

I

A human life

From the moment when he catches sight of the light of the world a man seeks to find out *himself* and get hold of *himself* out of its confusion, in which he, with everything else, is tossed about in motley mixture.

But everything that comes in contact with the child defends itself in turn against his attacks, and asserts its own persistence.

Accordingly, because each thing *cares for itself* and at the same time comes into constant collision with other things, the *combat* of self-assertion is unavoidable.

Victory or defeat – between the two alternatives the fate of the combat wavers. The victor becomes the *lord*, the vanquished one the *subject*: the former exercises *supremacy* and ‘rights of supremacy’, the latter fulfils in awe and deference the ‘duties of a subject’.

But both remain *enemies*, and always lie in wait: they watch for each other’s *weaknesses*, children for those of their parents and parents for those of their children (their fear, for example); either the stick conquers the man, or the man conquers the stick.

In childhood liberation takes the direction of trying to get to the bottom of things, to get at what is ‘behind things’; therefore we spy out the weak points of everybody, for which, it is well known, children have a sure instinct; therefore we like to smash things, like to rummage through hidden corners, pry after what is covered up or out of the way, and try what we can do with everything. When we once get at what is behind things, we know we are safe; when, for example, we have got at the fact that the rod is too weak against our obduracy, then we no longer fear it, ‘have outgrown it’.

Behind the rod, mightier than it, stands our – obduracy, our obdurate courage. By degrees we get at what is behind everything that was mysterious and uncanny to us, the mysteriously dreaded might of the rod, the father's stern look, etc., and behind all we find our ataraxia – our imperturbability, intrepidity, our counter forces, our odds of strength, our invincibility. Before that which formerly inspired in us fear and deference we no longer retreat shyly, but take *courage*. Behind everything we find our *courage*, our superiority; behind the sharp command of parents and authorities stands, after all, our courageous choice or our outwitting shrewdness. And the more we feel ourselves, the smaller appears that which before seemed invincible. And what is our trickery, shrewdness, courage, obduracy? What else but – *mind* [*Geist*]!

Through a considerable time we are spared a fight that is so exhausting later, the fight against *reason*. The fairest part of childhood passes without the necessity of coming to blows with reason. We care nothing at all about it, do not meddle with it, admit no reason. We are not to be persuaded to anything by *conviction*, and are deaf to good arguments and principles; on the other hand, coaxing, punishment, and the like are hard for us to resist.

This stern life-and-death combat with *reason* enters later, and begins a new phase; in childhood we scamper about without racking our brains much.

Mind is the name of the *first* self-discovery, the first undeification of the divine; that is, of the uncanny, the spooks, the 'powers above'. Our fresh feeling of youth, this feeling of self, now defers to nothing; the world is discredited, for we are above it, we are *mind*.

Now for the first time we see that hitherto we have not looked at the world *intelligently* [*mit Geist*] at all, but only stared at it.

We exercise the beginnings of our strength on *natural powers*. We defer to parents as a natural power; later we say: father and mother are to be forsaken, all natural power to be counted as riven. They are vanquished. For the rational, the 'intellectual [*Geistigen*] man', there is no family as a natural power; a renunciation of parents, brothers, etc., makes its appearance. If these are 'born again' as *intellectual, rational powers*, they are no longer at all what they were before.

And not only parents, but *adults in general*, are conquered by the young man; they are no hindrance to him, and are no longer regarded; for now he says: One must obey God rather than men.⁷

From this high standpoint everything 'earthly' recedes into contemptible remoteness; for the standpoint is – the *heavenly*.

The attitude is now altogether reversed; the youth takes up an *intellectual* position, while the boy, who did not yet feel himself as mind, grew up on mindless learning. The former does not try to get hold of *things* (for instance, to get into his head the *data* of history), but of the *thoughts* that lie hidden in things, and so, therefore, of the *spirit* of history. On the other hand, the boy understands *connections* no doubt, but not ideas, the spirit; therefore he strings together whatever can be learned, without proceeding *a priori* and theoretically, without looking for ideas.

As in childhood one had to overcome the resistance of the *laws of the world*, so now in everything that he proposes he is met by an objection of the mind, of reason, of his *own conscience*. 'That is unreasonable, un-Christian, unpatriotic', and the like, cries conscience to us, and – frightens us away from it. Not the might of the avenging Eumenides,⁸ not Poseidon's⁹ wrath, not God, far as he sees the hidden, not the father's rod of punishment, do we fear, but – *conscience*.

We 'run after our thoughts' now, and follow their commands just as before we followed parental, human ones. Our course of action is determined by our thoughts (ideas, conceptions, *faith*) as it is in childhood by the commands of our parents.

For all that, we were already thinking when we were children, only our thoughts were not fleshless, abstract, *absolute*, that is, **nothing but thoughts**, a heaven in themselves, a pure world of thoughts, *logical* thoughts.

On the contrary, they had been only thoughts that we had about a *thing*; we thought of the thing so or so. Thus we may have thought 'God made the world that we see there', but we did not think of ('search') the 'depths of the Godhead itself'; we may have thought 'that is the truth about the matter', but we do not think of truth itself, nor unite into one sentence 'God is truth'. The 'depths of the Godhead, who is truth', we did not touch. Over such purely logical (theological) questions, 'What is truth?', Pilate¹⁰ does not stop, though he does not therefore hesitate to ascertain in an individual case 'what truth there is in the thing', whether the *thing* is true.

Any thought bound to a *thing* is not yet *nothing but a thought*, absolute thought.

To bring to light the *pure thought*, or to be of its party, is the delight of youth; and all the shapes of light in the world of thought, like truth, freedom, humanity, man, inspire and enthuse the youthful soul.

But, when the spirit is recognized as the essential thing, it still makes a difference whether the spirit is poor or rich, and therefore one seeks to become rich in spirit; the spirit wants to spread out so as to found its empire, an empire that is not of this world, the world just conquered. Thus, then, it longs to become all in all to itself; for, although I am spirit, I am not yet *perfected* spirit, and must first seek the complete spirit.

But with that I, who had just now found myself as spirit, lose myself again at once, bowing before the complete spirit as one not my own but *supernal* [*jenseitigen*], and feeling my emptiness.

Spirit is the essential point for everything, to be sure; but then is every spirit the 'right' spirit? The right and true spirit is the ideal of spirit, the 'Holy Spirit'. It is not my or your spirit, but just – an ideal, supernal one, it is 'God'. 'God is spirit.' And this supernal 'Father in heaven gives it to those that pray to him'.^a

The man is distinguished from the youth by the fact that he takes the world as it is, instead of everywhere fancying it amiss and wanting to improve it, model it after his ideal; in him the view that one must deal with the world according to his *interest*, not according to his *ideals*, becomes confirmed.

So long as one knows himself only as *spirit*, and feels that all the value of his existence consists in being spirit (it becomes easy for the youth to give his life, the 'bodily life', for a nothing, for the silliest point of honour), so long it is only *thoughts* that one has, ideas that he hopes to be able to realize some day when he has found a sphere of action; thus one has meanwhile only *ideals*, unexecuted ideas or thoughts.

Not until one has fallen in love with his *corporeal* self, and takes a pleasure in himself as a living flesh-and-blood person – but it is in mature years, in the man, that we find it so – not until then has one a personal or *egoistic* [*egoistisches*] interest, an interest not only of our spirit, for instance, but of total satisfaction, satisfaction of the whole chap, a *selfish* [*eigennütziges*] interest. Just compare a man with a youth, and see if he will not appear to you harder, less magnanimous, more

^a Luke 11:13.

selfish. Is he therefore worse? No, you say; he has only become more definite, or, as you also call it, more 'practical'. But the main point is this, that he makes *himself* more the centre than does the youth, who is infatuated about other things, for example, God, fatherland, and so on.

Therefore the man shows a *second* self-discovery. The youth found himself as *spirit* and lost himself again in the *general* spirit, the complete, holy spirit, man, mankind, in short, all ideals; the man finds himself as *embodied* spirit.

Boys had only *unintellectual* interests (those interests devoid of thoughts and ideas); youths only *intellectual* ones; the man has bodily, personal, egoistic interests.

If the child has not an *object* that it can occupy itself with, it feels ennui; for it does not yet know how to occupy itself with *itself*. The youth, on the contrary, throws the object aside, because for him *thoughts* arose out of the object; he occupies himself with his thoughts, his dreams, occupies himself intellectually, or 'his mind is occupied'.

The young man includes everything not intellectual under the contemptuous name of 'externalities'. If he nevertheless sticks to the most trivial externalities (such as the customs of students' clubs and other formalities),¹¹ it is because, and when, he discovers *mind* in them, when they are *symbols* to him.

As I find myself behind things, and that as mind, so I must later find *myself* also behind *thoughts*, namely, as their creator and *owner* [*Schöpfer und Eigner*]. In the time of spirits thoughts grew until they overtopped my head, whose offspring they yet were; they hovered about me and convulsed me like fever-phantasies, an awful power. The thoughts had become *corporeal* on their own account, were ghosts, such as God, emperor, Pope, fatherland, etc. If I destroy their corporeity, then I take them back into mine, and say: 'I alone am corporeal'. And now I take the world as what it is to me, as *mine*, as my property [*Eigentum*]; I refer all to myself.

If as spirit I had thrust away the world in the deepest contempt, so as owner I thrust spirits or ideas away into their 'vanity'. They have no longer any power over me, as no 'earthly might' has power over the spirit.

The child was realistic, taken up with the things of this world, until little by little he succeeded in getting at what was behind these very things; the youth was idealistic, inspired by thoughts, until he

worked his way up to where he became the man, the egoistic man, who deals with things and thoughts according to his heart's pleasure, and sets his personal interest above everything. Finally, the old man? When I become one, there will still be time enough to speak of that.