

DEFINITIONS OF MAN

The interpretation of man which I have defended in my book, *Theory of Man*, agrees with the Linnaean designation of *homo sapiens*, which is more exact, in my opinion, than the classical one of "rational animal." In that work I maintain that what is peculiar to man is that he is conscious of a reality outside of himself and of his own intimate being, or, in other words, that he recognizes the independent existence of the world and is an ego. Both matters can be reduced to a unique primary function: the objectifying activity, which in normal, continuous, and accumulative operation belongs only to man, and from which all essentially human traits are derived. The peculiar characteristic of perception properly so called, that is, human perception, is the observation of things that are present, the recognition that a given thing *exists*. To perceive, then, is to attribute presence or existence to what is perceived, to admit it as an object existing by itself, certainly in different ways according to whether it is a question of external things, of the subjective entity, or of the processes and "states" inherent in it; let it be noted that when perceptive attention fastens upon the "states," that is to say, on subjective, unintentional processes like those of coenesthesia which ordinarily are not perceived but are lived, enjoyed, or suffered, these become objectified without losing in themselves their condition of states. The capacity to objectify is the bedrock of human nature; animal conscience (if it deserves this name) must be imagined, save for rare excep-

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tions, to be a succession of "states" to which objectifying attention is not applied because such attention can only come from an ego.

The objectifying capacity is sufficient to distinguish man from animals because although the latter, in a few of the highest species, doubtless realize some objectification, they attain it in an elementary and discontinuous manner without its constituting in them a stable function. In man, the gift of objectifying not only characterizes him primarily and definitely as man, as the being for whom the world and his own ego exist, but it is also the origin of the two great superior human monopolies: culture and spirit. The faculty of objectifying, which, in its perceptive function, recognizes the exterior world and the interior of the subject as existent, in a projective or exteriorizing function, on the other hand, confers extra-subjective form on the notions or images of the subject, on certain movements and exigencies of his soul, and converts them into cultural objects: linguistic expression, laws, institutions, theorization, works of art or of technique, etc. It seems to me of the greatest interest to understand the root of human nature, this reduction to a unique principle of the two aspects of specifically human activity: the objective perception of external reality and the subjective, and cultural creation. That spirit is likewise a consequence of the objectifying capacity. When this capacity operates without what I call "subjective regression," that is without a subordination of what is objective to the subject which practices the objectifying, we have the acts which are designated as spiritual, whose general characteristic is to be governed by the object and not by the special interest of the subject; thus the ultra-subjective and universalist character of spiritual behavior. The spiritual type of knowledge, for example, is that which pays attention to the object itself and is interested in it only, without being preoccupied with the advantages which the conscious subject can obtain from it. It is easy to demonstrate that spiritual activity is only the establishment or purification of the subjective attitude in so far as it is projected purely toward what is objectified, without debasing it or confusing its existence with the interests or convenience of the subject. In short: the essential characteristic of man is the ability to objectify, which in its perceptive form sets it up within a subject or an ego surrounded by a coherent world, and in its creative and exteriorizing form produces concrete cultural creations; spiritual acts are those in which objectification foregoes the concrete and practical interest of the agent and is directed resolutely toward the object, whether it be in the realm of knowledge, ethics, esthetics, or religion.

From this general statement of the problem as a broad base, I propose to make certain observations on various points of view which differ from mine.

It is often maintained that what characterizes and differentiates man is his spirit, by which he is distinguished from animals. Spirit is frequently designated vaguely as the "aggregate of higher mental faculties." The kind and degree of higher faculties that are meant is not made very clear. A bandit may show extraordinary qualities of intelligence which are subjugated to his base purposes; this certainly would suggest a higher mental function, but no one would be very much disposed to elevate it with the classification of "spiritual." There is, on the other hand, a vague but firm agreement on spirituality, which sees in it the property of non-egoistic, disinterested acts, foreign to the private interests of the agent. This property is the one that I have tried to clarify, finding its motive in the establishment of the objectifying position, in an objectification which involves no servitude of what has been objectified to the profit of the objectifying subject. When the question is put in this way it does not seem to me legitimate to characterize man as "the spiritual being" without saying more; there are many typically human behaviors inconceivable in an animal—thus those of the refined, intelligent bandit of my example, which are none-the-less not spiritual. These behaviors, however, have, as a basis, objectification, although they are narrowly connected with personal interest. In principle, then, one can imagine man devoid of spirit or acting regularly according to non-spiritual incentives, but it is impossible to conceive of him deprived of objectifying capacity.

In the well known book of Max Scheler, *The Place of Man in the Cosmos*, there is an attempt made to define man by his spirit, making use of a rigorous characterization of spirituality which, at first sight, would seem to coincide with mine; in reality, my interpretation is not identical with his. Let us examine, for example, his opinions on knowledge. For Max Scheler knowledge is spiritual if it is apprehension of essences; the common type of knowledge, that which is found in daily life and even in certain sciences, seems to him to be common to man and animal. I hold that any knowledge is of the spiritual type if it is disinterested and pure knowledge, if it only aspires to the theoretical examination of the object; I believe, moreover, that intelligence properly so called is a human monopoly, for it is inconceivable without conceptual (or verbal) language and it presents the solution of practical problems in which an animal ordinarily fails. I do

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not deny the existence of rudiments of intelligent activity in animals, especially in those nearest man, but I see them as stupid gropings which cannot be called normal, intelligent, organized, continuous behavior; briefly, which do not show in them intelligence as an established, stable function; this is what, in my opinion and in that of other critics, is shown by well known experiments of W. Köhler with chimpanzees, which confirm some sparks of intelligence without the constancy and progress which a customary exercise of the intelligence presupposes. If this is so, if conduct worthy to be classified as intelligent is only demonstrated in one or a few species located at the top of the zoological scale, and even there, in an intermittent and precarious form, it seems justifiable to see intelligence as such an attribute peculiar to man without being surprised at weak tendencies toward it in those beings which are presages or anticipatory sketches of humanity. It should be remembered that not all psychic activity of an animal excluding intelligence can be considered instinctive; associative memory, behavior founded on the procedure of the casual effort, of trial and error, fixed associatively by the experience of success, are common in many animals and are wont to give a false impression of intelligence. The justification of all of this would require a rigorous characterization of intelligent conduct which cannot be attempted here. As a consequence of what has been indicated the following should be kept in mind: the spirit is not the distinctive state of human nature because much typically human behavior is not rigorously spiritual. On the other hand it is exclusively man's function to know himself and to apprehend a world of objectivity whose presence and structure condition his conduct in matters which are strictly different from the conduct of animals. Man is then the being who knows, *homo sapiens*. The spirit, although it does not define what is human in its origin and in its fundamental basis, is already latent in both potentially, as a possibility which tends to be realized because it is only the culmination and perfection of that faculty of objectifying on which man's being is founded; it is the objectifying function in its purity and rigor, projected toward the object without ulterior motives, without any design of tying it with chains of convenience or interest to the individual subject who apprehends it. Therefore the spirit, if it does not make man, perfects and completes him, and man deprived of it seems to us incomplete and truncated.

Beside the concept of the "spiritual man" offered by Max Scheler one can place that of the "voluntary or free man" defended by Werner Sombart. The work which the illustrious economist has devoted to man, *Vom Menschen*, 1938, is one of the greatest efforts made toward the elucidation

of the matter. Sombart errs in dedicating less space than is due to fundamental questions and of accumulating on the other hand much material on secondary themes, although all of them are pertinent; he draws on his vast experience and documentation in ethnography, sociology, and economics. Worthy of special consideration and certainly not lacking in originality is his approach to the problem; he does not want to enter into the metaphysical or merely speculative aspects of the matter nor does he want to adopt the naturalistic method of the anthropology which ordinarily considers itself the only scientific one. Against the pretensions on the one hand of metaphysical thought and on the other of that which is concerned above all with the biological, he proposes to construct an empirical anthropology according to the intentions and methods of the so-called sciences of the mind, of psychology, sociology, history, of the disciplines that study cultural phenomena. Such is, according to his criterion, the only way of obtaining correct notions concerning human nature. Sombart cites what is peculiar to man in free action, in the autonomy of the will; faithful to his methodical position he deals with an immediate and empirical concept of liberty, and he abstains from taking part in philosophical disputes about the grave conflict or opposition between liberty and determinism. The animal proceeds according to instincts; it obeys compulsions or blind impulse so that it may be said that in reality it is not it that acts, but nature that acts in it and for it. Man escapes these compulsions and thus avoids nature; his being is not nature, but "art." From the empirical or scientific point of view the free, characteristic, exclusive act of man is defined only by being rooted in a motivation and being directed toward goals; it is not indispensable that means and ends be conscious in every case, because, frequently, acquired habits and inherited tradition intervene, e.g., the various forms of social preordination of conduct, none of which affects the principle of motivation and purpose of actions any more than the mechanical function of the calculating machine denies a clear intellection of the mathematical relations to which its mechanism has been previously adjusted. Sombart is not unfamiliar with the importance of objectification; free action is made possible in his opinion precisely because man objectifies the world, is objectified to himself and is capable of the abstracting operations which serve as a vehicle for the formation of concepts. His error in my opinion consists in taking all of this only as the condition or supposition of free action, and seeing in the latter what is peculiar to man, whereas that which is peculiarly human is the capacity to objectify, which establishes the original subject-object structure that has been made general in the ego-world duality;

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undoubtedly the gift of objectifying makes possible free action as an act of an ego in a world, but also from objectification come many other things, all of which distinguish man; his distinct grades and forms of intelligence, the special human tonality of the emotions and feelings, etc. Likewise there comes from the objectifying capacity, as I indicated before and have explained in my *Theory of Man*, the spirit, concerning which Sombart has very confused ideas, since he limits himself to presenting it as an exclusive possession of man and to attributing to it a polarity or bifurcation in positive and negative moments, which is not very convincing. This lack of care in the characterization of what is spiritual seems to me to be one of the major deficiencies of the book, especially so because an essential part is assigned it; in general there do not abound in philosophical anthropology precise definitions concerning the spirit, and it is the merit of Max Scheler that he is an exception and has given us some notable insights, both rigorous and profound. Sombart contributes revealing insights and much useful information about varied questions defining human nature, the means of individual and collective human existence, and this mass of reflections and data compensates in part for the relative poverty of his fundamental presentation of the problem.

Among the theorists who attempt to explain human nature by a unique principle, those who see this principle in intelligence and symbolization occupy an outstanding place. The explanation of man by the primary place of intelligence has some relationship with the one that I have proposed; I ought, therefore, to insist on the characterizations of my interpretation to distinguish it from this one. On characterizing man by objectifying activity, I think I penetrate a more profound stratum than that of intelligence and arrive at the source from which intelligence springs. The attribution of intelligence to man of course concedes beforehand that the latter is a subject who practices the function of knowing; both the subject and world are presupposed. If on the other hand we turn our attention to objectifying activity as a primary event, we should note that the first result of objectification is to transform what is merely lived, sensations and "states," into objective perceptions and apprehensions, into recognition of "things that are present"; from this arises both the grasp of realities external to the subject as well as that of the subject itself, the constitution of the ego-world structure, which is the cornerstone of what is human nature. When intelligence is assigned to man as his prime characteristic, one notes especially the rational handling of what, tacitly, is judged as having oc-

curred and as preexistent: the things on which intelligence operates and the subject of intelligent action. The fundamental problem as I conceive of it has to be another one and must penetrate deeper; it cannot remain, so to speak, on the operative and functional plane of intelligence itself but it must strive to discover the bottom stratum, on which are formed the instances that permit intelligence to function, which are the things which have been objectified, and the subject which perceives them and thinks about them. Intelligence operates on a plane which we could designate as logical; those stages are prior and are constituted on a plane which, using Kant's terminology, we could call transcendental, without implying an identification with the epistemological position of Kant. Objectifying is, without doubt, the root of intelligence; but before all, by means of a perceptive apprehension, it converts sensations into objects which have been conceived as existing and subsisting by themselves, and, *at the same time*, creates a subjective center which is nonexistent in animals, a constant spiritual focus which has reference only to itself, and which is possible only as a pole of objectifying acts, since otherwise there is but a procession of sensations and states, of an undivided and confused mental stream which can in no wise be designated as an ego. When I define man as "the being who knows," that is, who knows himself and the world, I take into account in my definition above all the original operation from which this knowledge arises, the objectification, and in the second place the dependent functions of cognition all derived from that beginning. When man is defined as "a rational being" the scope embraced in the definition is much narrower and therefore incomplete, since the justification of the appearance of the objects and of the subject are omitted, which is what determines in reality the appearance of man as such.

Ernst Cassirer holds that the peculiar nature of man, that which separates him from animals and is the common substance of culture, is symbolization. "The principle of symbolism," he writes, "with its universality, its validity, and its general application is the magic word, the open sesame which gives access to the specifically human world, to the world of human culture." It is undeniable that symbolization has a most important part to play in the use and progress of the intelligence, for it makes possible processes which would be entirely impossible without the use of an adequate system of symbols. But I think that serious objections can be raised to Cassirer's concept in so far as he pretends to offer a general key for human nature. Symbolization does not operate in a void; the validity of the symbol is that it is sustained inasmuch as by means of it many facts are recapit-

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ulated and accumulated and they thus become conveniently manageable for the mind. These prior elements and the subject which symbolically recapitulates them and moves them are considered preexistent by Cassirer, whereas in my opinion the first thing that should be explained is this: the material of symbolization and the agent capable of symbolizing, that is, the objectified perceptions and the objectifying subject, the world and the ego. The capacity to symbolize requires a subject and an objectified world, two instances whose appearance can only be explained by objectification. Symbolization is a special objectifying procedure, an objectification of second or third degree which presupposes anterior ones, precisely those which contribute the basic human structure. On the other hand, all of culture cannot be reduced to systems of symbols. A painting, a statue, are not symbols, except as they may be allegories, artificial and secondary means of plastic expression. A lyric poem, a juridical rule, cannot be designated as symbols except as we may devote our attention exclusively to their verbal formulations, and then we shall have gone on to consider a very specialized aspect of them, that of linguistic symbolism. Thus as symbolization of natural phenomena has beneath it an immense number of facts of nature, likewise any symbolization in the field of culture embraces and absorbs an immense quantity of cultural facts; as we saw in the beginning, natural and cultural facts in so far as they are the product of two diverse regimes of objectification are the primary, genuine, human events, those that compose the world of man and simultaneously give rise to his own inner being, since the objectifying activity and the establishment of the subjective focus are two aspects of the same thing.

That Cassirer has had linguistic activity particularly in view is emphasized by these words of his: "The difference between verbal and emotive language represents the true frontier between the human and the animal world." As we see, he assigns to verbal language the same character of that which is distinctly human as he attributes in general to symbolization; and, in fact, if his theses are not satisfactory for the total understanding of culture, they are very acceptable for the meaning and importance of conceptual language, although with the reservation for the passage cited, that it would perhaps be well to interpolate between emotional language and verbal or conceptual language, indicative language, by means of which something is pointed out or indicated without transmitting its concept. Verbal language has been proposed more than once before as the quality *par excellence* and the *sine qua non* of man, *homo loquans*. It will not be difficult to show the insufficiency of this criterion. The substance of verbal

language consists of notions and relationships of very general nature which presuppose the ability to abstract; it is therefore necessary to go back to the latter, and although it is indisputable that language favors abstraction in fixing results, verbal meanings would not exist without prior abstractions. But the ability to abstract presupposes two things: the complexes supplied in perception and the isolation of the elements of those complexes. This latter operation has also an objectifying purpose. By every approach we arrive, in the last analysis, at objectifying, and, as we must accept that it is an exclusively human function, we must recognize in it the basis of distinctly human nature.

There have also been invoked as exclusive keys for the understanding of human nature other principles of less scope than intelligence and symbolization; they merit thorough consideration, which cannot be given to them at this time: religion and morality, and technical productivity. Among the naturalistic anthropologists of the last century, the inclusion of man in the zoological realm was justified by the thesis that his intelligence and emotional processes differ only in degree from the other animals; nevertheless, some proposed that a "human realm" be distinguished, and among them, A. de Quatrefages in his notes on religion and morality. Only man, in accordance with this doctrine, would be a religious and moral being, that is, he would believe in the existence of a supernatural order ruled by higher beings with which his life on this earth and beyond would be essentially connected; also, he alone would be endowed with the moral notions of good and evil. The detailed examination of this concept would lead me far, for a general consideration of religion and morality, a task of obvious difficulty and complexity, would be indispensable, and it is not legitimate to use these concepts without having a clear view of them. It will be sufficient then for me to indicate that both religion and moral conduct with discernment of ethical values presuppose the grasp of an external, objective world and the existence of the subjective, points which, as has been seen, depend on the original objectifying function. In regard to the concept of man as *homo faber*, that is to say, as the being capable of making instruments, it must be rejected since it delineates and emphasizes a fact inseparable from many others with which it forms a complex unit, that of human culture. Taken separately and as a process, the construction of tools is a case of action in pursuit of clearly perceived ends and with the choice of adequate means, which for Sombart, as has been noted, is peculiar to man; to this interpretation, then, the critical observations applied to Sombart are valid. But in addition to this, a tool is a cultural objectification, the

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concrete formation or fixing of a design in an object of culture; from this point of view it is only one of the examples of the second manner of objectification to which I have referred: objectification exteriorized or made concrete in "things," to which belong many other types of cultural creation such as works of art, institutions, theories, and in short, every product of subjective activity which attains extra-subjective consistency. Only an insufficient understanding of the complete sphere of culture, all of it informed by an identical principle, has permitted this highlighting or delineation of technical creation, motivated moreover by the intention of finding at the basis of human nature a function of the most practical and humble type, an "infrastructure" of utilitarian and almost biological order, above which all the rest would be placed as secondary and additional elements. The truth is that the origin of human nature must be sought at a greater depth in a perfect and constitutive structure capable of accounting for all behavior peculiar to man. I do not think it is necessary to examine the explication of man in terms of his play. The most illustrious among recent writers on this matter, Huizinga, has saved me that work, for in the excellent analysis of his book, *Homo ludens*, he admits the existence of play in animals also, and, moreover, he does not appear to consider it in the last analysis as a key for the explanation of human conduct.

To complete these notes, I should take into consideration two types of studies which have had great success in recent times, those which seek the differential nucleus of human nature in the heart of collective examples (society, history), and those which deny the existence of a permanent nature or typical structure in man. "Society" in general is not a privilege of ours since not only are there abundant types of animal societies but also in many of these societies the articulation of the individual in the whole and his functional subjection to communal ends reaches extremes inconceivable in human society. If mere social coordination were sufficient to produce humanity, man would have appeared in zoological trees greatly removed from those which have given him his origin. It is therefore obligatory, if one refers to the social aspect to explain man, to take as a point of departure not the undifferentiated notion of society, but rather that of "human" society. The essential aspect of the latter is not a division of tasks in the biological sense and for collective utility, though that division may exist to a notable degree, but rather the transmission of psychic content objectified by one member to another, which, in a finitely real form and an infinitely potential form, converts each member into the possessor of all

the psychic content of the group. The historical aspect is not separable from the social because history is society down through the ages. Precisely, if man has a history, it is thanks to the accumulation of that objectified content, which determines that for him the essential inheritance is not the biological but the psychic-spiritual, the inheritance of which is acquired and not fixed by life in his organism.

The thesis according to which man lacks a fixed, fundamental structure is connected with the foregoing when it is said that man does not have a “nature” but a “history.” I would argue that historicity is, in the last analysis, of capital importance for men, but that specifically human historicity rests on the process of accumulation of objectifications which, as is logical, is only explained by the prime exercise of the objectifying function. When what is affirmed above all is a limitless possibility of free determination, an absolute plasticity left to the judgment for making decisions, two things should be remembered: that the act of the will, with its projection toward an end and the selection of the adequate means, presupposes the fundamental and primary structure which composes the subject and the objectified world; and that the will never can ignore in its solutions social and historical situations, constructed principally by the accumulation and sedimentation of the objectified experience, so that there should be admitted here a conditioning related to the basic structure described at the beginning of this article.

In my opinion the foregoing reflections demonstrate that all the criteria or principles proposed to explain man go back to the objectifying activity as their foundation. Since this activity belongs exclusively to man and since there is no lower activity which is likewise exclusive, it ought to be considered as the basic principle of human nature. The objectifying function is the only one which bestows knowledge because it is the apprehension of objects; we could say that with it are born at one and the same time knowledge and man, and therefore when man is designated as *homo sapiens* one defines his essence and evokes the function which gives him his existence and his form. Let us not commit the triviality of quarreling over the name, dazzled by the ideal of a perfect, complete knowledge—sapience, wisdom, inerrant rationality, etc.—to which few approach and which no one attains. Before and below all this there is a common, effective knowledge, a fundamental knowledge, inseparable by its constitution from human nature, which one does not ordinarily observe since it requires effort to see what is obvious and familiar, what is essential and formative. The unique

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fact that reality occurs in terms of objects for a subject which grasps them and retains them as such, the creation of the objects for the subject and simultaneously of the subject itself, does not exist in the animal kingdom and must have occurred for the first time at a relatively recent date, compared with the cosmic age of the universe and even with that of the living world; with this event man arose as the being who is, because he knows.

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This bibliography is very incomplete. It was not possible to include much of the work that has been done in the many fields that have a strong interest in and relation to anthropology, such as history, psychology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and existentialism. A much larger and systematically ordered bibliography, although it is especially directed to those who read Spanish, can be found in my book *Ubicación del hombre*, listed above.