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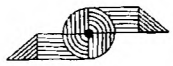

MORTALITY AND MORALITY

A Search for the Good after Auschwitz

Hans Jonas

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perception, and motility are faculties accompanying the phenomenon of self-preservation they serve. They preserve a "self" of which they are a part, and one can just as well say that metabolism exists for their sake as that they exist for its sake. Without these faculties there would be much less to preserve, and this "less" of what is to be preserved is the same as the "less" by means of which it is preserved.

From this perspective we see where the true progress represented by animal development lies. The mediate manner in which animals relate to the world is an increase in the mediacy already peculiar to organic existence on its most primitive (metabolizing) level, compared to the direct self-identity of inorganic matter. This increased mediacy brings about a gain in scope, both internal and external, at the price of greater risk, both internal and external. A more differentiated self must face a more differentiated world. Every further stage of separation (here we think of ourselves) pays in its own coin—the same coin with which it also acquires fulfillment. The kind of coin determines the value of the venture. The split between subject and object—opened up by perception at a distance and by a greater radius of movement, and reflected in the acuteness of appetite and fear, satisfaction and disappointment, enjoyment and pain—was never to be closed again. But in its growing expansion, life's freedom found room for all those ways of relating—perceptive, active, and emotional—that justify the split by spanning it and that indirectly regain the lost unity.

Translated by Hunter and Hildegarde Hannum

2

Tool, Image, and Grave: On What Is beyond the Animal in Man

1

Darwin's theory of evolution was not the first system of thought to inform us that human beings have much in common with animals. That we physically belong to the animal kingdom was already as familiar to Aristotle as it would later be to Linnaeus. It is obvious, moreover, from human anatomy, for man is a vertebrate, warm-blooded, placental mammal. Closer morphological comparison places him—with or without the theory of evolution—in, or at least closest to, primates, a specific family of animals.

Recognizing these similarities, however, has never been an obstacle to distinguishing human beings immediately from all the animals—in other words, from perceiving in him something that is beyond mere animality and locating his essential nature in that difference. It remains open whether what is peculiar to man—the *differentia specifica* defining him—is a single quality or several qualities; and if several, whether one or the other can be assigned the prime position. A famous definition based on one such quality is Aristotle's, which sees man as "the animal that possesses language (or reason)": *zóon lógon échon, homo—animal rationale.* The Bible, for its part, emphasizes the human ability to distinguish between good and evil, which is seen to be the main meaning of the phrase

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"imago dei." This ability assumes the existence of language and reason, but does not simply coincide with them. By transcending animality while at the same time remaining bound to it, man is regarded as a citizen of two worlds, as midway between animal and angel—in short, as a *partly* supranatural being rising above nature, even animate nature.

Why, then, when man had always known on the basis of his body that he was related to the animal, was Darwin's theory of man's *descent* from the animals such a cultural shock? If we disregard the obvious explanation which first comes to mind—that those who believed in the Creation story as told in Genesis were scandalized—there is still a more strictly philosophical trauma. With Darwin's immanent explanation of man's origins according to purely biological rules, which did not require the intervention of a new principle, the last earthly home of all previously believed-in transcendence was destroyed by the almighty monism of purposeless, mechanical nature. The *way* man had become what he had, defined what he had become. This last disenchantment, following all those having to do with the rest of the world, appeared to undermine the very foundations of the previous image of man.

Or so it appears according to what is called "the genetic fallacy." Since the principle of natural selection consists exclusively in the advantage of various modes of behavior for survival, man's difference from animals is viewed from an increasingly pragmatic perspective and seen to lie in his superior skill in achieving success. His mental faculties are interpreted purely instrumentally as means to this success, and the value, even the meaning, of what is specifically human is defined in terms of it. Indeed, we can ask what aspect of each human characteristic qualified it for natural selection, for passing through the biological sieve. Consequently, this *explanation* of its origin—that is, of nature's approval and nurture of it—can be mistaken for knowledge of its essence; the criteria favoring its development can be mistaken for the substance of what it has become. This fails to explain the enormous surplus of those characteristics that have emerged in man beyond what is needed for purposes of survival, the luxury of his highly autonomous, *self-generated* purposes, which are no longer biological at all.

The same approach, moreover, is exemplified by the genetic logic that characterizes much of modern psychology and sociology. Terms like "sublimation" and "superstructure" are applications of "evolutionary theory" in those fields and represent further examples of reductive interpretation beyond the field of biology. All these interpretations, insofar as they are true, are justified as correctives of a previous extreme view, of the absolute gulf opened up between man and animal—indeed, between man and nature in general—by the Judaic story of Creation, the Greek

metaphysics of reason, and—encompassing both—Christian transce
dentalism. As a result, the trauma of Darwinism was specifically Christi
and Western, a shock that avenged a long historical one-sidedness.
the battle that raged around Darwinism, certainly those who rejected t
view that man was denigrated by his relationship to animals were rig
they were also right in repudiating the accompanying affront to anim
nature.

But given the way we are, one truth can get in the way of anothe
the correction of one extreme can easily lead to the opposite extrem
The new monistic one-sidedness threatens to leave us with an impo
erished self-image that will obscure valuable insights afforded by t
rightly supplanted dualism. Our disenchantment, eye-opening at fir
is beginning to make us blind. In order to find the golden mean betwe
the extremes, it is time—and the task of a philosophical anthropology-
to give thought to what is essentially beyond the animal in man witho
denying the features common to both. On the contrary, we can s
everything surpassing animality as a new stage of mediate relationsh
to the world that is already beginning to take form in animals and,
turn, is already based upon the mediate nature of all organic existen
as such.[1] Upon this basis the intensified mediacy of man's relationship
world and self is built—but as something essentially new, not as somethir
that simply emerges gradually. The meaning of this statement will becom
clearer in what follows.

My method will be to investigate the significance of several selecte
human traits. There are many such traits, extending from the extern
ones of the body to the internal ones of the mind. But the increase i
man's brain size, his hand, his erect posture reveal their significance i
what they allow us to accomplish, and the same applies to his intern
traits, such as reason and imagination. I have thus chosen for eviden
visible artifacts made by man, specifically those occurring early in pr
historic times, which were widely dispersed, cannot be attributed to a
animal, and already display in their most primitive and simple form th
essential nature of the human trait reflected in them. In making m
choice I have consciously bypassed speech, for philosophically speakir
it is anything but "simple," though since time immemorial it has bee
correctly acknowledged to be man's most outstanding trait. Also, i
prehistoric beginnings are not directly accessible to us, whereas the visib
artifacts I shall treat here already indirectly attest to speech (or the abili
for it), since their creators must have been speaking subjects. Although
thematic analysis of this basic human trait is thus bypassed, its pervasi
presence cannot be overlooked. Let us therefore restrict ourselves
paradigmatic categories of what man has *produced* since earliest tim

and ask what each of them has to tell us about what is uniquely peculiar to him.

II

My choice falls upon tool, image, and grave, all of which appear among the remnants of the past long before the time of historical cultures, before the great temples of the gods and the written tablets. These three artifacts leave no doubt as to their human origin and reveal various decisive human qualities. Taken together, they provide us with something approaching essential coordinates of a philosophical anthropology. I shall begin with the *tool*, which is certainly the earliest of the three and comes the closest to serving vital animal needs.

What is a tool? A tool is an artificially devised, inert object interpolated as a means between the acting bodily organ (usually the hand) and the extracorporeal object of the action. It is given permanent form for recurring use and can be set aside in readiness for this use. Thus, a stick or a stone employed as a momentary aid is not yet a tool. Intended for working on something, the tool itself is worked on. Its production is free and therefore differs according to differing purposes, of which there are many; in the beginning there are typically recurring uses, but new ones can always be added. The point of a spear is shaped differently from an ax, a scraper, a knife, or a pestle. The production of all these may in turn call for additional tools—a double mediation in dealing with the world that can be multiplied again and again: a mediation in increasing degrees.

The tool is a human device by virtue of having in itself nothing to do with man. It neither arises from any organic function nor is subject to any biological programming. Thus, the spider web, "artful" as it is, is not a tool—not truly "artificial" but simply "natural" (as are bird nests and termite hills). The non-organ nature of the artificial tool is the other face of the *freedom* necessary for its invention. In spite of the roles that groping attempts and fortunate discoveries may play, its invention ultimately has an eidetic element: its form, present in the imagination, is forced upon matter; what is seen in a successful model is widely replicated. This presupposes an eidetic power of imagination and eidetic control of the hand (and of voluntary motility in general), bringing us to man's image-making ability, which is not simply synonymous with "thinking" but rather supports and enhances it through playful imagination (something that makes true thinking easily distinguishable from what computers do).

Before we move on to the theme of image-making, it should first be said that the free nature of tool creation, lying beyond the ability of animals as it does, is still—in terms of its motivation and intent, of its whole utilitarian character—very closely connected with the realm of animal necessity, even while it serves animal needs in a supra-animal manner. It should also be noted that here we can most readily speak of fluid boundaries between animal and human capabilities.

III

The same is not true of *image*-making, a capability which, from its very beginnings in its most primitive and awkward products, displays a total, rather than a gradual, divergence from the animal's. Later refinement adds nothing to this divergence—fluid boundaries are not even conceivable here. With this intuitive evidence, *homo pictor*, the maker and viewer of images, teaches us that *homo faber*, the maker and user of tools, is as such not yet the complete *homo sapiens*.

Wherever we come upon rock drawings, even if it should be on another planet, why are we so sure that only man can have made them (granting that in an extraterrestrial case "man" would be a creature lacking any morphological similarity to us)? The biological uselessness of any form of representation is enough to convince us immediately that no mere animal would or could produce an image. Animal artifacts have direct physical application to the pursuit of vital ends such as nourishment, procreation, concealment, and hibernation. The artifacts themselves have a purposive connection to something else. The depiction of something, however, changes neither the environment nor the condition of the organism itself. An image-making creature is therefore one that either indulges in the production of useless things, or has purposes beyond the biological, or can pursue the latter in a different way than through the instrumental application of things. In any case, by depicting images the object is appropriated in a new, nonpractical manner, and the very fact that interest in it can be attached to its *eidos* is evidence of a new kind of object-relationship.

What kinds of abilities and attitudes are involved in the creation of images (and in the recognition of images)? In the first place, what *is* an image? It is an intentionally produced likeness with the visual appearance of a thing (at rest or in action) in the static medium of the surface of another thing. It is not meant to repeat the original or to pretend that it is the original but to "re-present" it. For this purpose the suggestion of a

few "representative" features suffices: the rendition of something requires selectivity and permits, on the one hand, extreme frugality through omission and simplification and, on the other, even exaggeration, distortion, stylization. As long as the intent remains recognizable, the image of what is portrayed can do with a minimum of likeness. Since only the view of a thing, not the thing itself, is reproduced in an image, there can be any number of repetitions (copies) of the same image. Since there can be countless views of the same thing, there can be any number of different images of it, although certain views will be favored at different times. Above all, however, since form as such is "general," the same picture can represent any number of individual phenomena: the antelope in the drawings of Bushmen is not this or that specific one but every antelope that can be remembered, anticipated, or referred to as "an antelope"; the figures of hunters are any group of hunting Bushmen in the past, present, or future. Since representation occurs through form, it is essentially general. Generality is a conspicuous feature of the image, interpolated between the individuality of the image qua thing and that of the things depicted.

If these are the characteristics of the image, what characteristics are necessary for a subject to create or comprehend images? In the first place, of course, the perception of likeness—but as *mere* likeness without it being mistaken for what it is only supposed to represent. Perception in itself, however, knows nothing of representation; it recognizes only simple presentation, where everything stands for itself and nothing stands for anything else. Perception is a direct rendering of what is present in its presentness. Depiction, which renders what is absent, is in fact a conceptual dimension of its own, in which all degrees of visible likeness can occur in a representational way. This dimension contains in its structure a threefold differentiation: the image, its physical carrier, and the depicted object. The intermediary, poised between two physical realities—image qua thing and depicted thing—is the *eidos* as such, which becomes the real object we experience.

The principle involved here on the subject's part is the intentional separation of form from matter. Here we have a specifically human situation and the reason why we do not expect animals to make or comprehend images. The animal is concerned with the present object. If it is sufficiently "like" another object, then it is an object of the same kind. Reality alone counts, and reality knows nothing of representation. For example, the "sign" animals can leave behind, the trace of their scent, is not an image of the animal. Therefore, in our search for the conditions of image-making, we must move from the merely physical ability to discern

likeness to the nonmaterial one of separating *eidos* from concrete realit or form from matter.

What step does man's image-making ability take when he proceed to translate a visual aspect into a material likeness? We see at once that i this step a new level of mediacy is reached, beyond that already presen in vision as such. The image is separated from the object, that is, th presence of the *eidos* is made independent of the presence of the thing Having vision already involves a stepping back from the urgent pressure of the environment and created the freedom of an overview from distance.[2] A stepping back of the second order occurs when appearanc is grasped *as* appearance, is distinguished from reality, and—with it presence in our control—is interpolated between the self and reality whose presence is beyond our control.

This control is first attained in the internal exercise of imagination which, as far as we know, distinguishes human memory from anima recall. Memory transcends mere recall by means of imagination's capacit for free reproduction, which has the images of things at its disposal. Tha human beings can alter images at will follows almost necessarily from the fact that we possess them detached from actual sensation and thereb from the stubborn factuality of objects' own being. Imagination separates the remembered *eidos* from the event of the individual encounter with it, thus freeing it from the accidents of space and time. The freedom gained in this manner—to ponder things in the imagination—is one based upon both distance and mastery.

The remembered form can then be translated from inner imagination into an external image, which in turn is an object of perception: a perception, not of the original object, however, but of its representation. It is externalized memory and not repetition of the experience itself. To a certain extent this image makes actual experience superfluous by making some of its essential content available without the experience itself.

The control involved here proceeds via re-creation to new creation. As the re-creator of things "in their own image," *homo pictor* submits to the criterion of truth. An image can be more or less true, i.e., faithful to the original. The intention to depict an object acknowledges it as it is and accepts its verdict on the adequacy of the pictorial homage thus expressed. The *adequatio imaginis ad rem* preceding the *adequatio intellectus ad rem* is the first form of theoretical truth—the precursor of verbally descriptive truth, which is in turn the precursor of scientific truth.

The re-creator of objects is potentially also the creator of new objects, and the one power is no different from the other. The freedom that has chosen to render a likeness can just as easily choose to deviate from it. The first intentionally drawn line opens up that dimension of

freedom in which faithfulness to the original or to any model is only *one* decision: this dimension transcends actual reality as a whole and offers its range of endless variation as a realm of the *possible*, which man can actualize however he chooses. The same ability can bring about both what is true and what is new.

Pictorial activity is yet another example of human freedom. Images must, after all, be produced, not only conceived. Thus, their outer existence as the result of human activity also reveals a *physical* aspect of the power inherent in the image-making ability: the kind of command man has over his body. Only by means of this command can imagination proceed to depiction, and the motor freedom activated here repeats the imaginative one; the transition from imagination to depiction and the latter's *allowing* itself to be directed by the former are just as free as was the imaginative act itself. The most familiar example of this "translation" of an eidetic pattern or scheme into movement of the limbs is writing. The use of the hand in general demonstrates that this motor translation of imagined form in its fullest extent is the condition of all human creativity and therefore also of all technology, as we already saw in the case of tools.

What we have here is a uniquely human ability beyond that of animals: the eidetic control of motility, i.e., muscular action governed not by set stimulus-and-response patterns but by freely chosen, inwardly imagined, and purposely projected form. Eidetic control of motility, with its freedom of external execution, thus complements eidetic control of the imagination, with its freedom of internal projection. *Homo pictor*, who illustrates both capacities in *one* indivisible example, represents the point at which *homo faber* and *homo sapiens* coincide—indeed, the point at which they prove to be one and the same.

We can deduce something more from the examples of the earliest images: those who created them also possessed speech. What we assumed in the case of tools we can be sure of in the case of images, which do in visible fashion what names do invisibly: give things a new existence qua symbol. The Bible (Genesis 2:19) tells us that God created the beasts of the Earth and the fowl of the air but left it to Adam to name them. The naming of creatures is here regarded as the first feat of newly created man and as a distinctively human act. It is a step beyond Creation; the one who took it thereby proved his superiority to his fellow creatures and proclaimed his future mastery over nature. By giving names to "every living creature" created by God, man created a species name for the multiplicity of specimens that would later develop. The name, becoming general in this way, preserves the archetypical order of Creation in the face of its manifold replications in individual cases. Thus, the symbolic duplication of the world through names is at the same time an ordering

of it according to its generic prototypes. Every horse is the original horse, every dog the original dog.

The generality of the name is the generality of the image. The prehistoric hunter did not draw this or that bison but *the* bison—every possible bison was thereby evoked, anticipated, remembered. Drawing an image of something is analogous to calling it by name, or rather is its unabridged form, since it makes physically present that inner image of which the phonetic sign is an abbreviation and whose generality alone makes it applicable to the many individual specimens. Image-making repeats each time the creative act whose residue is concealed in the name: the symbolic "making-again" of the world. It demonstrates what the use of names takes for granted: the availability of the *eidos*, as something beyond particular things, for human comprehension, imagination, and speech. In the ideogram, then, the two—image and word—visibly meet.[3]

IV

We now turn to the *grave* as the third artifact, after tool and image. If biological superfluity or even uselessness is to be taken as a sign of what is beyond the animal in man, then in this respect grave surpasses image, which after all can serve purposes of communication, instruction, and even invention. To this extent the image could still be explained, as the tool certainly can be, by the evolutionary system of rewards. That the grave is an exclusively human phenomenon is empirically demonstrated to us by the fact that no animal buries or gives further consideration to its dead. According to this criterion alone, it would not rank any higher than tool and image. But the commemoration of the dead perpetuated in the cult of the grave and in other visible ways is uniquely human in a sense that surpasses both of the previous examples. For it is linked to *beliefs*, whose content—varying at different times and places, sometimes known and sometimes merely conjectured—we need not concern ourselves with here. Common to them all is that they somehow defy our apparent mortality, pointing beyond what is visible to the invisible, from the material to the immaterial. The grave bears visible testimony to this defiance.

Among all beings, man is the only one who knows that he must die, and in considering "the afterwards" and "the there," he also considers "the now" and "the here" of his existence—that is, he reflects about himself. With graves, the question takes on concrete form: "Where do I come from; where am I going?" and ultimately, "What am I—beyond what I do and experience at a given time?" With these questions *reflection*

emerges as a new mode of dealing with the world, beyond tool and image. It is not only man's relationship to the world which is indirect but also his relationship to himself. He arrives at his own being only via the detour of ideas about it. Knowing of his mortality, he must live as a human being with a self-image that is by no means self-evident but is the tentative result of questioning and speculation. This speculation necessarily expands from the individual ego to the whole of existence, in which the ego finds itself situated. Thus, metaphysics arises from graves. But so does that commemoration of the past which we call history, as the cult of ancestors first makes clear. Preserving the link with our forebears merges the transitory "now" of the single existence with the continuity of the succession of generations, and the memory of the temporal becomes just as suprapersonal as the commemoration of the eternal. In both respects the self attains distance from itself, thus discovering itself—with the ultimate sacrifice of immediacy—for the first time.

V

With this attainment of distance and the bridging of it by means of never-ending reflection, the principle of mediacy, with which life began and whose growth can be traced through all of organic evolution, reaches it pinnacle.[4] Man, who represents this pinnacle, emerges in his fullest sense when he who depicted the bison and its hunter turns his gaze upon the nondepictable image of his own being and fate. By the distancing of this wondering, searching, and comparing gaze, a new entity, "I," is established. This is the greatest step of all hazarded by mediacy and objectification, and the knowledge of death may very well have been the impetus for it. Henceforth, like it or not, man—each one of us—must live the idea or "image" of man, an image that is constantly being modified. It never leaves him, however much he sometimes yearns for the animal felicity he has lost. Only via the immeasurable distance of being-an-object-to-himself can man "have" himself. But he does have himself, whereas no animal has itself. In the gulf opened up by the confrontation of the self with itself, the greatest heights and the deepest depressions of human experience have their place. Man alone is open to despair; he alone can commit suicide. *Quaestio mihi factus sum*, "I have become a question to myself": religion, ethics, and metaphysics are never-completed attempts to confront this question within the framework of an interpretation of the totality of existence and to find an answer to it.

Let us summarize what the human products we selected have to say to us about man. The *tool* tells us that a being, forced to deal with matter out of need, meets this need in an artificially mediated way that depends on invention and is open to improvement. The *image* tells us that a being, using a tool on matter for an immaterial purpose, depicts the contents of his visual perception, varies them and transforms them, thereby creating a new world of depicted objects beyond the material world that is there to satisfy his needs. The *grave* tells us that a being, subject to mortality, reflects about life and death, defies appearances, and raises his thinking to the realm of the invisible, utilizing tool and image for this purpose. With these basic forms we respond to and surpass, in uniquely human fashion, what is simply a given for man and all animals: in the tool, physical necessity is met with invention; in the image, visual perception with representation and imagination; in the grave, inevitable death with faith and piety.

All three, going beyond the immediate, are modes of mediacy and freedom, which we today share with those who preceded us, and are thus valid for all time as diverse means, emanating from one source, of understanding the world. We may not always know the purpose of a specific tool, but we know that it had one, conceived in terms of end-means and cause-effect relations and produced as a result of that conception. If we follow this type of causal thinking further, we arrive at technology and physics. We may not always understand the significance of a given image, but we know that it is an image, was supposed to depict something, and by this depiction reproduced a heightened and validated reality. If we follow in this direction we arrive at art. We may not know the specific ideas behind a cult of the dead (and if we did know them, we would probably find them extremely strange), but we do know that ideas were involved here—the mere fact of the grave and its rituals tell us so—and that these ideas represented reflection about the mystery of existence and what lay beyond the realm of appearance. Following in the direction of such reflection we arrive at metaphysics. Physics, art, and metaphysics, adumbrated in primitive times by tool, image, and grave, are not discussed here as already existing or as developments that must occur universally but as original dimensions of the human relationship to the world, whose expanding horizon includes them as *potentialities* in its far reaches.

Just as little as potentiality guarantees realization, so little, too, does this enumeration of horizons mean that even their primitive adumbrations must be found in every human group at all times. Their presence is significant, but their absence is not necessarily so. For understandable reasons, tools will probably be found everywhere. But image and grave,

both representing a greater luxury for human beings struggling with the exigencies of nature, may for various reasons be missing here and there. Yet we consider the ability to produce them part of being fully human, and they are not missing entirely in any *culture.* Our culture today places the greatest emphasis on what was foreshadowed in the tool: technology and the natural sciences that serve it. Tools, which—of the three—best served the purposes of biology and its dynamics of selection, first appeared in response to the constraints of nature. Continually surpassing themselves with their undreamed-of successes in recent times, they now completely dominate our entire external existence, overshadowing everything else that distinguishes us "from all beings that we know" (Goethe). In spite of this, let us not forget that those other human creations pointing beyond the animal—even including the field of metaphysics, in such disrepute today—although less amenable to progress, still belong to the total picture of man.

Translated by Hunter and Hildegarde Hannum

3

The Burden and Blessing of Mortality

Since time immemorial, mortals have bewailed their mortality, ha longed to escape it, groped for some hope of eternal life. I speak, course, of human mortals. Men alone of all creatures know that th must die; men alone mourn their dead, bury their dead, remember the dead. So much is mortality taken to mark the human condition, that tl attribute "mortal" has tended to be monopolized for man: in Homer and later Greek usage, for example, "mortals" is almost a synonym f "men," contrasting them to the envied, ageless immortality of the goc *Memento mori* rings through the ages as a persistent philosophical ar religious admonition in aid of a truly human life. As Psalm 90 puts "Teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom."

Over this incurably anthropocentric emphasis, not much thoug was spent on the obvious truth that we share the lot of mortality with o fellow creatures, that all life is mortal, indeed that death is coextensi with life. Reflection shows that this must be so; that you cannot have tl one without the other. Let this be our first theme: mortality as an essenti attribute of life as such—only later to focus on specifically human aspec of it.

Two meanings merge in the term *mortal*: that the creature so calle *can* die, is exposed to the constant possibility of death; and that, eve tually, it *must* die, is destined for the ultimate necessity of death. In tl continual possibility I place the burden, in the ultimate necessity I pla

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