CHAPTER TWO

After the Awakening

After the awakening, after the lovers supposedly have ‘gone off into the sunset,’ a crucial new question arises: Toward what is the process of eros ‘transforming’ the consciousness of the lovers? If eros is to heighten consciousness by pulling it out of a plodding sameness and complacence, it cannot do so if the awakening phenomenon itself is allowed to continue long enough to become its own stasis and lethargy. The motivation for eros derives from the fact that consciousness seeks not only happiness, contentment and the reduction of drives, but also complexity, value-expressive activity, symbolization of these values through effective work, life-affirming adventure, and existentially meaningful transformation. It is not enough to be transformed into a permanent state of hypnotic pining and daydreaming.

It is not merely that the feelings described in the previous chapter would lose their interest over time; it is that they would cease to exist altogether if they were to remain the same. If consciousness cannot exist as stasis, then certainly heightened consciousness cannot do so. The essential aim of the awakening phase is therefore to move beyond the awakening phase. It seeks to enter a process of intensified consciousness which at first is so overwhelming that it takes up all energy and resources, but which over time allows other values to begin to emerge. Only in this way can consciousness continue to transcend itself.

The internal dynamics of the process of eros essentially intend not only to awaken us to the heightened feelings of eros per se, but to move us through the awakening phase into a condition where we can approach life on the whole from a value-expressive rather than a drive-reductive point of view. On the one hand, we enter a period of complete emotional fulfillment which allows us to posit new goals
whose purpose is not to benefit ourselves, but to express valuational feelings through effective action to promote those values. On the other hand, eros now enters a phase in which it is absolutely essential that the lovers embark on these non-reductively-motivated endeavors, so that they can continue contributing new meaningful elements to the erotic relationship itself, which would stagnate without the introduction of these elements. I shall refer to this new phase as the ‘adventure phase.’ Obviously, the people in a relationship must continue to unfold as interesting people if the relationship is to continue to unfold as an interesting relationship. And in order to be interesting people, they must at some point begin pursuing other worthwhile activities besides staring hypnotically into each other’s eyes.

The awakening phase can end in three ways: (1) It may lead naturally into the adventure phase. (2) The relationship may end against one’s will, i.e., in chagrin d’amour from which it is very difficult to ‘return to oneself,’ and even then we find ourselves in a continuing condition of existential need which may lead either to a return to stagnation or a renewed readiness for eros. (3) The relationship may end (or cease to be an erotic one) by one’s own choice or consent, in which case we find that we have returned to a condition of either existential need — which leads to renewed readiness for eros — or existential lethargy from which a later love relationship may extricate us. Each of these processes can help us to focus on a different set of important implications about the nature of eros, and therefore each will be discussed separately.

1. The Adventure Phase

The initial ex-static phase in which love is felt in terms of intense physical symptoms such as continual shortness of breath, insomnia, involuntary mental obsession, etc., cannot last forever (except perhaps, if we are to believe the accounts, in unusual cases of courtly love where both consummation and empathic contact are at least predominantly denied; such cases will be discussed in a later chapter).