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**Beyond Modernity:**  
**The Recovery of Person and**  
**Community in Global Times**  
**Lectures in China and Vietnam**

by  
*George F. McLean*

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## PREFACE

This series of lectures by George F. McLean was presented first in China and Vietnam and now is entitled, *Beyond Modernity: The Recovery of Person and Community in Global Times*. The reader is invited to enter a text that represents the world of thoughtful and critical engagement. Two central questions relate to regaining fuller understanding of the essential and existential aspects of persons and communities. The lectures pay particular attention to the intersection of the philosophic tradition with pre-philosophic social foundations as well as to certain Asian metaphysical and contemplative paths. In this respect the lectures by George F. McLean recapitulate his unique orchestration of the intersection of philosophic traditions and the social ground of cultures which he has promoted through the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP).

This book appears in the RVP series “Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change,” as volume 37 in series I “Culture and Values”. This is devoted to systematic explorations into cultural heritages and their contemporary challenges and transformations under the impact of modernity. In these lectures McLean illustrates a central features of RVP’s approach to the intersection of the philosophic tradition with the realities embedded in the foundations of social life. He masterfully engages the truth value found in such texts and the importance of re-engaging them not simply as artifacts in the history of ideas, but as sources for an ongoing quest for insight. This is directed toward the new capacities for understanding, new contexts, and especially the contemporary realities of globalism, pluralism and the collapse of the promises and premises of simplistic forms of universalism and modernity.

These lectures by McLean avail the reader access to his steady and balanced command of the history of philosophy as well as cultural-religious phenomena and foundational texts. They also echo his decades of interaction with the “brain stems” of the leadership cadres as members and associates of the Academies of Science and their Philosophic Institutes in Eastern Europe and Asia. McLean was invited to join them as they grappled with the tasks of recapturing deeper patterns of human consciousness and bonds of cultural grounding that remained embedded in the social realities of their peoples, as well as with their intellectual challenges of recovering the philosophic from the ideologic.

This work in some respects paralleled McLean’s scholarly journey to recover what was essential and efficacious in the philosophic. This required the turn to culture, phenomenology, personalism and a fresh hermeneutics needed for the contemporary needs of civil society, and the relevance of philosophy for public affairs, rather than a truncated life in the isolated and compartmentalization of the bureaucracies of academic governance.

These required elements of renewed inquiry have been institutionalized in the publications of RVP. Many of the 225 volumes published thusfar show patterns of related inquiry and generally are collaborative works by teams of scholars, frequently the final products of seminars organized and directed by McLean. In contrast this book provides the reader with direct and extended access to the voice of a great teacher. McLean's lectures address the recovery of a central mission of science--the explication and articulation of various ways of knowing and various modes of being. He engages contemporary concerns about person and community that have resurfaced in the wake of the collapse of modernity. He does not dwell on modernity's all too confident proclamation and imposition of certainties, remedies and fallacious hopes. Rather, he draws the reader into a grander argument and larger body of evidence. He presents a positive therapy of the search as he recovers philosophic literacy and reveals the ground from which such new competencies emerged. This leads the reader to remembering anew the transformation of reality that privileges the centrality of the person as the locus for fullest participation in reality and thus expresses the "really real" bonds of union that constitute communities among persons. In addition and most specifically this series addresses the specific bonds of union that extend over the peoples of Asia.

In this masterful blending of ideas and social life the reader will find insights and experiences that are at the core human questions about the capacity to control our gains in the sciences and to exercise the affirmation of freedom. One of the great outcomes of such awesome powers in the contemporary situation and even more in the globalization of such capacities and their attendant hopes for well-being is the challenge to re-engage the project of human development on a richer foundation and without the naiveté of the first modernizers. For our time science and well-being are yoked and the task of unpacking and critically clarifying this new landscape and especially the particular portion of its global configuration in Asia are the topics found in these fourteen lectures.

But this volume has more. The RVP's approach to the intersection of cultures and representative texts devoted to searching for understanding and meaning deepens our common capacities to know and to integrate ways of knowing and newly required competency of engaging the reality of cultures on other than one's own and in the most serious terms. Thus, this volume concludes with an appendix by Veerachart Nimanong of Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand, entitled "Thai Theravada Buddhist Understanding of Non- Attachment: A Middle Way for Culture and Hermeneutics in a Global Age".

*John A Kromkowski*  
*Washington, D.C., Spring 2010*

## INTRODUCTION

As we proceed into the third millennium we find a very different landscape than that to which we had become accustomed in modern times. With the great awakening or even rebirth of the Renaissance, modernity brought great new rational capabilities for the control and manipulation of the objects of our material world and new affirmations of human freedom. Humanity turned its full attention thereto.

But in the process it broke through not only the natural barriers of mountains, oceans and distance which had isolated peoples, but also the long humanizing tradition inherited from the Greeks and expressed in its exalted meaning by the monotheisms of the Abrahamic tradition. As the explorers circled the globe, not only did trade soon follow, but also colonial subjugation and exploitation. That was a first sign that something important had been left out, and a harbinger of worse to come.

As either the individual or the community was given priority the world split apart ideologically into individualism or communism. Both interpreted all—even humanity itself—in terms of the modes of production and distribution of material goods. The essential had been forgotten, namely, the innate and integral dignity of the person, along with its source and goal. The more this was sought in terms of one or the other ideologies of individual or community the more unbalanced and destructive the response became.

It is essential and urgent then to discover what had been lost and how it now can be restored. Because what is in question is the whole of modern civilization, any response must be multifaceted. It must consider what counts as knowledge in order to assure that the mind be adequately open to appreciate the issue and perceive relevant new insight. It must examine as well the constitution of the human person and hence how one's physical and conscious dimensions interact. It must consider also the ethical order weighing all that is relevant to determining and being determined by human action. And it must reconsider the understanding of being or reality itself in order to assure that it be able to integrate and evolve the new insights required for these new times.

The occasion of this work was a request from the Institute of Philosophy of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences in Hanoi. This directed attention to the positive contribution of Marx and the classical Asian tradition which I have attempted to integrate especially in Part I on the analysis and critique of modern development of the notion of person and as Part IV on the Asian contributions.

The task was vast but necessary and fortunately it brought not only challenges but new resources. First, the end of modernity and entrance into what thusfar can be called only post-modernity makes it possible to see with new eyes and evaluate with a new heart the modernity of the last 400 years. Second, this, in turn, makes possible a reappropriation of

prephilosophical resources through a deep archeology of the principles of person. Third, together these make possible an in-depth review of the philosophical construction and present reconstruction of the notion of person in the West. Lastly, this opens the way for an enormous enrichment and integration of the sense of the person through the global philosophical integration of the rich Asian philosophies, religions and cultural traditions. These constitute the four parts of this work.

Part I is devoted to clarifying the contemporary quandry of human self understanding and progress. This relates to the development of a sense of person shaped in the individualist liberal terms of the modern West and now entering Asia through the pervasive dynamics of economic globalization. Marx's central criticism was the idealistic character of modernity which distracted the mind from human reality and its oppression or, in Buddhist terms, suffering. Chapter I will try to discern the goods in whose pursuit the modern sense of the human person has been shaped, Chapter II will look at the unintended defects which have resulted from the manner of this pursuit, and which have brought some to speak of the end not only of modernity but of philosophy itself.

Part II in order to respond it is necessary first to do an anthropology of the sense of person to see if the lack of realism which Marx cites is endemic and essential to the notion of person or the opposite, in which case there is need to restore the realist character of the human person. This investigation will go back then to the earliest forms of social life in terms of totem and myth in Chapters III and IV.

Part III in Chapter V will study the development of the realist character of this notion of person in the Greek concept of substance and most properly in the enrichment of philosophy by the sense of existence which emerged in the cultural context of early Christianity and the Middle Ages. Chapter VI will take up the recent emergence of the sense of human subjectivity and hence of cultures as consisting of values and virtues, as well as a hermeneutic of intercultural relations. This will bring into focus the key issue for our times, namely, how can the sense of person be enriched existentially by the new interior awareness of human self-awareness and self-responsibility, and how can this at the same time not be an abandonment of realism but an enrichment of the sense of being. This was the proper work of the late John Paul II and will be the subject of Chapter VII.

Part IV will consider the enrichment of the sense of the human person by the resources of Asian cultures. This will be done in three steps: Chapter VIII will turn to the Confucian tradition in order to see how this can provide the aesthetic sense needed in order to seek not only justice through the tensions of the dialectic, but progress through harmonious



cooperation. Chapter IX will examine the way in which Hinduism can provide the realist base Marx desired, and at the same time provide a metaphysical path to the deep sense of existence, consciousness and bliss which constitutes the holy. Moreover, this chapter and the appendix will look to the reformist Buddhist sense of life through non-grasping and the contemplative path.



**PART I**

**HUMANISM: ITS MODERN CONSTRUCTION  
AND DECONSTRUCTION**

The project of understanding the human person is as old as humanity itself. Indeed, as man is the only being in the physical universe capable of self-understanding the project of properly human development must focus here. This struggle to appreciate man as a free being existing in his or her own right must be traced from the earliest modes of human social life and the earlier work in philosophy up to 1500 AD. This will be done in Parts II and III.

Before doing this, however, we shall look at the last 500 years which have come to be called modern times and which now seems at its end. In our concern to build the future our proximate focus must be the recent past in order to determine what is in need of being supplemented and what can be added for this task. This is due to the importance of the role of the question in philosophical hermeneutics.

As is pointed out by H.G. Gadamer in the historical hermeneutics of his *Truth and Method*<sup>1</sup> as the human mind is open to all being and all truth, without a focus it would fail to understand anything. Simply to review the development of ancient and medieval philosophy would then be at once too much and too little. It would exceed the bounds of any one work and yet not enable true insight regarding the nature and meaning of human life and the proper employment of human resources in our day.

Thus, in order to proceed there is need of a question in order to focus our abilities. Like a searchlight piercing the dark and enabling some part of reality to attract our attention, a question identifies an issue, alerts our mind and invites concentrated attention.

Thus, we shall devote the first chapter of this work to the development of the present issue regarding the human which requires new philosophical insight or understanding. This would be a narrow question requiring little insight if it were merely a matter of an incremental addition to one of the modern ideologies or the resulting social superstructure after “the end of history”.

What we now face, however, is a much greater issue, namely the shaping for the first time of a truly new world order which had not existed hitherto. The process now called “globalization” brings together the vast peoples of the world, North and South, East and West. With burgeoning populations and raising expectations we race ahead to provide a decent

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<sup>1</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (New York: Continuum, 1995).

humane life for people not only in previously unimaginable numbers, but with greater diversity and interpenetration than has ever been possible for nations separated by often conflicted borders. The task of building a global future consists largely in bringing all these together in a pattern of justice and cooperation, harmony and peace.

To do this it is necessary to recognize the forces which have enabled the modern period to be so creative in advancing the ancient notion of democracy and implementing it with the technical means to protect and support human life. But we must recognize as well that these forces have been used as well to bring humanity to the very brink of self-destruction. 20<sup>th</sup> century survival in hot wars was by the merciless application of massively destructive military might and in the cold war by an isometric of threats of total annihilation. More ominously still the very gratification of needs and desires has been accomplished a reduction of the meaning of the person to the man-machine, the slave to production and the force fed consumer whose purpose is to maintain "the market".

We need, in other words, first to study the nature of man as developed in modern times, in order to be properly aware of the challenges we face and which in fact have brought the modern period to its end. In Part II we will look for resources in prephilosophical times and in Part III in the civilizations and cultural heritages of West. Part IV will study how Asian cultures can contribute from its alternate perspective to a path by which humanity can now enter with hope into our global future.

**CHAPTER I**

**THE MODERN CONSTRUCTION OF  
THE PERSON**

**THE CHALLENGE OF THE RENAISSANCE**

It is difficult to encapsulate the complex of new forces, human and creative, by which humankind shapes its destiny. Indeed the writing of history is precisely the ordering of these factors. It must be selective and perspectival, but can be illuminating by drawing together relevant materials in new ways in response to new questions.

Modernity was born in response to the challenges and opportunities of the Renaissance, literally “rebirth,” which arose from a number of interconnected factors that are difficult to separate and order in any rigorous manner.

In terms of time, the new Renaissance interest in the life experience of ancient peoples produced the new field of archeology which brought to light the past accomplishments of humankind in art and architecture. In terms of space, the heavens received new theoretical and mathematical investigation which transformed the understanding of the Universe from Ptolemeian in which all revolved around the earth to the Copernican in which the earth revolved around the sun. Henceforth the universe would no longer be closed and fixed, but open and infinite. The world itself would come to be understood not simply as a limited space to be divided, but as an interconnected globe to be explored—and unfortunately exploited. All was seen afresh. Even the impossible was deemed possible: alchemy and superstition became rampant.

Closer to the human person, in economics the bubonic plague so reduced the population that earlier social organization in terms of productive estates and feudal fiefdoms was no longer necessary, or even feasible. The result was a new independence which freed people to move from place to place, from the countryside to the village and city, and to form new social patterns. This was reflected in the development of Republics in which at least those who owned property had a say in the gerence of public affairs. It was reflected as well in religious affairs with, literally, a “Reformation” as the periodic religious enthusiasm broke the old bonds and led to new modes of interpreting religious texts and traditions and of organizing the communities of believers or ecclesiastical affairs.

In sum, as humanity was reborn in a new universe, the realm of possibilities became almost limitless, both for progress and for confusion. There arose a sense that in this welter of discovery of both old and new all needed to be put on hold or bracketed until humankind could sort out what was true from what was false, what was helpful from what was destructive

for the life of the individual and the community. Thus at the conclusion of the Renaissance and by no means incidentally at the initiation of modernity, precisely because of the newness of its discoveries and developments one finds a new phenomenon: a desire to break with the past. One finds a new desire to establish some process by which assent could be withheld until<sup>1</sup> all could be tested or rebuilt in a new and controlled manner. Almost simultaneously and in both England and the Continent there arose a determination to rebuild human understanding with only what is clear and distinct to one or another dimension of human knowledge: the senses which are characterized matter and extension or the intellect which as spiritual is characterized by a lack of extension and hence by simplicity in operation.

The two were distinguished classically by Plato in his famous simile of the divided line and allegory of the cave. Let us review these here in order to be clear about the options exercised by Locke and Descartes and the possibilities and limits of knowledge for the philosophical schools they founded.

In his *Republic*, Plato confronted a problem similar to that of modernization. Things were not well. That the state had killed its wisest thinker, Socrates, as too dangerous to the new generation suggested a perverse desire for blindness. Teaching was being left to the Sophists whose approach was exemplified by the character of Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*. There could be no truth, for every statement could turn dialectically into its opposite; no principles, for the mind was tied to changeable sense experiences after the fashion of Hobbes; and no standards of ethics, for public life was a Machiavellian exercise in managing the crowd.

In contrast, Plato undertook to design a project of education or enlightenment which would form a generation of leaders who could direct a state in which the human spirit could flourish. This was not a short range project; he did not envisaged merely a method or a handbook of techniques for managing people. Rather, his plan was an educational model to reopen the mind to all levels of meaning. Thus, his *Republic* serves as a checklist for the dimensions of human knowledge. It presents this overall view in two media: the simile of the divided line and its explanatory allegory of the prisoner freed from bondage in the cave.

I should like to refer to this commonplace for its heuristic value, not only in distinguishing levels of knowledge, but especially in identifying how the progressive development of understanding might contribute to a more proper development of life at all levels. For this the return to the cave will be especially important for Asian cultures particularly in the Boddhisatva tradition for it concerns how the transforming divine light can illumine human issues and enliven our daily struggles.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hachett, 1998), I, pp. 59-63.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic*, VI-VII 509d-517d.

Through the simile of the line Plato deftly distinguishes the levels of knowledge; in the allegory of the cave he provides the imagination with a way of ascending these levels. The line is divided into two unequal parts, one represents the sensible level, the other represents the intelligible level; each is again subdivided unequally to result in four unequal parts. In the allegory of the cave there is a similar progression. First persons are chained facing the inner wall and are able to perceive only the shadows reflected on the wall. Behind them is a raised partition, on the other side of which people are carrying placards; at the mouth of the cave there is light from a fire or the sun. The content of knowledge at the lower stages are the images or reflections shed by the fire according to the shapes of the placards.

The first level may be seen as the affective order of sense feeling or imagination (*eikasia*) corresponding to reflections, e.g., of trees cast upon the water of a canal, or to the shadows cast upon the wall by the placards and the fire.

In the second section of the line the concrete individual realities (placards/trees) are directly perceived or intuited by what Plato terms belief (*sistis*). They are but limited expressions of the natures they express. Thus the perception of a concrete tree at any moment expresses but part of what this tree is and will become, and this tree in turn is but one expression of the possible ways in which the nature of tree can be realized. Similarly, in the allegory of the cave when a prisoner is freed from his chains and turns to perceive a square placard raised above the wall he senses but one concrete individual realization of that form or shape.

Thus proceeding beyond what Plato terms “imagination” one could decide to restrict knowledge to the sense level alone or to “belief”. In that case one would hold oneself to the material level of knowledge and only material reality would be able to be known. All would be structured accordingly from the logic of the mind, to the criterion of truth and the structures of the material world. Only what is subject to analysis is worthy of scientific attention, all else is but poetry or arbitrary imagination. As a philosophy this reduction of the mind to the realm of the empirical or sense experience is empiricism, as an ethics it is utilitarianism. This is characteristic of Anglo-Saxon philosophy in modern times. We shall see with John Locke how this can contribute to the appreciation of human life and where this contribution leads.

In the third stage, in passing beyond the partition, however, the prisoner moves from the sensible to the intelligible order. There he not only perceives concrete physical patterns, but understands (*dianoia*) the nature of the square shape and can appreciate how squares can be variously combined to generate triangular, rectangular, and pentagonal figures--indeed, the whole science of geometry. The simile of the line identifies the key step in the development of such a science as geometry, namely, generating hypotheses on the basis of which the entire content of the science can be deduced (e.g., that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points as the initial hypothesis for Euclidian geometry). The content of such

sciences being deduced from hypotheses is essentially and always hypothetical. This is the realm of ideas or forms, of the different ways in which being can be; it is that of the categories which Kant identifies as the conditions of possibility for the universal and necessary knowledge that constitutes the sciences.

In this third stage of knowledge one could only unfold more and more possibilities, descending from unity to multiplicity. One could stop the process at that level and proceed to organize life accordingly. This is indeed the choice of the rationalists for whom all must be available to technical reason and to scientific coordination in these terms. This is characteristic of continental philosophy in modern times as seen in Descartes, Kant and others.

One may, however, employ the hypotheses not as first principles for deductive knowledge, but as points of departure for moving to a fourth level of knowledge, to the necessary (rather than hypothetical) principle of the whole. This might be compared to Descartes' step when he reflects that in doubting he certainly is thinking and being. Thus, in order that there be such a thing as an hypothesis—of whatever content—there must be a distinction between being and its negation. For were it possible that to affirm an hypothesis is the same as to deny it (if to say that X equals Y is the same as to say that X does not equal Y) then no statement of whatsoever kind is possible. In the allegory of the cave, this is to ascend to the mouth of the cave, to the fire or the sun as the source of light on which the other levels depend but cannot explain. Without this no shadows of any shape could be shed, nor would there be any meaning to form if all is undifferentiable darkness and obscurity. Here one achieves true understanding or *noesis* in which not only all is seen, but all is comprehended in its true value.

Plato's model of line/cave has become classic because it deftly both distinguishes and relates the levels of sensation and intellectual knowledge. These, in turn, can be unfolded so as to take account, on the one hand, of affectivity at level one, of perception of shapes at level two, and, on the other hand, on level three of the categorical sciences of natures and on level four of the metaphysics of being.

But if the fourth stage of the line (or, in terms of the allegory of the cave, the light at the mouth of the cave) is knowledge of reality itself of which all the rest are expressions, then the insight of Plato can be essentially and immeasurably enriched to the degree that this fourth stage can be appreciated, which is precisely the work of metaphysics. This can be approached from two directions: East and West. The Indian tradition of *moksha-marga* and *yoga* can be immensely helpful, and can be helped, in turn, by the Western development of phenomenology in this century. In the West the philosophy of existence developed in early Christian and medieval philosophy speaks most directly to this issue and is particularly relevant to our times as is the *sat-cit-ananda* of Hindu metaphysics.



## DESCARTES

René Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, found himself faced with the heritage of the Renaissance as a great mass of information about the ancient and the new, the heavens and the earth, which could hardly be called learning. Before so great a jumble of the real and the misleading, of diverse and contradictory opinions the urgent task of the times was to develop a way of sorting through this tangled mass to tame it into a body of secure, certain and interconnected knowledge.

In his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes tells in autobiographical form how he did so. Describing his studies at *La Flèche*, the leading College in France at the time, he identified how each branch of knowledge had its attractiveness, but each seemed strangely unfulfilled. Mathematics had great clarity, precision and unity, but was being used mainly by engineers in the pedestrian tasks of digging canals and building fortifications; philosophy treated the truly important issues, but was rife with a myriad of opinions, without clarity or cohesion; etc. Thence emerged his great hope: to develop the work of reason so that the clarity and surety of mathematics could be extended through all fields of knowledge, and thereby to enable man “to walk with confidence in this life”.<sup>3</sup> His initial plans for this as sketched in his *Rules for the Direction of Our Intelligence* was to reduce all to their minimal components or simple natures, each clear enough in itself to be distinguished from all else, to order these simple natures by clearly grasped simple linkages one to the other, and by reviewing this panoramic pattern to be able to grasp *quasi* simultaneously all things both in themselves and in their relationship one to the other.

It was a simple plan much needed for its time, and certainly useful for some operations. It is no accident that Descartes became “the Father of the Modern Mind” due to the power of the model he provided the late Renaissance mind in its state of confusion from the welter of new information and high aspirations. The marvelous achievements of the route he opened for the human mind are immediately obvious in the transformation of our physical surroundings, in medicine and in the instrumentation of our lives. But recent environmental concerns begin to suggest that the model is too simple for our complex life. There are reasons to suspect that this is true in relation not only to the physical environment, but both to our social reality as people increasingly are manipulated by social systems, and to our personal self-understanding as people come to look upon themselves in merely functional and utilitarian terms.

Essentially, the problem lies in the fact that humans are the highest denizens of this world, but are not perfect. In fact their intellectual powers are tailored to working in this world with its diversity and hazards. They

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<sup>3</sup> *Discourse on Method* in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. E. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University of Press, 1969), Part I.

need an orientation to truth rather than falsity, to good rather than evil. But the human powers of intellect and will are poorly adapted to treating truth and evil as such; certainly the ideal conditions of clarity and distinctness cannot be achieved in their regard. The Cartesians or more simplistic followers of Descartes' method would therefore simply exclude any such metaphysical concerns, leaving humans simply as pawns of the physical forces they can clearly conceive. But then they are no longer able to live properly as humans with full freedom and responsibility, generosity and love, dignity and cooperation, rather than merely in competition for the survival of the fittest. Descartes himself considered further dimensions of knowledge to be essential even to his original project; the "Cartesians" missed the foundations he saw to be required.

To overcome these undesirable results one could simply add the humane alongside what initially was proposed by Descartes, but that does not promise to tame the vision of the man-machine. Instead it would introduce another dichotomy leaving the new humane additions in losing warfare with a tightly organized, well-entrenched adversary. This suggests that a better approach would be to return to Descartes and his original project in order to see if there are paths of openness and continuity which would point beyond the reduction of all to simple natures. When this is done a vast and fascinating panorama opens up, so rich as to suggest that Descartes' fatherhood of the modern mind has but begun. The paths are so spectacular that to appreciate these additional dimensions it is more helpful, if not necessary, not to be encased solely in the direct line of the modern Western currents which have applied his method thusfar. If so then non-Western peoples could provide a helpful vantage point for seeing more perspicaciously into the work of Descartes and the problems and potentialities of modernity itself for human progress. This will be the thesis of other parts of this work. But first we need to look more deeply and precisely into the work of Descartes to see if it is as closed as the "Cartesians" would hold or whether Descartes himself saw the need for the kind of deeper foundation that opens the way for a mutual enrichment between modernity and non-Western culture, particularly those of Asia.

### *The Rules*

When we return to Descartes we find something quite marvellous. His project of a unified science may have survived, but by the time he arrived in Holland in 1628, where he was to take up his major work, he had put an end to the effort to work out his general method on the basis he had elaborated in his *Rules for the Direction of Our Intelligence*. An analysis of this posthumously printed work, however, shows us what he was about. He had begun the work of laying out in detail his method as described above and was doing this basically in the manner in which it generally has been employed since that time. It was atomic in its assumption that all consists of a limited number of irreducible simple natures seemingly quantitative in

nature. And it was analytic in procedure assuming that these could be distinguished clearly one from another in order to identify the basic components. It would be synthetic only to the extent that these basic components would be assembled on the basis of equally clear but external linkages; no new reality or truth beyond that of the simple component natures could be derived in, or from, the unity. This was a universal mathematics in a reductionist sense.

Indeed, he had great success with his analytic method while he remained in mathematics. But the intent of his project had been to extend this to all fields. This he found to be impossible as soon as he tried. For instance, in facing the problem of the ‘anoclastic line’, “the curve through which parallel incoming light rays are refracted to focus on a simple point” the mathematician would reduce the issue to the relation between the angles of incidence and refraction. But many laws of refraction are mathematically possible and the mathematician restricting himself simply to what can be known clearly and distinctly by mathematics has no way of determining which is correct (AT X, 398). To make progress one would need to turn to other types of knowledge to discover “what human knowledge is” (AT X, 397-98), that is, it becomes necessary to determine the faculties of knowledge and their objects (Rule 12). But to do this requires, in turn, establishing a theory of human nature, of bodies and minds. The difficulty is that all this needs to be done before work in the sciences, which, in its turn, he would base “on the mechanical hypothesis which he wants to establish by this method.”<sup>4</sup> The circle had turned vicious.

The result was that he stopped work on this project all-together, and left the manuscript of the *Rules* in mid-state, replete with repetitions and unresolved alternatives. In no way did this mean abandoning the effort to develop an adequate basis for understanding the sciences. But it did mean that a new approach, a new dimension of thought and reality was needed.

In Holland he set out to develop this new way of understanding. To do so he worked carefully along the sequence of the faculties or powers of knowledge beginning from the senses and rising to the intellect. His approach at level after level was progressively to see if there were reasons to doubt that type of knowledge and if so to bracket or withhold assent from all knowledge of that type until he found a level which could not be doubted. Upon this he would construct an edifice of secure knowledge which would enable him to sort out what was mathematically certain from the welter of knowledge on that level. Only that would be admitted into his new universal mathematics. The rest might be pragmatically useful—even necessary—for daily life, but it would not be part of the new science.

In other words he had found, as had Plato, that working solely on the second and third level of the line it was impossible to establish the foundations for the sciences. For this he needed to proceed to the 4<sup>th</sup> level.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Menn, “The Problem of the Third Meditation,” Vol. LXVII, ACPQ (1993), p. 542.

We shall examine how he did this below. But for the present I would note its contrast to the rationalism of the many “Cartesians”. They would insist on remaining on these earlier levels closed in upon man, and hence with knowledge that was in fact unfounded. First this may suggest the dimension of truth in the postmodern critique of the modern claims to have a foundation for their knowledge. This is a fraudulent claim which the postmoderns unveil. Unfortunately, they then proceed to reject any effort to establish the foundations of knowledge and ultimately philosophy itself. Second, it entails as well that as unfounded the rationalist truth claims are then based on arbitrary and unjustified assertions. They constitute a fundamentalism which in its closure upon the human constitutes a secular humanism: man without God, which matches indeed the religious fundamentalism at the other extreme: a God without man. This makes it possible to identify the heated clash today as not a clash of civilizations but of fundamentalisms East and West.

If there is to be a way forward then more than a mere rationalism is needed. Descartes recognized this from very early on, namely, that he needed to escape from the cave to true “understanding” where one would be able to know 10,000 better.

## **LOCKE**

To follow this it is necessary to reach further back to John Locke and indeed to the Reformation.<sup>5</sup>

### *Epistemology*

On the one hand, as an ex-Augustinian friar Martin Luther was educated in a loosely Platonic, rather than Aristotelian, tradition. This favored the ideal over the concrete and the differentiated. On the other hand, as a follower of Ockham, and hence of nominalism, he held closely to knowledge of single atomic realities, which indeed was all there was, and rejected any capacity of the intellect for knowledge of natures and universals. These came together to constitute a fideism. Thus in order to bring out the importance of faith, in his commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans*, Luther focused upon the damage done to humankind by the Fall seeing it as not merely weakening, but corrupting human nature and its capacities for reason. On this theological, rather than philosophical, basis human reason was seen as no longer capable of knowing the divine or thinking in terms of being or existence as the proper effect of His causality. Suddenly, the world became very opaque. Knowledge of natures and hence of natural law was no longer possible, a study of human life could reveal at best what was, but not what ought to be. The morally good, could be known not from an understanding of the nature of things themselves, but only from

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<sup>5</sup> Ed. A.C. Grasser (New York: Dover, 1959).

the will of their creator, which, in turn, could be known only by special revelation as communicated in Scripture. In the important matters of life, faith firmly held was substituted for reason; theology replaced philosophy, which shrunk suddenly to external knowledge of accidental happenings.

The questions of the time, however, were not shrinking, but expanding and becoming more pervasive. They included not only what one could know, but how one could redevelop the socio-economic in view of the vastly expanded resources of far flung empire and the newly invented industrial capabilities. No less importantly there was question of England's burgeoning empire, of which office John Locke was Secretary, namely, how could all this be managed by the new parliamentary manner of governance soon to be institutionalized elsewhere by the American and French revolutions. The issue of civil society (*the koinonia politika*) would have to be rethought on this new basis, but by exceptionally narrow bands of knowledge to which would correspond a narrow understanding of freedom. This would be broad in the scope of the choices between things, but so reductionist in depth that it would shrivel the meaning of human life.

*Sense knowledge.* Early on John Locke was a member of the household of the Earl of Shaftsbury who would soon become the Lord Chancellor of the British Empire and literally loose his head in the complex political edies of those changing times. Directing a weekly seminar in these circumstances Locke came to see how progress on political and other issues required further clarification of what we could know. Thus, Locke's thought began from issues of governance and moved to those of knowledge. Facing the issue of how the *arché*, origination and sovereignty in political decision-making, could reside not in the single person of the king, but in a group or parliament, communication became of central importance. How could the members of such a group think together in order to come to agreement upon decisions on public policy and thereupon exercise their will in legislation? For Locke this meant that all needed to have equal access to the same foundations of knowledge.

To this end Locke drafted for his colleagues a "short paper" on ideas in general and their origin which would be the foundation of his historical plain method. He proposed in his *Essays Concerning Human Understanding* that we suppose the mind to be a white paper void of ideas, and then follow the way in which it comes to be furnished by ideas. These he traced from external things through the senses and onto the mind. To keep knowledge public, he insisted that only those ideas be recognized which followed this route of experience, either as sensation or as reflection upon the mind's work upon the materials derived from the senses.<sup>6</sup> On this basis David Hume reduced all knowledge to either matters of fact or formal analytic tautologies derived therefrom. They could concern neither the existence or actuality of things nor their essences, but could be simply the

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<sup>6</sup> *Essay*, Book II, chap. 1, Vol. I, 121-124.

determination of one from a pair of sensible contraries, e.g., red rather than brown, sweet rather than sour.<sup>7</sup>

The resulting ideas would be public in the sense that they could be traced back to their origin and thus could be replicated by anyone who would so situate himself in order to make the same observation. The mind could proceed to make all kinds of combinations with such ideas, and Locke eventually worked out the intricate pattern of such possible associations and dissociations of ideas. But all ideas, no matter how complex, were always subject to a test of verification, namely, that in principle all content could be traced back to an origin in the simple ideas drawn directly from the senses. No distinct order of intellectual knowledge was recognized; substance which as we shall see was the foundation of the notion of person would be reduced in this schema to an unknowable supposition soon to be dismissed by Hume. This 17th century epistemology was adopted broadly in the following century not only in England and in America, but in France where it became the context for the Enlightenment proper. It provided this thought with a systematic codification which imposed strict limits upon reason. From the passion to hold to the restrictive results of reason the times would come to be denominated the age of reason.

But as we shall see such a sense of the human without substance would constitute a hollow universe. Knowledge sedulously avoided any consideration of the nature of one's own reality or of that of other persons and things. Interpersonal bonds of civil society and human community based on an intimate appreciation of the nature of the person, and on respect for the dignity of other human beings were replaced by external observations of persons as single entities wrapped in self-interests. This lent itself to the construction only of external utilitarian relations based on everyone's self-interests. Mutual recognition constituted a public order of merely instrumental relations assured by legal judgements rendered by the courts. In this way there came to be established a system of rights and of justice to protect each one's field of self-interested choices and of action against incursion from without. This field was progressively defined through legal judgements and legislation and enforced by the coercive power of the state. Through the combination of industrial and colonial expansion, property or wealth was vastly expanded as was the public impact of the self-interested decision-making based thereupon. In turn, the state by legislating these private interests into public law and engaging its coercive power created a legal pattern which defined the meaning of justice for modern time. This was based on self-interest and bent upon exploitation which Marx would recognize at home and upon colonialism which for centuries would oppress much of the world.

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<sup>7</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960).

The restrictions implicit in this would appear starkly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Rudolf Carnap's "Vienna Manifesto" which shrinks the scope of meaningful knowledge and significant discourse to describing "some state of affairs" in terms of empirical "sets of facts." This excludes speech about wholes, God, the unconscious or *entelechie*s; the grounds of meaning, as well as all that transcends the immediate content of sense experience, also are excluded. All of these would be progressively bleached out of the sense of the human.

### *Human Person*

Beginning from the mind as a blank tablet and careful to control all that might be written upon by limiting it to ideas received from the senses and their tautological recombinations, John Locke undertook to identify the nature of the person within the context of his general effort to provide an understanding which would enable people to cooperate in building a viable political order. This concentration upon the mind is typical of modern thought and of its contribution to the appreciation of the person. Focusing upon knowledge, Locke proceeded to elaborate, not only consciousness in terms of the person, but the person in terms of consciousness. He considered personal identity to be a complex notion composed from the many simple ideas which constitute our consciousness. By reflection we perceive that we perceive; thereby we are able to be, as it were, present to ourselves and to recognize ourselves as distinct from all other thinking things.<sup>8</sup> Memory, which is also an act of consciousness, enables us to recognize these acts of consciousness in different times and places. Locke saw the memory, by uniting present acts of awareness with similar past acts, not merely as discovering but as creating personal identity. This binding of myself as past consciousness to myself as present consciousness constitutes the continuing reality of the person. Essentially, it is a private matter revealed directly only to oneself, and but indirectly to other persons.

Because Locke's concern for knowledge was part of his overriding concern to find a way to build social unity in a divided country he saw his notion of the self as the basis of an ethic for both private and public life. As conscious of pleasure and pain the self is capable of happiness or misery, "and so is concerned for itself."<sup>9</sup> What is more, happiness and misery matter only inasmuch as they enter one's self-consciousness as a matter of self-concern and direct one's activities. He sees the pattern of public morality, with its elements of justice as rewarding a prior good act by happiness and as punishing an evil act by misery, to be founded upon this identity of the self as a continuing consciousness from the time of the act to

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<sup>8</sup> *Essay*, Book II, ch. 27, n. 11 and 9-10; Vol. I, 448-452. The person is "a thinking, intelligent being, that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself."

<sup>9</sup> *Essay*, n. 17.

that of the reward or punishment. 'Person' is the name of this self as open to public judgment and social response; it is "a forensic term appropriating actions and their merit."<sup>10</sup>

This early attempt to delineate the person on the basis of consciousness, for which Marx would classify most of modern philosophy as an idealism, locates a number of factors essential to personhood such as the importance of self-awareness, the ability to be concerned with and for oneself, and the basis this provides for the notions of responsibility and public accountability. These are the foundations of his *Letters Concerning Toleration* which were to be of such great importance in the development of subsequent social and political structures of the West. They are key to the great modern contributions to a new appreciation of certain facets of human life. This is truly a triumph of the modern mind.

There are reasons to believe, however, that, while correct in focusing upon consciousness, he did not push his analysis far enough to integrate the whole person. Leibniz, in his *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, was quick to point out some of these reasons in a detailed response. For example by centering personal identity in consciousness, Locke distinguished it from the notion of the person as that which could be identified by a body of a particular shape. This led him to admit that it is conceivable that the one consciousness, self or person could exist in different bodies a thousand years remote one from another<sup>11</sup> or conversely, that multiple selves could inhabit the same body.

This is more than an issue of "names ill-used";<sup>12</sup> it is symptomatic of the whole cluster of problems which derive from isolating human consciousness from the physical identity of the human self. These include problems not only regarding communication with other persons for which one depends upon physical signs, but regarding the life of the person in a physical world in whose unity and harmony one's consciousness has no real share, indeed, in relation to which it is defined rather by contrast.<sup>13</sup> Recently, existential phenomenologists have begun to respond to the perverse, desiccating effect which this has had even upon consciousness itself, while environmentalists have pointed up the destruction it has wrought upon nature.

This implies a problem for personal identity. Locke would claim that this resides in the continuity established by linking the past with the present in one's memory.<sup>14</sup> But, as there is no awareness of a substantial self from

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* nn. 18 and 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 20

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 29.

<sup>13</sup> G.W. Leibniz *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II, ch. 27, 9, trans. A. G. Langley (Chicago: Open Court, 1916).

<sup>14</sup> Locke, *Essay*, ch. 27, n. 15.



which this consciousness proceeds,<sup>15</sup> what remains is but a sequence of perceptions or a flow of consciousness recorded by memory.

Finally, Leibniz would question Locke's claim to have provided even that public or forensic notion of the self by which he sought to provide a sufficient basis for legal and political relations. Memory can deal with the past and the present, but not with the future; planning and providing for the future is, however, the main task of a rationally ordered society. Further, Locke's conclusion, that since the self is consciousness the same self could inhabit many bodies of different appearances, would undermine the value of public testimony, and thereby the administration of justice.<sup>16</sup> Though self-consciousness is certainly central and distinctive of the person, more is required for personhood than a sequence of consciousness, past and present.

### *Freedom as Choice*

This can be seen especially in the sense of freedom which was, at the same time, most strongly affirmed and most radically reduced in the so-called "free world". What could be the meaning of freedom given this epistemology?

Mortimer Adler in his *The Idea of Freedom*<sup>17</sup> distinguishes three basic senses of freedom found in the history of Western philosophy: the first way of thinking is by the senses, that is empirical thinking, to which there corresponds freedom as a choice between external objects. The second way of thinking is that of the intellect as reason, as in Kant's first two critiques of *Pure* and *Practical Reason*, to which there corresponds the freedom to choose as one ought. The third mode of consciousness is the aesthetic which was treated in Kant's third *Critique* of Judgement and to which there corresponds the creative existential freedom of self-construction.

For Locke just as knowledge had been reduced to empirical knowledge of external matters of fact (red or brown), freedom was reduced to choices between external objects. In empirical terms, it is not possible to speak of appropriate or inappropriate goals or even to evaluate choices in relation to self-fulfillment. The only concern is which objects among the sets of contraries I will choose by brute, changeable and even arbitrary will power and whether circumstances will allow me to carry out that choice. Such choices, of course, may not only differ from, but even contradict the immediate and long range objectives of other persons. This will require compromises and social contracts in the sense of Hobbes; John Rawls will

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<sup>15</sup> Leibniz, *New Essays*, II, ch. 27, n. 14. This consequence was recognized and accepted by Hume who proceeded to dispense with the notion of substance altogether.

<sup>16</sup> *New Essays*, nn. 20-66.

<sup>17</sup> (Garden City, Doubleday, 1958), p. 609.

even work out a formal set of such compromises.<sup>18</sup> Throughout it all, however, the basic concern remains the ability to do as one pleases.

This includes two factors. The first is execution by which my will is translated into action. Thus, John Locke sees freedom as “being able to act or not act, according as we shall choose or will,”<sup>19</sup> and Bertrand Russell sees it as “the absence of external obstacles to the realization of our desires.”<sup>20</sup> The second factor is individual self-realization understood simply as the accomplishment of one’s good as one sees it. This reflects one’s personal idiosyncracies and temperament, which in turn reflect each person’s individual character.

In these terms, one’s goal can be only what appeals to one, with no necessary relation to real goods or to duties which one ought to perform.<sup>21</sup> “Liberty consists in doing what one desires,”<sup>22</sup> and the freedom of a society is measured by the latitude it provides for the cultivation of individual patterns of life.<sup>23</sup> If there is any ethical theory in this, it can be only utilitarian, hopefully with enough breadth to recognize other people and their good, as well as my own. In practice, over time this comes to constitute a black-hole of self-centered consumption of physical goods in which both nature and the person are consumed; this is the essence of consumerism.

This first level of freedom is reflected in the contemporary sense of “choice” to which the meaning of freedom has been reduced. It should be noted that this derived from Locke’s politically motivated decision (itself an exercise of freedom), not merely to focus upon empirical meaning, but to eliminate from public discourse any other knowledge. Its progressively rigorous implementation, from Hobbes through Hume to Carnap, constitutes an ideology in the sense of a selected and restrictive vision which controls minds and reduces freedom to willfulness. In this perspective, liberalism is grossly misnamed, and itself calls for a process of liberation and enrichment.

Here a strong and ever deepening gap opens between, on the one hand, what reason could ascertain, namely, a set of self-interested single agents interacting in the Hobbesian manner as wolves to wolves, and, on the other hand, what the cultural heritages and civilizations have found to be needed for the construction of a public social order.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>19</sup> *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, A.C. Fraser, ed. (New York: Dover, 1959), II, ch. 21, sec 27; vol. I, p. 329.

<sup>20</sup> *Skeptical Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1952), p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> Adler, p. 187.

<sup>22</sup> J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 5, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Adler, p. 193.

*Human Values and Moral Sentiment*

Due to the restriction of knowledge to the empirical reporting and managing of facts, the moral realm was no longer an effort at rational ordering of all toward the common good of the overall society and its variously articulated sub-groups. The newly restricted reason could provide no basis for a public moral order of duty and obligation. Instead, all moral life was located in the private, interior sphere as a matter not of reason, but of feeling, affectivity and emotions.

Further, when it came then to issues of the basic motivation for decisions in private or public life these could not be the result of reason, for here reason is of itself entirely incapable. "The ultimate ends of human action can never be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiment and affections of mankind."<sup>24</sup>

It would not be right to underestimate the power of this sentiment or its influence in humanizing the new social universe of Locke and Hume. The Cambridge Platonists had written eloquently of moral sentiment. Locke in his *Second Treatise on Government*<sup>25</sup> invoked prominently the subordination of human self-seeking to a unifying and uplifting order of divine Providence. The Scottish Common Sense Realists propounded this eloquently in Scotland and in the major Ivy League colleges in North America in an effort to articulate the moral dimension of life. This articulation of the moral order in terms of affectivity is central to the work of Adam Smith as is evidenced by his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*<sup>26</sup> and of Adam Ferguson in his landmark: *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*.<sup>27</sup>

In this process two sources of motivations are noted. One is theological, namely, divine inspiration and its approbation of love, charity or benevolence as actions in accord with a divinely approved law of nature. This is a strong and pervasive influence in Locke and it continues in such Scottish moralists as Francis Hutcheson. Alasdair MacIntyre documents this at length in his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*<sup>28</sup>

A second, more humanistic, source is the desire for social approbation developed in the work of Adam Ferguson. While recognizing the realm of self-interest, he defends the overriding reality of a moral sphere. "Mankind, we are told, are devoted to interest; and this, in all commercial nations, is undoubtedly true. But it does not follow that they are, by natural dispositions averse to society and natural affections." He expresses contempt for mere "fortune or interest" and looks rather to a

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<sup>24</sup> A. MacIntyre, "An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals" in *Hume's Ethical Writings* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), appendix I, p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: University Press, 1960).

<sup>26</sup> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> (Edinburgh: Kincaid and Bell, 1767); (New York: Garland, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

benevolent heart with “courage, freedom and resolute choice of conduct” as directing us to act with a view to the good of society. This, in turn, is seen less as divinely mandated universal laws of action than as universal attributes of “moral sentiments and natural affections (discovered) through the study of particular human agents acting in society.”<sup>29</sup>

In this manner the moral warrant for the civility of civil society is separated from reason, from the creator as source of society, and from the substance and end of society. Its warrant is left as self-justifying and self-motivating. While moral sentiment can generate a certain conception of a way of life and a conviction that this is a good way to live, these are hard pressed by the internalized motivation of self-interest based on the drive for material possessions. They even receive divine sanction in the complex convoluted puritan rationalization described by Max Weber in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>30</sup>

Is this motivation adequate to harmonize all the elements in the full breadth of human life? In the context of the first level of freedom as developed in early British empiricist philosophy following Locke, with its external utilitarian structure for human relationships, Adam Smith developed a corresponding economic theory. His goal was social promotion and protection of the economically disadvantaged. This, he thought, could best be achieved by the untrammelled development of economic forces under the guidance of their own inner logic, namely, free market interchange working as an invisible hand. Being blind to realities other than its material, economic self-interest, however, it was inevitable that this would trammel inadvertently upon the broader human and social reality which needed and deserved to be protected. Hence he turned with full and equal seriousness, if with less success, to the elaboration of another realm—civil society. This was neither the economic order nor the state, but was needed in order to provide a “safety net” for those endangered or damaged by the interplay of market forces and the dislocation and unemployment which they generate.

It could and should be argued further that in this understanding civil society is not merely a matter of protecting the victims marginalized from the economic system, but even more of providing a humane context for the lives of all who do participate in that system. It would be a field in which they could, as community, exercise their humanity and hence their freedom. Here the exercise of freedom need not be limited to the first or elementary level of a Lockean empiricism. Indeed the early modern Scotch theorists as a response to the empiricism of Locke, developed their theme of civil society as a realm of altruistic activity guided by moral affectivity. This stood in constant contrast to the self-interested and self-seeking management of property in terms of its own maximization. It was inspired

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<sup>29</sup> *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. See Seligman, pp. 31-36.

<sup>30</sup> Max Weber, translated by Talcott Parsons ; with a foreword by R.H. Tawney (London : G. Allen & Unwin, 1930).

both by such religious motifs as the example of divine providence and benevolence, and the desire to be seen and appreciated by one's peers as a good and morally sensitive person. Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*<sup>31</sup> was a natural, integral and typical part of this crucial early modern development, though he seemed over time to have moved to a stress upon justice over benevolence.

Finally, it should be noted that civil society was conceived not only as a refuge from the economic realm both for its victims and its participants, but also as a wellspring of economic abilities. Without health and basic education there cannot be a successful work force; without further education and communication there will not exist the creative inventiveness to generate more products and to compete successfully; without a sense of self-worth, human dignity and social concern the invisible hand of the market will be left to destroy its own environment and the human potentialities it requires.

All of this argues for human society based upon economic interchange exercised not reductively at the first level of freedom, but essentially transcending that dimension. Even those who would attempt to hold reductively to the first level and refer to civil society in terms of "enlightened" self-interest play loosely with words, for in effect it means exercising self-interest with levels of insight and meaning which transcend the empirical and utilitarian. This is to say that for utility to be maximized and really succeed it needs to be situated in a context of meaning and a set of values which transcend it. The Scotts recognized this and drew insight from other, especially religious, sources in order to humanize their world and support their system.

But is this sufficient to ward off the deleterious effects of leaving the economic order of production and distribution to a non-human "hidden hand"? Marx's world shattering analysis of the conditions of mill workers in 19th century England was a resounding "no". While these conditions have since been seriously attenuated, his indictment of the system that generated them, though fought over in wars hot and cold, has never been truly answered. The difficulties increase as the material stakes and self-interest increase, and as not only workers but management becomes more distant from ownership so that communication slips ever more toward the inadequate language of the economic balance sheet.

What can be expected of this arrangement as we move from the industrial to the information age in which the focus of material self-interest will shift to competencies possessed by the technically sophisticated few? This promises to catapult large numbers of people out of industrial production, which previously had been absorbing the expanding populations, and thus out of the economic web leaving them to wander and search for their survival. A similar fate is now overtaking the chosen

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<sup>31</sup> Adam Smith, edited by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2002)

technically sophisticated few as these skills and the information network links up the world and puts them into direct competition with economic systems which pay much less and where people live more simply.

The “liberal” response to this follows Hume’s separation of “is” from “ought” to develop a bifurcation between the public realm ruled by justice and the realm of private morality ruled by virtue. John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*<sup>32</sup> and its subsequent evolution in *Political Liberalism* follows this penchant. The so-called cosmic integrating or religious visions of the meaning and exercise of life he relegates to a position behind a “veil of ignorance” in order to constitute a “pluralistic” public domain charted by a minimum set of rules to which all would be expected to assent in order to be assured of a maximum range of action. The denizens of this domain, having deposited their basic self-identifying sense of meaning and commitment behind the “veil,” remain denatured clones whose age, religion, race and sex are not to be considered in the public domain.

This does not exclude that people might yet be inspired and motivated by values held in private behind the “veil of ignorance”, but these are not a matter of public concern or discourse. This is only that a field of action and equal competition be guaranteed by an agreed structure of rights protected by the state. This is the self-styled “free world”. In the common law areas it would be constituted by legislative or judicial will as exercised in resolving conflicts, but this would not be a properly moral field of ethical action, which is relegated to the private and the personal.

This exclusion of the ethical from the public arena and its relegation to the private realm is most important for the modern sense of the human. For if the point of society is to constitute a realm for the full exercise of a richly textured social life, this approach implies strong limitations. It creates a notion of the private, but does so in a negative manner, that is, not in terms of full personal self-expression, but as that which is excluded from public expression and engagement. Further, even as a private realm, civil society is in a precarious situation for the requirement that one abstract from gender, age, race, religion, etc., which the liberal approach imposes upon the public order, is continually extended to the private. More and more it becomes difficult to express one’s identity in a school or club, all of which come under the strictures of the public domain if they participate in any public funding or have any importance for social or professional advancement. The recent fear of government intrusion in the West is an aberrant sign of the sense of threat created by this invasive depersonalization not only of the public, but of the private realm. The same is true of fundamentalism in other lands.

In sum, certainly we need guarantees of equal participation by all in social life. The fight against discrimination and the calls for a society of law rather than of men have primarily that meaning. But where this has not already evolved over time what forces will generate it; and where it already

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<sup>32</sup> (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ., 1971).

exists is it sufficient? The critics of Rawls would note that his political liberalism does not provide the motivation for its own implementation, and thinkers ranging from Hobbes to Hegel and Marx see whatever motivation there is as being held captive to self-interest in terms of material possessions and Adler's first level of freedom. Most seriously this reflects the separation of morality and of religious and other integrating views of the meaning of life from the public sphere. As this progressively expands it pervades all and promises to subvert the bases for civil society as well.

This suggests some important elements for any development of the notion and reality of society. First, a people's integrating culture or sense of life must not be relegated to a private realm defined by exclusion from an ever expanding domain of public life and meaning. Second, the ethical must not be separated from the public exercise of freedom lest social life be a mere voluntarism. Third, the ethical must not be separated from reason and hence from reasoned discourse, or from the experience and shared traditions of a people.

## **KANT**

The previous section concerned the Anglo-American nominalist reduction of understanding to sense knowledge. This vastly simplified the realm of knowledge and directed the full resources of humanity to the understanding of human life possible in those terms. Much was accomplished with regard to the sphere of empirical knowledge and the implementation of industry and commerce. As regards the human person this engendered a focus upon the individual; relations between individuals were seen as conflictual and a common law system was constructed in order to articulate the rights of each individual against all others and against the state. Progressively, individualism ruled all. Correspondingly the freedom of the individual to choose was strongly asserted and limited only by the right of others similarly to choose among external objects. Lacking a sense of the nature of the person or of the objects to be chosen, as well as of the social unity of such individuals, social bonds were reduced to the realm of sentiment and then marginalized from public life. On the European continent, consequent upon the work of Descartes, this developed in a similarly ambiguous manner. There was a strong assertion of the person, but as Marx would note, without the realist character which could protect humans from exploitive ideologies.

Kant provided the basis for another, much richer notion of freedom, which Adler's team called "acquired freedom of self-perfection." This acknowledges the ability of man to transcend the empirical order and to envisage moral laws and ideals. Here, "to be free is to be able, through acquired virtue or wisdom, to will or live as one ought in conformity to the moral law or an ideal befitting human nature."<sup>33</sup> This is the direction taken

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<sup>33</sup> Adler, p. 193.

by such philosophers as Plotinus, Spinoza and Bradley who thought in terms of ideal patterns of reason and of nature. For Kant, freedom consists not in acting merely as one pleases, but in willing as one ought, whether or not this can be enacted.<sup>34</sup> Moral standards are absolute and objective, not relative to individual or group preferences.<sup>35</sup>

But then we face the dilemma of freedom. If, in order to have value it must be ordered, can freedom be truly autonomous and, hence, free; conversely, if to be free means to be autonomous will it be surely a value. In either words, how can freedom be free? The dilemma is how persons can retain both meaning and value, on the one hand, and autonomy or freedom, on the other. One without the other—meaning without freedom, and freedom without meaning—would be a contradiction. This question takes us to the intimate nature of reality and makes possible new discovery. I will suggest in the last part of this work that this could allow us to appreciate from within the more intuitive insight of Confucius and, thereby, to engage this in new ways particularly adapted to present times. To see this, we must look at the structure of the three critiques which Kant wrote in the decade between 1781 and 1790.

*Knowledge: the Critique of Pure Reason*

It is unfortunate that the range of Kant's work has been so little appreciated. Until recently, rationalists directed almost exclusive attention to the first of Kant's critiques, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which concerned the conditions of possibility of the physical sciences. In search of the possibility of the universal and necessary laws of science for an inherently particular and changing world Kant set up an order of knowledge: things in themselves were not knowable, but as humans had to live the world with them they had to set up some order or pattern of objects. What was received via the senses was amorphous—without space or time; the forms of space and time came rather from the receiving powers of sensation which worked in terms of spatial and temporal ordering. This relocation of all forms from the things in themselves to the receptive senses and eventually to the intellect meant the rejection of metaphysics as a science. This was warmly greeted in empiricist, positivists and generally materialist circles as a dispensation from any need to search beyond what was reductively sensible and, hence, phenomenal in the sense of being inherently spatial and/or temporal. All that was received by the senses was by that very fact located in, or better informed by, space and time.

Kant himself, however, insisted upon going further. If the terms of the sciences were inherently spatial and temporal then his justification of the sciences was precisely to identify and to justify, through metaphysical and transcendental reductions respectively, the sets of categories which

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.



enable this empirical world to have intelligibility and scientific meaning. Since sense experience is always partial or perspectival and limited to the here and now, the universality and necessity of the laws of science must come from the human mind. Such *a priori* categories belong properly to the subject as not material.

We are here at the essential turning point for the modern mind, for it is here that Kant takes a definitive step in identifying the subject as more than a wayfarer in a world encountered as a given and to which one can but react. Rather, he shows the subject to be an active force engaged in the creation even of the empirical world in which one lives. The meaning or intelligible order of things is due not only to their creation according to a divine intellect, but also to the work of the human intellect and its categories. If, however, man is to have such a central role in the constitution of his world, then certain elements will be required, and this requirement itself will be their justification.

First there must be an imagination which can bring together the flow of disparate sensations. This plays a reproductive role which consists in the empirical and psychological activity by which it reproduces within the mind the amorphous data received from without, according to the integrating forms of space and time. This merely reproductive role is by no means sufficient, however, for, since the received data is amorphous, any mere reproduction would lack coherence and generate a chaotic world: “a blind play of representations less even than a dream”.<sup>36</sup> Hence, the imagination must have also a productive dimension which enables the multiple empirical intuitions to achieve some unity. This is ruled by “the principle of the unity of apperception” (understanding or intellection), namely, “that all appearances without exception, must so enter the mind or be apprehended, that they conform to the unity of apperception.”<sup>37</sup> This is done according to the abstract categories and concepts of the intellect, such as cause, substance and the like, which rule the work of the imagination at this level in accord with the principle of the unity of apperception.

Second, this process of association must have some foundation in order that the multiple sensations be related or even relatable one to another, and, hence, enter into the same unity of apperception. There must be some objective affinity of the multiple found in past experience—an “affinity of appearances”—in order for the reproductive or associative work of the imagination to be possible. However, this unity does not exist, as such, in past experiences. Rather, the unitive rule or principle of the reproductive activity of the imagination is its reproductive or transcendental work as “a spontaneous faculty not dependent upon empirical laws but

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<sup>36</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), A 112; cf. A 121.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, A. 121.

rather constitutive of them and, hence, constitutive of empirical objects.”<sup>38</sup> That is, though the unity is not in the disparate phenomena, nevertheless they can be brought together by the imagination to form a unity only in certain particular manners if they are to be informed by the categories of the intellect.

Kant illustrates this by comparing the examples of perceiving a house and a boat receding downstream.<sup>39</sup> The parts of the house can be intuited successively in any order (door-roof-stairs or stairs-door-roof), but my judgment must be of the house as having all of its parts simultaneously and in a certain relationship. Similarly, the boat is intuited successively as moving downstream. However, though I must judge its actual motion in that order, I could imagine the contrary. Hence, the imagination, in bringing together the many intuitions goes beyond the simple order of appearances and unifies phenomenal objects in an order to which concepts can be applied. “Objectivity is a product of cognition, not of apprehension,”<sup>40</sup> for, though we can observe appearances in any sequence, they can be unified and, hence, thought only in certain orders as ruled by the categories of the mind.

In sum, it is the task of the reproductive imagination to bring together the multiple elements of sense intuition in some unity or order capable of being informed by a concept or category of the intellect with a view to making a judgment. On the part of the subject, the imagination here is active, authentically one’s own and creative. Ultimately, however, its work is not free, but is necessitated by the categories or concepts as integral to the work of sciences which, in turn, are characterized by necessity and universality.

How realistic then is talk about freedom? Do we really have the choice of which so much is said? On the one hand, we are structured in a set of circumstances which circumscribe, develop and direct our actions. This is the actual experience of people which Marx and Hegel articulate when they note the importance of knowledge of the underlying pattern of economic and other laws and make freedom consist in conforming thereto.

On the other hand, we learn also from our experience that we do have a special responsibility in this world to work with the circumstances of nature, to harness and channel these forces toward greater harmony and human goals. A flood which kills thousands is not an occasion for murdering more, but for mobilizing to protect as many as possible, for determining what flood control projects need to be instituted for the future, and even for learning how to construct them so that they can generate electricity for power and irrigate crops. All of this is properly the work of the human spirit. Similarly, in facing a trying day, I eat a larger breakfast

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<sup>38</sup> Donald W. Crawford, *Kant’s Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1974), pp. 87-90.

<sup>39</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 192-93.

<sup>40</sup> Crawford, pp. 83-84.

rather than cut out part of my schedule; instead of ignoring the circumstances and laws of my physical being, I coordinate these and direct them for my human purposes.

This much can be said by pragmatism and utilitarianism. But it leaves unclear whether man remains merely an instrument of physical progress and, hence, whether his powers remain a function of matter. This is where Kant takes the decisive step in his second *Critique* which will be basic to the development of the appreciation of the human person in modern times.

*Freedom: The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and the Critique of Practical Reason*

Beyond the set of universal, necessary and ultimately material relations upon which he focuses in his first *Critique*, Kant points to the fact of human responsibility in the realm of practical reason. If one is responsible, then there must be about him a distinctive level of reality irreducible to the laws of physical nature. This reality of freedom and spirit is what characterizes and distinguishes the person. It is here that the bonds of matter are broken, that transcendence is affirmed, and that creativity is founded. Without this nature would remain a repetitive machine; peoples would prove incapable of sustaining their burgeoning populations, and the dynamic spirit required for modern life would die.

Once one crosses this divide, however, life unfolds a new set of requirements for reality. The definitiveness of human commitments and the unlimited openness required for free creativity reflect characteristics of being which soar far beyond the limited, fixed and hypothetical relations of the physical order. They reflect rather the characteristics of knowledge and love: infinity, absoluteness and commitment. To understand the personal nature of our own life, we need to understand ourselves not as functions of matter, but as loving expressions of unlimited wisdom and creative generosity.

Locke had tried too hard to make everything public by reducing everything to the physical sense dimensions and concrete circumstances of human life. Instead, in order to understand the proper place of man in the universe, we must read ourselves and our situation from the opposite end, namely, as expressions of conscious life, progressively unfolding and refining.

Materialist philosophies of a reductionist character, such as positivism, would remain at the level of Kant's first Critique where the necessity of the sciences provides control over one's life, while their universality extends this control to others. Once, by means of Kant's categories, the concrete Humean facts have been suffused with the clarity of the rationalist's simple natures, the positivist philosopher hopes that, with Descartes, to be able to walk with confidence in the world.

For Kant, however, this simply will not do. Clarity which comes at the price of necessity may be acceptable and even desirable for works of nature, but it is an appalling way to envisage human life. Hence, in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant proceeds to identify that which is distinctive of the moral order. His analysis pushes forcefully beyond utilitarian goals, inner instincts and rational (scientific) relationships, that is, precisely beyond the necessitated order which can be constructed in terms of his first *Critique*. None of these recognizes that which is distinctive of the human person, namely, freedom. For Kant, in order for an act to be moral, it must be based upon the will of the person as autonomous, not heteronomous or subject to others or to necessary external laws.

This becomes the basic touchstone of his philosophy; everything he writes thence forward will be adapted thereto, and what had been written before will be recontextualized in this new light. The remainder of his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* and his *Critique of Practical Reason* will be composed in terms of freedom, and in the following two years he would write the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment* in order to provide a context enabling the previous two critiques to be read in a way that protects human freedom.

In the *Foundations*, he recasts the whole notion of law or moral rule in terms of freedom. If all must be ruled or under law, and yet in order to be free the moral act must be autonomous, then my maxim must be something which as a moral agent I—and no other—give to myself. This, in turn, has surprising implications, for, if the moral order must be universal, then the maxim which I dictate for myself must be fit to be also a universal law for all persons.<sup>41</sup> On this basis, freedom emerges in a clearer light. It is not the self-centered whimsy of the circumstantial freedom of self-realization described in the presentation of the thought of Locke above; but neither is it a despotic exercise of the power of the will; finally, it is not the clever, self-serving eye of Plato's rogue who can manipulate and cheat others.<sup>42</sup> This would degrade that which is the highest reality in all creation. Rather, freedom is a power that is wise and caring, open to all and bent upon the realization of "the glorious ideal of a universal realm of ends-in-themselves." It is, in sum, free men living together in righteous harmony.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Civil Society: Kant, Hegel and Marx*

In one sense Kant would appear to agree with Hume by developing as two separate critiques his treatment of pure and practical reason. The first provided an epistemology for scientific reason which does not attain to the

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<sup>41</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. R.W. Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), Part II, pp. 38-58 [421-441].

<sup>42</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 519.

<sup>43</sup> *Foundations*, III, p. 82 [463].

nature of things. According to this, one could not define a pattern of natural law nor determine a set of ends in relation to which one could construct a teleological ethics. In contrast, in the second critique he began afresh to develop a distinctive order of practical reason and to define the formal conditions of such reason. It is precisely on this that principles such as never treating a person as a means rather than as an end are formulated and founded.

In this way he makes a twofold transformation. One is to translate much of the content of the realm of moral sentiment, which had been the moral warrant for the virtues of society in the thought of the Scotts, into patterns of universal reason and thereby to provide them with rational rigor and universality. The second is to move these elements from the realm of the subjective and private to that of the objective and public. This was of central import for Kant, as it was through the civil structures of political interchange that his central notion of human autonomy was established. This was a noble effort, a landmark for the sense of the person, and a high standard in the exercise of freedom. It enshrined as a condition of freedom the public right to rational debate and critique in the realm of civil society seen now as distinct from the state.

At first sight Kant seems to have translated civil society back into the public realm and strengthened it with rational clarity and rigor. But one does not find here the personal bonds of community which would move one to put into action the universal dicta of practical reason, nor does one find its formal preconditions such as assuring equality of participation in public debate (more recently elaborated by J. Habermas).<sup>44</sup> Nor does one find the free determination of, and commitment to, ends. The public order is not a “kingdom of ends”, nor is it concerned with inner motives. Rights, and the laws which articulate them, require only that actions which outwardly affect others be done with their consent, actual or supposed.<sup>45</sup> In this light the ethical, like the religious, remains separated from the public order and is guarded jealously in the privacy of the human heart.

With regard to civil society this provides some cognitive preconditions for community and for participation therein, but it omits any actual meeting of hearts such as Aristotle considered central and it allows for only a selectively restricted meeting of minds. As to freedom and governance, especially in its basic sense of initiating and directing action, the concern for ends or goals and the motivation and conviction these evoke—all are left in the privacy of the heart. Natural sympathy has no place in the public order and virtue is seen to be a purely private matter.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Theory of Communicative Action* vol. I and II, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1981 and 1987); cfr. R. Badillo, *The Emancipative Theory of Jürgen Habermas and metaphysics* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1991), ch. IV.

<sup>45</sup> Susan Meld Shell, *Rights of Reason* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 83.

How could these elements be reintroduced? Efforts to do so are very significant for civil society today, because their success or failure will indicate the degree of sufficiency of the basic modern projects of knowledge and freedom. Even should these efforts prove unsuccessful that very fact may bear clues as to how we can proceed to the future. This is the special interest of the attempts of Hegel and Marx to respond to this challenge and thereby to save society, even if in the end both seem in Europe to have taken the notion down dangerous paths without exit.

Hegel attempted to re-imbue with value civil society understood as the sector between family and state. In the characteristically holistic and dialectical manner of his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*,<sup>46</sup> he followed the expansive unfolding of the idea. Just as the unity of the family would be based on love, so the unity of the civil society would be related to the satisfaction of needs and wants and hence based on property, for it is in the exchange of property that the individual attains both self-consciousness and mutual recognition.

For Hegel then this takes civil society beyond the realm of practical theory or of the “ought” and incarnates it as an “external” state and abstract universal. But there it is in grave difficulty, for when personal identity is tied to real property and possessions it comes to reflect not just greed, but the real needs of its members.<sup>47</sup> In time this comes to include the extravagances and wants of the people with the physical and ethical degeneration this can engender.<sup>48</sup> The power of self-interest generates conflicts which remain insoluble in terms of particular persons or smaller groups; hence the state is necessary, while the corporation mediates between the two. This state, however, is not an impersonal structure, but is the locus of the exercise of freedom and of the values and virtues needed to overcome private self-interests and the conflicts they engender. It is a concrete rather than an abstract universal, and is diversified internally by the multiple groups or classes which people have chosen or into which they have been forced.

However, when in time this forms itself into the state, it is not only public but has the power of coercion; hence it provides therefrom no protection or escape. “Individuals can attain their ends only insofar as they determine their knowing, willing and action in a universal way and make themselves links in a chain of social connections.”<sup>49</sup>

For Marx the ideal of a society in which all participate fully in all pursuits, including governance, could be a matter only for the future, a

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<sup>46</sup> *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller and G.N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>47</sup> *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), n. 183, p. 123.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 185, p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 187, p. 124.

soteriological myth.<sup>50</sup> For the present the private individual is dominated by one's property and in turn treats others as means for one's advancement. Only the state is concerned with the communal well being. But as this takes all governance to itself it becomes increasingly distanced from the people and their concerns. Thus, Marx predicted the end of the socialist state and a transformation to an ideal communist society. Where this has taken place, however, it has been succeeded not by the envisioned ideal communal state, but by a return to private property and less central control. It thereby reestablishes and leaves unresolved the initial problematic of how to assure the solidarity and subsidiarity of society.

In sum, Locke and Kant have contributed essentially to delineating the nature of the person for the modern mind as sense and intellect respectively. Both have pointed up that which distinguishes the person from other subjects. Focusing upon knowledge, Locke showed the person to be an identity of continuing consciousness which is self-aware and "concerned for itself." Focusing upon the will and its freedom, Kant showed the person to be an end-in-itself.

By attending directly to consciousness and freedom, however, both left problems which are similar and are of central importance to the present search for authentic personhood. The first regards the way in which consciousness and freedom are realized in the person as a unique identity with a proper place in society, and indeed in reality as a whole. It is true, as Locke says, that the term person expresses self-awareness and continuing consciousness, as well as its status in the public forum. But, one needs more than an isolated view of that which is most distinctive of man; one needs to know what the person is in his or her entirety, how one is able to stand among other persons as a subject, and how in freedom one is to undertake one's rightful responsibilities. One is not only consciousness or freedom, but a conscious and free subject or person. Further, it is necessary to understand the basis of the private, as well as the public, life of the person, for one is more than a role, a citizen, or a function of state.

The second problem regards the way in which the person can attain his or her goal of full self-awareness, freedom, and responsibility, namely, how the person can achieve his or her fulfillment through time and with others.

In sum, what Locke and Kant discovered about the person by considering self-awareness in the abstract and for the political arena needs now to be integrated with the subsistent individual in order to constitute the integral person as a rational and free subject.

In looking back on these foundations of modernity it is now possible to understand the task at hand. We do not now have to rediscover the technical and social accomplishments of the intervening centuries; we

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<sup>50</sup> L. Kolakowski, "The Myth of Human Self-Identity" in L. Kolakowski and S. Hampshire, eds., *The Socialist Idea: A Reappraisal* (New York: Basic, 1975).

live them and indeed depend upon them in all aspects of our daily life and its political process. The massive population of the globe today simply cannot survive without these accomplishments. Yet it is true also that the experiences of two World Wars and human atrocities in the last century, and the degeneration into the ideological employment of terrorism and military preemption in the very first years of the present millennium impose the view that our life is built on premises which can be also fatal. It is imperative therefore not only to celebrate the accomplishments of modern times in the discovery of human meaning and capabilities, but to attempt to identify the destructive conundra in our understanding of the human person in order to be able to save ourselves from fatal flaws which impede the forward progress of cooperation between peoples upon which the fate of our global future fundamentally depends.



## CHAPTER II

### THE CRITIQUE OF MODERN HUMANISM

As seen above from Descartes and Locke to Kant and Hegel, the long human fascination with reason and reason's fascination with the human person have generated much new insight regarding humanity. But it has done so by narrowing the rational focus to attain clarity at the cost of meaning. On the one hand, this produced a Lockean empty shell of empirical consciousness. On the other hand, Kant would attempt to rebuild the person in terms of the will as an equally empty end in and unto itself, remote from the human experience of life. Before attempting to supplement these by the resources of earlier ages and other civilizations, it would be helpful to look at the present needs which the modern notion of person manifest in order to be more clear.

By the beginning of the 20th century humanity had felt itself poised for the final push to create by the power of science a utopia, not only by subduing and harnessing the physical powers of nature, but by genetic human engineering and social manipulation. Looking back from our present vantage point we find that history has proven to be quite different from these utopian goals. For the power of science was diverted to two destructive World Wars and to the development of nuclear weapons capable of extinguishing the entire human race.

On the one hand, the ideals and idealism of Hegel and Josiah Royce would give way to William James's and John Dewey's concrete, pragmatic goals which could be achieved by human effort.<sup>1</sup> Or at least this would be so until it came to be recognized that in positive or empirical terms it was not possible even to articulate such social goals. Positivism would then succeed pragmatism, only to have to admit that its controlling "principle of verifiability" (and then of "falsifiability") could not be constructed in its own positivist terms.<sup>2</sup> The consumer society has shown itself incapable of generating meaning for life, but capable of exploiting everyone else, and its ideology of a totally free market appears to threaten the weak majority of the world.

On the other side of the cold war, before the end of the 20th century the Soviet Union appeared to implode and that light in terms of which meaning was conceived and life was lived by a great part of humankind was extinguished. It was as if the sun went down never to rise again.

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<sup>1</sup> William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York, 1907). John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York, 1920).

<sup>2</sup> Willard Van Orman Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review*, 60 (1951), 20-43.

Before attempting to rebuild the sense of human life in more solid terms let us look once again at this period of human triumph and defeat in order to get a better sense of the difficulties to be overcome. Hence we shall look here more to the negative side of modernity, enlightenment and liberalism. But by identifying what they chose to leave out we can hope in subsequent chapters to identify avenues for needed new and promising developments.

Though long a common cultural term, “modern” is a relatively recent philosophical term. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,<sup>3</sup> first published in 1967, had no such entry. In 1984, Philibost Secretan thematized the notion in his “Elements for a Theory of Modernity.”<sup>4</sup> Thereafter a broad parallel literature developed almost simultaneously on both modernity and postmodernity. As is often the case, we appreciate things more in their passing. In philosophy, this reflects the difficulty of identifying with surety the characteristics of the age in which one is immersed; these become clear only when an age is questioned or enters into crisis.

## **THE CRITIQUE OF THE MODERN SENSE OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

### *The Replacement of Goals by Means, of Purpose by Power*

If we return to the notion of Enlightenment, especially in its earlier roots in the 17th century in such thinkers as Hobbes, Locke and Descartes, this group immediately divides in two fields of interest. Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Leibniz and Newton wrote on physics, but did little on moral or political philosophy. In contrast, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were focused upon political philosophy and did not base their positions on moral or political issues on their scientific discoveries. From this Richard Kennington<sup>5</sup> concludes that the road to the Enlightenment for moral philosophy does not pass through natural philosophy. This, of course, does not preclude the subsequent dominance of the physical science model even in the human sciences, but it may help us to avoid the common, but too simple, transfer of changes in physical models into changes in social self-understanding. This is an important correction to the earlier obtrusive claims of several theories to be inexorable objective scientific truth, rather than social constructs for which we are responsible and which it remains our task to shape in a humane manner. Indeed, this may be the very center of human responsibility in our times when the human role begins to be

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<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> *Diogenes*, 126 (1984), 71-90.

<sup>5</sup> “Enlightenment and Natural Rights” in N. Chavchavadze, P. Peachey, and G. Nodia, *National Identity as an Issue of Knowledge and Morality* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994).

recognized even in the elaboration of physical theory. We shall then examine these two currents of Enlightenment thought, tracing that in which they agree as well as that which is proper to each social model.

What appears common and fundamental to both sets of Enlightenment thinkers is their abandonment of teleology or final causality in nature, including human nature. For Machiavelli this was a license for reducing the project of Plato from the perfection of the soul to cynical manipulation: it was the choice of Creon, as being supposedly more realistic, than Antigone. The rejection of finality is highly praised by John Dewey for whom the key to human emancipation means the reduction of all to the status of indifferent material in human hands and at the arbitrary disposition of human ingenuity.<sup>6</sup> The identity and meaning of things depend entirely on how they are engaged in the human project, whose end is set by human choice. If there is a guiding ideal it is "progress," but in Dewey this is self-defined in a circular manner as the constitution of those conditions which in turn make progress itself more possible. As progress for its own sake leads nowhere and is for nothing, life becomes ever more frenetic and unfulfilling.

Further if there is no goal there is no good open to human reason. In this case, reason no longer rules the will, passions and desires. Instead, by supreme irony reason, no matter how highly it be exalted, becomes in the end the tool or instrument of blind and unsatiable forces.

Thus far, however, one might think of the human will as basically benevolent and dedicated at least to progress. Upon further analysis this proves not to be so. This is not only because, having abandoned teleology, scientific knowledge is not able to tell us about the good to be desired. As noted by Kennington above in Chapter I Hobbes does not argue from science. To the contrary, standing astride the headwaters of this current of the Enlightenment he restricts his attention to ordinary human experience, which in turn manifests no sense of a highest good, but is concerned only with a changeable search for securing limited goods. In these terms human reason cannot claim to know the good for man; it can know only, as Hume would subsequently make clear, the various contraries which are manifest to the senses.

But if passion rules reason, on what then are our passions based? They are subject to the riotous panoply of contrasting attractions, but are guided by no supreme good. Inexorably, however, they confront as their nemesis death as the supreme evil. Many readings of the Enlightenment, such as Dewey's contrast of the Ancient and modern, root the difference in the change from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican system of the universe.<sup>7</sup> Though the importance of this should not be underestimated, it suggests only a reordering of relationships. The deeper revolution is that the world is

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<sup>6</sup> *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon, 1957). See also William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Washington Square, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Dewey, *ibid.*

no longer a realm of peace, the court of a loving God, in which people's freedom is ruled by their self-determined search for fulfilment in the good. Instead it becomes a mad flight from evil, as nonviolence is replaced by Hobbesian violence, and friendship by envy and enmity. One would not chose to live there; indeed, life there is no life at all.

In this light nature is perceived as a hostile aggressor upon man; one's basic right to life is threatened. Consequently, all action, natural and human, must be shaped toward dominating a hostile environment, both physical and social: man becomes wolf to man; conflict and competition reign. Pentagon planners at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would find their philosophy in Leo Strauss<sup>8</sup> who echoes Moses Maimonides' position that there must be two philosophies. The false one is exoteric and for the masses; it proceeds in Socrates' terms of justice and the good. The true philosophy is esoteric; it proceeds in terms of suppression, violence and fear as the only way to control the masses. This must be kept hidden, however; rule is by deception and the instilling of fear as said Thrasymachus and Creon of old.

In sum, as there can be no talk of ends, attention is focussed exclusively and insatiably upon the means, which basically is power that is acquired in violent competition with others. As a quantitative notion this has no standard within itself, but calls only and continuingly for increment—today reflected in what is called “consumerism”. In the competition for means there can then be no peace; social, commercial and political life all become fields of war “by another name.”

Indeed Tomonobu Imamich carries this one step further by pointing out that today the means available are so massive and involve such great investment that rather than being tailored to ends, the ends are tailored to the means. Thus, as national policies come to depend on the production of armaments as means, this in turn dictates wars.

### *The Replacement of Metaphysics by Method*

The history of the Enlightenment has been long and differentiated, replete with adjustments and adaptations. In the enlightenment model these are a natural part of the learning process. A major step in this was the development of an epistemology by John Locke as described in the previous chapter. This was not a conclusion from scientific discovery, though Locke knew Harvey and the new scientists at Oxford and took part in their discussions. As noted in Chapter I what was more decisive for him, however, was his work for the Earl of Shaftsbury and the political milieu of London. The discussions there, organized by Locke, seemed always to come to the same impass: how can one be sure of the position one

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<sup>8</sup> Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press of Glencoe, 1959), ch. 9, “On a Forgotten Kind of Writing”; “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Ethics* (1959).

advances? The issue was not merely speculative. Society as a whole was moving from the period in which all decisions were made by the monarch, to one in which the people in their multiple groupings were beginning to assume responsibility for state decision-making. Their concerns, interpretations and proposals needed to be able to be examined by all concerned. This problem in Locke's seminar at the Earl of Shaftsbury's residence mirrored that of the country as a whole: A democratic parliamentary system requires the ability to communicate what is in one's mind and heart, and in public affairs deliberation must be restricted to what can be evaluated together with others. Hence, Locke proposed his "historical plain method" which seems amazingly simple and clear. The first step is to remove all prior ideas—a ground-clearing process in the grand Enlightenment manner. Then one examines the way in which ideas come to be inscribed upon the mind, understood as a blank tablet. Only two classes of ideas are recognized. The first is ideas coming from the senses, the experience of which supposedly can be repeated by all other persons. The second is the process of reflection in which these and only these ideas are variously combined and interrelated.

Here the supposition is that if this history of ideas can be made clear, then the value of each idea can be ascertained. Thus, one must hold rigorously to the origin of ideas through the senses, as only these experiences can be replicated by others. Further, the process of manipulating ideas must add no new content. Hence, all thought will be open for inspection by all. The subsequent development of Lockes' text elaborated the ways ideas could be variously combined in the context of language. On this basis the final part of his *Essay* is able to delineate the extent and nature of knowledge.

His exchange with Bishop Stillingfleet, who objected to the loss of any real knowledge of substance in such a pattern, suggests that Locke was not fully aware of the drastic limitations this placed upon the mind. Indeed, it took some steps, first by Berkeley and then Hume, before the notion of substance, and hence of being and metaphysics as a whole, would be entirely rejected.

The radical implications of this for the present have been articulated in a consistent manner by R. Carnap in the "Vienna Manifesto".<sup>9</sup> Only that which is available to the senses or able to be traced back to perception thereby is to be considered valid scientific knowledge. Thus the political requirements of collaboration between scholars become the characteristics of the scientific endeavor. The unified science which Descartes sought to elaborate is no longer his rationally elaborate unity of natures, but the process itself of collaboration between scientists. The endeavor itself and its

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<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Carnap, *Vienna Manifesto* (with trans. Hahn and Otto Newrath, *Wissenschaftlicher Weltanffassung: Der Wiener Kreis [Vienna Manifesto]*), trans. Albert E. Blumberg in *Perspectives on Reality*, e.g., J. Mann and G. Kregche New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), pp. 483-493.

method supplants its object in importance. From the above it becomes manifest that the development of the Enlightenment, both in its Hobbesian content with regard to the nature and social dynamics of man and in its Lockean epistemology, was an inversion of the human outlook.

In the 18th century this epistemology had great impact on the European continent—to such a degree, in fact, that historians have compared it to the spread of Roman Law in ancient times. The Encyclopedists were rather propagandists than original thinkers, and the political lead up to the French Revolution needed simple and clear positions which could provide strong and broad impetus for the replacement of all things old with a new vision and practice. This spirit of the times buoyed up the human commitment to “The Rights of Man” in the face of the regime and the corresponding commitment of the masses to shaping by reason not only the exercise of political power, but the sense of the human person itself.

### **PROBLEMS OF PERSON IN MODERN THOUGHT**

Today, however, there is a growing consensus that modernity, as founded in the 17th century, realized in the revolutions of the 18th century, and proclaimed in more recent thought—both liberal and conservative — may not be sufficient to promote or even allow for the further deepening of the self-awareness of the human person. For an explanation of why this is so, Max Scheler’s<sup>10</sup> critique of liberalism provides a list of particulars, namely, its rationalist formalism, individualism, and absence of purpose. An examination of these should help in diagnosing the contemporary pathology which must be addressed by attempts to develop a more adequate vision for the new millennium.

#### *Rationalism: Reason without Life*

Among the most salient—and presently the most critical—aspects of the Enlightenment is its central characteristic and strength, namely, its development of, and dependence upon, reason. Its goal is control of reality through control of ideas. However, the more it succeeds in this goal the more it isolates itself from the highly integrated and complex character of life as physical and spiritual, from truth as goal of intellect and from the good as goal of the will, and from reason and affectivity both individual and social.

In its rigorous Kantian form rationalism would eschew the concrete facts as too chaotic, the psychological aspects of utility as too unstable, and traditional ethical principles as too heteronomous to be worthy of human autonomy. Instead, it would look to reason itself for formal rules of action

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<sup>10</sup> Max Scheler, *Problems of Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. M. Frings (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

and political cooperation common to all persons. This would mitigate the radical individualism of those proceeding on the basis of empirical knowledge; indeed, the test and proof of the validity of the norm and the corresponding political practice would be precisely their degree of universality.

But there is the rub, for universality at the cost of separating reason from concrete actuality, is idealized out of time and space. It is forgotten that reason is part of man and undergoes change in the dynamic developmental human processes of interaction with other persons and things. Further, while will depends on knowledge, we have a perception of values which precedes clear concepts and deductions, takes us out of indifference and situates our reasoning processes within an ongoing process of taking interest, evaluating and, at its highest point, being in love.

*Formalism: Person without Personality*

The formalism inherent in modern thought, liberal and conservative, derives from its conception of the social order as a set of external *quid pro quo* contracts between its members. In the positivist tradition this consists in a certain calculus of desires in which what counts is not persons and their values, but the method of calculation, or “due process” in the legal order. Where individualism is strong, this becomes a tool used by atomic individuals in pursuit of their discrete ends at the expense of society and its welfare. Where the social is strong the balance shifts so that the formal pattern becomes supreme; persons, their freedom and creativity in the social order are ignored or even crushed so that the social goals can be more freely pursued.

Classically, Kant attempted to protect the person in this context by his formulas for treating the other as oneself and all persons as ends in themselves. But the very universality which assures that such formal factors apply equally and identically to all bespeaks their essential limitation. The “X” which is to be treated as an end in itself is applicable identically to all humankind; its meaning is identical in each case. But this means that what is particular about each—their proper identity and history, their hopes and concerns, their freedom and creativity—are not taken into account. The concrete person, along with his or her free and hence unique affirmation of meaning and importance is lost. There can be an affirmation of universal rights, and certainly no one would want less; but in this context, the culture created by a particular people through generations and even millennia of shared suffering and generous commitment comes to be looked upon as a remnant from the past to be at best tolerated, but progressively disparaged and discouraged as an impediment to the emergence of the new and supposedly more purely formal democratic order. Formalism becomes the enemy of the concrete, and hence of the existential freedom of persons and peoples.

*Motivation: Progress without Purpose*

Liberalism fails adequately to explain its key notion of progress upon which it centers when it appeals to either need or utility. Need can be seen as a stimulus to actions undertaken to escape or lessen present evil, e.g., death for Hobbes or anarchy for Spinoza. Life is looked upon rather pessimistically and action is a process of ameliorating its deficiencies. But logically, because these needs develop in history they could not at the same time be principles for its explanation. As concrete needs arise spontaneously and randomly, the responses thereto are aimless and accidental; they could not explain positive progress over time. Rather, positive advance requires a surplus of time, of means and of vision free from the constraints of needs and necessities.

The other liberal approach to motivation is utility. But as individuals are particular, their utility does not take account of the commonweal. Hence it is unable to provide the motivation needed for social cohesion and true progress.

*Individualism: Person without Society*

The new stress on the individual contrasts to the prior state of affairs where interpersonal relations were duties and reflected one's place in society. For liberalism rights pertain to a person independently of society and prior to one's participation therein. Relations to others are secondary and society is reduced to a fabric of individual interests woven according to patterns of similarity and dissimilarity, convergence and contrast, in the form of explicit contracts or traditional usage.

Scheler would recognize levels of sociality as parallel developmental stages in the growth of the person, as well as stages in historical social development. This begins in the tribe in which the individual is completely submerged as an appendix to the community. In liberalism the situation is quite reversed. Society and other persons become objects and means for the individual and his or her ends. The bitter fruit of this is that conversely the individual becomes but an object in the eyes of others. Both authentic personhood and true sociality are lacking.

Hence, modern liberalism and conservatism make three main errors regarding the individual. First, the individual is seen as prior to the society, whereas in fact the person emerges from society. Second, by so stressing the action of simply parallel autonomous individuals as constituting the community all subjectivity is denied to others and to the community, and in the end to the individual him- or herself. Finally, individualism itself becomes unworkable for it is in the community that one discovers oneself. To be isolated is in the end to lose real individuality and personhood, and to be reduced to an abstraction.



## POST MODERNISM AGAINST FOUNDATIONALISM

Thus far we have reviewed the problems of the Enlightenment and of modern philosophy. It seems clear that with the Third Millennium we enter now upon a new age. This enables us to develop philosophical sensibilities and insights which are new and advance the understanding of the person. Indeed the present work attempts principally to elaborate in what this human subjectivity consists.

We will be interested in the ways the human mind has been able to enrich the rationalism and objectivism of modernity with earlier Western and Eastern senses of community and of the self-consciousness of the human person as subject. Thus, along with its flowering in the new 21<sup>st</sup> century, awareness of culture constitutes the special burden of this work.

However, it would seem best to include among the critiques of the notion of person to which this chapter is devoted the recent radical critique even of philosophy itself by what thusfar can be termed only "post-modernism".

Professor Liu Fangtong in his work *China's Contemporary Philosophical Turn* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004) has an exceptional chapter on "Post-modernism and the Orientation of Contemporary Philosophy" from an Eastern and Marxian perspective. He begins by situating postmodernism in relation to modern philosophy as beginning roughly from Descartes, Locke and the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He identifies one set of reactions which began in the mid 19th century and consisted in efforts to overcome the preceding reductionist intellectualism and rationalism, with its focus upon object rather than subject, matter rather than spirit, body rather than mind, and fact rather than the value which this entailed.

This effort to reintegrate the person by recognizing subjectivity as well as objectivity was early signified by Pascal and Vico; it gathered vigor with Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and emerged in full strength in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Blondel, Bergson, Wittgenstein and the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century there was another yet more radical reaction against modernity and even against the attention to subjectivity. It opposed all notions of substance, self and person as the foundational points for philosophy. Especially, it turned strongly against any metaphysical basis for philosophy and against philosophy's inherent tendency to see itself precisely as the search for such a point of reference. Indeed, these had been central to philosophy, since Socrates' and Plato's elaboration of the theory of values and ideas in order to draw society out of chaos and provide some coordinating and guiding principles. More recently, especially in reaction against the programs and holocaust of the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianisms, there has been suspicion of all principled stances, reducing them to the motivation of a commercial search for profit and a political search for

power. All was met with the question of “to whose advantage,” as if there could be no principles or principled actions for human welfare as a whole.

The effect has been a radical affirmation of will without reason and of the individual without society. This has come finally to its natural extreme in the rejection of the very notion of the individual substance, self or person. The affirmation of the power to do whatever is willed has finally become so radical as to reject the very identity of the agent as a subject in terms of which action might have some norms, guides and responsibility. In order to assure that one can do whatever one wants, the step is taken to being able to be whatever one wants. There is then no individual identity or person, but only a flow without cohesion or direction.

Liu Fangtong sees Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) as paradigmatic in this. It rejects philosophy as a general theory of representation in which the human mind is considered as a mirror reflecting external things, for that supposes an opposition between mind and matter, subject and object. This, of course, is just what Aristotle and his followers through Aquinas also were most anxious to reject in saying that the essence of knowledge consisted in the subject not mirroring, but becoming the object. Mind cannot be a mirror of reality for if it is only a representation then its truth could be secured only through another act of knowledge as a representation, and so forth *ad infinitum*. But when Rorty came to see that this could not work he would seem to have drawn the wrong conclusion. Rather than seeing the need to go back to Aristotle’s original sense of knowledge as unity, his nominalist Anglo-Saxon culture rooted in multiplicity led him to a radical philosophical *auto da fe*, that is, to reject the very possibility of knowledge and hence of philosophy. Rorty’s goal would become to destroy the reader’s trust in mind as something of which one could have a philosophical view, in knowledge as capable of a certain theory and concrete foundation, and in philosophy as practiced since Kant.

Liu Fangtong cites five problems with these broad critiques of “foundationalism” in late modern and post-modern philosophy:

1. *A new foundationalism*. One paradox was that, in attempting to overcome what they saw as the foundationalism of the modern philosophy, Nietzsche, Bergson and Bradley, as well as the analytic philosophy of Russell and the phenomenology of Husserl, set up their own foundations. Such would seem to be Nietzsche’s “will”, Bradley’s “mind,” the analyst’s “language,” the phenomenologists “consciousness” and Heidegger’s “being”.

2. *The death of man*. Post-modern philosophy, in objecting to modern philosophy as too centered upon man, made the crisis of man more central. Thus Foucault responded to Nietzsche’s death of God with the death of man, which became the “non-center” for Foucault or the “non-presence” for Derrida. Man may still exist, but not as a self or subject contrasted to an object, and not even as a center or essence with aims,

ideals, duties to society, or political and ethical responsibilities. If wonder is the source of philosophy, then such a man is truly no center of wonderment.

3. *A functional non rationalism of multiple truths.* A tendency to the extreme appears also in the postmodern attempt to overcome modern rationalism, not only by the contemporary substantive or foundational non-rationalism of Nietzsche's will to power or Schopenhauer's subconscious, but by a more radically functional non rationalism dissolving the reliability of any method of knowing so that all becomes unstable, indeterminable, incommensurable and even anarchic. For Derrida truth, as "for me" and "about me," becomes simply plural, thereby rendering communication and cooperation impossible.

4. *Rules as games.* To this end Lyotard employs Wittgenstein's "language game theory" so that not only are the rules reduced to being mere pacts between the participants, but the participants need not even abide by them. Even science becomes a mode of free thinking. Thus Derrida's deconstruction so alters and reinterprets the original relation between concepts that the rules of the game themselves become the game. Arbitrariness is the new foundation of life.

5. *The end of philosophy itself.* In the end therefore the postmodern exits philosophy itself, turning to literature and other imaginative and aesthetic modes. As a result, for Rorty there is no criterion to tell when we are contacting reality or truth. Philosophers only compare the advantages and disadvantages of the great narratives; they can tell only how the ways in which things get to be related are themselves related. There is no philosophy; its great project since Socrates and Plato, namely, to enable humanity to direct and enable its life, is abandoned. In the words of Dante etched on Venice's Bridge of Sighs: "Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here".

It would be wrong to miss the positive elements involved in the post modern effort. Indeed the present work begins with a chapter on the limitations of modernity, to which post modernism adds related criticism, e.g., of its excessive rationalism and objectivism. In this sense it joins our project of opening the way for the appreciation and exercise of new dimensions of the human person. But as itself a radical fundamentalism, postmodernism would seem to overshoot this mark and winds up in rejecting, rather than reconstructing or perfecting, philosophy itself.

## **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY IMPERIAL DEMOCRACY**

It would be inadequate, however, to think of this vision of the person as simply abstract and inactive in practical and political life, for if the sense of the human person is inadequate then social interaction cannot but be impoverished. This is not all, however, for as we have seen this impoverishment of the modern project is methodological; it is intended and systemic. Hence, it can be expected to tailor human concerns, to set up

walls of exclusion and to restrict human discourse and interaction between persons and peoples.

The impact of this can be seen by juxtaposing elements in the thought of Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls. After a long peregrination Habermas worked the implications of the replacement of metaphysics by method into his theory of communication ethics. If we could not know the nature of the human person or develop a categorical imperative, ethics could still be salvaged on a purely formal and methodological basis. This would be done by assuring that all persons could take part in practical discourse. No person, no view, would be excluded or disadvantaged. All could enter and play any role, from proponent to questioner: all hinges on complete openness.

When however, one turns to the *Political Liberalism* of John Rawls we find that this very principle of universal inclusion is rejected and indeed exclusion becomes the first principle of political discourse. Rawls codified a principle which most trace to the peace of Westphalia that ended the religious wars. Augsburg had not established religious freedom, for it bound the religion of the people to that of the ruler. Westphalia provided for a separation of religion from the public forum, of Church from state, of the sacred from the secular. In Rawls this appears as the condition for public discourse, namely, that all integrating, cosmic and religious visions be relegated behind a "veil of ignorance" so that public debate is framed in exclusively secular and singular terms.<sup>11</sup> Its origin in the ending of the Religious Wars gives this separation much more than theoretical weight. It bears the visceral weight of its alternative, namely, the devastating religious wars of the 19 century. It is a matter of ultimate concern for it presents itself as the basic grasp by societies on life itself and hence is closed to any discussion. This exclusionary principle of liberal reasoning was imposed by arms and remains unquestionable out of fear.

All constitutional and legal structures are then to be so articulated and interpreted as to assure that the process of public debate and decision making exclude religion and become reductively secular. It is true that in this forum each person can draw upon any and all sources for their personal inspiration and guidance, but what emerges as public policy must be intentionally and assiduously a-religious, both in articulation and in practice.

Though some would consider such an horizon to be neutral to all religions, as a process of exclusion of religion from public life and policy it is in reality neutering for it renders cosmic visions no longer cosmic. Indeed, Rawls recognizes that this should have the effect of diminishing religious fervor, and sociological research in the West would seem to confirm this. The more it is pursued the more it excludes religion and religious meaning in public symbolism, political practice and the

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<sup>11</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

educational formation of the next generation. It constitutes, in sum, an integrated and aggressive project of forgetfulness of God beyond question or discussion—a secular fundamentalism or black hole in public life.

Liberalism has come to mean that the mind of man could range freely, but over a decidedly limited terrain. It means free speech, but not about ultimate human concerns. In 1993 in his now famous article, “The Clash of Civilizations,”<sup>12</sup> and three years later in his *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*,<sup>13</sup> Samuel P. Huntington warned that this so-called ‘liberal’ world was about to encounter opposition from religious civilizations and should expect to be defeated. His reasons lie in a number of convergent factors:

1. The end of modernity is marked by, and even consists in, the end of an exclusive confidence in the competency of the scientific search for clear and distinct objective knowledge to provide the answers to human problems.

2. The end of this confidence entails, in turn, new attention to human subjectivity and to the creative freedom of each people by which they elaborate a set of values that over time coalesces as a cultural tradition. These traditions, in turn, together constitute civilizations as the largest human affiliations, “the largest we”.

3. Civilizations engage sets of cultures and, in turn, are founded in the major religions. Following this lead we find that cultures and cultural traditions are sets of values and virtues formed by the decisions of communities of people regarding how to cultivate their life in their geographical and historical circumstances. Thus where some people put a primacy on harmony and develop a pattern of virtues by which this can be realized, others might focus upon courage or initiative—thence result distinct cultures. What is important for us is that this is an act of responsible freedom which, in turn, shapes the many more specific decisions in the life of a people. Over time this is adjusted and adapted as the culture is passed on, or *tradita*, as a cultural tradition. This is rightly identified as the cumulative freedom of a people. We shall return to this below.

4. Going higher to the principles from which this vision flows and in which it is embedded, each civilization is based on a great religion; conversely, each great religion founds a distinct civilization (with the exception of Buddhism, which Huntington takes pains to explain). This religious commitment of non Western civilizations is emergent, rather than recessive, for the cultural traditions and the religions in which they are grounded and consecrated provide the grounding needed in unsettled and changing times.

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1993), pp. 22-49.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

5. This is so because these cultural traditions constitute the very purchase that peoples have on a properly human life, that is, one that is lived with dignity and self respect for themselves and their children. This sense of personal and social identity receives more, not less, attention at points of great change. When attacked it will be defended at all costs, more than matching the liberal terror at the suggestion of any compromise of separation of Church and State.

Thus, we find ourselves in a clash of two civilizations, as massive, all-inclusive and inexorable as the shifting of tectonic plates. On the one hand, there is the liberal tradition which sees the removal of all cosmic, metaphysical and religious vision from the public square as the sole strategy which can enable peoples to live together in peace. On the other hand, there is the broad sense among the other world civilizations that such a mental lobotomy would be the destruction of human meaning and dignity—the mega threat. Nothing could be more contradictory between the two civilizations, more threatening to each or more strenuously resisted by all.

In this light the present transition beyond modernity finds itself at the intersection of two fundamentalisms: on the one hand, a secular fundamentalism that is a forgetfulness of God, which, in contradiction to Habermas, Rawls formulates into a principle of liberalism; on the other hand, a reactive religious fundamentalism that consists in a forgetfulness of man. Huntington's analysis of the latter's reaction to the global assertion of secular liberal democracy is precisely his sense of an impending clash of civilizations, which he sees as undermining Western liberalism. But what even he seems not to have envisaged—though it may be a consequence of his analysis—is the aggressive character of Western liberal free-market democracy, when inspired by its own fundamentalism. Rather than a defensive military posture with aggressive diplomacy, it has reversed the order to a preemptive military strategy to force conversion of the world to its secular ideology. That ideology is the more fundamental issue now seems indicated by the willingness to squander the worlds resources and the lives of tens of thousands of people in the vain attempt to fight ideas with guns. There must be a better way!

In sum, we have diagnosed the modern Enlightenment program in order not to repeat it and return to the past. We have noted what it has not provided so that we might go in search of what is needed. The identification of what has been left undeveloped or deliberately suppressed will make it possible to identify the work now needed.

We found modern liberal and conservative theory to consist of:

means without goals,  
power without purpose,  
method without metaphysics,  
reason without life,

person without personality,  
people without society, and  
man without God.

As a result modern thought has fallen into a self-contradictory imperial attitude searching for hegemony after the pattern of the failed ideological empires of the last century: colonialism, fascism and communism, alongside which it takes its place.

The missing elements in the above list cluster around the sense of person in its existence and commitments, both personal, social and religious. Hence, in Part II we shall look back to the origins of human thought to find there the elements of unity and transcendence endemic to all cultures and their sense of the human. In Part III we shall look to Greek philosophy to chart out the dimensions of form and essence required by the person and to medieval Christian and Islamic philosophy for the sense of existence this entails. Subsequent chapters will see how the notion of person can be rearticulated and enriched following the Hindu characteristics of existence, consciousness and bliss (which in the West have been articulated less dynamically as unity, truth and goodness) as well as the Buddhist and Confucian dimensions of culture.

#### **MARX'S HUMANIST CRITIQUE OF HUMANISM**

Indeed the above corresponds significantly to the suggestion of Professor Liu Fangtong, namely, that the authentic inspiration of Marx is not to be found in the dialectic of object or matter which was rather the interpretation of his thought by Marxists restricted by the rationalists terms of their times. Similar to the Cartesians who, for this same reason, missed the classic insight of Descartes, Marxists simply transferred the still too idealist view of matter of Feuerbach into material objects and their dialectical relations. In contrast Marx's genius was precisely to break away from this systematization in order to take account of human action. For this reason Liu suggests that there is much greater openness in the thought of Marx, which can allow for a more positive relationship to Western philosophy.

Put another way, dialectical materialism in terms of the rationalism that has characterized modernity proved unsustainable. Simply adding to it other strains generated by modern Western philosophy from the same rationalist root promises only to compound the situation and to build an edifice with the combined defects of both left and right. Moreover, simply to move to action without substance as a "practical materialism" would quite lose the reality of the human person with its initiative and responsibility.

What is needed is not a comparative philosophy attempting an eclectic syncretism of modern Western and Marxist thought, but a deeper investigation of the roots of philosophy. In other words, what is needed is

not a mixing of weak strains in the hope of generating something strong, but as Marx suggests the integration of the missing dimension of human reality, namely, not merely technical reason but action. This had been lost in the flattening out of the project of Western philosophy once it became not only a rational search but a reductive rationalism. This means going back as with Heidegger's "step backward" (*der schritt Zurick*). If indeed it was with Plato that the process of Western formalization began, then there is need to go back beyond that to the more active, less formalized, sense of reality found in the Pre-Socratics or alternately to find this more active character of reality in our times by investigating human action. In this Liu points to a promising path.

However, to treat of action without an agent embedded in the world would leave such thought in the realm of ideas and of spirit appropriate for angels, but not for humans. Simply to move to action without the person acting in time, without sensuous human activity, is not enough. Thus what Marx points to is rather a focus on praxis, a study not of action alone but of the human person precisely in action. This is not merely the nature of man, but his full existential reality as self-responsible and creative in the world and in society. It recalls indeed the title of the key work of the late Pope John Paul II: *The Acting Person* or in Polish: *Person and Act*.

One cannot then simply accept the premise of modern rationalism that thought must be clear and distinct and hence either material or spiritual (the two sides of the Cartesian dichotomy). We need rather to look back for a sense of life in which the two are not separated, and man is not reduced to either "ism"—whether ideal or material—but remains whole and one, and open to the full range of action.

## CONCLUSION

This review of modern thought regarding the human person makes it possible now to sum up its achievements as lasting contributions to humanity. The list is impressive:

1. a focus upon man which enables continued discovery and development of human life; note particularly the development of the following:
2. the sciences both (a) agricultural and physical, to feed the ever expanding population and provide it with housing and health care, and (b) psychological and social, to understand the inner dynamics and enable the direction of conscious life;
3. the political and judicial order in which the dignity and legal rights of the person are recognized as integral to democratic processes; and
4. the arts, humanities and at least basic education for the great majority of humankind.



All of this has made it possible to renegotiate our relation to the environment and to one another in terms not only of tolerance, but of mutual support. This list of accomplishments is real and sought by peoples everywhere.

Yet that all is not well is equally evident. It is not only that we are unable to ward off all natural and health disasters or that we can be subject to vicious attacks by those who wish us harm. Rather, what we have seen above is that the very pursuit of these achievements has been so exclusively focused on the development of technical reason and what can be seen in its terms that the modern mind has become unable to take account of the nature and dignity of the human person, or the meaning and goals of human life. We have worked assiduously and successfully on means, but for unexamined ends and lost touch with human persons in their concrete communities and ultimate destiny. The list of deficits is so impressive as to call for urgent change. Thus,

1. the focus upon man has left humanity either as a collection of isolated individuals, or a “lonely crowd” without sufficient ability to relate to others, to form stable families, or to provide a context for the education of the next generation;
2. physical resources and technical capabilities are siphoned off for non-productive military uses or are so unequally and unjustly distributed that an infinitesimal percentage of humanity controls the vast part of its wealth and physical resources;
3. the political and judicial order in consequence is skewed in order to serve those with the power of wealth so that even the campaign for human rights comes to appear as part of a project for world domination; and
4. the thrust of education is turned from the development of the humane character of the student to making him or her into a “productive” servant of the machine and extensively of the military-industrial complex.

One is brought to agree with Marx’s most fundamental critique of the modern mind, namely, that it has become so introverted as to constitute not only an exercise of reason but an idealism, whether this be a focus upon language, upon will, or upon scientific rationality. What it is concerned with is not real people and their lives, but a realm of ideas which could be lumped together as idealism in a broad sense. After calling for a mind as a blank tablet Locke begins with the premise that what I know are ideas (not things). In his *Discourse on Method* Descartes, after putting all under doubt, draws even his first reality from thinking. Kant insisted that the *noumenon* or thing in itself was unknowable. Nietzsche varied this only by shifting all to will, the will to power. Russell would turn to language and its analysis and Husserl to intentionality. In all this the reality of the human person has been effectively lost.

It was then the essential contribution of Marx to restore the reality of man to the modern mind. It is no accident that he laid the foundation for

a movement of the people, for the people and by the people, renewing in this sense the Enlightenment's basic dedication to the welfare of peoples which had been obscured in the very efforts to focus exclusively on one or another specialized human capability.

In fact, the modern mind tried too hard, it focused too narrowly, and hence it wound up entrapping the human person and human resources within what man himself could make. This ignored the basic liberating truth, namely, that man cannot make himself but is open to truth itself which gives him freedom to fight injustice, to imagine and create, to critique and rebuild the society in which he can live and soar.

What Marx makes abundantly clear is that in order to help man we must break out of the ideational cocoon or ideology and turn to humans in action as they face the struggles of life, draw upon their own heritage and work creatively to construct their future.

To follow this path to the liberation of modern man and his reconstruction in the new millennium, Part II will look back into the earliest experience of human life in totemic and mythic times to find the prephilosophical experience of human kind whence in fact are derived the basic texts of our civilizations. Part III will then look at the development of this common human heritage in the West in order to review its understanding of the human person, the sources of its meaning, and the purpose of human life. This will be followed in Part IV by attention to ways in which human self-awareness of personal dignity and social purpose can be reconstructed today with the help of the resources of the Asian cultural heritage. This will mean drawing on the Buddhist heritage and seeing how this can be reinforced by going more deeply into its Hindu roots, and the role of Confucianism in enriching the modern contributions of science and democracy.

## **PART II**

### **PRE-PHILOSOPHICAL AWARENESS OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN MEANING**



**CHAPTER III**

**FOUNDATIONS IN TOTEMIC THOUGHT  
FOR HUMAN MEANING**

**A METHOD FOR AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF HUMAN  
CULTURE**

In this search for the character and dignity of the human person we began by focusing in Part I on the modern notion of person and its critique. We began in Chapter I with modern times both because this was the period in which attention focused most directly, if possibly too exclusively, upon the individual human person. This was examined especially in the thought of Locke, Descartes and Kant. Much was seen during this period and human self-consciousness made great progress.

Yet, with the test of time we came in Chapter II to the critique of the modern period as the weaknesses of that project begin to overwhelm its progress. Its empiricist focus appears to have been too individualist and its rationalist focus too abstract, or as Marx said too idealist, to take account of the reality of human life in its actual exercise. None would want to repeat the bloody character of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; all fear that worse lies ahead unless we can find new bases on which to proceed.

This dramatic situation makes it necessary to stop, to review our human resources, to learn from them, to draw them forward, and apply them in new ways for our global times. If modern times built on an excessive individualism leading in the end to alienation there is need to rediscover basic principles of unity which will enable the emerging sense of the person to be essentially relational rather than oppositional.

Looking back to totemic and mythic thought we find resources for unity that are common to all cultures and civilizations. To the degree that the earlier remains as a substratum for what succeeds the achievements of the earliest totemic and mythic societies still remain available. Here in Part II we shall look to early, basic levels of the experience of all peoples to see what insights regarding the uniqueness and the interrelatedness of human persons can be drawn from that vast extent of human life experience.

One approach to understanding the foundations of human life would be to turn to physics at the subatomic level and to try to achieve there a theoretical understanding of the laws of matter. But if taken strictly in material terms this inevitably would reduce all thereto; treated thus abstractly understanding loses touch with legitimate realist concerns.

Another approach would begin there but understand these laws in relation to the characteristics to the human being and to human society. This has been traced cumulatively by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in his work *The Phenomenon of Man*. By his principle of unity via levels of complexity, he

marshaled the discoveries of the many sciences to follow the progressive organization of being from sub-atomic particles to the human person. Indeed, his vision of unity could continue to order non-material reality when transformed into spiritual unity via levels of simplicity.

Another approach would be to focus upon that which is proper to humans, namely their social life and to follow this from its earliest forms. Even here, however, we need some guidelines for our effort is not simply to gather together all that can be known in whatever detail, but to analyze this in such wise as to enable it to reveal its structure and direction. Hegel has done this for the realm of the Spirit, but with such brilliant rigor that he too would seem to have overachieved for he has not left space for human freedom and creativity, and hence for that which is most real about humankind.

Hence, we shall turn neither to the physical sciences nor to ideal schemata, but to the experience of humankind in its progressive development. The significance of this is only now emerging as human awareness moves beyond the strictures and closures of objectivist modern rationalism to take account as well of human subjectivity and hence of cultures and civilizations. Thus, it becomes newly important to understand our cultures in depth and hence to reach back to the earliest stages of human social life. A method for doing this was elaborated by the Swiss psychologists and structuralist Jean Piaget in his study of child development.<sup>1</sup> We shall look at this with a view to applying it to elaborating a scientific structure not for an interior analysis of psychological development, but for an examination in depth of our human cultures.

Hence we will look at the sequence of the progressive awakening of cognitive capabilities charted in the work of Jean Piaget and summarized by him in "The Mental Development of the Child."<sup>2</sup> We will review, first, Piaget's general explanatory theory for the progression from one cognitive level to the next; second, the cognitive, affective, behavioral and physiological components or dimensions of a personality; and third, the differentiated and sequenced levels which obtain in the development of these components. This should enable understanding of how the synchronic distinction of modes of thought based on the psychological structure of the human person becomes as well diachronic. Found in personal psychological growth, we shall project this to the development through time of a progression in the levels of consciousness of entire peoples and their living of this expanding awareness in their social life.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies*, trans. A. Tenzer (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Piaget, "The Mental Development of the Child," *ibid.*, chap. I. (Page numbers in the text refer to this work.)

*A Theory of Development.* To help understand the progression from one stage to the next Piaget elaborated a theory based upon the notion of equilibrium, its loss and reconstitution.

Any stage in the growth of persons constitutes an equilibrium or integrated state of its component factors in which persons are able to make their contribution to others and to the whole society. An equilibrium is upset by a need, such as hunger, which leads to the activity required in order to satisfy the need and to restore the equilibrium. Where the need can be satisfied by competencies already possessed, such as eating to satisfy hunger, doing so simply restores the previous equilibrium with the same competencies had before at that level. However, where the need can no longer be satisfied by capabilities already possessed, new ones must be developed. The subsequent state integrating these new capabilities, constitutes a new and higher equilibrium. This overall structure of development holds true of the range of transformations from a child's learning to walk, through the green revolution in agriculture, to the stages in the history of astronomy.

Such development implies elements of both continuity and differentiation. There is continuity because in the higher stage the capabilities of the previous stage are not lost, but perfected. The infant's ability to move its limbs in crawling is not lost, but remains as a substructure and is perfected when the child learns to walk. These abilities are perfected still further when he or she learns to run and then adds the syncopation needed in order to be able to dance. Throughout, the earlier capabilities are retained and increasingly perfected. Where this is not the case would be not development but mere change, not improvement but mere substitution.

Conversely, development also implies differentiation because the adoption of one from among the many different possible modes of activity for responding to a need means that this type of activity will be the more developed. As further needs arise it is easier to respond by further developments in this same line than by activating other capabilities which, though in principle equally effective, concretely are less available to this person or people. A family, for example, may solve its food problems by either more intensive farming or more intensive fishing, but seldom by both. The same is true with the virtues of patience and courage. Progressively, one capability or mode of action atrophies as the other is repeatedly employed and developed. Thus, over time and in interaction with their physical and social environment, each people evolves distinctive cultural patterns along with its history.

*Components of Personality.* In order to render the general theory more concrete Piaget distinguishes four dimensions of a personality, all of which advance in some union:

(1) The cognitive, by which we are aware of things as they exist over against (“ob-ject” ) ourselves as knower, even if these be about ourselves. This is the life of our senses and intellect, namely, of sensation and intelligence. When intellectual knowledge achieves reflexion upon itself, it is no longer only objective, but subject centered as well.

(2) The affective, by which we respond to things with feelings and emotions, such an empathy and love, or rejection and hate.

(3) The behavioral, by which we act personally and eventually socially.

(4) The physiological, by which we are constituted bodily or organically.

Piaget describes the coordinated overall development of all four components as follows:

basic unity of the processes which, from the construction of the practical universe by infantile sensorimotor intelligence, lead to the reconstruction of the world by the hypothetico-deductive thinking of the adolescent, via the knowledge of the concrete world derived from the system of operations of middle childhood.

We have seen how these successive constructions always involve a decentering of the initial egocentric point of view in order to place it in an ever-broader coordination of relations and concepts, so that each new terminal grouping further integrates the subject’s activity by adapting it to an ever widening reality.

Parallel to this intellectual elaboration, we have seen affectivity gradually disengaging itself from the self in order to submit, thanks to the reciprocity and coordination of values, to the laws of cooperation. Of course, affectivity is always the incentive for the actions that ensue at each new stage of this progressive ascent, since affectivity assigns value to activities and distributes energy to them.

But affectivity is nothing without intelligence. Intelligence furnishes affectivity with its means and clarifies its ends. It is erroneous and mythical to attribute the causes of development to great ancestral tendencies as though activities and biological growth were by nature foreign to reason. In reality, the most profound tendency of all human activity is progression toward equilibrium. It is reason, which expresses the highest forms of equilibrium, reunites intelligence and affectivity.

From this a number of points stand out.



(a) that development of thought capabilities is from unity to the ability to integrate ever broader fields of multiplicity. In these global times with information and influences from all sides and at all levels this alerts us to ask whether new modes of understanding are needed and can now be developed.

(b) that the earlier stages are not dispensed with, but serve as substrata for subsequent understanding. This suggests that approaches such as those of Locke's blank tablet or Bacon's smashing of the idols may be too radical, casting away the bases and resources for the newly needed insight. Encapsulating man in man rather than locating him in an open and transcendent universe could be ultimately self-defeating.

(c) that the development of the higher level of understanding takes place in response to the inability to cope with the welter of new factors. This recalls Aristotle's image of the battle in which one is forced to move back to an ever higher position in order to avoid being overwhelmed and to be able to respond adequately to the evolving complexity of the scene.

(d) that all dimensions of the personality are involved and must move ahead together. Hence it is not only the cognitive development that can stimulate a step ahead; to think so is a limitation in the awareness of modern rationalism. The engine of development is the new cognitive capabilities, the new psychosomatic growth of the individual, the new social circumstances. Certainly all must be involved and all interact mutually; through, and by, all of these the identity of a person and the cultural identity of a people is in a process of transformation. What then is the real context of the new possibilities that are ever opening to challenge human creativity, and what real good is the goal which guides each people in their own circumstances toward good rather than evil, toward life rather than death?

To apply this to the search for the common and earliest foundations of human self-awareness and personal dignity we can look to Heidegger for some helpful suggestions. His assessment of the relation between Plato and the pre-Socratics provides both a key to his articulation of the task to be undertaken and an illustration of a method for its accomplishment. Pre-Socratic philosophy reflected in a general and unsophisticated manner the variety and powerful vitality of reality. To improve upon this vision Plato had focused on forms, natures or ideas. He elaborated all this with such great dialectical brilliance that Whitehead considered all Western philosophy since then to be a set of footnotes to Plato's writings. Unfortunately, the progress made in the conceptual clarification of the variety of kinds in nature was accompanied by a corresponding loss of sensitivity to the power and activity of nature, that is, to its existential reality. To remedy this loss Heidegger held that we must now return to the vision of the pre-Socratics in order to retrieve its dynamic existential element. Substantive forward progress in Western philosophy today, that is, the development of insight that is radically new, will depend not upon an

incremental conceptual development of forms, but upon reaching back prior to Plato in order to develop what he had omitted.<sup>3</sup>

This example from Heidegger's thought is replete with indications for a methodology for our project. First one needs to look at thought historically. This does not mean merely the forward direction of Hegel's search for ever more formal articulation. Like genetic strains in horticulture, these become increasingly enslaved to ever more specific conditions as they become remote from their origins. On the contrary, what is most essential must be sought where in principle the forward process of scientific conceptualization cannot operate. It must be sought in that which is essentially unscientific according to the terminology of the "scientific interpretation that brands as unscientific everything that transcends its limits."<sup>4</sup> Radical newness is to be found, if anywhere, not in further elaboration of what already has been conceptualized, but in a step backward (*der Schritt zurück*) into that which was in some way present at the beginning of philosophizing and has remained unspoken throughout. "Far from having been thought or even having been thinkable, this reality has been obscured by the objectifying effect of much of the thought which has been developed thusfar."<sup>5</sup>

The task then will be not merely to restate in a more perfect manner what already has been stated less perfectly, but to open ourselves to the reality toward which our historical efforts at conceptualization and indeed the very project of conceptualization as such is not directed. Thus, one finds in the term 'metaphysics' reference to that which lies "beyond" (*meta*) the project of definition and conceptualization of the material order which Aristotle had carried to its principles in this *Physics*. The *Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad* states that "when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self then . . . what should one think and through what, . . . through what . . . should one know the Knower."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Our asking of the fundamental question of metaphysics is historical, because it opens up the process of human being-there [in its essential relation — i.e., its relations to the essential as such and as a whole —] to unasked possibilities, futures, and at the same time binds it back to its past beginning, so sharpening it and giving it weight in its present. In this questioning, our being-there is summoned to [its history in the full sense of the word, called to history and to] decision in history." Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 36-37 and 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> "The criterion of the unthought demands that the heritage of thought be liberated in respect of what still lies in reserve in its 'has been' (*Gewesenee*). It is this which holds tradition initially in its sway and is prior to it, though without being thought about expressly as the originative source." Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", trans. by E. Lohner, in W. Barrett and H. Aiken, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 270-302.

<sup>6</sup> *Br. Up.*, IV, v. 15.

One method for developing a greater awareness of this foundation of thought consists in looking back as far as possible into its origins in order to rediscover what subsequently has been left unsaid because, it seems, too rich for the limited capacities of categorization. This is a return to our beginnings precisely in order to begin again in a new and more radical manner. To do this one must avoid projecting the limitations of one's own conceptualizations upon the origins. Hence, the manner of approach must not be only that of defining, which, literally, is to 'delimit,' though systems of philosophy need this in their structured processes of reasoning. Instead, philosophy must broaden its approaches to that of enquiry, that is, of opening to what has been left unsaid.

It would appear important, therefore, to look back into human experience for the mode and content of thought which preceded not only the beginnings of philosophy in the proper sense of the term, but even the forms of mythic symbolization which specify the distinctive cultures which derive from them. To do this we must employ data from anthropology regarding life in primitive societies throughout the world. This, in turn, will require the development of a philosophic hermeneutic adapted to discovering in the simplest forms of the lived experience of humankind what is truly foundational, and therefore common to all.

The term 'primitive' itself is in need of rehabilitation along etymological lines as first and hence basic for all else. It is a fundamental fallacy, notes Heidegger, to believe that history begins with the

backward, the weak and helpless. The opposite is true. The beginning is strongest and mightiest. What comes afterward is not development but flattening the results from mere spreading out; it is inability to retain the beginning . . . (which) is emasculated and exaggerated into a caricature.<sup>7</sup>

How can these beginnings be known? Because they precede not only the philosophical tradition, but even the pre-philosophical oral tradition as expressed in the myths, it is necessary to invert the general hermeneutic directive to attend to the words themselves. Instead, the following special hermeneutic principles must be followed in analyzing and interpreting the philosophic significance of our origins, namely: (a) the manner of acting will be more significant than what is said; (b) the manner of thinking and feeling will not be separable from the manner of acting; and (c) the preconditions or conditions of possibility of this manner of thought, feeling and acting will be the most significant of all.

What has been seen above suggests that we look back then to the earliest forms of social life and that we reexamine the progression of philosophy with the above principles of development in mind, namely, that

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<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 130.

the earlier is not crude but basic and remains as the substratum of all that follows.

To implement this the remainder of this chapter will take the following four steps. First, an anthropological analysis of the totem, as the means used by the primitives for social self-identification and coordination, will determine the structural characteristics of their life and thought. Second, an internal analysis of these structures and their transformations will show that they depend for their meaning upon a unity or whole. Third, further hermeneutic reflection will identify where this unity is to be sought in the life of the primitive. Finally, awareness of this unity will be located in the notion of the totem as a plenitude and in the participational vision of reality which that entails.

## A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

### *Formal Structures*

Anthropologists during the 19th century remarked the constant tendency of primitive peoples in the most disparate places to identify themselves and their relations with other humans and with nature in terms of a totem. This might be a bird, animal or, at times, even an inanimate object or direction. As all areas of life in these simplest societies were predicated upon the totem, their culture has come to be called totemic.

Lévi-Strauss's *Totemism* is a history of the anthropological work done on this notion in the XXth century,<sup>8</sup> and thereby a history of anthropology itself since 1910. It begins with a severely reductionist critique of the notion of totem by positivist anthropological theory.<sup>9</sup> The notion, however, proved to be so essential that it could not be dispensed with. Hence there followed four steps by which successive schools of anthropology progressively reconstructed the formal structure of the totem. Not surprisingly the steps are those by which one constructs a formal analogy of proper proportionality of the form  $A : B :: C : D$ .

First, A. P. Elkin identified the simple logical relation  $A : C$  between e.g., a bird and a tribe. This had both an analytic function for

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<sup>8</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> In that context earlier research into the origins of Indian thought such as that of A. Keith (*op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 195-97) tended to discount the significance of the totem, pointing, e.g., to the absence of one or another specific factor, such as ritual eating, which was in no sense essential to the notion. The subsequent anthropological work described here, by which the notion has been scientifically reconstructed, provides the basis for restating the question. This is the more true as Keith himself argues, even regarding the meaning of Brahman, from the fact that a notion such as that of a supernatural power pervading the universe is generally found in all tribes in other parts of the world to its having been a basic factor in early Indian thought. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 446.

classifying groups so as to set rules for inter-marriage, and a synthetic function expressing continuity between man and nature. L. Lévi-Strauss points out that this empirical approach contributed some appreciation of the synthetic significance of the totem in expressing relatedness between man and nature and continuity between past and present. Nevertheless, this interpretation was inadequate for indicating why this entailed that ancestors have totems with animal forms and why the solidarity of the social group needed to be affirmed in a plurality of forms. In time this made it necessary to add new functional dimensions to the first empirical explanations.<sup>10</sup>

Second, Malinowski added subjective utility or pragmatic value to this relation, pointing to the biological significance of the totem as good to eat or to its psychological importance in controlling fears. (To this Radcliffe-Browne added the insight that totemism constituted an instance of the ritualization of relations between man and animals.) Malinowski interpreted this in functional terms to mean not that totems are objects of ritual and sacred because they had already been made social emblems, but that totemic societies chose animals to serve as social emblems because they already were objects of ritual and that this in turn was due to the fact that they were important material and spiritual influences in their lives: they were good to eat. In this light the social factor is primary, while the ritual and religious dimension is secondary and a function of natural interest. (When some schoolboys explained in utilitarian terms the sacred status of cows because of their milk and other useful by-products, Rabindranath Tagore has an older classical Hindu remark that one can tell thereby that the boys had been educated by the British.)

However, the difficulty with utilitarian explanations is that they cannot explain sorts of totems which were not useful, i.e., not edible, etc.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, a psychological dimension was added, namely, that the totem helped to allay fears. But this explanation also confronted a daunting series of difficulties.<sup>12</sup> (a) Anxiety cannot be the cause, but only a concomitant, for it itself is due to the way one subjectively perceives a disorder. (b) An explanation cannot be found in a connection of articulate modes of behavior with unknown phenomena, for what is incomprehensible cannot be the explanation, but only an indication of the need to seek the explanation elsewhere. (c) Members of a group do not act according to their individual feelings; rather, they feel according to the way they are allowed, obliged or accustomed to feel. Customs and norms come first and give rise to internal sentiments and the circumstances in which these can be displayed. (d) It is not feelings which give rise to rites, as if religious ideas were born of effervescent social surroundings, but rites which generate feelings, i.e. religious ideas are presupposed for such emotions. Therefore emotions are not explanations, but the results of either body or mind. Lévi-

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<sup>10</sup> *Totemism*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-65.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-71.

Strauss concludes that the real cause must be sought either in the organism by biology or in the mind by psychology or anthropology.

However, he has already demonstrated that a biological, behaviorist or utilitarian psychological analysis of human emotions does not suffice, for these are generated in terms of circumstances beyond the self, not vice versa. Hence, he points his structuralist analysis to objective analogy. This leads to its prerequisites and thereby to the metaphysical level. Thus to explain the special use of certain types of animals anthropologists went beyond subjective utility to objective analogy.

Third, the relation of a tribe and its totem was stated by M. Fortes and R. Firth merely in terms of direct resemblance or external analogy of the members of a tribe or clan to their totem. For example, just as tribe C is similar to the eagle (A : C), so tribe D is similar to the sparrow (B : D) or A : C :: B : D.

Fourth, A.R. Radcliffe-Browne corrected this by noting that the analogy was not between sets of similarities, but between sets of differences. Just as the high-flying eagle (A) is different from, but related to, the low-flying sparrow (B), so the members of two tribes (C and D) are both distinct and related, i.e., A : B :: C : D. The totem then was not necessarily good to eat, but it was good to think.

These four steps reconstructed the essential analogy of forms in the totemic relation. But this was not yet structuralism, i. e. structure alone, for content had not yet been reduced to form. Lévi-Strauss took that step and directed attention to the logical connection between the pairs of opposites i.e. between A : B on the one hand and C : D on the other. He located the principle of the unity between the species chosen as totems and their tribes in a formal condition, namely in their having in common at least one formal characteristic which permitted them to be compared.<sup>13</sup>

If, in fact, this condition and hence the unity of such structures requires other factors beyond the order of form and structure, the investigation of such factors would require methods of analysis different from structuralism. We have begun, however, with the formal in order to be able to draw upon the extensive developments in the abstract theoretical side of the science of anthropology. With the tools of philosophical hermeneutics we can now reflect upon the formal structures in order to establish whether further meaning is to be sought in totemism and if so where it is to be found.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 87-88. Cf also *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 93. In *Totemism* (p. 82) he notes that E. E. Evans-Pritchard had held that the primitives looked upon the totemic animals and the tribes as collateral lines descending from God as their common origin, which implied that their reality or content was essentially related. This would correspond to some degree to Heidegger's "unthought" which founds the meaning of all things and unites them among themselves. For the structuralist, however, content is not distinct from form.

*Prerequisites of Totemic Thought*

*The Principle of Form.* There are, indeed, reasons to believe that more is required than can be articulated in Lévi-Strauss's purely formal structural analysis. First of all, his thought in classifying the pairs of species is categorical in nature and therefore has all the limitations of definition which concerned Heidegger. Bernard Lonergan described it as a method of determination which therefore has limited denotation and varies with cultural differences. Lévi-Strauss's condition for the totemic relation between the pairs A : B and C : D, namely that the pairs have in common at least one characteristic in terms of which they can be compared, cannot be fulfilled by categorial thought alone. Because categorial thought consists of forms which are contraries and hence limited, none of its objects could constitute the common element required for the total unity of structures. In principle the search for the basis of the unity, even of formal structures, cannot be carried out in terms of the limited denotations of abstractive knowledge. Instead it requires transcendental thought or intending which is "comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, invariant over cultural change."<sup>14</sup>

The need for this comprehensive cognitive unity is confirmed by Jean Piaget from the nature of structuralism itself. He criticizes Lévi-Strauss for attending too exclusively to structure, form and essence, which abstract factors, he claims, can be explained psychologically by the mere permanence of the human intellect. What is more fundamental for structuralism is the fact that structures are generated by a system of operational structural transformations. These transformations require a principle which cannot be impersonal for it is the cognitive nucleus common to all subjects. Neither can it be individual for, through the series of transformations in which the structure is constituted on ever new and broader levels, this subject is progressively decentered.<sup>15</sup> Hence, in principle it must be beyond any contrary or any concept; it must be unique and comprehensive. Much as Nicholas of Cusa's "folding together" or *complicatio*, the system of structural transformations points to a unity which is not reducible to any individual.

Thus the first level of reflection upon the structural analysis of totemism in terms of form alone points to what Heidegger referred to above as "the unthought". He identifies a number of its characteristics. It must be

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<sup>14</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 11. Sergio Moravia cites passages from Lévi-Strauss which indicate some recognition of this need. They speak of spirit as subject of the universal categories, and of the transformation of structures as the unconscious activity of the spirit. *La ragione nascosta, scienza e filosofia nel pensiero di Claude Lévi-Strauss* [Firenze: Sansoni, 1969], pp. 325ff.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Piaget, *Structuralism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 139-142.

one, unlimited, and spirit; it is the principle of all transformations and the basis of the unity, form and content of all structures.

A further, hermeneutic level of reflection by Paul Ricoeur in his essay, "Structure and Hermeneutics," identifies where this principle of the totemic relation is manifested. Above we questioned the self-sufficiency of the notion of a common characteristic by which the totemic species and the tribe are compared. Ricoeur continues this question noting that, while structural relations are based proximately upon semantic analogies, more fundamentally they depend upon real similarity of content.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, the totemic relations or homologies between species in categorial terms presuppose as the conditions of their possibility a more fundamental unity of meaning; this, in turn, presupposes a corresponding unity or whole of meaning and of being. There is

no structural analysis . . . without a hermeneutic comprehension of the transfer of sense. . . . In turn, neither is there any hermeneutic comprehension without the support of an economy, of an order in which the symbol signifies . . . (for) symbols symbolize only within wholes which limit and link their significations.<sup>17</sup>

Further, this fundamental whole or plenitude of meaning is both cognitive and affective, for humans first perceive meanings through feelings. Hence, the concrete logic of the primitive will have not only cognitive, but affective aspects, and both will be essential to our search. Earlier in this century, the philosopher anthropologist, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, pointed out that the two were not yet distinguished in what he termed the "collective representations" (more about this below) by which the members of a particular tribe interpret and respond to other persons and to nature. The totemic logic of proportionality between humans and animals unfolds against the background of a general cognitive-affective sense of kinship between humans and totemic animals. It is to this collective representation of kinship that we must look in order to discover the awareness of the unity or plenitude of reality and meaning upon which the totemic relation was grounded.

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<sup>16</sup> "A careful examination of *The Savage Mind* suggests that at the base of structural homologies one can always look for semantic analogies which render comparable the different levels of reality whose convertibility is assured by the "code". The "code" presupposes a correspondence, an affinity of the contents, that is, a cipher." Paul Ricoeur, "Structure and Hermeneutics" in *The Conflict of Interpretations, Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 56. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.



*The Principle of Existence*

The scientific constructs and models which help to interpret life abstract from time or are synchronomous. It must be urged that they express the form only and not the content or the reality; they are not life, but only “a secondary level of expression, subordinate to the surplus of meaning found in the symbolic stratum.”<sup>18</sup> The actual appearance of this meaning takes place only in diachronous relations, that is, those in which the “disinterested, attentive, fond and affectionate love (of kinship) is acquired and transmitted through the attachments of marriage and upbringing.”<sup>19</sup> For that fundamental and foundational meaning we must look to this existential process, to the life of the family in its simplest human contexts of tribe and clan. Remaining unthought, it is the principle of all beings and meanings.

Further, the search for this principle must inquire without imposing delimiting categories. Hence, our questions must not concern individual realizations, for the “unthought” is never adequately expressed in any individual life or any combinations thereof. Instead our questions must concern the conditions of possibility for concrete life as lived within the unity of a tribe, indeed of any and all tribes. This exceeds even the diachronous succession of generations, while being pointed to by those concrete tribal lives as the condition of their possibility.

**A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF TOTEMIC CULTURE AS A WAY OF BEING AND THINKING**

*The Question*

In directing our attention to the simplest societies, sometimes called “primitive,” this term is to be taken not in the sense of deficient or crude, but of that which is first, which manifests what is fundamental or basic, and hence is indispensable. Our method then will be to search for what is basic in the sense of being required or essential for human life in society.

In investigating any matter it is necessary to have a question so that the investigation can be directed to significant evidence, which then is assembled in order to provide meaningful insight. Like a searchlight, a question does not create the object, but enables it to stand out for observation and interpretation.

The basic issue might be stated in the following manner. On the one hand, the life of people who live together, whether in a tribe or clan, a village or city, or even on a global level, requires an attitude between persons and peoples which is not one of antipathy, for then cooperation

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48 and 56, n. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, p. 37.

would be impossible and murder would reign. Nor can it be one merely of indifference, for then we would starve as infants or languish in isolation as adults. Rather there is need of a way to consider others in a positive manner in order to be able to establish cooperative relations and, where possible, mutual care and concern.

On the other hand, persons are individual, distinct and irreducible one to another or to a community, party or commune. This constitutes the perennial human dilemma which was writ large in the Cold War between the extremes of the individualism of the liberal “free world” and the collectivism of the communist world, while the “third” world was basically proxy to one of the two or to the tension between them.

The overriding and perennial question is how distinct people with their proper autonomy can look upon each other not negatively or indifferently, but positively and with concern both to promote the good of the other and to see the other as good for oneself? That is, what links us together; in what terms and on what level can people think of the good both of oneself and of all?

### *The Response*

What is striking is that throughout the world in the earliest and simplest of societies peoples answered this question in a similar way, or by a common means. Each tribe identified a totem and in terms of this understood their relations among themselves, to other peoples and to nature. We must look more closely at this phenomenon.

It is unfortunate that the work of Lévy-Bruhl which first pointed this out has been received with such anxiety in the African context for it would appear to contain basic keys precisely for appreciating the present foundational importance of African thought for all other modes of human awareness. Lévy-Bruhl was himself a positivist in ethics and its logic. However, in analyzing the thought patterns reported at the turn of century by persons returning to Europe from other parts of the world he identified a mode of thought which was not merely an assembling and sorting out of multiple atomic components, but was marked by a central sense of unity. To his credit, rather than dismiss this as superstitious or insignificant he opened the way to recognizing this crucial and foundational sense of reality. Compared to his positivist logic, this was something other, which he unfortunately termed ‘pre-logical.’ Some took the explicit horizontal implication of the term and wilfully turned it into a vertical, evaluative category. Try as he did, in his *Cahiers* and elsewhere, to correct this meaning imposed upon his thought and even to do away with the term “pre-logical” which was being misinterpreted, he was never able to do so.

Instead, the term was caught up in the important and positive assertion of the significance of African thought, but with a complex political shift. On the one hand, for many years in order to assert the equality of African culture with that of other regions it was denied that there

was anything proper to its logic. Even after independence from colonial rule, Europe was still taken as the standard and the concern of many was to assert that African thought was no different. On the other hand, the situation was complicated further by the desire of many to affirm that Marxist analysis was appropriate for interpreting the African reality, which of course would be undercut were it to be recognized that Africa had a distinctive logic. A decade was lost discussing whether there was anything which could be called African philosophy. What was not appreciated was that if African culture had distinctive characteristics it might make a special contribution to world philosophy, and even, as is suggested here, to enabling other philosophies to appreciate their own foundations and consequently to appreciate more fully their own content. In this light the term “primitive mind” is more properly appreciated not negatively or pejoratively, but positively as meaning primary and foundational.

Lévy-Bruhl pointed out first that the mode of thinking was one of “collective representation”.<sup>20</sup> This is important to note, for since the Enlightenment Western thought has been basically analytic in nature. With Descartes we look for clear and distinct ideas regarding the minimal units of an object of reason or a problem and then seek to assemble these with equal clarity. Our mind becomes specialized in grasping limited things as divided and contrasted one against the other. We tend to lose capacities for the synthetic processes of thought and hence for attention to the unities within which the pieces have their origin, meaning and purpose, and *a fortiori* for the One “from which, in which and into which all exist”, (the opening words of the Hindu *Vedanta Sutras*).<sup>21</sup>

In contrast, in the term ‘collective representation,’ “representation” is used intentionally as more general and inclusive than concepts or even cognition; it includes sense as well as intellectual knowledge, affective reactions as well as knowledge, and indeed motor responses as well as knowledge and affectivity.

Further these representations are “collective” in a number of senses. First, they are socially conditioned: the same event may be a cause of fear in one tribe and of laughter in another. Second, they concern the total meaning of an event and for the whole of life. Third, they are not conceptual exclusions identifying each thing in contrast to all others after the manner of an analytic compartmentalization mentioned above, but synthetic in that they see each as participating in a whole. The importance of this synthetic or unitive character is reflected in the fact that to be ostracized is to be excluded not only from a particular community, but from human dignity itself. Literally, the evil of slavery lies not in bondage, but in the loss of the bond to one’s community: the unity of persons or of a people is the fundamental key to one’s humanity.

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<sup>20</sup> Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures; New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> *Sutras*, I, 1, 2.

Further, such attitudes must be more than merely subjective. If they have promoted, rather than destroyed, human life through the aeons of so-called primitive life, they are ways in which humans cannot only feel, but be, well. They must then reflect something essential and objective regarding human reality, and this must be the more true of that which makes them possible. What then is the condition of possibility of these positive attitudes between persons or towards one another in a tribe or clan?

This question was studied by Lévy-Bruhl in his work, *How Natives Think*, on the cognitive-affective collective representations of the first and simplest societies. His investigations led him to the totem as that in terms of which these peoples saw themselves to be united according to what he termed the "law of participation". In the most disparate places and climes tribes identified an animal or thing as their totem, its specific nature being differentiated according to the locale. Their perception of their relation to this totem was not simply that of a person to one's ancestors from whom one derives, to one's name by which one is externally designated, or to a later state which one will enter following death. Lévy-Bruhl notes that under questioning totemic peoples reject all such relations as inadequate. Rather, the members of the tribes insisted that quite directly they are their totem. "They give one rigidly to understand that they are araras (a bird that is the totem of this people) at the present time, just as if a caterpillar declared itself to be a butterfly." They understand their relation to the totem to be one of simple identity, which he describes as "a mystical community of substance."<sup>22</sup>

This participational mode of identity is both a way of thinking and a way of being. It is the former in that it does not work in terms merely of spatial relations. For example, no matter how far a hunter is from his camp, what his wife does or does not eat is thought to effect his success or failure. This does not mean that a sensitivity to spatial relations is absent; indeed it is amazingly acute and some South Sea islanders are said to be able to navigate over great distances without landfalls or navigational equipment. Rather what this indicates is that their thought processes regarding unity and related-ness are not controlled by, or reducible to, spatial considerations. That things could be caused and moved at a distance: telekinesis, which some now would call witchcraft, was considered an actual happening. Nor is this thinking held to temporal relations, for one's ancestors live now and effect our lives. Finally, it is not merely a functional relation, for they think not externally only, in terms of themselves and what others can do for them, but in terms of a real internal unity with others.<sup>23</sup>

Again this does not mean that there is no sense of time or of the sequence of events. Rather the sense of time is not simply external or of exclusion, of parts or moments outside of parts, but of inclusion. In sacred time moments perdure through time and are ritually present. This is

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<sup>22</sup> *How Natives Think*, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

particularly manifest in creation myths which express the basic reality of life and are formative of every facet of life. This was detailed by the Dogon sage, Ogotemmêli, and recorded by Marcel Griaule in *Dieu d'eau: entretiens avec Ogotemmêli*.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, such thinking is not in terms of functional relations in which one thing is done in order to cause another. Hence, the fact that a hoped-for result does not follow in space or time, does not appear to discourage the repetition of the practice. A totemic people does not appear to base its understanding of the meaning and purpose of things on practical success or failure. Thus, as noted above, whereas some anthropologists would say that something was chosen as a totem because it was good to eat or for some other practical purpose, Lévi-Strauss noted rather that the totem was not good to eat, but good to think.

Totemic people think not just in terms of themselves and others as separate, but in terms of the whole and of unity in the whole. This surpasses spatial, temporal or functional, i.e., external, relations. It is rather a unity of being. Primitive peoples are, and understand themselves to be, a unity with, in and by the totem.

Hence participation in the totem is not only a way of thinking, but also a way of being; indeed it is the former because it is the latter. This expression of one's identity in term of one's totem, such as "I am lion" or "I am araras", is not only to assume a common name as might a sports team; nor is it to indicate something past or future as if I used to be a lion, or am descended from lion, or after death will become a lion; nor is it to indicate that I am presently some part of lion such as its eye or tail; nor finally is it to state of kinship with lions.<sup>25</sup>

Instead, such statements, totemic peoples insist, express an actual and essential identity which is veritably symbiotic in character. The life of the person is that of the totem. Thereby, all the members of a tribe are most profoundly one with the others from their beginning and by the very fact that they have come to exist, just a I am a brother or sister to all the other children in my family not on the basis of something I do, but by my very emergence into being.

This unity then is in no wise merely an abstract identity of essence or nature, such as would be reflected by a structuralist analysis of forms. Rather, it is a concrete, living, existential identity or participation in the totem. It is in these terms that the primitive interprets his or her entire life, determining both the real significance of the actions he or she performs and hence what he or she should and should not do. —

In analyzing the most characteristic of the primitive's institutions—such as totemic relationship . . .—we have

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<sup>24</sup> Marcel Griaule, *Dieu d'Eau: Entretiens avec Ogotemmêli* (Paris: Fayad, 1966).

<sup>25</sup> *How Natives Think*, pp. 4-7.

found that his mind does more than present his object to him: it possesses it and is possessed by it. It communes with it and participates in it, not only in the ideological but also in the physical and mystical sense of the word. The mind does not imagine it merely; it lives it. . . . Their participation in it is so *effectually lived* that it is not yet properly imagined.<sup>26</sup>

This insistence upon unity with the totem manifests a state of both thought and feeling prior to the dominance of objectification whereby things and persons are seen as objects over against one. Unity has not yet been dominated by multiplicity; it is a concrete identity, indistinguishably both objective and subjective.

This mode of understanding was first termed by Lévy-Bruhl, not anti-logical or a-logical, but “pre-logical.”<sup>27</sup> In this he reflected his own initial positivist bias that there could exist only a series of single and externally related units, and consequently that any logic must consist simply of such terms. In his posthumously published *carnets*, however, he retracted the term ‘pre-logical’, for his investigations had shown that the primitives did indeed have a consistent pattern of meaning. Apostle has analyzed this in detail in his work on African philosophy, *African Philosophy, Myth or Reality?* and concluded to the need to recognize in it a proper, if not a perfect, logic.<sup>28</sup>

Primitive societies were not held together by understanding everything as a series of units of which the totem is but one. Rather, the totem was understood to be the one in which all the others had their identity, their meaning, and their unity among themselves. Such a reality cannot be just one being among many others. As that in terms of which all members in the tribe—no matter how many—have their meaning, the totem is for that tribe the fullness or plenitude of reality and meaning in which all live or participate as a community. It is the key to the meaning of all, the intensive center of all meaning. It does not participate in the individuals; rather, the individuals participate in it. In Augustine’s classic terms: “It is not I who first loved You, O Lord; but You who first loved me.” Due to this symbiosis of people with their totem, the primitive’s knowledge of reality expressed in the totem is immediate, rather than inferential.

In turn, a person’s relation to other members of the tribe and to nature is understood in terms of their relation to their totem. Through participation in the common totem the many members of the tribe are intimately related one to another; like brothers, they see themselves to be more deeply united than distinguished.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 362.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. III.

<sup>28</sup> L. Apostle, *African Philosophy: Myth or Reality?* (Brugges, Belgium: Story, 1980).

This is reflected in very varied forms of contact, transference, sympathy and telekinesis as, in the above example, when the success of a hunter is understood to depend more radically upon what is, or is not, eaten by his wife at home than upon any other factor. These and other examples manifest an intense understanding of the unity and relatedness of the members of the tribe in a manner not dependent upon surface spatio-temporal or empirical factors. It is not that such empirical and spatial relationships are not also known and acted upon by the primitive. But they see the basic reality of their life to be participation in the totem and on this they base their interpretation of the nature and the reality of their relationships to one another and to all else.

### **THE TOTEMIC MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE**

#### *Social Unity: the Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions*

Horizontally, this concept brings important insight to the question of unity and distinctiveness which have so divided the modern mind as characterized by a rationalist and analytic mode of thinking. The totem is not one in a series, but the unique reality in which each and all have their being—and, by the same token, their unity with all else.

This is the key to social unity. Each is not indifferent to all else or only externally or accidentally related to others in terms of temporal or spatial coincidence or functional service. Rather all are in principle and by their very being united to all, to whom they are naturally and mutually meaningful. Hence, one cannot totally subject anybody, or indeed any thing, to one's own purpose; one cannot take things merely as means in a purely functional or utilitarian manner. Instead, all persons are brothers or sisters and hence essentially social. This extends as well to nature in an ecological sensitivity which only now is being recuperated.

What is impressive in this is that all are united but without the loss of the individuality that has been absent from modern collectivisms. Instead, each individual, rather than being suppressed, has meaning in the unity of the totem. Hence, nothing one does is trivial, for every act is related to the whole. No one is subservient as a tool or instrument; all are members of the whole. As each act stands in relation to the whole whose meaning it reflects, everything is of great moment. There is justice and there are taboos, for there are standards which are not to be compromised.

Vertically what then should be said of the totem as the key to a meaning in which all participate. For a number of reasons some would answer that it is absolute and even divine:

- it is the key to the unity of persons, recalling the religious statement of the brotherhood of man in the fatherhood of God;
- it has the absolute meaning of the religious center: the one God of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism; and

- it is the key to the sacred meaning and dignity of all.

Others, such as the Buddhists, would speak in the negative of “non-self” in order to protect the absolute character from the restrictive character of human conceptualization. But, in all these ways the totem is source, center and goal.

Perhaps, however, it might best be called the proto-foundation, in that while this principle of unity is privileged and not reducible to humans, neither is it explicitly appreciated as being distinct from, and transcending the contents of this world. Indeed the effort of the mystic at the high end of the religious spectrum is precisely to overcome separation from the foundation of all. The direction is immanence and interiority, namely, to appreciate the unity of human life with its source and goal, and to do so perhaps less by achieving transcendence than by entering more deeply into the center of one’s own interiority. In this light totemic thought emerges in its true importance as something not to be escaped from, but to be recaptured and lived in new ways in the midst of our much more complex society and more technically organized world.

This is the more neutral proto position which will be diversely developed in East and West; it provides the basis for both civilizations and has the roots of the later search of each classical culture for the resources of human life and their general direction of the distinctive effort:

(a) It began from a reality that did actually exist, namely, the successful and progressive life of peoples through the thousands of centuries which constitute almost the entirety of human experience.

(b) It sought the principles of this existence, namely, the content of the understanding which made possible their successful human life.

(c) It concluded in that totemic unity and fullness in which people had both their being and their unity.

Thus, it established the plenitude of, and participation in, the foundational totem as principle both of the human mind and of social life.

This is not restricted to the more Western awareness of a transcendent cause of all,<sup>29</sup> but is foundational for both East and West. (a) Being essentially anthropological in character, it began with people in the primitive stage of their development. (b) Being essentially hermeneutic in method, it attended to the conditions of possibility for the understanding manifested in their life. (c) This combination of anthropological and hermeneutic factors concluded to the plenitude, not as it is in itself or, as cause distinct from effect—the much later science of metaphysics will be required for that—but only as appreciated by the primitive mind in its totemic mode.

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<sup>29</sup> See ch. VI below.



This difference should not be considered to be merely negative. The thought of the primitive is not merely a poorer form of what people in subsequent ages would grasp better with improved tools. Heidegger pointed to an important sense in which it is only by returning to the origins that important progress can be made. I would like to suggest three ways in which this is true of a return to the totemic vision if made through the combined tools of anthropology and philosophical hermeneutics.

### *The Foundation of the Human Person*

*Philosophical Reflection.* Human progress is made in part through the ability to understand in increasingly more formalized terms and systems the relationships which obtain in society, in nature, and between the two. If these scientific elaborations are not to be merely empty signs, hypothetical systems or external relations, they must draw upon the meaning of life itself, first expressed humanly in terms of the totem. This will be required not only for their certainty as noted by Descartes, but for their content and unity as pointed out by the classical realist philosophies. This will be particularly necessary if the process of development is to implement, rather than to supplant, human values and transcendent aspirations.

What has been said of the sciences should, with appropriate adaptation, be said of philosophy and its metaphysics as well. It is the task of philosophy to establish with rigor its processes of definition, reasoning and conclusion. The intelligibility of the entire science is dependent upon the intelligibility of its subject, being. In turn, it is the search for that intelligibility which has ever led the mind to reasoning regarding the plenitude of being of Plato's "One" or "Good,"<sup>30</sup> Aristotle's "life divine,"<sup>31</sup> Heidegger's "Being,"<sup>32</sup> or Iqbal's "total absolute".<sup>33</sup>

All are clear that this plenitude cannot be constituted by any limited instance or any combination thereof. Plato's notion of *reminiscentia* or remembering may be more helpful than is generally thought, however, if employed in terms not of the hypothesis of a prior existence of the individual in a world of ideas, but of the real experience of our totemic ancestors. The totemic peoples subjected to the acid test of time the proposition that if human life is to be lived it must be lived in terms of a unity, a whole, a plenitude of reality in which all have their being and meaning. This was the cultural heritage they bequeathed to subsequent ages. South Asian thought reflects this in being characterized by a quest for the highest value of life, for *moksa* or spiritual freedom. The Greeks

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<sup>30</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 508.

<sup>31</sup> *Metaphysics* XII, 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1962).

<sup>33</sup> *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. in Saeed Sheekh (Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy and Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989).

reflected this in their myths, in the context of which Plato was able to proceed from multiple instances of goodness to the one Goodness Itself which, as the sun, gives light to all in this cave of time. The so-called 'later Heidegger' came finally to focus on this as the ground from which all beings emerged into time. Iqbal saw it as the basis for all human knowledge.

*Return to the Source of Human Life.* This is not only a question of the past. Gandhi has pointed out that a new nation cannot be built unless it finds its soul. Menendes y Pelago said this well:

Where one does not carefully conserve the inheritance of the past, be it poor or rich, great or small, there can be no hope of giving birth to original thought or a self-possessed life. A new people can improvise all except intellectual culture, nor can an old people renounce this without extinguishing the most noble part of its life and falling into a second infancy similar to senile imbecility.

What Gandhi added was that this spirit or culture is to be found not only in books, but in family and village life. Though some have taken this as an issue of economics, in fact it is one of metaphysics.

How is such a metaphysics to be elaborated? Here the original suggestion of Heidegger assumes particular importance. He noted that philosophic traditions, in proceeding to ever more intensive analysis and clarity trade existential content in order to gain formal clarity. From within the scholastic contexts of both East and West it is protested—I believe rightly, but heretofore in vain—that the vital significance of the classical analyses is not appreciated. As carried forward by the rationalism which has characterized modern thought Marx characterized all such analyses as at best ideological superstructures which obscure attention to the reality of life.

In response, following Heidegger's suggestion, we have stepped back to a point, prior to Plato's and Aristotle's development of selective analyses, at which life was lived in communion, rather than seen in abstractions. We have stepped back beyond philosophy and even myth to totem. There, a crude but robust sense of the plenitude of reality and of participation therein is to be found. It gave men who had naught else an awareness of their unity one with another and an appreciation of the importance of the actions of each. With that, and that alone, they were able, not only to traverse the vast seas of time, but to arrive with such treasures in the form of epics, myths and hymns—rightly considered "sacred"—that our several civilizations have lived richly merely on the interest of such a patrimony.

But to live wisely on the interest of this treasure, it behooves one to be as clear as possible concerning the capital; this is especially true in

philosophy. Both as a sequential process of evolving human understanding and as Heidegger's process of retrieve, it is essential to know what came before in order to plan one's next step and have the materials with which it can be fashioned. A significant body of scholarship works on the basis of a supposed evolution from polytheism to monism. Others would hold that monism is the more original and that the evolution consisted in the progressive introduction of a plurality of gods. The two suppositions are used by their proponents, not only to order chronologically the Vedic hymns and passages in the *Upanishads*, but to interpret the meaning of their key phrases and ideas. The same can be said regarding such key notions as matter and spirit, monism and pluralism.

In fact, the totem is none of these, but expresses the unity and plenitude from which subsequently some will evolve an explicit monotheism, while others will develop theories regarding the development of the physical universe. Both will have their roots in the unity which is the totem, but neither will exhaust its potential meaning. More importantly, neither will be completely deprived of the unspoken totemic context of their meaning. Hence, as we shall see, it is erroneous to interpret Vedic thought or pre-Socratic philosophy with modern glasses as a proto-materialism or a proto-idealism, that is, as a poor form of what is now articulated in clear and distinct modern terms which force one to choose and hence to reduce reality; the content made present in totemic thought is rather the fullness of reality which Hinduism will try to express in positive terms and Buddhism will try to protect from reduction by human conceptualization. Both will be needed in order to suggest the fullness of meaning made present in totemic thinking.

*Foundations of the Meaning of the Person.* Precisely because this vision of unity in plenitude is foundational for the human person, the steps taken in the initial phases of its clarification and articulation will be statements of what is essential in order that life be lived and lived well in a particular culture. In the East the *Vedas* express these conditions of possibility. Professor T.N.P. Mahadevan marked well that they can no more rightly be said to be produced than Newton can be said to have produced, rather than to have discovered, the law of gravitation. They are indeed discovered or "heard" (*Sruti*) as one bores deeply into the accumulated sediment of our long experience of living, till finally "like joyous streams bursting from the mountains" the sense of Unity comes forth as revelation of the Real.<sup>34</sup>

There is difficulty, however, in restricting one's views simply to the words of the scriptures, for faith then becomes fideism. As century succeeds century the words lose their existential content, become empty signs, and are filled with ideas which are at best ephemeral and possibly

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<sup>34</sup> T.N.P. Mahadevan, *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1974), p. 14. The simile is taken from the *Vedas*.

even dangerous. In time they come to be progressively less understood and then ignored. For the active philosopher dedicated to wisdom and to comprehension these dangers are greater still. It is the philosopher's special task to work out the order of being and meaning, to clarify the significance of the steps in reasoning processes, and to test and ground their principles. This is done so that the One in all and all in One, the plenitude and the participation by which we live and breathe and have our being, may pervade our minds, may inspire our hearts and guide our steps.

It is supremely wise of Islamic philosophers such as Suresvara to recognize that their reasoning processes are only preparatory, ground-clearing operations, whereas the knowledge of the One arising from *Sruti* or sacred text is immediate and non-relational. It is not the product of their reasoning, and hence exceeds the self-restrictions which rationalism would impose on the human mind and heart. Rather, it is made known by Scripture through implication. Here the philosopher meets the real challenge of metaphysics and joins with the seer in concern for that which surpasses names and forms (*nama rupa*).

As negative statements must be based upon positive content, the Buddhist "non-self" is possible only in the light of the Hindu "self". The philosopher's negative statements that Brahman is "other than the unreal, the insentient, and the finite" needs to be based upon positive awareness of "non-relational, non-verbal content".<sup>35</sup> The philosopher must ask in what way such meaning is present to the awareness of the one who hears *Sruti*. The strong emphasis in Indian as well as totemic thought upon unity would seem to suggest or facilitate the appreciation of a presence which is revealed—Heidegger would say "unveiled"—in the words of the sacred text.

It has been the burden of this chapter to suggest that this presence can be further appreciated if we look, not to the individual alone, but to the mother-lode of human experience lived intensively in family and clan. There it is commonly found that parents nonetheless convey to their children a vibrant and concrete, if relatively inarticulate, sense of such characteristics of existence as its unity, truth, and goodness. The above analysis showed how the totem expressed in a non-verbal manner an awareness of the plenitude of being in which all are united. It indicated also the manner in which some of this meaning might now be retrieved.

If, indeed, some non-verbal awareness of unity and participation is present as the basis of all truly humane life, then:

- metaphysics may not be an esoteric concern; the realities with which it deals may be much more present than the data for which one needs telescopes, expeditions, laboratories and computers;

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<sup>35</sup> R. Balasubramanian, *Taittirīyopanisad Bhâsya Vârtika of Swreúvara* (Madras: Center for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1974), p. 180.

- action with which Marx was concerned may be a basis for understanding, just as *karma yoga* or the way of action may be integral to *jnana yoga* or the way of knowledge; and

- freedom as reflecting the true nature of man,<sup>36</sup> may have been lived in the simplest and most familiar of surroundings not as the elaborate Garden of Paradise of later creation stories or in Rousseau's abstract state of nature, but deeply in the very sources of human life. If Piaget's suggestion is correct that the earlier remains as the substratum of the later, the task of emancipation concerns not only our economic and political relations to others but more fundamentally the rediscovery of our roots.

In the words of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari of Madras:

Whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation's faith and ideas are produced by its literature is a question which one is free to answer as one likes. . . . Did clouds rise from the sea or was the sea filled by waters from the sky? All such inquiries take us to the feet of God transcending speech and thought.<sup>37</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In sum, the totem was not simply one animal among others, but in a sense limitless for no matter how many persons were born to the tribe, the totem was never exhausted. Further, the totem was shown special respect, such as not being sold or used for food or other utilitarian purposes, which would make it subservient to the individual members of the tribe or clan. Whereas other things might be said to be possessed and used, the totem was the subject of direct predication: one might say that one had a horse or other animal, but only of the totem would one say that one is, e.g., lion.

The totem, then, was the unique, limitless reality in terms of which all persons and things had their being and were interrelated. It was the sacred center of individual and community life in terms of which all had meaning and cohesion. It made possible both the human dignity and interpersonal relations which are the most important aspects of human life. It did this with a sense of direct immediacy that would be echoed, but never equaled, in subsequent stages of more formal thought.

This is more foundational and immanent than even most later religious formulation for it states the basically transcendent character of all human life. A true humanism then sees the absolute source and goal not as

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<sup>36</sup> S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), I, 58.

<sup>37</sup> C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), p. 312.

something distant which is added to a universe first experienced as basically secular. Rather it is the basic and essential insight of even the simplest forms of human community for which it provides both the inspiration and the guide.

In contrast then to the rationalist attempt to remove such issues from public life which it thereby impoverishes, totemic thought enables one to see that the issue is not whether there be room for such cosmic and integrating vision alongside public life or how to protect one from the other, but how this ordinary vision of unity can help to assure the community of persons in the midst of present ennui, alienation and conflict.

**CHAPTER IV**

**MYTH AS PICTURING  
HUMAN LIFE AND MEANING**

**INTRODUCTION**

The present chapter concerns a later, yet still pre-philosophical, period, namely, that of myth, hymn and epic. This will be studied as an evolution or transmogrification of human life from understanding all in terms of an externally sensible reality as with totem to internal imaginative terms, somewhat as a moth develops into the quite different form of butterfly. The earlier tradition of the totem manifested the original human awareness to be one of unity rather than of diversity for its self-understanding was based on the absolute unity and plenitude of the totem. In contrast, the tradition of myth begins a progressive recognition of the diversity of people within this basic unity. This process will be followed in subsequent chapters on the initiation of philosophy. Indeed its development in modern times has already been treated in Part I above.

In this process we shall encounter a new set of issues. In Chapter I we asked first and in principle about how development in thought takes place, enabling new questions to be asked and new insights to be acquired, and about the relation between the content of earlier and subsequent stages of thought? Here we must look concretely at the nature of the transition from the primitive to the mythic stage of consciousness, and at how this unfolding of totemic thought opens a new dimension of human self-understanding and fundamental awareness. This will be important for the development of diverse cultures and civilizations for it is such basic understanding that grounds and distinguishes the various civilizations as is noted by S. Huntington in his *Clash of Civilizations and the Making of the New World Order* and hence the possibilities of peace in our global times. For insight into the roots of Western cultures this Chapter will focus on Hesiod's *Theogony*. Corresponding dimensions of Eastern civilizations will be studied in Part IV by focusing there on the Hindu Creation Hymn, *Nusadiya Sukta*, Rg Veda X, 129.

Epistemologically the transition from totemic to mythic thought was a response to the need for a new way of thinking. In the totemic phase of human existence the life of each person or family was basically similar to all others as each did all that was required for their life and the basic unity of all was symbolized in terms of a totem which was directly present to their external senses. Hence the totem was articulated in terms of a physical object such as a bird or fish, something that could be seen in the locale. Now, however, with the specialization and division of labor, more complex

patterns of human relations with their broader possibilities and responsibilities confronted the human mind.

To take account of the diversity of life and one's distinctive identity therein it was no longer sufficient to think in terms of simple identity with the one foundation of all of life stated in terms of some one thing immediately available to the senses. Higher capabilities described by Piaget would be needed in order to take account of diversity as well as unity; relations of the many to and in the one would now be central. This made it necessary for the intellect to engage the distinctive capabilities of the imagination as an internal sense whereby the mind could variously combine what it received through the senses to construct images and models with which the intellect could work out complex models of human relations and meaning.

A very general, yet suggestive, analogy is the move from dancing to figure skating. In skating one is freed from the short strides and relatively slow speeds of the person on foot: one's body is endowed with the long graceful strokes along with the velocity which make possible moves quite out of the question even for the gymnast or ballerina. In literature the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, written in terms of the gods, illustrate the extent of the creativity with which the imagination can enable the human spirit. The mind is thereby reduced to the pictures the imagination creates, but through these pictures of gods and battles it is enabled to think deep truths about the human condition.

This can be seen in the progression of Kant's *Critiques* which provides a more properly philosophical insight into the possibilities opened to thinking by working in terms available not to the external senses, but to the imagination. Often imagination is considered ephemeral, unreal and distractive, but in his first *Critique* Kant points out the role played by the imagination in the development of the necessary and universal structures of the sciences. In his third *Critique* Kant points out its role in working out the alternatives essential for creative choice and hence the deeper roots of freedom. It may be helpful then briefly to step out of a merely chronological sequence from totem to myth in order to turn to Kant for help in appreciating this work of the imagination. This, in turn, will enable us to understand more adequately the nature of the development of human self-awareness from totemic to mythic thought.

For Kant in his first *Critique* it is the task of the reproductive imagination to bring together the multiple elements of sense intuition precisely in an order capable of being informed by a concept or category of the intellect with a view to making a judgement. On the part of the subject, the imagination here is active, authentically one's own and creative. Ultimately, however, its work is not free, but bound to the categories or concepts of the sciences which are characterized by necessity and universality. What is of special interest to us here is how in his third *Critique* of aesthetic judgement Kant described a greatly enhanced role for the imagination actively reviewing all possible combinations and sequences



making it possible to identify which best express the possibilities of humanity and beauty. This explains how the mind working in terms of the imagination can be so creative. We shall return to this in greater detail in comparison to Confucian thought in Chapter VIII below but for now this makes it possible to grasp the huge advance in human thought when this working of the imagination was developed and made it possible to create the myths as instruments of thought.

### **TRANSITION FROM TOTEM TO MYTH**

*Unity through Difference.* In Chapter III we saw the classical distinction of the three levels of knowledge and the identification by Piaget of the levels of psychological development of the child. His general theory of development sheds light on the cultural transitions which enable deep human self-understanding and reflect its source, foundation and goal. It provides three principles important for our work at this point of transition from totem to myth, namely, that the process of the human mind is:

(1) from unity to diversity—a decentering process which then enables a recentering in a deeper understanding of the original unity grasped in totemic thought and remaining as substratum in all that follows;

(2) always fundamentally intellectual, but works in terms proper first to the external senses, then to the internal senses, and ultimately to the intellect itself; and

(3) via a disequilibrium which however can come from any cause, from the psycho-somatic in adolescence to the wonder which Aristotle notes leads to philosophy.

The transition from totem to myth is a first such step beyond the universal and foundational primitive experience of totemic thought. Many of the elements of this transition were sketched out by the philosopher-anthropologist, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, in the last chapter of his *How Native Think*.<sup>1</sup> Piaget described the dynamism of this development as a process moving from an equilibrium in which the multiple internal and external factors of one's life are integrated, through a disequilibrium caused by the introduction of new factors, to a higher equilibrium through the development of new capabilities.

In these terms Chapter III went on to describe the character of human awareness in its primitive, basic or totemic stage. Each group focused on a single principle, namely, the totem, through identification with which all members of the group by their very identity are related to all others in the group. Social relatedness was not an arbitrary addition to one's humanity, but the essential task to which all are destined. Its social implications for the brotherhood of man are so central and obvious that one

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<sup>1</sup> (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966).

who says he loves God, but hates his brother, can be considered not just confused, but a liar.<sup>2</sup>

This primitive insight is the most fundamental, and the heart of all that subsequently will be developed in the various cultures and civilizations. From this follows the importance of Piaget's observation that any transition must not discard, but retain the essence of this prior state, and add thereto new capabilities and insights to form a new mode of thinking, feeling and acting. One begins from the equilibrium of the prior state of harmony in the primitively (i.e., originally and foundationally) appreciated unity and moves through disequilibria to reestablish the equilibrium at a higher level of awareness.

This chapter and those that follow then are not about the addition of a new mode of life alongside or substituting for that which was described in totemic terms. Rather they are the evolution. In the present case the move is from the equilibrium of the totemic state in which unity was stressed, through the disequilibrium introduced with the differentiation and specialization of roles, to a new equilibrium. Unity is continued, but by employing the work of imagination it engages the developing diversity in such wise as to form human self-understanding that is higher and more complex, yet more integrated and more stable.

*Transcendence.* With this ability to be both united and differentiated came an appreciation as well of the special distinctiveness of the sacred center with regard to the many individuals of which it was the principle. What in totemic thought previously had been stated simply by identity (I am lion) could now be appreciated as greater than and transcending the members of the tribe. This is reflected in the development of priesthood, rituals and symbols to reflect what was seen no longer simply as one's deepest identity, but as the principle thereof.<sup>3</sup>

Such a transcendent reality could no longer be stated in terms of such physical realities as parrot or lion corresponding to the external senses, but rather was figured by the imagination. The terms drawn originally from the senses now were reconfigured in forms that expressed life which was above the human and served as the principle of human life. Such higher principles, as knowing and will, were personal; and as transcending persons they were called gods.

It would be incorrect to consider this, as did Freud, to be simply a projection of human characteristics. On the contrary, the development of the ability to think in terms shaped by the imagination released human appreciation of the principle of life from the limitations of animals, birds and other natural entities available to the external senses. These had always been special: to eat or sell them was taboo. Now the imagination was engaged to allow the transcendence of the principle of unity to be expressed

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<sup>2</sup> I John: IV, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *How Natives Think*, ch. XII.

in a more effective manner. This did not create the sense of transcendence, but allowed the unique and essential foundation of human meaning of which Iqbal spoke to find new and improved expression through an evolution of human capabilities.

Hence, what previously had been grasped simply in direct symbiotic unity, now with more distinctive self-awareness came to be appreciated not only to be immanent to each and all, but to transcend them as well. Whereas the totem was considered to be simply one with the primitive, now symbol and ritual appear<sup>4</sup> in which the imagination is essentially involved. Thus the principle of the unity of many came to be pictured in the anthropomorphic forms of gods, and their interaction was the stuff of which myths were woven. If the totem had been proto-religious, the myth was religious for it opened the mind to the transcendent, if anthropomorphically pictured, principles of life and meaning.

In contrast to the taboos and the social unity based upon an unthinking totem, the unity founded in the gods could have elements of comprehension and command, of love and mercy; it could extend to all humans while being specific with regard to each person.

To ask of those in this stage of equilibrium how this could be so would be to suppose a later philosophical reflexion on thinking. What is important for the present is that, having attained the mythic level of development, the peoples were able to articulate with vastly greater complexity the unity which had been expressed as simple and direct identity in the totem. That unity could now be textured or woven, as it were, with the many rich threads of meaning available by the work of the imagination expressed in myths.

It should be noted that the evidence from this stage of development does not point to the use of mythical forms merely as literary devices. That would presuppose a prior understanding of things simply in their own, that is, in proper terms—a mode of understanding which had not yet evolved. Rather, myth at this point was the only mode of understanding—what Tillich would call “unbroken myth.”<sup>5</sup> The many realities of the world were understood directly in terms of the identities of the gods and the interrelations between them. Thus, the interpretation of the gods was the highest wisdom and the questions were asked, as noted the *Rg Veda*, “not jestingly. . . . Sages, I ask you this for information.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Paul Tillich, “Theology and Symbolism,” in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F. Ernest Johnson (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> C. Kunhan Raja, *Asya Vamasya Hymn (The Riddle of the Universe)*, *Rgveda* I-164 (Madras: Ganesh, 1956), pp. 5-6; see also G. McLean, *Plenitude and Participation; The Unity of Man and God* (Madras: University of Madras, 1978), pp. 34-38.

*Immanence.* Myth added a new appreciation of transcendence to the unity stated so forcefully by the totem as that in terms of which all has its meaning. To this dimension of transcendence there corresponds an appreciation of the immanence of the divine, for these two characteristics of transcendence and immanence are not opposed one to the other, but correlative. This is true throughout our experience: the more transcendent a reality the more present it is. Thus, organic material such as a stone simply rests upon the earth, whereas the plant sinks its roots into the immediate soil to draw nutrition and eventually enriches the soil, while the animal finds its water and nutrition over a broad territory. With persons and their cognitive and affective life this relation is vastly intensified, as can be seen in the pervasive mutual influence between teacher and student, or lover and beloved. Continuing in this same direction, it is possible to see as correlative both the infinite transcendence of the supreme principle of unity and meaning and its immanence.

This religious insight entails in turn the rich and sacred dignity of each person and of the social interaction of persons. Conversely, our self respect and the respect and love we extend to others constitute an immanent context for the discovery of the divine and for our response thereto.

This is not an alternative to what was lived in totemic terms, but enables that to emerge with much greater articulation both as regards the divine and as regards the principle of life and the human wayfarer. Henceforth, in mythic cultures all will be understood in terms of the gods. The classical literature of Greece would be written exclusively in these terms—indeed, they had no other—and Homer would produce the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as an irreplaceable, because unsurpassable, cornerstone of Western Culture, similar to the great *Mahabharata* epic of the East. We shall look into the *Theogony* in order to examine more concretely this new level of human self-understanding, but to do so we need to look more in detail into the nature of myth.

## THE NATURE OF MYTH

Myth might be described as “the operation of an imaginative consciousness which spontaneously conceives the world and man in the form of persons and events having a symbolic meaning.”<sup>7</sup> Let us look at this in detail:

- *An imaginative Consciousness:* As noted above this is not intellectual knowledge as such, nor is it simply sense knowledge, but the

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<sup>7</sup> George F. McLean and Patrick Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton, Century, Croft, 1972), p. 8. See also by the same authors *Readings in Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton, Century, Croft, 1971) and Ernst Cassirer, *Mythical Thought*, vol. II of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 1965), pp. 3-59.

intellect working according to, or in the terms presented by, the internal senses of memory and imagination. The imagination draws from the external senses information which it variously combines to constitute new integrated pictures. These, in turn, represent the external world not only as it already exists in itself, but also as it can be reordered and recombined by the human consciousness.

- *Spontaneous Conceptions*: Sensible realities are not first grasped directly in their own terms and then expressed through a god as their sign; instead, all is grasped in, and as, personal forms. E.g. the sea is not first known in its own right and then re-presented by Poseidon, rather the sea is Poseidon and Poseidon is sea: there is no other appreciation of sea separate from Poseidon.

- *Persons*: This enables the expression not only of some abstract empirical or physical data as would a thermometer or weather vane, but a joint cognitive, affective and behavioral involvement in reality. Myths express the meaning, value, purpose and creative contribution of the object. This can be appreciated by contrasting a weather report of a storm at sea with Homer's much richer if less technically exact description of the struggle between Poseidon and Zephyr or Vaughn Williams' "Sea Symphony".

- *Events*: What is important is not merely an individual, but the story line of the person's interaction with other persons and with all parts of nature. Thus, in the Bible what is important is less the individual figure or verse than the story line recounting the work of divine Providence.

- *Symbol*: This is not a sign which it joined arbitrarily to that which is signified, as green and red indicate respectively "go" and "stop" in traffic lights but could have been the converse. In contrast, a symbol participates in, or shares, the reality it symbolizes, bespeaking a mode of immanence as, e.g., with the flag of a nation.

Myths constitute a rational, though not a critical inquiry. It is not critical because they do not state things by their proper names, but rather by the names of the gods: e.g. the sea by Poseidon. Consequently, there can be no strict critical control over the conclusions to be drawn from the evidence.

Nevertheless, their thought content is rational and coordinated. The *Theogony* as we shall see is not just a random gathering of the names of the gods, but a systematic ordering in order to constitute an overall pattern conveying a deep sense of reality. Like the "days" of creation in the *Genesis* account, the sequence of the names and events may not be entirely consistent according to the laws of physics. But the *Theogony* and *Genesis* were not works of scientific cosmology; science had not yet developed and at the time was not a human capability. Nevertheless, myths were meant to convey deep and perduring truths, and were intentionally and effectively ordered to do so. Thus, in his *Works and Days*, the first treatise on labor, Hesiod found it necessary to identify vicious competition, for which there was no symbol, in order to contrast it to productive emulation symbolized

by Eris. To do so he developed a sister goddess to Eris, a bad Eris. The rational content of the myths can be seen also in the Greek articulation in terms of myth of a world view integrating the cosmos and humans. This was rich in expressing meaning and values and enabled people to live a human life in their physical and social unities. Indeed, it remains so indispensable a part of the world cultural heritage that in the East such epics as the *Mahabharata* written in terms of myths are the stories first recited and then assimilated through music and dance. In the West the *Iliad* is often the first book assigned in literature courses; it is a good place to begin one's effort to be more richly human.

In sum, one might describe myth as a picture understanding of reality in personal terms.

### THE THEOGONY

In view of what has been said above, the *Theogony*, written by Hesiod (ca. 776 B. C.), is especially illustrative. Because the gods stated the reality of the various parts of nature, when Hesiod undertook to state the relationship which obtained between them he undertook in effect to articulate the understanding of all, particularly the conscious forces. This provided not merely an understanding of man but an anthropomorphic or humanized understanding of all. Whereas modern thought so isolated the human from the rest of nature that it would leave one a beleaguered wayfarer in an alien and threatening land, the myth spoke of the basic issues of origin and goal and did so in terms relating directly to the human mind and will. In this it is closer to the totem in reflecting a recognition of the sacredness of earth and of nature which is one the most exciting of the recent sensitivities emerging in this post ideological period (e.g., Vaclav Havel's remarks on *Gaia*).

Hesiod's work has a number of important characteristics. First, it intends to state the highest possible type of knowledge. Thus, it begins with an invocation to the Muses to provide him with divine knowledge. "These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus."<sup>8</sup>

Secondly and correspondingly, it is concerned with the deepest issues, namely the origin and unity of all things. "Tell me which of them came first", he asks. Then he proceeds to a poetic treatment of issues ranging from the fact of evil to the justification of the reign of the gods (later named "theodicy" by Leibniz),<sup>9</sup> which include the basic problems of meaning and purpose, good and evil with which human life is most basically concerned.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Theogony*, n. 114, in *Readings in Ancient Western Philosophy*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 115.

<sup>10</sup> Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 12-13.

Thirdly, because it was written as the period of purely mythic thought was drawing to a close—within two centuries of the initiation of philosophy in Greece—it manifests the extent to which mythic thought could understand basic issues. Hesiod was able to draw upon the full resources of the body of Greek mythology, weaving the entire panoply of the gods into the structure of his poem. He did not, however, simply collect and relate the gods externally in a topographical or chronological pattern. Rather, his organization of the material was ruled by an understanding of their inner meaning and real order of dependence. Thus, when in the *Theogony* he responds to the question of “How at the first gods and earth came to be,”<sup>11</sup> his ordering of the gods weds theogony and cosmogony. It constitutes a unique manifestation of the way to God laid out by the mythic mind as understanding all as emerging from and of the divine. In order to examine this in detail we shall cite here the sections of the text that are central to our purposes.

**THE TEXT** (*Theogony*, 11, 104-230, 455-505)<sup>12</sup>

a. *Exhortation to the Muses:*

Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are for ever, those that were born of Earth and starry Heaven and gloomy Night and them that briny Sea did rear. Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be, and rivers, and the boundless sea with its raging swell, and the gleaming stars, and the wide heaven above, and the gods who were born of them, givers of good things, and how they divided their wealth, and how they shared their honors amongst them, and also how at the first they took many-folded Olympus. These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus, and tell me which of them first came to be.

b. *The order of the appearances of the gods:*

Verily at the first Chaos came to be, but next wide-bosomed Earth, the ever-sure foundation of all the deathless ones who hold the peaks of snowy Olympus, and dim Tartarus in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth, and Eros (Love), fairest among the deathless gods, who

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<sup>11</sup> *Readings in Ancient Western Philosophy*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Hesiod, *The Theogony*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 85-99, 107-151.

unnerves the limbs and overcomes the minds and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them. From Chaos came forth Erebus and black Night; but of Night were born Aether and Day, whom she conceived and bare from union in love with Erebus. And Earth first bare starry Heaven, equal to herself, to cover her on every side, and to be an ever-sure abiding-place for the blessed gods. And she brought forth long Hills, graceful haunts of the goddess-Nymphs who dwell amongst the glens of the hills. She bare also the fruitless deep with his raging swell, Pontus, without sweet union of love. But afterwards she lay with Heaven and bare deep-swirling Oceanus, Coeus and Crius and Hyperion and Iapetus, Theia and Rhea, Themis and Mnemosyne and gold-crowned Pheobe and lovely Tethys. After them was born Cronus the wily, youngest and most terrible of her children, and he hated his lusty sire.

#### *Diversity in Unity*

The order which Hesiod states in the *Theogony* is the following. The first to appear was Chaos: "Verily at the first Chaos came to be." Then came earth: "but next wide-bosomed Earth the ever sure foundation of all," and starry Heaven: "Earth first bare starry Heaven, equal to herself." From Earth, generally in unison with Heaven, were born Oceanus and the various races of Cyclopes and gods, from whom, in turn, were born still other gods such as Zeus and the races of men. In this manner, Hesiod articulates the sequence of the origin of all parts of the universe. Eros and the various modalities, such as Night and Day, Fate and Doom, also are pictured as arising from Chaos.

If, then, we ask what is the understanding of reality expressed by this poem, it will be noted that Hesiod expresses the very opposite of a random gathering of totally disparate and equally original units. On the contrary, the relation between the gods and between the parts of nature they bespeak is expressed in terms of procreation. As a result, every reality is related positively to all the others in a genetic sequence.

This relatedness does not depend upon a later and arbitrary decision; it is equally original with their very reality: they originate genetically from, and in, this unity. Neither does it involve only certain aspects of the components of the universe; it extends to their total actuality, including their actions. Rhea, for example, appeals to her parents for protection from the acts of her husband, Cronus, against their children. The understanding which the poem conveys, therefore, is that of a unity or relation which originates with their very being and on which the distinctive beings and their actions depend.

Indeed, unity is understood to be by nature prior to diversity. This is indicated by the genetic character of the structure in which each god



proceeds from the union of an earlier pair of gods, while all such pairs are descendants of the one original pair, Earth and Heaven. Further, the procreation of the gods proceeds from each of these pairs precisely as united in love. Finally, this is done under the unitive power of Eros, who is equally original with heaven and earth.

Note that there is a sequence: the text says that the gods “came to be” or “first came to be”. Further, this is not a merely temporal, external or atomic sequence, but a genetic one. They “came forth from”, bare or were born from. This extends through all the gods, who stand for all the parts of nature. Thus, the parts of nature have a meaning and cohesiveness among themselves and with humans who also were born in these genetic lines.

From what has been said we can conclude that unity pervades gods and men: all is traced back to Earth and Heaven as the original pair from whose union, under the impetus of Eros, all is generated.

#### *Unity as Absolute*

But what is the relation between Heaven and Earth? As the genetic lines derive from these two original gods, if these gods are related between themselves then each thing in the universe is related to everything else. But if heaven and earth are not related then each thing is related only to its own line, but is alien to the other half of reality, which then would be indifferent or even antipathetic.

A similar crucial question is being dealt with here: is the world a battlefield between two alien forces in which one’s basic attitude in life must be defence and manipulation, or is it in principle a unity in relation to which the proper attitude is love and generous cooperation. This, in sum, is the working out of the proper attitude in a situation in which diversity must be recognized and promoted. (In moral education it corresponds to Erikson’s notion of trust and hope.<sup>13</sup> The infant who is well cared for can develop an attitude of trust and on this basis evolve a moral character that is open to all, trustful, cooperative and creative. If not, lacking trust, the focus is on self-protection and the manipulation of everyone else toward this goal.)

The Greek mythic answer, which was foundational for the sense of unity in Western civilization lies in the mythical relation of Heaven and Earth. This can take us to a still deeper understanding in which the unity of all reality constitutes a path to God provided we return to the text and use the proper etymological tools.

The text states the following order: Chaos, Earth, Heaven. Unfortunately, since the Stoics, Chaos has since come to be taken to mean disorder and mindless conflict or collision, thus obscuring its original meaning in the earlier text of the *Theogony*. Etymologically, the term can

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<sup>13</sup> E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 247; and *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: Noton, 1968).

be traced through the root of the Greek term ‘*casko*’ to the common Indo-European stem, ‘*gap*’. Using this stem, as it were, as a sonar signal to sound out mythic thought throughout the broad range of the Indo-European languages, we find that the term is used to express a gaping abyss at the beginning of time as, e.g., with the derivative ‘*ginungagap*’ in Nordic mythology.<sup>14</sup> Kirk and Raven confirm this analysis and conclude that for Hesiod ‘chaos’ meant, not a state of confusion or conflict, but an open and perhaps windy space which essentially is between boundaries.<sup>15</sup> Aristotle in his *Physics* referred to chaos as empty space (*topos*).<sup>16</sup>

Returning to the text in this light, it will be noted that it does not speak directly of a state prior to Chaos, but begins with the emergence of Chaos: “At first Chaos came to be”. However, there is no suggestion that Chaos was the original reality; on the contrary, the text is explicit that chaos came to be: “*He toi men prôtista Cháos genet.*”<sup>17</sup>

Further, Chaos is a space to which boundaries are essential. These boundaries, it would seem, are the gods which the text states just after Chaos, namely, Earth and its equal, Heaven. These are not said to have existed prior to chaos and to have been brought into position in order to constitute the boundaries of the ‘*gap*’; rather, they are said somehow to be arranged as contraries on the basis of chaos.

Thus, Kirk and Raven understand actively the opening verses of the body of the text: “Verily at the first Chaos came to be, but next wide-bosomed Earth . . . and Earth first bare starry Heaven equal to herself.” They take this to express the opening of a gap or space, which *thereby* gives rise to Heaven and Earth as its two boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

For its intelligibility, this implies: (a) that an undifferentiated unity precedes the gap, and (b) that by opening or division of this unity the first contrasting realities, namely, Heaven and Earth, were constituted. That is, on the basis of the gap one boundary, Heaven, is differentiated from the other boundary, Earth. Hence, by the gap the boundaries are identically both constituted and differentiated as contraries. As all else are derivatives of Chaos, Earth and Heaven in the manner noted above, it can be concluded that the entire differentiated universe is derivative of an original undifferentiated unity which preceded Chaos.

It would be premature, however, to ask of the mythic mind whether this derivation took place by material, formal or efficient causality; that question must await the development of philosophy. But clearly the original reality itself is not differentiated; it is an undivided unity. As such it is

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<sup>14</sup> Jaeger, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The PreSocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1960), pp. 26-32.

<sup>16</sup> *Physics* IV, 1, 208b31.

<sup>17</sup> *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. by H.G. Evelyn-White (London: Heinemann, 1920), p. 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Readings in Ancient Western Philosophy*, p. 5.

without name, for the names we give reflect our sense perceptions which concern not what is constant and homogenous, but the differentiated bases of the various sense stimuli. What is undifferentiated is not only unspoken in fact, but unspeakable in principle by the language of myth, for this depends essentially upon the imagination.

Nonetheless, though it is unspeakable by the mythic mind itself, reflection can uncover or reveal something of that undifferentiated reality which the *Theogony* implies. We have, for instance, noted its reality and unity. Its lack of differentiation is not a deficiency, but a fullness of reality and meaning from which all particulars and contraries are derived. It is unspeakable because not bounded, limited and related after the fashion of one imagined contrary to another. This is the transcendent fullness that is at the heart of the Hindu *advaita* or nondual philosophy and which Buddhism is careful to protect by using the term “non-self”; it is also the total infinite to which Iqbal referred as that which makes finite thinking possible.

It is the source of the many things which can be properly seen and spoken of in our languages, and which Eastern thought refers to as the world of names and forms. Further, it is the source, not only from which the differentiated realities are derived, but of the coming forth itself of these realities. This is reflected in two significant manners. Positively, Eros, which itself is said to come from chaos, is the power which joins together in procreative union the pairs of gods, thereby reflecting the dynamic manifestive and sharing character of the undifferentiated reality. Negatively, this is indicated also by the acts which the *Theogony* describes as evil. For example, it says that “Heaven rejoiced in his evil doing”, namely, hiding away his children in a secret place of Earth as soon as each was born, and not allowing them to come into the light. Cronus is termed “a wretch” for swallowing his children. In each case evil is described as impeding the process by which new realities are brought into existence. This implies that its opposite, the good, involves essentially bringing forth the real. The undifferentiated unity is the origin of the multiple and differentiated; in terms we shall encounter below, it is participative.

### *Unity as Sharing*

It can now be seen that all the progeny, that is, all parts of the universe and all humans, are born into the unity of a family. They trace their origin, not to a pair of ultimately alien realities and certainly not to chaos as conflict, but to undifferentiated Unity. Just as there is no autogenesis, there is no unrelated reality or aspect of reality. It would seem, then, that verses 118-128 of the hymn imply a reality which is one, undifferentiated and therefore unspeakable, but nonetheless essentially generous, sharing and productive of the multiple. Like the totem, for the mythic mind of the Greeks then, beings are more one than many, more related than divided, more complementary than contrasting.

Thusfar we have focused on unity. We began, perhaps too egocentrically, in our separate realities and look for our relation to the One. But the path that leads us there is in reality two way. We have found that it is more basically a genetic pathway coming from the One; this is its deeper truth. Concern with the multiple realities and hence with individuality is integral to the concern of the *Theogony* which indicates much that is important thereto. But the key is its picturing of the multiple, both persons and parts of nature, as generated from the One. This has a number of implications.

First, it shows the One which is the source of all reality and hence reality itself to be expansive and generative, i.e., good. Second, it bespeaks participation, i.e., that it is of the nature of reality to share itself with others, to bear other identities as offspring which, in turn, share and bear still others.

From this it follows that the key to a good life is not holding off or refusing to share. Indeed, this is precisely the way evil is depicted: not as strife, but rather as hiding the children had by heaven and earth, and as Cronus swallowing his children as they came forth from Rhea so that they would not assume his office of king. Strife is not the source of evil, but follows from evil deeds. Thus, even negatively, the character of being is manifest to be good and sharing.

From this appears the proper basis of individuality. It is not opposition or selfish hording; rather individuals are significant to the degree that they participate, share and show forth the goodness of their deeper origin.

In addition this affirmation of the distinctiveness of individuals is not absolute, but derivative. Their generation is via separation in, and of, the originally undifferentiated unity, it is carried out under the impulse of Eros as a unifying factor bringing together the gods in procreative union. Hence, contrary to Hobbes and his sense of man as wolf to man in a war of all against all, or to pragmatic cooperation only for some external, e.g. economic, benefit, individuals are not isolated, much less opposed to one another. Rather, they are in principle positively related and unitive. Marriage is the living discovery of this unity.

In sum, the overall picture of the *Theogony*, which sums up a whole (the Greek) mythic tradition, is that of an original unity. The many gods which, as with the parts of nature they bespeak, come from the One via generative unions. This constitutes an open unity, parallel to that of all in the totem, but capable of taking explicit account of the differences in reality and integrating them. Finally, the identity of each is had not by holding to what it is, but in proclaiming, through sharing, what it has from the One. There is a strong sense of this in African cultures as well as in the image of the Cross as dying in order to live.

As a transformation of the earlier totemic structure, mythic understanding continues the basic totemic insight regarding the related character of all things predicated upon one center for the meaning of all. By

thinking in terms of the gods, however, myth is able to add a number of important factors. First, quantitatively, the myth can integrate, not only a certain tribe or number of tribes, but the entire universe. Second, qualitatively, it can take account of such intentional realities as purpose, fidelity love and care. Third, while still affirming the unitive principle which had been expressed in totemic thought with shocking directness (“I am lion”), it expresses or connotes rather its transcendent, unspeakable, undifferentiated and generous character.

This is the greatness of the human achievement at the level of mythic or imaginative thinking. It enables the various peoples to explore the many avenues of life with its aims and passions and to order these in special ways in which the meaning of life can be appreciated and pursued. These are the cultures and in broader terms the civilization in terms of which we are, and which we are challenged to reconcile in the global age.

### **CRITIQUE OF THE ADEQUACY OF MYTH**

The expression of all this in terms of the mythic forms available to the internal sense of imagination had its temptations. These were pointed out by Xenophanes.<sup>19</sup> One set of fragments from his writing gives classical and somewhat biting expression to its imaginative character.

But mortals believe the gods to be created by birth, and to have their own (mortals’) raiment, voice and body (Fr. 14, Clement, *Stromateis*, V, 109, 2).

Aethiopians have gods with snub noses and black hair, Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair (Fr. 16, *ibid.*, VII, 22, 1).

But if oxen (and horses) and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the form that each species itself possesses (Fr. 15, *ibid.*, V, 109, 3).

This, however, is not the real problem. Rather, Xenophanes noted that by the time of Homer and Hesiod a perfervid imagination had gone from expressing the transcendence of the gods to attributing to them as well the many forms of evil found among men.<sup>20</sup>

Both Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are shameful and a reproach among mankind:

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

theft, adultery, and mutual deception (Fr. 11, Sextus, *Adv. Math.*, IX, 193).

In effect, the very principles of meaning and value had come to point as well to their opposites.

The problem reminds one of the dilemma of Augustine regarding the mystery of evil. While his intellect not only began with material and hence quantitative data received through the senses, but was limited in its work to the characteristics of the external senses or the internal senses of imagination it simply could not treat the issue of reality as such.

While Augustine's thinking remained Manichean and was imaginative in nature the good extending through the universe was always overlapping and intermingling with evil. In these circumstances, being unable to resolve the great human dilemma of evil, he was forced to transcend the picture thinking of the imagination and its essentially extended mode in order to be able to think our this basic issue. In Piaget's terms he had to move to another level of knowledge. Similarly in the situation described by Xenophanes we find the key to the human mind's transcending imaginative and mythic thinking and thereby entering into the realm of philosophy.

If it was no longer sufficient to think in terms of the imagination, then the intellect needed to proceed in its own terms, beyond sense and imagination. This was necessary in order to state formally the absolute unity which was the deeper sense of what totemic thought had stated so directly in saying, "I am lion" and especially to defend what had been stated in the more complex manner of myth in terms of the gods of nature in the anthropomorphic ventures of the imagination. As the mind began to operate in properly intellectual terms, rather than through the images of mythic thinking, it was able to overcome the anthropomorphisms of the myth. This enabled Xenophanes to make explicit that the supreme principle of unity and meaning was transcendent, one, all wise and provident.<sup>21</sup>

There is one god, among gods and men the greatest, not at all like mortals in body or in mind (Fr. 23, Clement, *Strom.*, V, 109, 1).

He sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, and hears as a whole (Fr. 24, Sextus, *Adv. Math.*, IX, 144).

And he always remains in the same place, not moving at all, nor is it fitting for him to change his position at different times (Fr. 26, Simplicius, *Phys.*, 23, 11, 20).

But without toil he sets everything in motion, by the thought of his mind (Fr. 25, *ibid.*, 23, 23, 20).

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Philosophy as a distinct and proper discipline had begun. Proceeding in terms proper to the intellect, in time philosophy would supplant, but never eliminate, myth as a main dimension of human understanding.





### PART III

## THE WESTERN NOTION OF THE PERSON FOR GLOBAL TIMES

Where Part I concerned the modern philosophy of the person and its critique, Part II responded by retrieving the basis of human understanding at the pre-philosophical levels of totem and myth. The totem insured a deep sense of unity, while mythic thought was able to unfold the multiple modes of diversity and complexity. But it did so in terms tied to imagination and this in turn to forms and shapes, to what the mind could think in terms of extension or of symbols cast in such terms. Further progress in the understanding of the person would be possible if the intellect were freed from such constraints and enabled to consider directly the essence and existence of the human person. Hence, Part III will take up both of these in objective and subjective terms in Western philosophy, which Part IV will continue in Eastern terms.

The human person has been defined classically as an “individual substance of a rational nature.” In order to understand this we need to examine closely the steps by which this has been constructed. These consist in the laying of the foundations by which the initial and foundational sense of reality found in the originating totemic thought is brought to light in properly philosophical terms. On this basis it will be possible by Plato’s notion of participation to integrate philosophically the diversity of beings opened by the mythic mind and to provide a way of deciphering the multiple motivations, values and virtues of the human psyche and the related structures of human society.

Aristotle is of special interest to us here in our search for an adequate understanding of what it means to be human. He does this, as Marx directs, not in an idealist manner which takes one away from concrete persons; on the contrary, he proceeds in terms of a realism which is concerned with the human person in space and time.

Finally Marx suggests that even this is not enough, as the person might then be turned into an object. Rather it is necessary to focus ultimately on the person as acting in the world. To provide the philosophical foundation for this we shall look especially to the discovery, or better uncovering, of existence (to echo Heidegger’s sense of truth as an unveiling or *aleitheia*) in Christian philosophy and its elaboration of the sense of the person not only as an individual substance, but as a unique subsistent of a rational nature.



## CHAPTER V

# BUILDING THE NOTION OF THE PERSON IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

### THE PRESOCRATIC INITIATION OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

To review the path thus far, we sought in Part II to understand how philosophical understanding did not emerge suddenly, but grew out of the totemic and mythic traditions sketched in Chapters III and IV. In Chapter III we saw how a process of development takes place when a need arises that cannot be resolved by competencies already possessed. When, however, a new competency must be evoked and developed a dramatic shift in human cultures occurs. This would appear to be the case as the intellect steps beyond the mythic pictures drawn by the imagination to the properly intellectual terms that state the proper nature of the realities involved. This was the point of initiation of philosophy proper.

Following the suggestion of Heidegger that, in confronting major issues, real progress can be made only by a “step back,” Chapter III found that, totemic “primitive” thought was aware that all things formed a unity on the basis of a unique plenitude of being and meaning which was the basis of their reality. Chapter IV concerned myth seen as enabling the content of totemic consciousness to be understood to both transcend and be the origin of a differentiated universe. Hence, the authors of the myths came to be termed “*protoi theologisantes*”.<sup>1</sup>

In the East most do not consider philosophy in the proper sense of the word to have been initiated until the *Upanishads* around the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century BC when the issues were separated from the proximate context of ritual and treated by, if not for, themselves. Aristotle described the wise man, the lover of wisdom or the philosopher, as one capable of universal and difficult knowledge, with greater than ordinary certitude, and able to identify causes and seek knowledge for its own sake.<sup>2</sup> This set of characteristics need not be definitive for every culture, and Aristotle suggested it only as an inductive model.

It is time now to turn directly to the development of such philosophic thought in order to determine the distinctive sense of unity and diversity able to be developed by properly philosophical thought and its corresponding cultures. It is not that no attention had been given to these issues in earlier times. Indeed, they concern the most essential requirements for human life, and as seen above their understanding had been the central human concern of totemic and mythic ages.

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<sup>1</sup> Jaeger, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1, 1, 981-982.

But the essential and, at the time, yet unclarified role played by the imagination in the mytho-poetic mind, despite its major and still indispensable contributions, did not enable the development of a set of proper and precise intellectual terms. Once this problem was overcome it became possible to proceed by well coordinated processes of knowledge such as analysis and logical inquiry, synthesis and theory building,<sup>3</sup> to immediate and self-certifying awareness.<sup>4</sup> These processes would construct systems because, in the order of thought as in that of reality, unity is the touchstone of reality. In time each system would generate its own school, and in this manner the main body of philosophic work would be carried out. This chapter will concern the development of the capacity for systematic work in philosophy in the West and the contribution it can make to an improved objective understanding of the human person.

If development follows upon need, the words of Xenophanes provide insight into the evolution of the Greek mind from myth to philosophy. As recounted at the end of Chapter IV above, he showed how the imaginative element in myth had enticed men to envisage the gods in an inauthentic manner. Rather than principles of unity, truth and goodness, some gods had come to be exemplars of strife, deceit and all manner of evil.<sup>5</sup>

Something analogous is to be found in the history of Indian philosophy. After a long period of Hinduism the imagination had so corrupted the original purity and sacred character of its rites that a reform was needed, which was provided by Buddha. In turn, the Lord Buddha himself predicted that his Sangha would last for only 1000 years, and indeed some 1000 years later it was ripe for the reform realized by Shankara.

Xenophanes proceeded by suppressing the imaginative factor and stated the meaning of the gods in more proper and specifically intellectual terms.

In these terms he demonstrated a way for philosophy to state these crucial realities in terms which were susceptible to clear and controlled reasoning. Philosophy had been born.

Once begun, philosophy made spectacular and rapid progress. Within but a few generations, the human intellect had worked out a structure of the physical world using the basic categories of hot and cold, wet and dry, made available by the external senses, along with mechanisms of vortex motion.<sup>6</sup> Mathematical reason worked with the internal senses to

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-13; "St. Thomas's Thought on *Gratia Operans*," *Theological Studies*, III (1942), 573-74.

<sup>5</sup> McLean and Aspell, *Readings*, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Anaximander, fragments, see McLean and Aspell, *Readings*, pp. 14-17; McLean and Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy*, pp. 22-28.

lay down the basic theorems of geometry.<sup>7</sup> In brief, by developing properly intellectual terms the Greeks elaborated with new and hitherto unknown precision insights regarding physical reality.

But that had never been the root human issue. Totemic and mythic thought were not ways of understanding and working merely with nature, although they did that as well. Fundamentally, they concerned the metaphysical and religious issues of what it means to be, the divine unity as basis of life, the religious terms in which this needs to be lived and the implications for the unity of a diversified world.

Characteristically, the Greek philosophical mind carried out this search in abstract, rather than concrete, terms. By focusing upon a certain aspect of reality and omitting all else it developed clear and cohesive understanding. Even in employing such basic terms as air, fire, and water it considered them as principles which, when combined in various ratios of hot and cold, humid and dry, constitute whatever concretely exists. Where a single element, such as fire or water, was singled out this was due to its ability to explain the many states of things. Thus, for example, water, because it can exist in solid, liquid and gaseous states, was able to provide some unified and universal understanding for the entire diversified realm of physical reality. Dasgupta would claim, against Shankara, that the *Upanishads* viewed the development of real beings in the world as a similar process of combining elements.<sup>8</sup>

This abstract approach to understanding the unity of all was carried to an initial summit in the reasoning of Anaximander (611-547 BC). He proceeded beyond the four basic elements and their combinations, noting that what is most basic in reality must endure through all physical states, unite them all, and enable them to be significant for one another. The principle must, therefore, be neither hot nor cold, neither wet nor dry; it must be without any of the boundaries or limits expressed by names and forms which delimit or define things as contraries. This unlimited was stated negatively as the *apeiron* or “unbounded,” that is, the non-specified or undifferentiated.<sup>9</sup>

The search, for a positive statement of this unity continued. Pythagoras (c580-500) thought it consisted in numbers. Even Heraclitus, the classical proponent of diversity, was engaged in the same search for unity, for through all diversity he sought the unity of the *logos*. Thus, he considered fire to be the basic principle because, though darting up and dying down, it manifests throughout a certain unified form or shape. Both Pythagoras and Heraclitus recognized a certain unity and difference in what was numbered or changing, but on their level of abstraction the issue of the

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<sup>7</sup> McLean and Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy*, ch. III.

<sup>8</sup> Dasgupta, I, 53, See Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (New York: Dover, 1966), pp. 182-95, 237-39.

<sup>9</sup> Jaeger, pp. 24-36.

reality of that unity and diversity which had been the fundamental insight of totem and myth could not be directly confronted.

To do so would require a new level of insight regarding the fundamental unity indicated by totem and myth. This would require that the intellect work not only in terms of the external senses as with the totem nor with the internal senses as with myth, but in its own proper terms. That would be the proper work of Parmenides who would bring to explicit consciousness the foundation of beings on which the totemists built the earliest known mode of social life.

*Parmenides: Being as the One Foundation of Human Life and Action*

Parmenides is the father of metaphysics in the West precisely because he deepened the level of thought of his early predecessors in philosophy in order to be able to speak, not merely of this or that kind of thing, but of being or reality as such. It is important to note that for Parmenides this knowledge (*noeton*) is not simply a product of human reasoning. Like the *Theogony* and the *Vedas*; it is the divine knowledge found in the response of the goddess, Justice. Euripides held that the *nous* in each person is divine. Plato identified this as the fourth level of knowledge in the line/cave allegory when one encountered directly the fire or sun, i.e., the light itself by which all is made intelligible and known. For Aristotle it is by the *nous* that we immediately recognize the first principles and premises upon which deduction is based.

In the *proemium* of his famous poem Parmenides moves seamlessly, but dramatically from myth to philosophy. Speaking still in the language of myth, Parmenides described a scene in which he was awakened by goddesses and sent in a chariot drawn by faithful mares along the arching highway that spans all things. In this process he moved from obscurity to light, from opinion to truth. There, the gates were opened by the goddess, Justice, as guardian of true judgement, and he was directed by her to examine all things in order to discern the truth.

Such an examination must be a search for *noeton* or the intelligible in contrast to the *aistheton*, the perceptible, the physical or bodily. The latter knowledge is deceptive and dependent upon the physical organs of the body; in contrast *noein* is true knowledge of reality itself. It is of *noein* that he says, "It is the same thing to think and to be."<sup>10</sup> Neither *aistheton* nor, *a fortiori*, Locke's exclusively sensible perception or verification, but intellection is the norm of being and hence of meaning: *noein* is meaning, notes Guthrie.<sup>11</sup> This has been the crucial and decisive foundation for Western thought up to the present—and hence the measure of the crisis at

<sup>10</sup> McLean and Aspell, *Readings*, p. 40, fr. 3.

<sup>11</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Earlier PreSocratics and the Pythagoreans*, Vol. I of *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1962), p. 41.

this entrance into the 3rd millenium A.D. For Western thought since its beginnings the path of intelligibility has been that of being; conversely what is not intelligible, what is without meaning, is not real. Because the requirements of intelligibility are those of being and vice versa, a science of being is possible which will concern all reality without remainder. No valid question of being is in principle without an answer for "It is the same thing to think and to be."<sup>12</sup> Inasmuch as that science depends upon *noeton* (intelligence) rather than *aistheton* (sensibility), it must be a meta-physics.

Note that here, as with totemic thought, thinking and being are one. Marx's great discontent with most of modern thought was that thinking had separated itself from being and in its many ramifications had been exploring pathway not of reality but of the mind, which he referred to as idealism. Hence it will be important for an understanding of the reality of the life of the person to watch for the ways in which ideas can be separated from life and especially how thinking can be a real road into, rather than away from, reality.

With intelligibility as the criterion of being, Parmenides proceeded on the basis of that which is immediately intellected, namely, "that Being is; . . . nothingness is not possible."<sup>13</sup> He concluded that being itself and as such does not include negation or hence differentiation. That is, "to be" cannot be the same as "not to be". This principle of non-contradiction was a construct of the mind. Like *pi* in geometry it was good to think with. It enabled the mind to reflect upon the requirements of both being and mind, and to avoid anything that would undermine their reality. He thereby was able to reason as follows: any coming into or going out of being, any divisions or motion, indeed any differentiation would need to be predicated upon either what is or what is not. But, on the one hand, this could not be based upon being for, as being already is, no differentiation is possible thereby. But neither could difference be based upon what is not, because, what is not, cannot generate, differentiate, do or be anything.<sup>14</sup> Hence, being itself and as such cannot begin, change or be multiple.

Parmenides then imagines himself proceeding further along the highway of being<sup>15</sup> until he comes to a fork with a signpost pointing toward "beginning" or to a supposed way of being which would include in its essence that it begins. Parmenides reasons regarding the implications of such a route that because "to begin" means to move from nonbeing or nothingness to being, then were "to be" to include "to begin" that would mean that being included within its very essence nonbeing or nothingness. There would then be no difference between being and nothing: being would

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<sup>12</sup> McLean and Aspell, *Readings*, p. 40, fr. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40, fr. 3 and 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43, fr. 8. See Guthrie, pp. 28-29.

<sup>15</sup> Fragment 8; see Alexander P.D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides: A Study of Word, Images, and Argument in the Fragment* (New Haven: Yale, 1970).

be without meaning; the real would be nothing at all. If conversely, from this notion of beginning such nonbeing is removed, then it would not begin, but would be eternal. The possibility of taking the fork which would have being as essentially beginning is excluded; being cannot be essentially beginning, but must be eternal. Thus, this is the first requirement of being. Hence, all that begins must be derived from Being.

The chariot then moves along the highway of being and the procedure is analogous at the two subsequent forks in the road where the signposts tempt one to consider being as changing and as multiple, respectively. Each of these, Parmenides reasons, would place nonbeing within being itself, which would destroy its very character as being. Nonbeing is contained in the notion of change, inasmuch as a changing being is *no* longer what it had been and *not* yet what it will become. But for nonbeing to pertain to the essence of being would destroy being. When, however, nonbeing is removed then being emerges as unchanging. Similarly, nonbeing is essential to the notion of multiplicity, inasmuch as this requires that one being *not* be the other. When, however, nonbeing is removed what emerges is one. These then are the characteristics of being: it is infinite and eternal, unchanging and one.

Being as such transcends the multiple and changing world in which we live: it exists in a manner more perfect than could possibly be appreciated in the graphic, figurative and hence extended terms of the internal sense of imagination which characterized the mind in its mythic mode or stage of development.

In this way Parmenides discerned the necessity of one, eternal and unchanging Being—whatever be said of anything else. Neither being nor thought make sense if being is in any way the same as nonbeing, for then to do, say or be anything would be the same as not doing, not saying or not being. If what is real is irreducible to nothing and being is irreducible to nonbeing—as it must be if there is any thing or any meaning whatsoever—then being must have about it the self-sufficiency expressed by Parmenides's notion of the absolute One.

One can refuse to look at this issue and focus upon particular aspects of limited realities. But if one confronts the issue of being it leads to the One Self-sufficient Being as the creative source of all else. Without this all limited beings would be radically compromised—not least, human beings themselves. It is not surprising, therefore, that the painstaking journey of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* in search of the nature of being would conclude in life divine.<sup>16</sup>

The issue then is not how the notion of the One that is the source of the unity of all first entered human thought; it has always been there. This is true not only as fact, as seen in totemic and mythic thought, but in principle as shown by Greek philosophy. For without that which is One, humanity would be at odds with nature, and lack social cohesion. Without that which

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<sup>16</sup> *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072 b 26-29.



is Absolute, in the sense of infinite and self-sufficient, thinking would be the same as not thinking, and being would be the same as nonbeing.

It is unfortunate that attention has been directed almost solely to Parmenides's negation of differentiation, and that this has been taken as a negation of differentiation between beings and hence of multiple beings, rather than the separation of being from nonbeing. What is central is his direct and lucid clarification is:

- that being is, is one, and is intelligible;
- that it is absolute or fullness of perfection, and self-sufficient standing in definitive contrast to nothingness;<sup>17</sup>
- that as such it is self-explanatory or able to justify itself before *nous*; and
- that it is the ground of all metaphysics or understanding of being.

In this Parmenides worked out with the clarity of direct intellection what the totemic peoples had discovered at the dawn of human life, indeed the basic truth for a life that is human, namely, that all reality is in some sense one with a reality that is itself One. In stating this Parmenides was able to confront directly and for the first time, not merely the fact of differentiation among beings, but the issue of the reality of such differentiation. It is neither surprising nor of great importance that he was not able to resolve this issue. What is important is that due to his contribution the Western mind was able to go to work on the issue. No longer limited to asking about particular differences between specific beings or groups of beings, it could now begin to enquire directly concerning the radical question of the reality and bases of differentiation. In time Parmenides insight would lead to the discovery of one's own uniqueness and the nature of one's relation to others. Progress in the understanding of the person—as philosophers East and West observe—lies in understanding how this unity is lived, not destroyed, and that whatever meaning there be to the many is had in terms of the one.

Simplicius and others concluded from the first half of his Poem that for Parmenides not only must there be one being which was absolute, but that there could be nothing else. This, however, does not at all fit with the second, longer half of the Parmenides' Poem, which treats at great length the many changing beings of the universe. Hence, it would appear to be a more correct reading of the first section of his text that being requires the one infinite unchanging and eternal Being, i.e., an Absolute which transcends the world of multiple and changing beings, and on which the universe of changing reality depends. But how the universe of multiple beings described in the second part of his Poem is related to the One, in particular how man is related to or founded in the One, is not worked out by Parmenides. It could be expected, however, that whoever would work out

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<sup>17</sup> McLean and Aspell, *Readings*, pp. 42-43, fr. 8.

this relation of the many to the One would thereby be the father of the Greek—and hence of the Western—philosophical tradition.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

### *Plato: Man as Image of the One*

It is no accident then that the great figures, Plato (429-348) and Aristotle (384-322), who marked out the major paths in Western philosophy should follow Parmenides in rapid succession. Once directly confronted with the unity of reality and by implication with the issue of the reality of differentiation, the Greek mind had either to accept the skeptical position of the sophists which excluded any basis for organized civil life, or to begin some steps toward the resolution of the issue. These steps proceeded along the route of Plato's notion of participation of the many in the One. Based on this Whitehead considered all subsequent Western philosophy to be essentially a series of footnotes to Plato's work.

On the one hand, the search was directed toward those factors by which an individual being is most properly him- or herself. This required revisiting Parmenides discussion of non-being. As the principle by which multiple beings are distinct one from another non-being meant not absolute nothingness as with Parmenides but had also the sense of 'not-that-being',<sup>18</sup> by which one thing is not the other: i.e. Tom is *not* John. Along with being, this type of non-being is a component principle of each of the multiple things. Added to Parmenides sense of non-being as absolute nothingness Plato saw non-being as not-that being to be the key to difference and distinctiveness of beings.

On the other hand, that the community of things is similar or alike requires a source which itself is one. Because John, Agnes and Thomas are alike as humans, their forms share, partake, or participate in the one form of humanity. This form is not limited to the perfection of any one person, but is itself the fullness of the perfection of humankind. Like the totem, it is able to be participated in by an indefinite number of humans. To participate means to have one's being in derivation from, and hence as image of, Being itself. Hence, I am by imaging or participating; imaging is not simply what I do; it is what I am.

For Plato moreover, the object of the mind is the idea or form as the exemplar which "completely is" the reality of all that can be realized in that manner. This form is "perfectly knowable"<sup>19</sup> and the many instances are related as images to that one, either as sensible objects or as more differentiated forms to less differentiated ones. What is essential, as is manifest in Plato's later solution of the problems raised in his *Parmenides*, is that the relation of participation (*mimesis* or *methexis*) not be added to

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 259 A.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 248 E.

multiple being as already constituted, but be constitutive of them: their reality is precisely to image.

This implies that the original forms are ontological dimensions of reality which transcend the series of concrete individuals. They are spoken of as ideas or forms in contrast to concrete particulars. The highest of these ideas is the Good or the One in which all else share or participate precisely as images thereof.<sup>20</sup> This permits a more balanced and less imaginative interpretation of Plato's references in his *Republic* to "remembering" ideas. Rather than being taken literally to imply prior states of the soul, they express the personal development of one's awareness of the reality of a higher or deeper ontological realm and its significance for one's life. They have memory's directness and certitude, but like the source of light in Plato's allegory of the line/cave they are known by the Greek *nous*, and characterize the relation of the intellect to the source of all being and meaning.

By philosophizing in this mode of participation one escapes becoming trapped in the alternative of either constructing personal but arbitrary intellectual schemata, or elaborating an impersonal science. Philosophizing is rather a gradual process of discovery, of entering ever more deeply into the values which we have in order to comprehend them more clearly in themselves and in their source. Because progressive sharing or participating in this source is the very essence of human growth and development, the work of philosophizing and the religious sensibility implicit in this notion of participation is neither an addenda to life nor merely about life. Rather, as was seen regarding totem and myth, philosophy and religion are central to the life process of human growth itself and at the highest level; from this process humanity draws its primal discoveries.

*Aristotle: Man as Individual Substance; Being in One's Own Right*

Though Plato began the philosophical elaboration of the notion of participation, as his method was dialectical he did not construct a system. His terms remained fluid and his dialogues ended with further questions. It was left to his pupil, Aristotle, to develop the means for more rigorous or systematic work in philosophy. For this Aristotle elaborated a formal logic for the strict codification of forms or terms, their cognition in judgments, and the coordination of judgments into patterns of syllogistic reasoning. With this tool he was able to outline the pattern of the sciences which have played so dominant a role in the Western world to this day.

Moreover, Plato's philosophy of participation as imaging had been conducive to using "reflections" or shadows, e.g. of trees on the surface of a stream, as a simile of the physical world,<sup>21</sup> but in turn it suggested that the

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<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 509.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 509-511.

physical world of individual beings might not be truly real. To Aristotle this threatened the reality of the material and differentiated universe. Reducing reality to idea threatened to create the idealism which indeed would emerge in the rationalist context of modern thought. Hence, he soon abandoned the use of the term “participation” and gave great attention to the changing of physical things, which he saw to be the route to the discovery of the active character of individual beings.

Caution must be exercised here, however, lest the search for the individual person appear to reinforce the excesses of self-centeredness and individualism. This has tended to be a special danger in the context of some Western cultures whose stress on self-reliance and independence has been rooted historically in an atomistic and nominalistic understanding of persons as individuals, single and unrelated. This danger is reflected, for example, in the common law understanding of judicial rulings not as defining the nature of interpersonal relations, but simply as reducing violence through resolving conflicts between individuals whose lives happen to have intersected.

In this regard, it is helpful to note that when Aristotle laid the foundations for the Western understanding of the person he did so in the context of the Greek understanding of the physical universe as a unified, dynamic, quasi life-process in which all was included and all were related. Indeed, the term ‘physical’ was derived from the term for growth and the components of this process were seen always with, and in relation to, each other. (Similarly, modern physical theory identifies a uniform and all-inclusive pattern of relations such that any physical displacement, no matter how small, affects all other bodies). Within this unified pattern of relations the identification of multiple individuals, far from being destructive of unity, provides the texture required for personal life. Where individuals are differentiated by the moral tenor of their actions, which, in turn, make a difference to other persons, distinctiveness becomes, not an impediment to, but a principle of, community.<sup>22</sup>

In order better to appreciate the members of a community, it is helpful to consider them in three progressively more specific dimensions: first, as instances of a particular type, that is, as substances; secondly, as existing, that is, as subsisting individuals; and thirdly, as self-conscious, that is, as persons. The order in which these three will be considered is not accidental, for the former are required for the later. Moreover, while it is necessary to be of a certain definite type, it is more important to exist as an individual in one’s own right; for the person, finally, it is important above all that the individual have the unique singularity of one who is self-aware, free and hence responsible. Hence, our exposition begins with substance and the subsisting individual in order to identify some general and basic--

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<sup>22</sup> See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper, 1959); Wilfrid Desan, *The Planetary Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

though not specific or exclusive--characteristics of the person. What is distinctive of the person, namely, self-awareness and freedom, will be treated in the subsequent sections.

It was Aristotle who identified substance as the basic component of the physical order; his related insights remain fundamental to understanding the individual as the subject of moral life. His clue to this basic discovery appears in language. Comparing the usage of such terms as "running," and "runner" one finds that the first is applied to the second, which, however, is not said, in turn, of anything else.<sup>23</sup> Thus, one may say of Mary that she is running, but one may not say that she is another person, e.g., John. This suggests the need to distinguish things which have their identity in their own right (e.g., Mary and John) from those that can be realized only in another (as running is had only in a runner, e.g., Mary) whence they derive their identity (the running is Mary's and distinct from any running that John might do).

Hence, a first and basic characteristic of the moral subject, and indeed of any substance, is that it has its identity in its own right rather than through another; only thus could human beings be responsible for their action. Without substances with their distinct identities, one could envisage only a structure of ideals and values inhabited, as it were, by agents without meaning or value. In this light the task of moral education would be merely to enable one to judge correctly according to progressively higher ideals. Aristotle points instead to a world of persons developing virtues and realizing values in their actions. In their complex reality of body, affections and mind they act morally and are the subjects of moral education.

Secondly, as the basic building blocks in the constitution of a world, these individuals are not merely undetermined masses. As the basic points of reference in discourse and the bases of the intelligibility of the world these individuals must possess some essential determinateness and be of one or another kind or form. The individual, then, is not simply one unit indifferently contrasted to all others; he or she is a being of a definite nature or kind—in this case, humankind,<sup>24</sup> relating in a distinctively human manner to other beings, each with their own nature or kind. Only thus can one's life in the universe have sense and be able to be valued.

Thirdly, being of a definite kind the individual has its own proper characteristics and is able to realize a specific or typical set of activities. These activities derive from, or are "born of" (from the Latin, *natus*) the substance which therefore is termed a specific *nature*. The determination of what activity is moral will need to include, not only the good to be derived from the action, but respect for the agent and his or her nature.

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<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I, 4 73 a 3\_b 25.

<sup>24</sup> René Claix "La statut ontologique du concept de sujet selon le metaphysique d'Aristot. L'aporie de *Metaph.* VII (Z) 3," *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 59 (61), 29.

In the search for the person the work of Aristotle has made an essential contribution by directing our attention to three factors, namely: (a) individual beings, (b) who are particular instances of a definite kind, and hence (c) capable of specific types of activities. It should be noted that all three are concerned with the kind or type of the agent.<sup>25</sup>

By a careful coordination of the sciences of the physical world through a study of their general principles and causes in the *Physics*, and by relating the *Physics* to the *Metaphysics*, he clarified the relation of all changing things to a first principle. This principle is described in *Metaphysics XII* as subsistent knowledge and divine life.<sup>26</sup> To this all things are related as to their ultimate final cause which they imitate, each according to its own nature. Thus, the source, if not the system, of participation received important philosophical elaboration.

This notion of participation according to which the many derive their being from the One which they manifest and toward which they are oriented and directed, would subsequently provide the basic model for what the Chinese refer to as “outer” transcendence or the relation of creatures to God. In Plato’s thought, however, the order of forms was relatively passive, rather than active. Hence, the supreme One or Good was the passive object of contemplation by the highest Soul, which was conscious and active. Most scholars, therefore, consider the highest Soul or contemplator in Plato’s thought, rather than the highest One or Good upon which it contemplates, to correspond to his notion of the divine.

Aristotle’s philosophy, in contrast, began with changing beings available to the senses and discovered that such being must be composed of the principles of form as act and of matter as potency. As a result, his sense of being was axised upon form as a principle of act in the process of active physical change—which literally was “trans-formation”. Consequently, when in his *Metaphysics* he undertook the search for the nature of being or for what was meant by being, he tracked this from accidents such as colors which can exist only in something else to substances which exist in themselves. Inevitably, this same process led him to the highest of such substances which is or exists in the most perfect manner, that is, as knowing and indeed as knowing on knowing itself (*noesis noeseos*). This he referred to as life divine.<sup>27</sup> It is the culmination of his philosophy because it brings him to the very heart of the order of being—the goal of becoming and acting—and, hence, of reality itself. Joseph Owens<sup>28</sup> would conclude from his investigation of being as the subject of Aristotle’s metaphysics that for Aristotle being was primarily the one Absolute Being and was extended to

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<sup>25</sup> *Metaphysics*, VII 4-7.

<sup>26</sup> *Noesis noeseos*: “Thought thinks itself as object in virtue of its participation in what is thought,” *Metaphysics XII*, 1072 b 19-29.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being, The Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought* (Toronto: PIMS, 1951).

all things by a *pros hen* analogy; that is, all things are beings precisely to the extent that they stand in relation to the Absolute and divine One, which transcends all else.

In Aristotle's philosophy being was primarily substance; what changed was the composit or *synolon* of form and matter; substance was not the composite, but the form only.<sup>29</sup> As a result, his detailed scientific or systematic process of coordinating various types of being and identifying their principles was predicated upon forms which lent themselves to abstraction and universalization. The physical universe could be understood only as an endless cycle of formation and dissolution, of which the individual was but a function. Therefore, the freedom and significance of the individual were not adequately accounted for.

Further, while the individual's actions were stimulated and patterned—each in its own way—upon the one objectless Knower (*noesis noeseos*) as final cause, the many individuals were not caused thereby, derived therefrom or known by that principle of all meaning. Thus, though intense human concern is expressed in hellenic dramas which reflect the heritage of human meaning as lived in the family and in society, Greek philosophic understanding was much more specialized and restricted, particularly as regards the significance of the person.

More could not be expected while being was understood in terms of form alone. If, however, the meaning of the human person in this world of names and forms is of key importance today in both East and West; if the protection and promotion of the person becomes increasingly problematic as our world becomes more industrialized and technological; and if the search for freedom and human rights is central to our contemporary search to realize a decent society—then it will be necessary to look to further developments of the notion of being. Moreover, in these global times when interaction is not merely in terms of individual or even of nation but of peoples who identify themselves in terms of their cultures and civilizations which, as notes S. Huntington, are grounded in their religions then it will be necessary to look again at the roots of unity in divine life which we have been tracing from totemic times in order to appreciate further the role of religion in both founding and interrelating human life. Philosophy will proceed to create higher levels of equilibria by retrieving and making explicit more of what was meant by Parmenides's One than had been articulated in the Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, the fact that the thought of Plato and Aristotle was not brought into a synthesis by Aristotle himself suggests that it simply was not possible to do so in terms merely of form as was the manner of understanding in those times. Thus, in order to draw upon the full contribution of both Plato's notion of participation and Aristotle's systematic structures it is necessary to look to a

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<sup>29</sup> A. Mansion, "Positions Maîtresses de la philosophie d'Aristote," in *Aristote et Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Université de Louvain, 1955), pp. 58-67.

significantly deepened understanding of being, namely, being not as form, but as existing.

### **THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE AS LIFE IN GOD**

Above we saw the suggestion of Liu Fangtong that perhaps Marx had been misinterpreted when read in the rationalist terms of modern thought, whereas what was important to him was the technical structure of social change. Standing Hegel on his head the reality to be treated was matter, while the structure or laws of the dialectic remained the same. Indeed no other principles were effectively available to him in the context of the closed rationalist modern mind. The “contribution” then of Engels was to systematize Marx’s turn to matter. In fact this meant that it would be the formal factor which would prevail with the result that Marxists, despite Marx, would take their place among the idealists.

What Marx was really concerned about, states Liu Fangtong, was not matter, but the action and interaction of peoples and ways in which they could be liberated. In other words his insight really concerned not formal—and thus ideal—structures or essences, but activity or actions. To follow out this inspiration one needs then to turn not from form to matter, for that leaves one within the same field of essence, dealing with nations and kinds. The real inversion which Marx rightly sought was to break beyond the field of essence and its rationalist clarification and to turn to the order of act and action, that is, to the order of existence.

This was made clear in recent times by Sartre and others who came to be termed existentialists. Unfortunately, still suffering the limitations of modern rationalism they constructed existence alone into an internally consistent system, thereby excluding essence. The result was not just a restoration of existence but the new idealism or ideology of existentialism.

What is needed instead is an open field in which both essence and existence can be recognized and understood in a mutually complementary relationship. They cannot be two beings juxtaposed as would need to be the case in terms of sense knowledge of material and hence extended realities. Hence such knowledge would need to go beyond not only the external sense of sight and touch, but the internal senses of imagination which pictures or configures reality.

Thus we come to a decisive point in the development of philosophy. Just as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century physicists broke into the atom, deciphered its inner structure, and thereby were able to make great advances in comprehending the entire physical universe, we must ask if philosophers have ever been able to break into the composition of beings to decipher their inner composition by which they are of particular kinds (individual and genera) and are also in act and acting according to their kind or nature.



In Western philosophy the discovery of existence was the task accomplished by the Christian thinkers during the first millennium. The discovery of its inner relation to essence as the constitution of being was the achievement of Islamic and Christian philosophers in the first half of the second millennium (1000-1500).

For this we will look to Christian philosophy for the emergence of being as act, indeed as existence or the act of all acts. This was the special contribution of Christian philosophy and the key to its many innovations; it characterized the thought of Thomas whence this gained prestige in modern Christian circles

Although Greek philosophy grew out of an intensive mythic sense of life in which all was a reflection of the will of the gods, nonetheless, it presupposed matter always to have existed. As a result, its attention and concern was focused upon the forms by which matter was determined to be of one type rather than of another. For Aristotle, physical or material things in the process of change from one form to another were the most manifest realities and his philosophizing began therefrom. This approach to philosophy, beginning from sense encounters with physical beings, corresponded well to our human nature as spirit and body, and could be extended to the recognition of divine life. But Iqbal wants more; for him, as had been intuited spontaneously and foundationally by the early totemic thinkers, "It is in fact the presence of the total infinite in the movement of knowledge that makes finite thinking possible."<sup>30</sup> The Greek philosophical awareness of what it meant to be real would need considerable enrichment in order to be able to appreciate the foundational significance for human thought of its grounding in a fully transcendent and infinite Being.

The new equilibrium would have three components: (a) the development in the awareness of the meaning of being as existence; (b) its fruition through Plato's insight regarding the participation of the many in Parmenides's One; and (c) the systematization of both (a) and (b) by the tools of Aristotle's scientific philosophy. As Plato's contribution (b) had been continually employed, what was required was the discovery of being as existence (a) which took place with the early Christian Fathers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was systematized with the rediscovery of Aristotle's works (c) which took place a thousand years later.

#### *Being as Existing: To Live*

*Greek Dependence on Matter.* Development in the understanding of being required transcending the Greek notion which had meant simply to be of a certain differentiated type or kind. This meaning was transformed through the achievement of an explicit awareness of the act of existence (*esse*) in terms of which being could be appreciated directly in its active and self-assertive character. The precise basis for this expansion of the

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<sup>30</sup> Iqbal, p. 4.

appreciation of being from form to existence is difficult to identify in a conclusive manner, but some things are known.

Because the Greeks had considered matter (*hyle*—the stuff of which things were made) to be eternal, no direct questions arose concerning the existence or non-existence of things. As there always had been matter, the only real questions for the Greeks concerned the shapes or forms under which it existed. Only at the conclusion of the Greek and the beginning of the medieval period did Plotinus (205-270 A.D.), rather than simply presupposing matter, attempt the first philosophical explanation of its origin. It was, he explained, the light from the One which, having been progressively attenuated as it emanated ever further from its source, finally had turned to darkness.<sup>31</sup> This obviously is not very satisfactory, but whence came this new sensitivity to reality which enabled him even to raise such a question?

It is known that shortly prior to Plotinus the Christian Fathers had this awareness. They explicitly opposed the Greeks' simple supposition of matter; they affirmed that, like form, matter too needed to be explained and traced the origin of both form and matter to the Pantocrator.<sup>32</sup> In doing this they extended to matter the general principle of *Genesis*, that all was dependent upon the One who created heaven and earth. In doing this two insights appear to have been significant.

*Beyond Form and Matter.* First, it was a period of intensive attention to the Trinitarian character of the divine. To understand Christ to be God Incarnate it was necessary to understand Him to be Son sharing fully in the divine nature.

This required that in the life of the Trinity his procession from the Father be understood to be in a unity of nature: the Son, like the Father, must be fully of the one and same divine nature. This made it possible to clarify, by contrast, the formal effect of God's act in creating limited and differentiated beings. This could not be in a unity of nature for it resulted, not in a coequal divine Person, but in a creature radically dependent for its being. But to push the question beyond simply an issue of nature or kind of being is to open directly the issue of the reality of beings, and hence not only of their form, but of their matter as well. This is to ask not only how things are of this or that kind, but how they exist at all rather than not exist. It constituted an evolution in the human awareness of being, of what it means to be real. This was no longer simply the compossibility of two forms, which Aristotle had taken as a sufficient response to the first scientific question "whether it existed"; instead to be real means to exist or to stand in some relation thereto.

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<sup>31</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, II 5(25), ch. v.

<sup>32</sup> Maurizio Flick and Zoltan Alszeghy, *Il Creatore, l'inizio della salvezza* (Firenze: Lib. Ed. Fiorentina, 1961), pp. 32-49.

By the same stroke, our self-awareness and will were deepened dramatically. They no longer were restricted to focusing upon choices between various external objects and life styles—the common but superficial contemporary meaning of what Adler terms a circumstantial freedom of self-realization—nor even to Kant’s choosing as one ought after the manner of an acquired freedom of self-perfection. Both of these remain within the context of being as nature or essence. The freedom opened by the conscious assumption and affirmation of one’s own existence was rather a natural freedom of self-determination with responsibility for one’s very being.<sup>33</sup>

Paul Tillich would suggest a phenomenological progression of deepening awareness of being by reflecting upon the experience of being totally absorbed in the particularities of one’s job, business, farm or studies—the prices, the colors, the chemicals—and then encountering an imminent danger of death, the loss of a loved one or the birth of a child. At the moment of death, as at the moment of birth, the entire atmosphere and range of preoccupations in a hospital room shifts dramatically. Suddenly they are transformed from tactical adjustments for limited objectives to confronting existence, in sorrow or in joy, in terms that plunge one to the center of the entire range of meaning. Such was the effect upon philosophy when human awareness expanded and deepened, from concern merely with this or that *kind* of reality, to the act of existence in contrast to non-existence; and hence to human life in all its dimensions; and, ultimately to its source and goal.

*The Philosophical Impact of Redemption: Radical Freedom.* Cornelio Fabro goes further. He suggests that this deepened metaphysical sense of being in the early Christian ages not only opened the possibility for a deeper sense of freedom, but was itself catalyzed by the new sense of freedom proclaimed in the religious message.

I say “catalyzed”, not “deduced from,” which would be the way of science rather than of culture. Where the former looks for principles from which conclusions are deduced of necessity, a culture is a creative work of freedom. A religious message inspires and invites; it provides a new vantage point from which all can be reinspected and rethought; its effects are pervasive and enduring. This was the case with the Christian *kerygma*.

That message focused not upon Plato’s imagery of the sun at the mouth of the cave from which external enlightenment might be derived, but upon, the eternal Word or *Logos*, the Son who entered the cave unto death so that all might rise to new existence.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with  
God, and the word was God.

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<sup>33</sup> Mortimer Adler, *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conception of Freedom* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), I, 609.

The same was in the beginning with God.  
All things were made by him: and without him was made  
nothing that was made.  
In him was life, and the life was the light of men.  
And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not  
comprehend it.  
...

That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that  
cometh into this world.<sup>34</sup>

But this was more than light to the mind. Christ's resurrection was also a freeing of the soul from sin and death. Fabro suggests that reflection upon one's free response to the divine redemptive invitation was key to the development of the awareness of being as existence. The radically total and unconditioned character of this invitation and response goes beyond any limited facet of one's reality, and/or particular consideration according to time, occupation or the like. It is rather the direct self-affirmation of one's total actuality. Its sacramental symbol is not one of transformation or improvement; it is not a matter merely of reformation. Instead, it is resurrection from the waters of death to radically new life. This directs the mind beyond any generic, specific or even individual form to the unique reality that I am as a self for whom living is freely to exercise or dispose of my very act of existence. It opened a new awareness of being as that existence by which beings stand outside of nothing ("ex-sto")—and not merely to some minimum extent, but to the full extent of their actuality, which Fabro calls an intensive notion of being.

This power of being bursting into time:

- directs the mind beyond the ideological poles of species and individual interests, and beyond issues of place or time as limited series or categories;
- centers, instead, upon the unique reality of the person as a participation in the creative power of God—a being bursting into existence, which is and cannot be denied;
- rejects being considered in any sense as nonbeing, or being treated as anything less than its full reality;
- is a self, or in Iqbal's term an 'ego', affirming its own unique actuality and irreducible to any specific group identity; and
- is image of God for whom life is sacred and sanctifying, a child of God for whom to be is freely to dispose of the power of new life in brotherhood with all humankind.

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<sup>34</sup> John I:1-5, 8.

It took a long time for the implications of this new appreciation of existence and its meaning to germinate and find its proper philosophic articulation. Over a period of many centuries the term ‘form’ was used to express both kind or nature and the new sense of being as existence. As the distinction between the two became gradually clearer, however, proper terminology arose in which that by which a being is of this or that kind came to be expressed by the term ‘essence,’ while the act of existence by which a being simply is was expressed by ‘existence’ (*esse*).<sup>35</sup> The relation between the two was under intensive, genial discussion by the Islamic philosophers when their focus on the Greek tradition in philosophy was abrogated at the time of al-Ghazali.

This question was resolved a century later in the work of Thomas Aquinas through a “real distinction” between existence and essence, not as two beings, but as two principles of being. This rendered most intimate the relation of the two principles related as act and potency respectively, and opened a new and uniquely active sense of being. This is not to say that al-Ghazali was wrong in opposing Averroes or that Islam was wrong in choosing the side of al-Ghazali in that dispute; Aquinas too had to overcome the Latin Averroists in the course of his intellectual battles in Paris.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Person as Subsistent Individual*

Something of the greatest importance for the understanding of man—especially in relation to Marx’s concern for human action—was bound to take place when the mind expanded its range of awareness beyond the nature or form of things to existence or to what Shakespeare was to call the question: “to be or not to be”. At that point the mind became able to take explicit account not only of the kind, but of the existence of the individual, by which it is constituted in the order of actual, and hence of acting, beings. This is termed then not merely an individual substance, but subsistent, that is what Thomas would call existence, the act of all acts, that is, that by which whatever kind of substance or kind of action was constituted in act.

At a deeper level than Marx, this reflects his concern for human action and indeed approaches the human person in terms not of sensitive action or economic class, but of that existence (*esse*) by which the individual of the human species is put in act and made active.

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<sup>35</sup> Comelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino* (Torino: Societa Ed. Internazionale, 1950), pp. 75-122.

<sup>36</sup> M. Iqbal wrote his dissertation on Mulla Sadra who most vigorously and insistently attacked formalist categorial thinking in terms of essence. Instead Mulla Sadra was concerned to shift attention to existence. It is in this sense that Iqbal calls for a turn to the active character of reality.

From this there followed a series of basic implications for the reality of the person. It would no longer be considered as simply the relatively placid, distinct or autonomous instance of some specific type. Rather, it would be understood in the much more dynamic manner as existing. This means not only being in its own right or, as is said, “standing on its own two feet” (sub-sisting), but bursting in among the realities of this world as a new and active center (existing). This understanding incorporates all the above mentioned characteristics of the individual substance, and adds three more which are proper to existence, namely, (a) complete, (b) independent, and (c) dynamically open to actions and to new actualization. Yet, since existing or subsisting individuals include not only persons but rocks, trees and animals, these characteristics become properly personal only when realized by beings of rational nature, self-consciousness and self-determinative, free and responsible.

### *Complete*

First, a person must be *whole or complete*. As regards its nature it must have all that is required to be and to be of its distinctive kind (just as by definition a three digit number cannot be made up of but two digits). Hence, if humans are recognized to be by nature both body and mind or body and soul, then the human mind or soul without the body would be neither a subsisting individual nor, by implication, a person, for it would lack a complete human nature. This is of special importance in view of the tendency of some either to reduce the human person to only the mind, soul, or consciousness or to consider the person to be adequately protected if these alone are cared for. In fact, the inclusion of body in the human person is as central as is attention to the issue of torture for human rights. The same is true of the mind or spirit in view of the tendency, described by William James, to reduce the person to “nothing but” the inert by-products of physiology, or to functions of the structure of the production and distribution of goods.

Further, the existing individual requires not merely a complete nature, but his or her proper existence. As existing, the individual is not merely an instance of a specific nature or kind, but a concrete reality asserting oneself and dynamically struggling to achieve one’s fulfillment. In the person this goes beyond merely walking a course whose every step is already charted; it includes all the unique, fully individual choices by which a life is lived. It is subject then to combinations of the precarious and the stable, of tragedy and triumph in its self-realization. These are described by the American pragmatists and Continental existentialists as the very stuff of life, and hence by Dewey as the very stuff of education.

### *Independent*

Secondly, as subsistent the person is *independent*. Being complete

in its nature it is numerically individual and distinct from all else. In accord with this individual nature, one's existence is, in turn, unique, and establishes the subject as a being in its own right, independent of all else. This does not imply that the human or other living subject does not need nourishment, or that it was not generated by another: people do need people and much else besides. There is no question here of being self-sufficient or absolute. What is meant by independence is that the needs it has and the actions it performs are truly its own.

In persons as free and properly self-determinative this means that in interacting with other subsistent individuals one's own contribution is distinctive and unique. This is commonly recognized at those special times when the presence of a mother, father, or special friend is required, and no one else will do. At other times as well, even when, as a bus driver or a dentist, I perform a standard service, my actions remain properly my own. This understanding is a prerequisite for education to responsibility in public as in private life. It is a condition too for overcome depersonalization in a society in which we must fulfill ever more specialized and standardized roles.

Another implication of this independence is that, as subsisting, the human person cannot simply be absorbed or assimilated by another. As complete in oneself one cannot be part of another: as independent in existence one is distinct from all else. Hence, one cannot be assumed or taken up by any other person or group in such a way as to lose one's identity. In recent years awareness of this characteristic has generated a strong reaction against the tendencies of mass society totally to absorb the person and to reduce all to mere functions of a larger whole called the state, the industrial complex, the consumer society, cult, etc.

As noted above it is perhaps the special challenge of the present day, however, to keep this awareness of one's distinctive independence from degenerating into selfishness, to keep individuality from becoming individualism. The individual existent, seen as sculpted out of the flow and process of the physical universe, cannot rightly be thought of as isolated. Such an existent is always with others, depending on them for birth, sustenance and expression. In this context, to be distinct or individual is not to be isolated or cut off, but to be able to relate more precisely and intensively to others.

This can be seen at a series of levels. My relation to the chair upon which I sit and the desk upon which I write is not diminished but made possible by the distinction and independence of the three of us. Their retention of their distinctness and distinctiveness enables me to integrate them into my task of writing. Because I depend still more intimately upon food, I must correlate more carefully its distinctive characteristics with my precise needs and capacities. On the genetic level it is the careful choice of distinctive strains that enables the development of new plants with the desired characteristics. On the social level the more personable the members of the group the greater and more intense is its unity.

Moving thus from instruments such as desks, to alimentation, to lineage, to society suggests that, as one moves upward through the levels of beings, distinctness, far from being antithetic to community, is in fact its basis. This gives hope that at its higher reaches, namely, in the moral and artistic life, the distinctiveness of autonomy and freedom may not need to be compromised, but may indeed be the basis for a community of persons bound together in mutual love and respect.

### *Interrelated*

The third characteristics of the subsistent individual to be considered is this *openness* to new actualization and to *interrelation* with others. The existence by which one erupted into this world of related subjects is not simply self-contained; it is expressed in a complex symphony of actions which are properly one's own: thus, as noted above, running can be said only of an existing individual, such as Mary, who runs. What is more, actions determine their subject, for it is only by running that Mary herself is constituted precisely as a runner. This will be central to the persons as moral agent.

It is important as well for our relations to, and with, others. For the actions into which our existence flows, while no less our own, reach beyond ourselves. The same action which makes us agents shapes the world around us and, for good or ill, communicates to others. All the plots of all the stories ever told are about this; but their number pales in comparison with all the lives ever lived, each of which is a history of personal interactions. The actions of an individual existent reflect one's individuality with its multiple possibilities, and express this to and with others. It is in this situation of dynamic openness, of communication and of community that the moral growth of persons takes place. As subsistent therefore the person is characteristically a being, not only in him/herself, but with other beings. Indeed, we should go further to note the seeming paradox that it is precisely to the degree that the person is unique that it can relate intensively to others. Hence the person is not only an individual of a common nature but an utterly singular entity in full self-possession. Thus the utter travesty of selling oneself or being enslaved or imprisoned. Correspondingly, the person is able to relate to others in true bonds of freedom and love.

To summarize: thus far, we have seen that for the notion of the human person to evolve and become the contemporary notion of person a strong awareness both of the nature and of the existence of independent individuals needed to be developed. This was first achieved by the Greeks who identified within the one physical process basically different types of things. Primary substances are the individual instances of these specific types or natures.

There were limitations to such a project, for in its terms along the person ultimately would be but an instance of one's nature; in the final analysis the goal of a physical being would be but to continue its species



through time. This was true for the Greeks and may still be a sufficient basis for the issues considered in a reductivist sociobiology, but it did not allow for adequate attention to the person's unique and independent reality. This required the subsequent development of an awareness of existence as distinct from nature or essence, and as that by which one enters into the world and is constituted as an existing being in its own right that is not only substance, but subsistent. On this basis the subsisting individual can be seen to be whole and independent, and hence the dynamic center of his or her action in the world. This provides also the basis for the person as self-consciousness of one's own nature and for relating to others in properly human terms within the overall pattern of nature. This character of self-consciousness as the focus especially of recent phenomenological philosophy will be treated in the next chapter.

#### *The Unity of the Person and of All Persons*

The actual possession of existence and its real distinction from essence have special moment for the human person whose unity have always been a special challenge to the human mind. As humans living in a material world our powers of knowledge are structured to appreciate quantitatively differentiated things interacting in extension or space. Thus when we think of the human person as body and spirit we naturally image them as separate in space. As seen in Chapter I when Descartes proceeded to structure knowledge exclusively in notions so clear as to be distinct he had no way to understand how the two could constitute the one human being, thereby setting up the entire list of rationalist dichotomies of body and spirit which modern thought felt obliged to resolve essentially by choosing one against the other. The result was a human person bifurcated between body and spirit, a philosophy bifurcated between materialism and idealism, and a world bifurcated into a cold war succeeded now by an individualist economic system bent on suppression of any community or spiritual based culture.

In classical philosophy one observes a similar process whereby Plato's sense of the human spirit directed the mind to ideas separated from the world. Aristotle in contrast pointed to the material universe as the place from which philosophy begins. But he realizes that if the soul is the form of the body then it will be held to the physical or the quantitatively defined figures of the imagination. Hence he affirms the need to relate to an intellect separated from the world for conceptual thinking and human freedom. Christian and Islamic thinkers could see that this spiritual principle must pertain uniquely to each person in order to explain personal dignity and responsibility. Yet even as late as Bonaventure this was understood to imply two souls in man, one the physical form of the body and the other the spiritual form which superseded the body.

Here Thomas' distinctive appreciation of existence as the actuation of the individual human essence or substance provided a distinctive insight.

Existence as really distinct from essence must be simple and unique. Because as the form specified the essence and an essence with its proportioned existence constituted one being, to have two forms would mean two beings. Hence, the material/spiritual reality of the human synlon could have but one essence—a human essence—and by a simple proportioned *esse* this was constituted as a unique being. Man was not two but one. His or her body had the dignity of the spirit with its freedom and dignity; similarly his or her spirit was essentially incarnate, it was the spirit of a being whose body had the dignity, rights and obligations of a free and responsible person.

This is of singular importance to the present challenge of finding unity across borders and even civilizations in a global world. It would be easy and too common to focus simply on the individual and his or her rights. The result although benignly described as competition is in reality Hobbes' war of all against all in which in fact the most powerful exercises a brutal hegemony in the name of establishing freedom and peace. What is needed is to found the uniqueness of the individual in the unity of one source and goal of all.

This in fact is what is done by the classical discovery of the special nature of existence. For the infinite character of the One as described by Parmenides, existence or *esse* is unlimited by any essence beyond itself; it is existence (*esse*) to its full extent. Hence it is disputed only whether it is more proper to say that the infinite *esse* has no essence of essence be taken as limiting *esse*, or to say that *esse* is its own essence if essence be taken as affirming the full extent of *esse*. In any case it has no need and hence the fact that it has created or shared its *esse* is a totally free act of love.

On the part of creatures constituted as participations in this *esse* they are thereby constituted as totally unique beings. they may share in specific or generic likeness according to their essences as composed of form and matter, but their existence constitutes them as totally unique instances of being with their proper unity, truth and goodness.

It is here that their nature as participants in the divine existence is especially significant for the challenge of our day, namely, to understand how persons can be individual and have personal rights without being individualist selfish and antipathetic toward others. As created out of love they are unique to the degree of the divine freedom with which they were created. While constituted us many all are derivative of, and participations in, the One. Hence rather than being self seeking the very act by which they are created is fully generous and sharing. And their search for their own self-fulfillment is precisely a search to mirror more fully the one infinite love and goodness by which they were created.

Nicholas of Cusa carried this further by suggesting that whereas with Aristotle our bodily structures suggest that we begin all knowledge from the senses, it would be more insightful to work from the intellect and in terms of the One infinite source and goal of life. In this light the basis and context of knowledge would not be single physical things but rather the

whole of reality as founded in the One from which all is derived and to which all returns. In this light the whole would be the formal mode in terms of which any being, including oneself, would be considered. Thus other individuals as contractions of the same whole, reflecting of that one what I would, but fail to reflect. In terms of the whole then they are not alien but pertain to my essence. As in a family my goal is to promote their good and it is in their good that I participate.

With Eastern philosophies to be considered below this entails a sense of community essential for life in global times.



## CHAPTER VI

# HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY AND THE UNITY AND PLURALITY OF CULTURES

### INTRODUCTION

Part I looked at the development and critique of the understanding of the human person in modern times. This was characterized by rationalism, a reductionist humanism and an individualism poorly suited to global times as this requires an ability to appreciate and live with peoples of other cultures. The result was to highlight the need for a vision which could provide for unity with diversity, which would enable both the individualists of the world to require a sense of community both local and global, and those in strongly communitary cultures to develop a sense of personal rights and initiative needed to find their proper place in a global universe.

This directed attention in Part II back into time where we attempted, in terms of the organization of social life, to learn of the earliest, most basic and essential self-understanding of the human race. There we found the common and implicit foundation of the world's many civilizations in a totemic unity. We traced also the unfolding of this basic human thought through the imaginative mode of myth.

Thusfar in Part III Chapter V studied the scientific development of the notion of person in an objective Western philosophy. Not incidentally this sequence followed the evolutionary order from sensate life to intellectual powers reflected in such classic systematic schemas from Plato's line/cave to the development of systematic philosophy in Aristotle and medieval thought. Thus, overall the work thusfar has focused especially upon human reason. This was certainly central to Part I on modernity as characterized by rationalism. But it was also the structural principle for the evolutionary order of the study of the human person through Part II and Chapter V of Part III.

Yet we saw also in Part I the critique of modernity precisely for its excessive individualism, rationalism and objectivism. Some refers to this critique as "post modern"; certainly it is a deep questioning of modernity. But if the negative is based on the positive then one might suspect that this questioning is due not only to the tragic debacle of modernity manifested in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its wars, programs and holocausts, but to the positive, affirmative sense of life which pushes us despite all that destruction to rebuild and move on.

It is important then after having seen the development of the sense of person and community in more objective terms, before and especially during modernity, to look for the way in which in the last 50 to 70 years this has reemerged in terms of human consciousness. Or better still, how

human life has developed sufficient self-awareness to enable the interior dimensions of the human consciousness to emerge into the light. Indeed the etymology of phenomenology is built on “phe” or light and indicates a controlled way of bringing reality into the light. Hence, we shall follow Chapter V on person in objective terms by looking into the new awareness of human subjectivity. Moreover we shall look for the way in which this makes possible the origin of culture from within human consciousness, and the way in which this provides a contemporary and more adapted way of appreciating a unity of humanity which not only has room for, but is promoted by, a diversity of cultures. This sense of man in Eastern cultures is marked less by the individual, the external and the objective than by community, interiority and subjectivity. It is necessary then to look first into the new awareness of subjectivity and the way in which this is involved in the development of cultures and civilizations. This might provide, in turn, insight on the possibility of relating the civilizations and their religious roots East and West which—ready or not—we meet in these global times.

In this light it becomes especially important and urgent to look first in this Chapter VI to the emergent awareness of subjectivity, and hence the nature of cultures and the ways in which they interact. In Chapter VII we shall examine how these dimensions of objectivity and subjectivity can be not merely juxtaposed but truly united. In Part IV we will turn to the resources of Asian cultures.

#### *The Rediscovery of Subjectivity*

In recent decades, new insight into human subjectivity has made it possible to understand human valuing and its implied development of cultural traditions. Writ large these constitute as well the civilizations to which Samuel P. Huntington refers as the “largest we” and which he sees as rooted in the major religions. Hence the issues of the person in our times require that we look into the rediscovery of subjectivity and the new ability to appreciate the development of cultural traditions in order to guide the relations between them in ways that are mutually complementary rather than destructive.

It is a sad fact of history that relations between nations have long been characterized rather by conflict than by cooperation. It has been characteristic to look upon others as objects with which we are confronted, as competitors for land and resources, and too often to experience them as domineering and exploitive. In this the terms of reference have been especially quantitative and objective, trapping us in a zero sum game in which one can gain only at the expense of the other.

But it has been a characteristic of the last half century or more that this objective sense has been increasingly complemented by a new awareness of human subjectivity. This in turn has made it possible to take account of the values and virtues which constitute the culture of a people. In

these terms great strides have been made in hermeneutics as the method for interpreting other cultures and building fusions of horizons in which deep principles and commitments to cooperation can be formed.

At the same time economic, political and informatic advances have opened an era rightly called not only international, but global in character. In this light it seems helpful to look more closely at the opening of this new dimension of human self-awareness from which cultures emerge, to consider the possibilities of interpersonal interaction, and perhaps especially the new sense of relations between peoples made possible when whole cultures begin to think in global terms.

In the context of the many crises with which we have been greeted in entering upon the new millennia the role of philosophy comes to the fore. For if, with Aristotle, philosophy is something to be taken up when the basic needs of the times are cared for, then philosophy is in danger of being shelved for many generations to come. On the other hand, philosophy may have to do with our nature and dignity—with what we are, and with what we are after—and hence with the terms in which we live as person and peoples. If so, then philosophy may be not the last, but the first consideration or at least the most determinative for life in our trying circumstances.

During the last century human knowledge of the physical universe was totally transformed by breaking into the atom and discovering its structure. The effect was not only scientific advance but the joint threat of the atomic bomb and the great promise of atomic energy. It is the contention here that similarly philosophical understanding today has shifted from being a work of deduction by specialists working in abstraction from the process of human life, to deep engagement at the center of human concerns under the pressures of life's challenges. From external objective observation life is now lived in terms also of internal self-awareness or subjectivity where human freedom with its cultural creativity and responsibility become central. The playing field has shifted, the challenges have risen geometrically and with them the potential not only for death but of life. To understand this we need to review the steps, negative and positive, by which this breakthrough from mere objectivity to subjectivity has occurred.

### *The Crisis of Objective Reason*

These pressures force us to cross a new divide as we proceed into the new millennium. To see this more clearly we might review the history of reason in this epoch. The first millennium is justly seen as one in which human attention was focused upon God. It was the time of Christ and the Prophet; much of humanity was fully absorbed in the assimilation of their messages.

The second millennium is generally seen as shifting to human beings. The first 500 years focused upon the reintegration of Aristotelian

reason by such figures as Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and Thomas Aquinas. The second half of the millennium, from 1500, studied in Part I above, was marked by a radicalization of reason. Whereas from its beginning human reason always had attempted to draw upon the fullness of human experience, to reflect the highest human and religious aspirations, and to build upon the accomplishments of the predecessors—philosophers sensed themselves as standing on the shoulders of earlier philosophers—a certain Promethean hope now emerged. As with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, it was claimed that humankind would save itself, indeed that each person would do so by his or her power of reason.

For this, Francis Bacon<sup>1</sup> directed that the idols which bore the content of the cultural traditions be smashed; John Locke<sup>2</sup> would erase all prior content of the mind in order to reduce it to a blank tablet; René Descartes<sup>3</sup> would put all under doubt. What was sought was a body of clear and distinct ideas, strictly united on a mathematical model. It was true that Descartes intended later to reintroduce the various levels of human knowledge on a more certain basis. But what he restored was not the rich content of the breadth of human experience, but only what could be had with the requisite clarity and distinctness for objective knowledge. Thus, of the content of the senses which had been bracketed by doubt in the first Meditation, in the sixth Meditation only the quantitative or measurable was allowed back into his system. All the rest was considered simply provisory and employed pragmatically, and this only to the degree that it proved useful in so navigating as to avoid physical harm in the world.

In this light the goal of knowledge and of properly human life was radically reduced. For Aristotle,<sup>4</sup> and no less for Christianity and Islam in the first 1500 years of this era, this had been contemplation of the magnificence and munificence of God as the highest Being and of all as ordered thereto. By the Enlightenment, this was reduced to control over nature in the utilitarian service of humankind. And as the goals of human life for purposes of clarity or politics were reduced to the material order, the service of humankind really became the service of machines in the exploitation of physical nature. This was the real enslavement of human freedom.

#### *Subjectivity: the New Agenda*

To read this history negatively, as we have been doing, is,

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum Organon, De Sapientia Veterum* (New York, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1690).

<sup>3</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), I.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII.



however, only part of the truth. It depicts a simple and total collapse to technical reason acting alone and as self-sufficient. But there may be more to human consciousness and hence to philosophy. If so in analogy to the replacement of a tooth in childhood, the more important phenomenon is not the weakness of the old tooth that is falling out, but the strength of the new tooth that is replacing it. A few philosophers did point to this other dimension of human awareness. Shortly after Descartes, Pascal's assertion, "Que la raison a des raisons, que la raison ne comprend pas," would remain famous if unheeded, as would Vico's prediction that the new reason would give birth to a generation of brutes—intellectual brutes, but brutes nonetheless. Later Kierkegaard would follow Hegel with a similar warning. None of these voices would have strong impact while the race was on to "conquer" the world by a supposed omni-sufficient scientific reason. But as human problems mounted the adequacy of objective reason to handle the deepest problems of human dignity and transcendent purpose came under sustained questioning and more attention was given to additional dimensions of human capabilities.

One might well ask which comes first, the public sense of human challenge or the corresponding philosophical reflection. My own sense is that they are in fact one, with philosophical insight providing the reflective dimension of the human concern. In any case, one finds a striking parallel between social experience and philosophy in this century. After the extreme totalitarian repression by the ideologies of the 1930s there followed the progressive liberation from fascism in World War II, from colonial exploitation in the 1950s and 1960s, from oppressive majorities in the 1970s, and from closed societies in the 1980s. Throughout, like the new tooth, the emergence of the person has been consistent and persistent.

Wittgenstein began by writing his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*<sup>5</sup> on the Lockean supposition that significant knowledge consisted in constructing a mental map corresponding point for point to the external world as perceived by sense experience. In such a project the spiritual element of understanding, i.e., the grasp of the relations between the points on this mental map and the external world was relegated to the margin as simply unutterable. Later experience in teaching children, however, led Wittgenstein to the conclusion that this empirical mental mapping was simply not what was going on in human knowledge. In his *Blue and Brown Books*<sup>6</sup> and in his subsequent *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein shifted human consciousness or intentionality, which previously he had relegated to the periphery, to the very center of concern. The focus of his philosophy was no longer the supposedly objective replication of the

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<sup>5</sup> Tr. C.K. Ogden (London: Methuen, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> (New York: Harper and Row).

<sup>7</sup> Tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

external world, but the human construction of language and of worlds of meaning.<sup>8</sup>

A similar process was underway on the continent in Kantian circles. There Husserl's attempt to bracket all elements, in order to isolate pure essences for scientific knowledge, forced attention to intentionality and to the limitations of a pure essentialism. To avoid being trapped in an idealism his understudy, Martin Heidegger, moved the issue to being and the rediscovery of the existential and historical dimensions of reality in his *Being and Time*.<sup>9</sup> The religious implications of this new sensitivity would be articulated by Karl Rahner in his work, *Spirit in the World*, and by the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution, *The Church in the World*.<sup>10</sup>

For Heidegger the meaning of being and of life was unveiled and emerged—the two processes were identical—in conscious human life (*Dasein*) lived through time and therefore through history. Thus human consciousness became the new focus of attention. The uncovering or bringing into light of the unfolding patterns and interrelations of subjectivity would open a new era of human awareness. Epistemology and metaphysics would develop—and merge—in the very work of tracking the nature and direction of this process.

For Heidegger's successor, Hans-Georg Gadamer,<sup>11</sup> the task became the uncovering of how human persons, emerging as family, neighborhood and people, by exercising their creative freedom weave their cultural tradition. This is not history as a mere compilation of whatever humankind does or makes, but culture as the fabric of the human consciousness and the symbols by which a human group unveils its being in time.

The result is a dramatic inversion: where before all began from above and flowed downward—whether in structures of political power or of abstract reasoning—at the turn of the new millennium attention focuses rather upon the emerging upward of the creative freedom of persons in and as civil society. As what is termed civil society, they now become new and responsible partners with government and business, in the continuing effort toward the realization of the common good.

### **CULTURES AS SYNCHRONIC: THE ESSENTIAL DIMENSION**

While the new awareness of intentionality and the inner working of human consciousness are rightly considered to be characterized by freedom, it is not sufficient to consider only the freedom of single actors for that

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<sup>8</sup> Brian Wicker, *Culture and Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1966), pp. 68-88.

<sup>9</sup> (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

<sup>10</sup> *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. W. Abbott (New York: New Century, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

could leave human, and *a fortiori* social life, chaotic and inconsistent. Hence, it is necessary to see how the exercise of creative freedom is oriented and enabled over time by persons as living with others in community.

### *Value*

The drama of free self-determination, and hence the development of persons and of civil society, is most fundamentally a matter of being as affirmation and definitive stance against non-being. The account of this and its implication was the work of Parmenides, the very first metaphysician. Identically it is the relation to the good in search of which we live, survive and thrive. The good is manifest in experience as the object of desire, namely, as that which is sought when absent. Basically, it is what completes or “per-fects” life understood in its etymological sense as ‘realized through and through’. Hence, once achieved, it is no longer desired or sought, but enjoyed. This is reflected in the manner in which each thing, even a stone, retains the being or reality it has and resists reduction to non-being or nothing. The most that we can do is to change or transform a thing into something else; we cannot annihilate it. Similarly, a plant or tree, given the right conditions, grows to full stature and fruition. Finally, an animal protects its life—fiercely, if necessary—and seeks out the food needed for its strength. Food, in turn, as capable of contributing to an animal’s realization or perfection, is for the animal an auxiliary good or means.

In this manner, things as good, that is, as actually realizing some degree of perfection and able to contribute to the well-being of others, are the bases for an interlocking set of relations. As these relations are based upon both the actual perfection things possess and the potential perfection to which they are thereby directed, the good is perfection both as attracting when it has not yet been attained and as constituting one’s fulfillment upon its achievement. Goods, then, are not arbitrary or simply a matter of wishful thinking; they are rather the full development of things and all that contributes thereto. In this ontological or objective sense, all beings are good to the extent that they exist and can contribute to the perfection of others.

The moral good is a more narrow field, for it concerns only one’s free and responsible actions. This has the objective reality of the ontological good noted above, for it concerns real actions which stand in distinctive relation to our own perfection and to that of others—and, indeed, to the physical universe and to God as well. Hence, many possible patterns of actions could be objectively right because they promote the good of those involved, while others, precisely as inconsistent with the real good of persons or things, are objectively disordered or misordered. This constitutes the objective basis for the ethical good or bad.

Nevertheless, because the realm of objective relations is almost numberless, whereas our actions are single, it is necessary not only to

choose in general between the good and the bad, but in each case to choose which of the often innumerable possibilities one will render concrete.

However broad or limited the options, as responsible and moral an act is essentially dependent upon its being willed by a subject. Therefore, in order to follow the emergence of the field of concrete moral action, it is not sufficient to examine only the objective aspect, namely, the nature of the things involved. In addition, one must consider action in relation to the subject, namely, to the person who, in the context of his/her society and culture, appreciates and values the good of this action, chooses it over its alternatives, and eventually wills its actualization.

The term 'value' here is of special note. It was derived from the economic sphere where it meant the amount of a commodity sufficient to attain a certain worth. This is reflected also in the term 'axiology' whose root means "weighing as much" or "worth as much." It requires an objective content—the good must truly "weigh in" and make a real difference; but the term 'value' expresses this good especially as related to wills which actually acknowledge it as a good and as desirable.<sup>12</sup> Thus, different individuals or groups of persons and at different periods have distinct sets of values. A people or community is sensitive to, and prizes, a distinct set of goods or, more likely, it establishes a distinctive ranking in the degree to which it prizes various goods. By so doing, it delineates among limitless objective goods a certain pattern of values which in a more stable fashion mirrors the corporate free choices of that people.

This constitutes the basic topology of a culture; as repeatedly reaffirmed through time, it builds a tradition or heritage about which we shall speak below. It constitutes, as well, the prime pattern and gradation of goods or values which persons experience from their earliest years and in terms of which they interpret their developing relations. Young persons peer out at the world through lenses formed, as it were, by their family and culture and configured according to the pattern of choices made by that community throughout its history—often in its most trying circumstances. Like a pair of glasses it does not create the object; but it focuses attention upon certain goods involved rather than upon others. This becomes the basic orienting factor for the affective and emotional life described by the Scotts, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, as the heart of civil society. In time, it encourages and reinforces certain patterns of action which, in turn, reinforce the pattern of values.

Through this process a group constitutes the concerns in terms of which it struggles to advance or at least to endure, mourns its failures, and celebrates its successes. This is a person's or people's world of hopes and fears, in terms of which, as Plato wrote in the *Laches*, their lives have moral meaning.<sup>13</sup> It is varied according to the many concerns and the groups

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<sup>12</sup> Ivor Leclerc, "The Metaphysics of the Good," *Review of Metaphysics*, 35 (1981), 3-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Laches*, 198-201.

which coalesce around them. As these are interlocking and interdependent a pattern of social goals and concerns develops which guides action. In turn, corresponding capacities for action or virtue are developed.

Aristotle takes this up at the very beginning of his ethics. In order to make sense of the practical dimension of our life it is necessary to identify the good or value toward which one directs one's life or which one finds satisfying. This he terms happiness and then proceeds systematically to see which goal can be truly satisfying. His test is not passed by physical goods or honors, but by that which corresponds to, and fulfills, our highest capacity, that is, contemplation of the highest being or divine life.<sup>14</sup>

But what is the relation of this approach from below, as it were, to religion as a view from above, that is, from the point of view of revelation and grace which point to a more perfect goal and fulfillment? Thomas Aquinas' effort in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, analyzed by G. Stanley,<sup>15</sup> is to show the way in which religion is not a contradiction or substitution of the human goal, but rather its more perfect fulfillment than is possible by human powers alone. In eschatology the vision of God is not a negation of the contemplation of divine life of which Aristotle spoke, but its fulfillment in a way that exceeds human hopes.

### *Virtues*

Martin Heidegger describes a process by which the self emerges as a person in the field of moral action. It consists in transcending oneself or breaking beyond mere self-concern and projecting outward as a being whose very nature is to share with others for whom one cares and about whom one is concerned. In this process, one identifies new purposes or goals for the sake of which action is to be undertaken. In relation to these goals, certain combinations of possibilities, with their natures and norms, take on particular importance and begin thereby to enter into the makeup of one's world of meaning.<sup>16</sup> Freedom then becomes more than mere spontaneity, more than choice, and more even than self-determination in the sense of determining oneself to act as described above. It shapes—the phenomenologist would say even that it constitutes—one's world as the ambit of human decisions and dynamic action. This is the making of the complex social ordering of social groups which constitutes civil society and even more of the value pattern and culture by which they live.

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<sup>14</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 9, 1159b25-1160a30.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald F. Stanley, "Contemplation as Fulfillment of the Human Person," in *Personalist Ethics and Human Subjectivity*, vol. II of *Ethics at the Crossroads*, George F. McLean, ed (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1996), pp. 365-420.

<sup>16</sup> J.L. Mehta, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), pp. 90-91.

This process of deliberate choice and decision transcends the somatic and psychic dynamisms. Whereas the somatic dimension is extensively reactive, the psychic dynamisms of affectivity or appetite are fundamentally oriented to the good and positively attracted by a set of values. These, in turn, evoke an active response from the emotions in the context of responsible freedom. But it is in the dimension of responsibility that one encounters the properly moral and social dimension of life. For, in order to live with others, one must be able to know, to choose and finally to realize what is truly conducive to one's good and to that of others. Thus, persons and groups must be able to judge the true value of what is to be chosen, that is, its objective worth, both in itself and in relation to others. This is moral truth: the judgment regarding whether the act makes the person and society good in the sense of bringing authentic individual and social fulfillment, or the contrary.

In this, deliberation and voluntary choice are required in order to exercise proper self-awareness and self-governance. By determining to follow this judgment one is able to overcome determination by stimuli and even by culturally ingrained values and to turn these, instead, into openings for free action in concert with others in order to shape one's community as well as one's physical surroundings. This can be for good or for ill, depending on the character of my actions. By definition, only morally good actions contribute to personal and social fulfillment, that is, to the development and perfection of persons with others in community.

It is the function of conscience, as one's moral judgment, to identify this character of moral good in action. Hence, moral freedom consists in the ability to follow one's conscience. This work of conscience is not a merely theoretical judgment, but the exercise of self-possession and self-determination in one's actions. Here, reference to moral truth constitutes one's sense of value and duty, for the action that is judged to be truly good is experienced also as that which I ought to do.

When this is exercised or lived, patterns of action develop which are habitual in the sense of being repeated. These are the modes of activity with which we are familiar; in their exercise, along with the coordinated natural dynamisms they require, we are practiced; and with practice comes facility and spontaneity. Such patterns constitute the basic, continuing and pervasive shaping influence of our life. For this reason, they have been considered classically to be the basic indicators of what our life as a whole will add up to, or, as is often said, "amount to". Since Socrates, the technical term for these especially developed capabilities has been 'virtues' or special strengths.

But, if the ability to follow one's conscience and, hence, to develop one's set of virtues must be established through the interior dynamisms of the person, it must be protected and promoted by the related physical and social realities. This is a basic right of the person—perhaps *the* basic human and social right—because only thus can one transcend one's conditions and strive for fulfillment. Its protection and promotion must be a basic concern

of any order which would be democratic and directed to the good of its people.

But this is only a right to one's conscience; religion goes further in that it looks to divine grace for help. Some virtues are the result not only of human practice, but of divine action. In other words the perspective shifts from the secondary causality of the human creature to the primary causality of the divine existence itself. Its effect is created existence with its truth, justice and faith; love that expresses the goodness of the creation as source and goal; and ecstasy in response to the sublime beauty of the divine. (More about this diachronic or existential dimension below.)

### *Cultures as Synchronic*

Together, these values and virtues of a people set the pattern of social life through which freedom is developed and exercised. This is called a "culture". On the one hand, the term is derived from the Latin word for tilling or cultivating the land. Cicero and other Latin authors used it for the cultivation of the soul or mind (*cultura animi*), for just as even good land if left without cultivation will produce only disordered vegetation of little value, so the human spirit will not achieve its proper results unless trained or educated.<sup>17</sup> This sense of culture corresponds most closely to the Greek term for education (*paideia*) as the development of character, taste and judgment, and to the German term "formation" (*Bildung*).<sup>18</sup>

Here, the focus is upon the creative capacity of the spirit of a people and their ability to work as artists, not only in the restricted sense of producing purely aesthetic objects, but in the more involved sense of shaping all dimensions of life, material and spiritual, economic and political. The result is a whole life, characterized by unity and truth, goodness and beauty, and, thereby, sharing deeply in meaning and value. The capacity for this cannot be taught, although it may be enhanced by education; more recent phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiries suggest that, at its base, culture is a renewal, a reliving of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation.<sup>19</sup> This leads us beyond self and other, beyond identity and diversity, in order to comprehend both.

On the other hand, "culture" can be traced to the term *civis* (citizen, civil society and civilization).<sup>20</sup> This reflects the need for a person to belong to a social group or community in order for the human spirit to produce its

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<sup>17</sup> V. Mathieu, "Cultura" in *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), II, 207-210; and Raymond Williams, "Culture and Civilization," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), II, 273-276, and *Culture and Society* (London, 1958).

<sup>18</sup> Tonnelat, "Kultur" in *Civilisation, le mot et l'idée* (Paris: Centre International de Synthese), II.

<sup>19</sup> V. Mathieu, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> V. Mathieu, "Civiltà," *ibid.*, I, 1437-1439.

proper results. By bringing to the person the resources of the tradition, the *tradita* or past wisdom produced by the human spirit, the community facilitates comprehension. By enriching the mind with examples of values which have been identified in the past, it teaches and inspires one to produce something analogous. For G.F. Klemm, this more objective sense of culture is composite in character.<sup>21</sup> E.B. Tyler defined this classically for the social sciences as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits required by man as a member of society.”<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, Clifford Geertz came to focus on the meaning of all this for a people and on how a people’s intentional action went about shaping its world. Thus he contrasts the analysis of culture to an experimental science in search of law, seeing it rather as an interpretative science in search of meaning.<sup>23</sup> What is sought is the import of artifacts and actions, that is, whether “it is ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said.”<sup>24</sup> For this there is need to be aware “of the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs.”<sup>25</sup> In this light, Geertz defines culture rather as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of intended conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and attitudes toward, life.”<sup>26</sup>

Each particular complex whole or culture is specific to a particular people; a person who shares in this is a *civis* or citizen and belongs to a civilization. For the more restricted Greek world in which this term was developed, others (aliens) were those who did not speak the Greek tongue; they were “barbaroi”, for their speech sounded like mere babel. Though at first this meant simply non-Greek, its negative manner of expression easily lent itself to, perhaps reflected, and certainly favored, a negative axiological connotation; indeed, this soon became the primary meaning of the word ‘barbarian’. By reverse implication, it attached to the term ‘civilization’ an exclusivist connotation, such that the cultural identity of peoples began to imply not only the pattern of gracious symbols by which one encounters and engages in shared life projects with other persons and peoples, but cultural alienation between peoples. Today, as communication increases and more widely differentiated peoples enter into ever greater interaction and mutual dependence, we reap a bitter harvest of this negative

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<sup>21</sup> G.F. Klemm, *Allgemein Culturgeschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig, 1843-1852), x.

<sup>22</sup> E.B. Tyler, *Primitive Culture* (London, 1871), VII, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.



connotation. The development of a less exclusivist sense of culture and civilization must now be a priority task.

The development of values and virtues and their integration as a culture of any depth or richness takes time, and hence depends upon the experience and creativity of many generations. Taken as cultural inheritance, it reflects the cumulative achievement of a people in discovering, mirroring and transmitting the deepest meanings of life. This is tradition in its synchronic sense as a body of wisdom.

This sense of tradition is very vivid in premodern and village communities. It would appear to be less so in modern urban centers, undoubtedly in part due to the difficulty in forming active community life in large urban centers. However, the cumulative process of transmitting, adjusting and applying the values of a culture through time is not only heritage or what is received, but new creation as this is passed on in new ways. Attending to tradition, taken in this active sense, allows us not only to uncover the permanent and universal truths which Socrates sought, but to perceive the importance of values we receive from the tradition and to mobilize our own life project actively toward the future. We will look below at this more active sense of tradition as diachronic.

#### *The Genesis of Culture in Community*

Because tradition has sometimes been interpreted as a threat to the personal and social freedom essential to a democracy, it is important to see how a cultural tradition is generated by the free and responsible life of the members of a concerned community or civil society and enables succeeding generations to realize their life with freedom and creativity. This will be considered with special attention to religious traditions as lived in religiously based civilizations and their role in enlivening and supporting persons and groups in their lives as holy.

Autogenesis is no more characteristic of the birth of knowledge than it is of persons. One's consciousness emerges, not with self, but in relation to others. In the womb, the first awareness is that of the heart beat of one's mother. Upon birth, one enters a family in whose familiar relations one is at peace and able to grow. It is from one's family and in one's earliest weeks and months that one does or does not develop the basic attitudes of trust and confidence which undergird or undermine one's capacities for subsequent social relations. There one encounters care and concern for others independently of what we do in response and one acquires the language and symbol system in terms of which to conceptualize, communicate and understand.<sup>27</sup> Just as a person is born into

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<sup>27</sup> John Caputo, "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," in George F. McLean, Frederick Ellrod, eds., *Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent*

a family on which he or she depends absolutely for life, sustenance, protection and promotion, so one's understanding develops in community. Thus, as persons we emerge by birth into a family and neighborhood from which we learn and in harmony with which we thrive.

Similarly, through the various steps of one's development, as one's circle of community expands through neighborhood, school, work and recreation, one comes to learn and to share personally and passionately an interpretation of reality and a pattern of value responses. The phenomenologist sees this life in the varied civil society as the new source for wisdom. Hence, rather than turning away from daily life in order to contemplate abstract and disembodied ideas, the place to discover meaning is in life as lived in the family and in the progressively wider social circles into which one enters.

If it were merely a matter of community, however, all might be limited to the present, with no place for tradition as that which is "passed on" from one generation to the next. In fact, the process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition in relation to a people's evolving sense of human dignity and purpose, constitutes a type of learning and testing laboratory for successive generations. In this laboratory of history, the strengths of various insights and behavior patterns can be identified and reinforced, while deficiencies are progressively corrected or eliminated. Horizontally, we learn from experience what promotes and what destroys life and, accordingly, make pragmatic adjustments.

But even this language remains too abstract, too limited to method or technique, too unidimensional. While tradition can be described in general and at a distance in terms of feed-back mechanisms and might seem merely to concern how to cope in daily life, what is being spoken about are free acts that are expressive of passionate human commitment and personal sacrifice in responding to concrete danger, building and rebuilding family alliances, and constructing and defending one's nation. Moreover, this wisdom is not a matter of mere tactical adjustments to temporary concerns; it concerns rather the meaning we are able to envision for life and which we desire to achieve through all such adjustments over a period of generations, i.e., what is truly worth striving for and the pattern of social interaction in which this can be lived richly. The result of this extended process of learning and commitment constitutes our awareness of the bases for the decisions of which history is constituted.

This points us beyond the horizontal plane of the various ages of history and directs our attention vertically to its ground and, hence, to the bases of the values which humankind in its varied circumstances seeks to realize.<sup>28</sup> It is here that one searches for the absolute ground of meaning and value of which Iqbal wrote. Without that all is ultimately relative to only an

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(Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), pp. 199-222.

<sup>28</sup> Gadamer, pp. 245-53.

interlocking network of consumption, then dissatisfaction, and finally ennui.

The impact of the convergence of cumulative experience and reflection is heightened by its gradual elaboration in ritual and music, and its imaginative configuration in such great epics as the *Mahabharata* and in dance. All conspire to constitute a culture which, like a giant telecommunications dish, shapes, intensifies and extends the range and penetration of our personal sensitivity, free decision and mutual concern.

Tradition, then, is not, as in history, simply everything that ever happened, whether good or bad. It is rather what appears significant for human life: it is what has been seen through time and human experience to be deeply true and necessary for human life. It contains the values to which our forebears first freely gave their passionate commitment in specific historical circumstances and then constantly reviewed, rectified and progressively passed on generation after generation. The content of a tradition, expressed in works of literature and all the many facets of a culture, emerges progressively as something upon which character and community can be built. It constitutes a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn, provided it be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated.

Hence, it is not because of personal inertia on our part or arbitrary will on the part of our forebears that our culture provides a model and exemplar. On the contrary, the importance of tradition derives from both the cooperative character of the learning by which wisdom is drawn from experience and the cumulative free acts of commitment and sacrifice which have defined, defended and passed on through time the corporate life of the community.<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, it bears to us the divine gifts of life, meaning and love, and provides a way both back to their origin and forward to their goal: the *Alpha* and *Omega*.

### *Reason and Hermeneutics*

As the recognition of the value of tradition would appear to constitute a special problem for heirs of the Enlightenment, it may be helpful to reflect briefly on why this is so. Enlightenment rationalism idealizes clarity and distinctness of ideas both in themselves and in their

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Gadamer emphasizes knowledge as the basis of tradition in contrast to those who would see it pejoratively as the result of arbitrary will. It is important to add to knowledge the free acts which, e.g., give birth to a nation and shape the attitudes and values of successive generations. As an example one might cite the continuing impact had by the British Magna Carta through the Declaration of Independence upon life in North America, or of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the national life of many countries.

interconnection; as such, it divorces them from their concrete existential and temporal significance. Such an ideal of human knowledge, it is proposed, could be achieved either, as with Descartes, through an intellect working by itself from an intellectually perceived Archimedean principle or, as with Locke and Carnap, through the senses drawing their ideas exclusively from experience and combining them in myriad tautological transformations.<sup>30</sup> In either case, the result is a-temporal and consequently non-historical knowledge.

Two attempts to break out of this have proven ultimately unsuccessful. One might be termed historicist and relativist. In order to recognize historical sequence while retaining the ideal of clarity and distinctness, this attempted to attain detailed knowledge of each period, relativizing everything to its point in time and placing historicity ultimately at the service of the rationalist ideal. The other, the Romantics, ultimately adhered to the same revolutionary enlightenment ideal even in appearing to oppose it, for, in turning to the past and to myths, they too sought clear and distinct knowledge of a static human nature. Tradition thus became traditionalism, for all was included in the original state of nature and our only way of obtaining a firm grounding for human life was simply to return thereto.

In the rationalist view, in contrast, any meaning not clearly and distinctly perceived was an idol to be smashed (Bacon), an idea to be bracketed by doubt (Descartes), or something to be wiped clean from the slate of the mind as irrational and coercive (Locke and Hume). Any judgment—even if provisional—made before all had been examined and its clarity and distinctness established would be a dangerous imposition by the will.

This points toward the importance of civil society for realizing human life in a manner that reflects and ultimately leads toward the divine. First the Enlightenment ideal of absolute knowledge of oneself or of others, simply and without condition, is not possible, for the knower is always conditioned according to his or her position in time and space and in relation to others. But neither would such knowledge be of ultimate interest, for human knowledge, like human beings, develops in time and with others.<sup>31</sup> This does not exclude projects of universal and necessary scientific knowledge, but it does identify these precisely as limited and specialized. They make important but specific, rather than all-controlling, contributions. Hence, other modes of knowledge are required in order to take account of the ongoing and varied life of human freedom and its creative results. Further, this is not a solitary, but a group matter. Hence society, especially civil society, becomes the focus for the appreciation and evaluation of things and for the responses which build our world.

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<sup>30</sup> R. Carnap

<sup>31</sup> H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1975), pp. 305-310.

Secondly, according to Descartes,<sup>32</sup> reason is had by all and completely. Therefore, authority could be only an entitlement of some to decide issues by an application of their will, rather than according to an authentic understanding of the truth or justice of an issue. This would be “hastiness” according to Descartes’s fourth *Meditation*. Further, the limited number of people in authority means that the vision of which they dispose would be limited by restricted or even individual interests. Finally, as one decision constitutes a precedent for those to follow, authority must become fundamentally bankrupt and hence corruptive.<sup>33</sup>

In this manner, the choice of clarity as an ideal, first by Plato and then by Descartes, has generated an exclusivist mind-set ruled by a reductivist mechanism. It is not only that what is not clear is put aside as irrelevant. Even more, the dynamism whereby we reflect the love by which we have been made and respond to it with openness and generosity comes to be seen in a negative light as cognitively blind, while freedom appears in a negative light as affectively arbitrary. The only way these could achieve a redeeming clarity for the human mind is to be reduced to the unambiguous and simplest visceral violence of Hobbes’s struggle for survival, that is, by being reduced to the animal level where, precisely, human love and freedom are dispensed with.

In this light, too, there has been a tendency to isolate public authority from the shared moral sense of community. This, in turn, compromises the moral quality of government, which needs to include and be addressed by those who comprehend and share in the social good which government is to address. This we shall see is civil society.

If the cumulative experience of humankind in living together in peace is to make a contribution to the development of modern life, then, it will be necessary to return human knowledge to the ongoing lived process of humane discovery and choice in society. This, in turn, takes place within the broad project of human interaction and an active process of reception by one generation of the learning of its predecessors. The emerging consciousness of the importance of this effort has led to broadening the task of hermeneutics from the study of ancient, often biblical, texts to a more inclusive attention to the integral meaning of cultures. There it has found, not a mere animal search for survival, but a sense of human dignity which, by transcending survival needs enables human creativity in society and encourages a search for ever higher levels of human life leading ultimately to God.

The reference to the god, Hermes, in the term “hermeneutics” suggests something of the depth of the meaning which is sought throughout human life and its implication for the world of values. The message borne by Hermes is not merely an abstract mathematical formula or a methodological prescription devoid of human meaning and value. Instead,

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<sup>32</sup> R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, I.

<sup>33</sup> Gadamer, pp. 240, 246-247.

it is the limitless wisdom regarding the source of all and hence its reality and value. Hesiod had appealed for this in the introduction to his *Theogony*: “Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are forever. . . . Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be.”<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Aristotle indicated concern for values and virtues in describing his science of wisdom as “knowing to what end each thing must be done; . . . this end is the good of that thing, and, in general, the supreme good in the whole of nature.” Such a science will be most divine, for: “(1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others. All the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than this, but none is better.”<sup>35</sup> Rather than evaluating all in terms of reductivist clarity and considering things in a horizontal perspective that is only temporal and totally changing—with an implied relativization of all—hermeneutics or interpretation opens also to a vertical vision of what is highest and deepest in life, most real in itself and most lasting through time. This is the eternal or divine in both being and value, which is the key to mobilizing and orienting the life of society in time.

In this light one is able to understand better the character of religious communities which come together under the inspiration of the Prophets and great examples of the religious life as lived existentially by a Buddha, a Christ or a Muhammad—paradigmatic individuals in A. Cua’s term. Each set a distinctive pattern of values and virtues which has been lived through history and unfolded by a community of persons who have attempted singly and together to live the multiple modes of this example. This we will see is a seminal source of the groupings which constitute a society with a distinctive culture.

At the same time, while still echoing Socrates by searching for the permanent structures of complex entities and the stable laws of change, in redirecting attention to being in time, contemporary attention is open to the essentially temporal character of mankind and, hence, to the uniqueness of each decision, whether individual or corporate. Thus, hermeneutics attends to the task of translation or interpretation; stresses the presentation to those receiving a message, their historical situation and, hence, the historical character of human life. It directs attention not merely to the pursuit of general truths, but to those to whom truth is expressed. These are persons in the concrete circumstances of their cultures as these have developed through the history of human interaction with nature, with other human beings and with God. It is this human history as heritage and tradition which sets the circumstances in which one perceives the values presented in the tradition and mobilizes his or her own project toward the future.

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<sup>34</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* trans. H.G. Everland-White (Loeb Classical Lib.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 2.

Cua<sup>36</sup> traces to Vico<sup>37</sup> attention to the unreflective cognitive consensus on common needs and to Shaftesbury<sup>38</sup> the affective sense of common partnership with others that this entails. The result is the synchronic constitution of a community of memory whose members revere and commemorate the same saints and personages whose sacrifices built or exemplified the community's self image. This results in a community of vision or self-understanding, as well as of hope and expectation. A cultural tradition, in this sense, is the context of the conscious life and striving of persons and of the communities of which one is a member; it is life in its fullest meaning, as past and future, ground and aspiration.

The truly important battle at the present time is, then, not between, on the one hand, a chaotic liberalism in which the abstract laws of the marketplace dictate the lives of persons, peoples and nations or, on the other hand, a depersonalizing sense of community in which the dignity of the person is suppressed for an equally abstract utopia. A victory of either would spell disaster. The central battle is, rather, to enable peoples to draw on their heritage, constituted of personal and social assessments and free decisions, and elaborated through the ages by the varied communities as they work out their response to their concrete circumstances. That these circumstances are often shifting and difficult in the extreme is important, but it is of definite importance that a people's response be truly their own in all their variety and of their society with all its interrelated sub-units. That is, that it be part of their history, of the way they have chosen to order and pattern their social life, and in these terms to shape their free response to the good. This is the character of authority exercised in and by a civil society. It reflects, and indeed is, the freedom being exercised by a people in all the varied groupings in which they have chosen to live and to act.

### CULTURES AS DIACHRONIC: THE EXISTENTIAL DIMENSION

Thusfar we have considered the exercise of freedom as forming a consistent and integrated pattern of life which constitutes the inheritance or patrimony of everyone born into a human community. But each generation must live this inheritance in its own time and circumstances and is concerned to pass it on as a patrimony enriched and adapted to its children and its children's children in succeeding generations. This is tradition taken not in the passive sense of receiving, but in the active sense of *tradere* or to pass on.

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<sup>36</sup> "The Idea of Confucian Tradition," *The Review of Metaphysics*, XLV (1992), 803-840.

<sup>37</sup> Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. T. Bergin and M Fisch (Ithica: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), Vol. I, p. 72.

A first requisite for this is a dimension of transcendence. If what we find in the empirical world or even in ourselves is all there is, if this be the extent of being, then our life cannot consist in more than rearranging the elements at our disposition—newness could only be accidental in character. It is, however, the decisive reality of our life that it is lived in a transcendent context which goes beyond anything finite and indeed is inexhaustible by anything finite. Hence we are always drawn forward and called to radical newness. A tradition then is not a matter of the past, but of new applications. As reflecting the infinite creator and goal this is the decisively religious characteristic of human life.

As an active process tradition transforms what is received, lives it in a creative manner and passes it on as a leaven for the future. Let us turn then from the cumulative meaning and value in tradition, its synchronic aspect, to its diachronic or particular meaning for each new time, receiving from the past, ordering the present and constructing the future. This is a matter, first of all, of taking time seriously, that is, of recognizing that reality includes authentic novelty. This contrasts to the perspective of Plato for whom the real is the ideal and unchangeable forms or ideas transcending matter and time, of which physical things and temporal events are but shadows. It also goes beyond rationalism's search for clear and distinct knowledge of eternal and simple natures and their relations in terms of which all might be controlled, as well as beyond romanticism's attention to a primordial unchanging nature hidden in the dimly sensed past. *A fortiori*, it goes beyond method alone without content.

In contrast to all these, the hermeneutic notion of 'application'<sup>39</sup> is based upon an awareness that "reality is temporal and unfolding". This means that tradition, with its inherent authority or normative force, achieves its perfection in the temporal unfolding of reality. Secondly, it shows human persons and social groups, not as detached intellects, but as incarnate and hence enabled by, and formative of, their changing social universe. Thirdly, in the area of socio-political values and action, it expresses directly the striving of persons and groups to realize their lives and the development of this striving into attitudes (*hexis*) and institutions. Hence, as distinct from the physical order, human action is a situation neither of law nor of lawlessness, but of human and, therefore, developing institutions and attitudes. These do not determine and hence destroy human freedom, but regulate and promote its exercise.<sup>40</sup> This is the existential or diachronic dimension of culture which is a matter not only of choice between multiple human alternatives, but of living the divine gift of existence, by which we are constituted in being, of which freedom is the properly humane exercise, and for which culture is then the cumulative exercise.

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<sup>39</sup> Gadamer, pp. 281-286.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.



This can be observed in an emerging pattern at each level of reality, indeed this is the emergence of reality. Parmenides was the first to make clear philosophically the opposition of being to nonbeing or nothing, but we experience this constantly in our inability to reduce anything at all to nothing. As noted above pound a rock as one will, there will always remain a powder or residue. More positively, we see this in plants which, given proper conditions, can be counted on to grow, blossom and bear fruit. Animals with their additional competencies of motion and sensation are able to search out their food, water and partners, and to defend their lives and those of their offspring.

When humans add to these capabilities those of intellect and will this thrust of being, of life over death, reaches its physical summit. With imagination humans can work out in almost infinite number of ways to exercise and promote their personal and corporate life. Taken synchronically, as these constitute patterns of choices on how to live, they constitute cultures.

But more fundamentally they are not simply options between different patterns, which as such constitute kinds of culture different in nature or essence. Rather they are active responses to the gift of existence whereby we have been created. They are the ways in which we can act with the dignity of images of God and concretely raise our children to share in this dignity. Nothing could be more tragic—worse than death itself—than to lose one's culture as the ability to communicate to one's children these keys to their humanity, their ability to live humanely rather than be reduced to a beastly state. In this light one can understand the utter seriousness with which the undermining of a culture is taken and the ferocious character of efforts to protect one's culture therefrom.

Conversely, one can understand the definitive seriousness and high artistry involved in the process of shaping and adapting these cultures over time to changing circumstances. These are the corporate response of a people of God as source and goal, image and guide of their life.

There are broad guidelines; ethics and politics serve as guides for historical practice and vice-versa in the application of tradition. The concrete exercise of human freedom as unique personal decisions made with others in the process of their social life constitutes a distinctive and on-going process. Historicity means that responses to the good are made always in concrete and ever-changing circumstances. Hence, the general principles of ethics and politics as a philosophic science of action cannot be purely theoretical knowledge or a simple accounting from the past. Instead, they must help people consciously exercise their freedom in concrete historical circumstances and in groups which change and are renewed.

Here, an important distinction must be made from *techné* where action is governed by an idea as an exemplary cause that is fully determined and known by objective theoretical knowledge (*epistème*). As in the case of an architect's blueprints, the skill of the engineer consists in knowing how to act according to that idea or plan. When it cannot be carried out

perfectly, some of its parts are omitted in the execution. In contrast, a society and culture with its ethics and politics, though similar in the possession of a practical guide and its application to a particular task, differ in important ways. First, by shared action toward a common goal subjects and especially societies themselves are as much constituted as creative and productive: if agents are differentiated by their action, societies are formed or destroyed by their inner interaction. Hence, moral knowledge, as an understanding of the appropriateness of human action, cannot be fully determined independently of the societies in their situation and in action.

Secondly, adaptation by societies and social groups in their application of the law does not diminish, but rather corrects and perfects the law. In relation to a world which is less ordered, the laws, rules and regulations of groups are imperfect for they cannot contain in any explicit manner the adequate response to the concrete possibilities which arise in history. It is precisely here that the creative freedom of a people is located. It does not consist in arbitrariness, for Kant is right in saying that without law freedom has no meaning. Nor does it consist in an automatic response determined by the historical situation, for then determinism and relativism would compete for the crown in undermining human freedom. Freedom consists, rather, in shaping the present according to the sense of what is just and good which we have from our cultural tradition. This we do in a way which manifests and indeed creates for the first time more of what justice and goodness mean.

The law then is not diminished by distinctive and discrete application to the varied parts of a complex civil society, but corrected and enriched. *Epoché* and equity do not diminish, but perfect the law; without them the law would be simply a mechanical replication, doing the work not of justice, but of injustice. Ethics, politics and especially aesthetics which takes account of the unique is then not only knowledge of what is right in general, but the search for what is right for this group or sub-group with its goals and in its situation. Adaptation of the means by the social group, whether occupational, religious or ethnic, is then not a matter of mere expediency. Rather, it is the essence of the search for a more perfect application of a law or tradition in the given situation and therefore the fulfillment of moral knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to note that this rule of the concrete (of what the situation is asking of us) is not known by sense knowledge, which simply registers a set of concrete facts on the horizontal level. In order to know what is morally required, the situation must be understood in the light of what is right, that is, in the light of what has been discovered vertically through tradition with its normative character about appropriate human action. Only in this light can moral consciousness as the work of intellect (*nous*), rather than of sensation, go about its job of choosing the right means.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281-286.

Therefore, to proceed simply in reaction to concrete injustices, rather than in the light of one's tradition, is ultimately destructive. It inverts the order just mentioned and results in manipulation of our hopes for the good. Destructive or repressive structures would lead us to the use of correspondingly evil means, suited only to producing evil results. The true response to evil can be worked out only in terms of the good as the highest discovery by a people, passed on in tradition and applied by it in each time and place.

Where there are multiple traditions this must be not a reason for abandoning these humanizing dimensions and proceeding in a lesser manner, but of searching for the ways in which they can be related in a yet more rich and adequate realization of human life.

The importance of application implies a central role for the virtue of prudence (*phronesis*) or thoughtful reflection which enables one to discover the appropriate means for the circumstances. This must include, also, the virtue of sagacity (*sunesis*), that is, of understanding or concern for the other. For what is required as a guide for the agent is not only the technical knowledge of an abstract ideal, but knowledge that takes account of the agent in relation to other persons. One can assess the situation adequately only inasmuch as, in a sense, one undergoes the situation with the affected parties, living and suffering with them. Aristotle rightly describes as "terrible" the one who is capable of manipulating the situation, but is without orientation towards moral ends and without concern for the good of others in their concrete situations.

In sum, application is not a subsequent or accidental part of understanding, added on after perfect understanding has been achieved; rather it co-determines this understanding from the beginning. Moral consciousness must seek to understand the good, not as an ideal to be known and then applied, but rather through discerning the good for concrete peoples in their relations with others.

Creativity in the application of the tradition in the concrete circumstances of life thus becomes essential. In this context Cua cites J. Pelican's deft aphorism: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."<sup>42</sup>

## **HERMENEUTIC, METAPHYSICAL AND RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS**

The notion of application can help in sorting out the human dilemma between an absolutism insensitive to persons in their concrete circumstances and a relativism which leaves the person subject to expediency in public and private life. Indeed, the very statement of the dilemma reflects the deleterious aspect of the Platonic view of ideas. He

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<sup>42</sup> Jaroslav Pelican, *Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 65.

was right to ground changing and historical being in the unchanging and eternal. This had been Parmenides's first insight in metaphysics and has been richly developed in relation to human action through the medievals' notion of an eternal law in the divine mind.

But it seems inappropriate to speak directly in these terms regarding human life, for in all things individual human persons and humankind as a whole are subject to time, growth and development. As we become increasingly conscious of this, the personal character even of our abstract ideals becomes manifest and their adapted application in time can be seen, not as their rejection, but as their perfection. In this, justice loses none of its force as an absolute requirement of human action. Rather, the concrete modes of its application in particular circumstances add to what might have been articulated in merely abstract and universal terms. A hermeneutic approach directs attention precisely to these unfoldings of the meaning of abstract principles through time. This is not an abandonment of absolutes, but a recognition of the human condition and of the way in which this continually and, in endlessly marvelous manners, unfolds the ultimate richness of the source and principle of social life.

If so what should be the attitude of a philosopher in our day to this mode of aesthetics? If it be itself appreciative and conservative, is one who interprets it subject to the same approach and limited to the same content, or can interpretation legitimately open up new meaning in old texts? In other words, must ancient texts be read only with an ancient outlook? Indeed, is it even possible today to have an authentically ancient outlook—to see with eyes long closed in death—or does the attempt to do so require so much make-believe as to be in effect impossible? Even if one were to succeed in reconstituting the past, would one be faithful to the text which was written as a vital expression of the process of life, or would one instead be rendering lifeless a living text<sup>43</sup> (not unlike the biologist who makes a slide of once living tissue)?

It would seem, therefore, that our goal should be not simply to reiterate ancient times in reading ancient texts, but to recognize that we come to them from new times, with new horizons and new questions. We should allow them to speak anew to us; in so doing, the texts and philosophies are living rather than dead—and, therefore, more true. Texts read in this sense are part of a living tradition in which is situated our struggle to face the problems of life and build a future worthy of those who follow.

Some would fear that to give such importance to the horizon of the reader of a text might constitute a relativism and lose the permanent significance of the insights of the author. But this would seem to reflect a material and mechanical model ruled by successive discrete moments of

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<sup>43</sup> B. Tatar, *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of the Author: H.-G. Gadamer vs E.D. Hirsch* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998).

time in which universality is a function only of abstraction. This leaves what is universally applicable as relatively vacuous and reduces one to pragmatism as one's only response to concrete and changing circumstances.

Here, the real issue regards one's metaphysics: what is the nature of being, what does it mean to be? If the answer, as the Confucian sense of community would be the first to suggest, is not that the person is reductively matter trapped in time, but more amply one who exercises modes of intellect and will, i.e., of spirit through time, then to look for meaning in terms of the reaches of the spirit across time is not to lose but to find meaning. This is the sense of being emerging through the consciousness of Heidegger's person as *dasein*. Being is not merely what was, but what blossoms ever fresh in the human heart. In the same way, in reading ancient texts philosophy is not archeology but, like every human act, a creative unfolding of being in time. This creative freedom is the essential characteristic of the person.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, it is precisely as this is seen in the context of an understanding of being as infinite and transcending that we are opened beyond ourselves and even beyond the present state of our society and our culture.

Our mind and heart are directed toward an inner transcendence or immanence, Being itself which is the source from which the *dasein* emerges into time. This was the dynamic of the investigations of Heidegger as he moved from his earlier period of *Being and Time* to the so-called later Heidegger which concentrated rather on Being itself, the infinite source of all beings detailed in his work, *Parmenides*.<sup>45</sup> As the source precisely of our conscious intentional life this is Spirit marked not only by conscious self-awareness but celebrating its own perfection in and as love. Shankara at the heart of the Hindu religious tradition would express this by his *advaitan* (or non-dual) metaphysics of the absolute as existence, consciousness and bliss. The Christian sense of creation would express it as the life of the Spirit not only as creative source and ultimate goal (alpha and omega), but as lived by persons and peoples, individually and socially in the exercise of responsible freedom through time. We are moved thereby to pursue the realization in time of a social life reflecting the Unity, Truth and Goodness of the divine in which being is founded and life consists. In this lies stimulation for progress and hope for success.

What, then, should we conclude regarding the root of the actuality, the good or the perfection of reality which mankind has discovered, in which we have been raised, which gives us dominion over our actions, and which enables us to be free and creative? Does it come from God or from

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<sup>44</sup> Musa Dibadj, *The Authenticity of the Text in Hermeneutics* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Trans. A. Schuwer and R. Rojcewicz (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992).

man, from eternity or from history? As cited above in Chapter III, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari of Madras answered:

Whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation's faith and ideas are produced by its literature.... All such inquiries take us to the feet of God transcending speech and thought.<sup>46</sup>

*Religious Pluralism and the Progress of Cultures and Civilizations*

We encounter here an issue especially pregnant for progress in our time of globalization and interchange between cultures and civilizations. That is, if the diachronic character of tradition as prospective and progressive is founded in the Transcendent articulated explicitly in their religions how can the traditions, whether Western or Eastern, Buddhist, Hindu or Confucian, themselves live a fidelity that is progressive.

Thus far, we have treated the character and importance of a cultural tradition as bearing the long experience of persons interacting with their world and with other persons and with God. It is made up not only of chronological facts, but of insights regarding human perfection and its foundations which have been forged by human efforts in concrete circumstances, e.g., the Greek notion of democracy and the enlightenment notions of equality and freedom. By their internal value, these stand as normative of the aspirations of a people.

Secondly, we have seen the implication of historicity for novelty within the context of tradition, namely, that the continually unfolding circumstances of historical development do not merely extend or repeat what went before, but constitute an emerging manifestation of the ultimate roots of being that is articulated by the art, religion, literature and political structures of a cultural tradition.

It remains for us now to treat the third element in this study of tradition, namely, to see how the hermeneutic method can contribute to enabling the ultimate roots of cultures to be unfolded through mutual questioning in order to contribute to the progress of humankind. That is, we have seen how synchronically the infinite and eternal perfection is participated in patterns that constitute cultures lived in the many social groupings. We have seen also how diachronically these cultural traditions are more prospective than retrospective when unfolded in ways that are relevant, indicative and directive of our life in present circumstances? Thirdly we have seen how the potentiality for this rich adaptive character of a cultural tradition has roots whether immanent or transcendent. Now we must see how these can combine so that the ultimate and generally religious

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<sup>46</sup> *Ramayana* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), p. 312.

foundations of the many peoples interact in a way that enables each and all to proceed jointly in facing the future.

*The Hermeneutics of a Cultural Tradition: Unfolding by Questioning*

If we take time and culture seriously, then we must recognize that we are situated in a particular culture and at a particular time. All that can be seen from this vantage point constitutes one's horizon. This would be lifeless and dead, determined rather than free, if our vantage point were to be fixed by its circumstances and closed. Hence we need to meet other minds and hearts not simply to add information incrementally, but to be challenged in our basic assumptions and enabled thereby to delve more deeply into our own tradition to draw forth deeper and more pervasive truth. How can this be done?

First of all, it is necessary to note that only a unity of meaning, that is, an identity, is intelligible.<sup>47</sup> Just as it is not possible to understand a number five if we include only four units rather than five, no act of understanding is possible unless it is directed to an identity or whole of meaning. This brings us to the classic issue of the hermeneutic circle in which knowledge of the whole depends upon knowledge of the parts, and vice versa. How can this work for, rather than against, the development of social life?

The experience of reading a text might be suggestive. As we read we construe the meaning of a sentence before grasping all its individual parts. What we construe is dependent upon our expectation of the meaning of the sentence, which we derived from its first words, the prior context, or more likely, from a combination of the two. In turn, our expectation or construal of the meaning of the text is adjusted according to the requirements of its various parts as we proceed to read through the parts of the sentence, the paragraph, etc., continually reassessing the whole in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole. This basically circular movement continues until all appears to fit and to be clear.

Similarly, in regard to our cultural tradition and values, we develop a prior conception of its content. This anticipation of meaning is not simply of the tradition as an objective past or fixed content to which we come; it is rather what we produce as we participate in the evolution of the tradition and, thereby, further determine ourselves. This is a creative stance reflecting the content, not only of the past, but of the time in which I stand and of the life project in which I am engaged. It is a creative unveiling of the content of the tradition as this comes progressively and historically into the present, and through the present passes into the future.

In this light, time is not a barrier, separation or abyss, but rather a bridge and opportunity for the process of understanding, a fertile ground filled with experience, custom and tradition. The importance of the

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<sup>47</sup> Gadamer, p. 262.

historical distance it provides is not that it enables the subjective reality of persons to disappear so that the objectivity of the situation can emerge. On the contrary, it makes possible a more complete awareness of the meaning of the tradition, less by removing falsifying factors than by opening new sources of self-understanding which reveal in the tradition unsuspected implications and even new dimensions of meaning.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, not all our acts of understanding about the meaning of a text from another culture, a dimension of a shared tradition, a set of goals or a plan for future action are sufficient. Hence, it becomes particularly important that they not be adhered to fixedly, but be put at risk in dialogue with others.

In this, the basic elements remain the substances or persons which Aristotle described in terms of autonomy and, by implication, of identity. Hermeneutics would expand this to reflect as well the historical and hermeneutic situation of each person in the dialogue, that is, their horizon or particular possibility for understanding. As an horizon is all that can be seen from one's vantage point(s), in dialogue with others it is necessary to be aware of our horizon, as well as that of others. For it is precisely when our initial projection of their meaning will not bear up under progressive dialogue that we are required to make needed adjustments in our projection of their meaning.

This enables one to adjust one's prior understanding not only of the horizon of the other with whom one is in dialogue, but especially of one's own horizon. Hence, one need not fear being trapped; horizons are vantage points of a mind which in principle is open and mobile, capable of being aware of its own limits and of transcending them through acknowledging the horizons of others. The flow of history implies that we are not bound by our horizons, but move in and out of them. It is in making us aware of our horizons that hermeneutic consciousness accomplishes our liberation.<sup>49</sup>

For this, we must maintain a questioning attitude. Rather than simply following through with our previous ideas until a change is forced upon us, we must remain sensitive to new meanings in true openness. This is neither neutrality as regards the meaning of the tradition, nor an extinction of passionate concern regarding action towards the future. Rather, being aware of our own biases or prejudices and adjusting them in dialogue with others implies rejecting what impedes our understanding of others, of their religious or cultural traditions, or even of our own. Our attitude in approaching dialogue must be one of willingness continually to revise our initial projection or expectation of meaning.

The way out of the hermeneutic circle is then not by ignoring or denying our horizons and initial judgments or prejudices, but by recognizing them as inevitable and making them work for us in drawing

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 263-64.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235-242, 267-271.



out, not the meaning of the text for its author,<sup>50</sup> but its application for the present. Through this process of application we serve as midwife for culture as historical or tradition, enabling it to give birth to the future.<sup>51</sup>

The logical structure of this process is the exchange of question and answer. A question is required in order to determine just what issue we are engaging—whether it is this issue or that—so that we might direct to our attention. Without this, no meaningful answer can be given or received. As a question, however, it requires that the answer not be settled or determined. In sum, progress or discovery requires an openness which is not simple indeterminacy, but a question which gives specific direction to our attention and enables us to consider significant evidence.

If discovery depends upon the question, then the art of discovery is the art of questioning. Consequently, in working in conjunction with others, the heart of the democratic process is not to suppress, but to reinforce and unfold the questions of others. To the degree that these probabilities are built up and intensified they can serve as a searchlight. This is the opposite of both opinion which tends to suppress questions, and of arguing which searches out the weakness in the other's positions. Instead, in democracy, understood as conversation and dialogue directed toward governance, one enters upon a mutual search to maximize the possibilities of the question, even by speaking at cross purposes, for it is by mutually eliminating errors and working out a common meaning that we discover truth.<sup>52</sup>

In this there appears the importance of interreligious dialogue. Rather than being merely an external act of mutual acknowledgement, in view of what has been said above it is a true requisite if our cultures are to be open and developing. As religion is the basic conscious recognition of the transcendent horizon which invites progress, interchange between religions is important in order that this relation of cultures to their infinite source and goal remain open and be renewed. Indeed this would seem to be the more important the more education especially in its modern rationalist context advances, for the more a tradition is rationalized, philosophized or theologized the more it is made stable and fixed. The greater then is the danger of its becoming closed in upon itself and becoming inadequate for its task of reflecting the infinite and transcendent.

#### *Cultural Pluralism: Dialogue and Progress*

Further, in the present context of globalization such interchange provides an alternative to the much feared conflict of civilizations projected by S. Huntington. It should not be presupposed that a text, such as a

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<sup>50</sup> B. Tatar, *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of The Author: H.-G. Gadamer vs E.D. Hirsch* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> Gadamer, pp. 235-332.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-332.

tradition, law or constitution, will hold the answer to but one question or can have but one horizon which must be identified by the reader. On the contrary, the full horizon of the author(s) is never available to the reader, nor can it be expected that there is but one question to which a tradition or document holds an answer. The sense of texts reaches beyond what their authors intended because the dynamic character of being as it emerges in time means that the horizon is never fixed but is continually opening. This constitutes the effective historical element in understanding a text or a tradition. At each step new dimensions of its potentialities open to understanding, so that the meaning of a text or tradition lives with the consciousness and hence the horizons—not of its author—but of people in dialogue with others through time and history.

This is the essence both of democracy within a nation and of religious interchange in a time of globalization. They are processes of broadening horizons, through fusion with the horizons of others in dialogue, that makes it possible to receive from one's cultural tradition and its values answers which are ever new.<sup>53</sup>

In this, one's personal attitudes and interests remain important. If our interest in developing new horizons is simply the promotion of our own understanding then we could be interested solely in achieving knowledge, and thereby in dominating others. This would lock one into an absoluteness of one's prejudices. Being fixed or closed in the past, they would disallow new life in the present. In this manner, powerful new insights can become with time deadening pre-judgments which suppress freedom. This would seem to be the supposition of S. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. He sees civilizations as grounded in religions and develops at length the reason for the expectation that these will become ever more influential as time progresses. Unfortunately, he sees all identities as essentially self-centered and conflictual.

In contrast, an attitude of authentic religion as well as of democratic openness appreciates the nature of one's own finiteness. This has two dimensions. One is that of time, by which one is able at once to respect the past and to be open to discerning the future. Such openness is a matter of recognizing the historical nature of man and his basis in an Absolute that transcends and grounds time. The other dimension is horizontal, across civilizations, cultures and their religious foundations. This too is based in the absolute which no culture can adequately reflect. This enables us to escape fascination with externals and delve the deeper reaches of religious awareness by learning from the experiences of others.<sup>54</sup>

This suggests that openness does not consist in surveying others objectively, obeying them in a slavish and unquestioning manner or simply juxtaposing their ideas and traditions to our own. Rather, it is directed primarily to ourselves, for our ability to listen to others is correlatively our

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 336-340.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 327-324.

ability to assimilate the implications of their answers for going more deeply into the meaning of our own religious and cultural traditions and drawing out new and ever more rich insights. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that our cultural heritage has something new to say to us.

The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is, then, not methodological sureness, readiness for new compromises or new techniques of social organization. All these are subject to social critique and manipulation on the horizontal level. Instead, it is readiness to draw out in democratic dialogue new meaning from a common tradition.<sup>55</sup> Seen in these terms our heritage of culture and values is not closed or dead, but, through a democratic life, remains ever new by becoming even more inclusive and more rich.

This takes us beyond the rigid rationalism of the later Enlightenment and the too fluid moral sentiment of the earlier Enlightenment. It enables us to respond to the emerging sense of the identity of peoples and to protect and promote this in a religiously pluralistic society marked by solidarity and subsidiarity.

In this as a social project one guiding principle is to maintain a harmony or social equilibrium through time. In addition the notion of application allows the religious tradition to provide resources and guidance in facing new issues and in developing new responses to changing times. With rising numbers and expectations, economic development becomes an urgent need. But its very success could turn into defeat if this is not oriented and applied with a pervasive but subtle and adaptive human governance sensitive to all forms of human comity. This is required for orienting all suavely to the social good in which the goal of civil society consists.

This will require new advances in science and economics, in education and psychology, in the humanities and social services, that is, across the full range of social life. All these dimensions, and many more, must spring to new life, but in a basic convergence and harmony. The values and virtues emerging from the grounds of our cultural traditions and heritages and applied in freedom provide needed guidance along new and ever evolving paths. In this way cooperation between cultures and their roots is key to social progress.

#### *Cooperation among Cultures and Civilizations in an Attitude of Thanksgiving*

Thus far we have articulated cultural tradition as emerging from human experience and creativity in the exercise of human life, both personally and in the social groups. We have seen also how the force of this reflects in turn its foundation in absolute unity, truth and love in the manner of participation first suggested in the West by Plato.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325.

That sense of gift may make it possible to extend the notions of duty and harmony beyond concern for the well-being of myself and those with whom I share, and whose well-being is then in a sense my own. The good is not only what contributes to my perfection, for I am not the center of meaning. Rather, being, understood as received, paradoxically is essentially out-going.

This has two important implications for our topic. Where the Greek focus upon their own heritage had led to depreciating others as barbarians, the sense of oneself and of one's culture as radically given or gifted provides a basic corrective. Knowing and valuing oneself and one's culture as gifts implies more than merely reciprocating what the other does for me. It means, first, that others and their culture are to be respected simply because they too have been given or gifted by the one Transcendent source. This is an essential step which Gandhi, in calling outcasts by the name "harijans" or "children of God," urged us to take beyond the sense of pride or isolation in which we would see others in pejorative terms.

But mere respect is not enough. The fact that I and another—my people or culture and another—originate from, share in and proclaim the same "total absolute", especially as this creates not out of need but out of love, implies that the relation between cultures as integrating modes of human life is in principle one of complementarity and outreach. Hence, interchange as the effort to live this complementarity is far from being hopeless. In the pressing needs of our times only an intensification of bonds of cooperation between peoples can make available the needed immense stores of human experience and creativity. The positive virtue of love is our real basis for hope.

A second principle of interchange is to be found in the participated—the radically given or gifted—character of one's being. One does not first exist and then receive, but one's very existence is a received existence or gift. To attempt to give back this gift, as in an exchange of presents, would be at once hopelessly too much and too little. On the one hand, to attempt to return in strict equivalence would be too much, for it is our very self that we have received as gift. On the other hand, to think merely in terms of reciprocity would be to fall essentially short of one's nature as one that is given, for to make a merely equivalent return would be to remain centered upon oneself where one would cleverly trap, and then entomb, the creative power of being.

Rather, looking back one sees the futility of giving back, and in this finds the fundamental importance of passing on the gift in the spirit in which it has been received. One's nature as given calls for a creative generosity which reflects that of its source. Truly appropriate generosity lies in continuing the giving of which I have received. This means shaping one's cultural tradition creatively in response to the present needs not only of ourselves but of others, and cooperating with the creative gifts at the heart of other cultures so that they may be fully lived, that is, shared.

This vision requires the vast expansion central to the Buddhist and Hindu visions which we shall examine in Part IV below; it requires breaking out of oneself as the only center of one's concern. It means becoming appreciative and effectively concerned with the good of others and of other groups, with the promotion and vital growth of the next generation and those to follow. This is the motivation to engage with others in the creation of an harmonious culturally pluralistic world of civilizations and religions and to contribute thereby to the good of the whole. Indeed it means advancing Iqbal's Islamic insight regarding religious thought a step further to a harmony of man and nature which reflects what he terms "the Total Absolute" as the condition of possibility of all.

### **CONCLUSION: THE CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF LIFE IN OUR TIMES**

The implications of such generosity are broad and at times surprisingly personal. First, true openness to others cannot be based upon a depreciation of oneself or of one's own culture. Without appreciating one's worth there would be nothing to share and no way to help, nor even the possibility of enjoying the good of the other. Further, cultural interchange enables one to see more fundamentally the elements of one's life. In isolation these may have seemed to be merely local customs and purely repetitive in character. In reality they are modes in which one lives basic and essential human values. In meeting others and other cultures, one discovers the deeper meaning in one's own everyday life.

One does more than discover, however. One recognizes that in these transcendental values of life—truth and freedom, love and beauty—one participates in the dynamism of one's origin and hence must share these values in turn. More exactly, one comes to realize that real reception of these transcendental gifts lies in sharing them in loving concern in order that others may realize them as well. This means that passing on one's own cultural and religious heritage is not done by replicating it in others, but by promoting their own response to these gifts and thus what others and subsequent generations would freely become.

Finally, that other cultures are quintessentially products of self-cultivation by other spirits as free and creative images of their divine source implies the need to open one's horizons beyond one's own self-concerns to the ambit of the freedom of others. This involves promoting the development of other free and creative centers and cultures which, precisely as such, are not in one's own possession or under one's own control. One lives then no longer in terms merely of oneself or of things that one can make or manage, but in terms of an interchange between free persons and people's of different cultures. Personal responsibility is no longer merely individual decision making or for individual good. Effectively realized, the resulting interaction and mutual fecundation reaches out beyond oneself and

one's own culture to reflect ever more perfectly the glory of the one source and goal of all.<sup>56</sup>

This implies a truly shared effort in which all respond fully, not only to majority or even common needs, but to the particular needs of each. This broad sense of tolerance and loving outreach even in the midst of tensions is the fruit of Iqbal's religious attitude of appreciation as mediated through a phenomenology of gift. It has been described by Pope John Paul II as a state in which violence cedes to peaceful transformation, and conflict to pardon and reconciliation; where power is made reasonable by persuasion, and justice finally is implemented through love.<sup>57</sup>

There is an image for this in the Book of Isaias. It is that of the many nations, each proceeding along its own way marked out by its own culture, and all converging toward the Holy Mountain as the summit of unity, meaning and love.<sup>58</sup> In these pluralist and global times we are conscious of, and effected by, this process, not only in the lives of our own people and civilization but in others as well. Here we have tried to see how this can be a process of enrichment, which does not destroy but evolves our own identity, and that this process in turn depends upon and contributes to others. In this the lynchpin is transcendence: the ability to open by interchange with others ultimately to the religious resources of our culture and by going more deeply into our own identity to find this relation to others. This is the hermeneutic interchange of whole and part in which we are the actors; the life of humankind is the text, and its ultimate concern is to be, that is, to live in truth and justice, goodness and love. In the chapter which follows we shall attempt to see how the objective and subjective sense of the person unite to open rich new possibilities for human life in our times and in Part IV we shall look for the ways in which the sense of the person can be developed by the resources of the great Asian religious philosophies and civilizations.

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<sup>56</sup> Schmitz, pp. 84-86.

<sup>57</sup> John Paul II, "Address at Puebla," *Origins*, VIII (n.34, 1979), I, 4 and II, 41-46.

<sup>58</sup> *Isaias* 27:13.

## CHAPTER VII

# KAROL WOJTYLA'S MUTUAL ENRICHMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHIES OF BEING AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Thusfar much of this work on the person has been chronological and thus historical in character. Part II introduced the foundational sense of unity or identity from totemic thought and followed with the emergence of the appreciation of the diversity of persons in mythic thought. Part III followed with the development of a more external, objective sense of person in classical ancient and modern philosophy and the addition thereto of the interior dimension of human subjectivity in recent times.

Yet the intent has been not to be merely chronological or historical, but rather to face the challenges and engage the possibilities which the interchange of civilizations opens in these global times. Concretely, these consist extensively in the efforts of a large part of the human race to integrate the notion of an objectively inviolable person articulated by individual human rights into cultures marked strongly by their sense of an integrating community context of social life. It was for this reason that Part I led off with two chapters, the first articulating the modern objective construction of this notion of person and the second critiquing this construct as, in the words of Charles de Koninck, a hollow universe.

Now, in the light of the previous chapter on the recent appreciation of human subjectivity, we are in position to open the way to a response to the challenge of our times. For if the way can be opened to human interiority then it will be possible to enrich the objective sense of the person with the vital inner exercise of its creative freedom, rights can be directed to humane goals, cultural traditions can make possible the humanizing meaning and commitment needed for life, and the result of a meeting of civilizations can be not a clash but a symphony. We will seek support for this in Asian philosophies in Part IV.

But in order that this take place there remains a crucial task. In philosophy it never suffices simply to add horizons one alongside another. Whereas philosophy always seeks an integrating wholistic vision, two basic horizons existing side by side promise division and conflict rather than harmony and enrichment. This could be seen from the earliest days of philosophy in ancient Greece where Aristotle, as student of Plato for 20 years, developed as much a critique as an application of the thought of his teacher. In fact in terms of being as form the two presented the basic alternative for understanding: either descend from principles pre-known and remembered or ascend to principles from concrete sense experience. Reconciliation in order that the contributions of both traditions be harvested remained impossible until the very sense of being was moved gradually

from form to existence during the subsequent Patristic period and the Scholastic—Islamic and Christian—Middle Ages.

The structure of this work now brings us to an analogous juncture. In Part I we found that the objective sense of the person led us to an empty sense of person, and in Part III we elaborated on the needed dimension of subjectivity. Thus the challenge of our global times now appears starkly before us. If, on the one hand, the objective approach to the person becomes hegemonic then the interior life of the person which has produced human cultures will be dismissed and social life will be dehumanized. If, on the other hand, the interior life of consciousness succeeds in claiming the whole field of the philosophical understanding of the person the result will be an idealism in which universal categories of the mind will substitute for the dynamic life of humankind lived in time and with others.

The task then is not merely to recognize these two fields, objective and subjective, but to integrate them in the unity that is the human person. And if we can take a hint from inability to reconcile Plato and Aristotle in their own Greek terms of being-as-form, we can suspect that no amount of effort to reconcile the objectivity and subjectivity of the human person will succeed unless there be a deepening of the very sense of being itself.

This is exactly what was happening in the post World War II years of the 1950s and 1960s. After the 400 years of modernity analyzed in Part I, the tragedy of the War brought home the poverty of the philosophy focused too long on Descartes' clarity and distinctness. This had shifted attention to essence, quite missing the reality of existence. To redress this essentialism there arose an equally extreme existentialism. Its emphasis was needed, but its exclusive focus on existence was its weakness. What was needed was an ability to draw on and build upon the point in philosophy where the traditions of essence had been integrated in a deeper sense of being as existence.

This was the work of Thomas Aquinas. In the neo-scholastic revival of the late 1800s, the strongly rationalist context of the times emphasized essence. Conversely, in the context of the existentialism of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century this was redeveloped by Cornelio Fabro with a greater appreciation of existence (*esse*). His work on participation had been written in the 1930s, but was not published till after the war in 1950. Charles Hart at The Catholic University of America in Washington carried out the implications of this for all parts of metaphysics.

It was precisely this development of the existential sense of being which made it possible to integrate within the notion of person both the objective philosophy of being and the philosophy of human consciousness or subjectivity. This chapter is historical in character and will focus on this integration in the work of Karol Wojtyla, later John Paul II. It joins many other investigations of his work. Most have investigated specific aspects of his thought and together they constitute a rich mosaic of his insights regarding the human person and community. Fewer studies concern the overall structure of his work and look for how his philosophy was crafted.



Cardinal Wojtyla described his work as an individual, “groping” effort to return toward that which is objective in ethics (and above all in morality). He sought to reach these roots through a broadened discovery of the problem of the subject or the human being as seen through one’s actions. Externally, he describes his effort as owing “everything to the systems of metaphysics, of anthropology, and of Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics on the one hand, and to phenomenology, above all in Scheler’s interpretation, and through Scheler’s critique also to Kant, on the other hand.”<sup>1</sup> Here we will attempt to unveil the pioneering character of his work, particularly as regards the opening to human subjectivity and its foundation in being, in terms of act or *esse*.

It is precisely this integration of objectivity and subjectivity, and of essence and existence which now makes it possible to integrate positively the content of the multiple cultures as we move into global times. This will be the burden of the consideration of Asian philosophy in Part IV. If it be possible to draw their cultural creativity into the shaping of philosophy for the future then progress will need no longer to consist in a suppression of the many peoples of the world. On the contrary, the future of persons and peoples will be able to be enriched by the human creativity of all.

#### THE PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES OF THOMAS AQUINAS

As noted, Martin Heidegger<sup>2</sup> provides a method for examining philosophical traditions in the history of philosophical thought. A time of crisis may call for a particular response and subsequently, as this is developed in a consistent sequence, a philosophical tradition is evolved. This leaves undeveloped or underdeveloped alternate paths which had existed rudimentarily prior to the crisis, and which were left fallow in its aftermath. As a result, at a later crisis the way forward can well be a step back to take up the path less followed—or hardly attended to at all.

Heidegger applies this to the crisis in Greece. Upon finding that the rhetoric taught by the Sophists provided no adequate guidance when Athens killed its own Socrates, it was clear that external norms for human action were needed. The response is depicted in Michelangelo’s painting of the Agora. There Plato points upward to separated and unchanging ideas, while Aristotle points down to changing nature; both point not inward into the subject, but outward to an ‘ob-ject’; to something cast over against them.

Yet together they bring important alternatives regarding the objective understanding of reality. Is the real to be seen as emerging from the multiple and changing, as with Aristotle, or with Plato as descending

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<sup>1</sup> *The Acting Person* (Analecta Husserliana, V. 10; Dordrecht, Boston: D. Reidel, 1979), xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Vensus George, *The Experience of Being as Goal of Human Existence: The Heideggerian Approach* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), 221.

from the one and unchanging; does it come from matter or from spirit; is it in time or eternity? In Greek terms of 'form' these are irreducible alternatives, but as time moves on and new vision opens up, it may be that these alternatives become complementary enrichments of an ever-more sophisticated sense of being and person. It is in these latter terms that we would see the work of Aquinas and of Wojtyla.

### *Being*

This is particularly important for the architecture of the thought of Cardinal Wojtyla. In the neo-scholastic interpretation of Thomas with its special sensitivity to late 19th century rationalism, Thomas was read as quite decidedly Aristotelian: knowledge was primarily of objects as encountered through the senses. Anything else would undermine human self-transcendence, first to the external world and then to the transcendent cause of that world. This was the consistent frame of reference of the massive scholarship of Etienne Gilson<sup>3</sup> during the first half of the 20th century. But was this the only possible reading of Thomas Aquinas?

Early in the 20th century the search for the key to the metaphysics of Thomas was carried out in simply Aristotelian terms. For the Greeks being was form and for Aristotle it was encountered as bound to matter as act is to its corresponding potency. Hence, the Aristotelian key to Thomas' metaphysics would be act and potency, now broadened to *esse* and essence.

Soon, however, this began to appear not as untrue—and hence Thomas continued to be adjudged as most fundamentally an Aristotelian—but rather as somewhat one-sided. In the 1920s and 30s the master key to Thomas' metaphysics began to be sought in the more relational terms of analogy and causality. Then in the 1930s the effort to determine the definitive statement of the principle of causality led Cornelio Fabro to the deeper and more inclusive notion of 'participation.' He elaborated this in his *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino*,<sup>4</sup> which carried his search up to Thomas. Because of the onset of World War II, this was not able to be published till 1950. His later *Participation et Causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin*<sup>5</sup> traced the related developments after Thomas.

The genius of Fabro's work was that he did not simply take the notion of participation as it appeared in Plato and match Thomas thereto. Rather, he followed the progressive enrichment of the notion of being under

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<sup>3</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1929); *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. by A. H. C. Downes (New York, C. Scribner's sons, 1936).

<sup>4</sup> *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1950).

<sup>5</sup> *Participation et Causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Beatrice – Nauwelaerts, 1961).

the light of the experience of the early Church Fathers in their attempt to articulate the meaning of life and hence of being in the new Christian era. By following this theme through the following 1000 years, Fabro showed how the Greek notion of form was progressively enriched until, as it were, it exploded or divided into two terms: one was 'form' as related to matter; the other, as the proper effect of the creator, was 'esse' as related to essence.

This indeed was act, but not archetypically as for Aristotle the act or form of matter. Instead it was the image (*mimesis*) or limited realization (*methesis*)—Plato's terms for participation—of the absolute One as Being Itself or Subsistent *Esse*. Fabro showed how this transcendental participation constituted an intensive<sup>6</sup> notion of being or *esse*, graded in the extent to which each being participated, imaged or shared the perfection of being itself. This reflected the Platonic imagery of light proceeding from the One source which is progressively diffused and diminished.

Yet in the end Fabro sees Thomas' working out how this limitation was realized by his expansion of the sense of act and potency from form and matter in order to understand the relation of *esse* and essence. This extended development of act and potency at the very heart of being constituted Thomas as a certified Aristotelian.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Fabro developed a strong sense of the Platonic heritage in Thomas' thought, yet less than that of Arthur Little in his *Platonic Heritage of Thomism*,<sup>8</sup> for he saw this as shedding important light on what remained ultimately an Aristotelian position.

It is important to note that Fabro's work on the notion of *esse*—perhaps not coincidentally—was carried out at roughly the same time as the existentialism of Sartre<sup>9</sup> and Marcel,<sup>10</sup> Buber<sup>11</sup> and Tillich.<sup>12</sup> There was then a parallel existential movement within the Scholastic-Thomistic circles in Italy when Karol Wojtyla studied there after World War II. This participational perspective of being as participated from above through progressive limitation was the intellectual milieu in which he lived for some years. As in Michelangelo's *Agora*, this contrasted to Gilson's earlier Aristotelian Thomas which had been received in Poland. In those terms, the studies in Lublin viewed being from below, in terms of act as first manifest in physical change (the *prima via* of *Summa Theologica* I, 2, 3).

<sup>6</sup> *La nozione*, 135-139, 338-362.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 338-362.

<sup>8</sup> (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950).

<sup>9</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" in *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen, 1948).

<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence* (London: Harvill Press, 1948).

<sup>11</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

The newer Thomas of Fabro in the 1950s and 60s read being in terms of a limited participation in the divine light. This was open to a phenomenology and the philosophy of spirit and consciousness in a way that a Thomism based in matter and physical change was not. Rather than attempting to reduce his philosophy to an Aristotelianism that stood against Platonism, this sought to integrate an understanding of Thomas' sense of *esse* as having evolved in the context of the Christian Fathers and a Christian Platonism. This evolved sense of *esse* was able both to be implemented by appreciating Thomas' proper contribution in broadening the sense of act and potency to its proper mode in *esse* and essence, and now to be enriched further by phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness.

### *Subjectivity and Christian Platonism*

For this philosophy of consciousness it is important to note as well that early in the Christian era Augustine had stepped notably beyond the Greek sense of objectivity, and particularly beyond that of Aristotle as grounded in sense knowledge. Rather, he pointed inward to human consciousness in search of the Spirit. He did so in ways more similar to the Eastern religious traditions than to Aristotle's physics. This marked the character of Christian philosophy through the Middle Ages up to Thomas' contemporary, Bonaventure.

Some thousand years after Augustine, Thomas took a special step in the heritage of this Christian philosophy by integrating the tradition of Augustinian Platonism with Aristotle. Agreement over whether form was to be understood from above or from below had not been possible in the Agora, but it became so in the evolved sense of being understood as existence and this as the proper effect of divine creation. This is especially important today with the emerging need to attend to human subjectivity. While Thomas may in the end have come to see Aristotle's relation of act and potency as central<sup>13</sup> this was in no way in terms of Averroes' 'pure' Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> Rather he integrated within his thought the Platonic heritage of participation and the subjectivity of Augustine. This enables his thought today to be interpreted and extended—in the manner of a *sensus plenior*—so as to draw out its inherent subjectivity. This is not a rejection of Thomas or his Aristotelianism as some phenomenologists would too simplistically hold, nor an external addition thereto as some Scholastics of a particularly Aristotelian bent would protest.

Not long after Aquinas, the nominalism of William of Ockham put aside his metaphysics of the subject to leave only single beings open to, and measured by, sense knowledge alone. The result was a radical renewal of

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<sup>13</sup> *La nozione*, 338-362.

<sup>14</sup> Beatrice Zedler, "Averroes on the Possible Intellect," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association (ACPA)* (1951), 165-179.

objectivism and materialism, as typified in England by Hobbes, Lock and Hume; this was divorced from metaphysics and capable only of utilitarian manipulation. Even the Continental philosophical points of reference regarding subject and person, namely, Descartes and Kant, sought only what was clear and distinct, universal and necessary. Gabriel Marcel<sup>15</sup> would note that their subject remained in fact an epistemological object, the uniqueness and freedom of the person having been quite lost.

By the 1930s this objectivism had degenerated into a set of mega-ideologies: fascism, communism and colonial capitalism, devoid of human freedom and dignity. Thus modernity was doomed, and within the next 50 years all three had expired, whether through external war (WWII) at the cost of up to 100 million lives, the decolonialization of the 1960s, or the internal exhaustion of the Soviet Union in the early 90s. We speak now no longer of modernity, but of post-modernity.

This end of modernity is the context in which the work of Karol Wojtyła needs to be situated, for his thought consisted precisely in opening new horizons for human life. His thought must be understood not as an abstract systematizing, but as that of a spiritual craftsman or plastic artist—he described himself as “groping for his formulation of the concept of the ‘acting person’.”<sup>16</sup> conceiving and molding his materials in order to lead and inspire his people—indeed all peoples, as could be perceived in the world assemblage at the time of his funeral.

### **THE MAKING OF A MIND: KAROL WOJTYŁA IN THE 1950s AND 1960s**

#### *Subjectivity*

The post World War II decades were the years in which Wojtyła shaped his philosophical vision for his efforts in Poland at a renewal of philosophy that would liberate the peoples of Eastern Europe and reconstitute their humanity. Two issues were central. One of these was phenomenology and the turn inward to the subject in order to complement the abstract rationalism of modern times and even the realist objectivism of the Scholastic tradition. As noted above, in the neo-scholastic revival of the 1880s there had been so great an emphasis upon reason that the movement felt obliged to show that Thomas was in fact more rational, or at least more solidly rational, than the rationalists themselves. This was brilliantly achieved, as illustrated by the works of Etienne Gilson and remained the focus of the work at the Catholic University of Lublin.

Wojtyła took up the challenge of enlivening and enriching this objectivism with the subjectivity which the tragedy of World War II

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<sup>15</sup> Gabriel Marcel, “On the Ontological Mystery,” *Philosophy of Existence* (London: Harvill, 1948).

<sup>16</sup> *Acting Person*, xiv.

showed to be needed in order to defend and promote the proper dignity of the human person. Thus, his two doctorates were on Scheler, and also on the interior, even mystical life of St. John of the Cross. Indeed, his director, Garrigou-Lagrange, the major Scholastic theologian in Rome at the time, while writing the key dogmatic treatises in a definitive post-Tridentine manner, wrote also on the mystical life of John of the cross and St. Theresa of Avila.<sup>17</sup> This interest was reinforced by Wojtyla's native pride in the Polish phenomenologist, Roman Ingarden,<sup>18</sup> and by his interest in Buber's *I and Thou*.<sup>19</sup>

As noted, at that time the whole series of existential philosophers—Sartre and Buber, Marcel and Tillich—were drawing on the method of the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. The issue in the mid- to late 50s was whether, after Sartre's declaration that man had to deny God in order to be free, it was possible to follow an existential, phenomenological exploration of human consciousness and yet be religious. John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in response and, more positively, to explore how the new attention to subjectivity could promote, rather than exclude, the life of faith. The Council stimulated intensive reflection upon these issues and was a major and essential element in the development of Karol Wojtyla's vision, and vice versa.

Finally, being delegated for intellectual matters by the Polish Episcopacy, and hence for the response of the Polish Church and people to the challenge of Marxism, this took on the greatest concrete urgency for Cardinal Wojtyla. He was convinced that the only real answer to Marxism was a better philosophical anthropology on which, even when Cardinal of Krakow, he worked for some hours each morning. To dialectical materialism and its necessitating materialist dialectic of classes he responded with a focus upon the person as a unique and free image of God. This philosophy was elaborated most extensively in his *Acting Person*.

### *Being*

This required integrating the emergent awareness of existence precisely as this went beyond—but not without—essence.

To review:

1. If Thomas were to be interpreted reductively in objectivist and essentialist Aristotelian terms, then introducing the phenomenological

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<sup>17</sup> R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* according to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross (St. Louis: Herder, 1942).

<sup>18</sup> R. Ingarden, *Man and Value*, trans. by A. Szylewicz (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1983); *Short Work on Man* (Ksiuzeczka o calowreka, Krakow, 1972; *Research on Contemporary Philosophy* (A badan nad filozofia wspoligeana, Warsaw, 1963).

<sup>19</sup> (Edinburgh: Clark, 1957).

elements of interior subjectivity would have done violence to his thought. Fabro and others, however, had just shown that Aquinas' thought was in continuity with Augustinian subjectivity and Platonic participation—that it was indeed an enrichment of that Christian Platonism with the systematizing tools of Aristotle. Hence it contained, and might even be said to consist extensively in, those elements of existence and subjectivity which were strongly emergent in the continental existential phenomenologies of Wojtyła's time. Moreover, Brentano had shown the young Husserl that this interior reflection could be grounded in Aristotle's sense of intentionality.<sup>20</sup> Thus subjectivity was not antithetic to the mind of Aristotle, though due to his concern for realism in contrast to Plato's world of ideas, it was for the Platonic tradition the path less followed.

The interior path of human consciousness, so brilliantly developed by Augustine as the archetype of Christian philosophy, was at the root of Thomas' philosophy. If in times of modern objectivism, especially in a Marxist context, it was not helpful to point outward and upward as did Plato, there was urgent need to point inward to the life of the Spirit in humanity. In this project Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness could help, provided it could escape idealist closure within the human spirit. Hence, the need to provide a foundation in being for this philosophy.

2. This pointed the young Wojtyła to the work on participation which, as noted above, had been begun by Cornelio Fabro prior to World War II. This renewed the study of Aquinas by identifying not only the much noted Aristotelian elements of form and essence which were especially relevant to rationalism, but also the key Platonic notion of participation (*mimesis* and *methesis*). What this 'brought to light' (the etymology of 'phenomenology') was not only the systematizing elements of the structures of form as key to the species of material substance, but even more the sharing in being or *esse* in imitation of the creator. Fabro had carefully traced the gradual evolution of this notion through the Church Fathers and early Scholastics<sup>21</sup> as the term 'form' was gradually distinguished in order to express not only the form of matter, but, later, *esse* as distinct from form. Thomas finally related *esse* to essence not merely as an accident, as had been the case with Avicenna,<sup>22</sup> but as an expanded notion of act in relation to potency (essence). Thus, when Karol Wojtyła gives participation so central a notion in his philosophy he is at base speaking of the character of *esse* as formal effect of God's creative activity and as this is realized in beings according to their essences.

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<sup>20</sup> *Aristotle and His World View*, trans. by R. George and R. Chisholm (Berkeley: University of California, 1978); *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, trans. by R. George (Berkeley: University of California, 1975); *Psychology of Aristotle: in Particular His Doctrine of the Active Intellect*, trans. by R. George (Berkeley: University of California, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> *La nozione*, pp. 39-122; *Participation et causalité*, 179-244.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

3. In this way Fabro elaborated an intensive notion of *esse*,<sup>23</sup> graded according to the various levels of being. The orders of inorganic, vegetative, organic and animal life are graded intensively, each at a higher level than its predecessors. And if, as Thomas states, *esse* for a living being is to live, the *esse* of a person is higher than the *esse* of a non living being and means to live consciously, reflectively, freely and responsibly according to its properly human nature or essence. This is far from meaning merely “not nothing”.

Perhaps most astoundingly, this conscious life or action is not an accident adjoined to the substance, but is the very *esse* of that substance. Thus, if the subject or *supposit* is the substance as exercising its proper act of existence, then the very being of the person is most properly its self-conscious, and hence free and responsible, life. Thus, seen in the light of the investigations at the time of *esse* in terms of participation, the *Acting Person* brings not merely a sense of the importance of action as a human activity and engagement, but a penetrating insight into the very being of the person. This is properly free, unable to be assumed by state or class, yet bound in solidarity with nature and all humankind as participants in the divine Unity, Truth and Justice, Goodness and Love.

Much of this could be found in the work of Cornelio Fabro and was the exciting new development in scholastic metaphysics at that time. What Cardinal Wojtyla was conscious of adding were insights from the phenomenology of Scheler, especially regarding values. Both of these were vastly enriching, but what was key here was the combination of the two such that each contribution transformed the other. Together they constituted not only a reconciliation of opposites, but a decisive step ahead in the understanding of the human person. This was the proper philosophical contribution of Karol Wojtyla.

Hence, the notion of the human person, rather than being only formal, specific and abstracted from the uniqueness of the human person, is precisely that of a unique, irreplaceable and hence consciously free being. Moreover, this is true not only of a spirit which is somehow added to a body; rather it is the one person which is or exists in a bodily manner. Conversely, all the physical characteristics of the body—whether DNA, sexual differentiation, or physical action—are personal and carry the dignity of a unique, free and responsible being. Both physical and spiritual dimensions point to the unique character of a human person.

Here the exploration of interior conscious life takes on its full significance as the way in which the person (a) lives, (b) reflects the creative act by which he or she comes to be, and (c) is oriented teleologically toward the goodness of God as subsistent love. Every human has this dignity, and not only for human acts done consciously. This is true even as regards ‘acts of man’, that is, even where one’s freedom is not

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<sup>23</sup> *La nozione*, 135-139.



engaged one must take this human dignity into account, whether in infancy, prison or senility.

In this light it can be seen how in Thomas' times the realist objectivity based on essence provided what could then be known of the truth about man. But in the 1950s and 60s this truth was refounded in *esse* taken intensively according as the person consciously manifests the uniqueness and ineffability of the *esse* which it participates from the divine creator. Mystery, uniqueness and incommunicability, as inability to be simply assumed by class or category, are characteristics of the existing substance or "*supposit*" as existing not of itself, but in itself. In the face of Marx's class conflict this now took on enriched meaning.

Yet paradoxically, with this comes the basis for communication with all existents with whom we deeply share. Friends are not only abstractions or "gifts we give ourselves," but relationships in which we are immersed by the very fact of being created and creative participations in God as *alpha* and *omega*—the One at the summit of Plato's levels.

This creative historical juncture of *esse* and consciousness which Karol Wojtyla elaborated suggests that we look at his thought not statically as a structure out of time, but rather as a constructive effort. His situation at the point of human crisis which was the collapse of modernity recalls Heidegger's method of interpretation noted above. In this light Wojtyla's thought is not a static work with fixed pieces to be deciphered, or even to be assembled by external juxtaposition. Rather, it is an organic and creative process, not merely choosing but forging a new path. In this respect it recalls more the plastic artist, creating by shaping and reshaping his materials to constitute a new and unique sense of being and of life.

It is not, then, that metaphysics can be recognized by contemporary man provided it be complemented or enriched, but instead, the enrichment of metaphysics by the Christian sense of being today provides the ground for recognizing the proper dignity and rights of the person as self-conscious, free and responsible being. Similarly, it is not that consciousness alone is now central, but rather, it is the founding of consciousness in being precisely as participation in the absolute *Esse* that gives consciousness the uniqueness, freedom and transcendence by which it comes to characterize the person.

## **WOJTYLA'S ASSESSMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL TASK AHEAD**

### *The Enrichment of the Philosophy of Being by that of Consciousness*

To see this let us look at the page, reprinted below, with which Karol Wojtyla introduced his 1976 article "Person: Subject and Community." As the first half of the article is a summary of the *Acting*

*Person*, its publication in *The Review of Metaphysics*<sup>24</sup> was held up until after that of the *Acting Person*. This page was separated from the article, however, and was published only in the *Proceedings of the Catholic Philosophical Association*.<sup>25</sup> Its unique importance lies in its succinct statement by Wojtyla of the philosophical challenge to which his *Acting Person* attempted to respond and in the light of which Cardinal Wojtyla wanted his philosophy to be interpreted.

The problem of man's subjectivity is today of paramount importance for philosophy. Multiple epistemological tendencies, principles, and orientations wrestle in this field and often give it a diametrically different shape and sense. The philosophy of consciousness seems to suggest that it was the first to discover the human subject. The philosophy of being is ready to demonstrate that, on the contrary, the analysis conducted on the basis of pure consciousness must lead in consequence to its annihilation. It is necessary to find the correct limits, according to which the phenomenological analyses, developed from the principles of the philosophy of consciousness, will begin to work to enrich the realistic image of the person. It is also necessary to establish the basis of such a philosophy of person.

Apart from this, the problem of the subjectivity of the person, and especially this problem in relation to the human community, imposes itself today as one of the central questions concerning the world outlook (*Weltanschauung*). This is at the basis of the human "praxis" and morality (and consequently ethics) and at the basis of culture, civilization and politics. Here, exercising its essential function, philosophy takes the floor as the expression of basic understanding and ultimate justification. Though the need for such understanding and justification always accompanies man in his earthly existence, this need becomes especially acute at moments, such as the present, of great crises and confrontations regarding man and the very sense of man's existence, and in consequence regarding the nature and meaning of his being. It is not the first time that Christian philosophy is faced by a materialistic interpretation, but it is the first time that this interpretation has had at its disposal so many resources and expresses itself in so many currents.

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<sup>24</sup> *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 33 1979/80, 273-308.

<sup>25</sup> *PACPA*, vol. 53 (1979), 3-4.

It is well known that such situations in the course of history contribute to a deeper re-thinking of the whole Christian doctrine and of its particular elements. This is true in the present case in which the truth about man gains a distinctly privileged place. Twenty years of discussions on the world outlook have made it clear that it is not cosmology or philosophy of nature alone, but precisely philosophical anthropology and ethics which are at the center, contributing to the great and fundamental controversy on man.

From the point of view of Christian philosophy, and also of theology, such a turn of events, which has found its expression also in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and especially in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, points to the need for study on the subject of the human person in its many aspects.<sup>26</sup>

The page by Wojtyla begins by stating that he sees the issue of subjectivity or consciousness to be the paramount issue of the times. This entails a philosophy of subjectivity, of which phenomenology is a part, and to which he contrasts the philosophy of being. He proceeds to state both of these philosophies in their sharpest and most contrasting formulation.

Thus, he notes of phenomenology that the philosophy of consciousness “seems to suggest that it was the first to discover the human subject”. After all that had been done in this regard by the early Church Fathers, the medieval scholastics and Kant in modern times, this appears a bit tendentious and one must look carefully to see just what is being suggested. Equally tendentious is the balancing note that the philosophy of being, on the other hand, claims itself ready to show that pure consciousness leads to the very annihilation of the subject.

Both statements expressed the contrasting positions of the schools of Krakow and Lublin respectively in the philosophical debates of the time. Between these poles, Wojtyla sets the stage for his positive statement of what is needed in philosophy and what he attempted to provide in his *Acting Person*. The first is to find the correct limits in which the philosophy of consciousness or phenomenology will begin, not to replace, but to enrich the realistic image of the person. I take this term “enrich” to entail both that the work of Thomas is essential and that the earlier objectivist neo-Thomistic interpretation was inadequate, and therefore needed to be enriched. He will attempt to do this, however, not simply by external additions, but organically, through a further elaboration of intellect and will under the inspiration of the interior investigations of phenomenology,

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

especially those of Max Scheler<sup>27</sup> which he had studied in depth for his dissertation.

Conversely, in the same first paragraph of that page he proceeds to note that there is need to establish a foundation in being, for the philosophy of person concerns one who exists (being) and acts consciously.<sup>28</sup> If this were pure Aristotelianism or Avicenna the action would be an accident of a substance; in the Christian philosophy of Thomas, understood in terms of Fabro's recent discoveries regarding participation and intensive *esse*, this is the created existent participating in *esse* in the fully unique and creative manner proper to the human level as conscious life.

In sum, what he intends and promises to do in the article is to respond to the major philosophical needs of his time. He is to do this not by either a mere repetition of the objectivist neo-Scholastic reading of Thomas nor by the subjectivist philosophy of phenomenology. Rather, he will bring the two into a complementary and mutually enriching position. As a result being can be appreciated in its interior consciousness and consciousness can be grounded in the creative *esse* as it comes from, and returns to, God, the *alpha* and *omega*. The human person is precisely the point of union, transformation and mutual enrichment of these two elements. It is neither simply one nor the other; nothing less than the integration of the two will suffice.

*Difficulties:* Wojtyla's project was too focal to the progress of philosophical insight to escape those who thought in terms merely of one or the other component, that is, of consciousness or of being as essence. Though some now suspect later interference by Vatican theologians in these matters, this article was written while the English edition of the *Acting Person* was in the process of being edited and two years before Cardinal Wojtyla was named Pope.

In order to assure that the English translation of the original Polish would be effective for an English readership Cardinal Wojtyla had asked the help of the editor of the *Analecta Husserliana*,<sup>29</sup> in which his previous articles had appeared. In the process some objective elements essential to the Scholastic notion of the person, such as "substance" and "*supposit*" (e.g., for Capreolus, *supposit* was substance precisely as with its corresponding *esse*) were removed from the *Acting Person* and replaced by phenomenological terms related to consciousness. As a result, rather than the objective notion of person being enriched by a philosophy of consciousness, it was replaced thereby. In turn, the replacement lacked the foundation in being which Wojtyla considered necessary for the philosophy of consciousness.

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<sup>27</sup> *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, Translated by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

<sup>28</sup> E.g. "Person and Community," pp. 283-84.

<sup>29</sup> *The Acting Person*, xiii-xiv.

At the same time, Cardinal Wojtyla wrote an extensive summary of the *Acting Person* entitled “Person and Community” to be published in another channel, namely, *The Review of Metaphysics*. He had this translated by Emilia Ehrlich and passed it to me with the request that I assure its effectiveness for an English readership. What was especially notable was that in the first 14 pages of “Person and Community” which summarize the *Acting Person*, he used the technical objective terms ‘substance’ and ‘supposit’ some 38 times. Without doubt he intended to insist with the greatest emphasis upon the importance of the very terms which were in the process of being removed from the English edition of the *Acting Person*. Indeed, John Paul II later requested that these terms be restored to the *Acting Person* when a second edition was being planned—though this never eventuated.

Conversely, the use of the term “enriched” at the end of the first paragraph of the summary article was questioned, for if Thomas’ was a complete philosophy, then phenomenology could provide only helpful rhetoric for its expression, but no substantive enrichment. As a result the first page (reproduced above) of the article was simply omitted. It reached publication only later in the *Proceedings of the Catholic Philosophical Association* (1979) as part of the dedication of the Aquinas medal, awarded that year to the, by then, Pope John Paul II.

If this example be indicative, the interpretation and transmission of the thought of John Paul has not been easy and the documents must be verified with care. Nevertheless, it can be said with confidence:

(a) that Cardinal Wojtyla took up the development of the notion of being as *esse* in Thomas in the enriched manner of the new work on ‘participation’ at the time of his post-World War II studies in Rome; and

(b) that he enriched this with a philosophy of consciousness focused on an interior reading of the life, or *esse*, of the person, thereby enriching his Scholastic examination of the conscious acts of intellect and will.

(Thus, while holding fully to this Scholastic philosophy of the person able to be more fully appreciated in the light of the post-World War II investigations of being and participation, he considered this in need of being further enriched by being unfolded in the light of the philosophy of consciousness. For this Karol Wojtyla drew upon the thought of Scheler which he further grounded in being.)

(c) that epistemologically he thereby went beyond the conceptual truth based on essence, to the truth of the person based on *esse*; and

(d) that this enabled him to recognize the mystery and utter uniqueness of the free creativity of the person. He centered there the sense of person which, in the face of modern materialism, he saw to be the crucial step beyond modernity.

*Implications for Cultures and Civilizations*

The second paragraph of the original introduction to "Person and Community," cited in full above, stated the implications of this notion of the person as enriched by consciousness. It pointed to the sense of community which he recognized as having been inadequately developed in the *Acting Person* and which he promised to complement by the last half of that article. To this he adjoined the significance for ethics of this enriched notion of the person.

As an ethics of community, this engendered the vision of the Solidarity movement. In ten years, by insisting precisely on the recognition of the free consciousness of the person and hence of the people of Poland, this would require the "Round Table" Conference. There all Poles would participate as free and equally responsible subjects in determining their future: this was democracy, at last and in full. It decided to hold in 1989 the first free election in Eastern Europe in 40 years. Within six months this was followed by the liberation of all of Eastern Europe, and in two years by the demise of the Soviet Union itself.

But there was a more contemporary and no less dramatic implication of inner self-consciousness in this process, namely, the appreciation of the generation of the values and virtues which constitute cultures and civilizations. Given this awareness, Vatican II had needed to move on from the classical position of 'no salvation outside the Church' to a recognition of multiple paths to the One and Holy.<sup>30</sup> It therefore proposed a basic confraternity of religions upon which, and by which, relations between the corresponding civilizations could become possible.

In these days marked by clashing civilizations and majority/minority cultural tensions, this counterposes a sense of person which exists in itself with dignity and rights that must be neither suppressed nor reduced. In turn, this gives special importance to the cultures which peoples create. Tolerance is not then an arbitrary choice or external construction, but the basic condition of persons; hence the brotherhood of all persons and communities in God and therefore with one another. This is essential for building harmony internally (within nations) and peace globally.

This was manifest in the advice given by Cardinal Wojtyla in the deepest years of the Cold War. When most Polish philosophers rejected the very idea of dialogue with Marxists, Cardinal Wojtyla encouraged it. Communication was the proper mode of relation with all persons as conscious subjects; the hope, philosophy and power of humanity was built on this being the state of every person. He termed it a better philosophical anthropology.

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<sup>30</sup> *Nostra Aetate* in John Hogan and George F. McLean, eds. *Multiple Paths to God, Nostra Aetate, 40 years later* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 17-21.

On this advice was developed the world wide network of The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP), first in Eastern Europe, then with China and Africa, and now with Islam. At base, cultural traditions are the dialogues of peoples with the Spirit. In responding to their challenges—whether environmental, economic, or political—the Spirit is the initiator to whom the people respond by their creative action. This is enlivened by the attraction of the Good in a unique, free and creative process. Today this is challenged in the West (in some contrast to other civilizations) by a secularism which would close off the metaphysical dimension and leave only sensible phenomena for utilitarian or pragmatic manipulation for limited self-interests. The effort of the RVP is rather to encourage mining the cultural traditions for the resources with which to respond to the needs of the times. Thus the present series “Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change”<sup>31</sup> was initiated with this vision of the person as consciously transcending self to communicate and engage with others in an expanding human solidarity.

Finally, the third paragraph of this introduction proposed restudying the whole of Christian doctrine in the light of this renewed sense of person. This does not have as its paradigm the physical process of Aristotle, for that would be to understand the person and community in terms of matter and change or process. Rather, Wojtyla would take the self-conscious and free person as paradigmatic. Moreover, the person in expressing being in its exercise of freedom goes beyond the economic and the political. It reaches for and expresses its metaphysical foundation, namely, the divine Being as participated in time through the self-conscious person as self-transcending toward others as community.

This is the philosophical legacy of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II.

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<sup>31</sup> (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy [www.crvp.org](http://www.crvp.org)).





**PART IV**

**ASIAN PATHS FOR PERSON AND COMMUNITY  
IN GLOBAL TIMES**



## CHAPTER VIII

# CONFUCIAN HARMONY AND HUMANE PROGRESS

### INTRODUCTION

In 1919 it was suggested—indeed vehemently declared—that in order to introduce Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy to enable the modern development of China it would be necessary for Confucius to bow out. This chapter explores the opposite thesis, namely, that in order for Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy to truly make their true contribution Confucius is needed as their host.

In the context of the search for modernization and for appropriate standing among the nations of the world there seems to be no doubt that science is needed. Certainly, necessary and universal laws have made it possible to interpret and predict natural forces, and the development of an objective and mathematical spirit has enabled humankind to manage the forces of nature. Together these have provided the ability to project and realize the great accomplishments needed in order to support the quantity, and in many ways to enhance the quality, of human life—and, by implication, that of nature as a whole.

Very much has been accomplished in this direction; but there are reasons to fear that these modern accomplishments have been so single-minded as to place in question the broader context of human life, its meaning and dignity. This renders us unprepared for life together in the new global whole. Can Confucius help?

### THE PROBLEM

In the history of philosophy brilliant new creative openings often degenerate into reductionist efforts to absorb all other meaning. This perverse dynamism is found in no less central a personage than Plato who inverted Parmenides' foundation of thought in an infinity of being to only what was clear to the human mind. Thus, he invited the mind to soar, but where it met its limits—as in taking account of concrete realities and the exercise of human freedom—he generated the classic blueprint for a suppressive communal state.

Such temptations of all-controlling reason are characteristic as well of the modern West, beginning from Descartes' requirements of clarity and distinctness for the work of reason. The effect in his own philosophy was to split the human person between the extended substance or body and the nonextended substance or spirit. Much as he tried for a unity of these in the human person, this could not be done in the clear and distinct terms he

required of his philosophy. As a result philosophers, and then whole cultures, proceeded according to either body or spirit. Modern thought polarized between the atomism of discrete sensations and ever greater totalitarian hegemonies.

What is particularly frightening is the way in which theoretical philosophical experiments in either of these isolates were carried out by a fairly mechanical pattern of reason and then translated into public policy. It is fine for a thinker to give free range to the constructive possibilities of his or her mind by saying with a Hobbes or a Rawls: let's suppose that all are isolated singles in search of survival and then see what compromises and what rules will make survival possible. Over time we have become so accustomed to that game that we have forgotten Hobbes's identification of the wolflike basic instincts by which it is played. We should listen to others from the Southern hemisphere when they perceive the resulting system as truly predatory, brutish and mean.

Similarly, it could be helpful for a thinker to hypothesize that all is matter and then see how its laws can shed light on the process of human history. But when this was done by Marx and Lenin society began to repress the life of the spirit and term irrational everything except scientific historicism. The freedom of individuals and of peoples was suppressed and creativity died.

Both are parallel cases of theoretical axioms becoming metaphysical totalities even while, or perhaps especially due to, denying that there was such a thing as metaphysics. It is not surprising that the result for the 20th century was two world wars resulting in a bipolar world armed to the hilt and subsisting by a reign of mutual terror. What is surprising is that the internal collapse of Eastern Europe in 1989 should have given popular credibility to the notion that the parallel road taken by the other partner, namely, the liberal West, could be followed now without fear—that the wolf had been transformed into a lamb for lack of a mirror in which to observe the effects of its own root problems. The first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have shown how quickly the liberal paradigm turns into a neo-conservative hegemony, given only the opportunity.

This suggests that it is necessary to look for additional dimensions of science beyond reductive analysis and universal and necessary laws. While there is much to be discovered there which will be, and indeed has been, very helpful, it is important to recognize not only what is common but what is unique and distinctive in reality. Though it is true that without the necessary and the universal life would be chaotic, it is no less true that without the unique and different there would be neither life nor progress: all would be static, rather than emergent.

In this world logos must be realized in the concrete and unique. This points to events with their radical novelty. In human life this is the reality of promise and creativity, of uniqueness and freedom, of sharing and love. Surprisingly perhaps, it may be Confucius who can help to see how these can be not only juxtaposed to science and its technological offsprings,

but enable technology to be integrated into Chinese culture and to release thereby the full force of this culture's creative power. In order for Confucius to help it is necessary that technology and culture not be placed on the same level or considered as alternatives one to the other. To see how they can be positively related, how Confucius is needed for the introduction of science and the technological transformation of China, and how he can help the technological West in these global times, let us review the threefold structure of Kant's critiques described in Chapter I.

## **KANT'S RESPONSE**

### *The Critique of Pure Reason*

Kant provides an example of the requirement to move beyond an atomic reductionism in the direction of synthesis in his first and third critiques. In the former his problem is how, in the face of Hume's empiricist science could have universal and necessary laws.

Kant's rejection of metaphysics as a science was warmly greeted in materialist, empiricist and positivist circles as a dispensation from the need for any search beyond what was inherently spatial and/or temporal. Kant, however, went further. Since sense experience is always limited and partial, to justify the universality and necessity of the laws of science these forms or laws must come from the human mind. This showed the subject to be an active force engaged in the very creation of the empirical world in which one lives. If, however, human beings are to have such a central role in the constitution of their world, then certain elements will be required, and this requirement itself will be their justification. In particular here there must be an imagination which can bring together the flow of disparate sensations.

In the first *Critique* the task of the reproductive imagination is to bring together the multiple elements of sense intuition in a unity or order capable of being informed by concepts or categories of the intellect with a view to making scientific judgments. On the part of the subject, the imagination here is active. But if the above were the total explanation of science one might claim to explain necessary and universal laws, but this would not explain its creative dimension. On the contrary, human creativity would be suppressed in the search for the laws of necessity: freedom would be unwelcome, initiative would be repressed and stagnation would follow.

Thus in his third *Critique*, well along in the so-called "critical decade" in which Kant wrote his three critiques, and only after writing the first two, was Kant in position to discover—indeed, forced to recognize—what at the beginning of that decade he had not thought possible. Whereas he had once looked upon the human spirit only in order to uncover the universal and necessary laws at work therein, and considered the imagination only instrumentally, he now became aware of a new, productive, indeed creative function of the imagination.

It is in the third *Critique* that Kant provides the needed context for such uniqueness and creativity, and thus approaches the aesthetic sensibility of Confucius in articulating the cosmic significance of freedom. Kant is intent not merely upon uncovering the fact of freedom, as in his second critique of practical reason, but upon protecting and promoting it. He faces squarely modern man's most urgent question: how can this newly uncovered freedom survive when confronted with the necessity and universality of the realm of science as understood in his first *Critique of Pure Reason*? Will the scientific interpretation of nature restrict freedom to the inner realm of each person's heart, where it is reduced at best to good intentions or feelings towards others?

That is to say, when we attempt to act in this world or to reach out to others:

-Must all our categories be universal. If so then one cannot but be insensitive to that which marks others as unique and personal?

-Must our actions be necessary, and, hence, leave no room for creative freedom, which would be entrapped and then entombed in the human mind? If so, then public life can be only impersonal, necessitated, repetitive and stagnant.

-Must the human spirit be reduced to the sterile content of empirical facts or to the necessitated modes of scientific laws? If so, then philosophers cannot escape forcing upon wisdom a suicidal choice between either being traffic directors in the jungle of unfettered competition or being tragically complicit in setting a predetermined order for the human spirit.

Freedom would, indeed, have been killed; it would pulse no more as the heart of humankind.

Before these alternatives, Kant's answer was a resounding No! Taking as his basis the reality of freedom—so passionately and often tragically affirmed in our lifetime by such revered figures as Gandhi and Martin Luther King—Kant proceeded to develop his third *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment* as a context within which freedom and scientific necessity could coexist, indeed, in which necessity would be the support and instrument of freedom. Recently, this has become more manifest as human sensibilities have opened to the significance of culture and to awareness that being itself is emergent in time through the human spirit.

To provide for this context, Kant found it necessary to distinguish two issues as reflected in the two parts of his third *Critique*. In the "Critique of Teleological Judgment"<sup>1</sup> if there is to be room for human freedom in a cosmos in which man can make use of necessary laws, if science is to contribute to the exercise of human freedom, then nature too must be directed toward a transcendent goal; it must manifest throughout a teleology

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1968), pp. 205-339.

within which free human purpose can be integrated. In these terms, nature, even in its necessary and universal laws, is no longer alien to freedom, but expresses divine freedom and is conciliable with human freedom. The structure of his first *Critique* would not allow Kant to affirm the metaphysical character of the teleology or its absolute and self-sufficient basis, but he recognized that we must proceed “as if” all reality is teleological precisely because of the undeniable reality of human freedom in an ordered universe. If, however, in principle teleology provides the needed space, there remains a second issue regarding how freedom is exercised, namely, what mediates freedom to the necessary and universal laws of science? This is the task of his “Critique of the Aesthetic Judgment”,<sup>2</sup> and it is here that the imagination reemerges to play its key integrating role in human life. From the point of view of the human person, the task is to explain how one can live in freedom with nature for which the first critique had discovered only universal and necessary laws. How can a free person relate to an order of nature and to structures of society in a way that is neither necessitated nor necessitating?

There is something similar here to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In both, the work of the imagination in assembling the phenomena is not simply to register, but to produce the objective order. As in the first critique, the approach is not from a set of *a priori* principles which are clear all by themselves and used in order to bind the multiple phenomena into a unity. Rather, under the rule of unity, the imagination orders and reorders the multiple phenomena until they are ready to be informed by a unifying principle whose appropriateness emerges from the reordering carried out by the reproductive imagination.

Nevertheless, this reproductive work of the first *Critique* took place in relation to the abstract and universal categories of the intellect and was carried out under a law of unity which dictated that such phenomena as a house or a receding boat must form a unity—which they could do only if assembled in a certain order. Hence, although it was a human product, the objective order was universal and necessary and the related sciences were valid both for all things and for all people.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, the *Critique of the Aesthetic Judgment* sees the imagination in constructing an object by working toward an integrating unity, not to be confined by the necessitating structures of categories and concepts, but by ranging freely over the full sweep of reality in all its dimensions in search of whether and wherein relatedness and purposiveness or teleology can emerge, that is, how our world and our personal and social life can achieve their meaning and value. Hence, in standing before a work of nature or of art, the imagination might focus upon light or form, sound or word, economic or interpersonal relations—or, indeed, upon any

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-200.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), A112, 121, 192-193. Crawford, pp. 83-84, 87-90.

combination of these in a natural environment or a society, whether encountered concretely or expressed in symbols.

Throughout all of this the ordering and reordering by the imagination can bring about numberless unities. Unrestricted by any *a priori* categories, indeed it can integrate necessary dialectical patterns within its own free and therefore creative production, and scientific universals within its unique concrete harmonies. This work is properly creative. More than merely evaluating all according to a set pattern in one's culture, it chooses the values and on that basis orders reality. This is the very constitution of the culture itself.

This is the productive, rather than merely the reproductive work of the human person living in his or her physical world. In the first *Critique* the human person exists as another object in the physical universe, not only subjected to its laws but restricted and possessed by them. He/she would be not a free citizen of the material world, but its mere function or servant. In his third Critique Kant unfolds how one can truly be master of one's life in this world, not in an arbitrary and destructive manner, but precisely as a creative artist bringing being to new realization in ways which make possible new growth in freedom.

In the third Critique, the productive imagination constructs a true unity by bringing the elements into an authentic harmony. This cannot be identified through reference to a category, because freedom then would be restricted within the laws of necessity of the first Critique; rather, it must be recognizable by something free. That is, in order for the realm of human freedom to be extended to the whole of reality, this harmony must be able to be appreciated not purely intellectually in relation to a concept (for again we would be reduced to the universal and necessary as in the first Critique), but aesthetically, by the pleasure or displeasure of the free response it generates. It is our contemplation or reflection upon this which shows whether a proper and authentic ordering has or has not been achieved. This is not a concept,<sup>4</sup> but the pleasure or displeasure, the elation at the beautiful and sublime or the disgust at the ugly and revolting, which flows from our contemplation or reflection.

### **CONFUCIAN HARMONY AND THE DISTINCTIVELY CHINESE INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS**

One could miss the integrating character of this pleasure or displeasure and its related judgment of taste<sup>5</sup> by looking at it ideologically,

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<sup>4</sup> See Kant's development and solution to the autonomy of taste, *Critique of Judgment*, nn. 57-58, pp. 182-192, where he treats the need for a concept; Crawford, pp. 63-66.

<sup>5</sup> See the paper of Wilhelm S. Wurzer "On the Art of Moral Imagination" in G. McLean, ed., *Moral Imagination and Character Development* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998) for an



as simply a repetition of past tastes in order to promote stability. Or one might see it reductively as a merely interior and purely private matter at a level of consciousness available only to an elite class and related only to an esoteric band of reality. That would ignore the structure which Kant laid out at length in his first “Introduction” to his third Critique<sup>6</sup> which he conceived not as merely juxtaposed to the first two Critiques of pure and practical reason, but as integrating both in a richer whole.

Developing the level of aesthetic sensitivity enables one to take into account ever greater dimensions of reality and creativity and to imagine responses which are more rich in purpose, more adapted to present circumstances and more creative in promise for the future. This is manifest in a good leader such as a Churchill or Roosevelt—and, supereminently, in a Confucius or Buddha or Christ. Their power to mobilize a people lies especially in their rare ability to assess the overall situation, to express it in a manner which rings true to the great variety of persons, and, thereby, to evoke appropriate and varied responses from each according to his or her capabilities. The danger is that the example of such genius will be reduced to formulae, and thereby become an ideology that excludes innovation. In reality, as personable, free and creative, and understood as the work of aesthetic judgment, their example is inclusive in content and application as well as in the new responses it continually evokes.

When aesthetic experiences are passed on as part of a tradition, gradually they come to build a culture. Some thinkers, such as William James and Jürgen Habermas,<sup>7</sup> fearing that attending to these free creations of a cultural tradition might distract from the concrete contemporary needs of the people, have urged a turn rather to the social sciences for social analysis and critique as a means to identify pragmatic responses. But these point back to the necessary laws of the first *Critique*. In many countries

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elaboration of the essential notions of the beautiful, the sublime and taste in Kant’s aesthetic theory.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. Haden (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Washington Square, 1963), Ch. I, pp. 3-40. For notes on the critical hermeneutics of J. Habermas see G. McLean, “Cultural Heritage, Social Critique and Future Construction” in *Culture, Human Rights and Peace in Central America*, R. Molina, T. Readdy and G. McLean, eds. (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1988), Ch. I. Critical distance is an essential element and requires analysis by the social sciences of the historical social structures as a basis for liberation from determination and dependence upon unjust interests. The concrete psycho- and socio-pathology deriving from such dependencies and the corresponding steps toward liberation are the subject of the chapters by J. Loiacono and H. Ferrand de Piazza in *The Social Context and Values: Perspectives of the Americas*, G. McLean and O. Pegoraro, eds. (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1988), Chs. III and IV.

now engaging in reforms, such past “scientific” laws of history were found to have stifled creativity and paralyzed the populace.

Kant’s third Critique points in another direction. Though it integrates scientifically universal and necessary social relations, it does not focus upon them, nor does it focus directly upon the beauty or ugliness of concrete relations, or even directly upon beauty or ugliness in themselves. Its focus is rather upon our contemplation of the integrating images of these which we imaginatively create, that is, our culture as manifesting the many facets of beauty and ugliness, actual and potential. In turn, we evaluate these in terms of the free and integrating response of pleasure or displeasure, the enjoyment or revulsion they generate most deeply within our whole person.

### CONFUCIUS AS HOST

Confucius could feel very comfortable with this if structured in terms of an appreciation or feeling of harmony. In this way, he could see freedom itself at the height of its sensibility, not merely as an instrument of a moral life, but as serving through the imagination as a lens or means for presenting the richness of reality in varied and intensified ways. Freedom, thus understood, is both spectroscopy and kaleidoscope of being. As spectroscopy it unfolds the full range of the possibilities of human freedom, so that all can be examined, evaluated and admired. As kaleidoscope, it continually works out the endless possible combinations and patterns of reality so that the beauty of each can be examined, reflected upon and chosen when desired. Freely, purposively and creatively, imagination weaves through reality, focusing now upon certain dimensions, now reversing its flow, now making new connections and interrelations. In the process the creative human freedom of a person or people manifests not only the scientific forms and technological possibilities of the first critique and the potential forms of social and democratic interrelations of the second critique, but their interrelation in ways that evoke our free responses of love and admiration or rejection in hate and disgust.

In this manner freedom becomes at once the creative source, the manifestation, the evaluation and the arbiter of all that imaginatively we can propose. It is *goal*, namely to realize life as rational and free in this world; it is *creative source*, for with the imagination it unfolds the endless possibilities of human expression; it is *manifestation*, because it presents these to our consciousness in ways appropriate to our capabilities for knowledge of limited realities and relates these to the circumstances of our life; it is *criterion*, because its response manifests a possible mode of action to be variously desirable or not in terms of a total personal response of pleasure or displeasure, enjoyment or revulsion; and it is *arbiter*, because it provides the basis upon which our freedom chooses to affirm or reject, realize or avoid this way of self-realization. In this way, freedom emerges as the dynamic center of our human existence.

There is much in the above which evokes the deep Confucian sense of harmony and the role of the gentleman in unfolding its implications for daily life. This uncovers new significance in the thought of Confucius for the work of implementing, in a mutually fruitful manner, Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy in our times. Looking to the aesthetic sense of harmony as a context for uniting both ancient capabilities in agriculture with new technology and industrialization and for applying these to the work of building a democratic nation is a task, not only for an isolated individual, but for an entire people. Over time, a people develops its own specific sensibilities and through the ages forms a culture and a tradition which, in turn, constitute the human capital for such a project. In this sense, one can look to the Confucian cultural heritage for its aesthetic sense of harmony as a way to carry forward technological development for the authentic progress of not only the Chinese people but all peoples in these global times.

In this light, Antonio S. Cua notes that in his *Great Learning* stresses the importance of investigating the principles at great length until one achieves “a wide and far-reaching penetration (*kuan-t'ung*).” Read as *Kuan-chuan*, this suggests an aesthetic grasp of the unique interconnection of the various components of the *tao* as the unique unifying perspective of the culture. This is not only a contemplative understanding, however, but implies active engagement in the conduct of life. If this be varied by subgroups and structured in the patterns of solidarity and subsidiarity of civil society then the accumulation of corporate life experience, lived according to *li* or ritual propriety and *i* or sense of rightness, emerges from the life of a people as a whole. “For the adherents of the Confucian tradition, the tradition is an object of affection and reverence, largely because the tradition is perceived as an embodiment of wisdom (*chih*), which for Chu Hsi is a repository of insights available for personal and interpersonal appropriation, for coping with present problems and changing circumstances.”<sup>8</sup>

Cua finds similar notions in the distinctions of Chu Hsi in the neo-Confucian tradition regarding the diachronic sense of *tao* as residing between the substantial (*t'i*) and the operational (*yung*), the stable, basic or latent schemata and its operational sense in changing circumstances (*fei*). Hsün Tzu distinguishes the constant (*ch'ang*) and the changing (*pien*), and Mencius the constant rule (*ching*) and the sliding scale (*ch'üuan*). Use of the latter as an exercise of moral discretion based on *li* is essential for moral life due to the imperfections of our knowledge and the urgent complexity of life. In these circumstances, to hold to a static mean would undermine the realization of the holistic goal of the *tao*.

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<sup>8</sup> “Confucian Tradition” and “Hsun Tzu and the Unity of Virtues,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 14 (1978), 92-94.

For Confucius, the aesthetic vision is integrated in drama, of which dance is one moment. In the actual performance of *li* (ritual or liturgy), there is a combination of poetry, liturgical action and music. Confucius saw that in the poem our spirit can rise and stand in reality to achieve complete transcendence in the ecstasy of the spirit. This gives access in aesthetic terms to a source, not only of inspiration, but of vision that both draws one to aspire to greater perfection and opens the way for creative thought regarding ways in which this can be achieved.

Some suggest, however, that Confucius may have looked upon aesthetics more as a matter of appreciation and conservation, rather than as original, creative and free expression. If so then in the works of Confucius there are resources important for developing a modern vision which were unmined by Confucius himself and his schools. The Confucian sense of harmony is not a rationalist law whose unfolding would suggest an attempt to read all in an *a priori* and necessitarian manner. Its sense of life and progress is not that of a scientific view of history after the dialectic of Hegel and Marx. Rather, Confucianism understands humans as bringing their lives together in relation to other persons and in the concrete circumstances of everyday life. In this sense, it is not massively programmatic in the sense of a rationalist scientific theory of history. This may be very much to the good, for it protects against the efforts of an ideology to define and delimit all beforehand—which indeed so surpasses human capacities that to attempt it is to stifle the human person.

Further, one must not underestimate the cumulative power which the Confucian sense of harmony and resonance can have when it brings together creatively the many persons with knowledge of their circumstances in an effort to provide for life in its many modes. This extends from those farmers who know and love their land intimately and are committed to its rich potentialities (and analogously for all phases of productive economic life), to family members and villagers who love their kin and neighbors, to citizens who are willing to work ardently for the welfare of their people and nation. If the exercise of freedom is a concrete and unique expression of the distinctive reality of its authors, then the task is not how to define these by abstractive and universal laws which stifle personal initiative, but how to enliven all persons actively to engage the new technology and scientific structures in the multiple dimensions of their lives. Corporately and between cultures and civilizations, this is key to peace and progress in global times.

In this context, the philosophical importance of the Confucian attitude becomes more evident. For if harmony and resonance enable a more adapted and fruitful mode of realization for the human being, then the identity and truth, dynamism and goodness of being are thereby made manifest and proclaimed. In this light, the laws of nature and the technology which they enable emerge, not as desiccated universals best read negatively as prohibitions or intrusive machines, but as rich and unfolding modes of being and actualization best read through an appreciation of the concrete

harmony and beauty of their active development. This, rather than the details of etiquette, is the deeper Confucian and transcendent sense of the gentleman and sage; it can be grasped and exercised only with a corresponding aesthetic, rather than merely scientific or pragmatic sensibilities.

Nor is this beyond people's experience. Few can carry out the precise process of conceptualization and definition required for the technical dialectics of Platonic and Aristotelian reasoning. But all share an overall sensibility to situations as pleasing and attractive, or as generating unease or even revulsion. Inevitably, in earlier times, the aesthetic Confucian mode lacked the scientific precision which is now available regarding surface characteristics of physical phenomena or the technological prowess this makes available. But, in its sense of harmony, it possessed the deep human sensibility and ability to take into account and integrate all aspects of its object. This is essential for the contemporary humanization of our technical capabilities for the physical and implementation of our life and hence for the present advance into global interrelations.

This is foundational for integrating with this scientific and technological age the democratic practice and cultural traditions without which the creative life atrophies and progress ceases and dies. A strong indication of the importance of this, and of the fact that its principles are found in the Confucian tradition is that without physical resources Japan has become so great a world productive and economic power. For China the problem is not with willingness to change or initiative, but perhaps with how to harness the needed technology so that progress can be not only rapid, but authentically Chinese, and thereby a force for harmony among nations in global times. The Confucian sense of aesthetic harmony endows it with the crucial means for such integration and implementation of contemporary life. It is with—not without—Confucius as host that Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy can enter and truly help.



## CHAPTER IX

# HINDUISM'S AND BUDDHISM'S METAPHYSICAL AND CONTEMPLATIVE PATH TO THE HOLY

The Hindu understanding of the person was expressed eminently by Shankara in terms of an intensive sense of the unity or non-dual character of reality. Man is not God, but as the wave has its reality in the ocean so the human person or self has his or her reality in the whole which is the absolute Self. This view is of striking relevance to the search for a new paradigm as we enter upon a global age. To examine this we shall look especially to the creation Hymn *Rg Veda* X, 129, and to the *Bhagavad Gita*.

### RG VEDA X, 129: NUSADIYA SŪKTA (HYMN OF CREATION)

The analysis in Part II of totemism as a proto religious phenomenon showed it to be not an isolated experience of the solitary individual, as religion has come to be thought of by many in our times. Rather it was the commonly shared experience of all peoples and the first condition of human thought. This is continued and developed in Hindu thought.

#### *Thought and Action as Ways to God*

There is a long dialectic in the Hindu tradition between thought and action. This concerns not the commonplace that must be taught to every child, namely, to think before one acts, but rather the higher reaches of the spiritual life. It is here that the real dilemma of the human condition emerges, namely, how can the self-aware human being live his or her destiny. As a participant in God, one is less than God in one's being and hence in one's capabilities. Yet inasmuch as one is both from God and directed towards God, one can live truly and fully only by relating to that which transcends one, and which does so infinitely.

As the human person is both body and spirit two ways or paths can be taken in response. One is that of the body and rituals, the other is that of the spirit through mind and heart. Fortunately, these ways need not be mutually exclusive if the person is truly one in nature and being. Indeed, given the limitations of the human person each way can have only partial success and will need to be complemented by the other.

In the Hindu tradition this has entailed, on the one hand, a florid set of rituals and signs all expressing the divine. These employ to the fullest the capabilities of the human imagination, which we saw as basic to the mythic way discussed in Chapter III. However, as one attempts to enumerate the

rituals—someone has counted over forty in the morning bath—it begins to be evident that Hindu culture envisages not a secular life which is made sacred by a number of particular rituals, but an entire life that is not only sacralized but sacred. Yet as human life is essentially relative and not absolute, some argue that it is essential for the mind to point beyond actions, even the sacred ritual actions of our life. Beyond the actions of the body, it is up to the human spirit—not merely as marked by the picturing capabilities of the imagination, but as fully spiritual and open to being—to continue on towards God, and so it must.

Nevertheless, the dialectic continues, for the spirit too is finite or limited in power, not only in its concepts, but in all its acts. In the subsequent section on Buddhism we shall see philosophy attempting to come to terms with this in the form of negative intellectual judgements and the work of the heart rushing along mystic pathways. But one side of the Hindu experience argues inexorably that the human mind must always lag behind on any way to God and therefore that two strategies are essential. The first is to shorten, indeed eliminate, the distance by turning from transcendence, according to which God is infinitely distant, to immanence, in terms of which God is infinitely present. The second is to proceed not by mind in which we define and hence delimit the content of our thoughts, but by actions which point but do not define. Though I can point to a person, I cannot and must not attempt to define or delimit that person by my concepts. By actions we are ushered into the realm of sacred ritual, which must always be added over and above whatever can be achieved by human consciousness.

Further, among the numberless signs and rituals, sacrifices have special importance because they proceed not positively, but negatively. We can never be adequate in our attempts positively to affirm the full reality of God. But most philosophers agree that a negative statement can be more true, because less ambiguous than positive ones. In ritual the negative act by which the object of sacrifice is destroyed is decisive and definitive. It does not linger on to define and delimit that in favor of which it is made; in that sense it leaves open if more indeterminate the positive reality to which it points.

Of course, this may not be the end of the dialectic, for the meaning of the sacrifice can always be misinterpreted and this, in turn, will require prayerful reflection in order to achieve a more correct understanding of the actions and their significance. Thus, the two sides of the Hindu debate between mind and action, reflection and ritual, concept and sacrifice, or more deeply, the two ways to God each need the other.

Here we shall follow the path of sacrifice in terms not of the physical action itself, but of its significance. For this we shall look to a hymn which accompanied an act of sacrifice and expresses its significance. Hence, the perspective will not be that of *a posteriori* reasoning to God where the outlook is that of the creature looking for its self-sufficient cause. Here, by virtue of the act of sacrifice the bond of physical reality is broken



and one reenters the universe, as it were, from the horizon of its source and beginnings. Such is the Creation Hymn, *Rg Veda X*, 129.

The *Vedas* were poetry with a purpose. They sought not to entertain, or even to guide after the manner of an ethics. Rather, pertaining to sacrificial rituals, their intent was to express in words meaning and reality that is as radical as that expressed symbolically in the sacrificial act itself. As in negative theology, phenomenal existences were destroyed in order to make manifest the Absolute Reality. The purpose of sacrifice was to transcend the realm of ordinary meaning, which in comparison is an ignorance, and to proclaim the deep origin, order and sense of this life.

Unripe in mind, in spirit undiscerning, I ask of these the  
Gods' established places. . . . I ask, unknowing, those who  
know, the sages, as one all ignorant for the sake of  
knowledge, what was that One who in the unborn's image  
hath stablished and fixed firm these worlds' six regions.<sup>1</sup>

Further, there would appear to be here a potentially significant contrast to the Greek mind. While using the language of myth and expressing realities in the personal terms of the gods, the *Vedas* also employed concrete and proper terms, e.g., for the parts of the universe; indeed, the whole of *Rg Veda X*, 129, is written in non-mythic terms. This enabled the Rishis to state content which nowhere appears in the records we possess of the early Greek mind, which was characterized totally by mythic and symbolic modes of thought.

In view of the importance of retrieving the content of non-Western thought, attention to the *Vedas* can be of special importance for a further reason. Probably, as oral transmissions,<sup>2</sup> they go back to the thirteenth century B.C. and the immigration of the Aryans from Persia during the following few centuries. Yet Arthur Keith claims that no significant progress was made during the subsequent period of the *Brāhmanas* which closed about 500 B.C. Thus, "the *Rg Veda* carries us nearly as far as anything excogitated in this period"<sup>3</sup> prior to the *Upanishads* when philosophy proper is generally thought to have begun.

For this reason we shall now turn to the *Vedas* and in particular to the "*Nusadiya Sūkta*" or "Creation Hymn," *Rg Veda X*, 129, which has

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<sup>1</sup> C. Kunhan Raja, *Asya Vamasya Hymn (The Riddle of the Universe)*, *Rgveda* I-164 (Madras: Ganesh, 1956), pp. 5-6; see also G. McLean, *Plenitude and Participation; The Unity of Man and God* (Madras: University of Madras, 1978), pp. 34-38.

<sup>2</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), I, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. XXXII; Cambridge: Harvard University, Press, 1925), II, 442.

been considered to be “by far the most important composition in this class in the whole *Veda*”<sup>4</sup>—“the finest effort of the imagination of the Vedic poet, and nothing else equals it.”<sup>5</sup>

### *Method*

Here we shall look for the hymn's understanding of:

- (a) that from which all derive,
- (b) the origination of the universe,
- (c) the resultant relation between things, and
- (d) the nature of reality itself.

We shall be interested in seeing what light might be shed on this by taking into account also the earlier context of primitive thought and, comparatively, what relation there might be to the mythic process from unity to diversity developed in the alternate Greek branch of the Aryan family and reflected by Hesiod's *Theogony*.

Our project is not a simple one from first to last, and some specific hermeneutic considerations should be noted. The problems begin with the establishment of the text itself. One *mantra* may have been lost<sup>6</sup> and the commonly used text has been accused of depending excessively upon the quantity of syllables in each verse. By failing to take account of the quality of the syllables—especially those that were accented, e.g., a short syllable or vowel which at that time was still reflected in the pronunciation—A. Esteller claims that unwarranted changes were made in the Sanskrit text when it was finally fixed by Panini in ancient times.<sup>7</sup> This question must be left to Sanskrit scholars for further study, but Esteller has published a reconstructed text taking this into account.

In reading the text a sensitivity to metaphysical issues will be indispensable. A. K. Coomaraswamy remarks:

For an understanding of the *Vedas* a knowledge of Sanskrit, however profound, is insufficient. . . . Europe also possesses a tradition founded in first principles. That mentality which in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

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<sup>4</sup> Kaegi, p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Keith, p. 437.

<sup>6</sup> Griffith, II, 576, n. 5.

<sup>7</sup> A. Esteller, “The Text-critical Reconstruction of the *Rgveda*,” *Indica*, XIV (1977), 1-12. See also the Bandorkar Institute of Oriental Studies Jubilee Volume, 1978.

(AD) brought into being an intellectual Christianity, would not have found the *Vedas* difficult.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with the developmental model elaborated in Part II, we shall be interested in determining the distinctive manner in which the mode of thinking in this hymn surpasses that of the primitive or totemic mind, and differs from subsequent developments.

This, of course, does not discount the value of later systematic commentaries. They drew upon the full strength of the resources available to them in order to elucidate, in a manner consistent with their own doctrines, both the issue being treated in the text and related new problems which had arisen. It is precisely by means of these successive commentaries that Indian philosophy has progressed through the ages. They are our richest and clearest statements of the cumulative wisdom available on the issues treated in the text. This applies to the exegesis of our text in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and even more to Sāyana's commentaries on this text and in the *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, here we are engaged in the somewhat different task, described in Part II, of stepping back to the content of human thought which preceded the development of philosophic systems. It is crucial that this be done in terms of the early texts themselves, both in order that they might, without circularity, provide a basis for the subsequent systems and in order to retrieve as a basis for really new progress today what the intervening philosophic systems themselves did not undertake to articulate and develop.

Another important approach, suggested by V. Agrawala draws upon M. Ojha's *Daśavāda-Rahasya*. He identifies ten "doctrines which served as nuclei for the thoughts of the Rishis when poetic statements of *Sṛṣhti-Vidyā* were being attempted in a rich variety of bold linguistic forms." They constitute ten "language games"—to use more recent terminology—which were employed in the *Sāmhītās* and *Brāhmaṇas*, and referred to in the first two *mantras* of the "Nasadiya Sūkta." These are: *Sdasad-Vāda*: speech in terms of existence and non-existence; *Rajo-Vāda*: the primeval material cause; *Yyoma-Vāda*: space as the ultimate substratum; *Parāpara-Vāda*: such pairs as absolute-relative, transcendent-immanent, or higher-lower; *Āvarana-Vāda*: measure or container; *Ambho-Vāda*: water; *Amrita-Mṛityu-Vāda*: death and immortality, matter and energy; *Ahorāta-*

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<sup>8</sup> A New Approach to the Vedas: An Essay in Translation and Exegesis (London: Luzac, 1933), p. vii.

<sup>9</sup> Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *Hymn of Creation (Nāsadiya Sūkta, Rigveda X, 129)* (Varanasi: P. Prakashan, 1963), pp. 40-57. This remains true even while recognizing the value of observations by Roth and Müller: see Griffith, Vol. I, pp. x-xi. I am particularly indebted to Dr. R. Balasubramanian of the University of Madras for his extremely generous and detailed exposition of Sāyana's commentary on *Rig Veda X, 129*.

*Vāda*: time; *Deva-Vāda*: the gods; and *Brahma-Vāda*: the transcendent reality.<sup>10</sup>

These ten nuclei provide notably more proximate contexts for interpreting the text of *Rg Veda X*, 129 than do the much later six orthodox and three heterodox systems. They can be especially useful in identifying both the implicit content of the terms and their allusions. In particular, they were the tools with which that mentality carried out its reflection upon the issues of unity and diversity contained therein. Hence, they will be particularly central to our project of determining the metaphysical content of the vision in its own terms, though from our later and hence more self-aware standpoint.

*Text of the Hymn of Creation: Rg Veda, X, 129*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup>There was not the non-existent nor the existent then; there was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond. What did it contain? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, unfathomable, profound?

<sup>2</sup>There was not death nor immortality then. There was not the beacon of night, nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own power. Other than that there was not anything beyond.

<sup>3</sup>Darkness was in the beginning hidden by darkness; indistinguishable, this all was water. That which, coming into being, was covered with the void, that One arose through the power of heat.

<sup>4</sup>Desire in the beginning came upon that, (desire) that was the first seed of mind. Sages seeking in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of the existent in the non-existent.

<sup>5</sup>Their cord was extended across: was there below or was there above? There were impregnators, there were powers; there was energy below, there was impulse above.

<sup>6</sup>Who knows truly? Who shall here declare, whence it has been produced, whence is this creation? By the creation of this (universe) the gods (come) afterwards: who then knows whence it has arisen?

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-18. Other more detailed analyses of *Rig Veda X*, 129 are found in Sampurnand, *Cosmogony in Indian Thought* (Kashi Vidyapith), pp. 61-80; C. Kunhan Raja, *Poet Philosophers*, pp. 221-31; and Coomaraswamy, pp. 52-59.

<sup>11</sup> A.A. MacDonell, *A Vedic Reader* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1917), pp. 207-211.

<sup>7</sup>Where this creation has arisen; whether he founded it or did not: he who in the highest heaven is its surveyor, he only knows, or also he knows not.

### Content Analysis

The hymn would appear to be constructed of three parts. The first (*mantras* 1-3, verse 2) treats the state prior to creation; the second (*mantra* 3, verse 3—*mantra* 5) describes the creative process; the third (*mantras* 6-7) constitutes an epistemic reflection.

*Part I: Prior to Creation.* A number of things are to be noted here. First, reality in this state prior to creation repeatedly is affirmed to be undifferentiated. This is proclaimed by negating successively all that is related as contrary to anything else: there was neither air nor heaven beyond, neither death nor immortality, neither night nor day. There was no place. Some see this undifferentiated character as being stated more directly by rejecting even the principle for such distinctions: there was no beacon of night or day. Esteller would read this as stating directly that there is “no distinguishing sign of the night nor of the day”; Sāyana would say only: “There was no consciousness of night and day.” Finally, that its nature is undistinguishable (*apraketam*) is pictured by stating that it was darkness hidden in darkness and that it was water: “Indistinguishable, this all was water.” By pointing out that water is the stage of creation prior to earth, Sāyana substantiates that this reference to water implies undifferentiation. Together this use of proper terminology constitutes a real advance in stating unity over the improper and symbolic language used in the totemic and mythic visions analyzed above in Part II.

There are certain more positive indications of the nature of the undifferentiated. First, it is termed “that one” (*tad ekam*). This should be taken as a positive affirmation of being, for the text adds that “other than that there was not anything beyond” (*Mantra 2*). Secondly, it is also referred to as being of the nature of life by the statement, “that one breathed.”

Thirdly and of special importance, it indicates the self-sufficiency of “that one” which “breathed by its own power” (*Mantra 2*). Radhakrishnan accepts the description “windless,” and understands it as bespeaking Aristotle’s unmoved mover—a point which A. Keith rejects as anachronistic.<sup>12</sup> Esteller reads this as “unconquerable by his inborn power.” Sāyana may arrive at a similar point by holding that “breathless” implies the negation of all limiting factors, that is, all except the self; it is that which exists depending on, or supported by, its own being. This is important lest the originating experience of the *Rg Veda* be erroneously

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<sup>12</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977), I, 101; Keith, p. 436 and n. 3.

interpreted as being no more than a proto-materialism of the Sāṃkhya type—as is often said—and the Absolute merely a later superimposition for selfish purposes.

Finally, it might be asked whether in the first *mantra* the expression of undifferentiation by the words “there was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond” is not of further significance. In a threefold division of earth, air and heaven<sup>13</sup> it is by means of the introduction of the notion of air or space (*rajo*) that heaven is differentiated from earth. If this be the case, then, as with the notion of the beacon of day and night in the second *mantra*, the statement “there was no air” negates the principle of division and differentiation of heaven from earth, and hence a differentiated condition for heaven and earth.

If there be substance to this suggestion it would have two implications. First and most important, it should mean the philosophically important introduction from the very beginning of this hymn of the principle, not only of the unity, but of the differentiation of being. This would indicate that the two were not seen to be incompatible one with the other. Secondly, it could imply some correspondence to the above-mentioned, and not unrelated, notion of chaos as space (*gap*) found in this role in Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>14</sup> If this is found in widely diverse parts of the Indo-European diaspora it would be proportionately ancient and foundational for human thought.

*Part II: The Creative Process (mantra 3, verse 3 - mantra 5).* This is concerned with “the origin of the evolved world from the unevolved” and introduces two issues: first, in what does this origination consist; second, how is it realized?

The first issue is answered in terms of the differentiation of that which repeatedly had been described in the first part of the hymn as undifferentiated. In *mantra 4* this is spoken of as the bond of the existent with what previously had been called non-existent. *Mantra 5* describes the differentiations of above and below, of impregnators (*redodhā*) and powers (*mahimanā*), of energy (*svadha*) and impulse (*prāyatih*). Sāyana is keenly sensitive to the value implications of this differentiation; others would see these pairs as also being contrasted as male and female cosmogonic principles.<sup>15</sup> In that case the text would not merely state an initial differentiation of what previously had been undifferentiated. In the *Theogony* heaven and earth were related as male and female and from them all else is generated. Similarly, the original pair in the *Rg Veda X*, 129, if related in principle as male and female, would imply that all further

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<sup>13</sup> Kaegi, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter III above. Note the etymological similarity of the Sanskrit root of Brahman, ‘brah’, to the Old Norse, ‘brag’ and the close parallels between German spells and those of the *Artha Veda*.

<sup>15</sup> MacDonell, pp. 209-210.

plurality and differentiation can be understood fruitfully on the basis of a genetic unity. Only the main lines are traced, however, and that only in *Rg Veda X*, 72.

As with the *Theogony*, the nature of the unity which such male and female cosmogonic principles would imply depends upon the degree of the unity of this original pair. Here it is most significant that the image conveyed by the hymn from beginning to end is not that these two principles are simply different and then brought together. On the contrary, what precedes or that from which their differentiation arises is a state of undifferentiation. Most fundamentally they are one rather than many—a point of the greatest importance for us in global times as the world, as it were, comes back together. Continuity with the totemic vision and the experience it embodied could provide a basis for this vision.

On the second issue, namely, how this initial division was realized, the text is not silent, though it speaks after the manner of poetry, rather than of technical scientific prose.

First, in ‘*tuchyēnābhu*’ the word ‘*tuchya*’ introduces the notion of “void”, or that which is not. To this is added the instrumental suffix “by it,” to state “by means of the void.” Finally there is the verb ‘*bhū*’ or “become, arise,” that is, what comes into being everywhere. A. Coomaraswamy would interpret the following words, “All that existed covered (*apihitam yad āsīt*)” as veil or *āvarivah* in *mantra 1*, namely, the world as that which covers the ultimate reality. Does this mean that the void plays a role in the transition—which is creation—from the differentiated to the differentiated state? If so, it would correspond well to *mantra 5* regarding the division of the above and the below as cosmogonic principles.

This raises the further question of whether the notion of the void here is related in any way to the notion of chaos as ‘gap’ or ‘open space’ found in the *Theogony*’s description of the origin of the universe, especially as that notion reflected a very ancient, and common foundational element in Aryan thought. Here in *mantra 3* it is not merely an open space as in *mantra 1*, but the more philosophically suggestive notion of void. This suggests the notion of non-being which later will be of great systematic philosophic importance regarding these very issues. Sāyana interprets it as *Maya* which will play the major systematic role in these issues a millennium later in Shankara’s *Advaita*. Here, however, it remains a poetic and imaginative statement.

Second, whatever be said of verse 3, verse 4 of *mantra 3* and all of *mantra 4* may contain more substantive indications of the manner of differentiation of the universe through the notions of will and mind. Heat is often used as the simile for that ardor of will with which one grasps (*kāmās*), holds to, or is attached to existence. When the reality is present this attachment is enjoyment, that is, it is one and holds itself in bliss. Verse 1 of *mantra 4* proceeds to state that the origin was not deficient but *sam*, which Sāyana understands as meaning complete or having fullness. Further, *avartatādhi* should be understood, not as coming upon a reality from

without, but as arising from within. This would mean that from the point of view of its origin creation is seen in this hymn as taking place, not out of need, but out of the plenitude of perfection, which would imply that it is pure gift as discussed in Chapter V above.

But what does *Kāmas* indicate regarding the nature of reality itself and hence of created reality? It should be noted that, when the object of the ardor of the will is absent or not yet possessed, grasping or attachment has the nature of desire. We have seen that the void has a separative role in the origination of differentiation, and that the original state is one of undifferentiation in contrast to the present differentiated state. In continuity with the totemic unity, then, the differentiated parts remain most fundamentally attracted one to another. In this case the text would be suggesting that it pertains to the internal nature of reality itself to be unitive and for the differentiated realities to be positively related or attracted to one another. This is what the Greeks expressed in a relatively external manner in their mythic notion of the god, Eros. It would be also the metaphysical basis for the social life of the family or village, as well as for cohesion in our global times.

Further, verse 2 proceeds to say that desire is the first seed of mind. As regards the nature of reality itself does this imply that bliss (*ānanda*) as enjoyment of being in some sense follows upon or expresses consciousness (*cit*) of existence (*sat*)? For the originating Self this would imply that the creative causality of its active will is fully conscious. This, in turn, would provide the basis for the order and intelligibility which characterize the realm of creation.

In the order of created or differentiated beings the fact that desire is the first seed of mind integrates knowledge within the overall project of unity and orients it finally toward not analysis, but synthesis, as it would appear to imply a striving of one person to know the other. This, in turn, is predicated ontologically upon the fact that the mind and its object originally were an undifferentiated unity as noted in the first part of the hymn and inherited from totemic thought. Thus, knowledge itself is most fundamentally the effort to grasp the other in its differentiated and hence partial expression of the original and undifferentiated unity. In this light the desire or will of one differentiated being as regards others should be not that of self-seeking, but of aiding, of serving the other, so that it might share or participate more fully in perfection.

Finally, both mind and desire may be combined in wisdom in verses 3 and 4 of *mantra 4*: "Sages seeking in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of the existent in the nonexistent." Does this mean only that by reflecting on the problem they found the origin of the differentiated universe? This is possible, but the explicit distinction and ordering of desire and mind would suggest more, namely, the interior road to wisdom which is so characteristic of the Indian philosophers and of great interest in the West from Saint Augustine to present day phenomenologists (see Part III above).



What was said above regarding developmental modes of thought and the dependence of the poetic imagination upon the senses suggests that the answers to further questions, such as whether this is a monism or pluralism, a monotheism or a henotheism, a material or an efficient causality will require the development of subsequent modes of thought. The human mind, however, will never be able to supplant poetry or exhaustively to articulate its meaning in scientific terms. Thus, such poetic hymns as the *Theogony* and *Rg Veda*, X, 129 will ever remain inexhaustible and essential storehouses or treasuries for philosophers and for all people in their global effort to find how their lives coalesce in God and with one another.

*Part III. Epistemological Reflection (Mantras 6-7).* In the end the hymn steps back from the task of establishing the literal truth of the description in mantras 1-5, saying: who truly knows?

On one level as it has been concerned with creation this seems to argue that no created intellect can know what preceded it as such—no created mind can know the act of creation itself upon which it depends. *A fortiori* it cannot know the working of the mind and heart which generated the act of creation. Only the Creator could know such truth.

But mantra 7 goes further to open the possibility that the creator too does not know. This could be read in two senses. One is that the creator is less than knowing: some impersonal force, brute and crude. This would fit the recent evolutionary paradigm in which all is read in terms of matter from which humankind but barely emerges. The other sense is that the creator of knowledge may rather be above knowledge, not a union of subject and object but subsistent truth itself. This would correspond to the body of the *Vedas* and the basic Hindu conviction that the divine is existence, consciousness and bliss. This is the truly decisive point in the constitution of a culture for it sets the parameters in terms of meaning and value: not of darkness and conflict, but of light and love. This is the basic issue of who and what we are, and of what our life is about.

### *Implications*

From the above archeology of human thought in its totemic and mythic stages it can be concluded with Iqbal that it is religious insight regarding the Absolute which has made finite thinking possible. Leaving home and going deeply into the past now brings us back to reconstruct the deep truth regarding knowledge: it is not only that knowledge can be also about religion, but that in essence thought itself is the religious reconstitution of all in God: this is what knowledge most fundamentally is.

There are two implications of this archeology which I would like to cite here. The first concerns the relation of a people to the message of a prophet. If the basis of the human self-understanding of the different cultures is essentially religious, a divine revelation through a great prophet comes not as alien and conflictual, but as a special divine help to appreciate,

purify and strengthen a culture. The message of the prophet evokes the divine life which lies within; it enables each people to plunge more deeply into the infinite ground of their cultural traditions and to bring out more of its meaning for their life. Indeed, confidence (etymologically rooted in "faith" ) and commitment to one's tradition as grounded in the infinite means precisely expecting it to have even more to say than a people has yet articulated. In this light, the Prophet's voice is a call to delve anew into one's tradition, to bring out more of its meaning for one's times and to live this more fully. This is a voice to which one can respond fully and freely.

In this sense I would take issue with Iqbal's seemingly overly Darwinian description of the first period of religious life as:

a form of discipline which the individual or a whole people must accept as an unconditional command without any rational understanding of the ultimate meaning and purpose of the command. This attitude may be of great consequence in the social and political history of a people, but is not of much consequence in so far as the individual's inner growth and expansion are concerned.<sup>16</sup>

The archeology of human thought suggests that the response of a people to the message of a prophet, far from being without rational understanding, is more precisely a renewal and reaffirmation of their deep self-understanding. This is truly a homecoming in whose very essence lies the deep freedom of the peace one experiences in returning home after a long and confusing day. But I suspect that Iqbal would not disagree with this for in reality it is an application of what he concluded regarding thought as being made possible by the presence therein of the total infinite.<sup>17</sup> This applies first to culture and then even to the natural order. "There is no such thing as a profane world . . . all is holy ground," wrote Iqbal, citing the Prophet: "The whole of this earth is a mosque."<sup>18</sup>

A second implication can be of special importance in these times of global communication and interaction between peoples. If the future is to hold not Huntington's conflict of civilizations, but their cooperation in a shrinking world, then it is important to see how the civilizations deriving from prophets and religious traditions can relate one to another. Hermeneutics can be helpful here with its suggestion that in order to delve more deeply it is important to hear not only reformulations of what we ourselves say in our own horizon, but new formulations from other traditions regarding the basically shared truths of our divine origin and goal. As Iqbal is supported by an archeology of knowledge indicating that all knowledge is grounded in the divine, we can expect that religious texts

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<sup>16</sup> Iqbal, p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

from the traditions of other great prophets will evoke new echoes from the depths of our own tradition. In this light, interchange with other traditions comes not as a threat. Rather, cultural interchange can enable one to make one's pilgrimage more unerringly along one's own path to the one holy mountain<sup>19</sup>—to which Iqbal refers “as the total absolute”. Other forms of cooperation can, and indeed must, be built upon this.

### **BHAGAVAD GITA**

The first half of this chapter, in reflecting on the creation hymn, was set in the context of the ritual action of sacrifice which the hymn accompanied and expressed. There is another, indeed most known, text which begins from the actions of daily life, but which also leads the reader to the divine source, and hence to the meaning of life. This is the *Bhagavad Gita*, to which we shall now turn.

Anyone who has travelled in India undoubtedly has received myriad times the good advice: “Do one thing: read the *Gita*.” It holds a unique place in Hindu culture and literature. The main body of this literature emerges, as noted above, from the ritual practices, especially those of sacrifice, and thus is made up of four sections. First is the *Vedas* or Vedic hymns which were used in the sacrifices and state its basic truths: *Rg Veda* X, 129, examined above, is an example of this literature. Second are the *Brāhmanas* detailing how the rituals were to be carried out. Third are the *Aranyakas* or allegorical statements of the meaning of the *Vedas*. Lastly, come the *Upanishads* which were really appendices to the *Aranyakas* and provided in a more direct, non-allegorical manner the philosophy of the *Vedas*. These four correspond as well to the four ideal stages of life: student, householder, forest ascetic, and contemplative mystic.

Beyond this are two other key text. One is the *Sutras*, or “strings”, which are very short, cryptic statements of the central elements of the Vedic vision. Like the *Sententiae* of Peter the Lombard in medieval Europe they served as the basis for the systematic exposition of Hindu philosophy.

The other is the *Bhagavad Gita*. This is part of the great epic poem the *Mahabharata*, which recounts the history of the Bharata clan. Progressively this moves ineluctably toward a great battle between the Pandavas, the aggrieved party, led by Arjuna, and the Kauravas.

In moments just prior to a battle all pretense, self deception and minor concern must fall away. As in a great Shakespearean soliloquy it is then that the deepest truths of life are revealed. Here it is Arjuna, coming from a long preparatory forest retreat and tested to the extremes, who questions; it is the Lord Krishna himself who answers. Just as in the *Theogony* and the creation Hymn ultimate wisdom was sought of the gods, so it is here. It is the beauty and deep insight into the Truth contained in

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<sup>19</sup> *Isaias*: 27, 13.

Krishna's response that alone gives this its standing as the central text of the Hindu tradition. Let us listen to the text itself.

*The Dilemma*

Arjuna asks the Lord Krishna to be his chariot driver and they go to survey the line of the battle. He sees not only his own family and friends, but arrayed against them a set of relatives, teachers and people he loves and admires:

I.

<sup>21</sup>Drive my chariot, Krishna immortal, and place it between the two armies.

<sup>22</sup>That I may see those warriors who stand there eager for battle, with whom I must now fight at the beginning of this war.

<sup>23</sup>That I may see those who have come here eager and ready to fight, in their desire to do the will of the evil son of Dhrita-rashtra.

<sup>24</sup>When Krishna heard the words of Arjuna he drove their glorious chariot and placed it between the two armies.

<sup>25</sup>And facing Bhishma and Drona and other royal rulers he said: 'See, Arjuna, the armies of the Kurus, gathered here on this field of battle.'

<sup>26</sup>Then Arjuna saw in both armies fathers, grandfathers,

<sup>27</sup>sons, grandsons; fathers of wives, uncles, masters,

<sup>28</sup>brothers, companions and friends. When Arjuna thus saw his kinsmen face-to-face in both lines of battle, he was overcome by grief and despair and thus he spoke with a sinking heart.

.....  
<sup>33</sup>When those for whom we want a kingdom, and its pleasures, and the joys of life, are here in this field of battle about to give up their wealth and their life?

<sup>34</sup>Facing us in the field of battle are teachers, fathers and sons; grandsons, grandfathers, wives' brothers; mothers' brothers and fathers of wives.

<sup>35</sup>These I do not wish to slay, even if I myself am slain. Not even for the kingdom of the three worlds: how much less for a kingdom of the earth!

.....

<sup>40</sup>The destruction of a family destroys its rituals of righteousness, and when the righteous rituals are no more, unrighteousness overcomes the whole family.

<sup>41</sup>When unrighteous disorder prevails, the women sin and are impure; and when women are not pure, Krishna, there is disorder of castes, social confusion.

<sup>42</sup>This disorder carries down to hell the family and the destroyers of the family. The spirits of their dead suffer in pain when deprived of the ritual offerings.

<sup>43</sup>Those evil deeds of the destroyers of a family, which cause this social disorder, destroy the righteousness of birth and the ancestral rituals of righteousness.

<sup>44</sup>And have we not heard that hell is waiting for those whose familiar rituals of righteousness are no more?

<sup>45</sup>O day of darkness! What evil spirit moved our minds when for the sake of an earthly kingdom we came to this field of battle ready to kill our own people?

<sup>46</sup>Better for me indeed if the sons of Dhritarashtra, with arms in hand, found me unarmed, unresisting, and killed me in the struggle of war.

<sup>47</sup>Thus spoke Arjuna in the field of battle, and letting fall his bow and arrows he sank down in his chariot, his soul overcome by despair and grief.

Arjuna's ethical dilemma is grave indeed. First, he does not want to kill his kinsmen. Second, he does not want to have killed those who support him in the fight and for whom he is fighting (I, 33). Third, he does not want to kill those who attack him, even though they do evil, for then there would be no one to perform the sacrifices. Above we saw how the sacrifices express the source of meaning. Here Arjuna points out that an end to the sacrifices would eliminate the appreciation of the source of meaning and hence the personal and social dignity, meaning and worth by which we approach immortality. This, in turn, would destroy the social order, just as the loss of the totem of a tribe, leads to social disorder. (40-44)

Hence both personal and social life would be destroyed. Therefore he concludes that it is better not to act, to stand unarmed and to be killed, than to cause such a total destruction of his people. (46)

At this point the lord Krishna begins to speak and in the 72 verses of chapter II of the *Gita* presents, succinctly but classically, the main themes of Hinduism. The passage stands out so preeminently in Hindu literature that, though part of an immense epic, it has come to be considered part of the *Sruti* or revealed texts:

Krishna begins to respond by preparing Arjuna for deeper understanding. He does this by noting: first that Arjuna is not in an enlightened state, but is dominated by concern for his people (I 31, II 6); second, that he would drop out of action due to the problems of the

moment, rather than taking a longer view of life in its totality; further, that he may be under the influence of such ignoble emotions as fear and discouragement; and finally, that he gives in to grief, desolation and even to despair (II 1, 7). The reason for this would seem to be too external a sense of meaning. Thus, for example, he is preoccupied by the need to assure the continuation of sacrifices even where this might contradict their meaning. Hence, Arjuna asks the Lord, Krishna, to shed light on the path that is his duty. Krishna proceeds to do so in what certainly is one of the greatest pieces of world literature.

*The Response*

II.

<sup>10</sup>Krishna smiled and spoke to Arjuna—there between the two armies the voice of God spoke these words:

<sup>11</sup>Thy tears are for those beyond tears; and are thy words of wisdom? The wise grieve not for those who live; and they grieve not for those who die—for life and death shall pass away.

<sup>12</sup>Because we all have been for all time: I, and thou, and those kings of men. And we all shall be for all time, we all for ever and ever.

<sup>13</sup>As the Spirit of our mortal body wanders on in childhood, and youth and old age, the Spirit wanders on to a new body: of this the sage has no doubts.

<sup>14</sup>From the world of the senses, Arjuna, comes heat and comes cold, and pleasure and pain. They come and they go; they are transient. Arise above them, strong soul.

<sup>15</sup>The man whom these cannot move, whose soul is one, beyond pleasure and pain, is worthy of life in Eternity.

<sup>16</sup>The unreal never is: the Real never is not. This truth indeed has been seen by those who can see the true.

<sup>17</sup>Interwoven in his creation, the Spirit is beyond destruction. No one can bring to an end the Spirit which is everlasting.

<sup>18</sup>For beyond time he dwells in these bodies, though these bodies have an end in their time; but he remains immeasurable, immortal. Therefore, great warrior, carry on thy fight.

<sup>19</sup>If any man thinks he slays, and if another thinks he is slain, neither knows the ways of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill: the Eternal in man cannot die.

<sup>20</sup>He is never born, and he never dies. He is in Eternity: he is for evermore. Never-born and eternal, beyond times gone or to come, he does not die when the body dies.

<sup>21</sup>When a man knows him as never-born, everlasting, never-changing, beyond all destruction, how can that man kill a man, or cause another to kill?

<sup>22</sup>As a man leaves an old garment and puts on one that is new, the Spirit leaves his mortal body and wanders on to one that is new.

<sup>23</sup>Weapons cannot hurt the Spirit and fire can never burn him. Untouched is he by drenching waters, untouched is he by parching winds.

<sup>24</sup>Beyond the power of sword and fire, beyond the power of waters and winds, the Spirit is everlasting, omnipresent, never-changing, never-moving, ever One.

<sup>25</sup>Invisible is he to mortal eyes, beyond thought and beyond change. Know that he is, and cease from sorrow.

<sup>26</sup>But if he were born again and again, and again and again he were to die, even then, victorious man, cease thou from sorrow.

<sup>27</sup>For all things born in truth must die, and out of death in truth comes life. Face to face with what must be, cease thou from sorrow.

<sup>28</sup>Invisible before birth are all beings and after death invisible again. They are seen between two unseens. Why in this truth find sorrow?

<sup>29</sup>One sees him in a vision of wonder, and another gives us words of his wonder. There is one who hears of his wonder; but he hears and knows him not.

<sup>30</sup>The Spirit that is in all that begins is immortal in them all: for the death of what cannot die, cease thou to sorrow.

<sup>31</sup>Think thou also of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war.

<sup>32</sup>There is a war that opens the doors of heaven, Arjuna! Happy the warriors whose fate is to fight such war.

<sup>33</sup>But to forgo this fight for righteousness is to forgo thy duty and honor: is to fall into transgression.

<sup>34</sup>Men will tell of thy dishonor both now and in times to come. And to a man who is in honor, dishonor is more than death.

<sup>35</sup>The great warriors will say that thou hast run from the battle through fear; and those who thought great things of thee will speak of thee in scorn.

<sup>36</sup>And thine enemies will speak of thee in contemptuous words of ill-will and derision, pouring scorn upon thy courage. Can there be for a warrior a more shameful fate?

<sup>37</sup>In death they glory in heaven, in victory they glory on earth. Arise therefore, Arjuna, with thy soul ready to fight.

<sup>38</sup>Prepare for war with peace in thy soul. Be in peace in pleasure and pain, in gain and in loss, in victory or in the loss of a battle. In this peace there is no sin.

<sup>39</sup>This is the wisdom of Sankhya—the vision of the Eternal. Hear now the wisdom of Yoga, path of the Eternal and freedom from bondage.

<sup>40</sup>No step is lost on this path, and no dangers are found. And even a little progress is freedom from fear.

<sup>41</sup>The follower of this path has one thought, and this is the End of his determination. But many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the man who lacks determination.

<sup>42</sup>There are men who have no vision, and yet they speak many words. They follow the letter of the *Vedas*, and they say: "There is nothing but this."

<sup>43</sup>Their soul is warped with selfish desires, and their heaven is a selfish desire. They have prayers for pleasures and power, the reward of which is earthly rebirth.

<sup>44</sup>Those who love pleasure and power hear and follow their words; they have not the determination ever to be one with the One.

<sup>45</sup>The three *Gunas* of Nature are the world of the *Vedas*. Arise beyond the three *Gunas*, Arjuna! Be in Truth, eternal, beyond earthly opposites. Beyond gains and possessions, possess thine own soul.

<sup>46</sup>As is the use of a well of water where water everywhere overflows, such is the use of all the *Vedas* to the seer of the Supreme.

<sup>47</sup>Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work.

<sup>48</sup>Do thy work in the peace of *Yoga* and, free from selfish desires, be not moved in success or in failure. *Yoga* is evenness of mind—a peace that is ever the same.



<sup>49</sup>Work done for a reward is much lower than work done in the *Yoga* of wisdom. Seek salvation in the wisdom of reason. How poor those who work for a reward!

<sup>50</sup>In this wisdom a man goes beyond what is well done and what is not well done. Go thou therefore to wisdom; *Yoga* is wisdom in work.

<sup>51</sup>Seers in union with wisdom forsake the rewards of their work and free from the bonds of birth they go to the abode of salvation.

<sup>52</sup>When thy mind leaves behind its dark forest of delusion, thou shalt go beyond the scriptures of times past and still to come.

<sup>53</sup>When thy mind, that may be wavering in the contradictions of many scriptures, shall rest unshaken in divine contemplation, then the goal of *Yoga* is thine.

<sup>54</sup>How is the man of tranquil wisdom, who abides in divine contemplation? What are his words? What is his silence? What is his work?

<sup>55</sup>When a man surrenders all desires that come to the heart and by the grace of God finds the joy of God, then his soul has indeed found peace.

<sup>56</sup>He whose mind is untroubled by sorrows, and for pleasures he has no longings, beyond passion, and fear and anger, he is the sage of unwavering mind.

<sup>57</sup>Who everywhere is free from all ties, who neither rejoices nor sorrows if fortune is good or is ill, his is a serene wisdom.

<sup>58</sup>When in recollection he withdraws all his senses from the attractions of the pleasures of sense, even as a tortoise withdraws all its limbs, then his is a serene wisdom.

<sup>59</sup>Pleasure of sense, but not desire, disappears from the austere soul. Even desires disappear when the soul has seen the Supreme.

<sup>60</sup>The restless violence of the senses impetuously carries away the mind of even a wise man striving towards perfection.

<sup>61</sup>Bringing them all into the harmony of recollection, let him sit in devotion and union, his soul finding rest in me. For when his senses are in harmony, then his is a serene wisdom.

<sup>62</sup>When a man dwells on the pleasures of sense, attraction for them arises in him. From attraction arises desire, the lust of possession, and this leads to passion, to anger.

<sup>63</sup>From passion comes confusion of mind, then loss of remembrance, the forgetting of duty. From this loss comes the ruin of reason, and the ruin of reason leads man to destruction.

<sup>64</sup>But the soul that moves in the world of the senses and yet keeps the senses in harmony, free from attraction and aversion, finds rest in quietness.

<sup>65</sup>In this quietness falls down the burden of all her sorrows, for when the heart has found quietness, wisdom has also found peace.

<sup>66</sup>There is no wisdom for a man without harmony, and without harmony there is no contemplation. Without contemplation there cannot be peace, and without peace can there be joy?

<sup>67</sup>For when the mind becomes bound to a passion of the wandering senses, this passion carries away man's wisdom, even as the wind drives a vessel on the waves.

<sup>68</sup>The man who therefore in recollection withdraws his senses from the pleasures of sense, his is a serene wisdom.

<sup>69</sup>In the dark night of all beings awakes to Light the tranquil man. But what is day to other beings is night for the sage who sees.

<sup>70</sup>Even as all waters flow into the ocean, but the ocean never overflows, even so the sage feels desires, but he is ever one in his infinite peace.

<sup>71</sup>For the man who forsakes all desires and abandons all pride of possession and of self reaches the goal of peace supreme.

<sup>72</sup>This is the Eternal in man, O Arjuna. Reaching him all delusion is gone. Even in the last hour of his life upon earth, man can reach the Nirvana of Brahman—man can find peace in the peace of his God.

*The Wisdom of Sankhya—the Vision of the Eternal*

The direct response of Krishna to Arjuna in his dilemma is the message of *Karma Yoga*. *Yoga* means Yoke or placing under control; *Karma* means action in the broad sense of deeds, sacrifices, duties and prayer. The nature of *Karma Yoga* is to act or to carry out one's duties without looking for the fruit of one's action, either immediately here in this life or even afterwards in a higher life with God (II 47). To focus upon the results of one's action is to be subject to self-interest, to things or to results that we can accomplish. If instead one can proceed to doing one's duty then one can act with complete equanimity, equilibrium or balance of mind. This is a path between, on the one hand, activism in this life or even in making

sacrifices to obtain goods in the next world and, on the other hand, non-action, passivism or even rejecting all life activities in favor of contemplation. What Krishna advises is not renunciation of action, but renunciation in action.

But on what basis should one follow this path (II 1-38)? This must be not merely the way I feel, or the way I look upon things, but the way things really are. This is the path of the eternal, on which is based the path of wisdom: the vision of the eternal and freedom from bondage.

Its method is to move from my multiple states of experience and feeling (hot and cold, pleasure and pain) which are transient, to my self as that which continues through all these states and is their basis; that is, to move from the many subjective states to the one self who experiences them (14-15). But then Krishna directs Arjuna to go higher still, to rise to the absolute Self (16-18). This is above even one's own self, which he relativises as a seen between the two unseens (28), namely what precedes and follows after this life. Like Descartes, this is the search for what really is. The absolute or Brahman is described as *sat* or existence that is one, *cit* or consciousness, and *ananda* or bliss. These are the characteristics of the absolute, of divine life. Hence, they are also the essence of our true life as we are derived therefrom and directed thereto.

*Existence (sat)* is stated in terms of perdurance and unity. It continues the first step noted above as being from the transient to the permanent; it identifies as goal that which is not of limited duration. Where the individual self was a limited "seen between two unseens" (28), this is definitive in existence: "The real never is not"; it is immortal and eternal beyond time and destruction. As with Xenophanese the one is never changing or moving, but is ever one (16-19, 24, 30).

*Consciousness (cit)* is seen as the one source of all meaning. The whole process has been one of consciousness, from feeling the varied states of hot and cold, pleasure and pain, to the self. This appears here especially as justice or the ability to make the right judgement in terms of one's duty, or of doing what is right (31). It is honor as greater than death (33-36). Such right judgement is based on wisdom (39) which is the vision of the eternal. Ultimately it is founded in the all knowing Spirit or Self—like Xenophanese' God who knows all and moves all by His mind.

*Bliss (ānanda)* is the ultimate Source and Goal of all. All comes from God who shows joy in sharing, indeed whose essence, as in Greek myth, is to share rather than to hide or inhibit. The ultimate aim of all then is joy in God or divine life (55); a good life gives peace on earth and glory in heaven (37).

There is here essential wisdom for global times, that is, of ways that not only unite by abstracting from plurality and difference, but give great importance to cultures and other differences. Moreover, this is not in opposition to the One, but precisely in the global unity.

In this broad light the particulars of life are ignored only if taken by themselves and made into absolutes. This is particularly true of the ego or

self if taken as opposed to all others. This would be to make the ego an end in itself and reduce life to simply a matter of achieving particular pleasures. When, however, particular actions and persons are seen in and through the One then they take on ultimate importance as manifestations of the Brahman, i.e., of existence, consciousness and bliss. Only in these terms are they truly real, just and good. Hence, the point is not to achieve some goal, but to exist or live in a way that is true and just; only this is really meaningful. Only by acting in a way that is good, i.e. as a dynamic expression of joy, does one really exist: the rest is illusion.

What then of action, which concretely for Arjuna on that day is to enter into battle. The response is direct: do your duty (31-33), that is, do what is true, just and righteous. Not to do so is dishonor, which in terms of God and eternal life is worse than death (33-36). In sum, when to battle is one's duty, then that is what one must do. It is the moral quality of the action that is important, not its outcome: victory is glory on earth, in death is glory in heaven (37-38).

The metaphysics presented thus far has great ethical implications. The first half of this second chapter of the *Gita* distinguishes three levels of life: first, that of the various sensations such as hot and cold, pleasure and pain; second that of the individual human self; and third that of the absolute Self or Brahma.

Considering things on the first level there is only an interplay of physiological states, of the senses and of behavior. There is no question of honor: indeed, honor is pretense when taken in terms of Creon in the *Antigone*, of modern positivisms or of the post-moderns of our day. But this is to isolate these realities from their real foundations.

On the second level, that of the individual self or *atman*, people are seen only in terms of time and place and hence as egos opposed one to the other. To be united they must be seen in terms of reality which transcends this level.

The third level of reality and of awareness is what was spoken of in the totem and myth; here it is Brahman or the absolute. This is existence; it is consciousness, truth and justice; and it is bliss or joy and love as dynamic gift. The first two levels must be seen to originate from this third, Brahma or the absolute, which they express; only in as much as they do so do they really exist as matters of truth and goodness.

Evil in contrast, as was seen in the Greek myths, is suppression of this emergence from the real, from truth and goodness, and hence a negation of justice and goodness. It is dishonor on earth and hell thereafter (34).

After a life lived in truth, however, death is simply the termination of the time sequence. It is negation not of reality, but only of the unreal, that is, of the self as opposed to others. Death then is affirmation of reality (37).

On this basis the text proceeds in its second part to provide particular ethical directions on how to live, *karma yoga* (39-72):

- avoid thinking only of this life or state (II 42-44); these are delusions in comparison to the eternal or if thought of without the eternal (52);
- what is important is to achieve wisdom, i.e., to see all according to the eternal, which entails bringing all things together into an unity or harmony (61-66);
- this is done by ‘re-collection’, that is, by recalling the senses from the particulars (59-61); and hence
- those who do so are the ones who truly practice *karma yoga* (47-49).

This is the eternal in man, O Arguna. Reaching him all delusion is gone. Even in the last hour of this life upon earth, man can reach the Nirvana of Brahman—man can find peace in the peace of his God (72).

### **BUDDHISM: THE CONTEMPLATIVE PATH**

From the above it can be seen that the Hindu vision of the human person is rooted in the absolute self or Brahman as existence, consciousness and bliss. It is precisely the absolute character of the transcendence of this Self that rejects anything that might limit it or set it in contrast to or over against any other. As infinite there can be no “other” with which it shares or in relation to which it would be limited. It is not a person but only because it is so supra personal in the infinity and simplicity of its existence, as of its consciousness and bliss.

But the same is true of the finite human being whose goal is to overcome the limitations of his or her consciousness. Hence to the degree that this is perfected it does not turn in upon itself and set itself against others, but rather opens progressively to others and finally to the limitless light and wisdom in a process that culminates in being merged therein. Due to this destiny the human being is denominated not by an ego in contrast to others, but by a search to merge into the consciousness and bliss of the divine. The classical Hindu similes for this are the waves or rivers that merge into the sea.

In this light the experience and teaching of the Buddha is more continuous than discontinuous. It appreciates that the impediment to this process is “grasping” by which I hold onto external things, or even to my own interior identity or ego in contrast to others. Hence Buddhism would stress the “non grasping”, the “non ego” and the “non self”. It would set a life pattern of detachment and meditation whereby one is freed from bonds to things. Moreover, according to the directions of the Buddha himself, it would avoid metaphysical speculation regarding the nature of the self.

At first view and taken by themselves, such teaching could appear to be negative in character. This impression is reinforced by the reforming nature of Buddhism which tends to look negatively upon its Hindu

predecessor from which, and indeed in opposition to which, it sometimes identifies itself. However with broader cultural vision what appears is rather the long cultural heritage it was seeking to protect from corruptions. In relation to the deeper values of Hinduism, Buddhism can be seen not as its negations, but as negations of anything that would limit its openness to the Absolute being. The culminating state of nirvana/nibbana is not a nihilism, but a complete openness to the totally infinite—the merging of the wave back into the sea.

This can be of great importance in the effort to import elements of Western culture—for example its science and technology—or to develop commercial or political relations with entities formed by that culture. The strongly aggressive and egoistic character of individualist Western culture requires a firmly founded sense of the human and its dignity lest this be swept aside or absorbed into the modern pragmatic paradigm where all is made to serve arbitrarily chosen material goals.

In this light the Buddhist cultures, and in turn its Hindu roots, are essential for an appropriate humanization of life in Asia.

Conversely, as many in the West are finding, these cultural elements can be salutary in liberating the Western dynamic sense of person from avarice and greed, so that it can rediscover its ultimately humanizing cultural and religious roots, and begin to restore with others its sense of family and of nature in global times.

Buddhism came as a reform movement to Hinduism, and in turn after 1000 years was succeeded by Hinduism in India. Hence Buddhism cannot be understood without its Hindu roots for it is to the realization of that sense of perfection that the Buddhist reform was dedicated. Thus, for example, while Buddhism would speak of non-self, its intention is not an inherently contradictory affirmation of nothingness, but a negation of the limitations and egocentrism which Hindus too wish to ward off from their notion of the Brahman as “that from which, in which, and into which all is.”<sup>20</sup>

Here we face the great dilemma of the human person. In the whole of material creation man is the only being which is able to be not only aware of other things, but aware of being thus aware. This at times is to be not only reflective, i.e., to reproduce in oneself as subject that which is before us as object. It is to be reflexive, i.e., able to turn back upon ourselves and be aware that we are aware. Thereby we are able to express this in language and be free, i.e., to take charge or be responsible for our actions. This is the glory of man.

However, it has a down side. For if we are able to be thus self-aware and self-responsible we can do so on different bases. We can restrict this simply to ourselves and then proceed to organize all of life, indeed all of the reality simply in terms of ourselves. Rather than living in the large

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<sup>20</sup> *The Vedanta Sstras of Badarayana* with commentary by Sankara, trans. By George Thibaut (New York: Dover, 1962), I, 1,2.

world with all its dimensions of meaning, we struggle to reduce all of reality to ourselves and thereby to destroy its breadth and depth.

The challenge then for a human person is to live fully. That is, to envisage and engage one's life in terms not of an isolated self to the welfare of whom all is subjected, but as an active participant in the life of the world. This is to live in the image of absolute unity and truth, goodness—and beauty—as that again from which, in which and into which all is.

It is directly to this that the life and teaching of the Buddha is directed. He observed the suffering in the world; the story has him encountering visibly the sick and the aged. But he did not set about becoming a physician or as with some Chinese Daoists trying to learn how to prolong life. Rather his basic understanding of human suffering, as manifested in the constant pattern of his teaching and guidance of the Sangha, is precisely to counter the sense of grasping whereby the glorious reflexive capability of man is perverted into self-centeredness and egoism. These entrap one in alienation from others and the definitive frustration reflected by Sartre's word that "the other is hell."

In all there is special interest in the Buddhist response to what we identified as the key human dilemma, namely, that the capability for self-reflexion which is the key to man's unique role in the universe can be turned back upon him. If it is used as the basis for self-centeredness it generates the uniquely human suffering to which the Buddha directed his deepest concern. His answer was a systematic pursuit of "non-attachment." This is examined in detail in the extended appendix to follow by Dr. Veerachart Nimanong, "Non-Attachment: The Middle Way for Culture and Hermeneutics in a Global Age"<sup>21</sup>

Here it is especially important to note that nirvana "as conceived in early Buddhism is not non-existence or utter annihilation. It is the realm of being, which transcends the phenomenal world." Without this realization Buddhism could be seen to imply a passivism which would incapacitate human kind. This would quite miss the point.

However, to appreciate this, inasmuch as the Buddha seemed rather to direct attention away from phenomenal happenings it is necessary to turn to Hinduism for the direct consideration of the basic foundation and inspiration of life. It was when this had been perhaps over-ritualized and too subject to the human imagination that the Buddha needed to draw attention away from these ultimate imaginations and focus human concern on non-attachment by which to free one from one's own individual self. And 1000 years later when the same fate befell Buddhism—as, in fact, had been

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Veerachart Nimanong, "Thai Theravada Buddhist Understanding of Non-attachment: The Middle Way for Culture and Hermeneutics in a Global Age," in John P. Hogan and George F. McLean, *Multiple Paths to God: Nostra Aetate, 40 Years Later* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), pp. 246-251.

foretold by the Buddha himself—Shankara came forward to reargue the central importance of the Absolute Self as basis and goal of human life.

This issue reemerges today in facing the challenge of global times. We saw how modern individualism creates a universe of competition that degenerates into Hobbes' war of all against all. This is a formula not for harmony and cooperation, but for self-assertion on the part of the strong, whether economically, militarily or politically. We saw also how this would be attenuated by understanding all in an initial and foundational unity as with prephilosophic thought, and by appreciating that the emergence of the person in the existential terms of Christian philosophy also sees persons as participations in the one divine source and goal.

Yet the way in which this affirmation of the person was assumed into the individualism of modern Protestantism suggests that a "strong guard is needed in order to assure that the person is not reduced to an ego and lest egoism rather than charity come to rule the world. In this the contribution of Eastern thought is much needed. We have seen the contribution of the Bhagavad Gita that a focus on ego detaches one from reality and becomes an illusion. Only in terms of the third level of insight, that of the divine existence, consciousness and bliss, is the sense of the self-rendered truly real and holy—the one being the same as the other.

Dr. Nimanong describes non-attachment through a contrast to attachment as clinging or strong attachment to a cause or ideal, whether to sense desires, to dogmatic opinions, or to the root of self and others, namely ego-belief. Non-attachment is a rejection of a permanent self or ego belief. In contrast to the self in Hinduism as the inner controller of mind and body, Buddhism sees the person as a mere psycho-physical collection or aggregation. This points rather in the direction of Hume's bundle of different perceptions in rapid and perpetual flux.

The grasping of the self is the main origin of suffering. This is to be overcome by detecting the selflessness of the body-mind combination through meditation. This is both tranquility meditation and insight meditation. The latter phenomenological investigation of physical and mental phenomena allows one to see the emptiness or non-self.

It is important for our purposes to note that this is not the nihilism into which modern philosophy collapsed but what is at the moment of dependent origination. The physical combination is empty only in the sense of being empty of a self or of anything belonging thereto, and being dependent rather on the conditions of its coming into existence.

If all of this is directed toward nirvana then instead of looking for a self it would be better to ask who realizes nibbana. The Buddha would say that this is wisdom. When wisdom as a mental formation developed by insight meditation sees that the reality of things is impermanent, suffering and non-self then the phenomenal world is destroyed along with ignorance, desire and attachment. Thus, in turn, all the forces that produce the sense of rebirth in ignorance are calmed, along with attachment and desire for existence. Not thinking of being or non-being one is untroubled.



This, however, is not an annihilation of existence for there is no self to annihilate. It is rather annihilation of ignorance, desire and attachment to self, of greed and delusion. While the Sautranika would see this as nothingness, the Yogacara would see Nirvana as positive reality which is in effect the atman of the Upanisads. Theravada Buddhism would rather hold that it is not non-existence, but a positive, permanent and transcendental entity existing by itself. Hence “nibbana” as conceived in early Buddhism is not non-existence or utter annihilation. It is the reason of being, which transcends the phenomenal world.<sup>22</sup> Without this realization Buddhism could seem to imply a passivism or annihilation of the person which would incapacitate humankind. Its real thrust, it would seem, joins Hinduism in countering any egoism and enabling one to find their reality not in a separate ego against all others, but precisely in redirecting our attention to building our identity on participating in the one divine and its characteristics. This is truly a message for our times.

There is another point necessary for life in global times: it conceives persons not as alien, contradictory or antipathetic, but in principle as related in their one foundation. This much is strongly affirmed by contributions from Hinduism, especially as reinforced by Buddhism. What remains however is the worldly task of choreographing the interaction of these renewed and deeply holy persons conscious of their sacred dignity in a way that constitutes a daily life of cohesive beauty. For this the tradition of Confucianism and others in the Chinese tradition provide an essential complement.

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<sup>22</sup> (Mererk, 1988, p. 162).



## Appendix

# THAI THERAVADA BUDDHIST UNDERSTANDING OF NON-ATTACHMENT: A MIDDLE WAY FOR CULTURE AND HERMENEUTICS IN A GLOBAL AGE

*VEERACHART NIMANONG*

Introduction

The (Thai) Theravada Buddhist Understanding of Non-Attachment

The Buddhist Understanding of Non-Attachment

1. What is Non-Attachment?
2. Who Realizes non-attachment?
3. Is Nibbana Annihilation?

Non-Attachment as the Middle Way of Culture and Hermeneutics in a Global Age

Non-Attachment as the Middle Way beyond Existence and Non-Existence

Thai Buddhist Culture

Thai Buddhist Hermeneutics

Discussion and Comparison

Hermeneutics as a Mode of Thinking

Hermeneutics as Cultural Understanding

Concluding Remarks

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is to investigate a new alternative mode of thinking to supplement the philosophical hermeneutics of a “Fusion of Horizons”, which H.G. Gadamer developed on phenomenological and existential bases. My thesis is that the culture and civilization derived from the fusion of horizon based on an emphasis on substance may not be enough to cope with the present world problems. Arising from attachment, resulting in an unsustainable development of freedom, they possess elements of competition or relations with adversarial, minimal redress, with affront and confrontation, and finally with conflict. I will propose the Theravada Buddhist concept of ‘non-attachment’ (*annupadana*), based on an emphasis on non-self (*anatta*). This is intended to go beyond the two concepts of existence and non-existence in order to constitute an alternative mode of thinking as dialogical hermeneutics across cultures for self-realization in a globalization age. The terms ‘non-attachment’, ‘non-self’ and, ‘the middle way as the way beyond’ will be intentionally used in this mode to characterize the Buddhist context and to supplement, but not deny the

conventional self. Non-attachment is regarded as a ‘gradual path’ (*anupappamagga*) and ‘skillful method’ (*upayakosala*) to cultivate the conventional self and to realize the non-self. The non-self theory is a dialogue of doctrine and religious experience, which will eventually lead to cooperation, freedom, maximal cooperation, understanding and harmony.

It is believed that the idea of non-attachment can be discovered in all religions and thus the idea of ‘non-attachment’ can serve as a necessary basis for religious pluralism, or to use Gyekye’s terminology, to “cultural universalism” as opposed to “cultural relativism”. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a Thai Buddhist scholar monk would use the term “no religion” in order to understand religions. My objective is to investigate the Theravada Buddhist Hermeneutics of Non-Attachment in general and that of Thai Theravada Buddhism in particular. This will elucidate and propose a hermeneutics of Non-Attachment, already existent in all cultures and faiths as an alternative communication or dialogue to create mutual understanding among different cultures. I will treat first how Buddhists understand the concept of non-attachment (*annuppadana*).

## **THE (THAI) THERAVADA BUDDHIST UNDERSTANDING OF NON-ATTACHMENT**

### *The Buddhist Understanding of Non-Attachment*

*What is Non-Attachment?* It is possible to understand non-attachment in relation to attachment. Generally speaking, attachment to someone or something is a feeling of affection that one has for them. In other words, attachment to a particular cause or ideal is a strong feeling of belief in and loyalty to it. Particularly in Buddhism the idea of attachment means clinging to or grasping after, and is classified as of four kinds, namely attachment (1) to sensuality or sense desire, (2) to views or dogmatic opinions, (3) to mere rule and ritual or belief in the efficacy of rites and rituals, and (4) to ego-belief (D.III. 230). The last is more essential than the first three aspects. Therefore, non-attachment can be best understood under the rejection of a permanent self or the ego-belief through an analysis of the psycho-physical combination of human life. According to Buddhism, everything in this world functions under five natural laws, namely physical law (*utu-niyama*), biological law (*bija-niyama*), psychical law (*citta-niyama*), the law of cause and effect (*kamma-niyama*) and the law of cause and conditions (*dhamma-niyama*), (DA.II.432). The first four laws are essentially included in the fifth one, the dhammic law, which analytically can be both conditional and non-conditional. The conditional law is subject to change and cannot be controlled, but both conditional and non-conditional laws are non-self (A.I.285).

Buddhism does not accept the autonomous self of Hinduism or the Upanisadic thinkers, who say that the self is the inner controller of mind and body or in totality a person (Brh. Up. III, 7. 16-22). According to

Buddhism, the concept of person, when analyzed, is found to consist of five aggregates of materiality, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness, which are changing, subject to suffering and not able to be grasped as a self (S. XXII. 59). Hence the so-called person is a mere collection of the five aggregates known in short as the psycho-physical combination. This can be explained in the following metaphorical form: “just as it is by the condition precedent of the co-existence of its various parts that the word chariot is used, just so is it that when the five aggregates are there we talk of a ‘living-being’ (*jivatman*),” (Vism. Ch.XVIII. p. 593-94). What is analyzed by Buddhists is akin to what David Hume also said: “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure, I never can catch myself at any time without a perception. The rest of humankind are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (Hume, 1975, p. 252).

For Buddhism, everything is empty of self-reality. Nothing exists in itself, for each existence is conditioned by some causes outside itself. The phenomenal world is in the state of continuous flux. All things, without exception, are nothing but chains of momentary events, instantaneous ‘bits’ of existence. “There is no Being, there is only a Becoming”, said Rhys Davids (1976, p. 56). Thus, the Upanisadic notion of being (*sat*), the Husserlian transcendental ego and the Sartrean conception of being-in-itself are not acceptable to the Buddhist (Mererk, 1988, p. 111). According to Buddhism, all phenomena are subject to the laws of causation.<sup>1</sup> There is nothing haphazard. Every element, though appearing only for a single moment, is a dependently-originating-ceasing element because it depends for its arising and ceasing on what has gone before it. “Dependent Origination-cessation (causation) is said to have the characteristics of objectivity, necessity, invariability and conditionality” (S.XII.20). Therefore, the doctrine of dependent origination-cessation or causation and the analysis of the five aggregates give support to the non-self doctrine.

According to Buddhism, the idea of self is a mental construct produced by unwise attention, in which one fails to see things as they really are. The selflessness of things is difficult to detect because it is hidden by compactness. According to the Buddhist analysis of the psycho-physical

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<sup>1</sup>This causal law can be expressed by a formula: “when this is, that is; this arising, that arises. When this is not, that is not; this ceasing, that ceases.” Its general principle can be illustrated by a series of twelve factors: “Conditioned by ignorance are mental and kammic formations.... Conditioned by birth are old age, death, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair.... Through the cessation of ignorance, mental and kammic formation cease....Through the cessation birth, old age, death, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair cease,” (M.III.63).

combination, “the selflessness of body and mind is hidden by its compactness, likewise its impermanence is hidden by continuity and its suffering or unsatisfactory state is hidden by posture” (Vism.XXI. 640). The idea of self is considered as the manifestation of the strongest form of grasping, which is similar to what William James, the Western psychologist calls “self-love”, which is the center of all desires and actions (1950, p. 317). According to Buddhism, human beings have a tendency to cling to the five aggregates, namely matter, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness; and the five sensual pleasures, namely visible object, sound, smell, taste and touch (M.I.85). The Buddhist thinks that the grasping of the self is the main origin of suffering. To bring suffering to an end one must get rid of its cause, i.e., the grasping of the self. It is said that the grasping man will intend to do unwholesome actions, the results of which will lead him to an unwholesome state of rebirth. According to Buddhism, man is the creator of himself through both his good and bad deeds done in the past and in the present life. The Buddhists believe in the wheel of life; man can be born as a god, an animal and a hellish creature due to his intentional actions. To rid oneself of kammic results and detect the selflessness of things and the body-mind combination, Buddhists are recommended to practice meditation. This meditation is divided into two kinds: tranquility meditation and insight meditation in order to see things as they really are, that is, as emptiness or non-self. The Buddhists can realize the emptiness of life and things through insight meditation, which is a phenomenological investigation of physical and mental phenomena (D. Sutta No. 22).

It is worth mentioning that the emptiness of the psycho-physical combination in Buddhism should not be understood as nothingness: it is what it is at the present moment, because it is part of dependent origination-cessation. The psycho-physical combination is empty because it is “empty of a self or anything belonging to a self,” (S.xxxv. 85). As the most venerable Nagarjuna (150-250 AD), the founder of Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism, has pointed out: “Since there is no element (*dhamma*), which comes into existence without conditions, there is no element which is not empty” (MK. xxiv.19). In this case, emptiness simply means conditionality or dependent origination-cessation of all phenomena.

Moreover, the Buddhist has a practical purpose in rejecting the self-theory. Like the other teachings of the Buddha, the non-self doctrine has Nibbana (Skt: Nirvana) or the cessation of sufferings as its purpose. In relation to the doctrines of kamma and Nibbana, three questions may be asked: The first question is that if there is no self as agent, what is it that performs action, and accumulates and experiences the result of action? According to Buddhism, intentional consciousness performs action and also accumulates the result of action. When action produces result, it is consciousness that experiences it, but consciousness, which performs an action, is not identical with consciousness, which experiences the result. In fact they are neither the same nor different due to the law of conditionality. To say that the actor and the one who experiences the result are absolutely

the same is to hold the eternalistic view, and to say that the two are entirely different is to hold the annihilationistic view (S. XII. 2. 18).

*Who Realizes non-attachment?* The second question is that if the mind-body combination is not self, then who realizes Nibbana? According to Buddhism, there is no self as a thinker behind the thought; it is the thought that thinks. In like manner, there is no self behind the realization of Nibbana; it is wisdom that realizes Nibbana. When wisdom, which is one of the mental formations, is developed by means of “insight meditation” it sees the reality of things as impermanent, suffering and non-self. When the reality is seen, the concept of the phenomenal world is destroyed (M.III.244). Ignorance, desire and attachment are eradicated and in their places arises wisdom. Then all forces that produce the series of rebirths in ignorance are calmed down and unable to generate kammic energy, because there is no more attachment and desire for existence. As such, Nibbana is regarded as the realization of things as they are: “Not constituting, not thinking out for being or for non-being, man grasps after nothing in the world; not grasping, he is not troubled; being untroubled, he himself attains Nibbana,” (M.III.244). This is the doctrine of non-attachment, which is the mode of Buddhist thinking.

*Is Nibbana Annihilation?* The third question may be asked: “Since Nibbana is regarded as the authentic cessation of existence, Is Nibbana viewed as Annihilation or not” ? Nibbana is not self-annihilation, for there is no self to annihilate. If at all, it is the annihilation of the ignorance, desire and attachment of self. As the Buddha said: “In this respect one may rightly say of me that I teach annihilation. For certainly I do teach annihilation of greed, hatred, and delusion, as well as of the manifold evil and unwholesome things” (A.III.12). All schools of Buddhism apparently deny the ontology of all phenomena, but they differ from each other in the aspect of the ontology of Nibbana. As Ven. Phramaha Prayoon Mererk<sup>2</sup> said, “the followers of the Buddha, however, hold different views on the ontological status of Nirvana” (Mererk, 1988, pp. 160-163). The Sautrantika, for example, holds that Nirvana does not have a positive reality; it is nothingness. Just as space is the absence of a solid body or anything tangible, so also Nirvana is the absence of causes that are responsible for rebirth. Unlike the Sautrantika, the Yogacara maintains that Nirvana has a

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<sup>2</sup>His Royal Ecclesiastic Name is PhraThepsopon (Prayoon Dhammacitto [Mererk]) and he is now appointed as the Rector of Mahachula Buddhist University, Bangkok, Thailand, which has 14 University Branches over Thailand. He was born in 1955, became a novice at the age of 12. While being a novice he graduated with the highest degree of the Thai traditional Pali studies IX and the King sponsored his higher ordination in the Chapel Royal. He got his M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. from Delhi University, India. He is a monk of learning and administration.

positive reality; it is not nothingness. The realization of Nirvana eliminates the unreality of the phenomenal world, but at the same time it is a discovery of store-consciousness (Lankavatara-Sutra, p. 62; Mererk, 1988, p.160). Yogacara's idea of store-house is identical to the Upanisadic conception of Atman. Rejecting both different ideas, Theravada Buddhism maintains that Nibbana is not non-existence, but it is a transcendental entity, independently existent. It is an external, unchangeable state which exists by itself. Buddhaghosa of Sri Lanka rejects the view that Nibbana is non-existent. According to him, a mere fact that Nibbana is not apprehended by an ordinary man does not prove that Nibbana does not exist. Nibbana can be seen through the right means (the way of morality, concentration and wisdom) (Vism. XVI. 508). Nibbana is not non-existence; rather it is positive, permanent reality. To substantiate his view, Buddhaghosa quotes the Buddha's words:

Monks, there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned. If that unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned were not, an escape from what is born, become, made, conditioned would not be apparent. But, since, monks, there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, therefore, the escape from what is born, become, made, conditioned is apparent (Ud. 80-81).

Thus, Nibbana as conceived in early Buddhism is not non-existence or utter annihilation. It is the realm of being, which transcends the phenomenal world (Mererk, 1988, p. 162).

What is the meaning of Buddha's silence? This question can be understood through two discourses, concerned with the questions, later coined as undetermined questions. In Buddhism, not only is the reality of Nibbana indescribable, but also the destiny of the liberated person (*arahant*), i.e., one who attains Nibbana. In the time of the Buddha, a Brahmin came to ask the Buddha the following four questions:

1. The liberated one exists after death?
  2. The liberated one does not exist after death?
  3. The liberated one exists and does not exist after death?
  4. The liberated one neither exists nor does not exist after death?
- (M.I.484)

The Buddha did not give a specific answer to any of these questions. One of the reasons for the 'silence' of the Buddha is that the phrases 'exists', 'does not exist', etc., are misleading, because they have a spatio-temporal connotation and hence are inapplicable to Nibbana, which is beyond space and time and cannot be located. The mystery of the liberated person lies in the fact that he is no longer identified with any of the five aggregates by which the ordinary person is known. The



descriptions of his destiny in terms of the four alternatives mentioned above are out of place (Mererk, 1988, p. 163).

Another set of the undetermined questions was asked by another Brahmin: "Is the world eternal, or is it not? Is it finite, or is it not? Is life in the body, or in the soul? Do beings continue after death, or do they not? The Buddha explained that if he did not speak of them, it was because they did not come within the ambit of his primary concern. His primary concern was limited to a more urgent need of humanity. Then the Buddha narrated an example: "Imagine that a man is going through a jungle. Halfway through he is shot by a poisoned arrow. If the poisoned arrow remains in his body, he will die. The injured man says: 'I will not pull out this arrow until I know who shot it, whether he is tall or short, fat or lean, young or old, of a high caste or a low caste.' The man will die before he knows the right answers" (M.I.427). "Gautama viewed human suffering, and the liberation from it, exactly as modern psychologists and physician would look at mental or bodily patients in their clinics" (Fernando and Swidler, 1986, p. 105).

#### *Thai Buddhist Understanding of Non-Attachment*

Thailand is the land of the yellow robe: in 2002 A.D. Thailand had 36,117 Buddhist temples and 405,476 monks and novices. Buddhism in Thailand is known as Theravada Buddhism,<sup>3</sup> "which can be traced back to the eighteen schools of early Buddhism in the time of the Emperor Asoka, who supported the third Buddhist Council in India" (Bapat, 1987, p. 98). Thailand, known in the past as Siam, is a small country with an area of approximately 200,000 square miles and a population of 63,000,000 million, out of which the Buddhists are 95 percent. The King, although a protector of all religions, namely Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism, is a Buddhist, and he is the ultimate reference in administrative matters pertaining to the Buddhist Monastic Order. In 1956

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<sup>3</sup>Buddhism originated in India in 623 B.C. The Buddha (Enlightened One), whose personal name is Siddharta Gautama, was the founder. After he discovered his dhamma and preached it for 45 years, he died peacefully at the age of 80 years. Living Buddhism is divided into 2 broad traditions: the first one is called *Theravada* (Elders' words) Buddhism, which is also known as 'southern' Buddhism or Hinayana (small vehicle in the sense of being a conservative school) followed by over 100 million of people in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. And the second one is called *Acariyavada* (later teachers' words) Buddhism, which is known as Mahayana (great vehicle in the sense of being a liberal school) Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism is further divided into 2 lines, (1) one is known also as 'eastern' Buddhism and followed by 500 to 1,000 million of people in the East Asian tradition of China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam; and (2) the other one is known as 'northern' Buddhism and followed by over 20 million in the Tibetan tradition (Gethin, 1998, p. 1).

His Majesty King Phumipol Adulyadet resided at Bovoranives temple as a monk for a period of two weeks, and by this action gave royal support to the observance of the Buddhist 2500<sup>th</sup> jubilee year (Nimanong, 2002, pp. 361-364).

At present in Thailand, there are two prominent Buddhist scholar monks, whom Thai Buddhists revere and listen to. One is Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu<sup>4</sup> or in short Buddhadasa and the other monk is the most venerable Payutto Bhikkhu<sup>5</sup> or Payutto only. Payutto said that the history of the Thai nation is also the history of Buddhism. The Thai nation originated over 2,300 years ago. Also in that same period Buddhism came and has played an important part in the Thai history ever since (1990, p. 11-13). Samuel P. Huntington is right in saying that a Theravada civilization does exist in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (1997, pp. 47-48). But he might be wrong for two reasons in saying that, "Buddhism, although a major religion, has not been the basis of a major civilization," (1997, p. 48). One reason is that Buddhism actually still remains in India, its birth place, especially the Madhyamika School of Buddhism, which was founded by Nagarjuna (Bapat, 1909, pp. 106-108). Another reason is that if it is true that Buddhism no longer exists in India, its birthplace, and no people in India identify themselves as part of a Buddhist civilization, the truth of dependent origination-cessation as the nature of things is there (*dhammathiti*) in the nature.

Payutto sees the danger of attachment to views or dogmatic opinions (*ditthuppadana*) as the priority danger to escape from in this global age. According to him, ideology is based on the dogmatic opinions or wrong views. He commented: "In the preceding decades we experienced problems with ideologies. There were two major schools, which had split the world into camps. Now the contention between these ideologies has petered out, but we have not resolved the problems of nationalism, racism and sectarianism. So we come back to the problem of dogmatic opinion or ideology to find a solution," (1993, p.7). According to him, three dogmatic opinions or wrong views have controlled modern civilization. The first is the wrong perception towards nature that humankind is separated from

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<sup>4</sup>Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Royal Ecclesiastical name is Dhammaghosacariya and he was born in 1906 in the Southern Province of Thailand and he went forth as a monk in 1926. He established the Forest Dhamma Center in order to practice Insight Meditation in 1932 and passed away in 1989.

<sup>5</sup>Ven. Payutto Bhikkhu's Royal Ecclesiastical name at present is PhraDhammapidok (Prayudh Payutto Bhikkhu), who is now the most accepted Thai Buddhist scholar monk in Thailand. He was born in 1939 in Thailand. He became a novice at the age of 13 and while still a novice completed the highest grade of Pali examination. He wrote more than 200 books, and one of those is entitled *A Buddhist Solution for the Twenty-first Century*, which earned the 1994 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education.

nature and must control nature according to its desires. The second is the wrong perception denying that there are fellow human beings: to be a human being is to have desire, reason, and self-esteem (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 165). The last wrong perception concerns the objective of life, namely, that happiness is dependent on an abundance of material possessions (1993, p. 7). He said thus: “Being held under the power of these three wrong perceptions, the resulting actions become kamma on the social level” (1993, p. 8). This is the new understanding of kamma in the global age. According to Payutto, in the past decades, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities were influenced by the afore-mentioned wrong views, therefore humankind at present is encountering many problems of nature and environment, conflicts and competition. According to him, when the right view is incorporated into the mind of people and even into sciences and branches of learning, all those people’s minds and branches of learning will be well-based. For example, the physical sciences, applied sciences and technology would have a relationship with nature that is characterized by a pure desire for knowledge, rather than an impure desire to exploit nature. Like Payutto, Heisenberg wrote that natural science always implies the presence of man. The object of study in natural science is not nature itself, but nature as the object of human problems (Jurate Morkuniene, 2008, p. 2). M. Wertheimer also said that man finds himself in the centre of the world. He is no longer considered the ruler, conqueror or master of the world (or nature), but only the main actor or worker (quoted in Jurate Morkuniene, op. cit.).

Let us turn our attention to Buddhadasa’s understanding of non-attachment. According to Buddhadasa, the fundamental problem of human existence is attachment, which leads to pride, selfishness, and egoism. Since religions’ basic concern is with human existence, it must aim to solve the problem of human attachment. Buddhadasa is convinced that it is necessary to dismantle the gap between the lay life and the monastic life. According to him, monkhood can be cultivated while one remains in his life as a layman. Buddhadasa sees kamma, merit, rebirth, Nibbana as things of the present, as concrete not abstract. Moreover, because of his dissatisfaction with the traditional interpretation of the scripture, he developed an alternative hermeneutics or interpretative approach to the canonical scriptures, which was called by him ‘everyday language- dhamma language’ (*phasakhon-phasatham*). Human language is used and understood by a worldly person, but dhamma language is used and understood by a religious person. The real Buddhist is the one who can empty his mind, or in Thai “*cit-wang*.” The theoretical pivot of Buddhadasa’s reinterpretation or understanding of Theravada doctrine is the notion of *cit-wang*, “voided-mind” or “freed-mind” of the self-centeredness that leads to attachment, craving and suffering. *Cit-wang* denoted a state of mind, being detached or free from moral impurities and being in a state of peace and equanimity, the foundation of Nibbana. For Buddhadasa, *cit-wang* is the key to understanding the religious goal of Buddhism and is the

basis of the practice to attain that goal both in individual and in social life. He wrote a dhammic poem, which is still in the minds of Thai people:

Do work of all kinds with a mind that is void,  
And then to the voidness give all of the fruits,  
Take food of the voidness as do Holy Saints:  
And lo! You are dead to yourself from the very beginning.  
(*Toward the Truth*, p. 95)

In placing *cit-wang* at the centre of his presentation of Theravada doctrine Buddhadasa has in fact drawn heavily on the concept “emptiness” (*sunyata*) of Mahayana and Zen Buddhist teachings. Surprisingly, Buddhadasa studied all schools of Buddhism as well as the major religious traditions. He wanted to unite all genuinely religious people in order to work together to help free humanity by destroying selfishness. He reminded the Buddhists that we should not think that the teaching of non-attachment is found only in Buddhism. In fact, it can be found in every religion, although many people do not notice because it is expressed in dhamma language. Its meaning is profound, difficult to see, and usually misunderstood. He further said thus:

In the Christian Bible, St. Paul advises us: “Let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those that buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it” (Cor. 7:29-31). It should be understood in the same way as our basic theme of Buddhist non-attachment. That is if you have a wife, do not attach to having her; if you have a husband, do not cling to having him. If you have painful or sorrowful experiences, do not cling to them as “I” or “mine” and it will be as if they never happened. That is, do not be sad about them. Do not attach to joy, goods, and worldly dealings, either (*No Religion*, 1979, p. 12 or *Toward the Truth*, n.d., p. 97).

Thus, for Buddhadasa, the key to religious harmony is that each religion’s doctrines should be interpreted correctly according to dhamma language. According to Buddhadasa, the real enemy of any religion is not other religions, but materialism that feeds on and cultivates the human instinct of selfishness for the sake of material development. Runaway materialism is what all religions should join hands against, for it has been the most powerful force in turning people away from spiritualism of all forms. The ultimate mission in Buddhadasa’s life can be summed up in his Three Resolutions, posted at the entrance of Forest Meditation Center. They

are: (1) to help everyone to realize the essence of their own religion; (2) to help develop mutual understanding between all religions; and (3) to help to lift the world out of materialism. Indeed, this is an authentic goal for a global age.

### **NON-ATTACHMENT AS THE MIDDLE WAY OF CULTURE AND HERMENEUTICS IN A GLOBAL AGE**

#### *Non-Attachment as the Middle Way beyond Existence and Non-Existence*

The middle way of non-attachment is a critical thinking way or the way beyond. Let us first consider the legacy of the Buddhist middle way. The belief in either an absolute being or in absolute nothingness is considered to be an extreme view. The Buddhist's theoretical aim in rejecting the self theory is to dissociate oneself from the two extreme views, namely, annihilationism and eternalism, which are regarded by the Buddhist as wrong views (Kvu. 62). For the annihilationist the self is perishable, whereas for the eternalist it is imperishable. The Buddha claims thus: "All dhammas are non-self" (S.IV.1). With this statement the Buddhist rejects all substantial and non-substantial views of the world, maintaining that everything is dependently originated or becoming. In this, the Buddhist standpoint is close to process philosophy.

According to the Buddhist context, the Middle Way is a dialectic of negation as propounded by Nagarjuna. It goes beyond all these four propositions, namely: "it is the existence; it is non-existence; it is both existence and non-existence; and it is neither existence nor non-existence." According to Nagarjuna, the emptiness can be stated by eight negatives, namely "there is neither origination nor cessation, neither permanence nor impermanence, neither unity nor diversity, neither coming-in nor going-out, in the law of dependent origination-and-cessation or emptiness (Bapat, 1987, p. 107). Essentially, there is only non-origination, which is equated with emptiness. Hence, emptiness, referring as it does to non-origination, is in reality the middle path, which avoids the two basic views of existence and non-existence. To negate everything or all theories is to go beyond them. Moreover, Nagarjuna takes one more step to silence. The silence is said to be emptiness of the emptiness or non-origination. By this way, Nagarjuna's dialectic of negation cannot be taken as a theory, because it also negates itself. Therefore, to be called as non-attachment according to Buddhism, it must be without the bases of all identities. It should not be attached to any concepts at all. It should be free from egocentric thought.

Like the Nagarjuna's dialectic of negation, the position adopted by Buddhadasa is middle way for the conflicting truth claims of existence and non-existence.

The ordinary, ignorant worldling is under the impression that there are many religions and that they are all different to the

extent of being hostile and opposed. Thus one considers Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism as incompatible and even bitter enemies. Such is the conception of the common person who speaks according to the impressions held by common people. If, however, a person has penetrated to the fundamental nature (dhamma) of religion, he will regard all religions as essentially similar. Although he may say there is Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and so on, he will also say that essentially they are all the same. If he should go to a deeper understanding of dhamma until finally he realizes the absolute truth, he would discover that there is no such thing called religion, that there is no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam. (Me and Mine, 1989, p.146)

From the above quotation, we can see that three levels of conflicting truth claims are outlined by Buddhadasa, namely: (1) conventional distinctions; (2) shared essence; and (3) emptiness. The traditional Buddhist hermeneutics of non-attachment rooted deeply on non-self eliminates the conflicting truth claims by going beyond religions, as in the Buddhadasa's third point. What separates Buddhadasa from those non-dualists is the second level that Buddhadasa proposes, namely, a lower level of dhamma language that moves beyond conventional distinctions, but which is not yet at the highest level that proclaims "No Religion". The full significance of Buddhadasa's three levels of religious truth can be properly understood by applying a metaphor of water: First there are many kinds of water: rainwater, ditch water, sewer water, which ordinary people can distinguish. At another level, however, when the pollutants are removed, these waters have fundamentally the same substance. Nevertheless, there is yet a third level of perception in which water itself disappears when we divide it into hydrogen and oxygen (Sharma, 1997, p. 152). If we want to apply the theory of non-attachment as the middle way in order to understand different cultures in a global age, we have to go beyond the many and the one. We can say in other words, it is neither the many nor the one. Likewise the task of contemporary philosophy must go beyond simplicity and complexity, static and dynamics, rationality and irrationality, determinism and dialogue with reality, closeness and openness, and objectivity and subjectivity (Morkuniene, 2008).

### *Thai Buddhist Culture*

According to Buddhism, the Middle Way is actually taken as the foundation of Buddhist culture and values and it is taken as a sustainable path for all activities. The middle way consists of eight principles of practice called the Eightfold Noble Way (D.III.312). The eight ways or paths are numbered as right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration and right

mindfulness. They can be classified into three groups, namely the group of moral conduct, the group of meditation and the group of wisdom. According to Piyasilo Bhikkhu, the middle way is expressed in contemporary language as ecoculture, autoculture and metaculture. They are explained as follows: (1) ecoculture is moral conduct, consisting of right speech, right action and right livelihood; (2) autoculture is meditation, consisting of right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration; and (3) metaculture is wisdom, consisting of right understanding and right thought, (1988, p. 12). Ecoculture is to preserve the nature, autoculture is to strengthen one's mind, and metaculture is to cultivate one's wisdom and co-exist with others peacefully.

Eventually, Theravada Buddhist culture must be cultivated step by step, known as the gradual path of Buddhism. Nibbana is attainable not only in theory, but also in practice, to attain which, one has to follow the way of life conducive to the cessation of suffering. This way of life is governed by the standards of moral conducts generally regarded as Buddhist ethics. This is known as the 'Middle Way' (*Majjhima-patipada*) because it avoids two extremes: one being indulgence in sensual pleasure, the other being self-mortification (S.LVI.11). Moral conduct should be perfected first, for morality is a mode of intention present in one who abstains from killing, stealing, etc., or in one who fulfils the practice of duties (Vism.1.6). Having acquired the moral habit, one is capable of practicing meditation, three factors form parts of the Buddhist method known as 'tranquillity meditation' (*samatha-bhavana*). After that preparation, one is capable of practicing the group of wisdom practice known as 'insight meditation' (*vipassana-bhavana*). Heinrich Dumoulin notes that, "the ethics of Buddhism has stressed the universal norms, which are constant and applicable to everyone. They should not conflict with human nature. The doctrine of the middle way that the Buddha proclaimed is a humanistic ethic" (1976, p. 25).

G.F. McLean<sup>6</sup> remarked: "Today the horizon is no longer particular, but universal and all encompassing, due in part to the development beyond the cold war of a unipolar and all-inclusive economy, to the emergence of a series of interlocking regional and world wide organizations such as the United Nations, and to the promotion of world wide standards and cooperation in the fields of the environment, health and education; perhaps most of all it is due to the present flow of information. All of these constitute a new global whole in which the issue of culture, of how to cultivate the soul, becomes the basic human issue" (2003a, p. 119). Buddhists also need to cultivate their minds to attain the final truth and live their lives peacefully with others in the global age. The Buddhist monks

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<sup>6</sup>Professor Dr. George F. McLean is Professor Emeritus, School of Philosophy and Director, Center for the Study of Culture and Values, the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., Secretary, Council for Research in values and Philosophy (RVP), USA.

nowadays are working hard to cope with contemporary problems in a global age that often accompany technology and information development. Buddhist culture and education are centered on the gradual path of mental perfection through moral conduct, meditation and wisdom. This cultural aspect of Buddhism has had deep influence in the Thai arts, traditions, learning and on the character of the people, whose manner of thinking and acting it has molded. In short, it has become an integral part of Thai life. The charm that has caused Thailand to be called the Land of Smiles undoubtedly comes from the influence of Buddhism over her people (Payutto, 1990, p.11). They celebrate New Years day not only on January 1, but also on April 13 and 14. The April 14 is specially regarded as an Elders' Day. Thai society attaches great importance to older persons. The concept of gratefulness towards elderly persons and nature is well ingrained in Thai society ([http://www.thaimain.org/cgi-bin/newsdesk\\_perspect.cgi](http://www.thaimain.org/cgi-bin/newsdesk_perspect.cgi)).

Hence the Buddhist culture is in conformity with the meaning of culture as defined by Prof. McLean: "Culture is derived from the values and virtues of a people that set the pattern of social life through which freedom is developed and exercised towards the realization of civil society" (2008, p.15).<sup>7</sup> This term is further explained by Professor Kwame Gyekye,<sup>8</sup> according to whom, "culture is an enactment of a community of people, not of an individual, created in the attempt to negotiate the problems that arise in the context of a people's particular situation" (1999, p. 20). It is a value conducive to the well-being of humans: "all other values are reducible ultimately to the value of well-being" (Gyekye, 1999, p. 26).

Gyekye encourages the people in any society to step beyond the wall of culture through "common human understanding,"<sup>9</sup> which corresponds to the idea of 'right understanding' (*sammaditthi*) in Buddhism (D. II. 312). Common human understanding can be obtained through reflection upon what Gyekye called value and disvalue in the course of daily life experience. The value and disvalue experiences of human beings, which are known in Buddhism as 'worldly conditions' (*lokadhamma*),<sup>10</sup> generate common human understanding or right understanding in the Buddhist context. There are two levels of common human understanding,

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<sup>7</sup>On the other hand, the term is derived from the Latin word for tilling or cultivating the land. Cicero and other Latin authors used it for the cultivation of the soul or mind.

<sup>8</sup>Professor Kwame Gyekye is an erudite African philosopher at the University of Ghana, who belonged to Ghana Academy of Arts and Academy established nearly forty years ago on the initiative of the then Prime Minister, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, its first Chairman.

<sup>9</sup>According to Gyekye, this is what Immanuel Kant called *sensus communis* (1999, p. 31).

<sup>10</sup>The worldly conditions according to Buddhism are 8 factors in number, namely, gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, and happiness and suffering (A. IV. 157).



one concerns a specific human society, and plays its role at the very base of an organized and functioning human society and culture; the other is transcultural or intercultural conversations beyond cultures.

Transcultural or intercultural conversations help human beings in different societies or followers from different religions to understand each other. At this stage the transformation of cultures or what is called by Gyekye cultural borrowing or cultural appropriation with mutual understanding is possible. Sir Isaiah Berlin states: "Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is only possible because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them."<sup>11</sup> In order to attain the stage of beyond-culture, Gyekye proposed many approaches, such as a critical approach against cultural relativism, the incommensurability thesis and ethnocentrism in support of cultural universalism, the common good, cultural borrowing and real options in order to achieve humanistic morality and globalization.

William J. Klausner, born in New York City in 1929, went to Thailand in 1955 to undertake his post-graduate ethnographic research in a small village in Northeast Thailand focusing on cultural barriers to modernization. He spent more than half his life, i.e. forty years, in this second home, where he immersed himself in a social and cultural environment of Thailand (*Thai Culture in Transition*, 1998, pp.1-15). He takes the following features as proper to modernization: the dramatic development of transportation and communication networks, globalization of the economy, increased industrialization, and the growth of the service sector. To these he adds educational opportunities, increased geographical mobility, and rural electrification, coupled with the seemingly irresistible invasion of egalitarian and individualistic values, as well as Western food, music, entertainment, dress and language, all of which have influenced Thai culture. This transformation of Thai culture inevitably has brought about social, economic and political changes, some quite revolutionary in their impact. To match the economic changes in the rural areas, urban Thailand, and particularly its capital have witnessed a revision of traditional Thai corporate culture. Family control, personal favors in recruitment, and consensus building are slowly giving away to professional management, quality control, performance reviews and merit promotions, with an emphasis on creativity, initiative, and more aggressive and confrontational decision-making, in which profit is the bottom line. This cultural transformation is in line with Gyekye's conception of cultural transformation that "cultural borrowing is a historical phenomenon; through encounters between peoples, cultures have borrowed from one another, appropriating values, ideas, and institutions from other cultures" (1999, p. 39). Klausner further remarks: "while Eastern traditional values are undergoing dramatic change, in the West, many have increasingly come to

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<sup>11</sup>Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 11 (quoted in Kwame Gyekye, 1999, p. 31).

appreciate the healing properties of non-judicial conflict resolution and consensus, communal and family solidarity, and avoidance of confrontation so often associated with the East ... a core element of Thai culture is the avoidance of confrontation. Expressions of antisocial emotions such as anger, displeasure and annoyance are to be avoided at all costs. Another core element of traditional Thai culture is emotional distance. One should not become too attached, too committed (Ibid., pp. 4-5). These are the Buddhist elements of Thai culture rooted in the concept of non-attachment.

These unique characteristics of Thai cultures can be traced back to cultural Buddhism, in other words, to popular Buddhism, which is different from genuine, doctrinal or intellectual Buddhism. Cultural Buddhism is usually associated with some basic moral rules, observance of rituals and participation in religious ceremonies and worship. But Buddhism of the intellectuals offers a unique system of psychology and philosophy (Payutto, 1990, p. 13). The Buddhists nowadays will have to admit the cultural aspect of Buddhism as a way leading to liberation.

#### *Thai Buddhist Hermeneutics*

As has already been mentioned, there are two kinds of religion in Thailand, namely genuine or intellectual or doctrinal Buddhism and popular or cultural Buddhism. Cultural Buddhism is eventually a sort of hermeneutics for doctrinal Buddhism and vice versa. In Buddhism there are two levels of dhamma, called the dependent origination (*samsara*) and dependent cessation (*nibbana*) (S.II.1). In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, there is an interpretative principle based on advice given by the Buddha on his deathbed on how to deal with statements on the doctrine which are disputed:

Then, monks, you should study well those (disputed) paragraphs and words, and investigate whether they occur in the discourse (*sutta*), and compare them with the discipline (*vinaya*). If having investigated the *sutta* and compared with the *vinaya* they can neither (be found) in the *sutta* nor (found to be) comparable with the (teachings in the) *vinaya* then you should reach agreement on these points that they are certainly not the words of the Bhagava (the Buddha), and that the bhikkhu in question (who made the disputed statement) has incorrectly remembered (the Buddha's teaching). You should discard those statements completely. (S.II.1)

The principle of interpretation laid down here is that disputed statements on the doctrine should be compared with the recorded words of the Buddha, the book of discourse (*sutta*), and with the ethical principles recorded in the book of discipline (*vinaya*), to gauge whether they are

accurate and in accord with Buddhist ethical principles. The Buddha gave this strict and literal interpretative method at a time when Buddhism was an oral tradition. The Buddha's statement in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta is thus meant as an injunction to monks to adhere closely to the actual teachings of the Buddha, which they had committed to memory.

The tradition that there are two levels of the Buddha's discourses has been systematically expressed in the Abhidhammapitaka (the deep and profound teachings) as the Buddhist theory of two truths, namely 'conventional truth' (*sammatisacca*) and 'ultimate truth' (*paramatthasacca*). The conventional truth denotes the everyday level of knowledge, while the ultimate truth denotes a form of knowledge based directly on underlying truth or reality (AA.I.95).<sup>12</sup>

However, once the Buddhist scriptures were written down, the interpretative principle laid down in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta was considerably revised. One of the most important methodological texts of the literary period of traditional Theravada Buddhism is the *Netti-Pakarana*<sup>13</sup> as leading to the 'right construction' of the words of the Buddha: 'These terms and phrasing (in question) must be placed beside the *sutta*, compared with the *vinaya* and patterned after the essential nature of dhamma.'<sup>14</sup> The principle that interpretations of doctrine should 'be patterned after the essential nature of the dhamma' is more general than that put forward by the Buddha, proposing that a view or opinion should be theoretically consistent with the doctrinal basics of the religion, rather than being a literal restatement of the Buddha's words, as required by the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.

The *Nettipakarana* develops the canonical interpretative principle into a form more appropriate to a literary tradition in which the demands of simple memorization have been lifted and detailed textual analysis can be undertaken. The principle that, scriptural interpretations should be patterned after the dhamma, amounts to a recognition that in a literary tradition faithfulness to the Buddha's teaching no longer necessitates a strictly literal

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<sup>12</sup>More terms are further elaborated in the Abhidhamma, such as, the *conditioned* and the *unconditioned*, *lokiya* dhamma or *cariya* dhamma for the layperson, which promotes well-being but does not end the process of rebirth, and the *lokuttara* dhamma or *sacca* dhamma for the renunciate, which leads directly to the cessation of rebirth and to liberation from suffering (Dhs., 193, 245).

<sup>13</sup>The *Netti-Pakarana* is attributed to Mahakaccayana, an immediate disciple of the Buddha. It is not regarded as canonical by the Sinhalese and is not part of the Thai Tipitaka, but is included in the Burmese canon.

<sup>14</sup>George D. Bond, "The *Netti-Pakarana*: A Theravada Method of Interpretation," in Somaratna Balasooriya (ed.), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, Gordon Fraser, London, 1980, p. 20, quoted by Jackson, 1988, p.103.

adherence to his actual words, but may also be based upon views, which follow the spirit of the Buddha's teachings.

The *Netti-Pakarana* teaches that the scriptures can be interpreted at two levels: at the level of understanding the literal meaning of statements and terms, and at the level of understanding how those terms and statements point towards or are suggestive of Nibbana. Bond opined that the *Nettipakarana* developed the notion of the gradual path to Nibbana and employed it as a hermeneutic strategy for explaining the Dhamma. According to Bond, the *Nettipakarana* represents the social facts of ancient India, which generated two kinds of religious traditions. One was called the "disciplines of salvation," which were applicable to the renouncer, and the other one was "religious", which were characterized by the provisions they made to meet the needs of the people living in the society (in Lopez, 1988, pp. 33-35). To delineate the structure of the gradual path, the *Nettipakarana* set forth classifications of types of persons to whom the Buddha addressed his teachings and types of discourses that the Buddha employed to reach these persons (see appendix II.). In the *Saddasaratthajalini*, two types of textual interpretation are mentioned. What is said by the Buddha has to be understood either as meaning still to be determined (indirect meaning) such as the term 'self' (*atta*) or as meaning already determined (direct meaning) such as the term 'impermanence' (*anicca*) (quoted in Khemananda, 1993, p. 97).

*Thai Theravada Buddhist Hermeneutical Theory of Human Language—Dhamma Language (Phasakhon—Phasatham)*. Buddhadasa distinguishes two hermeneutic levels of the Buddha's words in 'the Buddha's discourses' (*Suttapitaka*), calling these two levels "human language-dhamma language". He gives the following definitions: Everyday language is worldly language, the language of people who do not know dhamma. Dhamma language is the language spoken by people who have gained a deep insight into the truth or dhamma (1974, p. 1). On the level of what Buddhadasa calls 'language of truth' (*phasatham*) there are many similarities among all religious adherents. Once Buddhadasa remarks:

The problem with most people who profess to be religious is their limited degree of real understanding; hence they think and talk on the level of 'language of people' (*phasakhon*), which never go beyond appearances to the higher truth of faith. Christians, for example, must understand that the idea of God is a concept essentially beyond the understanding of men and, therefore, transcends our usual distinctions between good and evil, personal and impersonal (Buddhadasa, 1967, pp. 35-37).

The human language interpretation of a term is then simply its conventional or literal meaning while the same term's dhamma language

rendering is its spiritual or symbolic sense. Buddhadasa used the distinction to argue that many of the traditional readings and interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures in Thailand remain at the literal or human language level. In his work Buddhadasa places more emphasis on the notion of dhamma language.

Let us consider some examples of his interpretations of the Buddha's teachings in the book known as human language-dhamma language:

Nos	Terms	Human Language	Dhamma Language
1	Buddha	Gotama	Truth or Dhamma
2	Dhamma	Books	Truth or The Buddha
3	Sangha	Monks	Their mental virtues
4	Religion	Temple	Dhamma
5	Work	Earning of a living	Mind training
6	Nibbana	Place, city	Extinction of defilement
7	Devil	Monster	Defilement
8	Birth	Physical birth	Mental birth
9	Death	Physical death	Mental death
10	World	Earth	Worldly mental stage
11	God	A celestial being	The natural law
12.	Man	A creature with a body of a so-called human form	Certain high mental qualities
13	Life	Anything that is not yet dead	The truly deathless state
14	Hell	A region under the earth	Anyone who burns himself with anxiety

It must be noted that Buddhadasa does not in fact completely deny the cosmological reality of heaven and hell. He says: "True enough, the heaven and hell of everyday language are realms outside—though don't ask me where—and they are attained after death. But the heaven and hell of dhamma language are to be found in the mind and may be attained anytime depending on one's mental make up" (2525/1982, p. 61). Taken as a whole, Buddhadasa's dhamma-language reinterpretation represents a systematic demythologization of the Buddhist scriptures whereby cosmological realms become psychological states and deities and demons are interpreted as individuals experiencing those states. Whenever a concept or term is traditionally interpreted in a way, which is at odds with a modernist or scientific worldview then that term or concept is demythologized and subjected to a dhamma-language reinterpretation. Buddhadasa's method of dhamma language is similar to Bultmann's method of demythologization, the purpose of which is to recover a meaning that is covered over by the garb of a physical cosmos, in which modern man no longer believes, i.e. the three-level universe of heaven earth, and hell (Palmer, 1981, p. 468). Buddhadasa's two kinds of interpretation can be traced back to the *Nettipakarana* and the *Saddasaratthajalini* as mentioned earlier.

To assist people especially the younger generation to understand dhamma language, Buddhadasa utilizes such various methods as books, painting, poetry, radio broadcasting, television and so on. We can observe that nowadays television and radio are taken as powerful and appropriate tools to communicate between religions and cultures in this global age. “Human communication is authored, on the one hand, and interpreted, on the other. Media technology links authorship with hermeneutics, often tacitly and even covertly. A certain quality of voice may be said to ‘convey authority’ and thereby enhance the credibility of a message” (Cosmos, 2008, p. 5).

Thai monks and people understand dhamma language through poems, because the poem is one of hermeneutic ways to make truth, as Rosemary Winslow also said: Poetry does not operate to reproduce existing personal, social, and cultural constructs, but rather to remake them (2008, p. 2). King Rama V of Thailand wrote a poem based on the non-attachment to the self thus: “Born men are we all and one; brown, black by the sun cultured; knowledge can be won alike, but the heart differs from man to man”. This poetry creates an impression that we are all called as human by birth. The worldly knowledge can be acquired by all of us at any time irrespective of race, culture or color of skin, but not the religious virtue or pure knowledge like love, compassion and so on. We differ from each other in heart or virtue, but not in brain or worldly knowledge.

*Buddhism Beyond-Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue.* Actually Buddhism does manifest a pluralistic view by proposing that all religions are equal in respect of making common reference to one single ultimate truth, which the Buddha had discovered. The Buddha as the discoverer of the truth, has opened the possibility for others to discover the truth for themselves. Buddha, as one who discovers the truth, rather than as one who has a monopoly of the truth, is clearly a source of tolerance. This leaves open the possibility for others to discover aspects of the truth, or even the whole truth, for themselves. The Buddhist acceptance of Individual Buddhas or Pacceka Buddhas, who discover the truth by themselves, is a clear admission of this claim. Thus other religions are equal in respect of offering means to truth, liberation or salvation. This idea paves the way for religious pluralism. Peter Byrne in his book entitled “Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion” lists the standard viewpoints of religious pluralism as follows:

1. All major religions are equal in respect of making common reference to a single transcendent;
2. all major religions are likewise equal in respect to offering some means to human salvation and liberation; and
3. all religions are to be seen as containing limited accounts of the nature of the sacred; none is certain enough in its particular

dogmatic formulations to provide the norm for interpreting others (Byrne, 1995, p. 12).

Pluralism<sup>15</sup> is the middle way beyond exclusivism and inclusivism. Hick, the eminent pluralist, considers exclusive and inclusive ways of regarding religions as no longer practical and indeed impossible. He supports pluralism. According to him all religions accept “the Ultimate Reality”, as one (Hick, 1990, p. 115). To say this is to accept the unity in diversity. But, for the Buddhist, to see unity in diversity is not sufficient to solve the conflicting religious truth claims. To put it in dhamma theory language, we have to step beyond the one and the many. That is to say we have to go beyond Hick’s theory of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. To go beyond is the middle way of pluralism. This distinction between human language and dhamma language provides an interesting approach to inter-religious understanding or interfaith dialogue.

The primary objective of dialogue is to remove barriers of differences among religions and exchange ideas. Dialogue requires unending patience. The process of dialogue is that of learning how to coexist peacefully with each other. “By dialogue, each culture presents its variety and difference, on the dialogue, a new idea of human being’s co-existence and also a new humankind culture mode are coming into being,” (Shipeng, 2008, p. 5). The spirit of tolerance, charity and freedom is characteristic of the “dialogue of the Buddha” and is especially evident in the Kalama Sutta (A.I.189). The Kalama people approached the Buddha with the following issues. Different religious teachers come to our city. They speak very highly of their own theories but oppose, condemn and ridicule the theories of one another. We are now in a state of doubt as to which of these recluses speaks falsehood. Then the Buddha said:

Kalamas, you have a right to feel uncertain for you have raised a doubt in a situation in which you ought to suspend your judgement. Come now, Kalamas, do not accept anything only on the grounds of tradition or report or because it is a product reasoning or because it is true from a standpoint or because of a superficial assessment of the facts or because it conforms with one’s preconceived notions or because it is authoritative or because of the prestige of your teacher. When you, Kalamas, realize for yourself that these doctrines are evil and unjustified, that they are condemned by the wise and that when they are accepted and lived by, they conduce to ill and sorrow, then you should reject them.

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<sup>15</sup>Pluralism is the view that the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality centeredness is taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions (Whaling, 1986, p. 153).

From the Kalama Sutta, one may conclude that there were varieties of religious beliefs in the Buddha's days. People have a great opportunity to examine and verify the teachings of many religious scholars in order to find out which was suitable for them and which was the road to the ultimate truth. When the different religious beliefs clashed, dialogue is the most desirable in situations of religious pluralism for the purpose of mutual understanding and enrichment, for dispelling suspicion and prejudices, and for harnessing moral and spiritual values and so on.

A close reading of Buddhadasa's works reveals the operation of some implicit criteria. These are sociological in that he bases judgements of the inaccuracy of traditional readings of the scriptures and of the accuracy of his dhamma language readings on the social and religious consequences of those respective interpretations. He is concerned to end social problems that hinder improvements in human well-being as fundamentally a religious matter, saying that:

The true objective of the founders of all religions with regard to the completion or perfection of what is most useful and needful for humanity is not being achieved, because the followers of the respective religions interpret the languages of dhamma wrongly, having preserved wrong interpretations and preached wrongly to such an extent that the world has been facing turmoil and problems created by the conflicts among religions.

According to Buddhadasa, the anthropomorphized concept of God in Christianity is only one rendering of ultimate reality on the level of human language. In the Dhamma language, God transcends our usual distinctions between good and evil, personal and impersonal. To know God is to know things as they really are or from the perspective of the divine (1967, p.63). In Buddhadasa's view, Jesus, like the Buddha, was in favour of the middle way; he lived it and taught or persuaded his followers to live it in order to avoid the extremes of being too loose or too strict in attitude and conduct. For example, such a middle way can be seen in the Bible: "Bend your necks to my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted; and your souls will find relief. For my yoke is good to bear, my load is light," (Matthew 11/29-30 in Buddhadasa, 1967, p. 53).

The sense of non-attachment as the middle way of dialogue can be seen through the speech of the Dalai Lama. Regarding the conflict between China and Tibet with reference to Tibet's independence, the Dalai Lama has made clear that he no longer seeks independence for Tibet, and that he is committed to "the Middle Way." He has also said that the concerns of the Tibetan people could be addressed within the framework of the People's Republic of China (Craig, 2003, p. A23).



## COMPARISONS

### *Hermeneutics as a Mode of Thinking*

Principally speaking, to philosophize is to argue for or to argue against any particular philosophical view one wants to defend or refute by using argument or reasoning. In contrast, as George McLean said, to use hermeneutics is “to speak of the importance of dialogue as the interchange between persons and peoples. This is not at all the same as argument. In an argument, one looks for the weakness in the position of the other in order to be able to reject it as a threat to one’s own position. In contrast, in hermeneutics one looks for the element of truth in the other’s position in order to be able to take account of it” (2008, p. 34). However, when we deal with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, do we mean to accomplish both argumentation and dialogue or not? To use the middle way as the dhamma language is to go beyond both, that is, carefully to practice dialogical argumentation. Eventually, learning to listen to others’ opinions is more difficult than learning to speak because “by listening to someone from another tradition one is enabled to go more deeply into the resources of one’s own tradition and draw on it in new ways for new times,” (McLean, 2008, p. 35). Such an idea is a great example of non-attachment.

The purpose of this study on “communication across culture” is to exchange ideas and experiences on the existential or cultural dimension of life through hermeneutics and dialogue, to seek or indeed to exercise our mutual understanding and collaboration among different people from different parts of the world. That has to be appropriately accumulated through Heidegger’s philosophy of existentialism and Gadamer’s hermeneutics of universalism. Both are key figures in ontological hermeneutics. Martin Heidegger laid out his famous analytic of Dasein, the structure of human existence. He stressed the central importance of “understanding” as the essential forward-looking of human beings (*Being and Time*, [tr.], 1962, pp. 183-193). His successor, Hans-Georg Gadamer has taken up the task to uncover human existence and culture through history (or what he calls pre-understanding) lived consciously with its issues of human dignity, values and cultural dialogue (1991, pp. 258-261).

Phenomenological and ontological hermeneutics are appropriate for this global age because it can preserve the essential standpoint of the new subjectivity and opens the opportunity for dialogue and understanding in a global society. Phenomenology helps one comprehend ontology as an existential life-world. The point of emergence is that the ontology of the existential life-world can be best understood through the Buddhist doctrine of “dependent origination or inter-relation”. But the divergence is that while theistic religions, like Christianity employ phenomenological techniques to grasp the ontologically existential feature of life, the non-theistic religion, like Buddhism, does this so as to comprehend ontologically the non-existential element of the psycho-physical combination. For Theism, failure

to understand being as existence or to use Husserl's terminology 'Lebenswelt' is taken as 'a learned ignorance' to use Cusa's terminology, and on the contrary, for non-theism, failure to understand being-as-being or non-being or non-existence is a 'learned ignorance'. Eventually, the 'Lebenswelt' turn (Sugiharto, 2008, p. 2) is the hermeneutic turn, as said Gadamer: "Being that can be understood is language" (1991, p. 474). Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness of experiences in terms of a story or language or forms of life or the comparativity of the text.

Thus Gadamer said, "the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between", i.e. between the traditional text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and our belonging to a tradition (1991, p. 295). The basic tenet of ontological hermeneutics is established on the amalgamations of historical consciousness and temporal distance. According to Gadamer, "to have a horizon means not being limited to what is near but being able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition" (1991, p. 302). Gadamer continued: "To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand, not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion" (1991, p. 305).

Gadamer's concept of "fusion of horizons" of knowledge or experience as human understanding of life and world is comparable to the Buddhist theory of knowledge or insight meditation, which focuses on an awareness of the contact between internal organs and external objects, resulting in feeling, desire and attachment. The contact in-between internal organs and their corresponding external objects is the true locus of Buddhist hermeneutics to use the Gadamer's terminology. To be properly aware of the horizon, Buddhists are advised to control feelings, which can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Michael S. Drummond is right in saying that, "the texts of the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism identify the attachment to feelings at the normally preconscious level of sense impression, as a primary link for the arising of tension (*dukkha*), while arguing therein for non-attachment. This is because they (feelings) facilitate the arising of unwholesome mental states," (2002, p. 51). Moreover, Gadamer's fusion of horizon theory is in conformity with the Buddhist ten principles of belief in the Kalama discourse in the sense that both theories emphasize awareness in making decisions. The fusion of horizons is a sort of dialectic, which consists of the principles of the hermeneutical circle and question-answer to render their support to the dialogue of cultural experiences. Precisely speaking, according to Gadamer, the dialectic of horizons consists of three interrelated steps, namely understanding or interpretation, explanation and application.

Heidegger took the model of interpreting a text as the basic model for all human understanding and experiencing. Heidegger saw human being as essentially or ontologically hermeneutical, but Gadamer saw human understanding as hermeneutical (Stiver, 1996, p. 92). Both disagreed with Schleiermacher's "authorial intent" as a useful method to understand the text. "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well," (1991, p. 296). Hence, understanding for Gadamer is a constructive activity. Simply to repeat a text is not to understand it: "To say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (Ibid., p. 297). Buddhists do not contradict this idea, but would say it in a different way. The Buddhists, to use dhamma language theory and St. Thomas Aquinas's proportional analogy, would say, "to understand is to understand in neither the same nor a different way, if we understand at all". Because the reader of the book will have to take both the author's intention and the text into consideration in order to gain the proper meaning. More precisely, the past (authorial intent, culture, history) plays one part, but is not the whole. The present cannot escape bringing its new questions and traditions have evolved since their distant past. When we interpret a text we have to fuse the past tradition or horizon with the present tradition or horizon. We cannot simply leap into past meanings in themselves nor can we impose our meanings on the text. We both look forward and create a freshly fused meaning. Interpreting a text is very much like a cultural festival process. In celebrating a festival of some past event, we neither merely duplicate the original event as it happened, nor celebrate it subjectively, each in one's own consciousness. It includes parts of both of these and something more creative. A festival fuses the past and present into a new creative moment over and above both past and present. The fusion of horizon of tradition or culture is possible through the dialectic of understanding, explanation and application as said earlier. In this way, the dialogues of life, action or multi-lateral dialogue, of doctrinal or academic dialogue, and of religious experience or spiritual dialogue automatically become possible among different religions and cultures. Gadamer's theory of the fusion of horizon is critical in its nature, which is identical to the Buddhist middle dhamma, so it cannot be alleged categorically as subjectivism, relativism, dogmatism or relative idealism (Bilen, 2000, p. 101).

The most important point to be kept in mind is that Theravada Buddhism can go hand in hand with the Existentialism of Heidegger in the light of the ontology of Ultimate Reality. Buddhism has no objection to the term 'existential', which relates to human experience. As we have already discussed, the state of Nibbana and the liberated one is not non-existence; rather it is positive, permanent reality, here and now in human life. This is comparable to the Heidegger's Authentic Dasein. Heidegger accepts the humanization of death and defines Dasein as being-towards-death. Death reveals itself as that possibility which is most deeply one's own. Death is

for Dasein the capital possibility from which all other possibilities derive their status (Heidegger, 1962, p. 277). The way Heidegger uses phenomenology to analyze Dasein and its death is similar to that of the Buddhist contemplation on death. Death is said to be the main feature of insight meditation practice. In Buddhism, it is said that one who realizes the nature of death is dead before death. The Authentic Dasein or 'conscious human life' is called Nibbana in the present life of a liberated one (*arahant*). Heidegger's philosophy of life culminates in Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy. Karl Rahner and the Second Vatican Council articulated the religious implications of this newly sensitive philosophy (McLean, 2008, p. 6).

Once Arwind Sharma put his observation thus: "While Aquinas could find a middle way between the univocal and the equivocal through the analogy, Buddhism could only find the middle way between affirmation and negation in Buddha's 'roaring silence'" (1997, p. 112). The Buddha's silence is similar to that of Wittgenstein who ends his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with this famous statement, "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (1961, 6.54). Regarding the mystical and religious experience, Wittgenstein is silent in the *Tractatus* but he is not mute in the *Philosophical Investigations*, which makes new subjectivity possible both in Western and Eastern thought, as already noted above. As Prof. McLean notes, "it could be understood in analogy to the replacement of a tooth in childhood, the more important phenomenon is not the old tooth that is falling out, but the strength of the new tooth that is replacing it," (2008, p. 6).

The unique characteristic of Buddhist hermeneutics is known as "general hermeneutics,"<sup>16</sup> the effort of which is to form a general and universal methodology based on a coherent and correspondent philosophy of understanding. The well-known book 'the Guide' or *Nettipakarana* serves as a set of 'canons' for interpretation.<sup>17</sup> Buddhist hermeneutics can accommodate both Schleiermacher's theory of the author's intention and Gadamer's theory of the fusion of horizon, because the former is identical to the Theravada Buddhist theory of "gradual path" as the latter is to the Mahayana theory of "skillful means." Buddhist hermeneutics does not

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<sup>16</sup>Palmer divides hermeneutics into three fairly distinct categories: regional hermeneutics, general hermeneutics, and philosophical hermeneutics (1981, pp. 461-2).

<sup>17</sup>In the *Nettipakarana*, every discourse contains two aspects, namely, verbal content (*byanjana*) and meaning (*attha*). Of them words consist of letters, verbal content, etymology, presentation (*nidesa*) and manner (*akara*). Meaning consists of the following six: explaining (*sankasana*), displaying (*pakasana*), divulging (*vivarana*), analysing (*vibhajana*), exhibiting (*uttanikamma*), and designating (*pannatti*). These six are called threads. Modes of conveying the meaning are sixteen: Conveying teaching (*desanahara*), investigation (*vicayahara*) and so on.

ignore the author's intention, because the Buddha is there as a human being. At the same time, the Buddhist hermeneutics opens the opportunity for the fusion of horizon, because the non-self or emptiness is there as a process of becoming. Therefore, the Buddhist hermeneutics starts from the author's intention to emptiness (Lopez, 1988, p. 65).

#### *Hermeneutics as Cultural Understanding*

The way Gyekye divided cultures into two levels of reality corresponds to that of Buddhism. In Thailand, Buddhism is divided into two kinds, namely cultural and doctrinal Buddhism just like the Buddha's discourses or dhammas, which also are divided into two levels, as discussed above. This is comparable to the hermeneutic circle, in which knowledge of the whole depends upon knowledge of the parts, and vice versa. The relationship between morality and culture could be understood better in the hermeneutics of "Beyond Cultures": "our shared humanity would prescribe a morality that stresses responsibilities and obligations towards others, whether as members of our own local community, or as members of the extensive human family" (Gyekye, 1999, p. 57). We need to apply the ethics of shared humanity, which is a base of civilization, not only within our family, but globally. Factually speaking, this ethics of shared responsibility must prevail in every culture in the world, and notably in Arab culture as well. It appears that, "although a united Arab world no longer exist, the system of Arab nations still behaves like a family even without a supranational authority" (Qing, 2008, p. 7). In supporting cultural universalism, Gyekye encourages us to challenge the theses of normative cultural relativism, cultural incommensurability, and ethnocentrism. The sense of non-attachment is intelligible in Gyekye's 'aspectual character of cultural achievement'. Thus, "recognizing the limitations of human culture can be a way to overcoming ethnocentrism" (Gyekye, 1999, p. 43). The concept of mutual understanding and collaboration of all could be perceived from Gyekye's theory of aspectuality and cultural whole (Ibid., p. 46).

According to the cultural aspectuality, real options are not one-to-one. If C1 borrows or adopts a dance form from C2, it does not at all follow that C2 will also borrow some dance form from C1. It may borrow some other cultural product from C1, any of C1's cultural creations or features that it (C2) considers worthwhile for the development of its own cultural life (Ibid.). In this manner, there will not be any clash of civilization and any end of history, because everything is dependent in origination. An example of non-egological treatment according to the Buddhist principle of non-attachment is exemplified by Warayuth Sriwarakuel<sup>18</sup> : "Being a Christian does not make me in trouble with my personal and Thai identity because I adopt the Buddhist way of thinking. With the principle of non-

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<sup>18</sup>Asst. Prof. Dr. Warayuth Sriwarakuel is at present the Dean of Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University, Thailand.

attachment I have no attachment to identity at all because I am conscious that we are new persons every moment.... So if someone happens to ask me, "Who are you?" In terms of religion, I would say, "I am a Catholic in baptism and tradition, Protestant in spirit, and Buddhist in the way of thinking" (2000, p. 21). Therefore, Gadamer's hermeneutics of openness, extension of understanding, and transformation into a communion is really a global philosophy.

Non-attachment is applicable to the case of Fukuyama's *End of History* (1992) and Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). Fukuyama was understood to be saying that humankind's ages-long global conflict was over because everyone would seek to become liberal democratic capitalists. In contrast, Huntington was understood to say that certain societies (or civilizations) would never evolve into such modern Western states (<http://www.brothersjudd.com>). In short, both thinkers tried to posit the idea of existence and non-existence behind their assumption. The end of Fukuyama's idea of political history is the rise of Huntington's idea of the history of civilizations. But Payutto, whose mode of thinking is grounded in "non-attachment to the dogmatic opinion theory", would go beyond these assumptions. He remarked that, "the collapse of communist socialism does not spell the soundness of capitalism. On the contrary, it implies that, of the two predominant forms of materialism, as the failure of one has been witnessed, that of the other can be expected" (1993, p. 24). According to Payutto, liberal democracy will be sustainable only when it no longer consists of the three wrong views mentioned earlier. Liberal democracy must be strengthened by the development of the human being's relation to nature and the environment, to society and to inner freedom; otherwise it cannot survive. Moreover, with regard to the role of the present system of democracy, Buddhadasa remarked more interestingly that democracy, like communism, can hardly resist human defilement or desire; both could be a means of taking advantage of, and destroying, others. Eventually, both democracy and communism can be an instrument to create peace only when they consist of dhamma or morality, and not only of freedom and liberty. The ideal form of politics is according to him, *dhammic socialist democracy*, in which dictatorial means are used to expedite moral solutions to social problems (1989, p. 183).

According to Payutto, for human beings to live happily there must be freedom on three levels as antidotes to the three wrong views. The first freedom is called 'physical freedom', which means the freedom to live with nature and the environment. Secondly, in our relationship with fellow humans we must have 'social freedom'. To have the social freedom is to be able to live safely together without being exploited by others. The third one is 'inner freedom', which is freedom on a personal level. This is the freedom from the internal enemies, greed, hatred and delusion; internal freedom is the foundation on which social and physical freedom can be grounded. The inner freedom of Payutto is in line with the Absolute Unity

of Cusa, i.e. the One, God or Being (McLean, 2008, p. 29; DeLeonardis, 1998, pp. 48-50). Payutto's concept of inner freedom is in conformity with McLean's "Existential Freedom as Self-Constitution and Self-Determination." This existential sense of freedom emerges as the dynamic center of our life. It is self-affirmation towards full perfection, which is the very root of the development of values, virtues, and cultural traditions. This sets in motion positive processes of concrete peaceful and harmonious collaboration (McLean, 2008, pp. 9-11). Existential freedom, beyond attachment and accompanied with right views, will strengthen liberal democracy and unite human civilization to the Infinite.

Buddhism accepts both the social self (everyday ritual) and the social non-self (beyond everyday ritual); there are two sorts of truth in Buddhism, namely conventional truth (indirect meaning) and ultimate truth (direct meaning) with special emphasis on the latter. To say that Buddhism pays more attention to the ultimate truth or social non-self is not to mean that Buddhists ignore the social self. The social self can be understood in terms of 'deference', which means acknowledging the values of the other person as well as of our own selves. Deference means also supportive interchange or a situation of social interaction, such as greetings, offers of help, remedial interchange and so on (Goffman, 1959, pp. 240). This social self is known in Buddhism as a social ethic elucidated in the Buddhist text (Sn. 259-268). For example, one of 38 highest blessings is reverence, respect or appreciative action, which is grasped in the context of the social self. But in addition to the social self, the Buddha teaches social non-self, which means forgiveness or non-attachment to the social self. Whenever the social self disappoints one, then the social non-self can help release such disappointment. The social non-self is a sense of forgiveness, love, non-attachment, which transcends any expectation of the consequences of our actions. Self-identity in the light of right understanding through self awareness or heedfulness must be cultivated in order to solve the problem conflicts occurring all over the world. McLean's sense of Heidegger's Dasein or Buddhism's Heedfulness (*appamada*) is that, "Done well this can be a historic step ahead for humanity; done poorly it can produce a new round of human conflict and misery".

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The highest aim of Buddhism is peace as the Buddha said: "No other bliss higher than peace (*natthi santi param sukham*).” Likewise peace is the highest aim of all religions and philosophical theories, so religions and philosophies are for peace; that is the implication of "diversity in unity." To present the idea of non-attachment as based on the doctrine of non-self does not mean intentionally to objectivize the idea of detachment as based on a new subjectivity, but to supplement it. Rather, both perspectives depend on and supplement one another; self is non-self and non-self is self. In the terminology of the Buddhist doctrine of dependent

origination-cessation, it is because of self that the non-self arises and because of the cessation of self that non-self arises and vice versa. The doctrine of dependent origination-and-cessation or interrelatedness in Buddhism is comparable to both the dialectic of horizons, the hermeneutical circle, and question-and-answer in the hermeneutical philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer, and to the dialectics of “thick and thin”, and “sacred and the profane” of Michael Walzer and Mircea Eliade respectively.

Buddhism teaches its followers to discover themselves and to cultivate unlimited wisdom, purity and compassion in order to have great respect for human beings and nature for the purpose of their harmonious and peaceful coexistence with each other. Such a friendly attitude toward others and nature is well expressed by Ven. PhraThepsophon (Prayoon Mererk), the present Rector of the Buddhist University of Thailand in his book entitled *Buddhist Propagation for World Peace* (2002, p. 98) as follows. When asked, “what will you do if your cuckoo doesn’t sing?” three men answered in different ways. The first man says, “The cuckoo doesn’t sing? All right, kill it at once.” The second man says, “The cuckoo doesn’t sing? All right, I will make it sing.” The third man says, “The cuckoo doesn’t sing? All right, I will wait till it sings.” The first man in this story is very aggressive because his mind is full of hatred, whereas the second man’s mind is full of greed or desire for mastery over nature. The third man, cultivating wisdom and purity of mind, holds respect for, and compassion towards, the bird. The third man’s position represents the Buddhist attitude towards nature and other human beings; it also suggests Heidegger’s ‘new intentionality’ and the emergence of self-awareness of the human person in time (Dasein) towards human freedom and social progress.

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### Appendices

#### I. Buddhist Technical Terms Used in The Paper

1. Abhidhamma/Abhidharma: 'higher teaching'; one of the three main divisions of the ancient Buddhist canon.
2. Aggregate: the five aggregates (physical form, feeling, perception, mental formation, consciousness) that together constitute a living being.

3. *Anatta*: ‘non-self’; the Buddhist denial of a permanent and substantial self.
4. *Arhanta*: an awakened Buddhist saint.
5. *Atman/atta*: self; belief the permanent self opposite to anatta/anatman.
6. *Bhavana*: ‘mental/ spiritual development’ Buddhist meditation.
7. *Bhikkhu*: a Buddhist monk.
8. *Bodhisattva/bodhisatta*: one on the path to Buddhahood.
9. *Brahmin*: a person who believes in Hinduism; a Hindu priest.
10. Dependent Origination-Cessation (*paticcasamuppada*): the Buddhist doctrine of causality.
11. *Dhamma/Dharma*: the underlying law of reality; the teaching of the Buddha.
12. *Dukkha*: ‘pain’; the unease or unsatisfactoriness which characterizes existence.
13. *Karma/kamma*: good and bad actions of body, speech, and mind whose pleasant and unpleasant results are experienced in this and subsequent lives.
14. *Madhyamaka*: ‘the middle’; alongside *Yogacara*, one of the two principal schools of Mahayana Buddhism.
15. Mahayana: ‘great vehicle’; a broad school of Buddhism.
16. Nagarjuna: 2<sup>nd</sup> century Buddhist monk and thinker, the founder of Madhyamaka school of thought.
17. Nikaya: a division of the Sutta Pitaka, section of the Buddhist canon; the school of Buddhist thought.
18. Nibbana/Nirvana: the ‘bowing out’ of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion; the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice; the unconditioned.
19. *Parinibbana*: the final death of a Buddha or arhant; or another term for Nibbana/Nirvana.
20. *Pacceka-Buddha*: a solitary Buddha , who could discover the dhamma, but could not convey his dhamma to the people. This category of Buddha will be born only in between the present Buddha and the Next Buddha. This paccakabuddha is different from the Sammasambuddha, who discovers the dhamma and could teach people.
21. Sangha: the Buddhist monastic order of monks and nuns.
22. *Samadhi*: ‘concentration’ or ‘meditation’.
23. *Samsara*: the Buddhist belief in round of birth or the wheel of life.
24. *Sautrantika*: ‘a follower of the Sutra or Suttapitaka, which is one of the three Buddhist main scriptures or canon.
25. *Sunyata*: ‘emptiness’ ; a Buddhist spiritual term used to characterize the ultimate nature of things.
26. Sutra/Sutta: ‘discourse of the Buddha’; one of the three Buddhist main scriptures or canon.
27. *Tathagata*: ‘the thus gone/ thus come’; an epithet of the Buddha.
28. *Theravadin*: a follower of the Theravada or ‘teaching of the elders’; a Buddhist school, which is taken as an Early Buddhism.

29. *Tripitaka/Tipitaka*: 'three baskets'; the three basic divisions of Buddhist canon.
30. Upanisads: a set of sacred Brahmanical texts included in the Veda.
31. Vipassana: 'insight', one of two main type of Buddhist meditation, namely 'tranquillity meditation or mental calmness' (*samathakammatthana*), and 'insight meditation' (*vipassanakammatthana*).
32. *Yogacara*: 'yoga practice' ; alongside *Madhyamaka*; it is also known as *vijnanavada*.





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# THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY

## PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

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A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues*. This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. *Joint-Colloquia* with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

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