ON THE NATURE OF JEALOUSY

Is jealousy a purely human quality? can we not observe it wherever conscious beings live together? In the lower regions, at least the more highly developed animals show behavior patterns which are comparable to those of human jealousy—in the upper regions it is the gods who fall into its clutches; not the gods of the spirit—not Apollo and Athena—but Hera, mythical goddess of marriage, whose jealous fits cause tumults in the Olympic spheres. Now, if even the god of the Old Testament proclaims: "I am a jealous god"—we may ask whether there is any human being who is not capable of jealousy. Without a doubt Kierkegaard would have answered such a question affirmatively with reference to Don Juan; for the genius of direct eroticism is the absolute antithesis of jealousy. But how about the genius of reflection—how about Socrates? In the sparkling Symposium of the "Stages" Kierkegaard says: A man... of whom one may expect intellectual insight... inevitably renders himself ridiculous as soon as he becomes jealous.... Just imagine Socrates unexpectedly catching his wife in the act.... Surely, the subtle smile which could transform the ugliest of Athenians to the most beautiful, would, for the first time, have changed into a roar of laughter." (P. 43)

Anyway, the vague concept one has of the far-reaching ramifications of jealousy, as also of the restrictions against its
total demands upon man, raise doubts as to: whether one may even assume a general and self-evident awareness of what jealousy actually means. The question as to the nature of jealousy is an urgent one for the psychiatrist; because, if jealousy can appear as a deformation, called a mania, the psychiatrist has every reason to find out what jealousy really is. In "Philebos" Plato counts this characteristic among those psychic conditions in which man is goaded by his passions. Like longing, eros, envy, passion is a pathos. The suffering soul desires something it needs to fulfill itself. This "something", for which the jealous soul craves, is manifold. A man can be jealous of success, reputation, honor, prestige, power, which a competitor contests, or of a woman whose love he may forfeit to a rival. We ought to carefully examine the verbal expressions which portray such jealous behavior. Where a sense of envy enters into such sayings, or is meant to express the same thing as jealousy, we have to draw a clear distinction, since there is no maniacal deformation of envy comparable to that of jealousy. Wherever jealousy arises, something is in danger of being lost which I regard as belonging to me. It may be something that is unequivocally mine, but it can also be something which I consider, announce and apprehend as my own. Envy, on the other hand, is always directed toward something that is primarily someone else's. Jealousy is not a wanting-to-have, but rather a wanting-to-hold, an objection to loss. That is why it ends at that point where the object that belonged to me, or that I claimed as mine, has been taken away from me or been lost to another once and for all. The existence of jealousy is unconditionally interlocked with this element of uncertainty, with an impending possibility of something slipping away that belongs to me. It is linked to the intentional sens-direction given by my possession moving away from me. When, in the certainty of ultimate loss (or else in the certainty of new possession) this movement comes to a halt, jealousy also ends. It is this movement which constitutes the unrest of the jealous person—his "fretting".

This initial sketch already intimates the specific structure of jealousy. Invariably it is myself who is in danger of losing something to someone to whom I impute an equal interest in the object in question. In this relation, the intersection of the decisive reciprocal intentions lies in what belongs to me, in the