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# **Elusive Transcendence**

## **An Exploration of the Human Condition Based on Paul Ricoeur**

**Indian Philosophical Studies, XV**

by  
*Kuruvilla Pandikattu*

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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**Dedicated to**

Jessy, Stephen, Tom, Tobin and Meera (The Kallidukil family)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- BH* Ricoeur, P., *Biblical Hermeneutics*  
*CI* Ricoeur, P., *The Conflict of Interpretations*  
*DI* Ricoeur, P., *De l'inteprétation. Essai sur Freud*  
*EH* Ricoeur, P., *Existence and Hermeneutics* in: Klemm, D.E. *Hermeneutical Inquiry* Vol I  
*FC* Ricoeur, P., *Philosophie de la volonté Vol II Part I L'home faillible* (Eng: *Fallible Man*)  
*FM* Ricoeur, P., *Die Fehlbarkeit des Menschen. Phänomenologie der Schuld* Vol II  
*FP* Ricoeur, P., *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*  
*HH* Ricoeur, P., *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*  
*HS* Ricoeur, P., *The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection*  
*IT* Ricoeur, P., *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*  
*LF* Ricoeur, P., *Language of Faith*  
*MP* Ricoeur, P., *The Metaphorical Process*  
*PV* Ricoeur, P., *Philosophie de la volonté Vol I, La volontaire et l'involontaire* (Eng: *Freedom and Nature*)  
*RM* Ricoeur, P., *The Rule of Metaphor*  
*SB* Ricoeur, P., *Symbolik des Bösen*  
*SE* Ricoeur, P., *The Symbolism of Evil*  
*SF* Ricoeur, P., *The Symbol: Food for Thought*  
*SM* Ricoeur, P., *Philosophie de la volonté Vol II, Part II La symbolique du mal* (Eng: *The Symbolism of Evil*)

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Pandikattu, K. (2010) "Amartya Sen and Paul Ricoeur on Participative Development and Freedom." In: Pandikattu, K., Ponniah, J. (eds) *The Dancing Peacock: Indian Insights into Religion and Development*. New Delhi: Serials Publications pp. 111-136.

Pandikattu, K. (2007) "Discourse as the Interlocutor for Participative Development: Amartya Sen and Paul Ricoeur on Freedom that Enables Capabilities". *Gandhi Marg* 29/3 (July-September 2007): 7-17.

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## INTRODUCTION

# THE PARADOXICAL HUMAN LIFE OPEN TO THE ELUSIVE TRANSCENDENCE

“Man infinitely transcends man.” ~Blaise Pascal

“Man is the only creature that refuses to be what he is.”  
~Albert Camus

“A human person is infinitely precious and must be  
unconditionally protected.” ~Hans Küng

“The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal  
hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty, and all  
forms of human life.” ~John F. Kennedy

Who am I? What do I know? What can I hope for? In answering these profound questions, the above quotes can remind us of the human being's transcending nature. The first one expresses that transcending nature positively and the second one rather negatively. Humans are unique since in the very process of understanding and answering fundamental questions about ourselves, we are drawn into the question still more. This book is a modest attempt to understand human nature with a view to fulfilling our human potential to the fullest.

This book explores the ever evasive nature of the human being. It is divided into three broad parts. The first part, Human Fecundity, deals with the positive or the creative dimensions of human existence, which enables a person to create meaning and enhance significance in her or his life. The second part, Human Frailty, delves into the frictional and tensional aspects of existence. Here we encounter the challenging dimension of our existence. The third part, The Human Fallibility, treats the fragile dimensions of human encounter, dealing with our actual brokenness and vulnerability. Together, the three parts throw further light onto our seemingly endless creative, tensional and paradoxical aspects. Finally, the concluding section muses on the human yearning for authenticity and reflects on the tensional or creative aspects of human nature, and thereby justifies the title, “Elusive Transcendence,” which is perceived from the givenness in human nature.

## **PART I. HUMAN FECUNDITY: FERTILE EXPERIENCE**

Part I focuses on the human capacity to interpret experiences creatively and make meaning out of them. The first chapter in this section attempts to focus on human beings as story-tellers. It is through stories that

we as humans understand ourselves, and history reveals stories are the best means of reflecting on ourselves (Pandikattu 2002a). Our story-telling has more than entertainment value. It provides us with a way of life with which we are so fascinated. On that note, this chapter also criticises some of the present story that we live, and offers suggestion for another more creative and viable story, which will enable us to better live our lives. This chapter, then, is an invitation for us to be story-tellers, and open to the creative and narrative part of our human nature.

The second chapter in Part I takes up a related narrative issue, the subject of myths, and how they shape human culture. Myths provide meaning and significance to our lives, in that they frame them in a larger picture. Existential and archaeological myths are means by which humans try to reconcile the paradoxical dimensions of life. Since myths enable us to live the reality of contradictions meaningfully, by giving us ideals to live by, myths may be considered as more classical and elaborate stories. Based on Michael Ende's classical and popular novel, *Momo*, this chapter helps us to appreciate the mythical dimension of our lives, and enables us to overcome evil and to essentially make human life goal-oriented or directional. In this chapter we study human beings as myth-makers.

The aim of the third chapter in Part I is to appreciate the role that imagination (or creative dream) plays in the very understanding of ourselves and God. Viewed from this perspective, we can say that imagination is crucial to our self-understanding. Because we can dream and imagine, we are able to create a world about which we can debate. It is this human capacity that permits us to enlarge or widen our life horizons. Thus, imagination provides us with the potential to make our experiences fertile and our world creative. Human beings, then, are creative dreamers.

The final, chapter of Part I studies the aesthetic experience of human beings. It looks at the human person as a seer or an artist. Following Paul Ricoeur's methodology, this chapter will first deal with the singular nature of the beautiful. Then, it will reflect on the symbolic and hermeneutic function of art and its significance, including music. Finally, there will be a discussion on art as it relates to ethics, in other words, the artist in relation to the artisan. That is to say, with reference to works of art, the artist plays a role in making the world aesthetically and morally better. That role indicates the symbolic and humanizing nature of art leading to human fecundity.

To summarise, Part I works with the fertile and creative dimensions of human experience. Those fertile and creative dimensions enable us as humans to make sense of our diverse experiences and evolve further our creative ability.

## **PART II. HUMAN FRAILITY: FRICTIONAL EXISTENCE**

Following the discussion on the human creative dimension, Part II treats the frail and frictional aspects of our human life-experience. It takes

seriously the broken, fragile and vulnerable dimensions of our human nature. It takes up significant human issues like freedom, development, capability, poverty, suspicion and trust, all of which make our every-day-life feeble and delicate.

The first chapter in Part II studies the unique human capacity for freedom in terms of the finite self, and opening oneself to the infinite. Using Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology of fallibility and freedom, this chapter relates freedom to the finite human capacity to reach out to the infinite. We as humans experience our freedom as both limiting and enabling. We remain always open to the infinite and yet are rooted in or bound to the finite. The swing, or the tension, between the two poles – bound finitude and unbound infinity – makes humans the unique creatures that we are. It is in this unique “in-between-ness” that we can situate and understand our own freedom. By doing that, we situate humans as in perpetual tension.

The second chapter in this section treats freedom from the categories of capabilities. It examines the Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen's understanding of poverty as lack of freedom, which in turn helps to appreciate Sen's notion of development as freedom. This understanding requires that we apprehend freedom as going beyond unfreedoms, and making ourselves capable of approaching well-being. Then, at the philosophical level, and borrowing from Ricoeur, this chapter presents an analysis of the crucial human fallibility, and relates it to freedom and various forms of unfreedom. Finally, from an anthropological point of view, we study Sen's and Ricoeur's suggestion that creative discourse could be a means by which to befriend human frailty and cultivate freedom both as a means to human realisation and an end in itself. In summary, this chapter exposes us to the dilemma of being human.

The dilemma of being human is studied further in the third chapter, which tries to appraise the human situation hermeneutically. Following Ricoeur's treatment, the final chapter of Part II traces the long hermeneutic journey from suspicion to trust. Doing this enables one to appreciate the self in terms oneself and the other. With reference to humans' historical conditioning of our own growth, this chapter focuses on the bodiliness of human experience and the ethical importance of human existence. It may be noted that one leads to the other. In this sense, we are “care concerned of the other.” Each one of us is cared for and is called to care for each other. So, it follows, humans are seen as the bounded openness moving from suspicion to trust and from oneself to the other. It is by maintaining this movement that we realise ourselves.

### **PART III. HUMAN FALLIBILITY: FRAGILE ENCOUNTER**

Part III takes up the tragic dimension of the precarious human existence. This final part of the book delves into the fallible and violent aspects of the human heart and society. This discussion leads to an opening of sorts. In that opening lives a realistic hope, a experiencing the “joy of

Yes despite the sadness of the finite.” That “joy of Yes” affirms, unconditionally and unequivocally, our human precarious and precious life.

The first chapter deals with the theme of violence and sinfulness. Without attempting to give a philosophical analysis of the origin of sin and evil, what is presented are some of the dynamics at work in the emergence of evil. What is discussed is based mostly on Paul Ricoeur’s and Ernest Becker’s work. Ricoeur points out that the disproportion that characterizes human beings makes evil possible, though not always. Such a disproportion opens the way to sin and evil. The natural progress from *bios* to *logos* has enhanced human life greatly and caused an evil force to develop an enlarged horizon. With reference to evil, Becker’s work showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt to eliminate it. Both Ricoeur and Becker trace the existence of evil (and also goodness and freedom) to the disproportion or in-between-ness in the human condition. This chapter, to summarise, is a phenomenological description of the emergence and progress of moral evil in individual human beings and human society.

The treatments of violence leads to the second chapter and its predominant theme, which is to attempt forgiveness. Based on the insights of Ricoeur, this chapter reflects on the depth of fault and the possibility of forgiveness at both the theoretical and the existential level of human beings. Individual history is contrasted to the collective history of a community. At the individual level, humans can speak meaningfully of a “happy memory”, but for a community such a “happy memory” does not always exist. That discussion naturally leads to the topic of the act of genuine forgiveness (both at the collective and individual levels) and to the art of creative forgetfulness. Such an approach hopefully provides useful insights for dialogue between and reconciliation of cultures without which humanity cannot survive. Thus, the aim of this chapter is not so much to focus on the depth of fault, but to remind ourselves of the travesty of justice that human beings – both as individuals and cultures – are capable of committing. Also, this chapter attempts to encourage an opening to the promise and possibility of forgiveness – even forgiveness between cultures, which today’s world so badly needs. It is the capacity of human beings to forgive that gives hope to humanity. Such a hope is taken further in the next chapter, which focuses on the human ability to reach out to others and nature.

The third chapter of Part III takes up the issue of prayer from a phenomenological and a-religious perspectives. In this chapter on spiritual exercise and experience, the agonies and ecstasies faced by the world today are discussed. What is asserted is that the uniqueness and versatility of a spiritual exercise is tested by the actual life situation of the community: how far it promotes life, fosters joy and furthers love. After understanding spirituality primarily as an experience, what is attempted is to situate a meaningful spirituality (and spiritual experience) on our collective and contemporary human experience. Next, then, is a discussion on the human longing and fulfilment that is embedded in every spiritual quest – leading to

an appreciation of spiritual exercises as an experience of love conditioned by our context and open to the whole of reality. It follows that that experience can cause a person to appreciate the uniqueness and versatility of spiritual exercises and experiences, which leads to a renewed vision of God, world and humans. The focal point of our human spirituality, then, is LIFE in its varied forms searching for fullness, which does not negate the debilitating human experiences of sin and evil in our lives.

The concluding chapter looks at humans as “the elusive Transcendence” inherent in human nature. In the first section of this chapter, using the ordinary alphabets, we try to indicate that language and reality is more than monadic letters. Then, we take up two scientific theories to indicate the inherent connectedness of the whole of reality. We also employ another contemporary scientific finding to show us that we do not perceive much of the empirical world, which can help us to be humble in our approach to the larger world. Then in the light of our scientific study, we recognise human beings not as pure entities (“independently subsisting objects”) but as an evolving horizon that is ever becoming. Finally, we dwell briefly on love as relationality constitutive of reality, which is ever enlarging and expanding.

This book, interdisciplinary in character, takes the scientific world seriously and is open to other fields of enquiry. Some scientific data and religious insights from both Christian and Hindu traditions are used for reflection. Since the author has been specialising on Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), who is widely recognised as one of most distinguished French thinkers of our time, these reflections are heavily inspired by Ricoeur’s insights. These reflections are not an exploration of Ricoeur’s thought, but are based on or inspired by him.

As such, each of the chapters of the book forms an independent unit, and gives its own insight into human nature. Still, the general aim of the book is to trace the common thread running through the chapters and arrive at an evolving, tensional and creative understanding of the human person as poised between the present and the past, between the actual and the potential, between good and evil, between freedom and non-freedom, between the real and imagination, and between authenticity and inauthenticity. The goal is to show that it is in maintaining and not denying the tension that we as humans can truly realise ourselves as the ever open horizon.

The title, “Elusive Transcendence,” may need some explanation. Firstly, it refers to the tensional existence of human beings, in terms of time. We live in the present, always anticipating, and even transcending, the future. So we carry the past, in fact all our past experiences, with us. Secondly, it points to the existential longing for more, inherent in human beings. Never satisfied with what we have, we yearn for more and this more is characteristic of our existence. Thirdly, at the philosophical level, we are always one step ahead of ourselves. When an actuality is realized, a new

potentiality emerges, inviting us to transcend ourselves. It is in this “already and not yet” that we exist. We are the horizon that is ever elusive: ever receding and inviting at the same time. We are limited transcendence, open unlimitedly to The Transcendence. Thus the Elusive Transcendence!

## **PART I**

### **HUMAN FECUNDITY: FERTILE EXPERIENCE**

“Human language appears to be a unique phenomenon, without significant analogue in the animal world.” ~Noam Chomsky

“Human language...prevents us from sticking to the matter at hand.” ~Lewis Thomas

“A common mistake that people make when trying to design something completely fool proof is to underestimate the ingenuity of complete fools” ~Douglas Adams



## CHAPTER I

### THE STORY-TELLER: SEEKING THE PLOT OF LIFE

“On the day when man told the story of his life to man, history was born.” ~Alfred de Vigny

“A man does not know what he is saying until he knows what he is not saying.” ~Gilbert K. Chesterton

“Thus I rediscovered what writers have always known (and have told us again and again): books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told.” ~Umberto Eco

On 12 May 1998, the Discovery Channel transmitted an interesting and useful television programme in the “Mission Impossible” series. It dealt with human beings’ cherished desire to “conquer” space and to “colonize” the stars and galaxies. Meticulous planning is needed to send human beings into space, and it was suggested that we could even bypass Einstein’s limit of the speed of light by properly making use of gravitational waves. It was also hinted that generations of human beings could settle down in outer space with or without access to their parent planet, earth. What strikes one in the whole discussion of this challenging topic was the frequent occurrence of the words “colony” and “colonization” to denote such a venture.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to indicate that this tendency towards colonization is in-built in the story of our human lives. Colonization, as a political phenomenon, which is almost 500 years old,<sup>1</sup> is based on a story.<sup>2</sup> The process of colonization is enacting a particular story. We shall see in this chapter some of the assumptions and implications of this story. Furthermore, we will argue that de-colonization requires that we enact a radically different story. We will assume that the same story of colonization, when modified slightly, would not enable us to live in a de-colonization paradigm. What is required is a story that enables us to live life authentically, and in a totally different paradigm. For this treatment we borrow insights from Daniel Quinn’s *Ishmael* (Quinn 1995).<sup>3</sup>

The method that we are following is philosophical. Drawing upon the recent hermeneutical studies on myth, metaphor and story, we are dealing with the topic of colonization from a theoretical perspective, and suggest the model of a new story as an alternative paradigm of a life beyond the colonial past.

This chapter understands human beings as story-tellers. It is through stories that we understand ourselves. They are the best means of reflecting on ourselves, and hence provide more than entertainment value. They give

us a life-style which enable us to find meaning in life. As such, this chapter also makes some criticism of the present story that we live and offers suggestions for another more creative and viable story, which will enables us to live our lives better. Lastly, this chapter is an invitation for us to be story-tellers, and open to the creative and narrative part of our human nature.

### **HUMAN LIVING AS ENACTING A STORY**

Before an understanding of human life in general and colonization in particular as enacting a given story, it would be helpful for us to understand what we mean by the terms *story*, *enacting* and *culture*.

We could begin by understanding a *story* as “a scenario interrelating the human beings, the world and the gods” (Quinn 1995: 41).<sup>4</sup> A story, like a myth or epic, relates human beings with God and the world in existential and enigmatic ways. Such a story gives a broader vision to the burning issues of humanity and articulates a solution to the conflicting situation of human existence.

Furthermore, “to *enact* a story is to live so as to strive to make [the story] come true” (Quinn 1995: 41). Enacting a story enables us to make the story come true in our own lives. Conversely, we build on the story given to us by enacting it in our own lives. Collectively, we live the story and elaborate the story, modify it and to some extent make it our own. This story is handed on to future generations for their own appreciation, appropriation and further enactment.

Such a story is aetiological. It is a story that explains. It explains to ourselves and to our own culture how things came to be this (particular) way (Quinn 1995: 43). Bridging the gap between reason and heart, such a story tries to reconcile the contradictory aspects of our lives. It gives us both a justification for our existence and a motivation for it.<sup>5</sup>

In short, it tries to explain everything. A story that explains (and justifies) the meaning of the world, the intentions of God and the destiny of human beings is bound to have mythological characteristics and profound implications on our daily lives.

We may further understand *culture* as a group of people enacting one story against this background. Thus, human beings in one particular society enact their own story and it is in the enacting that they understand themselves, the world and the divine (Quinn 1995: 34-36, 40-44 and 62). Such a group of human beings enacting the same story constitutes a culture. For no single human being can invent a story and enact it for himself or herself. The story is given to him or her by the culture. The culture enriches itself by the enactment of the story by its members.

In the context of the above terms we can understand human living as enacting a story. This is more profound than regarding human life as a story. Life is seen not merely as a story or as a plot, but life is seen as living out a plot (story) given to us by the wider community (culture).<sup>6</sup> It is such a story

that gives us meaning and orientation. It is the story that makes us what we are. The story explains and validates the prejudices, pre-understandings, the values, the vision and the goal of a culture. Such a story given to human beings by a culture has two mutually enriching aspects:

- a. Humans are *captivated* by that story
- b. Humans are *captives* of that story

The story that we are asked to enact is one that fascinates us, that goads us to further commitment and action. The story truly captivates us, and we are enchanted and find our lives fulfilled by it. We are ready to give up our most cherished selves for its sake. In this sense, the story takes precedence even over the individual. In the case of Nazi Germany, for many Germans the story of Aryan supremacy was one that motivated them, fascinated and inspired them. That story gave them “a reason to live and a reason to die” (Powell 1975). The hardships that came their way could be faced because of the tremendous influence of the story. They were blinded by the story, admired it, made it their own and lived it!

On the other hand, we are also captured by the story, and held captive by the story. The story given to us by our culture is not our own. We are not free to reject it. We are truly held in a cultural prison by the story that we are told to enact. This cultural prison, as opposed to the criminal prison, offers us no easy escape, and no release. In the criminal prison, the wardens have the keys to remove us from the prison. But in the cultural prison, given to us by our culture, both the prisoners and wardens share the same fate and know of no escape route.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the Germans enacting the Nazi story of the supremacy of the Aryan race were not totally free to think otherwise. Even if they did think otherwise and were not convinced of this ideology, the propaganda machine, the story being enacted by the wider culture, prohibited them from actually living out a different story. Even unconsciously, the Germans were dragged into living out this story of the majority community. This story was being lived out in every sphere of the nation’s life. The only way to free themselves of the story was through physical death or by leaving the country (Quinn 1995: 242-243).<sup>8</sup>

Such an understanding of living as enacting a story could be compared to speaking which could be considered as enacting a language. In human speech, we are already given the language. We are “forced” to follow the rules of the language. At the same time, we are at liberty to carefully invent new words and creatively use the language to exploit the ambiguities of linguistic rules.

As pointed out by Wittgenstein (1971 *passim*), the words of the language acquire meaning in the context of the language game. Similarly, the actions of our daily life acquire its meaning in the context of the story that is being enacted. We are not totally bound by language in speaking or by the story in living. We can creatively use both the language and the story

to go beyond their own limits. But our freedom is not unlimited. It is a “bound freedom,” to use a favourite phrase of Ricoeur’s (1966: 41f).

In the process of development of both language (through speaking) and story (through living), we, the actors in the story, are invited to play the game “properly,” that is according to the rules. Sometimes ingenuity is encouraged or tolerated. Even the protesters or the rebels in the story are contributing their share to that game of “enacting” or “counter-enacting” the story. “Counter-enacting” can form part of the same story. We can even “play to the gallery.” But to play a totally different story is difficult, if not impossible. A child who has not come in contact with another culture cannot talk a different language on its own. So, too, it is difficult to create a different story from within the story one is enacting.

Hence, human living could be visualized as enacting a story, a story given to us by the culture, a story reinforced by the life of other individuals of the culture. Colonisation as a political phenomenon is the carrying out of a story, enacting a story which captivated some people (the “Takers”) and which held them captives and in turn made them captors – in contrast to those we might describe “Leavers”.

### **THE STORY ENACTED BY TAKERS**

Against this background of human living as enacting a story, it is our venture to describe some of the features of the story being enacted by the Takers.<sup>9</sup> It may be remembered that the Takers were, like most of us, well-intentioned people, not necessarily villains out to conquer and kill. Our aim here is to look at some elements of the story that motivated, guided and inspired their actions. Doing that will enable us to see how Takers were motivated to enact the story of colonization, and how they could live for and even “die” for that story. We shall then be able to understand the more heinous aspects of colonization from their world view, and from the point of view of the story they were enacting.

#### *Its Premise: A World for Humans*

“Every story is based on a premise, is the working out of a premise” (Quinn 1995: 60). The most appealing premise of the Takers is that “the world was made for us” (Quinn 1995: 61). From this premise it follows that “if the world was made for us, then it belongs to us and we can do what we damn well please with it” (Quinn 1997: 279f; Quinn 1995: 61).

The premise of the Takers is that the world was made for human beings, which they alone were made to rule, to conquer or to colonize. Not just the one’s own world, but other civilizations and people become the objects of colonial subjugation. “You hear this fifty times a day. You can turn on the radio or the television and hear it every hour. Man is conquering the deserts, man is conquering the oceans, man is conquering the atom, man

is conquering the elements, man is conquering outer space” (Quinn 1995: 73).<sup>10</sup>

For conquering the world, human beings have to pay a heavy price. But the role provided by the story makes human beings willing to pay a price bravely and gladly, however high it may be. But they do not realize that “the price... is not the price of becoming human. It’s not even the price of having the things you [need]. It’s the price of enacting a story that casts mankind as the enemy of the world” (Quinn 1995: 75). It is the price paid by the Takers and by the colonized because of the story being acted out by the Takers.

#### *Its Method: Cut-Throat Competition*

There are three methods the Takers followed that are fundamental to their culture and civilization and yet never practised in the rest of the community of life.<sup>11</sup>

Firstly, the Takers deny their competitors access to food.<sup>12</sup> In the wild, you may deny your competitors access to what you are eating, but you may not deny them access to food in general. For example, a lion in the forest does not claim that all gazelles are his and others should not eat them. The lion naturally defends its kill but does not regard the herd as its own. The jackal also can eat of a gazelle when its turn comes. Unlike the lion, the Takers seem to take full possession of the herd and are ready to defend it and deny it to their competitors.

Secondly, the Takers systematically destroy the competitors’ food to make room for their own. In the natural community, the general rule is to take what you need and leave the rest alone. No wild animal, for instance, destroys the whole habitat of its enemy or the enemy’s food.

Thirdly, the Takers exterminate physically their competitors, which is something unheard of in the larger community of (biological) life. In the wild, for instance, animals will defend their territories and pre-empt their kills, but they never hunt competitors down just to kill them. What they hunt, they eat, unlike what ranchers and farmers do with game.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Its Law: Unlimited Growth*

The law followed by enacting the colonizing story is that of unlimited and unbridled development (Quinn 1995: 134). Not just that of settlement and growth, but of unlimited settlement and growth. This leads to unlimited production and uncontrolled expansion. When humans do not achieve satisfaction and fulfilment in their lives by the production and use of one car, the solution, it is suggested, lies in the production and use of many faster or better cars. So too, if one is not satisfied by possessing one house or one estate, it is hoped that possession of unlimited houses or estates will bring joy and satisfaction.

*Its Way: One Right Way*

The colonizer's story has another dimension. Colonizers are convinced that their way is the right way, and the only right way. So they force everyone else in the world to do as they do, and to live the way they live. Everyone has to be forced to live like Takers because the Takers alone know the one right way of existing.

It is going to be very hard for the Takers to change their way of life because they are sure that what they are doing is right. A part of the Takers story is that they must carry on doing what they do even if it means destroying the world and humanity with it.

*Its Task: The World Police Force*

In enacting their story, Takers had a noble purpose, a holy task: To civilize the world. For without them the world was unfinished, was just nature "red in tooth and claw" (Quinn 1995: 71). It was in chaos, and in a state of primeval anarchy. Their task was to enter into cultures different from their own, and straighten them out; to give order to this world and people unlike themselves; to give to the world a sense of harmony and morality which it otherwise lacked; to bestow on the "other" people a sense of decency and civilization that they never could dream of; to impart to the uncivilised people a sense of values. Conquering and colonizing the world was a holy task to make it financially, morally and spiritually viable. In performing this task, the Takers became a world police force.

*Its Consequence: Colonization*

Nothing much needs to be told about the consequences of enacting the story of the Takers,<sup>14</sup> since we are witnesses to its effects. The Takers' story includes both the few positive as well as the many devastating negative aspects associated with colonization: lack of openness to other cultures, utter destruction of other cultures, unimaginable economic calamity, inhuman bondage, physical slavery, economic misery and mass extermination of groups of people!<sup>15</sup>

**A DIFFERENT STORY ENACTED BY LEAVERS**

If the Takers are enacting a dehumanizing story, a different and creative story is needed to depart from it. From within the Takers' story itself, it is not possible to be "liberated" anymore than it is possible to be liberated from within one language family by speaking a totally different language. Liberation is speaking a different language, and playing a different (language) game. It is to be noted that even the radicals or the rebels within a story cannot create a new story, they can only alter the story here and there. Such efforts will end up only in slightly changing the plot, or

some grammatical rules of the game. They will only make “the oppressed the oppressors,” and will not be a game changer. The story we are looking forward to is that of the “Leavers,” using the terminology of Daniel Quinn.

Moreover, the Leavers’ story is not just one story, as opposed to that of the Takers’. They are different stories, which would be opposed to the prominent traits of the Takers’ story. So it is not our attempt to give a full account of the Leavers’ story. Our attempt here is only to indicate some of the salient features of this different story, which could act as a paradigmatic alternative to the Takers’ story.<sup>16</sup> We do not claim that we are able to formulate an alternative story that could replace the Takers’ one story. Our aim is a mere effort to explore some of the possible avenues that the new story could point to. Hence, the following suggestions are tentative.

*Its Premise: Humans in the World*

The Leavers’ story, unlike the Takers’, is premised on human beings becoming human beings by living in the hands of God.<sup>17</sup> Human beings do not need to bring order to the world created by God. Furthermore, the world does not belong to human beings, but human beings belong to the world.<sup>18</sup> “Man was born to the world. Being shaped by the world” (Quinn 1996: 149),<sup>19</sup> and not the other way around.

Since the world and human beings are God’s creation, growth and development can go on forever in one’s own as well as in others’ culture. This is to be positively appreciated. According to the Leavers, God made humans for the world, in the same way He made salmon, sparrows and rabbits for the world; this seems to have worked pretty well so far, and so we can take it easy and leave the running of the world to God. The world is in fact God’s garden, the Garden of Eden.

*Its Method: Limited Competition*

The world in this story also will not be the place of perfect peace and harmony, and portrayed as the “Kingdom of God” for Christians or “Ramarajya” for Hindus. We cannot imagine this world to be a place of peaceful co-existence. In a world where we need to excel, some amount of limited and healthy competition and rivalry may be acceptable. So there is scope and need for the law of limited competition (Quinn 1997b: 252-253). But there would be clear limits on the limited competition so that it does not become unlimited. There would also be general laws guiding the growth of life, and the laws would be derived from life and not from parliaments (Quinn 1997a: 85). Certainly, human beings will not play the role of annihilators (Quinn 1997a: 87ff).<sup>20</sup> That said, there could be, sometimes, “erratic retaliation” to make the other aware of one’s own existence (Quinn 1997a: 110).<sup>21</sup> Such an “erratic retaliatory strategy” has been found to be viable and community sustaining from the very beginning of life (Quinn 1997a: 106).

*Its Law: Sustainable Growth*

Unlike the law of unlimited growth, the law followed here is that of sustainability and viability. It is a law that has been in existence for the last three million years, and proved to be viable.<sup>22</sup> This law of sustainability is in-built in the (evolutionary) mechanism of the growth of biological life, and the role of human beings is to discover this law and to live in accordance with it. Thus, the ecological concerns of today will be significant here, and not derived from an anthropological but cosmic perspective.

*Its Way: Many Ways*

The exclusive claim that there is only one right way, the Leaver's way, is not made by them. Since other ways are acknowledged, space is provided in which other cultures can live and flourish in their own ways (Quinn 1995: 246). Respect for diversity is encouraged. Diversity is seen as a survival factor for the community and is therefore prized. The problems emerging from plurality and diversity are tackled, and not denied and allowed to grow out of proportion such that they seemingly explode. Each society is allowed to live in the way it prefers without canonising one particular way as "the way" for the whole human community. The success of this way of life is affirmed by the existence of human beings for three million years without being colonized.<sup>23</sup>

The colonized people were never obsessed with the delusion that what they were doing was right. For example, they never insisted that everyone in the entire world had to practise agriculture, and that every last square yard of the planet had to be devoted to it. They said to the hunters: "You want to be hunter gatherers? That is fine with us. That's great. We want to be agriculturists. You be hunter-gatherers and we'll be agriculturists. We do not pretend to know which way is right. We just know which way we prefer" (Quinn 1995)<sup>24</sup> and maybe we can learn from you.

*Its Task: To Shepherd*

Since human beings are in the world, their task is to live according to the laws of God, and not according to the laws invented by them. In the Takers' paradigm, it is clear that the laws of God are the laws of life.

What is required, then, is a healthy respect for the world and for other living creatures and societies. The particular task of a community or society is to be a trailblazer or pathfinder in the full development of other cultures and the universe (Quinn 1995:242f). One can certainly invite the other cultures to learn from the discoveries made by one's own community, but cannot enforce that learning. Space must be provided for the other communities to live the way they prefer, so long as their actions are not detrimental to the common good of the "community of life". Thus, human

beings are called to be a shepherd and guide to the other communities of humans as well as those of the animals.

*Its Consequence: Fair and Viable Life*

The consequence of such a new story cannot be totally imagined. It can, however, be maintained that such a story leads to more humanization, and freedom and opportunity for all communities to shape their life and destiny the way they see fit. Mutual enrichment and dialogue, and not intolerance and annihilation of groups, be they political, economic, cultural or religious, would be the guiding principle and the practical consequence of such a story. The tensions that inevitably arise would be solved in ways, which are fair to the human societies concerned.

## CONCLUSION

For a society attempting to go beyond the colonial past, the challenge is not just to revise the old story, and nor to modify it or even to improve on it. The challenge is to create a new story. A new story based on a different premise, and engaging different methods, tasks and goals. Such a story can lead us to a society with a different dream, vision and culture. Only such a story can give us the impetus to build a truly liberated society. Otherwise, the danger is that colonization will continue to exist in different forms (e.g., cultural, financial or religious colonization instead of the usual political kind) or in different modes (e.g., where merely the actors or agents of colonization will change, but the process of colonization goes on). Going beyond colonization calls for a new dream and a new story, which can be enacted only by a new culture. It is a mistake to think that the new story of liberation (or Leavers) would be a story of turning the clock back or of denying scientific progress. It does not lead us merely to a utopian world of primitiveness.

Such a culture could be as or more technologically advanced as today's culture.<sup>25</sup> It would not be improper for such a society to delve into the galaxies to probe the inexplicable mysteries of the cosmos. The motive must not be to "conquer" and "colonize" but to "encounter" and to "relate". It would be a technological advancement with a "human face" (or better with a "cosmic heart") that can respect the other and encourage the other to be itself.

Therefore, the challenge for us is to dream a story which is more humane and adequate so that we can face the challenges of our present civilization, all of which is unlike that of the Takers', and then enact that story. The call is to have a re-vision of the whole cosmic adventure so that we can live in tune with the cosmic rhythm. The process of liberation calls for a new mode of living, a new narration of a story and a new enactment of this story.

That is the challenge before human beings today: To realize the story we are enacting and formulate collectively a new story that reclaims our past heritage and opens us to new possibilities. We need to remember we are the story-tellers and story-enactors. We live out the story given to us by our particular culture and we have also the innate capability to go beyond the narrow stories told to us.

Can we make more humane and adequate stories for ourselves? This takes us to the larger question of myths, which are complex elaborations or stories.

## NOTES

1. This chapter is based on the course I gave at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India in 1997 entitled “An Alternative Vision of Humanity”.

2. This has quite a lot to do with the recent studies on story, myth, and metaphor. Though we are appreciative of “story-theology” we do not make any explicit reference to it in this article. This article does not belong to the category of story-theology. Here story is seen as more primordial.

3. More about the author and the ideas could be found in the very informative web site <http://www.ishmael.org>. Detailed description of the fans club, of the universities where courses based on Ishmael are given and of the possible ways of supporting this venture are given in the same site. It might be noted that Ishmael operates basically on the two categories of *Leavers* and *Takers* and their different stories. Leavers are those who are left out of the race, the conquered, the uncivilized, the primitive and the Takers are the conquerors, the civilized. This article does not equate the Takers with the colonizers nor the Leavers with the colonized people. But we assume that the colonizers’ story is linked to the Takers and a decolonizing story could draw its inspiration from Leavers story.

4. See also Pandikattu (2000) for another elaborate discussion of story, myth and symbol.

5. Thus through the story the people have been given an explanation of how things around them came to be this way, and this stills their alarm. This provides them with a sense of justification for the calamities they inflict on others and on themselves. This explanation covers everything, including the deterioration of the ozone layer, the pollution of the oceans, the destruction of the rain forest, child molestation, subjugation of millions, slave trade, inhuman flesh and drug trafficking!

6. It may be noted here that by story we understand here not the story of the individual lives; but we mean the story given to the whole community by the culture. It is this larger story with its plot that gives each individual a role, an identity and meaning. It is this story that enables the individual to live in the community. Such a story is intimately linked to the culture.

7. Such an understanding could be compared to that of a *Weltanschauung* or horizon of understanding or living. A *Weltanschauung*,

like a horizon is something beyond the grasp of the person concerned, but he or she is profoundly influenced by it. Cf. Coreth 1994, 54.

8. Obviously the choice of leaving the country is practically ruled out in the case of the wider story that is being enacted by the larger world community of colonizers.

9. It may be noted that the author D. Quinn uses the two terms *Takers* and *Leavers* to denote the two types of stories prevalent in our world. We take liberty to identify the features *Takers* (conquerors, civilized, survivors or the “normal,” natural people who have existed on the earth for about 3 million years) to be that of *Leavers* (defeated, vanquished, “uncivilized”, primitive people) to be that of the colonized. We do not assume that the colonized are always the *Leavers*.

10. Note the similarity with the conquering of the outer space mentioned in the introduction.

11. Cf. Quinn (1995: 126-127). These rules are adapted from the life style of the *Takers*’ as given by Quinn.

12. In *My Ishmael* (Quinn 1997) Quinn observes that our modern society (or for that matter, the society of capitalists) is the only society which keeps food under lock. This control of food enables the society to maintain itself. In other societies where food is not kept locked up but freely available, as for animals and birds, people cannot be forced to live this one way of exploitation. See Quinn 1997 50-57.

13. There is a fourth law mentioned by Quinn as characteristic of the *Taker* civilization, that is, storing food for the future. He remarks that the lion does not kill a second gazelle to save for tomorrow, but the *Takers* do.

14. We assume that the story of the “*Leavers*” as told in *Ishmael* will foot the bill here. We assume that the *Leavers*’ paradigm could be equated to that of the “natural” way of life. Further, it may be noted that when India exploded a nuclear bomb it was playing according to the rules of the game set up by the industrialised, nuclear powers. By this explosion India became part of the nuclear club following the rules of their game. Defeat and success in a game (or war) belong to the set norms of the game and defeat does not enable you to exit from the game. Due to lack of space we do not elaborate that this story of the *Takers* (or colonizers) is a self-defeating story leading to the utter destruction not only of their own culture but also of the whole living planet. More could be found in *Ishmael*, chapter 6, where the colonizers civilization is compared to a flying contraption made out of only pedal and falling from a top clip. While it falls the occupant thinks that he or she is flying without imaging the impending doom.

15. Further it may be remarked that the story of the colonizers had its origin about 10,000 years ago when one group of people took up agriculture in the Fertile Crescent. This story cannot have a future since it has inevitably led to the utter destruction not only of its own culture but also of the entire living world. Therefore the only way to get out of the story of the colonizers is to live a radically different story.

We cannot modify the story of the Takers and make it a Leavers' one. That would be like adding a new vocabulary to make a new language. Such a counter-story would be absorbed by the story of the colonizers in due time.

Learning the new story of the Leavers is like learning to speak a totally different language with radically different linguistic and grammatical rules. This is a new way of looking at the world, a new way of living in the world, a different way of being. The encouraging aspect of this is that such a story (or more properly, stories) is about three million years old, the stories which are as old as human beings, and the stories which make human life on the earth sustainable, viable and humanizing.

16. It may be noted that some of the features of Indian Independence could be seen as forming part of such a different story. The way Mahatma Gandhiji got independence for India does not fully fit in with the Colonizer's story as perfected by the British. Facing bullets with bare hands or using non-violence to fight the mighty English do speak of another story by which Gandhi lived.

17. We need to keep in mind that ours is not really a narrow and parochial understanding of God, but an all-embracing, cautious and open one, which we will be elaborating in the latter chapters.

18. This could be compared to the role of *Dasein* in the two phases of Martin Heidegger.

19. It may be noted that the "gods" of Ishmael are being replaced by the author by God from a Christian perspective.

20. The general law could be "give as good as you get" and "Don't be too predictable." An elaborate discussion is found in Quinn (1997a: 87-111).

21. By 'erratic retaliation' is meant retaliation to one event but in unexpected ways and at unforeseen times. The retaliation cannot be fully predicted by the enemy. This keeps the surprise in retaliation making the attacker not fully sure of the mode of response. So it is implied that the method of competition, as long as it does not become a cut-throat one, is tolerated or even needed in every community of life.

22. This is the claim made by D. Quinn. According to him the Leaver story has been enacted from the very beginning of human appearance. We assume this to be true and assert that such a Leavers' story could lead to a decolonizing story.

23. This is an assumption we make. We think we are right to assume that colonization with its ugly face is of very recent origin.

24. Here we are again assuming that the colonized were not acting out the Takers' story, but the Leavers' story. Even if it is not historically right our assumption it is that only a Leavers' story could serve as a paradigm for a liberating story. The Takers' story leading to colonization can never serve as the paradigm for the Leavers' story.

25. There is not much space to elaborate this point. It must be affirmed that the marvelous technological advancement of our society has to

do with its story, but it is possible to have a still more technologically advanced and morally humane society which is enacting a different story.



## CHAPTER II

### THE MYTH-MAKER: COMMON SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

“Myths are like stars; you will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the seafaring person on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them you will reach your destiny.” ~Carl Schurz

“I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge – myth is more potent than history – dreams are more powerful than facts – hope always triumphs over experience – laughter is the cure for grief – love is stronger than death” ~Robert Fulghum

“Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths.” ~Joseph Campbell

Closely related to stories are myths. This chapter takes up the larger issue of the myths that humans have created that form human culture. Myths provide meaning and significance to our lives by framing our lives in a larger picture. The existential and archaeological myths are means by which humans try to reconcile the paradoxical dimensions of life. Since myths enable us to live the reality of contradictions meaningfully through providing ideals to live by, myths may be considered as more classical and elaborate stories. Based on Michael Ende’s classical and popular novel, *Momo*, this chapter enables us to appreciate the mythical dimension of our lives, and enable us to overcome evil and make human life essentially dynamic and open to new possibilities. Here we look at human beings as myth-makers.

Humans live in time and space, and in the process of living create their history and culture. Humans live in a relationship of meaning and formulate their own personal and collective destiny. This network of time, space, culture, meaning and destiny give rise to the myth humans live by! Those myths enable them to make their lives significant. Myth enables people to relish paradoxical human life more meaningfully and in turn shapes people’s vision and goal.

In this chapter we try to see one of the myths of modern times as articulated in the best-seller novel of Michael Ende: *Momo* (Ende 1986).<sup>1</sup> We shall broadly see the mythic elements of *Momo*, and see its relevance for modern society. Since *Momo*<sup>2</sup> is an extremely stimulating and captivating novel with an elaborate plot, some arbitrary selection of events have to be made to substantiate our thesis. Our aim is to choose events from the plot, and sometimes arbitrarily, to indicate the line of our

thinking. We attempt to understand the salient features in *Momo*, which enables us to visualize it as a modern myth.

This chapter is not going to be a critique of *Momo* or of Michael Ende's philosophy. It is not even a systematic presentation of the novel. It is basically an invitation to appreciate *Momo's* depth of dimension as a myth. It is an invitation to be open to the mythical truth in *Momo*, which is more profound than the historical concerns that we are more familiar with. Such openness to the mythic *Momo* will, we hope, enrich our lives and make them more profound and significant.

As such, the mythical insights of this section are drawn only from the novel, *Momo*. No other books of Ende's are referred to. It is also not presupposed that the reader has a detailed knowledge of the novel. A general understanding of it will be enough to appreciate the logic of the arguments. However, it is hoped that every careful reader, even without familiarity with *Momo*, will be able to understand the basic dynamics of the novel and the flow of the argument. In this chapter, we only seek to establish coherence within the plot of *Momo* and unmask its mythical dimension. For this purpose, we select certain fundamental events and insights of the novel rather arbitrarily.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, we try to articulate a deeper and more significant understanding of myths. Such a positive understanding will enable us to appreciate the mythical aspects of *Momo*, which are treated in the second part. In the final part, we see the significance of the mythical *Momo* for modern humans.

## **A CREATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF MYTHS**

We humans have a cosmic tradition dating back to about 13.78 billion years, when the Big Bang gave rise to the universe of today! Roughly 4.5 billion years ago, the solar system formed. Approximately 4.5 million years ago, humans (*Homo sapiens*) evolved. And about 20,000 years ago, the Neanderthals sat around the fire at night watching shadows and listening to the sounds from far off. The Neanderthals would be trying to make sense of life, but more importantly, of death. They would ask: "How did dead people appear in our sleep, in our dreams? What can be made of our own impending deaths?" To honor those who died, Neanderthals buried their dead with flowers and beads. They also took care of the sick and elderly until death. To understand death through ritual and ceremony, Neanderthals gave us their greatest gift: mythology. This method of understanding has endured until today, although in different forms! We modern humans are not very much different from the Neanderthals!<sup>3</sup>

The word "*mythos*" is related to Greek and means "to be spoken with the mouth". All myths are related to speaking in its deepest sense. They are fundamentally, if not historically, true and lead to the highest of truths. The myths and their many facets have given birth to religion, mysticism, spirituality, philosophy or in short, to the different articulations of the

human quest for meaning. Myth is humanity's basic means of communicating our understanding of the cosmos and answering the basic why and how questions regarding the birth, life and death of humans as well as the rhythms of nature.

Mythology lives and breathes in us. More accurately, it is we who live and breathe our myths. Myth constitutes our philosophy, psychology and our very existence. We have been imprinted with certain fears and faiths that have remained in our collective unconscious for thousands of years. Mythology is the language of the universe of rituals, ceremonies and symbols. They are the enactments of our desire to have mystical experiences, and communion with God. With and through myths we bathe ourselves in the Mystery of life.

#### *The Myth as Spiritual Metaphor*

The crucial fact about mythology is that it is a spiritual metaphor. Myth is a guidepost to a higher truth or understanding, which, if taken literally, destroys its original function and meaning. For example, the myth of Adam and Eve, is a myth describing how humans became conscious and especially conscious of evil. The story depicts how Eve convinced Adam to eat the apple, and which lead to humans being thrown out of paradise. A literal interpretation of this myth has led generations of people to believe women are the source of all evil and think of their suffering in childbirth as a just punishment. By reading this myth exegetically and interpreting it, we learn a great deal. For example, the serpent in the story, and across many Mediterranean cultures, with the exception of the Old Testament, represents wisdom, which symbolizes the feminine goddess of power and rebirth because it sheds its skin. Also, we learn the tree is the Tree of Life and the World Tree, found in almost every culture, is understood as the link between the conscious and unconscious, the under-world and the upper-world. Last, by eating the apple, Eve made humans almost godlike by knowing good and evil. This mythic thread might point to the Divine is within us. This understanding of myth as elaborated by Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell and Paul Ricoeur, goes against the anti-historical or rational interpretations of myths, that was fashionable few decades ago. As opposed to this view we know today that we make myths and myths make us.<sup>4</sup>

Carl Jung is the forerunner of *Depth Psychology*, which is the science of reconciling the unconscious and conscious halves of the human psyche. In his study of neurosis through dream analysis and spontaneous artistic expression, Jung discovered recurring symbolic themes that he recognized as existent in all cultures and remaining unaffected by the boundaries of time and space. These shared symbols or *archetypes* which are irrepressible, unconscious, pre-existing forms seem to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche, and can manifest themselves spontaneously anywhere and at any time. Jung explained that this global sharing of specific symbols is the result of a collective unconscious and that "the further we delve into the

origins of a collective image... the more we uncover a seemingly unending web of archetypal patterns that before modern times were never the object of conscious reflection". Archetypes, expressed boundlessly across cultures, are explained by Jung to be the result of synchronistic influences where there is a meaningful link, by a convergence of outer and inner events that are not themselves causally connected.

Jung felt that the psyche provides a religious function in that it receives divine inspiration and expresses it in words or shapes it into art. Actually, no religious symbol has ever totally comprehended the true reality of our human life. Campbell, Jung and Ricoeur suggest that we create new myths because the creative act allows us to delve into and become aware of the unconscious which initially created symbols that have lasted a millennium and have bound us physically and psychically. As Campbell explained in relation to Jung, the mythical image "lies at the depth of the unconscious where man is no longer a distinct individual, but his mind widens out and merges into the mind of mankind, not the conscious mind, but the unconscious mind of mankind, where we are all the same."

#### *Myth as Discovering Meaning*

Emile Durkheim, a noted sociologist and mythologist, explained that myth exists as a social institution that orders or regulates rituals, economy, history and the meaning structures of society.<sup>5</sup> He described myth as the unconscious of society. In other words, myth is a global way of thinking through things, and from which all social agendas emerge. Campbell maintains that we are all living (or enacting) a myth. So if we do not figure out what our myth is, we may be forced to live it against our will. He also warns us that a society that takes its myths literally is suffocating itself. Studying mythical symbols is one form of bringing back the wonderfully divine, if not mystical, experience of realizing that all life is connected, at the very least, at an unconscious level.

Campbell cites four purposes of myth: 1. To awaken wonder by putting us back in touch with the child within. 2. To fill all corners or niches with an image of the Mystery. 3. To validate social order; and 4. To teach us how to conduct ourselves during the stages of our lives. We can further add another purpose: 5. Myths enable us to live the reality of contradictions meaningfully by giving us ideals to live by!

In short, through myths we make sense of our reality. Myth provides us with meanings, enables us to organize even the contradictory experiences of our lives and makes our lives bearable. It explains our experiences, justifies our actions to ourselves and explains our failures and tragedies. Thus, it has basically mediating and motivating functions. Myths also mediate the infinite through the finite. It situates us in the vast cosmic and divine background, wherein we can find the significance of our own selves. Our puny human actions are magnified and enriched because of the cosmic and divine significances attached to them. It also motivates our

actions, and enables us to live a meaningful life within a horizon of broader significance. It is in such a horizon that we are encouraged to act. Every action, originating from a mythical experience, becomes unique and infinitely more meaningful at least for the actor of the myth.

When Andrew Greeley wrote *The Jesus Myth* (Greeley 1971),<sup>6</sup> he had to do some explaining. Greeley had to defend himself against the popular misconception that a myth has to be paraded against history and that myths are merely fanciful narratives. He equates myth with symbol, and wrote, that religion appears “first of all in symbols, in dense, complex, multi-layered, polyvalent pictures, stories and rituals because religion takes its origin from experience, and religious communication is primarily designed to lead to the replication of experience” (Greeley 1971: 24-25). In such a replication of experience, life becomes glorified and significant. Seen in this context, Jesus is a myth for Christians because he enables them to live more authentically by trying to approach the original liberative experience of his resurrection. In this way, Jesus’ story has “the grandeur of a myth, that is to say, it has more meaning than a true story” (Greeley 1971: 236). Our treatment of *Momo* as a myth also follows similar lines of thought. We affirm that *Momo* as a myth today has more profundity since it mediates a truth more intensely than historical truth. The truth mediated is an existential one; one unconsciously lived out in the day to day experiences of a human culture.

A myth may be contrasted with the parabolic or the prophetic expressions in a society. A prophet tries to break the old patterns of living and usher in a new world, and a more just society. A myth tries to make the present world liveable. It tries to bring in order and harmony to our existential and paradoxical world. As a myth, *Momo* is a creator of a counter culture, which permeates into the consciousness of the masses, and becomes a dream and divinity for the people.<sup>7</sup> The most important aspect of *Momo*’s mythical role is in showing that the counter culture it created is viable, or liveable, in spite of its few contradictions. By tying up the loose ends of the counter culture in his own life he has presented an ideal to humanity: an ideal which remains most of the time unattainable and, nevertheless, inspiring and enabling people to live! An ideal for us today! A Fantasy that is more real than reality!<sup>8</sup>

Almost every myth follows the general dynamics of a drama with a universal plot. That means the myth presents an initial problem, a crucial struggle with the villain and a mythic victory that is achieved mainly by the hero. Every myth also deals with human paradoxes, and portrays the divine as a player in the dreams presented and inviting us to transcend our mundane lives to reach a more profound life.

After having analyzed briefly the critical and creative role of myths in human consciousness, we now proceed to the study of the mythical elements of *Momo*. Briefly, we shall review *Momo*’s critique of the present day culture in terms of the dynamics of myth.

## MOMO'S CRITIQUE OF OUR CULTURE

The mythical (or rather prophetic) character of Momo is most notable by the virulent attack of the culture of the time, which is symbolized by the grey men. That Momo's life style was totally opposed to the dominant capitalist culture is obvious, and does not need elaboration here.<sup>9</sup> What we want to see in this section briefly is what we believe to be the main basis and strength of Momo's criticism of our contemporary culture. Since the basis and the strength of the criticism is the very fundament of our human existence, it is assumed that such a criticism is all the more poignant and significant.

### *The Basis: Total Humanness*

Momo's criticism of the grey men, and her life in general, is based on her life strategy or will for total humanness. This strategy of humanness, with its natural spontaneity and ingenuous creativity, was not the product of a conscious decision but one born out of her innocent nature.

Momo was not a brave heroin who did not know fear or anxiety. She was afraid of many things, including the grey men, and we as sympathetic readers suffer with her many a time as she expresses uncertainty and doubt. Momo was also concerned about her friends. Indeed, all of Momo's fear and anxiety makes her truly human and authentic.

It was Momo's capacity to listen – another genuine human quality – that enabled her to solve many problems. She could listen to the old and sick, to her companions and even to the birds. By listening, she could heal and reconcile. It was this listening that enabled her to gather friends and made her so popular. Though innocent and weak, Momo became powerful through her natural human talent of listening, which she did through her heart. She touched people and made them open their own hearts to her. That was her truly human quality.

In Momo's presence, others felt at home. Others felt that she was simply there for them. Even in her poverty and simplicity, others felt needed. That was the strength of her character. That was her way of being human. Her heart was open to others, and so her presence comforted others because she was transparent to them.

So we may hold that it was Momo's humanness – simple, sincere and spontaneous – that made her abhor the life style propagated by the grey men. Her criticism of the grey men was based on her humanness. Even in her fear and anxiety, she just could not sacrifice her basic humanness. So her response was total and radical. By opposing the grey men, her only weapon was the very being of herself – her human nature.

*The Strength: Inner Joy*

Along with her staunch humanness, Momo's critique of that culture was based on her own inner nature and on an inner joy. This inner joy and peace, based on her spontaneous human nature, was her most precious gift. This precious possession of Momo could not be taken away from her, in spite of all the efforts of the grey men.

She was a child, and so play came naturally to her. She enjoyed and relished playing with her friends and ordinary toys. Playing not only made her happy, but also enabled her to relate with joy to her comrades. Momo found many friends and related to many grown-ups through her natural sense of play.

This joy was also shown in the trust she radiated. She trusted her companions, the villagers and, surprisingly, even the grey men. Even when she missed her friends, for a long time she never gave up her innocent trust. Since her trust emerged from her childlike joy, there was nothing the grey men could do to root it out! Her basic trust flowed from her spontaneous nature of relating to people.

This joy and trust led Momo to a life of concern, creativity and spontaneity. She was concerned with people. She was creative in her approach in communicating with people, and genuine in her spontaneous response to them.

Such an attitude invited co-operation from others. This co-operation was not limited to play alone, but to other realms of life too. Her attitude and approach enhanced the community atmosphere, and led to a more humane and joyous togetherness. That was the strength on which she based her life. Her criticism of the grey men's life style, mostly unconscious and unthematic, grew out of her life.

So these two characteristics --- humanness and inner joy - make *Momo's* criticism of today's world valuable and virulent. These two characteristics made Momo the unique person that she was: a friend of fantasy, a leader with vision, a mystic on a mission. These same characteristics are threats to the grey men's culture. So Momo's "strength obviously does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will" (Ende 1986). Such a power or strength capable of destroying empires and kingdoms is precisely what makes it truly mythical for us.

## **MOMO AS A MYTHIC SAVIOUR**

In this section we shall analyse the mythic dynamics present in the novel, *Momo*, which will enable us to appreciate the mythic dimension of *Momo* the novel and the name of the story's main protagonist. We shall see how the figure of Momo fits in very well with a typical mythic hero or savior. For this purpose we shall analyse the mythic dimensions of the plot with the initial problem, a crucial struggle and a mythic victory found in

*Momo*. Since myths are also intimately related to religion, we shall also briefly reference religious parallelism to these mythical dimensions, without claiming that *Momo* is a religious novel.

#### *The Universal Problem*

The background problem is described in the first part of the novel. The second part presents the problem as being brought in by the grey men. A careful observation of the presentation of the problem leaves no one in doubt that the problem is not limited to any particular group. It is not even limited to the obvious problem of time. The referent of the problem is humanity at large. The content of the problem goes beyond that of “stealing time.”

The problem which begins with the saving of time extends itself to a problem of human meaninglessness and inner contradiction. It can further be elaborated to have dimensions of the problem of evil and of suffering, which have affected humanity perennially. The basic dissatisfaction and unhappiness in the human being is presented here, starting with the simple problem of time. It is not merely a problem of “more haste and less speed” or that of “three lunches and no answers.” Rather it is the deep existential problem of the suffering and evil in society as the product of human beings themselves. The wider problem of the unfulfilled life is depicted by the “stolen time” or “stolen life.”

That the problem is not limited to the local village around the amphitheater is clearly raised in the third part. The “Nowhere House” itself indicates such a widening of the frame of reference of the problem. By speaking of the “nowhere house,” the reader is reminded of the common expression of “utopia,” and neither of them deal with any concrete location but extend to the whole place.

The initial problem of time is further universalized in the third part where the entire human freedom and dignity is threatened. The siege around the “nowhere house” could form a powerful symbol of the today’s humanity. The siege very well represents our civilization in bondage, which is threatened from the outside and dominated from the inside. It is our own society! The pursuers, the grey men, could stand for the “enslaving” agents in this civilization – the source of evil and suffering.

In religious terms, the initial problem can very well be seen as a non-redeemed state of present day human beings. The primeval innocence of human beings is lost and evil is introduced into the world by active agents of evil (personalized as Satan or Devil). Such a situation cries out for a solution, a “savior.” In Hinduism, this situation of the world is described as *Maya* or ignorance. Christian notions of original sin and “fall” also approximate this existential human situation.<sup>10</sup>

### *A Crucial Struggle*

The second dynamics of a myth – the struggle – is very evident in the *Momo*. In the course of the development in the village that is *Momo*'s setting, the struggle becomes inevitable because the initial primeval state of innocence is lost. Paradise is lost and Bondage has set in. It overpowers human beings who become slaves (or mere tools) in the hands of the “evil” forces, the grey men. And humans find themselves in a situation of helplessness.

Though the humans are held in bondage, their basic openness to human values is not totally eliminated. In fact, it is assumed that basic humanness cannot be eliminated totally, because evil is, according to the novel, non-existing, although in itself it is very powerful. The persons like Bepo, Guido and the children represent this positive aspect in the drama.

The struggle portrayed in the novel has ramifying consequences. It spreads to all the dimensions of human existence. The grey men are perfect and meticulous planners in pursuing their case, but they simply cannot overcome the basic goodness in the world. Still, many of the steps the grey men take succeed, and so they store up an enormous amount of resources.

The positive and life giving forces wake up from their dormancy. For example, the demonstration taken up by the students could be termed as the beginning of the struggle. This struggle is actively encouraged and supported by the benevolent Dr. Hora, who represents forces friendly to the human race. The human race is represented by Momo herself. So, in this scenario, the “divine” comes to the aid of the mortals and the interplay of the divine with the human, a feature in any mythology, comes to the fore in this crucial struggle.

The crucial struggle in *Momo* reaches its climax in chapters 17 to 20. The picturesque representation of the struggle is not merely imaginative, but also existential. It captures many elements of the fascination of evil in human lives – especially in its social dimension. It describes a warlike situation in the human race that calls for critical undertakings. A prophet or a priest has to take a decisive stand against the forces of dehumanization. In the person of Momo, though she herself is weak and tender, such a demonstrative stand is successfully accomplished.

Religiously speaking, by and large, the human situation today has become life threatening. Something drastic has to happen to redeem the world. “*Adharma (injustice)* reigns supreme.” Such a situation demands an *Avatara (incarnation)*. Krishna, Rama or Jesus, a priest or prophet with divine power, must appear. S/he must participate in the daily life of the human beings and with them struggle against the forces of evil or *maya*. The cosmic and non-human forces can contribute to this struggle (e.g., Cassiopeia which represents God's messenger or human conscience).

*A Mythic Victory*

The third and final dynamics of the myth – that of the victory over the dehumanizing forces and the creation of a just and peaceful human existence – is the climax of any mythic narrative. The struggle is crucial for the “redemption” and continued survival of humanity. The future of the whole of humanity is at stake. This struggle has to lead to a final victory.

This victory, almost generally, is not brought about only by human means. Non-human or cosmic forces are involved. And Dr. Hora is a clear example of this. Though there are other cosmic agents helping Dr. Hora, human participation is crucial and necessary. Divine forces alone cannot achieve this victory.

So a savior figure is called for, and Momo fulfils that role, although he/she could be a mediator (like Jesus, Rama or Krishna), a prophet, a priest or all of these. Normally, such a savior is an extra-ordinary figure. Again, such a savior figure in almost every myth is a male. In *Momo*, the savior is an ordinary person: Even a helpless and weak girl!

But it has also clearly cosmic consequences. The water lily and the tortoise are indications of this in *Momo*. So, the final victory has not just human significance, but the whole universe participates in the victory dance. The victory is an authentication of the cosmic dynamism towards life and wholeness, and so more than human values are involved in the victory.

That is why, normally, the victory achieved is a call to return to nature; a simple way of living; a more spontaneous life style. The creative, playful and affective elements are very much involved both in the victory and in the renewed way of life after the victory.

Such victories cannot be achieved merely by meticulous planning, judicious systematizing or painstaking organization alone. The means used by the grey men cannot be those employed for the final victory.

The four crucial elements contributing to the final mythic victory are: The human (Bepo, Guido), the human child (Momo, children), the heart of the human (tortoise, water lily) and the supra-human or the universal (the almost Divine Hora). Such a victory, involving all of these, is tremendously fascinating and life-giving for humans and the cosmos.

In religious terms, it is clear that the final victory is assured and is a tremendously significant event. In Hinduism, the victory is denoted by *nirvana*, the absolute identification of everything with the divine (*advaita*). For Christianity, this victory is a resurrection, and not just that of human beings but of the whole cosmos. The kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus is the sign of this victorious life.

**CONCLUSION: A MYTH RELEVANT EVEN IN FAILURE**

So far, we have reviewed the mythical dimensions of *Momo*, which follows the general dynamics of a myth. In this concluding section, we shall

see *Momo*'s significance for modern human beings.

An impartial look at today's world will convince us that the world of *Momo* is on the decline today. Such a life is losing its ground. *Momo*'s lifestyle is failing, or more adequately, our civilization is failing us. *Momo*'s vision. Michael Ende would recoil in his grave at some of today's happenings! But then that was the fate of almost all of our great leaders, religious mystics and mythical figures. So, the failure of *Momo*'s vision in today's world does not really reflect the elimination of the mythical dimension or its continued significance for us. It does not at all negate *Momo*'s vision and values.

Still, it may be noted that today there is a resurgence of interest for *Momo*'s vision of life. The tendency in our world to return to nature is much more than a mere fad. The search for a more viable way of living has crept into the consciousness of the human race. Literature, talks, seminars and conferences are conducted to foster viable and more natural ways of living. Today, the need for such a vision has crept into the human consciousness. Spontaneity and creativity have found their way in today's spiritual movements and psychological methods. *Momo* still strikes a chord in the hearts of millions, even for those who have never heard of the novel. Hence, *Momo* is not read today only as children's fiction! It is taken seriously and lived out unconsciously (Ende 1986).

*Momo*'s mythical vision may not be explicitly in the consciousness of the modern world. It may be reviled, but it cannot be forgotten. It may be rebuked, but cannot be ignored. And, sometimes, it may even be hated, but cannot be abandoned. *Momo* and her vision provide us with a background within which the meaning of human nature is constructed. It is true, *Momo* may not be an ideal that can be always put into practice.<sup>11</sup> Even if this ideal (or idol) fails sometimes, *Momo* becomes an ordinary person's extraordinary hero, her story a rudimentary myth. *Momo* provides the reader with a vision for a new counter culture for humanity.

*Momo* is a child who awakens, even today, a sense of wonder by putting us back in touch with the child — the quest for truth and wonder — within. *Momo*'s both transparent and enigmatic life fills all corners or niches of the human heart with an awareness of Mystery. *Momo*'s vision helps us to validate human social order. *Momo* as a novel gives some general guidelines to conduct ourselves during the stages of the growth of human consciousness. Further, *Momo*'s vision enables us to live the reality of contradictions that make up human life. It is a call to be truly human and deeply joyful in being human. These factors make the story of *Momo* a myth, a modern myth of joy, innocence and peace!

*Momo* may not be a myth for those one-dimensional persons who do not find any conflict in their lives that needs reconciling, nor for those who do not need to find meaning in life and neither for academicians who find meaning not by "living a myth but by making a living out of myths." Actually *Momo*'s life is not primarily meant to be philosophically analysed, but existentially encountered. The novel invites us to a broader

and deeper reality: To a counter culture! In this way, *Momo* remains the myth for the moderns: both for the mighty and the marginalized!

As a myth, *Momo* rekindles the basic human longing for life and love; it keeps the truth of human nature burning; it leaves the search for the fullness of life not stifled. As a myth, *Momo* gives human beings the confidence that humanity and human creativity will find victory. As a myth, *Momo* gives assurance to the one-dimensional civilization that fantasy, dreams and conscience are still vital for us!

Like a star, *Momo* shows us the way, although we will most probably never arrive at its ideal innocence. Like a star, it guides us and enlightens us, making our life more understandable, and making the paradoxical human situation a little more meaningful for ourselves. Like a star, *Momo* is a call for us to be totally human and to be totally joyful.

*Momo* enables us to see ourselves as humans seeking meaning and achieving victory over “evil,” with the help of cosmic forces and the unconscious dimensions of life. It is when we are in touch with the depth of ourselves, through mythic imagery, that we truly become ourselves. Understood thus, each one of us aspires to experience “salvation” or “wholeness” so we can truly become agents of such “wholeness” for others.

As myth-makers, humans have that urge to reconcile opposites, seek meaning and search for wholeness. In so doing, we shape our own lives in and through our daily existential dilemmas.

## NOTES

1. It may be noted that no actual quotations are given from this book in this chapter. Still it is the basis for this section.

2. *Momo* may refer both to the hero of the novel as well as to the novel. We try to distinguish between the two meanings by using italics when we refer to the novel. Most of the time the term ‘*Momo*’ refers to the novel.

3. The first part of this chapter is adapted from my “Gandhi as a Millennium Myth” in Pandikattu (2001).

4. For Paul Ricoeur’s treatment of myth see (Ricoeur 1971). See also Quinn (1995: 48-50). Saint Irenaeus has another interpretation. After all, the (inspired) biblical authors themselves made changes in the traditional myths which they borrowed from their neighbours.

5. There are diverse understandings of myth some of which are listed below. We may understand myth as the spiritual evolution of humankind which can be mapped and studied to find the differences and the similarities between cultures, places and time. Mythology is humankind’s way of honouring, loving, understanding and making holy the wonderful, miraculous order of the universe. Some of the various definitions of myths are: “Myths are facts of the mind made manifest in a fiction of matter.” (Maya Deren) “All variations of a myth are equally true.” (Claude Levi

Strauss). “Myth is sacred history.” (Mircea Eliade). “Myths guide, direct and lead others to the vast, often indecipherable language of the soul.” (Dr. Jeffrey Collins). “Mythology is a spiritual hologram. No matter what way a hologram is cut up or in how many pieces, each piece still has the full image. Each myth no matter how small contains the whole.” (Dr. Jeffrey Collins). “Myth is a metaphor that is transparent to transcendence.” (Emile Durkheim). “Myth is obsessive repetition of a few unconscious representations centred on sexuality.” (Dr. Sigmund Freud). “Myth is a symbolic story.” (Paul Ricoeur). “Myth is the song of the imagination, infinite and endless.” (Joseph Campbell).

6. See also the other books of Greeley related to myth like (Greeley 1971, 1972, 1973, 1989 and 1991). Greeley passed away on May 29, 2013.

7. In this sense Momo is prophetic (as against cultic) in ushering a new humanity. It may be noted that in this chapter Momo, without italics, is the child character in the novel *Momo*, written in italics.

8. See the next chapter when we deal with the dreaming and imagining aspect of human life.

9. We attempted precisely this in the previous chapter, where capitalists were identified as Takers.

10. It may be noted that many contemporary Christian thinkers offer relevant and creative interpretations of the original sin.

11. It may be remarked that all utopias (“nowhere land”), including Ramarajya, Proletarians, paradise or God’s Kingdom, are never fully attainable.



### CHAPTER III

## THE DREAMER: IMAGINATION AS ENABLING

“Imagination was given to man to compensate him for what he is not; a sense of humour to console him for what he is.” ~Francis Bacon

“You can kill a man but you can’t kill an idea.” ~Medgar Evers

“Love is a canvas furnished by Nature and embroidered by imagination.” ~Voltaire

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.” ~Albert Einstein

“A poet looks at the world the way a man looks at a woman.”  
~Wallace Stevens

“A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on.”  
~John F. Kennedy

Stories and myths, as we studied in the last chapters, are intimately linked to the creative imagination of humans. In this chapter, we want to appreciate the role imagination (or creative dreams) plays in our very self-understanding. Viewed from this perspective, we can say that imagination is crucial to our self-understanding. Only because we can dream and imagine are we able to create a world about which we can debate. It is this capacity of humans that enables us to become and widen our life horizons. Thus, imagination provides us with the potential to make our experiences fertile and our world creative. In this chapter, we perceive human beings as creative dreamers.

What is imagination, and how is it different from and related to reality? This is the main question we take up in this chapter. After studying the relationship between imagination and reality, we want to apply it to the religious field. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to appreciate the role imagination plays not just in fantasy, but also in understanding ourselves, which includes our relationship with God. Viewed from this perspective, we can say that imagination is crucial to our understanding, experience and encounter of God.

After relating reality to imagination, we analyze the views of Paul Ricoeur, and show that it is imagination that enables an appreciation of the reality of the universe. Based on this claim, we briefly see how even God can be positively and creatively understood as the power of the ingenious human imagination. The method we follow in this chapter is descriptive.

We base ourselves primarily on philosophical and narrative authors for substantiating our thesis. In fact, the term “God” is generic, and so no belief in God is presupposed to understand and appreciate the basic insights of this chapter.

**BEYOND REALITY AND IMAGINATION**

Our world is basically dualistic. We not only make practical distinctions between you and me and the past and future: Even our own very identity is dualistic – between that of body and soul, material and mental, earthly and spiritual. So, it is not surprising that in our day to day life, we make the following rather simplistic distinctions:

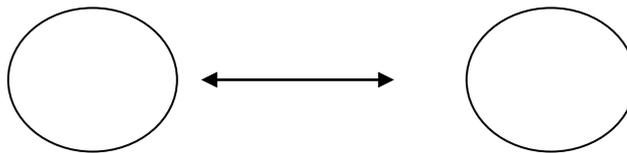
<b>SIGN</b>	<b>SYMBOL</b>
Concrete	General
Actual	Ideal
History	Fiction
Thinking	Meditation
Action	Reflection
Reflection	Contemplation
Real	Image
Factual	Imaginary
Object	Image
Reality	Imagination

*Chart 1: Sign vs Symbol*

By specifically dealing with the topic of imagination, and contrasting it with its opposite (real, history), we can show that there is more of fantasy in history than we imagine. There is more of imagination in reality than we dream of. There is more of imagination also in reason.<sup>1</sup>

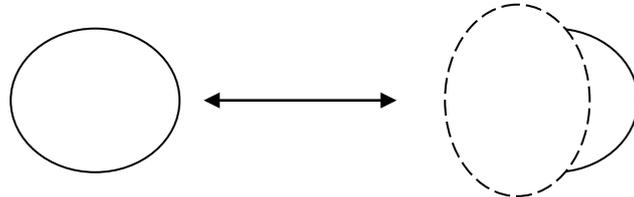
Let us base ourselves on a simple dualistic paradigm. According to the traditional view, “This world is but canvas to our imaginations” (Thoreau: 1985: 238). When we relate to someone (or something) the dualistic image (the picture theory of the early Wittgenstein) would denote it as:

- a. The reality of myself relates to the reality of object

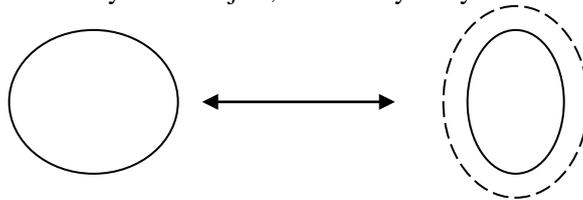


A little reflection takes us to a deeper level. We can ask the simple question: “How does imagination play a role here?” This takes us to the second stage, that is:

b. The reality of myself relates to the image (imagination) of the object. In the diagram the “reality” is denoted by solid lines and image (imagination) by dotted lines. The next stage could be visualized as:

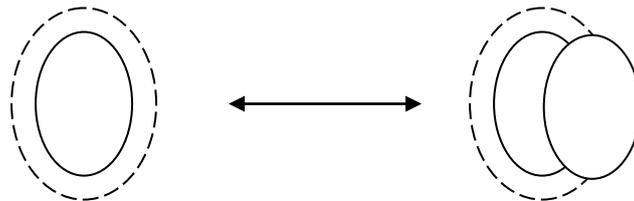


c. A slightly deeper reflection tells us that we are in fact relating not to our imagination of the reality, but to both. So reality of myself relates to the image *and* reality of the object, which may be symbolized as:

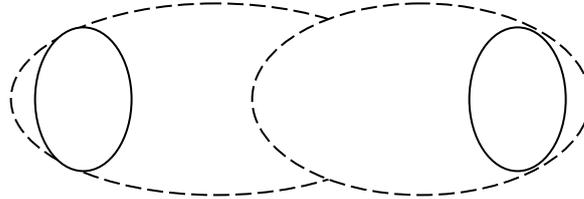


When we enquire further and the final stage is:

d. The image and reality of myself relates to the image and reality of the object



The process can still be made more complex. To make the situation manageable, we have to assume that the reality of myself and the object involve also the image (imagination) of myself. So our simple analysis has taken us beyond a naïve dualistic understanding of subject and object. This can be further extended to imply that reality consists of the empirical reality, non-empirical reality, the image of the empirical reality, the image of the non-empirical reality and so on. This understanding does not completely eliminate the distance between subject and object. The notion of “fusion of horizons” (Hans-Georg Gadamer) may serve to illustrate this case. In relating the horizon (not entity) that the subject is fuses with the horizon of the object and in this interaction new horizons emerge. Both the subject and object may be better understood as horizons, rather than individual entities. So we can speak of a “the whole nexus of associations, memories, and emotions” (Dryden 2004: 254). We could extend this analogy and speak of the fusion of the real and the imaginary, the fusion of reality and imagination which creates new reality.<sup>2</sup>



This is the nature of our understanding of reality and life. This is the greatness and depth of the consciousness that we uniquely possess.

### **THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION IN HUMAN LIFE**

Any talk of the future inevitably involves the use of the imagination. But imagination gets a bad press in the popular perception. The imagination is referred to derogatorily as something that is fanciful and not true. It is treated as having no practical value; it implies a sheer waste of time, which only the lazy squander their time to daydream about. Indeed, it may be an occupational therapy for the unemployed or underemployed. Or for that matter, it might be used as a professional tool by which writers of fiction earn their living. This is harmless as far as the world of fiction is concerned. But those who are smart and thrifty want to have nothing to do with the imagination. Their perception is that a dream world can hardly serve any purpose, especially when one faces the hard facts of life. At best, from this perspective, imagination distracts us from the business of living and at worst makes us lose ourselves in a world that is totally unreal and consistently capricious. Regardless, both cases portray an alienated and alienating world.

The philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, whose work attempts to retrieve the place that imagination should rightfully occupy in our value system, has shown that the imagination plays no small role in our lives in spite of the fact that we do not take it seriously.<sup>3</sup> Imagination is operative in our world in important ways. Were we to acknowledge its pragmatic priorities, indeed, the priorities in our value system would undergo dramatic change.

Ricoeur asserts that even works of history are not free of fiction, and in much the same way that fiction cannot entirely dispense with history. His discussion on the narrative function aims at the following:

- It is necessary to establish that there is more *fiction in history* than the positivist conception of history admits.

- Next, it must be shown that fiction in general, and narrative fiction in particular, is more *mimetic* than positivism allows.

- These two prior points being granted, we can suggest that the references of empirical narrative and fictional narrative *cross upon* what we provisionally can call historicity or the historical condition of the human being.<sup>4</sup>

It is the imaginative portrayal of the events of history that makes a historian great. History is built on facts, but facts alone do not constitute history. The framework of the historical narrative is not history, but the work of the historian's imagination.<sup>5</sup> The narrative gets revised as new facts emerge, but it should be noted that such a narrative is the real contribution of the historian.

Facts, it has been said, are like a sack that cannot stand unless it is filled up.<sup>6</sup> It is the imaginative narrative that makes stand – as many germane facts of history as possible. Individual facts, like individual bricks, have to become part of a definite pattern, and a definite structure so that they can participate in a more enduring significant status than they would as individual and unconnected facts.

As a matter of fact, though we are not conscious of it, we are led by it and fall a prey to our imagination in times of happiness and sorrow. It is the imagination that makes us look forward to the visit of a friend and dread the approach of something or someone unfriendly.

It may be noted that all learning requires the help not only of the memory, but also of the imagination. Memory helps retain the facts, but it is the imagination which contributes to understanding their significance. When facts are brought together through a connecting link, their significance stands out and this work of linking is the domain of the imagination. In our everyday lives we are all detectives. The way we put things together makes it possible to understand and not merely to classify them.

What precisely then is the role of the imagination? The noted Indologist, Francis X. D'Sa (D'Sa 2002: 94-98) holds that the "past" and the "future" are important factors in the process of understanding. The so-called facts of the past are never completely facts "neutrally" observed and "objectively" expressed. Ineluctably, the world of the reporter enters into the reporting. Historians study these reports and compare and contrast them with other similar reports with the intention of minimizing the subjective prejudices that they all contain. But historians can realize this task only by linking them with the help of their own universe of meaning. Similarly, whenever we recall the past with the aid of whatever "facts" we have collected, we too are linking them from within our universe of meaning. The "facts" of the past by themselves do not make sense. In order to understand them we need to connect them. This connection, constructed from within our universe of meaning, is again the work of the imagination.

Similarly, the role of the future in our lives brings out the way the imagination functions in an equally convincing manner. The consequences of the past as well as the state of the present, together, project a world that contrasts with our everyday world. But this joining together, as well as the contrasting, is *our* contribution, since it derives from within *our* universe of meaning. It is in and through the domain of the imagination that the world of the future is projected; it is in the same domain that contrast and comparison take place. From this challenge, correction and

complementation occur. Briefly then, the *way* we present the facts and look at the past and perceive the future is the work of the imagination.

Last but not least, the world of the imagination is very closely connected to the world of the emotions. Whoever and whatever appeals to the imagination also works up the emotions. This is not necessarily a positive aspect. One cannot judge a thing from its abuse. Emotions have an important function in life. They can supply much needed energy or they can sap the little energy that is at our disposal. Reason is an important aspect of our conscious life, as it can help guide the imagination and the emotions. In their turn, the imagination and emotions water and fertilize the dry, sterile world of reason so that the process of understanding avoids narrowness of vision and strives to be holistic.

Viewing the work of the imagination in a sober way, we can assert that the world of fancies, with which the popular world credits it, is not the only contribution of the imagination. All the important aspects of being human (i.e., religion, human relations, understanding, etc.) are made possible by the assistance of the imagination. Since the Enlightenment, so much exclusive stress has been placed on the function of reason that we have developed severe suspicions about the world of the imagination. In consequence along with the imagination, emotions too have been banished from the process of understanding.

Needless to say, the imagination is very actively involved in all this. If it were not so, the understanding process would not affect the person as well as the world of the person. One could state as a general conclusion then: that concerns the 'world-aspect' in the understanding process is always the work of the imagination. Reason can classify and reason out, but only the imagination can construct and project a world.

Thus, if we are to reflect on the future we need the contribution of the imagination. The intention of the elaborate justification of the imagination was precisely to highlight this: The imagination is necessary if we are to talk and reflect meaningfully about our future and that of humanity as a whole.

### **IMAGINATION AS ENABLING THE REAL**

Imagination is linked to memory<sup>7</sup> and is intrinsically tied to intentionality, purpose, freedom and creativity. Beyond the empirical facts of vegetative responses and animal sense perception, human rationality enables us to understand external stimuli and respond to them creatively.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, since time immemorial, we pride ourselves of being "rational animals."<sup>9</sup> This rational nature of ours implies that we are able to form images (symbols or concepts)<sup>10</sup> of objects (including ourselves) and then play with them, and interrelate them to form highly developed images or concepts which may be applied back to reality. Such higher application (i.e., the so called realm of "theoretical disciplines") involves imagination. Human ways of responding to the reality needs this capability of

imagination.<sup>11</sup> When we use fire to cook food, rely on the wheel to move things, invent machines to extend our senses and apply the zero to theorize, we are using the power of imagination to take us beyond the purely “empirical realm.” That we can respond to stimuli ingeniously, manipulate concepts usefully and understand ourselves objectively, implies that we can go beyond mere sense-perceptions, and use imagination to our own advantage.<sup>12</sup> “Your imagination is your preview of life’s coming attractions” (cited in Savelle 2009: 143). Such a use of imagination is the basis of our creativity.<sup>13</sup>

If we extend this level of thinking, we can show that what we understand as the “real” is actually and creatively imagined.<sup>14</sup> It is the imagination that enables our real world. This affirms not just that imagination can create a better world, – which it can – but that imagination creates the very world we live in. As Oscar Wilde affirms: “The imagination imitates. It is the critical spirit that creates” (cited in Eden 2008: 390).

Thus, creation includes and implies a creative act of imagination. Even the imperfections in the present world can be perceived because we are able to sense imaginatively the difference between the real and the ideal. Furthermore, the very possibility of the fulfilment of the real mundane world is possible at least partially in and through imagination. That is why Arnold Toynbee holds that “[a]pathy can be overcome by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things: first, an ideal, which takes the imagination by storm, and second, a definite intelligible plan for carrying that ideal into practice” (Gordon and White 1979: 110). The world famous artist Picasso puts it simply: “Everything you can imagine is real” (cited in Chang 2006: 385). In comparison, Albert Einstein is rather modest when he asserts: “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> And Napoleon put it simply and powerfully: “Imagination rules the world” (Bogunovic 2013: 228). So to a limited extent at least, we are the imaginations of ourselves.

## **GOD AS THE PRODUCT OF HUMAN IMAGINATION**

Let us begin by asking: What do religions and their scriptures (or whatever oral traditions homologous to the scriptures) purport to do? What is the function of their message? Is it *primarily* to convey some facts that we did not know? If that were the case, we would need to be more historians and less believers! The fact of the matter is that religions with their message of faith [hope and love] appeal to our imagination. Religions are concerned about reality in its fullness and wholeness and totality – something we are unable to grasp through the intellect alone. Accordingly, religions employ symbolic language – the language of myth, metaphor, parable, etc. – to appeal to our imagination and open us to the world that such a language projects in front of us. Religions project a world that is holistic, healthy and meaningful from every possible angle. It is less a world of reason and more a world of the imagination and understanding.

Belief and the imagination are surely not the same, but belief without imagination would be a belief that is crippled and, in all probability, ineffective. To speak in the metaphors of our culture, if belief is the deity, imagination is its vehicle.

The reason for this is simple: Belief is activated in and through the world of the imagination. But the bricks of the world of belief are symbols and metaphors that flourish only in the world of the imagination.

The realm of everyday pragmatic life, compared to that of faith, is vastly different. For a successful pragmatic life we need precise information, and not symbolic language. If we need information regarding reaching the railway station on time, then we need to know the shortest possible route, and not a metaphoric saying: "The railway station like the Kingdom of God is not far from you!" Conversely, speaking of the Kingdom of God as we would of the railway station would not be appropriate either. The 'Kingdom of God' can animate our everyday life, but it is not on the same level as everyday life.

Both religion and personal life make use of the imagination. When we are far from our family and our loved ones, isn't it the imagination that sustains us with live memories of children, parents and friends? Good memories are the batteries that the imagination supplies so that there is light in moments of darkness and lonesomeness. Without the imagination, separation would not be tolerable and looking forward to a 'homecoming' would not accelerate joy. Unfortunately, we make use of the imagination more to torture ourselves by concentrating on hurt feelings and sad happenings than to focus on events that galvanize us and supply us with energy for rainy days.

So it is legitimate to extend the realm of imagination to God. Our understanding of God and our ability to transcend ourselves to be like God are both unique to human beings. There has not been a human society without some notion of Transcendence, understood in a very general sense.<sup>16</sup>

The Biblical assertion is that God created humans in His image and likeness (Gen 1:27). This profound theological insight makes humans truly great, dignified and unique. At the same time, the opposite assertion is also true.<sup>17</sup> Humans create God in their own image, and that is done through idealization and projection, which is both legitimate and warranted. This is not to assert that God is merely a "figment of human imagination." The only way we can speak of God, conceive of him and relate to him is through human categories, i.e., through human ways of thinking, relating, visualizing or through the human imagination. Only through and by means of the human imagination can we conceptualize God. So what is meant is not that God is a human projection, but that the only way we can talk of God is by using human imagination. The only way of imaging God is through our human imagination; the only way God becomes real to us is through our human imagination.

Reality and God may not be limited by our imagination. But as far as we remain human beings, the reality we can talk about and work with is the only reality available and that is the reality that can be imagined. In this sense, and only in this sense, humans construct reality through their imagination. Hence, humans create God using the imagination. This means that the human imagination is the enabler and creator of the divine.

What is implied is that the assertion “theology is anthropology” (Marmion 2005: 43) is based on human experience, but not limited by it. The power of imagination enables humans to transcend their personal limitations to some extent. Humans then become the “beings that become,” or the “human becomings.”

Our notion of God is intimately linked to our act of worshipping. As persons, we are basically religious. Even atheists are worshippers.<sup>18</sup> So the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson affirms categorically: “A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behoves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming” (cited in Van Harn 2007: 33).

## **CONCLUSION: THE STORY OF BAUDOLINO**

The main character of Umberto Eco’s novel *Baudolino* (2002), is the boy with a very peculiar nature. In the novel, the peasant boy confesses: “The problem of my life is that I’ve always confused what I saw with what I wanted to see.” (Eco and Weaver 2002:30). The emperor of the Holy Roman Empire adopts the peasant boy Baudolino, and educates him in rhetoric, poetry and other arts, and then asks for his counsel. In a kingdom of barbarians, the emperor is expecting Baudolino to suggest ways to govern the empire which do not lead to bloodshed. Such questions on governance are beyond the capacity of anyone else to imagine.

Baudolino is rich in imagination. He says, “When I was not prey to the temptation of this world, I devoted my nights to imagining other worlds... there is nothing better than imagining other worlds to forget the painful one we live in. At least so thought I then. I hadn’t yet realized that, imagining other worlds, you end up changing this one” (Eco and Weaver 2002: 99). The visualized ideal world will haunt, correct and modify the actual world of here and now. Therefore, those who only look around and don’t look beyond, will have nothing to contribute to the renewal of the world. One who sees the world the way s/he wishes it to be, will change it. So imagination and vision do really matter.

Eco’s novel is full of philosophical disputations about the characteristics of the visualized ideal world. To a dispute about how the Promised Land differs from Earthly Paradises, our hero Boudolino says, “It is not a question of identifying a place where we will go, but of understanding the nature of the ideal place where each of us would like to

go. We are trying to understand what a kingdom of abundance and virtue is like, where falsehood does not exist, nor greed nor lust, otherwise why should one be drawn to it as to the supreme Christian Kingdom?"

Poets, visionaries and prophets are people endowed with stupendous imagination. They tell stories that won't stand comparison with life's realities. They describe ideals that entice and beckon. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "Wolves and sheep will live together in peace, and leopards will lie down with young goats. Calves and lion cubs will feed together, and little children will take care of them" (Is 11: 6). All this is wishful thinking for the realists who go solely by facts. It is the prophets of God who are able to imagine a utopian world because they have the heart of God. The visionary's imagination projects God's dream for the world.

It is the visionary, prophet or seer who has the intense imaginary power which connects them to God.

In fact, a person of God always confuses what s/he sees with what s/he wants to see and with what should have been. Only a saintly visionary can see a spotless virgin in a prostitute. The actuality of the sinner is confused with the possibility of a saint. The situation of corruption and injustice is judged with God's plumb line, as Amos did. The world of war is visualized as "beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning-knives" (Is 2: 4). Only such a visionary can experience the agony of suffering, see through the tragic pain of Tsunami victims and trace the loving presence of God.

Religious experience and encounter – just like any other genuine human experience – is a matter of imagination, which is purified by the burning coal from the throne of the Most Holy. A good religious person is one who has in him or her the picture of an authentic person, who is different from the commonplace, and leads people into that world. A leader bereft of imagination will use her/his leadership energy to convert everything into cultic irrelevancies.

Finally, we conclude with the religious thinker Matthew Fox's claim: If we are in love enough with the Earth and with Being itself – Earth's sacredness – our imaginations will work overtime to find ways to let go of those habits that are destructive so we can be instruments of compassion. This applies not only to ourselves and our own species but also to all beings with whom we share our sacred existence.

Thus, humans are truly dreamers, and capable, competent and creative ones at that! Dreams, driven by the power of imagination, constitute life, and we as humans can dare to go beyond ourselves through our own dreams!

## NOTES

1. Albert Einstein holds that "The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination" (Cited in Gratz 2009: 128) Again it may be noted that for Ernst Bloch the difference between fantasy and real

imaginative possibility is praxis (Judith Brown, "Ernst Bloch and the Utopian Imagination" See [http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/eras/edition\\_5/brownarticle.htm](http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/eras/edition_5/brownarticle.htm). Retrieved on July 3, 2009).

2. Dee Bowman says, "All of us are, to some extent, victims of what we are. We are not limited by our imaginations, but by our ability to do what we imagine. We are not too often limited by our abilities as much as by circumstances. And we are not as often limited by our circumstances as much as by the lack of the will to respond." From <http://www.quotelady.com/subjects/ability.html>. Accessed on Jan 3, 2009.

3. See especially his "Imagination in Discourse and Action," in *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1991), 168-187. Other important essays connected to our theme are "Appropriation" 182-193 and "The Narrative Function" 274-296, in P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Essays on language, action and interpretation. Edited, translated and introduced by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, rep. 1985). For this section we are indebted to D'Sa (2002: 94-98).

4. Paul Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 274-296, esp. 289. He states clearly: "(1) It is necessary to establish that there is more *fiction in history* than the positivist conception of history admits. (2) Then it must be shown that fiction in general, and narrative fiction in particular, are more *mimetic* than the same positivism allows. (3) These two prior points being granted, I shall suggest that the references of empirical narrative and fictional narrative *cross upon* what I provisionally called historicity or the historical condition of man."

5. See Carr 1974: 28: "The duty of the historian to respect his facts is not exhausted by the obligation to see that his facts are accurate. He must seek to bring into the picture all known or knowable facts relevant, in one sense or another, to the theme on which he is engaged and to the interpretation proposed....But this, in turn, does not mean that he can eliminate interpretation, which is the life-blood of history."

6. Carr 1974: 11. See too Carr 1974: 12: "The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate."

7. It may be added: "Memory is not a literal reproduction of the past, but instead depends on constructive processes that are sometimes prone to errors, distortion, and illusions" (Schacter, Norman, and Koutstaal 1998: 290).

8. According to Charles Horton Cooley (1902: 87), "The imaginations which people have of one another are the solid facts of society."

9. In this context Albert Einstein's remark is both simple and insightful: "Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere" (cited in Miller and Spoolman 2012: 51).

10. Image schemas form an enormous store of potentially accessible conceptual material, some of which is mapped onto the propositional structures of language. But in Langer's theory of imagination, "things inaccessible to language...have their own forms of conception" (Langer 1957: 265); and vast regions of the underlying network of meanings are mapped onto a variety of nonpropositional forms – the material of dreams, myth, ritual, narrative, and the arts – that Langer contends are all vehicles of conception, insight, thought, and understanding.

11. So we can agree with Katherine Paterson that "Our fundamental task as human beings is to seek out connections – to exercise our imaginations. It follows then, that the basic task of education is the care and feeding of the imagination" (cited in Ryan and Cooper 2012: 31).

12. The popular inspirational author Steven Covey (1990) advises us, "To be successful we must live from our imaginations, not from our memories."

13. At the centre of human experience stands the activity that Langer calls "imagining reality." It helps in "conceiving the structure of it through words, images, or other symbols, and assimilating actual [experiences] to [the resulting conceptual structure] as they come" (Langer, 1962, p. 150). Furthermore, the activity that Johnson calls "metaphorical projection" (Johnson 1987: xx) provides a basis for establishing conceptual relations between domains of experience, connecting them together to make the larger fabric of meaning that frames the human world. In this sense, the framework of the human world is something conceptual – perceptible only through symbols (i.e., vehicles of thought) – and the world as it figures in human experience is conceptually structured. Each of the great orders of art creates the semblance of a different aspect or dimension of conscious experience. Each of the arts "begets a special dimension of experience" that is "a special kind of image" of some aspect of subjective reality (Langer 1957: 81).

14. With the 16th century renaissance thinker Philipus A Paracelsus we can hold that "Thoughts [or imaginations] give birth to a creative force that is neither elemental nor sidereal. Thoughts [imagination] create a new heaven, a new firmament, a new source of energy, from which new arts flow. When a man undertakes to create something, he establishes a new heaven" (Clucas 2006: 212).

15. And Einstein adds further: "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand." This was in answer to the question, "Do you trust more to your imagination than to your knowledge?" From interview with G. S. Viereck. Cited in (Whale 2008: 214).

16. The uniqueness of human beings could be perceived in terms of conceptual language, creative art and transcendental religion. We do not hold that all humans believe in God. We only assert that there is no society where transcendence has not been recognized.

17. Here we recall Niels Bohr who told Heisenberg that “The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.” Cited in (Kuberski 1994: 77).

18. That is why Simone de Beauvoir could firmly assert: “There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future.” Cited in (Jones 1988: 43).



## **PART II**

### **HUMAN FRAILTY: FRICTIONAL EXISTENCE**

“Man desired concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species; she desires discord. Man wants to live easy and content; but nature compels him to leave ease...and throw himself into toils and labors.” ~Immanuel Kant

“Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve” ~Erich Fromm

“It is not titles that honor men, but men that honor titles” ~*Niccolo Machiavelli*



## CHAPTER IV

### **THE PERPETUAL TENSION: FREEDOM AS THE FINITE QUEST FOR THE INFINITE**

“We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin” ~Charles Darwin (Descent of Man, 1871)

“God, Grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can, / And the wisdom to  
know the difference.” ~Reinhold Niebuhr (The Serenity Prayer).

“A man does not know what he is saying until he knows what he is not saying.” ~Gilbert K. Chesterton

Part I of this book focused on the fertile and creative dimensions of human experience, which enable us to make sense of our diverse experiences, and opens us to beauty and goodness. Part II treats the frail and frictional aspects of our life-experience. It takes seriously the broken, fragile and vulnerable dimensions of human nature. So it takes up significant human issues like freedom, development, capability, poverty, suspicion and trust, which make our every-day-life feeble and delicate.

The first chapter studies the unique human capacity for freedom in terms of her finite self that is open to the infinite. Using Paul Ricoeur’s phenomenology of fallibility and freedom, we relate freedom to the finite human capacity to reach out to the infinite. We experience our freedom as both bound and enabling. We remain always open to the infinite, yet rooted in the finite. The swing or tension between the two poles – bound finitude and unbound infinity – makes us the unique creatures that we are. It is in this unique “in-between-ness” that we can situate and understand our own freedom. Here we situate humans in a perpetual tension.

It is obvious that for us human beings freedom is natural. What is human nature and what is freedom? The dream of a free world and liberated life has always fascinated us. But this human quest has been dampened by our own nature. So the conflict between freedom and nature, similar to that of “nature and nurture”, has been with us from the beginning of human experience.

In this chapter, a modest attempt is made to enquire into some of the fundamental questions regarding human nature and freedom. What in the human being makes freedom possible? How do we understand the vulnerable and fragile? How do we cope with the fragile nature of freedom

where the infinite quest for freedom has to be bound with the finite structure of our being? We deal, basically, with the anthropological presuppositions and implications of freedom.

In the first part, we situate freedom in our human nature, that is, in our human will. Here freedom is seen in its dynamics with our bound nature: in the voluntary and in the involuntary. Next, in the second section, we review the types of consent or responses that can be given to our bound nature. The consequent freedom that follows from these responses is also studied. The issue here is how we humans can respond to “givenness” and how freedom can be actualized in “givenness.” Finally, in the third section human freedom is related to fallibility. Here the vulnerability and fragility of human freedom come to the fore. The fragile and fallible freedom that we humans possess is perceived as a mediation. So in the disproportion or “in-between-ness” that exists in the human being freedom is actualized. This leads us to situate human freedom dynamically in our nature (will) and to appreciate the unending quest for freedom through our limited nature.

### **THE WILL TO FREEDOM<sup>1</sup>**

For a phenomenological look into human freedom we use Paul Ricoeur’s relevant notion of human nature and human will.

In *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, Ricoeur deals with an Eidetic of the Will – a description of its basic structure. Influenced by Spinoza, Ricoeur takes up the problem of necessity in connection with that of the Will.

Ricoeur examines the structure of the Will at three levels: Decision, Human Action and Consent to Necessity. This is derived from Ricoeur’s own introduction of a three-fold schematism in which “I will” means (Thorer 1984: 26):

“I decide”  
 “I move my body”  
 “I consent”

He thus exposes the mutuality and interdependency of the polar concepts of willing and non-willing and freedom and necessity. Again, Ricoeur tries to work out these paradoxes as clearly as possible preserving at the same time the bond between the Voluntary and Non-voluntary.

Wherever he begins his reflections, it becomes evident to him that in each of these three levels, both an *objective* and *subjective* way of looking at the Will is possible. In fact, both refer to the same region in our mental structure. In the presence of this tension, when one asks about the unity of the human being, one is led to the inevitable conclusion concerning the central mystery of the human being. For a reflective philosophy, this is a puzzle, which urges one to go beyond the reflective level.

This process leads Ricoeur to the following conclusions about freedom and innocence found in the human Will:

-At the level of the *decision*, the body appears to be the source of motive. The freedom experienced by us is therefore a “motivated freedom” (*motivierete Freiheit*).<sup>2</sup>

-At the level of *action*, the body appears to be the object or initiator of action. Thus, the freedom is an “indebted freedom” (*verdankte Freiheit*), and is therefore further determined by the body. Hence, the freedom here has a capacity for action.

-At the level of the *consent to necessity*, the body appears as an insurmountable limitation. Thus, freedom is a “bound freedom” (*gebundene Freiheit*), and is further limited by the very nature itself.

Corresponding to each of these above levels is a dream of *Innocence*.<sup>3</sup>

The motivated freedom corresponds to the dream of a *transparent* freedom, in which the motive is clear; the indebted freedom corresponds to the dream of a *graceful* freedom, which leads a submissive body to an easy, flowing action; and the bound freedom corresponds to the dream of a *boundless* freedom, which is with nature limitlessly bound (Puthenpurackal 2012). The various aspects of freedom and their corresponding polarities are illustrated below:

<i>Structure of Will</i>	<i>Freedom Experienced</i>	<i>Dream of Innocence</i>
Decision	Motivated Freedom	Transparent Freedom
Action	Indebted Freedom	Graceful Freedom

*Chart 2: The Structure of the Will*

A lower limit corresponding to each of these three levels constitutes an existential limitation to the aim, capacity and nature of the Will. These limits require the Will to accept the unwilled positions. This can happen in different ways, each of which corresponds to a mythological response (Thorer 1984: 28):

- Human beings can rebel against their own basic limited constitution or deny their own finiteness. This corresponds to the *Promethean Denial*.
- One identifies oneself with the one’s limited constitution, and attempts to accept the inevitable, which would be equated with *Orphic Identification*.
- One can distance oneself from one’s own constitution and try to be an indifferent and passive observer then he or she would be modeled on *Stoic Duality*.
- Finally, one can with reservations consent to a future in hope, which would correspond to an *Eschatological Hope*.

The analysis of the *eidetic* of the human Will, according to Ricoeur, leads to a paradox of tension between the willing and non-willing, and to a *freedom* which is at the same time *bound* by its very nature. This double character of the human will lets itself be shown at every level of Ricoeurian enquiry. This paradox, which concretises itself in this way, cannot be eliminated (Reagan and Stewart 1978: 17). A freedom in which *creativity* and *necessity* are fully reconciled in itself, would not anymore be a *creativefreedom*. Such a freedom, though imaginable, cannot be realized. It is actually a *limit-idea*.

### TYPES OF CONSENT AND CORRESPONDING FREEDOM

The reciprocity of the voluntary and involuntary is maintained throughout Ricoeur's description of the structure of the Will. In relation to human freedom, the Will could be studied in its two basic aspects, which are ultimately seen as existence as *received* and existence as *task*, and that is a way of saying that the involuntary is *for* the Will just as the Will is *by reason of* the involuntary. This tension between the voluntary and involuntary reaches its limit in relation to that which is absolutely involuntary. It is in this context that Ricoeur develops and points to the "secret conciliation" in a paradoxical philosophy. Thus, the study of the Will could also be undertaken with reference to the tension between *Decision*, *Consent* and *Necessity*.<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur does this by using the following categories:

#### *Refusal of Necessity*

Consent to necessity is, after all, not the only possible movement of the Will confronting necessity. Freedom can here appear as a negation or as a refusal to accept necessity. Moreover, freedom has a privileged position, since it is through freedom that necessity is recognised.

If the Will makes the movement of refusal in relation to necessity, freedom appears as (a) the sorrow of finitude, (b) the sorrow of the unformed and (c) the sorrow of contingency (PV, 402-406).

Desire, then, which is expressed in the refusal of necessity, is the desire for aseity, and that is precisely closed to freedom and bound to the necessity of a finite situation. Ultimately, the final act of refusal (as rebellion against the substitution of finite being) might well be self-annihilation.

#### *From Refusal to Consent*

After having arrived at the juncture of freedom and necessity, Ricoeur maintains that it is in this junction that the "secret reconciliation" could occur. This secret reconciliation and hidden relationship is to be

uncovered by an understanding of the movement of consent. Ricoeur hopes to transcend necessity, without negating it, through consent.

Again, it is at this very juncture of freedom and necessity that the limit of *descriptions* is arrived at.<sup>5</sup> Here phenomenology may be transcended. "In any case it is clear that the unity of man with himself and with his world cannot be integrally included within the limits of a description of the *cogito*. For this to be the case phenomenology must transcend itself in metaphysics."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the whole and the other had become the horizon of the *cogito* or Ricoeur, philosophical anthropology without ontology is empty. According to Ricoeur, this insight is also the central Cartesian insight, and that the *cogito* has a necessary relationship to Ontology and Transcendence. But we must also be cautious to reify subjectivity into an ontology and refuse to return to the "reign of the object" which reduces the fullness of the subjective experience.

It is here that the movement from the refusal to consent takes on additional significance. The way in which consent is made emerges as of extreme importance. Ricoeur indicates that there are three major alternatives in the movement from refusal to consent: The *imperfect consent*, the *hyperbolic consent* and the *paradoxical consent*.

In the *Imperfect Consent* (Stoicism), as in the case of the Stoics, the relationship of subject to the Whole (Transcendence) is grasped as a relation of Part to Whole. This type of consent, or affirmation, is imperfect because this is actually a *detachment* rather than a reconciliation of freedom and necessity. In Stoicism, therefore, the body is reduced to the "already dead" and feeling to "opinion". Thus, subjectivity is reduced and the subjective recovery of incarnate existence is not made.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Hyperbolic Consent*<sup>8</sup> (Orphism), found in the Orphic tradition (for example, in Goethe and Rilke), the relation of the subject to Transcendence is to be found in a poetic admiration of Transcendence. The Orphic act of consent is not to choose, move or act but to contemplate. Here again, consent in this sense fails to preserve the fullness of subjectivity. Here subjectivity is lost in a vague metaphor and Nature is made into an idol. Subjectivity is reduced by losing itself in the act of admiration. For in the act of admiration identity is achieved!

Only in the *Paradoxical Consent* can we preserve the necessary tension between the fullness of subjectivity and the sense of the Transcendent as a source of subjectivity. Although both of the above types of consent avoid the refusal to seek to affirm necessity, they do so at the cost of reducing subjectivity in its fullness. This refusal is avoided in the *Paradoxical Consent*. To refuse necessity is seen as the defiance of Transcendence – the refusal is perceived to be at the heart of the Rupture. Here, the relationship between the subject and Transcendence is paradoxical. In refusing necessity, the self reaches its limits and necessity is that which opposes freedom as the Wholly-Other, the absolute limit which breaks the possibility for the self to make a complete circle with itself (PV 449). The *Paradoxical Consent* is the movement of the Will which affirms

necessity as the source of its being. It is the acceptance which affirms character, unconsciousness and vital organization and in which finitude and finiteness are affirmed.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is the consent of hope. The affirmation of hopeful consent makes possible an engagement in life which does not reduce subjectivity and refuse Transcendence.

#### *Limits to Pure Human Freedom*

In the incarnate existence of human beings, the problem of freedom remains a structure of reciprocity between the voluntary and involuntary. Since all Willing is both *reception* and *initiative* (PV 453), existence is also both received (as a gift) and is accomplished (as a task). Freedom in this context is a “dependent independence,”<sup>10</sup> and a bound freedom. This constitutes the essence of purely human Will.

The description of the fundamental structures of the Will has shown that the human being can neither dispose of her/himself at will, nor can s/he fully see through her/himself. The body, with its freedom and necessity, presents itself as an insurmountable limit. In view of this, both an objective analysis of oneself, as in the natural sciences and subjective examination of oneself, as in reflective philosophies, is possible and justified. Freedom and Nature stand against each other and side by side, and independent of each other and limited by each other. This makes it possible to go back into inner human nature from external expressions of oneself. This is achieved through an explicit acceptance of something (like intentionality, in the case of Husserl), and is open to an objective external observation. Therefore, the Ricoeur scholar Don Ihde sees here already a latent hermeneutics, which later will show itself to be inalienable in the understanding of symbols.<sup>11</sup>

As already noted, the paradox that human freedom is bound by nature is unavoidable. In the human person there exists a non-agreement within himself or herself. The synthesis is in any case a “*Grenziidee*”<sup>12</sup> that can only be dreamt of. This makes the emergence of symbolic speech in the anthropological frame possible and necessary. On the other hand, also in the region of necessity (where one does not need to dream of its possibility), the symbolic area suggests itself. What human being actually is, cannot be fully expressed in uniform and univocal language. We are dependent on a language, which is open to different types of interpretations or readings. Total reality is not otherwise accessible to us. Therefore, it is not surprising that these various levels are correspondingly present, and even in the human mythic answers to the necessary conditions of human life. The language expresses the human condition in view of our limitations. When we confront these limitations, a previously non-available region is opened to us. The human being can thus express oneself in its total reality (both the *free* and the *bound* nature of being) not in a bound system, but only in and through an *open* symbol.

## **FREEDOM AND FALLIBILITY**

We begin this section by describing human fallibility. The fact that the human being can be observed from various different perspectives, all of which, though they all refer to the same body, may be justified but not always compatible with each other, indicates a crisis in the self-understanding of the subject. The analysis of the fundamental possibility of the human Will in *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* has shown that there is a break, a wound and a non-agreement within the human person. This non-agreement makes it impossible for us to see ourselves transparently. Ricoeur is not satisfied with just this analysis. The fundamental structure of the Will, which he has traced, is only preliminary to the fact of human failure and fallibility. Since it is an absurd fallibility, it cannot be captured though the description of its own nature. Furthermore, it presents an alien element which can be philosophically approached only through concrete experiences.

Thus, human fallibility provides us an understanding of the possibility of evil for human freedom without implying its necessity. As such, fallibility is a concept open to elaboration from a purely reflective basis. Fallibility as the possibility for evil is taken as a primary characteristic of human existence. With this concept of fallibility, human existence is the place or possibility for the manifestation of evil.<sup>13</sup>

In two different ways, Ricoeur tries to capture and describe *fallibility*. The transition from innocence to guilt can be understood only in concrete expressions of human experiences, that is, through the act of confession, or avowal (*Bekennntnis*), which later leads Ricoeur to take responsibility for his actions. In the *La symbolique du mal*, Ricoeur examines, therefore, the symbolic language of the experience of guilt. But before that he studies the breaking point of the evil. Thus, he continues his description of the fundamental human possibilities, which he had begun and executed in a preliminary and abstract form in the *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* by interpreting the structures of the Will as fallible. Because of the opaque and absurd characteristic of guilt, its description (which emerges mainly out of a convergence of concrete signs) could only be "empiric"<sup>14</sup> and not "eidetic", a mere description of it. Fallibility describes a weakness which makes evil possible. It lies in the "structure of mediation between the poles of the finite and infinite nature of man".<sup>15</sup> The necessity and structure of this mediation is shown by Ricoeur in three ways: as transcendental synthesis, practical synthesis and a theory of feeling (or vulnerability of affectivity).

### *The Transcendental Synthesis*

The human situation of being in between the finite and the infinite (the "in-between-ness) has been expressed in philosophy and also in rhetoric and myth. But in order to become fully philosophical this *in-between-ness* or *disproportion* must be brought into the area of pure

reflection so that it could be further clarified and elaborated (Cf. Thorer 1984: 35 and Ihde 1971: 118). This clarification, however, is gained at the price of losing the irreducible depth of existential significance. Thus, clarification by means of transcendental synthesis can only provide a formal synthesis.

Ricoeur examines how the finite and infinite in the human being could be mediated first in the epistemological realm. He begins with a transcendental reflection – an examination of the possibility of knowledge. The mediation at this level is the “transcendental synthesis”. Its elements are the *finite perspective* and *infinite verb*, and both of which together synthesizes to give *the pure imagination*.

In considering the relation of the body to the world, it is seen that *openness* to the world is its first characteristic. For us the body is basically our mediator to the world. Through it we perceive and feel our needs and suffer from them. More considerations show that the openness of the body brings with it a *finite perspective*, since the body is itself the unsurpassable (non-replaceable) starting point of mediation. For example, through the body one can perceive objects in a definite way from a particular perspective. This mediation *through* the body is certainly of a finite perspective, and therefore limited.

We are not confined to this finite perspective: We overcome it through the *infinite verb* in the process of speaking. We describe something both by means of a noun or a verb. The noun, through which one denotes a thing, indicates an object independently of its perspective. Through, the verb we affirm and negate, and thus judge and transcend the determined or the limited (aspect of the noun or state of affairs). By means of the verb, we produce a relation of statements to the being as well as to the self as determining, and as judging.

There is also a relationship of *tension*, or “disproportion” (or “*in-between-ness*”) between the *finite perception* through the body and *infinite intention* of the words. This provokes the question of the third mediating element. This mediation is made possible through a “*pure imagination*” and is given in an object through consciousness. “The consciousness itself disappears in establishing a unity between the being and the presence” (FM, 68). The human person is the mediator between the finite and the infinite in objects. This synthesis is, for Ricoeur, a consciousness leading to freedom, but is not yet self-consciousness. This could be summed up as:

<i>Finite Perception</i>	<i>Consciousness</i>	<i>Infinite Intention</i>
Finite Perspective (Noun)	Pure Imagination	Infinite Verb

Chart 3: *The Human Mediation*

*The Practical Synthesis*

The next stage Ricoeur examines is that of the practical synthesis, which is actually parallel to the transcendental synthesis. The finite perspective, in perception and knowledge, corresponds in the practical synthesis to the notion of the *character*; the infinite in statements and judgments corresponds to the notion of *well-being*, or the blissfulness, and the constitution of objects (through a projected mediation) corresponds to the constitution of a person, i.e., *respect*.<sup>16</sup> Here we outline the steps which Ricoeur takes in the level of practical synthesis.

Ricoeur approaches the notion of *character* through an analysis of *affektive perspective*, or desire. As with perception, so also in desire, an openness of the body to the world and at the same time a necessary limitation is evident. Desire means openness, in so far as we, in and through desire, seek its fulfilment and outline the possibility of its fulfilment. At the same time, desire implies a closedness in so far as one seeks the other through the desire for oneself. Therefore, the body here has not just a mediated function, but also a limiting function, and a limit to the openness. One more characteristic of the finitude is to be paid attention to. In learning, for example, we try to acquire new possibilities and knowledge, and at the same time learning is also a fixing or determining process. According to Ricoeur, these points of view of the finitude (the perspective, ordinary self-love, persistence, indolence) constitute the notion of character, and not as sum total of the individual characteristics but as one totality (Thorer 1984: 33).

This finite openness of the human being is opposed by an infinite orientation – the *Well-being* as the explicit goal of all perfection, in which the human being surpasses himself or herself. *Well-being* is the horizon for all possible concerns. The terminus of this infinity of possibilities is the existential project or the totality of human destiny (Ricoeur 1960:82 and Ihde 1971: 127). As the infinite goal, for which the desire yearns, *happiness* is not given to us in any particular experience. There is only a consciousness, in which direction we have to seek this happiness. There is also a feeling of our belongingness to being as a whole in this search for happiness. Because there is a longing for the whole in us, we can perceive this sign, which indicates to us the totality. This is a happening where the horizon expands itself towards the immeasurable.

The synthesis of *well-being* and *character* is the person. Standing between finite character and infinite well-being, and all that can be gasped, is only a *direction*, but one must give form to direction (through reason) (Ricoeur 1960: 84f). In an existential project, the idea of a person is formed. Person, in this sense, is a projected destiny, and an ideal representation of an idea of the self. There is no complete experience of the person in her/himself and for her/himself. We can have only an outline of it. This constitutes itself in respect, which leads one to consider the other not as a means to be made use of but to recognize oneself as an end in itself. In the

very process of doing this, one takes back one's claim for one's own perspective and one's own desire. Just as in the level of the transcendental synthesis, it is *pure imagination* that constitutes a thing, and so too in the practical synthesis it is *respect* that constitutes a person. This could be summed up as:

<i>Affective Perspective (Desire)</i>	<i>Projected Destiny</i>	<i>Infinite Orientation</i>
Character	Person (Respect)	Well-being

*Chart 4: The Practical Synthesis*

### *A Theory of Feeling*

The examination of the fallibility of humans in the preceding section has enabled us to grasp the vulnerability of the unity of infinite orientation and the finite fulfilment in objects and in the person.<sup>17</sup> While the synthesis and the vulnerability of objects are manifested there, the incongruity of the innermost aspect of the human person in the affective realm is ignored there. This is one point where we are most vulnerable.

Feelings are the place of the most intimate appearance of *in-betweenness* and the place of its most fragile tension between finitude and infinitude. Here all disproportion is “interiorised” (Ricoeur 1960: 93). At the same time feelings are intimately related to the objects of reality. The feeling indicates the qualities and objects in the world and how “I” can be affected by them. As opposed to the distancing thinking, one begins to feel that one is fully interwoven with the things of the world, and in what is happening in the world, through feelings. This “interwoven” feeling produces a sense of belongingness, which is deeper than any opposition between subject and object (Pandikattu 2000).

Feeling, or affection, displays two directions or dimensions. The finite pole is to be found in *pleasure*, and which Ricoeur contends terminates in finite acts (Ricoeur 1960: 109 and Ihde 1964: 132). Pleasure is the movement of feeling towards the good fulfilled in the instant. As such, it is precarious and perishable. Its focus is upon its boundness to bodily life, and the fulfilment of pleasure is feeling as the existential condition for bodily life. In this pleasure stands at the level of *condition for* all other goods (Ricoeur 1960: 110). In itself, pleasure has its own type of totality and is non-reducible. It has an “innocence”, but it is a “menaced innocence” in that the potential for conflict is present with that of happiness.

The pole of infinitude in the feeling is *happiness (bonheur)*. Happiness or blissfulness is that dimension of feeling that revolves around the need for unity or wholeness in the human life. Happiness terminates in the existential project which is *destiny*. The feeling of happiness is intimately connected to the idea of well-being, but is more than merely an

idea, since it is the fulfilment of this direction in beatitude (Ricoeur 1960: 109).

These two tendencies appear side by side in affectivity also: The sensible desire for *pleasure* (*epithymia*) and the spiritual longing for *Happiness* (*eros*). The mediating factor is the *mind*.<sup>18</sup> The two tendencies allow themselves to be classified through their orientations. *Pleasure*, as the goal of sensible desire, completes a limited act, while reason, in contrast, aims at *blissfulness* or happiness as completion of the totality of the human being. The tension between the two tendencies (longings) results in an “unsatisfaction in mere *pleasure*, which would not be sign and promise and guarantee for happiness” (FM, 125, Thorer 1984: 35). Here, pleasure is not the opposing pole of *blissfulness*. Both *pleasure* and *blissfulness* aim in the same direction, but pleasure brings the danger to us, which shuts off the affective realm to the blissfulness. Blissfulness, as completion or perfection of the pleasure, has a regulative function in the fulfilment of lust through finite goals.

In mind, which is the mediating agent in affectivity, Ricoeur sees (following Kant) three basic longings at work: *Having* (*avoir*), *Ruling* (*pouvoir*) and *Valuation or Esteem* (*valoir*). These three drives or passions determine the relation of things to the person. In the desire of *having*, the relationship to things determines the relationship to persons. In the desire for power (*ruling*), the relationship to things recedes back to the relationship to the person. In the desire for *valuation*, there is the need to be recognised by the others. Each of these drives has its own vulnerability. The most vulnerable among them is in the drive for validation by others. Nothing is easier to hurt than an existence dependent on others for recognition.

So affective vulnerability has its location in the mind, which has to mediate between the finitude of pleasure and the infinitude of happiness. In each of these passions, we strive after the infinite, without being able to reach it. This produces an enduring conflict. These drives have an undetermined goal; *a limited goal is unlimitedly desired*. Herein lies the danger:

Only a being, which desires the whole and which can be schematised in the objects of human desires can mistake itself, i.e., forget its goal for the absolute, the symbol character of the connection of happiness, with a goal of the desires: this forgetting makes an *idol* out of a symbol... (Ricoeur 1960: 147 and Thorer 1984: 36).

It is the function of the mind to establish a relationship between human beings and the world, and to open up an enduring connection between them. The relationship of “I” to the world is spiritualised or internalised through the mind. This in turn brings about a division in us. Human duality goes intentionally over itself into an object of synthesis and spiritualises the conflicts of subjectivity in the affective realm (FM 172.) If

the division between the infinite orientation and the finite fulfilment in things and in persons finds a mediation through an **object**, then the innermost core of the person would experience this conflict within himself.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

So far, we have dealt with the human will and its two dynamic polarities of finitude and infinite. The infinite in us is both bound and enabled by the finite. We remain always open to the infinite and rooted to the finite. The swing between the two makes us the unique creature that we are. It is in this unique “in-between-ness” that we can situate and understand our own freedom.

As an ‘infinite god’ who is bound to the finite matter, and a finite being who reaches out to the unlimited, we humans lead a “tensional existence.” There emerges the precious freedom of which we are capable. There we perceive also its fragility. It is precisely in its fragility that the beauty and uniqueness of the human being shines forth!

Given such a human situation, where the voluntary is in the involuntary, the quest for freedom and liberation will always remain with us. The urge to reach out to the infinite enables us to remain humans. This quest can be stifled only at the cost of our being human.

## NOTES

1. For our purpose of understanding Ricoeurian freedom, we base ourselves on his *Philosophie de la volonté: Le volontaire et l'involontaire (Philosophie de l'esprit)* published in 1950 which together with *Philosophie de la volonté: Finitude et Culpabilité, Livre I: L'homme faillible. Livre II: La Symbolique du mal (Philosophie de l'esprit, 1960)* form his Philosophy of the Will. Ricoeur never wrote the third volume of his trilogy on the will, being sidetracked by his studies on Freud. See also the Chapter 7 on The Sinner: The Desire to Be Divine.

2. In the original French it is “liberté motivée.”

3. Details about the scope of innocence is beyond the scope of this book. Please refer to Pandikattu (2000).

4. See Ricoeur’s description of the Voluntary and Involuntary as Decision, Bodily Action and Consent to Necessity specially in the third part of PV. 319ff.

5. This would be the ideal starting point for symbol, according to Ricoeur’s understanding.

6. Ricoeur, PV, 469. See also Ihde (1964: 105).

7. See PV, 441-445. Also see Ihde (1964:107).

8. Here the poem quoted by Ricoeur is noteworthy. PV, 473. “Tell it to no other wise man /For the crowd is quick to rail; /I sing the praise of the living / who aspires to death in flame.”

9. For an elaborate discussion see PV, 45. Cf. also Ihde (1964:108).

10. See PV, 453-454. It is in here that the limit ideas could be traced. As a motivated freedom, the limit idea is that of a perfectly rational and transparent motivation. A second limit idea would be that of a perfectly docile body capable of totally gracious movements. The third idea related to the absolutely involuntary would be of a human freedom in which resistance of the involuntary is absent and pure initiatives are possible. None of these limit ideas can actually be realized in fullness. Cf. Ihde (1964:110-111).

11. See Ihde (1971: 26f). See also Thorer (1984: 29).

12. A limiting idea, a possibility for thought, is one which cannot be fully actualised and which surpasses the human condition. See Thorer (1984: 29).

13. See Ricoeur (1960: 14). Also Ihde (1964: 113).

14. By “empiric” we mean an intuitive, sudden encounter with the empirical in contrast to the reflective, thinking of “eidectic”. So the “empiric” would be the result of the first encounter with the concrete.

15. FM, 9.

16. In German *Achtung*.

17. For this section, we are heavily indebted to Ihde (1964: 129ff).

18. (German: *Gemüt, thymos*). It is here that we find Ricoeur’s whole theme problematic. Till now we could follow his analysis of the human Will, without any problem. But here we wonder if he is artificially bringing in the *Gemüt* to fit into the famous thesis-antithesis-synthesis formula of Hegel. Since this does not in any way affect our work on symbols, we can bypass this minor problem.

19. For more about evil and fallibility, please see Chapter Eight in this work. For this section see the concluding section of FM and Thorer 1984: 36-37.



## CHAPTER V

### THE PARTICIPATIVE DILEMMA: DEVELOPMENT AS FREEDOM

“So there he is at last. Man on the moon. The poor magnificent bungler! He can’t even get to the office without undergoing the agonies of the damned, but give him a little metal, a few chemicals, some wire and twenty or thirty billion dollars and vroom! There he is, up on a rock a quarter of a million miles up in the sky” ~Russell Baker

“Freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal means.” ~Amartya Sen

“There is plenty of evidence that when women get the opportunities that are typically the preserve of men, they are no less successful in making use of these facilities that men have claimed to be their own over the centuries. The opportunities at the highest political levels happen to have come to women, in many developing countries, only in rather special circumstances—often related to the demise of their more established husband or fathers.” ~Amartya Sen

Closely connected with the freedom, which we studied in the last chapter, is the promoting of development and fostering of capabilities. In this chapter, we examine Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen’s understanding of poverty as a lack of freedom, which helps us to appreciate his understanding of development as freedom. Doing this demands that we understand freedom as going beyond unfreedoms and making ourselves capable of approaching well-being. Then, at the philosophical level, borrowing from Ricoeur, we analyse crucial human fallibility relating it to freedom and the various forms of unfreedom. Finally, from an anthropological point of view, we see Sen’s and Ricoeur’s suggestion that creative discourse could be a means to befriend human frailty and cultivate freedom both as a means and an end. This chapter exposes to us the dilemma of being human.

Current development theories have been dominated by what can be called the “human development school,”<sup>1</sup> something of which has been widely popularised by the annual Human Development Reports<sup>2</sup> of the United Nations Human Development Programme. The programme’s conceptual roots are to be found in the works of Amartya Sen, the economist and Nobel Prize winner Sen opens the *Development as Freedom* saying, “Development can be seen, it is argued here, as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (1999a:3). Sen identifies

two reasons for viewing freedom as central to the process of development. First, there is an evaluative reason, for “assessment of progress has to be done primarily in terms of whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced.” And second, there is the instrumental reason, for “achievement of development is thoroughly dependent on the free agency of people.”<sup>3</sup>

As a child, Sen was traumatized by religious fighting, and the bloody conflicts among Muslims and Hindus he witnessed in Bengal. Influenced by that fighting, Amartya Sen became agnostic, and developed the theory of development, much of which has been built in purely secular circles. However, there are intriguing similarities between Sen’s capability approach and Catholic social thinking. We shall illustrate that both show many similarities at a superficial level. When one goes into a deeper examination of Sen’s capability approach, one discovers a fundamentally different anthropology which will have important consequences for the way poverty is conceived and tackled.

Sen’s insights, which are valuable to our exploration of freedom and development, need to be at times complemented by those of Paul Ricoeur, whose theistic and existential perspective complements and enhances Sen’s analysis. This paper is not meant to be primarily comparative but philosophical. We try to look at some of the issues related to freedom and indicate discourse as a means of enhancing freedom. Since this chapter is rather philosophical, and open to those who are both religious and non-religious, no theological ideas are brought in and God is bracketed out of our discussion.

First, we examine Sen’s understanding of poverty as a lack of freedom. Second, we study his profound understanding of development as freedom. This demands that we go beyond unfreedom and make ourselves capable of well-being both as individual and social beings. Thirdly, at the philosophical level, and borrowing from Ricoeur, we analyse human fallibility, which is a crucial issue while discussing freedom and that is intimately related to the various forms of unfreedom. Finally, from an agnostic point of view, we see Sen’s and Ricoeur’s suggestion that creative discourse could be a means to befriend human fallibility and cultivate freedom, both as a means and an end.

## **POVERTY AS LACK OF FREEDOM**

Since its emergence, development theory has been concerned with the achievement of improved human lives. But, as Sen argues, by putting the focus on the accumulation of commodities, development theory has failed to include the very nature of human living and has failed to take into account the fundamental aspects of the life that a human being succeeds in living.<sup>4</sup>

Sen’s capability approach characterizes human well-being in terms of what people are or do (e.g., healthy, reading or writing, taking part in the life of the community), which Sen calls functionings. More specifically, as

he considers freedom as one of the most basic aspects of human life, well-being is to be assessed not so much in terms of what people are or do, but in what they are *able* to be or choose to do (e.g., able to be healthy, read and write, participate in the life of the community), which Sen calls capabilities. A capability is “a person’s ability to do valuable acts or arrive at valuable states of being,” and it “represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be” (Sen 1993:30).

While functionings are distinct aspects of the living conditions or different achievements for living a certain type of life, capabilities are the real notions of freedom and reflect the real opportunities people have to lead or achieve a certain type of life. Sen often refers to the example of the fasting monk and the starving child. While both show similar level of functioning (nutritional deficiency), the fasting monk has the capability to be adequately nourished (he could eat should he choose to do so), while the starving child does not have that capability. Poverty is thus seen as a lack of freedom, as an unfreedom. In this sense development can be regarded as “the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency” (Sen 1999a: xii). Development is a matter of liberating people from what makes them unfree, and from what prevents them to live a life that they would have the reason to choose and value.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, for Sen’s capability approach, human freedom is the aim of development, and poverty prevents people to reach their human potential of freedom. For example, a clever tribal teenager may dream of going to university to study to be a doctor, but her freedom to live such a life is crippled by the poverty of her family who cannot pay for her schooling and by the inability of the government to offer free education for all (Deneulin 2007a).

#### *Freedoms, Choices and Capabilities*

But what does Sen really mean by ‘freedom’? Sen defines freedom as a “real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value” (Sen 1993:30). He maintains that what is important in the process of development is not so much the quality of life that people are actually living, but the quality of life that they *choose* to live among an available set of functionings – a capability being “a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person’s freedom to lead one type of life or another [...] *to choose from possible livings*” (Sen 1992:40. Italics added). As Sen summarizes,

This approach focuses on the substantive freedoms that people have, rather than only on the particular outcomes with which they end up. For responsible adults, the concentration on

freedom rather than only achievement has some merit, and it can provide a general framework for analysing individual advantage and deprivation in a contemporary society (Sen 2002:83).

It is interesting to note how Sen's capability approach resembles the utilitarian consumer theory, whereby the focus on the freedom to choose to consume a particular bundle of functionings rather than on the preference to consume a particular bundle of market goods. The aim of development policies is to provide people with as many different functioning bundles as possible so that people can have the choice to pick some of them up, should they choose to do so.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Capabilities as Not Closed*

Séverine Deneulin notes that Sen deliberately avoids identifying the capabilities that are valuable to promote (Deneulin 2007). Development is a matter of promoting the freedoms that people have reason to choose and value. It is up to the democratic processes in each society to work out what this 'reason to choose and value' means. Sen insists that his capability approach does not claim to contain an exhaustive evaluation of what is relevant for well-being. Eventually the choice of relevant capabilities that public policies ought to pursue has to be related to the underlying social concerns and values within a particular society. Sen calls this the "fundamental reason for incompleteness" (Sen 1992: 49) of his approach. And even if it would not be a mistake to find a complete ordering of human well-being, we could not identify it in practice; this is what Sen calls "the pragmatic reason for incompleteness" (Sen 1992: 49). Despite the incompleteness of the capability approach, Sen argues that it still has a "cutting power," "both because of what it *includes* as potentially valuable and because of what it *excludes* from the list of objects to be weighted as intrinsically important" (Sen 1992: 49). Even though it is impossible to determine quality of life in an exhaustive and precise way, Sen concludes in two famous quotes that, "it is better to be vaguely right than precisely wrong," (Sen 1987a: 6) and that "babbling is not, in general, superior to being silent on matters that are genuinely unclear or undecided" (Sen 1992: 134).

### **INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND THE COMMON GOOD**

The thrust of Sen's capability approach to development is that it be judged in terms of the expansion of substantive human freedoms. These substantive human freedoms are "seen in the form of individual capabilities to do things that a person has reason to value" (Sen 1999a: 56). By situating the evaluative space of the quality of life in what individuals are able to be or do, Sen's capability approach to development implies that the individuals

are to be considered as the very subjects of development, but it obviously does not consider them as detached from the social setting in which they breathe and live. Sen emphasizes that the individuals are “quintessentially social creatures” (Sen 2002:81). The freedom that each individual enjoys is “inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us” (Sen 1999a: xii). Institutions or societal arrangements are of central importance for promoting the freedoms of individuals. The development and the expansion of freedoms cannot occur without the presence of key institutions such as the market, public services, the judiciary system, political parties, the media, etc. As Sen puts it, such “a freedom-centred view [of development] calls for an institutionally integrated approach” (Drèze and Sen 2002: 20).

Even if social arrangements or institutions are seen as very important elements in enhancing or impeding individual freedoms, they are still to be “investigated in terms of their contribution to enhancing and guaranteeing the substantive freedoms of individuals” (Sen 1999a: xiii). Sen does not ignore the importance of intrinsic social goods in the evaluation of human well-being, for example, democratic freedom. It is “a significant *ingredient* – a critically important *component*– of individual capabilities” (Sen 2002: 79). However, the importance and value of democratic freedoms are only relevant to the extent that they function as a component of individual human well-being, and to the extent that it makes the lives of individuals better. Sen is very reluctant to approach development with a supra-individual subject. He underlines that all actions finally bear upon their effects on the lives that human beings live, and lives which are only lived by the individuals and not by some meta-subject (Sen 2002).

The position according to which states of affairs should be evaluated only according to their goodness or badness *for* individuals is known as ethical individualism. The individual subjects are to be the unit of moral concern. However, ethical individualism leads to an excessive focus on the existing individual lives and directs attention away from the examination of the social structures and the historical explications of these structures which are responsible for the conditions of life of the individuals today. It does not suffice to evaluate institutional arrangements by looking at their effects, positive or negative, upon individual dispositions such as individual freedoms. There is a strong case for assessing development in terms of these structures themselves, and not only upon their consequences upon individual freedoms.

#### *The Structures of Living Together*

The idea of ‘the common good’ is very close to the idea of ‘structures of living together’ put forward by Paul Ricoeur. He defined them as structures belonging to a particular historical community that provide the conditions for individual lives to flourish and are irreducible to and bound up with interpersonal relations.<sup>7</sup> The common good could be seen as the

sum of these structures of living together, which emerges from the life in common, from the 'living together' in human communities. Identifying the common good is a matter of identifying the set of all these structures of living together that provide the conditions for the individual lives to flourish. Among these structures, one finds, for example, the country's power structure, its social norms, its national identity or its political and democratic history.

To sum up, while Sen's capability approach focuses on individuals, and then looks at institutional arrangements to promote the well-being of individuals, which is a 'common good approach' to development, it also focuses on the institutions themselves, as well as on the individuals, because it is precisely within these institutions that the individuals are formed and nurtured. Because the institutional fact is constitutive of a person's individuality, it is not only the well-being of individuals which is to be secured, but also the well-being of these institutions. But how is this common good to be fostered? How to promote these structures of living together which sustain the good life in common?

#### *The Political Participation and Capability Approach*

One of the most foundational building blocks of Sen's capability approach is "the ability of people to help themselves and to influence the world" (Sen 1999a: 18). Throughout his works, Sen emphasises that people should not be seen as the passive spoon-fed patients of the social welfare institutions, but "have to be seen as being actively involved in shaping their own destiny" (Sen 1999a: 53). In respect to that, the capability approach grants a fundamental role to the public debate and democratic decision-making, or in more generic terms, to the ability to participate in the life of the community and to take decisions in matters that affect one's own life and the life of fellow-human beings. This ability "to do something not only for oneself but also for the other members of the society" can even be considered as "one of the elementary freedoms that people have reason to value, [...] even among people who lead very deprived lives in material terms" (Drèze and Sen 1995: 106).

Democratic freedom, or the ability to participate in the life of the community, has three fundamental roles in the capability approach to development (See Sen 1999b). First, it is of fundamental intrinsic worth to human well-being, it is "a significant ingredient, a critically important component" (Sen 2002: 79) of the capabilities that the individuals have reason to choose and value. Second, given the open-endedness and the plurality of the different capabilities that people have reason to choose and value, "there is a strong methodological case for emphasizing the need to assign explicitly evaluative weights to different components of the quality of life (or of well-being) and then to place the chosen weights for open discussion and critical scrutiny" (Sen 1999a: 81). Democratic freedom plays a crucial role in specifying and choosing the capabilities that are worthwhile

to be promoted. It is essential in specifying a society's underlying values and in choosing the capabilities that are valuable and worthy of being pursued. Referring to the choice between cultural tradition and poverty on the one hand and modernity and material prosperity on the other hand, Sen writes: "If a traditional way of life has to be sacrificed to escape grinding poverty or minuscule longevity, then it is the people directly involved who must have the opportunity to participate in deciding what should be chosen" (Sen 1999a: 31). The role of participation also extends to the choices of the means that will bring about the chosen priorities, and hence to the kind of policies required to promote the chosen capabilities. Third, the democratic freedom is also of constitutive importance in value formation. It clarifies and constructs a society's values and priorities, builds consensus and achieves compromises that prevent conflicts.

One might object that such an emphasis on political participation to promote social justice, or even that equating political participation with commitment to the common good, is very naïve. Political participation obviously occurs in a context of power inequalities with conflicting interests. The world ideological systems and the world configuration of political power impose their constraints. Along with these power imbalances with the outside world, which affect a country's margin of manoeuvre, one has also to include the power imbalances within the political community itself in which political freedom is exercised. Although every person might formally have an equal political voice, those who command more resources and education are likely to better be able to influence the decisions to their own advantage.

Drèze and Sen are not ignorant of the influence of socio-economic inequalities upon inequalities in political participation. They note that these inequalities "give disproportionate power to those who command crucial resources such as income, education and influential connections" (Drèze and Sen 2002: 28). This has much to do with the tension that Sen has pointed out but little explored, which is namely the tension between the freedom to participate in the market economic exchange and the freedom to participate in the life of the political community. Among the capabilities that people have reason to choose and value in Sen's capability approach, lies not only the fundamental capability to shape one's own destiny by participating in the life of the community, but also the fundamental capability to participate in the markets: "We have good reasons to buy and sell, to exchange, and to seek lives that can flourish on the basis of transactions. To deny that freedom in general would be in itself a major failing of society" (Sen 1999a: 112). People should have the fundamental "right to interact economically with each other", and failing to grant that right would be a significant "social loss" (Sen 1999a: 26).

Sen warns however that the freedom<sup>8</sup> in markets should go hand in hand with the freedom in other institutions, so that extensive freedoms of some in the markets do not override the freedoms of others in participating in the life of the community: "While emphasising the significance of

transaction and the right of economic participation (including the right to seek employment freely), and the direct importance of market-related liberties, we must not lose sight of the complementarity of these liberties with the freedoms that come from the operation of other (non-market) institutions” (Sen 1999a:116). This is particularly important because, although the freedom to pursue market transactions leads to efficiency results, they may also result in greater inequalities, and corrective measures will need to be taken so that the freedom of all in the different institutions, market and non-market, may be guaranteed. For example, extensive freedoms in market transactions may result in environmental loss or in reduced lower access to health or educational facilities by lower income groups. Sen emphasizes however that the remedy to correct the unfreedom that the market freedoms might generate “has to lie in more freedom—including that of public discussion and participatory political decisions” (Sen 1999a:123).

Drèze and Sen insist that the presence of inequalities cannot justify the authoritarian regimes that would provide a more equal basis for exercising political freedom. Even if a perfectly benevolent dictator would provide all the fundamental human freedom (so that no member of that political community would be lacking food, shelter, health, education, etc.), it would violate an important aspect of human well-being if it deprived the members of the community say in the organization of the community. This is why Drèze and Sen insist that the *only* route that can be taken to promote human freedom is enhancing the political power of the unprivileged (Drèze and Sen 2002: 376), so that they can exercise their political freedom on the same equality basis as the more privileged.

Drèze and Sen propose two ways for enhancing the political power of the underprivileged and for responding to the problem of the poor people’s claims being trumped by the claims and interests of the more powerful (Drèze and Sen 2002:29). Firstly, the capability of the underprivileged for self-assertion must be enhanced through offering incentives for them to organize in political organizations, and through which they will gain sufficient power to counteract the clout of the privileged. Secondly, a sense of solidarity must be created among the most privileged and underprivileged (e.g. intellectuals and higher social classes speaking on behalf of the underprivileged and defending their interests).

But the question remains how to bring about these two crucial factors that Drèze and Sen point out are needed. If a country is driven by powerful elites who are not sensitive to the needs of the less privileged, and if powerful elites who are directing policy decisions impede the poor from organizing themselves politically (for example, by maintaining low educational standards through not improving the public education system), one can have legitimate doubts about how these changes are ever to emerge in unequal societies.

Sen, a Smithian liberal by inspiration, gives prime importance to freedom as an ideal and process and not a product, and so he relates

freedom to the struggles of the people in search of collective well-being and development. He acknowledges that development is a multifaceted and, at the same time, integrated goal (Maliekal 2002: ch 1). The themes of autonomy, agency, freedom, resistance to ultimate injustice and deprivation are found often in Sen's writings.

Influenced by Adam Smith, Robert Malthus, David Ricardo, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill, Sen acknowledges that "the natural interdisciplinary perspective of the classical political economy is profoundly important for analyzing economic problems," (Maliekal 2002) such as hunger. Sen has adopted a broad perspective on issues like hunger and poverty, class conflict, ideological alienation, etc. We limit our treatment to development as freedom, well-being, capability and entitlement.

### **DEVELOPMENT AS FREEDOM**

The notion of development as freedom is the focus of many an analytical framework developed by Sen. Sen also has grappled with several burning issues of the Third World: famine and endemic hunger, rampant poverty and growing unemployment, population explosion and missing women. All of these issues are indications of persistent inequalities and multiple alienations suffered by the exploited whom are fettered by many unfreedoms.<sup>9</sup>

In his vision of economics as the science of human welfare, Sen departs from the classical standpoint that lays importance on wealth and its creation. He is also at odds with the neo-classical approach to income, whether personal or national, which is regarded as the sole measuring rod of this wealth. He looks beyond wealth to freedom as the end and means of development, and lays stress both on the individuals as well as on the communities in the process of development (Sen 1999a: 7-14). Various freedoms can be viewed from the aspect of opportunities (e.g., longevity of life, financial security, sound health, a peaceful and crime-free environment, etc.). Such freedoms can also be viewed from the aspect of the process of attaining freedom (i.e., participation in the political process, deliberating regarding collective decision making and social choices) (Sen 1999a: 11).

Freedom, seen as not only the primary end of development, but also its principle means, has to be understood in connection to various other kinds of freedom. Political freedom, like free speech and participation in an election, helps to promote economic security. Social opportunities, in the form of education and health facilities, augment economic freedom. According to Sen, economic freedom in turn can create personal wealth and public resources, which are needed for social development. Such mutually enriching and synergetic dimensions of freedom have its implications for our understanding of development as freedom (Sen 1999a: 10-11).

Freedom involves the need to assess the requirements of removing various unfreedoms, from which the members of the society may suffer. This process is intimately related to the process of economic growth and

accumulation of physical and human capital, but its reach and scope go beyond the different types of income. Thus, there is no one homogenous and immutable criterion for well-being. There are varied aspects in the process of development, each of which requires attention and will have various weights and rankings. As such well-being helps us to overcome the various unfreedoms to varying degrees and will collectively foster freedom for both the individual and the community.

Such freedom has both an instrumental and constitutive character. If we recognize freedom as development, it is both instrumental in overcoming unfreedom and constitutive in empowering oneself and others. Thus, the various freedoms are interrelated and mutually advancing (Sen 1999a: 33-37).

The process of human development corresponds to these multiple interconnected freedoms, and involves multiplicity of institutions and mechanisms in the society involving private initiatives and public arrangements. The people are to be not the means of development but the end of the process, and so they are to be actively involved in shaping their own destiny. They are meant to be active participants and not passive recipients of the process and programmes of development. The state and society play their extensive roles of strengthening and safeguarding such human capabilities for the promotion of freedom. But theirs is essentially a supportive role, and does not provide the people with the finished products and projects.

### **FREEDOM AS ENABLING THE OTHER**

Sen's notion of freedom essentially addresses both the individual and social. It is here that we can draw upon the insights of Ricoeur on the necessary philosophical relation between oneself and the other. Following Emmanuel Lévinas, and to some extent Martin Heidegger, Ricoeur would hold that the other is constitutive of oneself, and not merely ontologically but also existentially. This explains the title of one of his famous books: *Oneself as the Other!* (Ricoeur 1992).

Therefore, E. Lévinas (1983) calls for a universal responsibility towards the other. He refers to "the Face" as the real expression of the person avoiding by this way, any economic, social or cultural context, and using the traditional ancient vision of the other's singularity. In this context, social interactions with the other have to be ethical. If this feature disappears, then the person becomes an abstract entity, and any destructive excess may happen, for instance, concentration camps, gas-chambers, gulags, genocide, etc. Therefore, the specificity of the person is to be embedded in a set of normative relationships. Setting the primacy of ethics, he differs from the usual phenomenological view, which only analyses intention and the rights-obligations interaction. This ethical social relationship with the other has to be described through the wording of the

infinite or absolute since “it allows to think far ahead from what it is possible to think”. It thus opens the way to transcendence and commitment.

The other, as a person, i.e. an autonomous human being, is able to decide in a rational and responsible way, but still remains vulnerable, due to weaknesses in his capability set. The feeling of solidarity, and then of responsibility, come from confrontation of this vulnerability, and to the suffering that may result from it. It is an absolute and sudden responsibility for the well-being of the other. This ethical relationship, that is suddenly generated when encountering the other’s *face*, has nothing to do with the evaluated responsibility based on consequences and benefits as referred to from the utilitarian view. It implies the capacity to imagine the situation of the other and to have compassion for that situation, and then to feel responsible for the well-being and happiness of the other and to help him/her increase his/her capacity to live a decent life (Lévinas 1974). Such an ethical behaviour relates to a transcendental attitude.

Lévinas refers to the *face* of the other as an absolute, and the priority of which is always given to the other even if the means sacrificing one’s personal freedom to ensure the happiness of the others. This is the extreme case of an infinite responsibility. However, this ethical vision brings to the fore two key elements that are extremely useful to ensure social sustainability. First, Lévinas introduces and explains in absolute terms that the other is also a person who requires undivided attention. Second, he introduces that everyone has an infinite responsibility for the well-being and happiness of others, whether those others are near, far away or have not yet arrived. As he said: “All men [and women] deserving such a name are responsible towards the others” (cited in Dubois and Mahieu 2007).

## **CONCLUSION: RESPONSIBILITY BY DISCOURSE**

Still, why are there so many unfreedoms? Why is it that as a community we are not always interested in the development of freedom for ourselves and the society? Why are we really not responsible for ourselves and others, both collectively and individually? (Stahl 2007).

In spite of some legitimate, as well as some exaggerated, criticisms of postmodernity, we may hold that collective and creative discourse can be the crucial, if not the only means, to go against such dehumanizing tendencies towards unfreedom, and to foster creative capabilities and responsibilities (Stahl 2007).

All humans seek freedom and development. Still, there is a collective rupture expressed in terms of exploitative and exploiting structures of social sins and personal fallibility. Therefore, in conclusion, we plead for a culture of discourse as a collective corrective against such inherent tendencies, and so as to further freedom.

Paul Ricoeur does not accept the rule of infinite responsibility, which can be accepted and internalised by very few people, as suggested by Lévinas and Jonas.<sup>10</sup> Nor does Ricoeur accept the short-term egoistic view

of utilitarianism, since he also refers to the inalienable right of person. He defines, as a primary capability, the capacity of a person to impute responsibility to current actions. This capacity is called “imputatio,” and expresses the human ability freely to assume responsibility for one’s finite actions and to recognize their corresponding impact on others (Ricoeur 1995). More generally, he shows that obligations have to be mostly fulfilled first, and much before associated rights can be exercised. This demonstrates the relevance of his “imputatio” theory of responsibility and, by the way, its “multiple realisability” (Nussbaum 2000) in various contexts.

Evaluation of development and freedom is vast, and therefore there is no one distinct model for dealing with the problem of the results of the various development models. Since the need for development is part of the process of decision-making of politicians and consumers, both politically and personally obviously it has something to do with morals and responsibility.

The answers of Amartya Sen and Paul Ricoeur to this question is a concept of (moral) responsibility by *discourse*. In his *The Argumentative Indian*, Sen pleads for such a culture of discourse. If one agrees with the idea that moral responsibility is aimed at the idea of improving social relationships, then responsibility has to be construed in a way which takes into consideration the needs, rights or interests of all affected parties. For this to occur, it is necessary to hear the affected parties beforehand in a real discourse. Responsibility *ex post* is in this setting only of interest in so far as it affects future actions. The objective of the discourse is the clarification of the validity claims (*Geltungsansprüche*).<sup>11</sup>

These validity claims, it may be remembered, do not only concern moral norms but they are concerned as well with the clarification of the perception of situations. This concept of responsibility overcomes the philosophy of consciousness, and realizes a philosophy of communication. It is an ethical notion which does not try to force substantive morals on anybody; it is not, however, an empty concept. The problem of moral solipsism is overcome, and at the same time no particular moral action is unjustly favoured (Stahl 2007).

Moral responsibility, as it is understood here, has to be actively assumed by those who act. This fact underlines the pragmatic character of responsibility and simplifies the understanding of the fact that responsibility as discourse has the future as its temporal horizon. The future, as a focus of responsibility, is also a plausible thought considering the usual understanding of responsibility. Whenever we hold somebody responsible for something that has happened, we do so with a perspective of avoiding future mistakes. Ricoeur affirms that it is the meaning of responsibility to accept something that will happen as the result of one’s action as a representative of oneself.<sup>12</sup>

The pragmatic character of responsibility, as ascribed, reflexively also answers the question of the need for God. In this case there is no need

for an external agency like God or some personal or societal construction. Also, the discourse is a guarantee of publicity, and which has been widely recognized as a requirement for ethics.

The realization of this principle has to be imagined as follows: A person who wants to be responsible realizes that s/he is about to make a decision which affects the rights or interests of others. Before acting s/he is now obliged to start a discourse with others. The topic of this discourse is the reality of the situation one is in, and as well as the norms which are to be applied. In the ideal case, all participants of the discourse reach a consensus, and the action one should choose becomes clear. The consensus – and this has to be noted – is always a temporal one. Under the impression of new facts or perceptions, the result of the discourse can be the topic of the next discourse.

Such an idea of responsibility may appear to be simplistic. The numerous problems arising from its implementation as well, as the implied conditions, have not been discussed. Nevertheless, we do not think that this concept is either trivial or without relevance to moral philosophy or to human development. Given that a consensus, or a strong majority decision, is achieved, there is a strong assumption that this consensus has a higher legitimacy than anything any philosopher in her/his study or any engineer at her/his workplace could have come up with. Furthermore, the result of the discourse takes all points of view into consideration. This leads to one central advantage of discourse which takes into consideration the concerns and knowledge of the affected parties which is a prerequisite of responsibility (See Stahl 2007).

Another advantage of discourse is the possible inclusion of the three described methods of dealing with development and its results. Furthermore, it opens up a perspective of the responsibility of the collective. While individuals are losing the ability and knowledge of how to deal with the development paradigms, those abilities are taken over by collectives, such as corporations, NGOs or bureaucracies. The conventional notion of responsibility does not allow these entities as the subjects of responsibility. Our notion of responsibility would render such an imputation possible, and without which the notion of responsibility does not seem to be of any use in the modern society.

Coming to our contemporary Indian context, when we reflect on the development, we take seriously the “call for responsibility” (Kaufmann 1992), and especially towards the weaker sections of our nations, including tribals, dalits, females and rural poor.<sup>13</sup> The development is possible only when we can enter into a discourse with them at different levels, including their own humdrum lives. Development implies that we regard them too, as constituting our own identity and self. Thus, a healthy, creative and respectful dialogue fosters the participative and progressive freedom leading to the development of humans.

**NOTES**

1. We are indebted to two excellent articles by Séverine Deneulin (2007a and 2007b) in the formulating the outline and arguments in this chapter.

2. It is to be noted that Human Development Index (HDI) for India is 0.611, which gives India a rank of 126 out of 177 countries. See [hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_IND.html](http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_IND.html). In 2004 and 2005 the position was 127. The HDI is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, and standard of living for countries worldwide. It is a standard means of measuring well-being, especially child welfare. It is used to determine and indicate whether a country is a developed, developing, or underdeveloped country and also to measure the impact of economic policies on quality of life. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_Development\\_Index](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index). However one may disagree with the procedure followed with HDI, India, which claims to be an economic power, cannot remain complacent.

3. This and all the following quotes are from Sen (1999a: 4).

4. See for example Sen (1985 a,b, 1987 a,b, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1999a). We need to distinguish between a development that promotes “having” more than “being” more. “Having” focused on adding more things to life, while “being” focuses on being more open to values. These ideas are from Gabriel Marcel and Cyril Desbruslais.

5. Poverty as a lack of freedom has been at the core of Catholic Social Thinking. For example, one reads in *Gaudium et Spes*: “Only in freedom can man direct himself towards goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly to be sure. [...] For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remains ‘under the control of his own decisions’.” (GS §17) “Human freedom is often crippled when a man encounters extreme poverty, just as it withers when he indulges in too many of life’s comforts and imprisons himself in a kind of splendid isolation” (GS §31).

6. This approach of Sen is also criticised: Such a capability approach remains however a theory of individual choice, which has little to offer for guiding collective choices. First, collective choices, such as the government’s actions to provide its population with the conditions for them to live long and healthy lives through the provision of public health services, cannot be assessed at the level of each individual’s freedom to choose that particular functioning but will have to be assessed at the level of each individual’s achievements and not each individual’s freedoms. There are areas of human life, such as health and education, which cannot be left up to ‘people’s choices’. Public actions will often have to be guided by the concern of making people function in one way or another rather than by the concern for giving them the opportunities to function should they choose so. This is particularly the case where externalities are involved. For example,

when dealing with environmental problems, it is more relevant that policies ensure that people *do* live in a non-polluted environment, rather than make them able to do so, should they choose or not. Given that individual choices have important consequences upon other people's lives, and given that an individual never lives alone and that human choices are deeply interconnected with other people's lives, the focus on individual capabilities rather than functioning as political goal may lead to important losses in well-being. This is why the freedoms or capabilities that development policies should promote are to be understood as good states of doings or beings rather than possible states of beings or doings, should one choose to exercise these states or not. The freedoms that the capability approach should speak about are best considered as excellences, as fundamental properties of human life which have to be perfected. But it is not only in its conception of freedom as choice that Sen's capability approach betrays its commitment to liberalism, it does so even more by considering the good human life as freedom.

7. Ricoeur's (1992:194) original definition refers to institution: "By institution, we understand the structure of *living together* as this belongs to a historical community, a structure irreducible to interpersonal relations and yet bound up with these."

8. Sen tends to use the term 'freedoms' frequently. In this chapter, we limit to the use of 'freedom' as a singular entity.

9. For this section we are dependent on the excellent work of the budding Indian thinker, Jose D Maliekal. See Maliekal (2002).

10. Lévinas calls for a universal responsibility towards the other. He refers to "the Face" as real expression of the person, avoiding by this way any economic, social or cultural context, and using the traditional Ancient vision of the other' Lévinas E., 1983, *Le temps et l'autre*, PUF, Paris. Further, already in 1979 Hans Jonas raises the issue of responsibility towards the future generations. Faced with the depletion of natural resources, only a decision of responsibility expressed by "precautionary principles" can set priorities. It ensures that future generations won't suffer from any decision taken by the current generation. Jonas, H., 1979, *Le principe responsabilité*, Cerf, Paris. See <http://www.ethiclaw.dk/publication/consumersfoodethics.pdf>. accessed in July, 2007.

11. With Habermas, on whose theory of communicative action (Habermas 1981) this model is built, one can differentiate three claims of validity: truth ("*Wahrheit*"), (normative) correctness ("*Richtigkeit*"), and veracity or truthfulness ("*Wahrhaftigkeit*").

12. Ricoeur (1990, 341). Jonas even goes so far as to see responsibility as a moral complement of our ontological condition of being in time.

13. An excellent survey of caste and freedom in the Indian situation is found in (Dharmathertha 2004).



## CHAPTER VI

### THE BOUND OPENNESS: FROM SUSPICION TO TRUST

“Man is an intelligence in servitude to his organs” ~Aldous Huxley

“Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be” ~William Hazlitt,

“Man will do many things to get himself loved; he will do all things to get himself envied” ~Mark Twain

“It is the nature of mortals to kick a fallen man” ~Aeschylus

The dilemma between freedom and responsibility was studied in the last chapter, where we tried to appraise the human situation hermeneutically. In this chapter, following Ricoeur's lead, we trace the long hermeneutic journey from suspicion to trust. This enables me to appreciate the self in terms oneself and the other. Basing ourselves on our historical conditioning, this chapter focuses on the bodiliness of human experience and the ethical importance of my existence, leading to the other. In this sense, I am “care concerned with the other.” Here, the human being is seen as bounded openness moving from suspicion to trust and from oneself to the other. It is by maintaining this tensional movement that we realize ourselves.

In this chapter, dealing with the self as bound and open simultaneously, we take up two of Paul Ricoeur's significant contributions to hermeneutical philosophy today: The “hermeneutics of suspicion” and that of the “self.” Borrowing from the “masters of suspicion,” Ricoeur invites us to go through a critical moment of suspicion, in order to arrive at a “second naïveté” and then reach a hermeneutics of trust and hope (Ihde 1971: 142f). As we explore into the hermeneutics of self, I raise the basic questions in the hermeneutics of the self: Who am I? How should I live? What is my context? The answers to these questions determine the self, and for Ricoeur the self is intrinsically related to the other. Finally, we conclude with some critical reflections.

Since the extent of Ricoeur's writings is mind-boggling, we are forced to limit ourselves to two of his major insights. Though Ricoeur has followed the tradition of Aristotle, Plato, Philo, Origen, Augustine, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Habermas and Gadamer, in this essay we do not take up this historical path. Nor do we take up the significant

issues connected with hermeneutics in general. Our interest is to show the anthropological significance of Ricoeurian hermeneutics. Following Ricoeur's profound insights, we hope to show in this chapter the basic hermeneutic nature of human beings and some of the significant contributions of Ricoeur to contemporary life. The method we follow is descriptive and phenomenological. After introducing Ricoeur the man and his philosophy, we take up one significant aspect of his hermeneutics: "the hermeneutics of suspicion." This is followed by his hermeneutics of the self.

### **RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS**

In one of his discussions with the neurologist Jean-Pierre Changeux, Ricoeur alludes to the development of his own hermeneutics. Here it is useful to let Ricoeur himself elaborate on it:

I want to make my position clear at the outset. I am a partisan of a current of European philosophy that contains three distinctive approaches, typically referred to as "reflective philosophy," "phenomenology," and "hermeneutics." The first approach, reflectivity, emphasizes the mind's attempt to recover its power of acting, thinking, and feeling – a power that has, so to speak, been buried or lost – in the knowledge, practices, and feelings that exteriorize it in relation to itself. Jean Nabert is the leading representative of this first branch of the tradition to which I belong (Changeux and Ricoeur 2000).

Ricoeur proceeds to elaborate on the second approach. According to him, the second approach, phenomenology, refers to the ambition of going back "to things themselves," which means the manifestation of what presents itself to experience as the least encumbered of all the constructions inherited from cultural, philosophical and theological history. This concern, in contrast to the reflective approach, lays stress on the *intentional* dimension of theoretical, practical, and aesthetic life and defines all consciousness as a consciousness of something. Husserl is the eponymous champion of this branch (Changeux and Ricoeur 2000).

The third approach is hermeneutics, and for Ricoeur this refers to an approach that "derives from the interpretive method applied first to religious texts (exegesis), classical literary texts (philology) and legal texts (jurisprudence) and stresses the plurality of interpretations associated with what may be called the reading of human experience. The masters of this third branch, which challenges the claim of any philosophy to be devoid of presuppositions, are Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer" (Changeux and Ricoeur 2000).

Indebted to psychoanalysis and the tradition of French semiotics, Ricoeur sets out to demonstrate that there is no unbridgeable gap between ontological and critical hermeneutics. Although the differences between the

two are genuine, he proposes an alternative that aims at unifying the most convincing aspects of both. Ricoeur agrees with Habermas and Apel that the hermeneutic act must always be accompanied by critical reflection. Yet he does not find that this requires a leaving behind of the field of tradition and historical texts.

Following the introduction to the person of Ricoeur and his thought, we are now ready to take up two significant Ricoeurian hermeneutics issues: The hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of the self.

### **THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION: BEYOND RELATIVISM AND SUBJECTIVISM**

The French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, while essentially operating from within the reader oriented end of the spectrum, is uncomfortable with the intrinsic subjectivity associated with hermeneutics, and thus seeks to walk the fine line between a call for objectivity (grounded in some way in the text) and simultaneously remain “open” to what the text may have to say. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion represents his attempt to retain the idea of hermeneutics as both science and art, whilst disallowing either an absolute status. In Ricoeur words: “Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen.”<sup>1</sup> Distilling the essence of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, A. Thisleton (1992: 26) notes:

The first addresses the task of ‘doing away with idols,’ namely, becoming critically aware of when we project our own wishes and constructs into texts, so that they no longer address us from beyond ourselves as “other.” The second concerns the need to listen in openness to symbol and to narrative and thereby to allow creative events to occur “in front of” the text and to have their effect on us.<sup>2</sup>

It is this hermeneutic of “critical openness,” of “suspicion and hope” (White 1991: 311-321) that we want to dwell on here.<sup>3</sup>

#### *The Masters of Suspicion*

In his highly influential work, *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur (1970) draws attention to three key intellectual figures of the twentieth century who, in their own ways, sought to unmask, demystify and expose the real from the apparent; “Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud” (FP 32).

Why were these masters of suspicion so highly impressive to Ricoeur? The answer to this question is not insignificant since it would appear that the suspicion displayed by these three serve as paradigms for Ricoeur’s own hermeneutic. Very briefly, Marx’s analysis of religion led

him to the conclusion that while religion appeared to be concerned with the lofty issues of transcendence and personal salvation, in reality its true function seemed to provide a “flight from the reality of inhuman working conditions” and make “the misery of life more endurable” (Stewart 1989: 299). Religion in this way served as “the opium of the people” (Marx 1964: 44).

Similarly, Nietzsche’s understanding of the true purpose of religion as the elevation of “weakness to a position of strength, to make weakness respectable” belied its apparent purpose, and namely to make life liveable for those with ‘slave morality’, the weak and unfit, by promoting alleged virtues such as pity, industry, humility, and friendliness. Thus, Nietzsche unmasks religion to reveal it as the refuge of the weak.

Likewise with Freud, the same pattern of “unmasking” to reveal and distinguish “the real” from the “apparent” is evident in his analysis of religion. So, while religion was perceived to be a legitimate source of comfort and hope when one is faced with the difficulties of life, in reality religion was an illusion that merely expressed one’s wish for a father-God (Stewart 1989:302). These insights of the “Masters of Suspicion” allowed Ricoeur to apply them to religion and culture.

Furthermore, Ricoeur insisted that it would be a mistake to view the three men merely as masters of skepticism. It is true that they are involved in destroying established ideas and, too, “[a]ll three clear the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of a ‘destructive’ critique, but by the invention of an art of interpreting” (Ricoeur 1970: 33). In other words, each of the masters have, in their own way, unmasked a false consciousness, a false understanding of the “text” (society), by systematically applying a critique of suspicion, and with the result that the true understanding, one that more faithfully tracks and correlates with the real situation, now becomes unmasked and revealed. All three, for Ricoeur, “represent three convergent procedures of demystification” (Ricoeur 1970: 34).

### *Second Naïveté or Innocence*

Such a hermeneutic, when applied to a text, gives rise to the possibility of a “second naïveté” whereby the goal of interpretation may be reached, namely “a world in front of the text, and a world that opens up new possibilities of being” (Ricoeur 1970: 34). It seems to us that Ricoeur’s insight here is an essentially valid one. When reading a text, especially one that we are familiar with, it is simply too easy to interpret it with rigidity and complacency tending to “freeze” its meaning irrevocably. To approach the text with suspicion – to query whether what the text appears to say really does correspond with its true message – seems to be both a valid and necessary hermeneutical process.

Ricoeur’s three “masters” highlight another important aspect of this question of suspicion, and namely that it (the suspicion) needs to operate

with a bi-polar focus. Just as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, in their own contexts, criticized both the participants (society at large, or individuals) and “the system” (religion), so we too need to be aware that the suspicion has a dual focus as we approach a text. I need to apply suspicion to myself. Am I imposing a meaning upon this text? And I should have a suspicion regarding the text, namely, the question: Is the text really saying this? Both the poles of suspicion are valid and necessary if we are to hear afresh what the other may seek to communicate to us. As G. D. Robinson tells us, “Ricoeur is in a way merely reminding us, in a startling manner, of the reality of the hermeneutical circle” (Robinson 1970). We must approach the text critically and suspiciously in order that its message is heard, and so that our own pre-understandings and certainties do not mask the truth. This calls for a second naïveté or innocence, that is more than a naïve simplicity.

### *Metaphor and Parable*

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion finds expression in his rich understanding of metaphor (White 1991: 312). Ricoeur believes that intrinsic to metaphor is both an “is like” element and an “is not” element. The former points to the literary vehicle used to convey the metaphor, while the latter indicates that the referent of the metaphor is not to be found in literal terms. This tension projects “a world in front of the text” which is the true metaphorical referent. For Ricoeur, “the metaphorical meaning and reference await appropriation through the recontextualizing activity of the current reader” (White 1991: 313).

By this interaction with the world through a written text, Ricoeur seeks for a “metaphor-faith beyond demythologization, a second naïveté” – a stress on the “is like.” However, Ricoeur simultaneously seeks to stress the critical “is not” aspect, and thus renders his hermeneutic an open system which seeks to avoid a naïve credulity. This tension finds expression in three spheres: (i) within poetic language, (ii) between interpretations of this language and (iii) between these interpretations and the lives of the readers or listeners. These tensions find resolution in the present by the creation of the new meanings and new referents.

Ricoeur identifies biblical “limit expressions” where tensions intrinsic to metaphor especially apply, namely proverbs, eschatological sayings and parables. In applying his hermeneutic of metaphor to parables, Ricoeur sees the “is like” component in the narrative form of the parable (the model), and the “is not” in the way the narrative form is transgressed (the qualifier) by the intrusion of the extraordinary or even the scandalous. These dual components lead to the tension between the “closedness” of the narrative form and the “openness” of the metaphorical process. Again, the tension leads to the projection of a world in front of the text between the interpreter/hearer and the text itself whereby the referent of the parable becomes apparent. Ricoeur’s definition of a parable as “the conjunction between a narrative form, a metaphysical process and an appropriate

qualifier” is thus seen to be consistent with both his overall hermeneutic of suspicion and his specific understanding of how the metaphor functions (Ricoeur 1975: 33).

### *Beyond Relativism and Subjectivism*

Ricoeur’s dialectical approach to the text, together with his desire to avoid absolutizing either the text or the interpreting self, leads him to an intrinsic “openness” regarding the meaning of a parable – and, in fact, to all written texts where distanciation is present. Distanciation objectifies the text by freeing it from the author’s (research participant’s) intentions (meanings) and giving it a life of its own.<sup>4</sup> In his desire to find meaning, not in the text itself, but in front of the text, Ricoeur in fact allows for an inescapable relativizing of the text’s message. As the reader’s context changes, so does the world in front of the text, and in reality the “is not” is allowed to dominate at the expense of the “is like.” Ricoeur wishes to maintain the tension, but in reality the tension is finally resolved in favor of the “new meaning” generated in the flux between the reader and text; an intrinsic destabilizing of the text’s message and an associated relativizing of that message inevitably follows. For Ricoeur, the relativism or the subjectivism that emerges must be held in tension with the search for the objective truth.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of suspicion, which attempts to find the balance between “explanation” and “understanding”, or science and art, falls on the side of the perpetual openendedness. According to a Ricoeur critique, G.D. Robinson, the hermeneutics of suspicion needs to be balanced by a hermeneutic that is grounded in the recognition that the written texts represent valid expressions of their author’s intent, and that principles may be established that would guide the reader to that intent. The science and art of hermeneutics is to be more than an eternal hermeneutical circle; it should move towards the closure implied by a spiral. A hermeneutic of suspicion helps in this move, but alone is ultimately inadequate for the task.<sup>5</sup> Thus, hermeneutics of suspicion leads to a refined “hermeneutics of trust,” and can handle the tension between absolute relativism and pure subjectivism.

## **THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE SELF AS THE OTHER**

Ricoeur asserts that “...the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of the cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always already articulates actions, and, among them, the narratives of everyday life.”<sup>6</sup> There are three closely related questions that animate all of Ricoeur’s work, and which he considers to be fundamental to philosophy: “Who am I?”, “How should I live?” and “What is our historical context or conditioning?” The first question has been neglected by much of the contemporary analytical and post-modern philosophy. Consequently, those philosophies lack the means to address the second question. At the same time, contemporary philosophy

of the mind reduces questions of “who?” to questions of “what?”, and in doing so closes down considerations of the self while rendering the moral question to one of mere instrumentality or utility. In relation to the question “Who am I?” Ricoeur acknowledges a long-standing debt to Marcel and Heidegger, and to a lesser extent to Merleau-Ponty. With regards to the second moral question, the debt is to Aristotle and Kant. The third question on historical conditioning is elaborately taken up in his latter three volume work on *Time and Narrative*.

For Ricoeur, hermeneutics has varied functions. From a general theory of interpretation, Ricoeurian hermeneutics has become the interpretation of the text, then the interpretation of the interpretation (“understanding of understanding”) and finally the interpretation of the subject (along with her/his context) who interprets. This is the key to his hermeneutical anthropology or hermeneutics of the self. Hence, Ricoeurian hermeneutics becomes anthropological, and so in this section we study briefly his hermeneutics of the self in terms of the basic question: Who am I?

Addressing the question of “Who am I?”, Ricoeur sets out first to understand the nature of selfhood – to understand the being whose nature it is to enquire into itself.

#### *Self as Intersubjective*

In this endeavour, Ricoeur’s philosophy is driven by the desire to provide an account that will do justice to the tensions and ambiguities which make us human, and which underpin our fallibility. Ricoeur’s interest to this end is noted in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, which was drafted during his years as a prisoner of war. In his text, Ricoeur explores the involuntary constraints to which we are necessarily subject in the virtue of our being bodily mortal creatures, and the voluntariness necessary to the idea of ourselves as the agents of our actions. We have, as he later describes it, a “double allegiance”, an allegiance to the material world of the cause and effect and to the phenomenal world of the freedom of the will by which we tear ourselves away from the laws of nature through action. This conception of the double nature of the self lies at the core of Ricoeur’s philosophy. Ricoeur rejects the idea that a self is a metaphysical entity; there is no entity, “the self,” there is only the selfhood. Selfhood is an intersubjectively constituted capacity for agency and self-ascription that can be had by individual human beings.

Selfhood itself is neither simply an abstract nor an animal self-awareness, but both. It essentially involves an active grasp of oneself as a “who”– that is, as a person who is the subject of a concrete situation, and a situation characterized by material and phenomenal qualities. This entails understanding oneself as a named person born in a location and at a specific time, linked to other similarly named persons and to certain ethnic and cultural traditions and living in a dated and named place. In *Oneself As*

*Another*, Ricoeur describes how the complexity of the question of “Who am I?” opens directly onto a certain way of articulating the question of personal identity: “how the self can be at one and the same time a person of whom we speak and a subject who designates herself in the first person while addressing a second person.... The difficulty will be... understanding how the third person is designated in discourse as someone who designates himself as a first person” (Ricoeur 1992: 34-35).

### *Essentially Embodied*

Subjectivity, or selfhood, is for Ricoeur, a dialectic of activity and passivity because we are beings with a “double nature,” structured along the fault lines of the voluntary and the involuntary and beings given to ourselves as something to be known. Ricoeur agrees with Marcel that the answer to the question “Who am I?” can never be fully explicated. This is because, in asking “Who am I?”, the “I” who poses the question necessarily falls within the domain of enquiry; I, the subject of the self, am both seeker and what is sought. This peculiar circularity gives a “questing” and dialectical character to selfhood, which now requires a hermeneutic approach. This circularity has its origins in the nature of embodied subjectivity.

Ricoeur’s account is built upon Marcel’s conception of embodied subjectivity as a “fundamental predicament” (Atkins 2005). The predicament lies in the anti-dualist realization that “I” and my body are not metaphysically distinct entities. My body cannot be abstracted from its being mine. Whatever states I may attribute to my body as its states, I do so only insofar as they are attributes of mine. My body is both something that I *am* and something that I *have*: It am “my body” that imagines, perceives and experiences. The unity of “my body” is a unity *sui generis*, and yet my body is also that over which I exercise a certain instrumentality through my agency. However, the agency that effects that instrumentality is nothing other than “my body.” There is no I-body relation; the primitive term here is “my body.” The inherent ambiguity of the “incarnate body” or “*corps-sujet*” can be directly experienced by clasping one’s own hands. In this experience, the distinction between subject and object becomes blurred: It isn’t clear which hand is being touched and which is touching; each hand oscillates between the role of agent and object, without ever being both simultaneously (Atkins 2005).

One cannot feel oneself feeling. This example is supposed to demonstrate two points: First, that the ambiguity of my body prevents the complete objectification of myself and, second, that the ambiguity extends to all perception. Perception is not simply passive, but rather involves an active reception (Atkins 2005; Ricoeur 1992: 319-329). In other words, my body has an active role in structuring my perceptions, and so the meaning of my perceptions needs to be interpreted in the context of my bodily situation. The non-coincidence of myself and my body constitutes a “fault line”

within the structure of subjectivity. The result is that knowledge of myself and the world is not constituted by more or less accurate facts, but rather is a composite discourse – a discourse which charts the intersection of the objective, intersubjective and subjective aspects of lived experience. With this in view, all knowledge, including my knowledge of my own existence, is mediate and so calls for interpretation. This also means that self-understanding can never be grasped by the kind of introspective immediacy celebrated by Descartes. Instead, as human beings we are never quite “at one” with ourselves; we are fallible creatures.

Thus, who I am is not an objective fact to be discovered, but rather something that I must achieve or create, and to which I must attest. With Ricoeur’s view in mind, the question “Who am I?” is a question specific to a certain kind of being, which is namely a subject of a temporal, material, linguistic and social unity. The ability to grasp oneself as a concrete subject of such a world requires a complex mode of understanding that is inclusive of integrating discourses of quite heterogeneous kinds, and including, importantly, different orders of time. It is to the temporal dimension of selfhood that Ricoeur has most directly addressed his hermeneutic philosophy and narrative model of understanding. Thus for Ricoeur, the self is essentially embodied. It is enabled, constituted and limited by its material and cultural situation (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

From the self, that is essentially material and cultural, we move to its social interactions involving fostering of life and ethics.

### **THE HERMENEUTICS OF LIFE AND ETHICS**

Though the terms “ethics” and “morality” are often used interchangeably, Ricoeur stipulates a distinction between them. In his usage, ethics deals with the domain of that which is taken to belong to a good human life. It is concerned with the overall aim of a life of action. Morality refers to the expression of this aim in terms of norms that are regarded as somehow obligatory. Moral norms are taken to be universal and to exercise some constraint on conduct. In standard terminology, ethics is teleologically oriented and morality is deontologically oriented. For Ricoeur, these orientations are complementary, and never incompatible.

At the base of both ethical and moral reflection are two fundamental capabilities described in Ricoeur’s anthropology, namely action and imputation. Persons are capable of initiating some new action, and what they do is imputable to them as their own freely chosen deed. An event is not an action unless it is imputable to an agent who has a durable identity. Recognition of the imputability of action opens the way for consideration of the ethical and moral determinations of action.

#### *Dynamically Transforming*

On the other hand, human beings are, in principle, always capable of

initiative, and of inaugurating something new. The stimulus to initiate is desire. Desire is not only a force that moves or impels a person, but also a reason for the initiative in question. It is a reason that makes the initiative intelligible and meaningful. Thus, desire shows that the self, as agent, belongs both to the order of nature, in which desire impels, and to the order of culture or meaning, in which initiatives make sense both to the agent and to others as motions aimed at obtaining what it desires.

These two dimensions of desire, however, are not sufficient to account fully for the agent with action or transformation. Action purportedly transforms the world. Accordingly, the crucial questions about action are: “What must be the nature of the world... if human beings are able to introduce changes into it? [And] what must be the nature of action... if it is to be read in terms of change in the world?” (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

The second crucial question about action is “What must be the nature of action... if it is to be read in terms of a change in the world?” Building upon Kant’s reflections on the antinomies connected with the thesis of the causality of freedom, Ricoeur argues that every action involves initiative, i.e., “an *intervention* of the agent of action into the course of the world, an intervention that effectively *causes* changes in the world.” (Ricoeur 1992: 109). Initiative requires a bodily agent, who possesses specific capabilities and vulnerabilities and inhabits some concrete worldly situation. The fundamental human capabilities are those of speaking, acting (doing or making), narrating and imputing actions to some person or persons as worthwhile or not worthwhile. Each of these capabilities has its corresponding vulnerability. For example, the capability to speak makes one always vulnerable to speaking erroneously, misleadingly or inappropriately (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

To sum up, agents, in and by their bodiliness, are capable of initiating and sustaining something new in the world. They are subject to other causal sequences that bind them to the world. The agent’s power to act requires a distinctive causal capacity that is not reducible to other sorts of causality but that can only be realized as such in conjunction with these other causal processes.

On Ricoeur’s analysis, every action is both purposive and related to other actions and it takes place in a context of meaningfulness. That is, every action is in some measure a response to past action and it anticipates that there will be future responses to it. Thus action takes place in what Ricoeur calls historical time.<sup>7</sup>

### *Towards Good Conduct*

The position that Ricoeur develops in *Oneself as Another* has its point of departure in the Aristotelian view that action always aims at some good. More specifically, its ultimate aim is to be a constituent in a “‘good life’ with and for others in just institutions” (Ricoeur 1992: 180;

Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011). For a good life, one must have associates with and for whom one acts. Furthermore, societal institutions, particularly political institutions, set the context for action and significantly affect its efficacy. For a good life, we aim to have institutions that meet our sense of justice in the obligations they impose and the privileges and opportunities they grant (Ricoeur 1992: 180).

The ethical aim, however, is insufficient to guide one to proper conduct. The threat of violence cannot be eliminated from action because to act is always to impinge upon another. An action does not necessarily inflict violence, but because an action always affects another's capacity to act, any action may inflict violence. Hence, the actual implementation of any specific ethical aim could turn out to be violent. This danger calls into question the adequacy of both our aims and the practices, values, and institutions that our society supports. Therefore, "by reason of the fact of violence, morality must not be ignored. One must pass on to the imperative, to duty, to interdiction."<sup>8</sup> Every actual aim must be submitted to such a criteria or sieve, according to Ricoeur.

One important version of this sieve is Kant's principle of the universalizability of any genuine moral norm. By using some version of this kind of sieve, we move to a second stage of ethical reflection, namely the stage of morality. At this stage, the sense of justice operative in the first stage is transformed into the rule of justice. But neither of these versions of the sieve, nor any other proposed version, turns out to be sufficient to guide a concrete conduct. All proposed versions are abstract and ahistorical (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011). Each in its own fashion would always require one to give priority to some universal norm. For Ricoeur, it is part of the tragedy of action that at times one can harm another precisely by observing some universal norm.

In those cases in which respect for another person and respect for a universal law conflict, one needs to resort to a practical wisdom to determine what genuine goodness for the other person would require. This practical wisdom is like Aristotelian *phronesis*. Ricoeurian "practical wisdom consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception that solicitude requires by breaking the rule to the smallest extent possible."<sup>9</sup> It has three distinctive features for dealing with the exigencies of particular cases, and especially serious and difficult ones (Ricoeur 1992: 269-272). First, practical wisdom never denies the principle of respect for persons. It considers how to express this respect in the case at hand. Second, practical reason always searches for an Aristotelian's "just mean." It looks for a way to reconcile opposed claims that is, unlike a simple compromise, more fitting than either of them. Third, practical wisdom avoids arbitrariness. A person exercises practical wisdom by engaging in discussion with other qualified persons and by consulting the most competent advisors available. In other terms, practical wisdom's guiding light is the solicitude we ought to have for each person in his or her uniqueness. This solicitude is a "critical" solicitude that has passed through

the double test of the moral conditions of respect and the conflicts arising from it. This *critical solicitude* is the form that practical wisdom takes in the region of interpersonal relations” (Ricoeur 1992: 273). Ultimately, critical solicitude rests on mutual recognition of one another as capable and vulnerable selves.

## **THE HERMENEUTICS OF HISTORICAL CONDITION**

Such a solicitude of oneself as capable and vulnerable urges us to situate ourselves in our temporal, historical and narrative context.

### *The Temporality of History*

The above reflections on good conduct leads us to appreciate Ricoeur’s understanding of action and involvement in history. Ricoeur’s conception of historical time unites two more elementary senses of time. First, there is cosmic time, the time of the world that unfolds as a sequence of uniform, and qualitatively undifferentiated moments in which all change occurs. Second, there is lived time, the time of our lives. In lived time, some moments are more meaningful than others. For example, the moments of one’s marriage, birth of one’s child, and death of a loved one are more important than many other moments. Thus, our elementary experiences of time confront us with a paradox. So Ricoeur holds: “On a cosmic scale, our life is insignificant, yet this brief period when we appear in the world is the time in which all meaningful questions arise” (Ricoeur 1985: 263).

People harmonize these two conceptions of time by establishing devices, e.g., calendars to measure time. These devices enable us to assign moments of lived time to moments of cosmic time, and vice versa. A calendar, for example, “cosmologizes lived time [and] humanizes cosmic time. And it does this by making a noteworthy present coincide with an anonymous instant in the axial moment of the calendar” (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011). The intelligibility of action depends upon the harmonization of these two kinds of time into what can properly be called historical time (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

The present moment of historical time in which action takes place stands at the intersection of what Reinhart Koselleck calls the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation” (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011). The space of experience is made up of past natural or cultural events that a person remembers in the present. It is the past now made present, and thus it serves as the point of departure for a new decision or action. The horizon of expectation, on the other hand, is the unfolding of the array of projects that one can now undertake, and of paths that one can now begin to explore. It is the future made present. The space of experience and the horizon of expectation mutually condition each other. The space of experience does not precisely determine a person’s horizon of expectation. But a person who remembers only a little has a foreshortened horizon. S/he

can only want something that is already rather familiar. Nonetheless, in considering a particular project, a person may be prompted to learn about some part of the past previously outside her/his space of experience.

Action, taken in the present, preserves the space of experience in a dialectical tension with the horizon of expectation. Without them, action would be impossible. But neither singly nor jointly can they fully determine action. Undoubtedly, we are affected both by a past that is not of our own making and by the pictured future that our society presents. Nonetheless, through our initiatives we do make history and affect ourselves in the process of doing so (Ricoeur 1988a: 164-177 and 301-309).

These considerations concerning action and the historical time in which it takes place lead Ricoeur to refine his conception of personal identity. He argues that the kind of identity that a person has is a narrative identity.

#### *Narrativity, Identity and Time*

The historical present is the time of actions, the time of the inaugurations of new sequences and arrangements of things. It is also the moment framed by the agent's space of experience and horizon of expectation. To give expression to this complex historical present one must have a kind of discourse that can articulate both strings of actions and events, and their human contexts. The kind of discourse to achieve this end is narrative. Historical time becomes human time "to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

As the most faithful articulations of human time, narratives present the moments when agents, who are aware of their power to act, act and patients, who are subject to being affected by actions, are acted upon. Narratives also tell of worldly outcomes, intended or otherwise, and of those interventions into processes that both antedates and outlasts them. The historical time that narrative presents, i.e., human time, is an interpersonal and public time. It is the time in which one can locate sequences of generations and the traces their lives have left behind. Furthermore, it is the time in which debts to predecessors have been incurred. Indeed, Ricoeur holds that without at least a latent sense of indebtedness to the respective predecessors, history would be meaningless (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

The constitutive features of a narrative form the basis for Ricoeur to hold that personal identity is itself constituted by a narrative identity. First, narratives draw together disparate and somehow discordant elements into the concordant unity of a plot that has a temporal span. Second, all of the elements that a narrative unites are contingencies; all of them could have been different or even nonexistent. Nonetheless, as employed, these elements take on the guise of necessity or at least of likelihood. Taken by

itself, an element of a story is of interest only if it is surprising, but when it is integrated into a plot it appears as a quasi-necessity. Third, narratives are made up not only of actions and events, but also of characters or personages. Plots relate the mutual development of a story and a character or set of characters. Every character in a story of any complexity both acts and is acted upon. Finally, a narrative's characters only rise to the status of persons – fictional or real – who can initiate action when one evaluates their doings and sufferings and imputes them to the persons as praiseworthy or otherwise. One evaluates how the person responds when confronted by other persons and their actions (Ricoeur 1992:141-145).

In sum, the narrative about humans tells of both the connections that unify multiple actions over a span of time performed, in most cases, by a multiplicity of persons and the connections that link multiple viewpoints on and assessments of those actions. “The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity.” Such identities are construed through individual and collective stories. “It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (Ricoeur 1992: 147-148).

Ricoeur's analysis of personal narrative identity yields four conclusions that are basic to his anthropology. Those conclusions are (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011):

1. Because my personal identity is a narrative identity, I can make sense of myself only in and through my involvement with others.
2. In my dealings with others, I do not simply enact a role or function that has been assigned to me. I can change myself through my own efforts and can reasonably encourage others to change as well.
3. Nonetheless, because I am bodily, and hence have inherited both biological and psychological constraints, I cannot change everything about myself. And because others are similarly constrained, I cannot sensibly call for comprehensive changes in them.
4. Though I can be evaluated in a number of ways, e.g., physical dexterity, verbal fluency and technical skill, the ethical evaluation in the light of my responsiveness to others is, on the whole, the most important evaluation.

In Ricoeur's last book, *The Course of Recognition*, he returns to the topic of personal identity. Here again, Ricoeur develops his position through an analysis of the fundamental capabilities and vulnerabilities that are constitutive of human existence. But here his focus is on these capabilities in their exercise and not simply in their potentiality. In their exercise, these capabilities always, more or less explicitly, implicate at least one other person. One speaks to someone. One affects someone by the doings and makings one either performs or leaves undone (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011). Every narrative one constructs involves the intersection of at least two human lives. And every imputation that one makes implies at least two

persons, one of whom bears some responsibility for someone else's well-being.

Finally, even after the "linguistic turn," Ricoeur does not abandon the basic claims of his earlier anthropology. He continued to emphasize the fragility of the human condition. The implications of Ricoeur's conceptions of discourse and action come together in a particularly striking way in his discussion of what he calls the narrative unity of a person's life. Whatever else a narrative recounts, he says, it also recounts care. Indeed, in a sense narrative recounts Care. "This is why there is nothing absurd in speaking about the narrative unity of a life, under the sign of narratives that teach us how to articulate retrospection and prospectation in a narrative way" (Ricoeur 1992:163). Thus Ricoeur sees person as essentially "Care Concerned of the Other" (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS: HERMENEUTICAL THEOLOGY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO RATIONAL RELIGION**

It is not surprising that although he is neither exegete nor theologian, Paul Ricoeur continues to have an impact on biblical research through his efforts to develop a general theory of interpretation. For him, biblical hermeneutics is one aspect of a general theory of interpretation which has its origins in an effort to understand ordinary language as the foundation of the various developed specialized languages which we recognize in scientific as well as in poetic discourse (Dornish 1981: 3).

He has been highly appreciated in theology circles too. The philosophical vision of the French thinker has provided an alternative to the rational approaches to religion through a theology of symbols. One of the primary polemics throughout his large corpus is his repudiation of Cartesian rationalism. Schleiermacher had earlier challenged the conceptual distance of Descartes' project and suggested what was really at issue for theology was immediacy and relationality. Interpretation is communal within the context of Schleiermacher's romanticism, not the solitary exercise on which Descartes embarked in order to discover the scope of doubt and knowledge. Throughout his writing Ricoeur has consistently demonstrated the problematic nature of what he calls "the Cartesian cogito." The self for Ricoeur is distinct from that of the cogito. The self "I am" is prior to the "I think," the thinking thing. For the philosophical hermeneutics of Ricoeur, knowledge (of the self and of the world) is a "gift" before it becomes a "task"; it must be received before it can be doubted.

The "gift" is given to the community. Ricoeur picks up on this theme of intersubjectivity in his constructive alternative to the individualistic rationalism of Descartes. He is joined by Gadamer and others in more of a communal, friendship model of hermeneutics compared to the earlier individual model. For example, Gadamer says "the task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning" (Gadamer 1993:

292). Only through conversation with the other are we really able to begin to exhaust the possibility of understanding a text or experience. Thus, inter-religious as well as dialogue with the non-religious and practitioners of all academic disciplines are given a high premium in Ricoeur's work. For Ricoeur, genuine "understanding" of a text or of another human person is the imperative demanded by genuine philosophy.

Thus Ricoeurian hermeneutics contributes significantly to a deeper understanding of the human persons, especially in their relational and tensional nature.

So in Paul Ricoeur we have a philosopher, who through the hermeneutic of suspicion, attains a "second naïveté" and proceeds to a refined "hermeneutics of hope." In this chapter, we have dealt with two important aspects of his hermeneutics: that of critical and creative suspicion leading to a "tensive" and a dynamic understanding of the self. Just as his hermeneutics of suspicion takes a "detour" and arrives at hope, his hermeneutics of self arrives at the other.

We want to conclude the study of Ricoeurian hermeneutics by mentioning a special honour given to him. John Paul II conferred the "Paul VI International Award" on Paul Ricoeur on July 5, 2003. In the award ceremony, the Pope stressed that the philosopher's research "manifests how fruitful is the relation between philosophy and theology, between faith and culture" (John Paul II 2003). The greatest merit recognized in Ricoeur's thought is of having offered an interpretation of interpretations which explain their variety, without placing them at the same level (utter relativism) nor preferring one to another (crass subjectivism).

## NOTES

1. For this section, we are much obliged to the creative work of Robinson (1970: 27ff).

2. See Thisleton (1992: 26). See also <http://www.gongfa.com/robinsonlike.htm>. More about idols and symbols may be found in my doctoral research which is a study on Paul Ricoeur. See Pandikattu (1999).

3. It is hoped that by examining Ricoeur's own heroes of suspicion, we shall show how his hermeneutic is applied to the larger realms of hermeneutics.

4. Philosophically, distanciation (placing something at a distance) has its roots in Gadamer's principle of (i) historically effected consciousness, that understanding is situated in history and influenced by history and (ii) fusion of horizons; that understanding occurs through a fusion of the text's and interpreter's horizon. For example, Ricoeur (1973b, 160–1; 1973c, 127) argues that historical consciousness contains within it a tension between the near and far, and that such consciousness takes place under the condition of historical distance. In the fusion of horizons resides a similar notion of distance (horizon), capable of being narrowed or enlarged through

understanding or misunderstanding, and always taking place within and being influenced by history. For Ricoeur, this is the distance between the self and the other (the familiar or alien), between the near and the far that interpretation and understanding attempt to reduce. Methodologically, distanciation objectifies the text by freeing it from the author's (research participant's) intentions (meanings) and giving it a life of its own. It is important not to confuse distanciation (objectification of the text) with objective knowledge as Ricoeur's theory links knower with known, thereby affirming the ontologic presence in all knowledge. Distanciation exhibits four forms: (i) fixation of the spoken into the written word, dialogue is recorded as writing and meaning becomes more important than the actual words; (ii) eclipse of the author's intention, the written word makes the text autonomous and open to unlimited reading and interpretation; (iii) emancipation of the text, the text is freed from the context of its creation and able to be read within different socio-political, historical and cultural traditions; and (iv) differences between spoken and written words, spoken dialogue is face to face, whereas the written word overcomes this limitation. For these reasons, distanciation is not a methodological imposition, 'rather it is constitutive of the phenomenon of the text as written' (Ricoeur 1973a, 133). As a result, distanciation leads to a distancing of the text from its author, from the situation of the discourse, and from the original context and audience. Thus, the four forms of distanciation allow interpreters to approach the text without concern for authorial intent. See Geanellos (2000). See also Ricoeur (1973).

5. See Robinson (1970). It may be noted that Ricoeur does speak of a "hermeneutics of trust" to complement the hermeneutics of suspicion. "A 'hermeneutics of trust' thus remains the ultimate focus of his work: the meaning we seek to understand is one that helps us better understand our world and ourselves. We interpret because we are open to the truths that can be gained from the objectifications of meaning in the grand myths, texts and narratives of mankind, in which the temporal and tragic aspects of our human condition are expressed. Ricoeur drew far-reaching ethical conclusions from this hermeneutics of trust that has been learned from the school of suspicion" (Grondin 2005: 982-987).

6. For this section we are heavily indebted to the excellent treatment on Paul Ricoeur as given by Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, see (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

7. More about will be dealt with in our next section. See also <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur/notes.html#12>. Accessed on October 3, 2009.

8. Ricoeur (1994: 16). See also Dauenhauer and Pellauer (2011).

9. See Ricoeur (1992: 269). We have slightly modified it. See also Dauenhauer and Pellauer (2011).



### **PART III**

#### **HUMAN FALLIBILITY: FRAGILE ENCOUNTER**

“Man is harder than rock and more fragile than an egg.”  
~Yugoslav Proverb

“Occident: The part of the world lying west (or east) of the Orient. It is largely inhabited by Christians, a powerful subtribe of the Hypocrites, whose principal industries are murder and cheating, which they are pleased to call “war” and “commerce.” These, also, are the principal industries of the Orient.”~Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil’s Dictionary*

“One has to take a somewhat bold and dangerous line with this existence: especially as, whatever happens, we are bound to lose it.” ~Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*



## CHAPTER VII

### THE SINNER: THE DESIRE TO BE DIVINE

“The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.” ~Joseph Conrad, (Under Western Eyes)

“The disastrous history of our species indicates the futility of all attempts at a diagnosis which do not take into account the possibility that Homo sapiens is a victim of one of evolution’s countless mistakes.” ~Arthur Koestler, *Janus: A Summing Up*

“Acedia is not in every dictionary; just in every heart.” ~Mignon McLaughlin

“The study of crime begins with the knowledge of oneself.” ~Henry Miller

The well-known Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset speaks of the divine discontent in human beings. “The essence of man is discontent, divine discontent; a sort of love without a beloved, the ache we feel in a member we no longer have” (Ortega y Gasset 1940) “Divine discontent” and “denial of death” are characteristics of contemporary humans. And they are also intimately connected to the emergence and existence of evil. In this chapter an attempt is first made to relate evil, at least moral evil, to the basic human condition of disproportionality. For this we draw insights from two prominent thinkers of the last century: philosopher Paul Ricoeur and psychologist Ernest Becker.

Our aim in this chapter is not to give any ontological basis to evil, but to understand phenomenologically the dynamics underlying the prevalence and progress of evil. We shall see that evil perpetuates itself in the face of the very process of fighting it.

After first analyzing the fallibility inhuman nature, we try to explore the symbolics of evil, and then in the final section, see the dynamics of evil perpetuating itself in the very struggle against death, and consequently evil itself.

#### THE FALLIBLE HUMAN

Paul Ricoeur has been one of the most outstanding philosophers of the last century. In his first major work, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950), one finds an expression of a perennial theme central to his anthropology, and namely the two-dimensional character of all constituent features of human existence.

Contrary to Sartre's claim that there is radical difference between consciousness or the for-itself and materiality or the in-itself, a difference that pits the freedom of for-itself (*pour-soi*) freedom against that of the in-itself (*en-soi*) sheer facticity, Ricoeur holds that the voluntary and involuntary dimensions of human existence are complementary. There is, to be sure, no seamless harmony between these two dimensions. Each person has to struggle with the conflict between them. But this conflict is what ultimately makes one's freedom and fallibility genuinely one's own, what gives a person one's distinctive identity and what enables evil in oneself and society (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

Ricoeur extends his account of fallibility in *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolics of Evil*, both of which were published in 1960. In these works he addresses the question of how it is possible for us to go wrong, and to have a bad will. In the *Fallible Man*, Ricoeur argues that there is a basic disproportion between the finite and infinite dimensions of a human being. This disproportion is epitomized by the gap between *bios*, or one's spatiotemporally located life, and *logos*, or one's reason, that can grasp universals. This disproportion shows up in every aspect of human existence. It is manifest in perception, thought and speech, evaluation and action. By reason of this disproportion, we are never wholly at home with ourselves, and so we can commit mistakes. Hence, we are fallible.

According to our author, this disproportion does not render our existence absurd, in spite of Sartre. Rather, the very disproportion that makes us fallible and human evil possible is also what makes goodness, knowledge and achievement possible. It is that which both distinguishes us from one another and at the same time makes it possible for us to communicate with each other through logos (Dauenhauer and Pellauer 2011).

#### *Description of Human Fallibility*

The fact that humans can be observed from many different perspectives, and all of which may be justified but not always compatible with each other, indicates a crisis in the self-understanding of the subject. The analysis of the fundamental possibility of the human will, in *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, has shown that there is a break, a wound and a non-agreement within humans. This non-agreement makes it impossible for people to see themselves transparently. Ricoeur is not satisfied with just this analysis, however. The fundamental structure of the Will, which he has traced out, is only a preliminary result in view of the fact of the human failures and fallibility. Since it is an absurd fallibility, it cannot be captured through the description of its own nature. Furthermore, it presents an alien object which can be philosophically approached only through concrete experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, for Ricoeur, fallibility provides an understanding of the possibility of evil and human freedom without implying their necessity. As

such, fallibility is a concept open to elaboration from a purely reflective basis. Fallibility as the possibility for evil is taken as a primary characteristic of human existence. With this concept of fallibility, human existence is the place or the possibility for the manifestation of evil (FC, 14 and Ihde 1971: 113.).

In two different ways, Ricoeur tries to capture and describe this fallibility. The transition from innocence to guilt can be understood only in concrete expressions of human experiences, that is through the act of confession, or avowal (*Bekentnis*), and which later leads one to take responsibility for one’s actions. In *La symbolique du mal*, Ricoeur examines the symbolic language of the experiences of guilt. Before that he studies the breaking point of evil. Thus, Ricoeur continues his description of the fundamental human possibilities which he had begun and executed in a preliminary and abstract form in *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, by interpreting the structures of the Will as fallible. Because of the opaque and absurd characteristic of guilt, its description (which emerges mainly out of a convergence of concrete signs) could only be as “empiric” and not as an “eidetic” description. Fallibility describes a weakness which makes evil possible. It lies in the “structure of mediation between the poles of the finite and the infinite nature of man” (FM 9).

*Interpretation of Fallibility*

Ricoeur has sought to show the situation of the human condition as being in between the finite and infinite, as having a certain in-between-ness or disproportion, and all of which is constitutive of fallibility or the possibility of the rupture. Thus, in relation to knowledge, there is a disproportion of finite perspective and infinite word; in relation to willing there is a disproportion between finite character and infinite well-being; and in relation to feeling there is a disproportion between pleasure and happiness. This could be illustrated as follows (Thorer 1984: 36-37):

	<i>Infinite Orientation</i>	<i>Finite Fulfilment</i>	<i>Mediation</i>
Knowing	Infinite Word (Verb)	Finite Perspective (Noun)	Pure Imagination
Willing	Well-being	Character	Respect
Feeling	Happiness	Pleasure	Mind
	Original Affirmation	Existential Difference	Human Mediation

*Chart 5: The Disproportion in the Human Being*

The human, as a fallible means that has the propensity to and possibility for engaging in moral evil is present in our very constitution. Fallibility results out of the tension-relationship between the finite and

infinite. Analogously to Kant's categories of qualities (Reality-Negation-Limitation), Ricoeur also differentiates three categories in the human constitution, which are characterised through tension: The original affirmation, existential difference and human mediation. The moment of the infinite, which we have seen at three levels (namely the Verb, idea of Blissfulness and Mind seeking happiness), are the very moments through which the original affirmation is enriched, perfected and spiritualized. The original affirmation may be trampled upon by the existential negation, which is presented to the human as perspective, character and life-feeling. So, the "human being is the joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite" (FM 140). This means that the human being is "capable of joy, joy through fear, and in overcoming the fear, that is the basic reason for all disproportion in the affective region and the source of affective vulnerability" (FM 140).

Fallibility is exposed through evil. Otherwise we can say that fallibility is the condition or the potential for evil. Thus, fallibility has a double sense. It is the breaking point of evil, so to say, and the weak point in the chain. In this sense, fallibility is the original situation, from which evil emerges. Evil, in fact, points to an original situation of innocence. The depravity of human beings lies in a longing for a non-guaranteed perfection. The original situation of innocence is nowhere present. It can be imagined through the existing situation, determined by evil and set apart from it. One can imagine this original situation of innocence, which we normally find in myths. Thus, the myths of the fall are always connected with the myths of creation and those of innocence.

Over and above these possibilities, fallibility means not just the breaking point of evil, but also the capability to sin and to commit evil. Only one more step is required to move from the vulnerability to the actuality of evil. "To say that man is fallible is to affirm at once that the limitation of one being, that does not fall with itself, is the original weakness out of which evil emerges. Furthermore, evil can emerge out of this weakness only because it dares" (FM 189; Thorer 1984: 37).

#### *Fallibility as a Symbol*

Ricoeur's examination of the voluntary and involuntary has made us aware that in each one of us there is a break, wound, disproportion, "in-between-ness" or non-agreement within himself. In the fallibility of humans, Ricoeur seeks to grasp precisely this world and to characterise it. The tensional relationship between the infinite orientation and finite fulfilment in humans turns out to be the reason and location for fallibility. The mediation which succeeds in the object of knowledge and in the works of practice, remains in the affective region as constant conflict and tension. Pleasure is more than a sign, it is a promise and a guarantee of happiness. This happiness would be sought after through *avoir*, *pouvoir* and *valoir*, as already indicated. For woman/man in every finite fulfilment there exists the danger of shutting off the affective dimension and of regarding the finite

fulfilment as the whole. Fulfilment, which could serve as a symbol of the desired blissfulness, tends to deviate itself to an idol. The symbolized structure, through which Ricoeur sees certain linguistic signs as characterized, corresponds to the human Will. It is the same for location and vulnerability. Humans can go against their own nature by forgetting the symbolic structure of finite fulfilments, and crossing over from symbols to idols.

For Ricoeur, the fallibility of the human being describes and characterises more precisely than the preceding Eidetic of the Will, the location in which symbolic speech is proper and significant. At the same time, symbolic speech shows that fallibility is a situation which we can consider for its own sake and which lets itself be accessible to us through actual concrete acts of evil (sin). Our reflection points to the transition from mere possibility to the concrete actuality of evil, and furthermore to an expression of the actual evil in confession, which means in the realm of symbols. Thus, the symbol serves humans in their self-expression.

#### **THE SYMBOLICS OF EVIL**

Fallibility as a symbol leads us to appreciate the symbolics and to trace how evil reveals itself in terms of the primary symbols of stain, guilt and sin, as indicated by Ricoeur.

##### *The Symbol as the Starting Point for Thinking*

The examination of human fallibility has shown, where and how the evil in us can originate. The transition from innocence to guilt is not to be understood otherwise than as an execution of the confession by which we accept our responsibility for our actions in symbolic language. In *La symbolique du mal*, Ricoeur is engaged with the concrete expressions of the human experience of evil in symbols (which we also meet in myths and primary confessions).

Before he actually proceeds with his task of studying the symbolics of evil through its concrete expressions, Ricoeur gives an account of his procedure. He begins the process with the following question: "How do we move from the possibility of human evil to its actuality, from fallibility to its act?" (SB 9; Thorer 1984: 39). Ricoeur wants to capture the transition from fallibility to its actualization by concentrating on the symbolics of evil from concrete human experiences. What he intends to do is a phenomenology of guilt, which repeats itself on its way to the imagination and to the projection of the confession of guilt. The phenomenology screens and orders the materials that would be the object of human thought. Thus there is an intimate connection between philosophical speculation and the pre-reflective expression (of guilt for example) in symbols. When one reflects on the philosophical expressions of evil, one is led back to the original expressions of it in myths. Then there is the move from myths to its

building blocks – symbols. Symbols characterize evil as blindness, ambiguity and anger. They refer to an oppressive experience and we in turn try to grasp this experience with the help of language. The experience of evil forces itself to be expressed, so that all speaking – including philosophical reflection – about it refers back to the original experience.

The area of investigation in *La symbolique du mal* is limited, as Ricoeur points out. It refers to a particularly important area: How evil touches on a central and crucial relationship between human being and the sacred, to which myth gives witness. So it is to be expected that an examination in this area will give us a deeper understanding of myths and symbols. In this crisis, the whole vulnerability of reality is evident: “Because evil is in a special way the critical experience of the sacred, the threatening rupture of this relationship of [humans] with the sacred may be urgently felt, and [also] how man is dependent on the power of this sacred” (Ricoeur 1971a: 12; Thorer 1984: 39).

#### *The Symbols of Evil: Stain, Sin, Guilt*

Ricoeur elaborates his understanding of evil in terms of the primary symbols of stain, sin and guilt. In *La symbolique du mal*, the imagination goes back to the farthest region where crime and misfortune are not to be differentiated. The Stain, which is associated with definite actions, is something analogous to a material thing. Evil action brings with it punishment. Evil action effects suffering. So the symbolics of Stain is the first explanation and rationalisation of suffering. The imagination of a stain points to a judging and avenging instance, which though remaining anonymous, concretizes itself in the laws and rules of society. When the guilty is accused of a crime, there is also a simultaneous expectation of responsibility, of proper punishment and with it a hope that the fear and consequences of this crime would thus disappear (Morrison 2005: 444f).

A new step in the development of evil is the building up of sin-consciousness. This consciousness presupposes a personal relationship to the God who invites us. Sin shows that aspect of guilt felt in the presence of God. Biblically speaking, sin is the breaking of the covenant.<sup>2</sup>

The next stage of internalisation is reached with the formation of guilt consciousness. Guilt shows the subjective moment of the crime (to be differentiated from sin, the objective, ontological moment). Guilt-consciousness consists of the fact that one is intensively aware of one’s responsibility and of her/his ownership. In this sense, it is anticipated and internalised, leading to pricks of conscience.

The imagination of evil develops from a material understanding (Stain) of evil to a deeper internalisation (Guilt). In this process, the symbols of the earlier stages of development are not just denied or negated, but are carried over to the later stages of development. Thus, there exists a connection between all these symbols. “So there is a circular movement taking place between all the symbols: the last symbol relives the sense of

the preceding symbol, but the first gives the last the full symbolic power” (Ricoeur 1971: 176; Thorer 1984: 41). If one wants to name the concept towards which the development of the original symbols of evil leads, then one is confronted here with the paradox of the “Non-free Will”. This concept – which is not identical with that of fallibility, but which is to be understood only in connection with the symbolics of evil, and which in turn gives it its significance – is characterised by Ricoeur as having three moments (Thorer 1984: 42):

- a. Positivity: Evil is a power
- b. Expressivity: Evil presupposes the free decision of the human being and comes as a temptation
- c. Infection: If humans give in to evil, first it is an outward act and then it spreads. It becomes contagious. At the same time, turning itself over, it tends to make the agent of the action innerly a slave.

So far, we have analysed the philosophical contribution of Paul Ricoeur on evil, which may be enhanced by the insights of the social psychologist Ernest Becker, whom we discuss in the next section.

#### **EVIL AS DENIAL OF EVIL (AND OF MORTALITY)**

Another prominent and insightful thinker of the last century who dwelt elaborately on evil is Ernest Becker in his two classics (Becker 1973 and 75). Like Ricoeur, Becker felt that evil finds its driving force in our human paradoxical nature: “in the flesh and doomed with it, out of the flesh and in the world of symbols and trying to continue on heavenly flight” (Becker 96). Becker humbly reminds humanity that we are still animals, and with all of the instincts and seemingly irrational chaotic impulses befitting all animals. Yet, paradoxically, humanity is fitted with a sense of reason that wishes to attain a “destiny impossible for an animal” (Becker 1975: 96). What we perceive as evil, in every form, is essential to any temporal creature. It is a part of our very humanity that we should exhibit qualities of moral evil, according to Becker.

Ernest Becker provides part of the answer to the problem of evil; that is, the paradoxical nature of the human, just as Ricoeur does. Humanity is both animal and rational, and therein lies the source of evil. A human being is a finite, limited and fallible being who is controlled mostly by animal urges centred mostly around survival. Simultaneously, the human mind allows for reasoning, which enables people to transcend their limitations and reach for the Divine. Humans are capable of creating evil as part of their nature, and choosing evil in the very search for the good. Our desire to eliminate evil may itself be our undoing (Hoffman 2002).

*Participating in the Immortality Project*

Why is it that of all the creatures on the earth human beings are the only ones to wage war, commit genocide and build weapons of mass destruction? Social psychologist, Ernest Becker, raised this question and then proposed an insightful answer in his book, *Escape from Evil* (Becker 1975), in which he goes one step further than Ricoeur's theorizing.

Becker's answer begins by recognizing that of all creatures on earth, human beings alone seem to be the ones who are conscious of their own mortality. This awareness gives rise to an anxiety that most people would rather not feel. So people cope with this situation by essentially choosing sides. They choose to align themselves with the side of life rather than of death, or identify themselves with "immortality projects" (Hoffman 2002). People align themselves with the side of life by seeking anything that promises to sustain and promote their own lives, such as power or money. Alignment with power can have two faces: Malignant power over others, as the power created by autocrats, or benevolent power, as in the power vested in the skills of a physician. Likewise, alignment with money can result in exploitation or philanthropy.

It may be noted that people also seek to align themselves with the side of life by seeking alignment with things that endure beyond a single individual's lifetime. These can include making a "lasting" contribution to a field of art, literature, scientific or knowledge. These contributions can also include involvement with religious movements or specific cultures. These larger than life phenomena in some way assure the perpetuation of the significance of the people associated with them, and in other words seemingly immortalize people (Hoffman 2002).

From this point of view, a threat to a person's culture, religion or "lasting contributions" is viewed as a threat to that person's own immortality project. The immortality project must be defended at all costs. This is the reason why some conflicts in the world can become so intractable. It's not just "my" country or tribe that is being threatened, but the very significance of "my" own life. Becker says, "This is what makes war irrational: each person has the same hidden problem, and as antagonists obsessively work their cross purposes, the result is truly demonic" (Becker 1975: 109).

People also try to align themselves with the side of life by aligning themselves with what is "good." This is because life is associated with "good" as opposed to death, which is "bad." Becker argues that this alignment with good may also be a major cause of evil. To follow his reasoning it is necessary to make a slight digression so as to understand the psychological concepts of shadow and projection (Becker 1973).

*Projecting the Shadow of the Shadow*

The psychological shadow is the dark complement of the consciously

expressed personality. It represents those personal qualities and characteristics that are unacceptable to the conscious ego. To borrow a fitting image from the poet Robert Bly, the shadow is like a sack that you drag behind you everywhere you go and into which you toss all the aspects of yourself that you are ashamed of and don't want to look at (Bly 1998). The psychological shadow is much like the normal human shadow: Everybody has one; when we face toward the light we can't see our own shadow; and sometimes everybody else but we can see it (Becker 1975).

Oftentimes these disowned contents of the psychological shadow are "projected" onto someone else. Then we see "out there" what is really "in here". Typically, the person we choose to project onto is not entirely innocent. He or she has some "hooks" on which we can hang our projections. If we're ashamed of our own anger, we find a slightly irritated person and view her/her as totally enraged. That's how projection of the shadow works.

People with inflated self-esteem find it easy to see themselves as being almost always on the side of the "good." Becker's argument is that in the process of taking the side of life and the good, we project our shadow onto an enemy. Then we try to kill it, and in this process perpetrate evil, without our willing it.

Psychologist Roy F Baumeister (1997) also reaches a similar conclusion. He holds that a major cause of evil in the world is the idealistic attempt to do good. Some examples include, the Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, Thirty Years' War in Europe (in which Catholic and Protestant troops devastated much of Germany in attempting to wipe out the "evil" version of the Christian faith represented by the other side), murders committed to prevent the "evil" of abortion and Stalinist and Maoist purges in Russia and China. Baumeister points out that "studies of repressive governments repeatedly find that they perceive themselves as virtuous, idealistic, well-meaning groups who are driven to desperately violent measures to defend themselves against the overwhelmingly dangerous forces of evil" (1997).

For instance, in many ways the Nazis were idealists. The Nazi SS was composed of the elite, and the noblest of the population; yet they willingly committed the most horrible deeds. The Nazis wanted to transform their society into a perfect one. They wanted to root out the elements that they considered "evil." Yet they almost never considered their own actions as evil, but perhaps at worst an unfortunate necessity in carrying out a noble enterprise (Baumeister 1997: 34, 38). The Nazis projected filth and evil on to the Jewish people, and then tried to establish a "pure" state by eliminating the Jews. One of the professed motivations of racist lynching in Western society was to maintain the "purity" of the white race. Many animal species, including coyotes, wolves and prairie dogs have been irrationally persecuted by humans in the name of eliminating "varmints" and "filth" and "disease-carriers." In other words, the enemy is "dirty."

Historically, nations have been aroused to war by the depiction of the enemy as pure evil. In cases of reciprocal violence, such as war, each side tends to see itself as the innocent victim and the other as the evil attacker. For instance, if a nation does not do its own “shadow” work, its aggressive response to other nations leads to cyclical violence and, in this very process, we perpetuate the very evil we wish to eliminate (Becker 1975).

Once a person has decided that some other is evil (or a devil), the decision helps justify behaviors that tend to belittle or punish the other. Such behaviors are precisely the behaviors that justify the other person in seeing the first person as evil. This reciprocal projection and dehumanization usually leads to a downward spiral. Patterns of violence often grow worse over time. The typical pattern for marital violence and violence among strangers is for minor insults and slights to escalate more or less slowly to violent aggression and physical attacks (Baumeister 1997: 283).

As Baumeister points out, one of the reasons why violence tends to spiral downward is that there is typically a huge discrepancy between the importance of the act to the perpetrator and to the victim. Baumeister calls this the magnitude gap (1997: 18). For example, rape is a life-changing violation for a woman, while it may be for the rapist seen as only a few moments of satiating his need and limited satisfaction. Also, whether or not an SS officer murdered twenty five or thirty Jews in a given day may have been for the officer a matter of having the additional work it would take to kill five more people, but for the life of those five Jewish people it was a matter of life and death.

Hoffman notes that the magnitude gap functions in a way that makes evil worsen over time. In a pattern of revenge, as occurs in terrorism and occupation, the roles of victim and perpetrator are constantly being reversed. The perpetrator (A) may think he has harmed the victim (B) only at a level of, say, one damage point. The victim (B) however feels harmed at a level of ten points. To exact tit-for-tat revenge, B perpetrates harm on A at a level of ten, of which from B’s point of view may seem only fair and from A’s point of view may feel like harm at a level of 100. This of course seems totally out of proportion and requires further revenge as A and B switch roles again (Hoffman 2002).

Becker’s analysis offers a way of understanding the instances of genocide and mass murder in the human history. He suggests, chillingly, that one way to gain the illusion of psychological power over death is to exert physical control over life and death. He points out that the killings in the Nazi concentration camps increased dramatically toward the end of the war, when the Nazis began to have a sense that they might actually lose. The mass slaughter gave the illusion of heroic triumph over death/evil (Becker 1975).

In Becker’s terms, people who maximize their own advantage are, in fact, maximizing the “side of life” narrowly understood as their own

welfare. They act to eliminate the “evil” of their own impoverishment. They ignore the fundamental fact of our human interrelatedness, a fact attested to by spiritual traditions throughout history (Hoffman 2002), and in this process aggravate the evil they wish to alleviate.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we had the modest aim of indicating some of the dynamics in the working out of evil. Ricoeur’s understanding of the disproportion so characteristic of human beings was, he came to conclude, insufficient to account for occurrences of actual will. No direct and unmediated inspection of the *cogito*, as Descartes and Husserl had proposed, could show why these evils, which are contingent, in fact came to be. Recognizing the opacity of the *cogito* in this respect confirmed Ricoeur’s suspicion that all self-understanding comes about only through “signs deposited in memory and imagination by the great literary traditions.” The progress from *bios* to *logos* has enabled us greatly, and made evil possible. Thus, we have arrived at an antinomy, and this is where philosophy has to stop.

By refusing to accept mortality as part of our human nature, we as humans deny our animality and try to be divine. The denial of our own mortality, and the anxiety ensuing from our inevitable death, leads us as humans to join the “immortality projects,” and disrespect the disproportion that is intrinsic to the human condition, which enables evil to emerge. By claiming to be divine, we inflict unnecessary suffering on others and thus perpetuate evil.

As a continuation of the philosophical analysis, Becker showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt at eliminating it. Though both the thinkers trace the existence of evil to the disproportion or in-between-ness in the human condition, it has not been our aim to give any account of the origin of evil.

Hence, Lao-tzu’s insight found in the *Tao Te Ching*, and formulated 2500 years ago, is valid even today:

There is no greater misfortune  
than to underestimate your enemy.  
Underestimating your enemy  
means thinking that he is evil.  
Thus you destroy your three treasures  
and become an enemy yourself (Lao-tzu 1995).

## NOTES

1. This section is a continuation of our earlier treatment on freedom in chapter five.

2. In this context, one legitimate question is: “Can there be an experience of fault (not necessarily sin) which does not require the idea of God?”

## CHAPTER VIII

# THE FORGIVER: THE DEPTH OF FAULT, THE HEIGHT OF FORGIVENESS

“I viewed my fellow man not as a fallen angel, but as a risen ape.” ~Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*

“Man desired concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species; she desires discord. Man wants to live easy and content; but nature compels him to leave ease...and throw himself into roils and labours.” ~Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, 1787

“It is easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man.” ~Albert Einstein

“Everyone who has ever built anywhere a new heaven first found the power thereto in his own hell.” ~Friedrich Nietzsche

In an era when we dare to talk of the “clash of civilizations,” (Huntington 1996) and experience abhorrent wars between cultures,<sup>1</sup> it is imperative for philosophers to deal with creative dialog and meaningful reconciliation not only between individuals, but also between cultures (or communities). This chapter has the modest aim of highlighting the scope and relevance of the crimes committed by communities against each other and, with a view to moving ahead, the possibility of their reconciliation.

As such, we limit this study to Paul Ricoeur because of the practical applicability of his ideas to our contemporary situation. Ricoeur is one of the most profound and insightful philosophers of the 20th century. His work on *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004a), which encompasses forgetting and forgiving, was motivated by a desire to overcome specific philosophic aporias in order to extend phenomenology to the social sphere. In many ways, Ricoeur was continuing Husserl’s work of a scientific revolution via phenomenology. Put in less inflammatory language, Ricoeur believed that once phenomenology was rescued from its primary failing – the problem of solipsism – it could fruitfully be applied to less abstract philosophic questions, such as whether or not and why history “over remembers” some events to the detriment of others. In other words, despite his philosophic rigor, Ricoeur’s inquiry into memory was driven by practical concerns.

The theory developed by Ricoeur could be applied to various situations – the crime of upper castes against lower castes in India, of black against white, the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Our aim in this article

is to formulate general principles, which may be modified and applied to concrete situations.

Based on the insights of Ricoeur, we talk of the depth of fault and the possibility of forgiveness, and both at the theoretical and existential level. Then we contrast individual history with the collective history of a community. At the individual level, we can meaningfully speak of a “happy memory,” which is not always impossible for a community. This leads us to connect the act of genuine forgiveness (both at the collective and individual levels) to the art of creative forgetfulness. Such an approach, we believe, provides useful insights for dialogue, and potential reconciliation, between cultures, without which humanity will not survive.

The aim of this chapter is to remind ourselves of the travesty of justice that we as human beings – both as individuals and cultures – are capable of committing, and thus to open ourselves to the promise and possibility of forgiveness, and even a forgiveness between cultures, which today’s world so badly needs.

The consequence of Ricoeur’s approach to history and forgiveness is laid down in the epilogue of his book, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Following the book’s third part on the historical condition is some sixty pages on the subject of forgiveness. It is not up to historians to pronounce judgments on the events of history, but they cannot refrain from all moral judgments. This becomes clear in a reflection on the difficult subject of forgiving and reconciliation in history. It is only at the limits of philosophical language that one may reason on the topic. Without leading to an apocalyptic tone critical reasoning or philosophy should encompass a certain ‘eschatology of the past’ (Ricoeur 2004a: 501). Jacques Derrida (1999) has also deconstructed the impossible possibilities of forgiveness and reconciliation. Ricoeur goes along with this deconstruction in an analysis of the entangling bonds of exchange and reciprocity. For Ricoeur, the individual identity or *ipseity* of a human being is at stake in this entanglement. In *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur 1992), the *ipseity* is formed by acts of pledging oneself. Now it appears that *ipseity* needs an opposite act of dissolution as well. In cases of entanglement, an agent needs to be dissolved from her/his acts, in order to set free a fundamental capacity of reconciliatory action. Along with Kant (1793: 57ff), Ricoeur, too, holds that although evil is radical, the disposition towards the good is more originary. This disposition may be activated when someone is approached with a word of liberation: “You are more than your works” (Ricoeur 2004a: 505). Only this liberating speech act can establish a ‘happy memory’ and set free a fruitful “reserve of forgetting.” When there is any magnificence in human life, it is because of such acts of liberation and forgiveness. The historical condition can be described in large part with Heidegger’s notion of care or *Sorge*; the idea of forgetting forms an essential addition to this historical condition. However, this oblivion cannot be put forward as an epistemological proposition or as an ethical command. It can only be named in a special mode of speaking, and at the limits of philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Such a limit enables us to reflect on fault and forgiveness as part of a tragic human existence.

### **THE DEPTH OF FAULT AND THE HEIGHT OF FORGIVENESS**

In this section, we trace some of the insights of Ricoeur which enable us to fathom the depth of fault that is intrinsic to human action and human existence. Here, we are forced to be selective in the analysis of Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology. This is followed by the "Height of Forgiveness" that human beings have experienced at times and can existentially hope for.

#### *Fault as a Lived Experience*

Ricoeur acknowledges that fault, which is the existential presupposition of forgiveness, and is experienced essentially as a feeling (Ricoeur 2004a: 459). Furthermore, Ricoeur agrees with Jean Nabert, who places the experience of fault among the "givens of reflection" and as a "boundary condition" (Ricoeur 2004a). Fault or Culpability, like the other "boundary situations," is implied in every contingent situation and belongs to our "historical condition" on the level of an ontological hermeneutics (Ricoeur 2004a: 460).

It seems obvious that there can, in fact, "be forgiveness only where we can accuse someone of something, presume him to be or declare him guilty" (Ricoeur 2004a: 460). This implies that fault can be imputed to someone. "Imputability is that capacity, that aptitude, by virtue of which actions can be held to someone's account." Such imputability constitutes an integral dimension of what Ricoeur calls "the culpable human being" (Ricoeur 2004a: 460; Ricoeur 1981).

Thus, both the experience of fault and possibility of forgiveness imply an intimate connection between "the act and the agent, between the "what" of the action and the "who" of the power to act – of agency." This is similar to the nexus between the "what" of memories and the "who" of memory (Ricoeur 2004a: 460). Accordingly, for the agent, "recognizing the tie between action and the agent is never without a surprise, for a consciousness is astonished after the action at "no longer being able to dissociate the idea of its own causation from the memory of the particular act which it has performed" (Ricoeur 2004a: 462).<sup>3</sup>

The radical nature of the experience of fault requires us to confine ourselves within the limits of the self-ascription of fault, and to sketch out at this level the conditions for a common recognition of a fundamental guilt. The specific form taken by such attribution of fault to the self is avowal, admission, and that speech act by which a subject takes up and assumes the accusation (Ricoeur 2004a: 461). From this perspective, beyond "the abyss separating empirical guilt from an innocence termed methodical avowal bridges another abyss, the abyss between the act and its agent" (Ricoeur

2004a: 461). In this manner, the agent is intrinsically linked to the act, and so imputability can be ascribed to her/him. Such an imputability makes her/him deeply responsible and recognizable as culpable. “At this level of depth, self-recognition is indivisibly action and passion, the action of acting badly and the passion of being affected by one’s own action” (Ricoeur 2004a: 462).<sup>4</sup>

“The negative dimension of fault contains the dimension of evil” (Ricoeur 2004a: 463).<sup>5</sup> The reference to evil suggests the idea of an excess, and of an unbearable overabundance. Such an experience of unbearable abundance points to the depth of the experience of evil by the agent as well as by the victim.<sup>6</sup> According to Jean Nabert, “these are evils, these are wounds of inner being, conflicts, sufferings, without any conceivable alleviation” (Ricoeur 2004a: 462). As such these evils are an indescribable misfortune for those who suffer them.

On the part of the agent or the evil-doer, Ricoeur discerns that “over and beyond the will to make others suffer and to eliminate them indeed stand the will to humiliate, to deliver the other over to the neglect of abandonment, of self-loathing” (Ricoeur 2004a: 464). Such is the phenomenon of the experience of evil implied in the relation between the act, agent and victim. It is therefore the extreme evil done to others, and rupturing the human bond that goes to extreme, which is that of the intimate malevolence of the criminal (Ricoeur 2004a: 464-5).

Such tragic experiences lead us to relate fault to evil. The conjecture or the connection between fault and evil invites us to search within the great cultural imaginary that has nourished the mythical expressions of human thought. What remains philosophically instructive is the narrative treatment of the question of the origin with respect to which purely speculative thought loses itself and proves its futility. At the pre-reflective level of the Adam myth, for instance, a distance is established between the agent and action

The action is henceforth universally reputed to be evil, and as such universally deplorable and deplored. But something in the subject is exempt from this, which might not have been dissipated in the adherence of the will to the evil act committed, an innocence which perhaps is not completely abolished (Ricoeur 2004a: 465). The tension between fault and self, and guilt and selfhood seems philosophically indissoluble, since “fault proceeds from the unfathomable depths of selfhood” (Ricoeur 2004a: 467).

At the close of this descent into the depths of the experience of fault, abstracting from any escape into a mythical imagery, the individual and collective situation may be characterized as “unforgivable” (Ricoeur 2004a: 466). Thus, tracing from the experience of fault, and relating it to both the victim and agent (criminal) and leading to evil, we see the unforgivable nature of guilt. That indicates the overabundance or the rootedness of guilt, and inherent in human actions and experienced both individually and collectively. That is the depth to which we human beings and human actions are capable of descending! (Pandikattu 2000).

*Forgiveness as an Experiential Necessity*

After tracing the “unforgivable depth” of human fault, we follow Ricoeur, in a rather sketchy manner, when he outlines the height or magnanimity of forgiveness. Forgiveness cannot come from within, nor can it come from the victim, since the depth of fault exceeds even the victim’s ambience.

By reason of the immensity of the misfortune that crushes its victims, and following Jean Nabert, Ricoeur investigates further the nature of evil and fault. He opines that “unforgivable” is truly applicable to the most intimate tie that unites the agent to the action, the guilty to the crime. In this analysis, since fault, and therefore evil, is so central to the self and whole of existence, stripping guilt from our existence would, it seems, destroy that existence totally.

This same idea is echoed by Nicolai Hartmann, one of the dominant 20th century German philosophers, and according to whom, “if forgiveness is possible, it would constitute a moral evil, for it would place human freedom at God’s disposal and would offend human self-respect” (Ricoeur 2004a: 466).<sup>7</sup> So if the human action and following fault is taken seriously, then forgiveness even by God will be disrespecting humans. Hence, “the being-guilty associated with bad action cannot be suppressed by anyone, because it is inseparable from the guilty party.”<sup>8</sup>

Forgiveness, in fact, implies the concept of imputability to humans. At least to some extent, humans are free, and therefore responsible for their crimes. There is in us the capacity to hold ourselves accountable for our actions as true agents. By acts of retribution one can lessen the bite of guilt, but not the guilt itself. However much we human beings try to rectify our evil actions, we can never eliminate their effects and consequences. “There is indeed a victory over evil on the moral plane... but not an abandonment of fault.” Understood thus, Ricoeur would agree that “[f]ault in its essence is unforgivable not only in fact, but by right.” (Ricoeur 2004a: 466).

At the same time, the basic Christian kerygma, “there is forgiveness,” sounds like a radical challenge given that of Hartmann’s radical position on the possibility of forgiveness. The expression “There is,” according to Ricoeur, protects the *illéité* and provides for it. In this context, *illéité* is the height from which forgiveness is announced, “without this height being too hastily assigned to someone who would be the absolute subject” (Ricoeur 2004a: 467). It may be “no less than a person” or the “source of personalization.” Ricoeur speaks of it as “a voice from above” that is silent, but not mute.

Ricoeur notes that an appropriate discourse is dedicated to this height or *illéité* in the Christian tradition, which is the Pauline hymn of love: “A discourse of praise and celebration. It says: *il y a, es gibt*, there is... forgiveness – the form of the universal designating *illéité*. For the hymn has no need to say who forgives and to whom forgiveness is directed. There is

forgiveness, as there is joy, as there is wisdom, extravagance, love. Love, precisely. Forgiveness belongs to the same family (Ricoeur 2004a: 467).

After analyzing the hymn, Ricoeur quotes the final verse of the hymn: “[I]n a word, there are three things that last forever: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of them all is love.” And he concludes with: “The greatest: because it is Height itself. Now if love excuses everything, this everything includes the unforgivable. If not it would itself be annihilated” (Ricoeur 2004a: 468). That is why Jacques Derrida asserts, “forgiveness is directed to the unforgivable or it does not exist” (Ricoeur 2004a: 468). Forgiveness, in this sense, is unconditional, and it is without exception and restriction; it does not even presuppose a request for forgiveness.<sup>9</sup>

Though the forgiveness command, historically, has been transmitted to us mainly through the Abrahamic tradition, there are complex, differentiated and even conflicting traditions “at once singular and in the process of universalisation” (Ricoeur 2004a: 468) which proclaims this command. In the words of Derrida, forgiveness’ “enthronement, however, is universal,” which amounts to a “Christianization which no longer had need of the Christian Church” (Ricoeur 2004a: 468). According to Ricoeur, Derrida, actually, is thinking of “all the scenes of repenting, of confessing, of forgiving, or of making excuses that have been multiplying on the geopolitical stage since the last war and which have accelerated in the last few years” (Ricoeur 2004a: 469). Ricoeur (2004a: 469) cites Derrida approvingly:

Each time that forgiveness is in the service of a finality, be it noble and spiritual (repurchase or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it tends to reestablish a normalcy (social, national, political, psychological) through a work of mourning, though some therapy or ecology of memory, then ‘forgiveness’ is not pure – nor is its concept. Forgiveness is not, and it should not be, either normal, or normative, nor normalizing. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, standing the test of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality.

Hence, Derrida and Ricoeur challenge us to this “test of the impossible” of forgiving the unforgivable, since “there is forgiveness” is a basic Abrahamic proclamation and also an existential experience.<sup>10</sup>

### **THE ACT OF FORGIVING AND THE ART OF FORGETTING<sup>11</sup>**

Though the fault is immense, and there is almost no possibility for forgiveness, it is the experiential aspect of being forgiven that urges Ricoeur to deal with this issue from an existential point of view. He relates genuine forgiving to a creative forgetting. Ricoeur suggests three ways of

formulating a possible art of forgetting that leads to genuine communitarian forgiveness.

1. One can develop this art in strict symmetry with the art of memory, as did Frances Yates. The art of memory was a technique of memorization, as opposed to spontaneous irruptions. If so, the art of forgetting, a “lethatechnique,” would have to rest on a rhetoric of extinction, that is, “writing to extinguish,” and in opposition to making an archive. Following Harald Weinrich,<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur cannot subscribe to this “barbarous dream” of the art of forgetting that obliterates historical events. Such an attempt is similar to *auto de fé*, or burning at the stake for heresy, and is regarded by Ricoeur as a “worse threat than forgetting through effacement” (Ricoeur 2004a: 504).

2. As opposed to the “ruinous competition between the strategies of memory and forgetting,” proposed above, there is a second suggestion for a possible art of forgetting by Marc Augé. This interweaves the fibres that connects us to time: “memory of the past, expectation of the future, attention to the present” (Ricoeur 2004a: 504). Marc Augé, an observer of African rituals, sketches three figures of forgetting. To return to the past, one must forget the present, just as it is the case in incidents of possession and trance. To return to the present, one must suspend the tie with the past and future, just as in the games of role reversal. To embrace the future, one must forget the past in a gesture of inauguration, as in rituals of initiation. So “it is always in the present, finally, that forgetting is conjugated” (Ricoeur 2004a: 504). So the art of forgetting is created in the process of interacting with the community and with the three modes of time: past, present and future. Such an art of forgetting that reigns over individuals and communities raises the pertinent question, asked by Ricoeur: “Must not forgetting, outsmarting its own vigilance, as it were, forget itself?”

3. The third way offers a strategy for the exploration of the art of forgetting: The path of a forgetting that would no longer be a strategy, nor a work, but an idle forgetting. It would parallel memory, not as the remembrance of what has occurred, memorization of know-how and commemoration of the founding events of our identity, but as a concerned disposition established in duration, and so related to care. If memory is in fact a capacity – the power of remembering (*faire-mémoire*) – it is more fundamentally a figure of care, and that basic anthropological structure of our historical condition. In memory-as-care we hold ourselves open to the past, and we remain concerned and caring about it. So Ricoeur asks: “Would there not then be a supreme form of forgetting, as a disposition and a way of being in the world, which would be insouciance, carefreeness?” Here, against Freud’s “terminable” care, *ars oblivionis*<sup>13</sup> would “simply add a gracious note to the work of memory and the work of mourning” (Ricoeur 200 4a: 505).

Such an art of forgetting relates us to Kierkegaard's praise of forgetting as the liberation of care. Referring to the Gospel exhortation to "consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air," Kierkegaard notes, "this is so only if the person in distress actually gives his attention to the lilies and the birds and their life and forgets himself in contemplation of them and their life, while in his absorption in them he, unnoticed by himself, learns something about himself" (Cited in Ricoeur 2004a: 505). Further, what he will learn from the lilies is that "they do not work." Ricoeur invites us to reflect further.

Are we then to understand that even the work of memory and mourning are to be forgotten? "And if they 'do not spin' either, their mere existence being their adornment, are we to understand that we too without working, without spinning, without any meritoriousness, is more glorious than Solomon's glory by being a human being". And the birds "sow not and reap not and gather not into barns. But if "the wood-dove is the human being," how can he manage not to be "worried" and "to break with the worry of comparison" and "to be contented to be a human being" (Ricoeur 2004a: 505).

For Søren Kirkegaard, the call to forget these worries are related to the ordinary worries. Basic to these forgetfulnesses is the desire to abandon oneself to the reality, and so he urges us "to consider: how glorious it is to be a human being" (Ricoeur 2004a: 505). Thus a "carefree memory on the horizon of concerned memory, the soul common to memory that forgets and does not forget" (Ricoeur 2004a: 505) leads us to an art of forgetting. Such a forgetting of memory can enliven forgiveness.

Finally, Ricoeur is persuasive: Under the sign of this "ultimate incognito of forgiveness, an echo can be heard of the word of wisdom uttered in the Song of Songs: "Love is as strong as death." So the final conviction and conclusion of Ricoeur: "The reserve of forgetting, I would say, is as strong as the forgetting through effacement" (Ricoeur 2004a: 506).

## CONCLUSION

As Ricoeur was fond of saying toward the end of his life, there *is* forgiveness and, with it, the possibility of new beginnings. This possibility cannot be the object of science or speculative philosophy; it can be spoken of only in the optative mood, which is subsidized by the currency of the imagination ("may be"). In the eschatological world of the Bible, we hear this word of forgiveness: "You are better than your works." Ricoeur proclaimed this word to all who had ears to hear: To the discouraged and disenchanting, theologians and philosophers, psychologists and politicians. There is reason to hope that despite the uncertain sound emerging from the contemporary world of divergent cultures and civilizations, philosophers can truly search for truth (Vanhoozer 2005).

Such a search for truth, and not the discovery of it, unites humanity with its divergent cultures. To enliven cultures and civilizations to this

search is the task of philosophy. The truth, then, we approach can only be named in a special mode of speaking, and at the limits of philosophy. This leads Ricoeur to a poetic closing statement of the book:

Beneath history, memory and oblivion.  
Beneath memory and oblivion: life.  
But the writing of life is another history.  
Incompleteness (Ricoeur 2004a: 506).

Will individual history be ever made complete by love? Will collective history be completed by means of forgiveness? How long and how far will these histories go on?

## NOTES

1. Though not true, we are referring to the wars between Iraq and USA or Serbia and Montenegro, which are generally regarded as wars of cultures. Some people assume that there will be a clash of civilizations between the Christians and Muslims, a view which we do not accept.

2. This section is adapted from the book review of Ricoeur's book by Hetteema (2010).

3. Note also: "The epoche is now removed and, with respect to this intended lack of distinction; fault belongs to the parerga, the "asides" of the phenomenology of memory" (Ricoeur 2004a: 461).

4. "Reflection... leads back to the centre of the memory of self, which is the place of the affection constitutive of the feeling of fault" (Ricoeur 2004a:462)

5. Note that in one of his early books of Ricoeur deals with this theme. See Ricoeur (1967).

6. Elsewhere Ricoeur pleads: "We must remember because remembering is a moral duty. We owe a debt to the victims. And the tiniest way of paying out debt is to tell and retell what happened at Auschwitz... By remembering and telling, we not only prevent forgetfulness from killing the victims twice; we also prevent their life stories from becoming banal... and the events from appearing as necessary." See his "The Memory of Suffering" in (Ricoeur and Wallace 1995: 290).

7. For a deeper analysis of Ricoeur's freedom, see Pandikattu 1999: 23-45.

8. Quoted in Kodalle (1944). So guilt and the guilty party are intimately linked.

9. So Derrida adds: "One cannot or should not forgive, there is no forgiveness, if there is any, except where there is the unforgivable." (MHF 468). Further, forgiveness can be related to a cosmic geometry and algebra that contrasts two infinities or disproportion. So we have a "disproportion" to use Pascal's term between "the depth of the fault and the height of forgiveness" (Ricoeur 2004a:468).

10. Here of course we can have recourse to the actual living experience of communities, where life has been lived out in spite of their tragic histories. The caste system in India is an example that comes to my mind immediately.

11. Obviously Ricoeur does not refer to a naïve forgetting as the condition for forgiving. He is not being guided by “forget and forgive” principle. But Ricoeur would hold that a creative forgetting of the crime done to me, is a necessary precondition for forgiveness. This is elaborated in the next section.

12. See Weinrich (1997). As noted by Ricoeur, Weinrich is tormented by Auschwitz and its impossible forgetfulness and so will abhor this first technique of the art of forgetting.

13. It is the “art of forgetting” or oblivion. For Ricoeur “The art of forgetting would have to rest on a rhetoric of extinction: writing to extinguish – the contrary of making an archive.”

## CHAPTER IX

# THE ONE WHO PRAYS: RENEWED VISION OF GOD, WORLD AND SELF

“Man is made by his belief. As he believes, so he is” ~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“Man is a messenger who forgot the message.” ~Abraham Joshua Heschel

“Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one’s weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.” ~Mahatma Gandhi

“The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.” ~Søren Kierkegaard

Humans are fundamentally open to the beyond and the spiritual realm. Though spiritual exercises are varied and versatile, and the experiences they give rise to are unique, there is a commonality in all genuine spiritual experience.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we make a modest attempt to argue that in today’s context, the many authentic spiritual exercises have one common denominator: An ardent desire and passion to protect, promote and perfect life in its totality.

The author’s background as an Indian Christian<sup>2</sup> has contributed significantly to such an understanding and appreciation of spiritual exercise and experience. For instance, the author’s Indian context makes him acutely aware of abject hunger and poverty, and so the conviction that any genuine spiritual experience has to respond to such a dehumanising condition and lead to fostering of life. This stems from my Christian commitment.

In this chapter, on spiritual exercise and experience, we bring forth the global agonies and ecstasies we face, and assert that the uniqueness and versatility of a spiritual exercise is tested by the actual life situation of the community: How far it promotes life, fosters joy and furthers love.

After understanding spirituality primarily as an experience, we try to situate a meaningful spirituality (and spiritual experience). Then, we focus on the human longing and fulfilment that is embedded in every spiritual quest. This leads to appreciate spiritual exercises as an experience of love, which is conditioned by our context and open to the whole of reality. Next, we study the uniqueness and versatility of spiritual exercises and experiences that lead to a renewed vision of God, world and humans. The focal point of our spirituality is life in its varied forms of searching for fullness. Here the activity of prayer, understood as a human activity and not

necessarily connected to any particular Divinity, is significant as part of our renewed vision of the whole of reality.

## UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUALITY AS EXPERIENCE

*Spirituality as beyond religion and theology:* Though the term ‘spirituality’ is widely used, it is difficult to define. For the purpose of this chapter, we shall contrast spirituality to related terms like religion and theology. Religion forms a community that shares a common world-view, and reinforces the other in their faith-commitment. Religion can be traced to a charismatic personality or significant experience shared by a community. Such a religion tends to be institutionalised, and tends to face the “dilemma of institutionalisation” that Max Weber has powerfully popularised.<sup>3</sup> Religious practices are self-expression of a community of faith. They articulate the vision of a faith community, and try to perpetuate the original experience (or “originary experience” Azzopardi 1984). Religion manifests itself through symbolic rituals (sacraments), structures and official articulations.

Theology may be considered as the conscious articulation of a community to relate the original experience to the contemporary world in a rational and systematic manner. Theology is an attempt to understand the community through rational categories. Though religion and theology are vital to the existence of a faith community, they are secondary compared to the spirituality. But spirituality refers directly to one’s way of living, and responding to one’s fears, hopes, ambitions and visions.

*Spirituality as an enriching relationship between God, world and humans:* Unfortunately, the term “spirituality” denotes the primacy of the “spirit” as opposed to the “body.” It presupposes that the material or the bodily is unimportant compared to the really important realm, that is, the “non-material.” The basic assumption when we use the term “spirituality” is that God or Divine is spirit (as opposed to the material), and so this realm is superior. Though some attempts have been made to coin different terms (like “carnality”), we have not come across any term that goes beyond the dualistic understanding of the human person and does justice to the depth and richness indicated by the term “spirituality,” which does justice to our embodied nature.

With this caveat, we can understand “spirituality” as an enriching relationship that draws us into a deeper engagement with the world, humans and Divine.<sup>4</sup> Spirituality may be understood as a deeper way of relating to ourselves and the whole of reality, and in a way, consonant with the “originary experiences” found in any of the religious traditions. The mystics point to a deeper and dynamic relationship with the Divine that transforms their whole existence. So we may roughly denote spirituality as a relationship that evokes a religious experience, and provides us with a profound sense of meaning and significance in our life. Such an experience enhances the horizontal, vertical and inner dimensions of our existence.<sup>5</sup>

*Fostering of life in all dimensions:* A spiritual experience that originates in a profound experience of reality, necessarily leads to the fostering of life in all its dimensions (Pandikattu 2002). One of the uniquely religious experiences of humans is the awareness of the brokenness (sinfulness, contingency and limitedness) of life in all dimensions (physical, biological, psychological, metaphysical and spiritual). Evil threatens our existence, and finally as individuals we are swallowed up in death. Our life, and particularly our spiritual life, is an attempt to respond to this possible nihilism. A meaningful spiritual relationship enables us to confront our *facticity*, and brokenness, to undertake everything within our power to preserve and foster life in its totality. Spirituality is not just an attempt to overcome death, the final human experience of finitude. It is our human attempt to rise above all forces of darkness that impede the flow of life through us.

Therefore, a meaningful spirituality has to respond realistically to the threats of ecological calamity, economic disparity, nuclear annihilation and terrorist violence, all of which we face as human beings individually and collectively.

*Towards a deeper experience of existence:* Therefore, spirituality is an experience of the threats confronting humanity and responding to it, and not merely from our own limited resources. A spiritual person is one who believes, like Albert Einstein, that reality is basically friendly to us. The forces of evil and the experience of tragedy that we encounter should make us realistic, but not desperate. For we know that life is not our exclusive responsibility. We are “handmaids” or “instruments” or “agents” of the Divine – the Ultimate Reality that is larger than the material – who acts in and through us. In acting to overcome evil, we are consoled and comforted by a loving and personal power that is beyond us. Thus spirituality is a deeper experience of reality being friendly to ourselves. As spiritual persons, we affirm that existence is benevolent in spite of contrary experiences, and that we are living in the hands of God in spite of the paradoxes that we encounter. So the equanimity that a spiritual person radiates is one drawn from a deeper experience of tragedy. Going beyond the tragedies of life affirms that reality is fundamentally meaningful and trustworthy. A genuine spirituality is drawn from an authentic experience of the depth of existence as meaningful, friendly and affirmative.

## **SPIRITUALITY AS THE DEEPEST FULFILMENT OF HUMAN LONGING**

Though the vast majority of Indians are Hindus, India claims proudly to have given rise to four major world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism (Quitterer and Pandikattu 2002). It is at the same time noteworthy that India hosts the second largest number of Muslims in the world. There are also numerous indigenous people with their own unique tribal religions (about twenty million according to conservative estimates).

Each of these tribal traditions has its own religion and spirituality. Much more than the number of religions, what characterizes India is an atmosphere of religiosity that is prevalent all over the country. This religiosity coupled with the economic and educational reality of India may be understood in terms of three features: scientific forwardness, economic backwardness and spiritual inwardness.<sup>6</sup>

The basic spiritual quest is for human fulfilment, which is multifaceted. Human longing is the result of the innate limitation of human existence and can only be satisfied through a fulfilment that is integral.

*Fulfilment which is more than material:* The Indian psyche longs for fulfilment that is more than the material. Our basic human needs are not merely food, clothing and shelter. Deep down we long for a fulfilment that goes beyond the material to the psychological, philosophical and spiritual. “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mat 4: 4). The “word of God” gives us the assurance that our lives are more than the bodily and have a destiny which is beyond the grave.

*Fulfilment which is more than individual:* The overemphasis on the individual soul and destiny has led us to believe in a human salvation (realization) that is over-individualized. The original human societies (be they the Jewish tribes or indigenous people) have visualized their human search and fulfilment as a collective affair. “No man is an island” (Donne and Fallon 1970). Humans can achieve their salvation only in a society that is oriented towards the Divine, Sacred or God and receptive to other human beings.

*Fulfilment which is more than that of the soul:* Again, too much emphasis has been on traditional religious practices, and to a fulfilment that is other-worldly and not-bodily. The soul has been blown out of proportion at the expense of the body. Today, we long to return to a holistic integration that takes our corporeality and our physical nature seriously.

*Fulfilment that is dialogical and relational:* Thus our contemporary spiritual exercises and experiences are both relational and dialogical. A genuinely spiritual experience calls for a dialogical interaction between human beings and God. The old paradigm of seeking God in isolation, and “alone with the Alone” (Maloney1982), is giving way to a common, creative and interactive search for the depth of human existence, which is essentially related and relational. We realize that we are bound to each other and it is only from the experience of the other that we gain our identity.<sup>7</sup> At the spiritual level, too, humans remain essentially communitarian and so the human search for spiritual fulfilment retains this collective character.

## **SPIRITUALITY AS AN EXERCISE OF LOVE**

It is within the context of the resurgence of fundamentalism, poverty and violence, discussed above, that we can visualize spirituality as an

exercise of love: Love for the whole of humanity and God, and without neglecting love for the concrete individual persons around us.

*Fundamentalism vs. going back to the fundamentals:* We may very well visualize spirituality as an encounter going back to the roots. "Returning to the original charism" of the religious tradition is imperative for us, so that we can live up to the fundamental precepts of religions (both historically and existentially). This challenges us to be open to the core message of compassion and sensitivity that is at the core of every religious experience.

So a proper antidote to today's growing fundamentalism is to rediscover the fundamental values and vision of religious tradition. It is only when we are firmly rooted in the tradition of our own faith, that we can reach forward and receive warmly the other traditions, which may think, feel and act differently from us.

*Other religions as partners in dialogue:* In the significant quest for meaning and fullness of life, gone are the days when we used to look at other religions as competitors. Today, the world has become increasingly one. We are so much united at the global level that we are growing into that sense of one world. We are in a common search for the meaning of existence, and together we search for the Ultimate, which remains ever elusive, and gives us but a glimpse of Himself at times. Further to this point, at a human level, the other religions and traditions serve as partners in bettering the life situation of three fourths of humanity, who are still deprived of a rightful place in human life.

*From saving our souls to saving humanity:* Confronted by the grave threats facing the world today, from nuclear, economic, ecological and justice issues, we must collectively change our religious priority from saving our souls to saving the world. It is definitely true that our final fulfilment includes the world-beyond-us. But as spiritual persons, we cannot live in a dream world where we become irresponsible to the critical concrete challenges confronting humanity. Nowadays, more than the individual believers' souls, the whole of humanity cries out for redemption. That is the desperate groaning of all living beings (the yearning of the new creation) and this hope is being trampled upon by human selfishness and greed. Faced with our own collective extinction, as spiritual persons, we have no option but to try and save and preserve the precious life on the planet earth.

*Working for the protection and promotion of life:* Therefore, our responsible religious challenge is to undertake everything to preserve, protect and promote all dimensions of life. Today, not just human life, but also planetary life is threatened. The beautiful creation of God is reduced to a money-value, and possibly sold at random. Precious life has become an object of commerce. Even enlightenment is sought after as a commodity to be sold or purchased. Human beings are treated as things. In this situation of the inhuman betrayal of life, we are called to foster life unreservedly. For this purpose, we need to collaborate with all people of good will: scholars, scientists, philosophers, bureaucrats, politicians and leaders of all types. The

simple and ordinary persons have something profound to contribute to the furtherance of life.

*Living religion for life:* Thus, religion and spirituality need to rediscover the significance of life on earth. Too long have we lived as if we had “enough religion to hate, not enough to love.”<sup>8</sup> As spiritual people, we need to reaffirm our commitment to life, and celebrate it. Our sacraments need to be recharged with the grandeur of life so that this world becomes sacred. Our sacredness needs to rediscover the beauty of life and reaffirm and celebrate it. Our life of faith needs to reassert the uniqueness and the dignity of life (and not just human life) that is so precious.

*Both belongingness (roots) and openness (wings):* For this we need to belong to the world totally and at the same time remain open to future possibilities, which are God’s gift to us. The invitation of God to embrace the whole world and to go beyond it in love has to be taken seriously. Without belittling the material, we need to soar high and experience the profound joy of being alive. Without negating the everyday, we need to consecrate the particularly sacred moments of our life. So we need a spirituality that takes wings to reach out to the ever beyond in us, while remaining rooted creatively in our past.

*A flexibility based on “at-home-ness” in the universe:* We need a spirituality that enables us to be truly at peace with our own selves. This calls for a spirituality that encourages us to be truly at home with the cosmos, so we can afford to be flexible and open in our relationship to God and to the world. We need not be afraid when faced with a future that may seem to be threatening. In spite of the dehumanizing forces operating in the world, we know that we can surrender ourselves to the hands of God. We are here because our God is alive and active.

## **THE UNIQUENESS AND VERSATILITY OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES**

In the context of the need to save life, here we explore some of the salient features of contemporary spiritual exercises (especially Indian) that are emerging. The focus is on a holistic integral understanding of human beings in the world.

*Beginning with this world (incarnation):* We have begun to realize that spirituality, just like corporeality, has to begin with the world. The other-worldly spirituality that tends to deny this world has become outdated. Though traditional spirituality lays heavy emphasis on bodily mortification and running away from the world – our so-called “vale of tears” – we are rediscovering the beauty of God’s creation as the source of our spiritual insight. No human being can claim to have any experience (including spiritual experience) totally divorced from the material world surrounding us. Though such exercises invoke in us the desire for the other world, we need to focus primarily on this world. Perhaps the best case for

such a reaffirmation of the world is to be found in the Christian notion of the incarnation. Together with the doctrine of creation (as original blessing), incarnation demands that a believer takes this world seriously. This world is the paradigm of divine activity and can never be excluded from plans of human fulfilment.

*The emphasis on the body (yoga):* One of the significant spiritual re-discoveries is the significance of the body as a means of spiritual realization. Though the extreme forms of it uses sexual energy<sup>9</sup> as means of spiritual realization, we can observe that the body has regained its legitimate role in spiritual experiences and exercises.

One of the significant bodily spiritual exercises is through breathing. By regulated breath or bodily awareness, various schools have tried to foster spiritual awareness. Buddhist meditation or Vipassana, for instance, focuses on awareness of breath as leading to enlightenment. Transcendental meditation also focuses on the body as a very important source of self-realization. Classical yoga is the best way of using bodily exercises as spiritual exercises in order to realise total fulfilment.<sup>10</sup>

*The rediscovery of the human face:* Just like reaffirmation of the bodily, another feature of the emerging spirituality is experiencing the beauty and uniqueness of the human face, and especially the eyes. If we cannot see traces of infinity in the human face, the tenderness of love in the human eyes and the eagerness to know in the human look, we cannot remain human, leave alone spiritual. This rediscovery of the human face (the ability to transcend oneself and see the other, as other, with compassion, love and tenderness) is a unique feature of the human living and spiritual experience.<sup>11</sup>

*The openness to life and death (resurrection):* The experience of transcendence in the face of the other (Lévinas 1974) also helps us to experience another still significant transcendence, namely, to go beyond life and death. Death is a common human experience, but equipped with the potential of a spiritual conviction and openness, we are enabled for a life that surpasses the material, and thus a physical and spiritual death. Such experiences of death enables us to open ourselves to the infinite possibilities that are open to us even in death – the most cruel and excruciating self-annihilation. Since love can never be extinguished from the human heart nor compassion from the human face, we affirm gently and tenderly that life can never be wiped out by death! This understanding reflects a genuine spiritual versatility and openness.

*Towards a future that is beyond ourselves:* For such a spiritual openness, we are called to immerse ourselves in self-abandonment, and surrender. To open to something more – and face the infinite appearing dimly before us with faith that life will take us beyond ourselves – requires trusting we are receiving life's loving affirmation, mostly notably, by way of life itself. To be able to experience the fullness of life, we need to let ourselves go, and open ourselves to the mystery that is beyond ourselves. Realizing totally that we are in safe hands, we need to open our fists and

give up the little attachments we childishly cling to. When we let ourselves – our selfish ego, petty plans and childish desires – be transported to a domain that is full of life, beauty and love, then we realize experientially that the seed that flowers forth does so by dying to itself.<sup>12</sup>

### **A RENEWED VISION OF THE WORLD, GOD AND THE HUMANS<sup>13</sup>**

The spiritual exercises, and the experience derived from them, which we discussed above, lead to a renewed vision of the world, God and humans. This renewed vision leads to a further commitment towards humans and the world and, as well, to a more profound openness towards the sacred and divine in nature.

*An exercise/experience of crisis at today's world:* Such a tender, loving and caring affirmation of life forces us to look realistically at the threats and dangers confronting life today. We refer here not just to the threats of nuclear or ecological disaster, but of human tragedies, like the large scale hunger of millions, dehumanized enslaving economic oppression of the powerless and of the calculated and systematic disinformation campaign for political and economic expediency of a privileged few at the expense of the many. Realizing these grave threats to life, a genuinely spiritual person will resolve to do what is individually and collectively possible, gently but firmly. An openness to the beauty and preciousness of life helps us to feel in our own bodies the grave threat to our planet, and yet without surrendering hope and trust in humanity.

*Positively responding to the technological revolution:* A genuine spirituality of our times demands of us that we respond creatively and constructively to the technological marvels that we experience today. It is true that most of the dangers that we face are, directly or indirectly, caused by the profound technological revolution. But condemning all technological progress as evil work will not help, nor will regarding technology as a panacea to all human evils. With a spiritual vision and openness, we need to revisit the tremendous technological progress and befriend technology without demonizing it.<sup>14</sup>

*A deeper understanding of reality and life:* Such a healthy befriending demands from us a deeper and multifaceted understanding and appreciation of life and reality. We need to ask ourselves: What is life? What do we want to achieve individually and collectively? What is the meaning of our life? How do we justify our existence to ourselves and find happiness in life? Then, we need to turn to the traditional answers (given by culture and religion) to open ourselves to experience the beauty, bliss and mystery of life and reality. Spirituality then becomes a celebration and affirmation of the beauty and depth of life, with the capacity to respond creativity and lovingly to the challenges that we face. It is here that our understanding of God also becomes crucial. In the whole drama of life, that

is being played in the universe, what is the role of God, the Divine or Sacred? Each religious tradition answers these questions slightly differently, and with varying nuances. But the genuine spiritual exercises and experiences enable us to appreciate the reality of the Divine in a very profound and mystical manner.

*The widening of human consciousness:* For such an enterprise, we need to be aware, above all else, of ourselves, and our own self-consciousness. Our notion of who we are, what our problems are and how we can confront them, depend on our human consciousness. At the moment, in spite of the development of human knowledge and ability, we are unfortunately stuck with a consciousness that is narrow and anthropocentric. We need to broaden our vision, enlarge our horizon and widen our consciousness. Doing that will enable us to experience the genuine problems that humanity faces, and overcome those problems with tenderness and compassion.<sup>15</sup>

*From "Evolution become conscious of itself" to "Evolution able to eliminate itself":* We need to reaffirm the fact that we are in a unique position: We are evolution become conscious of itself, to borrow an insight from the Jesuit scientist and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Teilhard de Chardin 1999: 154). In recent decades, however, we have advanced further! We have become evolution that seems capable of eliminating itself! Either enhance or annihilate itself: the choice is open to us! Standing at the threshold of life – human, animal, vegetative – we can decide for the whole of life, as to whether or not we enhance life beautifully or annihilate it completely! That choice is a tremendous spiritual responsibility and task! Are we ready for such a task? Our actions in the next few decades will decide whether or not we can be in any way called a spiritual generation, and if a next generation will be alive to evaluate us!

*The fulfilment of the whole living family:* A genuine spiritual experience calls us to realize the beauty of life and fulfil the whole of life. We are in a honored position! As humans – genuine, committed, spiritual, versatile and flexible – we can open ourselves and the whole of life to further enhancement! Doing that is a tremendous spiritual challenge! In our own openness, abandonment and realization, we shall be contributing to the overall development and realization of life itself! So our spiritual life urges us to remain deeply rooted in our earthly existence and to embrace at the same time the whole of life, including the Divine!

## CONCLUSION

The crucial spiritual experiences available to us through various exercises are values that promote life holistically: Transparency, gentleness, sensitivity, openness, transformation, innocence, bliss, unitive vision, loving compassion and at-home-ness with oneself and the whole of reality! We are urged to be genuine so as to let life flow in and through us, and thus resonate with the grandeur of life and partake of the flowering of love.

Every genuine spiritual exercise is a call to a greatly life transforming experience of openness to oneself, to the world and to the Divine. Such spiritual exercises (and experiences) make life on this planet earth more viable, and opens us to a fullness that is the Divine. That is the ecstasy open to every mystic, the bliss shared by every martyr and the delight lived by every saint.

## NOTES

1. In the title of this chapter, by “The Prayer,” we mean, the agent who prays. One excellent study on religious experience leading to a case for theism is Davis (1999). See specially pp. 19-55 on the nature of religious experience. It may be noted that the ecstasy and depth of a spiritual experience is something open only to one who has genuinely experienced it.

2. In the last twenty years the Church in India has been consciously trying to indigenize itself in the Indian culture and context. See specially two edited works of K. Pandikattu and R. Rocha (Rocha and Pandikattu 2002 and 2003), *Bend Without Fear: Hopes and Possibilities for an Indian Church* and *Dreams and Visions: New Horizons for an Indian Church*, where more than 40 Indian theologians reflect on the emergence of an “Indian Church” (which may be contrasted to a “Church in India”).

3. The “dilemma of institution” denotes the inherent dilemma present in the evolution of any structure. A charism needs institution to preserve itself. But the very growth of institution suffocates the charism it is meant to serve. See M. Weber (2002) and O’Dea (1961).

4. We acknowledge that spirituality need not imply belief in God. It is, rather, the recognition, for example, that there are realities that cannot be weighed, measured or counted. Committed openness to “higher” or “deeper” levels of experiences makes us spiritual people.

5. As is generally implied, by horizontal dimension, we understand our relationship with the world and human beings. Similarly the vertical dimension points to the transcendent, divine level. The inner dimension is that which takes us to the depth of our own human consciousness (or the soul).

6. More of this may be found in Pandikattu, K. (2003).

7. Some sociologists speak of the “looking-glass self.” See Cooley (1902).

8. Jonaathan Swift claimed: “We have just enough religion to hate, but not enough to love each other.” (Cited in Reilly 1982: 11)

9. This is particularly true of some sects or groups like tantrism or Shaktism encouraged by Bhagawan Rajneesh. See Mishra (2011).

10. For a detailed analysis see Kunnumpuram (2002). He has been involved in promoting a spirituality that is bodily and integrated. Atmadharshan, Patna, has been focusing on demystifying spirituality and fostering a spiritual vitality that is truly holistic. In Pune too Matthias Altrichter has been attempting such a synthesis since at least a decade.

11. Following Emmanuel Lévinas, we can speak of the face reflecting infinity and transcendence symbolising human love. See Saint-Cheron and Leïvinas (2010).

12. Human values like self-abandonment and self-surrender are crucial here. In this process we become capable of bearing fruits of compassion and love – by being open to the whole universe.

13. Definitely the renewed vision is an integrating spiritual one that is fully interrelated.

14. Recent attempts at dialogue between science and religion are such a positive enterprise. See [www.templeton.org](http://www.templeton.org), [www.jnanam.org](http://www.jnanam.org) or [www.ctns.org](http://www.ctns.org). Two other centres at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, also attempt to do so in a modest way ([www.assr.in](http://www.assr.in) and [www.iisr.in](http://www.iisr.in))

15. The works of Ken Wilber and Bede Griffiths are relevant here. See Wilber (1996, 1996a and 2000) and Griffiths (1976, 1997 and 2001).



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

“The chief obstacle to the progress of the human race is the human race.” ~Don Marquis

“How desperately difficult it is to be honest with oneself. It is much easier to be honest with other people. What is true is invisible to the eye. It is only with the heart that one can see clearly.” ~Antoine de Saint-Exupery

“This above all:  
To thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.” ~ Shakespeare, Hamlet

“To be nobody but myself-in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make me somebody else-means to fight the hardest battle any human can fight, and never stop fighting.”  
~e.e. cummings

“Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same House of Being is built. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to itself. In every Now, being begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The centre is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity.” ~Friedrich Nietzsche



## CHAPTER X

### THE ELUSIVE TRANSCENDENCE

“We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin” ~Charles Darwin

“We’re animals. We’re born like every other mammal and we live our whole lives around disguised animal thoughts.” ~Barbara Kingsolver

“The question is this: Is man an ape or an angel? I am on the side of the angels.” ~Benjamin Disraeli

“A man can do what he wants, but not want what he wants”.  
~Arthur Schopenhauer

When Karl Rahner asserted that “theology is anthropology” (Cited in Marmion and Hines 2005: 43), he was referring to the intimate connection between our God-understanding and self-understanding. God is not merely the fullness of humanity, s/he is the self-reflection of humanity. Anthropologically speaking, talk about God is talk about human beings, and thus our self-understanding changes, shapes and reinforces our understanding of God and vice-versa.

Today, science has profoundly shaped and changed the understanding of reality and of ourselves. In this concluding chapter, we want to study the intimately, relational understanding of reality and human beings as espoused by contemporary science. Such an understanding will have profound implications for the understanding of humans themselves.

In the first part of this chapter, we use the ordinary alphabets to indicate that language and reality is more than monadic letters. Then we take up three scientific theories to indicate the inherent connectedness of the whole of reality. We also use another contemporary scientific finding to show us that we do not perceive much of the empirical world, a fact of which urges us to be humble in our approach to the larger world. Then in the light of our scientific reflection, we recognize human beings not as pure entities and finished products, but as an evolving horizon that is ever becoming. Finally, we dwell briefly on love, which is constitutive of reality.

#### COUNTING THE ALPHABETS

Alphabets, or phonemic alphabets, are sets of letters, usually arranged in a fixed order, and each of which represents one or more

phonemes (both consonants and vowels) in the language they are used to write. In some cases, combinations of letters are used to represent single phonemes, as in the English *sh*, *ch* and *th* (Alphabets 2012).

The word “alphabet” comes from, via Latin *alphabetum*, the Greek word *αλφάβητος* (*alphabētos*), which itself comes from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, *α* (*άλφα/alpha*) and *β* (*βήτα/beta*). The best-known and most widely-used alphabets are the Latin or Roman alphabets and the Cyrillic alphabet, which have been adapted to write numerous languages. Most other alphabets are used for a single language or a few languages.

The history of the alphabet begins in Ancient Egypt, which is more than a millennium into the history of writing (Alphabets 2012). The first pure alphabet emerged around 2000 BC to represent the language of Semitic workers in Egypt and was derived from the alphabetic principles of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Most alphabets in the world today either descend directly from this development, e.g., the Greek and Latin alphabets, or were inspired by its design. The Greeks were the first people to create a phonemic alphabet, when they adapted the Phoenician model to write their language. They used a number of Phoenician letters that represented sounds with no equivalent in Greek to write Greek vowels.

Looking at the structure of written English, we can describe it as being made up of building blocks called words. Words, when they are written down, are made up of sequences or “strings” of the 26 letters in the alphabet.<sup>1</sup> Not every sequence or string of letters that we put together forms a word that we recognize and *accept* as part of the English language.<sup>2</sup>

Similar to English, languages that are made up of “words”<sup>3</sup> which are “strings” of “letters” from an “alphabet” are found in many fields of science. Biologists, for example, know that proteins are made up of discrete building blocks called amino acids that can only occur in certain combinations. A DNA molecule is a long chain made up of only four building blocks, but the patterns and ordering of the elements of this alphabet is used to write out the “words” that describe the genetic material of all living things.

After experimenting with the letters of the alphabet, it will become evident that for any *finite* set of letters or symbols of the *alphabet*, the number of *words may be* infinite! Thus, obviously alphabets are important in forming words, but on their own they are useless and insignificant, and only in creative combination and guided sequence do they make sense.

What is noteworthy is the location of space between words. Unlike zero in the number system, space does not have any value in itself. But it is the space that contributes to the construction of a meaningful word. Though the number of possible combinations and permutations of the letters can be infinite, for them to serve any useful purpose, they have to be located properly and bound suitably. So the space between words does have a function which is different from zero, but necessary for the meaning construction.

The use of alphabets to describe words denotes the importance of positioning or placement in the derivation of meaning. So in using alphabets to write words, positioning, sequencing and recognition pattern emerge as very highly significant.

After focusing on the positioning and patterns that constitute meaning and life, we venture to take up a few important scientific theories that demonstrates that reality is much more than the empirical or quantifiable aspect of physical experience.

### **SOME SCIENTIFIC POINTERS TO RELATIONALITY**

In this section we take up a few of the contemporary scientific theories that point to the inherently relational and connected nature of reality. Due to a lack of space, we are forced to give only a general overview of some of the significant theories used in contemporary science.<sup>4</sup> But in the following sections, we shall see the salient insights of the relativity, chaos and string theories, which help us to understand how the whole of reality can be intimately coupled.

#### *Relativity Theory: The Field that Connects*

Newtonian mechanics provided the paradigm to understand the classical physical world. According to Isaac Newton, material objects basically pull on each other, and with a force that increases depending on the mass of those objects and decreases depending on the distance between them. Newton's solution, relating mass, force, energy and acceleration, was elegant and accurate. Newton, however, was not satisfied with the results because he saw no way for this force to be conveyed through empty space. Thus, in spite of his mind-boggling and fantastic achievements, Newton lamented that he did not deduce from phenomena the reason for these properties of gravity. He longed for proven theories and not hypothesis, with which he was not satisfied. "For anything which is not deduced from phenomena ought to be called a hypothesis, and hypotheses of this kind, whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy" (Newton and Thayer 2005: 7).

In sharp contrast to Newton's theory, Einstein proposed that the *structure* (or geometry) of space was responsible for gravity. In fact, this great scientific genius saw no need for material objects, because as he affirmed: "We could regard matter as the regions in space where the field is extremely strong....There would be no place, in our new physics, for both field and matter, field being the only reality" (Einstein and Infeld, 1961: 243).

Although matter is generally conceived to be made up of atoms, the actual volume of atomic (or sub-atomic) particles in a material object is only about one-trillionth of the total volume of that object. The rest of the

volume is occupied by relational space. So almost the whole volume of matter is actually space. And within that space, there lays electric and magnetic fields that somehow serve to hold matter together.

Einstein's General Theory of Relativity did away with many of the classical problems of physics, and at the same time radically altered physicists' view of the Universe. The main features of General Relativity may be summed up as:

- a. Space and space-time are not rigid arenas in which events take place. They have form and structure which are influenced by the matter and energy content of the universe.
- b. Matter and energy tell space (and space-time) how to curve.
- c. Space tells matter how to move. In particular, small objects travel along the straightest possible lines in curved space (space-time).<sup>5</sup>

In curved space, the rules of Euclidean geometry are changed. Parallel lines can meet and the sum of the angles in a triangle can be more or less than 180 degrees, depending on how space is curved. Einstein's theory gave a correct prediction for the perihelion shift of Mercury. It also explained why objects fall independent of their mass: They all follow the same straightest possible line in curved space-time. Finally, in Einstein's theory, instantaneous gravitational force is replaced by the curvature of spacetime. Moving a mass causes ripples to form in this curvature, and these ripples travel with the same speed as light. Thus, a distant mass would not feel any instantaneous change in the gravitational force, and special relativity is not violated (Gravity 1999). According to Albert Einstein, "The electric and magnetic field or in short, the "electromagnetic" field is, in Maxwell's theory, something real" (Einstein and Infeld 1961: 145).

#### *Chaos Theory: The Butterfly that Terrifies*

The Theory of Chaos is among the youngest in the sciences, and has rocketed from its obscure roots in the seventies to become one of the most fascinating of all ideas. At the forefront of much research on physical systems – and already being implemented in fields covering such diverse matter as arrhythmic pacemakers, image compression and fluid dynamics – chaos science promises to continue to yield absorbing scientific information which may shape the face of science in the future. This theory deals with non-linear and complex situations, such as the stock-market, the flow of blood in the human body, weather forecasts, etc.

The two main components of the chaos theory are the ideas that systems – no matter how complex they may be – rely upon an underlying order and that very simple or small systems and events can cause very complex behaviors or events. The latter idea is known as *sensitive dependence on initial conditions*, a circumstance discovered by Edward Lorenz (who is generally credited as the first experimenter in the area of

chaos) in the early 1960s. Taking only the second aspect of the theory, we want to limit our explanation to the butterfly effect, which theorizes that something seemingly innocuous, such as a fluttering of a butterfly's wing, may be the catalyst for something larger, such as a tornado.

The *butterfly effect* encapsulates figuratively the more technical notion of *sensitive dependence on initial conditions* in chaos theory (Dynamical system 2012). The small variations of the initial condition of a nonlinear dynamic system may produce large variations in the long term behavior of the system. At times, this is sometimes presented as esoteric behavior, but can be exhibited by very simple systems: For example, a ball placed at the crest of a hill might roll into any of several valleys depending on slight differences in the ball's initial position.

The phrase refers to the idea that a butterfly's wings might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that ultimately cause a tornado to appear (or prevent one). The flapping wing represents a small change in the initial condition of the system, which causes a chain of events leading to large-scale phenomena. Had the butterfly not flapped its wings, the trajectory of the system might have been vastly different (Butterfly effect 2012).

A recurrence, the approximate return of a system towards its initial conditions, combined with a sensitive dependence on the initial conditions, are the two main ingredients for chaotic motion. Those ingredients have the practical consequence of making complex systems, such as the weather, difficult to predict past a certain time range (approximately a week in the case of weather) (Complex system 2012).

Sensitive dependence on initial conditions was first described by Jacques Hadamard in 1890 and popularized by Pierre Duhem's 1906 book.<sup>6</sup> The idea that one butterfly could have a far-reaching ripple effect on events seems first to have appeared in a 1952 Ray Bradbury short story about time travel. Although, the term "butterfly effect" itself is related to Edward Lorenz's work. In 1961, Lorenz was using a numerical computer model to rerun a weather prediction, and when, as a shortcut, he entered the decimal 0.506 instead of 0.506127, the result led to a completely different weather scenario. In 1963, Lorenz published his findings in the *New York Academy of Sciences* journal. In his paper, Lorenz noted that "One meteorologist remarked that if the theory were correct, one flap of a seagull's wings could change the course of weather forever." It was in later speeches and papers by Lorenz that reference to the more poetical butterfly was made. Philip Merilees concocted the *Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas* as a title (Butterfly effect 2012), which was added to the untitled paper Lorenz submitted and was to present in 1972 at the 139th meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. From then on, the "butterfly effect" became a popularly successful theory.

There are in reality many natural phenomenon which are so extremely sensitive to the initial conditions, that the outcome of which – intended or unintended – cannot be theoretically predicted! In such a world, one can visualize that the relationships between events or between

individuals are so complex that we cannot sensibly speak of determinism and cause-effect. Thus in such areas what we have are not accurate measurements but rough approximations. A major aspect of reality then is approximation, which belongs to the world of roughness and inter-relationships.

*String Theory: The Twine that Binds*

We live in a wonderfully complex universe, and we are curious about it by nature. Time and again we have wondered – Why are we here? Where do we, and the world, come from? What is the world made of? It is our privilege to live at a time when enormous progress has been made towards finding some of these answers. String theory is our most recent attempt to answer the last question.

So, of what is the world made? Ordinary matter is made of atoms, which are in turn made of just three basic components: Electrons whirling around a nucleus composed of neutrons and protons. The electron is a truly fundamental particle (it is one of a family of particles known as leptons), but neutrons and protons are made of smaller particles, known as quarks. Quarks are, as far as we know, truly elementary.

Our current knowledge about the subatomic composition of the universe is summarized in what is known as the Standard Model of particle physics. It describes both the fundamental building blocks out of which the world is made, and the forces through which these blocks interact. There are twelve basic building blocks. Six of these are quarks – they go by the interesting names of up, down, charm, strange, bottom and top.<sup>7</sup> The other six are leptons – and these include the electron and its two heavier siblings, the muon, tauon and three neutrinos (Güijosa 2004).

There are four fundamental forces in the universe: Gravity, electromagnetism and the weak and strong nuclear forces. Each of these is produced by fundamental particles that act as carriers of the force. The most familiar of these is the photon, a particle of light, which is the mediator of electromagnetic forces. (This means that, for instance, a magnet attracts a nail because both objects exchange photons.) The graviton is the particle associated with gravity. The strong force is carried by eight particles known as gluons. Finally, the weak force is transmitted by three particles: W+, W- and Z.

With one notable exception, the behavior of all of these particles and forces is described with impeccable precision by the Standard Model. That “exception” is gravity. For technical reasons, the gravitational force, which is the most familiar force in our everyday lives, has proven very difficult to describe microscopically. This has been, for many years, one of the most important problems in theoretical physics – to formulate a quantum theory of gravity.

In the last few decades, string theory has emerged as the most promising candidate for a microscopic theory of gravity. And it is an

infinitely ambitious theory that attempts to provide a complete, unified, and consistent description of the fundamental structure of our universe.<sup>8</sup>

The essential idea behind string theory is that all of the different “fundamental” particles of the Standard Model are really just different manifestations of one basic object: A string. We would ordinarily picture an electron, for instance, as a point with no internal structure. A point cannot do anything but move. But if the string theory is correct, then under an extremely powerful ‘microscope’ we would realize that the electron is not really a point, but a tiny loop of string. A string can do something aside from moving – it can oscillate in different ways. If it oscillates a certain way, then from a distance, one is unable to tell that it is really a string, and in fact a person would see an electron. But if it oscillates some other way, then we call it a photon, or a quark and so on. So, if the string theory is correct, then the entire world is made of strings! (Güijosa 2004).

Think of a guitar string that has been tuned by stretching the string under tension across the guitar. Depending on how the string is plucked and how much tension is in the string, different musical notes will be created by the string. These musical notes could be said to be *excitation modes* of that guitar string under tension.

In a similar manner, in the string theory, the elementary particles we observe could be thought of as the “musical notes” or excitation modes of elementary strings. In string theory, as in guitar playing, the string must be stretched under tension in order to become excited. However, the strings in the string theory are floating in spacetime, and they are not tied down to a guitar. Nonetheless, they have tension. The string tension in the string theory is denoted by the quantity  $1/(2\pi\alpha')$ , where  $\alpha'$  is  $\alpha$  “alpha prime” and is equal to the square of the string length scale.

If the string theory is to be a theory of quantum gravity, then the average size of a string should be somewhere near the length scale of quantum gravity, called the *Planck length*, which is about  $10^{-33}$  centimeters, or about a millionth of a billionth of a billionth of a billionth of a centimeter. Unfortunately, this means that strings are way too small to be seen by current or expected particle physics technology (let alone being able to finance such technology!!) and so string theorists must devise more clever methods to test the theory than just looking for little strings in particle experiments.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the string theory is that such a simple idea works – it is possible to derive (an extension of) the Standard Model (which has been verified experimentally with incredible precision) from a theory of strings. But it should also be said that, to date, there is no direct experimental evidence that string theory itself is the correct description of Nature. This is mostly due to the fact that string theory is still under development. We know bits and pieces of it, but we do not yet see the whole picture, and we are therefore unable to make definite predictions. In recent years, many exciting developments have taken place, which are radically improving our understanding of what is the theory.<sup>9</sup>

But particles in the string theory arise as excitations of the string. Included in the excitations of a string in this theory is a particle with *zero mass* and *two units of spin*.

If there were a good quantum theory of gravity, then the particle that would carry the gravitational force would have *zero mass* and *two units of spin*, and this has been known by theoretical physicists for a long time. This theorized particle is called the *graviton*.

But it was not enough that there be a graviton predicted by the string theory. One can add a graviton to quantum field theory by hand, but the calculations that are supposed to describe nature become useless, because particle interactions occur at a single point of spacetime, at zero distance between the interacting particles. For gravitons, the mathematics behaves so badly at zero distance that the answers just don't make sense. In the string theory, the strings collide over a small but finite distance, and the answers do make sense.

This doesn't mean that the string theory is not without its deficiencies. But the zero distance behaviour is such that we can combine quantum mechanics and gravity, and we can talk sensibly about a string excitation that carries the gravitational force. This was a significant hurdle that was overcome in late 20th century physics, and which is why so many young people are willing to learn the grueling complex and abstract mathematics that is necessary to study a quantum theory of interacting strings.<sup>10</sup>

The string theories are classified according to whether or not the strings are required to be closed loops and the particle spectrum includes fermions. In order to include fermions in the string theory, there must be a special kind of symmetry called "supersymmetry," which means for every boson (particle that transmits a force) there is a corresponding fermion (particle that makes up matter). So supersymmetry relates the particles that transmit forces to the particles that make up matter.

Supersymmetric partners to known particles have not been observed in particle experiments, but theorists believe that this is because supersymmetric particles are too massive to be detected at current accelerators. Particle accelerators could be on the verge of finding evidence for high energy supersymmetry in the near future. Evidence for supersymmetry at high energy hopefully may be so compelling that the string theory becomes a good mathematical model for nature at the smallest distance scales.

If the string theory is an adequate explanation for reality, then we may note that it is tension or stretching its constituents that makes up the reality. Therefore, reality is not conceived of as 'points' that can only move, but strings which can oscillate and interact. More than anything else, it is interaction (or oscillation) that gives the strings different shapes or different properties, which makes it either an electron, proton or muon! So the different oscillations of the string create differences in life and reality.

## THE DEPTH OF DARKNESS

The cosmic reality that we experience is truly and ontologically connected and interrelated. At the same time, there is another significant fact that the physicists tell us from experimental observation, and which the mystics of different religious traditions seem to have always glimpsed. It is about how little we really know about reality, and which truly makes us humble and open-minded. In this section, we shall briefly deal with two of the most puzzling phenomena that confront today's astrophysicists: That of dark matter and dark energy.

### *Dark Matter*

In 1933, the astronomer Fritz Zwicky was studying the motions of distant galaxies. Zwicky estimated the total mass of a group of galaxies by measuring their brightness. When he used a different method to compute the mass of the same cluster of galaxies, he came up with a number that was four hundred times his original estimate. This discrepancy in the observed and computed masses is now known as "the missing mass problem." Nobody did much with Zwicky's finding until the 1970's, when scientists began to realize that only large amounts of hidden mass could explain many of their observations. Scientists also realize that the existence of some unseen mass would also support theories regarding the structure of the universe. Today, scientists are searching for the mysterious dark matter not only to explain the gravitational motions of galaxies, but also to validate current theories about the origin and fate of the universe (Miller 1995).

Scientists estimate that ninety to ninety-nine percent of the total mass of the universe is dark matter. They can tell that the dark matter is "out there," but they cannot see it. Bruce H. Margon, chairman of the astronomy department at the University of Washington, told the *New York Times*, "It's a fairly embarrassing situation to admit that we can't find 90 percent of the universe" (Wilford 1994: C1-C13). This problem has scientists scrambling to try and find where and what is this dark matter. "What it is, is anybody's guess," adds Dr. Margon. "Mother Nature is having a double laugh. She's hidden most of the matter in the universe, and hidden it in a form that can't be seen" (McDonald 1994: A8-A13).

What do scientists look for when they search for dark matter? We cannot see or touch it: Its existence is implied. Possibilities for dark matter range from tiny subatomic particles weighing a hundred thousand times less than an electron, to black holes with masses millions of times that of the sun. The two main categories that scientists consider as possible candidates for dark matter have been dubbed MACHOs (Massive Astrophysical Compact Halo Objects) and WIMPs (Weakly Interacting Massive Particles). Although these acronyms are amusing, they can help you remember which is which. MACHOs are the big, strong dark matter objects ranging in size from small stars to super massive black holes. MACHOs are made of

‘ordinary’ matter, which is called *baryonic* matter. WIMPs, on the other hand, are the little weak subatomic dark matter candidates, for which are thought to be made of stuff other than ordinary matter, and called *non-baryonic* matter. Astronomers search for MACHOs and particle physicists look for WIMPs.

Astronomers and particle physicists disagree about what they think is dark matter. Walter Stockwell, of the dark matter team at the Center for Particle Astrophysics at U.C. Berkeley, describes this difference. “The nature of what we find to be the dark matter will have a great effect on particle physics and astronomy. The controversy started with the theories of what this matter could be – and the first split is between ordinary baryonic matter and non-baryonic matter” (Miller 1995). Since MACHOs are too far away and WIMPs are too small to be seen, astronomers and particle physicists have devised ways of trying to infer their existence (Miller 1995).

### *Dark Energy*

Dark energy started its long history in 1917 and was introduced by Albert Einstein. A constant (which Einstein called *lamda* was needed in his equations of General Relativity in order to allow for a static Universe. But shortly thereafter, when Hubble made his famous discovery of the expansion of the Universe, this constant and now seemingly unnatural and superfluous admixture, was rejected, even by Einstein himself (although his having called introducing *lamda* as the “biggest blunder in my life” most probably is a myth).

Later, when quantum theory was developed, it was realized that “empty space” was full of temporary (“virtual”) particles continually forming and destroying themselves. Physicists began to suspect that indeed the vacuum ought to have a dark form of energy, and that Einstein’s constant could be interpreted as a vacuum energy. But when they tried to estimate its value, they disagreed with observational limits by one hundred and twenty orders of magnitude, and making this the most erroneous estimate ever in physics.

The constant *lamda* was forgotten by most astronomers for nearly seventy years. Most interestingly, it was unearthed in the 1990s in order to reconcile theory with observations. Nowadays, it has become fashionable to call it “dark energy.”

The discovery in 1998 that the Universe is actually speeding up its expansion shocked astronomers. It just seems so counter-intuitive, and so against common sense, but the evidence has become convincing. The evidence came from studying a distant supernovae of a special type. This type of supernova results from a white dwarf star in a binary system. Matter transfers from the normal star to the white dwarf until it attains a critical mass (the Chandrasekhar limit), and undergoes a thermonuclear explosion. Because all white dwarfs achieve the same mass before exploding, they all achieve the same luminosity and can be used by astronomers as “standard

candles.” Thus, by observing their apparent brightness, astronomers can determine their distance using a simple mathematical calculation.

By knowing the distance to the supernova, we know how long ago it occurred. In addition, the light from the supernova has been reshifted by the expansion of the universe. By measuring this redshift from the spectrum of the supernova, astronomers can determine how much the universe has expanded since the explosion. By studying many supernovae at different distances, astronomers can piece together a history of the expansion of the universe.

In the 1990’s, two teams of astronomers, the Supernova Cosmology Project and High-Z Supernova Search, were looking for distant special type of supernovae in order to measure the expansion rate of the universe with time. They expected that the expansion would be slowing, which would be indicated by the supernovae being brighter than their redshifts. Instead, they found the supernovae to be fainter than expected, and hence the expansion of the universe was accelerating!

In addition, measurements of the cosmic microwave background indicate that the universe has a flat geometry on large scales. Because there is not enough matter in the universe – either ordinary or dark matter – to produce this flatness, the difference must be attributed to a “dark energy.” This same dark energy causes the acceleration of the expansion of the universe. In addition, the effect of dark energy seems to vary, with the expansion of the Universe slowing down and speeding up over different times.

Astronomers know dark matter is there by its gravitational effect on the matter that we see. There are ideas about the kinds of particles dark matter must be made of. By contrast, dark energy remains a complete mystery. The name “dark energy” refers to the fact that some kind of “stuff” must fill the vast reaches of the mostly empty space in the Universe, in order to be able to make space accelerate in its expansion. In this sense, it is a “field” just like an electric or magnetic field, both of which are produced by electromagnetic energy. But this analogy can only be taken so far because we can readily observe electromagnetic energy via the particle that carries it, which is the photon (Mattson 2011).

In the context of dark energy, the cosmological constant is a reservoir which stores energy. Its energy scales as the universe expands. As yet, no scientist can answer the fundamental question: what is the nature of dark energy? Unveiling this mystery will most probably reveal new physics and may even shake modern particle physics to its very foundations. Nevertheless, we have considerable astronomical knowledge about the properties of dark energy:

- Dark energy acts as a repulsive force or anti-gravitation. It is responsible for the acceleration of the Universe today.
- Dark energy is probably related to a vacuum energy density.

Saul Perlmutter, leader of the Supernova Cosmology Project headquartered at Berkeley Lab, remarked wryly, “The universe is made mostly of dark matter and dark energy, and we don’t know what either of them is” (Presuss 1999). More recent precision observations have shown that on the one hand the Universe is spatially flat, but that on the other hand matter (both ordinary and dark matter) contributes only about 30 percent of the matter/energy density required for the Universe to be flat! The startling conclusion is that the dominant component, 70 percent, of the Universe is in the more exotic form of “dark energy.”

Thus the universe is so exotic and strange, that we do not even know its nature and composition! If 90-96 percent of the universe is unknown to the physicists, we need to be humble and accept the limitations of our human knowledge! It could be that this dark matter could further connect reality more deeply! (Presuss 1999).

### **BETWEEN BEFORE AND BEYOND**

In the last section, we have used scientific theories to point to the inherent relational nature of the reality that includes the cosmos, life and humans, pointing to a deeper Transcendence inherent in nature. Here we want to point to the essentially intentional or inherently dynamic nature of the human being itself, which forms not a monad but a horizon that emerges and enlarges itself.

For this purpose, we analyze the use of alphabets and language in our daily language.<sup>11</sup> As we know, prepositions are grammatical words that show relationships between two things. These relationships often relate to time or space. In reference to grammar, an *adposition* is an element that combines syntactically with a phrase, and indicates how that phrase should be interpreted in the surrounding context. If the location of a particular *adposition* is fixed with respect to its complement phrase, it may also be known as a *preposition* (coming before the phrase), *postposition* (after the phrase) or *circumposition* (around the phrase).

*Adpositions* form a heterogeneous class, with fuzzy boundaries that tend to overlap with other categories (like verbs, nouns and adjectives). It is thus impossible to provide an absolute definition that picks out all and only the *adpositions* in every language. The following properties are, however, characteristic of the most frequently used “core” members of most adpositional systems.

The most common *adpositions* are single, monomorphemic words. According to the ranking cited above, for example, the most common English prepositions are *of, to, in, for, on, with, as, by, at, from* (Preposition and postposition 2012).

*Adpositions* are among the most frequently occurring words in languages that use them. For example, one frequency ranking for English word forms begins as follows (*adpositions* in bold): *The, of, and, to, a, in, that, it, is, was, I, for, on, you* (Preposition and postposition 2012).

Our basic assumption is that a noun denotes objects as entities and verbs denotes objects in action. It is the adpositions that denote the relationality between entities. Though such adpositions, and hence relationality, are the most frequently used words in language, and what is noteworthy is the very limited number of words denoting adpositions. Whereas a normal dictionary may contain a large number of nouns and limited number verbs, the number of adpositions is less than fifteen! That could be one of the reasons why we have been traditionally identifying reality, inclusive of human beings, with individual objects. But, in fact, human beings are materially composed of 'objects' (nouns) and dynamically active (verbs) and the interrelationship that relates the nominal and the verbal forms of actions (adpositions).

Understood thus, the subject "I" is not the noun form "I" but the "between-ness" (now) that carries with itself the before (past) and the ever widening beyond (future or realization). That is why theologians feel comfortable to speak today not of human beings, but also of human becomings. I am not the static being that forms a self-enclosed monad, but a dynamic becoming that is open to new possibilities.<sup>12</sup>

Human beings are not just the "givenness" but the opportunity and freedom to choose, realize and evolve, and in the process the "gift," the "givenness" and the "giver" merge among themselves, as horizons. The human being is therefore best characterized by the "horizon" that always recedes from us, but that always invites us and enlarges itself. The horizon, which constitutes our dreams, visions, disappointments, hopes and aspirations and includes our physical possibilities and limitations and the volitional yearnings and openness, constitute the human being. In this sense, we are always one step ahead. We are pilgrims reaching out to the highest and deepest and always on the way, but carried and supported by others. In this sense, each one of us is a relationship, and intertwined and related to the whole of the cosmic reality that is ever becoming.

Thus, the in-between-ness within us obviously refers to the dynamic relationship of the past and future. The present, in a way, is carried from the past forward to the future. Further to this, the in-between-ness refers also to the actuality and possibilities that I am. It opens up the horizon of my being and at the same time dynamically integrates my existential success and failures with the future possibilities – both positive and negative.

The in-between suggests a creative and tensional existence between my individual self and the collective us, both of which together make up reality. It also refers to the deepest level of interconnectedness and relationships that inherently constitute the whole of reality, including myself.

## **LIFE AND LOVE AS RELATIONAL**

After having indicated the inherent relationality in reality, we want to make some brief reflections on the profound notion of love: Its depth,

significance and implications.

We have seen from our above discussion that we need to go beyond the monadic (and, consequently, dualistic) patterns of understanding reality and the human being: A subject who interacts with other subjects through love. This is not fully adequate in our world-view. The traditional understanding that love is a quality (or property), and that the subject possesses love, needs to be replaced by a more integral view. Such a view presupposes that love is integral to the subject, or in other words it is love (relationship) together with the physical subject that constitutes the person. In this sense, it is insightful that Christianity identifies God with love. Such an understanding is deeper than asserting that love is a property of God. Love, understood holistically, becomes the relationship of interdependence and mutual affirmation that is constitutive of reality.

In this sense, a human person may be ontologically understood as love. A person is dependent on the environment, on her/his beloved ones and on the social setting, all of which are truly interacting, dynamic and inherently relational. A person, her/himself, is also a relational entity in interaction with other persons. Finally, we can hold that a person is truly in interaction with his or her own self. The self of a person evolves in contact interaction and feedback with oneself, and given that a person is intrinsically a dependent set of relationships or interactions. Such an interaction, when properly experienced, enhanced and affirmed, could be interpreted as love from a spiritual perspective.<sup>13</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

To recap on some of our insights: Counting and quantification has a value. But the significance of counting is derived from the pattern or sequence, as is abundantly clear from our use of alphabets in language. In a similar vein, we have shown from scientific theories, that pattern, configuration, interrelationships, fields, oscillations, tension and interconnectedness are constitutive of the totality of reality. So we need to go beyond a monadic or dualistic understanding of reality to a dynamic, and inter-connected and integral vision of reality which is ever evolving, like a horizon. The relativity theory speaks of the space-time curvature as a continuous and interactive field in exchange. The chaos theory with its butterfly effect points to the inherently instable state of both chaos and order, and the intrinsic causal or non-causal relationship between the various entities in the universe. The string theory holds that it is oscillations or the vibration of the extended string, which can take different forms, and forms that are the basic building blocks of the universe. Such building blocks are essentially relational and interacting.

We need to admit, humbly, that about 94 percent of the reality is unknowable to contemporary physics. Dark matter and dark energy present new mysteries to today's physicists, and this affirms the need for our

scientists to be humble and carry forward their research in an open-ended manner.

From such perspectives, we can infer that human beings are essentially not mere entities or nodes, but “human becomings,” or between-ness, the between before and beyond, which always tend to exceed themselves (towards the Transcendence) and, in the process, create themselves ever new. We can also affirm that love, both metaphysical and affective, is constitutive of such an interdependent reality.

Thus, from our study, it is clear that the material cosmos is essentially relational. The self and person that constitute the human becoming too is essentially an enriching interaction and enhancing connectedness. We are truly a dynamic, ever open between-ness – or better, in-between-ness – that goes beyond itself!

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Throughout our discussion we have been trying to see the inherent creative tension that is present in human persons. This creative tension enables humans to be ever open to the new horizon of possibilities.

The tension between the past and the future is only one of the creative paradoxes that we are exposed to. In this work, we first talked of the richness of human experience in terms of fertile experience. That human beings can come up with creative stories and myths in experiencing, encountering and articulating the world indicates the power of imagination that is intrinsic to us.

We then addressed the frail and frictional aspects of human existence in terms of the tension between finite actualities and infinite possibilities (freedom). Next, we dwelt on the participative dilemma involved in human development that is both material and spiritual. After that we studied the tensions between a hermeneutics of trust and suspicion, between time (temporality) and history that gives us identity.

In the third part of the book, we dealt with the fragile and fallible human experiences of sin, forgiveness and redemption (through prayer). The experience of sin and woundedness and healing and wholeness for the whole, make longing a necessary and vulnerable part of being human. Such experiences of forgiveness and prayer open us to a new and hope filled affirmation of life.

Finally, emphasizing the creatively paradoxical and tensional aspect of human beings, we focused on the human person as the “in-between-ness” – the present carries within itself past experiences and future possibilities; between the depth of potential (beneath) and the future possibilities (beyond). This may sum up the nature of the human being.

Such a predicament or “between-ness” surrounded by “before” and “beyond” may be also found our tensional and dynamic existence between:

- The past and future (temporal tension)
- now and eternity (temporal tension)

- transcendence and immanence (anthropological tension)
- life and death (“law of life”)
- verb and noun (the linguistic level)
- here and there (spatial tension)
- body and soul (anthropological tension)
- failure and hope (experiential tension)
- joys and sorrows (existential tension)
- memory and forgetfulness (existential tension)

True indeed is what the American thinker H. Richard Niebuhr wrote over sixty years ago:

Man lives in two worlds and when he tries to make his home in one alone something goes wrong with him. Our race, like that of the migratory birds, cannot live and perform all his functions in one climate, but must make a periodical flight to another home land....[Indeed] the life of man, the migratory bird, into whose structure the law of seasonal movement is written, is thwarted and distraught by confinement to one world, whether it be the world of sight or the realm of the spirit” (Niebuhr1944: 78).

## NOTES

1. Some examples of letter frequency rankings in English:

*David Copperfield*: etaoinhsrdlmuwycfgpbvkxjqz

*Pride and Prejudice*: etaoinhsrdlumcywfgbvpkzjxq

*Wuthering Heights*: etaoinhsrdlumcyfwgpbvkxjqz

*Vanity Fair*: etaoinhsrdlumcwfgybvkjqxz

*Gulliver’s Travels*: etaoinhsrdlumcfwygpbvkxjqz

*Alice in Wonderland*: etaoinhsrdluwgycymfbkvqxjz

British National Corpus: etaoinhsrdlumcwfgybvkxjqz (90 million words of UK English)

Brown Corpus: etaoinhsrdlumcwfgybvkxjqz (one million words of US English). See <http://www.bckelk.ukfsn.org/words/etaoin.html>.

2. For a detailed treatment see “The Alphabets, Words, and Languages of Finite State Machines,” <http://www.c3.lanl.gov/mega-math/workbk/machine/mabkgd.html>. Accessed on November 12, 2011.

3. The following are the most common word forms in UK English, based on 29 works of literature by 18 authors (4.6 million words) and Rosengren’s modified frequency, with case-equated matching: the and to of a I in was he that it his her you as had with for she not at but be my on have him is said me which by so this all from they no were if would or when what there been one could very an who them Mr we now more out do are up their your will little than then some into any well much about time know should man did like upon such never only good how before other see must

am own come down say after think made might being Mrs again. For details please see: <http://www.bckelk.ukfsn.org/words/uk1000.html>. Retrieved on July 3, 2012.

4. Those not familiar with science may omit this section and move on to the next section (“The Depth of Darkness”) without loss of continuity. Elsewhere we have attempted to give the relational character of reality derived from the quantum mechanics and so we are not repeating it here. See Pandikattu (2007).

5. For the above descriptions of General Relativity, I am indebted to the famous physicist John Wheeler. See Gravity (1999).

6. Pierre Duhem (1861–1916) was a French physicist and philosopher of science. As a physicist, he championed “energetics,” holding generalized thermodynamics as foundational for physical theory, that is, thinking that all of chemistry and physics, including mechanics, electricity, and magnetism, should be derivable from thermodynamic first principles. The book referred is *La théorie physique, son objet et sa structure*, Paris, Chevalier et Rivière, 1906.

7 A proton, for instance, is made of two up quarks and one down quark.

8. For this reason it is sometimes, quite arrogantly, called a ‘Theory of Everything’ (ToE)!

9. As of March 2013, the Large Hadron Collider Experiment at CERN, Geneva, does not give adequate experimental basis for supersymmetry. It may be noted that on July 4, 2013 the scientists have shown the existence of the “God Particle” or Higgs boson. See Pandikattu (2013).

10. See for details “Why Did Strings Enter the Story,” *The Official String Theory Website*, accessed at <http://www.superstringtheory.com/basics/basic3.html>. Accessed on Nov 3, 2012.

11. Obviously language reflects reality, the referred. But a brief reflection will tell us that language also reflects the human person, the speaker and its creator.

12. Such an understanding of the human person has profound theological, soteriological and eschatological implications, which is beyond the scope of this book.

13. More on this subject could be had from Desbruslais (1998). See specially “Towards a Metaphysics of Love,” pp. 85-88.



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## GLOSSARY

**Adharma:** That which is not in accord with the law. It is unrighteousness or injustice.

**Advaita:** it is the A Vedantic doctrine or school of thought that identifies the individual self (atman) with the ground of reality (Brahman). The best known proponent of it is Sankaracharya or Adi Shankara

**Aporia:** An apparently insoluble contradiction or paradox in a text's meanings.

**Archaeology of the subject:** Ricoeur distinguishes between two forms of hermeneutics: A hermeneutics of faith which aims to restore meaning to a text and a hermeneutics of suspicion which attempts to decode meanings that are disguised. As Ricoeur develops his reading of Freud, he suggests that there may nevertheless be a defensible dialectic between them. While the hermeneutics of demystification may be grounded in the archaeology of the person – the submerged and disguised wellsprings of action, the hermeneutics of restoration may be focused on the teleology of life – the hopes, desires, intentions and beliefs that frame the sense of the future. Demystification thus may serve the analysis of the structuralization of the past while a hermeneutics of restoration captures the representation of the future. Both forms of interpretation tenuously meet in an effort to understand the ever-shifting present.

**Aseity:** It refers to the property by which a being exists in and of itself, from itself or exists as so-and-such of and from itself. It originates from Latin a “from” and se “self”, plus –ity.

**Avatara:** A manifestation of a deity in bodily form on earth. Unlike the Christian incarnation, it can take place any number of times.

**Dasein:** For Heidegger it is an entity with a special mode of being. A human being is this entity and it is human beings in general who enjoy this singular kind of being, which can be referred to as Existenz, or existence. It is a general motif for Heidegger that human existence is existential in contrast to existentiell. The latter connotes a third person perspective of objectivity (ontic) whereas the former is in terms of a first person perspective of lived experience (ontological).

**Eidetic:** Greek eidos, form. Denoting exact visualization of events or objects previously seen; a person having such an ability. Related to eidos, the distinctive expression of the cognitive or intellectual character of a culture or a social group.

**Empiric:** (from Greek “*empeiria*”) is the experience of the senses.

**Geltungsanspruch:** claim for universal validity. As developed by Kant and Habermas it is the claim for universal validity of a statement of situation, where conditions, justifications, consequences and validity of a claim is established to be true.

**Gulag:** A system of labour camps maintained in the Soviet Union from 1930 to 1955 in which many people died.

**Kerygma:** It is the preaching of the Good News (i.e., the Gospel of Christ), especially in the manner of the early church, which was charismatic and joyous.

**Illéité:** (From “being He”) Illeity, has no Being; “He” acts without Being. “I don’t live life under the shadow of romanticism, but I do believe in an *illeity*, in a love that is other-oriented, although not as extremely as Lévinas proposes.” Beyondness, Latin for ‘he.’ It is this illeity in the self that allows for God to become invisible, disembodied, and immanent to the ethical relation, legitimating the statement that theological concepts are simply anthropological to a higher degree.

**Imputatio:** It means ascribing or taking responsibility for one’s action.

**Ipséity (*Ipséité*):** It is an individual identity person’s individuality, coherence, distinctiveness, existence. It is identification, integrity, name, oneness, particularity, personality, self, selfdom, the quality of being oneself or itself; the essential element of identity. It is Selfhood or Sameness, opposed to alterity.

**Lethatechnique:** Used by Ricoeur in *History, Memory and Forgetting*, Lethatechnique is the art of forgetting. Lethe was also the name of the Greek spirit of forgetfulness and oblivion.

**Limit-situations (*Grenzsituationen*):** In his early philosophy, Jaspers ascribed central status to ‘limit situations.’ They are moments, usually accompanied by experiences of dread, guilt or acute anxiety, in which the human mind confronts the restrictions and pathological narrowness of its existing forms, and allows itself to abandon the securities of its limitedness, and so to enter a new realm of self-consciousness. In conjunction with this, then, this term also contains a theory of the *unconditioned* (*das Unbedingte*). In this theory, Jaspers argued that limit situations are unconditioned moments of human existence, in which reason is drawn by intense impulses or imperatives, which impel it to expose itself to the limits of its consciousness and to seek higher or more reflected modes of knowledge. For theologian David Tracy, ‘limit situations’ are those moments in human experience where we reach the limits of our human capacity for rational explanation or conscious knowing. This is, by definition, the field of religious discourse.

**Maya:** it is usually translated as ‘illusion’ in Indian philosophy. It may be considered as the supernatural power wielded by gods and demons to produce illusions or the power by which the universe becomes manifest.

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.

**Myth:** From the Greek *mythos*, myth means story or word. Mythology is the study of myth. As stories (or narratives), myths articulate how characters undergo or enact an ordered sequence of events. The term myth has come to refer to a certain genre (or category) of stories that share characteristics that make this genre distinctly different from other genres of oral narratives, such as legends and folktales. Many definitions of myth

repeat similar general aspects of the genre and may be summarized thus: Myths are symbolic tales of the distant past (often primordial times) that concern cosmogony and cosmology (the origin and nature of the universe), may be connected to belief systems or rituals, and may serve to direct social action and values. The classic definition of myth from folklore studies finds clearest delineation in William Bascom's article "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives" where myths are defined as tales believed as true, usually sacred, set in the distant past or other worlds or parts of the world, and with extra-human, inhuman, or heroic characters. Such myths, often described as "cosmogonic," or "origin" myths, function to provide order or cosmology, based on "cosmic" from the Greek *kosmos*, meaning order. Cosmology's concern with the order of the universe finds narrative, symbolic expression in myths, which thus often help establish important values or aspects of a culture's worldview. For many people, myths remain value-laden discourse that explains much about human nature. Technically, myths are clearly distinguished from parables, fables and allegories.

**Narrative:** It is a kind of retelling, often in words (though it is possible to mime a story), of something that happened (a story). Broadly defined, it is one of four rhetorical modes of discourse. More narrowly defined, it is the fiction-writing mode whereby the narrator communicates directly with the reader.

**Orphism:** Orphism or the Orphic Mysteries was a religious cult of ancient Greece, prominent in the 6th cent. B.C.E. According to legend, Orpheus founded these mysteries and was the author of the sacred poems from which the Orphic doctrines were drawn. The rites were based on the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, the son of Zeus and Persephone. When Zeus proposed to make Zagreus the ruler of the universe, the Titans were so enraged that they dismembered the boy and devoured him. Athena saved Zagreus' heart and gave it to Zeus, who thereupon swallowed it (from which was born the second Dionysus Zagreus) and destroyed the Titans with lightning. From the ashes of the Titans sprang the human race, who were part divine (Dionysus) and part evil (Titan). This double aspect of human nature, the Dionysian and the Titanic, is essential to the understanding of Orphism. The Orphics affirmed the divine origin of the soul, but it was through initiation into the Orphic Mysteries and through the process of transmigration that the soul could be liberated from its Titanic inheritance and could achieve eternal blessedness. Orphism stressed a strict standard of ethical and moral conduct. Initiates purified themselves and adopted ascetic practices (e.g., abstinence from eating animal flesh) for the purpose of purging evil and cultivating the Dionysian side of the human character.

**Parable:** A story, usually short and simple, that illustrates a (subversive or unexpected) lesson.

**Perdurance:** Perdurantism or perdurance theory is a philosophical theory of persistence and identity.

*Phronesis*: *Phronesis* is the Greek word for wisdom or intelligence which is a common topic of discussion in philosophy. In Aristotelian Ethics, for example in the Nicomachean Ethics it is distinguished from other words for wisdom and intellectual virtues – such as *episteme* and *techne* – as the virtue of practical thought. For this reason, when it is not simply translated by words meaning wisdom or intelligence, it is often translated as “practical wisdom”, and sometimes (more traditionally) as “prudence”.

Ramarajya: it is the Kingdom of Rama, the Hindu God. It is the place where everyone is treated equally and fairly. According to Gandhi, “Ramarajya of my dream ensures equal rights alike of prince and pauper.” Comparable to the “Kingdom of God” in Christianity.

Refiguration: It is the capacity of the work of art to restructure the world of the reader, auditor, or spectator in upsetting his horizon, contesting his expectations, remodeling his feelings in reworking them from the inside, which Ricoeur calls so rightly “the biting power of the work on the world of our experience.”

*Richtigkeit* (correctness): It is the correctness of an action or behavior. It implies propriety. Normally it is related to truth and truthfulness, though not always. See also *Wahrhaftigkeit*.

Sempiternal: Enduring forever or eternal. For Panikkar it is “eternity that ever abides in its own unity”

Similie: (Linguistics) A figure of speech that expresses the resemblance of one thing to another of a different category, usually introduced by ‘as’ or ‘like,’ unlike a metaphor which does not use such terms to relate two objects.

Singularity: The state, fact, quality, or condition of being singular. The term was popularized by the science fiction writer Vernor Vinge, who argues that artificial intelligence, human biological enhancement, or brain-computer interfaces could be possible causes of singularity. The specific term “singularity” as a description for a phenomenon of technological acceleration causing an eventual unpredictable outcome in society was coined by the mathematician John von Neumann, who in the mid-1950s spoke of “ever accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue.” The concept has also been popularized by futurists such as Ray Kurzweil, who cited von Neumann’s use of the term in a foreword to von Neumann’s classic “The Computer and the Brain.”

Solipsism: The philosophical position that the self is the only thing that can be known and verified.

*Sorge*: (German, care, sorrow) It is used very much by Heidegger, who sees it as inevitable when we become aware of our mortality, and of the contingency of our own existence.

Stoicism: Indifference to pleasure or pain; impassiveness. Stoicism denied the importance of all bodily conditions, and emotions were always regarded as bad. The only factor seen as essential to human happiness was

virtue, all else in life having significance only as an opportunity to demonstrate that one possesses virtue. Seneca claimed that one could demonstrate virtue equally well through pleasure or through pain, whether enjoying a banquet or submitting to torture. Since all bodily experience equally provided an opportunity to show virtue, no experience was to be deliberately sought out over another. This contrasted with other philosophical approaches; for example, Epicureanism, which regarded pleasure as the goal of life. For the Stoic, poverty and detachment from the world were not seen as essential for the achievement of the good life, nor need worldly wealth be abandoned in the quest for virtue.

**Story:** An account or recital of an event or a series of events, either true or fictitious, as: An account or report regarding the facts of an event or group of events. In philosophy, story is connected to myths and is seen as a narrative.

**Tempiternal:** It is the temporal and eternal nature of reality. "Reality is not exhausted in temporality. It is not temporal now, and then eternal later, but rather *tempiternal*," according to Raimundo Panikkar.

**Tensive symbol:** They are open-ended symbols which to some degree can represent several conceptions or ideas. It implies the open-ended and polyvalent nature of symbols. It is usually opposed to "steno" symbol and is used by Philip Wheelwright, Paul Ricoeur and Norman Perrin in their theorizations.

**Trope:** A figurative or metaphorical use of a word or phrase.

**Wahrhaftigkeit:** See *Wahrheit*.

**Wahrheit (truth):** *Wahrheit* may be understood as truth that is mainly propositional. *Wahrhaftigkeit* (truthfulness) is more than truth, which is in fact a precondition for truthfulness. Truthfulness demands authenticity, sincerity and honesty. See also *Richtigkeit*.

**Weltbild:** See *Weltanschauung*.

**Weltanschauung:** From *Welt* (world) *Anschauung* (perception). A particular philosophy or view of life; the worldview of an individual or group. It is a comprehensive conception or image of the universe and of humanity's relation to it. In partial contrast to the rather narrow *Weltbild* (picture or view of the world), then, *Weltanschauung*, since the Romantics, is characterized by its subjective basis. Kant used the term *Anschauung* to denote the contemplation of the physical world. Since Hegel's comprehensive use, *Weltanschauung* has often stood for philosophical systems as such for unique, private, individual ways of looking at the world.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE BOOK**

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This book on Philosophical Anthropology, inspired by the writings of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) explores the dynamic, tensional and transcending nature of human beings. The first part, Human Fecundity, deals with the human being as story-teller, myth-maker and dreamer. The next one on Human Frailty, reflects on the tension and dilemma in human experience. The third part, Human Fallibility, accepts human person as sinner, forgiver and prayer. Finally, we reflect on the human nature as the tensional and enriching journey from the past to the future, from the actual to the potential, from the symbolic to the mythic and from the real to the creative, always open to the Elusive Transcendence, that is inherently part of and elusive of our ever transcending nature.



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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.

## **PROJECTS**

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.

4. *Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development*. A study in values and education which unites philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and scholars in education in the elaboration of ways of enriching the moral content of education and character development. This work has been underway since 1980.

The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

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