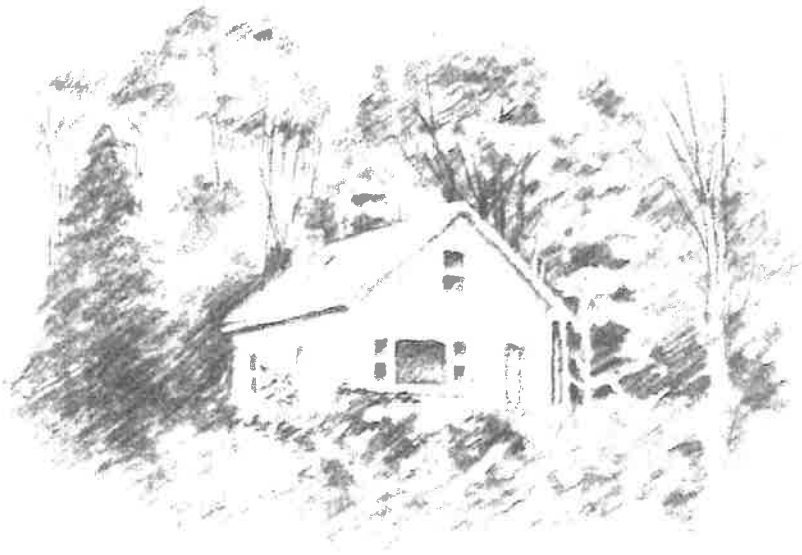

The Embers and the Stars

a philosophical inquiry into the moral sense of nature

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

A M. Paul Ricoeur
Une ésquisse d'une poétique
Hommage respectueux

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Prolegomenon

There still is night, down where the long-abandoned wagon road disappears amid the new growth beneath the tumbled dam, deep, virgin darkness as humans had known it through the millennia, between the glowing embers and the stars. Here the dusk comes softly, gathering beneath the hemlocks and spreading out over the clearing, muting the harsh outlines of the day. There is time to listen to the stillness of the forest when the failing light signals the end of the day's labor but the gathering darkness does not yet warrant kindling a lamp. Here time is not of the clock: there is a time of going forth and a time of returning, and there is night, soft, all-embracing, all-reconciling, restoring the

soul. On the clear nights of the new moon, the heavens declare the glory of God and the ageless order of the forest fuses with the moral law within. Here a human can dwell at peace with his world, his God, and himself.

In the global city of our civilization, girded by the high tension of our powerlines, we have abolished the night. There the glare of electric light extends the unforgiving day far into a night restless with the eerie glow of neon. We walk on asphalt, not on the good earth; we look up at neon, not at the marvel of the starry heavens.[1] Seldom do we have a chance to see virgin darkness, unmarred by electric light, seldom can we recall the ageless rhythm of nature and of the moral law which our bodies and spirits yet echo beneath the heavy layer of forgetting. The world of artifacts and constructs with which we have surrounded ourselves knows neither a law nor a rhythm: in its context, even rising and resting come to seem arbitrary. We ourselves have constructed that world for our dwelling place, replacing rude nature with the artifices of *technē*, yet increasingly we confess ourselves bewildered strangers within it, "alienated," "contingently thrown" into its anonymous machinery, and tempted to abolish the conflict between our meaningful humanity and our mechanical life-world by convincing ourselves, with Descartes, that we, too, are but machines.[2]

It is not my purpose in this book to condemn the works of technology or to extoll the virtues of a putative "natural" life. I have lived close to the soil for too long not to realize that such a "natural" life can also be brutish, worn down by drudgery and scarred by cruelty.[3] I am aware that *technē*, too, can be an authentically human mode of being in the world, capable of setting humans free to be nature's kin, not her slaves or masters. A life wholly absorbed in need and its satisfaction, be it on the level of conspicuous consumption or of marginal survival, falls short of realizing the innermost human possibility of cherishing beauty, knowing the truth, doing the good, worshiping the holy. A *technē* which would set humans free from the bondage of drudgery, to be the stewards rather than the desperate despoilers of nature, should surely not be despised.

Yet in our preoccupation with *technē* we stand in danger of losing something crucial—clarity of vision. Surrounded by artifacts and constructs, we tend to lose sight, literally as well as metaphorically, of the rhythm of the day and the night, of the phases of the moon and the change of the seasons, of the life of the cosmos and of our place therein. The vital order of nature and the moral order of our humanity remain constant, but they grow overlaid with forgetting. We come to think of a mechanistic construct, ordering a world of artifacts, as "nature,"[4]

losing sight of the living nature of our primordial experience in which boulders, trees, and the beasts of field and forest can be our kin, not objects and biomechanisms. Losing sight of the moral significance of nature, we then seek that significance in "History"—only to become trapped in the paradox of a "progress" which sacrifices the fullness of the present to an ever receding future.[5] We are still human, all too human; even amid our plastic gewgaws the moral sense of our being, the bond of love and labor, the vision of truth and justice, all remain constant. Yet that moral sense of our humanity is all too easily obscured by the mechanical order of our artifacts. Though no less there, it seems no longer evident to us as once it did to the Psalmist on a desert night or—perhaps—still to Immanuel Kant amid the sparse pine forests of Moditten.[6] In our daily lived experience, the starry heaven above and the moral law within have been heavily overlaid by artifacts and constructs.

The quest of this volume is one of recalling what we have thus hidden from ourselves. It is a philosopher's book, deeply indebted to the cultural heritage of three millennia of Western thought. It is also a book of philosophy, though in a sense far older than the current acceptation of that term. In a technological age, philosophy, too, tends to conceive of itself as a *technē*. To some writers, it has come to appear as one of the special sciences, whose subject matter is language, whose task is the analysis of arguments, and whose virtue is technical proficiency. Others take philosophy to be a metatheory whose subject matter is the theories of other philosophers and scientists, whose task is speculative construction, and whose virtue is sophistication in the peculiar sense of maximal remoteness from lived experience, so that the author who writes fifth-generation commentaries thinks himself more advanced than the preceding four generations of commentators—and far more so than the naïve observer upon whose original insight they all comment. Both linguistic analysis and theoretical construction are, surely, legitimate tasks. Yet the thinkers whose insight withstood the test of time, from Socrates to Husserl, were of a different breed. They were the perennial beginners, taking the sense of lived experience in its primordial immediacy for their subject matter. Their stance was one of wonder, not of sophistication; the task they undertook was one of articulation—and their virtue was naïveté, a willingness to *see* before theorizing, to encounter the wonder of being rather than enclose themselves in cunningly devised theories.

There is, I think, a reason. For the purposes of manipulating our environment—the legitimate purpose of *technē*—conceptual analysis and the construction of theoretical models are appropriate tools. Here

the theoretical construct of, say, a uniform motion in a frictionless medium, though nowhere to be found in experience, is far more useful than Aristotle's experientially accurate distinction between spontaneous "natural" motion and a violent one. When, however, the task is not to effect a predetermined purpose but rather to ask what the purpose is, to grasp the sense of the cosmos and of our being therein, including the purpose of engaging in natural scientific inquiry, then clear, sensitive seeing is in order. *Prima philosophia* cannot start with speculation. It must first see clearly and articulate faithfully the sense evidently given in experience.

So Plato's metaphorical prisoner labors through the stage of *dianoia* or reasoning not in order to construct a hypothesis but to reach the point at which he can *see*, grasp in a direct awareness, the idea of the Good. Almost three millennia later, it is *seeing* that Husserl and Wittgenstein alike call for in the face of the spiritual crisis of the West: not to speculate but to *see* the sense of it all. Reflection and speculation remain no more than cunningly devised fables if they are not grounded in what, paraphrasing Calvin Schrag, we could call the prephilosophical and prescientific matrix of self-understanding and world-comprehension.[7] Though philosophy must do much else as well, it must, initially, *see* and, thereafter, ground its speculation ever anew in seeing.

So I have sought to see clearly and to articulate faithfully the moral sense of nature and of being human therein through the seasons lived in the solitude of the forest, beyond the powerline and the paved road, where the dusk comes softly and there still is night, pure between the glowing embers and the distant stars. I have not sought some alternative, "more natural" life-style nor some "more authentic" mode of being human. Artifacts, I am convinced, are as "natural" to humans as the dam and the lodge are to beavers, culture as "authentic" to them as nature. Nor do I wish to recall humanity to an earlier stage of its technological development. It is, surely, good that there are synthetic medicines to ease the surplus of pain, telephones to break through loneliness, and electric lights to keep the wayfarer from stumbling.

There is, though, something wrong when we use medicine to deaden our sensitivity, when we obliterate solitude with electronics and blind ourselves with the very lights we devised to help us see. There is nothing wrong with our artifacts; there *is* something wrong with us: we have lost sight of the sense, the purpose of our production and our products. Artifacts, finally, are good only extrinsically, as tools. They have no intrinsic sense of their own. A humanity which knew only a world of artifacts might justly conclude that the world and its life therein are absurd.

Too often we have so concluded, having sought the sense of life where it cannot be found, in the products of our artifice. To recapture the moral sense of that life and its world, even the world of artifacts, humans need to bracket it, seeing beyond it to the living world of nature. It takes the virgin darkness to teach us the moral sense of electric light. It takes the beauty of solitude to enable us to grasp the sense of the word spoken over the distance, the crystal-bright gift of pain to teach us the moral sense of penicillin.

Through the years beyond the powerline I have sought to rediscover that moral sense of life, too easily lost amid the seeming absurdity of our artifacts. In writing of those years, I have not sought to "prove a point" but to evoke and to share a vision. Thus my primary tool has been the metaphor, not the argument,[8] and the product of my labors is not a doctrine but an invitation to look and to see. With Husserl, I have sought not to instruct but to point out,[9] to recall what we have forgotten.

My intellectual indebtedness to Husserl and Heidegger, to Plato and to Kant, to Ricoeur and to Rádl, to Masaryk and to Patočka, is, I think, evident enough in the text—and I have sought diligently to acknowledge it in my notes. I should, however, like to acknowledge a different indebtedness as well, to all the neighbors who helped and taught me to survive and to see, to Don and Robin Williston on Binney Hill, to the good people at All Saints', in the woods and along the logging roads, especially to Bonnie and to Larry Poole, wherever he may be, who for years had been a neighbor in the best sense of Luke 10:30–37 and a friend of lean winters. They, together with Borden Parker Bowne and Peter Anthony Bertocci, have taught me that, contrary to Descartes, long before the *cogito* of reflection there is the goodness and the truth of the *sumus*.

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1. Theoria

When, in 1928, Martin Heidegger described the human as a sheer "presence,"[1] contingently thrown into an alien context which constantly threatens to engulf him with its instrumentality, he appeared, to many of his contemporaries, to be doing no more than acknowledging an evident truth. Certainly, Heidegger was not speaking in a vacuum. For a century or more, Europeans and their cultural heirs in Russia and America had thought of themselves as privileged beings, persons in an impersonal, material world—and had acted accordingly. Western science described the world in ever more mechanistic, "value-free" terms, wholly alien to a moral subject,[2] while industry ruthlessly

exploited the world so described as no more than a reserve of raw materials for human gratification. Still, the impact of Heidegger served notice that, at mid-century, the heirs of Europe's personalistic cultural heritage had come to perceive themselves as absurd aliens in a dead, meaningless world.

Ironically, Heidegger himself may not have intended to present the image of the human as the embattled outsider. Though admittedly diverging from the moral personalism of his two great predecessors, Edmund Husserl and Max Scheler,[3] Heidegger, already in the introduction to his *Sein und Zeit,* insisted that the question he was posing was one of Being as such, to which the being of humans is to serve but as a clue.[4] In his postwar works, the continuity of Being and being-human does stand out prominently and the emphasis shifts: the fourfold presence of Being here becomes a clue to the understanding of being human.[5] In the phenomenology of *Sein und Zeit,* however, the discontinuity of humans and their world is no less present, and it was the discontinuity on which most of Heidegger's readers seized: the emphasis on the *Entschlossenheit,* the resoluteness of humans as *Dasein,* the presence standing out or "ek-sisting" from the tool-system of reality in a defiant self-assertion.

Whether or not such was indeed Heidegger's intent, that was the theme his successors derived from his work and elaborated for some three decades. In the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and of the thinkers who took their cue from him, notably Albert Camus, the nonhuman appears as also inhuman, absurd and nauseating. Here the descriptions of the natural world, as of the gnarled roots of an old tree or of the protagonist's own hand in *Nausea,* stress its repugnant absurdity. The human finds himself a stranger in that natural world, a nothingness, an outburst of an infinitely lonely freedom in *The Flies,* who exits, followed by the Furies. In the less fanciful categories of *L'Être et le néant*—literally the being and the nihilating, that which is and that which negates, not just the "Being and Nothingness" of the English title—the human is *l'être-pour-soi,* the intentional, meaning-creating project wholly discontinuous from and in a fundamental conflict with the sheer, meaningless mass of what simply is, as *l'être-en-soi.*[6] The human as a moral subject—"man," in the terminology of the age—is said to have no "nature": the ideas of "humanity" and "freedom" and the idea of "nature" appear fundamentally contradictory. The human here is a nothingness, a "godlike," arbitrary freedom to whom—or to which—nature, dead, meaningless, material, is at best irrelevant and typically threatening, to be conquered by an act of the will. In Sartre's rather infelicitous phrase, "existence precedes essence": the human

simply *is;* only retrospectively, in terms of what he has been, can he be said to have been something in particular.[7]

Whatever the value of "existentialism" as a philosophy, it is a powerful testimony to the intellectual climate of the West at a certain time. The vision of the human which appeared evident to some of the foremost thinkers of the age—those, at least, who refused to abandon the conception of the human as a moral subject in favor of the human as a particularly complex robot and so continuous with a mechanistically conceived nature—was one of a lonely, arbitrary freedom defying the absurd orderliness of a dead, meaningless reality. The immense popular appeal of existentialist writings testifies to a moment of recognition: the humans of the West in the mid-twentieth century indeed perceived themselves in a great part as perplexed, perhaps defiant aliens in a strange, meaningless universe. Two generations earlier, Nietzsche had proclaimed that God is dead. By mid-century, to a great many Westerners, nature seemed no less dead, and the human, a lonely survivor, himself an endangered species.

That progression is not accidental. Nietzsche's Zarathustra presented the death of God as great good news: though Dostoevsky was clearly mistaken in supposing that if there were no God, everything would be permitted, it did seem that, in that case, nothing would be prohibited. The true implication, however, is deeper. If there is no God, then nature is not a creation, lovingly crafted and endowed with purpose and value by its Creator. It can be only a cosmic accident, dead matter contingently propelled by blind force, ordered by efficient causality. In such a context, a moral subject, living his life in terms of value and purpose, would indeed be an anomaly, precariously rising above it in a moment of Promethean defiance only to sink again into the absurdity from which he rose. If God were dead, so would nature be—and humans could be no more than embattled strangers, doomed to defeat, as we have largely convinced ourselves we in fact are.

That the notion of a fundamental discontinuity between humans and their natural world should have come to appear evident is itself a curious phenomenon. That notion is, primordially, radically counter-intuitive. Humans, notoriously, live their lives in and as their bodies whose rhythm is integrated with the rhythm of nature. The cycle of vigor and fatigue echoes that of the day and night, the rhythm of the new moon and the full moon has its counterpart in the rhythm of a woman's body and, less obviously, a man's body as well. The cycle of the seasons harmonizes with the cycle of human life. In the quest

for sustenance and shelter, for the sharing of lives and the care of the young, in the eagerness of youth and the fullness of age, the lives of humans intermesh with those of all animate beings. Drawing water at dawn, making ready to break fast, I watch the woodchuck at his grazing: I can sense with all the evidence of primordial awareness that he and I are kin. Resting before the house at dusk, I can see the porcupines with their young beneath the boulders on the opposite bank venture forth: even so I had once led my children on their discovery of the world. Hoeing the beans, I watch their tendrils groping for the strings I stretched for them—so I, too, have groped for support. I can understand the old age of my apple trees, living past their time: perhaps that, too, will be my lot.

I sense my own place in the rhythm of the seasons, from seed time to harvest, the falling leaves and the stillness of winter. Some tasks are, perhaps, uniquely mine, not shared by other dwellers of the field and the forest. I can cherish the fragile beauty of the first trillium against the dark moss, and I can mourn its passing. I can know the truth of nature and serve its good, as a faithful steward. I can be still before the mystery of the holy, the vastness of the starry heavens and the grandeur of the moral law. That task may be uniquely mine. Yet even the bee, pollinating the cucumber blossoms, has its own humble, unique task. Though distinct in my own way, I yet belong, deeply, within the harmony of nature. There is no experiential given more primordial than that.

Sensing the life of the forest around me, I think only a person wholly blinded and deafened, rendered insensitive by the glare and the blare of his own devices, could write off that primordial awareness of the human's integral place in the cosmos as mere poetic imagination or as "merely subjective." The opposite seems far closer to the truth. It is what we are accustomed to treating as "objective reality"—the conception of nature as a system of dead matter propelled by blind force—that is in truth the product of a subject's purposeful and strenuous activity, a construct built up in the course of an extended, highly sophisticated abstraction. It is, undeniably, a highly useful construct for accomplishing a whole range of legitimate tasks. Still, it is a construct, not an experiential given. Humans must suspend lived experience to produce the "scientific world view" of physics.[8] Our direct awareness of nature as the meaningful context of our lives, by contrast, presents itself spontaneously, without a subject's effort. If anything, it requires the very opposite: to suspend effort, to let be and listen, letting nature speak. In a real, though not a customary sense, it is what we mislabel "poetic imagination" that is, "objective," a spontaneous

experiential given. It is our image of nature as dead and mechanical—and the image of the human as either a robot or a rebel—that is "subjective," a product of the subject's active imagination rather than a given of lived experience—and actually quite counterintuitive.[9]

The image of the human as a stranger contingently thrown into an alien context is as alien to the spirit of Western thought through history as it is to experience. Through its three recorded millennia, Western thought has been consistently personalistic and specifically *naturalistic*, at least in the generic sense of that term, understanding humans as continuous with and at home in nature.

That generic sense of the term "naturalism" is not, admittedly, readily accessible to our age. As commonly used, the term "naturalism" reflects the late mediaeval division of reality into two realms, conceived of as almost two distinct natures, one "natural," the other "supernatural." Within this bifurcated conception of nature and presupposing it, "naturalism" came to describe the claim that the "natural" component is both self-contained and self-sufficient, perhaps even alone real, so that the human, his works, and his world are to be understood without recourse to the resources of the putative "supernatural" realm. How narrowly or how broadly that exclusion was to be conceived—whether, for instance, it excluded only references to God and "miracles" or whether it precluded all reference to intentional objects, purposes, values, or meanings—would then depend on whether the investigator opted for a "rich" or an "austere" ontology.[10] Thus "naturalism" came to mean a philosophy which accepted as normative of "reality" the reality construct of the science favored by a given "naturalistic'" thinker, as, in random instances, vitalistic biology in the case of a Driesch or a Dewey, biophysics in the case of Schrödinger, or a rather simplistic mechanics of action and reaction in the case of a Hobbes or a Watson.

So interpreted, however, the term is not overly useful. For one, the division of reality into a "super-natural" and plain "natural" realm was a rather short-lived, fortuitous product of a highly specific historical situation. Saint Augustine knew nothing of it, and even Saint Thomas, though in fusing Aristotle with Augustine he was led to distinguish two realms of discourse, prefers to speak of them as philosophical and theological. Only the Averroist thinkers of a century later, most notably William of Occam, introduced a conception of a bifurcated reality, of two truths and two natures, one "natural," the other "super-natural." In the nineteenth century, that distinction came into common use by both Catholic and Protestant thinkers struggling to preserve the autonomy of the spirit against the reductivist science

of their time. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the distinction had all but disappeared from philosophical usage. Those Catholic and Anglican writers who, for reasons of tradition, continue to speak of the "supernatural," use the term, somewhat misleadingly, to indicate the dimension of the sacred in a unitary reality and experience, not a second, superior "nature." A philosophy contingent on the bifurcated conception of reality, affirming one of its halves against the other, would be as dated as that conception itself.

Then, too, making our philosophic conception of reality contingent not on lived experience but on the reality construct used by a particular natural science is intrinsically problematic. Even a philosophy of science, if it is not to become a sterile, self-confirming dogmatism locked within a wholly formal system of its axioms and their implications, must retain an independent access to the primordially given nature of lived experience in terms of which it can evaluate the adequacy of the reality construct assumed and used by a particular science. If we were to take "naturalism" to mean—as in fact it has often meant—a philosophy which takes a particular science as definitive of reality, the term could claim only a limited descriptive accuracy, not a philosophical significance.

For the purposes of our reflections, a generic rather than a historical idea of naturalism seems more relevant. By speaking of "naturalism" in a generic sense, which includes but is not restricted to its historical instances, we shall mean any philosophy which recognizes the being of humans as integrally linked to the being of nature, however conceived, treating humans as distinctive only as much as any distinct species is that, but as fundamentally *at home* in the cosmos, not "contingently thrown" into it as into an alien context and "ek-sisting" from it in an act of Promethean defiance. By "nature" in a similarly generic sense we shall mean the nature presented in lived experience, the primordially given cosmic context in which humans find themselves and to which they themselves belong in their bodies and minds, as humans are in fact aware of it, whether thematically or not, in their daily lived experience, not as it appears in the theoretic nature-constructs which seek to capture it. What is at issue between naturalism so conceived and its denial is not the nature of "nature" but rather the place of the human in the cosmos: whether we shall conceive of ourselves as integrally continuous with the world about us or as contingently thrown into it as strangers into an alien medium.

It is in this generic sense that we can speak of Western thought as basically "naturalistic." The conflicts within it hinge, for the most part,

on how nature is to be conceived; *that* humans are a part of its order seemed beyond question. That is certainly true of the pre-Socratics. For them, the crucial dividing line, if we can speak of one at all, would run not between humans and nature but between all that is natural, a part of nature as *physis*, the living, meaningfully ordered web of purpose within which each being, humans no less than the stars and all in between, has its appointed task, and, on the other hand, the realm of artifacts, devoid of a life and an entelechy of their own. The order which for, say, an Anaximander governs the life of the cosmos is indistinguishably both vital and moral.

That continuity of the vital and the moral order becomes explicit in Aristotle, as, for instance, in the familiar Book I of his *Politics*. Here Aristotle explicitly equates the moral order with the natural order. The moral order is distinctive only inasmuch humans, unlike their fellow animals, must grasp the order of the cosmos through an operation of the intellect and choose to honor it in an act of the will. While for beings endowed with instinct the operation of the law of nature is automatic, vital, for beings endowed with reason it is voluntary and, in that specific sense, *moral* rather than vital. Its contents, however, remain largely constant: it is the one order which appears either as vital or as moral; it is, in both cases, the "natural" which appears as good and the disruptive or "violent" which appears as evil.

Saint Thomas was able to take over that conception without undue difficulty. Natural law, as he conceives of it, is not the law of some "human condition" or a law specifically invented for humans. It is the law with which the Creator endows all of his creation. The analogies between human and animal societies, which sound so strained to a contemporary reader, seemed entirely legitimate to Saint Thomas and the medievals. The natural and moral "laws" of marriage and marital fidelity, of the love of a homeland, of the rhythm of aging and renewal, all are natural patterns of behavior which we can detect among most animals and which can serve as clues to the natural order of human life as well. Humans are distinctive only in their freedom to know and obey (or ignore and disobey) that natural law—and in their ability to discern, beyond that law, as the idea of the Good, the overarching virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the "theological" virtues which later Scholastics were wont to designate as "supernatural," with unfortunate results.

The vision of the integral unity of the being of humans and that of the cosmos is no less present in the other great tradition of Western thought, which we can trace from Socratic moral philosophy through Plato and the Stoics down to the Renaissance. Socrates shocks younger

readers today by his scornful insistence that he has nothing to learn from trees. Surrounded by artifacts which indeed can teach us nothing but what we have programmed into them, we are just beginning to realize that it is precisely the living, growing nature that Socrates scorns that can teach us. Similarly, Plato, Socrates' star pupil, rejects this world, presumably including *physis,* as a cave of shadows in the *Republic* and as a world running backwards in the *Statesman.* It is not difficult to read into Socrates and Plato a fundamental opposition between humans and nature and to re-present them as the ancestors of existentialism in a sense as generic as that in which we are using the term naturalism.

Before we do that, however, we might do well to look again. Neither Socrates nor Plato rejects the idea of a natural order in the name of the sovereignty of an arbitrary human will arrogating unto itself either the powers of creation or those of determining good and evil. The opposition, as becomes clear in Plato's exercise in designing an ideal community, is one between the rational order of the cosmos and the contingent, customary ordering of the human world. The human is not a stranger: he belongs integrally within a cosmic order. The Idea of the Good, the structure of the Ideas, and the reason which reaches out to them are neither "supernatural" nor antinatural, though Windelband, Jowett, and their nineteenth-century contemporaries may have tended so to read them.[11] Rather, they represent the true order and meaning of the cosmos in which nature and humans participate, albeit imperfectly. That becomes evident in the thought of Plato's direct heirs, the Stoics. For them, the *logos* is the order of the *kosmos,* guiding alike the flight of the sparrow and the life of the sage. As the bearer of the *logos spermatikos*—usually rendered "the spark of reason"—the human is anything but a stranger. If there is anything discordant and "unnatural," it is the unruly passions which elude the rule of nature's *logos.*

Christianity could incorporate the Stoic vision of the *logos* which/who was in the beginning and through whom all things were made, just as it could accept Aristotle's conception of a natural order of things, because it is itself deeply "naturalistic" in the generic sense of the term. Heir to the Psalmist who saw the heavens declare the glory of God, calling on a God who became flesh, reconciling the world unto Himself, Christianity did not conceive of nature as a dead, mechanistic medium alien to moral effort, nor of humans as strangers contingently thrown into it. The Christian cosmos is a *creation,* an ordered, meaningful work of God's hands, and the human is set into it as its steward and its integral part. Like the Stoics before them—notably Seneca—

the Christians did contrast the authentic *kosmos* as God created it with the "fallen" nature of everyday experience—acknowledging, by the way, that it was through humans that sin came into the world. By making that distinction, the Stoics and the Christians may have opened up the possibility for a later conception of a meaningless nature, separated from God's grace. Still, even the "pilgrim through this barren land" of Christian piety was not a homeless stranger but a homeward-bound wayfarer, a citizen of a kingdom which included both heavens and the earth. The Christians, repeating each Sunday that they believe in one God, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible, could never quite lose sight of nature as God's creation or of the continuity of their own being with that of the *kosmos.*

For all the motifs of the "prison of the body" and of the "pilgrim through this barren land," the ek-sistentialist vision of the human as essentially a stranger contingently thrown into an absurd, alien context—that is, the explicit denial of what we have been calling "naturalism" in the generic sense—remains foreign to the genius of Western thought, basically counterintuitive, and, ultimately, most unproductive, leaving the human in an arbitrary isolation. The question underlying our bewilderment about being human in an unhuman world may well be how we came to convince ourselves of the putative truth of the deeply counterintuitive and counterhistorical notion of the human as a stranger contingently thrown into a meaningless, mechanical world.

There are some obvious answers, frequently given. One is psychological: humans have to dehumanize their world in their imagination in order to be able to exploit it ruthlessly in their actions—and that is surely true. Another is historical: the cataclysm of the two world wars swept away ruthlessly all the familiar landmarks of our customary social world, leaving Europeans feeling bewildered, as strangers in a strange, unfamiliar context. Similarly, the collapse of ancient Rome was surely not unrelated to the dark view of nature associated with Stoicism, nor the theme of the pilgrim to the travails of the Thirty Years' War. An "ek-sistentialist" perception of man and the world is understandably more persuasive after a cataclysm and a useful ideology for the "conquest of nature," as in the period of heedless, ruthless industrial expansion which followed the suppression of the Southern bid for independence in America. All that is true.

In our time, however, the phenomenon has become global and the sense of the depersonalization of nature and of humans within it reaches far deeper. There is much to suggest that, apart from favorable conditions, it is the product not simply of particular greed or a particular cataclysm, but of the convergence of two lines of long-range devel-

opment, one conceptual, the other experiential. Since the seventeenth century, Western scientific thought—and popular thought in its wake—gradually substituted a theoretical nature-construct for the nature of lived experience in the role of "reality." Far more than we ourselves usually realize, when we make seemingly obvious assertions about "nature," we are no longer speaking about the natural environment of our lived experience, the living, purposive *physis* which humans can recognize as kin and in which they can feel at home. Our statements are far more likely to refer to a highly sophisticated construct, say, matter in motion, ordered by efficient causality, which is the counterpart of the method and purpose of the natural sciences rather than an object of lived experience. Within such a construct, to be sure, there is no place for a moral subject, simply because that construct was not designed to deal with him. As Erwin Schrödinger points out, that construct is not an accident: it is the product of a specific methodological device, the exclusion—phenomenological writers usually speak of the *self-forgetting*—of the observer, the subject with all that pertains to him, value, meaning, beauty, goodness, truth, holiness. As a methodological device, it is a useful and legitimate procedure. Increasingly, however, we have come to treat the construct it yields, useful for the purposes of manipulating our physical environment, as if it were what nature in truth is. Not surprisingly, we have then concluded that, if that is what nature is, the moral subject, if he is not to be simply an illusion, must be a radically nonnatural, "ek-sisting" being.

That conceptual development, to be sure, is not without a precedent. The contrast between an "austere" ontology said to be the Way of Truth and the rich ontology of lived experience, dismissed as the Way of Seeming, is as old as Parmenides. In our time, however, it has come to seem far more convincing because of a second, experiential development. With the expansion of our technology, we have, in effect, translated our concepts into artifacts, radically restructuring not only our conception of nature but the texture of our ordinary experience as well. It is exceptional rather than routine for us to sit before a croft of an evening, watching the all-reconciling night spread out from beneath the hemlocks into the clearing while the stars pierce the heaven above to declare the glory of God and the majesty of the moral law. We spend much of our lives locked in concrete cubicles, blinded and deafened by electronic glare and blare. On a primordial, intuitive level, we preform our conceptions of nature not in an intimate interaction with God's living nature but amid a set of artifacts which conform to our construct of reality as matter, dead, meaningless, propelled by

blind force. Heidegger's description of the world of artifacts, the dead *Zeuge*, "gear," surely owed much of its persuasiveness to the fact that most of Heidegger's readers were not woodsmen and tillers of the soil but urban dwellers, artificers in a world of artifacts devoid of life and rhythm of its own.[12]

That is indeed our world, and it is a world in which humans encounter neither the order of nature nor that of the moral law, only the products of their own labor, as Karl Marx, the unwitting prophet of relentless industrialization, so clearly noted long ago, taking the nightmare world of the factory as normative for the "species being" of humans. Actually, our world of artifacts may be no more than the thinnest of layers covering the rhythm of living nature, but it is that layer that we confront in our daily experience. Once we come to take it for "nature," then our impersonal nature-construct appears an accurate description. Then, too, the conviction that humans must conceive of themselves either as complex robots and so in tune with a mechanical nature or as moral subjects in defiance of it becomes experientially compelling. Though the theoretical construct of a mechanically ordered matter in motion may bear little resemblance to the living nature of the field and the forest and so may never have appeared convincing before, it is a faithful reflection of a world of artifacts and as such compelling to a humanity whose experience of nature is restricted to contact with artifacts. To insist, as the existentialists did, that though nature be meaningless, humans are yet bearers of meaning, is a noble but an infinitely wearying position. It was more with a sense of relief than of regret that the West welcomed the new gospel, proclaimed on the authority of science, that humans are not human after all.[13] The generic naturalism of the Western philosophical tradition broke down, I would submit, because the Western conception *and effective experience* of nature broke down first. To recover the moral sense of our humanity, we would need to recover first the moral sense of nature.

There have been thinkers who have sought to do just that, even in our time. To Americans of my generation, Joseph Wood Krutch was one such voice, and in the subsequent generation the ecological movement raised a chorus of voices. To my Czech compatriots, it was Emanuel Rádl who spoke most clearly. A biologist turned philosopher, Rádl had a keen sense of the wonder of nature. That sense of the order of nature led him to an awareness of a moral order. Starting from a moral sense of nature, he went on to write of the moral sense of Czech

national identity and of the moral sense of Western culture. In the darkest year of the Hitler war, 1942, when that culture seemed on the verge of disintegration, Rádl, then in the terminal year of a prolonged illness, penciled his philosophical testament, a passionate confession of faith in the genius of philosophy and in the personalistic vision of the world as *kosmos* and of humans as moral subjects therein.[14]

When Rádl's testament, *Útěcha z filosofie*, really no more than a brief, unedited essay, written in anguish and devoid of all the artifices of philosophical sophistication, could at last be published, a year after the war, it sold beyond all expectations, but appeared to many readers as little more than a moving anomaly. The time was charged with existentialist despair and revolutionary technological hope. A conception of the human as a moral subject seemed an outdated bourgeois prejudice: the human as the counterpart of Marxism and nature as a counterpart of technology appeared as the wave of the future. Rádl's assumptions seemed simply wrong.

Rádl's conception of nature is in truth far closer to that of Aristotle than of Galileo and his successors. His basic metaphor is not that of dead matter and violent force but of life with its inherent entelechic order.[15] What he sees about him, whether in his studies of the light sensitivity of plants and insects or in his reflections on biological theories, is not a dead, mechanically ordered force field conceived on the model of the world of artifacts but a living *physis* whose multiform strivings are guided by a hidden yet powerful purpose, each creature charged with its task. The human, too, as Rádl understands him, is a part of the vast cosmic order—and can be so because the cosmos with its vital order is not alien to or discontinuous with the order of meaningful life. In the case of the human, however, the vital order of the creation assumes the guise of a moral order. The human is called to recognize and to choose to obey voluntarily the same cosmic law which instinctually guides the plant, the insect, the animal. In that sense, the command presents itself as moral, not vital. While, however, its operation in humans is thus not automatic, there is yet a law of being human: there is a right and a wrong and the distinction is not arbitrary. While the moral law of being human is not identical with the law of other animate beings—there is, for instance, the fundamental difference between the rule "an eye for an eye" and the injunction to "love your enemy"—neither is it discontinuous with it. Human right and human wrong, too, are instances of what is "natural," consistent with what is harmonious in nature, and of what does violence to it.

Rádl argues vigorously that this had indeed been the guiding vision of Western thought through the millennia. He stresses the continuity

of antiquity and the Middle Ages, as well as the essential consistency of the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian heritage of the West in this respect. The radical break, he claims, comes only with the Renaissance and can be traced to a fundamental shift in our conception of what it means to know. Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, the idea of knowing had been linked to that of seeing, of a direct grasp, whether in sense perception or in rational intuition. Plato's prisoner, as we noted earlier, passes through the labor of *dianoia*, reasoning, not to construct a conceptual model but in order to *see* the Idea of the Good, not as in a glass, darkly, but face to face. Aristotle, too, for all his divergence from Plato, seeks to *see* the patterns of meaning acted out in nature, not to construct them. His distinction, say, between the spontaneous movement of life and the violent movement of matter impelled by a force, as in the image of the arrow violently propelled skyward and naturally falling to earth, presents a faithful articulation of an experiential given which has its counterpart in the lived experience of the ease of spontaneous movement of our bodies and the strain of their effort. The medievals took over Aristotle's and Plato's conception: up to the Renaissance, when seeking to know, Western thought sought to see clearly and to articulate faithfully the intrinsic structure of experienced reality rather than to construct ideal explanatory schemata and to impose them upon nature.

The technical efficacy and moral sterility of more recent thought, Rádl believes, reflects the decision to focus on the latter rather than the former. The shift, symbolized by Galileo, comes with the recognition that, for the purpose of manipulating our physical environment, ideal constructs with no intuitive counterpart can be far more efficacious than categories articulating the order of experienced nature—and the deeper assumption that the overall purpose of all such activity is basically nonproblematic, so much so that it requires no special inquiry. The Renaissance, indebted to Roman Stoics though hardly sharing their somber mood, thought of it as a "conquest" of nature, a restructuring of nature in the image of Reason. The nineteenth century spoke of "progress." In our time, B. F. Skinner settles for "survival."[16] This way or that, however, the question of purpose remained unasked, overshadowed by the question of efficacy.

Together with the majority of the critics of our technological infatuation, Rádl tends to speak of the Galilean turn in tones of moral indignation. In fairness to Galileo, though, we should note that the shift to the methodology of generating and imposing constructs is not at all arbitrary, a sort of conceptual equivalent of original sin. It is itself

a reflection of the structure of lived experience, prompted by the ineffectiveness of experiential categories for certain specific tasks.

There is, for instance, an experiential, "natural" temporality in the rhythm of the seasons and of human life, with the possibility of a "natural" time reference. This natural time is not the imaginary, mathematically reversible sequence of uniform moments, extending infinitely into the past and the future and capable of being treated mathematically as a fourth dimension along with the three spatial ones. Neither, however, is it a merely "subjective" internal time consciousness, private to each experiencer, or a form of sensibility imposed by reason upon experience. It has all the hardness of the real, a logic of its own—the rhythm of vigor and fatigue, of day and night, the cycle of the seasons in the life of nature and humans alike. Its stages, though personal, are not in the least arbitrary. Primordially, human experience simply is not a sequence of discrete events which need to be ordered by a clock and a calendar or by free association within a stream of consciousness à la Proust or Joyce. It is, rather, set within the matrix of nature's rhythm which establishes personal yet nonarbitrary reference points: when I have rested, when I grow weary, when the shadows lengthen, when life draws to a close. Though we may speak that way, it is simply not the case that at "six of the clock" certain events will occur—the shadows will lengthen, my axe will grow heavy in my hands. Stopping the clock does not stop the event. The primordial time reference is the opposite: it is the experience of the evening, lodged in the shadows about me and in the weariness of my arms, which is the primordial given. Only secondarily do we designate it by a clock reference or acknowledge it in an internal time consciousness.

For the sake of managing our environment purposively—say, of dispatching rockets to the moon or of assembling a body of persons for a lecture on temporality—such a natural time reference is, admittedly, not overly effective. Bodies tire at different rates, the darkness comes unevenly in valleys and on mountain tops, under clouds and on a bright day. Here an ideal time-construct, visualized as a uniform sequence of consecutively numbered moments providing an arbitrary but common reference, serves the special purpose at hand far more effectively. It does not, to be sure, articulate any experience: nowhere does such a time line exist in nature. The idea of 1800 hours on 6 June 1981 is a pure artifact, a construct imposed upon nature's rhythm, subordinating and ordering it. Still, for the specified purpose for which it was designed—and on the assumption that we know that purpose independently of it—it is a powerful tool.

The usefulness of such a construct, however, remains inevitably contingent on the prior purpose which brought it into being. The construct becomes problematic already when we seek to apply it beyond the scope of its original intent, as the theory of relativity made evident with respect to the traditional conception of physical time. It becomes even more problematic when we attribute an ontological significance to it, treating it no longer as a construct contingent upon and restricted by prior purpose but as a description of the true nature of reality—while we devalue the temporality of lived experience to the status of mere "subjective" reflection. Good physics makes bad metaphysics.

This becomes painfully evident when the task before us is not one of theoretical reflection but of practical decision. I know of no example more graphic than the dilemma posed by the technology we call "life-supporting," even though, too often, it cannot support life—only prolong dying without relief. A patient without hope of recovery, strapped to the gleaming chrome artifact, no longer lives. He is condemned to witness his own dying. It is a cruel and unusual punishment. When is the right time to flick the switch and let death come? When is the right time to die?

The technical reason which produces the machine cannot teach us its human use. We can speak of a *right* time only in the matrix of natural time, the rhythm of human life and the cycle of the seasons. Here there is a time to be born, a time to rejoice and a time to mourn; there is also a time to die. On an infinite line of uniform numbered moments, however, the very notion of a "right" time becomes wholly unintelligible. Here time cannot be "right." There can be only $t_n \ldots t_\infty$. The decision to disconnect the machine at t_3 rather than at t_6 or t_n becomes arbitrary. To make it, we would need to have recourse to the recognition of the rhythm of natural time, the rhythm of a human life. Having, however, convinced ourselves that our linear time construct alone is real while all else, including our awareness of natural time, is "merely subjective," we have effectively foreclosed such a recourse. Instead, we stand helplessly over the machine and the agony, hoping that a committee will reduce to anonymity the decision which we can no longer make responsibly as moral subjects.

The example of time and temporality can serve to describe Emanuel Rádl's reading of the development of all Western thought since the Renaissance. As he sees it, we have, in effect, mistaken the development of our conceptual technology for a progress of knowledge, step by step substituting our constructs for experienced reality as the object and the referent of our thought and discourse. Those constructs, how-

ever, were designed for a particular purpose, that of the manipulation of our physical environment, and the composite image of reality they present is, appropriately, one of a system of manipulanda. In a nature so conceived, from which the dimensions most crucial to lived experience, those of value and meaning, have been intentionally bracketed out as "subjective," there is no more room for a moral subject.

Rádl directs his most emphatic criticism against a mechanistic materialism which, in our time, survives on the level of popular scientism rather than at the leading edge of theoretical physics or philosophy of science. By contrast, he endorses a biological model which, in the work of Bergson and even more pronouncedly in that of Teilhard de Chardin, leads to some rather problematic results.[17] The fundamental thrust of his criticism, however, is deeper than his specific polemic and speaks to the biological as well as the physical model. In principle, Rádl is pointing out that the physicalist model, taking as its root metaphors "matter" and "force," may be at most capable of *reducing* the complexity of life's rhythm to its terms, not of *understanding* it in its complexity. The biological model, taking the process of a life as its basic metaphor, is far more adequate, but still not sufficient for understanding the life of a moral subject. It adds the dimension of temporality which life adds to the inanimate, but it ignores the distinctive dimension of eternity which humans add to the temporality of the animate.

Eternity here does not refer to an endless prolongation of a linear time, as it often does in common usage. It indicates, rather, the awareness of the absolute reality of being, intersecting with the temporal sequence of its unfolding at every moment. For animate being—at least as we conceive of it, unfairly, perhaps, to the animals—all value is basically instrumental, defined by a horizontal reference to a before and an after. As an animal, which he also is, the human is a dweller in time, defining his present instrumentally. Process philosophy, child of the age of "progress," articulated the positive aspect of temporality in the concept of growth, as in the work of John Dewey, or again in a conception of a creation of novelty, especially in Bergson. Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit*, noted the obverse: being-in-time is a *Sein-zum-Tode*, being toward death, leading the existentialists to conclude that human life is always a failure because the human dies.[18]

As a moral subject—a Person in the technical personalist sense, *Geist* or spirit in the work of Husserl or Scheler[19]—a human, however, is capable of nontemporal reference as well, grasping the moral, noninstrumental value of being. The beauty of a trillium, the truth of an insight, the goodness of a gesture of kindness, or the pain of tragedy

have their absolute value, ingressing in time but independent of it. Whitehead sought to capture it with his conception of the "consequent nature of God"[20] in which the absolute being of each moment is inscribed in eternity. Whether or not that metaphor is adequate, the experience is real: Persons are beings capable of appreciating beauty, goodness, truth, holiness, all serving no purpose in time and justified by none, needing no such justification, but ingressing into time—in our earlier term, intersecting with it—as good in themselves. When we conceive of being human as a biological model, even one extended by what Teilhard calls the "noogenesis" of a "noosphere" or by the "immortality" of popular religion,[21] all value becomes reduced to an instrumental status in the course of a "progress," its present validity contingent on the "attraction of an inexhaustible future." While for Rádl the physicalist model fails because it cannot do justice to the temporality of being human, the biological model fails in its turn because it is unable to recognize the dimension of eternity in human life.

Rádl was by no means alone in protesting against the reduction of the personal, moral dimension of our humanity to the merely physical and biological cycle of need and its gratification. Ironically, though, his writings, more than those of kindred spirits from Søren Kierkegaard through Max Scheler to Alfred North Whitehead, demonstrate why the conception of a moral law became problematic. If critical reason lacks the ability to discern the moral in the vital—and reason technologically conceived notoriously lacks that ability—how is the moral law to be made manifest? Rádl looks to custom, to tradition, to bring forth the moral law: what humans have ever believed and observed must *eo ipso* be natural and so moral. Unlike in the works of his vigorous years, in his final anguished testament Rádl comes to sound as an uncritical defender of all that is traditional as also moral. Yet tradition, as the notorious example of slavery graphically demonstrates, can itself be profoundly immoral. In this respect Husserl, identifying the crisis of our culture as a crisis of reason, reduced to the service of technology, may be more perceptive than Rádl. The outcome, though, is the same: a conception of the human as a cluster of matter in motion and of human life as devoid of all meaning, all order other than that which can be derived from the cycle of need and gratification.

It is another Czech thinker who, to me, most clearly points out the cultural corollary of that conception: a reversion of humans to a "prehistoric" level of their humanity.[22] Jan Patočka, who died in 1977 under

police interrogation after affixing his signature to a human rights manifesto, is known in the West primarily as Edmund Husserl's last pupil and collaborator, the author of a Husserl bibliography and of studies in the philosophy of history which exhibit a strong kinship with Martin Heidegger. Yet, for all that, Patočka is also Rádl's heir. In his usage, the term "prehistoric" refers less to an age than to a mode of being human which is characterized by a total absorption in needs and their gratification, in production and consumption, untouched by a vision of the Idea of the Good or of a moral law. In the terminology we used earlier, it is a horizontal, wholly intratemporal mode of being, devoid of all vertical reference. A century ago, writers routinely attributed such a purely "animal" existence to "the primitives," quaintly termed *Naturvölker,* natural peoples, by German writers contrasting nature with history (and identifying history with morality, in great part, perhaps, because the application of the "scientific" model had at the time not affected our vision of history as much as it had that of nature). Yet already those very writers, from von Humboldt to Cassirer, were presenting evidence that such peoples do not in truth fit that definition.[23] Far from being merely producers and consumers, they were, eminently, the makers of myths and worshipers of the gods in whose lives myth and worship were anything but peripheral. What they lacked was not the moral dimension of being human but only the nineteenth-century conception of history as "progress"—without which the West might well have been better off.

Far more than the cultures of the *Naturvölker,* it is the culture of consumerism on which both the Marxian and the non-Marxian societies of the historical West are converging which fits most accurately the definition of a "prehistoric" humanity in Patočka's sense. Consumer societies, to be sure, mass-produce "culture" no less prodigiously than electric can-openers, but its significance shifts radically. No longer is it an expression of *cultus,* the awe before the holy, the beautiful, the true, the good. Rather, it, too, becomes a consumer product, a part of the "entertainment industry," subordinated together with all the being of humans and of the society to the dynamics of production and consumption, whether guided by a five-year plan or by the whims of the marketplace.

The logic of that production and consumption, however, grows ever more elusive. Through the ages of humanity's precarious survival on this earth, the meeting of basic survival needs provided a ready justification for productive activity. Were we inclined so to direct our energies, it might still do so: there is more than enough hunger and sheer dismal misery still with us. For the most part, though, we manage

to ignore such need. The logic of our production is not that of need but of affluence which lacks such automatic justification. If affluence is to be justified, it cannot be by need but by some greater good, be it meeting the needs of others, caring for the natural world, or creating higher values of culture. Culture, in the noblest and widest sense of *cultus,* has to justify surplus consumption and production.

When culture, however, ceases to be *cultus,* an ideal we serve, and becomes no more than another component of the vast surplus of consumer products designed to gratify our whims, what can justify surplus consumption? Surely not need—what conceivable need could we conjure up for, say, a remote-control tuner of ever larger colored television sets unless the viewer is paralyzed and unable to reach out for a knob? Not the slightest. Yet individually and collectively we sacrifice precious life and resources to producing and paying for just such items—and are constantly assured that we must do so to "stimulate the economy." Production itself has become the justification of ever more absurd consumption: we consume to produce, produce to consume; all other considerations must stand aside.

A humanity which so orders its priorities is indeed reverting to a "prehistoric" stage of development, wholly absorbed in production and consumption—though, as Patočka also points out, with a crucial difference. Unlike the primitive survivor absorbed in satisfying his needs, the sophisticated consumer, though no less so absorbed, is not confronted in his daily doings with the immediate proximity of lived nature and its law. The world with which he deals is a construct embodied in a system of artifacts, devoid of any presence of a Great Spirit such as American Indians encountered in their search for sustenance in the field and the forest. The artifact world, to be sure, also bears the imprint of its maker, but its maker is "man." The consumer society is here realizing the nightmarish vision of Karl Marx, for whom the human is the being who confronts the world and encounters in it only the product of his labor. The system becomes self-perpetuating. The metaphor of a wholly self-contained, man-made world, a "Battlestar Galactica," is quite appropriate. That is the ultimate solipsism embracing our entire species—a world of nothing but humans and their works, devoid of an Alter to confirm the reality of our collective Ego. Nietzsche's Zarathustra proclaimed the age in which God is dead and what had been His creation with Him, humans alone remaining, as an age of liberation. Masaryk, however, once pointed out that the solipsist must kill, whether himself in suicide or others in murder, to reassure himself of his reality.[24] What, then, if the entire species is the solipsist?

The failure of the existentialist revolt made the point that we cannot retain our moral humanity in a defiant isolation. However, the development of naturalism, both in its physicalistic and its vitalistic forms, has made the point that we cannot break out of our isolation by seeking to integrate our being with a nature construct from which we have abstracted the dimension of meaning. A philosophy which would take seriously the task of the "care of the soul" with which Socrates charged it must take the care of nature no less seriously. It cannot take over the nature-construct which represents no more than the theoretical assumptions of a special science. It must approach nature anew, undertaking no less than a phenomenology of nature as the counterpart of our moral humanity.

How, though, can we go about the task of recovering our vision of a living world and of our place as moral subjects therein? There are surely a great many ways. If, however, Husserl's critique of our constructs is at all justified, then Husserl's program might also be appropriate. Perhaps our first step does need to be a bracketing of the thesis of the naturalistic standpoint which, over the last three centuries, has become so familiar as to appear "natural." We need to suspend, for the moment, the presumption of the ontological significance of our constructs, including our conception of nature as "material," and look to experience with a fresh eye, taking as our datum whatever presents itself in experience, as it presents itself and only insofar as it presents itself, using the totality of the given as the starting point, the justification and the ultimate test of all speculative claims. With respect both to ourselves and to nature, we need to suspend all theory and ask, without prior ontological prejudice, just what it is that in truth presents itself in lived experience itself.

That, in any case, is the familiar phenomenological program which Husserl sets down in *Ideen I* and reiterates, with minor variations, in all his subsequent works. The evident estrangement of our scientific theory, especially in the humane sciences, from lived experience gives that program a certain perennial timeliness. Still, almost three generations later, it is hardly new or revolutionary—if anything, it might sound a bit weary. If, however, the implications we have sought to derive from Husserl's analyses of the crisis of Western consciousness are at all sound, then the proposal for phenomenological bracketing does acquire a new, radical dimension, as *not only a conceptual, but a practical bracketing as well*, a bracketing of artifacts. Our constructs, we have argued, are no longer merely conceptual. We have translated

them into artifacts which effectively hide the sense of our lived experience from us. The heavens may still declare the glory of God, but we look up not at the heavens but at neon reflected on smog; we walk not on the good earth but on asphalt. Our estrangement from nature is no longer conceptual only: it has acquired an experiential grounding. Figuratively, we are all in the position of the child who has never seen, never mind milked, a cow, and whose lived experience constantly provides an experiential confirmation for the assumption that milk comes from a supermarket cooler. In such a context, the attempt at a phenomenological bracketing, no matter how theoretically sound, will inevitably prove practically futile. The *Sachen selbst*, the very stuff, of our daily experience will reintroduce the very constructs we have bracketed. Though milk may still come from cows, our lived experience reaches only as far as the dairy case. Though we bracket the construct of "nature" as a mechanical system and of the human as the sole source of all meaning, our urban experience will lead us right back to it. In a world of artifacts, "man" is indeed the "measure of all things"; the human as a producer and a consumer is here indeed the source of all meaning amid a mechanical system. If Husserl's program of phenomenological bracketing, his call for a return to the *Sachen selbst*, is to uncover the fundamental sense of the world and of being human therein, it must, I am convinced, look for ways of bracketing not only purely, bracketing constructs, but of practical bracketing of artifacts as well.

In a technological age, to be sure, any proposal to bracket the world of artifacts will inevitably sound suspect, as a nostalgic romanticism longing for a return to a simpler world that never was—and not without reason. There is something disingenuous about Thoreau's retreat to Walden Pond, a condescending self-righteousness which becomes painful when Thoreau propounds his alternative life-style as a model to the Irish laborer John Field, condemned by his lot to drudgery. Count Tolstoy's self-conscious imitation of his *muzhiki* tends to ring as false as the false low ceiling of hand-hewn beams which he had installed in one of the chambers of his palace to create the illusion of a peasant *izba*. It is not simply that few of us would wish to entrust our bodies to the medical treatment of, say, mid-seventeenth-century medicine or our safety to an army equipped with muzzle-loaders—though no one who ever had to submit to on-the-spot medical treatment or watch Soviet tanks rolling into his country could possibly wish either. High technology is indeed irrevocably a part of our life.[25] We could surrender it only at a high cost not simply in luxuries, but in genuinely human values like health and freedom.

The point, however, is more fundamental. Technology, as Martin Heidegger recognized even in the forests of the Schwarzwald, is not only a convenience but also an authentic human possibility.[26] In the freedom which transforms the vital order of nature into the human moral law, consciously grasped and voluntarily obeyed, the human does indeed in a significant sense stand out of nature. He is an artificer not by accident but essentially, and all his works are, in a sense, artifacts. Playing on words, we could say that even the natural, when done voluntarily rather than instinctively, becomes artificial. Technology is the human's achievement, not his failing—even though the use he chooses to make of it may be fallen indeed. If the products of human *technē* become philosophically and experientially problematic, it is, I would submit, because we come to think of them as autonomous of the purpose which led to their production and gives them meaning. We become, in effect, victims of a self-forgetting, losing sight of the moral sense which is the justification of technology. Quite concretely, the purpose of electric light is to help humans see. When it comes to blind them to the world around them, it becomes counterproductive. The task thus is not to abolish technology but to see through it to the human meaning which justifies it and directs its use.[27]

That is why I choose to stress Husserl's conception of bracketing. The task of the critique of artifacts appears to me strictly analogous to the phenomenological critique of theoretical constructs. There, too, the purpose of bracketing is not to abolish theory but to set aside its claim to autonomous validity as an arbiter of reality and to put it in the perspective of the lived experience wherein it is grounded and of the purpose which led to its generation. Husserl insists that he seeks not to deny the validity of the sciences but to affirm it by providing them with an experiential grounding. Even so it is not the purpose of bracketing the world of our *technē* to return, as Thoreau might have sought to do, to some prelapsarian, pretechnological existence but rather to restore its validity by capturing the moral sense which it simultaneously mediates and obscures. The world of artifacts may make philosophic reflection impossible when it assumes an absolute ontological status and subordinates the moral subject to its mechanical order. Bracketed, however, it can also make philosophic reflection possible. Thoreau's retreat to Walden is possible only in the margins of a complex civilization. Only on the fringes of a great city can I live in a forest clearing, yet devote almost all my time to thought and writing rather than to wresting a livelihood from the rocky fields of New Hampshire. The purpose of such a retreat is not to abolish the

works of technology but to bracket them, to escape their fascination in order to rediscover their forgotten meaning.

That distinction, so difficult to make in an electrically lit, centrally heated study where book-lined walls mediate between a human and his world, stands out clearly in a forest clearing, a mile beyond the powerline and the paved highway, where the dusk still comes softly, unscarred by neon, and the world of everyday lived experience is still God's nature, not "man's." Life here is not "pretechnological" or "natural" in some romantic sense. A wood stove and a kerosene lantern are still technology, even high technology by the standards of many parts of this world. Even an open cooking fire and a rush light would be that. There is, however, a difference between a participatory technology which lets the human meaning of a subject's act stand out and the automated technology which conceals it, creating the illusion of autonomous functioning.

Heating with one's own wood may be no more "authentic" than central heating, but it offers a far clearer metaphor. Heating with wood is very much a participatory activity. In the year-long cycle, from flagging trees for culling to the rich glow of oak cinders of a winter's night, the subject is constantly present and nature is directly present to him, both in the hardness and in the caressing softness of its reality. Felling, limbing, skidding, bucking, splitting, stacking, kindling and building a fire are all primordially, directly subject acts and experienced as such. There is nothing anonymous about the glow of the stove: its heat can be experienced primordially as a gift of the forest and of a person's labor. Cleaning the chimneys and trimming the wicks, filling the lamps and kindling a light in the darkness, those are no less evidently a person's acts, a person making light. In such a context, the place of the human in the cosmos stands out in unobscured clarity: the love which gives meaning to labor and the labor which makes love actual.

That love and that labor are no less present in an automatically lit and heated urban apartment. Here, no less than in a forest clearing, light and warmth of a winter's night are not automatic. They, too, are the gifts of love and labor. Their sense, however, does not stand out: too many intermediate links intervene. An urban parent may tell his child with equal justification that he goes to work to give her warmth and light, but when that work is not splitting wood or trimming a wick, the claim, however justified, will remain abstract and theoretical, lacking all experiential force. The parent himself may easily lose sight of it, becoming convinced that he must work to "make money" because "they" charge so much for the electricity which, in some better world,

would be "free"—paid for, that is, invisibly, by someone's anonymous, invisible labor. The alienation which Karl Marx attributed to capitalism is real enough, no less so in lands governed in his name. It seems, however, far more the by-product of the forgetting which becomes so easy when the intermediate layer of technology obscures the living bond of love and labor between the human and his world, leaving him with no place, no role therein—unless it be that of the consumer whose greed justifies it all.

Diatribes against technology, so dear to the Romantics, are, alas, always deeply justified—and vastly irrelevant. The point is not that "natural" life is good while technology is bad. It is not even that simple technology is good while complex, automated technology is bad. Since the same technology can be used either to destroy or to protect the creatures who share this planet, the problem could be said to be one of the uses of technology. Beneath that, however, the deeper problem is one of forgetting, of the covering-up of the moral sense of the cosmos and of human life therein beneath a layer of artifacts and constructs. Philosophy has many tasks, yet in our age the task of bracketing and seeing, of uncovering the forgotten sense of the cosmos and of our lives therein, may be one of the most urgent.

2. Physis