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The Subject¹

There is a sense in which it may be said that each of us lives in a world of his own. That world usually is a bounded world, and its boundary is fixed by the range of our interests and our knowledge. There are things that exist, that are known to other men, but about them I know nothing at all. There are objects of interest that concern other men, but about them I could not care less. So the extent of our knowledge and the reach of our interests fix a horizon. Within that horizon we are confined.

Such confinement may result from the historical tradition within which we are born, from the limitations of the social milieu in which we were brought up, from our individual psychological aptitudes, efforts, misadventures. But besides specifically historical, social, and psychological determinants of subjects and their horizons, there also are philosophic factors, and to a consideration of such factors the present occasion invites us.

1 The Neglected Subject

In contemporary philosophy there is a great emphasis on the subject, and this emphasis may easily be traced to the influence of Hegel, Kierkegaard,

1 [The Marquette University Philosophy Department Aquinas Lecture for 1968, under the sponsorship of the Wisconsin-Alpha chapter of Phi Sigma Tau, the National Honor Society for Philosophy at Marquette University. Delivered 3 March 1968 in the Peter A. Brooks Memorial Union. See also www.bernardlonegan.com at 74900DTE060, 'The Subject Fragments.']

Nietzsche, Heidegger, Buber.² This fact, however, points to a previous period of neglect, and it may not be amiss to advert to the causes of such neglect, if only to make sure that they are no longer operative in our own thinking.

A first cause, then, is the objectivity of truth. The criterion, I believe, by which we arrive at the truth is a virtually unconditioned.³ But an unconditioned has no conditions. A subject may be needed to arrive at truth, but, once truth is attained, one is beyond the subject, and one has reached a realm that is nonspatial, atemporal, impersonal. Whatever is true at any time or place can be contradicted only by falsity. No one can gainsay it unless he is mistaken and errs.

Such is the objectivity of truth. But do not be fascinated by it. Intentionally it is independent of the subject, but ontologically it resides only in the subject: *veritas formaliter est in solo iudicio*. Intentionally it goes completely beyond the subject, yet it does so only because ontologically the subject is capable of an intentional self-transcendence, of going beyond what he feels, what he imagines, what he thinks, what seems to him, to something utterly different, to what is so. Moreover, before the subject can attain the self-transcendence of truth, there is the slow and laborious process of conception, gestation, parturition. But teaching and learning, investigating, coming to understand, marshaling and weighing the evidence, these are not independent of the subject, of times and places, of psychological, social, historical conditions. The fruit of truth must grow and mature on the tree of the subject before it can be plucked and placed in its absolute realm.

It remains that one can be fascinated by the objectivity of truth, that one can so emphasize objective truth as to disregard or undermine the very conditions of its emergence and existence. In fact, if at the present time among

- 2 One should, perhaps, start from Kant's Copernican revolution, which brought the subject into technical prominence while making only minimal concessions to its reality. The subsequent movement then appears as a series of attempts to win for the subject acknowledgement of its full reality and its functions. For a careful survey of the movement and its ambiguities, see James Brown, *Subject and Object in Modern Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).
- 3 The formally unconditioned has no conditions whatever; it is God. The virtually unconditioned has conditions but they have been fulfilled. Such, I should say, is the cognitional counterpart of contingent being and, as well, a technical formulation of the ordinary criterion of true judgment, namely, sufficient evidence. See Lonergan, *Insight*, chapter 10, for more details.

Catholics there is discerned a widespread alienation from the dogmas of faith, this is not unconnected with a previous one-sidedness that so insisted on the objectivity of truth as to leave subjects and their needs out of account.

Symptomatic of such one-sidedness was the difficulty experienced by theologians from the days of Suárez, de Lugo, and Bañez, when confronted with the syllogism: What God has revealed is true. God has revealed the mysteries of faith. Therefore, the mysteries of faith are true.⁴ There is, perhaps, no need for me to explain why this syllogism was embarrassing, for it implied that the mysteries of faith were demonstrable conclusions. But the point I wish to make is that the syllogism contains an unnoticed fallacy, and the fallacy turns on an exaggerated view of the objectivity of truth. If one recalls that truth exists formally only in judgments and that judgments exist only in the mind, then the fallacy is easily pinned down. What God reveals is a truth in the mind of God and in the minds of believers, but it is not a truth in the minds of nonbelievers; and to conclude that the mysteries of faith are truths in the mind of God or in the minds of believers in no way suggests that the mysteries are demonstrable. But this simple way out seems to have been missed by the theologians. They seem to have thought of truth as so objective as to get along without minds. Nor does such thinking seem to have been confined to theoretical accounts of the act of faith. The same insistence on objective truth and the same neglect of its subjective conditions informed the old catechetics, which the new catechetics is replacing, and the old censorship, which insisted on true propositions and little understood the need to respect the dynamics of the advance toward truth.

Another source of neglect of the subject is to be found remotely in the Aristotelian notion of science, propounded in the *Posterior Analytics*, and proximately in the rationalist notion of pure reason. When scientific and philosophic conclusions follow necessarily from premises that are self-evident, then the road to science and to philosophy is not straight and narrow but broad and easy. There is no need to be concerned with the subject. No matter who he is, no matter what his interests, almost no matter how cursory his attention, he can hardly fail to grasp what is self-evident, and, having grasped it, he can hardly fail to draw conclusions that are necessary. On such assumptions everything is black or white. If one happens to have opinions,

4 See Heinrich Lennerz, *De virtutibus theologicis* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1947) 98–99, 103–104, §§ 196, 204; Ludovico Billot, *De virtutibus infusis* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1928) 191–93, 313.

one will have to defend them as self-evident or demonstrable. If one begins to doubt, one is likely to end up a complete skeptic. There is no need for concern with the subject, for the maieutic art of a Socrates, for intellectual conversion, for open-mindedness, striving, humility, perseverance.

A third source of neglect of the subject is the metaphysical account of the soul. As plants and animals, so men have souls. As in plants and animals, so in men the soul is the first act of an organic body. Still, the souls of plants differ essentially from the souls of animals, and the souls of both differ essentially from the souls of men. To discern these differences we must turn from the soul to its potencies, habits, acts, objects. Through the objects we know the acts, through the acts we know the habits, through the habits we know the potencies, and through the potencies we know the essence of soul. The study of the soul, then, is totally objective. One and the same method is applied to study of plants, animals, and men. The results are completely universal. We have souls whether we are awake or asleep, saints or sinners, geniuses or imbeciles.

The study of the subject is quite different, for it is the study of oneself inasmuch as one is conscious. It prescind from the soul, its essence, its potencies, its habits, for none of these is given in consciousness. It attends to operations and to their center and source, which is the self. It discerns the different levels of consciousness, the consciousness of the dream, of the waking subject, of the intelligently inquiring subject, of the rationally reflecting subject, of the responsibly deliberating subject. It examines the different operations on the several levels and their relations to one another.

Subject and soul, then, are two quite different topics. To know one does not exclude the other in any way. But it very easily happens that the study of the soul leaves one with the feeling that one has no need to study the subject and, to that extent, leads to a neglect of the subject.⁵

5 For a contrast of Aristotle and Augustine and their relations to Aquinas, see the introduction in my *Verbum*. The same material appeared also in *Philippine Studies* 13 (1965) 576–85, under the title ‘Subject and Soul.’ [See the Collected Works edition of *Verbum* (see above, p. 36, note 6) 3–11. In the fragments found at 74900DTE060 on www.bernardlonergan.com, Lonergan writes, ‘Note, please, that I am not saying that the doctrine of soul is false or even that it is misleading. Again, the doctrine of soul is in no way incompatible with the subject’s self-appropriation. But the doctrine of soul is distracting. It sets a far easier task than the self-appropriation of the subject. Commonly it fails to point out that one has far more to learn about oneself than can be learnt from the metaphysics of the soul. And so it may be said to be source of the neglect of the subject.’]

2 The Truncated Subject

The neglected subject does not know himself. The truncated subject not only does not know himself but also is unaware of his ignorance and so, in one way or another, concludes that what he does not know does not exist. Commonly enough the palpable facts of sensation and speech are admitted. Commonly also there is recognized the difference between sleeping and waking. But if universal, daytime somnambulism is not upheld, behaviorists would pay no attention to the inner workings of the subject; logical positivists would confine meaning to sensible data and the structures of mathematical logic; pragmatists would divert our attention to action and results.

But there are less gross procedures. One can accept an apparently reasonable rule of acknowledging what is certain and disregarding what is controverted. Almost inevitably this will lead to an oversight of insight. For it is easy enough to be certain about concepts; their existence can be inferred from linguistic usage and from scientific generality. But it is only by close attention to the data of consciousness that one can discover insights, acts of understanding with the triple role of responding to inquiry, grasping intelligible form in sensible representations, and grounding the formation of concepts. So complex a matter will never be noticed as long as the subject is neglected, and so there arises conceptualism: a strong affirmation of concepts, and a skeptical disregard of insights. As insights fulfil three functions, so conceptualism has three basic defects.

A first defect is an anti-historical immobilism. Human understanding develops, and as it develops it expresses itself in ever more precise and accurate concepts, hypotheses, theories, systems. But conceptualism, as it disregards insight, so it cannot account for the development of concepts. Of themselves, concepts are immobile. They ever remain just what they are defined to mean. They are abstract, and so stand outside the spatiotemporal world of change. What does change is human understanding, and when understanding changes or develops, then defining changes or develops. So it is that, while concepts do not change on their own, still they are changed as the mind that forms them changes.

A second defect of conceptualism is an excessive abstractness. For the generalities of our knowledge are related to concrete reality in two distinct manners. There is the relation of the universal to the particular, of *man* to *this man*, of *circle* to *this circle*. There is also the far more important relation of the intelligible to the sensible, of the unity or pattern grasped by insight

to the data in which the unity or pattern is grasped. Now this second relation, which parallels the relation of form to matter, is far more intimate than the first. The universal abstracts from the particular, but the intelligibility grasped by insight is immanent in the sensible, and when the sensible datum, image, symbol is removed, the insight vanishes. But conceptualism ignores human understanding, and so it overlooks the concrete mode of understanding that grasps intelligibility in the sensible itself. It is confined to a world of abstract universals, and its only link with the concrete is the relation of universal to particular.

A third defect of conceptualism has to do with the notion of being. Conceptualists have no difficulty in discovering a concept of being, indeed, in finding it implicit in every positive concept. But they think of it as an abstraction, as the most abstract of all abstractions, least in connotation and greatest in denotation. In fact, the notion of being is not abstract but concrete. It intends everything about everything. It prescind from nothing whatever. But to advert to this clearly and distinctly, one must note not only that concepts express acts of understanding but also that both acts of understanding and concepts respond to questions. The notion of being first appears in questioning. Being is the unknown that questioning intends to know, that answers partially reveal, that further questioning presses on to know more fully. The notion of being, then, is essentially dynamic, proleptic, an anticipation of the entirety, the concreteness, the totality, that we ever intend and, since our knowledge is finite, never reach.

The neglected subject, then, leads to the truncated subject, to the subject that does not know himself and so unduly impoverishes his account of human knowledge. He condemns himself to an antihistorical immobilism, to an excessively jejune conjunction between abstract concepts and sensible presentations, and to ignorance of the proleptic and utterly concrete character of the notion of being.

3 The Immanentist Subject

The subject is within, but he does not remain totally within. His knowing involves an intentional self-transcendence. But while his knowing does so, he has to know his knowing to know that it does so. Such knowledge is denied the neglected and the truncated subject, and so we come to the merely immanent subject.

The key to doctrines of immanence is an inadequate notion of objectivity. Human knowing is a compound of many operations of different kinds.

It follows that the objectivity of human knowing is not some single uniform property but, once more, a compound of quite different properties found in quite different kinds of operation.⁶ There is an experiential objectivity in the givenness of the data of sense and of the data of consciousness. But such experiential objectivity is not the one and only ingredient in the objectivity of human knowing. The process of inquiry, investigation, reflection, coming to judge is governed throughout by the exigences of human intelligence and human reasonableness; it is these exigences that, in part, are formulated in logics and methodologies; and they are in their own way no less decisive than experiential objectivity in the genesis and progress of human knowing.⁷ Finally, there is a third, terminal, or absolute type of objectivity, that comes to the fore when we judge, when we distinguish sharply between what we feel, what we imagine, what we think, what seems to be so and, on the other hand, what is so.

However, though these three components all function in the objectivity of adult human knowing, still it is one thing for them to function and it is quite another to become explicitly aware that they function. Such explicit awareness presupposes that one is not a truncated subject, aware indeed of his sensations and his speech, but aware of little more than that. Then, what is meant by 'object' and 'objective' is something to be settled not by any scrutiny of one's operations and their properties but by picture-thinking. An object, for picture-thinking, has to be something one looks at; knowing it has to be something like looking, peering, seeing, intuiting, perceiving; and objectivity, finally, has to be a matter of seeing all that is there to be seen and nothing that is not there.

Once picture-thinking takes over, immanence is an inevitable consequence.⁸ What is intended in questioning is not seen, intuited, perceived; it is as yet unknown; it is what we do not know but seek to know. It follows that the intention of questioning, the notion of being, is merely im-

6 For a fuller statement, see Lonergan *Insight*, chapter 13, and for something more compendious, *Collection* (New York: Herder and Herder, and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967) 227–31 [now in Bernard Lonergan, *Collection*, vol. 4 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 211–14. The selection is from the paper 'Cognitive Structure.']

7 [In *Insight* this second aspect is referred to as the normative aspect of objectivity. See *Insight* 404–405.]

8 Provided, of course, one's account of human intellect is not more picture-thinking, with human intelligence a matter of looking.

manent, merely subjective. Again, what is grasped in understanding is not some further datum added on to the data of sense and of consciousness; on the contrary, it is quite unlike all data; it consists in an intelligible unity or pattern that is, not perceived, but understood; and it is understood, not as necessarily relevant to the data, but only as possibly relevant. Now the grasp of something that is possibly relevant is nothing like seeing, intuiting, perceiving, which regard only what is actually there. It follows that, for picture-thinking, understanding too must be merely immanent and merely subjective. What holds for understanding also holds for concepts, for concepts express what has been grasped by understanding. What holds for concepts holds no less for judgments, since judgments proceed from a reflective understanding, just as concepts proceed from a direct or inverse understanding.

This conclusion of immanence is inevitable once picture-thinking is admitted. For picture-thinking means thinking in visual images. Visual images are incapable of representing or suggesting the normative exigences of intelligence and reasonableness and, much less, their power to effect the intentional self-transcendence of the subject.

The foregoing account, however, though it provides the key to doctrines of immanence, provides no more than a key. It is a general model based on knowledge of the subject. It differs from actual doctrines of immanence, inasmuch as the latter are the work of truncated subjects that have only a partial apprehension of their own reality. But it requires, I think, no great discernment to find a parallel between the foregoing account and, to take but a single example, the Kantian argument for immanence. In this argument the effective distinction is between immediate and mediate relations of cognitional activities to objects. Judgment is only a mediate knowledge of objects, a representation of a representation.⁹ Reason is never related right up to objects but only to understanding and, through understanding, to the empirical use of reason itself.¹⁰

Since our only cognitional activity immediately related to objects is intuition,¹¹ it follows that the value of our judgments and our reasoning can be

9 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* A 68, B 93 [in English, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965) 105].

10 Ibid. A 643, B 671 [*Critique of Pure Reason* 532–33].

11 Ibid. A 19, B 33 [*Critique of Pure Reason* 65].

no more than the value of our intuitions. But our only intuitions are sensitive; sensitive intuitions reveal not being but phenomena; and so our judgments and reasoning are confined to a merely phenomenal world.¹²

Such, substantially, seems to be the Kantian argument. It is a quite valid argument if one means by 'object' what one can settle by picture-thinking. 'Object' is what one looks at; looking is sensitive intuition; it alone is immediately related to objects; understanding and reason can be related to objects only mediately, only through sensitive intuition.

Moreover, the neglected and truncated subject is not going to find the answer to Kant, for he does not know himself well enough to break the hold of picture-thinking and to discover that human cognitional activities have as their object being, that the activity immediately related to this object is questioning, that other activities such as sense and consciousness, understanding and judgment, are related mediately to the object 'being' inasmuch as they are the means of answering questions, of reaching the goal intended by questioning.

There is a final point to be made. The transition from the neglected and truncated subject to self-appropriation is not a simple matter. It is not just a matter of finding out and assenting to a number of true propositions. More basically, it is a matter of conversion, of a personal philosophic experience, of moving out of a world of sense and of arriving, dazed and disorientated for a while, into a universe of being.

4 The Existential Subject

So far, our reflections on the subject have been concerned with him as a knower, as one that experiences, understands, and judges. We have now to think of him as a doer, as one that deliberates, evaluates, chooses, acts. Such doing, at first sight, affects, modifies, changes the world of objects. But even more it affects the subject himself. For human doing is free and responsible. Within it is contained the reality of morals, of building up or destroying character, of achieving personality or failing in that task. By his

¹² See Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 6, part 2, chapter 12, §§ 1 and 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image Books, 1964) 30–36, 60–66. [More recent: Frederick Copleston, s.j., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 6: *Modern Philosophy from French Enlightenment to Kant* (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1994) 235–42, 266–72]. Contrast with Étienne Gilson and Emerich Coreth in 'Metaphysics as Horizon,' *Collection* 202–20 [CWL 4, 188–204].

own acts the human subject makes himself what he is to be, and he does so freely and responsibly; indeed, he does so precisely because his acts are the free and responsible expressions of himself.

Such is the existential subject. It is a notion that is overlooked on the schematism of older categories that distinguished faculties, such as intellect and will, or different uses of the same faculty, such as speculative and practical intellect, or different types of human activity, such as theoretical inquiry and practical execution. None of these distinctions adverts to the subject as such, and, while the reflexive, self-constitutive element in moral living has been known from ancient times, still it was not coupled with the notion of the subject to draw attention to him in his key role of making himself what he is to be.

Because the older schemes are not relevant, it will aid clarity if I indicate the new scheme of distinct but related levels of consciousness, in which the existential subject stands, so to speak, on the top level. For we are subjects, as it were, by degrees. At a lowest level, when unconscious in dreamless sleep or in a coma, we are merely potentially subjects. Next, we have a minimal degree of consciousness and subjectivity when we are the helpless subjects of our dreams. Thirdly, we become experiential subjects when we awake, when we become the subjects of lucid perception, imaginative projects, emotional and conative impulses, and bodily action. Fourthly, the intelligent subject sublates the experiential, i.e., it retains, preserves, goes beyond, completes it, when we inquire about our experience, investigate, grow in understanding, express our inventions and discoveries. Fifthly, the rational subject sublates the intelligent and experiential subject, when we question our own understanding, check our formulations and expressions, ask whether we have got things right, marshal the evidence *pro* and *con*, judge this to be so and that not to be so. Sixthly, finally, rational consciousness is sublated by rational self-consciousness, when we deliberate, evaluate, decide, act. Then there emerges human consciousness at its fullest. Then the existential subject exists and his character, his personal essence, is at stake.

The levels of consciousness are not only distinct but also related, and the relations are best expressed as instances of what Hegel named sublation, of a lower being retained, preserved, yet transcended and completed by a higher.¹³ Human intelligence goes beyond human sensitivity, yet it cannot

13 This omits, however, the Hegelian view that the higher reconciles a contradiction in the lower. [In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan likens his view of

get along without sensitivity. Human judgment goes beyond sensitivity and intelligence, yet it cannot function except in conjunction with them. Human action, finally, must in similar fashion both presuppose and complete human sensitivity, intelligence, and judgment.

It is, of course, this fact of successive sublations that is denoted by the metaphor of levels of consciousness. But besides their distinction and their functional interdependence, the levels of consciousness are united by the unfolding of a single transcendental intending of plural, interchangeable objectives.¹⁴ What promotes the subject from experiential to intellectual consciousness is the desire to understand, the intention of intelligibility. What next promotes him from intellectual to rational consciousness is a fuller unfolding of the same intention: for the desire to understand, once understanding is reached, becomes the desire to understand correctly; in other words, the intention of intelligibility, once an intelligible is reached, becomes the intention of the right intelligible, of the true, and, through truth, of reality. Finally, the intention of the intelligible, the true, the real, becomes also the intention of the good, the question of value, of what is worthwhile, when the already acting subject confronts his world and adverts to his own acting in it.

I am suggesting that the transcendental notion of the good regards value. It is distinct from the particular good that satisfies individual appetite, such as the appetite for food and drink, the appetite for union and communion, the appetite for knowledge, or virtue, or pleasure. Again, it is distinct from the good of order, the objective arrangement or institution that ensures for a group of people the regular recurrence of particular goods. As appetite wants breakfast, so an economic system is to ensure breakfast every morning. As appetite wants union, so marriage is to ensure life-long union. As appetite wants knowledge, so an educational system ensures the imparting of knowledge to each successive generation. But beyond the particular

sublation to Karl Rahner's in contrast to Hegel's. 'I would use this notion in Karl Rahner's sense rather than Hegel's to mean that what sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, puts everything on a new basis, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context.' Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 241.]

14 These objectives are approximately the Scholastic transcendentals: *ens, unum, verum, bonum*; and they are interchangeable in the sense of mutual predication, of *convertuntur*.

good. Finally, as our knowledge of being is, not knowledge of essence, but only knowledge of this and that and other beings, so too the only good to which we have first-hand access is found in instances of the good realized in themselves or produced beyond themselves by good men.

So the paradox of the existential subject extends to the good existential subject. Just as the existential subject freely and responsibly makes himself what he is, so too he makes himself good or evil and his actions right or wrong. The good subject, the good choice, the good action are not found in isolation. For the subject is good by his good choices and good actions. Universally prior to any choice or action there is just the transcendental principle of all appraisal and criticism, the intention of the good. That principle gives rise to instances of the good, but those instances are good choices and actions. However, do not ask me to determine them, for their determination in each case is the work of the free and responsible subject producing the first and only edition of himself.

It is because the determination of the good is the work of freedom that ethical systems can catalogue sins in almost endless genera and species yet always remain rather vague about the good. They urge us to do good as well as to avoid evil, but what it is to do good does not get much beyond the golden rule, the precept of universal charity, and the like. Still, the shortcomings of system are not an irremediable defect. We come to know the good from the example of those about us, from the stories people tell of the good and evil men and women of old, from the incessant flow of praise and blame that makes up the great part of human conversation, from the elation and from the shame that fill us when our own choices and deeds are our own determination of ourselves as good or evil, praiseworthy or blameworthy.

I have been affirming a primacy of the existential. I distinguished different levels of human consciousness to place rational self-consciousness at the top. It sublates the three prior levels of experiencing, of understanding, and of judging, where, of course, sublating means not destroying, not interfering, but retaining, preserving, going beyond, perfecting. The experiential, the intelligible, the true, the real, the good are one, so that understanding enlightens experience, truth is the correctness of understanding, and the pursuit of the good, of value, of what is worthwhile, in no way conflicts with, in every way promotes and completes, the pursuit of the intelligible, the true, the real.

It is to be noted, however, that we are not speaking of the good in the Aristotelian sense of the object of appetite, *id quod omnia appetunt*. Nor are we

speaking of the good in the intellectual, and, indeed, Thomist sense of the good of order. Besides these there is a quite distinct meaning of the word 'good'; to it we refer specifically when we speak of value, of what is worthwhile, of what is right as opposed to wrong, of what is good as opposed not to bad but to evil. It is the intention of the good in this sense that prolongs the intention of the intelligible, the true, the real, that founds rational self-consciousness, that constitutes the emergence of the existential subject.

Finally, let me briefly say that the primacy of the existential does not mean the primacy of results, as in pragmatism, or the primacy of will, as a Scotist might urge, or a primacy of practical intellect, or practical reason, as an Aristotelian or Kantian might phrase it. Results proceed from actions, actions from decisions, decisions from evaluations, evaluations from deliberations, and all five from the existential subject, the subject as deliberating, evaluating, deciding, acting, bringing about results. That subject is not just an intellect or just a will. Though concerned with results, he or she more basically is concerned with himself or herself as becoming good or evil, and so is to be named, not a practical subject, but an existential subject.

5 The Alienated Subject

Existential reflection is at once enlightening and enriching. Not only does it touch us intimately and speak to us convincingly but also it is the natural starting point for fuller reflection on the subject as incarnate, as image and feeling as well as mind and will, as moved by symbol and story, as intersubjective, as encountering others and becoming 'I' to 'Thou' to move on to 'We' through acquaintance, companionship, collaboration, friendship, love. Then easily we pass into the whole human world founded on meaning, a world of language, art, literature, science, philosophy, history, of family and mores, society and education, state and law, economy and technology. That human world does not come into being or survive without deliberation, evaluation, decision, action, without the exercise of freedom and responsibility. It is a world of existential subjects, and it objectifies the values that they originate in their creativity and their freedom.

But the very wealth of existential reflection can turn out to be a trap. It is indeed the key that opens the doors to a philosophy, not of man in the abstract, but of concrete human living in its historical unfolding. Still, one must not think that such concreteness eliminates the ancient problems of cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics, for if they occur in an abstract context, they recur with all the more force in a concrete context.

Existential reflection, as it reveals what it is for man to be good, so it raises the question whether the world is good. Is this whole process from the nebulae through plants and animals to man, is it good, a true value, something worthwhile? This question can be answered affirmatively, if and only if one acknowledges God's existence, his omnipotence, and his goodness. Granted those three, one can say that created process is good because the creative *fiat* cannot but be good. Doubt or deny any of the three, and then one doubts or denies any intelligent mind and loving will that could justify anyone saying that this world is good, worthwhile, a value worthy of man's approval and consent. For 'good' in the sense we have been using the term is the goodness of the moral agent, his deeds, his works. Unless there is a moral agent responsible for the world's being and becoming, the world cannot be said to be good in that moral sense. If in that sense the world is not good, then goodness in that sense is to be found only in man. If still man would be good, he is alien to the rest of the universe. If on the other hand he renounces authentic living and drifts into the now seductive and now harsh rhythms of his psyche and of nature, then man is alienated from himself.

It is, then, no accident that a theatre of the absurd, a literature of the absurd, and philosophies of the absurd flourish in a culture in which there are theologians to proclaim that God is dead. But that absurdity and that death have their roots in a new neglect of the subject, a new truncation, a new immanentism. In the name of phenomenology, of existential self-understanding, of human encounter, of salvation history, there are those that resentfully and disdainfully brush aside the old questions of cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics. I have no doubt, I never did doubt, that the old answers were defective. But to reject the questions as well is to refuse to know what one is doing when one is knowing; it is to refuse to know why doing that is knowing; it is to refuse to set up a basic semantics by concluding what one knows when one does it. That threefold refusal is worse than mere neglect of the subject, and it generates a far more radical truncation. It is that truncation that we experience today not only without but within the church, when we find that the conditions of the possibility of significant dialogue are not grasped, when the distinction between revealed religion and myth is blurred, when the possibility of objective knowledge of God's existence and of his goodness is denied.

These are large and urgent topics. I shall not treat them. Yet I do not think I am neglecting them entirely, for I have pointed throughout this paper to the root difficulty, to neglect of the subject and the vast labor involved in knowing him.