Human Dignity and Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

A Life Worth Living?

The question of the meaning of human life is profound and challenging, often wrestled with in the depths of our souls and expressed through mediums as varied as art, philosophy, science, and theology. Sometimes, this struggle is evident in the face of devastating circumstances: What makes "my" life meaningful or happy? Is it worth living? What makes it worth living? These questions spring from the nature of human existence. Sooner or later, we discover we are given to the world without our knowledge or choice; indeed, we *discove*r that we exist as a part of a natural and social environment. We also discover that we come into being at a certain moment in time and will pass out of existence at a later moment. But the most important fact we discover is that we are not ready-made realities but potentialities for realization as particular human beings. We are constantly confronted by two stubborn challenges. First, how do we transform the potentialities we are into particular human individuals? Second, how should we live, love, and die, i.e., how can we lead a life worth living? The tree, the rock, or the lion does not ask this question. They simply exist. They are given realities, but humanity—the human essence, human nature, or that which makes us human realities—is not given as a ready-made reality; it is a reality to be created, and we are responsible for its creation. The questions of "how," "what for," and the manner of how we become the individuals we are always loom, at least implicitly, at the rim of our consciousness in conducting our lives; it frequently surges into our consciousness, especially when we make serious decisions, construct serious projects, or face critical challenges. However, how we lead a life worth living depends on how we create or realize ourselves as human individuals. As I shall explain in detail, the life of a human being is an ongoing process of self-creation. It is always personal and private. I—and no one else—am responsible for its growth and development as well as its failures and blunders. I may receive help or advice from my parents, friends, family members, and priests, and I may derive some insight from philosophical or artistic work, but I am accountable for the life I lead. Alone I was born, alone I live, and alone I exit the world.

But why should the question of a life worth living arise? Why has it always remained important to the ordinary human being, the philosopher, the artist, and the theologian? More importantly, can we avoid, ignore, or neglect it if we recognize that we are human realities in need of creation or what it means for us to exist as human beings? This question arises from the inner dynamics of human nature. The emergence of self-consciousness from the womb of consciousness, signifying the emergence of the "I," self, or subject that presides over one's growth and development, precedes the emergence of this question. The confrontation of consciousness with itself at that miraculous moment necessarily prompts the question of the reason for being in the world. The self realizes that it is an empty being—a pure potentiality for being, and as a potentiality, it is a cry for being. This cry is the quintessential constituent of potentiality; otherwise, it cannot be a potentiality. This claim is based on the assumption that potentiality is a quantum of power. Every type of potentiality is a cry for being because it does not exist abstractly but always as a possibility inherent in a certain object.

The question of how I should live implies a corollary: What is the best or most appropriate type of life I should live? The immediate response to this question is that I should live according to the capacity, logic, and purpose inherent in me as potentiality. Every object that exists acts according to its particular nature. Acting according to its nature is its destiny. An apple tree thrives as an apple tree and fulfills its destiny by producing apples. An apple tree does not choose or determine the way it grows and produces apples. It does not produce plumbs or oranges because producing such fruits contradicts its nature as an apple tree. Its destiny is determined by nature, that is, by the natural forces that act on it. In contrast, human nature is not given as a ready-made reality the way an apple tree is but as a potentiality for realization as a concrete individual reality. However, although it is conceptualized as a potentiality, it is not a *tabula rasa* but a composite of capacities, each one of which is essentially a *power* that can be realized in a certain way. The self that confronts itself in a moment of self-consciousness is this composite of powers. I have highlighted *power* because it exists as an impulse, a drive, a craving, or a cry for realization in the world. Is the rosebud that suddenly appears at the end of the branch of a rose plant not a surge of power potential in the plant as a type of formal organization?

I should at once clarify that the emergence of self-consciousness does not take place in some kind of metaphysical *locus* or vacuum but in the stream of social life at the peak of adolescence. At this stage of our lives, we reach a reasonable level of intellectual, affectional, and volitional skills, and we

accumulate some knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. But the self we discover at this moment of self-consciousness is a social construct. The emergence of self-consciousness happens in the medium of this construct. This emergence signifies an insistent urge to transform this construct into an authentic self that grows and develops its identity from within the capacities inherent in the core of its unique human reality. Although intuitively, the human dimension of our being, which emerges from our consciousness that we are potentialities for growth and development, gradually comes to light as we move forward in social living. The itch for personal identity, for being yourself, grows and steadily replaces the identity we received during the first period of our lives. Our life as a human individual begins with the growth and development of personal identity. The question of how we should live, love, and die, or how we should live a worthwhile life hovers silently but actively on the fringes of our consciousness when we endeavor to realize ourselves as particular human individuals.

I have highlighted this aspect of our growth and development mainly to underscore the significance of the claim that the question of the meaning of human life originates from the inner dynamics of human nature that inheres in the human body as a potentiality. We not only strive to survive biologically, socially, and psychologically but especially as human beings. What is human individuality? What does this concept entail? What does it mean to live a worthwhile life? These questions will be discussed herein.

Thesis of the Book

The central thesis I shall analyze and defend in this book is that living as human individuals is necessary for living in dignity. The defining feature of dignity is respect or esteem. A person who conducts their life as a human individual is entitled to respect. What is respect? By "respect," I mean the preservation of integrity and continual promotion of the well-being of the human individual. However, respect is a bipolar concept; first, the human individual is obligated to preserve their integrity and well-being as an individual, and second, the state or society is obligated to preserve the integrity and well-being of the human individual. As I shall argue, the person who possesses the quality of dignity has the right to grow as a human individual, and the state must protect this right.

Leading a life of individuality is, first, the source of meaning the human essence craves, second, the source of hope, courage, and strength we need to grow and develop as human individuals, and third, the basis of the attempt

to justify the worthwhileness of the life we have led. A life poor in human meaning, regardless of whether it is endowed with wealth, knowledge, pleasure, fame, or longevity, is a life lived in the dim cellar of human existence.

What is human individuality? Under what conditions can one live as a human individual, and, as a consequence, with dignity? In my endeavor to answer these questions, I begin with a detailed discussion of human values, then I argue that human nature, which exists in the human body as a potentiality, consists of four basic capacities: thinking, affection, volition, and sensibility. By their very nature, these capacities function as peremptory desires that inherently aim at the realization of the values of truth, beauty, goodness, freedom, religiosity, and life. The differentia of value is importance. The structure of human character consists of realized values. Thus, individuality is a value concept.

Under what conditions can a human being grow and develop as a human individual? This question is tantamount to asking, what is the dwelling, environment, or domain in which human beings can thrive as human beings or live in dignity? This question implies that people live in two realms—in the realm of nature by virtue of their bodies and in the realm of humanity by virtue of the environment they build, viz., the state or society as an organization of human beings, more concretely in the institutions and organizations that make up the structure of the state. The building blocks of these institutions and organizations are realized values. Although the nature of the realm of humanity generically differs from the realm of nature, it is nevertheless anchored in it. This relation is made possible by the fact that the natural environment in which it is anchored is appropriated for human purposes. Generally, human purposes embody human values. The process of appropriation involves the ingression of human values. For example, a given segment of a natural environment is transformed into arable land, a road, a bridge, a garden, a house, a village, or a city. Again, the process of transforming a natural environment into a built environment is a manner of humanizing it because it is rebuilt or reformed in a human image. Accordingly, the concept of the state, or that of society, is a value concept.

The built environment comes to life in the frame of the state as a human institution. People live in states; they do not live in uninhabited parts of nature the way animals live in the forest or the mountains. The state is a *sine qua non* for the possibility of living in dignity primarily because its building blocks are realized values: it is a human environment *par excellence*. I argue that democracy is the highest or purest exemplification of this environment.

First, it originates from the will of the people; second, its constitution is a conceptual articulation of this will; third, the political authority that administers the public life of the people is a concrete embodiment of the constitution; and fourth, the law according to which the public life of the people is administered issues from the will of the people. Accordingly, as a unity of institutions, the state is the most appropriate environment in which people can grow as human individuals and live in dignity. This last point reminds me of a conversation between a Roman General and a Stoic philosopher.

"How can I raise my son to grow as a good human being?" The General asked the philosopher.

"Raise him in a state with good laws," the philosopher said.

This response is based on the fundamental assumption that law is not merely a prescriptive rule or principle that defines the limits of public freedom but also an educative power mainly because it expresses human values: justice, cooperation, peace, prosperity, community, compassion, or friendship. It is, I think, reasonable to say that the structure of a character formed in a state with good laws concretizes human values. The social atmosphere in such a state is conducive to the growth and development of human individuality. I shall underscore again the significance of this conversation toward the end of this discourse.

This book is an argument. The discussion of the first proposition begins in Chapter One and arrives at the final stage of the development of the thesis in the last chapter. To accentuate the centrality of my argument, I have imagined a critic who intervenes frequently to consider the views of other philosophers and certainly of ordinary people.

CHAPTER ONE

ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF HUMAN VALUES

General Idea of Value

We may characterize the objects that make up the structure of the world as a countless diversity in terms of kind and quantity; we may, moreover, distinguish two types of objects, human and natural; and we may, finally, deem these objects as important, or valuable, for at least three reasons. First, they exist. In addition to its being ontological, the concept of existence is also a value concept because it implies that it is better to exist rather than not: being is better than non-being. Although most philosophers would grant the reasonableness of this claim, some thinkers, especially moralists, might question it, for they may ask whether the existence of natural and human evil is better than not. As I shall presently explain, values and their opposites, disvalues, are not constitutive of the ontic structure of the world (i.e., objects in the scientific or physical sense of the word); they are qualities created and ascribed by people to natural and human objects. Regardless of whether it is human or natural, evil exists to or because of human beings. For example, we may treat an earthquake that swallows up a village or destroys an important human monument as evil, but nature itself, as I shall momentarily explain, is neither good nor evil, not only because human beings judge it as god or evil but also because the same earthquake can simultaneously open up a very rich oil well we usually judge as good. Second, the existence of objects and species of objects is necessary; they are not self-created. Accordingly, they exist regardless of whether the author of their existence is human or non-human. Their importance, if they are judged as important, does not necessarily come into being with their coming into being. Third, all the objects that exist, be they natural or human, are potentially *useful.* That which is useful is important. Human beings judge them as important or valuable. Their value or importance does not befall them *ab extra* (i.e., haphazardly, accidentally, or from nothing). A corollary to this assertion is the idea that the importance or value of existing objects does not *exist* in them as elements or features constitutive of their *ontic structure* but as qualities people ascribe to them.

Moreover, we can classify all the objects of our experience, the way scientists and philosophers do, in terms of their importance or value pyramidically. As far as we know, human beings are the measure of the extent to which they are important. This claim is warranted by the fact that no matter its kind, the "value," "importance," or "worth" of an object is not a fact of nature the way stones, trees, or animals are. We do not encounter or in any way interact with a reality called "value," "importance," or "worth in the streets of social life, forest, marketplace, or garden. It is a quality human beings ascribe to objects. The value ascribed to them exists as a *felt quality* in the person who ascribes it to the object. Some feature or aspect in it produces both the quality the person ascribes to the object as well as the feeling it generates in experiencing it. But although it does not inhere in it, nevertheless, it is essential to it because the feature or aspect that provokes it is an integral part of the object. For example, we can say that the horse and the wolf are important because they promote the integrity of the ecosystem. Human beings make this kind of judgment. It is based on the fact that both the horse and the wolf promote the integrity of the ecosystem, the integrity of the ecosystem is important to the integrity of nature, and the integrity of nature is important to the survival of human and natural life. From the standpoint of nature, the horse and the wolf are equal in importance. They are necessary emergent from cosmic evolution, and they are equally necessary for its continuation. Does a storm or an earthquake discriminate between a horse, a tree, or an architectural monument? So far as I know, nothing in or about it about it declares or even indicates its value or any kind of magnitude of value it might possess.

But we can also say that the horse is more vital than the wolf. Some features of the horse absent from the wolf are the basis of this judgment. It is a higher-order evaluation because it is comparative. It is actuated by the degree to which its basis, or object, promotes human well-being: *the more an object promotes human well-being, the more valuable it is*. Implicit in the preceding line of reasoning is the fundamental premise that the promotion of human well-being, usually referred to as "happiness," "self-fulfillment," "human perfection," "human growth development," or "self-realization," is the ultimate value in human life. This premise was first articulated by Aristotle in the 4th century B.C. and affirmed by the major philosophers during the past 2500 years. It is based on a deep understanding of human nature and experience. It is not an accident that it is treated as the ultimate *criterion* in any attempt to measure the values of a natural or human object. As such, it functions as a signifier, indicator, or measure of the extent to which an object is important or valuable. Directly and frequently indirectly, people seek to maximize their well-being. It is, moreover, prudent to resort

to a criterion they can rely on in their pursuit of the greatest amount of well-being. The absence of such a criterion in the pursuit of any good in our lives is a source of caprice, failure, or harm. Without it, people would drift in their lives without any moral, rational, or practical constraints.

The quest for the highest well-being in human life is a primary tendency in human nature. The human self or psyche is not only the *source* but also the *impetus* of the various types of human action. But although it is a primary tendency, it does not necessarily follow that human beings are necessarily, or by nature, selfish, for two reasons. First, in all its forms, self-satisfaction is essential for the growth and integrity of the human individual. This assertion is to a reasonable degree corroborated by the generally recognized findings of scientists, such as Darwin, Jung, and Freud, and philosophers, such as Epictetus, Seneca, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, not to mention the obvious dictate of practical wisdom, namely, human beings are expected to assume not only charge but also responsibility for their lives. Second, the impulse to live is not the only drive or impetus in human nature. Creativity is one of its primary drives. The human self, mind, or psyche does not only aim to receive but also to give good deeds—moral, aesthetic, economic, cultural, religious, affectional, intellectual, and material deeds. This drive is the ultimate source of moral, aesthetic sense, social sense, religious sense, curiosity, and the consciousness of freedom. Indeed, it is a *sine qua non* for any kind of altruistic action. What is altruism but the capacity of the human individual to foster her well-being and the well-being of as many other human individuals as possible? Again, what is the capacity to foster human well-being but the power to create meaningful works? This power to give originates from the bosom of the human mind and heart. I am quite aware that selfishness has always been, especially these days, a way of life. People wear the robe of vibrant, sophisticated altruism, but underneath this robe, vibrant, sophisticated selfishness thrives with an amazing skill of self-assertion! However, its predominance does not obviate or undermine the validity of the claim that *qua* power altruism is a primary ingredient of human nature. The question of why selfishness is so predominant is a central concern of the educational expert and the social scientist.

Value as Importance

We may interpret the concept or category of value in terms of importance: that which is *valuable* is *important*. Accordingly, we should ask, what is "importance"? What makes an object important? "Importance" is a primary category in the sense that it resists conceptual definition because it is not

given to the world as an individual object the way natural and mental objects are given (e.g., *Mount Everes*t or Goethe's *Faust* are given to the min.); it exists in a direct intuition of certain qualities or features of the objects of human experience. This assertion implies that the value, or importance, of an object does not exist in it as a physical or psychological quality but as a quality that emerges in apprehending the dynamic interrelatedness of the elements that make up the constitution of the object as a physical or mental integrity. What I apprehend cannot be reduced to any type of physical or mental reality; put differently, the type of value that emerges in experiencing the importance of an object is generically different from any type of physical or mental reality. Can we reduce the value of joy we aesthetically feel when we experience *Symphony No. 9* or the value of a loving act we receive from a friend when we suffer the pains of a tragic or devastating experience to a psychological or physical experience or feeling?

Although importance does not exist as an independent object or as a constituent element of a given object, it is a quality *par excellence*, one we can ascribe to the object the way we ascribe whiteness to the snow or redness to the fire for two reasons. First, the quality refers to the object and derives its being and identity from the being and identity of the object. For example, the kind of joy I experience when I undergo an aesthetic experience of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* is peculiar to this artwork. I cannot have it when I experience any other type of artwork or any type of object in the world. The joy I experience comes into being when I experience this particular symphony. Second, the quality emerges in apprehending the dynamic interrelatedness of the elements that constitute the structure of the object; it comes into being and thrives within the parameters of the apprehension. These two reasons imply that the quality inheres as a potentiality in the constitutional structure of the object; otherwise, how can we say that it emerges from the dynamic interrelatedness of the elements that make up this structure? That which is potential does not yet exist but can exist. It comes into existence under certain conditions. For example, the joy that exists potentially in the musical composition Beethoven created inheres, first, in the score he wrote, second, in the way this score is translated into a special organization of sounds by the maestro of the symphony and the orchestra she conducts, and third, in the *aesthetic conditions* the listener translates the organization into a living presence of the joy potential in the score. These aesthetic conditions are *decisive* in determining the extent to which the depth of the joy Beethoven conceived and sought to communicate comes to life as true to his intention as possible. I say "decisive" because the quality potential in the music is not given as a ready-made reality but as a reality that can be made or created. In creation, the listener "squeezes out"

(i.e., presses out) the quality from its womb of potentiality. But, as I shall explain in detail, in the following pages, the objects of human experience differ in their kind and inner structure. Accordingly, how a value inheres in an object depends on (1) the kind of object it is and (2) the conditions under which it is deemed important. Now, in what sense does a quality inhere in an object regardless of whether it is natural or artifactual? This question asks for an adequate account of the meaning of (1) "potentiality" and (2) the mode of its inherence in the object.

Broadly speaking, we can say that an object is important since it is meaningful, momentous, significant, decisive, or consequential, in short, since it matters to us as individuals or communities, regardless of whether it is good or evil. An important object makes a serious difference in our lives. It is the kind of object that may promote or reduce our well-being. However, although importance does not exist as an independent reality, and although it emerges in an intuitive act in the apprehension of the various qualities of the given object, nevertheless, it assumes the status of a quality *par excellence*, one we can ascribe to the object the way we ascribe whiteness to a pile of snow or redness to a flare of fire for two reasons, first, the emergent quality refers to a particular object and derives its being and kind from the identity of the object. The kind of joy I experience when I listen to *Symphony No. 9* is peculiar to the symphony. It comes into being by experiencing the work aesthetically. Second, the quality does not exist as a given ingredient in the sounds I hear or in the experience as an intellectual event; it is experienced as a quality in the context of apprehending the aesthetic dimension of the symphony. This claim is based on the assumption that the quality inheres as a potentiality in the aesthetic dimension of the symphony. This potentiality is realized in the activity of my apprehension when I experience it *in a certain way* (i.e. aesthetically). I underline "in a certain way" because the quality I apprehend is not given as a ready-made reality but as an act of creation. This type of apprehension squeezes out, or *presses out*, the quality that inheres in the aesthetic dimension of the symphony. But, as I shall detail in the following sections, no two objects are identical in the fullness of their individualities. They differ in kind and inner structure. Even twins cannot be completely identical; they may be identical in principle, or genetically, but not in fact. They begin to be different the moment they see the light of day and begin to grow as human integrities.

Value as a Potentiality

Accordingly, how a value inheres in a particular object depends on the kind of object it is and (2) the conditions under which it is deemed important. For example, how beauty inheres in an artwork differs from the way heat inheres in fire, mind inheres in the human body, or sadness inheres in a human face. Now, in what sense does a potentiality inhere in an object regardless of whether it is natural or artifactual? This question asks for an adequate account of (1) the signification of "potentiality" and (2) its mode of inherence in the object.

First, "potentiality" derives its essential meaning from the Latin *potens*, the preposition of *posse* meaning "to be able," which signifies "capacity" or "power." An object that possesses a potentiality is an object that is "powerful" in a certain way. As a category of thought, we can say that potentiality is a quantum of power; it is "the ability to do, act, or produce." In itself, it does not exist as an object that occupies a certain space during a period the way physical objects do. We do not encounter an object in our experience called "potentiality." However, we articulate it as a general concept in the activity of experiencing objects in a certain way, that is, by reflecting on (1) the nature of these objects and (2) the kind of role they play in our lives. We intuit, when we penetrate the foundational stratum of our experience of these objects, that they change and that, by this change, which is a dynamic aspect of the objects, they possess a certain capacity to produce a certain type of experience. We understand the nature of this capacity by a penetrative, analytical, and critical apprehension of the way the various types of objects act or behave—what they can do or produce or the kind of effects they usually produce. For example, a rock can change into a weapon, a building block, or a statue, and a sunset can produce an experience of beauty. We discern the presence of this capacity as a potentiality inherent in the object of our experience. We do not possess an *a priori* concept of this potentiality as a type of reality; on the contrary, we articulate it in reflecting on the nature of the object and its role in human life. This type of reflection is an ongoing observation in science, philosophy, technology, art, theology, and practical life. For example, we grow in our knowledge of the various potentialities inherent in matter the more we explore the nature of the vast realm of subatomic particles, which remains a challenge to this day. Could it be that growth in our knowledge of matter depends on the exploration (i.e., observation) of the potentialities inherent in these subatomic particles? Could it be that the more we explore, observe, and understand the parts that make up the structure of the human body, the more we grow in our knowledge of human nature? Do teachers or parents not sometimes discern

that a certain young person who seems at first ordinary or even mediocre possesses the potential to become a great artist, leader, or mathematician?

The view that the *arche,* that is, the stuff, of the cosmic process that constitutes the being of the universe, which was first explored by the Pre-Socratics, is not an inert, static, or changeless substance but essentially a process, is encapsulated in the general dictum that the cosmic process is a creative advance. Most, if not all, contemporary philosophers and scientists would grant the plausibility of this dictum. How is creativity in the natural and human realms possible if the *arche* that underlies the being of the universe is not a fountain, or a source, of the potentiality of infinite forms of being? How can we explain the continual process of change in nature and humanity without basing our explanation on the assumption that the elements that constitute the structure of the cosmic process are essentially potentialities for the possibility of new modes of being? I have invoked this metaphysical assumption only to spotlight the fact that what scientists, philosophers, and ordinary people call "objects," regardless of whether they are natural or human, are clusters of capacities that are potentialities for new types of realities.

The values we ascribe to objects are emergent. They come into being in the activity of experiencing them. Their emergence is no less real than the reality that makes up the structure of the natural and human world. The beauty of a natural or human object, the morality of an individual or a communal action, the truth of the theory of relativity, or the assertion that the human mind is the highest type of reality we proclaim in the course of our theoretical and practical lives are as real as the reality of the sun, the mountains, or the rivers that sustain the life of zoological and botanical organisms. These values do not emerge or exist as natural or artifactual objects; the role they play in the life of nature and humanity is as real, and as effective as the role of the infinity of the various elements that are the vehicle of the creative advance of the cosmic process.

My critic would now intervene: "I understand what you mean when you say that value exists in an object as a quality we ascribe to the object and that this quality emerges in the process of experiencing the object in a certain way. But the question that piques my mind is, what is the structure of this emergence? It is one thing for a reality or a quality to exist as a potentiality, but it is something else for it to exist as an actuality, i.e., as a realized potentiality. What sort of reality is it?" Let me at once submit that in the sphere of human life, the type of reality that is realized is meaning; that is, in this type of experience, a potential *is transformed into an experience of*

meaning. Put differently, that which was potential comes to life in the activity of realization as an experience of meaning. This type of experience is spiritual *par excellence*. The meaning is apprehended and integrated into the basic structure of the mind that apprehends it. In this kind of experience, the dimension of the mind expands in magnitude by the expansion of the dimension of meaning the mind undergoes. It is important to emphasize at this point that the possibility of the apprehension and integration of meaning is the essence of what philosophers and educators call "human growth and development." What is the true essence of this growth and development but growth in the ability to apprehend and realize the various types of values *qua* meaning in the mind of the young and the adult? The mind does not grow and develop when it is stuffed with "information," which is frequently confused with "knowledge," but when its inner structure grows and develops in its capacity to apprehend the meaning implicit in the various types of human values. The greater the depth of the values we pursue and experience, the greater the process of human growth and development.

Implied in the preceding line of reasoning is that contrary to a widespread popular belief, human growth and development are not merely, or necessarily, growth in power, wealth, health, knowledge, or pleasure, although their attainment is frequently a condition for genuine human growth and development because, as I have just indicated, that which grows and develops is the self, the I, the mind, or agent that p*resides* over the various types of objectives we aim at or the various types of experiences we undergo in our daily lives. This type of growth and development cannot be reduced to a sensuous or psychological experience. It is a drop in human experience, of human *beings*, in short, of *human meaning*. Does our personal world not shrink when the range of our meaningful experiences shrinks? Do we not feel real and expansive when we sizzle in an experience of truth, beauty, love, truth, religiosity, or creation? I would not be amiss if I said that the reason for being of our lives as human beings stands on the ground of human values. Destroy this ground and you destroy our reason for being.

It is critically important at this juncture to elaborate on the concept of potentiality to point out that, regardless of its kind, apprehension of meaning is the fundamental stuff of any type of human creation. Is it not the datum of reflection in science, philosophy, technology, theology, and practical life? Is it not the fountain from which the artwork or the philosophical theory derives its being? Even in practical life, do we not feel bored, listless, or forlorn when we are idle, that is, when we do not enjoy the nectar of the various types of meaning in the various types of human experience?

Valuation

The diversity of human and natural objects that make up the fabric of reality are *potentially valuable*; that is, they are inherently valuable, at least for two reasons. First, as I have just emphasized, since it exists as an object, it is a dynamic reality which, following Leibniz and especially Whitehead later on, is a dynamic reality—a drop of power. Moreover, it is a process of being in constant change. As such, it is a cluster of potentialities, each one of which is a potentiality for various types of realizations, which can be sources of new potentialities. Accordingly, as a drop of power, an object is, in principle, a possibility for the emergence of value as a quality that inheres in the organic unit of the essential features that make up the constitution of the object. It is not the kind of quality that belongs to the object directly. The object is its source, and the mind is its *ontic locus*. But although it exists in the mind and for it, it belongs to the object. Any discourse about the value always takes place with reference to its source (i.e., the object). This is why a discourse about the quality is tantamount to a discourse about the object. For example, although the beauty I feel when I experience the sunset exists in my mind and nowhere else, I can say, "The sunset is beautiful." The mental state that exists in my mind in the activity of having the experience of beauty is *inherently intentional*, in the sense that it aims at the object that is its source. The quality of beauty that is potential in the sunset comes to life in my mind. We cannot, in the process of having an experience, clearly distinguish between a subject that undergoes the experience and an object that is the object of the experience. If I am to use Hegel's concept of dialectic, I can say that a higher kind of reality comes into being (i.e., synthesized), in the activity of experiencing the object. The experience in the richness of its detail becomes a drop of meaning—a spiritual event.

Now I can formally propose that the objects of our experience are potentially valuable. This proposition does not necessarily imply that a certain value exists in the object the way sensuous or psychological qualities exist in their objects; it only implies that it possesses a potentiality for giving rise to the existence of a certain value or the possibility of its emergence. Accordingly, apart from the activity of realizing it, the object remains silent; it doesn't speak or communicate the reality of the value. For example, in itself, the sunset is not beautiful. Its beauty comes to life only when a human being contemplates it in a certain way (i.e., valuates it). It emerges in her mind. If this is the case, and I believe it is, we should ask, under what conditions do we discern the presence of a value as a potentiality in an object? Why should some people but not others discern beauty in the sunset? Some popular dicta such as "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," "Each to his own," or "Birds

of a feather flock together," come to mind in this context of my discussion. Implied in these and similar dicta is that some but not all individuals and communities discern the same value inherent as a potentiality in a given object, probably for cultural, religious, ideological, social, or idiosyncratic reasons. Nevertheless, some classes of objects, such as moral, intellectual, artistic, or religious objects, seem to possess value qualities recognized or discerned by the majority of human beings in various cultures and historical periods.

"Let us grant," my critic would interject, "that the assertion or denial of the existence of a value in an object varies from one person to another, one community to another, and one historical period to another. Under what conditions can one discern the presence of a value quality in an object? What is the basis of this discernment?"

This question aims at the crux of the question of the mode of existence of value as a quality and the conditions under which it can be realized. I shall begin my response to this question with the following proposal: the form of an object is the basis of its valuation. An object declares a value it possesses by virtue of its form. This form is the language by means of which it speaks, and it speaks by revealing its identity. The process of apprehending its identity is the *locus* in which we discern the existence of the value potential in it. If I know the identity of an object, I should, in principle, be able to discern not only the kind of value that may be in it but also its significance. The activity involved in this sort of discernment is evaluative because it is composed of three moments: in the first, we cognize the nature of the object; in the second we valuate it (i.e., intuit the presence in it); and in the third, we estimate its significance. The estimate always takes place concerning a certain interest, aim, preference, criterion, or something we deem important. It issues from what we may call "a sense of value." We do not only know that a certain object is valuable in a certain way; we also feel the value that inheres in it. The value comes to life in the medium of feeling it. For example, if I stand before an artwork such as the *Mona Lisa*, I can identify it as a particular representation, and I can describe in detail the features and elements that make up its structure. But I cannot assert that it is an artwork unless I experience it *aesthetically*; that is, unless I penetrate the details into the potential values that make up its world of meaning. I say aesthetically because possession of aesthetic sense is a necessary condition for aesthetic perception, just as possession of moral sense is a necessary condition for acting morally, and possession of religious sense is a necessary condition for acting religiously. My ability to undertake this penetration is the basis of my assertion that the *Mona Lisa* is an artwork. In this kind of penetration,

I move from the representation as a given picture to the multitude of values that inhere in it. Can I say of any practical or instrumental object that it is useful if I do not discern how it is instrumental? I may be reminded that we discern the utility of an object in terms of a preconceived idea of what this type of object can do or produce. I grant the validity of this assertion, but this kind of judgment is derivative in the sense that it is based on an original experience in which we have established that this kind of object can produce a certain effect.

Now, if the form of an object is the basis of its valuation, the following question necessarily arises: What is form? I raise this question for the following reasons: Knowledge of the form of an object is a necessary condition for discerning the existence of the value inherent in it as a potentiality. Can I know that the *Mona Lisa* expresses the value of enigma if I do not know or experience it as a specific type of form? I may know that it is a "representation" or what it means for it to be a representation, but how can I know that this representation is an artistic form, much less that it expresses the value of enigma, if I do not discern the kind of form it is? Moreover, even if I know what it means for it to be an artistic form, how can I discern the world of meaning inherent in it if I cannot experience it as a unique form? I raise this rhetorical question because the objects that make up the fabric of reality are diverse. We may classify them or genera based on commonly shared properties, but even within the same class, no two objects have identical forms.

But the question of what form is is not merely ontological in the sense that the objects of experience exist or that they are experienced as different from each other; it is also epistemological in the sense that we cognize their nature or identity. A necessary condition for cognizing the nature of an object is its givenness as an integrity (i.e., as a particular form). This aspect enables us to experience it as an object that has an existence of its own. But what about it that enables us to apprehend it as an identity? What is the ontic locus of this identity?

The first major theory of form, one that endured the test of time, was advanced by Plato in the 4th century B.C. Although most, if not all, philosophers reject the assumptions on which it was founded, its fundamental thesis remains an effective principle of ontological and epistemological of explanation to this day. I do not know of any philosopher from the time of Aristotle to the present who advanced a more adequate principle of explanation. It has been presented and employed differently in the different philosophical systems but the *fundamental intuition* that underlies its

articulation of these presentations and deployments remains intact. Plato encapsulated this intuition in his notion of *eidos*, which is valiantly translated as "idea" or "form." The form of an object is its *eidos.* Broadly, this concept signifies "universal," "essence," "standard," or "measure," in short, the features or qualities that constitute the essential nature of an object. I shall use "universal" or "essential features" interchangeably. These features constitute the structure of the universe; they express its nature, and they are the basis of the identity of the object. Knowledge of an identity is tantamount to the knowledge of a universal. But the number of the features that make up the structure of the concrete, individual object exceeds the number of the features that constitute the structure of the universal, for the universal is an abstraction of the common features that make up the class of which the object is a member.

Moreover, any concrete object is an instantiation (i.e., an instance) of a universal under the ingression or exemplification of the universal in its actual structure. The ingression of a universal in a mass of matter or a mental medium transforms it from being an indeterminate reality into an "object," that is, into an integrity—individuality, singleness, or oneness. The outcome of any ingression is the creation of an independent reality.

The presence of the universal in a concrete object is the basis of our knowledge of its identity, but it is not the basis of the identity of the object as a concrete integrity or as an independent reality. The act of identifying an object is an act of subsuming it under a universal. In this act, we classify it; we, in effect, say that the object is a member of a certain class of objects that possess the features signified by the same universal. For example, you may ask me to identify the small object that sits on my desk, which happens to be a pen. I cast a look at it, and then say, "It is a pen." In this case, I have identified the object using the universal or general idea of "pen" that exists in my mind as a universal. In making this judgment, I do not make any reference to the color, smoothness, weight, solidity, size, function, or other properties that belong to the object I identified as a pen. Knowing the significance of a universal is one thing, and knowing the features that make up the concrete object is something else. You may know that I am a human being, but does this knowledge imply *what I am* as a concrete, living individual? This is the main reason why we cannot reduce the concept of the form of an object merely to the concept of the universal an object instantiates but to the constitutive elements or features that make up the structure of the individual object. This assertion is based on the assumption that the ingression of a universal in an indeterminate medium transforms the universal from being abstract to being a concrete reality. The reality of

humanity as a universal in me as a concrete object is generically different from its reality as an abstract idea, and yet, although it is different, it essentially signifies a human reality mainly because the essential structure of humanity is the source of the essential structure of "humanity" as universal. Regardless of whether it is natural or artifactual, the universal always provides the logic and structure of the activity of instantiation or ingression implicit in the universal in a certain medium. This provision justifies the threefold claim that (1) an object is an instantiation of a certain universal, (2) we apprehend the universal in the particular, and (3) the particular is a concrete universal.

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that the apprehension of the value that inheres in an object is based on its type of essential constitution as an individual object, not merely as a universal or as a mere shape or representation. We can distinguish two types of essential constitutions—natural, such as cats or trees, and artifactual, such as kitchen knives, Melville's *Moby Dick*, or acts of justice. The type of value that inheres in the essential constitution of a natural or instrumental object is based on advantage—utility, benefit, or pleasure. On the other hand, the type of value that inheres in artworks is based on aesthetic qualities that exist in the works as potentialities. The first type of object is valued as a means to an end, while the second is valued intrinsically (i.e., as ends in themselves) in the sense that the value exists in the artworks. While we value the plow because it helps us till the field, we value Moby Dick because its value inheres in as a potentiality. It is customary in philosophy to refer to the first type of value as extrinsic and to the second kind as intrinsic.

Values as Schemas

It is important to emphasize at the point of my discussion that, regardless of whether they are intrinsic or extrinsic, values perform two functions. They can be used (1) as schemas and (2) as criteria for evaluation. First, they are used as plans of action; as such, they are sources of the logic and conceptual structure of the action, which implies that they are the source of the identity of the object that results from acting; put differently, they function as principles of individuation. But, if, as I have already explained, the object of human experience is different not only in terms of a kind but also in terms of individuality, and if the emergence of the value that is inherent in it is based not merely on the apprehension of the universal that is instantiated in it but also on the concretization of the universal into individual integrity, it should follow that apprehension of the *way the object is constituted* as an

individual object is a necessary condition for the emergence of the value. Let me illustrate this claim by an analysis of two examples—the first is an analysis of the emergence of an extrinsic value, and the second is an analysis of the emergence of an intrinsic value.

First, let us consider the value of a natural object, such as an apple tree thriving in my backyard. It is appropriate to say that this tree is valuable. Its value does not exist in it the way any of its perceptual properties exist in it, and yet, I can ascribe value to it. If I observe every perceptual aspect with any or a combination of my five senses, I do not perceive the value I ascribe to it because the ascription is not based on the way the tree appears to my senses, which is inherent in the tree, but on a particular function, namely, its capacity to produce apples, which are deemed important, or perhaps the shade it casts over some flowers in the backyard. In other words, the tree is valuable because it is useful. If, perchance, it does not perform any useful function, I would get rid of it. However, I would judge it as valuable if I deem it useful in some way. In this case, I apprehend the value as a quality of the tree, not merely as a physical object that stands erect in the backyard, but as a useful object whose utility, whose apprehension, and reality exist external to the object. This is mainly why I cultivate the tree to the best of my ability. Would I keep it if it were useless? Similarly, I ascribe value to various types of natural or practical artifacts based on my apprehension of their functional capacities. Only in this type of apprehension does the value emerge in my experience as a lived feeling. This type of judgment is frequently habitual and based on pre-established original judgment.

Second, let us consider an intrinsically valuable artifact, such as Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Broadly, like works of fine arts, this object, which hangs on the wall of a room in the Louvre, is not treated as a practical or instrumental object, such as cars, plows, or knives. We do not encounter it as an item in a grocery store unless the curator of the museum chooses to exhibit it there for cultural advancement. Its existence is singular. As a given representation, it exists in the world as the picture of a woman seated in a certain way against a natural background. Aesthetically inclined people would view it as a valuable object, and they would ascribe the quality of aesthetic beauty to it. It is valuable to possess this very quality. What is the basis of this ascription? How do we perceive this artifact as an aesthetically beautiful object? Under what conditions can we perceive its beauty? I raise these questions because the quality of beauty does not exist in the representation as a given quality, and the representation does not exist as a useful object. Now, suppose I approach this work intending to experience it aesthetically (i.e., as an object that possesses the quality of beauty) and suppose I focus

on it as an object formed in a certain way—what do I perceive? If I rely exclusively on my naked eye, all I see is a picture—a representation formed in a certain way. Do I see a value called beauty? No. But then, this representation is valuable, and its value inheres in it. However, it does not inhere in it merely as an artifact, but as an artistic artifact—as a fine work of art. Being art is more, essentially much more, than being a given representation, and yet the given representation is an integral element of it as a work of fine art because it is the medium in which the artistic dimension inheres. The representation is the ontic locus of the value of aesthetic beauty. Accordingly, experiencing the *Mona Lisa* as valuable is possible only when I rise in my perception of it from its being as a mere representation to its being as an artwork. In this type of perception, I aim at the *way*—the way its form is organized—its beauty emerges as a world of meaning when I creatively penetrate the inner constitution of the painting as an artwork. This feature of experiencing the artwork is, I submit, the main reason why most aestheticians argue that the real work the artist creates is essentially *form*. Aesthetic beauty inheres as a potentiality in the way the form is organized. It comes to life in the process of the aesthetic experience.

Next, in addition to its being the basis of *valuation*, schema is the basis of *evaluation*. We do not only assess the presence and value of an object to determine the perceptual conditions under which possesses a type of value or whether it is valuable, but we also evaluate its measure or the extent to which it is more or less valuable than other objects within the same class of objects according to implicit or established criteria. For example, we say this knife is valuable because it is useful; in this case, we perform a special cognitive act in which we intuit or assert its value based on use. But we can also say that this knife is better than that or some other knife based on an established criterion. The criterion signifies a certain measure, or features, of goodness or excellence. Usually, criteria of evaluation are extrapolated from critical, analytical, and extensive experience and assessment of the value of a large number of the value exhibited by the members of a class of objects. This type of criterion is implied informally and sometimes vaguely in ordinary discourses about the value of artistic and instrumental objects, but it is articulated, explained, and defended clearly by philosophers, art critics, social scientists, and theological critics. No matter its kind, a criterion is a general statement. It enunciates the measure and the condition under which we can determine the value of an object. For example, when I say that Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilych* is superior to Trollope's *The Soul of a Bishop* or Melville's *Moby Dick* is superior to Austin's *Sense and Sensibility,* I mean that Tolstoy's or Melville's work is a greater, deeper, more meaningful work than Trollope's or Austen's. My judgment in this

and similar cases is based on a criterion supported by extensive experience and testimony that has withstood the test of time. The articulation of criteria for the valuation of different types of valuable objects is based on the ultimate supreme criterion I discussed in the previous chapter, that the promotion of human well-being in all the spheres of human experience is the highest aim of human life. Broadly, criteria provide sufficient, reliable, or justifiable reasons for making reasonable judgments of value and pursuing the most desirable kind of actions, projects, policies, or works. Do we not appeal to recognized criteria of evaluation when we confront various types of social, moral, cultural, intellectual, political, or personal conflict, disagreements, or confusion?

The source of the reliability of a criterion is two-fold. First is its generality. This feature ensures the requirement of objectivity in judging or evaluating objects, which is a necessary condition for certainty or confidence in making sound judgments and choosing the best possible actions. Second, the general aspect of the criterion implies a reasonable degree of validity and recognition. I do not exaggerate if I say that, although it is a far-fetched goal, mainly because nature and the conditions of human life are constantly changing, the desire for certainty in what we do or hope for is an essential impulse in human nature. It is a kind of safety net against the possibility of failure.

With an obvious air of impatience, my critic would, at this juncture of my discussion, step in: “I feel content with your analysis of the valuation of natural and human objects, but I doubt that many philosophers, including me, would accept your account of the criterion of evaluation. If, as you say, the *ontic locus* of the criterion is a universal, if, like all universals, it is a human creation, again, if it is derived from our experience of natural and human reality, it would follow that no matter its validity, degree of reliability or usefulness, it can neither be enduring not stable. How can it be if the world is a process? First, nature is a process of creative advance and second, the human mind is in constant process of growth and development. The knowledge of today will fade in utility, significance, and extent before the knowledge of tomorrow and the significant truth of today will be prevarications tomorrow. Does Heraclitus’s fundamental intuition that change is king and that this king constantly sweeps with its wand the foundation of all universals in the realm of science, philosophy, and art? I do not need to remind you of or invoke the Pyrrhonist arguments against the possibility of a criterion of truth in all the areas of human knowledge, especially of their logical acuity and profundity, which no epistemologist can ignore, and I do not need to make any reference to the widespread variance of the criteria of evaluation in the various philosophies, religions,

and cultures of the world because I am certain that you are cognizant of them and of the multitude of critical questions they provoke, not to mention the difficulty of providing adequate answers to many of them. I think that neither I nor any philosopher expects you to explore the vast and thorny territory of this multitude of questions, but I think that it is critically important to shed as much light as possible on how a value schema *qua* universal can be an effective principle of explanation if it, as well as nature and human nature, are constantly changing? How can that which is constantly changing be a reliable and stable basis of judgment?" My critic uttered her critical remark with a gentle smile on her lips. I felt that the smile was generous, understanding, and sympathetic. I responded to her smile with an appreciative smile.

I aver that reality is essentially a process and that the elements that make up its fabric are in a constant state of change. They come into being, endure for a certain period, and pass out of being. The elements that come into being are different and sometimes more advanced than their predecessors. But despite this unquestionable fact, the incontestable thrust of change is neither possible nor conceivable if the objects that come into being and pass out of being do not linger in time. Recognition of this truth is in effect an implicit recognition of the possibility of meaning in life, human destiny, and the destiny of the cosmic process. Endurance is a necessary condition for the possibility of process in the cosmos and humanity. The ultimate question that stares people in the face of this incontrovertible truth is, how should we live during this short life of ours as groups and individuals? What can the foundation of this life be?

Relative Endurance of Natural and Human Objects

First, as I indicated earlier, value does not exist as a part of nature; it exists as a human creation. The existence and measure of the value of an object are always made by a human agent. The value exists because of and for the sake of the agent; it does not exist outside the mind that creates it. Accordingly, its existence is not only contingent but also dependent on the fulfillment of a purpose or desire. This claim entails the idea that the natural objects deemed important *exist as a means to an end*. Their value emerges from the fact that the valuable object can be used or appropriated by people differently in the various spheres of their lives. An object that is not used is not valuable even though it can have the potential for being valuable. It is always valuable to an individual or a collective human agent. Do individuals, societies, or states value objects, such as deserts, thickets on the edge of

cliffs, or abandoned buildings? Do they worry or even think of the process of their coming into being, playing a role in their environments, and then passing away? Moreover, a desert, a thicket, or an abandoned building may seem useless and, therefore, valueless, mainly because it is not directly used as a means to a practical end by one or more human beings; nevertheless, it may be important to the government because it can justifiably treat it for social, economic, political, or ecological purposes. Even the moon, which seems beyond the possibility of direct human usefulness, can be viewed as important because it is an integral part of the solar system and, therefore, a necessary condition for the survival of the human species because its collapse will in some way signal the collapse of the earth or at least human world as we know it. Finally, do philosophers, scientists, artists, and intellectuals in general not view the world of civilization, which sits comfortably as an alien reality in the middle of nature, as a human creation? What is this world but *a concrete objectification* of human desire, will, and purpose?

First, the judgment or determination of the value of any natural object is always relative to a person or a community of persons. But human desires, interests, and needs, whose existence is the source of human value, change from one person to another, one society to another, human circumstance to another, and one historical period to another. The dynamics of this change lie in the belly of Time—in the incontestable fact that everything that exists is in a continuous state of change, or process. The structure of this kind of process, which may be social, cultural, religious, intellectual, artistic, economic, technological, and certainly natural is constantly changing—growing, developing, progressing, withering, and degenerating. This is the main reason why neither the criterion nor the evaluation process is permanent or stable. But if it is neither permanent nor stable, can the criterion function as a reliable basis for meaningful action? More to the point, can we speak of any type of meaningful experience if reality is essentially a process? This question calls for the following comments:

First, the *aporia* that surrounds the necessity, and to some extent mystery, of permanence amid change, which was brought into sharp relief in the penetrating, cogent, yet contentious debate between Heraclitus and Parmenides in the 5th century B.C., remains a serious challenge to this day. There is no need for me at present to discuss or offer a solution to it. I mention it only to emphasize that, regardless of the powerful arguments Parmenides advanced against Heraclitus, the validity of the thesis that change is king remains formidable. This king sweeps, with his irresistible hand, the existence and identity of everything that exists and will exist.

However, it cannot perform this activity if the objects it sweeps away do not endure at least to some extent. This fundamental feature of reality underlies the generally accepted belief that although human values and the principles that are founded in them change; nevertheless, their endurance is relative in the sense that their existence and meaning are constantly changing. But, alas, how can the endurance of any reality be relative? In what sense can it be relative, if at all possible? This question asks for two types of explanation because the structure of the world is composed of two types of objects, natural and human; they are generically different from each other. Accordingly, the explanation of how natural objects endure amid cultural change would necessarily be radically different from the explanation of how natural objects endure amid the process of cosmic or natural change. Although a comprehensive, systematic, and reasonably adequate account of these two types of explanation is beyond the scope of this discussion, I shall advance two brief remarks about their dynamics. The first remark focuses on the continuity of the identity of natural objects and the second on the continuity of the identity of human objects.

First, although natural objects are constantly changing, we can argue that their identity endures relatively by virtue of the transmission of essential features, or elements, from their preceding states of being to their proceeding state of being; that is, the preceding (i.e., emerging) state of being, which is an ongoing process even in the process of its emergence, consists of receiving some of the essential, identifying features of the preceding states of being. Some features recede into the realm of non-being, but the essential features endure in the following states: Do all the features of the apple tree that grows in my yard remain in its newly emerging states of being in the following spring or any of its newly emerging states? No. The essential, as well as the newly emerging features, continue to exist in its newly emerging state of being. The older it gets, the better its fruits. This line of reasoning is based on the generally accepted assumption among theoretical physicists that natural objects possess what they call a "vector" quality. This type of quality *enables matter*, which is the stuff of natural objects in their various forms, to receive and assimilate the new features into its emerging structure. For example, the boy I was during my adolescent period is radically different from the adult man I was during my 20s and 30s, different from the old man I am now, and certainly different from the man I was at every moment of my being during these periods. If a movie is taken at every moment of my growth the way botanists photograph the growth of a plant to show the continuity of its growth, we can certainly discern how the essential features that make up my identity are transferred to my next state of being from one moment to the next—that is, how so many of the features