

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

On the Natural Equality of Human Beings

(1799)

August Ludwig Hülsen

Translated, introduced, and annotated by Marlene Oeffinger*

What follows is a complete translation of August Ludwig Hülsen's contribution to the third issue of the *Athenaeum* published in 1799. August Ludwig Hülsen (1765 –1809) may be a lesser-known but by no means unimportant figure of German idealism and early German Romanticism. The son of a pastor and expected to become a clergyman himself, Hülsen left his theological studies at the University of Halle in his early twenties to pursue instead philosophy at the University of Kiel, under the tutelage of Karl Leonhard Reinhold. It was through Reinhold that Hülsen encountered the writings of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and fascinated by Fichte's work on the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in 1795 Hülsen moved to Jena to study under Fichte. In 1796, Hülsen garnered Fichte's attention as well as that of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis through the publication of what would be his only book, the *Preisschrift*.¹ In response to the question posed by the Academy of Sciences in Berlin on the progress of metaphysics since Leibniz and Wolff, Hülsen argued in his *Preisschrift* that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and transcendental philosophy could not be dissociated from its history and called for "a foundation for the systematic formulation of a speculative

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¹ A.L. Hülsen. *Prüfung der von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aufgestellten Preisfrage: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolff für Progressen gemacht?* (Altona: J.F. Hammerich, 1796).

history of human culture”², addressing questions concerning the historicity of logic and reason prior to Schelling and Hegel.

Moreover, Hülsen questioned the position of the critical philosopher, considering it as one divorced from any real existence of the human being, claiming that only a practical self-reflecting capability will enable reason’s historical development and the history of philosophy will only begin once reason achieves the integration of its reflective knowledge in a systematic manner – to judge synthetically.² Further writing on the incompatibility of systematic and unsystematic thought in his 1797 *Philosophical Letter on Popularity in Philosophy*³, Hülsen contended that this discordance had detrimental consequences for the communal relations of human beings, creating not only opposition among human beings but also an atomized community, and thus preventing moral coordination.^{2,3} Instead, a reconciling of the critical and the popular approaches, “to popularize critical philosophy and to transcendentalize popular thought”², in Hülsen’s view, would enable a redetermination of the concepts of ‘philosopher’ and ‘human being’ into a universal concept of the ‘human being’, which he saw as an essential precondition in establishing an account of humanity’s true moral vocation.³

It is this universal concept of the human being that is at issue in his essay “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, which was initially published in the first issue of the second volume of the Jena Romantic journal *Athenaeum* in 1799.⁴ In this essay, Hülsen argued for a restoration of harmony between the critically thinking and the practically acting human being as one in which intellect, senses, and emotions are inseparable, in order to bring forth a reconciliatory concept of moral agency. Hülsen drew on the Fichtean *Tathandlung* (‘act’) as an inner cognitive act that is not empirical but rather underpinned a person’s consciousness and moral agency.⁵ He considered any such act, including the positing of ‘*ich bin*’ (I am), as reflexive self-knowledge insofar as it denoted an acting agent as well as a product of a non-self-conscious practical act of self-positing. He claimed that the arising self-reflection, as an acquired critical ability, enabled a qualitatively different

² Cf. E. Posesorski, *Between Reinhold and Fichte: August Ludwig Hülsen’s Contributions to the Emergence of German Idealism* (Karlsruhe: KIT Scientific Publishing, 2012).

³ This essay was published in Fichte’s and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer’s co-edited *Philosophical Journal*. A.L. Hülsen, “Philosophischer Brief an Hrn. von Briest in Nennhausen. Erster Brief. Ueber Popularität in der Philosophie”, *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft deutscher Gelehrten*, 7. Band, Heft 1 (1797): 71-103

⁴ A.L. Hülsen, “Ueber die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen”, *Athenaeum*, 2. Band, Heft 1 (1799): 151-180.

⁵ See D. W. Wood, “Fichte’s Absolute I and the Forgotten Tradition of Tathandlung”, in: *Das Selbst und die Welt: Beiträge zu Kant und der nachkantischen Philosophie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019), 167-192.

insight into thinking activity and transformed the non-self-conscious act of positing into a concrete object of self-conscious judgment and allowed a person to attain self-determining knowledge of his practical and active relation to his holistically self-positing objects – self and world – as he sought reason in himself and his actions alone. This “sense that perceives within us”⁶ is what Hülsen regarded as an innermost part of a human being’s essence which remained so by virtue of his very nature⁴; hence, the concrete self-conscious acts of judgment laid bare both a person’s unquestionable membership in the human species and his individuality as a concrete manifestation of reason. As reason provided a common and universal ground of unification and true moral vocation for all practically acting human beings, no real inequality could exist among humanity in Hülsen’s view.

Moreover, for Hülsen, our reflective capacity further enabled us to finally transform into an evolutionary agent of a logical-historical character. While time is signified by humanity’s own free acts as “a departing and returning of the spirit [*Geist*] into itself, where multiple and different moments of time only express the manner of our actions”⁷, the temporally spaced emergence of transcendental instances of self-reflective knowledge and judgments through these free acts make the emergence of a cultural order possible, in which past and future are joined within humans through the relation of their actions. Building on both Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* and Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*⁸, Hülsen moves beyond them, laying the foundations for a speculative history of human culture and a history of philosophy as it is taken up by Schelling and Hegel.

Hülsen’s ideas were highly regarded by his contemporaries, foremost among them Friedrich Schlegel, which led to his brief association with the Jena Romantic Circle. This included two contributions to the *Athenaeum*, the essays “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings” and “Reflections on

⁶ “[..] daß der Sinn, der in uns wahrnimmt.” In: “Über die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen”, *Athenaeum* 2/1 (1799): 152-180.

⁷ “[..] ein Ausgehen und Zurückkehren des Geistes in sich selbst, wo also mehrere und verschiedene Zeitmomente nur die Art und Weise unsers Handelns ausdrücken.” In “Über die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen”, *Athenaeum* 2/1 (1799): 152-180.

⁸ Both Reinhold and Fichte declared the need for a more “scientific” and systematic version of transcendental idealism. Reinhold’s *Elementary Philosophy* sought to build a critical philosophical system that determined the ground for all the other propositions of the system, in particular the principle of consciousness. Envisioning an equally radical yet foundational system, Fichte grounded his *Wissenschaftslehre* or “Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge” on the concept of subjectivity, or the “pure I,” to reconcile freedom of a moral agent with necessity, to be part of a world.

Nature on a Journey across Switzerland.”⁹ Schlegel called Hülsen a “Socratic”¹⁰ philosopher, “absolutely original, spiritual, almost obstinate.”¹¹ And while Novalis counted Hülsen among the five most important philosophers of his time¹², this significant figure of German idealism has all but been forgotten. None of his works have been translated into English until now – possibly due to what Novalis called Hülsen’s often heavy and obscure style of writing; “poetic yet ponderous”, in Schlegel’s formulation.¹³

⁹ A. L. Hülsen, “Natur-Betrachtungen auf einer Reise durch die Schweiz”, *Athenaeum* 3/1 (1800).

¹⁰ In the *Athenaeum* Fragment #295, Schlegel alluded to Hülsen having provided a Socratic answer to the question posed by the Academy of Sciences in Berlin on the progress of metaphysics. Hülsen was known to often present his work in lectures; no written transcripts have survived. F.W. Schlegel, “*Athenaeum Fragmente*” In *Athenaeum* 1. Band, Heft 1, 1798.

¹¹ F.W. Schlegel, Fragment 236 in “*Philosophische Lehrjahre.*” *Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar*, edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 110-121.

¹² Written in 1798, in Fragment #25, Novalis writes: “I would like to name Baader, Fichte, Schelling, Hülsen and Schlegel the philosophical directorate in Germany. An infinite amount is still to be expected from this Quinquévrat. Fichte presides and is Gardien de la Constitution.” [Baader, Fichte, Schelling, Hülsen und Schlegel möchte ich das philosophische Directorium in Deutschland nennen. Es laßt sich noch unendlich viel von diesem Quinquévrat erwarten. Fichte praesidirt und ist Gardien de la Constitution.] “*Logologische Fragmente.*” *Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar*, edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 330-338 (Novalis HKA II, 529-530).

¹³ *Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar*, edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011).

On the Natural Equality of Human Beings

(1799)

August Ludwig Hülsen

In the communication of our thoughts, we always suppose that we speak to people to whom we can make ourselves understood.¹ This is the presupposition we take as the basis for all our experience, and which, for this very reason, cannot be negated by any singular experience.

This is nowhere more evident than in the general complaint about misinterpretation and misunderstanding, which in itself would not even be possible if that initial presupposition did not exist. Yet overall that complaint interferes very little with our social goals, and, on the contrary, often increases and enlivens the very effort to unite our spirit [with those of others].

This is a fact of history, of both ancient and modern times, and it would be beneficial for our strivings if human beings [*die Menschen*]² took note of it and thus conceive of the entirety of their experience in relation to every aspect of their acting spirit as truth of that spirit [*Geist*]. The often harsh and unkind form of communication should not hinder us in this, for it is in itself a deception, which we must interpret as part of a higher truth. Where communication takes place among rational beings [*Wesen*], this condition of a presumed intelligibility applies as part of common purpose, and in scrutinizing this purpose I must create the possibility of an ever more pure and beautiful form of our social relationship as a whole.

I state this to preface the following investigation, in order to place my own purpose in doubt at once and remind the judge of the intention of his own judgment.

¹ The original German version of this text is entitled “*Über die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen*” and was initially published in the Jena Romantic journal *Athenaeum* 2 (1): 152-180, in 1799.

² In the original German text, Hülsen uses the terms *Mensch* (singular) and *Menschen* (plural) to describe human beings in their context as social beings and in contrast to (*Lebe-*) *Wesen*, beings capable of reason. Hence, it should be kept in mind that “human being” and “human beings” in the text are to be interpreted in this sense.

Everywhere the human being [*der Mensch*] is the object of our observation. For every possible phenomenon is determined by him, and every apperception hence a touch of his spirit that invites us to look at it, thereby leading us back to our own free actions.

But we also comprehend the human being only in so far as he comprehends himself, and everything that we assert about him can therefore only contain its truth through him and in him. This is the capacity to reason [*Vernünftigkeit*], a capacity that would be meaningless if not for the relationship of our own actions through which we become alive in the whole extent of our existence [*Daseyns*]³. As conscious as only human beings are, so conscious is every one of all determinations of their essence [*Wesen*]⁴ as themselves in their own free acts. And the natural equality of human beings resides in this reciprocal relationship of free action.

Out of this concept, I establish the main argument of the entire investigation for now; a mere cue on where to focus one's attention. For in order to get to the true content of a concept, it cannot be considered as *a priori* given, but instead we must go back to its initial object and let it arise before our eyes through actual intuition; then, it appears as the result of repeated contemplation and is in itself nothing other than the free and steadfast gaze with which we regard our own acts.

The human being, whose work and deeds I observe in order to get to know the relation of his life within him, is everywhere among humans through the associations of nature, and is therefore only truly a human being in the relation of his existence to an enduring lineage.

³ *Daseyn*, archaic spelling of *Dasein*. In the Eighteenth Century, the word was largely used to describe the present time or *Gegenwart*. During the mid-eighteenth century, it gained an additional meaning denoting 'existence' [*Existenz*]. The Adelung dictionary, the first and for Hülsen's time authoritative dictionary of the German language, connects these terminologies describing *Existenz* as "a concept that is as incapable of a definition as the words being, thing, being and others. You are there, you must therefore fulfill the purpose of your being [*ein Begriff, der so wenig einer Definition fähig ist, als die Wörter Seyn, Ding, Wesen und andere. Du bist da, du mußt also den Zweck deines Daseyns erfüllen*]" (see Adelung, Johann Christoph, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*. Ausgabe letzter Hand, Leipzig 1793–1801). Hülsen alludes to this connection between present and existence in his text, denoting 'existence' and 'life' in its entirety, as state of the human being in nature defined through his action in the present moment. *Daseyn* is rendered into English as "existence" in the present translation.

⁴ The German noun *Wesen* can refer to either the whatness or ownmost characteristic of a being or thing, translated here as 'essence', or to (*Lebe-*)*wesen*, a being capable of rational thought, translated as 'being' throughout the text (see also footnote 2 above).

But I find him first and foremost as acting and efficacious only in a social circumstance which we call the State [*Staat*]. Born and educated within it, he bears all the determining attributes that characterize him as a social being [*Wesen*]⁵ in the first place, and hence I must first observe him within this circumstance in order to be able to ascertain his natural condition.

The initial question is not how a connection between people can exist, which is deemed natural in itself, but rather how one that is ineffectual at expressing the nature of our essence is possible at all. First, I will only consider how human beings imagine their social relations, a concept in which they can still err; accordingly, I consider this notion of a social state – the one we call State – expressed in the possible equivalence of all individuals as parts to a whole. The equivalence of the parts is consequently the equivalence of the whole with itself, and therefore a harmonious activity which is not contained in any individual part alone. The parts of the whole thus behave merely like organs, which mutually inter-act with one another and re-act to each other, and only through their difference produce and maintain the harmony of the whole.

The difference between the individuals as parts of a whole is consequently their mutual relationship in the State, which determines their participation and activity in it and, therefore, makes an inequality among them a necessity.

Yet the size of the whole and the degree of difference required in the relationship of its parts to completely realize the notion of a State is not predictable. Most theories, as far as I know, regardless of their position presuppose the State, and experience teaches us only what has already happened and must therefore itself be evaluated carefully and in accordance with a higher principle. Without doubt, the difficulty of the matter lies in following:

This wholeness which we call society in the State is not only determined by the parts, but the parts are also determined by the whole insofar as each part is born in and educated by the State. The whole, however, does not exist, think nor act unless each individual part does, and society therefore ceases to be organized as parts to a whole. As long as society is organized as parts of a whole, the State's participation in the determination of its relations remains; yet as the State is negated in terms of an intrinsic ability to think and act, it does not truly determine, and, consequently, the relation of the parts to the

⁵ Hülsen is referring again here to (*Lebe-*) *Wesen*, a being capable of reason and living in a society or State.

whole presents only the unpredictable and the flawed within society, which will always conform to circumstances that emerge as the commanding ones out of the conflict of forces.

Therefore, it is through the relation of human beings as parts to a whole that the efficaciousness of each for the whole is determined, and this alone is the purpose of the activity of all.

But the human being cannot exist in this manner without losing his capacity to reason; he needs to take agency and equate his actions with himself as they are really his own, and so he lives within society not as a part but as a whole in himself.

Out of this arises a conflict for society as each individual's actions are determined by the relations within the State, wherein the human being does not represent the whole, while, simultaneously, each necessarily considers their actions as pertaining to themselves, in whose sense they embody a veritable whole.

This particular wholeness is not comparable to any other, rather, out of the own condition of its free acts arises the necessary demand that all difference (between parts, or people as part of society) ceases. Insofar as such differences emerge out of the conditions within the State, we observe an unequal struggle between human beings for prosperity and a higher spiritual culture everywhere. Thousands of them may appear as if in a slumber of their existence, where even the idea of a better life barely moves their heart or warms their rigid breast.

This inequality among human beings, however, is as necessary as society itself, and, rather than criticizing it, it is important to consider it calmly in order to understand its uses. It is part of the circumstances of actual life, where its intention is no less than to rouse our thoughts to a stage of heightened contemplation for the benefit of social life. Besides, human beings have always attempted to measure their reality against their inner desires and demands, and generally considered their actual life as a disturbance of nature.

Nevertheless, the idea of a possible equality among human beings has always been of such great interest to the imagination that even its contradiction in actual experience could not prevent its inclusion among the maxims of faith, at least from a religious point of view.

Among all peoples of this earth who still conceive of their origin beyond the fact of history, exists a legend of an original Golden Age of the world: a state of most intimate harmony and love, where the disturbance of reality, inequality rooted in varying relations within a society, did not yet exist; a

beautiful and harmonious springtime of life, when an innocent mankind was happy and content, and only peaceful deities walked among them.

This legend, which had been passed down to the descendants of those fortunate ones and has always been held sacred, was intimately connected with the belief in a future in which heavenly peace would again return to mankind, and joy and harmony would dwell among us undisturbed once more.

In that manner people sought comfort and reassurance for the present in images of a beautiful past and future. Only on the latter two rested their eye with quiet pleasure, while the former was harshly reproached for every joy.

However one-sided this idea of our lost and future happiness may be, it is the least peculiar that equality among human beings could not be separated from the idea of a happy and peaceful life. Therein appears a certain necessity of reason, which calls on us to reflect, and which, upon closer examination, might demand more of us than to merely occupy ourselves with an idle play of the imagination; any discussion of it on the ground of supposed experience is tantamount to a superfluous reminiscence. Only once our belief in the past and the future is no longer mere hearsay, will we feel justified in abandoning the written word and seek reason in ourselves and our own actions alone.

It is certain, however, that mere belief in a past when people still lived happily and contentedly in a state of innocence and childlike harmony could neither truly delight us nor provide any comfort if we did not sense, deep within us, a future in which that beautiful age that once was will return with all its virtues and joys. This connection is in itself necessary, as no one would understand their feelings at a happy and benevolent memory otherwise if they had not interpreted it with such imagination.

Yet one thing is certain: gazing solely into the future takes us back to the past, while both the future and the past in themselves have their origin and full determination solely in the present. This is what determines our interest in everything beautiful [*allem Schönen*] and true [*Wahren*], which poetic imagination presents to us in such delightful images. It is, however, nothing else than the feeling of our free efficaciousness [*freie Wirksamkeit*] by which the world is just that for which we form it. How we shape and arrange it makes the world itself our life, and only those will not have acknowledged this fact for whom their own imagination remains a mystery.

It is hence the mere nature of our spirit that makes the condition of time necessary. We can never think of the human being without him being the one who thinks, and his every determination of time therefore acquires truth

solely through his acts. Yet he himself exists and lives only in and through his actions, and, consequently, does so exclusively in the condition of the present moment. Every determination of time within him must thus express this condition as it can have neither truth nor certainty otherwise.

We do not know the least of a future as future, because its intuition as such is impossible and would not be intelligible if we would not make it comprehensible for ourselves through a general condition of time and in the intuition of the real [*Anschauung des Wirklichen*], within which it is both true and purposive, and should be no different from the present, but rather represent the very same and thus should be perceived and considered as such.

Yet the present contradicts our desires and demands and does not hold what we are looking for; nonetheless, it is in the present that we continue to strive for our desires with a vital exigence and force of our actions, because the future is nothing other than our own eternal freedom, which we express in our reality in order to realize ourselves as free and eternal beings. Therefore, everything we might seek and demand is necessarily nothing else than our own free acts as real intuition and, consequently, always and eternally the present.

This is inconceivable to those who do not simultaneously behold the creator within a creation: as we strive to understand our desires and demands within the circumstances of reality, without tying the experience of the latter to ourselves, the connection of occurrences will immediately take us back to the past until the imagination finally gains leeway and, from that moment on, we contemplate our more delightful future life in the smiling images of our memory.

This is the significance of all those imaginations through which people have always tried to understand their most radiant feelings. Often times, they appear to us only as an amusing game, and we call them dreams of imagination until we realize that our most cherished treasures – veracity and conviction – are contained and preserved within them.

The past, therefore, has such a high interest for human beings only for the sake of the future, and the future only for the sake of the present. Consequently, the future, with all its possibilities, is nothing more than a simple yet necessary requirement of the present, and which we must understand as such insofar as to not continue searching for it outside of ourselves, in the empty void.

This is the condition of all time. Time is our own free act, a departing and returning of the spirit into itself, where multiple and different moments of time only express the manner of our actions. Only in this way, is there a past and future that do not contradict themselves, for they are joined within

us through the relation of our actions, which reach forward and backwards into their own infinity.

Whoever understands himself through this concept, comprehends and exalts his intimate pleasure in the poetry of a past and future life; for these are nothing without their relation to the present and cannot be understood any other way according to their possibility.

Our belief in a future should, therefore, rest upon truth and certainty through our actual deeds, and the idea of a future equality among human beings is thus either practical and intervenes in our active life, or it has no meaning at all and cannot be justified even in this absence.

It can, however, also be assumed, that inequality among human beings also arises from our mutual actions; yet if we do not want to enable an antinomy of reason at this point, but also explain the unreasonable via reason, it will only require an accurate understanding of such possible inequality and our idea of it must immediately reveal itself as mere illusion.

Any difference in judgment does not change the matter and is only superficial. For we observe one and the same thing with one and the same reason and have already been so wise as to believe our own eyes and ears. Therein all discord will be resolved in the end, as soon as we have convinced ourselves that it is not the pupil that sees or the eardrum that hears, but that the sense that perceives within us is the very same as the innermost part of our essence. If, therefore, human beings as human beings [*Menschen als Menschen*] are equal, they must remain so by virtue of their nature, which they can never lose. For the existence of free beings is always originary and therefore remains eternally the first embrace of a loving nature.

Nevertheless, it is important for all of us to balance our mutual determining judgements where possible, and it is precisely this firm and tireless endeavor that is the surest proof of the harmony of our spirits, which we may only perceive in order to express it immediately in our actions.

The answer to the question on the natural equality of human beings is a determining judgment about the original relationship of humans. Ours is therefore an inquiry into this relationship to ascertain its foundation and verity.

Up to this point, I have only shown how the idea of a natural equality ought to have arisen, and while, inevitably, it could be interpreted only with regards to a past and future, in order not to contradict itself in itself, it can, however, really only sustain its truth in the fleeting moment of life that is the present.

From this I draw the following conclusions that will guide us further. First, the condition of time is only a relation of the moment in which we act. If we do not act, we do not exist, and time does not exist for us. The actual moment is made real only through its relation to a past and a future, for it is precisely in this relation that our actions exist. If the natural equality of human beings is to maintain its truth in the moment of life, it is not enough for it to be imaginable; rather, it should not contradict itself insofar as it truly expresses the conditions of our life and thus inevitably exists as we exist as human beings. It is therefore important not to look at our original condition as one-sided, not as lost in the past or only existent in the future, but through the relation of the moment as lasting and eternal: then we will be able to understand all phenomena of life only through one and the same lens and thus watch every inequality among human beings disappear before our eyes as mere object of a one-sided judgment and, consequently, an illusion.

It is with this consideration in mind that I look at the human being, and I receive him as I find him: as singularity in the full scope of his existence, for he himself is his entire sphere, and thus all determinations within him can only have truth through this relation to himself. His whole relation within the sphere of his existence is therefore necessarily none other than the relation to one and the same consciousness, and it is within this sphere that we must observe the human being in order to get to know him.

In this conception, I do not abstract from the human being as an individual; on the contrary, it is this image of him I have before my eyes: because where another may exist in the vicinity of the Milky Way, I do not know, and hopefully no one else does either. But even the human being as individual is not determined by anything other than himself, and it would be a vain pretense to try to deduce him without this relation by mere abstraction. He is therefore to be thought of only insofar as he thinks of himself, and hence only existent in the one and same free self-activity [*Selbstthätigkeit*]. All his actions are therefore nothing more than a continuation of his own self-determination, and, consequently, an extension of every determination towards infinity. Here, then, every goal we set ourselves appears to be relative and infinite at the same time; we establish the differences, but we do not do so comparatively for several individuals, but in each one by relation to their own actions. Therefore, we simultaneously cancel out these differences and assert of each what we assert of everyone; not by considering a potential future but through the relation of each moment as actual and immediate and, consequently, as an overall necessity.

This concept embodies the complete image of the human being in the original and hence permanent relation of his existence. But it, and with it our

conviction, can only become apparent to us if we guard against the misconception that the human being is in time, instead of time existing in him and being determined by him.

If time is in the human being and its entire condition determined by his actions alone, we can only compare him to himself, and, consequently, must consider everyone's free acts within the same sphere of freedom and thus always relate these acts as a striving towards infinity, towards the human being himself, the infinite. Thereby everyone preserves their own eternal timeline, which, in all its self-referential aspects, is one and the same for everybody, otherwise infinity would not equal the infinite.

But the human being within the circumstance of his own existence is the human being among human beings. He is no different from whom he truly is, and all his acts and deeds are therefore an expression of this circumstance. Everyone, then, within the circumstances of their existence comprehends all others, and everyone in this circumstance represents the order of the whole, which is one and the same in each and everyone. Therefore, no human being is ahead of or behind the other, and no human being more or less than the other; rather, each one is naturally equal to themselves, as a human being among human beings. The existence of the many, therefore, intervenes in the existence of the one through the condition of his reality, and every comparison always returns to a weighing of the human being against himself, as it has no significance otherwise.

This arises out of the human being's reality as a social being with and around others. It is therefore primary and embedded in the nature of our innermost essence, and, for this very reason, it remains eternal and unchangeable as it includes the whole sphere of our free existence, and, consequently, can never be annulled by any action.

If it is eternal and unchangeable, then everything human beings did for their unity must rest within the framework of this condition, and, consequently, every connection must be located within it and explicable by it.

The general judgement of an inequality among human beings is hence an illusion, which arises from the fact that we want to isolate the human being who exists only within the structure of a society, and thus erase the presupposition required for the judgement in the course of the judgment itself.

I am only realized as a human being among human beings, and what I am as such is therefore in my essence one and inseparable. Now, if I would seek to abstract my existence and put in its place that of another, then this very action would automatically negate itself, for otherwise I could not

proclaim the assumed other as more or less than I am, ahead of or behind me. I thus refrain from doing so because the very abstracting from my own existence represents in that moment a determination of my existence and, consequently, is itself part of my reality. Accordingly, no action releases me from my sphere, which is essential if it is to encompass the actual existence of the human being among human beings in its entirety.

Our judgement of an actual inequality among people is, however, in itself a reality, and if it is to be an illusion, then we must at least ask how such a misconception is possible if equality among human beings is a necessity. The answer is as follows.

For one, the assertion of inequality among human beings would be impossible if it were not based on the judgment of a necessary equality, for without this standard we would not be able to determine what comprises inequality. If, therefore, we establish the latter, by necessity, we also demonstrate the former, and the assertion of the former must consequently be derived from that of the latter. This confirms the above requirement that in the original and lasting circumstances of human beings all other provisions must be contained, and I provide the following explanation.

Every circumstance of human beings arises from their own free actions, and the determination of the same by intuition and judgment is, consequently, a determination of these free actions. Every circumstance then becomes a practical determination and cannot be understood in any other way than in the necessary intensive and extensive expansion of itself.

Our actions are based on the intuition of ourselves and only thereby become actions. Hence, intuition and intuited are not to be separated and are in themselves one and the same. It is by the same manner that we comprehend our circumstance, and such as it is, it is only through a continued determination, and, consequently, only as interrelation of our practical existence as a whole. Understood this way, it is free and complete in itself, and its every aspect signifies the whole infinite connection between our acts and effects. No human being can act outside of this interrelation, and every action maintains its truth only in relation to its completion.

⁶“In this original condition of our free actions, every human being strives for the freest mastery and the fullest enjoyment of the whole of nature. Yet no one can encompass its entirety by themselves and can only do so as human being among human beings, through all others. Consequently, everyone must realize that idea of the individual, which in turn is only

⁶ Hülsen places the following two paragraphs in quotations, however, they do not appear to be citations from another text.

possible through the complete harmony of their conceptions of the world and their exercise of power upon it.”

“The State and its constitution are attempts to accomplish this unity and mastery of nature and are — because there is no absolute failure — at least partly successful. For as long as the world has existed, there has been no ruler and no servant, but society striving for unity with itself, and that is the import of all that we see.”

It is our actions themselves, therefore, on which the most intimate and profound union of the human being with human beings is based, and none are possible that would contradict this *per se*. Therefore, any assertion of inequality among human beings can only occur as a consequence of the purpose of our actions; and where we keep this purpose as object in mind, the assertion becomes impossible.

Hence, we misinterpret our own active existence as our need to be most intimately connected to the human being. We seek and want for nothing else, as consciously as we act. Yet as consciously as we act, we also cannot look for it anywhere else but in the actual intuition; here, however, we will never find it if we do not at the same time understand the object of our actions. Nevertheless, we challenge intuition because we could not act otherwise, and, in the end, since we are unable to find our own active existence in the human being, we ultimately apprehend only an idea [*Gedankenwesen*]⁷, towards which we believe we must direct all our future striving.

In this way, we considered our object realized and our demand fulfilled; human beings are unequal and must be so by virtue of their reality, which is thus and not otherwise, a fact we determine in accordance with equality, which we place external to ourselves, and which is not part of our nature.

Nonetheless, it is our nature and remains so eternally in all circumstances. The illusion, therefore, does not prevent us from acting freely and autonomously; and as freely acting beings who receive our determination in ourselves only through ourselves, we ourselves are not only our own end in itself but have already reached this end in every sense. Indeed, our end exists nowhere but in the present moment of our actions, that is, in all time, and the point in time is thus determined by the relation of our acts; the latter in themselves then are our end in itself, as an eternally in themselves continuing free extension. Thus, there can be no higher law for us than our actions, and its expression is as follows: to act and create and work within the harmony of our own powers.

⁷ A literal translation is “beings or entities of thought” and Hülsen refers here to *entia rationis*, or objects which exist only within the mind and emerged through an extension of rational thought via imagination.

The idea of ends outside of ourselves is hence based on the original relation of our actions. We desire and seek the human being as free and complete being; however, he achieves such state only as acting being and hence does not exist in any other form than in and through his acts. That idea (of ends outside ourselves) has therefore a sublime meaning as long as we do not sever the human being from his own actions: for now, we cannot sever him from ourselves either, as we, the two of us, exist in the most intimate unity.

This unity is as real as human beings themselves, and only we are allowed to see it, and must acknowledge and honor it. Nature has provided each one with our essence so that we should freely find each other in this intimate closeness. He who feels it in their bosom, loves human beings and seeks them out, and to those he finds and recognizes, he relinquishes his entire essence, who and what he is. Thus, we offer ourselves equally [*das Gleiche*] and are equal [*das Gleiche*], and this exchange of our spirit becomes in every sense a radiant emulation in the striving for the same ends. It is primordial and encompasses every aspect of our free actions. No one can therefore sever the thread of one's existence, which is tied to an infinite lineage; and in this determination, everyone is hence only living essence through themselves insofar as they are simultaneously also determined as such through their whole lineage.

Such is the connection of our spirit through the bonds of nature. Everyone belongs to us as we to ourselves, for all are the condition of an active existence of all. He who beheld this in its luminosity and clarity, understood the existence of the eternal within his chest, and the calm earnest search for truth and destiny became an uninhibited and clamorous feeling of his true existence. This is the soaring sense of a moment when the heavenly joy lifts our bosom, and our eye shines with the purest delight of life. It is in this moment that our existence reaches through the infinite points in time that are connected in the sensation of the present, and our essences are one, and above us, in the wreath of stars, we espy the image of our beautiful union. So the human being walks eternally in the harmony of a god; for who does command his life, which is only life within and through himself? And where does nature end in its infinity? The human being is our God, through whom we exist and remain, and if one were to perish from this circle of life, joy would be silenced in all of us. Therefore, whoever you are, grief-stricken human being, without you no higher heaven beckons to anyone, and no eternal love fills their bosom; and this is the creation of a more delightful life, where your lament will fall silent, and your eye will wander reconciled among the stars.

Let no one ask, however, where and when this will take place. — The earth rests in the midst of the infinite blue sky, and no sun in the universe circles in higher spheres, for every distance of the luminous flux is a measure of our eye, and therefore the splendor of the one sky that our gaze traverses; and our *when* is always *now*, for within ourselves rests the eternity which we call forth with free might, and everything is therefore reality as the world which we understand through our free and eternal actions.

Everyone asks themselves: what is the human being among human beings according to his free efficaciousness? Let the answer teach them to honor their radiant circumstance and to elevate their efficaciousness within its sphere. Everyone delights once they unraveled the foolishness and dried their tears. But at the bottom of his heart, he does not want to laugh as long as even one remains who cries. In the quiet seclusion of his own being [*Wesen*], he awakens a higher longing for the human being and does not seal off his breast so that his desire becomes clamorous, and everyone recognizes within it their own. Only among human beings is he human, and a radiant sphere encompasses the whole species. Therefore, everything that he himself is, should become reality within the illuminated circle of life through his free acts and not remain concealed from the participating and spirit-lit eyes of human beings. Let no one be fearful to look at the human beings around him, if only to interpret their strivings. It is still one and the same nature in which we live and are, and we would not exist at all if we ever had—or could have—stepped out of its circumstance. That is why this state—the state of nature—is enduring and inevitable, forever encompassing our efficaciousness in its entirety, and for which, consequently, all our institutions are purposed. In it, the human being is a family-man, and whatever garment clothes us, and whatever thought of existence elevates or diminishes us, there are no other kinds of human beings to be found anywhere than parents and children. Therefore, we can never seek and want for anything other than to realize the ideal of the family-man, and to bring peace and joy into our homes. It is enough, then, that this circumstance exists and that we are only eternally efficacious and active in it. When we judge the human being, we must only look at these works and deeds, and we will approach him gently and lovingly, and not reassure ourselves about the appearance of freedom. The encouragement to all that is great and beautiful lies within reality. It alone awakens our mind to the richness of life, and everything we seek through a perfected form stands there and beckons us to the perfect deed. Thus behold the eternal altars of peace, the temples of the goddess of abundance, and the dwellings of joy all across the flower-crowned earth. I know they do exist, and so does everyone who told themselves what this

reality signifies. Everything we see around us and above us lies within the sphere of our existence and is our existence; and if we always keep this in mind, everything will appear to us free and complete in itself, because we do not understand it any other way than in and through our actions, which is an acting in itself and therefore free and complete.

Thus, everywhere human beings exist in the original condition of their existence through their relationship in nature, which is their spirit's intuition and truth. I know nothing greater and more sublime than this signification of nature. No branch greens and no stalk blooms; these are the living signs that in their light our eyes should meet, and our spirits should recognize each other. In their germ rests an everlasting green and an eternal blossom, and that is why our determination remains eternal in them. Wherever we look, there is the human being's touch in every formation and growth, in every rain and the life of wandering figures. But this touch becomes touch only in the free observation of our spirit in nature, in nature's reformation through unconditioned symbols and words within it. This is how human beings found one another, and how we still find each other in an intimate community. For the word is a representation of our radiant circumstance in a free bond, and so we call out to one another with every syllable's sound: You are my essence, as I am yours.

This truth is an expression of our entire active life, in whatever context we may think of it. Upon recognizing this truth, we cannot help but to resolve any doubt and bring peace and harmony into the confused spectacle of life. In this respect, I know of no greater deception than the privileges we concede to human beings based on the mere conception of thought. We forget the actual human being, the human being of actions, and substitute him with a 'being of pure thought' [*Gedankenwesen*], an idea without object. The actual human being of actions is the family-man, who is everyman by circumstance of nature. Whatever we effect by virtue of our actions, therefore, has an essential connection to the actual human being, since there is no other who exists, or acts. Hence, the State is only an institution in nature, and its conditions mean nothing if their principles are not grounded in nature. Why do we want to decorate ourselves with bells, so that we may recognize ourselves as beings of one and the same spirit [*Wesen eines Geistes*]? Do we not visibly walk in the light of heaven? Do we still require these signs and symbols to be able to rejoice in the human being? Leave the signs and symbols their meaning but let us refrain from transforming them into creatures who dishonor the human being while we simultaneously forget all about him. No human being will ever be more worthy than another, regardless of how he positions himself, that is certain; it is only mere opinion

that can elevate or diminish us, while we remain what we are, eternally and always in one and the same condition of nature.

There is otherwise no *'in front of'* and no *'behind'*, no *'more'* and no *'less'* other than in relation to our own actions, and, consequently, only in the comparison of each one with himself. But each one compares themselves only in their own circumstance to the human being, i.e., they consider their own condition as essential in each and every one; and, so, the human being is me, a freely acting being, and every appearance of life a touch of their equal and eternal spirits, a touch that expands, grows, and becomes ever more intimate throughout all spaces of heaven.

Therein lies the greatness and sublimity of the human being, that none can be exalted above the other, but each one only beholds themselves in all, regardless of how many times the appearance may rattle them; for the truth of the human being is only one truth, and it shines forth victoriously from every distortion as soon as our eye knows how to find and interpret it.

Accordingly, everything we may desire and demand is the human being in a practical relationship with the world, and therefore one and the same as the human being among human beings. Therein, every possible extension exists as certain and necessary, and, therefore, in everything we observe, we always see only the greatest and most excellent – not as prospective, but as actual and in the present moment. For what is, that is; and he who sees clearly is able to behold it since our intuition and cognition are not separated in themselves but belong to the same breath of our active life.

I say this with free and firm conviction and say it first of all to those who honor contemplation and examine and judge with an unbiased eye. Many like to content themselves with witty remarks without even knowing their own purpose, and these human beings, I gladly confess, are the most difficult to contend with as they tend to look for sources of amusement in everything — except in themselves. But even they may believe that there are no distortions in nature, and everyone laughs only out of joy and pleasure as long as they find themselves consciously touched and move their lips into a visible expression of their inner selves. If only human beings could first understand that they should never wrest anything from a word that they themselves did not imbue it with, then they would be more cautious in their judgments and not make presumptions based on mere hearsay and hence on habit and prejudice. Everyone must justify their entire experience within themselves, and should this remain possible, then they must hold up every appearance with all its interconnections, that is, in their true and essential relations, before their eyes. Only then they can pass free and impartial judgment. But this is precisely where human beings fail. They tear

something, which is real only in the context of the whole, cleanly out of that very context, and are left with nothing but their empty thought, which they then proceed to judge in an equally empty manner.

But if all human beings are equal, I hear myself say, why is it nevertheless sufficient for you to deal with one infinitely more often than the thousand others? Anyone may take this particular action as an opportunity to argue, and, without doubt, those who believe to have to assert an inequality among human beings will use it as their justification.

I answer this, however: I know well that through only *one* person, I am always in connection with all others. Because all people are *one* and another *one, and so on*. For that very reason no one is a human being in actuality without the connection to all the others, which therefore remains necessarily the very same as connection of rational beings through their essence, that is, as connection of all with everyone, and of one with all. In this determination, it becomes a reciprocal touch of our spirits, free through the individual relationship of each and every one, and, therefore, always a practical relationship.

Hence, we understand our inter-actions only through our own actions and within the condition of time, which is determined by these acts. The most intimate friendship would therefore be non-existent if we wanted to sever it from our whole circumstance; for it is only possible within this circumstance, and only within it does it gain a greater and more elevated significance. The general love of the human being is a love of the individual, and it is based precisely on the attitude with which we honor the whole lineage of our species in each one, which once again would be impossible if our attitude were not accompanied by the idea of a necessary equality of the human being. We return to it in every contact. Every reality, therefore, has no other meaning than that of the most intimate community of all our essences. Only as such is this reality our own active existence which in itself cannot separate them, but in all possible actions must remain eternally the same.