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The Countenance in the World.

Thoughts on Identity in the Twentyfirst Century

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Should we venture to peruse the centuries, to regard philosophies past and former schools of theological thought, that is to say, if we were to consider the cultural concepts put forth by the western hemisphere in its endeavours to make sense of the world, we would encounter the endlessly repetitious and ongoing conflict between reason and belief.

The types of approach to the world and the representations of the world, which are dependent upon the kind of approach taken, have emerged from the play of forces between two systems of classification and interpretation. The older of these is synthesis, which places the phenomena we perceive in relation to one another and puts multiplicity into an intelligible context. The Greek term σύνθεσις (synthesis) is elucidated by its Latin translation, compositio, and additio — addition.

Synthesis is both the primary and value-forming principle. It can serve to interpret the world because it mirrors human nature, which is in itself the primordial manifestation of synthesis; body and soul, mind and matter, reason and the acceptance of non-verifiable reasoning in science or religion fuse together to form the particular character of human beings.

The nature of human beings, however, not only is synthesis, it also behaves as such, for it develops over time, and to develop means to connect, to knit together, to form associations. Being called upon to develop affects in its turn relatio-

nality and human nature (which is perpetually in process), along with its social character and its historical significance.

Among the historical forms of social synthesis are numbered traditions, privileges, hereditary nobility and of course church and religion. Yet the family, which has found itself in a state of disintegration and re-orientation since the early nineteenth century (and the ultimate liberation of the individual during the establishment of the Enlightenment's new image of humanity), also belongs in this category.

The dialectic of intellectual history draws upon the dichotomy between synthesis and the second System of classification and interpretation — analysis. Here too the translation of the Greek term *ἀνάλυσις* (analysis) into its Latin counterparts gives us an insight into its range of meanings: *resolutio*, and *reductio* — meaning decomposition, dissection, reduction, decrementation and even dissolution.

Whereas synthesis originates from the interaction of soul, mind and disposition, analysis is an instrument of the intellect. It was analysis that generated systematic philosophy, the idea of the system itself, technology, the need for the machine, and also, from the advent of its centuries old triumph onwards, the previously unfamiliar concept of progress.

Yet, though often deliberately overlooked, analysis itself has a necessary foundation in synthesis. The sciences, as a direct product of analysis, are actually fundamentally rooted in presuppositions that cannot be rational. For this reason alone it was possible to make the economy independent of human beings. Its laws became part of nature and set in stone, and humanity became subservient to it for better or for worse. Individualism became a question of property and the

direct relationship between property and property owner in contrast to feudal ownership, which represented a relationship between people and which was therefore synthesis-like. Among other things it also placed the feudal lord under an obligation to care for those individuals subordinate to him. This semantic transformation, better known to us as liberalism, brought with it significant consequences for industrialisation, the destruction of social structures, pauperism, population growth, the creation of belligerent national states, and ultimately the state of the modern world.

Social atomism (and Sartre's individualism) emerged from applying analytical thought to society. It rejected all social organisms on the grounds of their inherent dependencies and with them the rural feudal social system of the eighteenth century. The outcome of this scientific ideology (and its attendant method of atomisation, dissection and decomposition being applied to social life) was the disintegration of legal societies, social classes, guilds and monasteries, whereby individuals and claimholders, material, intellectual and spiritual elements arose to take their place. Schiller concluded that, instead of hastening upward into organic life, society set free was collapsing into its elements.

In contrast to the synthesis-like composition which the mind yields, it is mechanical juxtaposition, (amalgamating by simply placing side by side), and the establishment of conclusions on the basis of subtraction — the true face of analysis — that our contemporary world consists in. Juxtaposition is the only instrument that scientific ideology has at its disposal to place the fruits of its complex scientific apparatus in a relationship to the world. Yet its elucidatory power rela-

tes solely to the particular and cannot be truly illuminating because it contradicts the spirit of analysis. Contrasted with this are principles derived from freedom, creeds, well established institutions and organic structures and entities, which, although often incomprehensible to us today due to their densely interwoven historical significance, nonetheless stand out as points of reference within our plural, confused society because they resist dissection and dissolution.

It is both a paradox and a confirmation of the pre-eminence and value of synthesis, that analysis itself must also be synthesis — that it must have non-verifiable, indissoluble principles at its foundation to avoid dissection and ultimate self-refutation. The belief in the universal knowability principle is a strange dogma illustrating this point.

The current inability to achieve basic or religious synthesis stems from the dominance of scientific ideology. This impotence plunges mankind once liberated from hegemony (and therefore any type of integration) into the depths of materialism. How can the individual forced to perform forty hours of weekly work differ from a machine? Indeed the notion of the mechanical soul came into existence during the nineteenth century for this very reason.

Due to their analytical methods, rationalism, scientism, enlightenment and the exaltation of the self can never offer a conclusive view of the world; this can only be the result of the opposing method. Modern society and the individual believe in the image of mankind established by the Enlightenment, and yet this notion leaves them to reel and pitch, bereft of true orientation in the endless pursuit of true iden-

tity. A world-view is by its nature diametrical to a human centred perspective.

The ideal of the liberated human being and the image of mankind derived from humanism, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, will only then be called into question, when biotechnology has generated the first artificial human being. As the old social order (which favoured the ruling classes and was far from ideal) is long since disintegrated, the freedom of the individual has emerged to take its place. If the individual can be arbitrarily reproduced in a test tube, the individual's freedom to determine the course of his or her life is equally lost. Mankind, enlightened and liberated from its allegedly self-induced state of dependency, is suddenly hurled from the dizzy heights of that enlightened rational freedom into an unimaginable abyss of bondage and senseless dependency.

There seems to be no doubt that the inferior system of classification and interpretation, which is analytical and the expression of the critical intellect, will therefore turn out to represent the greatest threat to western culture. A new Copernican revolution in the interpretation of the world is essential if we are to arrive at a viable paradigm for the future that is capable of shaping culture and identity. Since the philosophers are bound by their analytical and ultimately deconstructivist methods, and academic theology must perforce define itself in scientific terms, who is there to guide us towards a new world understanding?

For now though, we find ourselves in an era of juxtaposition, which, like the internet, places random phenomena side

by side, giving rise to a great variety of detail, but also confusing everything and generating chaos. It is the era of subtraction, of dissection into ever decreasing parts and of disorientation — of the disintegration of associations and structures and that which is connected. Thus work is no longer a humane principle founded on identity; instead it is an encumbrance — it is exploitation and even punishment. Children, life's great blessing, are primarily a financial burden, and whether or not the absence of children is desired, childless couples are censured for indirectly profiting from their decision to remain so. Life, being itself the nucleus of the family whence the next generation emerges, has become a question of entitlement and the redistribution of goods.

Whereas previously one generation was able to bequeath what it had inherited from its parents, the isolated and liberated individual has nothing to pass down. The three-tiered, self-generating family model no longer exists. The middle generation occupied with reproduction can no longer identify its role within the vertical treadmill of history. It thus demands, in the present, compensation for its efforts from unrelated contemporaries instead. The laws of the economy, detached from human beings, prevail within the spirit of freedom but also in an atmosphere of ambitious expectancy and social and spiritual impoverishment.

Present society, clearly disoriented and in search of meaning and moral direction, can only find true orientation in that which is essentially indissoluble, in that which, at the last, evades scientific clarification, and in the process of personal development already referred to as the primordial manifestation of synthesis. The idea of the person and the personal

identity dwelling therein are key notions that have always drawn from both systems of interpretation — analysis and synthesis. Their orientational potential derives from this.

Christianity is just as inconceivable without the wondrous truth of the holy Trinity — that mystical truth of three beings united within one whole — as the Tonic, Stoic and other schools of philosophy without their notions of the person, which provide a shared context for an ideal entity and reason (logos), and thereby attempt to establish the true freedom of human beings. The natural law, which places mankind in a hierarchy of creation, informed the work of Augustinus and later Thomas Aquinas, eventually and inversely influencing humanism and the apotheosis of the self in the Age of Reason.

It is the nature of all great religions, and of religion in general, to explain the world by, referring to human beings. Only with the advent of the Copernican revolution was this relationship overturned in an irreversible process. Family, church, and the idea of personal or communal salvation have therefore become less influential. There have been no cathedrals built since then. Instead, banking establishments have sprung up as centres of industry and capital and symbols of individualisation and mastery over the ostensibly free individual.

For many centuries scholars have consequently occupied themselves with the personal constitution of the individual, which cannot merely consist as an entity or in immanence, as each of us must surely feel, if at no other time than when standing before a gravestone. The apparently irresolvable contradiction between the freedom of the human will and

the omnipotence of God is therefore also a general subject to be found at the heart of attempts to explain the world over the course of the last two thousand years. Closely related to this is the question of the nature of the personal identity that creates the personality and the person, and which relates to God and the world.

Person is that which is always in the process of becoming, that which creates itself. Its qualities are therefore apparently in process. Where the Old Testament tells us that God created mankind according to his own image, then this can be understood not only metaphorically but also substantially: the personal identity issues from itself just as God issues from himself, without an external cause. The essence of the personal is meaning without context, as even contemporary philosophers acknowledge.

It may seem strange, but almost all important thinkers in the history of western ideas have described the person as an independent individual that generates itself through a fundamental act, sometimes by virtue of God, at other times only belonging to itself, and then at times freely answerable to itself in the knowledge of being metaphysically constituted. The notion of the person constitutes the central point of focus where efforts to interpret the world converge.

Consequently, both the philosophy of the Enlightenment and theology concur in acknowledging the special significance of the person (Immanuel Kant argued that one's neighbours should not merely be considered as a means to some other purpose — which would correspond with the spirit of analysis — as they are ends in themselves with their own intrinsic worth). It is a sign of the times that the theologian

Bernhard Welte necessarily reasons that love, as a personal relationship, can only be the opposite of a functional relationship.

Love and personality are deeply human concerns, which is why both of these terms are also central to the process of orientation. One of the greatest accomplishments of synthesis in intellectual history (the beauty and illustrative power of which naturally being inaccessible for contemporary people limited by their rational manner of perception) is the incarnation of the Christian God, representing a legitimate pattern of personal development which corresponds exactly with that of human existence. The fact that the person Jesus Christ, the son of God, was never seen as a miraculous being, but rather as a person in whom, by virtue of God's action, both kinds of nature and love and personal constitution constantly re-combine in one process, indicates that the person, the personal, and the birth and development of such are the indisputable primordial substance of orientation and identity.

In addressing the primordial wisdom of our culture, it should prove illuminating to examine this fundamental knowledge in the light of the development of its central concepts, for language is generally said to preserve this meta-knowledge of a people. This also means that etymology is not simply a scientific sidetrack, but rather a wellspring for history and philosophy.

At the apex of the medieval world-view's ascendancy, characterised by scholastic thought, the political/theological *Zweischwerterlehre* (a doctrine which divided power between

the Pope and the Emperor), the sanctification of all life and the immanent numinosity of life — in the entirety of this world, no word existed in the German language (which had not yet played any formative role in the realms of theology and philosophy) to describe the notion of the person. This signifies the immense power of the medieval paradigm which permeated everyday life and made the word necessary in German that actually had to be borrowed from the Latin. The very loan of the word itself however, also points to the fact that the concept contained therein was borrowed along with it, for if a similar notion had existed, it would surely have found expression in the native tongue. It bears great significance for German history that the influence of Latin and the tradition of the great Greek philosophies absorbed by it was not simply restricted to the adoption of Roman law. The ideas of the period referred to as classical antiquity were directly introduced into and reflected within the thinking of German people via the Latin scholarly language. The loan of the word and concept of the person in the time of Thomas Aquinas represents a milestone in the course of this development.

For a long time it was believed that the idea and the term person might be derived from the Latin term *per-sonare* (to sound through). The temptation was great as it would have pointed to the notion of the person being nationally and metaphysically derived and provided excellent semantic validation for the theological interpretation of the person. However, the Latin *persona* is itself a loan word from the Greek *τό πρόσωπον* (to *pros-ophon*), which only partially contains our modern notion of the person, because the theolo-

gical and philosophical significance of the term were not familiar to the classical world. The meaning of pros-opon first owed its further development to early Christian theology. From the 2nd century onwards sources make reference to the person which is self-creating, and which is one with its role, that is, its self-creation and the relationship to a third person, which is to be established or created by this same self-creating person. Although the term does appear in the Old Testament, it only took effect with the development of early Christian theology. Persona stands in contraposition to nature; Christ is a person, yet through his nature he is also a part of the Trinity. Tertullian speaks of the first, the second, and the third divine person. Thus person confronts substance.

The discovery of the theological potency of the term lead to a profound and dynamic discussion within the ancient church, which was connected with the development of monotheism within the Christian faith. Monotheism represents the overthrow of the classical world, whose metaphysical understanding precluded this idea. The classical world believed that the precedence of the general over the particular would constitute its limitation and finitisation.

Above all, however, pros-opon means face. This meaning is probably the oldest and most original, for the word is a compound. Meaning against,  $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$  (pros) seems to point to the primordial experience of the ego in the world — that the self only recognises itself in comparison with another. It connects with  $\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma$  (opos), which contains both a conditional meaning and expresses that something is in process. Without wishing to force a predetermined interpretation of the word,

the term pros-opon (person/face) seems to be a reflection of the very earliest kind of perception, which must certainly also be of anthropological relevance. The term is based upon the idea of something proceeding towards something else, something in process, and has its basis in an emerging existence, which is part of a causal relationship and which faces up to something else. This core meaning is mirrored in the Latin translation and even in a German parallel term. As late as 1767, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, a widely used schoolbook, translated *persona* not only as face, but also as *ein gemacht Antlitz* (a created countenance). This German parallel formation is then clearly either humanistic, inspired by the Greek original, or an accidental parallel development which is manifest within the expression.

The German parallel term of *Antlitz* (countenance) shows that, just as in the case of its Greek counterpart, the idea of the face is conceived of as relational, its appearance being derived from its relation to something else. Face or pros-opon meant facing towards something, because, like pros, the Common Germanic prefix *ant-* stood for against. The prefix *ant-* (which is otherwise only to be found in the word *Antwort* (answer) within the German vocabulary) is actually, and with regard to our discussion astonishingly, once again directly related to the Greek prefix *anti*. This prefix mirrors once more exactly that relationality, which can be identified in both pros-opon and the German parallel formation of *Antlitz*, as it means in the face of, opposite and lastly, looking towards. The reason for this likeness lies in the common Indo-Germanic root in the form of the substantive *ant-s* (front, forehead, face). Nonetheless, this does not serve to explain the

parallel development of these meanings in two different language areas.

In contrast to the German word *Gesicht* (face), which actually means that which is seen, and of which only the old meaning now endures in the literary phrase *ich hatte ein Gesicht*, (meaning I had a dream), *Antlitz* is almost identical to the Greek notion of *pros-opon* which continued to be developed during the early Christian period. When we also establish that *litz* is the derived form of an obsolete German verb that meant to see or to look (*wlitan* in Old English), and that it is related to to shine (*leuchten*), then it becomes clear that *Antlitz* marvellously expresses the idea of the personal as primordial synthesis, which becomes the person through the countenance and by means of an a-physical and yet substantial act.

An important stage in the development of the meaning of the Latin term was the further differentiation and systematic formulation of the idea of the person by Sanct Thomas Aquinas. He drew a distinction between being or existence (the substance), and the manner or way of being (the person), thereby also separating the divine dimension, and especially the holy orders, from the person they inhabit. The impetus here was the necessity of isolating the incorruptible divinity from the morally fallible, earthly person accommodating it.

Bishop Odo of Bayeux, who claimed that no man might judge him but the Pope, could therefore not be sentenced as a bishop under William the Conqueror. However, as the Earl of Kent he was indeed subject to the jurisdiction of the King and duly received his sentence. There is also an account of a French bishop who lived a clerical life of celibacy and yet, as a baron, could be married at the same time. This distinction

between the office and the person, which derives from canonical law, bore significance for the development of modern political office.

First and foremost, the person was above all an entity with its own free will. A person could therefore not only be a natural person, but also a corporate body acting in accordance with the principles of collective owners, an association, a holy order, a foundation or, in an exceptional legal and theoretical manifestation, even an empire.

The separation of divine calling and person, that is, of office and person, could after all be easily applied to the king, as he received holy orders through his coronation.

If we wish to reinforce the impression that the personal becomes the face, through which its substance, its very nature radiates, then the idea of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation must surely be of interest to us here. It owed its origins to the consolidation of the idea of empire as a corporate transpersonal entity, even though the notion of the corporation in the legal sense was as yet unknown in the Middle Ages. The sacralisation of the idea of empire does not stem from Roman law, but is rather the result of a long development which culminated precisely and not without reason during the golden age of the medieval period, in the thirteenth century. The theological dualism between church and empire did not simply remain a matter of theory, but found expression in some elements of legal culture and symbols of power.

The eternal and flawless *Sacrum Imperium Romanum* acquired its face via the succession of emperors following on from one another. The insignia of the empire played an

important role here, as they were more than mere symbols. In legal terms they were considered to possess material character. The crown jewels are representative of the empire (the German word Reich, means empire or kingdom in a physical and transcendental sense and rich when used in its adjectival form). Indeed, the empire itself is present in them, which is why they could legitimise sovereignty. Considering the fact that the insignia (the crown, the imperial orb, the holy lance, the Stephansbursa [St. Stephan's pouch] etc.) embodied the empire, it becomes manifest that the loss of these insignia must also have meant the loss of sovereignty over the empire.

The sanctity of the empire led to the coronation being performed liturgically, and to the emperor being anointed bishop just before the coronation. The relics contained within the crown jewels established a link between the earthly and heavenly kingdoms.

It is a significant cultural achievement of the Christian Middle Ages, that the idea of empire was formulated as being corporate, transpersonal and holy. The emperor provided the living empire with a body and a countenance. The symbolic and synthesising power of the High Middle Ages could hardly be more impressively illustrated than by the personification of the Holy Roman Empire in the anointed form of the person bearing the imperial insignia. According to sources, the insignia themselves actually were the empire (*daz rîche*).

It is interesting to note here that, during the act of coronation, the empire is not incorporated within the elected person as the crown is lowered to their head, but rather in the mo-

ment following on from this, where the people present (or their representatives) acclaim the crowned one as their ruler. The acclamation was also later incorporated into the coronation liturgy. Two choirs (representing the people) performed the Kaiserlaudes (a canticle in praise of the Emperor), which expressed the theological unification of the Emperor with Christ: *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat*. This was the moment in which the transpersonal *Sacrum Imperium* became personal and visible in the form of the anointed (χριστός, *christos*) and crowned being.

English theorists took the idea of the separation of kingship and person one step further with the theory of the king's two bodies — the physical and the political/metaphysical. The king's one countenance represented what we may refer to as the biological person of the king and the kingdom at the same time. And yet this was far more than merely inspired symbolism. In modern terms we might say that the empire lived a virtual existence, which presented itself within the imperial territory, the institutions of the state, and the nation as a whole. This is why a second body, namely that of the empire, emerged from the physical body of the king during the coronation. The increasing complexity of state structures later led to high-level canonical abstraction. The empire was manifested within the crown, which, on the other hand, was not necessarily one and the same thing as the coronation diadem, but rather revealed itself through it.

The famous portraits of Elizabeth I. are worth consideration here. By her own design, the legendary monarch, under whom the kingdom was united, intentionally made use of her portraits to demonstrate visually the compass of her

realm. Her mask-like face and regalia, which almost topographically depicted the body of territories under her power, dramatically illustrated the glory of the empire in the person of the queen.

Albeit vestigially in the form of the applause of the peers present, the acclamation, as an act of imperial personification, has been preserved in the English coronation ritual. Franz Xaver Winterhalter's monumental painting is on show at Buckingham Palace, where it affords a chronicle of Queen Victoria's coronation. Intuitively, the painter has not, as one might expect, documented the diadem being placed upon her head, choosing instead to record for posterity the moment following on from this, that is, the approval of the peers, brandishing their hats and acclaiming their sovereign queen.

This ancient legitimisation and initiation ritual is also contained within medieval imperial coronation liturgy. There are written accounts as early as the time of Charlemagne's coronation in 800 A.D., which record the Roman people acclaiming the freshly crowned Franconian emperor. And indeed this was done by order of the Pope, who clearly understood the consummatory nature of the ceremonial ritual and its theoretical significance in terms of power.

It constitutes an amazing parallel with the relationship of the essence of the person and its countenance, that the metaphysical empire issuing from the people was conceived of as transpersonal and at the same time as subject, and that the empire was called upon to take shape and be personified through its representative agent. As its nature was expressed through its representative, the embodiment of the empire

was a metaphysical act and the expression of a substance that lay beneath it.

In legal/historical terms it is therefore appropriate to assert that the coronation, which necessarily required the sanction of the people, was an act of personification, and more precisely, of the personification of the community of people, metaphysically embodied in the form of the empire.

The transpersonality of the empire expressed itself in an on-going process of manifestation, without this being legally constitutive, as the foundation-like character of the empire could not be limited to the exercise of the freewill that legitimises the subject. By its very nature a foundation is without temporal end. It can be suspended without actually ceasing to exist. In the fourteenth century the jurist Baldus wrote: The person of the emperor must die, but his emperorship, the office of the emperor, is immortal.

Emperor Franz II laid down the crown of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, in particular in order to avoid it being seized by Napoleon. He spoke thereby of the bonds which until then had bound us to the public body of the German empire.

The empire then, no longer had a representative — no person to personify it. And yet, as a transpersonal creation, it by no means ceased to exist. Whether the empire once again began to flourish under the types of states that prevailed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and whether indeed it was actually expressed in the national bodies or organs of these periods, remains a subject of controversy. Nonetheless, there is much to be said for this: the proclamation of a new empire in 1871, the declaration of legal successors in the various German states, and even the clear association ex-

pressed by the adoption of the term the Third Reich. It is also notable that, in 1947, the allies felt it necessary to declare the dissolution of the State of Prussia, its central government and all of its subordinate authorities. From 1934 onwards Prussia had merely continued to exist as an administrative domain. So at the point of its being dissolved by the allies, it had already ceased to exist 13 years previously. Clearly a belief endured in something that was not visible and yet existed — no doubt this was a belief in the notion of an empire and concomitantly in something transpersonal. Something that is striking in connection with the issue of the *Sacrum Imperium Romanum* enduring in modern forms of rule is the German revival of the one-headed black imperial eagle against a golden background. This ancient and medieval insignia of Roman emperorship and precursor to German emperorship is the heraldic emblem of the German Federal Republic today. However the true vital force of these supra-personal structures is best experienced at Jewel House within the Tower of London. So as to regulate the great numbers of visitors, onlookers must step onto a moving belt which conveys them past the crown jewels without stopping. The unintended symbolism of this profit-enhancing arrangement is marvellous: people come and go, but the empire is everlasting. The medieval notion of empire is a theologically and canonically formulated synthesis of the national community, which becomes metaphysical in the form of the empire and physical person in the form of the monarch. The theology of rule that has influenced western civic culture to this day reflects the central idea behind the notion of the person,

namely the relationship between a perpetual substance and a countenance. By recently commenting that her duty consisted not in doing, but in being, Queen Elizabeth II revealed an understanding of the fact that her sovereignty is founded upon exactly this kind of metaphysical substance.

On the threshold of modernity a reinterpretation of the notion of the person inaugurated a transition in intellectual history. If, in the High Middle Ages, the will of God guided the world and hence also the person, who, as an individual and freely self-determined being was in communion with that incommunicable substance, then, owing to a change of emphasis, a significant departure from this was now apparent: the person now generated substance him or herself, and indeed by virtue of his or her very self-creation. This transformation, which may at first seem marginal, actually constitutes the beginning of the Reformation and the theoretical foundation for the modern individual's sense of entitlement.

For Boëthius (circa 480-524 A.D.), person continued to be *substantia incommunicabilis* (substance which cannot be communicated). One thousand years later Suarez (1548-1619 A.D.) described person as *existentia incommunicabilis*, meaning the incommunicable existence of an intellectual nature which was now separated from that existence.

Rationalism and psychological idealism dealt the last blow and ultimately completely freed the notion of person from the context of its semantic attachment to the universality of existence and the transcendence of the mind. In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason, 1781), Immanuel Kant saw person as being constituted by virtue of

income, dignity, hereditary rank and distinction. Since then, the notion of the person has no longer been and continues not to be pros-opon. It is no longer something called upon to be a means for something else and the face of something, but rather it is an end in itself. This being, existing for itself, must then feel threatened by the universe, in all its power and vastness. According to Kant, the individual counters this by his or her (certainly not rational, but far more synthesis-like) sure knowledge of belonging to a higher world. Little reveals so well the impoverished nature of our modern intellectual perspective as this concept of a human being that, by means of some strangely diffuse sense of a calling, wishes to secure for itself something human from the left-over fragments of the highly analytical reduction of its existence. Otherwise the human being has no choice but to conceive of itself as being socially constructed.

The Greek term pros-opon also specifically refers to the mask of the actor, which loans a voice and a face to something. This idea of the face (in the sense of that which is seen or to be seen), of orientation towards something, of being the surface of something and of coming from something substantial, provides an abiding alternative to the reductionistic image of humankind presented by the Enlightenment, and an eternal wellspring for our understanding of the world.

The dialectic of intellectual historical development is also reflected in other examples of ancient terminology that demonstrate the act of perceiving and reflecting the other, this being the seeing opposite number which allows itself to be recognised. We must perforce refrain here from exploring in depth the etymology of the term loben (to praise), which meta-

physically reflects the process of recognition and thereby of acknowledgement and which is closely related to the metaphysics of the western notion and term of the person. Nor will we be able to consider at length the common root and religious nomenclature of the two terms *denken* and *danken* (think and thank).

In its explanation of the world, the original idea of person and personality, which was elaborated in the early Christian period, represents a magnificent triumph and an acknowledgement of the human need for synthesis. Whereas in Greek, person and countenance were one and the same term, Roman culture, succeeding its Greek precursor and holding it in contempt as weak and feminine, developed its own separate second term for the idea of the face.

The Latin intellect owes its greatest cultural achievements (the systematisation of law, which continues to influence the world today, and the political/military and highly analytical concept of *divide et impera*, among many other things) to its immense ability to subtract, to create systems and leadership — in short, to analyse. Today this masculine culture is reflected within many aspects of American leadership symbolism, and so manages to hold sway over the world two thousand years after its actual ascendancy and decline.

Consequently, it must have been incomprehensible to the Romans that the face should be something personal, in other words something owing its existence to an inseparable substance and could thereby not be actively constructed or produced. And yet these military strategists and the administrative officers who followed them changed the face of the entire world. It is characteristic of the spirit of the Romans

and their ability to establish an architecture of logic (reflected in their language), who facilitated the establishment of canon law and with it the unprecedented creation of a religious world organisation, that the Angesicht (face) was *facies*. Derived from *facio* (I make), this term holds a central message about the rustic nature of their collective Roman soul. Although the original Greek idea is still visible in the infinitive in its accusative form (meaning to portray, to enable, and in the subjunctive form, meaning to bring about), it was the Latin separation of person, personality and its countenance that embarked upon a triumphal conquest throughout the world. In Old French we find *enface* (*façon* etc.), which found its way into the English language in 1290. Consequently the English word *face* is a genuine Latin extraction, which particularly reflects the decisive, analytical nature of Roman culture. The extent to which the *face* was subject to worldly composition (and here the English term is once again demonstrably Latin) is revealed by the meaning that *face* also has, namely reputation or good name. The fact of the *face*'s ability to be constructed and formed within Anglo-Saxon/American culture becomes vividly clear when we call to mind that a good name can be lost at any time. Because of this cultural influence contained within the English usage, a term loaned from the Chinese language in 1876 (*tiu lien* — to lose face) could easily take root and was soon widely used. Only at first glance is it a surprising cultural coincidence that in both Asian and western cultures, the *face* is not only identical with the person, but that the countenance is also, both figuratively and in a deeper sense, seen as the seat and expression of personality and identity. However the mean-

ing documented by the formation of the term probably has a more straightforward anthropological origin.

The impression that, in contrast to the Roman notion, the countenance is not merely a work of artifice that can be produced, but rather exists in a special, dependent relationship to the person, and is perhaps even something like a translucent membrane that allows another substance (no doubt that same incommunicable substance) to shine through, has been conveyed by many famous artistic portraits over the course of time. Mona Lisa's famed physiognomy has unsettled generations because it suggests that the countenance is pros-opon — that it is the face of something. It is most illuminating to note that the painter himself, as a great inventor and humanist thinker, was a driving force behind the spirit of technology, for whom knowledge was primarily founded on visual perception. Da Vinci established a unique correlation between science and painting, and for all we know the portrait of La Gioconda may contain some special clue as to the personal belief system of that universal genius.

Fairly late on, and yet authentically conceived in the deep anthropological rootedness of its etymology, the German national spirit arrived at a morphology that strove to express exactly this translucent (and indeed the religious and holy) nature of the countenance. In the fifteenth century a loan translation of the Latin term *perillustris* (very brilliant, very famous), occurred in German, giving rise to the Middle High German term *durchliuhten* (*durchleuchten*, to shine through). The term *Durchlaucht*, the title for royal personages, made the divine entity beneath the countenance visible and tangi-

ble, clearly acknowledging the essence of the personal and at the same time legitimising the person's rule.

The prevailing medieval world-view disintegrated with the onset of humanism, as the fourteenth century witnessed the concept of the person, or the individual, undergoing a process of re-definition, which overturned that which had gone before. The humanistic founding principle proclaimed the person to be a free being that developed in line with the ideals of antiquity, these being imparted through the study of both classical languages. Humanism was originally conceived upon the premise of self-explanatory perception and thereby the free development of the person. Hence the richness inherent in the respective development of each individual and his/her dignity and inviolability according to the humanistic ideal.

The humanists' exertions had to be of an analytical nature, dismantling the previous holistic world-view, because the orientation towards the values of antiquity placed human beings at the centre of their imaginative cosmos. Although the ancient gods hardly lived a theologically independent existence (to a large extent they mirrored mortal life in a cosmic dimension), the reinstatement of the ancient understanding of the world was a dramatically abrupt departure from the theologically defined concept of the human that prevailed during the Middle Ages. St. Thomas' image of mankind was ultimately pure theology and therefore entirely at variance with the anthropocentricity of antiquity. This rejection of the last great instance of interpretational synthesis within our culture (the holistic world-view of the medi-

eval period) paved the way for modern concepts of humanity, the philosophical power of which would be analytical and not synthesising, rendering them incapable of producing any new meaningful world-view.

Humanism did indeed bring the Middle Ages to a close in terms of intellectual history. Nonetheless, the two conflicting intellectual currents continued to exist alongside one another for a long time, reciprocally and perpetually influencing each other, so that, in the course of the centuries, a great ravel of contradictions ensued. The ruling theology of the Middle Ages, for instance, persisted until the eighteenth century, coinciding with what was actually the age of the Enlightenment. Only with the advent of the decline of the Reichskirche (imperial church) by means of the secularisation that accompanied the Reichsdeputationshauptschluß (Final Resolution of the Imperial Deputation) in 1803 and the destruction of existing European territorial structures under Napoleon, did the truly medieval conception of the empire, and the biblically inspired interplay between church and state, actually come to an end. Kant had long since formulated his famous categorical imperative. Although at precisely this time Bach, in his role as cantor of St. Thomas' Church in Leipzig, was steering the polyphony of the Middle Ages towards its universal zenith, natural law had long since begun to triumph in literature, philosophy and theology.

The epochal delineation which locates the beginning of the modern era and the end of the medieval period in 1500 is, therefore, artificial and even erroneous. Furthermore the diverse media of communication — whether in the fine arts, literature, music, philosophy or theology — often undergo a

transformation in their patterns of interpretation at different times, so that, in most cases, it is entirely impossible to speak of the end of one period being the direct commencement of another. One must regard history as permanent interwovenness in process, where competing models strive to explain the world. From their mutual influence upon one another, and as they almost retrogressively stutter forwards together, a new world-view or Vision of humanity finally emerges to dominate subsequent perceptions.

The breakthrough of the new humanistic interpretative framework in around 1500 was extremely dramatic. Its associated Vision of mankind was so potent that it was able to present a lasting challenge to the Christian world-View which had evolved over and prevailed for more than one and a half thousand years. The idea of liberating mankind from what was seen as the oppression of rule became the central principle of all modern development. It nourished the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Peasant War (and even feudal absolutism), rationalism and science.

If the memory of a people resides within their language, and if language draws its Vitality from the powerful imagery of its terminology, then it is the fine arts which strive forwards and illuminate intellectual movements. Art can indicate currents, even when these are still nascent undercurrents, not yet fully evolved. And ultimately its images can also become impulses themselves, affecting the future and consolidating or altering a nation's self-perception.

Similarly, the humanistic understanding of the world had found expression fairly swiftly in the art of the fifteenth century. This process was accelerated by the fall of Constan-

tinople in 1453 and the flight of Greek artists and scholars away from the conquering Turkish forces. They imported with them into Central European culture the legacy of antiquity which had been thriving in Byzantium. By addressing and processing this impulse, Albrecht Dürer played a key role in the establishment of the humanistic ideal in art. His genius lay in unearthing the original power of the corporeality of the ancient world, a process which resulted from his contact with the works of the North Italian masters, whose compositions strove to emulate the masterpieces of antiquity. The early Renaissance, dominated by the process of shifting from one intellectual movement to the next, finally managed to become established because not only were the ideas of antiquity being reawakened (especially thanks to Dürer's efforts), but their inherent character-forming power was also undergoing resurrection. Albrecht Dürer therefore stands out as an individual who paved the way for modernity, and certainly as a man destined to capture and illustrate the great paradigm shift that occurred around 1500.

His works are classical masterpieces. This is due to the fact that, as with the literature of Goethe and Schiller (and then only between 1795 and 1804), encapsulated in one fleeting historical instance, he depicted with unrelenting veracity a society destined to undergo the tumultuous process of civilization, managing at the same time to express and amalgamate this stark impression with great external and internal beauty. At the height of the dissolution of the medieval conception of the world, Goethe's *Werther* also represents one of the great accomplishments of the Enlightenment for the same reason. *Werther* reflects the same kind of character-

forming power through the vitality of the human image he presents, which is humanistic at its core. It seems to us quite natural that Goethe should have selected a person as his instrument to portray the effects of the Enlightenment and of sensibility in general. The character Werther eventually became an archetype for his times and the character-forming power of this illuminating text (and this dramatically attests to the very real significance of the interpretative framework) cost the lives of a great many young men who committed suicide in emulation of their literary role model.

The most indicative illustration of Dürer's re-orientation towards antiquity are the Roman depictions of Sol, the sun-god. The religiousness of late antiquity was characterised by astral mysticism and a belief in the omnipotence of the sun-god. This influence was so considerable that cults could only thrive if they absorbed elements of solar belief systems. Christ prevailed over Mithras, also (or perhaps precisely) because Christianity assimilated within it well-known features of solar mythology. We need only call to mind the celebration of Christ's birth on the 25th of December.

Christianity triumphed over the invincible sun-god (*sol invictus*) with the double-entity of the sun-god and Christ in one, this being at any rate a just god (*sol iustitiae*). Thus a moral deity proceeded from a cosmological one. Subsequently in art, Sol was often depicted in the form of a lion, the symbol of power, justice and judicial office. There is also a reference in the Old Testament to the judicial office of the sun-god (*Maleachi*), which incidentally stems from the ancient Babylonian cult of Shamash.

The deeply rooted nature of the image of Christ as the Pantocrator (Almighty) and ruler of all may well serve to explain the church's early and lasting interest in the idea of jurisprudence. This interest endured for centuries and it is therefore unsurprising that the portals of churches offered a favoured location for local court sessions in the Middle Ages. The steps of the southern portal of Straßburg's cathedral formed a veritable Gerichtslaube (small courthouse), where one may still encounter the lion metaphor in its statuary.

Dürer went beyond merely reinterpreting the ancient sun-god as Christ. In his portraits he also placed sol invictus in lieu of the Christian Son of God, making reference to him again in his portrayals of Adam. If in antiquity the biblical God had superseded the heathen deity, then, at the time of antiquity's revival, the once vanquished divinity predictably triumphed anew. Dürer's joint depictions of Christ and Sol, which the old master sold and distributed in the form of wood engravings, mark the breakthrough of humanism in art and represent a blow to the closed Christian world-view of the quattrocento.

Dürer's famous self-portrait of 1500 holds special significance in relation to the determination of the humanist conception of the individual. This image is contained within the collection at the Alte Pinakothek museum in Munich and shows the artist with cascading tresses from a front-on perspective. Dürer, a theorist, arranged the proportions of the portrait according to geometric rules of composition based on the pure prototypes of the triangle, the square and the circle. In doing so he was the first person to render human portraiture on the basis of perfect proportion and exact

measurement Not only does he hereby make a staggering claim for the perfection of the individual, he also goes so far as to substitute the human being for Christ, for until that point, the front-on perspective in art had been reserved for likenesses of the living God This in throno perspective was certainly permitted in the portraiture of emperors, but only because, thanks to the medieval theology of rule, rulers themselves were sanctified and therefore christos (the anointed one) or vicarius (representatives) of Christ.

But Dürer even went one significant step further with his portrait, installing not the human being as such, hut rather the self, in place of God Thus Albrecht Dürer's self-portrait already reflects the agenda of the Age of Reason in the eighteenth century, namely the process of placing the individual at the centre of his or her own world via the liberation from all forms of rule and hence accordingly, the claim to rulership itself This was a tremendous development, to which we owe our modern existence, with all its advantages, yet from which Robespierre too drew his justification, the Romantics their despair, and socialism its juxtapositional conception of society. There is though also a deeply tragic connection between this great humanistic accomplishment and the brutal players of the twentieth century via the indirect route of Romanticism and the Romantic notion of Volksgeist (national spirit), which ultimately gave rise to anti- Semitism.

We may view the countenance of Dürer as a symbol for the ascent of the new human ideal and of the incipient demise of the previous world-view — as the last great achievement of synthesis in western history. The new human conscious-

ness finds expression not by placing the human being in context with nature — which, especially for Dürer (who discovered landscape as a subject in his watercolours), would have been a natural approach — but rather in a real awareness of the anthropological significance of the pros-opon through the illustration of the countenance. In Dürer's self-portrait the status of person becomes absolute, the divine becomes the individual, and ultimately the countenance transforms into a site of holiness, elevating the liberated human to holiness along with it. Yet Dürer also achieves this amalgamation of the image of God and the image of the autonomous human being with the help of religion. In terms of its theological import, his self-portrait must be viewed in context with his etching of the sol just iustitiae, for Dürer actually chose to interpret this as inflammatus, according to the words of the Apocalypse, by encircling the face in flames. Sol/Christ is portrayed as the homo ferus ac leoninus of the Apocalypse. In so doing, the artist accomplishes the fusion of the image of God with the world-shattering ambition and expectant nature of the modern human being, and he does not halt at merging mankind with the artistic image of Christ, but goes on to suggest the cosmic attributes of the ruler of all things. In his interpretation of Sol/Christ, Dürer presents the human being as ruling person and as judge of the world, with the symbols of the scales of justice, the sword and the lion. The lion is a biblical reference which would have been clearly decipherable for his contemporaries and displays Dürer's reverence for religion. Through the early Renaissance and the feat of its artistic back-referencing to antiquity, religion becomes the

stepping stone for the new paradigm. The individual is now (according to Dürer's humanistic interpretation of the biblical passage) a leonine being, sol iustitiae itself, arbiter of the world and thus Sol/Christ and God.

In order to understand the impact of Albrecht Dürer's self-portrait and its powerful proclamation of the new Vision of humanity and universal ascendancy of the individual, we may take a moment to consider something which we might say presents a visual medieval alternative to this, reflecting in its profundity the entire scope of the Christian, medieval world-view and still possessing the power to amaze the unsuspecting onlooker: the shroud of Turin.

The shroud is not a work of art or picture of something, but far more a direct manifestation. The countenance itself becomes Visible as a visor of the personal. When, in a great act of self-negation, the personality reveals a third constituent entity, the *substantia incommunicabilis*, then it becomes a consummate person. The countenance becomes meaning, and indeed, becomes meaning free of context. It demonstrates the absolute identity of an existence that responds and is responsible, revealing an object which the intelligible, mechanistic philosophies of the present day cannot access. It demonstrates the character of the human being.

The features of the shroud would doubtless not be fascinating, if it were not for the fact that the countenance appears to be such an absolute location of personality. It is evident proof that the deconstructualists of the twentieth century must be wrong when, like Levinas, they describe the countenance as being other, as naked, and even as a plea to

be spared death. This interpretation signifies that intellectual analysis cannot go beyond itself, and that it can merely divide its own structures into other structures, never arriving at an absolute justification. It is both the merit and the limitation of analytical thought, that it subtracts, and can therefore never come up with a solution which exceeds the components of the question.

The countenance however, is undoubtedly the self, the I, which owes itself to a third entity that shines through it. We might call this its spirit. And the I has a share in this third entity. The third entity resides within the I and the I is consequently also the third entity. And this accounts for the imperative behind thou shalt not kill (me), which is not without reason one of the ten commandments. It accounts for the holiness of the face and its aura. It may also serve to explain the unsettling experience which overcomes the unprepared observer of the shroud of Turin, regardless of whether he or she sees the features of Christ or those of another person becoming one with itself.

The belief in revelation is of a mythological rather than an anthropological nature. Thus it could be called into question by the anthropology of Logos, by humanism and the philosophy of reason etc. Western culture can now only progress if, moving beyond anthropological conceptions of reality, it arrives at the acceptance of a valid first principle and a revelation. Just as the Enlightenment and rationalism could not exist without a first, that is, a non-rational founding principle, the enigma of the world remains present within the mystery of the personal, which is anthropological and

declarational, being namely face, that which sees, that which is seen — countenance.

If life and society are to bear humane character, then the understanding of the world must do justice to the needs of the human constitution. And because this constitution incorporates both principles within itself — the analytical nature of the material and physical and the synthesis-like and bridge-building nature of the spiritual, a conception of the world can only be connective and meaningful, and therefore it must be religious.

This conception of the world can no longer lie within the world, nor in a metaphysical god, nor outside the individual, because, paradoxically, humanism has convincingly established the individual's primacy over nature and the world. Now that science has given us everything and taken everything away from us again, this new world-view can only be founded on the personal constitution of the exalted individual, as this is the only remaining place that ethics, the acceptance of the other and responsibility can be located.

It will be of key significance here that the human being is a being in process, not yet possessed of its nature. As it must first discover and unfold its identity, it can also err and stray towards inhumanity. Its liberty is predicated upon this.

Yet this also explains the fact that the human being cannot determine its nature by itself, as psychoanalysis confirms. If Descartes taught that the intellect cannot create anything greater than itself, it follows that individuals must look for their origin and consequently their identity outside themselves. And when the structuralist philosophy of Heidegger and his like recognises the architectural elements of huma-

nity, but leaves its composition, the fact of its being called upon and with it the very form of the human being unexplained, then this is indicative of modern enlightened philosophy's fear of the voice behind the countenance. For the human being becomes the person when he or she responds, thus developing within a relationship of mutual responsibility.

It is surely just a question of time before the philosophers begin to probe beyond the horizon of their aesthetic constructions so that they may partake of that incommunicable spiritual substance. It will pose a challenge for the proponents of the scientific methods to accomplish this step by analytical means, relinquishing hereby Immanuel Kant's ideological smokescreen, which sought to justify the inevitable recourse to axiom, first principle or religion as being a necessary construction of reason. The inexpressible beauty of great works of art does not only stem from the masterful fusion of the ideal with transient reality. The finest artefacts appear to us as if they were actually representing something out of sight, or referring back to something, and as if they were truly inspired and ignited by something. And after all, enthusiasm — as the ancients who invented analysis had long known — always comes from God (*εν θεός*, *en theos*).

It is above all literature that is called upon to reflect the whole in detail, to render it biographically where appropriate, to give it a face, and to hopefully help us understand how somebody before us responded to their calling in life and which solutions they arrived at for themselves. Especially at a time in which we believe we can explain the universe but

the mysteries of personality, love and destiny remain beyond our grasp, the biography is gaining great significance. All at the same time the biography demands a great deal in terms of a writer's artistic ability, an awareness of the human or personal condition, an understanding of the prevailing conditions of the period in question, and a capacity for self-restraint, self-negation and humility.

Here the approach of the writer intent on gaining true understanding far outweighs scientific, analytical methods. For can we really produce an illuminating picture of the substance of a life lived by using mere facts and quotations? Is it remotely possible to accurately document or explain an existence by historical/critical, that is, analytical means? Not to mention the difficulty of illuminating the personal or the nascent person in process. Writers on the other hand, can adopt the perspective of the subject. They can (the nucleus of truth perhaps lying dormant and awaiting discovery, or standing behind the words that articulate it) truly understand (in German *verstehen*, with *stehen* also meaning to stand) the subject because their standpoint proceeds empathetically from one person towards another and they can engage personally with their subject. It is the skill of a talented artist which produces a likeness in this resounding manner — a likeness which is a face and which brings that individually experienced metaphysical substance to light.

The personal remains that which is constantly called upon — it seeks, decides, and is answerable. In answer to the renewed call for a paradigm which can explain the world it offers a language which is primordial and pre-conceptual,

and with which we can ultimately devise our own absolute response. Icons are the recognised expression of the mystical world understanding of ancient times. Yet in today's world, with the supreme ascent of the enlightened scientific/analytical image of humanity, symbolic images and mystical worship no longer suffice. Identity can now only become visible and acceptable through the individuality of the personal. Only when the incommunicable substance of a person surfaces by means of the personality can it be comprehensible to us today. And it is this substance alone that can still admit of meaning. As the *substantia incommunicabilis* is metaphysical and thus originates in all persons, it is this which determines names for things and therewith reality. It is this same substance that allows the world to be understood. Let us recall to mind once more that shroud, which, in direct contrast to the icons of the Middle Ages, shows a real person. This person is recognisably one with his incommunicable substance, which is why his features reveal exactly that purest reality.

So it is that meaning without context illuminates the darkness time and again in our godforsaken world. Conviction becomes visible. It becomes the face and thus concrete and ethical. It is surely the greatest wonder of our modern world that the human being, after all, remains that which is actually also expressed by the Greek term *pros-opon* — mask, namely the mask of that incommunicable substance, or, if I may venture to express a conviction, the mask of the countenance of God.