solve his problem?-

-Who is the person who comes to meet him on the beach?-

-That person could very well be the personification of his proairesis operating in the right way and suggesting to him the correct action to take-

-It's normal to be anxious and perhaps even to give in to despair when things that are planned cannot be realized. There is nothing wrong with that: it happens to everyone!-

- I can concede, even though I doubt it very much, that anxiety and despair are not a bad thing, but I am certain that to know how to master both anxiety and despair is definitely a good thing-

-Sure, admitted Irene, but if I always force myself to self-control I'll become a very insensitive person, someone unable to feel anything anymore!-

-If you say this you equate our precious ability to be happy with the impossibility of being happy, because you are declaring that we can be really alive and sensitive only provided that we experience anxiety and despair. Let me further explain my argument, in order to get rid of such a contradictory statement. A person's life is like a journey that can end up in three different towns. Those who end up in the first town believe that all external objects, like work, money or honours, are by themselves the goods or evils of men. Those who end up in the second town believe that every aspect of our body, like physical integrity, health or prettiness, are by themselves the goods or evils of men. You can agree with me if I suggest to call all these things 'proairetic things', as they are not in our exclusive power. On the contrary, those who end up their journey in the third town believe that the right judgments about external objects and about our body are the only goods of men and therefore the sources of their happiness, as well as the corresponding incorrect judgments are the evils of men and the sources of their unhappiness. You can agree with me that in this third town the goods and evils of men are definitely 'proairetic things'-

-And you, Raniero, in which town did you live till now?-

-I lived all my life a bit in the first and a bit in the second town. Then one night I came home and went into my room, where I was seized by a splitting headache. And now here I am. But tell me, Irene, what do you see in the second scene?-

-A great tragedy, said Irene; the tragedy of being sentenced to death-

-Look closer, suggested Raniero, and you'll see that besides the death sentence, which is a fact, two people are living the same situation in completely opposite ways. One soldier is condemning himself to desperate unhappiness. The other soldier, on the contrary, makes a totally different choice and gets rid of unhappiness. The circumstances in which the two inmates find themselves are exactly the same. What is that makes the difference between them?-

-What makes the difference between them is the fact that, facing the same circumstances, the first one uses his proairesis in a certain way, while the second uses his proairesis in a completely different way-

-Well said! smiled Raniero. The first one gives to those who kill him not only what is of the killers, that is his body, but also empowers them to make him happy or unhappy. Happy, if by any chance the execution should no longer be performed. Unhappy, because he is desperate, he complains and does not want to die. The second one, like the first one, gives to those who kill him what is of the killers, that is his body, but remains the only master of his proairesis. He firmly holds in his hands with marvelous dignity what the killers could never take off him without his consent: the high, noble and free attitude of his proairesis in such a situation-

-Sorry, said Irene, but why do you say that my body belongs to those who kill me? Those who kill my body at the same time kill also my proairesis. My body and my proairesis are closely united, even if they are not the same thing-

-You are right, said Raniero, but keep well in mind how little our body itself is free. You cannot deny that our body is a slave of fever, of cancer, of dysentery, of a tyrant, of fire and of iron; in short of everything stronger than it is. On the other hand, it's also true that in order to kill the proairesis of a man you must not necessarily also kill his body. Proairesis can kill itself simply by giving up its freedom and entering into unhappiness-

-You mean that in order to get rid of unhappiness we must accept anything that happens to us?-

-When you play cards you cannot refuse the cards that chance gives you. Your skill lies in the ability to make the best possible use of the cards that you have. Right is therefore only the use of proairesis which allows you to be happy in circumstances of life that you have not chosen. But this we will discuss later. Tell me now: what do you see in the third scene?-

-I see, said Irene, a brave man and one consistent with his own ideas. Of course, he could make a compromise and save his life, which is the most important thing ...-

-In your opinion, asked Raniero, which are the secrets that the torturer wants to know?-

-Well ... I think he wants to obtain crucial informations about some political agitators, or the names of the heads of some underground organization-

-It may be so. However, the more I think about it the more I am convinced that what the torturer wants to know is not the name of some conspirators but the secret that allows this man to behave in the way he behaves and to remain calm. The torture puts the proairesis of the torturer in a position of

serious weakness, as his happiness or unhappiness, so to speak, will depend on the responses of the victim. Happiness, if the tortured reveals what he knows. Misery and unhappiness should that not happen. Like a blind bull, the torturer is forced to increasingly brutal beatings and increasingly serious threats. In fact the secret of the victim is exactly the mastery he has of his proairesis. If the proairesis of the tortured surrendered to the corporal torments, having lost control of himself the man would condemn himself to death even if he remained physically alive-

It was the sunset. The sun was diving into the Aegean and its light gilded everything. We all were looking to the West.

-Excuse me, said Raniero after a long silence, are you two not hungry?-

-We are, said Irene. Let's stop our conversation here, and go to dinner at Irini's restaurant-

Dialogue 2

Medea: diairesis, antidiairesis and the mysterious judge

A few days later Raniero, Irene and Muriel gathered again in the amphitheater overlooking the sea.

-Do you remember, Raniero said, "The scene of the wind" that we discussed a few days ago? Today we can add something to it. Watch as the sea is now rough and the wind raises more and more sparkling waves. Just below us, do you see how the sail of that little boat is rocked by the Meltemi?-

-Yes, I see it, said Irene. When observing the movements of the people who are on the boat, you can notice a lot of excitement. I'm afraid something dangerous is happening to them. What are they saying?-

-I hear excited voices, but I don't understand what they mean-

-All this reminds me of Medea, continued Irene. The mind of Medea was shaken as violently as the sail of that boat in a rough sea. Could you tell us again her story?-

-Yes, I will. It's always a good thing to go back in time and rethink stories so dramatically true. Now, when Medea after years of mutual love saw herself abandoned by Jason -who wanted to divorce her and marry Glauce, the daughter of Creon the king of Corinth- she took the atrocious revenge that you know-

-Yes, I remember very well: she killed her children-

-Why do you think that she did this?-

-She did this in order to punish Jason. She could not accept being rejected by him after years of life together-

-Let us grant that you are right, continued Raniero. Medea was for sure a woman of great temperament. Certainly she did not lack the 'representation' of what is meant when something turns wrong and we don't get what we want. Medea was looking for a way to punish Jason, whom she judged not only unfair to her, but also insulting and outrageous-

-Let's forget, at present, about revenge, said Irene. How could Medea not suffer from the choice of Jason? Who doesn't suffer when he feels rejected?-

-It depends, said Raniero. The man who is refused and continues to desire the appreciation and love of those who reject him suffers the pains of hell. But the man who is rejected and judges this refusal a liberation, doesn't suffer at all. Please note that Jason, by marrying Glauce, would become king. He cared a lot about this project, but his life with Medea had made it impossible to realize-

-But, according to you, Jason also wanted to send Medea away from Corinth, so as not to see her any more?-

-Certainly not. Jason, on the contrary, had proposed to Medea to remain in Corinth and become his mistress, the mistress of the king! This was a decision that Glauce had approved-

-That's something that Medea cannot accept and that seems to her as an unbearable outrage, said Irene-
 -But from the experience of suffering pain to the project of killing her own children, Raniero suggested, I think that you also see a step which is not automatic, that doesn't simply follow from the fact of feeling pain and that requires something else to be accomplished-

-So, what brings Medea to make this choice?-

-Medea's mind, as we have said, is a mind of great strength. Her proairesis is indeed, and you can certainly understand it now, a powerful one-

-Yes, Medea must do something. She cannot remain passive and simply wait and watch-

The most varied possibilities, continued Raniero, swirl in Medea's proairesis, and we can rightly call them 'projects'. So Medea thinks: 'Jason is a traitor and deserves a punishment. I poison him.' Or: 'I cannot stand to be considered less worthy than Glauce. I kill her'. Or: 'I kill myself because I cannot stand what gives me so much pain'. And finally: 'I kill those I gave him, his children'.

-But they were also her own children...-

-Right! In Medea's proairesis there is also this judgment: 'By killing his children I'll punish myself, too'. But to this statement, just as Euripides makes her say, she immediately replies: 'I don't care! I know what evils I am going to do, but my wrath is stronger than my resolutions'-

-Which is the criterion that allows Medea to choose among these projects?-

-Follow me, said Raniero. We must enter deeply into the proairesis of Medea and carefully analyze each one of her projects. The fundamental question that we must ask is the following: 'Is what I want to do in my exclusive power or not? Let's see. Is to poison Jason something in my exclusive power?'

-I think so, answered Irene. At least unless the material conditions don't allow me to do it. But in any case the action is mine and I can try to put it into practice even if its success is not up to me-

-Well, you missed the point, said Raniero. You are unaware of making contradictory statements. The decision to walk is one thing, but to walk is a different thing. The first is a project in my exclusive power, the second is an action that is not in my exclusive power because it is subject to all sort of possible accidents. One thing is to have the necessary judgments and to conceive a project, another thing is to put it into practice. In fact, its realization is always subject to possible accidents. Check again the project 'I poison Jason' and give me a new answer. Know that it is no longer possible to enter the room of Jason, that all his food is checked by a slave and that he is surrounded by bodyguards who watch over his safety-

-The answer that I must give you, said Irene, is then the following: 'To poison Jason is not in the exclusive power of Medea. In the exclusive power of Medea is only the project of poisoning him'-

-What can we say about the project 'I kill Glauce'?-

-We can say that to kill Glauce is not in the exclusive power of Medea, and that only the project to kill her is in Medea's exclusive power-

-‘I kill myself’ is the third alternative that Medea conceives. But she rules out this project, because the suicide appears to Medea as a complete victory of Jason and Glauce, who not only would not need to commit a murder to get rid of her, but would also inflict on her the humiliation of celebrating the memory of a virtuous mother and a perfect wife-

-And in this case, added Irene, Medea would not get what she wants, which is to save her place at Jason’s side. But doesn’t Medea realize that by committing suicide she can at least stop the pain she feels?-

-Even in the case of the project ‘I kill myself’ we must consider whether this is something in the exclusive power of Medea or not. You’ll see that if we look carefully at this project, which seems closest to depending exclusively on her, we will find that it is not so-

-But suicide is the only thing, said in surprise Irene, for which I don’t need others and that is entirely up to me ...-

-Jason has already thought about that. He has put in place not only his security measures but has given secret and peremptory orders to prevent any action that could lead to the suicide of Medea. Medea is unaware of this, but she is surrounded by people who watch over her safety. We can believe or not in the possibility of preventing a suicide, but this must be said to remind once more that the realization of a suicide is not in our exclusive power, while in our power is only the decision to put an end to our life. For the rest I agree with you that the death would release Medea from all the pain and anger she feels-

-Also to kill their children, protested Irene, is not in the exclusive power of Medea, but that’s what happens. What’s the difference between this project and the previous ones?-

-There is no difference at all, answered Raniero with a serious tone. This project is also subject to the conclusions we have reached in the case of the other ones. To conceive the killing of her children is in the exclusive power of Medea, but to make this happen is not in her exclusive power-

-But most of the other plans of Medea do not come true while this one is successful. Why does this happen?-

-It happens simply because the circumstances do not prevent its success. Medea’s children, like all children, are raised and cared for by women. Medea has given Jason two children, and they are still with her night and day. Jason has never even remotely thought to remove them from the care of their mother, because this is his culture. Jason is a Greek. Medea is not a Greek and, though a king’s daughter, she is perceived as a barbarian of Pontus who conceives a plan of tremendous atrocity, a plan that no Greek woman could ever have been able to conceive-

-So, asked Irene, the projects ‘I poison Jason’, ‘I kill Glauce’, ‘I kill myself’, ‘I kill my children’ are completely equivalent with respect to their design and their possibility of realization?-

-Let’s be more precise, continued Raniero. They are completely equivalent in terms of their conception, because they are all projects in the exclusive power of Medea. They are perfectly equivalent also

because their practical realization is always subject to all sort of uncertainties. They are no longer equivalent if you consider that it's impossible to know exactly and in advance which and how many impediments will hamper or which events will make easier the realization of any of them-

-You mean the difference between them goes back to that '... subject to all sorts of possible accidents'?

-You are right. And this is the reason why only the attempt to realize them can tell us which plan of ours will be successful and which will not-

-But we can judge that one plan is more likely to be successful than other ones. Don't you think so, Raniero?-

- I agree, of course. But the crucial point still remains this: any project which needs the involvement of our body or of any external person or object has no certainty of realization. And for the time being that's all we need to hold firmly in this discussion about Medea-

-Are you suggesting, my dear Raniero, that we should resign ourselves to what happens, stay still and do nothing? Is yours an invitation to be passive? Sometimes to move a simple chess pawn, even if we know that the situation is difficult, could change something and make it easier to accept the facts that we don't like-

-Don't misunderstand my words. I repeat that we cannot move a piece of the game with the guarantee of success, but I tell you that only by kicking the ball with strength and skill towards the goalkeeper we know if we scored a goal, if the shot hit the goalpost or if the goalkeeper saved our shot-

-So yours is not an invitation to passivity but to something else. However, I don't understand to what, said Irene thoughtfully-

-My invitation is an invitation to 'diairesis'-

-Diairesis? What does it mean? It's a word I've never heard, protested Irene-

-Be patient and everything will slowly become clearer to you. Let's go back to Medea. Since we know that each project of Medea is aproairetic, we must assume that her proairesis has a natural ability to choose which project has to be implemented-

-I agree. It can only be this way, but I am unable to give a name to this natural ability-

-Let's make a comparison with what happens in Court and imagine that the various projects are different defendants and that this 'natural ability' is their judge-

-Yes, nodded Irene. The comparison is clear and I like it-

-Once the judge has examined the defendants and the witnesses, has heard the prosecution and defense speeches and has read the relevant articles of the Code, it decides for conviction or acquittal. In our case let's call the judge that chooses between the different projects of Medea 'antidiairesis' -

-Antidiairesis? You enjoy muddling my ideas, said Irene. A little while ago you were talking about diairesis. Now you come out with this new word. I don't understand anything anymore!-

-The two judges, diairesis and antidiairesis are twin brothers, as Apollo and Artemis were, or, if you prefer, the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux-

-Why is the judge that chooses which plan of Medea has to be implemented called 'antidiairesis'?-

-Even if this definition doesn't completely satisfy me, let's temporarily define antidiairesis as the judge that operates upon things that are not in our exclusive power. The antidiairesis works according to the instruction it receives from diairesis, while the diairesis is the judge that operates on what is in our exclusive power. Remember that our argument started from this basic question: 'Is what Medea wants to do a thing in her exclusive power or not?' We concluded that to conceive a project is in Medea's exclusive power but that to carry it out is not in the exclusive power of Medea. The judge that chooses which project of Medea must be implemented is called antidiairesis because it's the judge appointed to carry out what is not in her exclusive power-

-Does this mean that antidiairesis is a bad judge?-

-Not at all. It is a judge not only good but necessary, that, however, plays a very different role from that of its brother diairesis-

-And what is the role played by the judge that you call diairesis?-

-As I told you, diairesis is the judge appointed to judge whether a project is in our exclusive power or not and, if it is in our exclusive power, to carry it out-

-You continue to amaze me, said Irene, and I am almost short of breath. Are there also projects that depend solely on us?-

-Certainly, replied calmly Raniero. I am aware that you've never heard about this, but we have to go up only few more stairs. I can anticipate, so that it might be clearer to you, that the projects whose realization depends solely on us are, as you will see, those proceeding from our natural ability to change our view of a given situation-

-And then ...?-

-Let's go on with the Court's comparison and accept that in this Court there are two judges. The judge diairesis is the first to receive and study the papers of the trial. In our case, the projects swirling in the mind of Medea. It has done its work and found that the implementation of none of these projects is in the exclusive power of Medea. As the judge diairesis is appointed to judge whether a project is in our exclusive power or not, what did it have to do?-

-It had to stop there and pass the papers to someone else-

-We accepted, for the moment, that there are only two judges in our proairesis. So... and here Raniero stopped talking-

-So..., said Irene, it... passed the papers to his brother, to the antidiairesis-

-That's right. Let's suppose that this is what happens in people's proairesis. If the judge diairesis finds that the project doesn't fall under its competence, it passes the case to its brother antidiairesis, giving instructions on how to carry on the further steps-

-I understand. It's clear that Medea's projects fall under the competence of the judge antidiairesis. Medea is confused, upset, and doesn't realize that the implementation of none of the projects swirling in her mind is in her exclusive power. I guess this is the only door that Medea can open in order to express, in a brilliant albeit terrible way, her unhappiness-

-However, to tell you the truth, at this point I see a serious difficulty. We know that diairesis is the judgment that is able to distinguish what is in our exclusive power and what is not. We also know that antidiairesis works upon external things, upon what is not in our exclusive power, according to the instructions of diairesis. We know that Medea ignores the existence of the diairesis. But, then, who has written the instructions for the antidiairesis that Medea is certainly using?-

-Is there in our proairesis, asked Irene, a mysterious judge that we have not yet discovered?-

-You are probably right, my dear Irene. On the papers that were passed to antidiairesis something was written that obviously was not written by diairesis. If it was not written by diairesis it must have been written by someone else, because we know that Medea is ignorant of diairesis. On the other hand it is certain that the antidiairesis only has the task of working in accordance with the instructions written on those papers. This is a question to which I am unable to give a clear answer now. One thing we know for sure is that Medea sees the source of her affliction as being outside herself. It cannot be but like that because Medea, unable to use the diairesis, that is, to grasp what is in her exclusive power and what is not, is unable to assess which is her contribution to the desperate grief that she feels. If the behavior of Jason was in itself the cause of the affliction of Medea, then anyone in the face of such behavior should experience the same affliction-

-In a similar way, interrupted Irene, if death was in itself a terrible event, no one should commit suicide-

-Exactly. The cause of the affliction of Medea is therefore not the refusal by Jason but the judgment, which is exclusively of Medea, that the refusal of Jason is an insult, an injustice that humiliates her. The friends of Medea, as a matter of fact, do not have the same feelings about the behavior of Jason-

-It seems obvious to me, Irene interrupted, that the friends of Medea are not feeling the same affliction as she does. Maybe they feel a similar affliction because of their friendship with Medea-

-This may be the case, but theirs is a different affliction. The crucial point we have now reached is this: is there a project whose realization is in the exclusive power of Medea and that the appropriate use of diairesis would allow her to find? Or, to go back to the comparison with a Court: is there at least one project that depends exclusively on Medea, and that therefore the judge diairesis would not even need to pass to his brother?-

-Let me think for a moment, sighed Irene. From what you have said so far I think that a reasonable answer could be this one: Medea can change her judgment on the situation in which she is trapped-

-That's exactly what I think too. We are touching the very heart of the problem. There is something which is entirely up to Medea: the judgment that she has of Jason and of his behavior. Jason, with his refusal, appears to Medea like a traitor worthy of the worst revenge. This judgment is in the exclusive power of Medea and she can change it. If Medea looked at Jason as at an unhappy careerist unworthy of her love, she would totally change her plans. Medea wants at all costs to live with Jason. Tell her: 'Look at Corinth. It's a dirty, unattractive, uncomfortable town with an unhealthy climate. You want light, air and sun. If you remember what you really like, you'll see Corinth with new eyes and will consider the possibility of abandoning both Corinth and Jason as a stroke of luck. Jason can prevent you from committing suicide, from killing Glauce, your children or him; but Jason can't prevent you from considering him an unhappy careerist, and therefore from judging the possibility of being deserted by your husband as highly desirable for you and a real stroke of luck. Does he want to keep the children with him? Let him have the children!-

-I understand what you are saying and I know that your words will be very helpful to me, said Irene. But Medea doesn't change her mind because she doesn't think that Jason is an unhappy careerist. She knows how important it is to become the Corinth's king-

-Sure, Medea continues to appreciate Jason and knows he is a man of great value. But the situation has changed. We are no longer in the happy days of the conquest of the Golden Fleece. Let's go straight to the heart of the problem and let me explain the situation with words that Medea can neither use nor understand. What Medea cannot accept is, in fact, that a man of the value of Jason no longer has, as before, the same judgments of Medea. We are faced with the full conflict of two proairesis. Medea has come to the conclusion that her most vital project is now the one of mastering Jason's proairesis and force it back in line with her own. Medea ignores what proairesis and diairesis are, and nobody can teach her on the subject. Do you still believe that it's correct to call 'project' or 'activity' the attempt to master the proairesis of someone else, and to call 'passivity' the plan of making the right use of your own proairesis? In the first case you have no certainty of success and are doomed, as Medea, to failure. In the second case, on the contrary, the diairesis will tell you how to live well and be happy-

-The judgment of Medea, Irene sighed, has not turned negative upon Jason. It has turned negative upon her own value and upon the value of her relationship with Jason-

-This is one of the characteristics of a proairesis that ignores or underrates its power to diairesize. At some point, such a proairesis is forced to deface the past, to depreciate it, to see lies and deception even where there was sincerity and loyalty. If you don't use diairesis, your proairesis will never appreciate itself for what it really is and at some point will believe itself worthless-

-I wanted to ask you one more question, continued Irene. What makes you say that Medea wants Jason to have her ideas? Why do you exclude that it is vice versa?-

-The reason is simple. The strength of Jason's proairesis outclasses that of Medea's proairesis, and Jason shows himself definitely superior to her in their conflict. Jason is not afraid to lose Medea: he is ready to abandon her. On the contrary, Medea is afraid to lose Jason: the idea of living away from him without avenging herself for the affront she believes she suffered at his hands is unbearable for her. In this clash of proairesis the winner is inevitably the one who is willing to yield ground to the other, in the sense that Jason is willing to yield ground peacefully to Medea, while Medea is not. The discomfort of Medea arises from the fact that she has fallen in contradiction with herself. She wants Jason but at the same time she doesn't want Jason like he is, that is Glauce's husband and king of Corinth. Jason, on the contrary, is not in contradiction with himself because he wants Medea as she is, the wife and mother of his children. Jason and Medea are in real opposition: Jason has a plan that Medea rejects, Medea has a plan that Jason refuses-

-You used the word 'contradiction' before, and now you use the word 'opposition'. Can you explain me why you do this?-

-You must know and remember that no contradiction can be detected in proairetic things. The contradictions exist only in the brain of human beings, and they are personal and are unbearable. It's impossible to believe that something is 'white' and at the same time 'not white': you have to choose 'white' or 'not-white'. The contradictions must be resolved quickly, otherwise it's impossible to communicate and also to act: no person can say or do one thing and at the same time the opposite one! The conflicts, on the contrary, are everywhere in nature, are actual oppositions of different plans and are bearable. For example, Medea notes, and could not do otherwise, that Jason has his own opinions and has projects that she doesn't like at all-

-In the case of Jason and Medea, do you think it's possible to overcome the conflict?-

-The exit from the contradiction is necessary and unavoidable. The conflicts, however, although they are bearable, are deadlocks rationally insolvable. The conflicts can persist indefinitely or end because one party drops a plan or because some facts change. It's a pure question of opposing forces, and the stronger will always prevail over the weaker-

-Let me go back to one thing that you said and that I had not taken into account. You said that Jason had proposed to Medea, after his marriage to Glauce, to become his mistress. We may call this a compromise proposal, advanced in order to resolve the conflict, but Medea rejects it. Indeed this proposal offends Medea. Why? Which judgment underlies the rejection of Medea?-

-Can a person consider that something is useful to him and not choose it? He cannot. When Medea says: 'I know what evils I am going to do, but my wrath is stronger than my resolutions' she says this because she prefers to gratify her resentment and take revenge on her husband rather than to save her

children. The same is true in the case of Glauce. Could Medea find it helpful to share with Glauce the bed of Jason? Her behavior clearly tells us: 'No'. There can be many, different and easy to imagine judgments that underlie this behavior. For example: 'Jason prefers the kingdom to my love. My love is not enough for Jason and he wants to find the love of a different woman. Jason is a selfish person and doesn't care about choosing something that deeply hurts me. Jason simply wants to 'have it all'. Finally Medea is jealous of Glauce because she fears her as younger, more beautiful, more interesting, and is afraid to be abandoned forever by Jason. All these judgments of Medea reflect her inability to use the *diagnosis* and to recognize her contribution to the desperate grief she is living in. Medea, behaving this way, leaves the key to her happiness and unhappiness entirely in the hands of Jason-

-I see that the sailboat is no longer here below us, said at this point Irene-

-The sea has calmed down and it has certainly reached safely the port of the island, assured Raniero-

-I think that today we have talked enough, concluded Irene. Would anyone like to swim? I'm really looking forward to do it. What about us all going to Kedros beach?-

Dialogue 3

The diairesis at work

The plan of Raniero, Irene and Muriel was to enjoy a delicious swim in a calm and crystal clear sea. But once at Kedros beach, they immediately had to face an unexpected situation. The beach was overcrowded. A lot of people were playing with beach-rackets and produced a constant and annoying noise that seemed especially designed to cover the gentle sound of the waves breaking on the shore. Other people, running on the sand, were spraying those lying near the shore. Some people delighted in throwing to two dogs a stick that always ended up on someone's feet. There were people who produced clouds of sand by shaking their towels. Others yelled very loudly calling some friend at the other end of the beach. Someone was stealing what was in the unattended bags of people at sea.

-Here is a situation, said Raniero, that seems especially designed for us. I mean, designed to test our ability to put the diairesis at work. When we decided to come here to swim we also said: "I want to swim, but I want also to keep my proairesis in accordance with the nature of things, and I'll not achieve this goal if I shudder with indignation and anger in front of activities that other people consider useful for themselves and that are not my exclusive power to change". Do you remember?-

-Yes, said Irene, I remember it very well. To keep our proairesis in accordance with the nature of things means to remember that we cannot have complete control over what is not in our exclusive power. So now we are faced with two possibilities. The first one is to get angry and intervene to stop those we judge are jammers. But it is clear that, here and now, this would be hazardous and perhaps even counterproductive. The second possibility is to put the diairesis at work, to not place ourselves in direct conflict with them and choose a different beach. But which beach?-

-I agree that we should not protest against this crowd, added Raniero. If they like what they do, let them enjoy it! We have here a good opportunity to exercise our tolerance. It is not what we hoped, but we are endowed by nature with enough resources to cope with this and other far more serious difficulties. I find this a wonderful demonstration of the truth we were discussing a few days ago: one thing is the project to find a quiet beach and to bathe, and a very different one is to actually find a beach that is quiet, because this outcome is not in our exclusive power! Anyway, I know that on the island there is another beach that is even more extraordinary than this one. It's a couple of miles away and is more secluded: its name is Livadi. Do we want to go there?-

-Yes, nodded Irene, but it takes a long time to walk there and the path is not so easy-

While they were discussing the situation, the big blue boat of Nicola appeared far away on the sea, coming from behind the headland overlooking the beach. The boat was already loaded with people going to Livadi. After a few minutes and to their complete surprise, Raniero, Irene and Muriel saw the

boat coming towards them and directing itself to the left end of the beach, where there is a small dock. “Here is the solution: let’s go to Livadi by boat”. They quickly reached other people already waiting on the pier and, after they got into the boat, Muriel noticed the presence of an elderly man wearing a white cloak. A flowing white beard framed his face, which was serene and sun-tanned. Muriel found a place beside him and distinctly heard him ask one of the young men who accompanied him to write down what he would slowly dictate. His words were the following: “We must train ourselves especially in this form of exercise. At once, stepping forth at dawn, inquire about whom you see, inquire about whom you hear and answer like to a question. What did you see? A handsome young man or a pretty wench? Apply the standard. Is it an aproairetic or proairetic thing? Aproairetic. Ignore it. What did you see? Someone mourning the death of her child? Apply the standard. Death is an aproairetic thing. Ignore it. Did you meet a consul? Apply the standard: what kind of thing is a consulship? Aproairetic or proairetic? Aproairetic: ignore it, too, for it has no value; throw it away, it is nothing to you. If we did this and in this we exercised every day from dawn to night, something would happen, by the gods! Instead, we are surprised by every impression, and only when at school we might wake up a bit. And then, when we leave the school, if we see someone mourning we say: ‘She is lost!’. If we see a consul: ‘Blessed man!’. If a banished fellow: ‘Disgraced man!’. If someone poor in money: ‘Miserable man, he has nothing to eat!’. For, what is to cry and to wail? A judgement. What is ill fortune? A judgement. What is conflict, what is disagreement, what is blame, what is accusation, what is impiety, what are babbles? These are all judgements and nothing else, and judgements on aproairetic things as good or evil. Transpose these judgements onto proairetic things, and I guarantee that you will be stable, no matter the circumstances that surround you”.

Once they got out of the boat, Muriel noticed that the elderly man was leaning on a cane and limping noticeably.

Livadi is a large white sand beach, very secluded, with a clear blue sea and calm waters. Beyond the beach, in the shadow of a great tamarisk, they saw some tents and a group of young people sitting in a circle on colorful towels. They were all naked, and were talking quietly among themselves. On the beach other people were swimming or sunbathing or simply walking along the seashore. Some of them were wearing a bathing suit, but the majority of people had gotten rid of all clothing.

After a swim, Raniero and Irene approached the group of young people under the tamarisk. Muriel approached them too, and turning to his two friends said: “Sorry, I had lost sight of you both because I decided to write down the terrible things that I heard from an elderly man while we were on the boat. I can read them to you later, if you want”.

The young people welcomed them and offered them some water. At a certain point, a guy named Iorgos told them that just that morning two dear friends of him had left the island and gone back

home. He confessed that this separation had touched him very deeply, that he was feeling unhappy, and that for this reason he needed to share his feelings with other people.

-Feelings? What do you mean, asked Tom, when you use this word?-

-For me, answered Mary, to have feelings means to express the emotions I feel towards other people. You told the two friends who left, that you loved them. For me, the only true feeling is essentially the feeling of love-

-I completely agree with you, said Tom. But I must add, as I told Iorgos this morning, that to share this feeling with other people doesn't heal the pain and misery that I, too, feel for this separation-

-If you, intervened Raniero, let yourself be overrun by nostalgia and grief because of the separation, you seem to give a purely negative judgment of the situation, and thus unlock the door that brings you unhappiness. Why do you need to behave this way?-

-This is not the point, said Iorgos. I just give myself the right to feel what I feel, and to notify you about this. If you experience the same feeling, this empathy makes the misery of separation more bearable for me. I find the possibility of sharing our feelings with other people helpful and important-

-Look, said Raniero: if you analyze the subject in depth, you'll come to the conclusion that those you call feelings are in fact judgments-

-How can you say this? asked Iorgos-

-The ones you call feelings, explained Raniero, are judgments because they can always be translated as follows: "I like being with these people". If your judgment were different and were: "I don't like being with these people" you would call this a feeling of aversion, and the separation would not bring you any unhappiness-

-Your argument, rose up Tom, seems trivial to me! You're simply saying that if the situation were different my feelings would be different. So what?-

-I accept your obvious criticism, replied calmly Raniero. But the important thing here is to acknowledge that our feelings are in fact judgments, that our judgments are our true self, and that the complete control upon our judgments is the only actual power that we have. We are the only ones able to change them. No one else can do it for us, nor we can ask someone else to do it for us: we are totally free in our judgments-

-So, continued Iorgos, I should change my opinion of the situation, and say that I don't care if my friends have gone? Is this the way I could avoid feeling unhappy? Is this what you mean?-

-Nature, replied Raniero, has made us the only masters of our judgments. When you talk of the feelings as if they were entities independent of our judgments, you run the risk of believing that the feelings are our masters and that we are the guests of our feelings. If our feelings were really masters of us, logically the separation you mention should drag you to extreme decisions. This is what you should do: kill yourself for the misery that you experience because of the separation, as did Dido when Aeneas left

her. If these friends had not only left you but if they were already dead in an accident and you could never see them again, what would you do? Since they are for you really good people, since the removal of this good thing is for you an evil that makes you unhappy, since you have lost this good that they took away by leaving you, in order to be consistent and true to yourself you should commit suicide-

-It seems to me an overstatement, said Iorgos. In a person's life there are not only friends but many other things. So why commit suicide? I'm just sad-

-Be careful then, replied Raniero, because you are not sufficiently aware that your behavior is the consequence of a chain of judgments that follow each other. First, you chop the 'big good' into small bits, into a lot of different 'small goods', as many as the number of people and of external objects that you judge important and useful to you. Secondly, you think to have over each of these bits such a power that their possession brings you happiness and their loss misery. Thirdly, you tacitly decide that there will never be a decisive loss, and therefore, that you'll choose to commit suicide only if all these people together and all these external objects were taken away from you all at once. But if you reason soundly, you must recognize that not even one of these persons and objects belongs to you, because they are people and things outside of you. They are, as we said, aproairetic entities over which you have no exclusive power-

-Yes, intervened Mary, it can be so. But this doesn't prevent me from feeling unhappiness because of a separation-

-This happens, continued Raniero, because you equate the separation with a loss, and judge that it has only a negative value. On the contrary, you must judge that your friends are for you, as external to you, neither good nor evil things; and therefore that your separation from them is not the separation from something which is good but from something which is neither good nor evil-

-You mean, Mary said, that all external objects have no value at all? This seems to me a very self-centered attitude and one that doesn't convince me at all-

-I am stunned, said Raniero. If you take away from everything that is external the quality of being good or evil, does this mean that you take away all importance to what is external? If something is neither good nor evil, does this mean that it no longer continues to be hot or cold, colored or colorless, heavy or light, sweet or savory; and in the case of a person, attractive or repulsive, tall or short, male or female, happy or unhappy, and all the countless other possible determinations that specify and characterize him or her?-

-When you state, said Irene, that a person is neither a good nor a bad thing it seems to me that you are saying that she or he is worthless, and that bothers me. In our culture the words 'good' and 'bad' are closely related to the concept of value-

-All that is external to us (people, things, situations, etc..) is neither good nor evil, repeated Raniero. Good and evil lay only in the use we make of these external things, and this use is in our exclusive

power. For example, chess pieces are neither good nor evil things, they are simply chess pieces. The good player, however, will use them in the right way and will win the game, while the bad player will lose it. This is not a judgment upon the value of the chess pieces as such, but about the way the players use them. A ship is neither a good nor an evil thing. Does it mean that the ship doesn't exist or that it is worthless? The good pilot will dock it even in a rough sea, the bad pilot will make it sink-

-I understand, Tom said. All that is external to us is neither good nor evil, and good and evil are only in the use we make of what is external to us-

-You are right, nodded Raniero, this is the truth. You preserve the power to judge pleasant, desirable and useful the presence of the friends who left the island, because this judgment is exclusively up to you. But you must admit that the separation, on the contrary, doesn't depend exclusively on you. You preserve the right to have your own opinion of the separation, too. But why should this judgment always be negative and cause you unhappiness? Allow me to put the question in this way: what hurts you is not the departure of your friends but your fear of suffering-

-Maybe you are right, murmured Iorgos emotionally. But what can we do better than that?-

-You can make a different choice, said Raniero. You can consider the separation from another point of view. You are free to conceive other judgments. For example, that the separation will make it more pleasant to meet your friends again, or that the separation is unavoidable and will produce something new and unexpected, and so on. If you put the diairesis at work, the diairesis will change your judgments and these new judgments will change your feelings. If you take good and evil away from what is aproairetic, why do you deduce as a consequence that you cannot have feelings anymore? Don't be afraid to feel this languor, do not try to resist the pang, don't fear the separation, allow yourself to experience something that you imagine can crush you while, in fact, you are actually superior to it and able to master it-

-When I feel pain, said Penelopes, I censor it. I start thinking about a lot of different things and become hyperactive, because I don't want to feel badly. I don't do what you suggest, I don't accept the pain and I go elsewhere-

-When I feel the pain of separation, said Muriel, I lose energy and no longer want to do anything. Nothing anymore seems to me interesting and everything seems negative. I soon enter a state of depression and nothing appears valuable to me anymore. I start to believe that the separation is my fault and that I have no value at all, because otherwise there would be no separation. This happens to me especially if the separation is the end of a romance-

-When you say, Raniero explained, that you feel guilty for the separation and that you are worthless, you implicitly assume that the separation is something in your exclusive power. If you judge yourself to be the cause of the separation, you also admit to be the origin of your own affliction. Now, if you

judged that the separation doesn't depend exclusively on you, you would at least avoid the vicious cycle you've described, which forces you to live the separation as well as the depression-

-On my part, intervened Sofia, I find it important to stay in the situation, even if it is one of nostalgia or unhappiness, and accept it, as Raniero said. If you refuse the situation, the pain gets bigger and bigger, while if you accept and dominate it you can be happy-

-Excuse me, protested Iorgos, you cannot tell me that you can be happy and unhappy at the same time...-

-You are right in saying this, intervened Raniero, because if we use contradictory terms we'll make a mess and understand very little. So I suggest that we don't call unhappiness the whole range of soft, delicate and nostalgic feelings of those who have learned the right use of their proairesis. Epictetus frequently invites us not to use a judgment without first having carefully analyzed it. So, how must we show affection? We must be affectionate as the free men are, as the lucky men are. Our reason will never choose that we are slaves in our proairesis, nor that we lose its vigour or make it depend on this or that. We can, therefore, love, and love with the intention of preserving our proairesis free and in accordance with the nature of things. If, however, due to the feeling of affection, whatever it is we call affection, we are to be slaves and petty men, we must avoid being affectionate-

-I'm sorry, asked Irene, are you saying that in order to avoid the risk of being unhappy or enslaved it's better not to be affectionate at all?-

-I'm telling you, answered Raniero, that your presence is dear to me, but that if you leave me, even though I will feel a sense of lack, of longing, or the languor that follows a separation, I'll live in your absence as a free man lives, a man who is not overwhelmed by feelings related to events that are not within his power-

-It seems to me, said Muriel, that in this way you're passively accepting the choices of other people-

-I can try, answered Raniero, to influence the choices of Irene, in order to facilitate or hinder the choice I don't like; but certainly it's not in my power to ensure that she will choose what I prefer. I don't forget the existence and the meaning of the feelings of sadness, languor or nostalgia which follow a separation. We can usefully define these feelings as sudden, short-term feelings. But I don't lose sight of the fact that these feelings cannot overwhelm me, as they are themselves aproairetic events, that is events that are not in my exclusive power. At this point what I can and must do, is to put at work the diairesis, analyze them in the light of the fact that they are not in my exclusive power and open the door to the stable, long-term feelings that we now know to be actually judgments. This is what depends exclusively on me. To feel badly or good is therefore totally up to me-

-I separated from my wife last year, intervened Dimitri, and I still cannot accept this separation. I constantly seek traces of her in the form of letters, photographs, of people who remember her, so that I can feel again as I used to feel before-

-The judgment that you have of your wife, said Penelopes, is that she was certainly a good thing for you, and the separation from her makes your life unhappy. But if you try to recreate a situation that is no longer possible, you won't get anything out of it-

-I have given up, sighed Dimitri, experiencing new things and I want to be alone with the memory of what was good for me-

-Nobody in the world, nodded Raniero, will convince you of the opposite. I think it's a pity to lose a friend like you, who chooses to live alone. It's a pity to lose your company and the opportunity of meeting and discussing together. But if this is your choiche, we cannot change it. You, my dear Dimitri, are sending a man to hell, that is yourself; a man who has committed no injustice at all-

-On the contrary, intervened Irene, I have experienced the diairesis at work, the change of judgment, as you call it, after a separation. For me, the separation is not exclusively negative and a source of regret, though, of course, this feeling is not unknown to me. The separation has been for me a period that has allowed me to see more clearly what I lived, and to experience feelings of gratitude for what I had before, while being aware that everything has a beginning and an end. I think that this is exactly the opposite of what Medea chose to do because of her painful separation from Jason. We know that she chose to devalue all that had passed between them-

-If I understand it well, said Mary, you Raniero do not deny the existence of sudden feelings and the legitimacy of experiencing them. You simply say that the long-term feelings are in fact judgments, that we are masters of these judgments and that the use of our feelings is an open question-

-That's right, Raniero stated, and of course what we do with our feelings depends on the judgments that guide us. The word 'diairesis' itself means separation. Separation from what? Separation of the judgment of good and evil from everything external to our proairesis and the assignment of good to our individual proairesis when it operates correctly, that is, when it is capable of distinguishing between what is in our exclusive power and what is not. I don't deny the sadness of separation, but I don't forget that the separation doesn't depend exclusively on me; and I deny that the judgment on separation must always be a cause of unhappiness. On the other hand, we cannot but interact with people and things outside us. Well, we should not be afraid of these relationships and we should not expect to suffer harm from them, but good, provided that we know, thanks to the ability to use the diairesis, to appreciate and firmly hold their true value. No football player disputes the weight or size of the ball. The talent of each player is shown by his ability to use the ball as it is, identical for all. Up to us is to overcome the obstacles, including the fear of winning, and to decide to score a goal-

It was late afternoon and suddenly a distant but unmistakable rumbling announced the imminent arrival of the big blue boat of Nicola.

-Who wants, asked Mary and Dimitri, to go to Kedros by boat with us? The boat is in sight and we must be ready to leave in a few minutes-

-The sea is calm and therefore I will gladly take the boat back with the two of you, said Muriel-

-I do wish, said Irene, to see again from the boat the magnificent rocky coast we admired coming here this morning. I'll join you, Muriel. And you, Raniero, what will you do?-

-I prefer walking. I would like to look at the sea from the top of the rocky coast and delight myself with the scent of the bushes of thyme and helichrysum that dot the rugged path leading here. Shall I see you later for a beer at the tavern of Nikitas?-

*Dialogue 4**The nature of things*

An old, large and still very vibrant juniper, thick with fragrant berries, stands leaning against a stonewall which is not far from the small amphitheater overlooking the sea. Its long, rough and prickly lower branches spread out radially and down to the ground. By properly cutting them away, Raniero has been able to set up under the juniper a magnificent natural gazebo. Especially after lunch, when the summer sun pours its shiny streams of heat on the island and no movement is possible, it's very pleasant to take a siesta in the shade and coolness of the gazebo.

Muriel told me that one summer day she had been invited by Raniero and Irene to join them in the late afternoon. While looking at whether the lavender and the geranium, which had been planted a few days earlier needed some watering, she was surprised by the sudden appearance of her two friends behind her.

-I didn't see you coming, said Muriel, and I was a bit scared. Where do you come from?-

-We took a nap on cots placed under the gazebo, answered Irene, and when we saw you we came out to meet you. Today Raniero really amused me. Do you want to know with which name he has just baptized the gazebo?-

-I have no idea, replied Muriel, but as Raniero often jokes, I expect it to be a funny name-

-Now he calls it "our Siestina Chapel" said Irene laughing and looking fondly at Raniero-

Muriel laughed too, while Raniero endeavored to remain very serious.

-Despite the north wind, the plants you transplanted the past few days look great! noted Muriel-

-Yes, agreed Raniero. I didn't expect so big a success, because in these things we are only amateurs.

Now I propose to go indoors and to prepare a good cup of coffee. Then if you want we can resume our conversations in the amphitheater-

-I accept with enthusiasm, immediately nodded Muriel-

-The air is no longer as hot as a few hours ago, said Irene, and the wind is very calm. It will be great to talk together again-

Once they had tasted the coffee and taken a seat on the steps of the amphitheater, Muriel turned to Raniero and asked him:

-You speak often of the nature of things. To you, does understanding the nature of things mean being able to capture all the data of a given situation?-

-Not so much the data, answered Raniero, which could also be called the representations that a person gets of a certain situation. When I speak of the nature of things I refer, first of all, to the fact that of all the existing things, some are in our exclusive power while some others are not. The nature of things is

essentially their fundamental bipartition in things that depend exclusively on us and things that don't depend exclusively on us; that is, as Epictetus defines them, in proairetic things and in aproairetic things-

-For the sake of clarity, intervened Irene, can you give us once more an example of the ones and of the others? -

-Well, responded Raniero, in our exclusive power, and therefore proairetic things are: our judgments, impulses, desires, aversions, assents; in a word, everything that is the work of our own proairesis. Not in our exclusive power, and therefore aproairetic things are, for example: our body, property, reputation, titles; in a word, everything that is not the work of our own proairesis-

-But is Stoicism not an 'ideology', asked Muriel? It seems to me that Stoicism is only one of the many existing 'isms' such as, to quote only a few of them, Epicureanism, Idealism, Marxism, and so on-

-And what's more, added Irene, is it not a purely 'cultural' thing, that is a construction linked to historical contingencies and cultural models that have in no way universal value?-

-You pose rightly and straightaway the problem of the very existence of the nature of things, that is the existence of something that can be defined as 'invariant', and to which everything else is relative. Let's start then from the material world and the laws of physics. When they speak of the 'Theory of Relativity', certain people really like to repeat that 'everything is relative'. This is of course nonsense, since the so-called theory of relativity doesn't show at all that in the physical world everything is relative. On the contrary, this theory is intended to exclude from its foundations everything that is relative to the conditions of the observers, and it succeeds in arriving to a formulation of the physical laws that is completely independent from them. In the physical world is there at least a parameter that is invariant and to which all the others are relative?-

-Irene and Muriel were puzzled and replied: we don't know what to answer-

-The answer is yes, said Raniero. Einstein and many other physicists with him have shown that this parameter exists and that it's the speed of propagation of the electromagnetic field in the vacuum or, to put it more simply, the speed of light. Now, let's skip entirely the flood of implications and consequences that are inherent to this achievement, and let's ask this simple question: is the light a proairetic or an aproairetic thing?-

-Certainly an aproairetic thing, answered confidently Irene-

-Then we can conclude, continued Raniero, that at least in the case of aproairetic things it's legitimate to speak of the existence of the nature of things. This means, in other words, that it's possible to propose rules that will enable us to interpret and predict the behavior of at least some material objects-

-In fact, Muriel agreed, so far the discussion seems to me to go on smoothly-

-Let's ask now whether it's possible to speak of the existence of the nature of things in the case of proairetic things too. We can ask the question in this form: "Is it possible to find in the case of

proairetic things a parameter that has the same importance and the same meaning of the speed of light in the case of aproairetic things?"-

-This seems to me, confessed Irene, a very difficult question, and one which has no possible answer-

-It's not so, said Raniero. The invariant parameter we are looking for in the case of what is proairetic exists, we all know it and its name is 'freedom'-

-How, said Muriel filled with wonder, can you compare the speed of light to freedom? The speed of light is a quantity that has a finite and measurable value. You cannot speak of freedom as if it were a measurable quantity-

-I understand, admitted Raniero, that you are somewhat perplexed and I will not go into details that I don't master. For me it's enough if we admit the existence of infinite quantities which are suitable to be treated with the same ease with which we treat integers and finite quantities. If that it's the case, we are entitled to believe that the nature of things exists even in the case of what is proairetic, and are entitled to speak about it, that is about our conceptions, impulses, desires, aversions, judgments and so on, as aspects of the same invariant and infinite quantity that we call 'freedom'-

-But, asked Muriel, which kind of freedom is the one you are talking about?

-Let's forget about freedom as an abstract concept, and let's talk about free men as concrete individuals. Who are these free men? They are the men 'to whom everything happens according to the judgments of their proairesis'. Namely, they are the men who don't pursue what is not in their exclusive power as if it were in their exclusive power, those who learned how to deal with any aproairetic thing and who know how to pass this test keeping their virtue, beauty and happiness intact. Free is therefore the man who uses the diairesis and is well aware of the nature of things-

-You certainly know, stepped in Irene, the statement that tells: 'My freedom ends where yours begins'. How does this statement relate to what you are saying?

-Epictetus repeats many times that no man can be master of the proairesis of another man. The proairesis is such a thing that nothing can force it to conceive or prevent it from conceiving, for instance, a judgment, a project or a desire. This means that the human proairesis is absolutely free and is an infinite quantity-

-Does this mean that a man can do whatever he wants?-

-Infinity is not at all equivalent to omnipotence. So, although your proairesis is infinite, as there is by nature no quantity superior to it, when you clash with another proairesis, there ends what you call 'omnipotence' because you can never, as we have said, be master of the proairesis of someone else. If the proairesis were something of a finite size, then the larger or stronger proairesis would be the master of the smaller or weaker proairesis. The proairesis of a man, however, is neither larger nor smaller than the proairesis of another man. Both proairesis are infinite, and can be masters only of themselves-

-I realize now, interrupted Irene, that when we discuss proairesis we are just talking about this invariant parameter, and I understand now why we always speak of proairesis as of something unhampered and unconstrained by nature-

-You are definitely right, concluded Raniero. What no power is able to hamper or constrain can rightly be defined as infinite. This is the freedom of each of us, of every human being. This is the answer to the question we have asked about the existence of the nature of things in the field of what is proairetic-

-Excuse me, protested Muriel, but you forget that it's enough, in order to subordinate and enslave a man, just to threaten him with death!-

-Let's use again the words of Epictetus, answered Raniero, and say that it's not the threat of death which subordinates and enslaves such a man, but that it's the infinite freedom of his proairesis that judges better for him to do what he is asked to do than to die. It's always a judgment that compels another judgment, that is, it's always the proairesis which forces itself, since an infinite quantity cannot be overcome by a finite quantity-

-But you have not yet explained, said Muriel, why the existence of the nature of things and the bipartition into proairetic and aproairetic things is not a purely 'ideological' and 'cultural' belief. The main difficulty I see in this regard lies in the fact that good and evil, happiness and misery, beauty and ugliness are judgments that belong only to individuals and that they are forms, to use your terminology, of their infinite freedom. However, the variety of civilizations, cultures, languages and human individuals is so huge that I don't see how you could focus on defining a model, for example, 'right' and consider other ones as 'wrong'. This is what I mean when I say that I am sick and tired of 'ideologies' and when I say that all the 'cultural models' are relative-

-Let's summarize, resumed Raniero, what we have said so far. I believe we now agree on the existence of proairetic things and aproairetic things. This bipartition is not an ideological or a cultural concept: it reflects the simple and incontrovertible empirical evidence of what we can do and of what we cannot do. We agree on the existence of the nature of things in the case of aproairetic objects, as we are taught by the physicists who study them and who clearly demonstrate that any aproairetic thing is subject to impediments and constrictions by what has a finite value bigger than it has. We agree on the existence of the nature of things also in the case of proairetic things: a nature of things which is embodied in the infinite freedom of our proairesis. The difficulty that Muriel sees can be resolved in this way. There is no doubt that good and evil, happiness and misery, beauty and ugliness, and so on are proairetic things, that they are judgments that belong only to individuals, and that these judgments are forms of their infinite freedom. Let's now ask the crucial question in this way: "Even if it's certain that men differ in judging good and bad things, is there at least one judgment, or a pair of judgments, upon which all human beings cannot but agree, regardless of their culture, race, religion, ideology, language, age, gender, and whatever difference you can imagine?" If the answer is 'yes', we can say we have found the

unshakable foundation upon which to build our confidence in the existence of the human nature. If the answer is 'no', we conclude that there is no human nature, and that we shall be eternally enclosed within the boundaries of 'ideology' and 'culture', with all the consequences that this conclusion implies. Do either of you have an answer to this question or at least feel ready to venture a guess?-

In the silence, you could hear the hiss of the wings of large seagulls darting in the sky and whose raucous shrieks mingled with the inexhaustible chirping of cicadas.

-Okay, resumed Raniero, let me try to give an answer. I declare that there is a pair of judgments on which all human beings cannot but agree regardless, as I said before, of their culture, race, religion, ideology, language, age, gender, and so on. Indeed no human being, I repeat, no human being can avoid judging what he wants as a beautiful, happy and good thing, and judging ugly, unhappy and bad stumbling into what he averts. This statement is the unshakable foundation we were looking for-

-I don't understand, interrupted Irene, in what sense this statement can be an unshakable foundation-

-It is an unshakable foundation, answered Raniero, in the sense that human nature exists because every human being is such that he tends to get for himself what he regards as beautiful, just, good and so on; and to run away from what he regards as ugly, unjust, bad, and so on. Because of this empirical evidence we are also allowed to define the human nature as a nature that tends to happiness and not to its opposite-

-I don't agree with you, said Irene. A friend of mine who is a professional psychotherapist tells me that most of the people who seek her help complain continuously about making choices that they themselves define as 'wrong' and that make them unhappy. They say they always make choices that make them feel bad, by a sort of compulsion to repeat their mistakes-

-Look, explained Raniero. It would seem that the behavior of these people contradicts what I said before, but in reality when they choose something that may well appear to them 'negative', such as to gorge themselves with food in the case of a bulimic person, as a matter of fact they make a choice that is good for them, because otherwise they would not make it-

-What you notice is true, said Irene. After all, what is therapy but a path that leads people to change their judgment of what is good for them?-

-I also agree on this, said Muriel. Any individual wants his own good and avoids his own evil, but it's quite evident that the difference among individuals lies exactly in what each of them judges to be good and to be bad, to be right and to be wrong, and then in what each of them will concretely desire or avert-

-Well, let's restrict ourselves, for simplicity, to the consideration of desire and of aversion. It's true that the differences between us, continued Raniero, lie in what we desire or avert and that for each of us the verb 'to desire' and the verb 'to avert' can have very different meanings. Do you remember the

discussion on the three cities that we had in the first dialogue, when we introduced the word 'proairesis'?

-Yes, we remember it perfectly, said both Muriel and Irene-

-Well, I believe that the key to the solution of the problem is right there. Humans want different things, but there are only two classes of things that they can desire or avert: proairetic things and aproairetic things. This statement is valid always and for everyone, since it reflects the natural, basic bipartition of reality. So, the only sensible question we must ask when dealing with any desire or aversion of any human being is this one: "Is this individual desiring or averting a proairetic thing or an aproairetic one?" Again, for the sake of simplicity, let's consider only the case of desire and aversion and give an example. Does any of you want to suggest a subject?-

-Let's take money as the subject of the example, suggested Muriel-

-Great one, congratulated her Raniero. An individual deems money a desirable thing and judges it to be a good. Money is obviously an aproairetic thing and our man puts his desire upon it-

-In doing so, intervened Irene, he makes his own happiness depend on the fulfilment of his own desire. But we know that the possession of an aproairetic object, given the nature of things, will never be in his exclusive power. So our man runs a very serious risk-

-Yes, resumed Raniero, you are telling the truth when you say that he runs a very serious risk. Indeed, as we assume that our man is someone who knows what he does, and given the fact that he judges money to be a good thing, he cannot but aim at acquiring all the money in the world, and in order to do that he must be willing, albeit tacitly, to steal as much money as he can. Then, if an individual is true to himself and the money is for him a good thing, he 'must' become a thief. And since he will never reach the goal of his life, which is to have all the money in the world, he is doomed to eternal misery-

-But you exaggerate, interrupted him Muriel, when you take Scrooge McDuck as an example. An individual doesn't usually want for himself all the money in the world and is satisfied with much less-

-Of course, answered Raniero; but this happens simply because the world teems with insignificant persons, contradictory people who a little 'wish' and a little 'do not wish', who think they can say 'yes' and 'no' at the same time-

-And anyway their lives, interjected Irene, are a ride of misery. But let's now analyze the case of a man who, on the contrary, judges that money is a bad thing and who averts its possession-

-I accept your suggestion, said Raniero. This individual judges money to be a bad thing and therefore, first of all, he tries to get rid of the money he has-

-This, said Muriel, immediately reminds me of the story of Saint Francis of Assisi-

-Let us leave the poor man of Assisi alone, continued Raniero. We are interested in talking about an individual who is well aware of what he averts. Whatever is the way by which this man got rid of the money in his possession, he makes his own happiness depend on the aversion of money. But he

constantly stumbles into what he averts, because he ceaselessly comes across people who use it and offer it to him, and this makes him unhappy. He will then, by explaining why and how money is pure evil, try to convince other people to do what he has done. But his plan to eradicate money from the world is totally meaningless, because it contradicts his own necessities of life. Do you know the quip going round in the circle of people who were part of the more immediate entourage of Gandhi? The quip was the following: "It is unbelievable how much money it costs to keep Gandhi poor". Since our individual is a consistent person, he will soon be forced to flee from all contacts involving exchange. This is equivalent to an escape from the human world in search of a pure and absolute self-sufficiency. As you can see, this man 'must' escape other men and totally isolate himself. And since he never finds perfect isolation and perfect self-sufficiency, I would not be astonished if he decided to commit suicide. And here we leave him-

-In short, concluded Irene, to crave for an aproairetic object or to crave for avoiding it doesn't make much difference. In both cases, we show ourselves ignorant of the art of using aproairetic objects to enjoy peace and to be happy-

-It's exactly like that, concluded Raniero. The last case remains to be considered, that is the case of the man for whom no aproairetic object is good or bad, and for whom only his judgment about an aproairetic object can be good or bad. This individual will judge that money is neither a good nor an evil thing and will act accordingly-

-Do you mean that this man, asked Irene, in the case he has a lot of money, will know how to be rich in money with dignity and respect for himself and for other people? Do you mean that this man will not forget where his true wealth is? And that he will do the same in the case he is poor in money?-

-It's exactly like that, responded Raniero; this is what I mean. The true good is not the money in itself but the judgment that the money is neither a good nor an evil thing. All you need to be a happy and virtuous man is to intimately possess this judgment and to apply it in everyday life. Similarly, we can say that the true evil is not the money but the judgment that makes us crave for it as if it were a good or, inversely, to avoid it as if it were a bad thing. Who feeds on the judgment that money is a good thing is unhappy as the one who is nourished by the judgment that money is an evil thing-

-Let's analyze another example, proposed Muriel, which has nothing to do with money-

-Well, said Raniero, here is another example of our inability to recognize the nature of things and its fundamental bipartition. A person cannot stand the idea that other people have opinions different from his own and, believing he can master their proairesis, seeks in various ways to impose his own ideas. First of all, let's ask: "Are the judgments of other people proairetic or aproairetic things?" Obviously they are aproairetic things, aproairetic like the money we mentioned earlier; though, unlike money, we can consider them immaterial things. We can apply the conclusions we have just reached to the case of immaterial aproairetic things as well. 'Good' is the judgment that the judgments of other people are

neither good nor evil things for me. 'Evil' is the judgment that the judgments of other people are a good or a bad thing for me. In the first case, I'll be tolerant and I'll try to understand and make myself understood by other people. In the second case, I'll be ready to become the follower of a sect, a party, a religion, and I'll hold myself compelled to do everything I can in order to change the minds of those who don't have my judgments-

-This is also the premise, if I'm not mistaken, that underlies all the great monotheistic religions, said Muriel. None of them recognizes the fundamental bipartition of things and their nature. They all declare themselves to be the custodian of 'Revealed Truths' and aim to 'save' humans bringing them from the condition of 'Unbelievers' to that of 'Believers'-

-I want to suggest, stepped in Irene, an example closer to the experience of all of us. When two people make love it happens sometimes that they cannot reach an orgasm, either both or one of them, even if they are fond of each other. There are two popular ways to manage this situation: the first, which is the commonest, is to think that the fault lies with the partner; the second is to feel guilty for not having been up to the task. What is at stake here is the fact that ordinary people believe sexual orgasm to be a thing in our exclusive power and therefore proairetic. The main result of this way of thinking is unhappiness, accusations, quarrels and disaffection. But sexual orgasm is something which is not in our exclusive power, since a lot of different subjective and environmental events can condition it. Only by thinking this way we can allow ourselves to enjoy the pleasures we have lived; I mean the kisses, the caresses, the sensuality of those moments, without spoiling what we have lived because we have actually not reached the orgasm-

-Even after having been presented with all these examples, said Muriel, I am not convinced and I am still in doubt. Does such an attitude towards life not confine us to a sort of passivity? If everything is aproairetic except our judgments, we can change absolutely nothing!-

-It's not true that we can change nothing, answered Raniero. First of all, you can change your judgments, and a few days ago we already discussed this question in depth. Our conclusion was that it's not correct to call 'activity' the attempt to dominate and change aproairetic things, and call 'passivity' the project of making the right use of our proairesis. Secondly, we already admitted that none of us can live without interacting with other people and with external things. Well, we made it clear that we should not be afraid of these relationships with what is aproairetic and that we should not expect from them any harm or evil but a good, if we know, thanks to diairesis, how to value them properly. Thirdly, we agreed that to learn diairesis is essential in order to recognize the nature of things and their fundamental bipartition, and so be able to use the materials of our existence without neglect, without recklessness and without carelessness; because it's true that all aproairetic things are indifferent but our use of them is not at all indifferent and requires attention, diligence and extreme care-

-I would very much like to have one more coffee, interrupted Irene. What we have just had was so good... Isn't it, Muriel?-

-I agree on a second coffee, answered Muriel-

-I'd also gladly drink a coffee, and let us stop here our conversation for today, concluded Raniero. We might meet again in a few days. I would like to tell a story, if you still want to hear any, about a certain Gyges-

*Dialogue 5**Gyges: diairesis and counterdiairesis, Good and Evil*

A few days later Muriel, Irene and Raniero gathered again in the small amphitheater and resumed their conversations.

-Some time ago, began Raniero, I reread a few chapters of the first book of the 'Histories' of Herodotus, and I came across on the story about Gyges. The vicissitudes of Gyges revolve around the choices he has to do, and the story in which he is involved seems to me a good explanatory example of what 'good' and 'evil' are, of where they lie and of what the correct use of our proairesis means-

-I have never heard this story and I'll listen to it gladly, said Muriel-

-The name of Gyges sounds quite new to me too and I'd like to know more about him, said Irene-

-Here is the story, said Raniero, as Herodotus tells it.

* Candaules, the King of Lydia, was in love with his bride and, as he was in love, he believed to possess by far the most beautiful of all women. Among his bodyguards was Gyges, the son of Daskylos. He was particularly dear to him. Candaules used to confide in him his most important business and even spoke to him about the beauty of his wife, praising her beyond measure. One day the King said to Gyges: "Gyges, I think that you don't believe me when I speak of the beauty of my wife. Try, therefore, to see her naked". Gyges replied in an agitated voice: "Lord, what insane speech are you making, inviting me to look at my naked sovereign? With the stripping of the clothes the woman is stripped also of her modesty. Since ancient times men have found good precepts from which we must learn, and one of them is that everyone must take care of his things. I am absolutely convinced that the Queen is the most beautiful of all women, so please don't ask me to do things that are against the law". But Candaules told him: "Be reassured, Gyges, and don't be afraid of me. I am not making these proposals in order to put you through a test. Don't be afraid of my wife either, that you may receive harm from her, because I will arrange everything so that she will not even know of having been seen by you. I shall take you secretly into the room where we sleep, and I'll hide you behind the door left open. After I come in, my wife will soon follow me and get into the bedroom. Next to the entrance there is a stool where she will place her clothes, taking them off one by one, and you'll be able to quietly contemplate her. Then, when she heads off from the stool to the bed and you see her back and shoulders, be quick to get out of the bedroom and be careful not to be seen on the way out of the door". So Gyges, since he could not refuse, was ready to obey the King. Candaules, when it was time to sleep, led him into the bedroom. Then his wife appeared and, as soon as she got in, she started undressing and laying her clothes on the stool, while Gyges watched. When he found himself behind the woman walking toward the bed, he came out stealthily. She saw him as he left but, having understood what her husband had

done, did not cry out of shame and pretended to have noticed nothing. However, she planned to take revenge on Candaules. Among the Lydians, as is usual also in the case of other barbarians, to be seen naked is a cause of great shame, even for a man. As soon as it was day the Queen summoned Gyges. Gyges, still believing that she knew nothing about the incident, accepted the invitation because from time to time he used to visit the Queen when she called him. As soon as Gyges came in, the woman said: "Now, Gyges, of the two roads which are in front of you I'll let you choose which one you want to head for. Either you kill Candaules, get me and the Kingdom of Lydia, or you yourself must die, so that in the future you'll no longer see what you must not see. Come on, then! Either he who has hatched this trap must perish or you, who saw me naked and are guilty of an illegitimate action". Gyges was at first stunned by this speech, and after a while implored the Queen not to force him to make such a choice. However, he was unable to persuade her and saw himself forced to either kill his master or to perish himself at the hands of other people. He chose to live, and asked: "Since you force me to kill my Lord against my will, let me at least know the way we will attack him". The Queen answered: "The attack will take place in the same room where he showed me naked to you, and we shall attack him while he sleeps". So they plotted the trap, and when night came Gyges followed the woman into the bedroom. She gave him a dagger and hid him behind the same door. Later, while Candaules was sleeping, Gyges came out of hiding, killed him and took the woman and her Kingdom. *

-What do you think?-

-A very interesting story, said Irene-

-I would like to look at it, proposed Raniero, by entering into the head of the three characters and examining what happens in their proairesis. If you believe that it's worthwhile, we can start with a cursory examination of the story. Since we are three and the characters in question are also three, we may assign one to each of us-

-I agree, said Irene excitedly. I propose Raniero be the first, because in this way he can also put us on a good track, and that he be Candaules. Muriel can speak about the Queen and I shall, lastly, talk of Gyges. Do you agree?-

-Wow! exclaimed Muriel. I'll do my best to be up to the task-

-Then I shall start, said reassuringly Raniero. We are not in front of a board of examiners. We seek only to understand the story better and we'll give each other a hand. We will assume that the Queen was really the most beautiful of all women. Let's also assume that all of the King's subjects, including Gyges, were sincerely convinced of this fact-

-Yeah! said Irene, so why does Candaules question Gyges?-

-He questions him, said Raniero, because the King is the kind of person who cannot even stand the suspicion that other people have judgments different from his own. He firmly believes that this is an 'evil' for him. Doubting Gyges, Candaules decides to actually convince him that his wife is by far the

most beautiful of all women. To achieve this goal he plans to show to Gyges the Queen in her splendid nudity, believing that this would be a vision capable of making Gyges admit the truth. The project that Candaules must implement for this purpose is very risky, because he is well aware that Gyges should see the Queen but should not be seen by her. In fact, if the Queen discovered the trick and knew that she had been seen naked by a stranger, she would avenge the outrage. However, Candaules judges more harmful for him the doubt he has about the judgments of Gyges than the possible revenge of his wife. Gyges has therefore the opportunity to contemplate his Queen naked, and after this vision we can easily be sure that Gyges swears again and again to be now absolutely convinced that the Queen is the most beautiful of all women. The design of the King seems to have been carried out to perfection. Candaules is happy and feels 'good' because he has got what he wanted. Gyges is happy and feels 'good' because he also has got what he wanted. The reality, on the contrary, is that neither Candaules nor Gyges knows how the things actually are. Let us see how and why it is so. We now possess the tools necessary to examine the character of Candaules with reference to 'proairetic things/aproairetic things' and with reference to 'good/evil'. Let's have a look at the side 'proairetic things/aproairetic things'. The first question I ask myself is this one: "Is the judgment of Gyges on the beauty of the wife of Candaules a proairetic or an aproairetic thing?" My answer is, and if you don't agree please interrupt me: "The judgment of Gyges is a proairetic thing for Gyges but an aproairetic thing for everyone else, including Candaules". Now I ask myself: "Do we know what Candaules thinks about the judgment of Gyges?" We know it for certain, as he himself tells it to us. Candaules thinks that the judgment of Gyges about the beauty of the Queen must be in his own power, in the power of the King. This is so true that Candaules, unable to bear any uncertainty about controlling the proairesis of Gyges, implements the project that we know. So the thought of King Candaules could be summed up in the following way: "I am the King and the proairesis of my subjects is my own business!" Now, the project Candaules sets at work in order to dominate the proairesis of Gyges can be divided into two elements: the design and the implementation of the project. We already know that the conception of a project is a proairetic thing while its implementation is an aproairetic thing. Now I ask myself the third question: "Does Candaules think that the implementation of his project is a proairetic thing or an aproairetic thing?" He certainly believes it to be a proairetic thing, as his behavior tells us. Candaules is certain, without reservation, that Gyges will see without being seen. The thought of Candaules in this regard could be summed up in this way: "The King proposes and the King disposes!" Let us now examine the character of Candaules with reference to 'good/evil'. We know that no aproairetic thing can be 'good' or 'evil', and that 'good' is only the judgment of the proairesis working properly, while 'evil' is the judgment of the proairesis not working properly. So we know that 'good' is the judgment: "The judgments of other people are neither good nor evil for me". We also know that 'evil' are the two judgments: "The judgments of other people are a 'good' for me" and "The judgments of other people

are an 'evil' for me". What does Candaules think about these statements? Even in this case it's enough to hear his words and look at his behavior. Candaules thinks that the judgment of Gyges on the beauty of the Queen is 'evil' if it's different from his own, the King's judgment. Subsequently he falls from the frying pan into the fire. In fact he thinks that the judgment of Gyges on the beauty of the Queen is now 'good' because it has become equal to his own. Let me summarize. In at least two cases Candaules has gone astray, because he considers as proairetic something that by the nature of things is aproairetic. In addition Candaules is in the 'evil' because he has at least a couple of judgments that we know to be the distinctive form taken by a proairesis not operating properly. What shall we say to Candaules? We shall say: "Stop it, Candaules, stop it! What you believe to be love, what you believe to be happiness and 'feeling good' rests upon incorrect foundations, disrespectful of the nature of things. Stop it and change your judgments. You can escape the tragic chain of error, vice and misery already tight around your neck, only by using the diairesis!"-

-Now it's my turn, said Muriel with a little fear in her heart. I'll speak of the Queen. I hope you agree if I limit myself to the consideration of the 'good/evil' issue-

-We agree. This is more than enough, nodded both Irene and Raniero-

-We already know, continued Muriel, that 'good' is the judgment: "To be seen naked by other eyes is neither good nor evil". We also know that 'evil' is the pair of judgments: "To be seen naked by other eyes is good" and "To be seen naked by other eyes is evil". Which are the judgments of the Queen? In my opinion there is no doubt that the judgments of the Queen are as follows: "To be seen naked by Candaules is good" and "To be seen naked by Gyges is evil". She believes that the eye of Candaules has the power to encircle her with the 'good' and believes, on the contrary, that the eye of Gyges has the power to put shame on her, to put her in a state of unbearable 'evil'. So, the outrage she has suffered is so serious as to merit a vengeance. Neither Candaules nor Gyges know that the Queen had a glimpse of Gyges when he left the bedroom and she, while Candaules embraces her, reasons in this way: "I am the Queen and to be seen naked by my husband Candaules is 'good' for me. But now I know that Gyges saw me naked and this is 'evil' for me. Gyges could never see me naked if he were not authorized and maybe instigated to do so by Candaules. So Candaules betrayed me and it is primarily on him that I must take my revenge. But Gyges, who fully obeys Candaules, deserves to die too, so that in the future he will no more see what he must never see. I will therefore make them perish, either one or the other, so that I can again be surrounded by the 'good' and again say to myself: "To be seen naked by X is 'good' for me". At this point the Queen operates upon the weakest ring of the chain and designs a way to raise Gyges against Candaules. She summons Gyges and brutally puts him in front of the alternative of killing the King or dying. The proairesis of the Queen has planned a real murder. We know that this project is a proairetic thing, and that 'good' and 'evil' lie only in what is proairetic. Allow me to skip the analysis of the actual implementation of the killing project of the Queen, which will be carried out by

the hand of Gyges armed by her, the seizure of power by Gyges and the new marriage of the Queen with Gyges. I jump directly to the question: "Is the conception of this project by the murderous Queen something 'good' or something 'evil'?" At this point I know I have an answer, but I don't know how to justify it. I need you, Raniero, to help me clarify this point. In fact, if 'good' and 'evil' are characteristic only of what is proairetic, if they are nothing more than different attitudes of the proairesis, when can we say that a certain attitude of our proairesis is 'good' and that a different attitude of our proairesis is 'evil'?" Or, to put the question in slightly different terms: "When can we say that a certain project of the proairesis is 'good' and that a different project of the proairesis is 'evil'?"

-Thank you Muriel, said Raniero, for the confidence you place in me. I'll try to give you an answer. Let me ask the question in the following way: "Are all the proairetic things, that is, all the things that are in our exclusive power, 'good'? Are all our projects, impulses, desires, aversions, approvals and so on 'good' simply because they are proairetic things?" Certainly it is not so, because we know that they can also be 'evil', while no proairetic thing can be 'good' or 'evil'. "Therefore, when can we define a judgment, an impulse, a desire, an aversion, an approval and so on, to be 'good', and when can we define it to be 'evil'?" The problem is a serious one, because in order to get out of trouble in this case we need to find a canon, a parameter that is 'invariant', that is unaffected by any difference of ideology, culture, race, religion, language, age, gender, and so on between human beings. Do you remember that in one of our conversations we reached the fundamental conclusion that the nature of things exists also in the case of proairetic things, and that our projects, desires, approvals and so forth are all aspects of the same invariant and infinite quantity that we have called 'freedom'? Our proairesis is this invariant and infinite quantity, and as such human proairesis is by nature free, unhampered and unconstrained. Which is, then, the canon we are looking for? I think that the answer can be formulated in these terms: "The proairesis is true to itself, it's 'good', when it keeps itself free, unhampered and unconstrained. The proairesis is untrue to itself, it's 'evil', when it no longer keeps itself free, unhampered and unconstrained". The naked proairesis is an infinite quantity, no finite thing can be greater than it is, and so no proairetic thing can limit it. It's only the proairesis that can choose to dress up and disguise itself as a slave, a coward, an unhappy man. The proairesis is therefore 'evil' when it disguises itself in this way, and I suggest to call this perversion 'counterdiairesis'. When our proairesis counterdiairesizes, it claims to lack exclusive power over what the nature of things has placed in its exclusive power. When the proairesis sets at work the counterdiairesis, it loses its sense of responsibility and shows itself conditioned by smaller, finite quantities. Diairesis and counterdiairesis thus appear as the two ways that the proairesis has at its disposal to rotate on itself, while the implementation of what anyone decides is entrusted, when it's the case, to the antidiairesis, which can be complementary to both. Once we have found the canon, I think we have found the answer to the difficult question that had been raised and now we can go back to the story of the Queen-

-Dear Raniero, said Muriel smiling, you're priceless. I hope I have got it right and I believe I am now able to complete my task. Incidentally, I want to note an important thing with reference to one of our previous conversations. Talking about Medea, we compared our proairesis to a Court with two judges. Now we can say that there were not two judges in office but three, and we can finally give a name to the mysterious judge who wrote the instructions for Medea: his name is definitely counterdiairesis. Let's now go back to our present subject. We know that Gyges and Candaules are aproairetic things for the Queen. If the Queen's proairesis judges that she has to kill either Candaules or Gyges or both, this means that she judges their existence as an impairment of her freedom. But if the proairesis finds that its own freedom can be impaired by an aproairetic thing, the proairesis is no longer judging itself as an infinite freedom. Therefore the proairesis of the Queen doesn't set at work the diairesis but the counterdiairesis. This means that the proairesis of the Queen has corrupted itself and is therefore in the 'evil'. Let's summarize. The proairesis of the Queen, like the proairesis of Candaules, is in the 'evil' because it has at least a couple of judgments that we know to be those of a proairesis unable to operate properly. Furthermore, the proairesis of the Queen is in the 'evil' because, using the counterdiairesis, it harbours feeling of revenge and nurtures a specific project of murder. What shall we say to the Queen? We shall say: "What a night was this one for you, lady! The garlands suddenly fell from the walls of the palace. Stop it, my Queen, stop it! Change your judgments! If you don't use the diairesis, you will celebrate a tremendous blood wedding and misery will be the perennial guest at your banquets'-

-Dear Muriel, said Irene, you were so clear as someone reading a book! Now that it's up to me, I don't really know if I shall succeed in matching your accuracy and your clarity. I have to examine the behavior of Gyges. Gyges is obviously the weakest of the three characters and he could say: "The King has forced me to see the Queen naked and I could not refuse his order. The Queen has forced me to do something against my will and I could not refuse her order". Let's see if this is true. Candaules puts Gyges in front of a dilemma regarding the compliance with or the violation of a law. This law has nothing to do with the nature of things and could actually be called, in a much more precise way, a simple cultural model. We are in fact dealing with people who believe it a great evil for a woman and for a man to be seen naked. The law in question, which obviously excludes only the King, could be summarized in this way: 'You'll never see your Queen stark naked'. Raniero has already examined the reasons why Candaules introduces Gyges into this labyrinth and we know from the words of Herodotus that Gyges, despite the assurances of the King, finds himself in a situation in which he cannot avoid to choose. Candaules is aware that he is asking Gyges to violate the law, and Gyges is also fully aware of it. The command of the King then puts Gyges in the following contradiction: 'To obey the King is 'good' for me (because I'll continue to obtain his favours)' and 'To obey the King is 'evil' for me (because I violate the law)'. We know that the contradiction is rationally unbearable and must be swiftly solved. It is also clear from the account of Herodotus that Gyges would prefer to choose the

respect of the law, but he is certain that disobeying the King would mean to lose his favours. Gyges knows that if he does not break the law he can keep his proairesis free, unhampered and unconstrained, but he can attain this result only by disobeying the orders of the King and losing his favours. On the contrary, Gyges knows that, if he obeys the orders of the King and violates the law, he will retain the favours of the King at the cost, however, of counterdiairesis and then of making his proairesis slave, subservient and subordinate. We know what Gyges chooses. The proairesis of Gyges, infatuated as it is with aproairetic things like the favours of the King, has perverted itself and is therefore in the 'evil'. When the human proairesis puts itself in this evil state and dresses up with counterdiairesis, then the problem arises of how to justify this renunciation of its infinite freedom. This justification, for any human being belonging to any culture, civilization, sex, religion, language and so on, takes invariably the form: 'It's the fault of someone else'. The proairesis which is no longer free and master of itself due to the use of counterdiairesis, is forced 'invariably' to project outside itself the cause of its perversion; and this happens because the proairesis is, at least temporarily, unable to recognize the nature of things. This is the reason why Gyges says that his choice is actually the King's fault. And what shall we say to Gyges? We shall say: 'Stop it, Gyges, stop it! At what a small price you are selling your proairesis! You are selling it at the price of indigestion and drunkenness. Stop using the counterdiairesis. Change your judgments, otherwise you'll be forced to a banquet of blood!' After a few days Gyges finds himself for the second time in a completely unexpected situation, and that again forces him to make a choice. This time it's the Queen who asks him brutally to make a choice between life and death. Gyges enters here in the following contradiction: 'To obey the Queen is 'good' for me (because I shall live, I'll have the Queen and the Kingdom)' and 'To obey the Queen is 'evil' for me (because I have to assassinate my King).' The contradiction, as we know, is unbearable and must be quickly resolved. It's clear from the account of Herodotus that Gyges would tend to choose not to murder Candaules, but this would mean his own death. And Gyges chooses to live. Let's forget for a moment that the proairesis of Gyges is already in the 'evil' because of its first counterdiairesis. If Gyges does not kill the King, he keeps his own proairesis (supposing that it is in a 'good' state) free, unhampered and unconstrained. But this choice would mean his own death. If Gyges murders the King, he stays alive and gets the Queen and the Kingdom, at the cost, however, of the perversion of his own proairesis. We know what Gyges chooses and we also know that for this choice he blames, this time, the Queen. What shall we say to Gyges? We shall say: 'Stop it, Gyges, stop it! Your proairesis is twice in the 'evil'. Change your judgment, use the diairesis and give up the banquet of blood. Gyges today is saving himself by dying, not by killing!'

A long silence followed.

Today, said Raniero softly, I think we learned about a lot of things, and I believe that it's now time to go prepare dinner. Are you staying with us for dinner, Muriel?-

-I really do want a glass of retsina, said Muriel with tears in her eyes-

-We will put the dining table on the big terrace, said Irene, eat, and wait until we see the stars lighting up slowly in the sky-