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MAN BEFORE HIMSELF

Excerpt from
El hombre ante sí mismo

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Of loftiest moments in human life, such as birth, death and communion of souls in love, one meets the exalted instant of consciousness in which a man finds himself, is aware of his own reality, limitations and unfathomable bottom of his *Being*.

This lofty instant is religious in essence, of purest religiousness beyond conception, achieved in the silence of the inner temple and where man, acting as a priest, is conscious of his own limits and witness of his real *Being*. In this self-knowledge, man, God and mankind are linked by a unique expression of real life on earth.

This amplifying moment of consciousness determines and grants perfection to the simplest act of life and to existence as a whole. As according to *Holy Scriptures*, the one who sees God's face dies, so the one who is before himself however it may be for an instant, before the fullness of being, before light and fire of what really is, cannot be himself any more as before: it is a transformation experience impressing new dynamics on life.

Every human individual bears in himself this possibility of being and at certain moment of his life he finds himself in front of himself, but to update one's being and become what one is, might hardly be a good fleeting wish, or deeply move life and acquire the stamp of true vocation of Being.

After reviewing the history of philosophy, we'll see how, from most ancient times until to now, man has constantly looked for, by thought efforts, the reality of being, of what truly is, of the fundamental and eternal reality that is behind appearances of phenomenal world.

According to Plato, it is *admiration* what moves a man to know reality:

Our eyes make us join to the show of stars, sun and vault of heaven.
By such show we are given momentum to do research into the universe.
Philosophy is born here for us –it is the greatest good granted by gods to the race of mortals.

And Aristotle said:

So, admiration becomes a momentum for men to philosophize; they started admiring what was as surprising as strange, and gradually they progressed and wondered about vicissitudes of moon and sun and stars, and about the source of the universe.

In fact, in such admiration, a man becomes conscious of his non-knowing and wants to know, and knowledge arises. One doubts about reality of the universe and wants to know the real, the permanent.

When rational knowledge has acquired certain development, man becomes conscious of his own thought limited; he is not before the universe any more but before his own thought and doubts about reality of knowledge provided by senses. So criticism of reason –epistemology of science– arises and one looks for certainty of knowledge.

Following this line of historic philosophy so properly developed by Karl Jaspers, we are before a new streak in quest of reality –which is only new because of its difference from the two prior, but as ancient as to be summed up by the stoic philosopher Epictetus as follows:

“The source of philosophy is to realize one’s weakness and helplessness.”

Here, the universe or reason is not called in question any more, but human existence itself. Absorbed by knowing the outer world and living for other things, man has forgotten himself.

The human existence point at issue constitutes the central theme in contemporary philosophy, and the “before-himself” as a vital and existential problem becomes one of fundamental worries in these times.

Quite rightly, Jaspers has noticed what he calls extreme situations, that is to say such situations as death, suffering, struggle for life, to be subject to chance and feeling of guilt, which are inescapable and ultimately grant to man a feeling of his own failure.

A genuine living experience of such failure, awareness of his own helplessness and recognition of extreme situations are deeply moving and motivating man toward certain “beyond existence”, toward the essential root of Being.

But for existential failure to have a high regenerative power one should fully admit it, live it and experience it not escaping from it.

That is to say, consciousness about extreme situations and failure are not sufficient so as to become Being but it is necessary to take full care of one’s extreme situation.

In his place, man reacts closing his eyes and escaping from those situations or surrendering to despair, that is to say, by a movement that takes him out of a real self-vision.

When a man is healthy and full of strength, he becomes conscious of his power and makes up his mind to conquer the world and life.

When a man is before pain and impotence, he despairs, and when the crisis is over, again he forgets about himself and again makes up his mind to enjoy life.

If there is a vocational attitude of being, only a stability limited by one's failure, enables to go beyond limits of existence and achieve the human condition in its full reality.

We have spoken of vocation for being, and this requires an explanation.

That is to say, every speculation about these extreme situations, analysis of human existence and recognition of its essential root do not constitute a path to achieve a true state of being. It is not only self-knowledge, self-analysis or self-realization as expressions of rational or volitive action of man; it is a jump from the contingent plane of life to the plane of being that assumes for us a *vocational choice of being*.

In other words, one thing is a rational self-knowledge as a psychological or philosophical way, and another matter altogether is the living way leading to being.

Perhaps never as today, in conditions that society grants, men have become conscious of limits in their own human condition to achieve a full vision of reality and a really human form of life on earth.

So far technical and scientific breakthroughs achieved have not been a higher understanding guarantee among men; on the contrary, the technical industrial and urban society creates such distortions in both individual and collective life that are threatening mankind even in its very root.

Today the general clamor is not for higher progress but for better humanity.

Everywhere, one has a feeling that social systems or institutions should not be changed: it is the heart of man that should change; we need "more conscience", "more love", "more responsibility"... but how to achieve it?

Nowadays, one is conscious of a fundamental limit situation given by nature itself of man. That is to say, in whatever social structure one lives, there is a limit to possibilities of knowledge, understanding, love, action, and so on, which is given by an inner nucleus hardly accessible to a radical transformation

Really, it is not important to embellish this nucleus by means of culture or to enlarge it by means of progress because all that won't change the quality of man; what one needs nowadays is a substantial commotion enabling to release unknown energies from depths of being and to grant to man his full humanity.

What we call humanity is just a contingent, superficial and peripheral aspect of the real condition of man.

Usually, a man moves on a contingent plane and what we know about him, his thoughts, feelings and actions also are contingent –non essential– aspects.

A *vocational jump* establishes the real human condition from a contingent plane of life to the plane of ego-being; transcendent reality of being is not to say “beyond humanity” so often tried; it means essential human condition.

But again we should emphasize that such realization of being is not the fruit of self-analysis or rational self-knowledge: it is an updated vocation for being-man.

What does this mean?

1. First and foremost, it assumes choice of life; dedication to be what one is as the most important aspiration in life; it is integral attitude, not knowledge attitude.

2. Integral fidelity to the ideal chosen.

3. Sacrifice capacity. Determination to judge one’s life destiny, namely contingent values for essential value. Here is the trial for being: to testify death of contingent values for the highest ideal. This death or renunciation is fundamental condition of being; without it, vocation for being remains an unreachable ideal. Birth on the line of being assumes death on the line of contingent becoming.

Through such renunciation above-mentioned, man can testify on earth his essential divine value; through renunciation, transcendent value of being becomes immanent and vital, and it renovates, strengthens and illuminates human values that acquire human fullness through renunciation.

Through this co-substantiation of both the human and the divine, of both becoming and being, man reestablishes the path between humanity and divinity not making God ideal but divine. This is the path of *Being*, and not only a theory or speculation about it.

Finally, we’ll say this vocational path of being is nor for an educated or uneducated mass, but for an aristocracy of spirit; it is for those men willing to achieve the second birth that awakens them from contingent life to full life of being so that they may grant light, purity and being to humanity that is so much in need of it.