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THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAN OF ERNST CASSIRER

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Dedicated to all who, since time immemorial, have embarked the quest to help man discover who he is and what he can achieve to improve his lot in this universe and beyond.

I wish to thank all my colleagues, friends and relatives.

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INTRODUCTION

What is man? The answers to this question throughout history have been varied. But, although varied, we can generally categorize these answers to the question on the nature of man into four: idealism which prefers to define man by his reason alone; materialism which only considers the physical dimensions of man; dualism which clearly affirms the spiritual dimension of man but there is no integration with the body; and the last one is the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition which recognizes the spiritual and physical dimensions of man as essentially united with one another and thus exert influence on one another in their operations or functions. This Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition makes us understand that man is not reason alone, that man is not body alone, that man is not two entities with the mind having mental attributes and the body having physical attributes, but rather man is a unity of the mind and body. But, without "diminishing" the role of the physical or sensible dimensions of man, it is his reason that leads or guides him to the accomplishment of his goals. That is why man is called a rational animal.

Without invalidating this Aristotelian- Thomistic traditional definition of man as a rational animal, Ernst Cassirer proposes another way of understanding man in the attempt of specifically differentiating man from the animals and the rest of the living creatures. He "looks at man from outside" and takes into consideration what he has gathered as accomplishments of man through out the history of mankind. He also takes a "look at man from within" and considers the existence of the "I" which is inseparable from human activity. But for Ernst Cassirer, it seems that there is more than attributing our human accomplishments and interpreting our human knowledge and human experience to being rational. Cassirer tries to explore the other dimension or aspect of being human which can explain all those things achieved and to be achieved by man. This other dimension of the capacity of the mind to understand and construct meaning will try to explain what we have in culture as practices and products that make up the human world. In sum, what we are and what we can be is "explainable" by this symbolic capacity of man.

The question what difference does it make when we define man as a symbolic animal might perhaps be one of the questions that one can ask. By defining man as symbolic animal, Cassirer appears trying to overcome the notion which venerates too much reason in defining man on the one hand and the notion that limits man to material considerations on the other. As difficult as it is to understand, Cassirer's view of man, however, seems to offer us an alternative to an abstract philosophical definitions of human nature and to an exclusively empirical and physical study of such nature. In spite of all this, we are apprehensive with this view. This is understandable because this way of seeing the nature of man seemingly remains to be too abstract in origin and at the same time because of its ambiguities as to whether it has a good grounding in what is real.

So, does this way of understanding man merit our attention? The investigation into "what is man" in the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer is significant and relevant in the sense that everyday in man's life he makes use of symbols in order to express that "which he finds to be expressed" and to find "meaning in what he experiences and in what he wants to be."

Through this humble research, it is my hope that I can clarify and point out in a certain way that this different way of seeing man as introduced by Cassirer assists us in understanding certain problems of today, whether concerning man himself or his knowledge about reality and beyond. It is also my hope that this study helps affirm and vindicate our ability to resolve human problems by the courageous use of our minds in association and integration of various elements of human living.

Furthermore, as this present work studies the philosophy of man of Ernst Cassirer who tries to offer a concept of man which revolves around the symbolic capacity of man, the discussion and the investigation of the content of this view leads us to understand how we understand reality and construct meaning based on that reality understood through symbolic forms.

The perception of reality by man as a symbolic animal is very interesting to investigate. Thus, we can formulate three basic questions to answer in order to arrive at this task of understanding Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of man:

1) What is the foundation of the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer?

2) How does Cassirer understand and use the concept symbol that results in the notion "symbolic form"?

3) What does the nature of man as symbolic animal presuppose and imply?

Truly, Ernst Cassirer is known for his original contribution to Philosophy of Ideas and Philosophy of Culture. The present study limits itself to the presuppositions and implications of Cassirer's philosophical understanding of the nature of man which is implied in his work *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923 – 1929) and which is later elaborated in his work a year before his death *An Essay of Man* (1944). I am mostly interested in the area of the state of knowledge in this definition of man as a symbolic animal.

Thus, the first chapter will deal with Cassirer's biographical sketch and the development of his philosophy. This will explain the background and the basic foundation of his philosophy and its proper place in the history of philosophy. The second chapter will focus on the nature of symbols and meaning of the philosophy of symbolic forms. This will explain the concept of symbol and the nature of the symbolic form and how is reality being perceived through this way. The third chapter will dwell on Cassirer's definition of man. This chapter will present the idea of Cassirer on man as symbolic animal, the presuppositions of such definition, its place and difference from classical anthropology. The fourth chapter will deal with the critical evaluation of the philosophy of man of Ernst Cassirer and its place in today's discussion of such field of discipline by identifying its positive contribution to our understanding of man holistically. The conclusion will try to summarize Cassirer's presuppositions and evaluate the importance and values and implications of his thoughts in our continuous search for understanding better ourselves and the knowledge of the things that surround us.

From the problem we have stated, we will proceed to seek answers and possible insights through careful analysis of the sources available to the researcher, considering the fact that Ernst Cassirer wrote in his original tongue and he had his own personal style in presenting his thoughts. The gathered sources will be validated where possible and

complemented with the findings and insights of other authors. Conclusions and implications will be drawn from the synthesis of the gathered data.

In particular, the manner I proceed in this study is this: I will present Cassirer's thoughts, dissecting them as careful as I should and if I will ever give an immediate critic to what he says, I will do it in a reasoned and balanced way, without destroying what he intends to mean. Throughout the body of this work, there will be now and then some immediate evaluation as the situation deems it necessary and appropriate.

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ERNST CASSIRER

1. A BRIEF SKETCH OF ERNST CASSIRER'S LIFE

Ernst Cassirer was born into a family of Jewish heritage on July 28, 1874 in the German city of Breslau, Silesia (now Wroclaw, Poland). In October 1880, Cassirer entered the Johannes-Gymnasium in Breslau and graduated in the spring of 1892 with the highest honors. On the insistence of his father, he studied law at the University of Berlin in 1892. But, not long after, his interests led him to the study of German literature, history, art, and very soon to philosophy.

In these first few years, Cassirer moved from one university to another: from Berlin to Leipzig and then to Heidelberg, and then back to Berlin. Along the way, he met and studied under these prominent and progressive professors: Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, and Wilhelm Max Wundt. But it was Georg Simmel who introduced Cassirer to the work of Hermann Cohen, the leader of Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism. After spending two intensive years of studying the work of Cohen on Kant, Cassirer went to the University of Marburg in 1896, where he studied philosophy, mathematics, biology, and physics. There he became one of the best students and close friends of Cohen.

At the age of 24, on July 14, 1899, Cassirer successfully defended his doctoral dissertation, "Descartes' Critique of Mathematical and Natural Scientific Knowledge"[1] at the University of Marburg, with the unusual highest grade. The whole work was later published in 1902 as "Leibniz's System in *Seinem Wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*".[2]

It was during this period that Cassirer, while attending the wedding of his close relative in Berlin, met her cousin Toni Bondy, daughter of Otto Bondy and Julie Cassirer,

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[1] The original work's title was *Descartes' Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis*, Marburg, 1899.

[2] Cassirer, E., *Leibniz's System in Seinem Wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*, Marburg, Germany: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1902.

from Vienna. A year later, they were married in Vienna. They lived for a while in Munich with the first of their three children and then moved to Berlin.

With the affluence of Cassirer's parents and relatives, Ernst Cassirer could find all the time to devote himself to the study of philosophy. He decided to live in Berlin not only because most of his influential relatives and friends lived there but also because it was one of the cultural and intellectual centers of Europe.[3] In addition to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Berlin, Cassirer preferred this city because of the excellent state and university libraries which were easily accessible to him anytime for his research.

Starting this period in Berlin, Cassirer produced some of his major works. We can mention here the first two volumes of the four volume work on *The Problem of Knowledge in Philosophy and Science in the Modern Age (*1906-1907).[4] These works are very significant and important in the history of epistemology. His mentor, Herman Cohen, encouraged Cassirer to embark upon an academic career, which in the beginning he showed little interest because of the anti-Semitism already prevalent at that time. When Cassirer finally applied in 1906 to be a *Privatdozent* at the University of Berlin, Wilhelm Dilthey defended Cassirer in his public lecture as he was relentlessly and dogmatically attacked by Cohen's rivals Stumpf and Riehl.[5] With this successful public lecture, Cassirer received the *venia legendi* and became a *Privatdozent* at the University of Berlin, a position he held for thirteen years.

Cassirer's international reputation at this time was growing after having won the *Kuno Fischer Gold Medal* from the Heidelberg Academy for his work *Das*

[3] Through his family and friends living in Berlin, Ernst Cassirer was able to enter into the different worlds of arts, music, literature, science, politics, and even economics. His uncle, Max Cassirer was a well to do and influential businessmen; his cousins, Richard Cassirer (1868-1925) and Kurt Goldstein (1878-1965) were famous neurologists; Fritz Cassirer (1871-1926) was a well known composer; Bruno Cassirer (1872-1941) ran a publishing house for art and literature and published Cassirer's ten volume edition of Kant; Paul Cassirer (1871-1926) was an art dealer who introduced impressionism in Germany. It was in this context, immersed in all the different forms of culture, that Ernst Cassirer developed his philosophy.

[4] The original edition's title: *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* published by his cousin Bruno Cassirer in 1906, revised 2nd edition in 1907; 3rd edition 1922; reprinted in 1971 and 1974.

[5] Dilthey is reported to have risen during the discussion and said: "I would not like to be a man of whom posterity will say that he rejected Cassirer". Cf. Gawronsky, D., "Ernst Cassirer: His Life and His Work, in the Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer", in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp, Evanston, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1949, p.17.

Erkenntnisproblem. In fact, he received an invitation from Harvard University to be a visiting professor in 1914. However, he declined the invitation because he would not like to be far from his family, and most of all he would like to continue his philosophical research.

The two newly created universities in Frankfurt and Hamburg after World War I dashed into getting Cassirer in order, without doubt, to immediately establish themselves and to make a name in the whole of Germany. However, the heart of the Ernst Cassirer fell on the University of Hamburg where he became not only an ordinary professor of philosophy but also the chair of the department of philosophy in 1919. There he found himself more comfortable because of the serene atmosphere of the place good for continuing introspection and practical research on his project of the philosophy of symbolic forms which was already conceptually well advanced before coming in Hamburg. There he found the *Warburg Library for the Cultural Sciences* where materials on art, myth, language and all concrete historical work of spirit were ordered and classified systematically according to the same internal logic of cultural forms that he was developing.

In his stay in Hamburg, Cassirer met also important personalities who might either be influenced by him or make impressions upon his subsequent works. There was Erwin Panofsky, the art historian, who was influenced by the lecture of Cassirer in 1924. The psychologists William Stern and Heinz Werner were pointed out in his writings this period of time. It is also during this period that Cassirer would attend the lectures of the biologist Jacob Uexkull from whose theory of organic forms Cassirer would later draw a clear parallel of his theory of symbolic forms.

The conducive atmosphere of Hamburg and the richness of resources of Warburg library made Cassirer highly productive this period. Just in the first two years, Cassirer was able to publish the third volume *The Problem of Knowledge* (1920), *Eisntein's Theory of Relativity* (1921) and *The Individual and Cosmos in the Philosophy of Renaissance* (1927). It was also within this period that Cassirer was able to publish the three volumes, one after another, of his *magnum opus, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.*[6]

[6] Cassirer, E., *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Berlin, Germany: Bruno Cassirer, 1923; the second volume was published in 1925, the third volume was written in 1927 but only published in 1929. The English

The famous *Davos* debate between Cassirer and young Martin Heidegger took place in 1929.[7] This meeting between Cassirer and Heidegger was part of their participation in the Second Davos University Courses of March 17 – April 16, 1929 wherein the major issue of the conference was the opposition between the views of Heidegger and Cassirer over *Dasein* and over the possibilities and meaning of human freedom. After that debate, Cassirer was elected Rector of the University of Hamburg which a year before almost lost Cassirer to the University of Frankfurt which tried to lure him away from Hamburg. The election of Cassirer as the first Jewish Rector of a German university clearly shows the high esteem the university held for Cassirer, considering the political and social climate at that time. Despite his heavy responsibilities as Rector, Cassirer was still able to work and publish the following: *The Philosophy of Enlightenment* (1931), *The Case of Jacques Rousseau* (1932) , and *The Platonic Rennaisance in England* (1932).

Unfortunately in 1933, when Adolf Hitler rose to power as the Chancellor of Germany, Cassirer resigned from his post and left Germany in haste with his family like what the rest of the German intellectuals of Jewish descent did. He then accepted a post as a professor in Oxford University in England where he learned amazingly fast the English language which is the only medium of instruction in the university.

After two years at Oxford, Cassirer went to the University of Goteborg in Sweden where he stayed for six years (1935- 1941) as a professor and where he worked harder than he had before, producing four monographs on the theory of relativity applied now to the concepts of quantum mechanics.[8] He then mastered the Swedish language and wrote a work

translation of this work: *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 vols., trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven, Conn.: Yale-University Press, 1953-1957. Hereinafter cited as *PSF*.

[7]In the words of Dennis Coskun, the Davos-debate between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger in 1929 has proved a landmark in the history of twentieth century philosophy. The debate not only influenced, although in implicit ways, legal and political theory but also at various levels of discourse, philosophical, moral, and that of legal and political philosophy. This is an account of an imaginary encounter between two traditions, so that the clash of their opposing forces may shed sparks on a dark era in Western philosophical history. The conclusion sums up the lessons or wisdom to be learned for political and legal theory. Cf. D. Coskun, "Cassirer in Davos. An Intermezzo on Magic Mountain (1929)", in *Law and Critique* 17 (2006) : 1-26.

[8] I am referring here to his work entitled *Determinismus und Indeterminismus in der modernen Physik. Historische und systematische Studien zum Kausalproblem*, Goteborgs Hogskolas Arsskrift,1936. The English

on the Swedish Philosopher Alex Hagerstrom (1939)[9] and another work on Descartes's influence on the 17th century and on the Swedish Queen Christine (1939).[10] In 1939, he became a Swedish citizen which would require him by Swedish law to retire the following year from teaching. But before formally retiring, Cassirer took advantage of the winter term to lecture on Goethe.

With the advancement of the German forces in Central Europe in the summer of 1940, Cassirer and his family again were anxious about the situation. So, he and his family left Sweden on May 20, 1941 and took the ship *Remarren* destined to New York. He accepted the invitation of the chairman of the department of philosophy of Yale Charles Hendel, to come as a visiting professor. Cassirer's original intention was to teach in Yale University for only two years and then return to Sweden, but the entry of the United States into World War II changed his mind. At the end of two years, he was unable to go back to Sweden because of the war. He then agreed willingly to extend his contract with Yale University for another year. Despite his age and being in yet another country, Cassirer remained active and productive. Teaching and participating in seminars, he still found time to publish numerous articles and wrote two books, namely: *Essay on Man* (1944) and *The Myth of the State* (1946). Unable to extend his contract for another year in Yale, he accepted the invitation to teach at the Columbia University for a year. He intended to go west after Columbia University to the University of California in Los Angeles. But the "odyssey" suddenly came to a definite halt when Ernst Cassirer died of a heart attack on his way to the Columbia University Faculty Chess Club in the morning of April 13, 1945.

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version of this: *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics: Historical and Systematic Studies of the Problem of Causality*, trans. O.T. Benfrey, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1956.

[9] The original version of this work: *Axel Hägerström. Eine Studie zur Schwedischen Philosophie der Gegenwart*. Göteborgs Högskolas Arsskrift, 1939.

[10] This is the title of the work: *Descartes. Lehre Persönlichkeit Wirkung*, Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1939.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS PHILOSOPHY

When Ernst Cassirer died in 1945, he left volumes of published and unpublished works. Through the recent interests in his works in the last decade, it was known that Ernst Cassirer published more than 125 books and articles in a period of nearly fifty-years, including several items that appeared posthumously.[11] These works comprise 11,380 pages, not including Cassirer's unpublished papers- more pages than the Prussian edition of Kant's collected works. The works of Ernst Cassirer may be divided into five sections. But the divisions that we make here should not be regarded as sharp divisions of his thought. The reason for this is that Cassirer move backed and forth throughout his career between so many subjects. Thus, the divisions are to be considered as general positions from which most of the various threads of Cassirer's thought can be grasped.

The dissertation of Cassirer in 1899 was on Descartes under the supervision of Hermann Cohen who had founded the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism about 1870. The neo-Kantianism movement sprang up in the last half of the nineteenth century as a response to the challenge of Hegelianism regarding its attempts to grasp all of human knowledge in one swoop, in a total system developed from the top down which results in having the specific bases of the individual fields of knowledge not sufficiently examined.[12] The method of critical philosophy was thought to have been abandoned easily by Hegelianism.

The roots of this return to Kant can easily be traced in the works of Herman von Helmholtz, Friedrich Albert Lange, Eduard Zeller, and Otto Liebmann. This Neo-Kantianism has two tendencies: the emphasis on epistemology of the natural sciences as shown in Marburg school of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp and the emphasis on the logical problems of history and the cultural sciences as exhibited in the Southwest (Baden) school of Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert.

Cohen, who was nominated professor of philosophy in the university of Marburg in 1876, concerned himself with both the exegesis and the development of Kant's thought. In wider sense, his principal theme is the unity of cultural consciousness and its evolution and

[11]Cf. Cassirer, E.,*Symbol, Myth and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernt Cassirer, 1935-1945,* ed. Donald Phillip Verene, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 63-42. Hereinafter cited as *SMC.*
[12] Cf. Copleston, F., *A History of Philosophy,* Vol. 7, New York: Doubleday, 1985, pp. 361-373.

whether he is writing on logic, ethics, aesthetics, and religion, it is noticeable that he is constantly referring to the historical development of the ideas which he is treating and to their cultural significance at different stages of their development. Natorp, who also occupied a chair a Marburg, was also strongly influenced by Cohen. In his *Philosophical Foundations of Exact Sciences* (1910), he tries to show that the logical development of mathematics does not require any recourse to intuition of space and time. Both Cohen and Natorp endeavored to overcome the dichotomy between thought and being which seemed to be implied by the Kantian theory of the thing-in-itself. Thus, Natorp held that both being and thought exist and have meaning only in their constant mutual relations to one another.[13]

Regarding the various forms of the Neo-Kantian Movement, Cassirer said in his article "Neo-Kantianism" for the fourteenth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* that there is a certain methodical principle common to all of them despite their differences in the sense that they all see philosophy not merely as a personal conviction or individual view of the world, but rather they inquire into the possibility of philosophy as a science with the intention of formulating its conditions. Cassirer further said that Hermann Cohen's work on Kant brought one single systematic idea into the center of investigation, and this idea is that of the 'transcendental method.'[14] This 'transcendental method' is Kant's philosophical method which is sometimes called critical method.[15] This consists in reflection about the subjective conditions of the knowledge of the objects, which conditions constitute the very principles of the structure of the objects themselves. If Descartes had set the question of method in the foreground, for Kant critical philosophy comes to be identified with its method. In fact, he considers the *Critique* to be a treatise on method, which must penetrate very deeply into the nature of reasoning, because reasoning has its object only pure thought. One is no longer trying to think about things, about itself: the key to philosophical problems is found in reason knowing itself.

[13] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 363.
[14] Cf. Cassirer, E., "Neo-Kantinaism", in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ed. L. Garvin, Vol. 10, 14th edition., New York: Cox Publisher, 1929, p.213.
[15] Cf. Copleston, F., *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p. 232.

Going back to Cassirer's article mentioned above, that thought is clearly originated in the perspective of the neo-Kantian position. It is then notable in most textbooks and explanations of twentieth century philosophy, Cassirer's philosophy is commonly classified as neo-Kantian. However, Cassirer pointed out that, although his philosophy started at Marburg, the understanding of it should not end there as he explained in the preface of his work in 1936, *Determinism and Indeterminsm in Modern Physics.*[16]

In as much as he explained the direction of his philosophy, Cassirer nevertheless could not deny his origins which are clearly in the Marburg tradition. His choice of using the term "critique" in the title of his dissertation and his interpretations of Descartes and Leibniz are very revealing of his desire of using critical philosophy in the understanding of the problems of modern philosophy. Not simply as formulators of rational metaphysics, Descartes and Leibniz are seen by Cassirer as fundamental sources for the approach to knowledge of critical philosophy.[17]

The first two volumes of his work *The Problem of Knowledge in Philosophy and Science in the Modern Age* came out in circulation in 1906-07 as he did the editing of Leibniz' works. Cassirer studied here how the problem of knowledge developed from the thoughts of Nicholas of Cusa to the critical philosophy of Kant. This problem of knowledge, seen as the central problem of modern philosophy, culminates in the stage of *Erkenntniskritik* . The understanding of this culmination lies in the comprehension of the interconnections between the conceptions of knowledge within the development of the modern philosophy and those present in the rise of modern science.

What came to follow these enormous work of learning and scholarship would be the third and fourth volume on the problem of knowledge. Published in 1920, this third volume was a full treatment of the philosophy of Hegel, and this has an influence in the publication in 1929 of Cassirer's third volume of his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* which uses

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[16] Cassirer, E., *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics: Historical and Systematic Studies of the Problem of Causality*, cit., pp. xxiii-xxiv. Also cf. p.132 of this same work wherein Cassirer writes: "my bond with the founders of the Marburg school is not loosened and my debt of thanks with regards to them is not diminished, if it follows from the following investigations that…I have arrived at substantially different results".
[17] Bayer, T.I., *Cassirer's Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms: A Philosophical Commentary*, New Haven, Con.: Yale University Press, 2001, p.12.

Hegel as the source of the phenomenology of knowledge. The fourth volume on the problem of knowledge, written in Sweden in 1940, studied the developments since Hegel up to 1932 and with treatments on the areas of biology and history.

But it is very important to mention here that in 1910, two years after the appearance of the second volume on the problem of knowledge, *Cassirer's Substance and Function*[18] was published. With the subtitle "Investigations Concerning the Fundamental Questions of the Critique of Knowledge", this philosophical work of Cassirer talked about more than philosophy of science. Cassirer here wants to replace the classical Aristotelian "substantialistic conception" of concept by one based on the functional relations of modern mathematics. This model of the functional concept becomes the master key to understand Cassirer's later conceptions of symbol itself and to his sense of a system of symbolic forms in which the whole culture is ordered in terms of its own set of functional relations, harmoniously grasped and portrayed by philosophy. There was no clear expression here of the concept of the system of symbolic forms and even symbolic form itself. But when Hermann Cohen read this work of Cassirer, he realized that Cassirer began setting himself in a new direction and thus began departing from the Marburg neo-Kantian epistemology.

With this work, Cassirer then had laid the groundwork for taking the 'transcendental method' further than the elucidation of the principles of cognition and scientific thought to which Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism was tied.

The conception of the entire philosophy of the symbolic forms started just like being flashed into Cassirer's mind in 1917 as Cassirer took a train in Berlin.[19] His *magnum opus* was finally realized in the University of Hamburg and in the Warburg Library.

The term 'symbolic form' is Cassirer's own.[20] His initial definition of it - as having as an internal structure a bond between a universal meaning and the particular sensory sign

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[18] Cassirer, E., *Substance and Function and Einstein Theory of Relativity*, trans. William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey, Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003.

[19] Cf. Gawronsky, D., "Ernst Cassirer: His Life and His Work," in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, cit., p.25.

[20] Donald Phillip Verene wrote in the introduction of the work of Thora Ilin Bayer entitled *Cassirer's Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms: A Philosphical Commentary* (2001) that Cassirer's initial definition of symbolic form appeared in the essay published in one of the publications of the Warburg Library ("Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften," in *Wessen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs*,

in which the meaning inheres - can be put side by side with the two elements of the functional concept (the principle of order of a series and the particular that is ordered by it) in *Substance and Function* and with the idea of 'symbolic pregnance' in the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.* But the term "symbolic form", which is the central characteristic of his philosophy, has twofold source: one from the Hegelian aesthetics of Friedrich Theodor Vischer from his essay "Das Symbol" which appeared in a Festschrift for Eduard Zeller in 1887.[21] In this essay, Vischer uses the term *Symbolbegriff* and similar formulations, but never does he precisely use *die symbolische Form.* The other source was from the field of science Heinrich Hertz. In presenting the concept of his philosophy of symbolic forms in the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923), Cassirer says that mathematicians and physicists were first to gain a clear awareness of this symbolic character of their basic implements. This new ideal of knowledge to which this whole development points was brilliantly formulated by Hertz in the introduction to his *Principles of Mechanics*.[22] Hertz understood that scientists do not grasp the object of their investigation in its immediacy but grasp the world by means of the system of their symbols.

With his highest respect for Cohen, Cassirer never abandoned totally the central principle that Marburg school took from Kant, the 'transcendental method'. In fact, in his general introduction in the first volume of *The Philosophy of the Symbolic Forms* he states that in the philosophy of the symbolic forms "the critique of reason becomes the critique of culture."[23] For Cassirer, Kant has deduced the form of science, ethical life, aesthetics, and organic natural forms through the transcendental method. Through the medium of the symbol Cassirer would like to extend this approach to include myth, religion, art, language for the purpose of showing that these are forms of knowledge although traditionally noncognitive forms using symbols in different but fundamentally related ways. In his latter

Oxford: Bruno Cassirer; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956, p.175). Cf. Bayer, T.I., *op.cit*., p. 16.

[21]Vischer, F.T., "Das Symbol", in *Philosophische Aufsatze:Eduard Zeller, zu seinem funfzigjahrigen Doctor-Jubilaum gewidmet*, Leipzeg: Fues's Verlag, 1887, pp. 169-173, 192-193.

[22] Cf. *PSF I*, p.75.

[23] *PSF I*, p.80.

works, he added history[24] to his original list of symbolic forms and mentioned of the possibility of various symbolic forms of social life: economics, technology, ethics, and law.[25] However, he never discussed such possibility.

Cassirer's works *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932), *The Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927) *and the Platonic Renaissance in England* (1927) would constitute the "phenomenology of the philosophic spirit."[26] In explaining this, Cassirer argues that philosophy is certainly part of spirit. This philosophic spirit is traced in the development of philosophy from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

In these works, the Hegelian influence starts to come into view as Cassirer traces historically no longer the development of the critical problem of knowledge presented in Kantian terms, but already the development of the spirit. Hence, the problem at this time concerns no longer about knowledge but rather concerns about what is philosophy itself - as part of culture. In this way, Cassirer employs the logic of culture-concepts[27] - as opposed to nature-concepts which can use specific principle to determine the object - in treatment of Enlightenment in which the mentioned and discussed philosophers are being coordinated with the spirit of the age.

The understanding of philosophy in cultural terms and not simply in logical ones can also be found in his works *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1932), *Descartes: Doctrine, Personality, and Influence* (1939), and *Rousseau, Kant, and Goethe* (1945). The emphasis of these works is on the philosopher's coming of terms with his life, work, and time in such a way that philosophy then understands itself as part of the human spirit. This is indeed a holistic approach to philosophy in the sense that there is a culture of philosophy that that exists within and is made possible by the wider process of human culture.

What is philosophy then for Cassirer? It is more than the history of philosophy, more than a mere addition to science, and more than a clarification of the logic of the sciences.

[24] *EM*, pp. 171-206.
[25] *PSF*, II, p. xv.
[26] Cassirer, E. *Philosophy of Enlightenment,* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1951, p.vi.
[27] Ernst Cassirer extensibly explains this in his work entitled *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies,* trans. S. G. Lofts, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000.

Being considered as one of the *Kulturwissenschaften*[28] (cultural sciences), philosophy then makes use of culture-concepts to understand its own spirit, to understand itself as part of culture, and to understand culture itself.

The understanding of human culture and human as such is therefore the aim of philosophy and not the attachment to any symbolic form. And the philosopher's work is only to coordinate these symbolic forms. In this process, the guiding principle in the philosophical reasoning is a sense of organic form, a sense of the whole as something ordered within itself. The inspirations for this comes certainly from Hegel, Vico, and Goethe whom Cassirer considered as the poet of the humane spirit.[29]

While Goethe was seen by Cassirer as the ideal of the human spirit of culture, Albert Schweitzer was for Cassirer the example of the spirit of the ethical thinker. Cassirer agrees with Schweitzer that philosophy is not to be blamed for the disintegration and crumbling of our spiritual and ethical ideals of culture but philosophy will never escape the blame for our world for not admitting the fact.[30] In other words, philosophy should have directed our attention to the disintegration of culture. Thus, here it is clear that Cassirer starts to explicitly express the normative direction of his philosophy of symbolic forms.

Evidently, this direction began to take shape during World War I when he produced the work *Freedom and Form* (1916) at which he explained the connection between freedom and culture and that culture is the work of human freedom – the same theme he emphasized at the Davos debate with Martin Heidegger ten years after the war. The position of Heidegger with regards to *Dasein* is unacceptable for Cassirer because it ignores ethics. The position of the emotivists was also rejected because they reduce ethical judgments to subjective states of approbation or disapprobation and thus results in ignoring the following: the sense in which the values objectively present in every culture and the sense in which ethical ideals exert a real force in human affairs.

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[28]Cf. Hamlin, C., "Ernst Cassirer's Concept of Kulturwissenschaft", in the *Cultural Studies and the Symbolic*, ed. Paul Bishop and R.H. Stephenson, Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2003, pp.21-41.
[29] Cf. Bayer, T.I., *op.cit.*, p. 26-27.
[30] This idea is actually explained in the inaugural lecture of Cassirer at the University of Götenborg, Sweden in 1935, entitled "*The Concept of Philosophy as a Philosophical Problem"* ; Cf. also *SMC*, pp. 49-63.

Upon Cassirer's arrival in the United States of America in 1941, there was an urgent request from his friends and colleagues to translate into English *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms to* make his philosophy available to English speaking people and also to apply his philosophy to understand politics and events surrounding the twentieth century. Rather than putting these three volumes of *The Philosophy of the Symbolic Forms* into English, Cassirer opted to summarize, recast, and update his views in new form. And thus the work, already mentioned above, An *Essay on Man* was born in 1944. With the subtitle "An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture," this book was more than an expansion and revision of the critical problem of knowledge but as a philosophical anthropology.

In another work "Albert Schweitzer as Critic of Nineteenth Century Ethics,"[31] which appeared posthumously in 1946, Cassirer made use of the views of Albert Schweitzer to oppose the Hegelian view that philosophy is its "time apprehended in thoughts," which means philosophy does not ever have an active role in culture. According Cassirer, the "coming too late of philosophy to events" happens for two reasons: when it forgets its principal duty and when it surrenders to the pressure of external forces.

Serving as the final moment of Cassirer's philosophy, *The Myth of the State* shows the capacity of Cassirer to comprehend the nature of the Nazi's use of myth to create a politics of the modern state. Having at his disposal a complete analysis of myth as the original symbolic form of human culture, Cassirer developed this theory of myth to become the key for the philosophical understanding of the twentieth century politics.

There were volumes of works left unpublished, as explained above, when Ernst Cassirer suddenly died in 1945. Among which were manuscripts dealing with a "metaphysics of symbolic forms." Nobody thought that these manuscripts were to be part of his conception of a philosophy of symbolic forms. Without doubt, the coming out of these manuscripts[32] invites a new perspective and a new understanding of the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer.

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[31] Cf. Bayer, T.I., *op.cit*., p.33.

[32] The survey of these papers, as I mentioned in the footnote under the section "unpublished metaphysics", collected by Donald Phillip Verene led to the publication of a volume of twelve of Cassirer's essays and lectures from the last decade of his life. Cf. Cassirer, E.,*Symbol, Myth and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernt Cassirer, 1935-1945*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 293-98.

The lack of metaphysical principles to support Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms led some early commentators to say that Cassirer was anti-metaphysical.[33] Cassirer was already dead when these critical essays came out in 1949. It was then impossible for Cassirer to reply to these comments.

However, in the introduction to the third volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* Cassirer made an indication to publish a work discussing on the principles of spirit *(Geist)* and life *(Leben).*[34] But this work never came to be published, resulting into the popular conclusion that Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, having no metaphysical principles, is just a mere extension of Marburg Neo-Kantianism in the sense that his "philosophy is just a series of analyses of various areas of human culture to show how each employs Kantian categories in different ways and how each can be understood as a type of knowledge."[35]

The manuscripts that make up the fourth volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* appeared in 1995 in German edition[36], and the following year in 1996 the English edition[37], as the first volume in what is planned to be a twenty-volume edition of Cassirer's unpublished papers. The first part of this, written by Cassirer in 1928 when he was finishing the third volume of The *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* focuses on the principle of spirit and life. The second part, written in 1940 in Sweden, before his departure for New York, introduces his concept of "basis phenomena" *(Basisphanomene).* This concept of basis phenomena, coupled with the great distinction between spirit and life, constitute Cassirer's metaphysics and offer the most that he has said about his concept of symbolic form grounded in a concept of the real.

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[33] Cf. Swabey, W.C., "Cassirer and Metaphysics", in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer,* cit., p. 121. Cf. also Kaufmann, F., "Cassirer's Theory of Scientific Knowledge", in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer,* cit., p. 183.
[34] *PSF, 3,* p. xvi.
[35] Bayer, T.I., *op.cit.*, p.5.
[36]Cassirer, E., *Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen,* ed. John.Michael Krois, and Oswald Schwemmer, *Vol.1 of Ernst Cassirer, Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte* , Hamburg: Miener, 1995.
[37]Cassirer, E., *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, vol.4, The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms,* ed. John Michael Krois and Donald Philip Verene, trans. John Michael Krois, New Haven, Con.: Yale University Press, 1996. Hereinafter cited as *MSF*.

CHAPTER II

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SYMBOLIC FORMS

In order for us to understand the philosophy of man of Cassirer patterned after symbolic forms as developed by Ernst Cassirer, I find it helpful to first deal with how Cassirer conceives and uses the term symbol in his thought. This section then starts with the presentation and explanation of the common understanding and usage of the term symbol. Since this common understanding of symbol is not enough for us to proceed in our investigation, we need to turn, though brief, to classical and modern thinkers who have maintained certain positions with respect to signs and symbols. We will then proceed to present and analyze how Cassirer understands and uses the term symbol.

1. THE COMMON UNDERTANDING OF WHAT IS A SYMBOL

The word symbol comes from the Greek *symbolon*, which means contract, token, insignia, and a means of identification. Parties to a contract, allies, guests, and their host could identify each other with the help of the parts of the *symbolon*. In its original meaning the symbol represented and communicated a coherent greater whole by means of a part. The part, as a sort of certificate, guaranteed the presence of the whole and, as a concise meaningful formula, indicated the larger context. The symbol is based, therefore, on the principle of complementation. The symbol object, the picture, the sign, the word, and the gesture require the association of certain conscious ideas in order to fully express what is meant by them. To this extent it has an esoteric and at the same time an exoteric, or a veiling and a revealing, function. The discovery of its meaning presupposes a certain amount of active cooperation. As a rule, it is based on the convention of a group that agrees upon its meaning. Symbols, however, may also be individually and subjectively constructed. In sum, a symbol is a written character or mark used to represent something; a letter, figure, or sign conventionally standing for some object, process, etc.

Having explained the common usage of the term symbol, I need to explain the term symbolization. What constitutes symbolization? Firstly, it is the replacement of something by a symbol. There are different kinds of such replacement. For example, one can replace "mass" by m, a number by "n", a particular number "nine" as 9, the idea of "variable" by x, the concept of relation/mapping by f (as in function) and so on. One can also 'name' objects by a symbol such as using 2 to name the "object two". In almost all cases such replacement or naming is conventional and arbitrary. A common example in logic is to symbolize terms such as replacing the sentence "All Greeks are mortals" by "All A is B", where A stands for the set of all Greeks and B for all mortals. The conventional of the symbolization lies in the fact that A is chosen arbitrarily to stand for all Greeks. Note that neither is there any connection between Greeks and A nor that in performing this replacement any new meaning or information to the original term has been added. The process of symbolization should not and does not modify or distort that which it stands for. Symbolization in logic and mathematics most often rests on such premises.

There are three classes of symbols which may be distinguished. The first type are effects which actually point to their cause, like for stance, smoke and fire. The second type have by their very nature a certain potential signification, which needs, however, to be actualized by being determined and expressed, e.g., washing with water as a symbol of purification from sin. The third type of symbol does not by nature designate any given object either actually or potentially. They only become signs through human convention, like the colors of traffic lights.

The symbols, in particular linguistic symbols, are 'mediators' between thought and sensibility.[38] Intellectual action cannot ordinarily take place in a suitable way without symbols. Thought is the fountain of language. Without sensitive symbols or without concrete words, the intellectual operation is "fleeing" and thus cannot be recovered, individualized and suitably used. This is how this relationship could be explained. Knowing demands the presence of the object known. The Absolute Being knows things in themselves, without need for any actualization. In all other cases, knowledge happens by

[38] Cf. Sanguineti, J., *Introduzione alla Gneseologia,* Firenze, Italy: Le Monnier, 2003, p. 93.

information: the object is represented by means of a species or idea. A finite knowing subject is in a state of (active) potency to knowing one object or another among those included in the formal objects of its various faculties. To know this specific object, the subject must be determined by a species which actualizes a faculty in order to bring about the knowledge in question in each case. This actualization is the cognitive praxis itself, in which the knower in act is the known in act.

But what we know are not the species, but rather the things of which the species are likenesses. The cognitive species has two functions: First, subjective: it informs the faculty as its accidental act; through it the cognitive faculty passes to second act. Second, objective: the species makes something known. It is the means by which (*quo*) one knows, but it is not that which *(quod)* is known. To know by species is to know immediately, not per *aliud* or mediately (as when one thing is known by means of the knowledge of another, which happens, for example, in reasoning).[39] The thing is directly grasped, while the subject grasps himself reflexively (*in obliquo*): "In all faculties which can return upon their own act, it is first required that the act of the faculty tend towards some object other than itself and that afterwards it return upon itself." [40]

When we know reality by means of ideas, it is not a question of "going beyond the idea" as if, in order to know something different from our very knowledge, we have to "go beyond" knowledge. If someone attempts to do this, it is like trying to jump over his own shadow or to get outside of his own skin. Knowledge – in the Aristotelian sense – is a praxis, an immanent operation: it perfects the subject who knows rather than the thing known. It is a non-procedural, instantaneous operation: one knows and – immediately – one possesses the known. Therefore it is not equivalent, in any way, to the immanentist version of knowledge. Because the idea itself refers to reality, it is intentional according to its very nature; just as is the nature of the intellect which can be conformed to things. Thus, it is not necessary – nor is it possible – "to get outside of knowledge" in order to know something

[39] St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 3, ad 18.
[40] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. III, ch. 26.

different from knowledge itself: on knowing, simply on knowing, something other than knowledge is known.

Now, we take note here the representative character ascribed to the concept in classical thought. The concept does not substitute for the real form but, rather, remits to it intentionally. "To be there for" or "to suppose" is not, then, equivalent to "superposing" on top of effective reality a sort of second instance which would possess a *realitas objectiva* that would dispense one from the investigation of real cases and things. The concept is considered a path to things, *via ad res*, and thought does not stop primarily at the concept, but only secondarily reflects upon it. Therefore, intellectual representation can be understood – as tradition understands it – as a formal sign, whose being consists exclusively in being a sign; its reality is exhausted in remitting to the reality which is known in it (*in quo*). A formal sign is one which, without previously being noticed in itself, directly and immediately represents something distinct from itself.

The need to recur to the concept, as *that in which* the known thing is known, duplicates neither the known object nor the act by which one knows. Therefore, it does not convert knowledge into something mediate. And thus appears here the meaning of "*to represent"*. In sum, the formal concept is the term of an immanent operation, in which the object is made present and is set forth as known. If this presentation is a representation, it is because the known object is made present to the faculty in the immanent term, according to its intentional rather than its physical being. But the intentional being which the object has in the concept remits to the object itself, so the concept is not the known thing, but only the species in which the presence of the known thing occurs.

Today, there is the science that studies the life of signs within a society, and that is called semiology or semiotics. It was born when French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure[41] (1857-1913) formulated his theory of language, published a few years after his death. Semiotics is not limited to language however – far from it. Everything that involves communication, even non-deliberate, is something that semiotics can tackle. This science has

[41]Cf. Saussure, F., *Writings in General Linguistics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

been applied to animal behavior, social habits, proxemics, architecture, poetry, mythology, etc.

For Saussure, symbols, in general, are events or things that direct attention or are indicative of other events or things. A symbol has a certain structure that Saussure first defined as the association between a signifier and a signified. Let us take the letter A and say it represents an ox. The signified is the ox, what the letter A signifies. The signifier is the letter A. The sign requires the presence of both A and the ox. It is not, as is sometimes believed, the letter A alone, because if it has no signified – if it has nothing to represent – then the A is nothing but itself. It is not a sign, it has nothing to say about something other than itself. It remains a signifier, but one that is out of work.

There are three large groups of signs, namely: the Icon, the Index, and the Symbol. Simply put, an icon looks like its signified. We are all familiar with computer icons, that helped popularize the word, as well as with the pictographs such as are used on "pedestrian crossing" signs. There is no real connection between an object and an icon of it other than the likeness, and thus the mind is required to see the similarity and associate the two itself. A characteristic of the icon is that by observing it, we can derive information about its signified. For instance, if I do not know what a wolverine looks like, seeing an image of one will teach me a great deal about its appearance. The more simplified the image, the less I will learn, but I will still learn. No other kind of sign gives that kind of information.

An index has a causal and/or sequential relationship to its signified. A key to understanding indices (or indexes) is the verb "indicate", of which "index" is a substantive. Indices are directly perceivable events that can act as a reference to events that are not directly perceivable, or in other words they are something visible that indicates something out of sight. We may not see a fire, but you do see the smoke and that indicates to you that a fire is burning. Similarly, we cannot see sadness, but we can see the tears that indicate it. The word "this", like a pointed finger, are also indices. The nature of the index has nothing to do with that of the signified, but the connection here is logical and organic – the two elements are inseparable – and here is little or no participation of the mind. Indices are generally non-deliberate, although arrows are just one example of deliberate ones.

A symbol represents something in a completely arbitrary relationship. The connection between signifier and signified depends entirely on the observer, or more exactly, what the observer was taught. Symbols are subjective, dictated either by social convention or by habit. Words are a prime example of symbols. Whether as a group of sounds or a group of characters, they are only linked to their signified because we decide they are. Since the connection is neither physical nor logical, words change meaning or objects change names as time goes by. Here it all happens in the mind and depends on it. For Saussure, symbols are indeed ideas, and whenever we use one, we are only pointing to the idea behind that symbol.

Another famous "semiotician" is Charles Sanders Peirce[42] (1839-1914). He was an American philosopher, went further into the analysis of the Saussurian theory. His study does not diverge from Saussure's, except for two details. Peirce inverses the words "sign" and "symbol", making "sign" the general word and "symbol" the convention-based sign. Instead of the binary relationship of signifier and signified established by Saussure, Peirce uses a triangular model: object-sign-interpretant. For Peirce, a sign is anything that stands for something in somebody's mind. This "something" is called the sign's object; the "somebody" is called its interpretant. Saussure had collapsed the object and interpretant into one signified, a model that denies any possible difference between an object and our perception of it.

These three elements (object, sign, interpretant) form a triangle that is held together by a fourth, and that is, the ground on which the sign stands for the object (icon, index or metaphor). The exact process of signification is determined by the relationship sign-ground-object, and Peirce went all the way in his analysis. Here are the complex nuances he goes into. The so-called triadic relations of comparison are relationships based on the kind of sign involved: Qualisign – a "quality" that acts as a sign once it is embodied; Sinsign – an actual thing or event that acts simply and singly as a sign; Legisign – a law that acts as a sign, e.g., grammar is a legisign in language. There is also the so-called the triadic relations of performance which involve actual entities in the real world and are based on the kind of ground: Icon has three kinds - Images, Diagrams, Metaphors; Index has sub-index or

[42] Cf. Peirce, C.S., *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotics,* Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

hyposeme; Symbol – which may be singular symbol and abstract symbol. Finally, the so-called Triadic relations of thought which are based on the kind of object: Rheme or Seme – a sign that indicates the understood possibility of an object to the interpretant, should he have occasion to activate or invoke it; Dicent or Dicisign or Pheme – a sign that conveys information about its object; Argument – a sign whose object is not a single thing but a law.

2. THE CASSIRERIAN USE OF SYMBOL

It is very difficult to decipher under which category I introduced above Cassirer would like to use the term symbol and symbolization until we come to know the extent of the influence of Immanuel Kant on his thought. Cassirer's understanding of symbol is not just in terms of representation or not just in terms of causality or a distinction between the symbol and the thing signified. His symbolization is not just in terms of replacing something by a symbol as that of logic and mathematics. Instead, his understanding of symbol and symbolization is in the context of Kant-like innate categories. It means therefore that symbol replaces Kant's schemata.

As I pointed out in Chapter I regarding the influence of Kant on Cassirer, Cassirer's development of symbolic forms is indebted to Immanuel Kant's philosophy. As Charles Hendel says in the Introduction to *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, "the recollection of Kant is ever-present in the pages of Cassirer's writing. Whenever he started any goal he went back to the philosophy of Kant as a base from which to proceed."[43] And it is Kant's concept of transcendental schemata which became germane to Cassirer's concept of symbolic forms.

[43] Cf. Krois, J.M., *Cassirer, Symbolic Forms, and History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 1. This does not imply, however, that Cassirer's philosophy is in complete accord with Kantian philosophy as I have pointed out in Chapter I. As Charles Hendel later points out, while Kant was the primary "source of inspiration" for Cassirer, he was one of the many "rich sources" which Cassirer drew from in developing the "authentic originality of [his own] thought" (*PSF, I,* p. 21). Thus, in extending Kantian thought regarding symbolic form, Cassirer definitely diverges from Kant in many aspects of his works. One thing he rejects in Kant is Kant's rationalism and intellectualism (understood as his lack of historical perspective) and his indifference to cultural evolution and its myriad manifestations. Also, Cassirer drops the distinction between the nuomenal and the phenomenal since symbolization does not permit a real separation of principle and object – the dualism of form and content is done away with. Cf. also Rosentein, L., "Some Metaphysical Problems of Cassirer's Symbolic Forms", in *Man and World* 6 (1973): 304-306.

For Kant, the human faculties are sensibility and reason. But reason has two "uses", and that is, intellection or understanding and reason. The faculty of reason produces "pure" concepts independent of the senses, such as freedom, soul, or God. The faculties of sensibility and understanding are based on synthetic a priori forms and categories. Kant argued that the mind is structured to analyze data in terms of a particular set of a priori rules. Now, the a priori forms which comprise intuition, or more accurately, perception, are space and time. Because for Kant, space and time were not features of external reality, but features of the structure of the mind, space and time are the "irremovable goggles" through which we perceive the world. Furthermore, there are twelve a priori categories which comprise understanding, including unity, plurality, totality, causality, and substantiality. As examples, causality relates things perceived in space and time in terms of cause and effect, and substantiality relates things perceived in space and time in terms of substance and attribute.

Now, the crucial point in Kant becomes "how we are to conceive of the via media between concept and intuition in the actual construction of specific knowledge by the human understanding? Kant states his proposed solution as follows:

> It is clear that a third thing must be given which must stand in a relation of being of the same sort with the category on the one hand and with the appearance on the other, and which makes possible the application of the former to the latter. The mediating representation must be pure (without anything empirical) and yet not simply intellectual; it must at the same time be sensuous. Such a thing is the transcendental schema.[44]

The schema is the uniting "representation," the synthetic "medium" in which the forms of understanding and the sensuous intuitions are assimilated so that they constitute experience. But the schema is not merely the medium through which the sensuous and the intellectual are brought into unity. "The schemata of the pure concepts of the understanding

[44] Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Werner S. Pluhar Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996, pp. 210-211.

are the true and sole conditions that make possible any relationship of the concepts to objects, and consequently the conditions of their having any meaning."[45]

Thus, it is Kant's idea of schemata which Cassirer was to develop his entire philosophy of symbolic forms around.[46] For Cassirer, symbolic forms became the transcendental schemata, the unifying determinant of the mind. As Cassirer stated, "the schema is the unity of concept and intuition, the common achievement of both factors." [47]

Thus, Cassirer took the "irremovable goggles of man" which Kant described and refocused them to see through symbols: "instead of saying that the human intellect is 'in need of images' we should rather say that it is in need of symbols." [48] In sum, symbol becomes a mode of knowing phenomenon.

What does it mean? This means that the "symbol" is seen by Cassirer as an immediate or expressive and intuitional tendency towards objects around man. So, man knows direct realities or objects around him through symbol (intuitively) because of his symbolic capacity. In this view, man is a direct (immediate) object known by or through symbol. We take for example of the man who dances. The dancer is never separated from his dancing activity. This is functional or expressive symbolism. Since the activity of dancing expresses directly (immediately) the nature of man as a dancer, therefore a dancing man expresses the nature of man through direct action (function) of *dancing-symbolism*. Here, symbol is a referential relation between the knower and the known, that is, as the example given above, a dancing activity refers us to know the nature of man *being a dancer* through the symbol of dancing.

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[45] *PSF, I.,* pp.12-13.

[46] In the words of Philip Verene, Cassirer's notion of the symbolic form is a transformation of the Kantian notion of the "schema," that is, the notion of a "sensuous-intellectual form" that lies at the basis of knowledge. Kant reaches this notion of a schema through a process of making distinctions within his transcendental analysis of the elements of experience. Cassirer wishes to find this schema in experience as a phenomenon. He does so in his discovery of the symbol as the medium through which all *knowledge* and culture occur. Cassirer understands his philosophy as an idealism that he, in fact, traces back to the problem of form in Plato, but he insists that the object of which he speaks is truly "there." It is not a creation of the mind of the knower. This is a point on which he insisted in a lecture to the Warburg Institute in 1936, "Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture," and later, to his students at Yale in the 1940s. The notion of the perceptual object as something "there" being pregnant at the same time with something that is "not there". Cassirer connects to Leibniz's term praegnans futuri, as well as to the psychology of perception. Cf. also Verene, P, "Metaphysical Narration, Science, and Symbolic Forms" in *The Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1993) : 115-123.

[47] *PSF, I,* p.15.

[48] *PSF, I,* p. 50.

Thus, in this way, all what we know intuitively as direct object is known through the mediation of symbol.

Moreover, following the line of arguments of Cassirer, we can say that symbol is a formal principle of the mode of knowing phenomenon. Why does Cassirer explain things in this way? This can be explained by the fact that Cassirer never subscribes to the idea of explaining things (realities) through their essence, but rather through their epistemological functionality. This is evident in the first formulation of his own theory of knowledge:

> To explain nature is thus to cancel it as nature, as a manifold and changing whole. The eternally homogeneous, motionless "sphere of Parmenides" constitutes the ultimate goal to which all natural science unconsciously approaches. It is only owing to the fact that reality withstands the efforts of thought and sets up certain limits, that it cannot transcend, that reality maintains itself against the logical leveling of its content; it is only by such opposition from reality, that being itself does not disappear in the perfection of knowledge… The identity, toward which thought progressively tends, is not the identity of ultimate substantial things, but the identity of functional orders and correlations.[49]

Steve Lofts in his book, *Ernst Cassirer: A Repetition of Modernity*, explains in details this inversion of understanding of things or realities which we hold since the time of Aristotle. Not by substance that we can understand things but by their function. Lofts traces this necessity of inversion to Cassirer's acquaintance with the recent development of mathematics and physics whose nature are functional.[50]

With this view, Cassirer comes to assert that a symbol can never be explained by itself, but rather by the object or reality expressed by it. This therefore implies functions or activities and the dynamic nature of symbol.

This dynamic nature of symbol is also explained by the fact that, for Cassirer, symbol as a "representation" between the subject and object calls for a binding-together of the real

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[49] Cassirer, E. *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relativity,* Marie Collins Swabey and William Curtis Swabey (trans), New York: Dover Publications, 1953, p. 324. Please also cf. *PSF, III*, p. 209, where Cassirer states that we will take 'form' not in a substantial but in a purely functional sense.

[50] Cf. Lofts, S., *Ernst Cassirer: A Repetition of Modernity*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000, pp. 36-40.

object and subject in its formal consciousness. The binding brings about a new dynamic principle of a priori knowledge and therefore makes the bond no longer a mere sign. How is this possible? The symbol has a dynamic nature, and it is through this that the meaning or nature of the known object becomes identical and identified with the nature of the knower or actor (doer). Hence, symbol surpasses or transcends a mere sign or signification. For example, a smoke has a signal nature of fire and it has fire as the end of its signification, and it does not go beyond its signal nature of fire, neither does it express the nature of fire, nor does it unify the nature of fire with the knower or subject.

This makes a symbol different from any other sign in the sense that, as we pointed out in the above example, sign is static by nature, whereas symbol is dynamic. In addition to this, we may ask how we can further distinguish between signs or signals and symbols. For Cassirer, a sign or signal is a sense-reference to some physical object or event. A symbol is an expression which refers to an intuited, universal meaning. That is to say, the meaning of a symbol is intrinsic to it and is not to be understood by reference to some objects other than itself. Signs or signals have a particular value for behavior and may be perceived by all animals. But symbols have a theoretical function which only humans are capable of experiencing. Thus, Cassirer states:

> Symbols – in the in the proper sense of this term – cannot be reduced to mere signals. Signals and symbols belong to different universes of discourse: a signal is a part of the physical world of being; a symbol is a part of the human world of meaning. Signals are "operators," symbols are "designators." Signals, even when understood and used as such, have nevertheless a sort of physical or substantial being; symbols have only a functional value.[51]

Susanne Langer, a "disciple" of Cassirer, made this point clear by further making this kind of formulation with respect to the distinction between signs and symbols. She said that "the fundamental difference between signs and symbols is the difference of association, and

[51] *EM*, p. 32.

consequently of their use by the third party to the meaning function, the subject: signs announce their objects to him, whereas symbols lead him to conceive their objects."[52]

Since it is dynamic by nature, symbol is explained by Cassirer to have different variable and invariable hierarchical strata. Why does it vary? Cassirer holds that it varies depending on the nature of the object known. The known objects are forms of knowledge according to Cassirer. The known experience data formulates the mode of knowledge. Compared with Kant who says that knowledge formulates experience, Cassirer says that experience (forms) formulates knowledge.[53] The reason is that the forms of experience formulate the mode of knowledge and the forms of knowledge know the forms of experience through symbols.

Hence, symbolism is a bond between forms of knowledge and forms of experience. How? The answer is through a priori knowledge as a principle of symbolization, according to Cassirer. Every nature is a form, every form is symbolic and the mode of knowing the nature of forms depends on the different variable and invariable hierarchical strata within the invariable categories of space, time and number being forms of relations as a base for every symbolization.

3. THE "CREATION" AND MEANING OF SYMBOLIC FORMS

There is the role of the creative spirit in defining the symbolic forms. Symbolic forms are paradigmatically introduced by Cassirer in reference to an extended version of Hegel's objective (and absolute) spirit. Hegel had an equal if not greater influence than Kant upon Cassirer's philosophy, as I have mentioned in Chapter I regarding the development of the thought of Cassirer.[54]

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[52] Langer, S., *Philosophy in a New Key*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956, p. 61.
[53] Cf. *PSF, III*, pp. 434-435.
[54] I think that it is also important to know what Cassirer rejects in Hegel. Cassirer rejects Hegel's conception of philosophy as having reached its end in the exhaustive synthesis which he himself created. Cassirer conceives of his philosophy as a program to progress, a method to discover and understand things as they are in the mode in which they appear. Rather than sweeping them in dialectic to become concrete for the castle of the Absolute, Cassirer opposes in principle philosophy's subsumation of other cultural forms to itself in such a way as to abrogate the autonomy and independent importance of each by allowing finally only the cultural form

Perhaps the most pervasive mutual presupposition is that the ultimate subject of Philosophy is the development of Spirit.[55] Then, too, there is the common view of the internal (subjective) as the expression and the phenomenal comprehension of the external (objective), and vice-versa. Coupled with the consequent rejection of "things in themselves," the historical evolution of mind is conceived of more as taking place in spirit and life rather than as existing between inquiring subject and fixed object. Again, just as Kant's schema is seen as precursor of Cassirer's symbolic forms, so equally is Hegel's concept of the universal and the notion. Thus, Cassirer claims, for example, that symbolic forms are their own criterion, meaning that the achievements of each one "must be measured by itself, and not by the standards and aims of any other."[56] Then, too, as with Hegel's dialectic of the notion, Cassirer conceives of different symbolic forms as each claiming more than is its 'due' in the course of its historical development.

> In the course of its development every basic symbolic form tends to represent itself not as a part but as the whole, laying claim to an absolute validity, not contenting itself with relative validity, but seeking to imprint its own characteristic stamp on the whole realm of being and the whole life of the spirit.[57]

of 'logic' to be autonomous qua form. To insist upon a dynamic evolution of the symbolic forms in the same manner as did Hegel with his notions would coalesce the independence and unique structure of each, vitiate their peculiar directions of creativity, and collapse and negate their internal value and truth. Cf. Rosentein, L., "Some Metaphysical Problems of Cassirer's Symbolic Forms" in *Man and World* 6 (1973) : 304-321.

[55] Cf., *EM.*, pp. 67-68.

[56] *PSF, I,* p. 91

[57] *PSF, I,* p. 81.

Now, going to the topic on how Cassirer conceives the symbolic forms as creation of the spirit, let us go to what scholars have considered the first reference to the definition of the symbolic forms.

> That which should be understood under 'symbolic form' is every energy of the spirit through which meaning-bearing content, mental or spiritual, is attached to a concrete, physical sign and with which this sign is inwardly endowed. It is in this sense that language, the mythical-religious-world, the art confront us as a special symbolic form. For in them all the basic phenomenon imprints itself that our consciousness is not content with receiving the impression of the exterior, but rather it connects and permeates each impression with a free action of the expression.[58]

Birgit Recki in her essay, *Cassirer and the Problem of Language*, states that the original term *Geist* in the original text *Energie des Geistes* is taken to mean that the human mind, in its productive activity, forms the objective world which in its autonomous development and meaning is to be understood as spirit. The *Geist* refers then to both 'mind' and 'spirit.'[59]

In addition to this, Cyrus Hamlin in his article, *Cassirer's Concept of Kulturwissenschaft,* also believes that the emphasis of the above quotation is on "energy" of the spirit.[60] To which that refers? Hamlin maintains that this refers to any activity through which the mind or the spirit expresses itself and makes itself manifest in and through some external act or event.[61] The manifestation of the spirit occurs through a "concrete sensuous sign" that contains a "spiritual meaning" and which is dedicated to or constituted and appropriated by this sign in an inward way. This reflects a certain way of thinking or a

[58] Cassirer, E., "The Concept of the Symbolic Form in the Construction of Humanities", in *Wesen and Wirkung des Symbolsbegriffs,* trans. Colin Guthrie King Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977, p. 175.
[59] Recki, B., "Cassirer and the Problem of Language", in *Cultural Studies and the Symbolic*, ed. Paul Bishop and R.H. Staphenson , Leeds, United Kingdom: Northern Universities Press, 2003, p. 2.
[60] Hamlin,C., "Cassirer's Concept of Kulturwissenschaft and the Tradition of Humanities in the Modern University", in *Cultural Studies and the Symbolic*, ed. Paul Bishop and R.H. Staphenson, Leeds, United Kingdom: Northern Universities Press, 2003, p. 26.
[61] Cf. *Ibid.*

context of thought with respect to the concept of sign and its relation to mind or spirit. Hamlin calls this as "semiotic truism to claim that the external sign, which is produced by the action of the spirit, also manifests that spirit as its 'inner meaning,' even within its specific concrete sensuous status."[62] The externalization therefore of spirit in concrete signs where the sign makes manifest, or signifies, that spirit as its meaning or content, is a symbolic form.

These two authors indeed see, in the quotation above, the intimate association of a spiritual and mental content with a physical sign. That is the core of the definition of the symbolic form, according to Recki. She further says that "the intended breadth of this concept of the symbol is remarkable, for thus the concept qualifies as the systematic focal point not only of all basic disciplines of philosophy, but also of all branches of science."[63] The coining of the term is very remarkable for Recki:

> for if Cassirer grasps a symbol as the particular case of 'the sensuous' being 'filled with meaning,' as every case of 'particularization and embodiment,' then his symbolic forms are not to be understood as the particular carriers of meaning (i.e. signs), but instead as regularly active and typical kids of symbolization – energies of forming or energies of the spirit as Cassirer calls them.[64]

The definition then of symbolic forms for Cassirer is something which leads us to understand that symbolic forms are not only *forma formata* but also *forma formans* at the same time. In other words, they are forming, shaping agencies, structuring human action and activities. And having their own peculiar structure, they are the formed products of human action and activities.

But the question here is how does this spirit create? The question presupposes the raw-material of creation and the source of the creating act. However, in Cassirer's

[62] *Ibid.,* p. 26.
[63] Recki, B., *op. cit.,* p. 3.
[64] *Ibid.*

philosophy, we cannot exactly determine the two because, Cassirer, in introducing his philosophy of symbolic forms, concerns only about the process of creation itself.

> The characteristic and peculiar achievement of each symbolic form – the form of language as well as that of myth or of theoretical cognition – is not simply to receive a given material of impressions possessing already a certain determination, quality and structure, in order to graft on it, from the outside, so to speak, another form out of energy of consciousness itself. The characteristic action of the spirit begins much earlier. Also, the apparently "given" is seen, on closer analysis, to be already processed by certain acts of either the linguistics, the mythical, or the logico-theoritical "apperception". It "is" only that which it has been made into by those acts. Already in its apparently simple and immediate states it shows itself conditioned and determined by some primary function which gives it significance. In this primary formation, and not in the secondary one, lies the peculiar secret of each symbolic form.[65]

It is not therefore possible to find here the "primary datum" underlying the creative activity of the mind or consciousness or spirit. Every primary datum is already spiritually permeated, even the simplest special perceptions, like left and right, high and low.[66] The same is true of the original sensuous perception of time, number, and causality. An "immediate datum" is already a material-spiritual context, it is a *creatum* – the germ of the symbolic form.

With the explanation of the process of creation, Cassirer shows that the source of the creating act is the consciousness or spirit. But Cassirer cautious us not to take consciousness in either its metaphysical or in its psychological determination – but in a critical analysis which goes beyond it. Thus, Cassirer says: "the modern critique of cognition, the analysis of the laws and principles of knowledge, has freed itself more and more determinedly from the presuppositions both of metaphysics and of psychologism."[67] The reality then here is neither understood from the point of view of consciousness alone nor from any metaphysical

[65] *PSF, II,* p. 94.
[66] Cf. *Ibid.*
[67] *PSF, II,* p. 15.

principle but rather in the combination of both. This means to say that reality is understood in the symbolic form as constituted by the creative activity of the spirit. Not only in the creative activity but also in the produce, the autonomous creation of the spirit do we have reality, and therewith the truth. Cassirer argues:

> for the highest truth which opens itself to the spirit is finally the form of its activity. In the totality of its accomplishments and the cognition of its specific rules by which each of them is being determined, as well as in the consciousness of the connection which combines all these rules into the unity of one task and one solution : in all these the spirit possesses the knowledge of itself and of reality.[68]

And that *knowable* reality is the real. Cassirer continues:

> the question of what, apart from these spiritual functions, constitutes absolute reality, the question of what the 'thing in itself' may be in this sense, remains unanswered, except that more and more we learn to recognize it as a fallacy in formulation, an intellectual phantasm. The true concept of reality cannot be squeezed into the form of mere abstract being; it opens up into the diversity and richness of the forms of spiritual life – but of a spiritual life which bears the stamp of inner necessity and hence of objectivity. In this sense each new symbolic form – not only the conceptual world of scientific cognition but also the intuitive world of art, myth, and language – constitutes, as Goethe said, a revelation sent outward from within, a "synthesis of world and spirit", which truly assures us that the two are originally one.[69]

From this passage, it is not difficult to understand that for Cassirer the world of symbolic forms is the world of life itself. How to comprehend this life is neither in the primitive intuition of the spirit[70] nor in the primitive perception of natural being. The reason

[68] *PSF, I*, p. 111.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] Cf. *Ibid.*

for this is that life has left both these states behind because it has transformed itself into the form of spirit.[71] "The negation of the symbolic forms would therefore, instead of apprehending the fullness of life, on the contrary destroy the spiritual form, to which the fullness is necessarily bound."[72]

With regards to modalities of the spirit and objectivation, Cassirer has this to say:

> When we designate language, myth, and art as "symbolic forms", the term seems to imply that they are all modes of spiritual formation, going back to an ultimate, primal stratum of reality which is perceived in them only as through a foreign medium. It would seem as though we could apprehend reality only in the particularity of these forms, whence it follows that in these forms reality is cloaked as well as revealed. The same basic functions which give the world of the spirit its determinancy, its imprint, its character, appear on the other side to be so many refractions which an intrinsically unitary and unique being (Reality) undergoes as soon as it is perceived and assimilated by the "subject." Seen from this standpoint, the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is nothing other than an attempt to assign to each of them, as it were, its own specific and peculiar index of refraction. The philosophy of Symbolic Forms aspires to know the special nature of the various refracting media, to understand each one according to its nature and the law of its structure.[73]

From what is discussed above, we know the activity of the spirit which is defined in terms of the "modalities"[74] which the spirit assumes in each particular medium. The life of the spirit therefore is "multi-dimensional"[75] in the sense that there are undulations without end, movements and dynamic processes.

The process of differentiation is the process of objectivation. Cassirer follows the law of spirit as he uncovers them. What is this law is none other than the law of growth itself. Now, what are the three stages of growth or objectivation? The three are *Expression*,

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[71] Cf. *PSF, I*, p. 112.
[72] *Ibid.,*
[73] *PSF, III*, p. 1.
[74] *PSF, III*, p. 13.
[75] *Ibid.*

Representation, and *Meaning*. The three are not isolated from one another but rather they are closely related since the three contain certain "points" at which the forms flow into one another.

The first stage, "expression", can be described as the subject which possesses the environment as a variety of physiognomic experiences.[76] Long before there are "things" there is such structurization of experience. "Existence" and "reality" are at that stage physiognomically manifest. The abstraction of pure perception, which is the starting point of pure sensualism, is here already transcended. Donald Phillip Verene, in his article *Metaphysical Narration, Science, and Symbolic Form,* interprets this stage in the way that the knower is not separated from the known. The object is "felt" and portrayed as a benign or malignant force.[77] Myth and art originate in this stage where the two (art, myth) meet language, which, in the sentence, takes up[78] and transcends that stage, setting the new dimension, and that is "representation".

In the "representation", the sentence, however, very slowly swings itself upward into the new dimension or stage. It remains bound to the physiognomic realm, substituting logical determination for spatial demonstration. Only gradually it expands from perceptual and emotional perspectives to full objectivation in three steps. The first is the *mimic* stage where the sentence remains in the plastic world, in the spatial meanings of the copula, in the demonstrative pronouns, the definite article, onomatopoetic formations, and the rendering of the physiognomic characters through voiced or voiceless consonants, and in higher or lower vowels. The second is the *analogic* where in the relation of sounds the relation of the objects are expressed. The third is the *symbolic* where all the similarity between the world of language and that of objects has disappeared. The whole stage enacts a separation of knower and known. It is typified by the analogical power to "liken" things into groups, to develop a referential relation between knower and known and attain a logic of classification of

[76] Cf. *PSF III.*, p. 69.
[77]Cf. Verene, P, "Metaphysical Narration, Science, and Symbolic Forms", in *The Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1993) : 115.
[78] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

objects.[79] Cassirer sees this as tied to the powers of language, of logos as separated from mythos to organize the world as a system of discrete objects. These three stages of language are thus, as it were, the steps by which the spirit passes from the physiognomic to the representative dimension, and beyond it into that of meaning.

The third is the significative stage. This is the power of the knower freely to construct symbol systems through which the known can be ordered and which themselves can become elements in wider systems of symbols. This is dominated by what Cassirer calls the purely "symbolic." This function has its shape in the symbol systems of modern logic, in mathematics, and in the theoretical structures of modern science. Here the thought of the knower constructs worlds of pure meaning that have their own coherence of form, and which in the modeling, empirical and experimental activities of science find loci in experience and provide consciousness with a formal articulation of what is there. Here in the last stage the process of objectivation is completed.

With these explanations, it is not difficult to concur with the observation of Robert S. Hartmann, in his *Cassirer's Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms,* that rightly the "symbolic forms are progressive states of the self-emergence of consciousness."[80] That emergence, according to him, may be followed in the gradual unfolding of metaphysical thought into modern science or may be demonstrated in the gradual unfolding of the raw material and mirroring produce of the self-evolving consciousness.[81]

The above stages of objectivation are also called in phenomenology of knowledge of Cassirer as the three functions of consciousness. In sum, each *Energie des Geistes* is an act in which consciousness internalizes the sensory content in a certain way such that this content can ultimately be formed as an object of knowledge. Every symbolic form is at once a way of knowing the object and a way of the subject defining itself in relation to the object. These acts of consciousness do not just designate forms of knowledge. These forms of knowledge correspond to fundamental forms or directions of man's cultural activity. "To exist as a

[79] Cf. Verene, P., *op.cit.* p. 116.
[80] Hartman, R., "Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms", in the *Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer,* cit., p. 8.
[81] Cf. *Ibid.*

human is to be at the juncture of life as it is formed or flows into one of the various directions of the mind or spirit."

I would like to make a diagram below to illustrate the three stages of objectivation or the three functions of the consciousness which would help us understand and proceed smoothly to the next section which also deals with consciousness or mind and realities. The active aspect of forming and shaping is expressed in the first line, and the resulting "opera", the products of this formation in the second.

Expression	→	*Representation*	→	*Meaning*
↓		↓		↓
Language	→	*Image*	→	*Construction*

Furthermore, bear in mind that language (and other types of expression), images and notions are not only products they are themselves the means and tools of the forming-process itself. If we read the line from expression to notion in the sense of a classical constitutional theory of objectivity and knowledge (e.g. Husserl's phenomenological approach) we were urged to determine the emergent aspects of each single step of this line. The referents of expression, representation or notion existed independent of the means of expression, representation or cognition and were - so to say - in a second step to be expressed, represented and conceptualized or apprehended.

The phenomenon that the world is organized in terms of meaningful gestalts is taken to mean by Cassirer as "symbolic pregnance". He identifies this symbolic pregnance with a "genuine apriori."[82] This becomes a concept that sums up his criticism of the sensualists' photographic model of perception:

[82] *PSF, III*, p. 203.

> We have designated as symbolic pregnance the relation in consequence of which a sensuous thing embraces a meaning and represents it for consciousness: this pregnance can be reduced neither to merely reproductive processes nor to mediated intellectual processes — it must ultimately be recognized as an independent and autonomous determination, without which neither an object nor a subject, neither a unity of the thing nor a unity of the self would be given to us.[83]

This relates to perception of things or realities. And here we see that perception is never pure and neutral. It transcends the particular pictures of sense impressions. Thus, the thing does not amount to a sum of pictures of sense impressions, but rather to a symbolic compression, a monogram, created in accordance with the meaning context and thus with, the direction of the situated act of perception. The phenomenon of perceptual constancy amounts to the compression of a phenomenon into one of its factors, where this factor embodies the phenomenon symbolically — in a state of symbolic pregnance. In virtue of this symbolic compression the phenomenon becomes fixed. It emerges as a stable thing with certain attributes, this stability making it possible to find the thing again. A stable, "objective" world presupposes that things can be found again, and this act of finding again in turn presupposes what Cassirer designates as representative function.

Everything that we call identity of concepts and significations or the constancy of things and attributes is rooted in this fundamental act of finding again. Thus, it is a common function which makes possible on the one hand language and on the other hand the specific articulation of the intuitive world.[84]

[83] *PSF, III*, p. 235.
[84] *PSF, III*, p. 114.

4. THE UNITY OF THE SYMBOLIC FORMS

What Cassirer has shown above is that there are several symbolic forms and yet there is a dynamic unity among them. The question that we can raise now is that how can we understand the dynamic unity of the symbolic forms on a metaphysical level?

There is a temptation to understand Cassirer's metaphysics in terms of a hierarchy of symbolic forms, since he often suggests such a hierarchy when he relates the forms to each other.[85] However, this is the very position Cassirer criticizes the idealists for holding. Cassirer's metaphysics must give a universal account of the creative process involved in the generation of symbolic worlds out of the various symbolic forms. Cassirer gives this account in the papers collected to form the fourth volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.[86]

In this volume, Cassirer describes the motion of the symbolic forms in terms of the dialectic of spirit and life. The clear definition of these two terms is not clearly given here. But generally, the term spirit represents the structure of the symbolic forms as well as the rules and laws that govern the process of symbolization, while the term life represents the creative force which constantly strives to move beyond itself to create new meaning and give full content to a symbolic world[87]. In this dialectic, Cassirer tries to capture the idea that every act of symbolization contains an underlying tension. In creating a symbolic world, life wishes to be free to create the fullest possible symbolic world, and yet spirit wishes to sustain a totalizing order which maintains consistent meaning and structure. Spirit must restrain life's desire for novelty in order to make the symbolic world intelligible. Life satisfies its creative need by altering the rules of spirit to create new symbols. Out of this tension, consciousness gives rise to fuller symbolic worlds.

The clearest example Cassirer gives of this dialectic concerns the symbolic form of language. The tension of the dialectic shapes every linguistic act. Every speech act is creative in that it contains an alteration of the rules that preceded it but is consistent in that it does not

[85] Cf. *EM*, p. 207.
[86] *MSF*, pp. ix-xxvi.
[87] Cf. *MSF*, pp. 12-14.

change the rules of language such that the speech act becomes unintelligible.[88] By understanding the symbolic forms in relation to the dynamics of the dialectic, one can understand the symbolic worlds as they are actively fashioned by consciousness.

The principal conclusion Cassirer draws from this dialectic is that the relationship between spirit and life must ultimately be understood as cooperative and co-dependent rather than as antipathetic[89]. Life must develop spirit to higher and higher levels so that its creative impulses may be better satisfied. Spirit needs life because spirit has no energy. Without the creative impulse of life to keep it fresh, the laws of spirit deteriorate and collapse.[90] The result of this cooperation is ultimately the positive liberation of life achieved through its perfect harmony with spirit. In this liberation, life and spirit achieve a balance in which the structure of spirit is stable enough to be used in the creation of highly complex symbolic worlds and is flexible enough to be modified by life without jeopardizing the stability of spirit.

Cassirer‘s aim in presenting the dialectic in the fourth volume is to distinguish himself from those thinkers, such as Ludwig Klages and Martin Heidegger, who argue that truth can be known only through the raw experience of the purely irrational stream of life. Cassirer accuses these thinkers of failing to realize that spirit is a product of life and that the two are metaphysically inseparable.[91] The philosopher needs to understand life through the experience of life’s movement toward self-liberation in the construction of spirit. The truth lies in comprehending the experience of rational progress, not in irrational emptiness.

In presenting this argument, Cassirer spends little time discussing how the movement of the dialectic can be comprehended. Cassirer’s most straightforward investigation of this problem comes in a brief discussion of Henri Bergson’s notion of intelligence. Bergson suggests that intelligence may comprehend human understanding through a transcendent ability to look back upon the creative force that produces symbolization.[92] Cassirer argues that intelligence cannot actually transcend itself because it cannot escape its own process of

[88] Cf. *MSF*, p. 15.
[89] Cf. *Ibid.*
[90] Cf. *MSF,* p. 111.
[91] Cf. *MSF*., p. 61.
[92] Cf. *MSF*, p. 49.

symbolization. Intelligence can never gain authentic self-knowledge by turning itself into a static object for contemplation.

However, Cassirer holds that intelligence is at the core of the process of symbolization and at the center of the dialectic of spirit and life.[93] Because of its privileged position, it can turn itself around. The same process that allows intelligence to create symbolic worlds can also allow it to understand "the ground and significance" of other symbolic worlds. That is, intelligence can "dismantle" its own activity so as to arrive at the underlying unity of the symbolic world. Cassirer says that:

> intelligence turns against itself, yet with the intention not of negating its own essential nature, but of recognizing it. It acquires this knowledge not by just running through the individual phases of the process of construction, but by reviewing the way they correlatively link up to one another. It expands its own horizon through this review so that it is able…to bring in not simply all the forms of the mind but all the forms of life as well.[94]

The important point is that intelligence's activity of dismantling neither produces a static principle of unity nor articulates the process of creation in discrete conceptually defined stages. Rather, by turning back on itself and recognizing its own process of creation, intelligence recognizes the dynamic unity that it produces through the dialectic of spirit and life.

Cassirer implies that intelligence can go beyond its own time and culture to examine other aspects of history: "We may understand it [intelligence] neither in a one-sided intellectualistic manner nor in a merely pragmatic sense, but must take it as the central point of unity for all varieties and directions of the giving of form."[95] This places intelligence at the core of not just its own activity of symbol making but at the center of all possible symbol

[93] Cf. *MSF,* p. 60.
[94] *MSF*, p. 54.
[95] *MSF*, p. 60.

making undertaken by any consciousness--thereby unlocking the door to all symbolic worlds. Thus, Cassirer continues:

> We can understand the dynamic structure of the cultural world by reference to this main focus, only in this way can we accent the correct meaning and value. This world contains a closed field of energies in which all the individual forces, no matter how they appear to diverge, are nonetheless related to a common center and are united in it.[96]

It is therefore very clear here that, through this common unity, all the different manifestations of the dialectic of spirit and life may be unveiled.

Moreover, it is important to note that intelligence does not turn upon itself by simply re-creating a given historical period. Cassirer argues that "every such imaginative attempt at illustrative clarification must necessarily mislead us."[97] Rather, intelligence turns upon itself to find within its own unity, the unity that exists in a different historical epoch. It is also important to note that this view of intelligence further undercuts the argument that Cassirer saw history solely developmentally. The task of intelligence is to understand the common force present in all forms at all periods. While the force may be manifest in better or worse ways in different eras, this judgment is not the real purpose of intelligence's investigation of history.

So, Cassirer argues that, because intelligence can use symbolic forms to create symbolic worlds, it can understand any process of symbolization and so understand the dialectic. But, why should understanding a particular historical manifestation of the symbolic forms lead one to a necessarily atemporal unity? This is particularly problematic because Cassirer argues that intelligence cannot transcend life. Cassirer's answer to this problem rests in his attack on what he calls the organological philosophy of history. This historicist position, as held by Oswald Spengler, presents history as having a birth and death and holds that human history is bounded by the life cycle such that any attempt to overcome one's own

[96] *Ibid.*
[97] *MSF*, p. 55.

temporal place is impossible.[98] Cassirer points to the obvious contradiction that if one cannot transcend one's temporal location, one can neither know that fact nor the cycle itself.

The above discussion on the dialectic serves a good opportunity for Cassirer to make an important point about understanding history. In order to comprehend the development of mathematics, for example, one must already have an idea of the nature of that form. It is impossible to simply gather from historical data the essence of a particular form because the pattern of the form must already have been known in order to determine the relevance of the given data. Cassirer maintains:

> Once we have grasped the essence, the *eidos* of the mathematical, then we can begin to follow it out in its various temporal forms in which it is represented and realized in the totality of its historical manifestations. But the heaping up of all these manifestations does not help us to find and grasp this essence itself if we were not already able to experience it paradigmatically in a single case of its realization.[99]

Thus, Cassirer claims that every act of a symbolic form participates in the essence of the form such that every act can unlock the nature of the form. Cassirer avoids the accusation of historicism because his method of uncovering the unity of each symbolic form does not rest upon an inductive examination of the different manifestations of the form. Rather, each manifestation of a form already contains within it the universal unity both in terms of the objective structure of spirit and the creative impetus of life. To understand a symbolic form fully, a variety of historical manifestations must be explored, but the purpose of the exploration is to find the common force that exists in all the manifestations.

This is where the connection between Cassirer's philosophy and history lies. The work of intelligence is to find the dynamic unity of the symbolic forms and so unlock the dialectic of spirit and life. Intelligence will be aided greatly if it can begin with an examination of the historical. The task of history is to expose the movement of a period by

[98] *MSF*, p. 108.
[99] *MSF*, p. 110.

using historical evidence to determine the period's dynamic unity. Once history has done this, intelligence can then take the unity found in history and see it as a true philosophical unity; that is, intelligence separates the universal aspect of the unity from those aspects which are particular to a historical era. Intelligence then reveals the truth of the dialectic as a dynamic rather than static entity.

A careful reading of Cassirer's account of historical investigation reveals that the purpose of history is indeed to find the dynamic unity of a historical period. Cassirer's writings on historical investigation, especially in the *Problem of Knowledge*, trace its development through three main figures: Johann Gottfried Herder, Leopold Ranke, and Hippolyte Taine.[100]

Each thinker contributes key elements to Cassirer's interpretation of the task of history as the search for dynamic unity rather than as the articulation of cause and effect. Herder is important for Cassirer for two reasons. Before Herder, historians generally thought in terms of material causes and effects. Herder was the first to consider seriously the idea that an individual's emotions are fundamental for historical understanding.[101] This is significant not so much for Herder's emphasis on feeling but for his emphasis on understanding history as grounded in dynamic passion rather than as a scientific examination of cause and effect.[102]

Second, Cassirer praises Herder because he had an important sense of universality in history. Herder avoids the charge of historicism not by finding a universal pattern to history but by acknowledging that there is universality to human nature grounded in what he calls the "ideal of humanity." The "ideal of humanity" is not a strictly temporal goal; every period in history stands independently in relation to it. The entire course of history does not slowly strive toward the ideal. Rather, each period of history is valuable in its own right insofar as it has a unique relationship to the goal.[103] Every epoch of history is worth investigating because each epoch reveals human nature.

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[100]Cassirer, E., *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science and History since Hegel*, trans. William H. Woglom and Charles W. Hendel New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1950. Hereinafter cited as *PK*.
[101] Cf. *PK*, p. 219.
[102] Cf. *PK.*, p. 221. Cf. also *The Logic of the Humanities*, trans. Clarence Smith Howe, New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1961, pp. 56-57.
[103] *Ibid*.

Herder's conception of the ideal of humanity is similar to Cassirer's philosophy. Cassirer presents the symbolic forms in a developmental fashion because symbolic forms do tend to develop historically. However, Cassirer does not examine symbolic forms solely to see how one prefigures another. Rather, one finds the unity of a symbolic form to get a sense of how it is a significant element of human nature.

The second historian Cassirer discusses at length is Ranke. Cassirer commends Ranke for overcoming the romantic tendency to ignore accurate research.[104] Yet, Cassirer argues that Ranke did not fully engage in the full-fledged historical positivism of which his critics accused him. To understand Ranke, Cassirer claims, one must look beyond the superficial statements he makes about the need for objectivity and look directly at his historical writings.[105] There he reveals the authentic activity of the historian.

On one level Cassirer praises Ranke for the same tendencies he finds in Herder. Just as Herder tried to find the value in each period as a unique entity, Ranke approached history with a "universality of sympathy" that allowed him to judge each period fairly and on its own terms. This is especially apparent in his historical portraits where he attempts to come to terms with lives of particular individuals.[106]

Most important, however, Ranke fascinates Cassirer because Ranke realized that there must be a type of philosophical unity holding a period together. Ranke realized that this unity could neither be found in the bare facts of history nor in a universal concept. So, Ranke tried to meld the universal with the particular in a concept which he called the "idea".[107] This universal historical idea cannot be understood either objectively or subjectively. While it is universal, it is in no way separate from the particular. The historian may speak in broad terms about the universal as long as the historian does not try to understand a metaphysical separation between the idea and the fact or between the universal and the particular. Cassirer writes of Ranke's view of the historian: "All that he can apprehend is 'universal-and-

[104] Cf. *PK*, p. 230.
[105] Cf. *PK*, p. 236. A similar sentiment may be found in Cassirer, *EM*, p. 188.
[106] Cf. *PK*, p. 237.
[107] *PK*, p. 241.

individual existence'; and thus it is the 'truly spiritual'. The formal is the universal, the real is the particular, and together they are the living individual reality". [108]

Thus, Ranke avoids the dualism of subject and object. Ranke and Cassirer both wish to understand the particular as representative of the universal while at the same time arguing that the universal cannot be separated from the particular. Of course, Cassirer's philosophy operates at a level different from Ranke's history. Nevertheless, Cassirer's account of Ranke's history reveals how Cassirer's own philosophy must be understood as transcending the traditional philosophical dualism.

Why do we consider historians here? The reason is that Cassirer holds that the historian, by acknowledging the particular symbolic nature of the historical world, brings the subjective and the objective together in a unique way. History goes beyond a more objective and structural analysis of the period in order to reveal the subjective, dynamic, and creative elements that create the cultural world. Cassirer describes the cultural world by saying: "Man could not communicate his thoughts and feelings, and he could not, accordingly, live in a social world, if he had not the special gift of objectifying his thoughts, of giving them a solid and permanent shape. Behind these fixed and static shapes, these petrified works of human culture, history detects the original dynamic impulses."[109] Thus, history reveals the dynamic unity of a period. It is now possible to explain the vital role that history plays in the philosophy of symbolic forms.

In addition to the reason why we consider history here is that to understand spirit and life dynamically, then, philosophy must examine history's presentation of the historical encounter with the dialectic. History will present intellectual periods as driven by the central problem of this dialectic. As philosophy examines this movement, it uncovers what is universal about the movement and so understands its universal aspect. Thus, I agree with Alexander Bertland, that Cassirer examines history not simply for support but because he believes that it is the motion of history that contains the truth of the symbolic forms.[110]

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[108] *PK*, p. 240.
[109] *EM.*, p. 185.
[110] Cf. Bertland, A., "Ernst Cassirer's Metaphysics and the Investigation of History", in *CLIO* 28 (1999) : 279-289.

CHAPTER III

MAN AS SYMBOLIC ANIMAL

Knowing the background of Cassirer's concept of symbolic form, we are now ready to explore how he views the nature of man. The way Cassirer conceives the philosophy of symbolic forms is the way he presents his own view of the nature of man. The way he understands how our consciousness[111] works is now applied to the way he proposes the definition of man. As we recall in the previous chapter on the philosophy of the symbolic forms, what occupies so much in the mind of Cassirer is the explanation of the power of the consciousness which can be deduced from his presentation of the philosophy of the symbolic forms. It was only later in his philosophical works, to be exact in his work *An Essay on Man*[112] that he talked about man. Thus, how he describes man in this work *An Essay on Man* is very close to how he presents the philosophy of the symbolic forms. As he emphasized the priority of function over substance in his philosophy, so too here Cassirer defines man not by what he is but rather by what he does. Hence, man is a symbolic animal.

Traditionally, man is defined to be a rational animal.[113] When Cassirer replaces this definition with something else, there are a lot of questions being raised as to what better does

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[111] Cassirer never makes a distinction between consciousness and mind. He uses in his works the term consciousness as mind and other times as spirit. So, the three terms, consciousness, mind, and spirit seem to be the same for Cassirer.

[112] Before the publication of *An Essay on Man* in 1944, Cassirer was very much occupied with the philosophy of symbolic forms which came out in three volumes (the first volume in 1923, the second volume in 1925, the third volume was written in 1927 but only published in 1929). Charles W. Hendel called these three volumes as an outstanding contribution to epistemology and to the human power of abstraction – cf. *PSF, I,* pp. vii – xi.

[113] We know that from the Greeks the most important idea of man is developed: man is a rational animal. It has been commonly understood that it is human rationality that sets man apart from animal. Clearly, this idea first originated from Aristotle. The formulation *zoon logon echon, i.e*., man is the living being who possesses the gift of speech, can be found in at least two places in Aristotle's *Politics.* Accordingly, the formulation "*zoon logon echon*" is not exactly Aristotle's. It is stated in *Politics* 1253a 9-10 that "nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who has the gift of speech" and in 1332b 5 that "Man has reason, in addition, and man alone". Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* trans. Benjamin Jowett, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 1988, 2114.
However, what Aristotle seeks to point out in the context of *Politics* is not so much to confine man within the rational capacity, though *logos* in the sense of rationality plays a central role in his theory of the soul and the

it make to the concrete situation of the human existence or what advantageous contribution does it have to the on-going search of man to understand himself and his surroundings. The replacement of reason with symbolism is said to be not a minor modification of the Western philosophical tradition. There are reasons why Cassirer replaces rationality with symbolism, and his reasons revolve around the crisis in man's knowledge of himself.

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ethical theory of happiness. In the discussion of the principle of life in *De Anima*, Aristotle's aim is to distinguish the living from the non-living. The soul, *psyche*, being the principle for all living things, constitutes five different categories of psychic powers: "the nutritive, the appetitive, the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of thinking."[113] Based on these five powers, Aristotle proposes a ladder of beings, starting from the lowest type of living being, like plants, which have only the nutritive soul, to the highest level of the ladder, mankind, who possesses all the five powers. However, Aristotle is cautious here not to stress that it is man alone who has this power. He says, "[There is] another order of animated beings, *i.e*., man and possibly another order like man or superior to him, the power of thinking, *i.e*., mind."[113] Man is not the only being who has the power to think and reason. The gods are equally endowed with the rational mind. Rationality is therefore not the only essential characteristic of human nature. When the formulation *zoon logon echon* was later translated by the Roman Stoic Seneca into "*Rationale enim animal est homo*," — a dictum of man equating *logos with ratio* —, the full meaning of the term *logos* was thus narrowed down only to reason.

Insofar as Aristotle understands the word, logos means more than reason. More primordial than reason is the ability of speech. In addition, *logos* alone does not exhaust the nature of man. Man is also by nature a *zoon politikon* — a political animal. Therefore, it is now clear that Aristotle does not simply take *zoon logistikon* as the only defining characteristic of man. Combining these two insights, Aristotle maintains: "[W]hereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals, ***the power of speech is intended to set forth*** the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is ***a characteristic of man that he alone*** has any sense of good and evil, or just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state."

We therefore consider this as one of the most important insights into what is really called human nature. Aristotle clearly tags along Sophocles' idea about the greatness of man in *Antigone.* For him, man's rational ability alone does not make man as man. The establishment of communal living within a *polis* and the moral awareness of goodness and justice are the conditions of the possibility of human existence and in turn are the determination of human nature as such. Reverberating once again Sophocles, Aristotle joins him in condemning solitary man. "But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god; he is no part of a state. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first found the state was the greatest benefactor." Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 414b 30, trans. J.A. Smith, Oxford, UK: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1955; William Keith Chambers Guthrie enumerates eleven common meanings of logos in the fifth-century Greek world, among them, reason or argument, speech, measure, general principle and truth. Cf. his work *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 419-24. "Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal". Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a 2-3, p. 1987.

1. THE CRISIS OF MAN'S SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS' INSUFFICIENCY

Ernst Cassirer starts his discussion on the definition of man, in his book *An Essay on Man*, by saying: "That self-knowledge is the highest aim of the philosophical inquiry appears to be generally acknowledged."[114] He supported this observation by giving us facts. One is derived from different philosophical schools which, although they are conflicting with one another, still consider such philosophical objective as the Archimedean point. The other is derived from the Skeptics who, despite the fact that they distrust all general principles, accept the possibility and necessity of self-knowledge. Cassirer accepts that in the history of philosophy skepticism has been the counterpart of the resolute humanism in the sense that the skeptics hope to throw all the thoughts of man back upon his own being by denying and destructing the objective certainty of the external world. Thus, the skeptics declare that self-knowledge is the first prerequisite of self-realization.

What Cassirer refers above is the method of introspection in order to know the nature of man. This method is espoused by modern philosophy which claims that the evidence of our own being is impregnable and unassailable. But the advance of the psychological knowledge makes modern psychologists say that this method is precarious. What determines human nature is behavior. For this, Cassirer says that behaviorism "can warn us against possible methodological errors, but it cannot solve all the problems of human psychology."[115] However, purely introspective view is not at all acceptable, but Cassirer admits that it is not to be suppressed or be eliminated for the following reasons:

> Without introspection, without an immediate awareness of feelings, emotions, perceptions, thoughts, we could not even define the field of human psychology. Yet it must be admitted that by following this way alone we can never arrive at a comprehensive view of human nature. Introspection reveals to us only that small sector of human life which is accessible to our individual experience. It can never cover the whole field of human phenomena. Even if we should succeed in collecting and combining all the data, we should still

[114] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 1.
[115] Cassirer., E , *EM*, p. 2.

> have a very meager and fragmentary picture – a mere torso – of human nature.[116]

In relation to this, Cassirer makes reference to Aristotle who maintains that all human knowledge comes from a basic tendency of human nature manifesting itself in man's most elementary actions and reactions. He then maintains that that the whole extent of the life of the senses is determined by and impregnated with this tendency. Quoting Aristotle, Cassirer writes: "All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses."[117] With this, Cassirer distinguishes Aristotle's conception of knowledge from that of Plato.[118] Cassirer says that in Plato it is impossible to compare the desire for knowledge with the delight we take in our senses because, for Plato, life of the senses and life of the intellect are separated by a broad insurmountable abyss. This means that knowledge and truth belong to the transcendental order – to realm of pure and eternal ideas. In contrast, Aristotle denies the separation between the ideal and the empirical world. Cassirer claims that Aristotle attempts to explain the ideal world, the world of knowledge, in terms of life.

> In both realms, according to Aristotle, we find the same unbroken continuity. In nature as well as in human knowledge the higher forms develop from the lower forms. Sense perception, memory, experience, imagination, and reason are linked together by a common bond; they are merely different stages and different expressions of one and the same fundamental activity, which attains its highest perfection in man, but which in a way is shared by the animals and all the forms of organic life.[119]

What is pointed out here is the biological point of view of man. Cassirer says that if we adopt this view, it will lead us to the expectation that the first stages of the human

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[116] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 2.
[117] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 2.
[118] Cf. Bidney, D., *On the Philosophical Anthropology of Ernst Cassirer and Its Relation to the History of Anthropological Thought*, in the in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, Arthur P. Schilpp, (ed.), Evanston, Ill.: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949, p. 470.
[119] Cassirer, E., *EM.*, pp. 2-3.

knowledge would deal exclusively with the external world on which man depends for all his immediate needs and practical interests. Cassirer holds that man cannot live without constantly adopting himself to the conditions of the surrounding world. That is why, for Cassirer, "the initial steps towards man's intellectual and cultural life may be described as acts which involve a sort of mental adjustment to the immediate environment."[120]

What is the nature of self-knowledge here seems to be just a theoretical interest. But Cassirer explains that it is not conceived to be just like that – theoretical and speculative. He argues that primitive anthropology is found side by side with a primitive cosmology in the first mythological explanations of the world. To put it more clearly, the question of the origin of the world is inextricably interwoven with the question of the origin of man. It is known that religion never destroys these first mythological explanations but rather preserves them and gives them new shape and depth. Thus, from natural instinct and from a fundamental moral obligation man must know his very self.

Seeing the same principle in the general evolution of the philosophical thought, Cassirer claims that in the earliest stages of Greek philosophy cosmology predominates in most branches of philosophical investigation: the physical philosophy of the Milesian School to the mathematical philosophy of the Pythagoreans and to the logical philosophy of the Eleatic thinkers. However, the depth and comprehensiveness of the Greek mind makes an individual thinker as representing at the same time a new general type of thought. Standing among the borderline between cosmological and anthropological thought was Heraclitus who was convinced that it is impossible to penetrate the secret of nature without having studied the secret of man. In other words, fulfilling the demand of self-reflection is the key to discover reality and understand its meaning. This thought comes to full maturity during the time of Socrates. For Cassirer, it is the problem of man that separates pre-Socratic thought from Socratic thought. However, Cassirer takes note that Socrates never criticizes nor attacks former theories and does not even introduce new philosophical doctrine. But in him, according to Cassirer, all the past problems are seen in a new light since they are referred to

[120] Cassirer, E., *EM*, pp. 2-3.

a new intellectual center. In Socrates, Cassirer sees that we no longer have an independent theory of nature or an independent logical theory. Only one question remains: What is man?

Before answering this question, Cassirer explains that Socrates always maintains and defends the ideal of an objective, absolute and universal truth. But, according to Cassirer, the only universe that Socrates knows, to which all his inquiries refer, is the universe of man. This is the reason why Cassirer calls Socrates' philosophy as strictly anthropological. But Cassirer holds that nowhere in Socratic dialogues (found in Plato's work) can we find a direct solution to the problem on man. Socrates there in dialogues just gives us the detailed analysis of the nature of individual human qualities and virtues, but never dares to give a definition of man. How can this be possible? We have claimed above that through Socrates the question on man is raised in the new light. Cassirer, in reply to this, would say that it is precisely through the negative answer of Socrates that gives us new and unexpected light on the question. This then gives us the positive insight into the Socratic conception of man: "we cannot discover the nature of man in the same way that we can detect the nature of physical things. Physical things may be described in terms of their objective properties, but man may be described and defined only in terms of his consciousness."[121]

This Socratic insight makes Cassirer say that empirical observation and logical analysis are not adequate means to determine the nature of man. How can we gain insight into the nature of man is only in our immediate intercourse with human beings. Cassirer states that "only by way of dialogical or dialectic thought can we approach the knowledge of human nature."[122]

This Socratic insight is very important to Cassirer, because by this Cassirer claims to have found the new, indirect answer to the question "What is man?"

> Man is declared to be the creature who is constantly in search of himself – a creature who in every moment of his existence must examine and scrutinize the conditions of his existence. In this scrutiny, in this critical attitude toward human life, consists the real value of human life. "A life which is unexamined", says Socrates in his *Apology*, "is not worth living."

[121]Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 5.
[122] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 5.

> We may epitomize the thought of Socrates by saying that man is defined by him as that being who, when asked a rational question, can give a rational answer. Both his knowledge and his morality are comprehended in this circle. It is by this fundamental faculty, by this faculty of giving response to himself and to others, that man becomes a "responsible" being, a moral subject.[123]

With respect to the solutions given by the stoics and Christian thinkers to this crisis of man in knowledge of himself, we find Cassirer looking into the commonality in Socrates and Marcus Aurelius, one of the leading figures of Stoicism, despite the fact that Marcus Aurelius was neither an original thinker nor a logical writer in his methodology. The commonality lies in the fact that both thinkers believe that in order to find the true nature or essence of man, it is a must to remove from his being all external and accidental traits.

> Call none of those things a man's that do not fall to him as man. They cannot be claimed of a man; the man's nature does not guarantee them; they are no consummations of the nature. Consequently neither is the end for which man lives placed in these things, nor yet that which is perfective of the end, namely the Good. Moreover, if any of these things did fall to a man, it would not fall to him to condemn them and set his face against them,…but as it is, the more a man can cut himself free…from these and other such things with equanimity , by so much the more is he good.[124]

This shows, for Cassirer, that everything from without never constitutes the essence of man. It is not then riches, rank, social distinction, even health that matter. But "what matters alone is the tendency, the inner attitude of the soul; and this inner principle cannot be disturbed." [125] In addition, Cassirer finds also in Stoicism this thing common with that of Socratic thought. This is the requirement of self-questioning which at this time does not only

[123] Cassirer, E., *EM,* p. 6.
[124] Aurelius, M., *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius,* Bk. V., tans. C. R. Haines , Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916, p. 15.
[125] Cassirer, E., *EM.*, p. 7.

have a moral background but also have a universal and metaphysical background.[126] In support to this claim, Cassirer explains:

> He who lives in harmony with his own self, his demon, lives in harmony with the universe; for both the universal order are nothing but different expressions and manifestations of a common underlying principle. Man proves his inherent power of criticism, of judgment and discernment, by conceiving that in this correlation the Self, not the Universe, has the leading part. Once the Self has won its inner form, this form remains unalterable and imperturbable.[127]

What merit does Stoicism have for us with respect to their concept of man? Cassirer believes that its merit lies in the fact that their conception gives us both a deep feeling of our harmony with nature and of our moral independence on nature which, for Stoicism, do not conflict with each other but rather complement each other.[128] Cassirer says: "Man finds himself in perfect equipoise with the universe, and he knows that this equipoise must not be disturbed by any external force. Such is the dual character of Stoic "imperturbability."[129]

Having explained Stoicism, Cassirer starts here to compare its view with that of Christian thinkers. He holds that almost from all sides Stoicism and Christianity agree with each other, except in this assertion: the absolute independence of man which the Stoics consider as the fundamental virtue but Christian thinkers consider as vice and error. According to Cassirer, the struggle of these conflicting views has lasted for many centuries and even today it is still being felt.

Now, talking about St. Augustine, Cassirer points out that the founder of medieval philosophy considers reason as that which cannot show us the way to clarity, to truth and wisdom because it is itself obscured in its meaning; and its original power is lost due to the fall of Adam. Cassirer states: "reason alone, when left to itself and its own faculties never

[126] Cf. Aurelius, M., *op. cit*., Bk. III, p. 6.
[127] Cassirer, E.,*EM.,* p. 8.
[128] Cf. Bidney, D., *op. cit*., pp. 479- 484.
[129] Cassirer, E., *EM.,* p. 8.

can find the way back. It cannot reconstruct itself; it cannot, by its own efforts, return to its former pure essence. If such a reformation is ever possible, it is only by supernatural aid, by the power of divine grace."[130] This new view on man is further developed by St. Thomas Aquinas who concedes to human reason a higher power than Augustine did. However, St. Thomas Aquinas again is convinced that, without the divine illumination, reason cannot make the right use of its power. According to Cassirer, at this point we have come to see a complete reversal of all the values upheld by Greek philosophy.

> What once seemed to be the highest privilege of man proves to be his peril and his temptation; what appeared as his pride becomes his deepest humiliations. The Stoic precept that man has to obey and revere his inner principle, the "demon" within himself, is now regarded as dangerous idolatry.[131]

In explaining this new anthropology, Cassirer does not go beyond here because it appears to him impractical to analyze its fundamental motives and developments. However, he claims that there is a shortest route in order to understand this new anthropology. This route is that of Blaise Pascal who would give a new vigor and a new splendor to this new view of man. Making distinction between the "geometrical spirit" and the "acute or subtle spirit", Pascal relates that "what characterizes man is the richness and subtlety, the variety and versatility of his nature. Hence, mathematics can never become the instrument of the doctrine of man."[132] Cassirer continues to point out the thought of Paschal: "All the so-called definitions of man are nothing but airy speculation so long as they are not based upon and confirmed by our experience of man. There is no other way to know man than to understand his life and conduct."[133] In relation to this, Pascal considers religion as the only approach to the nature of man. There is a double man – the man before and after the fall. Man is destined for greatness, but he fails to achieve this because he falls from grace resulting in the loss of

[130] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 10.
[131] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 10.
[132] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 11.
[133] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 11.

his power and the perversion of his reason and will. Cassirer explains that Pascal attacks the classical maxim "Know thyself" because it is misleading and erroneous in the sense that man cannot confide in himself and listen to himself but rather man should be silent to listen to higher and truer voice.

Cassirer cautions us here that what is being given here is not meant to be a theoretical solution to the problem of man because he believes that religion cannot offer such a solution. As understood by Cassirer from Pascal, religion never pretends to clarify the mystery of man; rather confirms and deepens the mystery: "The God of whom it speaks is a *Deus absconditus*, a hidden God. Hence, even his image, man cannot be other than mysterious. Man also remains a *homo absconditus.*"[134] Is there no other way to uncover this man veiled in mystery? Let us turn to the logical-positivists to see what attempts they try to solve the problem on man.

With respect to the approach of the empiricists and logical positivists, Cassirer argues that the question "what is man?" is raised to a higher level in the sense that the quest now is for a general theory of man based on the empirical observations and on general logical principles. This was the beginning of modern times and the period after the appearance of Descartes's *Discourse on the Method*. Accordingly, to understand the order of human things is to begin studying the cosmic order which appears this time in a wholly new light. This time is the advent of the new cosmology, the heliocentric system introduced in the work of Copernicus, which becomes the sound and scientific basis for a new understanding of man.

Before the coming of the new cosmology, the universe is understood as a hierarchic order in which man occupies the highest place. Man is described as the end of the universe which is governed by the divine providence, as taught by the Stoic philosophy and Christian theology. This is now questioned by the new cosmology. As a result, man's claim to being the center of the universe has lost its foundation. Where is man now? He is placed in an infinite space in which his being seems to be just one of the vanishing dots. The universe is mute, the world is silent to man's religious feelings and to his deepest moral demands. According to Cassirer, the Copernican system became the source of the philosophical

[134] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 12.

agnosticism and skepticism in the 16th century. Montaigne, for example, attacked human reason by saying that man makes the small circle in which he lives as the center of the world and makes his private life as the standard of the universe. For Montaigne, this is an absurdity and provincial way of thinking and therefore be given up.

Cassirer considers criticisms of Montaigne as the clue to the whole subsequent development of the modern theory of man. The challenge now of modern philosophy and modern science is how to disprove the claim that the new cosmology weakens or obscures the power of human reason. Cassirer mentions Giordano Bruno as the first thinker who interprets positively the Copernican doctrine in the sense that he proposes to us the term infinity not as a negative concept but as an immeasurable and inexhaustible abundance of reality and the unrestricted power of the human intellect. Thus, "the infinite universe sets no limits to human reason; on the contrary, it is the great incentive of human reason. The human intellect becomes aware of its own infinity through measuring of its power by the infinite universe."[135]

Following Bruno in offering a solution to the problem of man are the great metaphysicians and scientists in the history of philosophy and science. Cassirer mentions Galileo who maintains that all possible knowledge is attained by man in the fields of mathematics. Accordingly, this knowledge is not inferior to the divine knowledge in the sense that objectively the few "verities known by the human mind are known as perfectly by man as they are by God."[136] On the part of Descartes, he begins with his universal doubt putting man within the limits of his consciousness and thus seemingly implying there is no way out into knowing the reality. The potent instrument to overthrow the universal doubt is the idea of the infinite. With this concept alone, the reality of God is demonstrated and in an indirect way, the reality of the material world is shown. In addition, combining this metaphysical proof with scientific proof, Leibniz makes use of the mathematical thought – the infinitesimal calculus – by whose rules the physical universe becomes intelligible and the laws of nature are seen as special case of the general laws of reason. And the last of this

[135] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 15.
[136] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p.16.

mathematical theorist is Spinoza who constructs a new ethics, a theory of passions and affections, a mathematical theory of the moral world through which man can attain his end.

This is all we see, the general theme, in the 17th century. Cassirer says that it is the rationalistic solution to the problem of man. What binds man and the universe is the mathematical reason which permits us to pass freely from the one to the other. And what is the key to a true understanding of the cosmic and moral order is mathematical reason. In sum, to understand man and things that surround him, we turn to mathematics.

This assumption of general principles in mathematics was put into question by Denis Diderot in 1754 because, accordingly, he expects a science of a more concrete character in such a way that it is based on observable facts. Cassirer says that Diderot claims that we highly overrated logical and rational methods in the sense that we know how to compare, to organize, and systematize known facts, but we fail to develop those methods through which we can discover new facts. There is then the desire of Diderot to free sciences from mathematical dominance and he prophesied that that time would soon come.

For Cassirer, the prophecy of Diderot never comes true. Mathematical speculations never end in the 18th century. The names of Gauss, Riemann, Weirstrass, and Poincare sprang into the fields of 19th century mathematics with their new mathematical ideas and concepts. However, in a certain sense, Cassirer says that Diderot's prediction contains an element of truth because, not denying the place of mathematics in the scientific hierarchy of the 19th century, there appears a new force – the biological thought. The publication of Darwin's work *On the Origin of Species* pushed some metaphysicians or some psychologists - who tried to found a mathematical psychology - out of the center of the scientific investigation on the nature of man. Cassirer states:

> Henceforth the true character of anthropological philosophy appears to be fixed once and for all. After innumerable fruitless attempts the philosophy of man stands at last on firm ground. We no longer need to indulge in airy speculations, for we are not in search of a general definition of the nature or essence of man. Our problem is simply to collect the empirical

> evidence which the general theory of evolution has put at our disposal in a rich and abundant measure.[137]

Cassirer admits that this is the conviction shared by the scientists and philosophers of the nineteenth century. According to Cassirer, what is important in the scientific investigation is not the empirical facts of evolution but the theoretical interpretation of these facts. "This interpretation was not determined, in an unambiguous sense, by the empirical evidence itself, but rather by certain fundamental principles which had a definite metaphysical character."[138]

Explaining the theory of evolution, Cassirer points out that this theory of evolution is not a recent accomplishment because this has a classical formulation in Aristotle's psychology and general view of organic life. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that Aristotle gives a formal interpretation, whereas the modern formulation comes out with a material interpretation. To understand the lower forms of life is to interpret them in the light of the higher forms. The understanding of the soul as the first actualization of a natural body potentially having life makes us see that organic life is conceived and interpreted in terms of human life. The teleological order of human life is manifested in the natural phenomena. But the modern theory asserts that the structure of the organic nature can be understood only by the material causes, not by final causes. How can we understand phenomenon by accidental causes (material causes)? The modern theory is quick to reply that organic life is a mere product of chance. The accidental changes, for the modern theory, are seen sufficient to explain the transformation from the single form of life to the highest and complicated forms.

In the theory of evolution, Cassirer sees the destruction of the arbitrary limits among the different forms of organic life, resulting in the absence of separate species – there is then one continuous and uninterrupted stream of life. But Cassirer raises the question here

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[137] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 18.

[138]Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 18. Please take note here that this is one of the assertions of Cassirer that disproves the claim of other thinkers that Cassirer's philosophy abhors metaphysics completely; cf. specifically the works of William Curtis Swabey, *Cassirer and Metaphysics*, in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, Arthur P. Schilpp, (ed.), Evanston, Ill.: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949, pp. 121-148.

whether we can apply the same principle to human life and human culture? Cassirer also asks whether the cultural world is made of accidental changes similar to the organic world? Is the world of human civilization reducible to a few general causes the same for the physical as for the spiritual phenomena? Cassirer mentions Hippolyte Taine[139] who said that what surrounds our physical and cultural life is the same iron ring of necessity. Accordingly, man never breaks out of this magic ring in his feelings, his inclinations, his ideas, his thoughts, and in his work of arts. In this perspective, one may consider man as an animal of superior species producing philosophies and poems in the same way as silkworms produce their cocoons or bees build their cells. But Cassirer again raises the question here that all impulses that we can find in human nature are not on the same level. He questions the empirical manner of accounting these impulses. He suggests to let us suppose these impulses as having a definite structure and we must discover such structure: "In the complicated wheelwork of human life we must find the hidden driving force which sets the whole mechanism of our thought and will in motion."[140]

The different theories, Cassirer admits, aim at proving the unity and homogeneity of human nature. But, unfortunately, their explanations given greatly vary from one another and even contradict each other. This contributes to the crisis because, in the view of Cassirer, there is no authorized body existing to unify all the interpretations of facts to understand man. Besides, our technical instrument for observation and experiments have improved and our analysis has become sharper and penetrating, and yet, Cassirer asserts, we have not found a method for the mastery and organization of this material. Is there any clue existing for us to proceed to investigate the present problem? If there is, what is then that clue that can lead us to understand the nature of man? The unfolding of the following pages may explain and answer this question.

[139] He was a French critic and historian who wrote the famous *Philosophy of Art* and *History of English Literature.* Also, he was the chief theoretical influence of French naturalism, a major proponent of sociological positivism, and one of the first practitioners of historist criticism.
[140] Cassirer, E., *EM.*, p. 21.

2. REPLACEMENT OF REASON WITH SYMBOLISM: CASSIRERIAN SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS

Cassirer owes a lot to the biologist Johannes von Uexkull[141] in explaining his position with respect to the clue to the nature of man. He points out that Uexkull was convinced that life cannot be described or explained in terms of physics or chemistry and there is no such thing as an absolute reality of things which is the same for all living beings. Cassirer writes:

> Reality is not a unique and homogenous thing; it is immensely diversified, having as many different schemes and patterns as there are different organisms. Every organism is, so to speak, a monadic being. It has a world of its own because it has an experience of its own. The phenomena that we find in the life of a certain biological species are not transferable to any other species. The experiences – and therefore the realities – of two different organisms are incommensurable with one another. In the world of a fly, says Uexkull, we find only "fly things"; in the world of a sea urchin we find only "sea urchin things."[142]

In this, Cassirer sees in Uexkull's work a very ingenious and original scheme of the biological world studied through an entirely objective or behavioristic method in order to avoid psychological interpretations. Accordingly, the only clue to animal life is given us in the facts of comparative anatomy, that is, knowing the anatomical structure of an animal species leads us to acquire the needed data for reconstructing its special mode of experience. The perfect image of the inner and outer world of the organism is obtained through a careful study of the structure of the animal body, of the number, the quality, and the distribution of various sense organs, and the conditions of the various sense organs.

> Every organism, even the lowest, is not only in a vague sense adapted to (*angepasst)* but entirely fitted into (*eingepasst*) its environment. According to its anatomical structure it possesses a certain *Merknetz* and

[141] Johannes von Uexkull has written a book in which he undertakes a critical revision of the principles of biology. For him, biology is a natural science which has to be developed by the usual empirical methods, i.e., by observation and experimentation. Biological thought, however, does not belong to the same type as physical or chemical thought. Cf.. Johannes von Uexkull, *Theoretische Biologie,* Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1920.

[142] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 23.

> a certain *Wirknetz*—a receptor system and an effector system. Without the cooperation and equilibrium of these two systems the organism could not survive. The receptor system by which a biological species receives outward stimuli and the effector system by which it reacts to them are in all cases closely interwoven. They are links in one and the same chin which is described…as the *functional circle (Funktionskreis)* of the animal.[143]

2.1. The Symbolic System in Man

Cassirer makes use of Uexkull's concepts and terminology to explain to us the nature of the human world since he is convinced that this world forms no exception to those biological rules which govern the life of all the other organisms. But what distinctly marks human life is the functional circle which is quantitively enlarged and qualitatively changed in man.

> Man has, as it were, discovered a new method of adapting himself to his environment. Between the receptor system and the effector system, which are to be found in all animal species, we find in man a third link which we may describe as the symbolic system. This new acquisition transforms the whole of human life. As compared with the other animals man lives not merely in a broader reality; he lives, so to speak, in a new dimension of reality. There is an unmistakable difference between organic reactions and human responses. In the first case a direct and immediate answer is given to an outward stimulus; in the second case the answer is delayed. It is interrupted and retarded by a slow and complicated process of thought. At first sight such a delay may appear to be a very questionable gain.[144]

For Cassirer, this development is an achievement of man from which man cannot escape and thus he should adopt the conditions of his own life. Cassirer argues that man is no longer in the physical universe but rather he lives now in the symbolic universe which includes language, myth, art, and religion as parts of such universe. Cassirer considers these

[143] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 24.
[144] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 24.

parts as different threads which weave the symbolic net – the tangle web of human experience.

With this present environment in which man finds himself, Cassirer enumerates here the consequences that man would experience in the symbolic universe.

> Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. His situation is the same in the theoretical as in the practical sphere. Even here man does not live in a world of hard facts, or according to his immediate needs and desires. He lives rather in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusions, in his fantasies and dreams.[145]

Although man is given new descriptions like above, the classical view, according to Cassirer, that man is a rational animal has not lost its force because rationality is an inherent feature of all human activities. In relation to this, he explains a little about myth and language. He points out that mythology itself is not simply a crude mass of superstitions or gross delusions and not also chaotic because it has a systematic and conceptual form. Although Cassirer asserts this argument, he says that it is impossible to describe the structure of myth as rational.[146] Regarding language, Cassirer is convinced that it has always been identified with reason and even with the very origin of reason. This, however, does not cover the whole field because, Cassirer says, side by side with the conceptual language there is the emotional language and side by side with logical or scientific language there is a language of poetic imagination. Furthermore, for Cassirer, language primarily expresses feelings and

[145] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 25.

[146] In the phenomenology of knowledge, Cassirer explains that myth shows us a world which is far from being without structure, immanent articulation, yet does not know the organization of reality according to things and attributes. Myth does not recognize the dividing line between the real and the unreal, between reality and appearance. Mythical metamorphosis is bound by no logical law of identity, nor does it find a limit in any fixed constancy of classes. Cf., *PSF, III*, p. 61.

affections and not thoughts and ideas.[147] Even religion, Cassirer says, is no more than a mere abstraction (in Kantian sense) because it conveys only the ideal shape, only the shadow, of what a genuine and concrete religious life is.

Regarding those thinkers who define man as rational animal, Cassirer says that they are not empiricists and thus never intend the empirical account of human nature. What they intend to express is by nature a fundamental moral imperative. That is why Cassirer comes to conclude: "Reason is a very inadequate term with which to comprehend the forms of man's cultural life in all their richness and variety. But all these forms are symbolic forms. Hence, instead of defining man as *an animal rationale*, we should define him as an *animal symbolicum*." [148]

2.2 The Human Language

Refreshing our minds of the important points proposed above that lead us to the present discussion may guide us well to follow and understand the concept of Cassirer on man as a symbolic animal. As developed from the writings of Uexkull, the symbolic quality of thought was demonstrated to be completely non-existent in the biological world. Symbolism, as expressed in philosophy, science, language, etc. is a manifestation found in man alone. The behavior of animals, no matter how elaborate, is instinctual. Their signal behavior, mediated through specific perceptual stimuli, has clear-cut adaptive goals: reproductive efficiency, natural selection by the environment, and eventual stasis with the environment. The switch from a system of signal responses to the symbolic level of thought and action represents a qualitative shift from the gross, if secure, substantialism of materiality oriented behavior to a new level of organic existence.

With this we are ready to follow how Cassirer develops this definition on man to a greater precision. Again, he asserts that symbolic thought and symbolic behavior are among the most characteristic features of human life. These two features are considered by Cassirer

[147]Cassirer extensively explains this theme in his book *Language and Myth*, Susanne K. Langer (trans.), New York, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1946, pp. 1-83.
[148] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 26.

as that on which the progress of human culture is based. But one may ask how to describe this symbolic attitude of man? What is the distinguishing character of man's symbolic behavior from the rest of the animal kingdom? Cassirer initially attempts to give us the description through the following examples:

> That animals do not always react to stimuli in a direct way, that they are capable of an indirect reaction, is evidently beyond question. The well-known experiments of Pavlov provide us with a rich body of empirical evidence concerning the so-called representative stimuli. In the case of the anthropoid apes a very interesting experimental study by Wolfe has shown the effectiveness of "token rewards." The animals learned to respond to tokens as substitute for food rewards in the same way in which they responded to food itself. According to Wolfe the results of varied and protracted training experiments have demonstrated that symbolic processes occur in the behavior of anthropoid apes.[149]

Robert M. Yerkes, in his book *Chimpanzees: A Laboratory Colony,* comes to make a general conclusion from these experiments. He says that the responses of the above animals being experimented may be considered as antecedents of human symbolic processes.[150] But according to Cassirer, the interpretation of the experimental facts always relies on certain fundamental concepts which have to be clarified before the empirical material can bear its fruit because of his line of reasoning that the problem at hand is not merely an empirical one but to a great degree a logical one. The animal language cannot be solved on the basis of mere facts of animal psychology, by forms of animal communications, and certain animal accomplishments because these would admit contradictory interpretations. What is necessary, Cassirer says, is finding first a correct logical starting point which can lead us to a natural and sound interpretation of the empirical facts. For Cassirer, the starting point is the definition of speech.

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[149] Cassirer, E., *EM,* p. 28.
[150] Cf. Yerkes, R., *Chimpanzees: A Laboratory Colony,* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1943, p. 189.

In his attempt to explain the nature of speech,[151] Cassirer believes that there are various geological strata of speech. The first and most fundamental is the language of the emotions – almost all the human utterances are under this level. Apart from this, there is a form of speech wherein the word is by no means a mere interjection, i.e., it is not an involuntary expression of feeling but a part of a sentence which has a definite syntactical and logical structure. Cassirer finds analogies and parallels to emotional language to be found in abundance in the animal world. In chimpanzees, for example, a considerable degree of expression is manifested by means of gesture: rage, terror, despair, grief, pleading, desire, playfulness, and pleasure. But here there is an element, which is indispensable to all human language, which is missing: no signs which have an objective reference or meaning.[152]

That is why at this point Cassirer puts forward the difference between propositional language and emotional language that would differentiate the human world from the animal world. Cassirer asserts that no observations and experimentations so far arrive at the conclusion that animal has ever made a decisive step from subjective to objective, from affective to propositional language. Accordingly, the lack of images in animals prevents them from achieving what humans have attained. Although, in the case of chimpanzee, there are processes that function effectively in animal world, they remain pre-linguistic and thus not comparable with human cognitive processes. Aside from the above distinction to clarify the difference between the human world and the animal world, Cassirer also introduces here the difference between signs and symbols – signs for the animal world and for the human world, it is beyond signs, it is in the realm of symbols. Hence, Cassirer does not deny that there is a sort of intelligence in animals if intelligence is understood as adjustment to the immediate environment or adaptive modification of environment. He does not also deny that there is no imagination in animals because, as many experiments would show, they can make

[151] Cassirer, E., *SMC*, p. 150-151.

[152]Cf. also Sanguineti, J., *Introduzione alla Gnoseologia,* Firenze, Italy: Le Monnier, 2003, pp. 90-96. Please also cf. the article of Gardiner F. Perry, III, , because here he also deals with the peculiar difference of the nature of man compared with animals, and that is, to give meaning – G.F. Perry, *Cassirer, Swedenborg, and the Problem of Meaning* in «Studia Swedenborgiana » 3 (1978) 5-15.

a sort of detours in their reactions.[153] As pointed out by Steve G. Lofts in his book, *Ernst Cassirer: A Repetition of Modernity,* Cassirer goes as far as to acknowledge in animals the ability to manipulate its world in a manner that would normally be considered as technological, that is, with tools fabricated to achieve a specific goal.[154] But Cassirer maintains that this intelligence or imagination are only practical, and not of human type. Thus, he says that "man alone has developed a new form: a symbolic imagination and intelligence."[155]

But how does the transition from a mere practical attitude to a symbolic attitude in man become possible? Cassirer says that it happens in a slow and continuous process which comes out not by the usual psychological observation but rather by nature itself. Cassirer gave the classical cases of Helen Keller[156] and Laura Bridgman, two blind deaf-mute children, who learned to speak by means of special methods. For Cassirer, these cases contain the best illustration of the general problem with which we are presently dealing. This is how Cassirer evaluates the case of Helen Keller:

> The decisive step leading from the use of signs and pantomime to the use of words, that is, of symbols, could scarcely be described in a more striking manner. What was the child's real discovery at this moment? Helen Keller had previously learned to combine a certain thing or event with a certain sign of the manual alphabet. A fixed association had been established between these things and certain tactile impressions. But a series of such associations, even if they are repeated and amplified, still does not imply an understanding of what human speech is and means. In order to arrive at such an understanding the child had to make a new and much more significant discovery. It had to understand that everything has a name—that the symbolic function is not restricted to particular cases but is a principle of applicability which encompasses the whole field of human

[153] One famous example of such experiment is that of Pavlov. In this experiment, it is proved that animals can easily be trained to react not merely to direct stimuli but to all sorts of mediate or representative stimuli as mentioned above. Also please cf. Todes, D., *Ivan Pavlov: Exploring the Animal Machine*, New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 20-45.
[154]Cf. Lofts, S., *Ernst Cassirer: A Repetition of Modernity,* New York, NY: State University New York Press, 2000, p.64.
[155] Cassirer, E., *EM.*, p. 33.
[156] Cf. Keller, H. *The Story of My Life*, London, UK: The Echo Library, 2007, p. 30.

> thought. In the case of Helen Keller this discovery came as a sudden shock. She was a girl seven years of age who, with the exception of defects in the use of certain sense organs, was in an excellent state of health and possessed of a highly developed mind. By the neglect of education she had been very much retarded. Then, suddenly, the development takes place. It works like an intellectual revolution. The child begins to see the world in a new light. It has learned the use of words not merely as mechanical signs or signals but as an entirely new instrument of thought. A new horizon is opened up, and henceforth the child will roam at will in this incomparably wider and freer area.[157]

The same typical elements found in the life of Laura Bridgman, who, after she had learned the use of the finger-alphabet, suddenly reached also the point at which she began to understand the symbolism of human speech. What is the point here of Cassirer is that the key to the human world is the principle of symbolism.[158] In his own words: "the principle of symbolism with its universality, validity, and applicability, is the magic word, the Open Sesame! giving access to the specifically human world, to the world of human culture."[159] For Cassirer, this magic key assures man further progress which can never be obstructed by any lack in the sense material in such a way that the construction of man's human world is not dependent on the quality of his sense material as shown in the case of Helen Keller. In relation to this, Cassirer assails the theories of sensationalism because - by making every idea as a faint copy of an original sense impressions - these theories make the life of a blind, deaf, and dumb child hopeless to achieve intellectual progress. Human progress or human culture, for Cassirer, draws its intellectual and moral values not from the material it consists, but from its form, its architectural structure. The expression of this form, says Cassirer, is in any sense material. For this reason, Cassirer sees that vocal language has a very great and technical advantage over tactile language, but the latter's technical defects never destroys its essential use. "The free development of symbolic thought and symbolic expression," says Cassirer, "is not obstructed by the use of tactile signs in the place of vocal ones."[160] When a child learns

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[157] Cassirer, E., *EM*., pp. 34-35.
[158] Cf. Paetzold, H., Symbol *and Culture*, in *Forms of Knowledge and Sensibility: Ernst Cassirer and the Human Sciences*, Gunnar Foss and Eivind Kasa (eds.), Norway: Norwegian Academic Press, 2002, pp. 45-47.
[159] Cassirer, E., *EM.*, p. 35.
[160] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 36.

to grasp the meaning of the human language, it doesn't count, for Cassirer, in which particular material this meaning is accessible. For this, he gives again the example of Helen Keller who was able to construct the symbolic world out of the poorest and scantiest materials. Thus, Cassirer states:

> The thing of vital importance is not the individual bricks and stones but their general function as architectural form. In the realm of speech it is their general symbolic function which vivifies the material signs and "makes them speak." Without this vivifying principle the human world indeed remain deaf and mute. With this principle, even the world of a deaf, dumb, and blind child can become incomparably broader and richer than the world of the most highly developed animal.[161]

It is in this context that Cassirer now claims that universal applicability is one of the greatest prerogatives of human symbolism, owing to the fact that everything has a name. Apart from this, human symbolism is also variable in the sense that one can express meaning in various languages or within a single language a certain thought or idea may be expressed in quite different terms. Again, human symbolism is seen by Cassirer as characterized not by its uniformity but by its versatility or mobility – all these could not be found in the animal world. This is how Cassirer illustrates this last point by using again the case of Laura Bridgman.

> Long before Laura Bridgman had learned to speak, she had developed a very curious mode of expression, a language…not consist of articulated sounds but only of various noises … as "emotional noises." She was in the habit of uttering these sounds in the presence of certain persons. Thus they became entirely individualized; every person in her environment was greeted by a special noise. "Whenever she met unexpectedly an acquaintance," writes Dr. Lieber, "I found that she repeatedly uttered the word for that person before she began to speak. It was the utterance of pleasurable recognition." But when by means of the finger alphabet the child had grasped the meaning of human language the case was altered.

[161] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 36.

> Now the sound really became a name: and this name was not bound to an individual person but could be changed if the circumstances seemed to require it. One day, for instance, Laura Bridgman had a letter from her former teacher, Miss Drew, who, in the meantime, by her marriage had become a Mrs. Morton. In this letter she was invited to visit her teacher. This gave her great pleasure, but she found fault with Miss Drew because she had signed the letter with her old name instead of using the name of her husband. She even said that now she must find another noise for her teacher, as the one for Drew must not be the same as that for Morton. It is clear that the former "noises" have here undergone an important and very interesting change in meaning. They are no longer special utterances, inseparable from a particular concrete situation. They have become abstract names. For the new name invented by the child did not designate a new individual but the same individual in a new relationship.[162]

Evidently from this passage, aside from enlightening us regarding the mobility of language, the question on the relationship between the relational thought and symbolic thought would emerge. This makes us proceed to the next topic to see whether this relational thought is really dependent on symbolic thought.

2.3 The Symbolic Capacity and Perception

Cassirer acknowledges that for the relational thought to come out or to come to its full development, there must exist a complex system of symbols. Without such system, we cannot speak about relational thought. He says that we cannot equate mere awareness of relations with the intellectual act, an act of logical or abstract thought because such an awareness is necessary even in the rudimentary acts of perception. According to Cassirer, sensationalist theories used to describe perception as an assortment of simple sense data, i.e., just a mere aggregate or bundle of isolated impressions. This is not true as corrected by modern Gestalt psychology because, Cassirer explains, in the simple perceptual processes there exist fundamental structural elements, certain patterns or configurations – especially of spatial and optical structures. This holds true not only for the human world but even in the

[162] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 37.

lowest stages of animal life. It is because of this that Cassirer asserts that mere awareness of relations is not the special feature of human consciousness.

> We do find, however, in man a special type of relational thought which has no parallel in the animal world. In man an ability to isolate relations—to consider them in their abstract meaning—has developed. In order to grasp this meaning man is no longer dependent upon concrete sense data, upon visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic data. He considers these relations "in themselves".[163]

Cassirer mentions Geometry as the classic example of the turning point in man's intellectual life because here man is not bound to the apprehension of concrete individual figures since in geometry we are concerned with studying the universal spatial relations for whose expression we have symbolism in abundance. But Cassirer here reminds us that it would be an impossible achievement if there was no preliminary step of the human language. Learning from various experiments regarding the processes of abstraction or generalization in animals,[164] Cassirer argues that "if there are certain traces of a *distinctio rationis* in the animal world, they are, as it were, nipped in the bud. They cannot develop because they do not possess that invaluable and indeed indispensable aid of human speech, of a system of symbols."[165]

And where does this human speech originate? Cassirer answers this question by referring to Herder who rejected the metaphysical or theological thesis of a supernatural or divine origin of the language. "Speech is not an object, a physical thing for which we may seek a natural or a supernatural cause. It is a process, a general function of the human mind."[166] Since it is not an artificial creation of reason nor a product of mere association, the

[163] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 38.
[164] Cassirer here refers again to the experiment of Wolfgang Koehler in his experiment regarding the chimpanzee. In this experiment, it shows that the animal has an ability to respond to the relation between two or more objects and to respond to perceptual quality. But there have been many errors being committed because of the animal's lack of what the humans have, i.e., the symbolic system.
[165] Cassirer, E., *EM.*, p. 39.
[166] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 39.

language process is psychologically very difficult to describe in terms used by all psychological schools of the eighteenth century.

For Cassirer, the stress of Herder's explanation on the nature of language rests heavily on what Herder calls "reflection", *i.e.*, the ability of man to single out from the whole undiscriminated mass of the stream of floating sensuous phenomena certain fixed elements in order to isolate them and to concentrate attention upon them. Quoting Herder, Cassirer writes:

> Man demonstrates reflection when the power of his soul acts so freely that it can segregate from the whole ocean of sensation surging through all his senses one wave, as it were; and that it can stay this wave, draw attention to it, and be aware of this attention. He evinces reflection when from the whole wavering dream of images rushing through his senses he can collect himself into a moment of waking, dwell on one image spontaneously, observe it clearly and more quietly, and abstract characteristics showing him that this and no other is the object. Thus he evinces reflection when he cannot only perceive all the qualities vividly or clearly but when he can recognize one or several of them as distinctive qualities. . . . Now by what means did this recognition come about? Through a characteristic which he had to abstract, and which, as an element of consciousness, presented itself clearly. Well then, let us exclaim: Eureka! This initial character of consciousness was the language of the soul. With this, human language is created.[167]

Analyzing this passage, Cassirer considers this theory of language as speculative for the great reason that this does not proceed form a general theory of knowledge nor from empirical observations. But Cassirer gives importance to this theory because it contains logical and psychological elements. What Herder emphasized here are distinctive marks that animals lack especially when it comes to abstraction and generalization. According to Cassirer, this view of Herder was clarified and confirmed later by the research in the field of the psychopathology of language which came to conclude that the loss (or severe impairment)

[167] Cassirer, E., *PSF I*, pp. 152-153.

of speech due to brain injury is not an isolated phenomenon. The defect changes the whole character of human behavior. If a person suffers from aphasia or related diseases, accordingly he would lose the use of words with corresponding changes in personality. Externally, such a person looks normal in doing the daily task. But when this person encounters a problem whose solution is in need of theoretical and reflective activity, he is at a complete loss. Unable to think now in general concepts or categories, he cannot perform any task which can be fulfilled only through a comprehension of the abstract and thus he will stick to the immediate facts or concrete situations.[168] What does all this show to us? Cassirer comes to conclude that it clarifies to us to what extent that type of thought Herder called reflective is dependent on symbolic thought. Thus, Cassirer says emphatically:

> Without symbolism the life of man would be like that of the prisoners in the cave of Plato's famous simile. Man's life would be confined within the limits of his biological needs and his practical interests; it could find no access to the "ideal world" which is opened to him from different sides by religion, art, philosophy, science.[169]

3. The Human World

In explaining his view on human nature, Cassirer includes space and time because these two are the framework through which we can conceive any real thing.[170] Any real thing is inconceivable without the conditions of space and time. For Cassirer, it is not good to assume that the perception of time and space is the same for all organic beings. Much more we cannot assume that lower organisms and man perceive space and time at the same level. There must exist an unmistakable difference between the human world and the animal world. How can we explain such difference? Cassirer admits the difficulty of explaining it in terms of the methods of psychology. Instead of psychological methods, he proposes the indirect

[168] Cf. Cassirer, E., *PSF, III,* p. 205-277.
[169] Cassirer, E., *EM.,* p. 41.
[170] Cf. Cassirer, E., *SMC.*, pp. 275-285.

way: the analysis of the forms of human culture to discover the true character of space and time in our human world.

As a consequence of this analysis, Cassirer introduces different types of spatial and temporal experience. Evidently, not all forms of this experience are on the same level because there are lower and higher strata arranged in a certain order. For Cassirer, the lowest of this stratum is described to be the *organic space and time*. Here, every organism lives in a certain environment and must adapt itself to the conditions of its environment in order to survive. Then there is the space for higher animals, which Cassirer calls *perceptual space.* Accordingly, this is not a simple sense datum because it contains different kinds of sense experience: optical, tactual, acoustic, and kinesthetic. The third stratum of spatial and temporal experience is the so-called *symbolic space*, a homogeneous space of geometrical and mathematical relations. By a very complex and difficult process of thought, man alone arrives at the idea of abstract space. For Cassirer, it is "this idea which clears the way for man not only to a new field of knowledge but to an entirely new direction of his cultural life."[171]

How does Cassirer explain the nature of this symbolic or abstract space? He does it by referring us back to the early Greek thinkers and to the modern era. Materialists and Idealists admit the significance of the discovery of the abstract space, but they fail to explain clearly its logical character. Democritus conceives space as non-being but has true reality. Plato in the *Timaeus* describes space as a 'hybrid concept", hardly describable in adequate terms. Newton gives us distinction between abstract space – for him, the mathematical space – and the space of sense experience. Space is not the principle of relations that concepts bear to the sensible objects. On the part of Berkeley, he says that Newton's "true mathematical space" was in fact an imaginary space or a fiction of the human mind.

The abstract space, then for Cassirer, has no counterpart and no foundation in any physical or psychological reality. This contention is supported by the reality that points and lines of the geometry are neither physical nor psychological objects – they are nothing but symbols for abstract relations. Cassirer says, "If we ascribe 'truth' to these relations, then

[171] Cassirer, E.,*EM.*, p. 43.

the sense of the term truth will henceforth require redefinition. For we are concerned in the case of the abstract space not with the truth of things but with the truth of propositions and judgments."[172]

Historically, Cassirer claims that in primitive life and under the conditions of the primitive society, the idea of an abstract space is absent. What the primitive people had is the concept that space is a space of action. This action is centered around immediate practical needs and interests. Thus, if ever we can talk about space in the primitive society, the conception is not purely intellectual or theoretical in nature, but laden with concrete personal or social feelings. For Cassirer, the decisive step from the space of action to a theoretical or scientific concept of space to the space of geometry is very impossible to happen in the primitive man. The reason is that in geometry all the concrete differences are swept away since geometric space abstracts from all the variety and heterogeneity imposed upon us by the disparate nature of our senses. The result is the homogenous, universal space. This then leads man to arrive at the concept of unique or systematic cosmic order. Without an idea of a uniform space, man cannot have an idea of a systematic cosmic order.

How does Cassirer explain the difference between the concrete and the abstract apprehension of space and spatial relations? Cassirer makes recourse again to ethnology which shows that primitive thought is not capable to conceive a scheme of space. This means that, for example, the primitive man will know perfectly the course of the river as he paddles or sails. But when asked to draw or give general descriptions of the river, the primitive man cannot do it. He is acquainted with the river, and yet he lacks knowledge in the abstract.

Thus, at this point, Cassirer makes a distinction between acquaintance and knowledge. For Cassirer, acquaintance means representation, whereas knowledge includes and presupposes representation. Hence Cassirer argues:

> The representation of an object is quite a different act from the mere handling of the object. The latter demands nothing but a definite series of actions, of bodily movements coordinated with each other or following each other. It is a matter of habit acquired by a constantly repeated

[172] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 44.

> unvarying performance of certain acts. But the representation of space and spatial relations means much more. To represent a thing it is not enough to be able to manipulate it in the right way and for practical uses. We must have a general conception of the object, and regard it from different angles in order to find its relations to other objects. We must locate it and determine its position in a general system.[173]

As mentioned earlier regarding the method of the forms of culture to be used here, Cassirer painstakingly traced the origin of the conception of the cosmic order to the Babylonian astronomy. Hence he is also convinced that the Babylonians were the first ones to have discovered symbolic algebra.[174] Yes, it is true that in the beginning it was a false and erroneous form of symbolic thought. But, Cassirer maintains, this "paved the way to a new and true symbolism, the symbolism of modern science."[175]

4. The Memory and the Future

That the concept of time[176] develops with the same characteristic progress with that of the concept of space is accepted by Cassirer. Making recourse to Kant, Cassirer says that space is the form of our "outer experience", whereas time is the form of our "inner experience". But, according to Cassirer, in the interpretation of man's inner experience there emerge new problems because the methods man uses in the order of physical things outside himself are no longer applicable.

The understanding before of time is that time is only a general condition of organic life, not as a specific form of human life. This means that organic life exists only so far as it evolves in time. From the point of view of Cassirer, time is not a thing but a process, i.e., a never-resting continuous stream of events. In this stream nothing ever recurs in the same identical shape, as Heraclitus once said: "You cannot step twice into the same river." Now, in dealing with the problem of organic life, Cassirer maintains that the prejudice of "simple

[173] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 46.
[174] Cf. Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 47.
[175] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 49.
[176] Cf. Cassirer, E., *SMC*, pp. 101-102.

location" must be removed first from ourselves. The reason for this is that the organism is never located in a single instant. There exist in its life three modes of time (past, present, and future) which form a whole and thus cannot be separated into individual elements. This makes Cassirer say that it is impossible to explain the momentary state of an organism without taking into account its history and its future to which this present moment is merely a point of passage.

In relation to this, Cassirer moves on to discuss about memory. He believes that memory is spread over the whole domain of living nature and thus, it is not a phenomenon limited to our conscious life. This view was originally developed by the famous physiologist, Ewald Hering, who defended that memory is to be considered as a general function of the organic matter. This theory is affirmed and further developed by R. Semon in his theory of *"mnemic biology"*. The meaning here of *mneme* is taken as the principle of conservation in the mutability of all organic happenings. As conceived by Semon, every after a stimulus acts upon an organism there is a definite physiological trace called "engram", and this "engram" determines the future reactions of the organism.

In front of these theories, however, Cassirer clarifies that we are still far from having explained the importance of the memory in the human world. The reason is obvious. In man, the concept of *mneme* is quite different from the rest of organic life. For Cassirer, to have a memory in the human sense of the word, it needs not only to have preserved some traces of former experiences which will later influence future reactions. In man, there is a need of recognition and identification, i.e., the repetition of past impressions is to be ordered, located, and referred to different points in time. But Cassirer points out that "such a location is not possible without conceiving time as a general scheme – as a serial order which comprises all the individual events. The awareness of time necessarily implies the concept of such a serial order corresponding to that other schema which we call space. "[177]

Moreover, memory in man is also different from that of higher animals - take for example the chimpanzees - in spite of the fact that these animals can solve problems and generally adapt to environmental situations by the help of symbolic processes analogous to

[177] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 51.

human verbal symbol and by dependence on associations which function as signs. The difference is that in man it is not just a simple recollection of the past impressions but a rebirth of the past. This then includes a creative and constructive process. "It is not enough," Cassirer argues, "to pick up isolated data of our past experience, we must really re-collect them, we must organize and synthesize them, and assemble them into a focus of thought." [178] Thus, this way of recollecting is that which gives human shape of man's memory different from the rest of the animal and organic life.

Another conception of memory which is rejected by Cassirer is that of schools of mechanism that would explain memory in terms of simple mechanism of association of ideas. Cassirer's rejection of the mechanical theories of memory is based on the view of Bergson who asserts that memory means "internalization", "intensifications", and interpenetration of all the elements of the past.

To explain further this issue on memory, Cassirer again reminds us at this point that he is not going into the metaphysical aspects of the problem. As mentioned earlier, he would attempt to illustrate and expound the issue by concrete examples taken from man's cultural life. Thus, Cassirer now turns to Goethe's life and works. It is from Goethe that Cassirer explains further the nature of memory and calls it now a symbolic memory.

> Symbolic memory is the process by which man not only repeats his past experience but also reconstructs this experience. Imagination becomes a necessary element of true recollection. This was the reason why Goethe entitled his autobiography *Poetry and Truth (Dichtung und Wahrheit)*. He did not mean that he had inserted into the narrative of his life any imaginary or fictitious elements. He wanted to discover and describe the truth about his life; but this truth could only be found by giving to the isolated and dispersed facts of his life a poetical, that is a symbolic, shape. Other poets have viewed their work in similar fashion. To be a poet, declared Henrik Ibsen, means to preside as judge over oneself. Poetry is one of the forms in which a man may give the verdict on himself and his life. It is self-knowledge and self-criticism. Such criticism is not to be understood in a moral sense. It does not mean appraisal or blame,

[178] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 51.

> justification or condemnation, but a new and deeper understanding, a reinterpretation of the poet's personal life.[179]

Cassirer wants to show us here that poetry is one that which characterizes a symbolic memory. But it is not limited to poetry. Cassirer considers the *Confession* of St. Augustine as another excellent example wherein we can see how the symbolic memory manifests itself in this work. Cassirer admires Augustine's work in this way:

> Every line … has not merely a historical but also a hidden symbolic meaning. Augustine could not understand his own life or speak of it except in the symbolic language of the Christian faith. By this procedure he became both a great religious thinker and the founder of a new psychology, of a new method of introspection and self-examination.[180]

Having explained the relationship of the present to the past, let us now turn to the other dimension of time, and that is, the future. For Cassirer, this is the most significant and the most observable characteristic of the structure of human life. He affirms that even organisms and lower animals are characterized in a way by the future in the sense that we cannot describe them without reference to the future and thus their instinctive actions are not prompted always by the immediate needs but rather in view of the future. However, Cassirer says that this does not prove that they have concept or awareness of the future. Even in the higher animals, the fact that these animals have a kind of conscious anticipation of future facts (again the experiment on monkeys) does not prove any idea that they are conscious of the future. Yes, it is true, that in a way, as explained above, "planning of future actions" are not beyond the reach of animal life. "But in human beings," says Cassirer, "the awareness of the future undergoes the same characteristic change of meaning which we have noted with regard to the idea of the past."[181] What does Cassirer mean by this? It means that the future

[179] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 52.
[180] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 53.
[181] Cassirer, E., *EM*, p. 54.

is not only an "image" but it becomes an "ideal" in man. This is a theoretical idea of the future which Cassirer at this time arrives at calling it the symbolic future:

> It is more than a mere expectation; it becomes an imperative of human life. And this imperative reaches far beyond man's immediate practical needs—in its highest form it reaches beyond the limits of his empirical life. This is man's symbolic future, which corresponds to and is in strict analogy with his symbolic past. We may call it "prophetic" future because it is nowhere better expressed than in the lives of the great religious prophets.[182]

The symbolic future here is to go beyond the empirical limits of man's existence as demonstrated by the old religious prophets as examples given to us by Cassirer. It is because in their lives we see the ideal future as the negation of the empirical world (the "end of all days") but at the same time as the hope and assurance of "a new heaven and a new earth."

With these ideas of the replacement of reason in man with symbolism, we can now ask the question whether this new conception of man helps the philosophical and scientific community in their quest to have a progress in their ongoing reflection on man and on acquiring knowledge with certainty so as to understand and resolve current problems faced today by humanity. So, what follows then is the evaluation of the relevance of Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of man today.

[182] Cassirer, E., *EM.*, p. 55.

IV

CASSIRER AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAN TODAY

Determining the place of Ernst Cassirer in today's philosophy of man is difficult if we fail to grasp the true meaning of his definition of man as symbolic animal. As I pointed out, man for Cassirer is not to be defined by what he thinks but rather by what he does. This means that this symbolic animal implies that there exists not only a mind but also a body. The trend of today's philosophy of man is the consideration of the totality of the person or in his entirety – his historical, cultural, biological, physical, psychical and spiritual make-up. What follows then is the evaluation and presentation of certain elements of his philosophy of man before and after Cassirer's death that will earn him a place in the ongoing progress of this philosophical reflection on what is man today.

1. CASSIRER'S IMPACT BEFORE HIS DEATH

1.1 The Influence of Dilthey and Ortega y Gasset

Based on what we discussed in the previous chapter on the nature of man as symbolic animal, there exists a strong inclination on our part to say that we see Cassirer providing a historical interpretation of the concept of human nature, although some are so critical of this view of man that they associate it with the radical historicism of Dilthey and Ortega y Gasset.

We recall that Dilthey accepted the historical relativity of philosophical systems and denied the validity of metaphysics. He held the idea that man is free to envision his own world of values and to reconstruct his human world in terms of his lived experiences – not to mention the temporal character and historical relativity of human achievements – appears to be what Cassirer shares with Dilthey.[183]

[183] Cf. Hodges,, H.A., *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction,* New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2003, p. 154.

With regards to Ortega y Gasset, he held that "Man has no nature; he has history."[184] His reason is that to have a nature would imply having a fixed form of being. As he considers life, like Bergson does, as essentially a Heraclitean process of becoming, he denies that man has any fixed nature. Man is said to be always in the making, and without any fixed constitution. Cassirer, in agreement with Dilthey's phenomenological anthropology, arrives at a similar conclusion by the subjective route of symbolical or cultural idealism. As against Ortega y Gasset's ontological position, Cassirer argues that:

> Since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* we conceive the dualism of being and becoming as a logical rather than a metaphysical dualism. . . . We do not regard substance and change as different realms of being but as categories – as conditions and presuppositions of our empirical knowledge. These categories are universal principles; they are not confined to special objects of knowledge.[185]

For Cassirer, then, an ontological or "substantial" knowledge of man is impossible. The reason given by Cassirer is that knowing the "substantial" knowledge of man would imply that man can have an immediate knowledge of himself as an entity or thing-in-itself apart from his symbolical representations. Man, he argues, cannot know himself except through an analysis of his symbolic cultural expressions or objectifications, since all human knowledge, including self-knowledge, is organized by the a-priori, symbolic categories of historical culture. That is why Cassirer asserts that man is said to be a "symbolic animal" rather than a "rational animal" as he has been defined since the time of Aristotle.[186]

It is therefore in this context, that Cassirer, in agreement with Comte, maintains that to "know thyself" individually requires that one knows humanity in terms of its historical,

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[184] Ortega, J.G., "Wilhelm Dilthey and the Idea of Life" in *Concord and Liberty,* New York: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 1963, p. 148.
[185] *EM*, p. 72.
[186] Cf. *EM*, p. 67. Here, Cassirer explained why man can only be defined "functionally", not "substantially". Why? He did not introduce clear arguments to support his claims. It seems for him that defining man as rational animal is "insufficient" to back up his philosophical claims. Why "insufficient"? He did not elaborate it further.

cultural achievements, and hence he accepts Comte's proposition that "humanity is not to be explained through man but man by humanity."[187]

Where does Cassirer disagree with Comte? He would disagree with Comte's positivism only insofar as Comte applies the objective methods of natural science to human studies, on the assumption that the latter were a kind of "social physics," subject to empirical observation and explanation in terms of universal, natural laws. In opposition to this naturalistic approach, the neo-Kantians would maintain that the human studies or cultural sciences require a subjective approach which would yield understanding and concrete, idiographic insight into the human processes and symbols involved – a type of knowledge which no amount of external observation, causal explanation, or statistical correlation can possibly furnish.

Why is this point important here? It tells us how closely historical idealism and sociological positivism approximate one another, and how much essential agreement there is in their conclusions, notwithstanding their professed differences in methodology. The basic reason for this agreement between historical idealism and sociological positivism lies in their common anti-metaphysical perspective. In rejecting any ontological or substantial knowledge of man or of human nature, the adherents of both historical idealism and sociological positivism are led to affirm that only a knowledge of "social facts" and historical, social achievements can provide a scientific knowledge of man. Thus both the positivists and the neo-Kantian idealists tend to reduce the category of nature to that of culture, thereby turning ontology and epistemology into cultural anthropology.

A careful analysis of contemporary ethnology would suggest, that both sociological positivism and cultural idealism represent extreme positions. If one were to adopt a polaristic conception of culture and recognize that the idea of culture is unintelligible apart from its reference to nature, then it would follow that human nature is logically and genetically prior to culture, since we must postulate human agents with determinate psycho-biological powers and impulses capable of initiating the cultural process. In other words, the determinate nature of man is manifested functionally through culture but is not reducible to culture. There is no

[187] *EM,* p. 64.

necessity in fact or in logic for choosing between nature and history. Man does have a substantial nature which may be investigated by the methods of natural science as well as a cultural history which may be studied by the methods of the social sciences and humanities. By assuming uncritically that all human phenomena pertain to the domain of cultural history, one sets up a false dichotomy or division between human studies on the one hand, and natural science on the other – a division which tends to widen the gulf between them and thus renders any effective cultural integration impossible of achievement.

In other words, it is insufficient to say that man changes, that man journeys toward self-realization or self-fulfillment, that man is historical; it is not sufficient to say that man is. We must explain how and why he is in change; we must explain what constitutes in his change and how the organic structure of his being operates in the course of becoming.

If there were nothing relatively permanent or fixed, if there were no human nature or essence, there could be no science of man but only a sequence of descriptions for each period of history. There is nothing in man which we can call an identity. On the other hand, if human nature were completely "unmodifiable," if man were incapable of determining for himself the direction or particular form of his development in time, there could be no culture or history. The cultural-process requires as its indispensable condition a determinate human nature and environment which is subject to "transformation" in time by man himself.

Critics do not only question this new conception of man by Cassirer but also the implication of this in determining certitude on the part of man in acquiring knowledge. Thus, they ask and seek answers "what will happen to human knowledge"?

1.2 The Question on Direction of Knowledge

Cassirer's critics claim that when we assess the statements pointed out in previous chapters, they show that in Cassirer's philosophy, there is really no distinction between sensitive knowledge and intellectual knowledge. These two levels of knowledge seem to be just one. Here, we can then make a glimpse of how he comes to understand the process of knowledge. It seems to us here that in knowing the object, Cassirer implies that knowledge

really depends so much on the capacity of the subject, the mind or the consciousness, to the extent that the object appears to be just the product of the mind, without any separate existence at all in reality. The object then seems to be not real. But we know that in perception of an object, there is always an interplay between the subject and the object. Our perception of the object depends on the data given to us by our senses. And whatever the senses give to us is that on which and from which our intellect works.

Knowing the Kantian-background of Cassirer, we can understand why his philosophy implies knowledge's dependence on the capacity of the mind. Consider in brief how Kant presents his theory of knowledge, and this makes us understand why Cassirer thinks this way. Kant's emphasis on the role our mental faculties play in shaping our "experience" implies a sharp distinction between phenomena and noumena. Noumena are "things-in-themselves," the reality that exists independent of our mind, whereas phenomena are appearances, reality as our mind makes sense of it. According to Kant, we can never know with certainty what is "out there." Since all our knowledge of the external world is filtered through our mental faculties, we can know only the world that our mind presents to us. That is, all our knowledge is only knowledge of *phenomena*, and we must accept that *noumena* are fundamentally unknowable. Idealism is the name given to the various strands of philosophy that claim the world is made up primarily of mental ideas, not of physical things. Kant differs from many idealists in that he does not deny the existence of an external reality and does not even think that ideas are more fundamental than things. However, he argues that we can never transcend the limitations and the contextualization provided by our minds, so that the only reality we will ever know is the reality of phenomena.

Comparing this view of Cassirer with his Kantian-background, we present at this point how we normally acquire knowledge insofar as the classical thought is concerned. Our knowledge begins with sense experience and in some way be derived from it.[188] Suppose that we have come into contact with one or more objects at the level of external sense perception. In order for perception to occur, in some way one or more external sense power

[188] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In De Trinitate,* q. 6, a. 2; cf. also *S.Th. II-II*, q. 173, a. 2.

must be acted upon by the object which is to be perceived. That here is a passive element in perception is a point repeatedly made by Thomas Aquinas. In reacting to this impression from without, the sense in question will directly perceive the thing insofar as it falls under the sense's proper sense object, that is, insofar as it is something colored, or sounding, or smelling, etc., and hence implicitly something which acts.

Going hand in hand with this, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, will be the recognition by an internal sense known as the common sense (*sensus communis*) that the external senses are indeed perceiving. At the same time, this internal sense is required to account for the fact that, even at the level of perception, we can distinguish the proper object of one external sense from that of another, for instance, that which is white from that which is sweet. Also, this common sense unifies different sense – perceptions. If these two activities lead Aquinas to defend the need for the common sense as a distinct internal sense, the first of these also suggests that the common sense may play an important role in our discovery of the existence of extramental things. Like the external senses themselves the common sense presupposes that the external senses are in direct contact with their appropriate objects and, as noted, it also enables one to be aware that one is indeed sensing.

Even at this level there seems to be an implicit awareness of the actual existence of the thing which is perceived by one or more external sense – this is the function of the common sense; for in being aware that one is sensing, one is also aware that one's power of sense perception is being acted upon by some object. Strictly speaking, what is perceived is an existent rather than existence as such. Hence such knowledge of existence itself is still only implicit. Existence will not be singled out or isolated as such for consideration at the level of the senses. But the raw material is now at hand for the intellect to advert to the fact that the senses are perceiving some object and for it to judge that the thing in question actually exists.

However, for this to happen, other steps are required. Still at the level of the internal senses, another internal sense power will produce an image or likeness in which the form of the external object, as appropriately distinguished and organized by the common sense, is preserved. This likeness is known as a phantasm and is produced by the internal sense known

as the imagination. This phantasm in turn is submitted to the light of the intellect's active or abstractive power, the agent intellect, which abstracts the potentially intelligible content contained therein from its individuating conditions and renders it actually intelligible. This abstracted intelligible content in turn is impressed on the other intellective power, the possible intellect (*intellectus possibilis*) and is grasped or apprehended by it. At this point one will have arrived at some kind of general or universal knowledge of the whatness or quiddity of the thing in question, though one will not yet know it intellectually as *this* thing or as an individual. To put this in other terms, the intellect's first operation – the understanding of indivisibles – will have occurred, whereby the intellect grasps its natural object, the abstracted quiddity of a material thing.

For the intellect to grasp an individual, another step is required, which is referred to by Aquinas as a kind of *reflexio* or turning back upon the phantasms. Only at this point will one be intellectually aware of *this* thing or *x* not merely in universal fashion or as *x* but as *this* thing or *this x*. One now will be intellectually aware that the thing in question is real in the sense that it actually exists.

That is how St. Thomas Aquinas presents his view on the process of acquiring knowledge. Looking now at the Cassirerian view, we recall the symbolic function by which alone man is defined. For Cassirer, the mind or consciousness has these three capacities: expression, representation, conceptualization or meaning. If we put these capacities in the classical context, it seems that these are similar to the classical understanding of the way we obtain knowledge: perception, image, and concept. But again, as I pointed out, Cassirer never explicitly talks about an object with which the mind interacts. As I tried to show in Chapter II, what Cassirer had been busied with was the creating mind or spirit to the extent that the created realities were left unexplained satisfactorily. This is understandable because Cassirer never talks about substance with fixed or rigid description similar to that of the classical thought.

But again how can an entity functions or operates without first of all a substance? The kind of function or operation that an entity has depends on the identity of his being. As St. Thomas said, "operation follows being." It is not the other way around. If ever an entity

functions, it is because it has a substantial nature defining its operations. By suggesting that man has no substantial nature, Cassirer not only renders man aimless because there is no point of reference to which he can refer but also renders it the impossible to determining his growth and development. Whatever functions or operations man has flow from his substantial nature, form his fixed human nature. To express, to represent, and to conceptualize are possible because of human nature. The symbolic capacity of man comes from his rationality, contrary to the claims of Cassirer.

What then I read in Cassirer is that he seems to introduce a process of knowing or understanding a reality by the sole power of the mind by stressing its symbolic or logical capacity alone. Cassirer does not seem to look at the other perspectives in understanding reality. It appears to us that he seems to build a reality completely not out of a "scratch" but out of thin air. He is not only denying the classical object-subject inter-action in the knowing-process, but he also denies the current theory of the cognitive-psychologists' "bottom-up and top- down"[189] model in understanding reality.

Furthermore, as Cassirer never makes distinction between sensitive knowledge and intellectual knowledge and as he gives so much power to the consciousness or mind, he also finds himself ambiguous with respect to the different levels of human actions. In classical anthrophology, we can speak of the following levels of actions.[190] There are sensitive actions which are described as psycho-somatic, that is, physical operations animated by the organic and sensitive quality. There are also spiritual human acts which transcend completely the body and yet they are united essentially not accidentally to the corporeal base of neurological

[189] The classical form of this is the deduction-induction method in scientific research. This vocabulary is also employed in neuroscience and psychology. The study of visual attention provides an example. If your attention is drawn to a flower in a field, it may be simply that the flower is more visually salient than the surrounding field. The information which caused you to attend to the flower came to you in a bottom-up fashion – your attention was not contingent upon knowledge of the flower; the outside stimulus was sufficient on its own. Contrast this situation with one in which you are looking for a flower. You have a representation of what you are looking for. When you see the object you are looking for, it is salient. This is an example of the use of top-down information. Cf. also Wolfe, J., "Changing Your Mind: On the Contributions of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Guidance in Visual Search for Feature Singletons" in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 29 (2003) : 483–502.

[190] Cf. Sanguineti, J.J., *Introduzione alla Gnoseologia,* Firenze, Italy: Le Monnier, 2003, p. 45.

and also behavioral nature. And lastly, all the human actions, both spiritual and organic, are united in the person in the sense that, for example, he who walks is not the feet but the person. All this is possible because in classical anthropology, there is the acceptance of the substantial nature of man. This is conspicuously absent in the thought of Cassirer because he rejects classical thought. Remember, Cassirer is a neo-Kantian.

1.3 Where is Metaphysics?

It is confusing sometimes to find in Cassirer's works that he deplores so much the idealistic and positivistic approach in philosophy, especially with regards to philosophical anthropology, and yet it seems that he arrives at the same conclusions similar to those philosophical positions. Consider the case of Cassirer's concept of cultural reality. In agreement with the Kantian position, Cassirer holds that human mind, as I pointed out above, is not a passive mirror of reality but rather a dynamic agent which creates a symbolical or intelligible world of its own. In his early work on *Language and Myth* Cassirer has formulated very clearly his basic indebtedness to the Kantian approach. He writes:

> Against this self-dissolution of the spirit there is only one remedy: to accept in all seriousness what Kant calls his "Copernican revolution." Instead of measuring the content, meaning, and truth of intellectual forms by something extraneous which is supposed to be reproduced in them, we must find in these forms themselves the measure and criterion for their truth and intrinsic meaning. Instead of taking them as mere copies of something else, we must see in each of these spiritual forms a spontaneous law of generation; an original way and tendency of expression which is more than a mere record of something initially given in fixed categories of real existence. From this point of view, myth, art, language and science appear as symbols; not in the sense of mere figures which refer to some given reality by means of suggestion and allegorical renderings, but in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own. In these realms the spirit exhibits itself in that inwardly determined dialectic by virtue of which alone there is any reality, any organized and definite

> Being at all. Thus the special symbolic forms are not imitations, but organs of reality.[191]

What is clearly a Kantian thesis here is that symbolic forms are not mere imitations but organs of reality. We can understand "organs of reality" here in terms of being active "agents" of understanding an object or of making an object visible to us. Cassirer continues:

> The question as to what reality is apart from these forms, and what are its independent attributes, becomes irrelevant here. For the mind, only that can be visible which has some definite form; but every form of existence has its source in some peculiar way of seeing, some intellectual formulation and intuition of meaning. Once language, myth, art and science are recognized as such ideational forms, the basic philosophical question is no longer that of their relation to an absolute reality which forms, so to speak, their solid and substantial substratum; the central problem now is that of their mutual limitation and supplementation. Though they all function organically together in the construction of spiritual reality, yet each of these organs has its individual assignment.[192]

Another Kantian thesis here is that there are a limited number of "archetypal" cultural phenomena which constitute the main categories of cultural reality. For man, all reality is ultimately cultural reality or symbolical reality which the human mind itself has created in the course of historical development, since that is the only kind of reality which it is possible for the human mind to apprehend and evaluate.

This symbolical world of objective meanings constitutes, as it were, "a new dimension of reality" available only to man. Man literally lives in a "symbolical universe" of his own creation and imagination. As Cassirer puts it in his *An Essay on Man*:

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[191] *LM*, p. 8.
[192] *LM*, p. 9.

> Man cannot escape from his own achievement. He cannot but adopt the conditions of his own life. No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience. All human progress in thought and experience refines upon and strengthens this net. No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. His situation is the same in the theoretical as in the practical sphere. Even here man does not live in a world of hard facts, or according to his immediate needs and desires. He lives rather in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusions, in his fantasies and dreams.[193]

Thus, according to Cassirer, the various cultural disciplines are, as it were, the language of the spirit, the diverse modes of symbolical expression created by man in the process of interpreting his life-experiences. One cannot go behind these symbolical expressions to intuit nature or things-in-themselves directly, since experience is formally constituted by symbols which determine all our human perspectives. For Cassirer, it would appear, as I pointed out in Chapter II, the symbol takes the place of Kant's forms of intuition and categories of the understanding. The symbol is thought to constitute the ultimate element of all human culture.

Again it is interesting to note that the sociological positivists have come to a similar conclusion by a different route. In his *Cultural Reality* Florian Znaniecki argues:

> For a general view of the world the fundamental points are that the concrete empirical world is a world in evolution in which nothing

[193] *EM,* p. 25.

> absolutely permanent can be found, and that as a world in evolution it is first of all a world of culture, not of nature, a historical, not a physical reality. Idealism and naturalism both deal, not with the concrete empirical world, but with abstractly isolated aspects of it.[194]

From this it appears that Znaniecki's positivistic, historical cultural reality is identical with that of the neo-Kantian idealists, although he himself thought that he was steering a middle course between naturalism and idealism (of the Hegelian variety). Once more it may be seen how sociological positivism and historical idealism come to the same conclusion and posit a cultural reality as over against a metaphysical or ontological reality which is pre-cultural.

Regarding intellectual crisis, it is the denial of the substantial basis of the science of man as the cause of the real intellectual crisis in knowing what and who man is – that Cassirer says in the opening chapter of *An Essay of Man.* He claims there is an intellectual or philosophical crisis which is very difficult to overcome as its solutions seem to be too dependent on a certain authority which, for Cassirer, no longer exists. Cassirer says:

> Owing to this development our modern theory of man lost its intellectual center. We acquired instead a complete anarchy of thought. Even in the former times to be sure there was a great discrepancy of opinions and theories relating to this problem. But there remained at least a general orientation, a frame of reference, to which all individual differences might be referred. Metaphysics, theology, mathematics, and biology successively assumed the guidance for thought on the problem of man and determined the line of investigation. The real crisis of this problem manifested itself when such a central power capable of directing all individual efforts ceased to exist. . .But an established authority to which one might appeal no longer existed. Theologians, scientists, politicians, sociologists, biologists, psychologists, ethnologists, economists all approached the problem from their own viewpoints. To combine or unify all these particular aspects and perspectives was impossible.[195]

[194] Znaniecki, F. *Cultural Reality,* New York, N.Y.: Russel and Russel Publishers, 1972, p. 21.
[195] *EM*., p. 21.

Here, it seems to appear in the mind of Cassirer, that the intellectual crisis of our times is a direct consequence of the fact that we do not have any "central power" or "established authority" capable of integrating all the sciences and the humanities in a single, unified, cultural perspective. But what I see is that Cassirer does not take into account the special characteristics of classical thought. We know that classical thought renders our knowledge a coherent or integrated whole. But Cassirer here indiscriminately lumps together "meta-physics, theology, mathematics and biology" as having at one time or another "assumed the guidance for thought on the problem of man." But what is it that makes it possible for these disciplines to assume the guidance for thought, and why is this no longer possible in the present crisis?

The question seems to be difficult to answer. But it seems that an answer to this question lies in the fact that classical thought agrees on metaphysics or ontology as the foundation for its epistemology, morality, politics, and religion. The various sciences, and especially the human studies, are referred back to this center of orientation which serves both as a logical starting point and as a criterion of validity. Hence, although the theologian, the biologist, or the mathematician might conceive this basic reality in different forms, once a given pattern of thought was accepted, it could serve as a norm and principle of integration for the culture as a whole.

Modern thought, on the other hand, following Locke, Hume, Kant, and Comte, has denied the possibility of universal, ontological knowledge. This then paved the way to a favorable environment for the upsurge of the chaotic pluralism and mutual unintelligibility of the natural and social sciences. This, I believe, we deplore so greatly. The historicism and relativism of the neo-Kantian approach has contributed to the breakdown of the classical metaphysical tradition. Such approach has swept away the last metaphysical presuppositions of the Kantian system by substituting the free or undetermined, creative, symbolic expressions of the life-process for the fixed structure of a comparatively abiding nature.

What then I want to point out here is that the most fundamental conflict in modern thought is one between diverse metaphysical approaches on the one hand, and anti-

metaphysical tendencies on the other. Classical ontological thought has attempted to view the phenomena of nature and life *sub specie aeternitatis,*[196] whereas modern ontological thought tends to view cosmic reality *sub specie temporis*. One might ask whether there is a possibility to reconcile these opposite points of view. There is a possibility. We must agree on the possibility and necessity of a comprehensive ontological theory based on verifiable scientific knowledge which should acknowledge these two elements in explaining the natural and cultural phenomena: structure and process. But when it comes to the conflict between the classical tradition of the possibility of "substantial" knowledge of reality and the "critical" idealistic position that ontological knowledge is impossible, we must decide and choose between these two contrary positions because there is no possibility of logical reconciliation.

Now, despite all these critical appraisals of the definition of man by Cassirer that his philosophy is idealist and anti-metaphysical, is still there the possibility of finding Cassirer a place in today's on-going search for scientific progress in all fields of disciplines.

2. CASSIRER'S IMPACT AFTER HIS DEATH

2.1 The Integration of Biological- Cultural Perspectives

In the 1990's, fifty years after Cassirer's death, there grew interests in studying the works of Ernst Cassirer. Such studies show that we can see Cassirer's attempt to re-integrate the biological and cultural perspectives in his anthropology as shown in the previous chapter. This is most evident in the largest section of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms III* (1929), which bears the title 'the pathology of symbolic consciousness'. It deals with impairments to perception and thought due to injuries to the brain, including optical and tactile *agnosia*, *apraxia,* and *aphasia*. Cassirer claimed that all these inabilities were variations on a single theme, the restriction of the capacity to understand symbolism. According to Cassirer, the ability to use signs and symbols was not only necessary for thought, even perception and

[196] This means "under the aspect of eternity"; hence, from Spinoza (1632-77) onwards, an honorific expression describing what is universally and eternally true, without any reference to or dependence upon the merely temporal portions of reality. The opposite of this is "under the aspect of temporality".

feeling depended upon it.[197] This made him commit to the claim that a person could be in possession of fully functional sense organs and to have what philosophers called 'sensations' and yet not be able to perceive anything at all, if the ability to understand symbolic meaning was impaired.

It is then in this particular view that we might put Cassirer outside the strictly idealistic philosophy. Why? Because his reference to the discussion of the brain, neurology, and the body appeared to be incompatible with any claims about the immanence of consciousness.

As we read history, aphasia had been a topic among philosophers before. In the year that Cassirer was born, 1874, there was a debate in Berlin about the nature and causes of *aphasia* in which philosophers, psychologists and linguists stood in opposition to physicians and physiologists. The former group preferred to treat *aphasia* in reference to 'the mind' while the latter group preferred to consider *aphasia* in reference to specific areas of the brain. With the debate at a standstill, a member of the medical faction asked whether the psychologists and philosophers might not actually come to see a patient with *aphasia* in the hospital, and even asked the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey to do so. Dilthey refused, explaining that a novice could not promote science by being confronted with a situation that he was not able to deal with.[198]

A half century later, prefatory to writing his study of the pathology of symbolic consciousness, Cassirer not only went to see a patient with *aphasia*, but in the company of the neurologist Kurt Goldstein he repeatedly visited a number of patients in the Frankfurt clinic for soldiers with brain damage from wounds in the first world war, and in Hamburg, he visited patients in Heinrich Emden's neurological ward at the Barmbeck hospital. He steeped himself in the medical literature and when he visited England in 1927 to lecture he sought out Henry Head, the great English pioneer in *aphasia* research.

What happened here is that Cassirer sided neither with the *mentalists* nor the *locationalists*. The reason is that, for Cassirer, 'the mind' (Geist) was not some kind of entity,

[197] Cf. *PSF III,* pp. 209-210, 227.
[198] Cf. Hagner, M., *Homo cerebralis: Der Wandel vom Seelenorgan zum Gehirn,* Berlin, Germany: Berlin Verlag, 1997, pp. 279-288.

but 'a function'[199] of the whole organism – the brain and the body, acting in its environment. The word 'environment' here translates the German 'Umwelt', or 'surrounding world'. From whom Cassirer got the term Umwelt which he often used in his philosophical anthropology? It was from a new colleague at the University of Hamburg, the biologist Jakob von Uexkull. In 1926 Uexkull became the director of the Institute for Umweltforschung in Hamburg, and Cassirer became a frequent visitor to the institute and later their friendship developed. By 1928, Cassirer was making extensive use of Uexkull's biological theories in his text on "The Problem of the Symbol as the fundamental problem of philosophical anthropology."[200] According to Uexkull, the anatomy of the organism had to be conceived in terms of its *Bauplan* or 'organization', which determined its particular Umwelt or surrounding world. This world was a correlate of the organism's particular anatomy. That meant that each organism lives in its own particular world or niche because of the nature of its anatomy – its perceptive organs, means of feeding and movement, etc – so that the phenomena familiar to one species are unknown to another.[201]

As Uexkull once put it, in the world of the fly we find only 'fly things', in the world of a sea urchin we find only 'sea urchin things'. Uexkull's theories, which were neglected for a time, seem to enjoy a renaissance today among biologists and cognitive scientists.[202] Cassirer was struck by the parallels and even more by the differences between Uexkull's conception of animals' worlds and the symbolic worlds of humans. Uexkull's theoretical biology of *Umwelten* provided the bridge that was needed to conjoin cultural symbolism with physical anthropology and biology. In addition to the biological *Umwelt* of the human anatomy, humans are able to inhabit worlds of symbolic memory, imagination, and knowledge that are unknown in the animal kingdom. Cassirer's incorporation of Uexkull's biological thought into his philosophical anthropology turned out, however, to be only a first step in a new development.

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[199] E. Cassirer, "Structuralism in Modern Linguistics" in *Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle in New York* 2 (1945) : 99-120.
[200] Cf. *MSF*, pp. 35- 111.
[201] Cf. *EM*, p. 23.
[202] Cf. Clark, A., *Being There: Putting, Brain, Body, World Together Again*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997, pp. 23-31.

With these new studies and discovery of other works of Cassirer, we will see in the next chapter that Cassirer's conception of man is not just hanging on thin air because of its lack of proper and real grounding. So, what follows is the discussion on basis phenomena and its important relation to philosophical anthropology or philosophy of man.

2.2 *Basisphanomene* (Basis Phenomena) : Relation and Importance to Philosophy of Man

We mentioned above that there grew interests in studying the works of Cassirer.[203] The reason for this is that there has been a surprising discovery[204] among Cassirer's unpublished manuscripts from his years in Sweden (1935-1941). Such manuscripts expounded a doctrine that he had always presupposed yet never explicated. This doctrine fits with Uexkull's theoretical biology but goes far beyond it in its philosophical finality. Cassirer called it the doctrine of the *Basisphanomene* or 'basis phenomena'. The purpose of this phenomenological doctrine was to make explicit the fundamental presuppositions of philosophy. Cassirer claimed that there are three basic phenomena, that is, independent and irreducible realities. He referred to them sometimes by the words *Life, Action,* and the *World* or simply by the pronouns *I, Thou, It*. He meant the phenomena, not the words. As he put it: 'Knowledge about "me" is not prior and independent of knowing about "You" and "It", rather, all this is only constituted together.'

This was a kind of 'realism', but it was not a return to traditional realism (going back to Aristotle), for the basic phenomena are not kinds of things or substances, but processes.[205]

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[203] Even in this decade such studies continue. Please cf. Curthoys, N., "Ernst Cassirer, Hannah Arendt, and the twentieth century revival of the philosophical anthropology" in *Journal of Genocide Research* 13 (2011) : 23-46.

[204] I mentioned in Chapter I that there were volumes of works left unpublished when Ernst Cassirer suddenly died in 1945. *Basisphanomene* was one of the manuscripts comprising the "metaphysics of symbolic forms". This now makes up the fourth volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – appeared in 1995 in German edition, and the following year in 1996 the English edition.

[205] Cf. *SMC,* pp. 193-194. Here Cassirer puts it: "Life, reality, being, existence are nothing but different terms referring to one and the same fundamental fact…These terms do not describe a fixed, rigid, substantial thing. They are to be understood as names of a process. Also cf. *MSF,* pp. 138 – 166, where Cassirer expounds this assertion.

The phenomenon of the *'I'* or *'Life'* did not mean the self-identical *'thinking subject'* of idealistic philosophy, but the process of feeling.[206]

This doctrine of basic phenomena at this point provided the framework for Cassirer's philosophical anthropology. It made its assumptions explicit: the existence of organisms living in a world. Cassirer had appealed to such a doctrine in the 1920s, but he did not make it explicit until the late 1930s[207] after he moved to Sweden. Here he was forced to make his position clear because of the charges of subjectivism hurled against him repeatedly by the Uppsala philosophers Hagerstrom, Marc-Wogau, and Hedenius.[208]

With his doctrine of basic phenomena, it would appear that it was no longer possible to believe that Cassirer upheld a subjectivistic philosophy. Nonetheless, even though Cassirer's doctrine of basic phenomena was a realism, it was not, as I pointed out, a traditional realism. The basic phenomena were processes and not things. But if we analyze it Cassirer wanted it both ways, to be a realist and to deny that phenomena are simply given. The point of his study of the pathology of symbolic consciousness was to show that what we take for granted as immediate givens are not really immediate, but depend upon symbolic processes, and the proof of this lay in the fact that it was possible to lose touch with these basic phenomena.

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[206] When Cassirer speaks of 'Life' in this phenomenological sense, it is not in terms of the biologist's theoretical conception, but something we all experience. He rejects Descartes' notion of the 'cogito' or 'thinking subject' and appeals instead to a conception that is based upon feeling. The neuro-scientist Jaak Panksepp (cf. *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions,* New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 309) makes use of a conception that agrees closely with Cassirer's criticism of Descartes (cf. *MSF*, pp. 169 – 176).

[207] In his earlier works Cassirer appealed to Goethe's notion of the Urphanomen again and again without ever explicating its place in his own thought. The expressive function of meaning is an Urphanomen (cf. *PSF III*, p. 87), the experience of the living human body is an Urphanomen (cf. *PSF III,* pp. 99–103), so too is the 'person' (cf. Ernst Cassirer, "Zur Wiederkehr seines Todestages" in *Acta Psychologia* 5 (1941) : 1-5), Time is an Urphanomen (cf. *PSF III*, p. 205).

[208] Cf. Hansson, J and Nordin, S., *Ernst Cassirer: The Swedish Years*, Gothenborg, Sweden: Peter Lang Pub Inc, 2006.

2.3 The *Basisphanomene* and the Pathology of Symbolic Consciousness

Regarded naively, the perception of the other – a Thou – as opposed to the perception of things – an 'It' – seems to be a simple matter of seeing obvious differences, but for Cassirer to perceive a 'Thou' required a different kind of symbolic understanding from the representative function involved in perceiving things. In neither case is perception simply a matter of sensation. One of Goldstein's patients, Cassirer noted, lacked the capacity to recognize people but saw them as objects. This patient was forced to use logic in order to distinguish people from things. The patient was able to classify automobiles and people as objects by reference to their particular dimensions, but he could not perceive the expressive, physiognomic qualities that ordinarily distinguish the animate and inanimate for us. The patient explained the difference between people and automobiles this way: 'People are all alike: narrow and long, cars are wide: you notice that at once, much thicker'[209].

Nowadays, the inability to perceive facial expression is known as *prosopagnosia.*[210] This phenomenon became widely-known through Oliver Sacks' case of the man who mistook his wife for a hat. Upon leaving Sacks' office one of his patients was unable to tell the difference between his wife's head and a hat on a hat-rack. The man's eyesight functioned, but he suffered from a loss of the ability to perceive expression visually. If automobiles, hats, and people can all be seen, but not physiognomic expression, then this limitation cannot stem for not having sensations, but from the inability to recognize expressive meaning.

All this leads us to say that in his study of the pathology of symbolic consciousness, Cassirer tries to show us the negative proof of the thesis that symbolism is a ubiquitous phenomenon, whose many facets we can only recognize when their function has been hampered. The perception of expression has been only of marginal interest in philosophy,

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[209]Cf. *PSF III,* p. 241. This concerns a protocol made by Kurt Goldstein and A. Gelb.

[210] Cf. Panskepp, J., *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions,* New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 307. The loss of face-recognition abilities does not eliminate the ability to perceive expression because such persons can still identify persons by the sounds of their voices. Oliver Sack's patients was still able to perceive expression – in auditory form, in music – cf. Sacks, O., *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat: And Other Clinical Tales,* New York: N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1998; also cf. *An Anthropologist on Mars,* London, G.B.: Picador, 1995.

and usually it has been shunted off into aesthetics as a special problem in the philosophy of art. But consider voices.[211] We can recognize voices we know almost instantly, and we can tell a person's mood by the sound of their voice, whether they are happy, sad, neutral, tired, busy, or whatever. On Cassirer's theory, this is neither a matter of causality nor immediate intuition but an example of expressive symbolism. The perception of expression is a symbolic process pervading all our waking and dreaming states.

With this doctrine of basis phenomena, Cassirer cannot be judged right away as historical and cultural idealist. There is the ground on which his concept of man with symbolic capacity can be founded. That is why his philosophy cannot be anti-metaphysical because he teaches that there is the real, though not in the sense of traditional realism. He can therefore earn a place in the ongoing reflection on who is man today, which takes into consideration his entirety as man.

3. CASSIRER'S PLACE IN THE GROWING SCIENCES TODAY

3.1 Placatory and Understated

The way Cassirer introduced above his view of man as symbolic animal might appear to us this way: he presented it in a placatory and understated manner. It seems that Cassirer adopts an approach which might call for a revision of the general direction of Western philosophy, and this was impossible because of so many factors: one was his sudden death in 1945 at the height of his career as a philosopher and therefore failed to further develop his proofs of his assertions and answer satisfactorily his critics and the other was that he failed to systematize his own original thoughts which are scattered throughout his many works – he just interpreted those body of works written by thinkers ahead of him.[212]

[211]In recent decades, it has been observable that literary scholars tend to neglect the sound of the voice in favor of the concept of the 'text'. A valuable assessment and correction of this tendency is found in R. Meyer-Kalkus, *Stimme und Sprechkunste im 20*, Berlin, Germany: Akademie Verlag, 2001.
[212] Cf. Itzkoff, S., *Ernst Cassirer: Scientific Knowledge and the Concept of Man,* Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1997., p. 222.

What is this general direction that Cassirer wants to introduce to philosophy? We can summarize his general direction this way: the color name 'blue' refers to something general and hence to something 'more real' than the actual perception of a color such as seeing 'this called blue', and the measurable difference on the spectrum between such a blue and an adjacent color is most real of all.[213] Perception is subjective; extension in space is objective. But in Cassirer's philosophical anthropology each of these aspects of color are equally real. They exemplify three different kinds of symbolism: representational (the color word 'blue'), expressive (the perception of 'this called blue'), and purely significative (blue's place on the spectrum of wavelengths).

Philosophical anthropology does not fit within the confines either of analytic philosophy of language or the anti-humanism typical of some contemporary 'continental' philosophy. Cassirer summed up his philosophical anthropology once this way: "There is no *consciousness of a me* without consciousness of a you and even less is there a self, an 'ipse', except in the general *Medium* of cultural forms, which provide the ways in which we are able to become a self."[214] This is a positive point in his philosophy when it comes to the reality of current demand that people should engage in dialogue today. The recognition of the self implies the recognition of the other aside from the self. This is important in dialogue as most of our institutions today when resolving issues affecting humanity call us to talk and listen to one another.

Furthermore, it is true that for us to become what we are, there is a need to participate and interact with our surroundings – the culture we grow up in. Language is not just a means of communication, but also a kind of "principle of individuation" in the sense that we become native speakers of a particular language, perhaps with a regional dialect, but we also acquire a way of speaking that is uniquely our own.

What is more, a person's language is also a matter of their speaking voice as well, and of its unique expressive qualities. Linguists refer to such matters as prosody – the musical aspect of language. Even having a recognizable voice is a matter of expressive symbolism.

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[213] Cf. *EM*, pp. 76-78.
[214] Cassirer, E., *Zur Kulturphilosophie und zum problem des Ausdrucks,* Hamburg, Germany : Felix Meiner, 2004., p. 25.

The tendency today is usually to treat the perception of expression as a matter of concern only in the philosophy of art, when in fact it is a ubiquitous phenomenon which, for me, needs to be explored further because I believe that using "symbols" and "images" can help further the progress of scientific knowledge.

3.2 Cassirer and the Present-Day Neurosciences

The tendency to underestimate the importance of expressive meaning is by no means limited to philosophy. Today neuroscientists still have to defend themselves from the criticisms of their colleagues when they advocate studying feelings or emotions as well as physiological processes.[215] There is the present day movement in the field of neurosciences towards the study of what now is being called the 'feeling brain'.

We can mention here Dr. Antonio Damasio, Professor and the present head of the department of neurology at the University of Iowa Medical Center. He has published the third in his series of books that attempts to popularize key parts of his breakthrough related to neurosciences. *Looking for Spinoza*[216] continues his exposition of the overwhelming role of emotion in life and, exploiting the intuitive understandings of the seventeenth-century philosopher named in the title, hypothesizes how biology might link to ethics and a desirable lifestyle.

In this work, it gives us the idea that modern neurology has demonstrated that the mind is, instead, "a process" of the body, that the brain draws on signals from the body through the nervous system and the bloodstream to create a self whose main motivation is preservation. The brain constructs neural maps of every body part, down to the cells, and develops its "feelings" as a result of its self-regard. Antonio Damasio might be a reductionist,

[215]Cf. Panskepp, J., *op.cit.* p. 341. Panskepp is forced to argue the obvious, that emotions are "essential foundation processes upon which many aspects of the human mind – from art to politics – have been created. He denies the existence of a Cartesian ego or a unified subject that has feelings, and contends rather that the feelings constitute a 'Simple Ego- type Life Form' (=SELF).

[216] Cf. Damasio, A., *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain,* New York, N.Y.: Harvest Books, 2004, pp. 53-73.

but in his work he shows the other aspect of the power of the mind, which until now he continues to study.

There are still many other names in the field of neurosciences that try to involve themselves along this line of research. I already mentioned the name of Oliver Sacks above. His famous works include *Awakenings* (1973), *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat (1985)*, and *An Anthropologist on Mars* (1995). Another famous author worthy to be mentioned here is Paul D. Maclean. He is an American neuroscientist whose book *The Triune Brain in Evolution* (1990) also theorized that the brain is connected with emotion.[217]

All this present-day movement towards the study of 'feeling brain' illustrates the kind of anthropological conception that Cassirer favored, a science that would also seek to study what Cassirer called the first basic phenomenon: the feeling of life. It is then here that I do not find Cassirer completely estranged from the currents of the growing sciences of today. It is here that Cassirer has something to say further by investigating deeply his doctrine on basic phenomena which I confess I have not explored that much due to the limitation of this research.

[217]Cf. MacLean, P., *The Triune Brain in Evolution,* New York: Plenum Press, 1990.

CONCLUSION

As we arrive at this particular part of our research, it is now possible for us to make some assessments of those points presented and dissected in order to understand the concept of man as proposed by Ernst Cassirer. An attempt to understand this particular view of man requires a certain knowledge of the background of the philosophy of Cassirer, especially his philosophy of symbolic forms. That is why we started our research tracing Cassirer's roots not only biological but also intellectual. Here in this first chapter, we have seen the influence of Immanuel Kant and the Marburg Neo-Kantianism on him. We have grasped the various threads of his thoughts by dividing them into five periods where one can see the dialectics of his works of systematic philosophy and historical studies. By studying such divisions of his thoughts, we have also seen the influence of other great thinkers, most especially Hegel.

With Cassirer's Kantian background, it is not a surprise to see that, in the second chapter, we saw that his concept of symbolic forms and symbolization is not the same as we commonly understand symbol as a mere representation of something or just a causality or a mere distinction between the symbol and what it signifies. Instead, symbolic form is understood as essentially reshaping of Kant's idea of schema in the sense that an empirical given is never simply reflected in consciousness or mind but is always generated and formed by a spontaneous act of consciousness. In other words, we can never have immediate access to the material contents of the world as such. Being mediated by symbolic forms, our experience is by definition a synthesis of the ideal and the "sensual", of the spiritual and material. This makes Cassirer's thought very different from the classical thought because here there seems to be no more distinction between the subject and object of our knowledge. Everything that is, is meaningful, according to Cassirer, precisely because it can only be grasped through a synthetic act of symbolic formation which finds meaning in, or imbues meaning to, the empirically given. With these points being considered, Cassirer here seems to appear to us as anti-empiricist and "post-positivist".

I have seen then the two "elements" in coining the very notion of the symbolic form: to grasp the "wonder" of the fact that the sensory material, simply by being attended to, is

endowed with meaning and the other is to grasp the internal connection which exists between the form and the content, between the sense and the sensibility.

Keeping in mind this consideration on the symbolic forms which imply the powerful capacity of the mind, we were not caught by surprise when in the third chapter we read Cassirer saying that man is a symbolic animal. He holds that the peculiar nature of man, that which separates him from animals is the symbolic capacity or we may say his symbolic ideation. This symbolic capacity involves the expressive, representative, and constructive (meaning) elements which are primarily made manifest in man's "linguistic know-how". Man is that being that has access to reality and to him only in and through symbols. In this sense, it appears to us that everything in our culture is reducible to being symbols because humans are never confronted with immediate reality, but only with a reality which is symbolically mediated. He maintains that principle of symbolism with its universality, its validity, and its general application is the magic word, the open sesame which gives access to the specifically human world, to the world of human culture. Although the historicity of this *animal symbolicum* view of man is associated by others to radical historical and cultural idealism, in Chapter IV, the place of Cassirer in the field of philosophy of man today is secured by his work on basis phenomena as it tackles "feeling of life" which is very important to growing sciences today.

However, as I come to close this simple research, I think that there are serious objections which can be raised to Cassirer's concept in so far as he pretends to offer a general key for human nature.

First, symbolization does not operate in a void; the validity of the symbol is that it is sustained inasmuch as by means of it many facts are recapitulated and accumulated and they thus become conveniently manageable for the mind. These prior elements and the subject which symbolically recapitulates them and moves them are considered pre-existent by Cassirer, whereas in my opinion the first thing that should be explained is this: the material of symbolization and the agent capable of symbolizing, that is, the objectified perceptions and the objectifying subject, the world and the ego.

The capacity to symbolize requires a subject and an objectified world, two instances whose appearance can only be explained by objectification. Symbolization is a special objectifying procedure, an objectification of second or third degree which presupposes anterior ones, precisely those which contribute the basic human structure.

Second, all of what is cultural cannot be reduced to systems of symbols. For me, a painting, a statue, are not strictly speaking, symbols, except as they may be allegories, artificial and secondary means of plastic expression. A lyric poem, a juridical rule, cannot be designated as symbols except as we may devote our attention exclusively to their verbal formulations, and then we shall have gone on to consider a very specialized aspect of them, that of linguistic symbolism. Thus as symbolization of natural phenomena has beneath it an immense number of facts of nature, likewise any symbolization in the field of culture embraces and absorbs an immense quantity of cultural facts. We know that natural and cultural facts in so far as they are the product of two diverse regimes of objectification are the primary, genuine, human events, those that compose the world of man and simultaneously give rise to his own inner being, since the objectifying activity and the establishment of the subjective focus are two aspects of the same thing.

Third, that Cassirer has had linguistic activity particularly in view is emphasized by what he said that the difference between verbal and emotive language represents the true frontier between the human and the animal world. As we see, it appears that he assigns to verbal language the same character of that which is distinctly human as he attributes in general to symbolization. And, in fact, if his theses are not satisfactory for the total understanding of culture, they are very acceptable for the meaning and importance of conceptual language – although with the reservation for what he said regarding verbal and emotive language as that which separates man from animal – that it would perhaps be well to interpolate between emotional language and verbal or conceptual language, indicative language, by means of which something is pointed out or indicated without transmitting its concept.

Verbal language has been proposed more than once before as the *quality par excellence* and the *sine qua non* of man, *homo loquans*. It will not be difficult to show the

insufficiency of this criterion. The substance of verbal language consists of notions and relationships of very general nature which presuppose the ability to abstract. It is therefore necessary to go back to the latter, and although it is indisputable that language favors abstraction in fixing results, verbal meanings would not exist without prior abstractions. But the ability to abstract presupposes two things: the complexes supplied in perception and the isolation of the elements of those complexes. This latter operation has also an objectifying purpose. By every approach we arrive, in the last analysis, at objectifying, and, as we must accept that it is an exclusively human function, we must recognize in it the basis of distinctly human nature.

In the last analysis, what Cassirer calls as the symbolic capacity of man can be likened to the power of abstraction which man is the only one capable of doing and therefore distinguishes him from animal. In this perspective, to say man is a symbolic animal is therefore tantamount to saying that man is a rational animal. It may appear to us then that there is no major revision or revolutionary in this concept of man as symbolic animal. But the definition of Cassirer affirms the power that mind or the consciousness or the spirit has to confront and solve problems as they come up. The definition of Cassirer also tries to affirm but not fully-developed that this mind is not just up in the air but rather this mind is an embodied mind. The definition of Cassirer tries to integrate various elements in order to explain the nature of man. There is indeed a positive contribution of Cassirer to philosophy: setting up the direction to the fact that there is the symbolic dimension of our knowledge, which is necessary in our continuing search for progress as human persons in a human society. It is undeniable that "symbolization" has a most important part to play in the use and progress of the intelligence, for it makes possible processes which would be entirely impossible without the use of an adequate system of symbols. This is very strong affirmation of Cassirer's concept of man. He enters into the realm where others just "remain at the portal". He indeed clearly points out this symbolic dimension of man and human knowledge.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

EM	*Essay on Man*
KPM	*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*
LM	*Language and Myth*
PIKC	*Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*
PSF	*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (I,II,III,IV)*
SMC	*Symbol, Myth and Culture*