ERNST CASSIRER

AN ESSAY ON MAN

AN INTRODUCTION TO A PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN CULTURE

ERNST CASSIRER

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HAMBURG

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Text und Anmerkungen
bearbeitet von
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To
Charles W. Hendel
in friendship and gratitude

PREFACE

The first impulse for the writing of this book came from my English and American friends who repeatedly and urgently asked me to publish an English translation of my »Philosophy of Symbolic Forms«.[1] Although I should have liked very much to comply with their request, after the first tentative steps I found it impracticable and, under the present circumstances, unjustifiable to reproduce the former book in its entirety. As for the reader, it would have taxed his attention to the utmost to read a three-volume study dealing with a difficult and abstract subject. But even from the point of view of the author it was scarcely possible or advisable to publish a work planned and written more than twenty-five years ago. Since that time the author has continued his study on the subject. He has learned many new facts and he has been confronted with new problems. Even the old problems are seen by him from a different angle and appear in a new light. For all these reasons I decided to make a fresh start and to write an entirely new book. This book had to be much shorter than the first one. »A big book,« said Lessing, »is a big evil.«[2] When writing my »Philosophy of Symbolic Forms« I was so engrossed in the subject itself that I forgot or neglected this stylistic maxim. Now I feel much more inclined to subscribe to Lessing's words. Instead of giving a detailed account of facts and a lengthy discussion of theories, I have tried in this present book to concentrate upon a few points that seemed to me to be of special philosophical importance and to express my thoughts as briefly and succinctly as possible.

Still the book has had to deal with subjects that, at first sight, may seem to be widely divergent. A book concerned with psychological, ontological, epistemological questions and containing chapters on Myth and Religion, Language and Art, on Science and History, is open to the objection that it is a mixtum compositum of the most disparate and heterogeneous things. I hope that the reader after having read these pages will find this objection to be unfounded. It was one of my principal aims to convince him that all the subjects | dealt with in this book are, after all, only one subject. They are different roads leading to a common center – and, to my mind, it is for a philosophy of culture to find out and to determine this center.

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[1] Ernst Cassirer, Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Erster Teil: Die Sprache, Berlin 1923 [ECW 11]; Zweiter Teil: Das mythische Denken, Berlin 1925 [ECW 12]; Dritter Teil: Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis, Berlin 1929 [ECW 13].

[2] [*Das Zitat stammt ursprünglich von Kallimachos:* »Mega biblion, mega kakon«.]

As to the style of the book it has been, of course, a serious drawback that I have had to write it in a language that is not my native tongue. I should hardly have overcome this obstacle without the help of my friend James Pettegrove, of New Jersey State Teachers College. He has revised the whole manuscript and given me his kind advice on all linguistic and stylistic questions. But I am also very much indebted to him for many valuable and pertinent remarks regarding the subject matter of the book.

I did not mean to write a »popular« book on a subject that, in many respects, is resistant to any popularization. On the other hand, this book is not destined for scholars or philosophers alone. The fundamental problems of human culture have a general human interest, and they should be made accessible to the general public. I have tried, therefore, to avoid all technicalities and to express my thoughts as clearly and simply as possible. My critics should, however, be warned that what I could give here is more an explanation and illustration than a demonstration of my theory. For a closer discussion and analysis of the problems involved I must ask them to go back to the detailed description in my »Philosophy of Symbolic Forms«.

It is my serious wish not to impose a ready-made theory, expressed in a dogmatic style, upon the minds of my readers. I have been anxious to place them in a position to judge for themselves. Of course it has not been possible to lay before their eyes the whole bulk of empirical evidence upon which my principal thesis rests. But I have tried at least to give ample and detailed quotations from the standard works on the various subjects. What the reader will find is not at all a complete bibliography – even the titles of such a bibliography would have far exceeded the space that has been allowed me. I have had to content myself with citing those authors to whom I myself feel most indebted and with selecting those examples that seemed to me to be of typical significance and of paramount philosophical interest.

By the dedication to Charles William Hendel I wish to express my feeling of deep gratitude to the man who, with indefatigable zeal, helped me to prepare this book. He was the first to whom I spoke about its general plan. Without his keen interest in the subject matter of the book and his friendly personal interest in its author I should hardly have found the courage to publish it. He has read the manuscript | several times, and I have always been able to accept his critical suggestions. They have proved to be very helpful and valuable.

The dedication has, however, not only a personal but also a »symbolic« meaning. By dedicating this book to the Chairman of the Department of Philosophy and to the Director of Graduate Studies at Yale University I wish to express to the Department itself my cordial thanks. When, three years ago, I came to Yale University, it was an agreeable surprise to find a close cooperation that extended to a wide field. It was a special pleasure and a great privilege to work together with my younger colleagues in conjoint seminars on various subjects. This was, indeed, a new experience in my long academic life – and a very interesting and stimulating one. I shall always keep in grateful memory these conjoint seminars – one in the philosophy of history, another in the philosophy of science, a third in the theory of knowledge, held by Charles Hendel and Hajo Holborn, Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop and Henry Margenau, Monroe Beardsley, Frederic Fitch, and Charles Stevenson.

I have to regard this book, to a large extent, as an outcome of my work at the Graduate School of Yale University and I avail myself of this opportunity to express my thanks to the Dean of the Graduate School, Edgar S. Furniss, for the hospitality offered to me these last three years. A word of cordial thanks is also due to my students. I have discussed with them almost all the problems contained in this book and I trust that they will find many traces of our common work in the following pages.

I am grateful to the Fluid Research Fund of Yale University for a research grant that helped me to prepare this book.

Ernst Cassirer
Yale University |

PART I

WHAT IS MAN?

I

The Crisis in Man's Knowledge of Himself

1.

That self-knowledge is the highest aim of philosophical inquiry appears to be generally acknowledged. In all the conflicts between the different philosophical schools this objective remained invariable and unshaken: it proved to be the Archimedean point, the fixed and immovable center, of all thought. Nor did the most sceptical thinkers deny the possibility and necessity of self-knowledge. They distrusted all general principles concerning the nature of things, but this distrust was only meant to open a new and more reliable mode of investigation. In the history of philo-sophy scepticism has very often been simply the counterpart of a resolute humanism. By the denial and destruction of the objective certainty of the external world the sceptic hopes to throw all the thoughts of man back upon his own being. Self-knowledge – he declares – is the first prerequisite of self-realization. We must try to break the chain connecting us with the outer world in order to enjoy our true freedom. »La plus grande chose du monde, c'est de sçavoir estre à soy,«[1] writes Montaigne.

Yet even this approach to the problem – the method of introspection – is not secure against sceptical doubts. Modern philosophy began with the principle that the evidence of our own being is impregnable and unassailable. But the advance of psychological knowledge has hardly confirmed this Cartesian principle. The general tendency of thought is nowadays again directed toward the opposite pole. Few modern psychologists would admit or recommend a mere method of introspection. In general they tell us that such a method is very precarious. They are convinced that a strictly objective behavioristic attitude is the only possible approach to a scientific psychology. But a consistent and radical behaviorism fails to attain its end. It can warn | us against possible methodological errors, but it cannot solve all the problems of human psychology. We may criticize or suspect the purely introspective view, but we cannot suppress or eliminate it. Without introspection, without an immediate awareness of feelings, emotions, perceptions, thoughts, we could not even define the field of human psychology. Yet it must be admitted that by following this way alone we can never arrive at a comprehensive view of human nature. Introspection reveals to us only that small sector of human life which is accessible to our individual experience. It can never cover the whole field of human phenomena. Even if we should succeed in collecting and combining all the data we should still have a very meager and fragmentary picture – a mere torso – of human nature.

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[1] [Michel de Montaigne, Essais (Buch I, Kap. XXXVIII), hrsg. v. Joseph-Victor Le Clerc, 2 Bde., Paris 1836, Bd. I, S. 275.]

Aristotle declares that all human knowledge originates from a basic tendency of human nature manifesting itself in man's most elementary actions and reactions. The whole extent of the life of the senses is determined by and impregnated with this tendency. »All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing […] to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.«[2] This passage is highly characteristic of Aristotle's conception of knowledge as distinguished from Plato's. Such a philosophical eulogy of man's sensuous life would be impossible in the work of Plato. He could never compare the desire for knowledge with the delight we take in our senses. In Plato the life of the senses is separated from the life of the intellect by a broad and insurmountable gulf. Knowledge and truth belong to a transcendental order – to the realm of pure and eternal ideas. Even Aristotle is convinced that scientific knowledge is not possible through the act of perception alone. But he speaks as a biologist when he denies this Platonic severance between the ideal and the empirical world. He attempts to explain the ideal world, the world of knowledge, in terms of life. In both realms, according to Aristotle, we find the same unbroken continuity. In nature as well as in human knowledge the higher forms develop from the lower forms. Sense perception, memory, experience, imagination, and reason are | all linked together by a common bond; they are merely different stages and different expressions of one and the same fundamental activity, which attains its highest perfection in man, but which in a way is shared by the animals and all the forms of organic life.

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[2] Aristotle, Metaphysica 980a, 21 ff. (The Works of Aristotle, Engl. transl. ed. by William David Ross, 12 vols., Oxford 1908 ff., Vol. VIII).

If we were to adopt this biological view we should expect that the first stages of human knowledge would deal exclusively with the external world. For all his immediate needs and practical interests man is dependent on his physical environment. He cannot live without constantly adapting himself to the conditions of the surrounding world. The initial steps toward man's intellectual and cultural life may be described as acts which involve a sort of mental adjustment to the immediate environment. But as human culture progresses we very soon meet with an opposite tendency of human life. From the earliest glimmering of human consciousness we find an introvert view of life accompanying and complementing this extrovert view. The farther we trace the development of human culture from these beginnings the more this introvert view seems to come to the fore. Man's natural curiosity begins slowly to change its direction. We can study this growth in almost all the forms of the cultural life of man. In the first mythological explanations of the universe we always find a primitive anthropology side by side with a primitive cosmology. The question of the origin of the world is inextricably interwoven with the question of the origin of man. Religion does not destroy these first mythological explanations. On the contrary, it preserves the mythological cosmology and anthropology by giving them new shape and new depth. Henceforth self-knowledge is not conceived as a merely theoretical interest. It is not simply a subject of curiosity or speculation; it is declared to be the fundamental obligation of man. The great religious thinkers were the first to inculcate this moral requirement. In all the higher forms of religious life the maxim »Know thyself« is regarded as a categorical imperative, as an ultimate moral and religious law. In this imperative we feel, as it were, a sudden reversal of the first natural instinct to know – we perceive a transvaluation of all values. In the histories of all the religions of the world – in Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity – we can observe the individual steps of this development.

The same principle holds good in the general evolution of philosophical thought. In its earliest stages Greek philosophy seems exclusively concerned with the physical universe. Cosmology clearly predominates over all the other branches of philosophical investigation. It is, however, characteristic of the depth and comprehensiveness of the Greek mind that almost every individual thinker represents at the|same time a new general type of thought. Beyond the physical philosophy of the Milesian School the Pythagoreans discover a mathematical philosophy, while the Eleatic thinkers are the first to conceive the ideal of a logical philosophy. Heraclitus stands on the borderline between cosmological and anthropological thought. Although he still speaks as a natural philosopher, and he belongs to the »ancient physiologists«, yet he is convinced that it is impossible to penetrate into the secret of nature without having studied the secret of man. We must fulfil the demand of self-reflection if we wish to keep hold of reality and to understand its meaning. Hence it was possible for Heraclitus to characterize the whole of his philosophy by the two words *ἐδιζησάμην ἐμεωυτόν* (»I have sought for myself«).[3] But this new tendency of thought, although in a sense inherent in early Greek philosophy, did not come to its full maturity until the time of Socrates. Thus it is in the problem of man that we find the landmark separating Socratic from pre-Socratic thought. Socrates never attacks or criticizes the theories of his predecessors. He does not intend to introduce a new philosophical doctrine. Yet in him all the former problems are seen in a new light because they are referred to a new intellectual center. The problems of Greek natural philosophy and of Greek metaphysics are suddenly eclipsed by a new question which seems henceforth to absorb man's whole theoretical interest. In Socrates we no longer have an independent theory of nature or an independent logical theory. We do not even have a coherent and systematic ethical theory – in that sense in which it was developed in the later ethical systems. Only one question remains: What is man? Socrates always maintains and defends the ideal of an objective, absolute, universal truth. But the only universe he knows, and to which all his inquiries refer, is the universe of man. His philosophy – if he possesses a philosophy – is strictly anthropological. In one of the Platonic dialogues Socrates is described as being engaged in a conversation with his pupil Phaedrus. They are walking, and after a short time they come to a place outside the gates of Athens. Socrates bursts into admiration for the beauty of the spot. He is delighted with the landscape, which he praises highly. But Phaedrus interrupts. He is surprised that Socrates behaves like a stranger who is being shown about by a guide. »Do you ever cross the border?« he asks. Socrates puts symbolic meaning into his reply. »Very true, my good friend,« he replies, »and I hope that you will excuse me when you hear the reason, which is, that I am a lover of knowledge, and the men who dwell | in the city are my teachers, and not the trees or the country.«[4]

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[3] Heraclitus, Fragm. 101, in: Hermann Diels, Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Griechisch und Deutsch, ed. by Walther Kranz, Berlin ^{5}1934, Vol. I, p. 173.

[4] Plato, Phaedrus 230D, in: The Dialogues of Plato, Engl. transl. by Benjamin Jowett, 5 vols., 3rd ed., rev. and corr., Oxford 1892, Vol. I, pp. 391–490: p. 435.

Yet when we study Plato's Socratic dialogues nowhere do we find a direct solution of the new problem. Socrates gives us a detailed and meti-culous analysis of individual human qualities and virtues. He seeks to determine the nature of these qualities and to define them: goodness, justice, temperance, courage, and so on. But he never ventures a definition of man. How is this seeming deficiency to be accounted for? Did Socrates deliberately adopt a roundabout approach – one that allowed him only to scratch the surface of his problem without ever penetrating into its depth and its real core? But here, more than anywhere else, we should suspect Socratic irony. It is precisely the negative answer of Socrates which throws new and unexpected light on the question, and which gives us the positive insight into the Socratic conception of man. We cannot discover the nature of man in the same way that we can detect the nature of physical things. Physical things may be described in terms of their objective properties, but man may be described and defined only in terms of his consciousness. This fact poses an entirely new problem which cannot be solved by our usual modes of investigation. Empirical observation and logical analysis, in the sense in which these terms were used in pre-Socratic philosophy, here proved inefficient and inadequate. For it is only in our immediate intercourse with human beings that we have insight into the character of man. We must actually confront man, we must meet him squarely face to face, in order to understand him. Hence it is not a new objective content, but a new activity and function of thought which is the distinctive feature of the philosophy of Socrates. Philosophy, which had hitherto been conceived as an intellectual monologue, is transformed into a dialogue. Only by way of dialogical or dialectic thought can we approach the knowledge of human nature. Previously truth might have been conceived to be a sort of ready-made thing which could be grasped by an effort of the individual thinker and readily transferred and communicated to others. But Socrates could no longer subscribe to this view. It is as impossible – says Plato in the »Republic« – to implant truth in the soul of a man as it is to give the power of seeing to a man born blind. Truth is by nature the offspring of dialectic thought. It cannot be gained, therefore, except through a constant cooperation of the subjects in mutual interrogation and reply. It is not, therefore, like an empirical object; it must be understood as the outgrowth of a social act. Here we have the new, indirect answer to the question »What is man?« Man is declared to be that creature who is constantly in search | of himself – a creature who in every moment of his existence must examine and scrutinize the conditions of his existence. In this scrutiny, in this critical attitude toward human life, consists the real value of human life. »A life which is unexamined,« says Socrates in his »Apology«, »is not worth living.«[5] We may epitomize the thought of Socrates by saying that man is defined by him as that being who, when asked a rational question, can give a rational answer. Both his knowledge and his morality are comprehended in this circle. It is by this fundamental faculty, by this faculty of giving a response to himself and to others, that man becomes a »responsible« being, a moral subject.

2.

This first answer has, in a sense, always remained the classical answer. The Socratic problem and the Socratic method can never be forgotten or obliterated. Through the medium of Platonic thought it has left its mark[6] on the whole future development of human civilization. There is perhaps no surer or shorter way of convincing ourselves of the deep unity and perfect continuity of ancient philosophic thought than by comparing these first stages in Greek philosophy with one of the latest and noblest products of Graeco-Roman culture, the book »To Himself« written by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. At first sight such a comparison may appear arbitrary; for Marcus Aurelius was not an original thinker, nor did he follow a strictly logical method. He himself thanks the gods that when he had set his heart on philosophy he did not become a writer of philosophy or a solver of syllogisms.[7] But Socrates and Marcus Aurelius have | in common the conviction that in order to find the true nature or essence of man we must first of all remove from his being all external and incidental traits. »Call none of those things a man's that do not fall to him as man. They cannot be claimed of a man; man's nature does not guarantee them; they are no consummations of that nature. Consequently neither is the end for which man lives placed in these things, nor yet that which is perfective of the end, namely The Good. Moreover, if any of these things did fall to a man, it would not fall to him to contemn them and set his face against them [...] But as it is, the more a man can cut himself free [...] from these and other such things with equanimity, by so much the more is he good.«[8] All that which befalls man from without is null and void. His essence does not depend on external circumstances; it depends exclusively on the value he gives to himself. Riches, rank, social distinction, even health or intellectual gifts – all this becomes indifferent (*ἀδιάφορον*). What matters alone is the tendency, the inner attitude of the soul; and this inner principle cannot be disturbed. »That which does not make a man himself worse than before cannot make his life worse either, nor injure it whether from without or within.«[9]

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[5] Plato, Apology 37E, in: Dialogues of Plato, Vol. II, pp. 95–136 [S. 131: »[…] the unexamined life is not worth living […]«].

[6] In the following pages I shall not attempt to give a survey of the historical development of anthropological philosophy. I shall merely select a few typical stages in order to illustrate the general line of thought. The history of the philosophy of man is still a desideratum. Whereas the history of metaphysics, of natural philosophy, of ethical and scientific thought has been studied in all detail, we are here still at the beginning. During the last century the importance of this problem has been felt more and more vividly. Wilhelm Dilthey has concentrated all his efforts upon its solution. But Dilthey's work, however rich and suggestive, remained incomplete. One of the pupils of Dilthey, Bernhard Groethuysen, has given an excellent description of the general development of anthropological philosophy. But unfortunately even this description stops short of the last and decisive step – that of our modern era. See Bernhard Groethuysen, Philosophische Anthropologie, in: Handbuch der Philosophie, Sect. 3: Mensch und Charakter, ed. by Alfred Baeumler and Manfred Schröter, München/Berlin 1931, pp. 3–207. See also Groethuysen, Towards an Anthropological Philosophy, in: Philosophy and History. Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer, ed. by Raymond Klibansky and Herbert James Paton, Oxford 1936, pp. 77–89.

The requirement of self-questioning appears, therefore, in Stoicism, as in the conception of Socrates, as man's privilege and his fundamental duty.[10] But this duty is now understood in a broader sense; it has not only a moral but also a universal and metaphysical background. »Never fail to ask thyself this question and to cross-examine thyself thus: What relation have I to this part of me which they call the ruling Reason (*τὸ ἡγεμονικόν*)?«[11] He who lives in harmony with his own self, his demon, lives in harmony with the universe; for both the universal order and the personal order are nothing but different expressions and manifestations of a common underlying principle. Man proves his inherent power of criticism, of judgment and discernment, by conceiving that in this correlation the Self, not the Universe, has the leading part. Once the Self has won its inner form, this form remains unalterable and imperturbable. »[…] *a sphere once formed continues round and true.*«[12] That is, so to speak, the last word of Greek philosophy – a word that once more contains and explains the spirit in which it was originally conceived. This spirit | was a spirit of judgment, of critical discernment between being and nonbeing, between truth and illusion, between good and evil. Life in itself is changing and fluctuating, but the true value of life is to be sought in an eternal order that admits of no change. It is not in the world of our senses, it is only by the power of our judgment that we can grasp this order. Judgment is the central power in man, the common source of truth and morality. For it is the only thing in which man entirely depends on himself; it is free, autonomous, self-sufficing.[13] »[…] distract not thyself,« says Marcus Aurelius, »be not too eager, but be thine own master, and look upon life as a man, as a human being, as a citizen, as a mortal creature. Things do not touch the soul, for they are external and remain immovable, but our disturbance comes only of that judgment that we form in ourselves. All these things, which thou seest, change immediately, and will no longer be; and constantly bear in mind how many of these changes thou hast already witnessed. ›The Universe – mutation: Life – affirmation.‹«[14]

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[7] Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Ad se ipsum (Bk. I, § 8). In most of the following passages I quote the English version of Charles Reginald Haines, The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Emperor of Rome, together with his Speeches and Sayings, London/Cambridge, Mass. 1916 (Loeb Classical Library, Vol. LVIII).

[8] Ibid. (Bk. V, § 15), p. 115.

[9] Ibid. (Bk. IV, § 8), p. 73.

[10] Ibid. (Bk. III, § 6), pp. 55 f.

[11] Ibid. (Bk. V, § 11), pp. 111 f.

The greatest merit of this Stoic conception of man lies in the fact that this conception gives to man both a deep feeling of his harmony with nature and of his moral independence of nature. In the mind of the Stoic philosopher these assertions do not conflict; they are correlated with one another. Man finds himself in perfect equipoise with the universe, and he knows that this equipoise must not be disturbed by any external force. Such is the dual character of Stoic »imperturbability« (*ἀταραξία*). This Stoic theory proved to be one of the strongest formative powers of ancient culture. But it found itself suddenly in the presence of a new, and hitherto unknown force. The conflict with this new force shook the classical ideal of man to its very foundations. The Stoic and the Christian theories of man are not necessarily hostile to one another. In the history of ideas they work in conjunction, and we often find them in close connection in one and the same individual thinker. Nevertheless, there always remains one point on which the antagonism between the Christian and the Stoic ideals proves irreconcilable. The asserted absolute independence of man, which in the Stoic theory was regarded as man's fundamental virtue, is turned in the Christian theory into his fundamental vice and | error. As long as man perseveres in this error, there is no possible road to salvation. The struggle between these two conflicting views has lasted for many centuries, and at the beginning of the modern era – at the time of the Renaissance and in the seventeenth century – we still feel its full strength.[15]

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[12] Ibid. (Bk. VIII, § 41), p. 219.

[13] Cf. ibid. (Bk. V, § 14), p. 114: »*Ὁ λόγος καὶ ἡ λογικὴ τέχνη δυνάμεις εἰσὶν ἑαυταῖς ἀρκούμεναι καὶ τοῖς καθ’ ἑαυτάς ἔργοις.*«

[14] Ibid. (Bk. IV, § 3), pp. 70 ff.: »*Ὁ κόσμος ἀλλοίωσις· βίος ὁπόληψις*«. The term »affirmation« or »judgment« seems to me a much more adequate expression of the thought of Marcus Aurelius than »opinion«, which I find in all the English versions I have consulted. »Opinion« (the Platonic »*δόξα*«) contains an element of change and uncertainty which is not intended by Marcus Aurelius. As equivalent terms for *ὑπόληψις* we find in Marcus Aurelius *κρίσις, κρῖμα, διάκρισις*. Cf. Bk. III, § 2: p. 47; Bk. VI, § 52: p. 161; Bk. VIII, § 28 and 47: pp. 211 and 221 f. [*Die Passage »Things […] witnessed« findet sich in der angegebenen Aurelius-Ausgabe nicht in diesem Wortlaut.*].

Here we can grasp one of the most characteristic features of anthropological philosophy. This philosophy is not, like other branches of philosophical investigation, a slow and continuous development of general ideas. Even in the history of logic, metaphysics, and natural philosophy we find the sharpest oppositions. This history may be described in Hegelian terms as a dialectic process in which each thesis is followed by its antithesis. Nevertheless, there is an inner consistency, a clear logical order, connecting the different stages of this dialectic process. Anthropological philosophy, on the other hand, exhibits a quite different character. If we wish to grasp its real meaning and import we must choose not the epic manner of description but the dramatic. For we are confronted, not with a peaceful development of concepts or theories, but with a clash between conflicting spiritual powers. The history of anthropological philosophy is fraught with the deepest human passions and emotions. It is not concerned with a single theoretical problem, however general its scope; here the whole destiny of man is at stake and clamoring for an ultimate decision.

This character of the problem has found its clearest expression in the work of Augustine. Augustine stands at the frontier of two ages. Living in the fourth century of the Christian era, he has grown up in the tradition of Greek philosophy, and it is especially the system of Neo-Platonism which has left its mark on his whole philosophy. But, on the other hand, he is the pioneer of medieval thought; he is the founder of medieval philosophy and of Christian dogmatics. In his »Confessions« we can follow every step of his way from Greek philosophy to Christian revelation. According to Augustine all philosophy prior to the appearance of Christ was liable to one fundamental error, and was infected with one and the same heresy. The power of reason was extolled as the highest power of man. But what man could never know until he was enlightened with a special divine revelation is that reason itself is one of the most questionable and ambiguous things in the world. Reason cannot show us the way to clarity, to truth and wisdom. For it is itself obscure in its meaning, and its origin is wrapped in mystery – in a mystery soluble only by Christian revelation. Reason for Augustine does not have a simple and unique, but | rather a double and divided nature. Man was created in the image of God; and in his original state, in which he went out from the hands of God, he was equal to his archetype. But all this has been lost through the fall of Adam. From that time on all the original power of reason has been obscured. And reason alone, when left to itself and its own faculties, never can find the way back. It cannot reconstruct itself; it cannot, by its own efforts, return to its former pure essence. If such a reformation is ever possible, it is only by supernatural aid, by the power of divine grace. Such is the new anthropology, as it is understood by Augustine, and maintained in all the great systems of medieval thought. Even Thomas Aquinas, the disciple of Aristotle, who goes back to the sources of Greek philosophy, does not venture to deviate from this fundamental dogma. He concedes to human reason a much higher power than Augustine did; but he is convinced that reason cannot make the right use of these powers unless it is guided and illuminated by the grace of God. Here we have come to a complete reversal of all the values upheld by Greek philosophy. What once seemed to be the highest privilege of man proves to be his peril and his temptation; what appeared as his pride becomes his deepest humiliation. The Stoic precept that man has to obey and revere his inner principle, the »demon« within himself, is now regarded as dangerous idolatry.

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[15] For a detailed account see Ernst Cassirer, Descartes. Lehre – Persönlichkeit – Wirkung, Stockholm 1939, pp. 215 ff. [ECW 20, S. 157 ff.].

It is not practicable here to describe further the character of this new anthropology, to analyze its fundamental motives and to follow up its development. But in order to understand its purport we may choose a different and shorter way. At the beginning of modern times there appeared a thinker who gave to this anthropology a new vigor and a new splendor. In the work of Pascal it found its last and perhaps most impressive expression. Pascal was prepared for this task as no other writer had been. He possessed an incomparable gift for elucidating the most obscure questions and condensing and concentrating complex and scattered systems of thought. Nothing seems to be impermeable to the keenness of his thought and the lucidity of his style. In him are united all the advantages of modern literature and modern philosophy. But he uses them as weapons against the modern spirit, the spirit of Descartes and his philosophy. At first sight Pascal seems to accept all the presuppositions of Cartesianism and of modern science. There is nothing in nature that can resist the effort of scientific reason; for there is nothing that can resist geometry. It is a curious event in the history of ideas that it was one of the greatest and profoundest geometers who became the belated champion of the philosophical anthropology of the Middle Ages. When sixteen years | old, Pascal wrote the treatise on conic sections that opened a new and a very rich and fertile field of geometrical thought. But he was not only a great geometer, he was a philosopher; and as a philosopher he was not merely absorbed in geometrical problems but he wished to understand the true use, the extent, and the limits of geometry. He was thus led to make that fundamental distinction between the »geometrical spirit« and the »acute or subtle spirit«. The geometrical spirit excels in all these subjects that are capable of a perfect analysis that may be divided into their first elements.[16] It starts with certain axioms and from them it draws inferences the truth of which can be demonstrated by universal logical rules. The advantage of this spirit consists in the clarity of its principles and in the necessity of its deductions. But not all objects are capable of such treatment. There are things which because of their subtlety and their infinite variety defy every attempt at logical analysis. And if there is anything in the world that we have to treat in this second way, it is the mind of man. What characterizes man is the richness and subtlety, the variety and versatility of his nature. Hence mathematics can never become the instrument of a true doctrine of man, of a philosophical anthropology. It is ridiculous to speak of man as if he were a geometrical proposition. A moral philosophy in terms of a system of geometry – an Ethica more geometrico demonstrata – is to the mind of Pascal an absurdity, a philosophical dream. Traditional logic and metaphysics are themselves in no better position to understand and solve the riddle of man. Their first and supreme law is the law of contradiction. Rational thought, logical and metaphysical thought can comprehend only those objects which are free from contradiction, and which have a consistent nature and truth. It is, however, just this homogeneity which we never find in man. The philosopher is not permitted to construct an artificial man; he must describe a real one. All the so-called definitions of man are nothing but airy speculation so long as they are not based upon and confirmed by our experience of man. There is no other way to know man than to understand his life and conduct. But what we find here defies every attempt at inclusion within a single and simple formula. Contradiction is the very element of human existence. Man has no »nature« – no simple or homogeneous being. He is a strange mixture of being and nonbeing. His place is between these two opposite poles.

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[16] For the distinction between »l'esprit géométrique« and »l'esprit de finesse« compare Pascal's treatise »De l'esprit géométrique«, in: Blaise Pascal, Pensées. Publiées dans leur texte authentique avec un commentaire suivi, ed. by Ernest Havet, Paris 1897, pp. 600–641, and idem, Pensées. Édition variorum d'après le texte du manuscrit autographe contenant les lettres et opuscules, l'histoire des éditions des Pensées, la vie de Pascal par sa sœur, des notes choisies et inédites et un index complet (chap. IX), ed. by Charles Louandre, Paris 1858 (Collection des classiques français). In the passages which follow I quote the English translation of Orlando Williams Wight, New York 1861 [*Die nachfolgenden Zitate Pascals wurden nicht anhand der von Cassirer genannten englischen Ausgabe von 1861 geprüft, da diese nicht verfügbar war. Die entsprechenden Zitate werden im folgenden nach der französischen Ausgabe von 1858 im Originalwortlaut gegeben.*].

There is, therefore, only one approach to the secret of human na|ture: that of religion. Religion shows us that there is a double man – the man before and after the fall. Man was destined for the highest goal, but he forfeited his position. By the fall he lost his power, and his reason and will were perverted. The classical maxim, »Know thyself«, when understood in its philosophic sense, in the sense of Socrates, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius, is therefore not only ineffectual, it is misleading and erroneous. Man cannot confide in himself and listen to himself. He has to silence himself in order to hear a higher and truer voice. »What shall become of you, then, O man! you who search out what is your true condition by your natural reason? […] Know, then, haughty man, what a paradox you are to yourself. Humble yourself, impotent reason; be silent, imbecile nature; learn that man infinitely surpasses man, and hear from your master your true condition, which you are ignorant of. Listen to God.«[17]

What is given here is not meant to be a theoretical solution of the problem of man. Religion cannot offer such a solution. By its adversaries religion has always been accused of darkness and incomprehensibility. But this blame becomes the highest praise as soon as we consider its true aim. Religion cannot be clear and rational. What it relates is an obscure and somber story: the story of the sin and the fall of man. It reveals a fact of which no rational explanation is possible. We cannot account for the sin of man; for it is not produced or necessitated by any natural cause. Nor can we account for man's salvation; for this salvation depends on an inscrutable act of divine grace. It is freely given and freely denied; there is no human action and no human merit that can deserve it. Religion, therefore, never pretends to clarify the mystery of man. It confirms and deepens this mystery. The God of whom it speaks is a Deus absconditus, a hidden God. Hence even his image, man, cannot be other than mysterious. Man also remains a homo absconditus. Religion is no »theory« of God and man and of their mutual relation. The only answer that we receive from religion is that it is the will of God to conceal himself. »Thus, God being concealed, every religion that does not say that God is concealed is not true; and every religion which does not render a reason for this, is not instructive. Ours does all this: *Vere tu es Deus absconditus* [...] For nature is such, that it everywhere indicates a God lost, both in man and out of man.«[18] Religion is, therefore, so to speak, a logic of absurdity; for only thus can it grasp the absurdity, the inner contradiction, the chimerical being of man. | »Certainly, nothing strikes us more rudely than this doctrine; and yet, without this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we are incomprehensible to ourselves. The knot of our condition takes its twists and turns in this abyss; so that man is more inconceivable without this mystery, than this mystery is inconceivable to man.«[19]

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[17] Pascal, Pensées (chap. X, sect. 1) [S. 219: »Que deviendrez-vous donc, ô homme! qui cherchez quelle est votre véritable condition par votre raison naturelle? […] Connaissez donc, superbe, quel paradoxe vous êtes à vous-même. Humiliez-vous, raison impuissante; taisez-vous, nature imbécile: apprenez que l'homme passe infiniment l'homme, et entendez de votre maître votre condition véritable que vous ignorez. Écoutez Dieu.«].

3.

What we learn from Pascal's example is that at the beginning of modern times the old problem was still felt in its full strength. Even after the appearance of Descartes' »Discours de la méthode« the modern mind was still wrestling with the same difficulties. It was divided be-

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[18] Ibid. (chap. XII, sect. 5; chap. XIII, sect. 3) [S. 240f. und 254: »Dieu étant ainsi caché, toute religion qui ne dit pas que Dieu est caché n'est pas véritable; et toute religion qui n'en rend pas la raison n'est pas instruisante. La nôtre fait tout cela: *Vere tu es Deus absconditus*. [...] car la nature est telle, qu'elle marque partout un Dieu perdu, et dans l'homme, et hors de l'homme [...]«].

[19] Ibid. (chap. X, sect. 1) [S. 220: »Certainement, rien ne nous heurte plus rudement que cette doctrine; et cependant, sans ce mystère, le plus incompréhensible de tous, nous sommes incompréhensibles à nous-mêmes. Le nœud de notre condition prend ses replis et ses tours dans cet abîme; de sorte que l'homme est plus inconcevable sans ce mystère que ce mystère n'est inconcevable à l'homme.«].