

Human Subjectivity and the Law of the Threshold

Phenomenological and Humanistic Perspectives

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THE WORKADAY WORLD AND THE FESTIVE WORLD

One of the key assumptions of phenomenological psychology is that human consciousness is structured by an *intentional* relationship. Human consciousness is openness to a world, in the same sense that subjectivity is necessarily intersubjectivity and that personhood necessarily implies interpersonality. Our problems in understanding these psychological dimensions are attributable in part to our use of nouns to denote what are essentially actions that bridge the distance between one person and another or between a person and a thing. Consciousness is not something that can be found among things, not even among the thing like bodies described by biology and medicine. Consciousness refers to a fundamental relationship between persons and things, and it is this relationship that forms the basis of our awareness of our world.

This way of understanding consciousness in particular, and human reality as a whole, is not a recent philosophical or psychological

discovery, but represents a way of thinking that is probably as old as mankind. Itself. There is an ancient Greek proverb that says very simply and directly *Aner oudeis aner*, meaning, literally, "None without another," or, more fully, "One single human being, considered in the absence of a relationship to another, is in fact no human being at all." Being human means standing in a relationship to others, to things, and to a world. In what follows, we will explore two very different types of relationships to the world that always occur together and that in their dynamic interplay open for us a truly human world.

The first attitude opens *a world of work*. It seeks to transform the natural world in such a way that it conforms more closely to our particular bodily and material needs. In our Western societies, both technology and the natural sciences developed out of this workaday need to transform our natural environment and to make it conform to our needs. The central theme of the workaday world, of technology and the natural sciences, is the transformation and ultimately the complete appropriation of a natural environment.

The second attitude opens *a festive world* and cultivates close alliances with human, divine, and natural beings in such a way that both the self and the other are thereby revealed to one another. In our Western societies, religious practices, together with the arts, the humanities, poetry, and literature, form together a festive world

that is structured around the fundamental desire to stand in a mutually revealing relationship to a natural, a human, and a divine world.

The various cultural forms to which these basic two attitudes give rise vary from place to place. They also vary from time to time and from one situation to another. The world of work of New Guinean Papuans clearly differs from that of the Bantus in South Africa, and the festive world of medieval France is not the same as that of modern France. Yet these differences, no matter how great or small, do not contradict the fundamental given that all societies have to a greater or lesser extent recognized and practiced the difference between a time and a place for work, centered on acquiring life's necessities, and a time and place devoted to thanksgiving, to celebration and the festive revelation of the self and the other.

We will later return to this subject for a closer examination of these two fundamental attitudes. For the moment, however, we want to focus our attention on the mysterious *transition* that occurs when we move from a workaday relationship to the world to one that is essentially a festive one.

To study this transition in some detail, we will make use of a thought experiment in which we follow the thoughts and feelings and behavior of a fictional person as he moves from a *workaday*

attitude, in which he seeks to understand and mentally appropriate the natural world, to a *festive* attitude, in which he seeks a personal manifestation of an other.

We should realize that each of these fundamental attitudes toward our world has its own inherent possibilities and limits so that neither should be thought of entirely in isolation.

I have a particular affection for words such as *man* and *mankind*, which express so well what we as human beings are, or at least ought to be. The word "mankind" is made up of two words, "man" and "kind." The word "kind" relates to "kin" and thus to the entire complex of "race," "species," "family," "relatives," and the like. Thus, the word "man," as used in this context, has nothing to do with a biological masculinity or femininity, but refers to all human beings as a whole insofar as they are differentiated from inanimate things by their ability to think. We use a different form of the same word in German as *der Mensch* or in Dutch as *de mens*, always to refer to human beings without regard to their particular sex. Latin gives us the related form *mens, mentis* to speak of the mind. Our concepts of the "mind" and our ideas of what is "mental" spring from the same source that gives us our generic "man" and "mankind." What these words exclude is not femininity but *mindlessness*. To exclude oneself from "mankind" can only mean

that one excludes oneself from the realm of thought and of spirit.

No human culture can prosper, or indeed survive, without some practical and intellectual understanding of the laws that govern the natural world. But neither can a human society last for long without learning to cultivate the festive dimension and finding effective ways in which to frame a mutual revelation of what is self and other, of what is human, natural, and divine being.

All functional cultures possess an understanding of what it means to work and to appropriate natural resources. They all possess also, to one degree or another, an understanding and a practice of festive disclosure in which they witness in celebration the generous, uncoerced appearance of self and other.

A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

In seeking to explore the mysterious shift from a workaday to a festive attitude, we will want to know not only what sets these two fundamental attitudes apart or in what respects they differ, but also how these attitudes and the worlds they create stand in relationship to one another, and how together they form a whole. The world of everyday, mundane tasks and the world of the festive each has its own integrity, its own essential conception of what is real and

important, its own sense of what is fitting and unfitting, of what it is right to do and of what should be avoided. Moreover, each of these worlds is surrounded by a horizon that announces the imminent arrival of the other world. While we participate in a festive gathering, we remain aware that we will have to return to the mundane world of work, and while we work, we comfort ourselves with the prospect of festive revelations. Only severe pathology could limit us merely to one perspective and deprive us of a counterbalancing perspective of the other.

Let us now turn to a concrete example in which we can study in some detail the experience of a person at the very moment when he turns from the world of work in which he had been pursuing his natural scientific interests and begins to shift to a festive attitude in which he seeks a mutually revealing encounter with an other.

Let us imagine a geologist on a scientific expedition in a very remote and uninhabited region of the world. Let us imagine him just after he has climbed the last mountain range to arrive at his planned destination, which is a small plateau overlooking a vast expanse of barren and uninhabited wasteland. We assume that he has come to study an important geological feature of this particular landscape that he had discovered while studying a satellite photograph of the area. At the moment when we begin to take an interest in his work, he already has behind him a very long journey

that began with a flight to the capital of the remote country in which the wasteland is situated and then continued from there, first by car, then by camel, and finally by foot.

At the point in time when we begin to follow his adventures, he is very near complete physical exhaustion, and we see him struggle to hoist himself atop a large boulder from where he can look out upon most of the surrounding landscape. What he sees before him is an enormous expanse of barren sand and rocks that shows nowhere a sign of animal or even vegetative life. Such variety as is offered by the landscape is that of countless boulders of all shapes and sizes that lie strewn over the desert landscape as far as the eye can see. He finds himself thus completely alone in a world that appears actively hostile to every form of life.

In the course of his already long and distinguished career, our geologist has become used to barren landscapes, and he feels buoyed by the thought of having reached his final destination after having triumphed over so much adversity. He takes a little food and drink from his diminishing supply and then pulls out his notebook to begin to sketch out the physical features of the terrain.

As he surveys his surroundings, the geologist notices ancient traces of what once, several millennia ago, must have been a forceful stream running down the mountains and crossing in a wide

sweep the entire length of the valley below. The river not only carved a still visible path from the mountain down through the valley, but also left behind a trail of variously sized boulders with rounded and smoothed features that testify to the shaping power of sand and water.

The geologist observes other, rougher stones that do not bear the mark of flowing water and that must have reached their present location by other means. He traces the path of their descent back to the eroding sides of the mountain, and he can read from their weathered surfaces the corrosive impact of rapid temperature changes combined with that of water, wind, and sand. Here and there, the combined action of these natural forces has shaped some of the stones into truly fantastic forms. Sometimes these strangely shaped stones appear in clusters, some leaning against each other as if embracing or fighting, others heaped together in bizarre formations that defy description. If an ordinary citizen were suddenly confronted with this sight, he might guess that he was seeing an intergalactic sculpture garden.

Our geologist is not given to such reveries, and the thought of sculpture is furthest from his mind. He treats the appearance and the precise location of each stone as a kind of material archive, containing the record of all the natural forces that have left their imprint on the landscape since it first came into being. When he

sees the rounded form of a boulder in the desert, he thinks of the forces that brought it there, about those that broke it loose from the mountain and brought it to its present location, all the while scraping away its edges and exposing it to a new array of natural forces. He sees the stone as broken loose from its base, as carried away from where it was, as smoothed and rounded by water, wind, and sand. He reads the presence of natural forces from what is *missing* from the stone, from the fact that it no longer forms part of the mountain, that it no longer appears as jagged and huge, as it was when it first broke loose, but as smaller and rounder. The presence of the natural forces is thus entirely identifiable with what the stone is no longer, *with what is missing* from it.

Sculpture proceeds on a very different principle. The sculptor also removes parts of a block of stone, and in this his labor superficially resembles the natural action of heat and cold, of water, sand, and wind in all their naturally occurring combinations. Yet there remains a profound and unbridgeable difference between the two kinds of actions. The sculptor removes material from the surface of a stone not in a completely accidental way, not as determined by a pure interplay of physical forces, but as a means of *revealing a personal presence*. What is missing stands thus in an active relationship to what is thereby revealed.

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on a stone can be understood as gradually revealing a presence; meaningful to him personally, that in retrospect can be thought of as having been imprisoned in the stone. In this way, sculpting reveals itself as essentially different from the simple and mechanical process of erosion, which in retrospect reveals nothing except the simple fact of its own operation.

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out of his hiding and into the light of day.

The physical act of artful carving, understood as the revealing of a subjective presence, cannot take place within the Euclidean space of natural science, but requires an intersubjective space in which it becomes possible for one subjectivity to reveal itself to another. Artful carving and sculpting thus resembles speaking and conversing closer than it does the process of erosion. It is as erroneous to look upon the essential purpose of sculpting as an action that removes parts of stones as it is to regard the purpose of speech as that of moving our lips or that of forcing air outward through our oral or nasal passages. Both speaking and sculpting serve the same ultimate purpose of cultivating and revealing natural, human, and divine subjectivity.

As a natural scientist, our geologist would certainly shrug his shoulders at the suggestion that the weathered boulders before him could be seen as art objects. This is not because the geologist is hard of heart, or lacks artistic sensibilities or cultural refinement, but because his scientific training and his current mission place him in a culturally constructed, naturalistic, and workaday frame of mind that for the moment screens out all aesthetic and subjective experiences as being irrelevant to his present field of vision.

It is not that the geologist is incapable of the latter, but rather that he has learned to set these experiences aside for the moment in

order to pursue his scientific work. His very training as a scientist permits him to make carefully cultivated distinctions between a workaday natural scientific landscape and a festive interpersonal one. By dint of much effort, he has learned to perceive a physical world solely in terms of natural forces, and the scientific task he seeks to accomplish is one of reconstructing the natural history of a given geological formation. This *natural history* is principally and methodically distinguished it from ordinary *human history* by the fact that it scrupulously avoids every and all reference to either a natural, a human, or a divine subjectivity. This methodic principle that calls for the exclusion of subjectivity forms the very basis of natural science, and to transgress it means to step outside its perimeter and to forsake its explanatory power.

It is important to understand, however, that the geologist practices this methodic exclusion of subjectivity only as long as he is engaged in practicing his discipline. When he returns from his labors in this distant part of the world, he will be able to embrace his family and friends and respond with gladness and affection to their heartfelt welcome. Moreover, even here in this deserted outpost of the world and in the midst of his labors, he would easily step outside the naturalistic frame of his discipline if he heard a child cry out or saw a person approaching him, or if he were distracted from his work by an awe-inspiring sunset. While

absorbed in his work, he thinks about a world of material forces, but at the fringe of his consciousness he remains ever ready to welcome a stranger, or to say a prayer, or to suddenly experience a landscape as radiant or majestic, or to think of the surging mass of a mountain as expressing grandeur. Only madness could condemn a person to become imprisoned in the landscape of geology or in the body of biology. Our essential humanity resides in the fact that we can shift perspectives from the realities of work to those of the festive, and from those of impersonal forces to those of subjective manifestations.

For the moment, our protagonist is obliged to practice the methodic exclusion of subjectivity that is demanded by his scientific discipline. He thus seeks to reconstruct the natural history of the landscape without in any way making reference to a human or a divine person. This methodic exclusion constrains him to write this history without at any time making use of personal pronouns. The scientific account of his natural observations therefore cannot make use of such attributions as "He created" or "She managed" or "They did."

This methodic exclusion places him, grammatically speaking, in an awkward position, since the usual construction of ordinary sentences in European languages generally demands that a verb be linked to a subject or to a subject and an object. In order to

overcome this grammatical difficulty, our geologist takes recourse to a subterfuge by using the *impersonal* pronoun *it*. His account will therefore necessarily take the form of "*It* rained," "*It* fell," "*It* formed," "*It* froze," "*It* melted."

We should note here as an aside that the particular perspective of the natural sciences, which excludes all direct reference to subjectivity and which gives us access to the strange world in which "it" is the sole source of action, was developed first in the millennia-old discipline of astronomy. This perspective slowly developed starting from the day when the first eager amateur looked up at the night sky and began to take note of the orderly changes he observed in this realm.

In astronomy, the observer faced a realm that was at once clearly visible and observable, but at the same time also entirely beyond the reach of human beings. The astronomical observer studied a world that could become as familiar to him as the back of his own hand, but that for all its familiarity would nevertheless remain *inaccessible* to him.

Natural science always presents us with a natural world that we learn to observe and get to know in great detail, but from which we nevertheless remain substantially excluded. We may know the world of physics and chemistry, but we shall never be able to fully make it our own. Nobody can bathe himself in H₂O, nobody can

dine on chemical compounds or make love to a biological organism. The world in which my friend Mike becomes a biological entity and where a cup of tea becomes a chemical compound is like the starry sky of the night: We can see it and study it, it may induce us to make marvelous discoveries that in turn have extraordinary implications for our life on earth, but we can never *inhabit* it.

It was the first systematic knowledge of the starry sky that gave us the calendar and that made it possible for mariners to trace a path across the seas. The great scientific revolution of the modern world took place when we learned to view our familiar earth with eyes that had been trained to observe the sky and with a mind formed by the study of the inhabitable regions of astronomy. We learned to see the earth as though it were itself an uninhabited planet and we learned to set the course of our daily lives guided by the rapidly increasing knowledge derived from the study of this new planet. But then we began to confuse the planet that we studied from the perspective of astronomy with the familiar world that we must inhabit. The era of modernity is profoundly marked by this confusion, and we will not be able to leave it behind us until we have reestablished the primacy of the intersubjective world of host and guest. It is only in such a world, founded in hospitality, that we can humanly live and die, love and pray. And it

is only in such a world that we can ever be truly at home.

It is interesting to note how Freud introduced the natural scientific world into the innermost recesses of our being with his second theory of the psychic apparatus. He spoke here of *das Es* (the "it") as an unconscious psychic region governed entirely by impersonal material forces. His English translator, perhaps thinking that to speak of the unconscious in such a simple term as the "it" might detract from the dignity and the professional image of psychoanalysis, rendered it in Latinized form as the *Id*. Freud wrote that his use of the term "it" to describe the unconscious had been inspired by his reading of Georg Groddeck's (1987) book bearing the German title *Das Buch vom Es*, which appeared in an English translation as *The Book of the It* (Groddeck, 1961). Freud (1975) continued to use the plain German term *das Es* till the end of his life (p. 292). He defined that term as "an impersonal psychic entity that unavoidably forms part of our psychic make-up" (Freud, 1964, pp. 72-75).

Here is not the place to discuss in detail Freud's understanding of what he referred to as the "psychic apparatus," or that part of it that he understood as the domain of the "it," except to point out that the fundamental attitude within which he analyzed the human mind and soul had been developed long before his time by Babylonian, Egyptian, and Greek astronomers scanning the starry

dome of the night. By adopting their attitude and applying it to the study of the "psychic apparatus," he transformed the starry heavens of the early astronomers into the subterranean, dark, and impersonal realm of the human soul.

But let us return to our geologist in his lonely desert outpost, where he continues to contemplate the land of "it" of the early astronomers in the manner in which he has learned to project it upon an earthly landscape. Let us assume that there comes for him a moment when, wearied from his calculations, he allows his eyes to wander a bit aimlessly over the barren surroundings. Let us suppose that his glance is drawn toward some particular feature that does not seem to fit in with the rest of the geological landscape and that from that moment on keeps attracting his attention as a source of difference within the vast expanse of sameness. The place to which his attention is drawn and from which this difference emanates is a strangely regular, geometrically formed rectangular clearing that is bordered on all sides by small round boulders of about equal size. On one side of the rectangle, the geologist notices, is a five-foot-high, pyramid-shaped mound of smaller rocks that appears to form part of the composition.

It is difficult to say which of the many differences from the rest of the landscape was the one that made it stand out. Was it the regular shape of the small pyramid or the rectangular form of the

clearing, or was it perhaps the rhythmic pattern of the border, made up of nearly equal-size round stones carefully laid out in such perfectly straight lines?

No matter how hard he tries, the geologist cannot find a satisfactory place for this particular configuration within the world of geology. At the end of all his attempts to find a natural scientific explanation for the phenomenon, he still remains faced by a stubborn and a irresolvable difference that refuses to disappear in the geological landscape of "it."

I to say that this particular formation does not fit in the landscape of natural science is I not to say that this part of the landscape, on which he is now focused, is not subject to the identical natural forces that govern the rest. The sun shines on these symmetrically placed : stones as it does on all the others. What sets it apart from the surrounding world of "It stands," "It falls," "It rains," "It shines" is the fact that it insistently evokes a purposeful and expressive world of "He built," "She stood," "We live," and "We die." What the geologist perceives at the outer limit of his neutral, natural scientific landscape is the upsurge of a very differently constructed *inhabited* world in which it is possible to express *ajudgment* and to incorporate a *decision*. After spending several hours in the uninhabited regions of the world of natural sciences, the geologist, like his predecessor the astronomer, finds himself

suddenly called back to earth by the presence of another human being. Where only a moment ago he was lost in the rarefied world of planetary systems, he is suddenly confronted by a human presence that calls him back to a very different world that demands of him a radically different manner of approach. His humanity does not reside in his ability to use one approach or the other, but rather in his capacity to make the shift from one fundamental perspective to the other. It is precisely madness and loss of our humanity that imprisons us in one attitude or the other and that prevents us from making the shift back and forth between the world of work and the world of celebration.

The first two letters of the word *judgment* refer us to the *Latinjus*, meaning "law" or "what is right"; the second two refer to the Latin *dicere*, meaning "saying," "telling," "informing" (Klein, 1971, [see under *Judgement*]). A judgment speaks to us of a subjective presence capable of differentiating between what is right and what is wrong and gifted with the means to make this difference known to us.

The word *decision* refers us to the Latin verb *caedere*, which means "to strike down," "to cut down," "to beat," or "to cut off." To encounter someone's decision means to enter the arena of fateful human action, to the place where the Gordian knot is cut, where choices are made, where one path is pursued instead of another.

This arena of fateful choice, of judging, and of choosing to do one thing rather than another does not fit inside a geological landscape that is entirely constructed on the principle of impersonal forces. "It" can rain, but "it" cannot be made to decide, to judge, or to choose!

This *odd* appearance in the *even* landscape draws the geologist out of the neutral landscape of his academic discipline. He closes his notebook, climbs down from his perch, and begins to walk in the direction of the mysterious rock formation. His entire outlook on the world is now transformed. The same landscape that only a moment ago was, from the perspective of the geologist, a field of resisting natural forces holding the promise of some day becoming entirely transparent to natural scientific reason now has transformed to become *the domain of an other*. This metamorphosis of the landscape takes place at the exact moment when the geologist begins to suspect that the little mound of boulders and the small rectangular clearing before him is not a natural but an artificial formation and that in all likelihood he is facing a human grave.

From this fateful moment on, the geologist begins to assume a very different emotional and intellectual stance toward his surrounding world. His thinking of even just a moment ago had been formed by notions of physical causality and by an exclusive

logic of natural forces and material interchanges. Just a moment ago, he still sojourned in the country of "it." But now that he has come face-to-face with a *monument*, his thinking and feeling enter a very different register and become restructured along the primordial fault line that divides the "self" from the "other."

He now enters an ethical realm of "right" and "wrong," a sexual domain of "he" and "she," and a generational domain of "older," "contemporary," and "younger," of the "unborn," the "living," and "the dead." He rediscovers motive and desire in relationship to an other, he enters an aesthetic world of beauty and ugliness, and a religious world of what is permissible and not permissible to do, of what is sacred and what is profane.

In more concrete terms, his thoughts now turn to the possible identity of the person buried beneath these carefully arranged stones. Was he, like the geologist himself, perhaps also an explorer, and did he meet here with an accident or perhaps fall ill? (The geologist's imagination follows here the path of *literature*, and specifically that of the heroic adventure novel.)

Or was he perhaps an aboriginal hunter confused by a sandstorm? (His imagination now turns to *anthropology* and to questions about possible early inhabitants of what is now a desert.) Perhaps the buried person was once a ruler of an ancient city that prospered long ago on the banks of the now extinct river? (He now

turns to *archeology* and the *history* of such what became of this ancient people and what is now left of their civilization? (He remembers a haunting painting by Caspar Friedrich of a lone man in a dark 19th-century overcoat standing atop a mountain overlooking an empty landscape of rocks and clouds. Here he summons his experiences of *art* and *poetry*.)

Could it really be true that at one time children played along the fertile banks of a river where today one sees nothing but stone and sand? Is this how all civilizations end? (His sensibilities now draw nearer to questions concerning the meaning of life and evoke his experiences with *philosophy* and *religion*. He hears a fleeting fragment of a melancholy *poem* by Goethe about a frightened maiden consoled by death, and he hears strains of the melody Schubert created while setting the poem to *music*.)

We see thus how the geologist, in facing the monument, has returned to the inhabited world of intersubjectivity. His mind has now turned away from the scientific calculations that kept him tied to the uninhabited universe of the astronomer's sky, and he has returned to the inhabited world in which he has learned to love and cultivate the humanities and the arts. The world of geology and the land of "it" has not disappeared from his consciousness; it still forms a horizon around his present consciousness of a festive world in which it is possible to encounter another human being.

But he now sees the grave site and the landscape surrounding it, not with the eyes of astronomy, but with sight ready to discover a painting and with ears attuned to the human voice and to music.

This different way of seeing the world does not alienate him from concrete worldly reality, but it does makes him experience it in a different way. He now has entered the intersubjective and festive world of host and guest. He is no longer the lone astronomer studying the sky with all the world around him sunk in sleep, but is now the guest walking up to the house of his host in eagerness to make his acquaintance. He temporarily has left behind the natural scientific struggle with inert obstacles and is now eager to enter the world of the humanities in which it is possible to have a conversation. His reflections on the fate of the unknown person in the grave inevitably provoke in him thoughts about his own precarious situation, about his own dwindling supplies, about his own exhaustion, about the dangers he still must face on the way back home, perhaps even about his own mortality.

His melancholic thoughts about the fate of civilizations, aroused by the presence of the stranger, make him reexamine the meaning of his current mission and even make him briefly question his utter devotion to his discipline. His present awareness of this grave and of this death, even if later it would prove to have been based on an error in perception, constitutes at this time his awareness of an

other. And it is this *other* who has opened his eyes and his heart to the intersubjective world of the humanities, of the arts and religion. It is this *other* who has opened to him a world of hospitality and conversation. It is the presence of the other that has opened to him the portals of reflection that led him to meditate on the meaning of life and the fate of civilizations.

It was thus the evocation of a *personal presence*, incarnate in a artifact, that at first disturbed the geologist's ongoing natural scientific preoccupation. It was this awareness of a personal presence amid the stones of geology that transported him from the neutral geological world of "It rains," "It falls," and "It happens" to another world in which it was possible to think of mortality, of truth, of beauty, of good and evil, of motivation, of life and death, and the fate and ultimate purpose of what we do or fail to do. His entire train of thought, which drew sustenance from philosophy, theology, art, history, architecture, literature, and music, was set in motion the very instant he felt himself called upon by someone.

If, instead of discovering a grave, the geologist had suddenly heard a child cry out, or had he been surprised by the song of angels, the result would not have been different. In all these instances he would have been called away from his geological preoccupations in order to confront an other.

Note here how the contemplation of physical nature introduces

us to a generic, a-historic time of "it," prior to the emergence of a "he" and a "she," a "self" and an "other," while the contemplation of a monument, even though it ostensibly belongs to the past, introduces us to a temporal order in which we are invited to a relationship of mutual revelation of self and other. *A monument addresses us.* It demands of us a personal acknowledgment; it opens to us a space that is hospitable to conversation; it invites us to enter into a dialogue with the past. We are thus *present* to a grave in ways that we can never be present to the rocks of geology, to the forces of physics, or to the substances of chemistry.

THE WORLD OF THE BARRIER AND THE WORLD OF THE THRESHOLD

We have seen thus far how the awareness of the presence of another subject takes the geologist from the neutral and indifferent world of natural scientific pursuits and transports him to a very differently structured world of hospitality and dialogue in which it becomes possible for him to encounter his own and the other's subjectivity. His situation differs in no essential respect from that of someone who in the midst of his daily labors is surprised by a telephone call or by a knock on the door. Such a person interrupts his absorption in the world of work, where he is in the habit of

removing one obstacle after the other, and enters a very differently structured world that leads him to a threshold and fills him with the hope of a hospitable and personal encounter.

As we observe the geologist walking toward the grave, we notice that he no longer moves and acts in the forthright and businesslike manner of the experienced field geologist. He no longer is surveying a geological terrain in the manner of the astronomer scanning the skies, but is now on his way to meet a stranger. This shift in perspective introduces a certain note of reticence in his manner and a certain hesitation in his footsteps. His entire body now moves in a way that testifies to his mental and physical understanding that he is approaching a *threshold* that leads to the mysterious domain of an *other*.

When he reaches the grave site, he kneels down beside the monument to inspect it at close range. His demeanor is now respectful, his movements and expressions more tentative and ready to respond to the presence of an other. As he begins to examine the conical headstone, he is very careful not to place his foot upon the rectangular clearing that forms part of the grave. And as he bends down to inspect the individual stones that form part of the monument, he no longer studies them in the manner of a geologist who is primarily interested in their physical and chemical composition; rather, he studies them as an anthropologist might

study a mask or a historian an ancient manuscript. Within this new world of festive encounters with others, he now approaches these stones as markers or as letters that spell out and symbolize facets of a *personal* identity and a *social* history. He now finds himself in the position of someone calling upon a stranger. We expect such a person to be alert and to behave so as to open himself up to possible surprises.

We might think here of an insurance man, for example, as he makes his way along the path through flower beds to the front door of the house of a prospective client. We assume that this is his first call, and we imagine him thus as eagerly looking around for clues that may help him frame the right approach to his new client. He certainly will take note of the size, the stature, and the state of upkeep of the house and flower beds. He may be glad to discover a prosperous bed of roses, because he himself cultivates roses, and the topic of rose cultivation may serve as a bond between him and his client. If he notices a child's bike on the lawn and is greeted by a cocker spaniel wagging his tail, he will gauge his sales pitch differently than he would if he were to come upon a growling pit bull fiercely tugging on a chain. All these details inform the salesman about the identity of his client and help him find a proper manner to approach him.

Within the given frame of mind, the salesman is not likely to

inspect the flower beds as would a biologist or a professional gardener. Nor would he be likely to scrutinize the structural details of the house as might an architect or a real estate salesman. He would more likely take notice of all those details of maintenance and construction that would afford him insight into the tastes, preferences, and habits of those he is about to meet.

What the visitor seeks in the flower beds, the shrubbery, the garage, and the steps leading up to the front door are the unknown faces of those he seeks to get to know. He seeks not the house or the car or the garden. He seeks not the instrument, but the user of that instrument, his state of mind, his character. This search for a face, for an identity, for a state of mind has little in common with the research of the technologist or the natural scientist, but rather resembles the activities of the humanist historian, the literary scholar, the religionist, and the humanist-psychologist.

As the geologist cautiously inspects the grave, all material objects that fall under his scrutiny awaken from their slumber within a neutral, material world of natural forces and transform themselves into a kind of material *adjectives* that add concreteness to what is at first only a blank portrait of a stranger. Within this new attitude in which he approaches the threshold, all objects that draw his attention reveal themselves as *belonging to an other*. These objects now point to an other subject and begin to reveal to

him that other subject's world.

The geologist has stepped from one attitude into another, and the world around him stands now revealed in a very different light. It is as though the objects that he now encounters have undergone a sudden and miraculous transformation from indifferent natural things to symbols capable of describing a human and a cultural reality. This transformation or transubstantiation takes place at the very moment when the geologist steps outside the uninhabited world of the natural sciences and enters the inhabited world of *personal encounters*.

This moment of transformation thus marks the transition from the cultural workaday sphere of the natural sciences to the festive sphere of the humanities, the arts, and religious practices. It also marks the shift in perspective from a naturalistic psychology that dissolves the human presence into the world of "it" to a humanistic and descriptive psychology that belongs to the world of the humanities, the arts, and religious practices.

The progressive world of the natural sciences is one of relentless advances in which we move from discovery to discovery in an unending search for intellectual and material mastery of the natural world. Entering this world is like beginning a long march on a road where every step on the way demands the removal of a physical or mental *barrier* and where each new breakthrough, as

soon as it is achieved, brings into view some new obstacles on the way to an ultimate mastery of nature. Each barrier incarnates a facet of the natural world's resistance to human dwelling, each manifests its essential indifference to human needs and desires, and the removal of each barrier represents a weakening of this resistance and a further step on the road of the natural scientific and technological conquest of nature.

Both the world of work and the world of the festive offer us an ultimate prospect in which all our needs and desires would at last be met and put to rest. The ultimate dream of the workaday world is that of an absolute appropriation of nature in which all of natural reality would have been made subordinate to our will. The ultimate dream of the realm of the festive is that of an absolute revelation of self and other in which all our love and desire for the other would be stilled and in which our passion to give recognizable form to our experience would have been not just calmed, but silenced. Our desires unrestrained would thus lead us in the direction either of a total appropriation of the natural world or of a total revelation of self and other. In the end, we would be forced to make the impossible choice between *being* and *having*. Clearly, our desire to gain mastery over nature must be tempered with the desire for festive manifestation, and our desire to gain material possession of a natural landscape must be tempered by our desire for a festive

revelation of that landscape. Equally, our desire to control and dominate the other and to use him as an instrument in the service of our workaday projects must be counterbalanced by a festive desire to witness his free and spontaneous self-manifestation.

The world revealed to us within the attitude of mental or physical appropriation and the world revealed to us in the festive revelation of self and other resemble each other insofar as both are structured by a *difference* between what is self and what is other than the self. Neither world can maintain itself in the absence of the other, so that both are characterized by an internal and an external difference. Another way of saying this is that both the world of work and the world of the festive can be understood as two different ways of cultivating the difference between what is self and what is other.

Within the world of everyday work, of technology and natural science, each task and each problem presents itself as an obstacle to progress, as a *barrier* against which we pit the strength of our bodies and the agility of our minds in order to overcome and remove it. But the festive world of revealing encounter is structured, not by natural *barriers* that must be opposed and removed, but by *thresholds* that must be left in place and that demand to be respected. The world of the festive demands that we regard the threshold as an inviolable limit before which we bring to

a halt all progress of a workaday, technological world and where we do no more than announce our presence and await the manifestation of the other.

The path of scientific inquiry into the natural world is that of Columbus sailing uncharted waters to the unknown comers of the earth. To progress along that path means to do battle with an endless succession of obstacles in which each obstacle represents a measure of our ignorance and inexperience with the world of natural forces. Within this workaday world, we progress by relying on resources of body and mind and by cultivating the virtues of courage and steadfastness that make us persist in the face of an indifferent natural world.

But the festive world of inquiry in which we seek a personal revelation of self and other sets us on a path that leads us to altars, portals, doorways, and monuments. Our inquiry here begins with accepting the first law of the threshold, which forbids us to make use of force or trickery to gain our way and places on us the demand to arrest our workaday progress, to make known our presence, and to await the appearance of the other. This path of inquiry explores the festive self-manifestation of the world of host and guest in which we live and die and feel at home.

**THE ALTAR AS THRESHOLD IN
HESIOD'S *THEOGONY***

Hesiod's (1959) *Theogony* tells the story of Prometheus and details for us the important role he played in the emancipation of mankind from an original state of dependency and confusion to that of an independent people inhabiting their own domain. The myth tells us that in a very distant past, human beings lived among the gods without any awareness of their own identity as mortal human beings and without perceiving the essential differences that set them apart from the gods. For Hesiod, the mystery of human origins is not that of the material creation of a particular type of creature and does not concern even a process of making or fabricating. The creative act whereby humankind comes into being takes here the form of an acknowledgment and subsequent celebration of what is initially a painful truth. Within this vision, mankind came into being the very day it began to realize its own distinct nature and began to properly orient itself in respect to the other forms of being. The birth of humankind came thus in the form of a discovery of the difference between self and other, and about the place that human beings should properly occupy within both the natural and the supranatural world.

Ontological distinctions are distinctions made on the level of being. Thus, we think of the difference between divine and human being, or of that between human beings and animals, as

ontological distinctions. It appears that in the *Theogony*, the birth of mortal human beings takes the form of their discovery of their own ontological difference from the immortal gods. We find in this text nothing concerning the physical making of mortals, nothing that would make us believe that human beings had from the start been set apart from the gods. The story of the creation of mankind should logically recount two different stages, the first of which does not appear in this story. That first stage should tell about the coming into being of human beings and the creation of a difference in the universe of divine beings. The second stage, which forms part of the Prometheus story as it is told here, concerns mankind's discovery and final acceptance of that fatal and glorious difference. This discovery and acceptance comes to light under the tutelage of Prometheus, the great emancipator and benefactor of humankind. It is for this reason that the story of the birth of mortals is told here in the form of a story concerning Prometheus.

Hesiod (1959, verses 535 and 536, p. 155) tells the story of the discovery of the fateful difference in a very succinct way:

It was when gods and mortal
men took their separate
positions at Mekone.

The story gives us no specific details about what it was that caused the separation or how the discovery of man's separate nature came about. All we know is that it was made and that the best way to understand man's emancipation is to follow the story of Prometheus, who incarnates the human spirit and its movement toward independence.

What sets the story of mankind and Prometheus in motion is thus not a quarrel, not an accidental misunderstanding, but the intellectual and spiritual discovery of an ontological difference. When Zeus was told about mankind's decision to set up separate households at some distance from the gods, his initial reaction seemed to have been favorable. He ordered that a great feast be prepared to celebrate the impending separation so that mortals and immortals would be able to enjoy a last supper together and embrace each other for a last time. He charged Prometheus with slaughtering a magnificent bull and with preparing two portions, one to be offered to the gods and the other to the mortals.

The choice of Prometheus for this task shows the central role he played in the drama of human emancipation. Throughout the complex weavings and windings of the story, he plays the role of the benefactor of mankind, which he serves with his ability to anticipate the future-his name derives from the Greek *prometheia*,

meaning "forethought," "foresight," and "caution"-and with his extraordinary ability to make appropriate distinctions.

After killing and butchering the bull, Prometheus proceeded to divide the portions, and he did so in such a way that mankind appeared to gain the better part. But however we may interpret the division of the portions, it appears clear that it was made to reflect the different natures of mortals and immortals. After Mekone, it was still possible for gods and men to eat together, but it no longer was suitable for them to eat the very same food.

Prometheus took the massive bones of the slaughtered animal, craftily covered them with layers of offal, and placed this offering before Zeus as the portion destined for the gods. He then hid the meat inside the unsightly stomach, covered it with the entrails, and placed it next to the other portion. Zeus declared himself satisfied with the seemingly more desirable portion for the gods, and his doing so raises the question whether he was truly taken in by Prometheus' deception.

If we read the story with the understanding that a quarrel had led to the fateful separation, then we must assume that Zeus was unaware of the clever trick being played on him, and this hardly seems plausible. But if we approach the story as a myth concerning human emancipation, then we see Zeus' apparent gullibility in a very different light. The deception practiced by

Prometheus would then represent a first step in the emancipation of mankind, and Zeus' apparent failure to notice it should be read as his quiet, unstated approval of the growing independence of the human spirit. The deception could then be seen as the end point of a period during which mortals had remained morally and intellectually transparent to the gods.

Something very similar can be observed in the developing relationship between young children and their parents. There comes a time when the child begins to outgrow a relationship of complete transparency to the parents and begins to move in the direction of a more autonomous life in which it becomes possible to hide something from the parents and to keep a secret. The child thereby accepts a first fruitful distance from the parents, and this distance, if it is properly respected, lays the foundation upon which all further stages of emancipation are built.

Yet, this first distance and this fateful first step in the direction of independence invariably give rise to conflicting feelings in parents and child alike, feelings that must be borne with patience, like the pain of birth itself. Few parents would fail to recognize themselves in this portrait of a half-irritated and half-pleased Zeus, as he sees mortal beings take their first fledgling steps in the direction of independence. In any case, if we place Zeus' silent suffering of Prometheus' tricks within the larger context of the

emancipation of mankind, the whole story begins to make sense.

There is another good reason to read the myth in this manner. All the events of which the myth makes mention occurred in a place named Mekone. Some have tried to link this name to that of an ancient town in Corinth, but such realist interpretations do not advance our understanding of the myth (Lamberton, 1988, p. 98). A more promising approach would be to read the place name as a hidden revelation of a central aspect of the myth. The Greek noun *mekoon* translates as "poppy" or "head of the poppy," or, in botanical terms, *Papaver somniferum* (Liddell & Scott, 1966 [see under *Meekoon*]). As such, it refers to the realm of sleep and dreams and to a preconscious realm prior to conscious human existence. To escape from that realm thus constitutes a first step on the way to full humanization and self-possession.

It is perhaps useful here to recall that Aristotle (1967, p. 587) used the word *meconium* almost the same way we still do in modern English, namely, to refer to either the juice of the poppy or the fecal discharge of newborn infants. If we read these ancient meanings back into the place name, we begin to understand that the site of the last banquet with the gods was also, at the same time, the true birthplace of the human spirit.

It was thus at Mekone that the human spirit, guided and

symbolized by Prometheus, came to recognize its essential difference from the gods. Characteristic of that recognition was mankind's adopting for itself the name *mortals* and learning to speak of the gods as the *immortals*. It thus seems that human confusion disappeared and that sensible action became possible when human beings began to recognize their nature as essentially fragile, mortal, and limited. This would imply, at the same time, that the condition of confusion and lack of sense would return whenever hubris overwhelmed common sense and decency, and blur human understanding of the lines of distinction between mortals and immortals. A corollary of this proposition would be that the soundness and the clarity of the human mind would in some important measure depend on the human ability and willingness to assume a proper stance in regard to the gods and, by extension, in respect to fellow human beings, other living creatures, and, finally, to natural and artificial objects. A fully human rationality developed beyond the stage symbolized by Mekone would thus be based on the lived recognition of the threshold that both separates mankind from and unites us to the gods.

But let us return to the scene of the farewell dinner and observe what next took place. Most likely, the two groups made complimentary speeches to each other following the dinner and,

most likely, sang poems and made merry and then embraced each other in a last farewell. The mortals then gathered themselves under the leadership of Prometheus and set out for their new homeland.

. The gods remained on Mount Olympus, and perhaps watched the departing mortals begin their long journey from Mekone to the distant and as yet unsettled human world. Let us remind ourselves that the road traveled by the mortals opened in only one direction, so that mortals could never retrace their steps. One is reminded in this context of the title of Thomas Wolfe's (1940) great novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*. Only Prometheus was able, now and then, to return to the abode of the gods. Yet this inability of ordinary mortals to physically return to their origins did not, for all that, make them forget or scorn their origins, and one of the first things they did after reaching their new homeland was to build an altar.

In building that altar, they created a threshold between the realm of the gods and that of mortal men and thereby established a definition of the human condition that both separated it from and linked it to the domain of the immortal gods. In this way, they situated themselves in a meaningful way within a larger cosmos.

Hesiod (1959, verses 556 and 557, p. 156) writes:

Ever since that time the race of

mortal men on earth have
burned
the white bones to the
immortals
on the smoking altars.

Greek ritual sacrifice required that a victim be killed and slaughtered in a carefully prescribed fashion. Much as Prometheus had done in preparation for the last supper with the gods, the priest officiating at a sacrifice would burn the bones and the fat of the victim on the altar as a gift to the gods while he offered communion to the celebrants in the form of roasted meat.

The sacrificial ritual would thus be, first of all, a commemorative event in which mortals would remember the time when they had lived without distinction among the immortal gods. At the same time, they would also remember the painful day of their separation at Mekone, together with the proud day when they built an altar to delineate their own domain. The sacrifice thus evoked not only nostalgic feelings about a lost closeness to the gods, but also pride and confidence in a newly established position within the whole of the cosmos. It was in final instance this establishment of a domain of their own that enabled mortals to host a meal and to make a sacrifice to the gods.

In Aeschylus' (1976) *Prometheus Bound*, verses 444-458, we find a passage in which Prometheus describes the condition of humanity prior to the exodus from Mekone, and this portrayal is anything but flattering. He describes that condition in the following words:

In those days they had eyes, but sight
was meaningless; Heard sounds, but
could not listen; all their length of life
They passed like shapes of dreams,
confused and purposeless. Of brick-built,
sun-warmed houses, or of carpentry,
They had no notion; lived in holes, like
swarms of ants,
Or deep in sunless caverns; knew no
certain way
To mark off winter, or flowery spring, or
fruitful summer; Their every act was
without knowledge, till I came.
I taught them to determine when stars
rise or set
A difficult art. Number, the primary
science, I

Invented for them, and how to set down
words in writing.

The Greek ritual of sacrifice thus offered an opportunity to think back upon a time of great intimacy with the gods, while at the same time rejoicing in the blessing of living in an intelligible world in which it was possible to make moral, aesthetic, and intellectual distinctions. It was above all a time to celebrate the gift of a circumscribed identity, of a place and a time of one's own that, in turn, would make it possible to extend hospitality to mortals and immortals. It was all these gifts that together provided a sense of direction to what otherwise would have been a merely scattered, episodic life.

As noted before, it was Prometheus who led mankind out of its state of primordial confusion and who guided humanity in the direction of a more autonomous and separate existence at some distance from the gods. It was again Prometheus who presided over the original division of the portions and who gave a lasting form to the institution of ritual sacrifice. He introduced distance and difference into the life of the human race, and the Greek altar remains a lasting monument to his spirit.

In Aeschylus (1976), we read how he taught humans to distinguish themselves from the gods and how, once that

distinction was properly made, he succeeded in teaching them the difference between the seasons, between the constellations of the stars, and between one natural or artificial sign and another. His ultimate claim (verse 506) is that he laid the foundation for

All human skills and
science. . . .

We might ask ourselves what relationship we might be able to discern between this abundance of Promethean gifts and the establishment of the first altar. To begin to understand this relationship, we must first realize that the altar, understood as a first threshold between mortals and immortals, placed human beings for the first time *in a proper relationship* to the gods. The essential Promethean gift did not take the form of a particular thing or a particular circumscribed ability. It was not something added to the bill of particulars of a human life; rather, it consisted in a fundamental reorientation of human existence that placed it in a right perspective, first, in regard to the gods and, second, in regard to each other and the natural world. Prometheus thus did not endow human beings with intelligence-Hesiod and Aeschylus are both clear on this point-but he placed them in a relationship to their surrounding world in such a way that their intelligence could

become properly engaged and bear fruit.

What we can say about human intelligence applies equally to the human senses, to the worlds of sight and sound. Just like human intelligence, the senses of sight, of taste, of touch, of smell, and of hearing were never absent from the human condition. But these senses could make their rich contributions to a human world only after mortals had found a right perspective and a proper relationship to the immortals and, by derivation, had found the proper stance from which to approach themselves, others, and their surrounding natural world. This manner of understanding the birth of mankind and the essential gift of Prometheus as that of an emancipating orientation brings us back to the central issue of the altar, understood as the archetype of all thresholds.

The Greek rite of sacrifice can be understood as a journey back in time and space to the outer limits of the human realm marked by an altar that point to the adjoining realms of mankind and the gods. The journey thus brought the celebrants into the presence of a marker that pointed to a difference that was understood to be the very source of all subsequently discovered differences. The ritual repeated the journey of the ancestors that had ended in the founding of a separate human realm and the establishment of the first altar. At the same time, the journey commemorated the last supper humans and mortals had enjoyed in each other's immediate

company. The ritual thus revived the memory of an old relationship of confusion in which mortals still lived in ignorance of their own mortal nature. But it also offered grounds for pride in a new alliance, in which mortals proved capable of making and bearing distinctions, of holding and keeping apart, while at the same time being able to build bridges, to forge meaningful connections. In final instance, the ritual spoke of the dignity of the human condition as deriving from a dual, and only seemingly contradictory, movement. Mortals stood their own ground at some respectful distance from the gods, but with unceasing efforts to create and maintain meaningful links between the two realms. Between the two realms there stood as symbol, of both their separate status and their alliance, the altar founded by Prometheus. Such an altar may be understood as the very archetype of all thresholds.

The rite of sacrifice can thus be seen to *symbolize* the entire emancipatory myth that tells the story of the birth of mankind. We use the word "symbol" here in the literal and ancient meaning of *a bringing together a host and a guest within a hospitable realm*. The word *symbolon* originally formed part of the vocabulary of ancient Greek customs of hospitality (Liddell & Scott, 1966). If two strangers befriended each other while on a journey away from home, they would upon parting break a piece of pottery or a coin

in two pieces and have each guard a half as a permanent token of their friendship. This token could then later serve as a sign by which to recognize either each other or each other's descendants. The *symbolon* thus always signified at the same time the actuality of a separation and the promise of a hospitable return. But note that the promise contained in the two broken pieces of pottery, like that contained in the altar, referred to a hospitable meeting and not the canceling of the original breach.

The rite of sacrifice made visible the primordial separation of mortals and immortals through the dramatic act of killing and slaughtering the victim. This separation was then further emphasized by burning the bones and eating the meat. But the same rite also made visible a new union growing out of this separation, and that union was symbolized by the altar, understood here as a threshold that opened up a realm of hospitality.

We are thus thinking of the Greek ritual of sacrifice as an opportunity for the celebrants to revisit and reaffirm those fundamental and fateful choices that they experienced as having constituted their humanity. The sacrificial rite offered them a dramatic and reflective space in which it became possible to reexperience the birth of humanity as an entering into a new relationship to self, to others, to other forms of being, and to the

cosmos.

The dramatic and reflective space in which this revisiting of the ontological past became possible was and remains typically associated with hospitable thresholds. Hospitality in its fundamental form is always a meeting at the threshold, where it opens a particular type of conversation that begins with this question: "Who are you? Please declare and identify yourself, please manifest your being, your truth, your nature!" There are obviously many levels on which this question can be asked and answered, but the meeting at the threshold cannot avoid this question. As guests, we walk up to the threshold of the host to announce who we are, and in response the host comes to the door to manifest his presence and to offer the hospitable space in which we can further speak and give form to our world, and visit the perspectives offered by our host.

By guiding mankind to take its proper distance from the gods and by inducing them to establish their own domain, symbolized by the establishment of an altar, Prometheus brought mankind to the fundamental discovery of hospitality. By establishing a hospitable threshold between their own domain and that of the gods, human beings at the same time established a hospitable enclosure within which all aspects of the experienced world could make their uncoerced appearance. The first ritual sacrifice was

thus also the first true encounter, not only between mortals and immortals, who now stood sufficiently apart to come into the presence of each other, but also between neighbor and neighbor, between mankind and beast, and between mankind and nature. The altar thus made possible a first comprehensive outlook upon self and other and upon the world as a whole, We may think of it as a kind of theater upon the stage of which the diverse aspects of the human world could move to the fore and make themselves known to a waiting audience.

A human world perceived from the festive perspective of a hospitable threshold differs essentially from the same world revealed in the hand-to-hand combat with nature that characterizes the profane and workaday world. A merely vital contact between the hunter or the trapper and his quarry provided him with the means to still his hunger and to prolong his biological life. A purely utilitarian, profane, and workaday contact with animals would provide information relevant to the hunt, or to the raising of livestock, but only the festive and hospitable enclave of the cult site could bring the early hunters into the uncoerced presence of reindeer, boar, and bison.

The festive threshold provides a fullness of access, both to the self and to the other, in a way that a profane breakdown of barriers can never attain. At the end of our complete mastery of the other, we

find a compliant or evasive slave. But the invocation of the threshold and performance of the rites of hospitality transforms both self and another into in exhaustible and mysterious sources of vital interest. Profane and practical life provides us with tantalizing glimpses of the human world, but only the realm of the festive and the sacred can create for us the hospitable enclosures from which we can attain coherent insights into our human condition.

We saw how Prometheus described mankind's early state of confusion prior to the original separation from the gods. He portrayed them as effectively blind and deaf, as bereft of common sense and lacking in any understanding. In that early condition of confusion between self and other, there was as yet no altar, no distance, no difference, and therefore no hospitable means to bridge distance and difference.

We thus learn from the tale of Prometheus that the acceptance of a festive difference and distance within the spirit of hospitality provides us with the only means we have to a full disclosure of self, of other, and of our world. Without that vital and humanizing ingredient, all existing differences, all clarifying and productive distances between things and beings begin to disintegrate; all actions, all manner of objects, all distinctions begin to lose their contours, begin to invade each other, begin to fuse with one another, thereby draining the world of sense and purpose. Only a

relationship of hospitality, based on the sacredness of the threshold, opens us to a meaningful perspective upon the world so that all manner of objects and beings can appear in their full and true dimensions. It is thus only within the embrace of hospitality that anything at all can emerge as fully visible, fully tangible, audible, and sensible. It is only within a pact of hospitality that the world can be properly queried and understood and that it can fully show itself for what it is.

The threshold is a place where differences are hospitably received and acknowledged in such a way that they can be placed into a relationship to one another. It is here that they find mutual reconciliation and emancipation within the wide embrace of hospitality. The threshold should be seen as essentially the entryway to a place *of festive disclosure* that bids all those who are gathered within its embrace to manifest themselves and to endeavor to come fully into each other's presence. Seen in this way, only the threshold holds out for us the prospect of a fully human world.

THE THRESHOLD AND THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

As we have seen thus far, thresholds constitute the ultimate

borders of the human domain and indicate the very limits beyond which it is no longer possible to forge ahead with the otherwise powerful instruments of progress that the world of work puts at our disposal. These ultimate borders demand from us a response different from that elicited by barriers and obstacles. They demand that, for the moment, we lay down our weapons, abandon our instruments of progress, abstain from strategies, forsake all designs for mental or physical conquest, and await instead the manifestation of an other as an *other*. Where we encounter the threshold, we turn from our ordinary daily concerns, we suspend the struggle for life in order to assume a festal or religious attitude and await, whether in hope and joy or in fear and trembling, the one who is *other* and irreducible to ourselves.

We may think of the *other* whom we await at the threshold as the one who completes us as an individual person, as our "better half" who is our wife or husband, or who, as a child or grandchild, completes us as a parent or grandparent, or who, as a neighbor or close friend, completes our social being. But it is also possible to think of the other as the *other* of humanity as a whole, as a god or venerated ancestor whom we await in a festal attitude at our communal border. Such an *other* may also take the form of another biological species, of a bison, an ibex, or a boar, such as we see depicted on the cave walls of the Paleolithic sanctuaries of

Lascaux and Alta Mira. We may think of such a cave wall as a threshold or as the communal border of the tribe, and may imagine the painter as an inspired priest welcoming the mysterious appearance of the other-as-animal from beyond the threshold.

There is a clear difference between seeking to approach an animal in the context of a hunt and welcoming the appearance of that same animal by means of the inspired action of song or dance or mime, of shadow play or theater, or via a dramatic retelling of an ancient myth. The animal we conquer and appropriate in the hunt is the animal we meet across obstacles. The mysterious animal that appears to us in dreams and visions, in dance and in pictorial representations, is an appearance of which we ask nothing more than that it show itself fully and clearly. It is the abundance of that appearance that renders us thoughtful and perhaps more grateful than we could be for any quarry. The animal we catch in the hunt feeds the hunger of the belly, but the animal that shows itself in response to our dancing it, to our singing or painting it, feeds the hunger of the soul. We pursue the animal of the belly past obstacles, we await the animal of the soul near the thresholds where the domain of human beings ends and that of animals begins. We hunt animals that live "in the wild," in field and forest. But we paint, dance, and sing animals as creatures that dwell with us on earth like neighbors.

On the walls of Lascaux, the animals appear, not as prey, not as something to be stealthily approached and conquered, not as a source of physical danger, not as a mere visual or auditory trace apprehended amid the excitement of the hunt, but as *others* that step completely out of hiding and openly approach us to meet us at a sacred border. These paintings thus show the *other* side of the life of the hunter-not when he is in active pursuit of his quarry, but when he turns from the world of obstacles and contemplates his world from the site of the sacred border and threshold. He experiences the animals that make their appearance here as manifestations of an *other* form of life that complements his own, that forms a whole with it. He sees these now as a necessary complement to human life, a life that without that complement would be fatefully altered and impoverished.

But the realm of animals, or that of nature, is not the only *other* that completes our human life. Our life is inevitably touched and in part defined by the dead and by the gods who inhabit the realm at the other side of the threshold. To be human means to be inevitably bordered and defined by other creatures and other beings. We are inescapably neighbors to both natural and supernatural beings.

We have stressed the fact that the border between self and other must ultimately take the form of a threshold. Between

neighbors and neighbors, we find the threshold that marks the end of the inhabited domain of the one and announces the beginning of the domain of the other. It is respect for and obedience to this threshold that makes possible the relationship of one neighbor to another. To remove that threshold from our world would at the same

time remove from our lives the very possibility of being someone's neighbor.

Between mankind and the gods, there stands the threshold in the form of an altar, of a holy place, of a place of worship. To desecrate or to remove that threshold would mean not only to despoil the human world of its treasured religions, but also to rob humanity of an important means of self-definition and self-understanding.

Between the living and the dead, there stands the threshold in the form of the grave and the funeral monument. To rob mankind of that threshold would transform the dead into mere refuse and our memories of them into empty and idle chatter.

A monument is literally "something that reminds us," and as such it is the cornerstone of any civilization. A society bent on removing all thresholds and replacing them with barriers would by that act not only transform the gods into empty illusions, but also undermine the very foundations of the countless great works they

inspired. Such a society would deprive itself not only of religion, of art and music, but also of all other forms of festive celebration. It would reduce the memories of our dead to ashes, deface all monuments, and transform home and hearth into mere shelters against rain and wind. In such a world of desecrated thresholds, love and friendship could no longer thrive, and in their place we would find only tasks to be completed, cravings to be assuaged, demands to be satisfied, procreation to be taken care of.

Such a self-destructive society, hostile to all thresholds, could endure for only a short time in the form of an unruly mob or a totalitarian state. In either instance, the marginal human life that it could offer would be joyless, and at the same time, nasty, brutish, and short. Our humanity depends on our ability both to work and to celebrate, to inhabit both quotidian and festive reality, both to be able to overcome obstacles and to obey thresholds, both to transform and master natural reality and to await the appearance of the *other*.

A natural science is inherently an instrument designed to remove barriers to our understanding and to overcome obstacles to our full use of natural reality. It is in the nature of natural science, as it is in the nature of our daily tasks, to overcome obstacles and to shape a natural environment in ways that fit our natural needs. But it is equally necessary to surround the task-oriented

perspective of our daily life, together with that of the natural sciences, with a very different, festive perspective that enables us to recognize thresholds and to evoke the manifestation of an *other*.

Generally, our world is structured in such a way that the perspective within which we perform our ordinary, daily, technical or problem-solving tasks is always already surrounded by a festive perspective that awaits the end of our labors and that is eager to open us up to another world in which we celebrate the manifestation of the self as the self and the other as the other. All work days are surrounded by the prospect of coming feast days, just as all obstacles and barriers are surrounded by thresholds.

To translate this understanding to the field of psychology means for us to recognize the needs for both a natural scientifically oriented psychology, capable of removing obstacles from the world of work, and a humanities-inspired psychology of the festive, devoted to the study of the establishment, the care, and the maintenance of intersubjective thresholds. The task of such a humanistic psychology would be to contribute to our understanding of all practices, whether ancient or recent, whether indigenous or foreign, that invoke the sacred distance of the threshold while evoking the appearance of the *other*. Such practices include, besides prayer, meditation, and the remembrance of the dead, the craft

of writing and the hermeneutical task of meditative reading. They include the arts of painting, sculpting, and drawing, together with those of pantomime and theater. They include singing and dancing and all forms of making music. Each of these practices places us before a door to which we have no key and that can be opened only from the other side and by an *other*.

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