

Man: The Furrowed Brow

David Thomasma, O.P.

Out of the stone curls and yearns the solid, muscular body, the heavy chin poised on the powerful fist, and at the peak of the yearning curl, the furrowed brow. Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker*, a study of man in bronze, is a graphic illustration both of the unity of man and of the furrowed brow, that something "extra" that puzzles man, setting up a division within himself. Like the "Thinker" man is chiseled out of stone—is one with nature and a total being in himself. Yet there is always a pressure in him towards an expression of himself. Unlike all other animals, he alone can stand apart from himself within himself. This "aloofness" from himself enables him to express what is constant both to him and to other human beings. Such standing-apart, aloofness, takes place in conscious reflection. As a consequence of this unique activity, he is able to perfect himself and his environment.

The experience of inner aloofness is commonplace. Perhaps while gazing at the stars in the evening, or watching the moon come shimmering over the surface of the sea, we have felt an exhilarating oneness with the universe. We are caught up in the beauty of nature. We are definitely one with the cosmos. But these moments never last! It could be a short moment later when our gaze focuses on our footprints left behind us in the sand or when our minds agitate the question "Why?" that we experience an in-between set within us. We become conscious of an in-between wedged between us and nature. We somehow are different than our surroundings. And this difference lies in our ability to question these very surroundings. But not only the surroundings! We can question ourselves as well. For this reason we are faced with a mysterious problem. Is man one being? Or is he really twofold, a combination of a "one with nature" being and an "apartheid" being?

The existentialists are fond of insisting that man is not at home in the world. He is not at home even with himself. However this may be, we do feel that Sartre expresses at least a partial verity when he says that man is the only being not identical with himself. Man is *ens pour soi* (being-for-itself). He empties himself in a constant effort to become *ens en soi* (being-in-itself). The latter type of being

is solid, objective. It literally "oozes" with being. It is the non-conscious world.¹

Sartre's picture of man lends aid to our dilemma. For him, man is constantly pushing himself toward an identification with solid being. Achievement of this push comes only with death. "For itself" wants to become "in itself." Man desires total being, *viz.*, a way of existing without the constant recognition by means of consciousness of what it might be not to be! When a man touches "solid" being, a bench for instance, it is his own death that he feels in amazement.

Therefore consciousness, the reason why we are not yet solid being, is a sort of curse. We might disagree with this interpretation. Nevertheless we could agree with Sartre that man is a divided unit. Because Sartre places the roof of free-choice and responsibility in the consciousness of man, he does not consider himself a mere materialist. In his eyes, man although one being, is divided within himself.

Heidegger too has formulated much the same insight, namely, that man is one and yet has two dichotomous poles within himself. These poles, similar to Sartre's *en soi* and *pour soi*, are expressed in Heidegger's customarily abstruse language as "standing-in" and "open-standing." The German black forester views these poles in the context of man's reflection into the depths of his own existence. "Man is that being whose Being is distinguished by the open-standing standing-in the unconcealedness of Being."² What does this statement mean? First of all, for Heidegger, consciousness is the self-reflective care about non-being. But not anyone's non-being! Rather it is the care about one's own non-being. Through consciousness then man is able to be "open-standing." In being "open-standing" he reaches a point of openness to the revelation of Being. It is only man who is open-standing however. He is the only one who is conscious of Being, beings, and of the possibility of non-being. The problem of non-being and death, therefore, is written in the very scroll of each man's personal existence and in all his actions and encounters. By the recognition through consciousness of his possibilities, each person is able in every moment to perfect himself and his environment. In this he is unique. But there is another aspect of man. He is "standing-in." He is one with all other things that are. "Standing-in" means that aspect of a man which all things have in common . . . they are. They stand in being.

However we look at man, then, we discover that there is a hole

in the middle of his existence. That hole is consciousness. He is one thing. Yet he still seems to possess two distinct and irreducible aspects, the "hole" and "what he is." Appearing much like a doughnut, man could choose to "fill" the hole with the wrong things. Such a choice leads to unauthentic existence. Actually the only way to deplete the hole is to become more doughnut, to "fatten" his powers. Needless to say he is incapable of fattening his powers, of perfecting himself, until he is able to "furnow his brow." In this state of the furrowed brow he can then focus his consciousness upon himself, find some dominant theme by which to measure his actions and thus begin the process of self-perfection.

In other words our thesis is that man is one being. Nevertheless there are two aspects in him qualitatively and irreducibly distinct. These two aspects are always in constant conjunction. But not just conjoined. They interpenetrate one another, are interlarded in all our acts. As a result there is a gap between sense and intellectual knowledge; there is a leap between awareness and consciousness. Hence forward, by awareness we will mean man's action whereby an experience of any kind is present to him. By consciousness we will signify the awareness as aware of itself. This latter type of awareness, conscious awareness, can be either pre-reflexive or reflective. In pre-reflexive consciousness, we are cognizant of an experience as past which is about to appear as present. In reflective consciousness we are actually taking account of a present awareness.

We have already seen the opinions of Heidegger and Sartre on the unity of man. They share the "two-pole" insight. But is this insight expressed by thinkers of different orientations? We think it is. Let us look for a moment at the same view as given by St. Thomas and Husserl. Finally we will offer a brief comment on the American Naturalists. All have widely divergent philosophies.

From a metaphysical stance there is little question that Thomas Aquinas considered man to be one being among others. This inclusive view was occasioned by his concept of Being as analogous. Being is all-embracing. But is this unity of man and his oneness with the rest of the cosmos borne out by Thomas' philosophical psychology? Yes it is.

Psychology for St. Thomas is a branch of natural philosophy and hence a philosophy of types of change. It is the proper study of the motions of living things, i.e., of material entities having for their

form a soul. The natures of these living beings not only indicate self-blossoming emergence (physis) as do all other beings, but also contain an awareness of the environment. Man, then, is very much a part of nature. He has a nature in common with all other material beings and an awareness of the environment shared with all the living beings. But his awareness has the additional power to be self-reflective. It enables him to *change* his environment; not only to change it, but to master it. In this he is unique. For this uniqueness, Thomas has recourse to a body-soul description of man.

We immediately think today that these concepts of body and soul force a duality into man. His unity seems destroyed. This is not the case. Just as it takes two distinct factors to make the unity called *marriage*, husband and wife, so too it takes two distinct aspects, body and soul, to form one whole which is man. In the *Commentary on the Physics* of Aristotle, Thomas takes as his own the theory of matter-form. These two concepts are co-principles however. Behind and underneath every motion and change in the world, they must always accompany one another, either as act-potency, as essence-existence or as body-soul. The two poles go together to form "one flesh." Hence man is a unity of action, therefore of powers to act, therefore of being.

The human person is also one with the rest of nature. He shares with all material things his materiality and with all living things, their life. Yet life, as with so many other concepts in Thomas, is analogous. As a consequence man has the vegetable, animal and human powers all in one soul. He lives "like" other living things, but with a difference. His sameness with other living things is expressed by "body." The indication of what sets him apart, his "furrowed brow," is expressed by "intellectual soul." The body and the soul form a unity though. "You can't have one without the other." For this reason the matter-form theory of Thomas and Aristotle is basically a theory of monism and not dualism as is so often falsely assumed. Man is one; but a unity with two distinct aspects. Are these aspects really distinct?

This is the important key to the concept of man in Thomas: the types of knowledge upon which the various gradients of living are based become vastly dissimilar when we examine how man knows. Vegetable life is the class of those living things having no knowledge of ends or goals; animal, having concrete knowledge of ends and the

means to these ends; human, having a grasp of the goals precisely as goals (universal knowledge) and of the means. In the case of man, then, it is true that the "mind-body" is found in constant conjunction, i.e., that when man thinks his body is always involved in changes which correspond to this thought-process. While this is true, however, it is possible on the theoretical level that the mind cannot be reduced to the body. Mind is qualitatively different than body because, in the matter-form context, it is able to apprehend universals while the body must be limited to particulars and concreteness.³

Although parts of the unitary actions of man, mind and body are theoretically really distinct, this insight rests upon the discovery that ideas are non-material. Ways of moving are transcended in man's knowing power; he can reflect upon his own power and see himself apart from his surroundings. In the very emphasis upon man's unity (explained by the matter-form schema) we find in St. Thomas the distinction in man himself between the "rock" and the "furrowed brow." Although the soul and the body are two moments of one reality called man, they are irreducible elements. There is a leap between them.

Let us turn now to Husserl. Husserl felt that man definitely is one thing. There is simply no place in his thought for a duality in man between body and soul. These concepts are not discussed. There is no split in man. The central insight of Husserl is that to be conscious is to be conscious *of* something. In correcting Descartes he stressed that one could not think merely of an "ego cogito." Rather one must say, "Ego-cogito-cogitatum."⁴ By this emphasis upon the thoughts thought in consciousness, Husserl trumpets the theme of contemporary phenomenology. He indicates the link between man's consciousness and the objects (essences or meanings) it constitutes. But that is not all. Through the objects constituted consciousness also has a bond with the world. For the constitution is based upon an originary sense experience. Due to Husserl's ideas, a final blow felled the Cartesian notion of an ego and a body as two separate entities without much to do with one another. Man acts as a unit in time.

Just as the other thinkers in this brief study, Husserl too recognizes a qualitative jump between two aspects in man. This jump comes in his theory of the difference between awareness and consciousness, in the critique against naturalism and in his very conception of consciousness as intentional.

We might explain the latter notion in the following way: The subjectivity of consciousness is a correlate of any essential, objective science. The conscious *intending* of the object (the meaning) is one process that includes the objective essence and the subjective consciousness. The clarification of a meaning in experience, then, is one act. Now it is a fact of experience that mankind has discovered objective sciences (e.g., geometry) which are true and certain for all cultures and for all men. Applying Husserl's insight that consciousness is consciousness of something, we see that there must be a subjective correlate of this permanent and transcultural science. It follows that this consciousness (the subjective correlate) must also be permanent, transcultural, and transtemporal just at the science is. Consequently, although consciousness is indeed a dynamic force in history there must be some aspect of it which is permanent. This is demanded by Husserl's philosophy. For him, then, as for all the other thinkers we have examined, the very thing lying at the roof of man's unity is also the cause of a distinction in him. Consciousness is dynamic and changing in the world, but must also be permanent. An objectively valid and universal science demands a correlative consciousness that transcends the ordinary categories of mobility. There must be some power in man beyond that found in the rest of the "world."

Even the American Naturalists today, although not those in the nineteenth century, recognize the qualitatively irreducible levels of experience in man. They take into account, for instance, the difference between sense knowing and knowing mathematics, or between the delight in eating and the delight in viewing a work of art. With a healthy avoidance of the needless Cartesian split in man between mind and body they are able to discuss these levels of experience in terms of functions and pragmatic ends.

We have seen that widely divergent thinkers consider man to be a unit with concomitant di-polar activity. Man is not a disembodied soul floating in a bodily crap-game; he is not some purity residing at his center amidst a miasmatic body. For we have also seen that there is no consciousness without awareness and no psychic act without a physiological one. The unity of man is also expressed in his union with the world in which he lives. He cannot act without the world triggering him to do so. Every action of man is a reaction to environmental stimuli impinging upon him.

But what if we leave for a moment our somewhat static study of

man and turn instead to Teilhard's more evolutionary outlook? Could Teilhard's law of complexity-consciousness offer any objection to this brief consideration? Is it possible to have a gradual rather than a disjunctive leaping between levels of knowledge, and thereby wipe out any non-materialist view of man? It is evident that Teilhard conceived the law of complexity-consciousness to be a theory explaining the qualitative leaps between various levels of consciousness. The previous levels were evolutionary preparations for the later ones but could never have anticipated them, could never have received advanced notice of them.⁵ Rather than disqualify our thesis, Teilhard supports it.

What we are left with, then, is a picture of the unity of man and his own disjunction within. This picture is not unlike the introductory theme of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The theme advances at first cautiously, like the first signs of living beings. Later the song of a community of instruments accepts the theme, as a totality of creatures. Finally the trumpets blast with joy at the culmination of the evolving process. But something is still missing! The leap to the human voice, the first time ever heard in a symphony, was a surprise and shock to Beethoven's listeners. This shock was nothing, however, compared to the cosmos as it witnessed the leap of awareness in life to a self-reflective awareness! Man was born. He is unique, one. He is able to sing the same theme as the instruments before him, but this theme is sung transformed. Despite his sameness, man stands out while standing in!

FOOTNOTES

¹ J. P. Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (NY: Noonday Press, 1966).

² "Der Mensch ist dasjenige Seiende, dessen Sein durch das offenstehende Innestehen in der Unverborgenheit des Seins, vom Sein her, im Sein ausgezeichnet ist." (Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* [Frankfurt a/M: Klostermann, 1965], p. 16.)

³ The greatest sign of a real distinction is a real separation. We have altered this principle of scholastic philosophy to read: the greatest sign of a theoretical distinction is a theoretical separation. Hence, the method used here is that of juggling elements found in constant conjunction with one another in the practical daily order (e.g., mind-body, psychic and physiological) to see if they are essentially connected. In this juggling we find that the intellectual knowledge, or consciousness, or the ego, depending upon the theory we use to explain man, *transcends* space-time awareness. Hence the intellect (or ego, or consciousness) is theoretically able to be found without sense (or simple awareness) for it is not limited to the concrete. This discovery does not immediately lead to a recognition of some spiritual soul however, which argument would require additional premises.

⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), n. 14, p. 31.

⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., *The Phenomenon of Man* (NY: Harper, 1961).