

CHAPTER I

The Person and
the Sexual Urge



ANALYSIS OF THE VERB 'TO USE'



The Person as the Subject and Object of Action

The world in which we live is composed of many objects. The word 'object' here means more or less the same as 'entity'. This is not the proper meaning of the word, since an 'object', strictly speaking, is something related to a 'subject'. A 'subject' is also an 'entity' – an entity which exists and acts in a certain way. It is then possible to say that the world in which we live is composed of many subjects. It would indeed be proper to speak of 'subjects' before 'objects'. If the order has been reversed here, the intention was to put the emphasis right at the beginning of this book on its objectivism, its realism. For if we begin with a 'subject', especially when that subject is man, it is easy to treat everything which is outside the subject, i.e. the whole world of objects, in a purely subjective way, to deal with it only as it enters into the consciousness of a subject, establishes itself and dwells in that consciousness. We must, then, be clear right from the start *that every subject also exists as an object, an objective 'something' or 'somebody'*.¹

As an object, a man is 'somebody' – and this sets him apart from every other entity in the visible world, which as an object is always only 'something'. Implicit in this simple, elementary distinction is the great gulf which separates the world of persons from the world of things. The world of objects, to which we belong, consists of people and things. We usually regard as a thing an entity which is devoid not only of intelligence, but also of life; a *thing* is an inanimate object. We would hesitate to call an animal, or even a plant, a 'thing'. None the less, no-one can speak with any conviction about an animal as a person. We speak of individual animals,

looking upon them simply as single specimens of a particular animal species. And this definition suffices. But it is not enough to define a man as an individual of the species *Homo* (or even *Homo sapiens*). The term 'person' has been coined to signify that a man cannot be wholly contained within the concept 'individual member of the species', but that there is something more to him, a particular richness and perfection in the manner of his being, which can only be brought out by the use of the word 'person'.

The most obvious and simplest reason for this is that man has the ability to reason, he is a rational being, which cannot be said of any other entity in the visible world, for in none of them do we find any trace of conceptual thinking. Hence Boethius's famous definition of a person as simply an individual being of a rational nature (*individua substantia rationalis naturae*). This differentiates a person from the whole world of objective entities, this determines the distinctive character of a person.

The fact that a person is an individual of a rational nature – or an individual of whose nature reason is a property – makes the person the only subject of its kind in the whole world of entities, a subject totally different from such other subjects as, for instance, the animals – though these, and some of them in particular, are relatively close to man in respect of bodily structure. Speaking figuratively, we can say that the person as a subject is distinguished from even the most advanced animals by a specific inner self, an inner life, characteristic only of persons. It is impossible to speak of the inner life of animals, although physiological processes more or less similar to those in man take place within their organisms. Because of this bodily structure they develop – again to a greater or lesser extent – a rich sensual life, ranging far beyond the simple, vegetative life of plants, and recalling at times to a quite deceptive degree the activities typical of human life: cognition and desire, or to give the second activity a somewhat broader name, striving.

In man cognition and desire acquire a spiritual character and therefore assist in the formation of a genuine interior life, which does not happen with animals. *Inner life means*

spiritual life. It revolves around truth and goodness. And it includes a whole multitude of problems, of which two seem central: what is the ultimate cause of everything and – how to be good and possess goodness at its fullest. The first of these central problems of man's interior life engages cognition and the second desire or, rather, aspiration. Both of these functions, though, seem to be more than that, to be rather what might be called natural tendencies of the whole human entity. Significantly, it is just because of his inner being, his interior life, that man is a person, but it is also because of this that he is so much involved in the world of objects, the world 'outside', involved in a way which is proper to him and characteristic of him. A person is an objective entity, which as a definite subject has the closest contacts with the whole (external) world and is most intimately involved with it precisely because of its inwardness, its interior life. It must be added that it communicates thus not only with the visible, but also with the invisible world, and most importantly, with God. This is a further indication of the person's uniqueness in the visible world.

The person's contact with the objective world, with reality, is not merely 'natural', physical, as is the case with all other creations of nature, nor is it merely sensual as in the case of animals. A human person, as a distinctly defined subject, establishes contact with all other entities precisely through the inner self, and neither the 'natural' contacts which are also its prerogative, since it has a body and in a certain sense 'is a body', nor the sensual contacts in which it resembles the animals, constitute its characteristic way of communication with the world. It is true that a human person's contact with the world begins on the 'natural' and sensual plane, but it is given the form proper to man only in the sphere of his interior life. Here, too, a trait characteristic of the person becomes apparent: a man does not only intercept messages which reach him from the outside world and react to them in a spontaneous or even purely mechanical way, but in his whole relationship with this world, with reality, he strives to assert himself, his 'I', and he must act thus, since the nature of his being demands it. Man's nature

differs fundamentally from that of the animals. It includes the power of self-determination, based on reflection, and manifested in the fact that a man acts from choice.² This power is called free will.

Because a human being – a person – possesses free will, he is his own master, *sui juris* as the Latin phrase has it. This characteristic feature of a person goes with another distinctive attribute. The Latin of the philosophers defined it in the assertion that personality is *alteri incommunicabilis* – not capable of transmission, not transferable. The point here is not that a person is a unique and unrepeatable entity, for this can be said just as well of any other entity – of an animal, a plant, a stone. The incommunicable, the *inalienable*, in a person is intrinsic to that person's inner self, to the power of self determination, free will. *No one else can want for me*. No one can substitute his act of will for mine. It does sometimes happen that someone very much wants me to want what he wants. This is the moment when the impassable frontier between him and me, which is drawn by free will, becomes most obvious. I may not want that which he wants me to want – and in this precisely I am *incommunicabilis*. I am, and I must be, independent in my actions. All human relationships are posited on this fact. All true conceptions about education and culture begin from and return to this point.

For a man is not only the subject, but can also be the object of an action. At every step acts occur which have, as their object, other human beings. Within the framework of this book, the subject of which is sexual morality, actions of precisely this sort will be our constant theme. In dealings between persons of different sexes, and especially in the sexual relationship, the woman is always the object of activity on the part of a man, and the man the object of activity on the part of the woman. That is why it is right to begin by enquiring, however, briefly, who it is that acts – who is the subject – and who is acted upon – who is the object of the action. We know already that the subject and the object of the action alike are persons. It is now necessary to consider carefully the principles to which a human being's actions must conform when their object is another human person.³