



# **The Adventurer's Attitude**

**A literature study of the Adventurer's Attitude: Beauvoir,  
Simmel and Horkheimer & Adorno**

*Sanne de Jong*

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Supervisor: Ruud Welten

Second Reader: Catherine Robb

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# I. Introduction

“One way to get the most out of life is to look upon it as an adventure”

-William Feather

“The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing”

-Helen Keller

“Every man can transform the world from one monotony and drabness to one of excitement and adventure”

-Irving Wallace

The message is clear: life is exciting and purposeful when you are an adventurer. Quotes similar to those above appear in many different contexts. Books, films and songs but also car commercials, fashion advertisements or posts of a traveler's Instagram account continually glorify the idea of being adventurous. Adventure is widely depicted as crucially important for creating meaning in your life, for finding yourself, and for getting into relationships with others. It is the breaking with 'normal, everyday life' through adventure that is portrayed as exciting and meaningful. In general, the individual who accommodates to this norm, who experiences great adventures, is praised in society. Whether it is your day at the office, your dating life, the car you buy or your trip to South-Africa; when the events in your life take on an adventurous form, you succeed to transform these events into something more inspiring and worthwhile (Gusman & Kleinherenbrink, 2018: 109).

It is in the context of talking about life and meaningfulness that there is constantly referred to the concept of adventure. This frequent combination of adventure and meaningfulness in our discourses seems to uncover something about what general image we have of the adventurous kind of person. The aim of this thesis is to articulate this exposure: to analyze what the adventurous attitude entails and to critically examine

how it relates to the idea of meaningfulness. I will do so by approaching the concept of adventure from a philosophical perspective.

To carry out the main project of this thesis I will address four sub-questions. First, I want to examine *what* kind of character an adventurer has, what the adventurous attitude contains (Chapter II). Next, I focus on the question of *why* people desire adventure; why being an adventurer is so appealing and why adventure is depicted, even glorified, as meaningful (Chapter III). The third question is about how the adventurous person is positioned in the world, what its attitude is towards others, towards the human being in general and towards itself. This chapter (Chapter IV) investigates what possible effects there may be for the world, for others and for ourselves when an adventurous attitude is endorsed. The practice of reflecting on this position of the adventurer enables both myself and the reader to ask oneself on whether it is *expedient* for us, for our society, to glorify adventure. Is it desirable that the concept of adventure is linked to the idea of having a meaningful human life and being a significant human being? Is adventure really meaningful in the way we generally think it is?

In analyzing three philosophical texts - the first also somewhat sociological - I will address the three sub-questions: Simmel's *The Adventurer* (1911), Horkheimer & Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1969) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948). The reason for choosing these particular texts as the main sources for the project of this thesis is the fact that all these authors explicitly mention in their writing the concept of 'the adventurer'. The three texts provide both a characterization of – and a critical look on 'the adventurer'. These texts being of philosophical nature make it possible to analyze the concept of adventure from a philosophical viewpoint.

In the last chapter (Chapter V) I will come to a conclusion by summarizing what I found to be the core features and the main problematic aspects of the adventurer's attitude – obtained from concentrating on the literature of Beauvoir, Simmel and Horkheimer & Adorno. I want to highlight that this thesis is, in the end, not an attempt to give final definitions or to give answers to certain questions. Instead, I want to give an illustration – derived from philosophical literature - of what the adventurous attitude entails and reflect on this attitude by bringing to light critical questions and apparent problematic issues. The starting position of this thesis are the quotes at the beginning, however not as statements, but as questions to be reflected upon: "is looking upon life as an adventure undoubtedly the way to get most out of life?"; is adventure really the way to make life meaningful?

## II. The Adventurous attitude

Generally, the first thing that comes to mind when speaking of an adventurer is the idea of someone who ventures into the wilderness, who leaves everything behind and goes on a hazardous journey. Fictional characters such as Bilbo Baggins, Indiana Jones, Lara Croft, Dora the Explorer, Odysseus or Alice in Wonderland or non-fictional persons like Jon Krakauer, Bear Grylls, Marco Polo, Laura Dekker or Neil Armstrong are obvious examples of typical adventurers. In everyday contexts there are also examples of people that are regarded off as adventurous - such as the student who decides to take a year off and to go travelling; or the career-oriented man who suddenly decides to quit his job and decides to start a bed & breakfast in Tanzania. There is an attitude or character a person can have that makes us see this person as an adventurer. In this chapter I examine what this character entails. In other words, I examine what it is that makes a person an 'adventurer'.

### **The adventure experience**

In *The Adventure* (1911) Georg Simmel describes adventure as a human experience with a particular form or structure. In Simmel's definition, Adventure is never a specific content of an experience; it is the *form* of experiencing that makes an experience and adventure. Any experience can be an adventurous one, as long as it meets two conditions. The first condition defined by Simmel is that the experience must have a 'beginning' and an 'ending'. Adventure is always a 'cut-out' experience: an experience of something that is not part of your consistent everyday-life. For instance, going on a boat trip can be experienced as an adventure when you are normally never on a boat. Because adventure is intrinsically a cut-out part of the continuity of life, the experience feels accidental, sudden and unexpected. However, adventure is never merely just a spontaneous and accidental happening. The second condition of adventure experience is that it is necessarily in connection with the character and identity of the bearer of the experience. To make this more clear, Simmel compares an adventure experience to the experience of a *dream* (Simmel, 1911: 3). Like a dream, an adventure rests on it being distinct from everyday life. Adventure is however – like the experience of a dream - still connected to your course of life and to your identity. It is due to its distinctness that an adventure is less closely connected to your life than ordinary,

everyday experiences - which are not at all experienced as distinct but as consistent, connected sequences of life. To give an example, driving your car to the supermarket is not experienced as an adventure because it is just a consistent, everyday part of your life. Going to an amusement park, on the other hand, is often experienced as an adventure because this 'day-off' is like a small story of its own within the bigger, dull story of daily life. Smaller happenings or events are the building blocks of the whole of your life-story. By bringing unity in a person's life adventure experiences succeed to have meaning (Simmel, 1911: 7).

### **Adventure as an attitude**

Defining adventure from this perspective, a person is to be called an adventurer only if this person experiences in a certain way. Simmel's two conditions that make an experience an adventure seem to be not really demanding. The form of experience that is dubbed 'adventure', consisting out of two conditions, can reside in every human experience, as Simmel writes himself (Simmel, 1911: 26). Every experience can take the form of an adventure, as long as it is not regarded of as usual, everyday-life stuff but in the form of meaningful and special happenings that are connecting with your life and your identity.

If it is the case that someone experiences, in general, in this form then the person is to be defined as being an 'adventurer'. Your individual life is then as a totality regarded of as an 'experience with a beginning and an ending'. Adventure can thus shift from being a single, drop-out experience to being an *attitude*, an "inner configuration" towards life. (Simmel, 1911: 11)

Simmel connects the adventurous attitude to religious attitudes, because an adventurer sees his own (earthly) life as an outlined experience within a higher unity of life or overarching existence – for example, living on earth versus living in heaven or hell (Simmel, 1911: 11). Considering this idea, I think this higher unity could also be interpreted as 'nature' or 'history'. One can place his or her individual life as an outlined part within the course of history or within nature. To elaborate, in the first case the person is adventurous in the sense that he wants to leave something behind, he wants to be part of history – these kinds of adventurers are, for example, explorers or scientists. In the latter case the adventurer is someone who decides to leave everyday 'luxury' life and to go back to nature, to be a part of nature – e.g. adventurers like mountaineers or hikers.

## **A gambler's attitude**

Experiencing life as a whole in an adventurous form, the adventurer is an individual who displays certain behavior. According to Simmel, the attitude of an adventurer can be compared to that of a gambler. A gambler, similar to an adventurer, constantly makes its life dependent on things that are incalculable: unexpected things that may cross your path – i.e. luck or favors. The gambler makes a system of that which is incalculable by treating it as something that is calculable (Simmel, 1911: 8). This typical conduct of the gambler is upheld by a certain conviction or belief – namely, the belief of being certain about things in life one can actually never be certain of. This is comparable to how the adventurer looks towards life. The adventurer thinks that he can be sure about unknown and unknowable elements in life and acts according to this belief. In seeing his own life as a totality, as a story within a bigger story, the adventurer feels that it is most important to make his own story a significant and memorable one. Knowing his own fate, the adventurer looks upon his own life from a distance and pretends, like the gambler, that future events are calculable. In his pretending that his own fate is transparent to him, the adventurer feels, like a gambler, powerful and secure. The thing he is certain of is that he must keep living, he must make his life legendary by constantly engaging in undertakings that are new and unknown. The only way to do so is to make his life dependent on luck or favors. This way, the adventurous attitude is one of unrest, of a constant longing for the new.

Hence, what makes someone an adventurer is this typical subjective attitude, this way of thinking as described above. The adventurer makes in his thinking the movement of transcending everyday-existence by taking distance of the totality of earthly life and seeing his own life as an adventure. Still, he connects his identity with this distant, isolated adventure.

## **Adventure is for the young**

Simmel goes on to say the adventure attitude is only adopted by young individuals. An old person can never think this way, Simmel explains, because the aged person upholds a world view that is limited to his or her personal past. The aged individual has found significant substance underneath the whole of life itself. Older people are more focused on particular (meaningful) projects. In my interpretation, such a substance could exist, for example, out of children, marriage or a certain profession. When someone deeply connects to this meaningful substance, the connection to life as a whole disappears.

Young or adolescent people, on the other hand, tend to accentuate life itself, and see life itself as a meaningful project. Being positioned at the beginning of their life, young people see that they have to make something of their lives, and of themselves. They have not much connected to certain substances underneath the life process but are much more focused on life itself. This makes adventure to be the prerogative of youth (Simmel, 1911: 23).

In my view, adventure is not solely a prerogative of youth but also an enormous social pressure laid upon them; namely, that it is *expected* of them to lay this focus on life itself. As young people are in the phase of life in which they are developing themselves, they feel that they must be adventurous, - not only because this makes them feel powerful as they pretend to be certain about all kind of uncertainties – it makes them also to be looked at, even glorified, as interesting people who really want to do something with their lives. When you are not adventurous, not engaging in new undertakings, you are more likely to be looked down at and to be regarded of as less successful than your adventurous peers – especially when you are young.

### **Becoming an adventurer**

Going back to the question of what kind of character an adventurer is, I will now dive into Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) in which she explicitly gives a characterization of the behavior type she calls 'the adventurer'. I will examine whether her description differs of that of Simmel and thus perhaps will add something to the characterization of the adventurer I have given in this chapter so far.

In accordance with Simmel, Beauvoir sees adventurous behavior as being typical for young people: "From the time of his adolescence a man can define himself as an adventurer" (Beauvoir, 1948: 63). What is different in Beauvoir's description is that she insists on the idea that the becoming of an adventurer is one possible attitude among other options – i.e. becoming a nihilist or becoming a serious person.

Growing up and losing child's naivety, an adolescent becomes (self-)reflexive. This reflexivity can lead him or her to become quite skeptic. As a skeptic adolescent you gain the insight that the world itself possesses no meaning and that you are actually nothing in this big meaningless universe. Adopting this kind of 'nihilistic anxiety' the young person sees that there is no use to pretend to be this or that. The nihilist character knows that he is alive, but he denies any meaning to his existence (Beauvoir, 1948: 62). From this position, from this anxiety, the skeptic person may choose to get to an attitude of *feeling*



existence as joy. Although knowing that life itself has no meaning, one can still desire to have pleasure or 'fun' in living. When a person, despite having nihilistic thoughts, is still really vital and still wants to feel the joy of existing, the attitude of an active, energetic adventurer is adopted instead of a passive nihilistic attitude.

As Beauvoir explains, the becoming of an adventurer is always accompanied with a dialectical movement. It is the combination of two sorts of behavioral attitudes that can steer someone to take the decision to become an adventurer. The first of these attitudes is, as explained above, the nihilistic despair against what Beauvoir calls 'the serious'. A serious person is completely attached to certain ends; for example to get a great job and earn a great amount of money, to buy a big house or an expensive car, to solve a math problem, and so on. Thinking such ends are meaningful, the serious person devotes his whole life, almost all of his undertakings, to these ends. The nihilist sees this way of living as illusory; that there are no given values and that it is an illusion to think something is valuable in itself. Therefore the nihilist opposes the idea that you are able to be something by achieving certain ends. The second attitude, the anti-thesis of the first one, is an opposition to nihilism. A nihilist is inclined to be very passive, to take the decision of doing nothing at all because you will not find any meaning in doing something.

The synthesis of these two theses is the adventurer: someone who sees that there is no use in sticking (seriously) to a certain end, but still decides to aim at ends. What makes him an adventurer is that he, knowing there are no given values, remains unattached to these ends.

Hence, an adventurer is someone who is detached from any ends but is still fully engaged in his undertakings. Following this, the adventurer likes undertakings for their own sake. It does not matter whether he 'fails' or 'succeeds'; the adventurer continuously throws himself into new undertakings. These undertakings can be of any kind: exploration, love, politics, war, speculation, competition, and so on. For example, a young woman who displays certain behavior on the dating app Tinder could be interpreted as being 'adventurous' in the Beauvarian sense. She aims at getting a relationship but is not attached to this aim. She will just see what happens and keeps enjoying all kinds of dates. The dating itself, in the here and now, is for her enough. Constantly engaging in new dates she finds joy in these undertakings themselves and she does not think in terms of failing or having success.

Similar to Simmel's characterization, Beauvoir sees the adventurer as someone who lives by an indifferent enthusiasm for (the process of) life itself. In Beauvoir's description of how

someone becomes an adventurer we however find, in my view, a significant difference with Simmel's conception of the adventurer. Simmel illustrates how the adventurer acts according to a belief - that of being sure about things one can actually never be fully certain of. This way, the adventurer does not deliberately decide to be adventurous but is misled by a conviction: the conviction that he knows things that are by definition unknowable. Simmel does not say the adventurer maintains partly a nihilistic attitude; he seems to say instead that the adventurer behaves according to the 'serious' (external) norm of 'making your life significant'. Beauvoir characterizes the adventurer as someone who does know: the adventurer knows that there is no use to pretend to be someone and to fix certain values and to stick to certain goals. The adventurer however chooses not to act according to what he does not believe. Finding joy in existence, in his undertakings, the adventurer decides to constantly be fully engaged in his actions - without sticking to certain goals. In my interpretation, Simmel's adventurer is an illusioned person who believes to be all powerful and meaningful in experiencing his life as one big adventure. Simmel's adventurer seems to hold on to a fixed value - that of development, of accentuating the process of life. Beauvoir's adventurer is, on the contrary, someone who is not misled by this illusion; in his nihilistic attitude he knows all too well the world is not full of meaning and there is no use in trying to achieve things. Because of this, the adventurer deliberately chooses to not hold on to any fixed value, to not strive to achieve certain 'serious' goals. The adventurer however deliberately chooses to be 'childish' - to not lead his life according to this nihilistic skepticism. Instead, the adventurer finds joy in action itself.

Having looked at the similarities and differences between Beauvoir and Simmel I already got to some conclusions about what kind of character an adventurer is, philosophically speaking. What remains unanswered is the question whether the adventurer, to a certain extent, deliberately chooses to ignore serious goals, to be indifferent and to enjoy existence or whether it is an attitude that is attached to serious goals - i.e. the goal of being praised in being 'interesting' or 'unique'. This is a question I will leave open for now. I first have one more text to discuss; I want to see if I can find some more additions to the characterization of the adventurer I have given so far.

### **Odysseus as prototype of the adventurer**

Horkheimer and Adorno mention the concept of the adventurer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1969); *Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment*. This text gives, in

my view, another perspective on what the adventurer is. Where Simmel and Beauvoir give a direct characterization of the adventurer in their texts, Horkheimer and Adorno not explicitly examine the adventurer itself. Instead, they examine the subjectivity of contemporary society – i.e. 'enlightenment subjectivity' (Sheratt, 2000). The reason why I choose to include this text is that Horkheimer and Adorno, in their project, appeal to Homer's classic tale about Odysseus – a character which they recurrently call an 'adventurer'. In their analysis of Odysseus, Horkheimer and Adorno give an analysis of the adventurer's attitude.

Horkheimer & Adorno illustrate the adventurer as someone who deliberately engages in all kinds of 'experiences of diversity, distraction and disintegration' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 38). These are the kind of experiences that lead people off their logical path, they may even lead – when threatening enough - to harm or death. Not only engaging in far travels like Odysseus does but also taking a huge risk in the stock market is an example of an experience of diversity and disintegration. In exposing itself to threatful events, the adventurer is confronted – again: like the gambler - with the strange, the unknown or the new. So far this account of the adventurer – the constantly engaging in new undertakings - is not relevantly different from Simmel and Beauvoir. What is different, is that Horkheimer and Adorno describe the adventurer as, by definition, being attached to an ultimate goal.

The goal of the adventurer is, as Horkheimer and Adorno describe, to become strong and independent, to become a 'master' or a 'knowing survivor' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969, 38). Hence, in accordance with Beauvoir, the adventurer deliberately chooses to be an adventurer – to engage in new undertakings. In contrast to Beauvoir, the adventurer does so because he is attached to a particular end: to gain knowledge that will help him to master a variety of situations (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 65). The underlying reason why the adventurer aims at this becoming a master is self-preservation; the maintaining of a self, an identity.

This process of becoming a master must not be looked at as being solely performed by 'wild' adventurers, dealing with savage and uncivilized events such as living in the forest and hunting for food. It is an attitude that counts for all human beings who are 'enlightened' thinkers - human beings who 'think for themselves', who deliberately break away from society, from everyday life, who engage in new events. These events can be of any kind and most of them can be undertaken by anyone: changing your wardrobe, going on vacation, moving to another city, trying new food, asking out a girl, doing extreme sports, backpacking to Thailand, etc. All these kinds of 'drop-out' experiences

are however not enough to achieve the goal of self-preservation. To accomplish self-maintenance, the adventurer adopts a certain attitude towards these experiences: that of the *protagonist*. This position enables you to distance yourself from any specific content - providing you the capacity to *describe* or to *narrate*. In taking this position, the adventurer makes a transcendental movement and imposes a division in being: between your own existence and the rest of events, objects and creatures in the external world (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 5).

This latter idea - the adventurer taking distance from his course of life to have a vision on his own life-story – is, in my view, somewhat comparable to Simmel's idea of the adventurer. In Simmel's account the adventurer makes a similar movement: transcending towards a position from which you see your own life as an outlined experience, as a story with a beginning and an ending. Another characteristic element that is present in both accounts is the ruling concept of self-preservation. For Horkheimer & Adorno the adventurer inherently has self-preservation as its end. Simmel also talks about experience in adventure-form being always connected to your identity, to who you are. Both Simmel and Horkheimer & Adorno seem to say, in my interpretation of their accounts, that this making something of yourself, the preserving of your identity, is the underlying norm that steers people towards having an adventurous attitude.

### **The character of the adventurer**

My examination on what the character of the adventurer entails has led to some conclusions. To be clear, these conclusions are solely the result of a reading of three texts and therefore I would like emphasize they are not final but must be kept open for discussion. Concluding from my analysis, the adventurer's attitude, first of all, is characterized by taking a distant position towards your own life. Seeing your life as an outlined experience with a beginning and an ending, you are able to narrate your experiences. This reflecting on your own life happens in such a way that you build up and maintain your identity. This attitude is perhaps present in you and many others because of a ruling social norm to 'be someone unique, to be legendary, to be an individual'. On the other hand, you can be adventurous because you know there is no meaning in getting attached to serious goals and therefore, to act according to this knowledge, you just fully throw yourself in experience and action itself. The issue of whether the underlying element that steers someone to be adventurous is the first or the second account is far

from clear and must, I think, be taken a closer look at. In the question of the next chapter – why someone wants to be adventurous – I hope to take this under further investigation.

### III. Why adventure?

Why do people engage in risky or unexpected 'adventurous' undertakings like off-piste skiing or travelling to a distant country on your own? Do we do this because we feel others expect this of us? Perhaps we do it because it serves to create some kind of societal status, or we do so to 'find ourselves', to cross our borders and to show to others and to ourselves who we really are and what we are capable of. Or do we just start to wander because we are no longer attached to our previous 'serious' future goals like getting a good job or getting married? Having lost commitment to such a goal we just fully dive into experience itself, we just 'leave everything behind' and continually engage in new things. In this chapter I will examine why people become and/or want to be adventurous.

#### **Being adventurous makes you feel strong and confident**

From Simmel's view, it is the problematic nature of a human being's position in the world that lets people to become adventurers (Simmel, 1911: 27). Human beings are positioned in the world in such a way that they are able to experience the world from a distance: like their life is a dream. It is this distinctness from life that is the fundament of an adventure; that makes an adventure experience something else than an everyday experience. Adventure experience is thus, as Simmel explains, a 'segment of our human existence'; it is part of the human way of being. When this form of experiencing is taken to such an extent that the whole of life is experienced as an adventure, a person becomes an adventurer. Why many people desire adventure and want to be an adventurer, is because adventure has, in contrast to everyday experience, an intrinsic value that can be recognized. This value of adventure is that it makes us feel the totality of life: it makes life more deeply felt, it reaches beyond the accidental nature of the content of experiences, it creates unity, it creates coexistence. Because one believes he knows about the totality of life, one starts to feel strong. Like a gambler, an adventurer is confident that he can achieve many things by surrendering himself to chance, by cooperating with fate.

Following all this, the main appeal to be found in Simmel's text of why we become an adventurer is that it makes us feel powerful and strong – due to the fact that we believe that we know about the totality of life. By doing something you normally never do, you feel that it will become an important and significant part of your life, determining who

you are and what kind of life you live. I think in Simmel's account much about being adventurous is about being seen, having an identity. That is why especially young people are adventurous: they have much more to prove to the world and to themselves what they are capable of and who they are.

### **Being adventurous gives you an identity**

In Horkheimer & Adorno's account I found more on adventure providing you an identity. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Horkheimer & Adorno see the adventurer as being, by definition, attached to a goal. Following this, one thus becomes an adventurer because the person is set in motion by wanting to achieve this goal.

The goal or purpose of the adventurer is to 'become master of more worlds than he previously knew' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 38). The goal of becoming a master is always done 'in the service of self-preservation'. It is in this self-preservation, this practice of individuation, where the meaning and value is to be found. Horkheimer & Adorno insist on this value of self-preservation being the principle the system of enlightenment aims for. Odysseus (an adventurer) does not simply wander into the world, being fully open to spontaneity. Odysseus engages in his undertakings with the purpose to form a strong and independent 'ego' (Sheratt, 2000: 534). The adventurer's behaviors – aimed at the end to preserve its own self, to get a strong ego – is thus conduct that is typically in accordance with enlightenment ideals – i.e. 'thinking for yourself'. Odysseus, an adventurer, the prototype of enlightenment subjectivity, acts meaningfully and finds meaning in self-development and self-maintenance.

For why one becomes an adventurer, there seems thus to be a twofold reason: self-creation and self-preservation. In Horkheimer & Adorno's view, the self does not exist, ontologically speaking, 'in-itself' but 'for-him': the self is a having, an (abstract) identity. The creating of a self is only done through the movement of taking distance of or alienating from one's self and the world and trying to overpower it all; to make it a 'having' (Hewitt, 1992). This alienation must not be understood as an alienation of any originally unified subject from itself. It is only through this process of alienation that any subject and self comes into existence (Hewitt, 2000: 153). Through this alienation, this practice of individuation, the human being becomes powerful: the human being sees itself as a sovereign mind, as a *protagonist*, and adopts a 'lordly gaze' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 6). Thus, by making the transcendental movement of alienation from the world, others and yourself, a 'self versus the world' relationship comes into being. By

staying in this distant position of the protagonist, something that the adventurer essentially does, this relationship, the self, is being preserved.

In taking distance from his life and outlining his life – in a narrative form of successive events – the adventurer constructs his own individuality and makes its identity more solid. It makes you, as protagonist, to be in control; you are able to make your self, deliberately, a nobody or a somebody, to create your own identity. A person's seek for adventure and the arrival at a point of describing is thus a way of constructing a solid self, an identity. The preservation of this self or this identity is carried out by constantly escaping everyday life. In continuously opposing its consciousness to its natural context, the adventurer can take distance and is, this way, able to preserve this created self.

This self-creation and self-preservation must be understood, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, as a dialectic process (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 38). The thesis of going on adventure and its antithesis of coming home lead to the synthesis of self-preservation. An arrival or homecoming is thus necessary for the adventurer to achieve its purpose. When you engage in new undertakings, you are dependent on recognition and admiration of others in order to be regarded of as an adventurer who is strong and powerful. Only the homeland can recognize you as an adventurer, as they are only able to see the growth of your identity or self. Inherent in the concept of self-preservation is thus a return to the homeland. In a systematical way, an adventurer keeps going on adventures but also keeps returning home; this to achieve its purpose of creating and maintaining a self or an identity.

To come back to Odysseus, this Homeric narrative clearly illustrates this dialectic process. In his homecoming, Odysseus maps out – through narration - his knowledge of the places he has visited and the people he met during his adventures. Hereby he transcends the original world and forms an overview, an overarching image of the world. It is only at the point of describing the world - which is during the adventurer's homecoming – that the adventurer comes to this consciousness he was aiming to get at in the first place. This is a consciousness that is 'master' over the world, that is an overpowering rational overview, that is a solidified self (Tally Jr, 2018: 129). To give an example, coming back from a crazy mountain biking adventure you may look back and think: 'I had not really expected this event to happen' or 'I thought that I would never to do such a thing'. Coming home, others might confirm this by listening to your new story. Overlooking everything from a distant viewpoint, you see how things were originally - before the undertaking - and you see how after the event your image of yourself and your image of the world have



become richer. You now have a new story to tell and this story is now part of who you are.

To elaborate a bit more, if I would put this dialectic process in a modern-day context, perhaps social media sites can be seen, par excellence, as possible platforms to 'arrive home' and to get your recognition and admiration from the homeland. In posting something online, you take the position of reflecting on yourself, on your identity. You can think of what kind of self you want to be for others. Having social media as a tool to narrate your undertakings you are able to create and preserve this identity. All kinds of adventures can be shared on Facebook and Instagram, whether it is going on a city-trip, your cat doing something funny, eating in a restaurant, going to a shopping mall or travelling the world; they are all shared with the purpose to create and preserve your identity.

### **Being adventurous makes you a free individual**

The element of self-reflection, which is a crucial element of Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of the adventurer, is also mentioned in Beauvoir's text. Similarly, self-reflection plays for Beauvoir an important role in her explanation for why someone becomes an adventurer.

In the previous chapter I illustrated how in Beauvoir's account, the reason why human beings desire adventure stems from a unification of nihilistic anxiety on the one hand and an ample vitality or taste for life itself on the other. The desire for adventure is thus, in simpler words, a desire to enjoy life. Choosing for adventure is choosing to avoid ending up leading an inauthentic and unhappy life. As adventurers, we decide to choose our own individual projects we want to engage in. It is in his undertakings that the adventurer feels that the extent to which human beings are free is exhibited. As adventurer I feel that it is in the things I do that I can sustain and create meaningfulness: I can make a 'difference' and I can act freely.

Beauvoir notifies there is however a high chance that the adventurer's attitude becomes 'impure'. When someone does not desire freedom itself but, for example, possession, glory, fortune or success, then the person may use being adventurous to reach these 'serious' goals he or she is attached to. An adventurer is, in essence, impure precisely because it executes a *mauvaise-foi*. The impure, serious adventurer subordinates himself to some external cause. He tries to fix his reputation, show-off his wealth, tries to preserve its identity. This way, in his subordination to such goals, he actually denies his own

freedom. If I would give an example of this I would think of tourists choosing to be adventurous by going 'off the beaten track' – the actual reason for this decision being to take plentiful pretty pictures, with no other tourist on them. This way the tourist can post his or her 'unique' pictures on Instagram to show how fortunate he or she is to be able to travel to such beautiful places. Another example may be the scientist who throws him- or herself adventurously into an exciting, completely new research-project in the name of 'discovery' – the actual reason being the career-boost or the extra money he or she gets from it. In both cases the adventurer is not free but rather a servant to some outside objective. If these actions would have been done in the name of freedom itself, no such 'serious' considerations would be the source of the action.

The impure adventurer is actually no longer really an adventurer but a serious person: someone who does not desire freedom in itself but a serious goal. This way, Beauvoir's characterization of the impure adventurer is perhaps comparable to Horkheimer & Adorno's conception of the adventurer. In my view, it seems plausible that the aim of the impure adventurer is often, perhaps always, in the service of self-creation and preservation.

To go back to the question why people are adventurous; there are two reasons to be found in Beauvoir's text, which are essentially different. The pure reason or drive for being an adventurer is a taste for living, a feeling of our human existence as such – i.e. freedom - which is valuable in itself. The pure adventurer is someone who is not attached to any goals and therefore acts out of a desire for freedom itself. The impure reason for being an adventurer is to use adventure to reach 'serious' goals.

### **Why adventure?**

Having examined the three texts, I brought into picture some reasonings of why people take on the attitude of the adventurer. Adventure is appealing because it has, in contrast to everyday-life, an evident, graspable meaningfulness. Adventurous experiences are captured in memory, they are chapters of your life-story – this makes it possible for your life to be narrated in a compelling way. Accordingly, adventures create unity within the whole of your life. Adventure is important because it enables you to create and preserve your identity. Adventure makes you engage in new things – your reflecting on these new experiences and the sharing of these experiences with others makes you to 'find yourself' and to 'show yourself'. It remains however arguable whether the latter is de facto essential to the adventurer. The element of self-preservation could

also be said to be a deviation of being a genuine adventurer. When adventure is about aiming for freedom, then a goal like fixing your identity is only making you and others less free and you are thus not really aiming for freedom. This point of discussion is something I will dive deeper into in the next chapter. Having discovered more about what kind of attitude the adventurous attitude is and why it comes into being, I now want to look at its effects - for the world, for others and for yourself.

## IV. The effects of the adventurous attitude

This final chapter is mainly a critical question. The question I want to reveal in this chapter, with its many aspects, is whether it is desirable that we want to live adventurously and that we, in our society, glorify the adventurous attitude. Is the adventurous attitude an attitude that is desirable – or does it have more perils than benefits? Is adventure really meaningful in the way we generally think it is – or in the way we want it to be meaningful? Stating this as a question, my aim is not to provide an answer. Rather, I strive to lay bare the beneficial and the problematic factors of the glorification of adventure and try to speculate what kind of effects these have - for ourselves, for others, and for the world we live in.

### **In a state of indifference and blindness**

The adventurer, similar to the gambler, has an attitude of living fully in the present and making itself dependent on the accidental (Simmel, 1911: 8). In a way, the adventurer is quite passive. Ignoring the possible risks and negative long-term future consequences, the adventurer leaves himself to powers and accidents of the world. It is this passivity that can be worrisome. On the one hand can it delight in us when, by chance, something great enters on your path – for example, in the gambler's case, winning the lottery. The adventurer's passivity, however, also carries the danger that it can at the same time destroy him. The adventurer, taking a risk, can also lose all his money in a lottery, or get paralyzed by falling from a cliff, or get poisoned by eating exotic food, and so on.

The worrisome feature of the adventurer is that he keeps pretending uncertainties of fate are always in his favor. He feels that it is good to constantly take risks and engage in new experiences. This belief makes the adventurer to have an attitude of indifference and blindness. Taking part in lotteries, living in the present and leaving himself to chance, an adventurer may in the end lose almost everything he had – perhaps even his own life.

### **In a state of unrest**

As the adventurer is focused on the process of life itself, it is the chance happenings of life that are constantly displayed in bright focus. The adventurer does not lay focus on substantial, fixed parts of life. Instead, it is uncertainties that the adventurer constantly experiences. Because the adventurer is focused on the new, he is indifferent and passive

towards the question whether his undertakings are harmonious with himself and his place in the world. This way the adventurer never comes at a state of rest, of security and of steadfastness. In other words, the adventurer is in a perpetual state of unrest. This could be a problematic factor of being adventurous. In my speculations, this shows how (the norm of) being adventurous could be a cause for people being tired all the time, being worried, stressed, never satisfied, on edge, burned-out, and so on.

### **Keeping up repressions**

According to Horkheimer & Adorno (1969: 1) the adventurer in a relationship with the world that is within the system of enlightenment understood as 'an advance of thought'. The adventurer, for example Odysseus, is depicted as enlightened, as he is 'liberated from fear' and has succeeded to 'master' the world (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 1). This way of individuating, this practice of self-preservation, is what Horkheimer & Adorno describe as worrisome.

In making the dialectic movement of taking distance of one's self and the world and trying to overpower it all, in invoking the detachment of narration, the adventurer has the possibility to impose its own names and narrations to all places and people it is or has been confronted with (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969: 6). By making the self, others and the world a *having*, the adventurer can carry on the practice of self-preservation (Hewitt, 1992: 152). In preserving one's self, the adventurer imposes a practice or ritual in which he proclaims, on and on, his own objective and his own convictions. In its projection of its own objectives, the adventurer maintains a domination over others and over nature. For example, an adventurous person may have as objective to climb a high and dangerous mountain or to go hiking off-road. Enough dangers are attached to these kind of activities; by doing these things your objective is not that these activities are meaningful for others. You look at your adventures from the position a distant, narrative perspective. In such a perspective, you are the protagonist and others are only means to help you to fulfill your objective. In arriving home from an adventure, you are able to tell your story; you flourish in being a dominator, in being a master. In this practice of the adventurer, others are pushed into the position of the dominated. Others are given names, are given roles, and are distributed and located in space according to the protagonist's view (Tally Jr, 2018: 129). The judgement of whether others are good or bad and what others deserve depends on whether they help the protagonist to reach his or her goal. For example, others are meaningful ('useful') when they have a teaching role and make the

protagonist learn something and are not useful when they are only an obstacle for the protagonist's goals.

Following this argumentation, an adventurer always projects a certain view on the world. This projection of a fixed, dominant view destroys the mobility and fluidity of other people and may perhaps be unjust. This is why Horkheimer and Adorno claim this 'Odysseusian' attitude to be repressive. In my interpretation, this repressive Odysseusian attitude is what Horkheimer and Adorno also aim at when they mention 'the law of Homeric escape' (1969: 61). This law holds that description or narration, with its *exactness*, makes it possible to keep record of any cruelty or social injustice. In other words, Homeric (adventurous) discourse succeeds to uphold and to even glorify existing repressive orders in society (Hewitt, 1992 :153). For example, the glorification of adventurous attitude upholds patriarchal orders in society because, in traditional adventure narrative women, - collectivized as women - always play the same kind of roles. In adventure, women are generally not able to care for themselves and need the help of a strong man. The other role women frequently have in adventure is that they stay home, waiting for their husband, the adventurer, to come home. Women are sometimes even, them being instrumentalized, identified with nature in adventure tales, which makes them to be in the service of men (Hewitt, 1992: 148). I think this 'fixed image' is nowadays, in Western society, much less upheld by the adventurous attitude than in the past because the concept of adventure has become much less gendered. Women today also have to individuate, to claim their identity. Women are not only expected to stay home and be a mother. We also expect from girls to go out, to experience, to fulfill their bucket-lists, to be adventurous.

Another element of repression, one that is perhaps more present in the adventurous attitude of today, is (Western) colonization. The adventurer is, in the story, often the knowing, sophisticated person who ventures himself into primitive nature or an unknown 'primitive' culture. Instead of seeing the foreign space he is situated in as a different space and instead of seeing the people he encounters as people who are different, the adventurer sees everything around him as 'less developed'. A concrete example of this colonization element is rich tourists travelling to other countries and seeing the people who live in these countries as 'poor' and 'unlucky'. From its own perspective, projecting its own standards, the western tourist views and treats people who live more primitively as people who need to be helped. When coming home the tourist tells to everyone how adventurous it was to go to such places and how it has changed his view on the world. But has it really changed? Or was it only a confirmation of his own fixed image? Because

the tourist treated the foreigners as primitive, he already projected his own views on them and judged the 'others' to be, indeed, less developed than himself and the people at home.

Coming back to the adventurer's attitude, Horkheimer and Adorno thus give an argument why such an attitude must not be celebrated (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1969: 35). They demonstrate how the adventurer emerges in a system of repression. Others are always thrown into a system by the adventurer – by the one who describes, the protagonist. For an adventurer, with its attitude of going after its own projects and sticking to its own convictions, anyone or anything appears only in estranged form: as instrument or thing that helps the adventurer to achieve its goal of self-preservation. Others appear for example as a source of knowledge, an assistant, a protector, a follower etc. The protagonist him- or herself is able to escape or transcend any repression by taking the position of the narrator. In its total isolation the adventurer has the option to decide for a ruthless following of its own interests.

### **Thinking for himself as an autonomous being**

Beauvoir (1948) illustrates the adventurer as being engaged in undertakings but not attached to any ends. In the traditional Kantian notion of autonomy, where human beings are understood as sovereign minds that act and decide for themselves, the adventurer's attitude would presumably be acknowledged as being a desirable attitude – ethically speaking. Given Beauvoir's characterization, the person with an adventurous attitude understands value is not in the world itself but is created by human beings. He knows there are no factual demands, that ends are always inflicted upon someone by someone else. As follows, the adventurer does not unreflexively follow conventions (Pettersen, 2015: 72-78). Instead the adventurer thinks for himself. It is not from factuality, from things, that the adventurer expects a justification for his choices. His full engagement in his undertakings is his own free choice, and he carries the responsibility for his own actions. Therefore, the adventurer seems near to living ethically; he transcends its situations, makes free choices and thinks for himself.

Besides the Kantian approval of the adventurer as being an autonomous, responsible thinker, the adventurer also seems really close to having an ethical attitude in the Beauvoirian sense. Unlike the nihilist, the adventurer does not stay immobile because of the insight that there are no factual demands in the world. The adventurer does not try to escape – but rather accepts the inescapable fact that we constantly have to decide,

again and again, and that we constantly have to take responsibility for our decisions (Weiss, 2002: 111). The adventurer understands that the fact that there is no meaning in the world itself makes him free to make his own choices, to do whatever he wants to do. Continually choosing its own projects, continually throwing himself into new undertakings, the adventurer affirms *freedom* as the ultimate end - instead of factual 'serious' demands (Weiss, 2002: 111). Due to this full commitment to its own actions, this aiming at living, the adventurer takes responsibility of - and, moreover, gives a meaningfulness to its actions.

### **The problem of solipsism**

According to Beauvoir, there is however one problematic aspect with the adventurer's attitude. This has to do with Beauvoir's conception of autonomy which is different from the traditional Kantian conception of autonomy. Beauvoir writes in *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) that the adventurer is, by definition, unable to arrive at real, moral freedom; that he is incapable of adopting an ethical existence. In Beauvoir's conception of autonomy – which is *relational* autonomy – human beings are fundamentally embodied, situated and relational beings (Weiss, 2002: 111). The human being is present in the world as being connected with others (Beauvoir, 1948: 72). Being fully engaged in – and committed to its own actions, the adventurer does not expect any external justification for his choices. The willing of his own freedom is for him enough justification. The problem is that, this way, the adventurer denies the indispensable role the of Other (Weiss, 2002: 111). The adventurer believes that he is free, that he can break away from every day-life, from the condition all other people are still situated in. This way, others are looked down at by the adventurer. They are viewed and treated as either instruments to make his undertakings a success, or as insignificant beings that play no role at all - that are destroyed because they are only in the way and only stagnate or hinder the actions of the adventurer. The adventurer will always, by definition, deny other's freedom because he needs this denial to uphold its attitude. Only by imposing himself on others the adventurer can exist because he needs availabilities like fortune, enjoyment, and, above all, glorification and recognition from others who look up to him. An adventurer wants his existence to be an affirmation, to be an example to all others, to be a legendary story.

Because the adventurer wills his own freedom but not at the same time also wills the freedom of others, he has an attitude that can be called *solipsistic*. In the name of freedom, the adventurer believes he can do anything he likes, he believes he can



choose any value. The solipsism of the adventurer will lead him, in his undertakings, to include values that actually oppress other people (Pettersen, 2015: 72). The fact that the adventurer's decisions are made in the name of his own freedom is for the adventurer enough justification that his decisions are good. The fault the adventurer makes is that he denies that external justification of (free) other people is also necessary to confirm his decisions are justified.

### **The effects of the adventurer's attitude**

Having examined the literature, I found mostly critical and worrying remarks that explain what is problematic about the adventurer's attitude. The attitude has been deposited as blind, indifferent, repressive, anxious, and solipsistic. This way, the attitude leads to unbalanced relationships between people. By taking distance and by seeing others as part of their own adventures, an adventurer sees other people as instruments rather than equals. When the adventurer's attitude is seen as only intended for - and only taken on by certain groups of people, other groups within society can be pushed into a repressed position. In my interpretation, the idea of adventure that has been sketched so far is that it is like a platform wherein forms social injustice can keep existing. As long as the adventurer's attitude remains solipsistic, it is blind and indifferent to these forms of social injustice, because the adventurer is fully (and perhaps anxiously) engaged in its own projects – in the service of preserving its own identity. The adventurer chooses for the type of activities and projects that serve this goal, indifferent to whether these may obliterate other's opportunities to lead autonomous lives.

Having an adventurer's attitude is however not only worrisome for others, but also for the person himself. The adventurer himself is actually also enslaved. It is the compulsive drive to self-affirm, to master everything and everyone in the service of self-preservation that the adventurer is enslaved to. The adventurer may think he aims, in all his undertakings, at real freedom. In actuality, the adventurer confuses real freedom with external availabilities, such as the having of an identity (Pettersen, 2015: 80). The great pressure to be someone, the goal of creating and having an identity, makes the adventurer to be anxious and enslaved. Hence, the adventurer and the 'other' seem both caught in a predicament.

## V. Conclusion: towards a less problematic adventurous attitude

In this thesis the core features of the adventurer's attitude have been brought into picture – by means of examining philosophical literature. In my interpretation, the main problematic element of this attitude can be formulated as such: 'The adventurous person' and 'the people at home' are both caught in a structure of oppression – one in which both 'master' and 'slave' are enslaved. The master, the adventurer, is slave to the great pressure of the goal of self-preservation and the slave, the 'bit player', is made slave in the adventurer's actions and behavior.

Looking at the problem of domination and oppression, it seems it is the adventurer's conviction about freedom that needs to be altered. The adventurer thinks being free is the same as having the power to do anything you like. The adventurer holds the conviction that it is good to take any risk, to wander, to see what will come at your path – because this serves the ultimate goal of becoming and being a free, autonomous, independent self. To refrain from acts of domination, to will other's freedom as well as his own, the adventurer must take a voluntary restraint on the potential availabilities or the potential use of his capacities. By 'taking a step back' the adventurer makes the decision to try to not be master but to acknowledge another's freedom (Pettersen, 2015: 73).

Such confinement seems to be by definition incoherent with the attitude of the adventurer. It would mean the adventurer, who wants to be free in his doings, must decide to no longer see it possible to engage in everything which he will be encountered with. What must be understood by the adventurer however, is that freedom is not equivalent to having the power to do anything you like. At the same time he realizes this, the adventurer may then realize his own suppression - i.e. his enslavement to being successful, his dependence on recognition, glorification and admiration of others. The adventurer would find that his behavior and his decisions rests on the illusion that freedom is equivalent to a certain power. When having realized this, the adventurer may see that his full engagement in his actions is actually meaningless, that it is not possible for his existence to really have value when his doings are only limited to his own projects.

For our existence to have meaning, something which an adventurer is often actually looking for, we are not self-sufficient but rather mutually dependent (Beauvoir, 1948: 67). Recognition of others – in coming home – is only fully satisfactory when given by people who are free. Denying or restricting other's freedom means to deny oneself the freely, voluntary support of- and interaction with others. Only when you, as adventurer, recognize the other as free, you can expect a meaningful recognition of the other.

Perhaps an alternative conception of being courageous, daring, and ready to take risks, - of being adventurous – must be embraced: one in which freedom is not understood as “doing whatever you like” but as “the ability to surpass the given towards an open future”(Beauvoir: 90). Adventure then is aimed at freedom itself and not at having power to do anything you are capable of. Adventure is then aimed at engaging in new things, not for self-preservation, but for preserving the freedom of one's own and of others. This freedom is preserved in the adventurer's movement of 'surpassing the given' – of going beyond fixed assumptions – and opening up space for other possible, perhaps more accurate and just, suppositions. Freedom must then be perceived by the adventurous person as a normative guideline that tells us to voluntarily lay restrictions on our potential capacities instead of getting the most out of them (Pettersen, 2015: 73).

This way, I think, the adventurer's attitude is one which is much less problematic and much more ethical. This adventurer who aims at freedom fully throws himself into new undertakings but, in the meantime, he makes sure the freedom of others as well of his own freedom is preserved and protected – in such a way that the adventurer's projects can truly be recognized, by others and by himself, as meaningful.

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