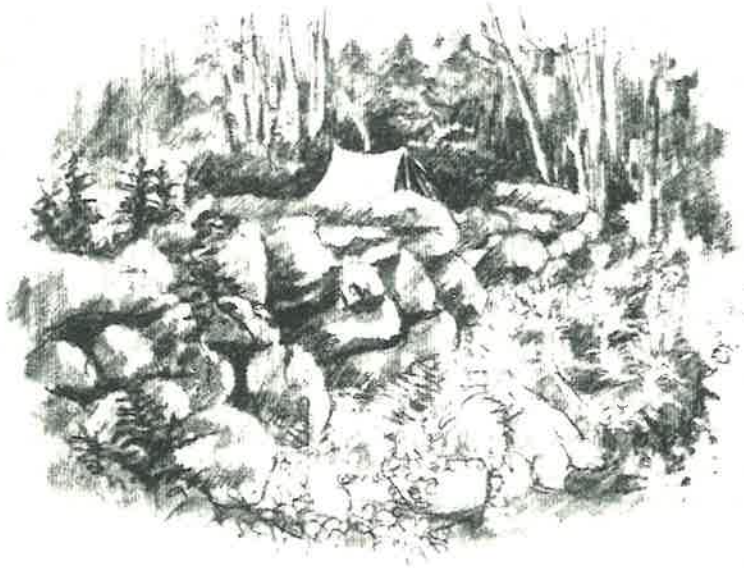
ingful, but as the norm of what is to be judged real. On that assumption, Gorgian skepsis seems irrefutable. The great gift of silent evenings in a forest clearing is that they dispel that illusion. Reality encounters us as a meaningful *kosmos*, only contingently reducible to a mathematical schema. The intent of discourse by which its adequacy must be measured is that of communication: the encoding of data in words but one of the tools, highly useful for some specific purposes, but by no means the norm of all valid discourse.

Humans, as Husserl points out, can know the truth because the truth, the sense of being, even the moral sense of life, is not a construct but a given of lived experience. They can speak about it because, as Jaspers and Ricoeur point out, words are not only designators but also metaphors capable of evoking experience and its sense. Husserl's call for faithful articulation, finally, is not vain, though faithful articulation in philosophy must take the form of an evocation of sense rather than of an encoding of data.[28]

As the sky grows light in anticipation of dawn, the trees once again stand out as black lace against it and the clearing opens up once more in the dissolving darkness. Then the Gorgian skepsis has little force. There still is night and the promise of a new day, and a truth which stands out in the transition. Humans can see it and speak of it, they can communicate it not in words that claim to contain the truth but in metaphors which evoke it. That truth is not the veridical factual assertion of *technē* or the mute wonder of *poiēsis*. It is more basic, as basic as the distinction between good and evil and the recognition of the moral sense of life.



The Gift of the Moral Law

There still is night, star-bright and all-reconciling. As it gathers softly beneath the hemlocks, muting the harshness of the day, there is also a truth that stands out in the dusk. It is not simply the truth of the great green peace of the forest. Though in the shipwrecks of our civilization we may seek refuge therein, resigning the distinctive task with which humans are charged and seeking renewal by sinking back into nature's green peace, the truth that stands out at dusk is a reaffirmation of our humanity, not an alternative to it. We can encounter that humanity, at times obscured and grotesquely distorted, yet still present, wherever humans dwell. It is there in the great city, in the

love and labor of its dwellers, in their hope and fatigue, in the rhythm of their lives. The forest at dusk teaches no esoteric *gnōsis*. It only lets the universal truth of life stand out clearly, out of the darkness of forgetting.

That truth is never wholly separable from the experience in which it is incarnate. It is the truth *of* being human, not a truth about it. To speak of it authentically, philosophy must resist the temptation of posing as a *technē* and must not fear to invoke the metaphors which call up the primordial experience whose truth it is, as Plato did not fear to tell myths, provoking Aristotle's censure. Without metaphor, philosophy's assertions could not but ring hollow, true and trivial as abstract formalism which, at best, can claim to be a truth about, not the truth *of*, being human.

Yet neither can philosophy be only *poiēsis*, a wordless sigh of wonder. Faithful articulation of the truth clearly seen requires also the "mediate conclusions and idealizing procedures" whose legitimacy Husserl grudgingly admitted.[29] It must also attempt to generate intermediate categories, or better, to let them emerge, slowly, in the work of seeing, reflecting, and speaking, constrained by the double discipline of the reality it confronts and the demands of those to whom it would speak.

The moral sense of nature—that is such a category, and the words seem so fitting, so obvious when the nature is as near as a summer rain all about. Before I enclosed my house, my living space on rainy days was marked out by a tarpaulin stretched over the fire-ring and the stump that served as my desk. It was a radically open space, the sheets of rain forming its walls. The rain-fresh air flowed freely through it, mingling with the scent of my fire. It was then that the words came alive—the moral sense of nature.

In the autonomy of the text, those same words seem cold and distant. Once upon a time, the word *moral* seemed important enough for philanthropists to endow chairs of Moral Philosophy—though even then the intent of that designation was to distinguish the chair from one of Natural Philosophy. As for the word *sense*, in English it has never functioned as a philosophical category at all.

Surrounded on all sides by the living wonder of a summer rain, I needed that word. Perhaps it was because, thinking in Czech, I relied on the category of *smysl*, the meaningful presence of a reality, which in that use has no exact English counterpart. English philosophical usage has traditionally relied on the term *essence* to designate the incoercible, intangible something that makes a being the kind of being

it is. Etymologically, that is not inappropriate. Derived from the word to be, *esse*, it indicates the distinctive mode in which a being *bes*—or, in our usage, its *sense*, the way it both acts out its role and presents its meaning in the economy of the cosmos.

In actual usage, though, the cluster of commonplaces associated with that word is all wrong. It suggests a mysterious component, distinct from the being itself, which that being is yet supposed somehow to bear within it and which might presumably be isolated, either conceptually or, as in the case of the essence of vanilla, chemically. Certainly no self-respecting philosopher would so define the term. Language, though, has its autonomy. Even were we to specify that we do indeed wish to use the term "essence" to indicate the integrity of a total meaningful presence of a reality, the living reality of a pine tree, a boulder, or a lumberman who stops by to borrow my chainsaw when a leaning hemlock had pinched his own, the word would betray us, evoking connotations of its own.

The term we need is one which would convey the integrity of the nature that surrounds the wall-less space of a tarpaulin on a rainy summer's day. Its being is not that of the material furniture of a region constituted by a subject's conscious presence. Nature is not simply there, as an aggregate of physical properties, not even if we think of them as bound together by a Berkleyan "I know not what." It has its own intrinsic sense, much as we can speak of the sense of a person's gesture or of the sense of a text. When Ricoeur speaks of reading the text of experience, the metaphor is apt.[30] In meaningful interaction with our world, we are reading the text of nature: encountering in it its meaningful presence. Its meaning is not an "essence" in our usual naïve sense, a mysterious internal component. Nor is it merely an idea in our minds, picked at random and applied arbitrarily, by trial and error. It is an intermediate reality: the text has or is endowed with a meaning of its own. The cluster of letters to which we reduce a spoken sentence is alive with a sense. So, too, the series of movements which constitutes behavior: we can select out certain movements as relevant and as constituting a behavior because they are endowed with a sense. Husserl, in such contexts, uses the term *Wesen*, which can be translated both as "essence" and as a mode of being, as in the term *animalisches Wesen*, animate being. In Husserl's usage, it is also closely associated with *Sinn*, usually translated as "meaning."[31] The meaningful presence of nature around us is all of that. That is why I have chosen to speak of the *sense* of life, the *sense* of nature, to evoke the recognition that nature does have a sense of its own, an integral mode of meaningful being.

The growing awareness of the sense of nature is intertwined with the rediscovery of nature as a living presence, beneath our conventional nature construct. But there is something more that I have sought to evoke by speaking of the sense of nature as *moral.* Today that predication may well seem wholly inappropriate. In our ordinary usage the word *moral* has been reduced to triviality. For most speakers it indicates little more than a conformity to a set of social conventions or mores. It is the people who conceive of themselves as conforming to conventions violated by what they perceive as the immoral minority who describe themselves as "moral." Hegel himself can be said to have sanctioned the usage by using the term *Sittengesetz,* convention, or, literally, the law of custom, as a synonym for Kant's *morales Gesetz,* the moral law. Our age has seized on that reduction with a vengeance, effectively emptying the term "moral" of all but its most trivial meaning.

Eighteenth-century thinkers used the word differently. They bequeathed to us the idea of the moral sciences, including moral philosophy. The Germans translated that term as *Geisteswissenschaften,* the sciences of the spirit. That is the term which we in our time have sought to retranslate, somewhat clumsily, as the "humane sciences"—in turn leading at least some contemporary German authors to speak of *humanistische Wissenschaften.* So used, the thrust of the term moral was to separate the distinctively human works of human freedom from the putatively merely mechanical and causal processes of nature. The century which coined and shaped the concept of "moral" was also the century which first exploited the possibility of conceiving of nature as radically amoral and inhuman, a set of physical entities exhibiting lawlike regularities in their behavior yet devoid of all sense.[32] The term moral was needed to distinguish a free act, governed by the vision of an ideal, from a natural event wholly integrated in the causal sequence of necessity and utility. So used, the term moral pointed to the ingression of the eternal sense of being, of the good, the true, the beautiful, into the order of time.

I have reverted to that obsolete usage in speaking of the moral sense of nature. That is the crucial recognition: the sense of nature which stands out in the radical brackets of dusk is not simply a "natural" sense as the eighteenth century used that word, representing no more than the observable regularities in the order of time. The sense of nature includes also a dimension of value, not merely as utility but as intrinsic, absolute value ingressing in the order of time. The chipmunk peering out of the stone fence is not reducible simply to the role he fulfills in the economy of nature. There is not only utility but also an integrity, a rightness to his presence. When humans encounter that

integrity in a trillium or a lady's slipper, they tend to acknowledge it by speaking of beauty, and it is not inappropriate. It is, though, also more—the presence of absolute value, the truth, the goodness, the beauty of being, the miracle that something is though nothing might be. With the encounter with nature in its integrity, there comes also the recognition that its presence is never free of value, acquiring its rightness only contingently in its utility. It is primordially good. The order of nature is also an order of value.

The philosophers of life almost a century ago—Emanuel Rádl among them[33]—were wont to speak of the *vital* order of nature, meaning by that term what we might describe as "biological," though purposively conceived. That order, they would say, governs all nonhuman life, wholly instinctually, leading the bee to gather pollen, the swallow to build her nest, and the she-wolf to nurture her young. A human mother is subject to the same law in her impulse to care for her child, though in her case the same order becomes *moral:* not an instinct but a call to choose rightly, capable of being obeyed or disobeyed. Even the most basic "vital" patterns, such as feeding, become "moral" for a being who must choose whether to eat or whether, by voluntary abstention, to provide food for a needier neighbor or to protest injustice. So conceived, the moral order is, in effect, the vital order seen from the vantage point of freedom.

That is a reading of the sense of our nature as having a moral significance which I can readily understand. Still, the ingression of freedom seems to entail something more. The significance of an act changes when it is no longer governed by vital necessity or utility but by the vision of absolute value. It becomes moral in a second sense as well: through it, eternal value ingresses in the order of time. Though not alien to it, that order is not a function of time. It is the value of speaking the truth when that act has no utilitarian value, simply because it is true. It is the value of courage in situations in which courage changes nothing. It is the act of justice motivated by nothing else than that such an act is just. That is the moment of eternity ingressing into time.[34]

To thinkers who conceived of nature as mechanical, as devoid of all sense—though also to those who thought nature's sense merely vital—such moral value appeared as that which makes humans distinct from the order of nature, and understandably so. Yet when humans encounter nature in the integrity of its being, freed by radical brackets from the veil of constructs, what stands out is the recognition that nature's presence, the sense of nature, is not merely natural or vital. It is not reducible to the order of time. It is also a presence of being

in its absolute worth, to be approached with infinite respect. The reason why humans ought not to devastate their world is not simply utilitarian. Nor is the reason why humans ought not to waste what they derive from it solely economic. More deeply, it is *moral:* to destroy heedlessly, to pluck and discard, to have and leave unused, is an act of profound disrespect to the eternal worth of nature. For nature in its integrity is not simply a reservoir of raw materials. In the phrase we used earlier, the sense of nature as humans encounter it in radical brackets is also moral, a presence of value.

It is in that sense that, groping for categories to match the metaphors of the forest at dusk, humans reach the recognition that the sense of nature's green peace and the sense of being human in this world which it reveals is not simply "natural," "vital," but also, profoundly and fundamentally, a *moral* order. Morality, the perception of life in terms of an order of rightness, is not a human invention, a construct imposed by reflection upon unruly passion. That assumption, symbolized for us most emphatically by the Freudian constructs of the blind force of the anonymous *es* and the arbitrarty rule of a grim *Ueberich*, reflects not the sense of being human but the order of the world of artifacts.[35] In that world, there is indeed no inherent rightness, no right time of sleeping and waking, of loving and fearing, of living and dying. A bulldozer with its unheeding operator—"I'm just doing my job, lady!"—is truly a blind, brute force, devoid of all intrinsic rightness and equally capable of visiting and containing devastation, but wholly incapable of distinguishing the two. The rules we impose upon it are dictated by the need to contain that brute force. It is not surprising that a psychology reflecting an artifact world produces no less artificial constructs of the blind force savagely disciplined by an unyielding rule—and projects them upon nature.

Superficially, that model may well appear a faithful reflection of that ordinary experience which Heidegger calls *Durchschnittlichkeit* and his translators "average everydayness."[36] The impact of Freud's speculative constructions would be incomprehensible without a flash of recognition. We have impressed our self-perception on nature to such an extent that nature now seems to conform to it. The perception, though, changes drastically when we no longer encounter nature as culture's wilderness preserve where reality remains "in the wild"—by our standards, anyway—but rather encounter it in its own being, ordered by its own sense. Accustomed to thinking in terms of an imposed, not of an intrinsic, order, a citydweller first notes the absence

of such an imposed order in nature. He sees mushrooms as growing "wild," not in neat trays, animals range "wild," unrestricted by leashes and cages, the entire forest, untouched by human hands for generations, grows "wild" as a neglected garden, devoid of order and waiting to have one imposed on it. At first the newcomer to the land may even try. But the forest is too vast. It absorbs human efforts. What it offers is something else: when humans give up the effort to impose their order and accept instead their place within the forest, they begin to discover beneath the seeming chaos a deep, intrinsic order.

That is perhaps the most basic realization that stands out at dusk—that there is an order, there is a sense to it all, a rhythm, a rhyme and a reason, in the symbiosis of mushrooms with the hairline roots of trees, in the patterns of animal life, in the cycle in which the forest renews itself. There is a *rightness* from which beings can deviate, but there is yet a *rightness.* When the word was fresh and unburdended with connotations, we might have said that there is *logos.* The dusk is a time of bracketing, when an experiential *epochē* covers human striving. It is a time of letting be. The world, seen by daylight, is a world of activity, structured by the human's intentional presence. Even in the deep solitude of the forest, as I go about my daily rounds, I recognize around me the world which Heidegger described in *Sein und Zeit* as my *Spielraum,*[37] a sphere of my activity structured by my purposes, ready at hand to be ordered, manipulated, used. Just walking down the path, preoccupied with other matters, I yet note a tree that needs to be culled, make a mental note of the type of wood, refer it to its possible uses. My intentional presence transforms even nature around me into an artifact. The world of my daily doings is a world structured by my active presence, unintelligible, it seems, without it. For all its rhetorical overkill, I can appreciate Sartre's description of the human as the "creator" of his life-world.

That is all too familiar, yet the most powerful realization that stands out in the dusk is that *all this is not so.* Were the cosmos indeed a senseless aggregate of tools, devoid of life or meaning of their own as the world of artifacts is, then dusk, suspending the subject's purposive presence, ought to be a time of infinite nausea. There is much to suggest that in the urban world it is in fact so: perhaps that is why, in the global city of our civilization, we seek so desperately to stave off rest with motion, silence with mechanical sound, the darkness with mechanical images. There must be doing, perhaps, because if there were not, there would be nothing.

But that is not so in the intimate green peace of the forest clearing. Here, as the dusk suspends human activity, the nature which throughout the day obligingly assumed the guise of an artifact does not disintegrate into meaninglessness. It stands out in the integrity of its own being. The brook cascades over the rocks like flowing silver. The trees swing gently in the breeze. An owl hovers in the treetop over the rabbit grazing unconcerned under the protective cover of broken branches that seemed so pointless by daylight. And, over it, ageless as the moral law, there is an immense starry heaven. There is a sense to it all, a rhyme and a reason. Nature in its integrity is not the senseless system which forms so fitting a counterpart for our sciences. It is not alien to our human mode of being: quite the contrary, it is radically its kin. Though perhaps a stranger in the world of his own making, the human in his humanity, in his being as a moral subject, is at home in a nature which is not yet his, subdued by him and depersonalized in its subjugation. Our products may be senseless; the world of nature is not. There is sense in its life as there is sense in the lives of humans. There is *logos.*

From the distance of reflection, the recognition that *there is logos,* that there is a rhyme and a rightness to the being of nature, stands out as the trait of the world at dusk which most transforms our understanding of the natural world—or, more precisely, makes it possible at all. Were there no *logos* intrinsic to nature, were the human the source of all meaning and the nonhuman world around him devoid of all intelligible structure, then the world could not be *understood* at all. Understanding, as distinct from explanation, is fundamentally and basically an *Eindeutung,*[38] the empathetic grasp of the intrinsic sense, of the rhyme and reason of its object. A senseless world could only be explained, accounted for in terms of constructs within which we subsume it and which are wholly our own, not reflections of a truth seen but mental artifacts, conceptual tools for manipulating our world. That is how my urban visitors frequently explain my world, categorizing it without giving themselves a chance to see it, to understand it. Yet that world can be understood, because there is *logos,* a sense in which humans can share, recognizing in the rhythm and rightness of the cosmos something kin to those of their own lives. It is to the extent to which humans can understand that they can feel at home in their world, at ease with it, sensing what is appropriate to it and integrating their lives with it rather than crashing through their world like a bulldozer in an herb garden.

That, to be sure, is already reflection, an "idealizing procedure," as Husserl would call it.[39] The primordial given is far more direct, the recognition of the radical continuity between the meaningful being of humans and of their world. At dusk, the full moon was muted last night by a high and filmy overcast, its edges blurred by a corona of shining clouds. Occasionally a scattering of darker clouds would drift over it. The silver light in the clearing is soft, unobtrusive. The family of porcupines that makes its home under the old dam across the stream brings out its youngster for the evening grazing. The two adults lumber solicitously around him, communicating their care and concern. Once, when he could have been but a few days old, he froze high on a young hemlock, too timid to attempt the descent. The adults coaxed and reassured him, finally easing him down gently. As long as I make no light, they pay me no mind. They share my world, but they have their own lives to lead. So does the woodchuck who comes to graze occasionally on the bright young leaves after I have mown the meadow and raked the hay. So do the snakes, muted on the top, bright and beautiful on the hidden part of their bodies. Much maligned throughout history, the snakes seem most at peace with their God of all the creatures around me. I am not a stranger in that world. There is so much life around me, so kin to my life. Though I, too, have my own ways, the creatures around me are much like I in their purposeful rhythm. Minimally, their *Sein,* like mine, is *Zeit:* their being, too, is projected into temporality.

Recent philosophy, seeking in historicity a substitute for the spirituality it has lost, has been loath to recognize the temporality of animal life. With reason: if we do not recognize the dimension of spirituality, the vision of eternity—or, with Husserl, "transcendental subjectivity"—as that which makes humans distinct, we might well have to insist that their temporality is distinctive.[40] Thus the dividing line in recent thought tends to run between the temporal being of humans and the being of all else, porcupines as much as boulders. Still, only from a very great conceptual distance could one mistake a porcupine for a boulder and lump them both together under the common label of *l'être-en-soi,* the being whose being is not projected as temporality but is wholly enclosed in itself.[41] Perhaps only the boulders, the ageless, lichen-covered boulders, could be said simply to be, *en soi,* complete, not projecting their being as temporality.

Even that, though, may be no more than an illusion, a product of our myopia. My geologist friends, thinking in terms of epochs rather than years, do speak of the life of rocks, reading out their history from their composition. There have been moments when I did sense a kinship

with them. Digging my well, I had a distinct sense that the rocks that for centuries had lain deep beneath the earth—deep, at least, as a pick and shovel measure depth in rocky soil—welcome being brought to the surface to which so many of them press their way even in climates where there is no frost to push them. It seemed to me that they are pleased, and most at ease in the shallow stream, washed by the river and warmed by the sun. Those, to be sure, were no more than fleeting moments to which I attribute no cognitive significance. As Teilhard de Chardin points out, on the level of inanimate being, purely causal explanation is quite possible.[42] I can equally well confront the boulders simply as being-in-itself, not being in time.

That, though, I simply cannot do even with the young plants that rise from seed buried a week or more ago, reaching toward the sun, groping for strings and grasping them with their tendrils. They so clearly reach out to a future, spanning time. Even less can I do it with insects. There is the gypsy moth caterpillar, raising its head, looking about him, taking stock of his situation and taking evasive action as my hand approaches him. If, in defense of my trees, I kill him, I know I am snuffing out a life spanning time. So, too, with the ant struggling with his burden, hailing a passing fellow ant, communicating with him and securing his collaboration. I am grateful that I need not kill ants: they are such miracles of miniaturization with a complex sense of purpose guiding a no less complex set of vital organs, a heart beating, lungs, a digestive system, a nervous system. They are the miracle of life. Nor can I, even in strained imagination, conceive of the porcupines, the beavers, the occasional woodchuck around me as atemporal being contained in itself. The lives they live are so clearly purposive, leaving their tracks on a past and projecting into a future.

The being of nature in its intrinsic cyclicity is intensely temporal, bearing a past within it as it projects a future. When you split the butt log of a red oak, you will often find preserved within it the original sapling, dark and distinct from the layers of wood that envelope it. Each blow of the axe uncovers knots, memories of branches long since outgrown. The tree bears its past within it as its swelling buds reach out to a future. It is even more evident in the animals. In their habits and their purposeful doing, they live ever in a transition between a past and a future, guided by memory and anticipation. They bear them within, yet the difference between them and those animals who record their memories and anticipations externally, in words and texts, seems no more than quantitative. It is, certainly, not the radical difference which Sartre posits between the being *en-soi* of nature and the *pour-soi* of humans. The human, as the being whose being is acted out in

time, is therein not distinct from but precisely radically kin to nature, though, to be sure, not to our mechanistic nature-construct which Sartre seems to take for nature itself.

There is, to be sure, a difference, but it is not the putative difference between human historicity and the *en-soi* atemporality of nature, but between the natural temporality of all living beings, including humans, and the illusory mechanical temporality of the man-made world. I have experienced that difference keenly in my transitions between the two worlds. In the world in which I wake, it is no "o'clock." It is dawn, the time of waking. There is light in the clearing, the trees stand out of the nighttime forest. As I go about my tasks, I sense the cycle of the day from dusk to dusk, each moment distinctive. The early dawning, when the first rays of the sun stream through the fog rising among the trees, is wholly different from the time when the sun is high and the forest alive with the buzzing of insects, or from the time of the late afternoon when the intensity of the day begins to soften with the declining sun. The plants know and honor the seasons of the day. So do the creatures of the forest, and so, too, do humans when they break free of forgetting.

All that I leave behind when I go into the city. In the uniformly lit, uniformly heated cubicles there is no season. Only the clock—and my tiring body, an intruder in that mechancal world—mark the passage of time. I am not aware of the changing seasons behind the drawn blinds of the seminar room. It is ten, twelve, two, four, six *of the clock*. Except for their numerical designations, all those times are uniform and arbitrary in their identity. Anything might be done at any of them with equal appropriateness or inappropriateness. There is no rightness, there are no seasons. Such pattern as life might have might well appear as no more than a convention, to be observed or violated at whim.

When I leave the building, the world has changed. I can sense darkness waiting for me beyond the neon screen. The headlights coming against me grow fewer as the pavement grows more ragged and finally disappear as I feel the cool of the evening forest around me. I turn into an unpaved road, then a few minutes more and I can shut off the engine and douse my headlights. The exhaust fumes dissipate rapidly. The house stands dark in the clearing. It is no longer "o'clock," it is again a season. It is the time of the rising moon and the stilling forest, the time of evening chores and prayers, a time to sit beneath the stars or to kindle a lamp that does not blind the night. My body, constrained by clocks through the long day, settles into the rhythm of the world

around me. It is time to rest, time to sleep—and there will be a time of waking.

Bodies remember what humans forget when they mistake the artifact temporality of clocks for the authentic human temporality. The temporality of clocks is not, to be sure, an arbitrary invention of idle minds. It is a formalization of life's rhythm, essential for the coordination of human activities and highly useful as such. I should not wish to do without it. I love the ticking and striking of the old Lipizzaner clock with its Vienna regulator in the silent house as I fall asleep. Still, the temporality of clocks is inherently absurd, meaningless, if taken as a reality in itself. "Six of the clock," taken as no more than a halfway point between "five" and "seven," is absurd. It is meaningful only when we remain aware of it as a symbolization of the season of lengthening shadows, the time of gathering tools, the time of the glowing maples. Artifacts and constructs, like clocks, can be authentically human only as the distinctive human way of articulating a more basic truth, the rhythm, the seasons of life. If we lose sight of the sense of life they articulate, they become absurd.

So it is with all the works of humans. All the artifacts of social coexistence which appear as arbitrary conventions, to be obeyed or broken at will and to be manipulated no less at will by social engineering, acquire a new meaning when we recognize in them the distinctive human expression of something far more fundamental, of the intrinsic rightness of all creation. What stands out at dusk, with the recognition of the *logos* of being, the living sense of things, is that for some three centuries we have fundamentally misconstrued the basic question of ethics. We have approached ethics as in a vacuum, as if, in a value-free context of arbitrary possible acts, our task were to designate some as good and right while labeling others evil or wrong, with no intrinsic rightness to guide us. We have assumed that our task is not so much one of recognizing what is good and right but one of deciding what we shall so label.

We have paid a high price for that willed ignorance. Yet it is less ignorance than a willed forgetting. Humans through the millennia have known the difference between good and evil, between right and wrong. Nor have they simply sensed it intuitively. With a remarkable degree of agreement amid cultural differences, they have articulated their basic moral awareness in codes which, for all the variation in wording, express the same basic sense of being and of being human. As our social world disintegrates around us, we need not some new and fanciful doctrine of the right and the good, but a rediscovery of the lost clarity of insight that the rules in which humanity for centuries has expressed its moral sense of life are no arbitrary conventions relative to this or that epoch of history but expressions of the perennial rightness of being. What the dusk reveals is not some new morality but rather the deep truth of the ageless moral insight of humanity.[43]

The words are so familiar that we hardly hear them at all. "Thou shalt not covet." "Thou shalt not bear false witness." "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not commit adultery." "Thou shalt do no murder." "Honor thy father and thy mother." "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." We know the words, but in the arbitrary world we have built up around us, they have come to seem arbitrary, no more than one possible set of rules favored by a particular sect. Still, those commandments are not uniquely Jewish or distinctively Christian. They represent the moral consensus of humankind, rooted in the very nature of our being and tested through the centuries, in obedience as much as in the breach.

Where the world is not yet an arbitrary "man's" world, those commandments stand out again in their ontological significance. Here the rhythm of the seasons fits organically with the moral rhythm of human life they reflect. What they are, more than anything else, is an expression of a posture of respect for the order, the *logos* of the creation. Their violation does not do violence simply to the victim but to the whole rightness of being, casting out the doer from its order.

"Thou shalt not covet." This is not an injuction against the rightful striving of all beings whose being is projected into temporality. It is an urgent warning against turning the world from the place of our dwelling into an object of possession, rendered dead and soulless by greed. Of all the commandments governing the relationship of finite beings to each other, it is, perhaps, the most basic. No force is more destructive than greed, no drive more elemental. Greed is not an extension of need, since a need can be satisfied. It is the desperate attempt to fill with possessions the emptiness which humans create when they ignore the first four commandments, turning their world into a meaningless wasteland in which they are utterly alone. The rediscovery of the presence which fills that emptiness, setting humans free from greed and envy, is the greatest gift of the forest peace.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness." Amid the green peace, amid the rightness of nature, the violence of a lie stands out. It is so utterly wrong, a violation of the rightness of the *logos*. A lie is at the root of all mental distress, the discord between what humans know and what they say, or more deeply, between what humans know and what they

dare to admit to themselves. A century ago, Borden Parker Bowne listed the need for truth as one of the most elementary human needs.[44] Today, that may seem quaint. We have become accustomed to living in a world of make-believe, of artifacts masquerading as physical objects—the paper flowers pretending to be living plants, the plastic furniture pretending to be wood, the robots pretending to be humans—and humans pretending to be robots. Yet through the ages humans have known that there is no condition more basic to authentic humanity than *to live in truth*.[45]

"Thou shalt not steal," for in taking from the other that with which he mingled his love and labor, you take away from his very being yet gain nothing, not having made it your own in labor or love. Theft depersonalizes not only the thief, but the world as well. The object stolen becomes dead possession. "Thou shalt not commit adultery," because that, too, is theft—taking away another's love but gaining no more than dead gratification. To be at peace with himself and his world, a human must be at one in himself, in his commitments, in his conscience. Adultery splits humans in twain. It is not only a theft, but also a lie which embodies the essence of human coveting.

"Thou shalt do no murder." Wanton killing, be it of a person, of an animal, a plant—or of a love or an idea—is an act of profound disrespect, of dehumanization so radical that it makes its perpetrator an outcast and shatters the peace of the land. Yes, there is a food chain. There are, too, the bitter works of love. Killing a wounded animal swiftly—the frog impaled on my scythe, the baby rabbit disemboweled by a cat—can be the most agonizing act of love, letting it suffer an act of moral cowardice. All that is true: there can be even a moral duty to kill. That is why I think the Bishops' Bible translation, "Thou shalt do no murder," more faithful not only to the Hebrew text, but also to the moral sense of the commandment than the familiar "Thou shalt not kill." Still, an act of killing remains an act of deep horror. Perhaps we have learned to objectify our world so that we could kill without remorse. Unquestionably, having objectified it, we do so kill, and easily. Like Cain, we find ourselves outcasts, taking what is not our own.

"Honor thy father and thy mother," since life in truth is not your own but a gift you receive at their hands. Not theirs only—every moment of life is a gift of the world around us and of the God of that world. To honor, the ability to honor—is both a distinctive human trait and the crucial component of humanity at peace. We are the beings able to cherish and give thanks. Hence "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy": it is not a day of rest only. Far more, it is a day of

thanksgiving. Not the absence of activity but the act of honoring, of giving thanks, is what restores the human soul and puts it at peace.

None of that, to be sure, is new. The radical brackets of the forest clearing teach no new doctrine. They do, however, give the dweller a new awareness of the age-old moral code as no convention but as a faithful expression of the rightness of the cosmos. In honoring that order, the human can be at home in his world—and vice versa, in dwelling at peace, a human learns to honor the moral code. Its precepts may come to seem as arbitrary constraints when we assume the posture of masters, proudly conquering the world. That posture, though, is our crushing burden, condemning us to loneliness in a world reduced to meaninglessness. The great gift of solitude at dusk is the surrender of that posture, the grateful acceptance of the place of a dweller in God's world. Once we dare encounter the world, the nature around us in its integrity, in respect, the traditional commandments cease to appear arbitrary or constraining. They become, instead, in the words of Jan Milič Lochman, the "signposts to freedom."

In the stillness of dusk, a double order emerges. There is the order of time, the all-reconciling rhythm of love and labor, of day and night, of the full moon and the starry skies of the new moon, the cycle of the seasons and the cycle of life, blossoming, renewing itself, and perishing. The great liberating discovery is that the human is not a stranger to it, that he has his integral place therein. The order which governs the life of the forest, the seasons of the trees, and the care of the porcupines for their young, the snakes at peace on their boulders and the human in his clearing, is both vital and moral. It gives a rhythm and a rightness to human life as well, expressed in the moral codes of human society and the deep, often obscured sense of the seemingly arbitrary works of humans. Its seasons give meaning to clocks, its dialectic of love and labor gives meaning to the devices of the cities. Even amid their man-made environments, humans need not feel strangers if they recognize in their works the rhythm of the nature whose part they, too, are—and let that vision guide them in their understanding and their use of technology.

That vision of an order of nature, finally, is the profound truth of any "naturalism" restored to validity by recognizing nature as *physis*[46] and as a creation, not a mechanistic nature-construct, as its starting point. Humans cannot live at peace with themselves and their God if they are not at peace with nature. Yet in the stillness at dusk, a double order emerges—not only the order of time but the order of eternity. That recognition comes far more slowly than the recognition of the order of time, the rhythm of the seasons. To a human grown brittle

and broken in the alienation of the world of artifacts, the discovery of a living nature whose rhythm finds an echo in his own being is all-absorbing. The diaries of solitary dwellers often reflect it. They speak of the grateful peace of assuming a place in the vital order of nature, embraced by the all-reconciling night, living the rhythm of the day. But there is the full moon, the searing moon of January nights and the comforting August moon of harvest nights. It evokes a second recognition—that though we may accept both the life and the death of the chipmunk as at peace in the rhythm of nature, we cannot but rejoice in the one and grieve the other. Our moral codes testify to it. We are beings who are able to see the world in the order of its time, not solely in the sterile atemporality of our man-made world. Yet we can see it also from the perspective of a perennial order of right and wrong which stands in judgment above the order of it, ingressing in it though not a part of it. The human is a dweller in time, though not in time alone. He dwells at the intersection of time and eternity.

The term "eternity" will call for an explanation each time we use it. It is a hopelessly misleading one, though perhaps the series of metaphors we have before us might help specify its meaning. We might, for instance, speak of the order of value, though that, too, can be misleading. Even temporality has its values, the values of utility relating the present to the past whence it stems and the future toward which it is projected. The experience of which I speak as the vision of eternity is a vision of an order of value in a different sense. It is the experience of value as intersecting with time and of the human as standing out of time in going out to it, seeing the present not in its relation to what preceded and what will follow it, but in its absolute being—in its relation to what, clumsily, we describe as eternity.

Eternity, so understood, is not an extension of time, not even an infinite time. It is, rather, a vertical dimension cutting through time at each of its moments. It is the confrontation with the full moon through the trees dark with the day's rain. It is the goodness of an act or the truth of a witness which avail nothing in the order of time, yet are still irreducibly good. It is the awareness of the intensity of the blue sky on a summer day. Though it is only July, the days have been cool, almost autumnal. The cedar shakes of the house in the clearing are sun-drenched, a light wind sways the trees. The forest world is deep green all about and, high above, the sky is incredibly blue. The blue of that sky is not a function of the gray dawn which preceded it nor of the greenish-yellow which will follow it at dusk. It simply is,

blue with a perennial validity unaffected by the passing of time. It is blue as, in Whitehead's term, an *eternal* object, ingressing in this moment of time.[47]

The pain of the grief suffered by a loved one has a similar quality. It once was, and it is no more. There were events which led up to it, and events which followed it, and, for practical purposes, it makes every kind of sense to think of it in those terms, in the order of time. Yet there is another perspective that will not be denied: recognizing that grief in its purity, in its eternal validity before God. So, too, the beauty of the trillium or the goodness of a moral act which changed nothing and yet, for all eternity, stands out in its nobility. Humans are beings capable of perceiving all that. They are capable of perceiving the creation not only in the order of time but in the order of eternity, lifting up its moments out of time's passage into eternity in the eternal validity of truth, goodness, and beauty of their joy and sorrow.

That is the recognition which stands out in crystalline clarity in the moments of grief and the moments of joy at dusk. Sartre and the existentialists denied that dimension of being human. Having committed himself to a militant atheism in his indignation at the Church, Sartre had to deny the dimension of the eternal in humans which Max Scheler had recognized so clearly.[48] Then, having denied what makes humans distinct, he had to make temporality their exclusive property—and, in effect, lie about raccoons and porcupines. Once, however, we recognize the shared temporality of all animate beings, we need to recognize the distinctively human task in the cosmos as of a different order. A human is the being capable in each moment of reaching out beyond the order of time to eternity. It is the human, in the recognition of the goodness, truth, beauty, and holiness of being, caught up in its temporality, who brings out its absolute validity, its dimension of eternity.

The dimension of eternity, the rightness of the green peace, sanctifies the order of time. Sir Charles Sherrington,[49] in his way no less careful an observer of nature than Joseph Wood Krutch, concluded that no life is sacred until humans recognize it as such. There is an insight in that assertion about the distinctive role of humans. Still, the green peace of the forest teaches me a different lesson—that though it may take humans to recognize it, all life is sacred quite independently of that recognition, and not life only but all being, the boulders, the leaves of grass, the infinitely distant star.

Yes, there is a food chain. The chipmunk searching for seeds among the boulders of the stone fence, companion of my days, is the food of the great owl, the majestic companion of my nights. The order of

time is an order of passing and perishing—and celebrating it as the creator of novelty does not alter that fact. Certainly birth is as much a part of the process as death. For psychohygienic reasons, even if for no other, a philosophy whose vision reached no further than the order of time might well prefer to regard the birth rather than the death as definitive.[50] Yet the emergence of novelty is hardly a cause for rejoicing if what emerges is no less doomed to perish than what made room for it by its passing. The moral sense of life cannot be wholly contained in the order of time. It must be anchored in the eternity of the good, the true, the beautiful, the holy.

That is the double order, the rhythm, and the rightness. There is a food chain, a rhythm of life's seasons. It is not simply that life "exhibits a lawlike regularity," though it does that. That metaphor, so useful for the purposes of natural scientific research, becomes misleading in the search for the sense of life. It obscures the deeper recognition that there is an order, a rightness as well as a rhythm of time. The generations of the porcupines, the phases of the forest, even the death of the chipmunk, all attest to a rightness of time. The glory of being human is the ability to recognize the pattern of rightness and to honor it as a moral law. The horror of being human is the ability to violate that rightness, living out of season—doing violence to the other, perverting the most sacred human relationships, devastating the world in greed, overriding its rhythm, not in the name of necessity and charity, but in the compulsion of coveting.

What Judaism and its spiritual daughter, Christianity, sought to express in their commandments is the age-old, precious discovery of the rightness of life. Still, were those commandments no more than that, their significance to the quest for the moral sense of life would remain marginal. It is not, because they are sanctified by the moral sense of nature in a second, deeper sense, not merely its rhythm but its rightness in eternity. Their common motif is the law of respect for the sacredness of being. The ageless boulders of the long-abandoned dam, the maple and the great birch by twilight, the chipmunk in the busyness of his days and his dying, even I, making my dwelling place among them, are not only right in our season. We have also our value in eternity, as witnesses to the audacious miracle of being rather than nothing. Ultimately, that is the moral sense of nature, infinitely to be cherished: that there is something. That is the eternal wonder articulated in the rightness and rhythm of time which humans honor in their commandments, the wonder of being.

The blue sky, the moral act, the moment of grief have their absolute validity, independent of the before and the after. The trillium, in its

passing moment of glory, is the locus of a beauty that ingresses in time but is not a part of it, reducible to it. That, too, is part of the truth of the radical bracketing at dusk: being stands out in its absolute, its *ab-solo*, validity—and the human in his role as the being who can reach out of his preoccupation with time to see the truth, the beauty, the goodness ingressing in it is called to testify to it. Though a dweller in time, he can see the wonder of the starry heaven. The truth that stands out at dusk is not only the truth of the order of nature and of the place of the human therein. It is also the truth of eternity.

Certainly, humans can become wholly absorbed in the preoccupations of time. As there are humans who are color-blind, so there can be humans who become blind to goodness, to truth and beauty, who drink wine without pausing to cherish it, who pluck flowers without pausing to give thanks, who accept joy and grief as all in a day's work, to be enjoyed or managed, without ever seeing the presence of eternity in them. But that is not the point. What is crucial is that humans, whether they do so or not, are capable of encountering a moment not simply as a transition between a before and an after but as the miracle of eternity ingressing into time. That, rather than the ability to fashion tools, stands out as the distinctive human calling. Were it not for humans who are able to see it, to grieve for it and to cherish it, the goodness, beauty, and truth of creation would remain wholly absorbed in the passage of time and pass with it. It is our calling to inscribe it into eternity.