

THE IDEA OF MAN

**AN OUTLINE OF PHILOSOPHICAL
ANTHROPOLOGY**

by

JOSÉ FERRATER MORA

Professor of Philosophy, Bryn Mawr College

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University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

Address inquiries to the Chairman.

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LET ME BEGIN by quoting—and slightly modifying—Descartes: "I do not know whether I should tell you of my meditations on the subject, for they are so metaphysical and so out of the ordinary that they may perhaps not be to everybody's taste."¹ The present paper is frankly speculative. It appears still more so as I am unable to clarify—and thus substantiate—some of its contentions, and even some of its vocabulary. Such clarification could only be provided, on the one hand, by means of a reasonably complete ontological framework on which I am presently engaged,² and on the other hand, by means of a certain number of scientific data, which are left in a sort of hinterland. Many of my friends who have, or boast of having, an anti-metaphysical and analytic temperament, will claim that most of what I have to say is either nonsensical or muddled, or both. I can sympathize with these hard-boiled souls, for I am myself often beset—as are all self-esteeming philosophers today—by grave doubts on the possibility, or the opportunity, of metaphysical and speculative statements. Yet, I dare to tell you of my meditations because I feel confident that if someone with more philosophical talent than I could work them out carefully, they would become more palatable not only to my friends, but also, strange as it may seem, to myself.

The vastness of the topic can only be matched by the disarming simplicity of the question. "What is man?" Many of the answers given thus far have been quite plain and straightforward: "Man is a rational animal," "Man is a social being," "Man is a natural entity," "Man is a creature of God," "Man is a historical reality,"

¹ *Discours de la Méthode*. Quatrième Partie (AT VI 31). The correct original text reads: "Je ne sçay si ie doy vous entretenir des premieres meditations que i'y ay faites; car elles sont si Metaphysiques & si peu communes, qu'elles ne seront peustestre pas au goust de tout le monde."

² See my forthcoming book, *El Ser y la Muerte. Bosquejo de filosofía integracionista* (Madrid, in print), particularly chapter one. These pages are partly a version and partly a reformulation of some thoughts contained at the beginning of chapter three.

and so on. "What is man?" however, is not a question, but a whole universe of questions. And many of the answers given are deceptively easy. Thus, while the formula, "Man is a rational animal," seems almost commonplace, its proper meaning can, in fact, only be appraised through interminable and exasperatingly sophisticated digressions.

The question, then, looks rather hopeless. Fortunately philosophers have one charming characteristic: they are never dismayed by the questions. (They are only dismayed by the answers.) I will follow suit, and will try to answer the questions by means of a sketch of philosophical anthropology. Among some of the things I will maintain here is that the human being, although indissolubly tied up to the natural world, is not reducible to this world. To say this is, of course, to say next to nothing, so I will do my best to add something to it.

For the sake of clarity I will indicate the main steps of my argument. I will first consider the problem of man's body, and will conclude that in some sense man *is* his body. I will then discuss the more general problem of the relations between biological life and human life. The results obtained will then be formulated in an ontological vocabulary; on the basis of this I will proceed to an ontology of human existence, which will end in an attempt at a definition.

Man and his body.

For many centuries it has been assumed that man possesses, as a defining characteristic, some "element" or "principle" substantially different from his body. This "element" or "principle" has been given various names: 'reason', 'spirit', 'soul', and so on. A few daring thinkers even went so far as to conclude that if the element in question were the defining characteristic of man, and if it did not necessarily entail the existence of the body, then the latter did not belong to the essence of a human being. More cautious philosophers have claimed that the body is still a significant element in man, but since it is, so they believe, an element substantially different from the rational or spiritual part, then there must be some way of explaining the undeniable interactions between soul, spirit, or reason, on the one hand, and the body, on the other hand. A host of metaphysicians, particularly since the time of Descartes, have spent much time and ingenuity on providing elaborate explanations of such interactions.

The numerous blind-alleys up which all these philosophers—

both daring and cautious—stumbled, led some thinkers to hoist the flag of naturalistic, nay materialistic, reductionism. Since man, they argued, is at bottom a natural being, and since natural beings are material entities, man's nature and activities must be thoroughly accounted for in terms of material organization. We may, if we really wish, talk about mind, soul, spirit and so on, but these are only epiphenomena of the material body. Naturalistic and materialistic reductionism explains away the so-called "spiritual manifestations" as mere appearances—if not as plain forgeries.

My account of the philosophical controversies on the mind-body problem is, of course, a deplorable oversimplification. But it may help us to understand the nature of the difficulties encountered when man has been defined either as only a soul, or as only a body, or as some uneasy combination of both. In contrast with the doctrines sketched above, some thinkers have tried to view man's body as both man's inalienable property and at the same time as something unaccountable for as a purely material—or, more specifically, biological—organism. Paradoxically enough, a few of these thinkers have been indebted to a tradition that has provided philosophical foundations for the Christian doctrine of the soul, or have even explicitly adopted this doctrine. As an example of the former I may cite Aristotle, when he defined the soul as "the form of the organic body having the power of life."³ As an example of the latter I may cite Saint Augustine, when he declared that "the way in which the body attaches to the soul . . . is man himself" (*hoc tamen homo est*).⁴ These opinions are quite similar to some of the ones I will maintain here. Unfortunately, they have been argued for obscurely or else half-heartedly, for practically all of the thinkers I am now praising as my predecessors have ended by defending the doctrine that there is in man some principle substantially different from the body.

The first point I wish to put forward is this: man does not have a body, but *is his* body—his *own* body. Otherwise said: *man is a way of being a body*. Thus, I seem now to subscribe to naturalistic or materialistic reductionism. I hope to be able to prove that I am not so rash. If my philosophical anthropology has some counterparts, they can be detected in such works as Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* or M. Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology*

³ *De an.*, II 1, 412 a 27 ff.

⁴ *De civ. Dei*, XXI. 10. See Pascal's comment in *Pensées; L'Oeuvre de Pascal*, Jacques Chevalier, ed. (Paris, 1936), §84 (page 847); *Oeuvres*, Léon Brunschvicg, ed., XII (Paris, 1925), §72 (pp. 91-2).

of Perception.⁵ This does not mean that my ideas are derived from theirs; it only means that they are in tune with some of theirs. Like them, but with vastly different assumptions, I try to shun equally classical monism—spiritualistic or materialistic—and classical dualism—such as the one exemplified in the Cartesian idea of the “ghost in the machine.” What I contend is this: that nothing can be detected *in* man that absolutely transcends his body, but yet that man is not reducible to a material substance. The human being is not a reality, or a cluster of realities, unified by a certain element or principle existing “beyond” or “beneath” them. Man can be defined tentatively as *his* living. If man is formally defined as a set, he is a set whose only subset is himself.

Biological life and human life.

Let me put it this way: living beings—which I will henceforth often call “organisms”—*live*; man, on the other hand (or rather, besides), *makes his own life*. This distinction looks at first sight too subtle, or perhaps merely verbal. Could it not be asserted that organisms, above all animals, and in particular higher animals, also make their own life? After all, organisms behave, so to speak, “spontaneously.” This does not necessarily mean that their behavior is uncaused; it only means that it springs forth out of themselves and is focused upon themselves. Yet, this latter meaning is not lightly to be dismissed. For it conveys the interesting idea that organisms possess an “inside” and an “outside.”⁶ To be sure, “inside” and “outside” are also names of attributes of inorganic matter. However, whereas in the latter case “inside” and “outside” designate spatial attributes, in the former case they designate behavioral characteristics. Organisms are capable of revealing, and of concealing, attitudes, purposes, impulses, emotions. Furthermore, they do that, not just accidentally, but constitutively. Rather than *having* an “outside” and an “inside” organisms *are* an “outside” and an “inside”.

The words ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ designate here, so to speak, ultimate behavioral attributes of organisms. Organisms reveal and conceal *themselves* instead of being “revealed” and “concealed”

⁵ Also, but less obviously, in Gabriel Marcel, *Journal métaphysique* (Paris, 1927), 3rd ed. (Paris, 1955), pp. 224–6, 252, 261–4, and *Le mystère de l'être*, vol. I (Paris, 1951), pp. 162–85 (English version: *The Mystery of Being*, vol. I [London, 1950], pp. 148–70). For interesting similarities between the phenomenological approach and the “linguistic approach,” see C. Taylor and A. J. Ayer, “Phenomenology and Linguistic Analysis,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 33 (1959), 93–124.

⁶ The terms ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ have here, then, a more radical (and hence more controversial) meaning than in Weston La Barre’s sentence: “It was the first organism which first brought the concepts of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ into the universe.” (*The Human Animal* [Chicago, 1954], p. 2; reprinted in Phoenix Books P45 [Chicago, 1955], p. 2).

to a knowing subject, as is the case with inorganic realities. Organisms express what they are no less than "what they are not." They are capable of deceit and of dissimulation. They express themselves not only impulsively, but also cunningly. In *this* sense, organisms also make their own life. But the expression 'to make one's own life' must have a stronger meaning if it is to serve as a feature distinguishing human life from biological life *in genere*. Should we say that it easily acquires such a meaning when 'to make one's own life' means 'to behave rationally', or 'deliberately'? I do not think so. We have experimental proof that some higher animals display an impressive amount of intelligence in their behavior. Not even tool-use and tool-making are exclusive attributes of human beings; some prehuman primates discovered that certain stones, sticks, and bones could be used as tools and even as tool-making tools.⁷ The same may be said, even if less confidently, in respect to language. If the term 'language' designates a set of signals—expressed by means of bodily behavior—to impart information, then the bees use language. If, however, 'language' has a stronger meaning, then its existence can be very intimately tied up with the human meaning of 'making one's own life.'⁸

The difference between 'to live' and 'to make one's own life' must be based, therefore, on less controversial features. One of them I consider noteworthy: it is the one revealed through a study of the type of relationship holding between living beings and their world—both the inanimate and the animate world.

All organisms develop within the frame of more or less definite biological species. Each one of the species is adapted, or becomes adapted, to a certain "world" by means of a fixed system of challenges and responses. The behavior of each individual organism fits almost perfectly into the structure of its world, to the extent that the latter can be defined conversely by the set of operations which each individual organism can perform within it.

The dependence of each individual organism on its species is practically complete. The individual organism limits itself to performing those actions which become biologically possible within the species to which it belongs. When an individual organism attempts to perform actions of a quite different character, its survival as an individual is gravely impaired. If I may be permitted

⁷ See Sherwood L. Washburn, "Tools and Human Evolution," *Scientific American*, 203, No. 3 (September, 1960), 63-75.

⁸ Cf. Grace A. de Laguna, "The *Lebenswelt* and the Cultural World," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LVII (1960), 781.

to use a formula infected with Platonic realism, "the species prevents the individual from acting otherwise." The well-known expression 'the genius of the species' summarizes metaphorically this almost consummate adaptability. Without such a "genius" the species would peter out—or would change so radically as to become a different species. Far from making its own life, each individual organism is "making" a part of the life of the corresponding species. This I call "to live" *simpliciter*. In order to make its own life it would be necessary for an individual organism to deviate from the perpetual cyclical movement of the species. If the individual organism succeeded without perishing, and if enough individual organisms followed suit, the species would no longer be a species: it would be a community.⁹ An essentially different type of relation between the individual organism and the species would then appear. For such an event to happen, two basic conditions would be required. On the one hand, the subordination of a certain number of primary impulses, among them the sexual impulse, to communal needs.¹⁰ On the other hand, and quite paradoxically, the possibility of a further inadaptability to, and even revolt against, communal patterns. These conditions would prove insufficient for the emergence of a fully fledged society. For such an emergence it would be necessary for the individual organism to invent and put forward new ways of life capable of transforming the behaviorial structure of the community. Then, and only then, would the individual organism make its own life—or have the possibility of making it. This happens, however, only with human beings. They belong to their community in a sense different from the one in which even pre-human primates belonged to their species. Human beings can, as a consequence, have a history, and not merely a temporal development. And in the course of history there occur behavioral changes which are, to be sure, supported by biological processes, but which are not exclusively subservient to them. To make one's own life requires, thus, the transcendence of biological conditions. On the other hand, to live *simpliciter* looks more like sinking into life.

Individual organisms do not only adapt to the conditions imposed by their biological species; they are also subordinated to the specific biological world corresponding to the species. This

⁹ I use the terms 'community' and 'society' in a sense similar to, although not identical with, the one proposed by Ferdinand Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* (Leipzig, 1887), 8th. ed. (Leipzig, 1935).

¹⁰ See Marshall D. Sahlins, "The Origin of Society," *Scientific American*, 203, No. 3 (September, 1960), 76-86.

world is not an "objective world"; it is a biologically conditioned world. And if we are ready to admit the equivalence "reality = objective reality," the world in question is not a "real world." The reality proper to the biological world is determined by the sum of biological needs and impulses as shaped by a definite physical environment. The various biological worlds can be intertwined, and constitute together one world—the so-called "world of the biosphere." But there is no world transcending these various worlds—no objectively transbiological world, that is. For an organic world to trespass beyond its own limits it would be necessary for the individual organisms belonging to it to stop, at least intermittently, acting according to a defined challenge-and-response pattern. They would have to be capable of refusing to fulfill biological demands for the sake of values of a more objective character.

This is what human beings do—at times. They repress their biological drives in the name of possible actions having some end in themselves—for instance, in the name of knowing for knowing's sake. We may call the result of these actions "cultural achievements". Now, although such achievements must draw their energy out of the sublimation of biological processes, they cannot be measured solely in terms of this sublimation. Max Scheler wrote that man is the only animal capable of saying "No"—or, as he put it, he is "the ascetic of life."¹¹ But refusal is not enough; otherwise culture would become a rather uncomfortable display of asceticism. And, in point of fact, culture can also mean fostering life, including biological life. But in such a case, this is not to be done in the name of biological life (if it can be said that it is done "in the name of" anything); it is to be done in the name of vital values. What, therefore, ultimately counts, is not what the individual does, but the purpose with which he does it. A non-ascetic life permeated by values—for instance, by beauty—is as cultured as any other, and sometimes even more so. Thus, we must not hastily conclude that cultural values are solely obtainable by the repression and sublimation of biological drives. Otherwise, they would not necessarily possess values of their own. At any rate, without some transformation of biological impulses there would be no possibility of an "objective world"; there would only be what I may call a "subjective-biological world": the world of the species.

¹¹ Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Darmstadt, 1928), p. 63.

To make one's own life can now be defined as follows: as the possibility of making the biological-subjective interests of the species, and of its individuals, serve as the energetic basis for the final recognition of objects as objects. This may in principle seem to lead to a type of existence in which the subjective drives of individual organisms are stifled never to recur again. Yet, the subservience of subjective-biological drives to objective realities and/or values need not be love's labor lost. The transformation of the self-enclosed biological world into an open objective world may be—it has, indeed, been—the necessary condition for a later much more effective fulfillment of biological impulses. The demands imposed upon men by the recognition of reality as objective reality have, in fact, led them to a mastery of the same biological world in which they were originally confined. Thus, to recognize reality as it is, and not as our whim takes us, has become—through science for example—the most efficient means to mastering reality. One of the many paradoxes of the human condition is that men may have to emphasize reality to the utmost in order to fulfill more completely the demands of their subjectivity.

Being, Becoming, Existing.

The concepts thus far introduced can now be translated into an ontological vocabulary. Inorganic matter I will define as "being in itself," namely, being what it is. Organic reality I will define as "being for itself," namely being for the sake of its own fulfillment—of the development and survival of biological species. Inorganic matter I will conceive as "something that already is"; organic reality, as "something that is in process of being." In some sense, organic reality can also be conceived as "that which is not yet what it is."

The term 'being' must not be construed here as designating something forbidding or recondite. In the present context 'being' means 'way of behaving'—in the general sense of 'way of being actualized.' To say that inorganic matter is already given is tantamount to saying that it is actual, or nearly so. The expression 'nearly so' I cannot adequately clarify here; it is sufficient to say that I am assuming the following ontological postulate: that no reality is absolutely actual—and its counterpart: that no reality is absolutely potential. In my ontological scheme there is no room for absolute attributes (or entities) of any kind; there

is at most room for some pseudo-concepts—which then become limiting concepts—of absolute attributes or realities. Inorganic reality is, from this ontological viewpoint, the most actual of all types of reality. If it is not purely actual, it “behaves”—or rather, it appears—*as if* it were so. Whenever there is something determinate, and determinable, that is the inorganic world. This is, be it said in passing, the reason why it lends itself so easily to description in that language in which, according to Galileo, the “Book of Nature” is written: the language of mathematics.

Inorganic realities undergo a number of states. Organic realities, in particular the higher organized ones, undergo a number of phases. The former endure a series of processes; the latter, a series of developments. Terms such as ‘state,’ ‘phase,’ ‘process,’ and ‘development,’ are, of course, utterly inadequate. Furthermore, the distinctions which these terms are meant to convey do not in any way presuppose that organic realities cease to behave in the way inorganic realities behave. After all, there is only one species of matter: the so-called “physical matter.” But organic realities, or, as I have also called them, “organisms,” do something that inorganic realities do not: they realize themselves in the course of their development. They bring themselves, successfully or not, to an issue. They appear much more than inorganic realities, as a set of potentialities which may or may not become actual. In principle, an organism could be defined (ontologically) as a τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι—the Aristotelian expression, sometimes translated, rather hastily, as “essence.” But of course, organisms are not essences. They are existences developing according to certain forms and patterns—which, no doubt, change in the course of evolution. In *this* sense, organisms are even more “determined” than inorganic realities—if the semantics of ‘determined’ is duly clarified. They possess, as an author has put it, a “determined future,” and abide by a “certain generic and specific cycle.”¹² Organic life has, thus, a “direction.” Which, of course, does not mean, even if it seems to mean, that it always and necessarily follows a preconceived plan, or develops according to a preestablished finality. We need not presuppose the existence of immanent final causes in the evolution of the organic world as a whole. We need only presuppose that organisms become what they are within a certain

¹² See Pedro Laín Entralgo, *La espera y la esperanza* (Madrid, 1957), 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1958), p. 479.

temporal-cyclical pattern, and according to certain laws of structural transformation.

When all is said, however, one thing remains certain: that both types of reality tally (ontologically) with the concept of "being." To be sure, one of these two types of reality is more aptly describable (ontologically, again) as "becoming" rather than as "being." Yet, the concept of becoming is still indebted to the concept of being. At any rate, both inorganic and organic realities can be understood as "things" of some sort—things which move and change; and things which, besides moving and changing, grow, develop, and reproduce themselves.

The most striking characteristic of human life, as we view it ontologically, is that it can scarcely be called "a being"—namely, "a thing." Walking, deliberately or not, in Fichte's footsteps, some contemporary philosophers have emphasized that human life *as human life* is not a thing—not even a "thing that becomes." In the sense then in which I have employed such terms as 'to be,' 'being,' 'it is,' 'they are,' and so on, it can be said that human life, properly speaking, "is not." It is not what it is. But neither is it what it becomes. Can we then talk about it at all? If we were too fussy about language, we should conclude that we obviously cannot. Happily enough, language is a very pliable affair; we can make its terms mean, if not all that we want, at least some things that we very badly want. In consequence, we can also say that human life "is." But we must hasten to add that it is not a "something," but rather a "someone." A few philosophers have even gone so far as to define it as some sort of absolute in which everything that is or becomes is enclosed—at least in so far as it is, or becomes, perceivable, knowable, and so on. I will not go with them. But I will admit at least that if human life is some kind of thing, it is a very strange thing indeed. This thing that is not a thing, may be called "an existent"—not, however, in the sense of "something that exists," but rather in the sense partly uncovered by traditional metaphysicians when they coined for another purpose the expression "the pure actuality of existing."

Natural sciences and social sciences contribute wealthy and valuable information about human life. It would be stupid to dismiss all these sciences by a stroke of the pen by claiming that they only touch on the "ontic" realm while in no sense reaching

the "ontologic" realm, as Heidegger puts it.¹³ For these two realms are not incommunicable. It has been said that, after all, we are quite uncertain about where one such realm ends and where the other one begins.¹⁴ I heartily subscribe to this view. Translated into a more accessible vocabulary, it simply means that metaphysical speculation and ontological analysis, while they do not need to follow scientific research blindly, should never proceed extravagantly against scientific research. If for no other reason than that science is probably here to stay, philosophers would do well to resign themselves to the fact that it may set certain bounds and exert certain controls on metaphysics (the converse may, of course, also be the case).¹⁵ The frontiers between metaphysics and science will eventually change; after all, neither one nor the other is a ready-made system of knowledge. Now, setting bounds to metaphysical speculation is far from equivalent to determining the direction that such speculation must take. Metaphysical speculation and, *a fortiori*, ontological analysis use concepts wrought by science and by common sense, but do not meekly conform to the meanings established by them. That this is so we will verify at once. I will introduce a few terms whose ontological meaning will prove to be quite different from, albeit somehow related to, the usual meaning. Among such terms, one is notably singled out for distinction: it is the term 'property,' considered here as designating the positive and concrete aspect of a yet undefined concept: the concept 'selfhood'—a rather clumsy translation of the German '*Selbstheit*' and of the Spanish '*mismidad*.'

Man as selfhood and as property.

To begin with, I will distinguish between 'ipseity' ('*ipseitas*') and 'selfhood.' The term 'ipseity' is meant to designate the fact that any given thing is what it is, namely the identity of any given thing with itself. Since such an identity is accomplished only when we arbitrarily discard the temporal element in a thing, pure "ipseity" is an attribute only of the so-called "ideal objects"—mathematical entities (if there are such), concepts, and perhaps values. However, it can be said that all things as things display a greater or lesser tendency to being what they are, and therefore to being "identical" in the above sense. This tendency to self-identity reaches its maximum in inorganic realities for reasons that

¹³ M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, I (Halle a.d. S., 1927), §4 (p. 13) and §10 (pp. 45-50).

¹⁴ José Ortega y Gasset, *La idea de principio en Leibniz y la evolución de la teoría deductiva* (Madrid, 1958), §29 (p. 339) (English translation in preparation).

¹⁵ See my book *Philosophy Today* (New York, 1960) pp. 159-67.

should now be moderately clear. It is much less perceptible in organisms, in so far as these are in process of becoming what they are according to temporal and cyclical patterns. Nevertheless, all beings are in some ways what they are, even if at times their being is, to use the well-known Aristotelian expressions, a "coming-to-be" and a "passing-away."

In a way the term 'selfhood' purports to designate a type of attribute similar to the one designated by the term 'ipseity.' Furthermore, if we define 'selfhood' as 'being itself' and/or as 'becoming itself,' then selfhood is just another form of identity. Thus, we may conclude that all realities, in so far as they are identical to themselves, possess the attributes of ipseity and selfhood.

Unfortunately, all these terms behave like the meshes in Eddington's fishing-net: they let some interesting fish escape easily. At any rate, they let human reality jump into the sea again quickly. This happens in particular with the terms 'identity' and 'ipseity'. Does it also happen with the term 'selfhood'? Not necessarily, provided that we employ it the way scientists and, above all, philosophers handle a number of expressions—by twisting or, at least, stretching their meanings.¹⁶ 'Selfhood' may mean more than just "being itself"; it may mean "being oneself." It may serve as a formal answer to the question "Who is it?" rather than an answer to the question "What is it?" In this sense it may describe a specifically human attribute. In order to avoid confusions, however, I propose the following terminological device: whenever 'selfhood' is applied to human beings, I will call it "property"—in a sense of 'property' which I will soon clarify.

Besides being denounced as barbaric, the present vocabulary will in all likelihood be declared superfluous. Why not use in this connection the more respectable terms 'spirit' and 'person,' already tested through centuries of philosophical experience? The term 'person' in particular looks quite handy. Yet, I prefer to avoid it—or rather, to use it only after it has been purged of many of its traditional connotations. Should the occasion arise we could, if we badly wanted to, use the terms 'spirit' and 'person' provided that the two following conditions were ful-

¹⁶ Twisting and stretching the meaning of terms borrowed from common speech is, of course, only part of the story. It is necessary that meaning-twistings and meaning-extensions should not function *in vacuo*. See, among many other contemporary writings in this respect, H. A. Hodges, *Languages, Standpoints, and Attitudes* (London, 1953), pp. 17-18 (University of Durham, Riddell Memorial Lectures, Twenty-fourth Series). Among classical warnings against illegitimate meaning-twistings and meaning-extensions Berkeley is still the most valuable.

filled: First, that these terms do not refer to any reality absolutely transcendent to human life, and still less running counter to the material—inorganic and organic—constituents of human life. Second, that they do not designate any indissoluble and inalienable attributes—namely, any supposedly eternal predicates which man would, so to speak, “share,” and of which he could be definitely assured. By the way, similar reservations could be made when the attributes of “rationality” and “emotivity” (some higher forms of emotivity at least) are chosen as denoting specific characteristics of human existence.

At most I will agree to say that man becomes *personal* and becomes *spiritual*—without ever completely succeeding. Man is making himself constantly as man—and that is what I meant by saying that “he makes his own life.” A certain biological structure and a number of psychological dispositions are in this respect necessary, but not sufficient, conditions. They are in no way merely contingent facts—purely circumstantial elements which man can take or leave as he pleases. A certain human body and a certain human mind are also a certain given man. Each man thus makes his own life with his body and his mind, which are not solely “things,” but basic elements of man’s existence.

Here lies one reason why human beings are not identical with, even if in some respects they are comparable to, servomechanisms. It is quite probable that the more we know about the structure and the behavior of nervous systems—and above all, about the structure of the human central nervous system—the more similar they will appear to be to a complex servomechanism. The psychosomatic structure of human beings can be largely explained in terms of complicated mechanical states in stable equilibrium. The so-called “organic self-control” (homeostasis) can be described as a kind of thermostatic control. We may even go so far as to admit that servomechanisms can think, remember, learn, and so on. When all is said, however, there still remains the problem of whether a servomechanism, no matter how human-like we imagine it to be, can indeed perform operations of a really human character. Professor Mario Bunge has pointed out that “irrespective of their degree of automatism [computers] are all characterized by the fact that *they do not perform mathematical operations*, but only physical operations which we coordinate with mathematical ones.”¹⁷ Computers “do not add pure numbers; they add turns of cogwheels, electric pulses, etc.”¹⁸ That some

¹⁷ Mario Bunge, “Can Computers Think?” in *Metascientific Queries* (Springfield, Ill., 1959), p. 129 (American Lecture Series, 341).

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

functions can be described in terms of automatic control operations is one thing; that they are identical with such operations is another. In any case, it would be pure fantasy to claim that servomechanisms make themselves the way human beings do; that, therefore, they belong to themselves. This does not mean that servomechanisms could not in principle reproduce themselves—if von Neumann's blueprint for a self-reproducing machine proves feasible we will eventually assist at such a stupendous ceremony—;¹⁹ it only, but significantly, means that their reality will never be *theirs*, but something else's, and actually someone else's reality.

"Man belongs to himself" is a way, albeit a rather awkward one, of saying that man is his own property. I do not only mean the fact that the body and the mind of human beings belong to them, instead of being something alien and contingent. I also, and above all, mean that men possess their own lives, so that they are ontologically, and not only morally, responsible for themselves. Man is not a being *that* lives; he is *his own* living. However, since man is not anything definite except the constant effort to become man, it may even be risky to say that he is his own living; let us then say that he constantly tries to make his living his own. Making one's own life—for this is ultimately what all this boils down to—is then something different from, although somehow correlated to, the biological processes of growing and developing. What such "self-making" most resembles is a series of efforts to reach and, as it were, to conquer one's own reality while stumbling all along the way.

The above may cast some light on the perplexing paradox of man as a free being. On the one hand, man as man is necessarily free. The arguments adduced in favor of this view by authors such as Ortega y Gasset,²⁰ Sartre,²¹ and so on are quite

¹⁹ See John G. Kemeny, "Man Viewed as a Machine," *Scientific American*, 192, No. 4 (April, 1955), 58–67.

²⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, James Cleugh, trans. (New York, 1933), p. 52. See my book, *Ortega y Gasset. An Outline of His Philosophy* (London, 1956 & New Haven, 1957), pp. 52–3.

²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant* (Paris, 1943) Quatrième partie, chap. 1 (pp. 508–642). It should be noted that, despite his adhesion to Marxism, Sartre has not considerably changed his views on the "primacy of freedom" in man, even during the so-called "period of exploitation." Sartre only argues now that such freedom displays itself within "a certain given conditioning environment." "Pour nous, l'homme se caractérise avant tout par le dépassement d'une situation, par ce qu'il parvient à faire de ce qu'on a fait de lui" (*Critique de la raison dialectique*, Vol. I: *Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, Paris, 1960, p. 63.) At any rate, not only Sartre's "Marxism" is expressed in an unmistakably Existentialist language, but Sartre himself claims that his later opinions can easily be integrated with his earlier ones. Incidentally, Heidegger makes similar claims in respect to the relation between his "earlier" and his "later" philosophies (see *Unterwegs zur Sprache* [Pfullingen, 1959], pp. 85–155, and especially 98–9).

pertinent, even if they are not always altogether convincing. On the other hand, freedom is not given to man in the sense in which it might be given to a thing as one of its unassailable attributes. As a consequence, the paradox of freedom is still more puzzling than has often been claimed. Let me put it this way: man acquires his own freedom in so far as he freely develops as man. Thus, freedom is a requisite for the existence of man . . . who must himself produce this requisite. Man is that type of reality that can make itself while it can also unmake itself. Man, in short, has the possibility of being himself, and of not being himself, of appropriating himself and of alienating himself.

Human reality is, therefore, a "being for itself" in a much more radical sense than the being for itself proper to organisms. No organic reality as such can move away from itself. Ceasing to be itself is for such a reality equivalent to becoming another. To use, and by the way to distort, the Hegelian vocabulary—to which I and many others are indebted nowadays, no matter how much we try to put it out of our head—an organic reality is never an *Anderssein*, and can never become properly an *Aussersichsein*. If we persist in applying the expressions 'being for itself' and 'being other' to the behavior of organic realities, it is with quite different meanings in mind. In discussing human reality ontologically we are not interested in forms of being as being but in ultimate possibilities of existence. Whereas organic reality can be in many different ways, it never ceases to be what it is. On the other hand, man can cease to be himself and as a rule never becomes entirely himself. Yet, not being himself is also one of the ways of being a man. The reason for this paradoxical condition of human existence is, again, that man is never a "thing that is."

It may now be contended that I have gone indeed too far in my attempt to deny that man is a "being" or a "thing." First, man is also a thing—an organic thing, and many inorganic things together. Second, we may view man, from the religious angle, as a creature—therefore, as a type of reality that could never make his own existence, or even simply exist, unless God produced him, and perhaps helped him to exist. Such claims are not lightly to be dismissed. The former one is based upon facts; the latter one is founded on a belief. Nevertheless, I need not consider these claims as unduly embarrassing. The first claim I have already rebutted; although man, through his body and mind, is a fact, or

a collection of facts, what makes him a man are not these facts but what he does with them. In human life it is the meaning of the facts that counts. As to the second claim, it is sufficient to say that even if man received his being from God, it could still be argued that he is not properly a man unless he maintains himself in existence. If man is a created being, he is such in a sense quite different from the one in which we say that things, or for that matter, pure spirits, are created. The freedom that constitutes man and by means of which he constitutes himself must be his very own. To express it in Nietzsche's language: man is like an acrobat walking over an abyss;²² it is up to him to fling himself down or to keep his balance. In order to be able to walk over the abyss with a reasonable degree of poise he does all sorts of things—for example, he creates "culture" and "history." There is little doubt that "part of every culture is 'defense-mechanism'," and that "the function of culture and psychosis alike is to be 'homeostatic', to maintain preferred equilibriums."²³ But this is only part of the story. As I have tried to establish, culture is also, and above all, the result of the attempt to make man's world an objective world, independent from, albeit attached to, his basic drives and instincts. There is no harm, however, in admitting that man is fundamentally a cultural and historical being. He does not produce culture and history just because he finds it fun, but because he badly needs them. But this question leads us to the end of our metaphysical journey, for it is the problem of "where" man is heading that will occupy us in the last few pages.

The definition of man.

Let me briefly recapitulate my argument. The concepts "being" and "becoming" apply to human reality only in so far as this reality is part of a continuum—the continuum of Nature. I have never denied, but rather emphasized that man is also an inorganic and an organic being, to the extent that he really *is* matter and body rather than just having them. But as we wish to distinguish human realities ontologically from the other realities of the said continuum, the ontological vocabulary must be stretched when it is not twisted. Thus, terms such as 'selfhood,' 'property,' and

²² Literally, a tight-rope walker (*ein Seiltänzer*). "Der Mensch ist ein Seil, geknüpft zwischen Tier und Übermensch—ein Seil über einem Abgrunde. Ein gefährliches Hinüber, ein gefährliches Auf-dem-Wege, ein gefährliches Zurückblicken, ein gefährliches Schaudern und Stehenbleiben. . . . eine Brücke und kein Zweck. . . ." (*Also sprach Zarathustra*. Zarathustras Vorrede, 4. *Werke in drei Bänden*, Karl Schlechta, ed., II [München, 1956], 281).

²³ Weston La Barre, *op. cit.* [Note 6], p. 246.

others come to the rescue in order to allow us to have a glimpse of what it means to say such odd things as "man is not a being, but a maker of himself."

I could have also said that the reality of human life is, properly speaking, the meaning of human life if I had been given the opportunity to introduce the term 'meaning' (or perhaps 'sense') with any likelihood of not being utterly misunderstood. I will confine myself to a less controversial vocabulary, and will say that human reality is "intentional" in character. 'Being intentional' here means 'going toward, wending or directing one's course.' But a question now arises: where is he going? where is he wending or directing his course?

If I say 'toward something outside of him,' or 'toward something inside of him,' I will not go very far indeed. To proceed to the outside is tantamount to adapting to the surrounding world—a world in turn constantly shaped by the adaptive efforts. To proceed to the inside is tantamount to self-regulating the individual structure. In both cases we are talking about biological and bio-psychological processes. These have, in man and in higher animals, a firm basis in two types of nervous system: the 'cerebro-spinal' nervous system, which coordinates the knowledge and action relations with the external world; and the sympathetic nervous system, which regulates the so-called "inner processes" of the organism and which is split in as many independent systems as prove necessary for the proper functioning of the various parts of the organism. Where, then, does man as man proceed to? No doubt, we can still use such expressions as 'toward the outside' and 'toward the inside,' but the terms 'outside' and 'inside' acquire a quite different meaning here.

The "outside" toward which human beings proceed is the world as a world, namely the world as an objective reality, independent in principle of purely biological and psycho-biological needs, and at times even running counter to such needs. This "intentional opening" to the objective world, as phenomenologists would put it, is the foundation of knowledge. To be sure, men know and think to some purpose. But the contents of thinking and knowledge must be objectively valid, and not only subjectively useful. Human beings project themselves toward a world outside that transcends any subjective purpose. Human beings may have, so to speak, invented and promoted knowledge for the sake of life. But here we can modify a celebrated formula:

propter cognitionem cognitionis perdere causas; we must sacrifice knowledge (knowledge as a vital tool) for the sake of knowledge (knowledge as an end). Or, rather, we must promote the former only because we hope to reach the latter. This does not mean, of course, that knowledge as an end is necessarily incompatible with knowledge as a tool; after all, action has often been all the more successful when disinterested contemplation has preceded it. On the other hand, knowing is not the only possible intentional attitude; evaluating is also important, and sometimes even more so than knowing. In any case, man exists as man in so far as he fulfils himself not by directly responding to the challenges of the environment, but by making the environment an objective world. Therefore, when man proceeds toward an outside, he does not confine himself either to adapting to it completely, or to refusing it completely. He goes back and forth from subjectivity to objectivity—which helps explain why the cultural world, which man creates as he springs up from the natural world, is at the same time a world which he must objectively recognize.

On the other hand, the "inside" toward which man wends his way is not only the inner biological or bio-psychological structure. It is not equivalent to, even if it is based on, the process of self-conservation and self-regulation of the organism, but some sort of reality which may be called the "oneself," "one's own reality," and also "one's authenticity." There is also a projecting movement here. But then man does not project something; he rather projects "someone"—himself. When he thus projects himself, man searches for—without necessarily finding—his "authentic being," or, as it has also been called, rather pathetically, his "destiny." To be sure, all realities, and in particular all organisms, exist in some way as self-fulfilling and self-projecting realities; they all are, consciously or not, intent on realizing themselves. But whereas the pattern for self-realization is given to them in the forms and laws of nature, man is not given any such definite pattern. Each one of us finds his own pattern, without knowing whether it will ever be discovered, or even whether there is one. All realities, except man, can be, or can become. Man can, besides, cease to be—in the sense of "ceasing to be himself." Here is why the concepts "being" and "becoming" have proved inadequate to describe ontologically human reality. In that sense Sartre was right when

he contended that human life—or "consciousness," the "being-for itself"—is not what it is, and is what it is not. In view of this, we could now assert that man is not even doomed to be free. Man is not properly speaking doomed to anything, not even to be a man. This does not necessarily mean that freedom is neither good nor bad. In fact, unless he is—or rather struggles to become—free, man is not worthy of being called a human being. But he does not receive his freedom ready-made; he makes it. Or, more precisely: he makes it as he (freely) makes himself. This is, of course, a deplorable vicious circle, for it comes to saying that only freedom makes possible a certain type of reality . . . which makes itself through freedom. But I see no way of escaping this vicious circle. It may well happen, by the way, that some vicious circles are philosophically inescapable. On the level of the ontology of human life, we must often acknowledge that some consequences may play at the same time the role of principles.

Human life can be defined as a kind of unceasing march toward oneself, which can often become a march against oneself. Paradoxically, not being oneself is as good an attribute of human life as being oneself.

This is the meaning of the attribute "property"—that human life is always man's *own* life. Man owns his life even when he seems to be on the verge of annihilating himself as man—whether to go back to his purely animal living, or to transcend himself and become, as it were, ecstatic in front of pure objectivity. This last point deserves brief elucidation. Let us imagine that man consists, as some say, in being a spiritual substance, and that such a substance is defined as the possibility of bowing to objectivity—to objective reality and to objective values. Even in such a case, spiritual reality cannot be conceived unless as *existing*. And in order to exist it must undergo all sorts of experiences—private and public; personal and historical. To live as a man is to undergo what makes one to be what one is. As a consequence, man as a person tends to yield to the impersonal, but he is no longer a man when he yields to the impersonal to the point of fusing with it. This is, of course, another paradox which, I am afraid, I must leave. Let me simply say that man continually hesitates between the realm of pure objectivity and the realm of pure internal experience. He cannot come to a halt in his constant shift from one extreme point to the other.

Reality and values are objective to man only in so far as they are subjectively experienced. Human experience, on the other hand, is lived through what some philosophers have called "situations." And since situations, whether individual or collective, are historical in character, human living is always historical, namely, irreversible, and in some sense at least, "dramatic." Anything done, thought, or felt by man in order to live authentically is irretrievable. It may be claimed that some acts or decisions sink so deeply in the living root of human reality that they can transform it from the ground up. As an example I may cite repentance—usually followed by conversion. In contradistinction to mere remorse,²⁴ repentance makes some kind of spiritual rebirth possible. The past is not actually wiped away, but it becomes so transfigured by the present as to make it appear entirely different from what it was. Yet, even these "extreme situations" are possible only because the facts which they transform have existed the way they did. In other words, for repentance to be even conceivable, something to repent from is necessary. The very possibility of a fundamental change in human life is based on life's basic irreversibility. No human act is entirely alien to man. Hence the dramatic character of human existence. I do not inject the word 'dramatic' here just because I wish to make the readers shudder—for I feel certain that the readers, if they happen to be philosophers, will never shudder. I use the term 'dramatic' only to emphasize the temporal, experiential and historical character of human reality. To say "life is a drama," on the other hand, is one of the ways of saying "life is mine." No drama is such if it is not the exclusive property of the character who displays it.

The source out of which the "dramatic" actions and decisions of human individuals spring is, therefore, no purely spiritual, intelligible, and, least of all, permanent nature. Ortega y Gasset has pointed out that human life is at all times circumstantial;²⁵ each man does what he does—or abstains from doing what he abstains from doing—in view of specific and very concrete circumstances. I agree, but with one important reservation. Ortega y Gasset thought—as did Sartre later—that the body and mind (the character and temperament) of man belonged to the

²⁴ On the difference between repentance and remorse, see Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La mauvaise conscience* (Paris, 1951), pp. 94-107, and especially 94-5.

²⁵ See my book on Ortega y Gasset [Note 20], pp. 26-7, 49.

circumstances of human life, so that man made his choice with, and, if necessary, against his own body and mind. If such were the case, however, the human reality would boil down to pure nothingness. The body and mind of a human individual would never be his own. He would become a disembodied ghostly "chooser." Furthermore, he would be an infinitely plastic and malleable reality. By dint of making every natural reality in him appear as a purely contingent "facticity" (as Sartre puts it), the very human reality would entirely dissolve. By means of depriving man of everything, he would not even be someone who would act with, for or against any circumstances. On the other hand, if we conclude that only man's body and mind constitute man, we again risk making man a thing among other similar things. I will now turn to this difficulty as a preface to my final definition of man.

Some philosophers have tried to determine "who" ultimately man is as distinct from ascertaining "what" he is. A few have said, moreover, that man is his irreducible "authenticity," his "inner call" (Heidegger), his "destiny." And they have added that we may choose to be faithful or not to our "incorruptible core." Theirs is an exquisite and refined doctrine. It is not, however, a very illuminating doctrine. To say that "whoness" (if I may be allowed to use this word) is equivalent to authenticity and nothing else, is to put forward a purely nominal definition of the expression 'oneself.' It is equivalent to saying that one is (at bottom) what one (at bottom) is. No consequences, moral or otherwise, ensue. Some other philosophers have argued that in view of the above difficulty, it is preferable to subscribe to some more traditional definition of man—at any rate, to any formula defining man as a really permanent "someone." But when these philosophers have started defining or describing such supposedly more enduring reality, they have been caught in the trap of all classical substantialist theories. They have been compelled to define man as some kind of "invariable nature"—and often as someone possessing an "intelligible (or rational) core." In other words, they have again defined human reality in terms of such categories as "thing" and "being" which I have taken so many pains to discard.

Is the question at all solvable? The general ontological framework that supports all my philosophical views and that I must again leave unexplained comes to the rescue. In this onto-

logical framework no absolutes—and hence no absolute modes of being—are allowed. Each reality is supposed to bend towards some of the so-called absolutes without ever reaching it. Now, the infinite plasticity and malleability of the human reality, on the one hand, and its invariable and permanent character on the other hand are absolute modes of being. As such, they are only limiting realities describable by means of limiting-concepts. We can talk about them, but only if we are careful enough to allow them a mere quasi-existence. Thus, concrete human reality perpetually oscillates between two ideal poles. Man is not to be defined either as a pure possibility of choice or as a purely invariable entity; he unceasingly rebounds from one end to the other in order to make himself. Human reality is not like an unbordered river. Neither is it comparable to a waterless river-bed. It is not pure nature. Neither is it pure history. It is both, but in a constantly shifting—perhaps I should say, "dialectical"—way.

In some respects I have tried to put traditional metaphysics and modern ontology together. The former insisted on substance; the latter has emphasized function. The former argued in favor of a "rational" or, at least, "intelligible" core of man; the latter has underlined "history," "experience," and "drama." If we now reintroduce the time-honored term 'person' and try to put it to some use, could we not say that the unforeseeable and irretrievable history of the human being is inscribable within the frame of the notion of person? We would not then say that man is a person having a history, but rather a person constituting itself historically. According to the venerable formula, the human person is "an individual substance of a rational character,"²⁶ subsisting thus in its own right and as a communicable reality. Provided that we interpret the term 'substance,' in the light of the preceding considerations, as a self-making reality, we can conclude that man is "an individual substance of a historical character." It is most improbable that my formula will ever become as influential as Boethius'. But perhaps it is because philosophers are nowadays harder to please.

I began with a quotation from Descartes. I may as well end with another—also slightly modified: "I have been plunged into so many doubts by this meditation that it is no longer in my

²⁶ "*Persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia*" (Boethius, *De duabus naturis et una persona Christi*, 3 [PL., 64, col. 1345]).

power to forget them; nor can I see by what means they might be resolved. I am as confused as if I had suddenly fallen into deep water and was able neither to plant my feet on the bottom nor to swim to the surface again."²⁷

²⁷ *Meditationes de prima philosophia*. Meditatio II (AT VII 23-4). The correct original text reads: "In tantas dubitationes hasterna meditatione conjectus sum, ut nequeam amplius earum oblivisci, nec videam tamen qua ratione solvendae sint; sed, tanquam in profundum gurgitis ex improvise delapsus, ita turbatus sum, ut nec possim in imo pedem hgere, nec enatare ad summum."