

# 1

## *Secular Meditations*

Let not the mind therefore seek  
itself as though it were absent, but  
let it take care to discern itself  
as present.

Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X, 9 (12)

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first  
time.

T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

All this had always been and he had  
never seen it, he was never present.  
Now he was present and belonged to  
it.

Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha*

There are at least two forms of meditation that have entered into the West. A first form is exhibited in the title of one of the major works of the father of modern philosophy: *Meditations on First Philosophy* by René Descartes (d. 1650). The immediate aim of such meditation is the securing of “clear and distinct ideas” in metaphysics as the roots of the tree of knowledge. The ultimate aim is to pluck the fruits of the tree by securing power over nature in mechanics, medicine, and eventually morals.<sup>1</sup> Here thought detaches itself from the half-comprehended matrix of experience within which and out of which we perpetually think and act, and concentrates itself into a pure intellect for which everything becomes detached object or problem, thrown (Latin *-jectum*, Greek *-blema*) over against (Latin *ob-* Greek *pro-*) the involuted self, which aims at the certitude of complete mastery. Such thought begins with distrust (methodic doubt) and fore-

shadows the "hermeneutics of suspicion" cultivated in a striking way by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, but undercutting the lucidity of consciousness prized by Descartes.<sup>2</sup>

Such a pose was applied, after and following Descartes, in the period called "the Enlightenment." It reached its first phase of maturity around 1687 in Newton's *Principia*, the first systematic statement of modern mathematical physics. Of Newton Pope wrote: "The world and its secrets lay hidden in night. God said, 'Let there be Newton,' and all was light."<sup>3</sup> In 1690 Locke extended such enlightened thought to psychology<sup>4</sup> and to government.<sup>5</sup> Power over nature in a rationally organized society applied in industry and extended through education would lead to indefinite progress. This was the program of the Enlightenment, rooted in the pose of detached mastery exhibited in Descartes's *Meditations*.

However, in that work such a pose and such a thrust is broken in one place: at the end of Meditation III. Here, having, he thought, proved the existence of God as Infinite Being, Descartes set aside one short paragraph urging his readers to contemplate such a God.<sup>6</sup> This solitary locus seems to display "the last trailing clouds" of an evaporating tradition of medieval spirituality. For that tradition there was another type of meditation: a movement of the mind from point to connected point practiced specifically in order to arrive at the resting of the mind in the deepened presence of the contemplated object.<sup>7</sup> Such meditation moves from detachment to a kind of inward participation, an interpenetration of subject and object. If Descartes's meditation cultivated the detached intellect and aimed at mastery, medieval meditation cultivated the heart and aimed at participation in a Presence. Such presence is grounded subjectively in a detachment of another sort: detachment from the grasping and split self. There are thus two modes of detachment corresponding to the two types of orientation: a detachment from the whole of experience leading to the cultivation of intellect, and the detachment from the grasping self within experience leading to a cultivation of "the heart." Descartes's brief paragraph on contemplation is but a momentary hearkening back to an earlier tradition. Its proportionate relation to the rest of the book is analogous to the subsequent concern the West has exhibited for such a participatory relation.

Interestingly, the state arrived at through meditation is called *satori* in the Zen tradition, which translates as "enlightenment."<sup>8</sup> There are then two modes of enlightenment, one represented by the modern West whose mind-set now dominates the world, and the other by the earlier traditions of spirituality in the East and in the West against which—or against significant segments of which—the modern world

was launched. The two modes of enlightenment parallel Heidegger's distinction between *aletheia* and *orthotes*, which we mentioned briefly earlier. They are paralleled, in their turn, by the ambiguity of ordinary language terms connected with cognition.

Heidegger calls attention to the opposition in the use of the term *wonder* as awe on the one hand, and as curiosity on the other. 'Awe' involves being struck, being gripped, encompassed in the whole of our being by that which overwhelms us, whereas 'curiosity' involves a certain detachment, holding our own in relation to that which we can in principle master. Commentating on Plato's statement that "philosophy begins in wonder,"<sup>9</sup> Heidegger claims that 'beginning' here must be understood as a principle that pervades the whole enterprise rather than as a point of departure that we leave behind and that 'wonder' must be understood as awe. A better reading would be: "Philosophy is sustained by awe."<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, on the contrary, understands 'wonder' as curiosity that disappears once we come to know the fact or understand the cause about which we have 'wondered.'<sup>11</sup>

There are other parallel ambiguous terms relating to cognition: for example, at the origins of our culture, the Book of Genesis speaks of Adam's "knowing" Eve, and Homer's *Iliad* of Achilles "knowing" wrath. Here something different is obviously involved than the 'knowledge' that Eve's hypothetical gynecologist or Achilles' psychoanalyst might have. 'Knowing' in the former cases involves, again, a kind of total, encompassing state of mind, touching those involved "at the center," in the heart. It is a kind of *participatory* knowledge, whereas, in the latter cases, a certain detachment and thus partial involvement occurs.

Again, 'understanding' is different in the situation where, responding to one who turns to us in distress, we might be able to say and mean, "I understand," compared with the 'understanding' that occurs when I am able to explain the social, psychological, and physiological causes of the distressed state. "Under-standing" in the latter sense occurs when I can "stand under" the immediate presentation and grasp the intelligible patterns that "stand under" the appearances, after the manner of Plato who launched Western thought along the lines of rational science in his allegory of the Cave.<sup>12</sup> But in the former sense, 'understanding' involves empathy, participation, lived-through experience. Some schools of psychotherapy today are concerned with reestablishing the first way of understanding as part of their practice,<sup>13</sup> and certain approaches to the human sciences in general emphasize *Verstehen*, participatory 'understanding' in the manner of the German historian and philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey.<sup>14</sup>

In the history of Western thought these two cognitive poles have continually jostled with one another. The distinction appearing

in all these terms appears at the dawn of Western philosophy in the thought of Parmenides as the distinction between *nous* and *logos*.<sup>15</sup> The famous "Being is, non-being is not," surrounded by mystical-religious metaphors, follows from the aspirant's wandering "as far as my heart desires" and emerges as a gift from the goddess. *Nous*, activated in *noein*, is the capacity of being taken over by Being itself, "an event which has man,"<sup>16</sup> as distinguished from drawing out the implications or developing the presuppositions of our formulation of the experience by reasoning (*logos*). (Sophism followed as a playing of logical games in the service of a mode of life far removed from one oriented toward the full thrust of human desire.)<sup>17</sup>

In the High Middle Ages, with the rediscovery of Greek and especially Aristotelian rational science, a new kind of experiential pattern emerged. Thomas Aquinas speaks of 'wisdom' (*sapientia*) in this line as "systematic knowledge of things in terms of ultimate principles" (*scientia rerum per causas ultimas et primas*),<sup>18</sup> whereas his contemporary and friend Bonaventure, dwelling on the etymological root of *sapientia* in *sapere*, "to taste" (from which we get "sap"), claimed that there was no wisdom without a "*gustus experimentalis*," an experiential tasting of "ultimate reality" by the "whole man."<sup>19</sup> In fairness to Aquinas, we might add that he distinguished at least three senses of wisdom: speculative, practical, and infused. His definition referred to above described speculative wisdom. Practical wisdom or "prudence" is a kind of "situation conscience" or ability to make wise practical judgments on the basis of a well-developed experiential background or "connaturality." Infused wisdom, however, is one of the "gifts of the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup> However we understand the latter, it involves an interpretation of the experiential dimension to which Bonaventure referred.

But the link between *nous* and *logos* was decisively strained with the emergence of modern thought in René Descartes, to whom we have already alluded. Descartes attempted a reconstruction of all thought from the point of view of an enclosed consciousness dealing only with its controlled representations or "clear and distinct ideas" patterned after the procedure that had had success for centuries in geometry and was enjoying new success in the analytical geometry introduced by Descartes himself. In this way he hoped to lay the philosophical basis for the newly emergent science of mathematical physics. This approach was immediately counteracted by the claim of Blaise Pascal (d. 1662), which became a kind of battle cry for the later Romantic period: "The heart has its reasons of which 'reason' knows nothing." Pascal sets *nous* in deliberate opposition to the self-contained *logos* of the "geometric spirit," bent on mastery of the

whole, by reinvoking the "logic of the heart" that opened Western thought in the first line of Parmenides' poem.<sup>21</sup>

'Reason' changed its character in the work of G. F. W. Hegel (d. 1831) by opening up a new kind of logic, a dialectical logic of patterned change that aimed at encompassing the whole panorama of experience in an immense system.<sup>22</sup> But immediately after, the Father of Existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1848), protested against the presumptive adequacy of "The System," which treated the individual human being as the intersection of rationally discernible principles. According to Kierkegaard, in their preoccupation with all-encompassing objectivity, thinkers have forgotten what it means to be an existing individual, what it means to be a "subjective thinker," to exist with passion and "inwardness." They construct magnificent thought castles but "dwell" in miserable shacks nearby. Thinking as "dwelling," as "inwardness" has been forgotten in favor of thinking as "objective mastery." The accent has been on objectively discerning the "What," but men have lost sight of the "How" of subjective appropriation.<sup>23</sup>

The expanded development of science in the latter half of the nineteenth century led to the increasing dominance of the pattern of rationality called mechanistic materialism, having included the phenomena of life within the mechanical system through the success of Darwinian evolution. Henri Bergson (d. 1941) attempted to overcome such a form of Rationalism by a distinction between "intuition" and "analysis." 'Intuition' involves sympathetic identification with the flowing, cumulative "inside" of reality, first in one's own consciousness in which all the contents interpenetrate and affect each other, then in the moving interplay of the evolutionary universe, and ultimately in the mystical experience of union with the Creative Source Itself. Analysis, on the other hand, involves turning that flowing, interpenetrating inwardness into a set of timeless principles related to the temporally unfolding reality as a series of still photographs to the changing richness of the real. Mechanistic rationalism is an abstraction from the fullness of life.<sup>24</sup>

More recently, stirred by the impersonality of a technical system of applied science that involved, especially in the two great world wars, the increasing regimentation and depersonalization of human beings, French existentialist Gabriel Marcel (d. 1970) distinguished two modes of reflection that he called, rather unimaginatively, first and second reflection. *First reflection* involves a break with involvement in one's own life as rooted in the body and as sharing in the lives of other persons and things. First reflection, in its detachment, sets everything over against itself, including one's own life. Everything becomes *ob-jec-tum* or *pro-blema*. Everything "over against,"

everything "objective," is a problem, in principle capable of solution, whether it be a mechanical problem situated "over against" our look, or a mathematical problem situated "over against" our "mind's eye." But there is another mode of reflection and another kind of "object": a second reflection, thought trained on "mystery," on that "original participation," that basic presence involved in my being a body, sharing in the presence of persons and things.<sup>25</sup>

Other existentialists call attention to a similar distinction. Martin Buber early in his career distinguished between "orientation" and "realization." In orientation we have mastered our experience in such a way that we know our way about, whether practically or intellectually. Realization, on the other hand, involves a new mode of presence to what is already "known."<sup>26</sup> Later, as we have indicated in the Preface, Buber will distinguish, somewhat poetically, between two modes of relation: I-Thou and I-It. We will remark that distinction again, especially at the culmination of both parts of this work.

There has thus been an ongoing tension between the two modes of thought: one heads toward complexity, the other toward depth. One surges ahead, "makes progress"; the other returns to where we already are and recognizes it for the first time.<sup>27</sup> They have tended to be associated with objectivity and subjectivity respectively, though there are various complex relations between the subject- and object-poles of experience that led to a transposition of the two in certain cases. There are modes of 'objectivity' that could actually be considered as coconstituted by finite, cognitive subjectivity; and there are modes of 'subjectivity' that touch the heart of 'the objective' (i.e., the true, that which corresponds to Being). Whitehead, for example, contended that certain forms of poetry are, in a sense, "truer than science,"<sup>28</sup> and Heidegger held that often feeling is more carefully sensitive to the character of things than all logic.<sup>29</sup>

Reaching the depth-dimension occurs for the most part in accordance with what might be called "the law of opposites": opposites reveal in depth; negation reveals, in depth, affirmation. Heraclitus formulated this "law" very early in the development of Western philosophy: by sickness we know health; by hunger and thirst, satiety; by weariness, rest; and (as an interpretation of other texts) by death we know life.<sup>30</sup> Now, at this time more is "known" about health and pathology, nutritional problems, organic entropy and dissolution, and the like. But this kind of knowing is not what is at stake here: knowledge in depth, appreciative knowledge. Unfortunately, in the contemporary context 'to know' has been increasingly restricted to functions that could be described as carrying out appropriate verbal performances that can be linked to verbal systems on the one



hand and to correspondent empirical observations and/or operations on the other, leaving any other mode of relation for the realm of emotional, merely 'subjective responses, responses that are either noncognitive or else revelatory of nothing but one's own internal states.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary knowledge is largely knowledge achieved within the horizon of the project of mastering the world, and therefore in terms of detached consciousness marshalling empirical objects over against itself. But the knowledge we here seek is appreciative knowledge attained by a reflective thinking that draws close to things, letting them be there in intimacy. To awaken such knowledge, I suggest that each of us pursue very quietly and alone a set of meditations on situations of opposites, which should gradually open up to us deeper levels of experience and thereby enrich the soil in which the seeds of metaphysical thought are to be planted. The direction in which I want to pursue these meditations initially is that of our own *self*-experience—and that by reason of the fact that it is only in our own cases individually for ourselves that we have knowledge of Being "from the inside." Of every being other than ourselves, our knowledge is external, knowledge "from the outside." Only if we deepen within our own self-experience can we begin to appreciate what it means for another to live his life "from the inside."<sup>32</sup> But then, following several suggestions offered by Teilhard de Chardin,<sup>33</sup> I want to turn attention to the context within which the human drama occurs.

And so, first of all, I want to offer meditations on five themes involving states of opposites within ourselves: on our own origination, on our own term, on our lived bodiliness and our own consciousness, and finally on self-identity.

### *Death*

Turn to one end of our temporal span: consider death as a personal event.<sup>34</sup> Within the stream of ordinary consciousness (the *Lebenswelt* of the phenomenologist), our concern is usually, and perhaps exclusively, directed towards our projects, immediate or remote—death usually not entering in any direct sense into our consideration. But by extricating myself from this lived context, I can judge, on the basis of my experience of others, direct or indirect, that one day my projects will end, one day phenomenal nothingness will take hold of me and I shall no longer be as I now am. The judgment is objectively valid—true in my case because true for all. And on its basis I may even choose to reshape my projects, if not in themselves, by choosing an entirely different set of projects, at least in objective perspective.

But it is one thing so to view death objectively, i.e., in thought, detached from the stream of lived experience; it is quite another to lay hold of it *within* the stream itself. Proceeding only as far as the level of objective judgment, I have succeeded in effecting a dichotomy within my consciousness between the stream of lived experience and my objective thought. Proceeding to reshape my projects in the light of that judgment, I have allowed that objectivity to exercise causality upon the stream: it guides the direction of the stream, but without itself entering within it.

Now, however, on the basis of that judgment, we can go further, concentrating our attention not merely upon the direction of the stream, but upon its content. We are thus attempting to see the objective judgment become incarnate, so to speak, from its original detached position. And what emerges from this concentration is a new objective judgment: that the stream of lived experience occurs under an illusion, that of a kind of eternal present, i.e., that non-objectively, unreflectively, immediately, I "live" as if I were eternally given, and given in the condition of experience in which I normally find myself. Notice, it is not a question of the way in which I *think about* myself; it is a question of my *self-experience*, that pervading sense of selfhood carried through all relationships. "Ordinary" philosophic thinking, engaged as it generally is with universal and hence transtemporal, impersonal truths, only serves to foster that experiential illusion of eternal presence.

The 'I' of the syllogism

All human beings are mortal.  
I am a human being.  
∴ I am mortal.

is the anonymous 'I', the universal concept into which any 'I' can "plug" himself. The dominance of such *logos* in the total system of which education is a part cuts the edges, so to speak, of uniqueness off the individual subject, shaping him into a conformist subject, an interchangeable cog in the economic-social machinery. Thought must become universal in a detached, impersonal sense. To think in this detachedly universal way is to create the subjective basis for the reification, the "thingification" of human subjects in an alienated productive society.<sup>35</sup>

The basis of the illusion of eternal presence lies in the fact that what each of us knows of the conditions that antedate, ground, or will follow his/her existence is anchored in his/her own temporality. My limited time-span is the basis of the appearance of the atemporal



truths of, e.g., logic and mathematics and of the (in the order of appearance) potentially infinite span of time, past and future. The atemporal and omnitemporal character of certain objects of experience are spontaneously transferred from the object to the subject-pole of experience. We each "naturally" experience ourselves as always around, the permanent pivot of the universe.

But once convinced of the illusion of eternal presence, there is a deeper dimension to be secured, further progress to be made in the incarnation of objective thought. The task is now to attempt to dispel that illusion *within* the stream. And objective correction, though quite simple, is also by itself quite irrelevant to that end, for it corrects from an alien position outside the stream. The task is, then, to create conditions for entry into the stream itself—something not achievable as a general, objective truth-for-everyone, but something that each has to do for himself entirely alone. And in so doing, we enlarge and deepen that stream. Our lived-world is enriched. As we enter more deeply into such lived-reflection, death may emerge now and then in fleeting flashes, as a kind of a grace, "perceived," immediately seen as here and now taking hold of my existence, correcting for a brief instance the optics involved in the inner illusion that is constantly ours. However, objective alienation is a moment in the enriching of living experience itself, provided objectification can be brought back into living experience.<sup>36</sup>

To speak of the perception of death is *not* to say that of a sudden we experience an emotional reaction, a disturbance, a "fear and trembling"—though these factors may occur. But these are organically based reactions, not what, for want of a better word, we might call a spiritual perception. What characterizes the perception I am attempting to describe is, quite exactly, *sight*—or rather, sight become "vision" whereby we are "touched" by the reality of death—a situation of distance and participation at once. Whereas the purely emotional reaction is disturbing, unhinging, the perception is calm, serene, for it opens up to the reality-loving, illusion-hating consciousness the ultimate lived-perspective of one's own personal existence. Rather than an organ-based reaction, the experience is a perception rooted in the spiritual.

Of course, such perception has its preconditions. One who has never made the fundamental decision to accept reality on its own terms will probably flee from the thought of death. Or, if for some reason the thought of death pursues him, he may become morbidly preoccupied. In this case, he may lose the capacity for significant action by fascination with the morbid or he may become paralyzed in action by depression.

Now, the description of the "vision" of one's own being-toward-death is difficult, since description presents objectively what at this level is nonobjective; description presents impersonally, in common terms, what is deeply personal and highly unique within experience. All one can do, if one is not a poet, is to point to the fact: it is one thing to carry out the objective judgment; it is quite another to "see"—in the peculiar and totalistic sense in which we are using the term here—the objective truth incarnate within the stream of lived experience, to achieve personal, subjective transcendence of the everyday.<sup>37</sup> Such transcendence pries us loose from our factual involvements, places them all in brackets, provides a fundamental distance from which the whole of our individual existence is illumined. Standing at a distance from our culturally introjected self-image toward the ultimate aloneness of our own dying, we are radically individuated. But at the same time, we are most in communion with the whole of mankind, which stands condemned by nature to the same end.<sup>38</sup>

### **Birth**

Turn attention now to the other end of the temporal span: consider birth. And focus first upon birth as discoverable in others—not just any others. Consider the birth of someone particularly close. Spend some time attempting to "get the feel" for what it means for that child to have been born, to have originated in such a way that, prior to conception, it absolutely was not itself in any way. The point of selecting someone close and recently born is to enhance the personal involvement, for what is crucial here is not the formulation of correct propositions, but the *realization* of what was already *known* in a detached sort of way. The task is to develop an insight into living experience—something that is a total-personal event and not simply the verbalization of a detached intelligence.

In the second place, give some attention to those immediately present. See them as having been born, as not having been. Grasp their present life-structure as the congealing of one line of possibilities out of the multiplicity opened up at the fresh moment of emergence into the world of humankind. In the light of the not-being of possibility, the being of present actuality is illuminated.

But the task is much broader: not simply to discover the inner meaning of origination in an Other, but rather to discover in a deeply personal manner what it means *for me* to have originated absolutely. Hence the third part of the meditation consists in returning, with our heightened grip on the origination of another, to the self. And what emerges from such a reflection is a new angle from which to assess

our “usual” experience, for in a living way we grasp ourselves as if somehow we were always around, the permanent furniture of the universe—indeed, its very center. To think our way into an actual experience of the time when we were not opens up to us the strangeness (though indirect) of the fact that we are at all. Indeed, when we ponder the complexity that preceded our actual conception and the improbability, before the fact, of *this particular* human being that I call myself coming into being, a chasm of non-being opens up beneath us. If, in every act of coition, some 5,000,000 sperm are released, and only one of them penetrates the ovum, the chances of the individual who emerged as me coming to be were five million to one (even abstracting from the chance that my parents would not have had sexual relations while the particular ovum that developed into me was present). But the same chances were there for each of my parents; and the same was true for their parents before them, and so forth, down to the emergence of the first genetic code that led up to human life.

Were we to consider the history of life in terms of its prior possibility and its actual development, it would appear as a kind of infinite web of possibilities branching out from each intersection, like a vast switching mechanism. The course of actual life would be a luminous line or set of lines that, taking one turn at an intersection, closes off a whole set of possibilities that themselves branch off infinitely. In this view of things, the chances before the fact against this particular individual I call myself coming into being are well-nigh infinite. Each of us just made the train of life by one final desperate lunge as it left the station. I, the center of my world, might easily not have been! A different sperm, a different ovum, a slight modification of circumstances, and the world would have flowed on in its massive indifference, substantially unmodified, without me.

Nietzsche inquired: what is a human being? He replied: a question mark between two nothingnesses, an unknown, moving out of its own not-having-been into its own no-longer-being—but an unknown whose self-knowledge is of deepest concern.<sup>39</sup> And perhaps we might—less apodictic about our antecedents and consequents—reverse the aphorism: a human being is a nonentity strung between two question marks—or better yet: a question mark between two question marks.

### ***Embodiment***

We have thus far pondered two aspects of self-experience which, while obvious, are nonetheless temporally remote. We want now to con-

sider something more obvious because more immediate—and yet it is something that we scarcely ponder with sufficient depth: our own embodiment.

Consider first of all body-in-general as a perceptual object. Simple reflection upon the microscopic discoveries in biology and physics shows that the situation of relatively smooth and solid bodies standing over against us and separated by empty space is only apparent, at least insofar as the use of refined instrumentation reveals greater roughness and less solidity in the bodies and much less emptiness in the space that separates us. The world of everyday experience does not coincide with the world of full reality. The marvelous strangeness of the body-object lays hold of the scientific investigator and draws him on towards an ideal term of full being, the path toward which reveals wonders that, for the everyday focus of awareness, are bizarre. Ponder that sufficiently and the underlying strangeness of the everyday world of familiar bodies will slowly enter into the depth of consciousness.

Consider then the human body in particular as revealed through biological investigation: what emerges is the fantastic complexity and unbelievable interrelation of the elements within our organic being. Consider that within each of our heads there are some one hundred billion connections, each one of which is, in turn, related to all the chemical-physical factors that go into a single nerve cell. Consider the constant anabolism and catabolism, the buildup and breakdown that occurs each second within a system that looks to the external observer—and even to the one who *lives* that body—as if it were very quiet and rather grossly articulated morphologically.

For example, one cubic millimeter of human blood contains some five million red blood cells.<sup>40</sup> The cells contain hemoglobin molecules that are combinations of four heme groups and four polypeptide chains that form the globin, each chain being a sequence of over one hundred forty amino acids. One of the amino acids—for example, histidine—is a six-carbon molecule. The carbon atom itself exhibits two electron shells with four electrons in the outer orbit and two in the inner. When we are at the electron level, the size is in the neighborhood of one trillionth of an inch. And besides the electrons orbiting a proton-neutron nucleus, work with high-speed accelerators has yielded at least eighty other manifestations of energy at the subatomic level.

The complexity of a single cell is indeed staggering. But when one considers that there are some sixty trillion cells in the human body, each dynamically engaged in maintaining the balance of that staggering complexity of its own components, and each functioning in perfect conjunction with all the rest, and that fifty million of these

cells are perishing and as many coming into being each second, we are faced with a truly incredible situation.

What we are trying to do is to exploit the contemplative possibilities opened up by scientific discoveries, to use them not just to gain practical control or to satisfy intellectual curiosity (or to show off how smart we are or to get good grades!), but to deepen our sense of the strangeness of our own being, to render more profound our mode of dwelling in our life-world. Part of the problem is that what is discovered under the microscope, e.g., always appears in the plane of our ordinary visual experience on a scale proportionate to the scale of what appears in that plane. For practical and theoretical purposes, the objective inference that arrives at the scale is sufficient. For contemplative purposes, one has to work at reforming one's *Gestalt* on the basis of the observations and inferences that we make within science until the firm surfaces that appear in ordinary experience are, as it were, dissolved by the power of imagination to conform more to the fullness of what is actually there but does not directly appear. Seeing might then on occasion and for an instant be transformed into vision. (In this direction one might reflect with profit on the role of the arts.)

But perhaps the most astonishing aspect in these considerations is that all the staggering complexity of the physical-physiological mechanisms is just what is involved in the apparently simple acts of writing and reading this page. Consider, then, the self as the one who does live that body: consider the body-subject.<sup>41</sup> To me in my everyday consciousness, these factors mentioned above occur beneath the level of my conscious life, supporting it as an ocean supports a cork floating upon its surface. Kierkegaard reminds us: we are floating over waters seventy thousand fathoms deep.<sup>42</sup> That ocean is me—and yet I am scarcely aware of it.

Ponder then what is involved in the astonishment of the young man, who, having experimented with mind-expanding drugs, asked in astonishment: "Did you ever hear your body move?" The body, after all, does make sounds constantly: the flow of the bodily fluids, the movement of the electro-chemical impulses, the creaking of the joints, the beating of the heart. Gurgling, thumping, humming, wheezing, creaking, cracking: the dance of life goes on, for the most part beneath the level of consciousness which springs from and floats upon it. In suddenly hearing such things as within *himself* and *as himself*—things of which he was not usually aware, except occasionally in a detached sort of way in books and in lectures, or perhaps even in scientific experiments—he suddenly grasped the strangeness of his being.

There is a peculiar sort of identity/nonidentity relationship operative here. It was not simply a matter of hearing some new audible

datum—that need not provoke astonishment. It was a matter of hearing *himself* internally moving (identity-factor). But still, the astonishment emerged from the simultaneous nonidentity: such sounds and therefore such movements are not usually lived through *as me*, do not enter into the sphere of awareness which is the self-familiar side of myself, the side with which I am most intimately identified. The strangeness of bodiliness and consciousness coemerge out of their unquestioned unity in the region of the familiar. We live our lives within the daylight of consciousness, which is a small circle of light partially structured by our intentions, fringed by preconscious directedness, and surrounded by the darkness of our physiological processes. What is this strange substratum that supports us, which is ourselves, and yet of which we are rarely aware in any fully living way? What is our bodiliness?

### *Consciousness*

Already in our consideration of our own bodiliness we have been led (again by “the law of opposites”) to grasp something of what it is. Let us now consider it more explicitly.

Awareness is something rather illusive—so illusive in fact that many people (even those of good intellectual capacity) are led to deny its existence by reducing it to factors that can be publicly verified through the senses. More than one thinker (and many more non-thinkers) has considered consciousness to be nothing but a matter of electrochemical factors. But what is peculiar about the situation is that, though the electrochemical factors appear to a public sensory inspection (they can “lop off” the top of my head and peer inside), my awareness does not so appear. Neurosurgeons are able to stimulate certain areas of the brain in order to produce recall of certain types of experience or to induce fantasies; but the way in which they verify the experiences is not by looking at the electrochemical events in the brain: it is rather by asking the patient what he is aware of when such and such an area of the cortex is stimulated. And even if scientists might develop laws of correlation so exact that they might no longer need to ask the patient but only study the electrical pattern, consciousness remains a strange Other.<sup>43</sup> Consciousness itself slips out of every attempt to trap it within the net of our sensory observations, for it is the condition that makes possible the sensory observations. It is the frame within which everything appears, but it itself does not appear. And even though we may deny it or not even bother to consider its existence, it is the region within which we dwell and which is negatively illuminated by meditation upon the factors of



bodiliness which are not immediately explicit in experience but which factually support experience. All of our meaningfulness stems from this region of our being, for it is in terms of our mode of awareness that we judge ourselves fulfilled or unfulfilled, happy or unhappy, in the truth or deluded or confused.

Awareness is set in motion by the presence of a perceptual object. Reflection on the status of the perceptual object in the field of everyday attention moves us back to consider the coconstitutive character of that attention in relation to its objects. Bodies appear only in terms of thresholds set up by *our* organic situation. The perceptual *Umwelt* is our world. Nonetheless, the object is given for us as existing in itself, as *other* than our awareness of it.<sup>44</sup> The otherness is more fully uncovered in a controlled way by scientific investigation drawn on by the dim recognition of a term which would be full manifestation of the full being of the object. Human consciousness is an anticipation of the full being of any other.<sup>45</sup>

But when we consider the distinction between body-subject and body-object, we see that that full term is more than object of scientific investigation, and we are then turned in the direction of intersubjectivity. The eye of the other is not the same object for the oculist and for the lover. The oculist's "concrete" focus on the eyeball mechanism abstracts from the essential expressivity of the look of the other person.<sup>46</sup>

In both cases, that of body as object-for-consciousness and that of the lived body-subject, we are thrown back upon a nonobjectified conscious-subject whose self-identified self-presence is the condition for the progressive revelation of otherness, and which comes to its own self-possession in that revelation, dimly but more deeply in interpersonal relations, clearly but more superficially in scientific investigation—and somewhere in between in phenomenological reflection.

Reflection upon the anticipation of the full being of any other, in conjunction with the ideal of full theoretical comprehension of a total domain of objects in science, could open up an even deeper thrust toward the fullness of being that is the deepest ground of consciousness, drawing the lover and the knower on toward the term to which authentic religious consciousness aspires. Again, mind emerges into the field of our attentiveness as anticipation of the total-real.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Self-Identity***

The consideration of bodiliness and consciousness will have, I hope, led us to see what earlier people had seen: that there is an "inner" dimension to our being that is the source of all personal meaning,

without which being in the mode of bodily existence means nothing: "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his soul?" ("Soul" here is another one of those overworked terms which, like an old coin that has passed from hand to hand—to borrow an expression from Heidegger—soon loses all trace of its real meaning. But the meaning here should be sufficiently clear for our purposes at this point.) But once having discovered the interiority of the human being as an other in relation to the object-body, in spite of those massive efforts of the modern world to eliminate that interiority, the problem has always been to put the human being back together again: Am I simply an angel (or devil) driving a machine? a spirit fallen into a heavy, distracting matter—so distracting that I am often led to consider my spirit as an explanatory fiction? Or am I essentially bodily? And if so, what is this interior dimension I have uncovered? How is it related to the bodily dimensions that I and all others can observe about me?

The practice of becoming aware of one's own breathing is a significant method for returning from *logos* to *nous*, for *logos* involves a detachment of thought from its object. Standing at an inward distance, thought gains mastery. But the price it often pays is the loss of unity, the introduction of an existential split within the self. Thought desires completeness, independence, self-transparency. But try as it might to achieve this, it is always compelled to face up to the partiality, dependency, and unclarity rooted in the existential situation of its own essential embodiment.

Identification with the breathing process is a *conscious* letting-be of that without which we are not humanly conscious. It is a bringing to participatory (and not detached) awareness of that which goes on even without our awareness. Such a practice is a return from the pretension of a de facto "idealism" to existential (as distinguished from theoretical) realism. It is, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, an inward movement "from refusal to consent," a reintegration at the level of reflective consciousness, of that unity with the rhythms of the cosmos enjoyed unreflectively in more primitive states.<sup>48</sup>

In our usual states of awareness, we are involved in the thinking of objects—usually objects distinct from ourselves. Occasionally—as we are attempting here—we might give some attention to the process of thinking itself: we think about it. But even here, the subject who is doing the thinking—the center and ground of thought—is involved in a duality with that which is being thought. Thinking about thought is still thinking about an object—even though this object is discovered to be of a radically different structure than the usual objects that people our consciousness, namely, the world of bodies. What about

the subject itself? What is the subject? Consciousness alone? Then what is it when I am in dreamless sleep? What about consciousness and its somatic ground considered together? We can never fully objectify that, never fully get it in front of ourselves, for it is the condition that makes objectification possible. It is that in front of which we get everything else—like a hand that is there for grasping all sorts of objects, but that cannot grasp itself. How do we grasp selfhood itself, which is that whereby everything else is conceived, grasped? Through the attempt at the complete emptying of the mind of all images, all concepts, all contents in general. This annihilation of all objects leads to the experience of that nothingness which is the subject, the self itself. Here the self spontaneously grows in its own power; here it removes all the arbitrary personal and social elements that have accumulated through personal and social history; here it readies itself for the reception of the authentic objects, linking itself to the ground that supports it to achieve psycho-somatic integration.

It is the self that has possession of itself that is capable of being really there for others, really there for the task at hand. The self is cleared of all the accidental accretions it has accumulated throughout its history: a clearing is made within which things and persons can appear in their real worth; a “cushion of silence” is established in which things can be “heard”;<sup>49</sup> a new “light” is enkindled within the self that intensifies the revelation of the Other. No new items of information are added, but everything is given a new mode of *presence*.<sup>50</sup> The self establishes in itself an inward purification, an openness, a self-emptying (or rather an ego-emptying, since the self is openness by its very nature).

It is from out of the achievement of this sort of meditative self-identified self-emptying that we will be enabled to extend our meditation to other areas and to circle back upon the objects of the four previous meditations—birth, death, bodiliness, consciousness—in order to let them be more deeply present before us. No new contents are added to consciousness, but there is a new mode of *being present*, a new inner light is enkindled in terms of which we are more fully there, really with whatever manifests itself, and not daydreaming in that mode of self-absence that characterizes our usual mode of awareness.

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In two short pages at the beginning of his *Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard de Chardin has laid out several parameters of the general context of our existence.<sup>51</sup> He entitles the section “On Seeing” and calls for the development of several new “senses” based upon the

extension of knowledge achieved in the natural sciences: a sense of spatial immensity, of temporal depth, of complexity, of levels of scale, of long-term movement, and of organic, environmental connectedness. Such new "senses" would be matters of "vision," of a "seeing" that "touches." They would serve to dispel the short-sighted illusions of human scale that center on size, disconnectedness, and immobility.

We have already alluded to the levels of scale of complexity in our reflections on embodiment. Following this lead, then, we continue our meditations, focusing now on the "outer world," its space, time, and interconnectedness.

### *Space*

Consider first of all the sky on a clear night. From the perspective of "eye-ball" seeing, the sky always looks to us as it looked to the primitive (abstracting from the problem of mythical configuration which most probably altered his perception of things qualitatively): we see, as it were, the inside of a kind of half-egg beginning at the horizon and vaulting over our heads to a height of . . . ? fifty miles? a hundred miles? maybe even a *thousand* miles? But of course we *know* that the stars are millions upon millions of light-years away, that the known universe is over ten billion light-years across, and that a lightyear is something on the order of seven quadrillion miles. And so there we have again our by now familiar split between what we know orthotically and what we know by way of our lived perception. Meditation in the actual presence of the stars on the known distances can on occasion enter into the "aesthetics" of our greater lived perception. We learn to "see" the stars from time to time more in accord with their true distances.

We have already pushed into the other direction of space in meditation upon bodiliness-in-general as a prelude to meditation upon our own embodiment. What is important to recognize, once more, is the immense gap there is between propositional correctness—truth in the orthotic mode—and presence. But it is also important to recognize the great labor involved in arriving at the scientific revelations at the micro- and macrolevels extending beyond the scale of our immediate perception. Meditation here, recalling scientific truth from its alien position in relation to "life," can significantly deepen our sense of presence and, to some extent, recall commonsense experience as well from its surface relation to things. We learn thereby to dwell in a deepened sense of space—or at least to become aware that the commonsense world where we all dwell is for the most part girt about by spatial depths that we may, in privileged moments, "see."

### Time

We dwell in the present in virtue of anticipation of the future and recall of the past, whether deliberately going in search of the past and the future or spontaneously being carried by immediate anticipations and recollective associations. Both directions open out to an indeterminate past and future incapable of being completely filled. And within those empty references to the indeterminate past and the indeterminate future, a more or less concrete filling goes on, involving a more or less profound concreteness in the present. Typically the past trailed off into "once upon a time" until people took it into their heads to fix genealogies and eventually keep records.<sup>52</sup> The best that men of the West could do until the eighteenth century was develop a sense of the extension of the past that went no further than 4004 B.C.<sup>53</sup> But men eventually set to work to develop the tools of criticism, working simultaneously from assessment of historical sources, from archaeology, paleontology, and biology, until the past concretely stretched into increasing depth, the past of the human race extending to some two million years, of life to four billion, and of the cosmic system as we know it to over ten billion years, corresponding to the over ten billion light-years across the known universe.

But again, the point for our purposes is to bring this orthotic yield into relation with our lived experience in order to gain a "sense" of what underlies our everyday world *temporally*, as we attempted above to gain a similar sense spatially.

The "reality" of the present moment and the presence of things to us is as thick and as deep as we are capable of bringing to bear upon it a recollective sense of their being the cutting edge of a growing past that bites progressively into the future. In an ancient Greek ruin twenty-five hundred years of history are sedimented. The pillars of the temple of Apollo at Delphi still gather the world of the ancient Greeks, though we may be no more present than to the sensuous immediacy of erect, fluted, weathered piles of ivory-colored drums among the dark, waving columns of cypress outlined against the sky beneath Parnassus. Around the winding path up to the temple, on to the theater, and up further to the stadium there still seems to float, for one properly alert, the sound of the footsteps and the hymns of the worshippers of old, some doubtless going through a relatively mindless social routine, others coming into contact with the holy that even today engulfs the sacred place. When thoughts such as these gradually or suddenly rise to the level of vision a genuine historian is born, the "dry as dust" comes to life, and the present moment deepens.

But twenty-five hundred years only defines the entry into the human world of marble that had been billions of years in the making. The “stability,” the “durability” of the artistic medium wavers and dissolves before the physicist’s vision of long-term development linked to the underlying rhythmic expenditures of energy that constitute the deep-structure of the hoary pillars. And the surrounding vegetation—indeed, we ourselves—are eddies in the great, almost undetectable upward surge of life that has moved from level to level in the journey toward humanness. Carried by that surge, we lived our lives almost oblivious of it. But if and when it becomes focal, we awaken.

### *Interconnectedness*

Atomism, whether in the physical, the psychological or the social sense, is the result of a peculiar abstractive methodology that has led to significant discoveries, but also to significant omissions that now have to be underscored. Field theory in physics, reaching toward the conception of the unity of the space-time matrix in which all events are embedded,<sup>54</sup> reestablished connectedness as a fundamental feature of things. In biology, the organism has increasingly been thought of, not in terms of relatively separable stimulus-response mechanisms, but in terms of wholistic functioning.<sup>55</sup> And one can scarcely do justice to organisms apart from considering their inseparable relations to their environments. Today, by reason of the systematic impact of the consequences of industrial development, we have become more sensitive than ever before to “the web of life” as a single system of which we are only relatively independent parts.<sup>56</sup> In psychology, there has been emphasis upon the significance of the *Gestalt*, the configured whole, not only in single perceptions, but also in the overall style of behavior and fundamental “feel” for things characteristic of the person.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the rise of sociology since Comte and Marx—by characteristic overreaction—reemphasized what the ancients clearly understood, that the human being is a “political animal,” rooted in a tradition of sedimented “words and deeds,” outside of which there is no true humanness.<sup>58</sup>

More concretely, the very process of writing and reading this page rests upon the structures of the English language tradition into which we enter and whose virtualities we are unable to survey with any adequacy. Linked to language, our whole sense of things is a product of the entry of the Western heritage into the present.<sup>59</sup> It is the metaphysical aspect of that heritage that we will explore throughout the work, but especially in part 2.

Our self-determination is always determination within, resting upon, the complex webs—physical, biological, psychological, and