DESCRIPTION OF THE HUMAN

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Anthropology: Its Legitimacy and Rationality

What was it that we wanted to know in the first place? The unease, which has palpably spread, about the state and outcome of the scientific process is traceable to an anecdotal form of that uncanny question, arising at the end of theoretical efforts extending over centuries. Such is the unexpected metamorphosis of a phrase that truly marked the beginning of philosophy, perhaps the only authentic utterance of that nonwriter Socrates to have come down to us: *I know that I know nothing*. Before that statement, there was no philosophy. Those considered as representative of it, the so-called pre-Socratics, were actually prephilosophers. They represent preliminary stages of what would later be called mathematics, cosmology, physics, or psychology. Socrates's dictum is among the products of a philosophy that surely no one would be prepared to accept today. In view of so imposing a reality as institutionalized science, it is asking rather much of us to confess that we still know that we know nothing. It would take a mystic to do so.

On the contrary, we feel, if anything, the burden of the mass of knowledge, which seems no longer to belong to anyone, which no longer gives anyone a sense of its being the kind of truth that, if augmented somewhat, could set us free. That

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it does procure freedoms there can be no doubt; I call to mind the only truly meaningful change in human behavior in our century, brought about by contraceptives. We know *a great deal*, but we do not know just *how much*. We can determine the ratio of knowledge to not-knowledge only marginally, which is to say, we are most likely to know today what we can only expect to know and perhaps will indeed know tomorrow—although here, too, it is worth remembering that, by definition, what is new tomorrow is not yet known today.[1] The art of knowing what we may soon know and how we might know it (methodological reflection) is finely developed—but it offers only scant assistance in knowing what we do not know or are not even capable of knowing. Least of all does it help us overcome our forgetfulness of what we had wanted to know in the first place, when the effort began. When it comes to such questions, philosophy has no competitors. It is astonishing that it should be losing confidence in and conviction about its function at the very moment when this complex of questions is unfolding before our eyes in its full undeniability. But in dealing with so enduring a matter as that descending from Socrates, one ought not to let oneself be bamboozled by momentary feelings of weakness and melancholy, nor by the concerted encouragement of those who have invented new names for the old thing.

In the midst of the nineteenth century, still untroubled by doubts about science—to be more precise, on August 14, 1872—Emil Du Bois-Reymond, in a lecture titled "The Limits of Our Knowledge of Nature," attempted to define the limitations of all forms of scientific knowledge in terms of a catalog of unsolvable questions, thereby unleashing the notorious "Ignorabimus dispute." Eight years later, in an address to the Berlin Academy of Sciences, titled "The Seven World Problems," he repeated the catalog.[2] Although the Ignorabimus dispute was an important step of a philosophical nature, it did not amount to a philosophical statement. For in his catalog of unsolvable world problems Du Bois-Reymond was unable to define their relation to what the goal had been when scientific understanding was set in motion—what we had actually wanted to know. But what the secretary of the Berlin Academy did at least make clear was that skepticism of a dogmatic type was no longer a possibility. In this case, however, the skeptical general thesis that we were capable of knowing and understanding nothing was replaced by a dogmatic *partial* thesis according to which there were some things that escaped our cognition. We could, for instance, never know what consciousness was and how it might have come into being. The orator gave the impression not of disappointment but rather of science having unburdened itself of so much useless ballast in recognizing unsolvable problems as such. This feeling of liberation is associated with the term *positivism*. The degree, however, of objective

1. Maier-Leibnitz, "Forschung—Luxus oder Lebensfrage?"

2. [Translator's note: Du Bois-Reymond, "Limits of Our Knowledge"; Du Bois-Reymond, "Seven World-Problems."]

unburdening depends on the antecedent question whether the unsolvable matters thus pushed aside are of corresponding superfluity to how we see the world—of whether the solvable questions that remain can meaningfully contribute to our orientation within the world.

But what is questionable above all is Du Bois-Reymond's *process*, whereby unknowability is classified in such a way as to produce a catalog of clearly defined problems that may henceforth be set aside because they must. What is far more important is the realization that unknowingness appears *in the midst of* knowledge, as its constant companion. Bertrand Russell explains this state of affairs: "Given some statement in a language of which we know the grammar and the syntax, but not the vocabulary, what are the possible meanings of such a statement, and what are the meanings of the unknown words that would make it true?"[3] This paradigm depicts in what the entanglement of knowledge and unknowingness in our knowledge of nature consists. What is astonishing about our theoretical situation is that we know of certain scientific propositions—at least such as are expressed mathematically—that they say something about the world to the extent that they enable us to predict or effect certain states of affairs. Our difficulty consists in our inability fully to understand some expressions within these propositions even though we are nearly certain that they do possess a meaning. We are able to compare differing conditions and relate them to and derive them from one another, but we cannot sufficiently indicate what elements constitute a given state. Thus we are able in the midst of our knowledge to localize the places at which our unknowingness resides and thereby state what potential achievements we may have to renounce. The philosophical maxim is not to know that one knows nothing but rather to know what one does not know. To set these boundaries very liberally is what brings positivism into disrepute among those who would have the natural sciences in particular submit to premature acts of renunciation.

Now, I would say it is possible, with a clear philosophical conscience, to make the following proposition in this context: *To prefer positivism means living impoverished; to abandon it means living dangerously.* Such points are at stake in the relationship between philosophy and the sciences. Philosophy cannot alter the epistemic situation. It is neither a science like others nor a superscience for the critique of others. In some respects, it is what accountants might call a "memorandum entry." Philosophy preserves questions that are posed—and with good and legitimate reason—neither in a discipline of institutionalized science nor in communication that is supposedly interdisciplinary. For there can be no doubt that such questions obstruct the theoretical process in science, though the answers that have been given to such questions obstruct it even more. Recall to what degree *vitalism*, which pretended to circumscribe the remit of physics and chemistry, impeded

3. Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, 55.

such fields as genetics and embryology. The function of philosophy resides neither *prior to*, nor *above*, nor *between* the sciences; if anything, it is situated *after* the sciences. Assuming that the scientific process will never reach a termination, this position can only ever be provisional. The grand illusions of philosophy's interdisciplinary and supradisciplinary role have always been brought down to earth quickly: it is pleasant to consider the satisfaction of the *spectator*, who in the Middle Ages was identified with the supreme happiness of beatific contemplation in the hereafter, or of the function of the *arbiter*, who is capable of turning an intermediary science into a suprascience, whether as an arbiter of language or of traffic, a judge of morals or of fashion—or, in more modern terms, as a trend setter or opinion leader. These are all short-lived pleasures, pleasures of anticipation rather than celebration, of Advent rather than Christmas.

The philosophical attitude framed thus is expressed in the questions *What was it that we had wanted to know?* and *What is it that we can know?* and *What shall we do when we have renounced or may yet have to renounce knowledge?* I suppose that this philosophical interest will also be decisive when we turn to that assemblage of approaches and endeavors known by the name of philosophical anthropology.

A philosophical anthropology will never be a science to stand, in its own right, as an equal among other disciplines. Nor, to be honest, will it ever be an interdisciplinary institution able to synthesize the findings of many other sciences on, as it were, a higher plane and to bring them together in new configurations. It is perhaps best defined by bearing in mind the classic and fundamental philosophical question *What is the human?*—not, however, primarily in the sense of placing or awakening hope in the possibility of that question ever being answered, but rather in asking, with a view to that formula: What was it that we wanted to know? And what can it be that we might learn?

Were one to take judgments as the point of departure—as critics of science always claim but have hardly ever convincingly demonstrated—then an anthropology, whatever its origins, would be the most important and pressing desideratum. About what should humans claim to know something if not themselves? No interest could be more urgent. In July 1868, Wilhelm Dilthey wrote to Herman Grimm, Bettina Brentano's son-in-law, that his studies in the physiology of nerves had suggested to him the plan of a lecture course in anthropology, "although it must always remain a daring exercise." Why, then, was the exercise nonetheless to be dared? On the subject of the lecture course in anthropology, Dilthey continued: "If, however, it should come off even passably well, then it would in itself secure a profound influence on the students to their own true advantage."[4] One would fain make such words one's own. But who would dare

4. [Translator's note: Blumenberg is mistaken here. The letter is addressed to Wilhelm Scherer, not Herman Grimm, the addressee of the subsequent letter as published in Dilthey's collected works. See Dilthey, *Briefwechsel*, 468.]

to do so after a century's worth of "philosophical anthropologies"? What has remained under that heading is a questionable discipline of philosophy and an even more questionable science. Can it exist? Or even: *Ought it to exist?* Such a question is altogether new: Ought not everything that *can* exist in the field of theory do so? To turn the question around: Can what is possible even be prevented? Assuming an anthropology to be possible, might one prefer to *ignore* it? Does it not always already exist, as hermeneutics would have it?

There is no shortage of objections that, regardless of its possibility, would assert the *dangerousness* of such a theory—always assuming, of course, that such a theory would at least pretend to offer incontrovertible truths about humanity and, if successful, would promote the unchangeability of the human in its present state as a scientific defense against all expectations and demands that humans should change, or let themselves be changed, or be changed by those who know of a "new human being." Rallying to the axiom *esse sequitur agere* [being follows action], the philosophers of existence had already proclaimed that the human becomes what it is only through itself—a premise even more radical than that postulating its changeability as an environmental variable, as a socially determined quantity. The more certain the substantial invariance of human beings, the smaller their disposability, dependency on the world, sociability. But even irrespective of criteria of judgment and moral critique, anthropology faces inherent theoretical difficulties—not only insofar as it claims to be a *scientific* discipline, but perhaps all the more so insofar as it aspires to be a *philosophical* one.

The reasons for these theoretical difficulties deserve to be taken very seriously indeed. They provide justification either for anthropology to be expressly and resolutely excluded from the circle of philosophical subjects or, alternatively, for its existence and validity to be made dependent on another philosophical discipline, meaning that one can only ever be actualized at the cost of renouncing the other. Even the merely historical question of when a philosophical anthropology first arose has given rise to *mutually exclusive* answers: one holding that such a thing had existed *from the very beginnings* of philosophy and beyond, human beings having never been able to forgo inquiry into their own nature—and the other asserting that philosophical anthropology was an *invention of the recent present*. In that respect, it most nearly approximated an expression of philosophy's search for a new core subject to replace those lost to it through psychology and sociology, or indeed those it denied itself in consequence of the decline of epistemology and ontology.

More importantly, however, there appears to be a relationship of mutual exclusion between anthropology and the philosophy of history—understanding which requires no appeal to historical or recently fashionable authority. It will be imputed to anthropology, from the outset and with no hesitation, that it aims to

arrive at claims that apply to the human at every stage of development and under all conditions of human self-fulfillment. These are claims of the kind that are often known in philosophy as "statements of essence" [*Wesensaussagen*]. It is obvious that an essential claim not only encompasses what is possible with a particular thing, what can be done with it, but *eo ipso* also what constitutes the limits of the thing's capacity for change. A philosophical anthropology would then, to whatever degree, amount not least to a fixed definition of the human in a particular given status, a horizon of its capacity to have history and to make history with itself—in other words, a determination of constants. This procedure is not so peculiarly philosophical: no science can ever work rationally without introducing and defining constants.

If we assume that a determination of constants was the intention and then also the possible triumph of philosophical anthropology, it would at the same time be necessary to say that this anthropological triumph entailed a *defeat of the philosophy of history* in all its possible varieties. For history can be a worthy subject only to the extent that "essential" matters are not simply stumbled on in history but actually *occur* in history. An "essential" event, however, is one that involves a relatively large degree of change to a given condition. Rates of change play a part in our ability to perceive what we are prepared to call history: a Stone Age historian is hard to imagine, given the overwhelmingly *static* nature of conditions at that time. Above all, however, since "making history" appears possible and tangible to all, what is made must be satisfyingly striking—or so the philosophy of history assures us. The philosophy of history, therefore, cannot avoid describing the processes and structures of changes to the human condition, at least insofar as they are not purely factual and thus the business of historians themselves. A philosophy of history concerned with progress, for instance, in spite of the continuity in historical processes that it assumes, would be barely worth pursuing if it did not allow for such progress *essentially* to change the conditions under which the human can reveal and realize itself. It would be expecting too little for such progress to mean no more than the Old Adam constantly appearing in new characters and vehicles.

Thus every philosophy of history, according to its immanent logic, tends to ascribe to the human the largest capacity for historical change and, simultaneously, the smallest burden of fixed essentiality (or constancy of potential). Naturally, this generalization applies in the highest degree to philosophies that prefer to conceive of history in terms of *discontinuity*—in terms that describe or program the essential events of history as revolutions.

Although it may originally have been an interest in *variants* of human appearance—of the kind produced by climate, temperament, race, character, sex, or age, tending toward anthropology and giving rise, in an earlier form, to moralistic writing—there can be no theory of *variants* that does not serve to promote

the theory of *constants*. Yet from the perspective of the philosophy of history, constants are merely forces of inertia and resistance to the historical importunities of change. These forces may only ever work externally and incidentally, but they strictly preclude the kind of thinking that entertains the idea of a "new man."

It no longer requires historical proof that the appearance over time of anthropologies (or equivalent thematic interests going by other names) is occasioned by *disaffection* with one or another distinct philosophy of history (or, again, a conception of human possibilities equivalent to it). Anthropology appears as the rejection of the philosophy of history, while the philosophy of history appears, at least by implication, to curtail the possibilities of anthropology. These alternations need not be separated by world-encompassing time spans. By way of cursory evidence, I might mention that Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, in the introduction to their jointly produced *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947; reissued 1969), wrote that the notes and drafts contained in the concluding section of the book, in which they hoped to "offer advance summaries of problems to be treated in forthcoming works," were mostly "concerned with a dialectical anthropology"[5]—a feasible anthropology, even though dialectical. This assertion brings to mind the fierce aversion that Adorno later voiced against any form of anthropology. In *Negative Dialectics* (1966), he writes:

> We cannot say what man is. Man today is a function, unfree, regressing behind whatever is ascribed to him as invariant—except perhaps for the defenselessness and neediness in which some anthropologies wallow. He drags along with him as his social heritage the mutilations inflicted upon him over thousands of years. To decipher the human essence by the way it is now would sabotage its possibility. . . . The more concrete the form in which anthropology appears, the more deceptive will it come to be, and the more indifferent to whatever in man is not at all due to him, as the subject, but to the de-subjectifying process that has paralleled the historic subject formation since time immemorial. That man is "open" is an empty thesis, advanced—rarely without an invidious side glance at the animal—by an anthropology that has "arrived." It is a thesis that would pass off its own indefiniteness, its *fallissement*, as its definite and positive side. . . . That we cannot tell what man is does not establish a peculiarly majestic anthropology; it vetoes any anthropology.[6]

This veto is unlike the relation of mutual obstruction or exclusion that obtains between anthropology and epistemology. The latter tends to define the demands made on knowledge with reference to every one of its possible objects or to the necessary minimal structure of *any conceivable* subject of knowledge. Only thus might a theory of knowledge emerge that does more than "merely" describe

5. [Translator's note: Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvii.]

6. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 124.

the human as a factual terrestrial life-form, with its capacities and conditions for having objects. The advantage of so comprehensive a theory of knowledge, encompassing all rational creatures, once lay in its potential applicability to such metaphysical beings as God, angels, demons, and other spirits, its capacity for determining the necessary commonality of their modes of knowing and thus of their own particular truths. And commonality of truths is the precondition for that *minimal consensus* that must, after all, obtain between oneself and the devil if he is to stand any chance of tempting one. Since the eighteenth century, however—since the Enlightenment—reason has come under the influence of another force of plurality: the question, made unavoidable by the assumption of a plurality of inhabited worlds, of what terms of connection and comparison might even apply between rational beings across the universe. Today, we have numerous developed theories about the communication of rational beings—theories that operate on the strict assumption that their experiential worlds and their means of making themselves understood are minimal. Again, reason is placed under the postulate of functioning in any possible world, which, in turn, gives rise to such basic questions as: How could an astronaut, engaged in the empirical observation of living beings in strange worlds, conclude even that they were endowed with reason and *capable* of communication without first raising the question of the *technicalities* of communication?[7] If the universe should harbor even the least possibility of the existence of rational beings, it would be problematic to tie discussions of the potentialities of reason and its capacity for communication to the *contingent* fact of the human—even if we had no choice but to use this example to examine such possibilities.[8]

It seems a cogent tenet of our scientific reason that to ascribe life and reason *only* to Earth was one of the last variants of the old prejudice in favor of the central role of the human in the universe. But to mention *life* and *reason* in one breath reveals an even subtler prejudice, which holds that the existence of life in the universe must entail, at the peak of its respective developmental processes, the attainment of reason. Now, it is both my claim and my objection that this assumption contains the anthropological *implication*, accepted without examination, that reason is a natural step in the development of organic systems. Yet surely it remains possible, even if purely as a thought experiment, to regard reason as a false turn in organic development. Reason may be a sleight of hand or emergency fix on the part of organic systems whose development has brought them to a virtual impasse—to a situation so precarious and desperate that only by developing plastic compensations of the type grouped under the name of "reason" could they survive in the struggle for existence. Survival would in turn allow the

7. Consider the aluminum plate designed by Linda Sagan and attached to NASA's Pioneer 10 space probe, or the Leibniz languages and proto-logic.

8. See Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 314n1, 315n6.

achievements of reason, which at first were purely compensatory, to take on a life of their own. What initially succeeded only as compensation might indeed later, in taking on a life of its own, have become capable of the most sublime cultural achievements.

What we encounter here is a most curious reversal of the burden of proof and the sequence of argument: anthropology turns out to be antecedent to the epistemological problem of whether reason—even in other worlds—is a "natural" acquisition of living beings in the course of their developmental processes. Only then would we be entitled to assume that such beings might in the same manner experience their cosmic environment and contemplate the possibility of sharing the cosmos with other beings endowed with reason like themselves. Moreover, we implicitly assume them to be so interested in communicating with beings like them that, like us, they would be willing to go to the immense effort needed to establish "extraterrestrial communication." Herein lies the true anthropomorphism of theories of astrocommunication: the curiosity of contemporary Europeans is declared an essential of reason, though reason may just as well be conceived of as complacent, introverted, and self-fulfilled. What otherwise would be the purpose of scanning outer space with strong receivers in the hope of finding signals conveying an improbable sort of information whose character as information would be self-evident even before we understood its content?

I would argue that anthropology can become a discipline enjoying the freedom from prejudice we associate with philosophy only to the extent that anthropologists are willing to entertain, as *equally valid* to its opposite, the proposition that the human being is not the corollary of organic evolution but merely the correction—awkward, laborious, and, within this evolution, altogether heterogeneous—of difficulties in and impediments to adaptation. Only then does the post-Copernican freedom from prejudice begin truly to take on its burden of proof—only when reason (even presuming the moderate improbability that *life* is a widespread occurrence in the universe) remains an utmost improbability among the normal means of self-assertion available to organic systems. I do not intend any particular distinction by pointing out that the emergence of reason, as a desperate last resort of organic evolution at a specific point, may also be an event unique in the universe. Any distinction would already be eliminated by the explanation of human evolution in terms of a makeshift for mere self-preservation. Moreover, the extremely episodic nature of human existence, measured against world-time, would also serve to render human singularity in the universe meaningless. What counts in the expectation of contacts with stellar intelligences is the claim, not of their uniqueness, but merely of their extreme improbability. For such contacts, given the time it takes signals to travel, would be significant only in the neighborhood of our solar system, which is to say in a very small portion of a universe that may well be traversed by signals sent out before the human

episode and destined not to reach Earth before human beings had perished from it. For the time being, my concern is merely to qualify one blithe assumption, which has existed since the age of Enlightenment. Having forgone the eminence of the human being as a special achievement of creation, we then immediately deduced the existence of similar (if perhaps more perfect and reasonable) beings in the universe as a self-evident conclusion from the destruction of that particular theological doctrine.

Anthropology developed not only against the philosophy of history but also *against the Enlightenment* of the eighteenth century. Anthropology did not promote an awareness of equality, since it was from the search for variants and the conditions under which they arose that the discipline emerged. Given the paradigm of intelligent life in outer space, this point is made only stronger. For if the universe is ubiquitously settled by rational and possibly superior beings, the traits and features that make the human capable of description become largely irrelevant. What is contingent about human nature becomes almost incidental, particularly in its moral aspects. For the interest in rational beings elsewhere in the universe was driven especially by a way of thinking comparable to the one by which discoveries of exotic peoples played out, with the moral standards of European culture losing their self-evidence in the process. It seemed, indeed, more likely that outer space was home to rational beings more highly developed, or at least less corrupt, than those one might encounter face-to-face.

The nineteenth century destroyed the conditions of the belief that remote worlds were bound to be more advanced. Its destruction resulted from the connection between the idea of development and its driving force, the struggle for existence. If one makes the human the preliminary outcome of creatures' struggle for the preservation of themselves and their species, then one must assume that each higher step of development, as long as it is based on organic life (and what other base should it have?), likewise developed through the struggle for existence. This assumption, however, reduces the likelihood that beings on other planets are significantly superior to humans. For whoever and whatever they might be, they owe it to the toughness of the conditions against whose pressure of selection they have asserted themselves. On distant planets too, the development of organic systems will not tend to favor the qualities we would wistfully recognize and desire as superior to our own. There again, evolution would depend on and result precisely in (or something functionally equivalent to) what makes us miserable about our own species: the will to self-assertion, the fascination of the stronger in selecting a mate, rivalry over space and rank in the lifeworld. If it is unlikely that the evolutionary mechanisms of organic systems—assuming such to exist anywhere else in the universe—should function by means other than the selective adaptations familiar to us, then there too evolution, understood as the increasing complexity of achievements, would come at the price of endangering the emer-

gence of moral-like norms, to the extent that such norms are always based on balancing the claims to life of all those involved (which is to say, on suspending selection). The existence of such subtle refinements of the struggle for existence as cold-blooded envy and intellectual aggression may make matters physically easier, but it creates new forms of insufferableness, as anyone alive today knows.

Anthropology, in its early nineteenth-century association with Romanticism, turned against belief in the universality of the Enlightenment concept of reason, which is another way of saying that anthropology and epistemology are mutually exclusive. After all, no anthropology seeks to understand an achievement so general that it might occur in any possible world, as Leibniz's definition of reason would require. What anthropology seeks to understand is rather the peculiar limitation and limitedness of reason under *local* conditions, under conditions of *this* physical nature and *this* sensory apparatus—or even reason as a complement to these conditions and this organic structure. But it is inevitable that this project should come at the expense of the rigor of epistemology, given that a theory of knowledge seeks to understand the relation of any possible kind of object to any possible kind of subject under conditions of necessity. . . .

The questionable aspect of philosophical anthropology consists not only in that it can be and has been suspected of taking the presumption of "human nature" as a pretext for willfully enshrining the current de facto condition of humanity. An imputation of that sort, from the perspective of the critique of ideology, is impossible to avoid in virtually any theoretical undertaking. It is probably due to the inevitability of such accusations that the guilty feelings incurred have become a modern substitute for sin, with offers of salvation never far behind. That questionable aspect of philosophical anthropology consists—and this is all the more nagging and immanently harder to bear—simply in that, with this discipline, nobody seems to know quite what ought to be asked or indeed can be asked. Anthropology, young though it may be in the broader scheme of the history of modern science, finds itself very much in the position of having to ask itself or to be asked: What was it that we wanted to know in the first place?

This diagnosis bodes ill but must be kept in perspective, for it largely conforms to the normal situation of philosophy. Over the long term, philosophical thought has made infinitely greater efforts to frame questions than to answer them. Often, however, the questions have had to be retrofitted to the answers, since there are always statements, theses, and axioms for which it can be established only retrospectively what questions they were supposed to answer—and this circumstance may come to light only when the preceding answer has already become obsolete. The history of philosophy shows that only in retrospect, after an arduous search for the difficulty they were supposed to overcome, do dicta and systems become answers to questions that were unfamiliar until their solutions became known.

Nowhere is this peculiarity more apparent than in the disciplines that, formerly intermingled in the fold of philosophy, have struck out to define their own autonomous areas of inquiry. These disciplines have been more successful than philosophy in answering questions that have arisen because they learned, from the failures of philosophy, how to pose them in so economical a manner as to make their capacity to be answered a part of their framing. But this circumstance in turn has given rise to the accusation brought by philosophy against its offshoots that they failed to answer the original grand old question. This accusation indeed seems to me to be one of the most important functions of philosophy: to object that the sum of scientific answers does not amount to an answer to the question as it was originally put.

Disciplines that today go by the name of a particular kind of anthropology (cultural anthropology, medical anthropology, pedagogical anthropology) or dispense with such qualifications and wear quite different badges (psychology, sociology, ethnography, ethology, genetics, and so forth) would all be unthinkable without an array of potential questions, provided by philosophy, that preceded them. This factor, however, does not in itself make a case for philosophy. It may just as well be taken to mean that philosophy was justly devoured by its own children.

Furthermore, the context from which emerged both the array of potential questions and the methodical regulation of admissible and possible answers may indeed be reconstructed, with the benefit of hindsight, for philosophy itself. After all, philosophy has always claimed to raise and address questions that were already intrinsic to and tacitly present in either human nature or the human lifeworld. Philosophy, then, merely lifted these questions out of their wordless prehistory, merely stated the intractable concerns of humanity. It is therefore indispensable for philosophical work to treat the history of philosophy as a diachronic guide to the genetic connections that apply synchronously between the everyday lifeworld, on the one hand, and the world of scientific institutions and artifacts, on the other. For this connection seems increasingly to recede from view, while the final stage of the formation of scientificity appears to be characterized by its questions losing touch with the lifeworld, which would make them pure artifacts of the immanent operation of a theory that just cannot leave well enough alone.

Applied to the status of a possible or an actual anthropology, the foregoing arguments result in the following conclusions:

1. None of the philosophical disciplines poses so uncontested and unambiguous a query as the lapidary question "What is the human?"
2. Straightforward though it is, the question of what the human might be is neither so ancient nor so congruent with the overall history of philosophy as the uncontested grip of the problem would suggest. For all that the term

can be found in Aristotle and other classical authors, the concept of an anthropology as denoting a discipline or even a question in its own right makes its first appearance in the orthodox philosophy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its task was to specify the province of *psychologia*, which had become too general by including animals.

3. None of the modern scientific disciplines to have emerged from philosophy has made the question "What is the human?" fully its own as its proper and specific problem. The yield of all disciplines that concern themselves with the forms in which the human is manifest amounts to less than could be called an answer to the philosophical question.
4. Nonetheless, it cannot be pretended that philosophy can look its successor disciplines in the face, accept the burden of proof, and claim to know what it means to ask "What is the human?" Nor indeed can philosophy expect to find an answer that it might deem satisfactory. It never found one in the past, does not expect one now, and has never worried about it.

It might well be objected that the basic question of any philosophical anthropology has already been canonized, with respect to classification and content, by Kant's celebrated catalog of philosophical questions, contained in his lectures on logic. But Kant's is not an exhaustive catalog of the problems falling within the remit of philosophy as a discipline. On the contrary, Kant's contrasting a "cosmopolitan" concept of philosophy with a "scholastic" one not only eased the conditions of methodical rigor and self-evidence to which a philosophy would have to submit, it resulted in a concept of philosophy that can be called humane. That philosophy is "the science of the relation of all cognition and of all use of reason to the ultimate end of human reason, to which, as the highest, all other ends are subordinated, and in which they must all unite to form a unity."[9]

From this cosmopolitan concept of philosophy are derived the familiar four questions, in this order: "(1) What can I know? (2) What ought I to do? (3) What may I hope? (4) What is man?" To these questions are assigned four correlate disciplines, the fourth of which, at any rate, is not an unambiguously philosophical one: (1) metaphysics, (2) morals, (3) religion, (4) anthropology. According to Kant's definition, these questions ought not only to feature in any "cosmopolitan philosophy" or obtain this particular sequence from being cosmopolitan, they "must" also "all unite to form a unity" within it. Kant adheres to this prescription, contained in the cosmopolitan concept of philosophy, by adding to his catalog a sentence, duly recognized as important in the literature: "Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one." Still, this addendum is problematic and far trickier than it seems. Of course it is correct to say that the basic epistemological ques-

9. Kant, *Logic*, 538 (A 25).

tion of what we can know not only has the purpose of delimiting the scope of our knowledge and establishing that it is secure but also contributes something to the self-enlightenment and self-understanding of those who know themselves to be capable of it. But that aspect is only one of several concerned with how the four questions relate to one another. It is no less correct to say that any answer to the question "What is man?" would have to contribute meaningfully to addressing the other three questions of the catalog.

Here, however, Kant displays a hesitancy found in all transcendental forms of epistemology. After all, reason, whose laws are at stake, is meant not exclusively or even primarily to be *human* reason, since every transcendental insight into the structure of cognition is supposed to be valid in every world and for every subject. In Kant's practical philosophy, too, the generality of the concept of law, which must be one of pure reason if it is equally and mutually to bind all partners in the realm of moral intelligences, blocks any access from the side of anthropology. The upshot of a morality based on practical reason is—as always, when theoretical and doctrinal positions are refined to the highest degree of purity—a *para-ethics*, that is, a moralistics of pragmatic devices by following which it is possible, under the conditions of the world, *nevertheless to survive*. Which is largely what Kant meant by "Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View." Were I asked what Kant's succinct answer to the question "What is man?" might have been, my reply would be seemingly glib: "Man is a cut-rate, popular epitome of reason."

But that is not the answer Kant gave, and it is possible that he did not have an answer, succinct or otherwise, when he made his fourth question ("What is man?") the principle of unity in cosmopolitan philosophy. The problem is not only a historical issue for the interpretation of Kant. It is dubious whether the question "What is man?" could ever lead to a sufficient foundation and summation of the discipline of philosophical anthropology. Asking it may lead to nothing but difficulties. Is it altogether certain that the question will lead to statements, whether true or false, that are clearly related to it as answers? Further, do we even understand what the question demands? Understanding the question entails keeping it within a margin of expectations as to the type of answer. What kind of answer does one expect when posing this question?

The lapidary style of the question "What is man?" obscures the quandary we face when trying to state what it is we wish to learn by means of it. Of course, this manner of questioning—the posing of a metaquestion—could arise only at a very late stage, once the question "What is man?" had already been asked for a suitably long time. But what was it that one had wanted to know? What answer would have been satisfactory? In such a quandary, it is methodically advisable to imagine a profound questioner confronted with an unreflecting respondent. Anyone observing philosophical discussions will soon realize the gains to be made

by the unreflecting respondent in such situations, and how painfully slow the profound questioner appears when returning to his line. I would ask readers to picture the following dialogue:

Profound questioner: What is man?

Unreflecting respondent: There's one right there.

Profound questioner: But is that one like me?

Unreflecting respondent: They're all like you.

Profound questioner: Perhaps everyone is someone else.

Unreflecting respondent: Everyone is different.

Profound questioner: How do you know what everyone is?

At the core of this dialogue lies the objection that it provokes: Why should one ask what the human is when one is oneself human? We have this point of departure for no other subject. Knowledge of the answer ought to be the most securely held of all things known—so much so that we might assume that someone asking "What is man?" no more wants an answer than did Pilate to his query "What is truth?" In the present case, no answer is needed. But the identity of the questioner with the object of his question seems less self-evident than the boundary case that Descartes constructed for himself at the outset of the modern age: those asking about what is absolutely certain can be absolutely certain that, by asking the question, they demonstrate their existence to themselves. But this identity of consciousness and the content of consciousness goes no further, or at least not much further. We are not the contents of our consciousness beyond the single datum that we exist insofar as we have consciousness at all.

What is meant by the question "What is man?" must lie outside the immediate contents of our consciousness. For what must surely be meant is an answer in which the essence of the human or at least something essential about humanity would be stated, thereby excluding the "demonstrative" answer associated with the mere act of pointing. In an elementary situation, one in which the person asking the question reveals him or herself to be completely unfamiliar with something, it is sufficient to answer the question "What is that?" by pointing at it while stating its name. That is the usual way of answering children's questions, but it likewise applies to a piece of music one has just heard or an object in a museum that is missing a label. Such situations are characterized by the reversibility of the question. Consider the following sequence: *What is that? Answer: a human. What is a human? Answer: that to which I just referred by that name.* This reversibility depends on the repetition of the indefinite article: *a* human. The question ceases

to be reversible as soon as the definite article is used: "What is *the* human?"[10] Once that question has been put, it can no longer be answered with reference to something at which one has just pointed. By the grace of language, by the magnificent invention of the article, the demand has become one for the utmost rigor and precision. It calls for strict economy, which by exclusion means: for the purpose of definition.

A definition is above all an act of establishing difference. Its purpose is to ensure that one thing cannot be mistaken for another. Its economy is determined by the necessity of stating those features—and those features alone, but in full—that are necessary to the distinction of one thing from others. It is for this reason that the bulk of the philosophical efforts retrospectively grouped together under the heading of "anthropology" were dedicated to producing an inventory of the differences between *the* human and *the* animal.

The capacity of the basic anthropological question to be answered would then depend on the answer to another question: Can the human be defined? To which it might be countered by yet another question: Is it important to have or to obtain a definition? What would it cost to admit that a definition neither exists nor lies within reach? The implications of the answers to these queries carry far beyond the boundary of philosophy. When Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) pitched his system of the absolutist state against the age of religious and civil wars, he expressly endowed it with one of the most important perfections of power conceivable: the power of definition. In chapter 17 of *On the Citizen* (*De cive*, Paris, 1642), Hobbes invests the state with the power to make definitions in decisions over cases of doubt likely to have practical consequences. Even theoretical errors (*errores circa philosophica*) may sometimes harm the state, leading to rebellions and lawbreaking. For that reason, the principle to be applied was: "Whenever, then, a controversy arises about these matters which threatens the common good and social peace, there must be someone to give a judgement of the reasoning, i.e. whether the inference is good or not, so that the controversy may be stopped." This principle applied also in cases of controversy arising over precise and actual meanings, that is, the definition of names or appellations in common use. The decision, to the extent that one is needed in the interest of public peace or in order to uphold the law, is rightfully the state's. In the terms of our own day, we might say that the authority of the state to decide in matters of a theoretical nature is a question of "social relevance."

Hobbes has an example to hand: "Suppose a woman gives birth to a deformed figure, and the law forbids killing a human being, the question arises whether the new-born is a human being. The question then is, what is a human being?" This matter is for the state to decide, "and without taking account of the Aristo-

10. [Translator's note: The phrasing of the question as "What is man?" was retained while Kant was under discussion. Since the definitive article becomes crucial here, it marks a convenient point for returning to "the human."]

telian definition, that a Man is a rational Animal." In order to keep theological and sectarian conflict out of these affairs, Hobbes expressly assures his readers that "law, politics and the natural sciences" are subjects "on which Christ says that it was not his business to give instruction or to teach anything but this one thing, that in all disputes on these topics individual citizens should obey the laws and decisions of their commonwealth."[11] This outlook is consummate absolutism, founded on the contract by which individuals uncertain of survival and self-preservation in the state of nature make their submission. And the contract of submission is described as a process of delegation, of ceding responsibilities, including the responsibility of philosophizing autonomously—of making use of reason in this liminal space of the power to make definitions.

Hobbes does not even grant the skeptical assumption that we have no way of knowing what a human is and where, in the case at hand, to draw the line between a human infant and what, in the parlance of the time, would have been called a monster. He does not claim that the Aristotelian definition is erroneous or controversial. He leaves the matter at this point: even the surest self-evidence of this definition would change nothing about the state's power to make definitions, which is framed in altogether voluntaristic terms and which, in this function, serves no purpose other than to fill the gap left by divine revelation. It must be recalled, Hobbes writes, that "as God Christ could rightly have commanded as well as taught, whatever he wished." But the key point is that God had not wished to do so in this regard and had proclaimed his will in only a single respect—namely, that citizens in all their disputes were subject to the authority of the state.

This complex included the fundamental question of anthropology. Anyone wishing to form an idea of its significance can do so with great precision by reading an essay, "Rechtsfähigkeit des Menschen, metaphysische Embryologie und politische Psychiatrie" ("Human Legal Capacity, Metaphysical Embryology, and Political Psychiatry"), published in 1957 by the Marburg philosopher Julius Ebbinghaus.[12] Of course, the old Section 218 of the German criminal code [prohibiting abortion] also contained a definition of the human being—one that avoided excessively straightforward answers by not *equating* the killing of an embryo with killing a person of legal capacity, which would have been the consequence of a definition so comprehensive that it would have bestowed recognition as human life on even the very earliest stage of the embryo's development. But the legislative authority avoided demonstrating its power to make definitions inasmuch as it made no further use of this anthropological competency, apart from setting delivery [of a human infant] as the beginning of legal capacity. There can be no doubt that any step further into this territory would be a step closer to Hobbesian

11. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 215.

12. Ebbinghaus, "Rechtsfähigkeit des Menschen."

absolutism—to granting the state authority to decide what is a human being and by what criteria to decide *what is not yet*, or *already is*, or *no longer is* a human being.

At this point, the questions of anthropology touch directly on those of political philosophy. Even for Hobbes, the absolute power of the state is founded on an act of submission, an original contract—on the principle of delegating what the individual does not feel capable of dealing with on his or her own. Accordingly, these are cases not only of relief from a burden [*Entlastung*], as some modern anthropologists would have it, but also of acute risk to self-preservation, in which the human delegates its primal authority to institutions. The state takes over, above all, the tasks of self-defense and territorial security from the organic system. The state is not the essence of its citizens but the quintessence of delegation. Much confusion in criticism of the state arises from citizens wanting to see in the sovereign not so much *ruler* as *representative*. Why else the tolerance of state profligacy? Although we must not overlook that an identity as a representative is generated rarely, episodically, and fleetingly—for instance, by means of a general election. This situation would be altogether outrageous were it not that anthropogenesis was founded on the principle of delegation to institutions. The anthropological root of the state is the human capacity for delegation as a remolding of *actio per distans*. The *actio per distans* that constitutes the origin of the state is unique as a case in which individuals may take action, even against themselves, on the premise that they thereby protect their general interests from their subjective ones.

The human is the animal that wants to do it all but therefore must delegate as much as possible—only soon to regret that it cannot do more on its own. The quintessence of delegation is the state, and the citizen's regret about delegation is the wellspring of utopias. The question that arises here is whether something can be delegated that does not fall within the authority of the delegator. Should we be (probably? perhaps?) fundamentally unable to answer the question of what the human is, we would be in no position to delegate its resolution now or, even implicitly, in the past. It is not a mere theological platitude to say that we do not know *what a human being* is, or *when it is not yet human* and *when no longer so*, or *who is not yet human* and *who no longer*; it is also a result of rational reflection. This judgment, this definitional power, accordingly can never have been delegated; not to anyone. What cannot be delegated lies within no one's authority. Hence only I myself can declare myself a nonperson by extinguishing myself, and so the right to force a failed suicide to live can never have been delegated to anyone. This supposedly beneficial act [of prevention] is based on the assumption that people who attempt suicide must be insane—incompetent with regard to themselves and thus unauthorized to render themselves nonpersons. Placing limits on what can be delegated serves a protective function in the face of claims to discharge delegated functions or to allow them to be discharged.

Hobbes argued that not even Aristotle's definition of the human being as a rational animal could limit the state in its power to define who or what was human and who or what was not. Still, Hobbes obviously supposes Aristotle's definition to be generally recognized, established, and philosophically uncontroversial; the situation was thus far more straightforward for him than it is for us. Hobbes was not making a nominalist's or even a skeptic's confession of inadequacy, such as would have mandated decisionism with respect to all essential questions. It was moreover unnecessary to assume the incapacity of the rational subject to make decisions.

Aristotle's definition does not make matters as easy for us, since in the meantime it has dawned on us (at least in theory) that a definition of that kind is not only too weak to address pragmatic implications, it also and indeed to a greater extent is a dead end when it comes to developing the *theory* of the human being. The trait of rationality, which it adduces as a specific difference, is an *accessory* to the organism—attached to and executed by the organism as though the organism as a whole were the organ of rationality. The theoretical fault lies in the impossibility of explaining the trait of rationality in terms of its organism alone, which *would* be possible *if* the organism had differentiated itself into this trait. The metaphorics of the organism is of a tool serving a power that is attached or indwelling but heterogeneous to itself, whatever it may be called and whatever kind of union with the organism it may enter into. The trait of rationality stands in a soluble and, where its function is concerned, questionable relation to the body as its instrument.

In other words: the classic definition of the human being as a rational animal does not oblige theory to conceive of rationality as an achievement necessary and integral to this animal in particular, nor to do so based on the conditions of its existence. That conception would be possible only if reason were proved to be the minimum condition for the self-preservation of this organic system—this body of the human *eidos*. The classic definition is not only anthropologically meaningless, it positively prevents anthropology. By indissolubly linking the definition to the traditional concept of substance, it encouraged the misapprehension that reaching a definition would conclude the process of cognition with respect to the fundamental question of what the human is. There would then be no more scope for further questions, save for those already left to specialized disciplines such as medicine.

It is no coincidence that the renewal of philosophical anthropology in the 1920s began with Max Scheler's dictum, conventionally possible only as a paradox, that "*indefinability* belongs to the essence of mankind."[13] Now, however, in view of the pragmatic or indeed political consequences of placing in the hands

13. Scheler, "On the Idea of Man," 192.

of others the supposed definability of the human, we are able to understand the true significance of Scheler's dictum that the human was indefinable, not only because of inadequacy but also because of its essential structure. This dictum is not an unambiguous gift, for it contains the existentialist conception that Man defined himself by realizing his existence. From a theoretical perspective, however, the indefinability claimed by Scheler amounts to a license for us to consider other means of settling the question of what the human is, including abandonment of the question altogether. Doing so might mean, for instance, replacing the question by another that modifies it—a transcendental question, such as *How is the human possible?* Such a question implies that human existence is not obvious or necessary, and that a change to this state of affairs is not inconceivable. Modifying the question can be a means, at first and at least, of approaching the contingency of the human. The human need not be at all, nor need it be as it is.

Scheler's dictum does not appear in the logical form of an argument. One might say that it parodies an argument. Plato described the human being—ironically, and in what was probably a parody of a definition—as a "featherless biped,"[14] and there have been only a few other such attempts between Plato's day and ours. The past two centuries, however, have witnessed an explosion in the diversity of such parodic "essays in definition." What characterizes them is their combination of a formal claim to general validity and their substantial resignation to covering only one aspect. I doubt whether surveying and cataloging that sort of thing is worthwhile. Apart from establishing which formulas come closest to fulfilling their stated ambitions, an inventory might yield a structure of types or an organizational pattern of statements. Only thus could the necessary distance be gained to survey the topography, to obtain a view of what is out there and a sense of whether there are clusters of definitions as well as barren or meager regions. The inventory could be titled "Observations on Being at a Loss to Define the Human."

Essays in Definition

"Man is an animal that diddles, and there is *no* animal that diddles *but* man." —Edgar Allen Poe[15]

"The human is a *zoon astronomikon*." —Otto Liebmann[16]

"The human is a being that envies." —Helmut Schoeck[17]

"The human . . . is the most exact physical apparatus that can exist." —J. W. von Goethe[18]

14. [Translator's note: Plato, *Statesman* 266e.]

15. [Translator's note: Poe, "Raising the Wind."]

16. Liebmann, *Gedanken und Tatsachen*, 10.

17. Schoeck, *Der Neid und die Gesellschaft*, 300.

18. Goethe, *Scientific Studies*, 57.

"Man is an indirect being." —Georg Simmel[19]

"Man is the exchanging animal." —Georg Simmel[20]

"The human is a being in search of consolation." —Georg Simmel[21]

"Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God." —Sigmund Freud[22]

"Man is a pliable animal—he must be so defined—a being who gets accustomed to everything! That would be, perhaps, the best definition that could be given of him." —Fyodor Dostoevsky[23]

The human is an "agglomeration of systems." —Niklas Luhmann[24]

In psychiatry, there is a phenomenon known as "negation mania" or "negation delirium," which expresses itself in statements like "there is no such thing as the sun." If we grant that it is permissible or even advisable to look to psychopathology for essays in definition, we should admit the following to our list:

"The human is the being that is capable of negation mania."

The human is "a being of discipline [*Zucht*]." —Arnold Gehlen[25]

"Man shows himself as the entity which talks." —Martin Heidegger[26]

"Man is a creature of weak intelligence who is ruled by his instinctual wishes." —Sigmund Freud[27]

As a way both to condense the structuralist idea of the human into a formula and to situate it at an ironic distance, Odo Marquard devised this parody of the implicit definition of structural anthropology: "The human—compelled by nature, via logic, to adopt culture—is the orderly being."[28]

An utterance of the young Friedrich Engels lends itself to an essay in definition: "The essence of the state, as of religion, is mankind's fear of itself"[29]—which leads seamlessly to further explications:

"The human is the being that is afraid of itself."

The human is the being with "the fear of being touched." —Elias Canetti[30]

"Man was a savage after he had ceased to be an ape." —Karl Marx[31]

"The human is the being of unsuitable means." —Georg Simmel[32]

19. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, 211.

20. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, 291.

21. Simmel, *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlaß*, 73.

22. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 44.

23. Dostoevsky, *Notes from a Dead-House*, 9.

24. [Translator's note: Luhmann, "Das Phänomen des Gewissens," 230.]

25. Gehlen, *Man*, 24

26. Heidegger, *Being and Time* 208 (§34).

27. Freud, *Future of an Illusion*, 45.

28. Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 143.

29. Engels, "English Constitution," 489.

30. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 15.

31. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," sec. 1.

32. Simmel, *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlaß*, 11.

Man is "six feet of a particular molecular sequence of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and phosphorus atoms." —Joshua Lederberg[33]

"Humans are a species of ape suffering from delusions of grandeur." —Hans Vaihinger[34]

"The human is the hungry being par excellence." —Georg Simmel[35]

The posthumous papers of Oswald Spengler contain a collection of notes gathered under the heading "What is the human?" in his "Draft II on 'World History.'" This too, in its characteristically narrow-minded striving for comprehensiveness, is an essay in definition:

> Slain from within: freedom will. Predator, hunter, Life, plant, animal, flame. Appropriating, fighting, ab-cd. Compulsion of the species. Hand. Individual and flock, specimen. Rare animal among mass-like others. (Like the genius amid the crowd of lesser talents.) Equivocal life among later species. Through toughness raised to cunning. Lacking strength and weapons, therefore mind [*Geist*] as weapon. Instinctive, inventive. Fire. Infantile. Bête incomprehensible (Pascal), noble beast. A life tied to the earth. Unto earth shalt thou return![36]
>
> . . .

Nothing could be harder to perceive and identify than what is not on such a list, especially if it is something obvious and therefore easily missed. One would be well advised to look not at the traits distinguishing human from animal with absolute (yet never absolutely maintained) certainty, but at the one trait that, though it might also or occasionally appear in other creatures, has turned out to be decisive in human development and the human character. If so, one would hit upon this obvious definition: "The human is the animal that walks upright." From approximately 1.5 to 0.5 million years ago, the early form of *Homo sapiens sapiens* was the type now known as *Homo erectus*. In 1784, J. G. Herder, in book three of his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, prefigured this definition so compellingly that Arnold Gehlen, in his definitive work of 1940, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, could refer back to Herder for support.[37] What Herder had written was: "The form of man is upright: in this he is singular upon the earth."[38] Herder found etymological support for this claim in the Greek word for the human, *anthropos*: "Man is ἄνθρωπος, a creature looking far above and around him"—and Herder is representative of a long tradition of defining humanity in which the upright gait is merged with a gaze raised to the heavens.[39]

33. Lederberg (geneticist, 1958 Nobel laureate in Medicine), ["Biological Future of Man," 263].

34. Vaihinger, "Wie die Philosophie des Als-Ob entstand," 192n.

35. Simmel, *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlaß*, 14.

36. Spengler, *Frühzeit der Weltgeschichte*, 497.

37. [Translator's note: See Gehlen, *Man*.]

38. Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, 67.

39. Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, 68.

By saying that the human looks not only "above" but also "around him," Herder adds an aspect to this definition not mentioned in antiquity. *Vision* is closely linked to the unique characteristic of the upright gait. Reading Herder, it also becomes clear why [the philosophical] tradition—the exception being a statement of Aristotle's in *De partibus animalium*, that "man partakes of the divine," since, "of all animals, man alone stands erect"[40]—had not made the upright gait a defining characteristic: any trait that forms part of the definition must be a *substantial* property. A substantial property cannot be shed or surrendered, and sometimes humans do not walk upright. Herder admits "that this mode of going erect is not so essential to man, that its opposite is as impossible for him as to fly," and only in Herder's own century had comparative anatomy come to understand the upright gait as depending on a variety of peculiar anatomic adaptations in the human skeleton. Yet even "the gait most incommodious to man is not impracticable to his pliable nature." Although the upright gait was peculiar to the human, it was the product of a complex effort and tension in relation to his physical predispositions: "It is only by the combined exertion of innumerable actions, that our artificial mode of standing and going becomes possible."[41] It is, however, precisely for that reason that Herder will not accept the upright gait as resulting from a process of development: only *against* nature *in general* can it be maintained as the *particular* nature of the human. Although degeneration or feralization might entail the loss of the upright gait, its acquisition could not be understood as marking an ascent from animal nature (and hence as development). Rather than these instruments having combined to result in the upright gait, walking upright had created instruments for its purposes in human anatomy:

> I cannot comprehend how the human species, if it had possessed from Nature the abject horizontal position, could ever have raised itself to a position of so much art and constraint. . . . Had man been a fourfooted animal, and had he been so for thousands of years, assuredly he would have remained so still; and nothing but a miracle of new creation could have made him what he now is, and what alone all history and experience represents him to us.[42]

Herder concludes this chapter: "With wonder shall we perceive, what new organism of powers commenced in the erect position of mankind, and how by it alone man was made a *man*."[43]

Given this conclusion, we should cast a glance back at our list of essays in definition. I would argue that these definitions shed light on the upright gait. While its emergence is not explained or its function made intelligible, it does

40. Aristotle, *De partibus* 656a.

41. Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, 68.

42. Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, 68–69.

43. Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, 70.

combine with them to produce the image of a risky and biologically extraordinary creature that, if it is not to be understood as expressing an unknown higher will, might at least give rise to the astonished question of *how* this creature, with such properties and with such an unstable form of locomotion and way of carrying itself, could sustain its existence. One must try to imagine approaching these questions unaided by the idea of evolution in order to appreciate how "unnatural" this creature's unstable balance is. I believe that Herder in particular was aware of the upright gait as an extreme effort mounted against all the advantages and amenities offered by a comfortably supported four-footedness. An obvious question to ask, then, concerns the complex of achievements involved in the sheer effort of compensation for the unusual character of this existence and for the difficulties entailed by it.

The old idea that reason is an alien force, engaged in a long effort to lead human beings out of their primal savagery and to tame them, then finally to celebrate its victory over the weakness and intransigence of its organic system during the Enlightenment or in the General State Laws of Prussia, has completely blinded us to the question whether reason might not be the last resort and desperate sleight of hand on the part of this organism, the better to cope with the adversity of a potentially lethal impasse reached in the conditions of its existence. Only astonishment at the existence—and continuing existence—of this erect biped makes it possible to comprehend "at least the equivalence" of the position that "reason might be one of life's back doors." I believe that, among the findings made by evolutionary biology in recent years, one in particular has been insufficiently noticed: the probably incontrovertible deduction that the [evolutionary] forms approaching the human being—outside of what [the anthropologist] Gerhard Heberer calls the "transitional field" between animal and human at the end of the Tertiary period—can by no means all be counted among the ancestors of the [modern] human. In other words, among the hominids there were unsuccessful aspirants such as *Australopithecus*, which died out in the Pleistocene of the Quaternary, just within the temporal limit of 1.5 million years. The same applies, and not much later, to the Neanderthals, which became extinct without becoming an ancestor of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The evolutionary strands of *Australopithecus* and *Homo* separated more than three or four million years ago, but perhaps the three separate African branches of *Australopithecus* lived in southern and eastern Africa contemporaneously with forms of *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* for another almost two million years.[44]

Interpreted in strictly biological terms, the human initially was not one of nature's more successful experiments. The early forms of compensating for the reduced adaptation of the organic system—the first indications, that is, of

44. Heberer, *Moderne Anthropologie*, 95.

what we call culture—appear not to have been particularly suited to this end. The bridge to the surviving forms of *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens* is narrow and gives every indication of having been a precarious expedition. Nothing any longer suggests that reason at some point took this instrument firmly in hand. Everything points to the struggle involved in each of these achievements constituting itself and in their eventual summation—achievements in which we have learned, in retrospect, to trace the course of reason. Whatever else they may be or have become, reason and culture initially correlate with an increasingly problematic nature of existence, which may have consisted not only in the struggle for existence with rival beings and hostile environmental conditions but in the added difficulty of preserving the organic system of this being, raised to the position of a biped, in the first place. A question suggests itself: How is it possible that the human *could* survive? And then, a next, more radical question: How is it possible that the contradictory result of these efforts *can* exist in the face of all the challenges and difficulties?

That way of posing it, to be sure, is a *minimalization* of the anthropological question. But therein lies its theoretical opportunity—which, like any sound theoretical gamble, gives rise to the expectation that a great multiplicity of different phenomena might be explained with respect to the unity and simplicity of a principle.

It is the beginning of the human imagination in its lifeworld to realize that the existence of other people is as self-evident as my own and that the properties and abilities that others display are of a necessity equal to that of Ursa Major in the sky or the cockchafer and the elephant among terrestrial fauna. It would require a long process of problematization—both of the theory of evolution and of the even more surprising reality of the extinction of established species—to bring to fruition and intensify the question of how anything like the human could exist. The biological equipment of the human—what Max Scheler called the "organological dilettantism of the human being"—is not such as to guarantee its self-preservation.[45]

The idea of the human as a deficient being [*Mängelwesen*] supplanted the idea that what made the human special consisted in additional equipment or even in a surplus of features and abilities. It appears that a decision of sorts has been made with regard to the human as a being that is by nature either rich or poor. This elementary alternative applies when drawing up a typology of historical statements about the human—for instance, are human skills and inventions solutions to urgent problems, or do they go beyond the horizon of what is merely useful for living? But the recent preference for seeing the human being as innately poor is not a valuation or even primarily a decoding of the empirical material;

45. Scheler, *Vom Umsturz der Werte*, 307.

rather, the preference is based on the tendency to *rationalize* the anthropological question, to shake off its essentialist assumptions. It derives not directly from the question "What is the human?" but from the intermediary step of evolutionary theory and its genetic question, "How did the human come to be?" This revised question concerning evolution can be answered compellingly only if each supposed step forward has been not a *superadditum* but the solution of an acute difficulty of self-preservation. What has been added may strike us, from the vantage point of what may be its final stage, as an instance of progress—and for all the efforts and forbearances of cultural pessimism we cannot but arrive at such a valuation. This development, however, is merely the phenotype of a genotypical constancy to which the idea of progress is alien. Looking at the evolutionary history of the human as it presents itself to us today, it is not by chance that another essay in definition is due at this point: *The human is the being that could have failed to accomplish itself and may yet still fail.*

Existential Risk and Preemption

The human is a precarious being that may fail to accomplish itself. Charting its developmental stages and antecedent forms discloses abortive attempts ending in extinction. Cases in point are the Australopithecines and Neanderthals. The human is the very embodiment of unlikelihood—the animal that lives in spite of everything.

Now, existential risk is a claim that applies to all species—the difference being, of course, that the factor of risk, where the human is concerned, applies not only to bare existence but to a graded life success. Only the human can live and be unhappy in the process. The human being may thus fail in what seems to itself the very purpose of existence. Even in committing suicide, human beings apply one last artful maneuver, attempting self-preservation at any cost, even the cost of life, in order not to have to deny the possibility of their identity. Death, whether it occurs naturally or not, leaves this question open. To that extent, the capacity for self-murder is among the distinctions of a being whose existence is not reliably programmed to succeed.

The high level of risk attaching to the human is a peculiarity insofar as highly developed organisms as a whole are already the result of a reduction of evolutionary risk entailed in the process of evolution. In that respect, each evolutionary step represents the solution of a problem. Darwin's natural selection is nothing but the mechanism of this reduction, which means an increased resilience of organic systems toward negative factors, both internal and external. A key indicator of this kind of "progress" is a decline in the number of offspring required to perpetuate the species.

In that respect, the history of humankind in the last two centuries pre-

sents a superficially false picture. Notwithstanding the population growth that Malthus, even in his day, found to be such a threat, the story, in purely biological terms, is one of steady decline in the rate of offspring required to preserve the species. The decline, of course, was achieved not by the further development of the organism itself but by a biological surrogate: improving all the cultural factors taking on organic tasks and resulting in a symmetry of natality and mortality. The lowering of infant mortality rates achieved by medicine, the successful struggles against rickets and tuberculosis—these factors mean that an already uniparous being needs fewer offspring to perpetuate itself. That human culture has taken on the task of warding off existential risk suggests that the organism inhering in it has ceased to participate in the biological reduction of existential risk through evolution. That the human is threatened by forty thousand known and a considerable number of yet unknown diseases shows it to be a biologically exposed being that is able successfully and repeatedly to avoid peril only by virtue of medical science.

It is the task of philosophical anthropology to make it comprehensible that the human no longer participates in the benefits of evolution—optimized adaptation and the reduction of physical existential risk—and that we can afford to continue evading participation only if we make progress in our flight from the effects of natural selection. Those who would despise progress must understand that, were there to be none—were the growth of technical and cultural harms arrested momentarily—the state of that non-Darwinian world would certainly be insecure. For human culture is a set of emergency measures to compensate for deficiencies in biological equipment. But for the human, shielded by culture, the reduction of existential risk—including the risk of a failed life—means that our acute major crises already lie in the past and have been weathered by the species as a whole. By that measure, elementary cultural achievements at bottom are successes in the struggle for existence, or even for happiness—although the idea of happiness may be dismissed as bourgeois kitsch. It implies that the human species can attain more (or that humans believe themselves capable of more) than the mere preservation, by an equitable distribution of the means of life, of bare existence.

If we affirm the end of biological evolution in the human and through the human, then we must accept that there are no boundaries to instrumental evolution. For instrumental evolution is the compensation not only for the human's *initial* but all the more of its *final* biological weakness. It may be that the human will finally succumb to instrumental evolution, which could be avoided only by once more putting biological selection in motion. By consistently diverting the conditions of our origin toward the worlds of objects made by humankind, we eliminated the conditions of our origin in order no longer to have to live in a world founded on and sustained by Darwinian principles. It is among the

most familiar phenomena in any process of domestication that, as selection pressure diminishes, so does biological quality. It may be that, as biological quality declines, the possibility of moral quality may grow and its necessity be seized. The point here is to grasp the questions that pose themselves. Are we prepared to accept the emergence of a non-Darwinian world even at the price of the human going downward and perhaps ceasing to exist, even without the major disaster that humankind may prepare for itself? The question must be posed in yet more radical terms: Would we be capable of drawing conclusions from a negative answer to the foregoing question? The reason our readiness may be doubted is that we could not afford anyone the right to decide on the nonapplication of life-saving measures, because doing so would exceed the executive authority in any system governed by a separation of powers. Granting that right to anyone would invest the political system with authoritarian force, since the recipient of the power would be compelled to allow its delegation, which in turn would be followed by pressure to converge discretionary powers in exercising that authority. We have already seen this outcome in relation to the involvement of physicians in the consequences of altering Section 218 [of the German criminal code]. Theoretical questions associated with anthropology often can be answered only when their practical scope has been demonstrated.

The crisis in which the human may find its end must be considered in light of the crisis from which it emerged and in which the loss of adaptive equipment compelled [the emergence of] the cultural sphere of artifactual and institutional adaptations. It is the task of the anthropological perspective to render visible, by means of this elementary biological process, the human being's expressions and achievements as a unitary genetic structure. Such a demand is always most easily grasped in the attempt to indicate its maximum, at the point where it is not yet overstretched. In the case of anthropology, this criterion is met by the insistence on explaining the capacities of human consciousness in terms of the specific situations of biological deficiency into which the biological origination process placed this organic system. Consciousness, that idealistic triumph of nature over nature, would in anthropological terms correlate with an almost lethal quandary. Its growth and expansion, such as they are, would map onto new, by now historical perplexities of a no longer prima facie deadly kind. For a quandary is a situation in which obviousness has been lost, and the being placed in a quandary is sensitized toward itself and toward its way of being-for-others.

There must be something innate to the structure of human consciousness that makes reason its optimum mode of performance, inasmuch as reason means surpassing the immediacy of a sensory relation to reality.

An organism's embeddedness in its environment reaches its utmost degree in the immediate functioning of the reflex arc. To each stimulus—each one triggering information—there corresponds an instantaneous and precisely matched

reaction. The afferent and efferent sides of the organic system are in full symmetry. If the received stimulus is a signal for a specific behavior, then any ambiguity and therefore any delay are eliminated. If environmental stimuli cease to be unambiguous and precise in their triggering—for whatever reason—the system of the reflex arc must lose the pleasing immediacy that gives it the appearance of pure determination. What then occurs appears to be a recalibration of the system's capacity to process a multiplicity of stimuli. Only now do the summation and constellation of data yield specific results on the efferent side. These results are the beginning of "perception," defined as that condition of the receptor in which it has (and had) to dispense with accepting or admitting unclear or even unspecific stimuli. But what gets through now lacks the unambiguous force of the trigger: perception is a means of processing unspecific stimuli. Sensation and triggering are dissociated, which means that the organic system does not constantly have to act but can leave the stimulus as a sensation, just as optimally adjusted receptors must do when overstimulated by the massed occurrence of triggers. Consciousness is not only an instance of the constant processing of stimuli but also a capacity for their reactive "leaving things be." The *external* leaving-be, by the only specifically responding receptor, has been replaced by the *internal* leaving-be of an already received stimulus, which is waiting, so to speak, to be integrated. Let us call this *latency of reaction*.

In animal behavioral research, the "law of heterogeneous summation," introduced by Alfred Seitz in his studies on the pair formation of cichlids, has been in use since 1940.[46] The law states that, where several key stimuli are preformed to trigger a certain behavior, each of which can cause the triggering by itself, the simultaneous or cumulative application of these stimuli causes the specified behavior in intensified form. In the stickleback, for instance, aggressive behavior is triggered both by the red coloration of a rival's belly and by the downward position of the head as a threatening gesture; each trigger can initiate aggression on its own, and the two traits combine to increase aggressiveness. (In 1969, C.-Y. Leong demonstrated this feature quantitatively in the bite rate of cichlids.)[47] If so, the law of heterogeneous summation may also be applied to instances where the clarity and intensity associated with each particular trigger fall short, meaning that only the cumulative effect of the triggers, each insufficient in itself, produces the barely sufficient key trigger for the specific behavior. It is easy to see how this seemingly harmless adjustment of the content of the law of heterogeneous summation demands an altogether different performance on the part of the receptor—a performance that is unspecific in its parts and becomes specific only in the result. For whereas, in the law's original formulation, the addition of a sufficient stimulus to another (already sufficient) stimulus

46. Seitz, "Die Paarbildung bei einigen Cichliden."

47. Leong, "Quantitative Effect of Releasers."

only augments a behavior that is already manifest and identical in kind—biting with increased fury, for example—the receptor is now required to memorize the still-insufficient stimuli and to process them, in their variety, to form a whole.

At the same time, however, even the initial (still-insufficient) stimulus must cause the receptor to develop a preliminary disposition toward the arrival of further stimuli—an attitude of expectation, formed by a multitude of not-yet-integrated partial stimuli from objects that initially are only possible and not-yet-actual objects. The point I am trying to make is that sensations, impressions, individual conceptions are, initially, incomplete objects and as such are always tied to the index of capacity for integration. The aspect of what those objects still lack is the negative side of the process. The positive side is that, even when considered as partial stimuli, they are *reductions of indeterminacy* that, in terms of cumulation and integration, raise expectations that, though they may be disappointed, will nonetheless have served to push back against indeterminacy. Their disappointment is a correction and as such points the course of object-formation in another direction—one along which progress has already been made.

The stimulus that remains below the threshold of the sufficient key signal offers a first indication and demonstration that yielding to the first impulse is an appropriate response neither in perception nor in action—that a lag in the nexus between perception and action offers the possibility of reexamination and hence of attainable superiority. After all, learning from experience means not so much appraising successful experiences as retaining premature and false interpretations of first impressions and putting them to use as deterrents.

Surely, it is a biologically important question whether the development of a perceiving consciousness relies on the receptor's attunement being despecified or on the environment having lost the specific features to which the receptor had become attuned by adaptation. Environmental change may be caused by the relocation of a species changing (or being forced to change) its original habitat or by changes to the habitat itself on a geological timescale. For the origin story of the human being, we must probably suppose that climatic changes caused a shrinking of Tertiary rainforests, compelling forest-dwelling species into the steppes. We may assume that, in crossing the boundary between these two biotopes, long-term determinations were made concerning the adaptability of individuals and ultimately of species. In the circumstances of a shrunken habitat, superiority meant not having to depend solely on the means belonging to one's organic equipment in order to win the now-harder struggle for existence. The struggle is not a matter of aggression alone. Superiority might also mean taking flight. For flight now meant entering and mastering a space—the steppe, with its expanse and visual openness—whose fundamental conditions were unprecedentedly different from those to which humans had been accustomed.

This crisis must have been selective, one that could be weathered only

with a high degree of *unspecific* capability. There had to be a reserve capacity of adaptability not exploited, not fully used in the previous way of life. It is at this point that the distinctive endogenous development of the primate brain comes into its irreplaceable significance: the voluntary functional centers superimpose the involuntary-distinctive ones ("promination").[48] It is clear that those stimuli recognized by other members of the species and social group as "triggers," in the narrower sense of social and sexual behaviors, follow the change of habitat. Indeed, it is from the stable sphere of triggers that the advantage enjoyed by strongly sociable animals in changing habitats derives. And it is in this mobile social biotope, the primal horde, that all the things imagined by the obsolete Freud eventually occur: parricide, incest, the pact between the sons, and all the rest of it. This idea contradicts those anthropogenetic theories that, following the pattern of neoteny, would have humanity begin from scratch. As is so often the case, rigidity in one part of the system encourages elasticity in another. The enforced change of habitat brings to the fore those properties and capacities that depend on minimally specific equipment and adaptation. The new biotope does not possess, as the previous one did, the lifeworld's character of obviousness, being instead a space of authentic perception of unspecific and mainly latent reactions. Sensations must occur that cannot (or at least not immediately) be translated into commands for action, and it is only their interrelation or constellation that brings to perception the character of a complex "object." In this way, at any rate, delay constrains action: there is deferral, pending intelligibility and lucidity.

The fundamental state of a being whose most imperative doings are necessarily preceded by the processing of complex sensations regarding objects is rudimentary: it is the state of *having time*. Having time is the advantage of the steppe over the jungle, which though it offers hiding places also harbors threats at close quarters. Once the wide expanse of the steppe is open to grasping visually—which is to say, judged in terms of distance and hence of warning time spans—sufficient time is gained for reflection before making decisions.

The peculiar and comparatively stately dignity of the human—which consists in the preemption of haste and precipitateness, of recklessness and negligence, of immediacy (regarded as the absence of thought)—begins here. A person who is decisive and resolute in action is always impressive at an instinctual, animal level, for these people seem best suited to cope with situations of urgency and danger. Still, this animal confidence diminishes to the degree that fear does and fast decisions seem no longer likely to be of help. It is then the doubter, able to win time before action, who inspires our confidence. A note of Kant's from the winter of 1765/66 on doubt concludes with the sentence: "I seek the honor of

48. [Translator's note: Blumenberg introduces the term *promination* in an earlier chapter and cites Spatz, "Vergangenheit und Zukunft des Menschenhirns."]

Fabius Cunctator [the Delayer]."[49] Humans do not hesitate and dither because they have reason; they have reason because they have learned the value of hesitation and dithering. Reason typifies presumptive, anticipatory, and also provisional achievements, whose anthropological boundary value is that the consciousness of having to die is always with us.

In the parlance of the philosophical tradition and in that of phenomenology as well, this awareness of delay as the processing of multiplicity is known as intentionality—and as the structure of a consciousness interrupting the reflexes, intentionality must have developed before the change of habitat took place. It must already have been available before the change and in time for it, as exactly the prototype presumed by the brain's endogenous development. But the selection advantage of this prototype comes into play and is specified only when leaving the native habitat. It is clear that this structure of consciousness favors ways of life associated with change and migration. That human beings should have turned out to be prepared for theoretical reasoning must surely be traceable to their far from obvious (and initially, far from ideal) structure of consciousness. That structure is linked to a surrender of immediacy, to praise and yearn for which is, however, by and large a matter of aesthetic nostalgia. From this perspective, immediacy, understood as openness to any reality and unreserved abandonment to it, must begin to look questionable. Consciousness, in its mature structure, implies a disruption of immediacy—with immediacy defined as the mere passage of energy through the black box that is the organic system, from its afferent to its efferent side—but only because consciousness originates in an interference with the preconditions of that immediacy. Consciousness, in other words, originates in the disrupted possibility of a specific interplay between signal and behavior, between trigger and reaction.

The disruption is no trespasser on the preexisting system, and consciousness is not a mysterious stranger. Rather, consciousness is already entangled with the disruption, with processing the data still available from a reality that, since the disruption, has been leveled. Consciousness is not the originator of the disruption but the form in which it fully manifests itself: to the extent that it is intentional, it takes advantage of the time to be gained in the expanse of space. Only *gaining time* can compensate for losing the unreflective coordination of reaction and stimulus. The new, long-distance vision of the fugitive forest-dweller makes possible something that did not exist under previous conditions and had no need to exist: temporally anticipatory behavior—preemptive action along the arc from flight to self-concealment to self-armament. If reason, in its scientific variety,

49. Kant, *Vorarbeiten und Nachträge*, 175; see the editor's note to page 496 on parallels to the ending of *Träume eines Geistersehers*, on the letter to Mendelssohn of April 8, 1766, and on the "Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbenjahre von 1765–1766." [Translator's note: See Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 187.]

should ultimately culminate in predicting future events with the highest exactitude, it would only mark the consummation of this original achievement of consciousness in the complex of its preemptions. Reason is essentially an organ of expectations and of the development of horizons of expectation, the epitome of preemptive dispositions and provisional, anticipatory attitudes. In that way, it remains constant from the first to the last of its earthly days.

. . .

An expansive structure of capacities, spanning the multitude of elements that we call consciousness, confers immeasurable advantages. A structure of that kind is able, by the cumulation of partial stimuli, not only to engage action-triggers that are specific to the species but also to enable adaptations through individual experience. The structure exists in that situations already concluded—concluded for better or for worse—offer a head start in dealing with comparable situations; less preparation for them is required. The price paid for these advantages, for this elasticity in relation to perception and action, is that the determinacy of the reflexes—the *certainty* about key stimuli, whether singular or mutually interchangeable—has been lost. All experience, including the anticipations and prejudices that might otherwise affect one's attitude toward even the possibility of determinacy, is preceded by indeterminacy. To have a horizon is, after all, altogether different from having an environment [*Umwelt*] that consists of clearly determined and determining features. When the processing of the realm of perceptions assumes a long-term character but the horizon of the unexpected continues for an interval—when the structure of everything that may henceforth constitute the human being's world is impending—then indeterminacy finds a new complement in consciousness or, more neutrally, in the mind. That complement is *anxiety*.

The domain of hiding places and concealments in which humanity's predecessor hatched its surplus cerebral power—the biotope of the forest, the jungle—is an environment lacking a horizon. This point cannot be made too forcefully. It is not simply, as the phrase goes, that an originally narrow horizon broadened, it is a matter of positing a horizon in the first place, as the epitome of possibilities and objects that enter perception through the horizon. The horizon is merely a notional threshold, but it is decisive for the coming-to-consciousness of a being whose vision is limited by the frontal arrangement of its eyes and the advantage conferred by perspectival vision in the breadth of the optical angle. In other words, humans can *see only to one side*, while we can *be seen from all sides*. Objects of perception, once they have become well defined, are always situated before a narrow segment of an unprocessed background. Where it is not possible—or only narrowly so—to prepare for things to come and anticipate them with pre-

conception, there anxiety can take hold. Anxiety is the signal of an impasse—of a vagal death avoided by means of anxiety. The human is a creature of such extreme anxiety because it "specializes" in escaping extreme situations and has a very high threshold for absolute "inescapability."[50]

It is no coincidence that there is a distinct pathological connection between space and anxiety—anxiety in open spaces (agoraphobia) or confined ones (claustrophobia). Both afflictions relate to the horizon of perception, are neurotic exaggerations of the degree to which what may occur must remain unknown. The pure iteration of such anxieties is what Eugen Bleuler called "phobophobia," sheer anxiety regarding the indeterminability of coming anxiety. The bare horizon is the primal opponent of human consciousness and its confident familiarity with the world; the bare horizon corresponds also to reason, inasmuch as concepts anticipate something possible and definable that is still absent but can be expected.

The epitome of rationality is accordingly *anticipation*, which is the attunement to anything possible within a given horizon. Anxiety is an index of the incapacity for anticipation—and enduring anxiety in a world of almost nothing but anticipation is an index of the qualitative significance of the quantitatively insignificant remnant of fatalism. Genetically, anxiety and rationality are antithetical boundary values. It is a principle of behavioral research that the degree to which a situation is charged [*besetzt*] with emotion reflects the degree of risk associated with it in evolutionary history. Anxiety therefore contains the genetic teleology of recent human emotion in concentrated form: it represents a stage of incomplete objectification, since the level of alarm has yet to be reached. Anxiety refers to the emotionally uncharged peripheries of conceptual instrumentality, which finds its first emotional charge in the hastiest of prejudices—the separation and polarization of friend and foe. This beginning is ultimately also the symptom of a pathological loss of confidence in the possibility of an economy appropriate to rationality (or hyperrationality).

If it is true that motion and emotion are indissolubly connected—connected so the unity of a motion sequence is rooted in the unity of feeling for the aim of the motion invested in it—then it is also true that the intentionality of consciousness as a structure of object integration is not yet sufficient to effect structural preparation and initiate the transition from sign to presence. One would be well advised not to assume that the pretheoretical consciousness is freely inclined toward objectification. Rather, in exercising its capacity, the pretheoretical consciousness is dependent on the strongest of all emotions—anxiety. And anxiety makes consciousness subject to the laws of intentionality. Emotion is the energetic side of intentionality, just as—so Hans Jonas has shown—emotion leads action

50. Bilz, *Die unbewältigte Vergangenheit*, 242–75.

across all its intermediate stages, which "must be bridged by continuous emotional intent." Jonas continues: "The appearance of directed long-range motility (as exhibited by the vertebrates) thus signifies the emergence of emotional life. Greed is at the bottom of the chase, fear at the bottom of flight."[51] Emotion makes it possible to reach distant goals; it is a precondition for *actio per distans*, for any insertion of distance between imagination and fulfillment. Emotion also makes it possible for spatial distance to be overcome by holding fast to a single goal.

Emotion enables capability even across distances that are stipulated not by perception but solely by concepts. At such a distance, the phenomenal index of all freedom—the detour—finally becomes possible. The detour is the demonstration that one feels secure in the emotion that drives one toward the intention's goal. In Jonas's words: "The arc of its detour is the locus of the freedom and risk of animal life."[52] The modern author, in speaking of emotion, naturally prefers to think of passion, libidinal desire, possessiveness, the pursuit of happiness; but all these are still directly connected with naked self-preservation and demand elementary acts of processing a world whose qualities are unknown—a world whose primeval character is disclosed by anxiety on the threshold of panic.

The assumption that all anxiety relates to the trauma of birth bears on the thesis that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, the place of anxiety in human development being connected as well to separation from a familiar and protective habitat into open space—into the wild. To that extent, the root of anxiety is the rupture of a primal symbiosis. Only as atavism does anxiety belong to the pathology of how human beings relate to the world. Since the human is often no longer able to afford the objectifications toward which it was phylogenetically driven, it cultivates substitutions of objects available now for nameless objects of the past. Humans invent rituals to banish demons, name the great enemy, placate the imageless power by representations. The uncanny builds its houses. A return to the cave—or the forest, the earth, the womb—is the secret longing that everyone sees no one can afford. Anxiety is debilitating, horror even more so. These are significant residues of moments in evolutionary history when flight was impossible because there was no certainty about the *direction* of an object that, even prior to reification, evoked anxiety and horror. Anxiety paralyzes, freezes, prevents every motion toward escape; it musters whatever is needed to make the subject face its task—which is to acknowledge nothing as real but verified objects.

Facing these pathological archaisms, one must not forget what unique profit the human species has drawn from being in such jeopardy. The human being is, for all the poverty of its biological equipment and the lack of programmed behavioral certainties, a being that is exceptionally stable with a minimum of recent hereditary adaptations. We know why the stabilization of mutations into

51. Jonas, *Phenomenon of Life*, 101.

52. Jonas, *Phenomenon of Life*, 104.

hereditary changes are absent in an organic system culturally relieved from environmental pressure. Scientific medicine has treated what were initially lethal and therefore hardly manifest mutations in the gene stock. But all the adaptations possible in human history have asserted themselves as stabilized forms of action—as institutions, as concepts, and finally as *reason* (in perhaps three thousand cultural variants). Biologically, the human species is singular among all of Earth's creatures by virtue of its high level of constancy and identity and, thus, by the absence of evolutionary developments that are cross-sterile. Hence there is no development of the human below the level of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, but also none beyond it. There is no way out for human beings. [As the geneticist Jérôme Lejeune writes:] "If there were other solutions, just as good, perhaps even better than their present genetic constitution, then the human races would have had to separate into different subspecies, as can be observed in numerous examples with other mammals."[53]

Genetically speaking, the human is an end product. Each variant is pathological because there are no factors that could favor nonpathological variants. Moreover, human beings have carried out an optimal adaptation in a direction opposite to all other biological adaptations by tailoring their cultural environment to their bodily constitution. The price of the unity and constancy is the occurrence in the human species of anomalies in its morphologically identical set of chromosomes. The high degree of constancy of the species in spite of the relative lability of the genome associated with any [process of] domestication is paradoxical. No mutant can prevail against an environment that is already set up against its possibility.[54]

The high degree of genomic constancy stabilizes the identity of humankind over time. That constancy is the anthropological precondition of there being *one* world, with its unlimited possibilities of identification, telepathy, and delegation. It also vouches for the ability of all cultures (in principle) to communicate with and understand each other. Much descriptive work has been done here, and there is little descriptive despair with regard to this approach. On the other hand, the human organic system being contained in each human culture, there is no reason to impose any particular culture on the system. The basic principle of any cultural anthropology in its relation to philosophical anthropology is that the differentiation of cultures substitutes for the differentiation of the human being itself, which is neither possible nor desirable in the modern network of communication and information. The pressures and adaptations of external reality, which originally could be dealt with only biologically, are absorbed in the form of culture. In cases when, however, the shell of culture fails in its protective function—when

53. Lejeune, "Über den Beginn des menschlichen Lebens," 45.

54. The sexual dimorphism XX/XY is the only nonidentity to occur morphologically in the genome of *Homo sapiens*.

the background of unprocessed reality penetrates through the shell—the evasive and adaptive capacity of the organic system is relatively small and, it must be feared, continues to diminish. [As we have seen,] Dostoevsky said that the human is the being that can get used to anything, but his statement was made in the context of the cultural buffer between the human body and reality as a whole. Still the relative solidity of the cultural buffer so seldom allows invasive demands to reach the body that even relatively small stresses can appear extraordinarily great.

In the variety of human achievements that are descriptively representable, the principle of unity is best grasped under the heading of "distance," and indeed "distance" is one answer to the question of how the human being is possible at all. In order to comprehend, in this answer, the systematic and functional unity of the human being's manifold capabilities—and doing so is the single task of philosophical anthropology—we must represent the initial genetic situation of humanity in a manner schematically radicalized. The morphology of paleontological findings offers few cues for how to proceed. Every morphology always already grasps that understanding adaptations to the upright gait will never reveal the compulsion that caused *Homo erectus* to raise itself upright in the first place.

There are now two theories (and perhaps only two are possible) about the hypothetical point of departure for human phylogenesis: the *Fluchttier* [escape animal or fleeing animal] theory of Paul Alsberg (*Das Menschheitsrätsel*, Dresden, 1922) and the neoteny thesis of the Dutch anatomist Louis Bolk (*Das Problem der Menschwerdung*, Jena, 1926). Temporally in between is the development of the concept of proterogenesis by Otto H. Schindewolf ("Entwurf einer Systematik der Perisphincten," 1925).[55] This work belongs on the side of Bolk's thesis but is worth mentioning not only because of its antecedence—only a later work by Schindewolf ("Das Problem der Menschwerdung, ein paläontologischer Lösungsversuch," 1928) is generally regarded as evidence for his having been the first to coin the term[56]—but also because Schindewolf formulated the logic of this process of concept-formation.

What these positions—so close to one another in time and therefore likely to have emerged from the same theoretical nexus—have in common is their seeking to explain how, amid primate forms specialized and adapted to environments, there could arise an unspecialized type, largely free of adaptations, that must be assumed an indispensable precursor to human development. In both theories, the capacity and need for development act as both condition and explanation: the *primitive state of human organs*, which biologically determined human appearance in its youthful form, was the result of a regression. The decisive difference of opinion concerns whether, as Alsberg assumes, another such regression can take place by the gradual waning of obsolete arrangements or whether, as Bolk would

55. Schindewolf, "Entwurf einer Systematik der Perisphincten."

56. Schindewolf, "Das Problem der Menschwerdung."

have it, the human being remains arrested at a primitive stage of ontogenesis. The result in any case is that the biological preamble to anthropology is of the utmost brevity.

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Only a reversal of an endogenous kind—whether called "developmental inhibition" or "precession"—could cause such characteristics as the human's prolonged *juvenile* stage, our uniquely slow *growth rate* relative to the comparable primate group, and our equally unique life phase of *senility* beyond the phase of reproductive capacity, which alone is decisive for natural selection. Arnold Gehlen formulated a compound of these processes and characteristics as a "universal anthropological law" under the name of "retardation" and traced it to peculiarities of (and changes to) the endocrine system.[57] The theory of retardation most perfectly explains the reduction of instinct in the human, a failure of biological adaptive equipment that has since been shown, by behavioral research, to be unacceptable in this radical form, because an abundance of residual instinctive determinations has been found—an overabundance, perhaps, as the critical pendulum has again swung, in recent years, against ethological determinism.

But the theory of retardation neglects bipedalism—the question of the origin of the upright gait—as the basic issue of human evolutionary history. In a field where we know almost nothing and may continue to know almost nothing, we must be permitted to choose the most powerful model. The merit of Alsberg's *Fluchttier* theory lies in its positing a dire situation that enlists the endogenously acquired ability to transform an accident into a decisive and advantageous developmental leap. Alsberg does not write of this endogenous aspect. But he does show what may have been the decisive advance for humankind in walking upright: gaining the capacity for *actio per distans* as fundamental to the complex of human achievements.

It is a hypothesis that corresponds to the primal scenario that has become so popular in paleoanthropology today. The fleeing animal thought of as the forerunner of the human being reaches an impasse, a hopeless situation in facing its pursuers. Since it has gradually lost the equipment for one-on-one physical combat, it can, in view of the emergency, fall back only on a performance reserve—its ability to change posture—that typifies its primitive character. The creature could free its forward extremities, at first only momentarily, to defend itself by throwing a suitable object. The capacity for invention and for perceiving the suitability of nearby objects, on hand only by chance, to be missiles must be added to the contents of the creature's performance reserve. By this point,

57. [Translator's note: Gehlen, *Man*, 95.]

natural selection would already have done its job thoroughly: every failure in this situation would have been subject, perhaps a millionfold, to the normal biological punishment of elimination from the ancestral line of organisms. The scenario is as accidental as everything else in evolution, because it retains the one success from innumerable failures only by virtue of this recourse having been a success (with respect to evolutionary theory) in its consequences.

As for evolution on the whole, we again face the disheartening truism that the overwhelming majority of developmental paths do not lead to the human being. By far the largest part of animal phyla do not figure in human ancestry. If nothing else, this maxim testifies to the arduous, if not arbitrary, character of nature's efforts to reach its culmination in the human. But only the desperate situation, the lethal impasse, could test and prove the resilience of this organic system that rendered permanent the fleeing animal's foundational accomplishment. The human's ancestor put distance between itself and its enemies, not by running but by means of a preemptive capacity across space, in which direct physical contact was no more decisive than it was in the process of fleeing.

Alsberg's primal scenario, which is more dramatic than the theory of mere transition from the forest habitat to the steppe, raises another problem not easily resolved: how the contrivance of standing upright and throwing a missile could be "learned." The response must be that only one capable of learning can learn. But what was learned in the process of invention was to abandon the principle of flight essential to despecialization: in a single moment when escape was foreclosed, the human's progenitor found a way to adopt combat as its new principle.

Darwin had believed that both the ancestor of the human and its primal form retained a predator's dentition, distinguished by long canines suitable for seizing prey and fighting enemies at close quarters. The adoption of tools rendered long canines redundant in the selection process. Darwin lacked a crucial biological insight won by his successors—that the human is a biologically unspecified being that specializes and despecializes itself as the situation demands. Darwin's successors have this animal, dependent on flight, placed in a combat situation against its will and specializing itself in the moment, not by changing organically but by equipping (or arming) itself instrumentally. The capability of doing so (and nothing other than that capability) is *intelligence*.

But who is now the hero, the subject in Paul Alsberg's *Urszene*? A fictional ancestor from the clade of primates known as *Hominoidea*, whose descendants would have to include both pongids and hominids: "*Pithecanthropogoneus*, not a humanoid ape in the modern sense but truly deserving the title of the most 'humanoid' of all apes, by far exceeding that family's modern representatives in its resemblance to the human."[58] Yet this undiscovered ancestor, to be sought in

58. Alsberg, *Das Menschheitsrätsel*, 402.

the depths of the Tertiary, remained very much an animal, even if the progenitor of humans as well as apes: "From this initial, very humanoid form the apes developed into less human forms, while the human being went from the 'humanoid' to the human form."[59] This curiously anthropocentric idiom of speech is unrelated to the theory of the paleontologist Edgar Dacqué, familiar from the lectures delivered in the dining car by Professor Kuckuck to Felix Krull, the eponymous con artist of Thomas Mann's novel. According to Dacqué, the general line of development had everywhere followed basic patterns tending toward the human. *Pithecanthropogoneus* is the normally invoked ancestor of humanoid apes. Only through an exceptional primal event did it also become the ancestor of the human being, if solely by dint of its hidden receptiveness to dealing with the primal event. It is only because *Pithecanthropogoneus* was an animal of flight that it possessed adequate "freedom" to choose a means of self-defense when the urge to escape failed to preclude disaster. The choice made then [to stand up and fight] committed the course of human development to following the principle of *actio per distans* at a higher level of effectiveness.

Thus the human ancestor became, antithetically, a fighting animal, albeit in its own singular variant: preemptive combat. Alsberg's "principle of humankind"—the alternative both to flight and to direct physical combat—is gaining distance, by which reality is literally kept off the human back. To be able to keep things off one's back—away from one's body—is the fundamental human capability. It leads from the first defensive act (throwing a stone) to the development of concepts and the ability to gather the world into a scriptorium without so much as a grain of sand needing to be present physically. It is no accident that the organic preconditions for the human body are focused on the outermost extremities: the foot capable of supporting bipedal posture and gait, no longer fit for flight, and the hand, which is likely to have emerged from the primate stage of "knuckle walkers,"[60] who even when walking quadrupedally were able to use their hands to carry food and perhaps even missiles. The development of hands and feet as organs of touch had already begun in the [prehuman] primates.[61]

According to Alsberg, "It was the 'hand' that made the human into the human."[62] It was the hand that made possible what he calls *Körperausschaltung*, or "body-liberation"[63]—the epitome of shifting basic capacities for self-preservation into the distance. Yet it was, Alsberg adds, an error to suppose that prehumans had adopted the upright gait in order to free up their hands. Since, in the preliminary form of *Pithecanthropogoneus*, they had carried their missiles quadrupedally

59. Alsberg, *Das Menschheitsrätsel*, 402.

60. [Translator's note: The word is given in English.]

61. Heberer, Henke, and Rothe, *Der Ursprung des Menschen*, 24.

62. Alsberg, *Das Menschheitsrätsel*, 378.

63. [Translator's note: This translation follows the heavily reworked English version of Alsberg's *Das Menschheitsrätsel*: Alsberg, *In Quest of Man*, 38.]

before rising momentarily to throw them in self-defense, it would be more appropriate to say that the human had adopted the upright gait "because his hands were no longer free."[64]

Once "found" [at all], this means of saving one's skin could not be found everywhere and at all times and so had to be carried—in this case, by the "knuckle walker." The invention impeded or even prevented the flight response and added new pressures to fight. The selective favoring of the supporting foot over the running foot is the morphological manifestation of this process: the hereditary impasse of the escape animal. *Homo primigenius*—the conjured result of the choice, between innovation and death, made by *Pithecanthropogoneus*—remained for a long while more hunted than hunter, while perfecting its invention of a new procedure in the struggle for existence and the organic reconfigurations that it entailed. Without the strongest pressures toward self-assertion, stabilizing that invention and its morphological preconditions would not have succeeded. . . . In Alsberg's view, "humankind emerged at a single blow." It "was born in the moment of constant practice of the method of defense by throwing stones, that is, by adopting body-liberation as a principle of development." Anthropogenesis is not a process that left morphological traces; the data confirm only the changes in form that emerged under pressure from the *Fluchttier*'s original principle. The human being had already emerged, even if "in each and every respect it was altogether identical to its animal predecessor."[65]

I would suggest that this process be called *cryptogenesis*, but I do not mean by this suggestion to add a layer of mystification. For today's biological anthropology emphasizes that, morphologically speaking, the transition to the human was accomplished by such modest means that an imagined posthuman scientist of humanity, having at his or her disposal no traces of cultural achievements but only the fossil remnants of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, would be unable to discern the leap from ape to human. This transition is characterized by suddenness in the change of controlling principle and gradualness in the change of form. The human came into being at a single blow—or, to be more precise, a single throw. The hypothetical later observer would perceive nothing of the kind. In a thought experiment, [the zoologist] Adolf Remane suggested that

> if a later being were to find the remnants of the human only in fossil form, it would find little cause for surprise. It would rank them among the apes, and while the upright gait would register as a peculiarity, bipedalism would be recognized as a reasonably common form of locomotion. It would, moreover, note the brain capsule, an abnormally enlarged bubble, but it would scarcely occur to a future scientist that this creature had remolded the world in a manner quite unlike any other

64. [Translator's note: Alsberg, *In Quest of Man*, 38.]

65. [Translator's note: Alsberg, *In Quest of Man*, 365.]

in a history of life spanning billions of years. This discrepancy between the small change in physical appearance and the vast change in capabilities is a problem peculiar to human evolution.[66]

Even standard considerations [of the details] of human habitation, [for example,] may be taken to mean too much or too little. Fire cannot have proven its utility with the suddenness and clarity that a successfully thrown stone could have done. There are indications that the use and taming of fire were acquired and lost several times in human history. In the transition from flight to fight (even if preferably at a distance), it is likely that fire, in its evanescence, was a late accomplishment, presupposing a degree of settlement. Self-defense by throwing objects, by contrast, requires only one condition: that of perceiving, on leaving the Tertiary rainforest, a rubble-strewn zone that offered a readily available store of missiles, and of remembering their first successful use. The ability to remember is the single dire necessity in preserving an identity once seized upon.

Animal memory can be characterized as short-term; the identity of what it is meant to recognize must be complete [to be remembered at all]. Human memory tends to be very long-term and [hence] favors abstraction by making it possible to grasp, in cases where concrete circumstances differ to whatever degree, all that is identical in type. In the fossil finds, the constancy of the procedures and the patterns of their production show how the human capacity for memory is an ability to develop tradition. The transmission of a lifetime's personal memory and of tradition over generations are, biologically considered, the only forms of "inheritance of acquired characteristics" that we know. The very things not accomplished by the complicated mechanism of the genome, which produces mutations by mechanical randomness and then puts them to the test in the process of selection, are produced by memory over a lifetime and across the lifespan of a culture. Language and writing are stabilizers, bearers of constancy.

The capacity for memory must be carefully distinguished from the ability merely to recognize what is identical among objects, individuals, localities, and situations. Memory is the capacity to make objects and experiences present that do not have to be available for direct perception. Memory is a unique form of *actio per distans* that has become a kind of behavior under variant conditions and with variant means. If the capacity for long-term memory was contingent on the blurring of our images of objects and situations, it would be the first instance of vagueness—of the renunciation of rigorous consistency and exactness—to prove its worth in human history. A stable consistency of configurations became possible only in an environment reduced to relatively few stimuli and triggers. It is therefore coherent with the principle of anthropogenesis as being unique and

66. Remane, "Die Bedeutung der Evolutionslehre," 319.

momentary for the biologist to conclude: "The strongest impetus in development toward the human being appears to be an increased capacity for memory."[67]

. . .

Self-innervative reflexivity is the structural feature that first instantiates the human being in its development, which is to say that the human being not only produces its sphere of objects and culture as something external, like a hardened shell, but is compelled by all that it has produced to reinforce and intensify the trends on which it has already embarked. The human is thus the tool-making being proclaimed by [Benjamin] Franklin—capable of being identified and localized in prehistory by way of its tools.[68] Through the things made, the human becomes more precisely and strictly what it is. It may be that one who departs from nature may ultimately be unable to do anything but destroy what it has departed from—and rejecting adaptation to nature by means of body-liberation means gradually depleting all consideration for nature. What cannot compel us to adapt is bound to lose reality for us. It is a superstition that what has no need to adapt will flourish of itself, whereas the atrophying of the body begins with the transfer of its functions to the world of objects that the subject fashions. The body is thereby compelled to continue augmenting that world by constantly giving away more of itself. Not only does the redundant body of a despecified infantile organic system demand the tools without which it cannot live, but the world of tools in its turn produces a surplus of redundancy in the organism it harbors, around and on top of which it has erected its structures.

. . .

As for the late stage of technology that corresponds to the forms of biological regression: only here does the degree to which it confirms Alsberg's theory (of despecifying feedback into the organic system) become fully apparent. As the parasite loses the equipment by which to support itself, so the human becomes a parasite within the technical sphere of life, reducing direct contact with reality and the capacities associated with it. The question remains whether there are irreducible constants—limits to the depletion of resilience.

. . .

Resilience is a fundamental anthropological category. Astonishingly, the depletion of resilience by the technical and cultural shell leads to makeshift solutions:

67. Remane, "Die Bedeutung der Evolutionslehre," 321. 68. Alsberg, *Das Menschheitsrätsel*, 270.

the shell is fitted with artificial devices for self-testing resilience. In culture, it becomes impossible to recognize what humans can bear. A distinct cultural interest, accordingly, arises in discovering the remaining natural possibilities for extreme challenges—to render them comparable and, where that achievement is no longer possible, to recreate them under artificial conditions and parameters. It is nonsense to suppose that human beings would not have landed on the moon once doing so had become a technological possibility, just as it is nonsense to suppose that a human would ever forgo any attainable sporting record, whatever the price might be. Humans make use of the principle of distance even with regard to themselves by objectifying their resilience experimentally. They can become spectators with regard to themselves. Indeed, they already are spectators by virtue of being able to see themselves through the eyes of others—a procedure sometimes fatal to their own self-esteem.

Finally, in the context of residual constants in the face of intrasystematic depletion, we must consider systemic interaction. The natural starting position of the human being in relation to its natural rivals and foes changes as soon as the subject of *actio per distans* encounters another of its kind. All other rivals are capable of action only in each other's immediate physical proximity. The human rival is always one who may preempt another at a distance—capable, by virtue of the wide radius enabled by a raised head and the frontal position of the eyes, to estimate distances. This advantage may be fatal to them both if the preemptive actions possible across space are increased. Anticipating actions at a distance becomes biologically and psychologically all the more advantageous, the more hopelessly the body, stripped of every last help, is confronted with what has come into its immediate proximity. If in this way distant action stands against distant action, in the permanent effort to outdo one another, there is theoretically no longer a boundary value to systemic interaction. The spaces opened up by preemption have no natural boundaries. As soon as technology permits, the opponent—who no longer appears within the zone of perception but is always kept in mind—is anticipated at the far horizon of its intentions and possibilities and is counteracted by covering the zone of all potential action. Any residue of specific triggering or inhibition of reaction thus becomes obsolete. The reaction to traits of friendliness or unfriendliness tends to produce a preemption that does not relate at all to a recognized other, instead making space and time a gap in which threatening and hindering actions expand to the point of "blanket coverage."

The capacity of the corresponding other for *actio per distans* raises preparedness for intraspecies aggression and lets what was originally a defensive function lapse—given an increase in uncertain encounters with members of the same species—into a default attitude that is exponentially more aggressive. Highly developed technology has reduced the time needed to cross space to such a degree that the preemptive and copresent powers of human vision are no longer sufficient to

anticipate and prepare for what is coming. It is this problem that appears under the heading of "warning time" and has made it into a metaphor.[69]

There is no such thing as an aggressive drive. Aggression emerged in a landscape in which preemption is all. Mechanisms of defense and restraint that usually apply among members of the same species of animal have been deactivated by preemption and its escalating, mutually reinforcing need for space and time. The sight of another member of the same species being struck down or killed becomes an event post-factum, no matter how shocking it may be in its appeal to ancient restraints. The uniqueness of the human in the force wielded against its own kind can still be found to rely on the principle of body-liberation. The sobering experience of proximity arrives too late.

To preempt everything that might make an altercation inevitable would be to situate one's acts against a horizon of possibilities, which would mean that observation has been pushed aside by thought. Acute situations must be dealt with before they occur, which means even if they do not occur and, indeed, to ensure they do not occur. Human life relies on the safety imparted by spatial and temporal distance from threats and ultimately on the effort to render that distance absolute. Hence the idea behind weapons supposed to make war impossible. But no one will ever know when the point has been reached at which all factors leading to destruction are at an absolute distance.

To provide an anthropological account of intraspecies aggression without declaring it to be a "drive" is therefore possible. And it is troubling that such an account should be disallowed only so as not to encumber the mobilization of humane willingness—the possibility of social and psychological inducements, or even just the rhetoric of kind words and declaration of best intentions—with resignation in the face of a supposed constant. The hostility toward anthropology springs from a perfectly legitimate desire to leave the causes of aggression between human beings in the ambit of short-term historical causality—of everything, in other words, that falls reliably within the scope of political and social action. According, however, to the conception proposed here, aggression is rooted in the logic of the primal human situation, of the very behavior by which humans became human. Yet to say so is by no means the same as ascribing aggression to an unchanging "human nature."

It seems that preemption has boundary values, crossing which renders it futile. Why should what originally released human beings from fighting their conflicts with their bodies alone be unable to impact the new concern for making obvious the archaism of these conflicts? Precisely because the exponential

69. [Translator's note: A reference to the early-warning radar systems set up in the Cold War to identify incoming bombers and ballistic missiles, notably the Distant Early Warning Line across the North American Arctic.]

increase in preemptive activity relies on the presumptive power of concepts and has made only auxiliary use of the energies of emotion, concepts too must be able to determine the line beyond which remote actions collide below the threshold of warning times and, in their automatic reciprocity, deprive each other not of effect but of any potential beneficiary.

Accepting that disengagement of the body is the human developmental principle that best explains even the current structure of human capacities in their unity has advantages that are clearer with recourse to a classic problem that Darwin himself tackled in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. In this treatise based on the assumptions of evolutionary theory, the basic thesis is that *expressive* movements emerge from the obsolescence of *purposive* movements. They are, in other words, residues of objective relations that once were instinctive or voluntary. What we regard as an angry expression is the residue of what was originally an attack—its first stage, as it were—and the same is probably true of threatening behavior. Take, for instance, the now ubiquitous embrace with which leading politicians welcome one another at all the world's airports, a gesture that once was reserved for one's own family and now indicates the pretense of fraternity—so much so that a mere handshake is tantamount to a political threat. The meaning of the emotional expression need not derive from the original purposive action; indeed, it may signify its retraction or negation. Then—as Darwin of course does not point out, since it would be at odds with his theory—the embrace would be the residuum of an action aimed at strangling or smothering an opponent. Performing the residual action allows one's counterpart to signal trust in the harmlessness of the embrace and gives one an opportunity to prove that this trust is justified.

This observation suggests another that is moreover not irrelevant to the history of language: a sign, a symbol, an expression, initially has a breadth of meaning that includes position and negation. This observation was first made, with reference to the language of the Pentateuch, by Oskar Goldberg, who called his discovery the "polarity of the verb." It was, Goldberg argued, "embedded deep within the Hebrew language itself."[70] Key verbs in ancient Hebrew encompass mutually contradictory meanings, to the effect that "the positive meaning is constantly being indifferentiated by the negative one, such that pathos is prevented from arising even at the linguistic level." One and the same root verb, *berech*, might mean "to bless" as well as "to book" [*buchen*], "slander," or "renounce." A verb might even signify, more radically, "both the recognition of somebody's existence and the denial of that very existence."[71] Such ambiguities reach into the sphere of expression, including facial expression, and into that of ritual. The taming of the embrace, for instance, may have occurred through its use in

70. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 97.

71. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, 97.

sacral (and hence domesticated) contexts. Rudolf Bilz related this process, which Goldberg himself called "etymological reduction," to the paleo-anthropological *Urszene*. One example is the origin of the kiss in feeding [offspring] with chewed or regurgitated food. By now we have a range of examples for this phenomenon, which is not only the biological reduction of primeval purposive actions but also a force contributing to the trend of body-liberation. The less the degree to which the body itself is the instrument, the *executive organ* of actions, the more it can become a pure *bearer of expression*, capable by virtue of the information conveyed in its repertoire of physical expressions and gesticulations to replace, prevent, repel, or trigger actions.

This example illustrates that the process of body-liberation culminates not in the instrumental sphere of the classic understanding of "tools" but rather in all that which, as the epitome of reasoned and aesthetic human expression, was able to bear the imprint of pure purposelessness and, in doing so, paid unique testimony to the "success" of anthropogenesis. Pure theory, like disinterested pleasure in the aesthetic object, derives its value, in the history of humankind, from this relation to a prehistory in which the mere instrumentality of the animal body ceases to apply. Some historical manifestations of the process may since have become incomprehensible, for instance the self-representation by ascetics of the "principle of humanity," which—no different in that respect from its conjectural and (later) aesthetic varieties—is an expression of freedom as liberation from the body. For here, as in many an archaic and magic ritual, the body is treated as something that, though its sheer existence cannot be escaped, is disdained as somehow not present, not real, not vulnerable, not subject to pain or want, an impediment to life.

From this perspective, a world of behaviors and capabilities discloses itself. The ability to depict reality or to represent it symbolically is itself a means of keeping it at a physical remove while minimizing the loss of its presence. [The physicist G. C.] Lichtenberg noted long ago that "even the most perfect ape cannot draw an ape, that too only man can do, and man alone"—[an observation] that might be taken for an element of definition in the favor of humankind if the sentence did not conclude "but only man takes the ability to do so to constitute an advantage."[72] If one is not to miss the peculiarity of the *actio per distans* inherent in the capacity for depiction, it is crucial not to overlook its elementary predecessor, the gesture of pointing. For pointing retracts the exclusivity of physical possession. Alsberg failed to notice this key stage between seizure [*Ergriff*] and concept [*Begriff*]. The human is a creature that points, and any use of brute force is a regression relative to this primal achievement. The case of pointing makes it possible to explain how the seizure of an object can be "retracted" merely by

72. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, 1:742.

touching (with the boundary value of only momentarily touching the object with an outstretched finger) and how the retraction of even that [limited] contact in a more abstract gesture indicates the direction of sight or motion. Across space, indeterminacy can be remedied, an object specified even if it lacks a name, and attention can be directed at it. Naming presupposes the ability to point. But so does delegation, which requires, in order to give something up and pass it on, at least the unambiguous precision of pointing at a person. When pointing fails to refer to a perceptible object and becomes a mere indication of the direction in which it might be sought or from which it might be expected to come, pointing gains distance from the absent object. In delegation, pointing can direct another person beyond the horizon of perception in order to broaden it—by searching or exploring, for instance. Delegation proves itself to be a function of *actio per distans*: one need not be present at the scene of the crime.

What preceded the ability to point may still be observed in toddlers, who feel compelled to touch and handle. The stereotypical admonition of parents not to touch is not merely a commandment of late bourgeois hygiene but the index of a specifically human property: to no longer feel compelled to touch everything, to have modes of immediacy short of touching. In this light, the fear of touching or of being touched seems to be a pathological caricature of anthropogenesis, no less so than its supposedly therapeutic countermovement, the ritualized performance of physical contact as a means of preventing sensory impoverishment. What this observation fails to appreciate is that the human "consists in" forgoing immediacy. When Francis Bacon, reacting to centuries of artificial, concept-centered mediation, proposed that we get back "in touch" with nature, the assertion entailed a shocking element of regression forgotten during the centuries of its pervasive influence.[73]

. . . . We tend to regard a concept as a means to seize an object, but concepts have something of the restraint found in the gestural and ritual approach to objects, for genetically speaking conceptualization is a matter of holding back from physically reaching for objects. Conceptualization is the residue of manual intervention in reality—the culmination of the process of forgoing "tangible" possession of all things and of abandoning the claim to omnipresence involved in being the leading actor in all endeavors. Even at its pinnacle, human achievement will [continue to] be based largely on abstention from reality—another element of our definition of the human that is open to highly negative interpretations by cultural critics. To live in a world of surrogates, mere depictions, of a reality that is mediated in a multitude of ways and ends by being itself a simulation [is not an overview that will appeal to everyone]. Any criticism, however, ought to be very carefully considered. Trying to understand and accept that reality—given the

73. See also Goldstein, "Über Zeigen und Greifen."

inability to have everything and be everywhere oneself—is a complex of mediations and surrogacies that may entail serious intellectual turmoil. Simulation may have cost humankind a great deal, yet it also has preserved us from monstrous developments and may continue to do so on an exponential scale. Some threats perhaps can be gauged realistically and avoided only by being made accessible to simulators. Simulation is *actio per distans* in its purest form; in it, the absence of the object itself is absolute and its dispensability has become a positive factor. There may be cases of deception, simplification, overestimation, yet in principle the realism of simulation is superior to any type of classical realism, be it political, economic, or even military.

In an overcrowded world, moreover, authentic access to reality will by no means be open to all. The growth of travel and tourism suggests that special destinations will be democratized, if not destroyed. Only hesitantly will it be asked whether none should have what previously was available only to a few and, in any case, never accessible to all. A question of this kind would be whether opera houses ought to be demolished because they have so few patrons, indeed ever fewer when set against the growing human population. Is it enough to counter that musical recordings and televised productions would not exist if there had not been and continue to be opera houses with their elite audiences? The share of all in reality cannot be maintained unless much is replaced by equivalent simulations. The principle [of *actio per distans*] will have gained only a new name and grander reach. Aesthetically speaking, the principle is as old as epic, which makes experiences accessible to those who, given the conditions involved, would never be eager or even capable of undergoing them without mediation. Even if one denies that film and television intensify mediated experience, it is undeniable that they facilitate access under minimal conditions of subjective fitness. There is, at all events, an unmistakable tendency for reality and illusion, truth and image, to become indistinguishable. Leibniz anticipated this result when, against Descartes's skepticism of experience as free of deception, he defended the absolute dream (one not ending in the disappointment of awakening) with the argument that by no criterion would it be distinguishable from reality. The loss [of the reality of the dream experience] arises only from inconsistency.[74]

In the foreseeable future, people may hesitate to say that the conflicting claims of everyone to everything made the inexhaustibility of simulation a fully inhumane alternative to the claims of "realism." But when one considers this boundary idea about our relation to the world from an anthropological perspective—the perspective of its being the consequence of the distance of the human as a physical system from being affected directly by its world—the idea is far from

74. Blumenberg, "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Möglichkeit des Romans."

self-evident. If one can sidestep the ardent expressions of nostalgia for immediacy that we hear from certain culture critics, then this boundary idea falls within the remit of a total aesthetics—of an art that cannot be disturbed or undone by the intrusion of nature.

. . .

The human as *animal symbolicum* is a being geared toward the reduction of confrontations with reality, at least those that are painful, dangerous, and consume energy. Only to the extent that humans, in times of want and distress, have been capable of saving energy in their relationship to reality have they become capable of immense expenditures of energy on supposedly superfluous pursuits—the luxury of their sublimations, the redundancies of their culture. What we grandiloquently call the "creative" side of human beings consists primarily of capabilities set free within their economy of powers. Superfluity is based on the surplus of a human nature that, by means of cultural parasitism, retreats from and avoids contact with reality.

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The young human organism for a long time remains parasitical on its nest-world by learning from having learned, drawing experience from experiences that it never disregards. That the human being exists "historically" means that we make the human past and its cultural possessions instrumental, rendering them the medium of our own experience of the world—an experience whose subjectivity would be even more unbearable than this "participation" in the "supersubject." [Ludwig] Feuerbach was the first to recognize that memory is a way of gaining time by enabling the remote experiences of the self and others to be made present. History is the epitome of such mediated experience, even though the dictum *historia magistra vitae* applies only to the extent that history is the condition of our ability to make experiences and not a trove of experiences ready to be processed. That formulation is not one for anthropology to arrive at. Anthropology assumes that the human being is possible only because it has gained this advantage in the struggle for survival: "The human—an escapee, as it were, from zoology—would have perished, like so many initially related animals, had he not succeeded in becoming a historical being. He *is* only because he is able to accumulate time and thus his experiences, thereby keeping present his past."[75]

75. Sperber, *Alfred Adler oder das Elend der Psychologie*, 68.

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