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Plenitude and Participation: The Life of God in Man

by
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Introduction

These lectures were originally prepared and presented as Sri L.D. Swamikannu Pillai Endowment Lectures at the University of Madras in the Dr. S. Rhadakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy. The Institute was especially, and rightly, focused upon the advaita philosophy of Shankara. This is based, in turn, on the Brahman as that from which, in which and into which all is (*Vedanta Sutra*, I, 1, 2). As existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ananda*), this is truly the plenitude or absolute fullness of being.

To criticize perfection itself in its fullness is not easy, but some would say that to focus thereupon is to ignore the life of limited beings, this world and its inhabitants, and thereby to impede human progress and condemn many to inhuman conditions. Undoubtedly, there is basic truth in recognizing that while it is the Absolute on which all depends, and while this provides the ultimate horizons of meaning, it does not dispense with the issues of daily life.

Similar to the state of the issue raised by Parmenide's articulation of the One, eternal and unchanging Being, it leaves the condition of the many beings unthematized and subject to being ignored and hence unaddressed. Yet simply to shift attention from the One that is absolute to the many that are relative would not help, for to leave the relative without their foundation in the Absolute would be to condemn them to effervescent absurdity and ultimate nothingness. Hence, Plato became the Father of Western philosophy not simply by reaffirming the many, but by uncovering their foundation in the one. Plato termed this "participation," with the sense not simply of being partial or finite in relation to the infinite, but of sharing in the One which the finite thereby imaged (his choice of terms for this was *mimesis*).

There is here a not too subtle difference in vision. On the one hand, Shankara, speculative touchstone of Indian philosophy, would say in the introduction to his commentary on the *Vedanta Sutras* that in relation to the One or Plenitude the many are as "illusions." On the other hand, Plato, father of Western philosophy, would be concerned to show the reality of the many as based in or participating in the One.

The relation between the two, between plenitude and participation, is then at once the root issue of both the reality and the dignity of the world in which we live and of the life we live therein. Is attention to the betterment of human life in the end to ignore the divine and thus ultimately a dedication to annihilation and nihilism, or is it engagement in the manifestation of the Plenitude of Being? Is devotion to the absolute One a distraction from the world, or just the opposite, namely, the discovery of the foundation upon which love and concern for the welfare of others can be founded?

Moreover, in these days of global interchange and of relations between civilizations, the ability to live cooperatively in the present world depends radically upon the ability to relate the Western emphases upon the life of the many to the Eastern focus upon the eternal One and thus to find ultimate meaning for all peoples and cultures.

These ultimately urgent contemporary issues direct the mind to issues classically formulated as Plenitude in the East and Participation in the West, the consideration of which brings one to the roots of the contemporary East-West dialogue. It is important, however, that this not be interpreted as a confrontation between two alien systems of thought, for then effective dialogue could only mean compromise in which either the Absolute would be relativized or the relative would be made absolute and anarchic both to the One and to others.

The chapters of this work will look back with anthropological tools to the common origins in the earliest totemic forms of human life, follow its unfolding with the evolving sophistication of the human mind in Greek myth and Hindu ritual, and examine its flowering in the classical systematic philosophies and more recent phenomenologies, with their implications for interpersonal and intercultural relations. Overall this will constitute a progressive search beginning from common foundations in the sense of Plenitude found in prephilosophical and early philosophical thought, proceeding through the development of the sense of participation as a basic structural element of systematic philosophy, and culminating in the union of the two in a contemporary philosophy of communion between cultures and their religious foundations ever more essential for these global times.¹

¹ The themes outlined here have been developed more elaborately in my *Ways to God and Person, Peoples and Cultures in a Global Age* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000 and 2004, respectively).

Chapter I

Rediscovering Human Foundations: Unity in Plenitude

On December 19, 1925, in Calcutta, the first All-India Philosophy Congress was held in order to rediscover and further develop the rich philosophic patrimony of the subcontinent. The direction given by its President, the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, was that philosophers should look to the philosophy of the people.¹ His words echoed Gandhi's pointer to the village and its values. In this, as in many matters, Tagore and Gandhi showed keen good sense which time is proving prophetic.²

It was good sense, for were a person raised in a village to visit New Delhi or New York he would need a city dweller in order to get around and make arrangements for lodging. On a trip to the source of the Amazon, however, only a native accustomed to traveling by foot and finding food and shelter in the forest would be of help. The more sophisticated the guide the less he could be of-assistance; the guide from Delhi or New York would be totally helpless.

There is more here than mere common sense. Horticulturalists have found that the more highly refined a strain of rice the more reduced are its capabilities for adaptation. Conversely, wild grains have great capacity for adaptation and survival. Hence, they are looked upon genetically, not as deficient, but as treasuries of the capacities needed to develop grains adapted to new or more difficult environments. In archeology new findings are continually manifesting human capacities for iron work and for art long before these had been expected on the basis of earlier developmental theories. These and similar findings have suggested the need to reconsider the oversimplified evolutionary model of a univocal and self-sufficient process from the less to the more perfect. Especially, they call for a reassessment of views predicated thereupon regarding the origin and the nature of foundational understanding of the nature and meaning of the human person.

This reassessment as regards the basis of human self-understanding is further urged by the combination of, on the one hand, the great antiquity of *Sruti* such as the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* and, on the other hand, their unique continuing capacity to judge what is worst and to inspire what is most noble in human behavior. "Like a rich man, who knows how to bring both new and old things out of his treasure house," they bear witness to a transcendent dimension of human reason. Through the ages this has made possible the drama of life in the simplest household, while relativising the accomplishments of even the greatest human empires. It transcends time, but grounds every temporal vision.

Gradually, even grudgingly, we adjust our chronology of human life lived with care and concern upon learning, for example, that at the time of the claimed arrival of the Aryans, roughly between 2,000 and 1500 BC, the peoples of the Indus valley already had cities such as Harappa and Mohanjodaro with design, drainage and public facilities often surpassing those of the present.³ C. Kunhan Raja points out that, as prior to the *Vedas* there existed a great people and an advanced civilization, the hymns of the *Rg Veda* are not anticipations but "a scanty remnant from an earlier date of an immense store of philosophy, grand, sublime, profound, clear and definite."

¹ *The Vedic Age*, ed. R.C. Majumdar and A. D. Pusalker (Vol. I of "The History and Culture of the Indian People" (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1957), pp. 169-198.

² P.K. Mukherji, *Life of Tagore* (New Delhi: Indian Book Co., 1975), p. 153.

³ C. Kunhan Raja, *Asya Vamasya Hymn (The Riddle of the Universe): Rg Veda 1, 164* (Madras: Ganesh, 1956), pp. xxvii—xxxix; and *Poet-Philosophers of the Rg Veda: Vedic and PreVedic* (Madras: Ganesh, 1963), pp. x-xi.

Hence, “the latter-day systems of philosophy must be traced to earlier stages through the *Upanishads* to the *Rg Veda* and also to a much earlier stage of Pre-Vedic philosophy.”⁴ If we are to choose the appropriate tools for such a task it will be important for us to know how much earlier this might be.

Everything said thus far simply pales before the realization that Harappa and Mohanjodaro existed during only the last one-half of one percent of the 200,000 years since the time people left their polished stone instruments in the Mysore areas to the south. This, in turn, is but one-tenth of the way to those people in East Africa whose fossils can be traced back some 2,000,000 years.⁵

As the love of wisdom, philosophy and especially its metaphysics must search out the content of the comprehension which bore man up in this successful voyage across so vast a sea of time. What was the bark? What was its tiller, and by what was it guided and corrected? How did its crew hold together through the countless stormy trials, and how did they manage to emerge with such complex and elegant cultures?

For discovering this prehistoric understanding writ in the lives of countless generations it will not be sufficient to search for its echoes in the texts of hymns and myths which we can trace only to relatively recent time. Anthropology will be necessary, but it will not constitute a sufficient tool for, as Arthur Keith has noted correctly,⁵ the issue is too philosophical to be decided by empirical means alone. To anthropology then must be added philosophy, especially as hermeneutics. Fortunately, recent progress in this field, following some key insights of Heidegger, makes it possible to articulate more precisely the goal of our search, to elaborate a method for its discovery, and to begin to apply the method to the phenomenon of totemism in primitive societies. The intention here is not simply to discover thought that is past, but to identify that indispensable principle for human life which grounds cultures and transcends

Method

Heidegger’s assessment of the relation between Plato and the Pre Socratics provides both a key to his articulation of the task to be undertaken and an illustration of the method he elaborated for its accomplishment. Pre-Socratic philosophy reflected in a general and unsophisticated manner the variety and powerful vitality of reality. To improve upon this vision Plato had focused on forms, natures, or ideas, which he elaborated through dialectics with such great dialectical brilliance that all western philosophy since then has been termed by Alfred North Whitehead a set of footnotes to Plato. Unfortunately, the progress made in the conceptual clarification of the variety of nature was accompanied by a corresponding loss of sensitivity to the power and activity of nature, that is, to its existential reality. To remedy the loss, Heidegger held, we must now return to the vision of the Pre-Socratics in order to retrieve its dynamic existential element. Forward progress in philosophy today, that is, the development of insight that is radically new, will depend, not upon further conceptual development of modern forms, but upon reaching back prior to Plato in order to develop what he had omitted.⁶

⁴ Stephen Fuchs, *The Origin of Man and His Culture* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 47-49; G. E. Daniel, “Archaeology” in *Macropaedia, The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1977), vol. I, p. 1082.

⁵ Arthur B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Harvard Oriental series, Vol. XX-XI (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 195.

⁶ “Our asking of the fundamental question of metaphysics is historical, because it opens up the process of human being-there [in its essential relation—i.e. its relations to the essential as such and as a whole—opens it up] to unasked possibilities, futures, and at the same time binds it back to its past beginning, so sharpening it and giving it weight in its present. In this questioning, our being-there is summoned to [its history in the full sense of the word, called to history and to] decision in history.” Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), pp 36-37 and 32.

This example from Heidegger's thought is replete with indications for a methodology for our project. First, one needs to look at thought historically. This does not mean merely the forward direction of Hegel's search for ever more formal articulation. Like genetic strains in horticulture, these become increasingly enslaved to ever more specific conditions as they become more remote from their origins. On the contrary, what is most essential must be sought where in principle the forward process of scientific conceptualization cannot operate. It must be sought in that which is essentially unscientific, according to the terminology of the "scientific interpretation that brands as unscientific everything that transcends its limits."⁷ Radical newness is to be found, if anywhere, not in further elaboration of what has already been conceptualized, but in a step backward (*Der Schritt zuruck*) into that which was in some way present at the beginning of philosophizing and has remained unspoken throughout. Far from having been thought or even been thinkable, this reality has been obscured by the objectifying effect of much of the thought which has been developed thus far.⁸

The task then will be, not merely to restate in a more perfect manner what has already been less perfectly stated, but to open ourselves to the reality toward which our historical efforts at conceptualization as such were not directed. Thus, one finds in the term 'metaphysics' reference to that which lies "beyond" (*meta*) the project of Aristotle's *Physics*. The *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* states that "when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then...what should one think and through what,...through what...should one know the Knower?"⁹ Similarly, the *Brahma Sutras* state as a first principle that "(Brahman is not known from any other source) since the scriptures are the valid means of Its knowledge."¹⁰

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

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

The term 'primitive' itself is in need of rehabilitation along etymological lines in order to convey once again that which is first and basic for all else. It is a fundamental fallacy, notes Heidegger, to believe "that history begins with the primitive and backward, the weak and helpless. The opposite is true. The beginning is strongest and mightiest. What comes afterward is not

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁸ "The criterion of the unthought demands that the heritage of thought be liberated in respect of what still lies in reserve in its 'as been' (*Gewesene*). It is this which holds tradition initially in its sway and is prior to it, though without being thought about expressly as the originative source." Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. by E. Lohner, in W. Barrett and H. Aiken, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 270-302.

⁹ *Br. Up.*, IV, v.15.

¹⁰ *Brahma-Sutra*. I, i. 3.

development but flattening the results from mere spreading out; it is inability to retain the beginning...(which) is emasculated and exaggerated into a caricature.”¹¹

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

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

The Structure of Primitive Thought

During the last century anthropologists remarked the constant tendency of primitive peoples in the most disparate places to identify themselves and their relations with other men and with nature in terms of a totem. This might be a bird or animal, or at times, even an inanimate object or direction. Because all areas of life in these simplest societies were predicated upon the totem, their culture is termed totemistic. Levi-Strauss’ *totemism* is a history of the anthropological work on this notion in this century,¹² and thereby a history of anthropology itself since 1910. It begins with a severely reductionist critique of the totem by positivist anthropological theory.¹³ The notion, however, proved to be so essential that it could not be dispensed with. Hence, there followed four steps by which successive schools of anthropology progressively reconstructed the formal structure of the totem. Not surprisingly, the steps are those by which one constructs a formal analogy of proper proportionality of the form A: B:: C: D.

First, A. P. Elkin identified the simple logical relation A: C between, e.g., a bird and a tribe. This had both an analytic function for classifying groups so as to implement rules of inter-marriage, and a synthetic function expressing continuity between humans and nature. Secondly, Malinowski added subjective utility or pragmatic value to this relation, pointing to the biological significance of the totem as good to eat, or to its psychological importance in controlling fears.

Thirdly, to explain the special use of certain types of animals anthropologists went beyond subjective utility to objective analogy. At first this was stated by M. Fortes and R. Forts merely in terms of direct resemblance or external analogy of the members of a tribe or clan to their totem.

¹¹ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 130.

¹² Claude Levi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

¹³ It was in that context that earlier research into the origins of Indian thought such as that of A. Keith (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp 195-97) has tended to discount the significance of the totem, pointing, e.g., to the absence of one or another specific factor, such as ritual eating, which was in no sense essential to the notion. The subsequent anthropological work described here, by which the notion has been scientifically reconstructed, provides the basis for restating the question. This is the more true as Keith himself argues, even regarding the meaning Brahman, from the fact that a notion such as that of a supernatural power pervading the universe is generally found in all other tribes in other parts of the world and from its having been a basic factor in early Indian thought. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 446.

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

These four steps reconstructed the essential analogy of forms in the totemic relation, but this was not yet structuralism, i.e., structure alone, for content had not yet been reduced to form. Levi-Strauss took that step and directed attention to the logical connection between the pairs of opposites, i.e., between the A: B, on the one hand, and the C: D, on the other. He located the principle of the unity between the species chosen as totems and their tribes in a formal condition, namely in their having in common at least one formal characteristic which permitted them to be compared.¹⁴

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

Plenitude and the Totemic Structure

There are, indeed, reasons to believe that more is required than can be articulated in the purely formal structuralist analysis of Lévi-Strauss. First of all, his thought in classifying the pairs of species is of a categorical nature. Such thought has all those limitations of definition which concerned Heidegger. B. Lonergan describes it as a method of determination, which therefore has limited denotation and varies with cultural differences. Levi-Strauss' condition for the totemic relation between the pairs A: B and C: D, namely, that the pairs have in common at least one characteristic in terms of which they can be compared, cannot be fulfilled by categorical thought alone. Because that consists of forms which are contraries and hence limited, none of its objects could constitute the common element required for the total unity of structures. In principle, the search for the basis of the unity even of formal structures cannot be carried out in terms of the limited denotations of abstractive knowledge. Instead, it requires transcendental thought or intending which is "comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation and invariant over cultural change."¹⁵

The need for this comprehensive and cognitive unity is confirmed by Jean Piaget from the nature of structuralism itself. He criticizes Lévi-Strauss for attending too exclusively to structure, form and essence, which abstract factors, he claims, can be explained psychologically by the mere

¹⁴ Levi-Strauss *Totemism*, pp. 87-88. Cf also *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 93. In *Totemism* (p. 82) he notes that E. E. Evans-Pritchard had held that the primitives looked upon the totemic animals and the tribes as collateral lines descending from God as their common origin, and that this implied that their reality or content was essentially related. This would correspond to Heidegger's "unthought" which founds the meaning of all things and unites them among themselves. For the structuralist, however, content is not distinct from form.

¹⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 11. Sergio Moravia cites passages from Levi-Strauss which indicate some recognition of this need. They speak of spirit as a subject of the universal categories, and of the transformation of structures as the unconscious activity of the spirit. (*La ragione nascosta, scienza filosofia nel pensiero di Claude Lévi-Strauss*) (Firenze: Sansoni, 1969), pp. 325ff.

permanence of the human intellect. What is more fundamental for structuralism is the fact that structures are generated by a system of operational structural transformations. These transformations require a subject which cannot be impersonal, for it is the cognitive nucleus common to all subjects. Neither can it be individual for, through the series of transformations in which the structure is constituted on ever new and broader levels, this subject is progressively decentered.¹⁶ Hence, in principle it must be beyond any contrary or any concept; it must be unique and comprehensive. Much as Nicholas of Cusa's "folding together" or *complicatio*, the system of structural transformations points to a unity which is reducible to no individual.

This first level of reflection upon the structural analysis of totemism in terms of form alone points to what Heidegger referred to above as "the unthought." He identifies a number of its characteristics. It must be one, unlimited, and spirit; it is the principle of all transformations and the basis of the unity, form and content of all structures.

A further and hermeneutic level of reflection by Paul Ricoeur in his essay, "Structure and Hermeneutics," identifies where this principle of the totemic relation is manifested. Above we questioned the self-sufficiency of the notion of a common characteristic by which the totemic species and the tribe are compared. Ricoeur continues this question noting that, while structural relations are based proximately upon semantic analogies, more fundamentally they depend upon real similarity of content.¹⁷ For this reason, the totemic relations or homologies between species in categorical terms presuppose as the conditions of their possibility a more fundamental unity of meaning; this, in turn, presupposes a corresponding unity or whole of meaning and of being. There is "no structural analysis...without a hermeneutic comprehension of the transfer of sense....In turn, neither is there any hermeneutic comprehension without the support of an economy, of an order in which the symbol signifies...(for) symbols symbolize only within wholes which limit and link their significations."¹⁸

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

The scientific constructs and models which help to interpret life, because they abstract from time, are synchronomous. With Heidegger, it must be urged that they express the form only and not the content or the reality; they are not life, but only "a secondary level of expression, subordinate to the surplus of meaning found in the symbolic stratum."¹⁹ The actual appearance of this meaning takes place only in diachronous relations, that is, those in which the "disinterested,

¹⁶ Jean Piaget, *Structuralism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 139-41.

¹⁷ "A careful examination of *The Savage Mind* suggests that at the base of structural homologies one can always look for semantic analogies which render comparable the different levels of reality whose convertibility is assured by the 'code'. The 'code' presupposes a correspondence, an affinity of the contents, that is, a cipher." Paul Ricoeur, "Structure and Hermeneutics" in *The Conflict of Interpretations, Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 56. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48 and 56, n. 18.

attentive, fond and affectionate love (of kinship) is acquired and transmitted through the attachments of marriage and upbringing.”²⁰ We must look to this process, to the life of the family in its simplest human contexts of tribe and clan, for that fundamental and foundational meaning. Remaining unthought, it is the principle of all beings and meanings.

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

Totemism: Plenitude and Participation

The members of a tribe, clan, or other group living and acting together must not look upon others simply as alien, antithetic, or indifferent. Rather, others must be considered with positive attitudes of unity, such as care or concern. Further, such attitudes must be more than merely subjective. If they have promoted rather than destroyed human life through the aeons of so-called primitive life, these are ways in which human not only feels, but actually are, well. They must then reflect something essential to objective human reality. This is the more true of their condition of possibility. What then is the condition of possibility of these positive attitudes of one towards the other in a tribe or clan?

This question was studied by Levy-Bruhl in his work, *How Natives think*, on the cognitive-affective collective representations of the first and simplest societies. His investigations led him to the totem as that in terms of which these persons saw themselves to be united in accordance with what he terms the law of participation. In the most disparate places and climes tribes identified an animal or thing as their totem, its specific nature being differentiated according to the locale. Their perception of their relation to this totem was not simply that of a person to his father from whom he derives, to his name by which he is designated externally, or to a later state which he will enter, such as that following death. Levy-Bruhl notes that under questioning they reject all such relations as inadequate. Rather, the members of the tribes insisted that they quite directly are their totem. “They give one rigidly to understand that they are araras at the present time, just as if a caterpillar declared itself to be a butterfly.” They understand their relation to the totem to be one of simple identity or, in the words of Levy-Bruhl “a mystical community of substance.”²¹

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

In analyzing the most characteristic of the primitive’s institutions—such as (a) totemic relationship...—we have found that his mind does more than present his object to him: it possesses it and is possessed by it. It communes with it and participates in it, not only in the ideological but also in the physical and mystical sense of the word. The mind does not imagine it merely; it lives it...their participation in it is *so effectually lived* that it is not yet properly imagined.²²

²⁰ Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, p. 37.

²¹ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (Les fonctions mentales dan les societes inferieures; New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 62.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 324 and 62.

This insistence upon unity with the totem manifests a state of both thought and feeling prior to the dominance of objectification. Unity has not yet been dominated by multiplicity. It is a concrete identity, indistinguishably both objective and subjective.

This mode of understanding was first termed by Levy-Bruhl, not anti-logical or a-logical, but “prelogical.”²³ In this he reflected his own initial positivist bias that there could exist only a series of single and externally related units, and consequently that any logic must consist of such terms. In his posthumously published *Carnets*, however, he retracted the term ‘prelogical’, for his investigations had shown that the primitives did indeed have a consistent pattern of meaning. Their societies had not been held together by understanding everything as a series of units of which the totem is but one. The totem was understood to be the One in which all the others had their identity, their meaning, and their unity among themselves. Such a reality cannot be just one being among many others. As that in terms of which all members—no matter how many—in the tribe have their meaning, the totem is for that tribe the fullness or plenitude of reality and meaning in which all live or participate as a community. Due to this symbiosis the primitive’s knowledge of the reality expressed in the totem is immediate, rather than inferential.

In turn, a person’s relation to other members of the tribe and to nature is understood in terms of their relation to this totem. Through participation in the common totem the many members of the tribe are intimately related one to another; like brothers, they see themselves to be more deeply united than distinguished. This is reflected in very varied forms of contact, transference, sympathy, and telekinesis as, for example, when the success of a hunter is understood to depend more radically upon what is, or is not, eaten by his wife than upon any other factor. These and other examples manifest an intense understanding of the unity and relatedness of the members of the tribe in a manner not dependent upon the surface spatio-temporal or empirical factors. It is not that such relationships are not also known and acted upon by the primitive. Nevertheless, they see the reality of their life as a participation in the totem and on this they base their interpretation of the nature and reality of their relationships to all else.

Conclusion

The road we have taken has many of the characteristics of the classical *a posteriori* way to the existence of God. (a) It begins from a reality that did actually exist, namely, the successful and progressive life of man through the thousands of centuries which constitute almost the entirety of human experience. (b) It sought the principles of this existence, namely, the content of the primitive’s understanding which made possible this successful human life. (c) It concluded to that totemic unity and fullness in which men had both their being and their unity. This established both plenitude and participation as the foundational principles of the human mind and social life.

This road differs, however, from the classical five ways of Thomas Aquinas (see lecture III). (a) Being essentially anthropological in material, it began with humans in the early stage of human development. (b) Being essentially hermeneutic in method, it attended to the conditions of possibility for the understanding manifested by these men. (c) This combination of anthropological and hermeneutic factors concluded to the plenitude, not as it is in itself—the much subsequent science of metaphysics will be required for that—but as appreciated by the primitive mind in its totemic mode.

This difference should not be considered to be merely negative. The thought of the primitive is not merely a poorer form of what people in subsequent ages will do with better tools. Heidegger

²³ *Ibid.*, ch. III.

suggested that in an important sense it is only by returning to the origins that important progress can be made. I would like to suggest three ways in which this is true of the return to the totemic vision through the combined tools of anthropology and philosophic hermeneutics.

1. Man will progress in his ability to understand in increasingly more formalized terms and systems the relationships which obtain in society, in nature, and between the two. If these scientific elaborations are not to be merely empty signs, hypothetical systems, or external relations, they must draw upon the plenitude of meaning expressed first in the totem. This will be required not only for their certainty as the concern of Descartes, but for their content and unity as pointed out by the classical realist philosophies. This will be particularly necessary if the process of development is to implement, rather than supplant, man's values and transcendent aspiration

What has been said of the sciences should, with appropriate adaptation, be said of metaphysics as well. It is the task of metaphysics as a science to establish with rigor its processes of definition, reasoning, and conclusion. As we shall see in the third lecture, the intelligibility of an entire science is dependent upon the intelligibility of its subject, and it is the search for that intelligibility which has ever led the mind in reasoning regarding Plato's One or Good. All are clear that this plenitude cannot be constituted by any limited instance or any combination thereof. Plato's notion of *reminiscentia* may be more helpful than is generally thought if employed in terms, not of the hypothesis of a prior existence of the individual in a world of ideas, but of the real experience of our totemic ancestors. They subjected to the acid test of time the proposition that if human life is to be lived it must be lived in terms of a unity, a whole, a plenitude in which all have their being and meaning. This was the cultural heritage they bequeathed to subsequent ages. Indian thought reflects this in being characterized by a quest for the highest value of life, for *moksa* or spiritual freedom. The Greeks reflected this in their myths, in the context of which Plato was able to proceed from multiple instances of goodness to the one Goodness Itself which, as the sun, gives light to all in this cave of time.

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

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

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

How is such a metaphysics to be elaborated? Here the original suggestion of Heidegger assumes particular importance. He noted that philosophic traditions, in proceeding to ever more intensive analyses, trade existential content in order to gain formal clarity. From within the scholastic contexts of both East and West it is protested rightly that the vital significance of the classical analyses is not appreciated. Meanwhile, more and more classify all such analyses as at best ideological superstructures which obscure attention to the reality of life. Following Heidegger's suggestion we have stepped back to a point prior to Plato's and Aristotle's development of selective analyses at which life was lived in communion rather than conceived in abstractions; we have stepped back beyond myth to totem. There a crude but robust sense of plenitude and participation can be found. It gave men, who had naught else, an awareness of their unity one with another and an appreciation of the importance of the actions of each. With that, and

that alone, they were able, not only to traverse the vast seas of time, but to arrive with such treasures in the form of epics, myths and hymns that our several cultures have lived richly on the interest of this endowment alone.

Even to live wisely on the interest, however, it behooves one to be as clear as possible concerning the capital; this is especially true in philosophy. Both as a sequential process of evolving human understanding and as a process of retrieve, it is essential to know what came before in order to plan one's next step and have the materials with which it can be fashioned. As noted above, however, one finds a significant body of scholarship based on a supposed evolution from polytheism to monism. Others would hold that monism is the more original and that the evolution consisted in the progressive introduction of a plurality of gods. The two suppositions are used by their proponents, not only to order chronologically Vedic hymns and passages in the *Upanishads*, but to interpret the meaning of their key phrases and ideas. The same can be said regarding such key notions as matter and spirit, monism and pluralism.

In fact the totem is none of these, but expresses the unity and plenitude from which subsequently some will evolve an explicit monotheism, while others will develop theories regarding the development of the physical universe. Both will have their roots in the unity which is the totem, but neither will exhaustively state its potential meaning. More importantly, neither will be completely deprived of that unspoken totemic context of its meaning. Hence, as we shall see, it will be as erroneous to interpret Vedic thought in India as a proto-materialism as it will be to interpret pre-Socratic philosophy in that manner.

3. Precisely because this vision of unity in plenitude is the foundational one for human life the steps taken in the initial phases of its clarification and articulation will be statements of that which is essential in order that life be lived and lived well in the particular culture. As the *Vedas* express these conditions of possibility, Prof. Mahadevan remarks that they can no more rightly be said to be produced than Newton can be said to have produced, rather than to have discovered, the law of gravitation. They are indeed discovered or "the heard" (*sruti*) as one bores deeply into the accumulated sediment of our long experience in living, till finally "like joyous streams bursting from the mountains" they come forth as revelations of the Real."²⁴

Theologians, however, are in difficulty if they restrict their views simply to the words of their scriptures, for faith then becomes fideism. As century succeeds century the words lose their existential content, become empty signs, and are filled with ideas which are at best ephemeral and possibly even dangerous. In times such as these they come to be progressively less understood and then ignored. For the working philosopher dedicated to wisdom and to comprehension these dangers are greater still. It is the philosopher's special task to work out the order of reasons, to clarify the significance of the steps in reasoning processes, and to test and ground their principles. One does this so that the intuition of the One in all and all in One, of the plenitude and the participation by which we live and breathe and have our being, may pervade our minds, inspire our hearts, and guide our steps.

It is supremely wise of philosophers such as Suresvara to recognize that their reasoning processes are only preparatory, ground clearing operations, whereas the knowledge of the One arising from *sruti* is immediate and non-relational. It is not the product of their reasoning, but is made known by Scripture through implication. Here the philosopher meets the real challenge of metaphysics and joins with the seer in concern for that which surpasses name and form.

As negative statements must be based upon positive content, in implication the philosopher's negative statements that Brahman is "other than the unreal, the insentient, and the finite" would

²⁴ T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1974), p. 14. The simile is taken from the *Vedas*.

appear to need to be based upon positive awareness of “non-relational, nonverbal content.”²⁵ The philosopher must ask in what way such meaning is present to the awareness of the one who hears *sruti*. The strong emphasis in Indian thought upon unity would seem to suggest or facilitate the appreciation of a presence which is unveiled, that is, revealed by the words of the sacred text.

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

If, indeed, some non-verbal awareness of unity and participation is present as the basis of all truly humane life, then metaphysics may not be an esoteric concern; the realities with which it deals may be much more present than the data for which one needs telescopes, expeditions, laboratories, and computers; *karma yoga* may be integral to *jñâna yoga*; and emancipation, as reflecting the true nature of man,²⁶ may be being lived in the simplest and most familiar surroundings. In the words of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari—C. R., the beloved Rajaji of Madras—Whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation’s faith and ideas are produced by its literature is a question which one is free to answer as one likes....Did clouds rise from the sea or was the sea filled by waters from the sky? All such inquiries take us to the feet of God transcending speech and thought.²⁷

²⁵ R. Balasubramanian, *The Taittirîyopanisad Bhâsya Vârtika of Sureśvara* (Madras: Center for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1974), p. 180.

²⁶ S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banaridas, 1975), Vol. 1. p. 58.

²⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), p. 312.

Chapter II

The Proto-Philosophy of myth and Hymn: Unity in Transcendence

The previous lecture, following the directions of Tagore and Gandhi to look for the philosophy of the people, concerned a major paradox in human understanding. It suggested, with Heidegger, that the way forward for philosophy was for it to take a “step back”; that radical newness is to be found, not in doing more of the same, but in reaching more deeply into our heritage. To do so it was essential to mine the long human experience in living and to draw out what has not, and perhaps cannot be thematized and treated with the analytic tools of science. In doing this we were led to the totem as the principle of plenitude in which people understood their lives during the more than 99.8 percent of human experience which preceded the composition even of the *Rg Veda*.

The present lecture will concern a later period, that of myth and hymn, in order to see how the theme of plenitude and participation was further developed. Where the earlier nonverbal tradition of the totem could test the validity of the proposition that human life must be lived in a unity based on a principle of plenitude, the verbal tradition of myth and hymn will begin its progressive articulation, a process which will continue into philosophy and down to the present.

In this we shall encounter a new set of issues. First and in principle, how does development take place in order that new questions can be asked and new insights acquired, and what is the relation between the content of the prior and the subsequent stages? Second and concretely, what was the nature of the transition from the primitive to the mythic stage of consciousness. and what advance did it make possible in understanding the theme: plenitude and participation, in both East and West ? The former question will be treated only with a view to the latter. Then the study will focus upon Hesiod’s *Theogony* in the Western tradition, and conclude with some analogous issues which might be raised regarding the *Nâsadîya-sûkta* or “creation hymn”, *Rg Veda X*, 129.¹

Development

In the first of his *Six Studies in Developmental Psychology* Piaget outlines a general theory of the transformation of structures in which development consists. Any stage in the growth of a person, as of a science, constitutes an equilibrium. This is an integrated stage of its component factors; in this state each factor is able to make its contribution to the others and to the whole. An equilibrium is upset by a need, which leads to whatever activity is required in order to satisfy the need and to restore an equilibrium. Where the need can no longer be satisfied by the capabilities possessed, new ones must be developed. The subsequent integrated state, which includes also these new capabilities, will constitute a new equilibrium at a higher level. This pattern of development holds true of the range of transformations from a child’s learning to walk, through the green revolution in agriculture, to the stages in the history of the science of astronomy.

Development implies elements both of continuity and of differentiation. There is continuity because in the higher stage the capabilities of the previous one are not lost, but perfected. The infants’ ability to move its limbs in crawling is not lost, but perfected when these add the strength and balance which enable them to walk; these abilities are perfected still further when they learn

¹ Arthur A. MacDonell, *A Vedic Reader* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1917), pp. 207-211. Citations from *Rg Veda X*, 129 will be taken from this text.

to run and then to dance. Throughout, the earlier capabilities are retained and increasingly perfected. When this is not the case what is had is not development but only change, not improvement but mere substitution.

Conversely, development implies, not only continuity, but differentiation because the adoption of one from among the many contrary modes of activity for responding to a need means that this type of activity will be the more developed. As further needs arise it will be easier to respond by further developments in this same line than by activating other capabilities which, though in principle equally effective, are in fact less available. A family, for example, may solve their food problems by either more intensive farming or more intensive fishing, but seldom by both. Progressively, one capability or mode of action atrophies as the other is repeatedly employed and developed. Thus, over time and in interaction with its physical and social environment, each people evolves its distinctive cultural patterns along with its history.

Transition from Totem to Myth

The general theory of development described by Piaget can aid in better understanding the cultural transition from a totemic to a mythic mode of human awareness. Many of the elements were gathered by the philosopher-anthropologist, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, in the last chapter of his work, *How Natives Think*.²

In totemic societies all were one in the symbiosis of the totem; social differentiation was minimal. Subsequently, in accordance with the nature of development as just described, a differentiation of roles arose within the life of the tribe. When socially approved this made it possible for the primitive to develop a greater awareness of his own self-identity and of that of the others in the tribe, as well as of the complementarity between himself and others.

Because development implies perfecting the powers it employs, what atrophies are the contrary powers which are not exercised. Thus, the development of the sense of self-awareness implied not the disappearance, but a correlative perfecting of the awareness of that foundational whole or fullness articulated in the totem. In the process of becoming more aware of the distinctive reality and complementarity of oneself and other members of the tribe, people became increasingly aware also of the distinctive character of the totem as the principle of this relation and as inexhaustible no matter how many the participants. Further, what previously had been grasped simply in direct symbiotic unity, now, with the development of a more distinctive self-awareness, came to be appreciated not only to be immanent to each and all, but to transcend them as well. Thus, whereas the totem was considered to be simply one with the primitive so that the question of worship, sacrifices, priesthood, symbols and the like did not arise, all of these elements now come into evidence.³

Having attained this consciousness of themselves, people were able also to see that the principle of the meaning of all things and of every person could not itself be less than knowing and willing; that is, it must be personal. Thus, the objective reality which had been expressed by the totem henceforth was appreciated to be both transcendent and personal, that is, to be divine. As the imagination was essentially involved in this thought the personal divine was pictured in the anthropomorphic forms of gods and their interaction was the material of which myths were woven. Where the totem had been proto-religious, the myth was religious.

² (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966). See also Ernst Cassirer, *Mythical Thought*; Vol. II of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 3-59.

³ *Ibid.*, chap. ix.

In contrast to the taboos of the social unity based upon an unthinking totem, the unity founded in the gods could have elements of comprehension and command, of love and mercy; it could extend to all person while being specific with regard to each person. To ask of men in this stage of equilibrium how this could be so would be to suppose a later and philosophical type of thinking. What is important for the present is that, having attained the mythic level of development, it was possible to articulate with vastly greater complexity the unity which had been expressed by the totem as simple and direct identity. That unity could now be textured or woven, as it were, with the many rich threads of meaning found in the myths.

It should be noted that the evidence from this stage of development does not point to the use of mythical forms merely as symbols or as literary devices. That would presuppose a prior understanding of things simply in their own proper terms—a mode of understanding which had not yet evolved. Rather, at this stage of “unbroken myth,” the myth was the only mode of understanding and the many realities of the world were understood simply and directly in terms of the distinctions and interrelations between the gods. Thus, the interpretation of the gods was the highest wisdom and the questions were asked, as notes the *Rg Veda*, “not jestingly....Sages, I ask you this for information.”⁴

Method

To carry out the search for the enhanced vision of unity and participation in the myths and hymns it will be especially important to interpret these texts in terms of the specific equilibrium or stage in the development of thought in which they were composed. Our “stepping back” is directed toward drawing upon the lived experience and correlative wisdom of countless generations of our forebears—wisdom of which only certain strains have been developed in subsequent times. If we are to accomplish this purpose we must make every effort to read the text in the sense in which it was written

There are, of course, other legitimate and important modes of interpretation. One is to read the sacred texts of a particular community in terms of the understanding had by its later generations. This will make manifest at least one facet of the text which has proved to be a significant contribution to understanding the meaning of life and the principles by which it can be lived. Another method is to read the text in terms of a philosophic structure which evolved in later ages on the basis of this text. The classical commentaries on Aristotle and most of the medieval scholastic philosophy, East and West, are instances of this mode of work. These commentaries can be of special value in enabling one to profit from the sophisticated analyses subsequently developed in order to understand in depth the topic treated in the text. Both of these approaches can make their proper contribution—indeed, the most rich contribution—to our understanding, and must be part of an overall effort to gain maximum comprehension regarding the issues raised by the text.

Nevertheless, neither will be the precise mode of the present work, for each depends upon later stages of the process of cultural determination and delimitation, as is reflected by the terms ‘school’ and ‘scholastic’. Hence, (a) to avoid the *petitio principii* and *circulus vitiosus* of justifying a later system on the basis of texts read in terms of that system, (b) to renew awareness of the vital meaning of the scientific terminology of the schools by rediscovering the ground from which they

⁴ *Hymns of the Rg Veda*, trans. by Ralph Griffith (Varanasi: Chowkhamba, 1963), X, 88. This source will be used for all citations from the *Rg Veda* except X, 129. See also Adolf Kaegi, *The Rg Veda*, trs. by R. Arrow Smith (New Delhi: Amarko, 1972), p. 87 and nn. 364 and 368.

have developed, and (c) to retrieve the vision needed in order to resolve problems of life which characterize the world which has been developed in terms of the scientific systems, this study will attempt to return to the lived experience from which the text has come and to recapture the content of the vision it expressed.

This will require not only reading but reflecting, which is the proper work of the philosopher. In reflecting one must keep in mind any continuing factors from the earlier totemic equilibrium, as well as the requirements of meaning itself as was done in the previous lecture. To find the meaning of the myths themselves, however, it will be important that the reflection not be carried out through methods and conceptions not available to the mythic mind, but developed only in a later age. Further, as this work will not be a commentary but a metaphysical reflection upon the meaning of the text for the theme of plenitude and participation, the order of the remarks will correspond to the structure of that issue, rather than to the words, verses or *mantras* themselves.

Theogony

In view of what has been said above, the *Theogony*, written by Hesiod (Ca. 776 B. C.) is of special significance. Because the gods stated the reality of the various parts of nature, when Hesiod undertook to state the relationship which obtained between them he undertook in effect to articulate the theme of this study, namely, the Unity and interrelation of all.

His work has a number of important characteristics. First, it intends to state the highest possible type of knowledge. Thus, it begins with an invocation to the Muses to provide him with divine knowledge. “These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus.”⁵ Secondly and correspondingly, it is concerned with the deepest issues, namely the origin and unity of all things. “Tell me which of them came first” he asks, and then proceeds to a poetic treatment of issues ranging from the fact of evil to the justification of the reign of the gods; he includes all the problems to which the religious awareness of the period gave rise.⁶ Thirdly, because it was written as the period of purely mythic thought was drawing to a close—within two centuries of the initiation of philosophy in Greece—it manifests the extent to which mythic thought could understand basic issues. Hesiod drew upon the full resources of the body of Greek mythology, weaving the entire panoply of the gods into the structure of his poem. He did not, however, simply collect and relate the gods externally in a topographical or chronological sequence; his organization of the material was ruled by an understanding of their inner meaning and real order of dependence. Thus, when in the *Theogony* he responds to the question: “how at first gods and earth came to be,”⁷ his ordering of the gods weds theogony and cosmogony and constitutes a unique manifestation of the degree of understanding regarding the unity and diversity of reality of which the mythic mind was capable.

The order which Hesiod states in the *Theogony* is the following. The first to appear was Chaos: “Verily at the first Chaos came to be.” Then came earth: “but next wide-bosomed Earth the ever sure foundation of all,” and starry Heaven: “Earth first bare starry Heaven, equal to herself.” From Earth, generally in unison with Heaven, were born Oceanus and the various races of Cyclops and gods. From them, in turn, were born still other gods such as Zeus and the races of men. In this

⁵ George F. McLean and Patrick Aspell, *Readings in Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton, Century, Croft, 1971), p. 4. See also by the same authors, *Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton Century, Crofts, 1972).

⁶ 6. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 12-13.

⁷ McLean and Aspell, p. 5.

manner, Hesiod articulates the sequence of the origin of all the parts of the universe. Eros and the various modalities, such as Night and Day, Fate and Doom, are pictured also as arising from Chaos.

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

This relatedness does not depend upon a later and arbitrary decision; it is equally original with their very reality. Neither is it something which involves only certain aspects of the components of the universe; it is as extensive as their total actuality. This includes actions: Rhea, for example, appeals to her parents for protection from the acts of her husband, Cronos, against their children. The understanding which the poem conveys, therefore, is that of a unity or relation which is as original as the reality of things and on which their distinctive character and actions depend.

Indeed, unity is understood to be by nature prior to diversity. This is indicated by the genetic character of the structure in which each god proceeds from the union of an earlier pair of gods, while all such pairs are descendent from the one original pair, Earth and Heaven. Further, the procreation of the gods proceeds from each of these pairs precisely as they are united in love. Finally, this is done under the unitive power of Eros who is equally original with heaven and earth.

From what has been said we can conclude that unity pervades and precedes gods and men. All is traced back to Earth and Heaven as the original pair from whose union, under the impetus of Eros, all is generated. But what is the relation between Heaven and Earth? This question is at the root of the issue of unity in this perspective; it can take us to a still deeper understanding if we return to the text and use the proper etymological tools.

The text states the following order: Chaos, Earth, Heaven. Unfortunately, since the Stoics, Chaos has come to mean disorder and mindless conflict or collision. Aristotle, however, in his *Physics* referred to chaos as empty space (*topos*).⁸ Etymologically, the term can be traced through the root of the Greek term ‘*casko*’ to the common Indo-European stem, ‘*gap*’. Using this stem, as it were, as a sonar signal to sound out mythic thought throughout the broad range of the Indo-European peoples, we find that the term is used to express a gaping abyss at the beginning of time as, e.g., the derivative ‘*ginungagap*’ in Nordic mythology.⁹ Kirk and Raven confirm this analysis and conclude that ‘chaos’ meant, not a state of confusion or conflict, but an open and perhaps windy space which essentially is between boundaries.¹⁰

Returning to the text in this light, it will be noted that it does not say “In the beginning” or speak directly of a state prior to Chaos, but begins with Chaos: “At first Chaos came to be.” There is no suggestion that Chaos was the original reality; on the contrary, the text is explicit that chaos came to be “*He toi men protista Chaos genet.*”¹¹ Further, Chaos is a space to which boundaries are essential. These, it would seem, are the gods which the text states just as coming after Chaos, namely, Earth, and its equal, Heaven. They are not said to have existed prior to chaos and to have been brought into position in order to constitute the boundaries of the ‘gap’; rather, they are said somehow to follow upon chaos.

Thus, Kirk and Raven understand the opening verses of the body of the text, namely, “Verily at the first Chaos came to be, but next wide-bosomed Earth...and Earth first bare starry Heaven

⁸ *Physics IV*, 1, 208 b 31.

⁹ Jaeger, p. 13.

¹⁰ G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The PreSocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: At the Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 26-32.

¹¹ *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, trans by H.G. Evelyn White (London: Heinemann, 1920), p. 86.

equal to herself,” to express the opening of a gap or space, which thereby gives rise to Heaven and Earth as its two boundaries.¹²

For its intelligibility, this implies: (a) that reality precedes the gap, and (b) that by its opening or division Heaven and Earth have been constituted. That is, on the basis of the gap one boundary, Heaven, is differentiated from the other boundary, Earth; by the gap the boundaries are identically both constituted and differentiated as contraries. As all else are derivatives of Chaos, Earth, and Heaven in the manner noted above, it can be concluded that the entire differentiated universe is derivative of an original undifferentiated unity which preceded Chaos. It would be premature, however, to ask of the mythic mind whether this derivation took place by material or efficient causality; that question must await the development of philosophy.

The original reality itself is not differentiated; it is an undivided unity. As such it is without name, for the names we give reflect our sense perceptions which concern not what is constant and homogeneous, but the differentiated stimuli. What is undifferentiated is not only unspoken in fact, but unspeakable in principle by the language of myth, which is characterized essentially by dependence upon the imagination.

Nonetheless, though it is unspeakable by the mythic mind itself, reflection can uncover or reveal something of that undifferentiated reality which the *Theogony* implies. We have, for instance, noted its reality and unity. Its lack of differentiation is not a deficiency, but a fullness of reality and meaning from which all particulars and contraries are derived. It is unspeakable because not bounded, limited or related after the fashion of one imaged contrary to another; it is the transcendent fullness of that which is seen and spoken in our language based in the imagination, namely, the world of names and forms.

In addition, it is the source, not only whence the differentiated realities are derived, but of the coming forth itself of these realities. This is reflected in two significant manners. First, Eros, which itself is said to come from chaos, is the power which joins together in procreative union the pairs of gods. This power reflects something of the dynamic character of the undifferentiated reality. In a negative manner this is also indicated by the acts which the *Theogony* describes as evil. For example, it says that “Heaven rejoiced in his evil doing,” namely, hiding away his children in a secret place of Earth as soon as each was born, and not allowing them to come into the light. Cronos is termed “a wretch” for swallowing his children. In each case evil is described as impeding the procreative process by which new realities are brought into existence; its opposite, good, must then consist in or involve bringing forth the real. Whatever is most fundamental to this bringing forth must pertain particularly to that undifferentiated unity from which has come Chaos and Eros, through which came Heaven and Earth, and all things. The undifferentiated unity is originative of differentiation; it is participative.

Finally, it can now be seen that all the progeny, that is, all parts of the universe and all human beings, are born into the unity of a family. This traces its origin, not only to a pair of distinct realities and certainly not to chaos as conflict, but to an undifferentiated. Just as there is no auto genesis, there is no unrelated reality or aspect of reality. It would seem, then, that verses 118-128 of the hymn imply a reality which is undifferentiated, unspeakable, and productive of the multiple. For the Greek mythic mind, beings are more one than many, more related than divided, more complementary than contrasting.

As a transformation of the earlier totemic structure, mythic understanding continues the basic totemic insight regarding the related character of all things predicated upon a unity and fullness of meaning. Thinking in terms of the gods, however, myth adds a number of important factors. First,

¹² Kirk and Raven, *loc. cit.*

quantitatively the myth can integrate, not only a certain tribe or number of tribes, but the entire universe. Second, qualitatively it can take account of such intentional realities as purpose and fidelity. Third, while implying the unitive principle expressed with crude directness in totemic thought, it adds the connotation of its unspeakable, undifferentiated, and fruitful character.

Rg Veda X, 129: Nasadiya Sukta (Hymn of Creation)

Thus far, we have been looking into the transition to a state beyond that of totemic thought and discovered that the totemic understanding of the unity of reality as based in a plenitude was further developed in mythic thought at a higher and later level of development. We have looked in particular into Greek myth as the root of specifically Western philosophy. It would be helpful at this point to look with a similar purpose to the Vedas, the corresponding roots of Eastern thought. Here my words must above all be questions concerning issues for scholars within the Eastern tradition, but Socrates has shown that question can be integral to philosophizing.

The *Vedas* were poetry with a purpose. They sought not to entertain or even to guide, after the manner of an ethics. Rather, as pertaining to sacrificial rituals, their intent was to express in words meaning and reality that is as radical as that expressed symbolically in the sacrificial act itself in which phenomenal existences were negated in favor of absolute reality. Their purpose was to transcend the realm of ordinary meaning, which in comparison is ignorance or illusion, and to proclaim the origin, order and sense of this life. “Unripe in mind, in spirit undiscerning, I ask of these the Gods’ established places...I ask, unknowing, those who know, the sages, as one all ignorant for the sake of knowledge, what was that One who in the Unborn’s image hath established and fixed firm these world’s six regions.”¹³

There would appear to be a potentially significant contrast to the Greek mind in the thought expressed in the Vedas. While using the language of myth and expressing realities in the concrete and personal terms of the gods, the *Vedas* also employed concrete and proper terms, e.g., for the parts of the universe; indeed, the whole of *Rg Veda X, 129*, for example, is written in these non-mythic terms. This enabled the Rishis to state content which nowhere appears in the records we possess of the early Greek mind which was totally characterized by the mythic mode of thought.

In view of what has been said in the previous chapter concerning the importance of retrieving the content of earlier thought, attention to the *Vedas* can be of special importance for a further reason. Though they probably go back to the Thirteenth Century B.C. as oral transmissions,¹⁴ Keith claims that no significant progress was made during the subsequent period of the Brahmanas which closed about 500 B.C. Thus, “the *Rg Veda* carries us nearly as far as anything excogitated in this period”¹⁵ prior to the *Upanishads* with which philosophy proper is generally thought to have begun.

For this reason we shall now turn to the *Vedas* and in particular to the “*Nasadiya Sukta*” or “*Creation Hymn*” which appears as *Rg Veda X, 129*. The hymn has been considered to be “by far the most important composition in this class in the whole *Veda*.”¹⁶ It is “the finest effort of the imagination of the Vedic poet, and nothing else equals it.”¹⁷

¹³ C. Kunhan Raja, *Asya Vamasya Hymn (The Riddle of the Universe)*, *Rg Veda* I-164 (Madras: Ganesh, 1956), pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Dedhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), I, 10.

¹⁵ Arthur B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. XXXII; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), II, 442.

¹⁶ Kaegi, p. 89

¹⁷ Keith, p. 437.

Method

Here we shall look for the hymn's understanding of: (a) that from which all derive, (b) the origination of the universe, (c) the resultant relation between things, and (d) the nature of reality itself. We shall be interested in seeing what light might be shed on this by taking into account also the earlier context of primitive thought and, comparatively, what relation there might be to the process from unity to diversity developed in the Greek branch of the Aryan family and reflected by Hesiod's *Theogony*.

Our project is not a simple one from first to last, and some specific hermeneutic considerations should be noted. The problems begin with the establishment of the text itself. One mantra may have been lost¹⁸ and even the classical text has recently been accused of depending excessively upon the quantity of syllables in each verse and failing to take account of their quality due to the loss of accents which had indicated, e.g., a short syllable or vowel that had been reflected in the pronunciation. Esteller claims that as a result unwarranted changes were made in the Sanskrit text.¹⁹ This question must be left to Sanskrit scholars for further study.

In reading this text a sensitivity to metaphysical issues will be indispensable. A. K. Coomaraswamy remarks that "for an understanding of the *Vedas* a knowledge of Sanskrit, however profound, is insufficient... Europe also possesses a tradition founded in first principles. That mentality which in the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries brought into being an intellectual Christianity would not have found the *Vedas* difficult."²⁰

In keeping with the developmental model elaborated in the first of this lecture, we shall be interested in determining the distinctive manner in which the mode of thinking in this hymn surpasses that of the primitive or totemic mind, and differs from subsequent developments.

This, of course, does not discount the value of later systematic commentaries. They draw upon the full strength of the resources available to them to elucidate, in a manner consistent with their own doctrines, both the issue being treated in the text and related new problems which had arisen. It is precisely in these successive commentaries that Indian philosophy has progressed through the ages. They are our richest and clearest statements of the cumulative wisdom available on the issues treated in the text. This applies to the encephesis of our text in the *Satapatha Brahmana*, and even more to Sayana's commentaries on this text and in the *Taittiriya Brahmana*.²¹

Nevertheless, here we are engaged in the somewhat different task, described in the first chapter, of stepping back to the content in human thought which preceded the development of the philosophic systems. It is crucial that this be done in terms of the early texts themselves, both in order that they might, without circularity, provide a basis for the subsequent systems and in order to retrieve as a basis for really new progress what the systems have not yet said.

Another important approach, suggested by V. Agrawala draws upon M. Ojha's *Dasavada-Rahasya*. He identifies ten "doctrines which served as nuclei for the gathering thoughts of the Rishis when poetic statements of *Srshti-Vidya* were being attempted in a rich variety of bold linguistic forms." They constitute ten 'language games' to use more recent terminology—which

¹⁸ Griffith, II, 576, n 5.

¹⁹ A. Esteller, "The Text-critical Reconstruction of the *Rg Veda*," *Indica*, XIV (1977), 1-12. See also the Bandorkar Institute of Oriental Studies Jubilee Volume, 1978.

²⁰ A. *New Approach to the Vedas: An Essay in Translation and Exegesis* (London: Luzac, 1933), p. vii.

²¹ Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *Hymn of Creation (Nasadiya Sukta, Rg Veda, X 129)* (Varanasi: P. Prakashan, 1963), pp. 40-57. This remains true even while recognizing the value of observations by Roth and Muller: see Griffith, Vol. I, pp. x-xi. I am particularly indebted to Dr. R. Balasubramanian of the University of Madras for his extremely generous and detailed exposition of Sayana's commentary on *Rig Veda* X, 129.

were employed in the *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas*, and which are referred to in the first two *mantras* of the “*Nasadisya Sukta*.” These are: *Sadasad-Vada* or speech in terms of existence and non existence; *Raso-Vada* or the primaeval material cause; *Vyoma-Vada* or space as the ultimate substratum; *Parapara-Vada* or such pairs as absolute-relative, transcendent-immanent, or higher-lower; *Avarana-Vada* or measure or container; *Ambho-Vada* or water; *Amrita-Mrityu-Vada* or death and immortality, matter and energy; *Ahorata-Vada* or time; *Deva-Vada* or the gods; and *Brahma-Vada* or the transcendent reality.²²

These ten nuclei provide notably more proximate contexts for interpreting the text of *Rg Veda X*, 129 than do the much later six orthodox and three heterodox systems. They can be especially useful in identifying both the implicit content of the terms and their allusions. In particular, they were the tools with which that mythic mentality carried out its reflection upon the issues of unity and of participation therein. Hence, they will be particularly central to our project of determining the metaphysical content of the mythic vision in its own terms, though from our later and hence more self conscious standpoint.

Text

The hymn would appear to be constructed of three parts. The first, *mantras* 1-3, verse 2, treats the state prior to, or without, creation; the second, *mantra* 3, verse 3—*mantra* 5, describes the creative process; the third, *mantras* 6-7, constitutes an epistemic reflection. In part one a number of things are to be noted. First, reality in this state is repeatedly affirmed to be undifferentiated. This is proclaimed by negating successively all that is related as a contrary to something else: there was neither air nor heaven beyond, neither death nor immortality, neither night nor day. There was no place. Some see this undifferentiated character as being stated more directly by rejecting even the principle for such distinctions: there was no beacon of night or day. Esteller would read this as stating directly that there is “no distinguishing sign of the night nor of the day”; Sayana would say only “there was no consciousness of night and day.” Finally, that its nature is undistinguishable (*apraketam*) is pictured by stating that it was darkness hidden in darkness and that it was water: “indistinguishable, this all was water.” By pointing out that water is the stage of creation prior to earth, Sâyana illustrates the way in which this reference to water implies undifferentiation. Together this constitutes a real advance in stating the unity found in the totemic and mythic visions analysed above.

There are even certain more positive indications of the nature of the undifferentiated. First, it is termed “that one” (*tad ekam*). This should be taken as a positive affirmation of being for the text adds that “other than that there was not anything beyond” (*Mantra 2*). Secondly, it is also referred to as being of the nature of life by the statement, “that one breathed.”

Thirdly and of special importance, it indicates the self sufficiency of “that one” for “That one breathed by its own power” (*Mantra 2*). Radhakrishnan accepts the description, “windless,” and understands it as bespeaking Aristotle’s unmoved mover—a point which A. Keith rejects as anachronistic.²³ Esteller reads this as “sunconquerable by his inborn power.” Sayana may arrive at a similar point by holding that “breathless” implies the negation of all limiting factors, that is, all except the self; it is that which exists depending on or supported by its own being. This is important lest the originating experience of the *Rg Veda* be erroneously interpreted as being no more than a

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-18. Other more detailed analysis of *Rg Veda X*, 129 are found in Sampurnand, *Cosmogony in Indian Thought* (Kashi Vidyapith), pp. 61-80; C. Kunhan Raja, *Poet Philosopher*, pp. 221-31; and Coomaraswamy, pp. 52-59.

²³ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977), 1, 101; Reith, p. 436 and n. 3.

proto-materialism of the Samkhya type—as is often said—and the Absolute be considered merely a later superimposition for selfish purposes.

Finally, it might be asked whether in the first *mantra* the expression of undifferentiation by the words “there was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond” is not of further significance. In a threefold division of earth, air, and heaven²⁴ it is by means of the introduction of the notion of air or space (*rajo*) that heaven is differentiated from earth. If this be the case, then, as with the notion of the beacon of day and night in the second *mantra*, the statement “there was no air” negates the principle of division and differentiation of heaven from earth, and hence the differentiated condition of heaven and earth. If there is substance to this suggestion it would have two implications. First and most important, it would mean from the very beginning of this hymn the philosophically important introduction of the principle, not only of the unity, but of the differentiation of being. This would indicate that the two were not seen to be incompatible one with the other. Secondly, it would imply some correspondence to the above-mentioned, and not unrelated,²⁵ notion of chaos as space (*gap*) found in this role in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. If this is found in widely diverse parts of the Indo-European diaspora it would be proportionately ancient and foundational for human thought.

Part II of the hymn (*mantra* 3, verse 3—*mantra* 5), is concerned with “the origin of the evolved world from the unevolved.” This introduces two issues: first, in what does this origination consist; second, how is it realized?

The first issue is answered in terms of the differentiation of that which had been described repeatedly in the first part of the hymn as undifferentiated. In *mantra* 4 this is spoken of as the bond of the existent with what had previously been called non-existent. *Mantra* 5 describes the differentiations of above and below, of impregnators (*redodha*) and powers (*mahimanda*), of energy (*svadha*) and impulse (*prayatih*). Sayana is keenly sensitive to the value implications of this differentiation; others would see these pairs also being contrasted as male and female cosmogonic principles.²⁶ In that case the text would not merely state an initial differentiation of what previously had been undifferentiated. Just as in the *Theogony* heaven and earth were related as male and female from which all else springs, the original pair in *Rg Veda* X, 129, if related in principle as male and female, would imply that all further plurality and differentiation can be understood fruitfully on the basis of a genetic unity. Only the main lines of a theogony are traced, however, and that only in *Rg Veda* X, 72.

As with the *Theogony*, the nature of the unity which the male and female cosmogonic principles imply depends upon the degree of the unity of this original pair. Here it is most significant that the image conveyed by the hymn from beginning to end is not that these two principles are simply different and then brought together. On the contrary, what precedes and from which their differentiation arises is a state of undifferentiation. Most fundamentally they are one rather than many. Continuity with the totemic vision and the experience it embodied could provide a basis for this vision.

On the second issue, namely, how this initial division was realized, the text is not silent, though it speaks after the manner of poetry, rather than of technical scientific prose.

First, in ‘*tuchyenabhu*’ the word ‘*tuchya*’ introduces the notion of ‘void’ or that which is not. To this is added the instrumental suffix “by it,” to state “by means of the void.” Finally there is the

²⁴ Kaegi, p. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5 and notes 12, 82 and 95. Note the etymological similarity of the sanskrit root of Brahman, ‘brah,’ to the Old Norse, ‘brag,’ and the close parallels between the German spells and those of the *Artha Veda*.

²⁶ MacDonell, pp. 209-210.

verb 'bhu' or "become, arise," that is, what comes into being everywhere. A. Coomaraswamy would interpret the following words "all that existed covered (*apihitam yad asit*)" as veil or *avarivah* in *mantra* 1, namely the world as that which covers the ultimate reality. Does this mean that the void plays a role in the transition from the undifferentiated to the differentiated state, in which transition creation consists? If so, it would correspond well to *mantra* 5 regarding the division of the above and the below as cosmogonic principles.

This raises the further question of whether the notion of the void here is related in any way to the notion of chaos as 'gap' or "open space" found in the *Theogony*'s description of the origin of the universe, especially as that notion reflected a very ancient, and hence common foundational element in Aryan thought. Here in *mantra* 3 it is not merely an open space as in *mantra* 1, but the more philosophically suggests the notion of void. This evokes the notion of non-being which later will be of great systematic philosophic importance regarding these very issues in the West. Sayana interprets it as *Maya* which will play the major systematic role in these issues 1300 years later in Shankara's *Advaita*. Here, however, it remains a poetic and imaginative statement.

Second, whatever be said of verse 3, verse 4 of *mantra* 3 and all of *mantra* 4 may contain more substantive indications of the manner of differentiation of the universe through the notions of will and mind. Heat is often used as the simile for that ardour of will with which one grasps (*kamas*), holds to, or is attached to existence. When the reality is present this attachment is enjoyment, that is, it is one and holds itself in bliss. Verse 1 of *mantra* 4 proceeds to state that the origin was not deficient but *sam*, which Sayana understands as meaning complete or having fullness. Further, *avartatadhi* should be understood, not as coming upon a reality from without, but as arising from within. This would mean that from the point of view of its origin creation is seen in this hymn as taking place, not out of need, but out of the plenitude of perfection. Would not this imply that it is pure gift?

Returning once again to *kamas* in order to ask what it indicates regarding the nature of reality itself and hence of created reality, it should be noted that, when the reality with which the ardour of the will is concerned is absent, grasping or attachment has the nature of desire. If the void has a separative role in the origination of differentiation as suggested above, and especially if the original state is one of undifferentiation in contrast to the present differentiated state but in continuity with the totemic unity, it can be seen how the differentiated parts would nonetheless be most fundamentally attracted one to another. In this case the text would be suggesting that it pertains to the internal nature of reality itself to be unitive and for the differentiated realities to be positively related or attracted to one another. This is what the Greeks had expressed in a relatively external manner in their mythic notion of the god, Eros. It would also be the metaphysical basis for the social life of the family or village.

Further, verse 2 proceeds to say that desire is the first seed of mind. As regards the nature of reality itself does this imply that bliss (*ananda*) as enjoyment of being in some sense follows upon or expresses consciousness (*cit*) of existence (*sat*)? For the originating Self as one this would imply that the creative causality of its active will is fully conscious. In turn, this would provide the basis for the unity of order and of intelligibility which so characterizes the realm of creation.

In the order of created or differentiated beings the fact that desire is the first seed of mind would appear to imply that the striving of one person to grasp (*kamas*) the other is predicated upon mind. In turn, this is predicated ontologically upon the fact that the mind and its object originally were undifferentiated unity as noted in the first part of the hymn and inherited from totemic thought. Thus, knowledge itself is most fundamentally the effort to grasp the other in its differentiated and hence partial expression of the original and undifferentiated unity? In this light

the desire or will of one differentiated being as regards others should be not that of self seeking, but of aiding, of serving the other, so that it might share or participate more fully in Plenitude.

Finally, both mind and desire may be combined in wisdom in verses 3 and 4 of 4: "Sages seeking in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of the existent in the nonexistent." Does this mean only that by reflecting on the problem they found the origin of the differentiated universe? This is possible, but the explicit distinction and ordering of desire and mind would suggest more, namely, the interior road to wisdom so characteristic of the Indian philosophers and of great interest in the west from Saint Augustine to present day phenomenologists.

What was said above regarding developmental modes of thought and the dependence of the poetic imagination upon the senses suggests that the answers to further questions, such as monism or pluralism, monotheism or henotheism, and material or efficient causality, will require the development of subsequent modes of thought for work in philosophy proper. This will be the concern of the two lectures to follow. The human mind, however, will never be able to supplant poetry or exhaustively to articulate its meaning in scientific terms. Thus, poetic hymns as the *Theogony* and *Rg Veda*, X, 129, will ever remain inexhaustible and essential store-houses or treasuries for philosophers and for all people in their effort to find the meaning of their lives and the means for living it together.

Chapter III

Systematic Philosophy: Unity in Participation

Thus far, this work has been concerned with the suggestion of Heidegger that, in confronting present problems, real progress could be made only by a “step back.” The first lecture stated this as a method and initiated the study of our theme: plenitude and participation. It found that, in the totem, “primitive” or earliest thought was aware of a unity founded in a certain plenitude. The second lecture concerned the intermediate stage to philosophy, namely, myth and poetry; these were studied in their own terms and as transformations of the totemic consciousness. At that level of mental equilibrium in both East and West the plenitude was understood to transcend and to be the origin of the differentiated universe.

It is time now to turn to the development of philosophic systems in order to determine the distinctive contribution which that type of thought can make to an understanding of our theme and to a comprehension of the nature of our cultures predicated thereupon. It is not that no attention had been given to philosophical issues in earlier times. As these issues concern the most essential requirements for human life, their understanding has been central to human concern in all ages; this was the burden of the previous chapters. Jaeger termed the authors of the myths “protoi theologesantes”;¹ C. Kunhan Raja wrote of the *Poet-Philosophers of the Rg Veda*; and their hymns served ritual purposes whose eminent importance was stated by Arjuna in the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Nevertheless, their mytho-poetic writings were not philosophy in the proper sense described below.

Aristotle described the wise man, the lover of wisdom or the philosopher, as one capable of universal and difficult knowledge, of greater than ordinary certitude, of identifying causes, and of seeking knowledge for its own sake.² This set of characteristics need not be definitive for every culture and Aristotle suggested it only as an inductive model. He considered philosophy in the West to have been initiated by the first physicists, such as Thales. In the East most do not consider philosophy in the proper sense of the word to have been initiated until the *Upanishads* when the issues were separated from the proximate context of ritual and treated by, if not, for themselves.

The essential and, at the time, unclarified role played by the imagination in the mytho-poetic equilibrium had stood in the way of the establishment of a set of proper and precise terms. Once this problem was overcome it became possible to proceed by well-coordinated processes of mediate knowledge such as analysis, logical inquiry, and theory building,³ as well as by intuition, to immediate, indisputable, and self-certifying awareness.⁴ Once established, these processes would lead to systems, for in the order of thought as in that of reality unity is the touchstone of reality. In time each system would generate its own school and in this manner the main body of philosophic work has been carried out. The thought of those whose ingenious intuitions lacked—at times purposely—a corresponding structure of reason for its articulation and defense proved to be short-lived and of limited impact. This chapter will concern the development of the capacity for

¹ Jaeger, p. 10.

² *Metaphysics*, I, 1, 981-982.

³ Mahadevan, pp. 4-5.

⁴ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), pp. 6-13; “St. Thomas’ Thought on *Gratia Operans*,” *Theological Studies*, III (1942), 573-74.

systematic work in philosophy and the contribution it can make to an improved understanding of plenitude and participation.

The Origin of Systematic Philosophy in the West

If development follows upon need, the words of Xenophanes provide insight into the evolution of the Greek mind from myth to philosophy. He showed how the imaginative element in myth had enticed men to envisage the gods in an inauthentic manner. Rather than principles of unity, truth and goodness, some gods had come to be exemplars of strife, deceit and all manner of evil. “Both Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are shameful and a reproach among mankind: theft, adultery, and mutual deception.” As a result, Xenophanes removed the imaginative factors and stated the meaning of the gods in more proper and specifically intellectual terms. Thus, he proceeded to affirm that “There is one god, among gods and men the greatest, not at all like mortals in body and mind....He sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, hears as a whole....He always remains in the same place . But without toil he sets every thing in motion by the thought of his mind.”⁵ A way had been found, namely, philosophy, to state these crucial realities in terms which were susceptible to clear and controlled reasoning. Philosophy had been born.

Characteristically, the Greek mind carried out this search in abstract, rather than in concrete, terms. By focusing upon a certain aspect of reality, and omitting all else it developed clear and cohesive understanding. Even in employing such basic terms as air, fire, and water it considered them as principles which, when combined in various ratios of hot and cold, humid and dry, constitute whatever concretely exists. Where a single element, such as fire or water was singled out this was due to its ability to explain the many states of things. Thus, for example, water, because it can exist in solid, liquid and gaseous states, was able to provide some unified and universal understanding for the entire realm of physical reality. Dasgupta would claim against Shankara, that the *Upanishads* viewed the development of real beings in the world as a similar process of combining elements.⁶

This abstract approach to understanding the unity of all was carried to an initial summit in the reasoning of Anaximander (611-547 BC). He proceeded beyond the four basic elements and their combinations, noting that what is most basic in reality must endure through all physical states, unite them all, and enable one to be significant for another. The principle must, therefore, be neither hot nor cold, neither wet nor dry; it must be without any of the boundaries or limits expressed by names and forms which delimit or define things as contraries. This unlimited was stated negatively as the “*apeiron*” or “unbounded,” that is, the non-specified or undifferentiated.⁷

The search, for a positive statement of this unity continued. Pythagoras (c580-500 B.C.) sought to express it by numbers. Even Heraclitus, the classical proponent of diversity, was engaged in the same search, for through all diversity he sought unity in the logos. Thus, he considered fire to be the basic principle because, while darting up and dying down, it manifests throughout a certain unified form or shape. While both Pythagoras and Heraclitus recorded a certain unity and difference in what was numbered or changing, on their level of abstraction the issue of the reality of that unity and diversity could not be directly confronted.

Parmenides is the father of metaphysics in the West precisely because he remedied this situation by deepening the process of explicit thought in order to be able to speak of being or reality

⁵ McLean and Aspell, p. 31.

⁶ Dasgupta, I, 53, See Pall Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (New York: Dover, 1966), pp. 182-95, 237-39.

⁷ Jaeger, pp. 24-36.

as such. It is important to note that for Parmenides this knowledge (*noeton*) is not simply a product of human reasoning; like the *Theogony* and the *Vedas*, it is divine knowledge, the response of the goddess. Euripides held that the nous in each man is divine, and for Aristotle it is by the nous that we immediately recognize the first principles and premises upon which deductions are based.

Parmenides contrasts *noeton* as the intelligible to *aistheton* as the perceptible, the physical or bodily, whose knowledge is deceptive and dependent upon the physical organs of the body. It is of *noein* that he says, "It is the same thing to think and to be."⁸ It is not *aistheton*, nor a *fortiori* Locke's exclusively sense perception or verification, but intellection that is the norm of being and hence of meaning: *noein* is meaning, notes Guthrie.⁹ This is the crucial foundation for Western thought: the path of intelligibility is the path of being; conversely what is not intelligible, what is without meaning, is not real. Because the requirements of intelligibility are those of being and vice versa, a science of being will be possible which will concern being without remainder. No valid question of being in principle will be without an answer: "It is the same thing to think and to be." Inasmuch as that science depends upon *noeton* rather than *aistheton* it will be a metaphysics.

With intelligibility as the criterion of being Parmenides proceeded on the basis of that which is immediately intellected, namely, "Being Is;...Nothingness is not possible,"¹⁰ to conclude that all differentiation is impossible. Whether coming into or going out of being, whether divisions or motion, any differentiation would need to be predicated either upon what is, which being already is, or upon what is not, which cannot generate, differentiate or do anything.¹¹ There can then be no difference between beings or between states of being; there can be no change or development. As eternal it is not merely an endless extent of time, as it was for Locke; that would be the way of *aistheton*. Rather, it realizes in itself all the perfection signified by 'is' or 'is real'; it is the perfection and plenitude of being. Being is One.¹²

It is unfortunate that attention has been directed almost solely to Parmenides' negation of differentiation, for that is the least important of his considerations. What is central is his direct and lucid clarification that being is, is one, and is intelligible; that it is absolute in perfection; that it is self-sufficient or able to stand in definitive contrast to nothingness;¹³ that as such it is self-explanatory or able to justify itself before nous; and that it is the ground of all metaphysics or understanding of being.

In stating this Parmenides was able to confront directly and for the first time, not merely the fact of differentiation among beings, but the issue of their reality. It is neither surprising nor of great importance that he was not able to resolve this issue. What is important is that due to his contribution the Western mind was able to go to work on the issue. No longer limited to asking about particular differences between specific beings or groups of beings, it could now begin to enquire directly concerning the reality and bases of differentiation, including the meaning of one's own uniqueness and the nature of one's relation to others. Progress in philosophy, as philosophers East and West observe, lies in understanding how this unity is lived, not destroyed; whatever meaning there be to the many, it is had in terms of the one.

⁸ McLean and Aspell, p. 40, fr. 3.

⁹ W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Earlier PreSocratics and the Pythagoreans*, Vol. I of *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1962), p. 41.

¹⁰ McLean and Aspell, p. 40, fr. 3 and 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43, fr. 8. See Guthrie, pp. 28-29.

¹² Guthrie, pp. 29-30.

¹³ McLean and Aspell, pp. 42-43, fr. 8.

It is no accident then that the great figures—Plato (429-348) and Aristotle (384-322)—and the major orientations they gave to Western philosophy should follow Parmenides in rapid succession. Once directly confronted with the issue of the reality of differentiation, the Greek mind had either to accept the skeptical position of the Sophists which excluded any basis for organized civil life, or to begin some steps toward the resolution of the issue. These steps proceeded along two routes initiated by Plato, to whom, notes Whitehead, all subsequent Western philosophy is essentially a series of footnotes.

On the one hand, the search was directed toward those factors by which an individual being is most properly itself—ultimately toward the discovery of non-being as not-that-being¹⁴ by which one thing is not the other. Along with being, this is a component principle of each thing; in response to Parmenides, it is the key to the difference and distinctiveness of all beings. On the other hand, the community of things as similar or alike requires a source which is itself one. Thus, because John, Mary and Thomas are alike as men, their forms share, partake, or participate in a real human form. This is not limited to the perfection of any one man, but is itself the fullness of the perfection of humankind.

Hence, to participate means to imitate. For Plato the object of wisdom is the idea as exemplar which “completely is” and is therefore “perfectly knowable.”¹⁵ All else, the many instances, are related as images to that one, either as sensible objects or as more to less differentiated forms. What is essential, as is manifest in his later solution of the problems raised in his *Parmenides*, is that the relation of participation (*mimesis* or *methexis*) is not added to the multiple beings after they have been constituted; it is constitutive of them: their reality is precisely to image.

This implies that the original forms are ontological dimensions of reality which transcend the series of concrete individuals. They are spoken of as ideas or forms in contrast to concrete particulars. The highest of these ideas is the Good or the One in which all else share.¹⁶ This permits a more balanced and less imaginative interpretation of Plato’s references to remembering ideas and to the cave in the *Republic*. Rather than being taken literally to mean prior states of the soul, they express the personal development of one’s awareness of the reality of a higher ontological realm and its significance for one’s life.

They have memory’s directness and certitude, but their source is the Parmenidean norms, for they characterize the relation of the intellect to the source of all being and meaning.

Philosophizing in this mode of participation one need not become trapped in the alternative of either constructing personal but arbitrary intellectual schemes or elaborating an impersonal science. It is rather a gradual process of discovery, entering ever more deeply into the values which we have in order to comprehend them more clearly in themselves and in their source. Because progressive sharing or participating in this source is the very essence of human growth and development, the work of philosophizing is neither an addenda to life nor merely about life. Rather, as was seen regarding totem and myth, philosophy is central to the process of growth itself at the highest level of life and from this process draws its primal discoveries.

Though Plato began the philosophical elaboration of the notion of participation, as his method was dialectical he did not construct a system. His terms remained fluid and his dialogues ended with further questions. It was left to his pupil, Aristotle, to develop the means for more rigorous or systematic work in philosophy. For this he elaborated a formal logic for the strict codification of forms, their conjunction in judgments, and the coordination of judgments into patterns of

¹⁴ Plato, *Sophist*, 259 A.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 248 E.

¹⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 509.

sylogistic reasoning. With this tool he was able to outline the pattern of the sciences which have played so dominant a role in the Western world to this day.

Further, whereas Plato's philosophy of participation as *mimesis* or imaging had been conducive to using 'reflection,' e.g. of trees on the surface of a stream, as a simile for the physical,¹⁷ this appeared to Aristotle to threaten the reality of the material and differentiated universe. Hence, he soon abandoned the use of the term 'participation' and gave great attention to changing or physical things which he saw to be the route to the discovery of the form. By a careful coordination of the sciences of the physical world through a study of their general principles and causes in the *Physics*, and by relating the *Physics* to the *Metaphysics*, he clarified the relation of all changing things to a first principle. This principle is described in *Metaphysics XII* as subsistent life and as thinking on thinking.¹⁸ To this all are related as to their ultimate final cause which they imitate, each according to its own nature. Thus, the source, if not the system, of participation received important philosophical elaboration.

Nevertheless, in Aristotle's philosophy being was primarily substance and, though what changed was the compost or *synolon* of form and matter, substance was not the compost but the form only. As a result, his detailed scientific or systematic process of coordinating various types of being and identifying their principles was predicated upon forms according to their capacity for abstract universalization. The physical universe could be understood only as an endless cycle of formation and dissolution of which the individual was but a function. Hence, the freedom and significance of the individual were not adequately accounted for in his speculative philosophy. Further, while the individual's actions were stimulated and patterned—each in its own way—upon the one objectless Knower (*noesis noeseos*), the many individuals were not derived therefrom or known by that principle of all meaning. Thus, though intense human concern is expressed in hellenic dramas which reflect the heritage of human meaning as lived in family and society, Greek philosophic understanding was much more specialized and restricted, particularly as regards the significance of the person.

More could not be expected while being was understood in terms of form alone. If, however, the meaning of the person in this world of names and forms is of key importance today in both East and West, if its protection and promotion become increasingly problematic as our cultures become more industrialized and technological, if the search for freedom and human rights is central to our contemporary search to form a decent society, then it will be necessary to look to further developments of the notion of being. These will create higher levels of equilibria by retrieving and making explicit more of what was meant by Parmenides' One than had been articulated in Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies. Indeed, the fact that the thought of Plato and Aristotle was not brought into synthesis by Aristotle himself suggests that it was not possible to do so in terms of being when understood as form. Thus, in order to draw upon the full contribution of both Plato's notion of participation and Aristotle's systematic structures it is necessary to look to a later equilibrium predicated upon a significantly deepened understanding of being.

The Components of a Christian Systematic Philosophy

The new equilibrium will have three components: (a) a development in the awareness of the meaning of being; (b) its fruition through Plato's insight regarding the participation of the many in Parmenides' One; and (c) the systematization of both (a) and (b) by the tools of Aristotle's

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 509-511.

¹⁸ *Noesis noeseos*: "Thought thinks itself as object in virtue of its participation in what is thought," *Metaphysics*, 1072 b 19.

scientific philosophy. As Plato's contribution had been continually employed, what was required was (1) the discovery of being as existence, and (2) the rediscovery of Aristotle's works.

1. Development in the understanding of being required transcending the Greek notion which had meant simply being of a certain differentiated type or kind. This meaning was transformed through the achievement of an explicit awareness of the act of existence (*esse*) in terms of which being could be appreciated directly in its active and self-assertive character. The precise basis for this expansion of the appreciation of being from form to existence is difficult to identify in a conclusive manner, but some things are known.

Because the Greeks had considered matter (Hyle-the stuff of which things were made) to be eternal, no direct questions arose concerning the existence or non-existence of things. As there always had been matter, the only real questions for the Greeks concerned the shapes or forms under which it existed. Only at the conclusion of the Greek and the beginning of the medieval period did Plotinus (205-270 A.D.), rather than simply presupposing matter, attempt the first philosophical explanation of its origin. It was, he explained, the light from the One which, having been progressively attenuated as it emanated ever further from its source, had finally turned to darkness.¹⁹ But whence came this new sensitivity to reality which enabled him even to raise such a question?

It is known that shortly prior to Plotinus the Christian Fathers had this sensitivity. They explicitly opposed the Greek's simple supposition of matter; they affirmed that, like form, it too needed to be explained and they traced the origin of both form and matter to the Pantocrator.²⁰ In doing this they extended to matter the general principle of *Genesis* that all was dependent upon the One who created heaven and earth, the Spirit who breathed upon the waters. In doing this two factors appear to have been significant. First, it was a period of intensive attention to the Trinitarian character of the divine. To understand Christ to be God Incarnate it was necessary to understand Him to be Son sharing fully in the divine nature. This required that in the life of the Trinity his procession from the Father be understood to be in a unity of nature: The Son, like the Father, must be fully of the one and same divine nature. This made it possible to clarify, by contrast, the formal effect of God's act in creating limited and differentiated beings. This could not be in a unity of nature for it resulted, not in a coequal divine person, but in a creature radically dependent for its being. But to push the question beyond nature or kind is to open the direct issue of the reality of these beings and hence, not only of their form, but of their matter as well. To do this is to begin to ask not only how things are of this kind, but how they exist rather than not exist. This constituted an evolution in the human's awareness of being, that is, of what it means to be real. This was no longer simply the compossibility of two forms, which Aristotle had taken as a sufficient response to the scientific question 'whether it existed'; instead to be real means to exist or to stand in some relation thereto.

Cornelio Fabro suggests that another factor in the development of this awareness of being as existence was reflection upon one's free response to the divine redemptive invitation. The radically total and unconditioned character of this invitation and response goes beyond any limited facet of one's reality, any particular consideration according to time, occupation, or the like. It is a matter of the direct self-affirmation of one's total actuality. Its sacramental symbol is not that of transformation or improvement; it is that of passage through the waters, not merely of dissolution and reformation, but of death to radically new life. This directs the mind beyond any generic,

¹⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, II 5(25), ch. v.

²⁰ Maurizio Flick and Zoltan Alszegehy, *Il Creatore, l'inizio della salvezza* (Firenze: Lib. Ed. Fiorentina, 1961), pp. 32-49.

specific or even individual form to the unique reality that I am, that I exist as a self for whom living is freely to dispose of my very act of existence. This opened a new awareness of being as that existence by which beings stand outside of nothing (the “ex-sto” of existence) and this not merely to some minimum extent, but to the full extent of their actuality. As this differs in a graded manner it is called by Cornelio Fabro an intensive notion of being.

It took a long time for the implications of the new dimension of awareness to germinate and to find its proper philosophic articulation. Over a period of many centuries the term ‘form’ was used both in its original meaning as kind and to express this new meaning of act as the direct affirmation of being as existing. As the distinction between the two meanings was gradually clarified, proper terminology arose in which the act of existence by which a being simply is was expressed by existence (*esse*), while that by which a being is of this or that kind came to be expressed by ‘essence’.²¹

2. But what was the relation between existence and essence, and between the beings thus structured and Parmenides’ One? Because a transformation is not a creation the previous philosophic accomplishments regarding participation in plenitude must not be lost, but integrated within a cohesive structure. Hence, the participational insight of Plato and the systematic tools of Aristotle will be required for true progress. Since Plato and Aristotle had worked together as teacher and student for twenty years it might be expected that their two contributions would have been inseparably linked. In fact, such was not the case. While the body of Aristotelian texts lay sequestered in Pergamon for 150 years, the Platonic influence was gradually extended with Greek culture through Asia Minor to Alexandria. It became the philosophic atmosphere in which the thinking of the Church Fathers took place; especially through the works of St. Augustine it became the general context of the Christian thought of medieval Europe. Hence, while the knowledge of Aristotle in the West was in large part restricted to Boethius’ translations of the *Organon*, the body of medieval thought itself could be called a Christian Platonism.

In this situation it can be understood how new was the situation when the expansion of Arabian culture into Spain and the contact with the East resulting from the first and second crusades led to the introduction, within the short span of one century, of practically the whole body of Aristotelian works. This was not the mere discovery of some new principles or concepts which, by the proper genius of the medieval mind, would be gradually developed according to the demands of the previously existing Platonic thought pattern. It was the sudden opening of a new world, scientifically articulated in relative separation according to its own genius and its own pattern. Though genetically related, it was not just a new arrival to be reared according to family patterns, but a full grown relative with whom one discussed as with an equal.

If recent studies have done much to point out the need of considering Aristotle against the background of the intellectualism of Plato, they have not eliminated the profound diversity in the basic pattern and orientation of the two bodies of thought.²² When they met in Thirteenth Century Paris there was an increasingly sharp dispute between those, led by Siger of Brabant, who professed a relatively pure Aristotelianism as interpreted in the work of Averroes, and those denominated above as Christian Platonists. Like most disputes in which important issues are at stake either side would lose too much if it were really to defeat the opposition. For what would it

²¹ Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Torino: Società Ed. Internazionale, 1950), pp. 75-122.

²² A Survey of a number of authors on this point is found in Robert Henle, *St. Thomas and Platonism* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1956), p. xviii. See also William D. Ross, *The Ideas of Plato* (Oxford: Univ. of Oxford Press, 1942) p. 226; Joseph Owens, *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), pp. 358-59.

profit the Latin Averroists to gain philosophic leadership if they did so at the price of their Christian tradition; or how could the Christian Platonists carry out their hope of uniting all to God if they were to close the door on the new world of science which was being stretched out before them by the Aristotelians?

In these circumstances what was needed was a mediator. Working in the realm of ideas such a mediator could not simply divide the disputed area between the contestants, but would have to exercise the creative genius to relate both in a new and fruitful synthesis as an understanding of the whole. As this meant, first, that he would have to oppose each party on some points which made it unacceptable to the other, the task of conciliation required a campaign with fighting on both flanks. It has been suggested that this battle, fought by St. Thomas Aquinas in his last stay in Paris, was “one of the most decisive battles of the world.”²³ Upon it hinged the access of future Western thought to its combined heritage of both wisdom and science, the ability of the latter to draw its values from the former, and the fruition of both in an increasingly rich articulation of the meaning of existence. Secondly, the visions of Plato and Aristotle could be brought into mutually fructifying union only on the basis of a radically new insight drawn from the root meaning of human experience. This was available in the understanding of being as existence and was sufficiently profound and open to draw out further implications of both earlier orientations. The result was Thomas’ systematic philosophy of participation.

The Structure of Participation in the Philosophy of Aquinas

With the three major components in hand, namely, being understood in terms of *esse*, the Platonic notion of participation, and Aristotle’s structure for scientific knowledge, Thomas proceeded to develop a systematic metaphysics whose integrating structural principle was that of participation. In view of what has been said above, the test of such a system would be its ability to retrieve and elaborate some of the content of Parmenides’ awareness of the One in a manner which would contribute to understanding, rather than negating, the multiple or the differentiated. We shall consider, then: first, the systematic character of his metaphysics; secondly, the internal structure of participated beings; and thirdly, their causal relation of participation in plenitude.

1. As a systematizing tool for developing such a science Thomas had at his disposal Aristotle’s model of the syllogism (B is C; and A is B; therefore, A is C) as the basic logical form for scientific reasoning. A science is constructed as a study of its subject (A); in the case of metaphysics this is being, understood as that to which it pertains to be. The work of the science is to establish knowledge concerning the attributes, principles, and causes of this subject; it must state what is true of the subject necessarily and always, indeed, what cannot be otherwise.²⁴ This is done by the mediation of the middle term (B) as the essential or quidditative understanding of the subject (A). Whatever can be seen to pertain as an attribute (C) to the middle term (B), which in turn is the nature of the subject (A), pertains to the subject necessarily and always. The resulting judgments constitute the body of conclusions of the science.

There is a classic danger in systematic metaphysics, and it lies at just this point of establishing its subject. The danger is that what is taken as the subject will be but some limited form of reality which the philosopher has comprehended. As a result his scientific metaphysics will systematically reduce reality to that limited vision. This is the characteristic difficulty both of materialism and idealism, indeed of rationalisms of every sort. Thomas protected his thought against this

²³ Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950), p. 14.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 2, 71 b-72 a. 27.

reductionism in two ways. First, he recognized that if the subject of the science must be susceptible of quidditative understanding then in principle it could include only limited beings; if an absolute is to enter the purview of this science it will be as the cause, rather than as a component, of the subject. This is a humble beginning for metaphysics, but it enables metaphysics to retain its scientific rigor. At the same time it protects the transcendent and unlimited character of the Absolute from being cut down to the limitations of the capacity of the human mind for quidditative knowledge, whereas alternate metaphysics often tend to skepticism or to idolatry. Secondly, even for the limited being which is the subject of the science there is no attempt to establish an initial and inclusive definition. The sequence of drafts of Thomas' *Commentary on Boethius' De Trinitate*,²⁵ show him abandoning an attempt to constitute the subject of metaphysics in the same manner as the subjects of the other sciences, namely, by Aristotle's abstractive apprehension of a determined and delimited form or nature. To obtain the subject of metaphysics he was gradually forced to employ, not abstraction, but judgment which is directly concerned, not with form, but with existence as affirmation. As a result the notion of being is not univocal and delimited as is a form, but analogous or open to affirming in positive terms the full range of existence: whatever is and in whatever way it is.

Further—and subsequently this will be of importance regarding the Absolute or Plenitude of perfection—the form of the judgment is negative, setting aside whatever might in principle restrict or limit that affirmation. It states that the existent or beings with which the science will be concerned are not limited to those things which are of a changing or material nature and which are perceived by the intellect working in conjunction with the senses. Because there are both material and non-material things, in order to be real a being need not be material. Being as being, or that according to which it is being, is then not material or changing. This judgment is negative; it negates the limitation of being to only one type of being, namely, material being. By this type of judgment being as the subject of the science of metaphysics is liberated in principle from restriction to a particular kind of differentiated existence. It is opened for any being and for every aspect of being, for whatever might prove either to characterize or to be required by being precisely as being. With this as its subject metaphysics will be a systematic process without shackles, able to respond with faithful accountability before Parmenides' principle of contradiction and in positive terms to every evidence of being, whether conditioned or Absolute.

2. The systematic construction of participation begins with an analysis of the structure of multiple, differentiated, or finite beings. By conjoining Parmenides' analysis of the impossibility of beings differing either by being or by nothing with the evidence of differentiation, Plato concluded that there must be some principle by which this being (X) is not that being (Y). The principle will be non-being in the sense, not of nothing, but of not-that-being. Its relation to being, however, was not explained by Plato. By the beginning of the thirteenth century the question had evolved into that of the relation between the act of existence of a being and its essence or nature by which existence is differentiated. Drawing upon both Parmenides and Aristotle, Thomas contributed a solution whose structural principle was that of participation.

Being, as Parmenides had noted, was not limited and not differentiated; affirmation was not negation. Thus, if an existence is found to be limited, that is, negated as regards any more than the certain existence it exercises, this must be due to some principle other than existence. Further, if this principle exists though it is other than existence it must be made to exist by existence, to which

²⁵ *The Method and Division of The Sciences*, trans. by Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1953).

it is then related as a passive potency. Finally, if the result is a limited being this principle must be a delimiting capacity for act or existence.

Aristotle had discovered this relation of potency to act as the way in which matter and form, as two principles, constitute one physical or changing thing. Thomas extended its range to this relation between essence and existence. In this way he was able to discover the internal constitution of the subject of metaphysics, a step as crucial for metaphysics as was the discovery of the atomic structure of the molecule for chemistry and the infra-atomic structures for physics. Neither existence nor essence is itself a being or even intelligible by itself alone. Rather, beings are composed of these as intrinsic principles or constituents: existence is the act by which the essence is made to be, and essence is the limiting and defining capacity or potency by which the existence is distinct from every other existent and is of a particular kind. Attempts to think in terms of existence without essence have produced personal affirmation without order, just as thought in terms of essence without existence has produced order that is totalitarian and oppressive. Neither existence nor essence can be or be thought without the other

This insight enabled Thomas to state the basic internal or structural principle for participation. Plato had been able to describe differentiated beings as images of the undifferentiated One. Thomas was able to identify the interior structure of these differentiated beings. They are composit beings, composed of existence which is related as act to essence which is potency or capacity for existence. Conversely, whatever is not composit is unlimited affirmation of being.

3. Finally, on this basis Thomas was able to establish the dynamic or causal relation between composit and incomposit beings precisely as that between participated and unparticipated being. A being whose nature or essence is only potency or capacity for act, and hence really distinct from existence, could not be the explanation of its possession and exercise of existence. The Parmenidean principle of non-contradiction will not countenance act coming from non-act, for then being would come from, and be reducible to, non-being. Hence, composit beings are dependent precisely for their existence; that is, precisely as beings or existent. This dependence cannot be upon another composit being, for that would be equally dependent; the multiplication of such dependencies would multiply, rather than answer, the question. Hence, composit beings as such must depend upon being which is simple or not composit. That is to say, beings composed of existence as act and essence as potency must depend for their existence upon incomposit being whose essence or nature, rather than being distinct from and limiting its existence, is identically existence or being itself. That incomposit is simple, the One par excellence; it is participated in by all multiple and differentiated beings for their existence. The One, however, does not itself participate; it is unlimited, self-sufficient, eternal and unchanging, which Parmenides had shown to be requisite for being. In sum, composit beings are by nature relative, participated, and caused by incomposit being which is Absolute and unique, unparticipated and uncaused.²⁶

On this insight Thomas constructed his five ways,²⁷ which have remained the classic expression of *a posteriori* reasoning to the Absolute. The beings manifest to our intellect as it works through the senses undergo change, stand in a differentiated relation of contrariety to other beings, and realize their perfection of being or goodness only to a certain greater or lesser degree. This manifests that their being is a composit of their essence related as potency to their existence as act. This internal composition manifests that they depend for their existence upon that One

²⁶ Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (New York: Benziger, 1947), I, q. 2, aa. 2 and 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. by A. Regis (New York: Hanover House, 1955), II, 10-21.

which is uncomposit and hence unchanging, unique, and unlimited; their beings are predicated upon the simple Being Itself (*Ipsum Esse*). This alone is absolute; all else is related to it and participates in it. Plato had been able to analyze this only externally in terms of the relation of the many to the one and on the basis of formal causality. Thomas, using Aristotle's insight regarding internal structures and the Christian understanding of being as existence, was able to carry out an internal analysis. In its light the composit internal structure of multiple beings manifests them to be participations, that is, effects of the active or efficient causality of the unparticipated One.

Plenitude and Participation in Christian Philosophy

By means of the above structural and dynamic understanding of participation Thomas Aquinas was able to philosophize in a systematic manner upon the theme of plenitude and participation. Indeed, in the view of Cornelio Fabro, L-B Geiger, Arthur Little and others, this theme constituted the central discovery, the coordinating and fructifying principle, of his entire work. Here, we can identify but a few factors in order to illustrate the manner in which a systematic philosophy of participation can contribute to awareness of Plenitude and to the sense of one's life in this world and with others.

It will be noted that from this point onward our considerations will proceed in an *a priori*, rather than as above in an *a posteriori* manner. Unfortunately, 'a priori' has come to suggest arbitrariness. Etymologically, it means proceeding on the basis of that which comes first and is most basic, namely, proceeding from the cause to the effect. The importance of this *a priori* phase for metaphysics cannot be over-emphasized, for only by understanding being on the basis of that which is self-sufficient or Absolute can we gain basic understanding of being as such and of participating beings. This was seen by Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, all of whom developed works in metaphysics which proceeded from the absolute to the relative and considered this synthetic procedure to be the proper method for metaphysics. The realist character of Thomas' thought and his insistence upon the use of a scientific method for metaphysics led him to insist upon building the science around finite being as its subject. Once, however, the cause of that subject—the incomposit or unparticipated being—was discovered all could be seen more deeply and more richly through an awareness of that Absolute on which *all* depends. In particular we shall consider, first, the radical totality of the creative act; secondly, the extension of the language of being to the Absolute; and thirdly, what can be learned of the participated through a reflection upon the nature of the unparticipated as Unity, Truth, and Goodness.

Participation

First, note must be taken of the extent of the dependence of participated on unparticipated being. A preliminary, but not provisional, instance of great importance for our theme is the dependence of matter which the Greeks had presupposed to be a given—unquestioned and hence unexplained. As a result, for the Greeks, action consisted in the transformation of matter, that is, in its successive formation according to different forms: this process ultimately came full cycle, simply to begin once again. In this perspective the individual had no further purpose or meaning than to continue the cycle; nothing was radically new, unique, or personal. Above we saw that early Christian thought directed attention to matter and to its origin from God. *A priori* reflection in terms of participation can provide further understanding. As incomposit, the Absolute Being Itself is unlimited. For this reason, no reality can be equally original, for that would mean that

being would be had only partially by the Absolute. In that case the absolute would in fact be limited and therefore composit; there simply would be no absolute. The question concerning the existence of composit beings would then have no answer either in themselves or in a cause; there would remain only Parmenides' all impossible way, namely, that Non Being is.

Since, then, nothing can be equally original with the Absolute, all else for their total reality must participate in it. Each thing, to the full extent of its being, images in a partial manner the One. Further, as each limited being is in contrast to every other limited being, together they constitute an ever increasing manifestation of being. Though there are more beings, however, there is never more or less of being than the unlimited plenitude of the Absolute. The checks one writes do not add to the money one possesses; still more marvelously, one does not lose the knowledge one shares, but multiplies its instances. No matter how many participate in the One it remains ever the Plenitude and is in no sense augmented or diminished. The incomposit being does not depend upon the incomposit composit beings, but conversely upon it composit beings depend entirely.

This participated and caused character applies to all realities and components thereof; hence, it applies also to matter. As a potential principle its proper reality is that of a relation of potency to form as its act, without which it could have neither meaning nor reality. As a constituent principle of the essences of physical beings matter shares in their reality. Just as there can be no matter existing independently of form, neither can there be matter which with that form does not constitute an essence and participate to the full extent of its reality in the Absolute.

Thus, the causal activity in participation is a creation from nothing. By this is not meant, of course, that there is no cause; actively considered participation is causing. What is meant is that there is involved here only (a) the act which is the Absolute and (b) the effect which depends upon it and by which the Absolute is designated as cause or creator. What is excluded is any independent or equally original existence of the effect in its totality or in any of its principles, e.g., matter.²⁸ The full classical phrase is creation from nothing as regards the effect and any subject thereof (*creation ex nihilo sui et subiecti*).

Thomas would add that this does not say anything about time. As the measure of motion, this can exist only with physical reality which it cannot precede. However, he sees nothing about the creative power of the Absolute or the nature of physical creatures which would in principle limit the number of years or aeons which might be counted backwards during which there could have been physical participations. Hence, he sees no reason for excluding the possibility of physical reality having existed through time without beginning.²⁹ It is to be noted, however, that even here the relation between the participations and the Absolute remains one of essential dependence in being. Even if they were to have existed from all eternity, multiple beings would not be equally original, but would depend upon the One; this would be creation from all eternity.

Language

In view of this totality of the dependence of participating beings upon the Absolute, it is apparent that any insight concerning the nature of the unparticipated would contribute a radical elucidation regarding realities which participate therein. In order to make its contribution to this understanding a systematic philosophy must first prepare the language it will employ. Any

²⁸ *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 16; *Summa theologica* I, q. 14, a. 11; *On the Power of God* (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1952), q. 3, a. I ad 12; and *Truth*, trans. by R.W. Mulligan et. al. (Chicago: Regnery, 1952-1954), q. 2, a. 5.

²⁹ *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 31-38.

implication of limitation in human thought or expression must be removed from language concerning the Absolute.

We saw that being as the subject of the science of metaphysics expressed only differentiated or limited beings. We saw also that differentiated and composit beings were participations in Unlimited and incomposit Being. This has crucial implication for extending the analogous character of the notion of being. As the subject of the science of metaphysics, being had analogously but properly been said of the entire range of finite beings. It stated the existence of each being according to its essence in the form of a four term analogy of proper proportionality, a proportion of proportions: the existence of A : the essence of A :: the existence of B : the essence of B. On the basis of the participation of this composit subject in its incomposit cause the analogous range of the term being can now be extended from finite to infinite being.

To this extension the causal relation of participated effect to incomposit cause makes three essential contributions. (a) It justifies the affirmation of the third term in the analogy, namely, the existence of the Absolute inasmuch as the being and intelligibility even of limited reality (the first and second terms) cannot be grounded in simple nothingness: nothing does nothing, as Parmenides notes. (b) It constitutes the central proportion between the proportions, for the effect as dependent on the cause, must be similar thereto. (c) It founds the proportion in which Absolute Being is expressed (terms three and four) for it requires that the essence of the Absolute be identical with its existence, rather than opposed or even distinct and limiting. Thus, where being said of a finite being states existence according to its essence as a unique instance of human nature, being said of the Absolute in which it participates states Existence lived in its plenitude.³⁰

The above concerns the construction of analogy in a metaphysics whose subject is limited being, from which it moves to the infinite cause of this subject. An analogy is no less necessary in a metaphysics which begins from the Absolute; otherwise, existence would be taken to mean only the Absolute and the Parmenidean rejection of differentiation would be its last, rather than its opening, word.

In both these metaphysics it must be remembered that thought is a human activity and its terminology a human creation. This does not mean that it is only about humans; in fact, it is characteristic of beings which know, as distinct from those which do not, that they can react on the basis of what things are in themselves, rather than simply on the basis of their own subjective conditions. Nevertheless, the classic *dictum* that “whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver” applies also to knowledge. This is particularly significant when humans as participated and related beings speak of the plenitude that is unparticipated and Absolute. For this reason along with the positive and analogous language mentioned above—the classical *via positiva*—there is a second or negative way of speaking which denies of the Absolute that mode of expression which reflects the potential and composit human nature and its capacities. In order to say that the Absolute or Plenitude of being is good, or even simply that it is, one must use more than one Term and unite these in a judgment. As composit, however, this is not the nature of that One which the participational structures showed to be Incomposit. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that the composit character of our speech be denied of the One.

This is not an alternate, but a concomitant, to the positive ways; both must be used in every statement of incomposit Being. About this we must be clear. One cannot deny existence or goodness of the unparticipated without rejecting the Absolute; on the contrary, one must follow the positive way and affirm that the Absolute exists, that existence in its original state is realized

³⁰ George F. McLean, “Symbol and Analogy Tillich and Thomas,” *Revue de l’Université d’Ottawa*, XXVIII (1958), 193*-233*, reprinted in *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought*, T. O’Meara and D. Weisser, eds. (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 195-240.

absolutely. What is denied in the negative way is simply that the absolute exists according to the compost mode which inevitably characterizes all human expressions of the Absolute. Hence, the negative way does not mean that the Absolute does not exist or that it is not non-existent, which would reduce God to the minimal realization of existence. The negative way is not about the Absolute at all, but about man's mode of expressing it.

Consequently, in the way of eminence one combines the positive with the negative way to say that the Absolute realizes existence eminently, that is, in a mode which surpasses our ability to express. The function of the negative way is simply to keep open the vision of being which was initially opened by the negative judgment of separation through which the subject of the science of metaphysics was obtained. This must be kept open for the positive eminent affirmation of Being Itself so that incomposite Being can manifest itself to human minds despite their human constrictions. In turn, it enables humans to respond in positive terms which similarly are open and unfettered.³¹

Attributes of Plenitude

These reflections upon language provide direction for reflection upon the nature of the Plenitude of being and life. When Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* spoke of the categories as basically different ways of being he distinguished approximately ten categories; one was substance, the others were accidents or attributes of substance. Each substance differed from every other substance in relation to which it was an addition of being; the same was true of the attributes or accidents between themselves and in relation to substance. Aristotle's concern there was to codify the world of names and forms. He intended thereby to lead the mind to the supreme instance of being, through relation to which, by a *pros hen* analogy, all could be profoundly unified and comprehended. In this categorical or predicamental sense attributes are by nature limited and differentiated; by their realization in the substance the individual develops or becomes more perfect, that is, participates more of being. There is, of course, no question of such categories being applied to the undifferentiated or Absolute.

There is, however, another sense of attribute, one that is transcendental rather than predicamental or categorical. Such attributes apply to all beings; they are the attributes of being as such. These are not really distinct one from another or from being; they do not add reality to being. Neither are they distinct by what is technically termed a major distinction of the mind as are genera and species, because that would imply a real composition in being. Rather, each states the very reality of being, making explicit what was actually but only implicitly stated by the term being as that which is. They explicate or unfold what is stated really and actually, but only implicitly, by the term 'being'. It must be emphasized that they are not additions to being. They are not attributes, which are beings, but characteristics of being as such; they state simply what it means to be. Such are the unity stressed by Parmenides and later Plotinus, the truth which is found in Aristotle and Augustine, and the good which was central to the main body of Plato's work. They are reflected in the classic Eastern trilogy: *sat, cit, ananda*.

In order to develop a systematic list of such attributes, Thomas studied the different types of judgments of existence. If absolute or concerned with being itself, this can be affirmative: 'being is being'; or negative: 'being is not divided with non-being,' which, as Parmenides had noted, simply is not. This indivision of being is its unity or oneness: 'being is one'.

³¹ *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13.

Judgments of existence can also be relative, provided the relation be in terms of reality which is not in principle limited or limiting; just as to define radio waves in terms of the reception of an only AM radio would be to understate their extent. For this reason the relation must be stated in terms, not of physical life, but of the spirit; not of the potter, but of the poet. The relative judgments state the relation of being to spirit as open to all and any being, or to being as such. Speaking first in relation to intellect, being can be said not to be concealed, but to be positively open to the intellect, that is, to be intelligible or true. Secondly, as will is sensitive to the value of all being, in relation to will being is judged to be desirable or good.³²

Because unity, truth, and goodness are characteristics of being as such, they also state or explicate incomposit or unparticipated Being where they are found absolutely. To make progress in awareness of the absolutely One, True, and Good we should look further into self-identity, knowing, and willing. In doing this, however, we must be sure to remove those elements of composition or potency which characterize these spiritual acts in their limited human realizations.

With the mind thus opened for Absolute Being and a method for allowing its life to be explicated in our reflection, it is now possible to sample the nature of the insight with which systematic serial reflection of this type can enrich the awareness of Plenitude and participation described above.

Unity. The first of these explications of the Plenitude of perfection is that which Parmenides had stated so forcefully, namely, unity or oneness. As Existence (*sat*) being is undivided, that is, it is in no way non-being: it stands against or out of nothingness (the *ex-sto* of existence). This much must be said of being as such, and hence of any being or any aspect of being. Through an analysis of the participated character of differentiated and compost beings, however, it was possible to open the mind to that Unparticipated Being in which all else participates, and to know that it is not composit but absolutely simple in its internal constitution.³³ As such it is unlimited in perfection and realizes the totality of the perfection of the act of to be; it is the All-perfect, the All-powerful. Further, this is without division or differentiation, as metaphysicians always have insisted. Boethius expressed this classically as perfect self-possession; in contrast to temporal differentiation, he defined eternity as: “the perfect and simultaneous possession of limitless life.”³⁴

We have seen in totem and myth the unitive implications of this for the human relation to fellow humans and to nature. A systematic philosophy of participation develops this understanding by clarifying that the many participated beings are not simply divisions of place in what previously was undifferentiated, for that could mean a simple juxtaposition or contiguity of things. Neither is it merely the type of dependence that obtains between brothers in a family who remain ever related by consanguinity and origin. The formal effect of the participative, creative causality of Being Itself is the constitution of differentiated and participating beings not merely as individuals in a species, but as beings or existents. This creative causality continues to be exercised as long as they continue to exist and is called conservation. Thus, the unity of all participated beings is predicated, not upon a fact of the past, but upon their presently and actually participating in the existence, the actuality, the life of the All-perfect which is causally and creatively active in them to the full extent of their being.

What was said above about matter being caused means that all reality whatsoever in or of being is the dynamic expression of that which in itself is simple. This is the “*discretio divina*” of

³² *Truth*, qq. I and 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, *Summa theologica* I, qq. 3 and 11.

³⁴ *De consolatione philosophiae*, trans. by H. R. James (New York: New Universal Library, 1906), 5-6.

which Thomas speaks. It constitutes a plurality of participated beings related as contraries among themselves such that the being of one is not that of another and two beings together express more of being than either one alone. However, the same cannot be said of their relation to the One in whom all participate. There is no dualism here; the participants do not constitute more of being than the Absolute itself, but only more beings, more instances of being. Parmenides' vision of the One has been retained; that which is is the One, in which we live and breathe and have our being.

Truth. The second characteristic of being is truth, which in Eastern thought is expressed by the term: *cit*. As a characteristic of being as such and hence of any being, it explicates being as open to consciousness or able to be known by intellect. In positive terms being is intelligible, in negative terms it is unconcealed. This much can be known by reflection upon the ability of the intellect to make Parmenides' all engulfing judgment: 'being is, non-being is not'. Inasmuch as the intellect can make this judgment about being, being as such must be open to intellect or intelligible. This is not an adjunct to, but formally includes, the unity of being. What is open to intellect, or intelligible, cannot be other than or alongside, as it were, being, its identity or its unity, for then what would be known would not be being, but nothing. Truth is not a different actuality than being or unity, but their perfection.

Further, when this is reflected upon in terms of the participational structures identified above, it becomes evident that the Absolute, incomposit, simple act of existence in which all participate must in undifferentiated identity be: (a) agent or subject of intellection or consciousness, (b) power of consciousness, (c) act of consciousness, and (d) object of consciousness. This is but a further explicitation of what is meant by the unity which is the One; it constitutes the simple and subsistent act of knowledge or consciousness—it is Truth Itself.³⁵ As in Eastern thought with *cit*, it is consciousness without object³⁶ in the sense of anything distinct from it, on which it would depend and by which it would be determined. This means, not that it is without content or meaning, but that it is meaning itself.

Still further, because it is totally self-conscious it perfectly comprehends the full range of the limited states of perfection or combinations of perfections according to which its essence can be imitated in participating beings. This pattern of ideas, which Socrates had intuited in his search for virtue and which Plato recognized must have prior ontological reality, Augustine located in subsistent Truth. There, Thomas identified its character as exemplar cause after the pattern of which all things are created.³⁷ Interestingly, the most profound systematic comprehension of its constitution is had through the notion of measurement and the functions of being and non-being therein.³⁸ It would seem that this notion in some form entered the mind of the author of *Rg Veda*, X, 25, *mantra* 18, "who with a cord has measured out the ends of the earth"; some relate this to *Rg Veda* X 129, *mantra* 5, "a cord was extended across."³⁹

In any case, the Unparticipated as Truth or total lucidity in which all participate for their being is the foundation of the intelligibility of the universe. It is the basis of the conviction that the road of intelligibility is the road of reality; that finding sense is not merely an intellectual pastime of solitary minds but the way of sharing with others more deeply in the real; and that the rule of

³⁵ *Truth*, qq. 1-8; *Summa theologia* I, qq. 14 and 16.

³⁶ Keith, p. 437.

³⁷ *Summa theologia* I, q. 15.

³⁸ T. Kondoleon, "Exemplarism," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* V, 712-15. See also *On the Power of God*, q. 3, a. 16 ad 5 and *Summa theologia* I, q. 15, a 2.

³⁹ MacDonell, p. 210.

reason, especially when enriched but not abrogated by insight, is the sole rule that is truly humane both in personal and in public life.

Goodness. The third characteristic of being is goodness, which in Eastern thought is reflected in the term *ananda*. This is a still more explicit affirmation of unity and truth, for what is able to be known as being or perfection can also be appreciated as perfective. In this sense being relates to will; it is desirable or good. More directly, each being in its unity as being undivided with non-being and in holding to its own being or perfection is love of its own perfection.

When the unparticipated Plenitude of Being, Unity, and Truth is considered in these terms it can be seen that the Absolute is Goodness Itself. As with Truth, it is the subsistent identity of: (a) agent or subject, (b) power or will, (c) act, and (d) object of act. Thus, the plenitude of perfection is subsistent Goodness, or Love itself. This is not desire, which is love of a perfection which is absent. It is perfect, conscious identity with unlimited goodness,⁴⁰ that is, it is holiness. As the perfect possession of this goodness it is also its enjoyment, which is to say, bliss or *ananda*.

In this explication of the unparticipated incomposit being there is also to be found the intelligibility of the creative or participative character of the Absolute. Note that what is sought there is intelligibility, not necessity. From Plotinus, through Spinoza to Hegel, philosophers have often sought for necessary and necessitating intellection of the creative act itself. This has succeeded only in generating a vision neither of human freedom nor of Absolute and Unconditioned being, for it has made the source depend upon other beings for its perfection. What should be sought is not a necessitating reason for the Absolute being's creativity, but only intelligibility for it actively participating or sharing its perfection.

It was seen that Truth Itself comprehends the order of possible being, that is, all the ways in which the simple Plenitude of perfection can be imitated or shared by differentiated being. Subsistent Love, blissfully rejoicing in its goodness, perceives in it "the idea of a possible universe, with all the ways it has of sharing in...being and life and goodness. This provides the sufficient but non-compelling reason...It is a gift that deserves to be given." Its causality is predicated, not upon a need, a lack, or a desire on the part of the All-perfect, but upon "the gracious will to share, chosen in perfect freedom."⁴¹

Participating beings are known and loved by this same act of Knowledge and Love by which the One knows and loves itself.⁴² They do not measure Absolute Truth, but are known as sharing therein; neither are they loved as ends in themselves, but as ordered to Goodness or Love Itself. In the orders of both final and efficient causality creatures come to be on account of the Absolute Goodness; they are "ordered or directed to this goodness to be received or participated in."⁴³ The life of each person is thus an echo of, and a participation in, Subsistent Love; if lived well it should be in harmony with others and with nature, all of which are participations in that same Love. Even more, as an imitation of that Love by which one is loved, one can know that one's life is to be lived in terms of sharing with others rather than of grasping as the Buddha taught or of holding to oneself. This, rather than merely the avoidance of the suffering which inevitably follows any opposite course, is both the reason and the means for avoiding *karma*. Finally, a philosophy of participation can aid one to understand that life lived in imitation of creative Love will bring

⁴⁰ *Truth*, q. 21; *Summa theologiae* I, qq. 19 and 20, a. 1.

⁴¹ John Wright, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom: The God Who Dialogues," *Theological Studies*, XXXVIII (1977), 455.

⁴² *Summa contra Gentiles* I, 76.

⁴³ Wright, p. 464.

oneself and others into that same Love which, having been the Alpha, must also be the Omega of all.

In summarizing his exposition of the cosmology of the *Rg Veda*, Radhakrishnan concludes: “We see clearly that there is no basis for any conception of the unreality of the world in the hymns of the *Rg Veda*. The world is not a purposeless phantasm, but is just the evolution of God.”⁴⁴ Above we have seen the way in which a systematic philosophy can analyze and develop this theme. It elaborates the distinction of the composit and differentiated from the incomposit and undifferentiated Being, but avoids duality inasmuch as the very being or existing of the composit beings of the differentiated universe is nothing other than the participating—the sharing and manifesting—of that One. Further, it enters into the Absolute in order to learn more of that Wisdom and Love which is the Plenitude of perfection, which is unsublatable and creative.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion to this study of a systematic philosophy of plenitude and participation it seems appropriate to remark briefly upon the reality of the participants, the nature of the cause, and the task for a systematic philosophy.

The Participants. Thomas studied the reality of the differentiated universe in a work he wrote for Islamic thinkers. The Mutakallim had attempted to affirm the power of the Absolute by holding the insubstantiality of creatures. They claimed that creatures could not themselves cause, but were mere occasions for the creative action of the Absolute, indeed, that creatures ceased to exist at each moment and had continually to be recreated. Etienne Gilson claims that no point is argued by Thomas with more passion than the substantial character of created beings.⁴⁵ In the light of his insight regarding participation the absolute was not being affirmed, but denied by the reduction or elimination of the reality or active power of its effects. Thomas repeatedly returned to this theme in his chapters on “The True first Cause of the Distinction of Things” and “On the Opinion of Those Who Take Away Any Proper Actions from Natural Things.”⁴⁶ It should be noted that in these chapters he is not arguing for the reality of multiplicity as a simple chaos of different and clashing beings. What he is asserting is the reality of an ordered unity, the sharing of the one in a graded and interactive order of individuals, species, and genera. In other words, he is carrying forward Aristotle’s view of a universe of beings which, acting according to their proper natures, imitate, each in its own manner, the unity and perfection of That One which is the plenitude of perfection or perfection itself.

Because causing is a sharing, not a loss, of perfection—as can be seen best in the work of the poet—the effect has some degree of likeness to the cause. Due to the essentially limited character of any one composit being the intention to share limitless perfection constitutes sufficient intelligibility for the creation, not of one only, but of a great multitude of beings, each of a different form from the other. Further, it explains why these beings should be, not inert, but active and should by their interaction form an intensive unity which would the more munificently share in, and proclaim, the perfection and power of its source. By not only being, but sharing its being, creation manifests the power of its source; by its complex order, it manifests the wisdom of its

⁴⁴ Radhakrishnan, I, 103.

⁴⁵ E. Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 189-93.

⁴⁶ *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 45 and III-I, 69.

origin; by the good of its order which contributes to the well being of all, it manifests the Love that is its source.⁴⁷

God as Absolute. Throughout this development of the systematic structure of the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas I have deliberately used, not the term “God,” but the terms ‘Absolute,’ “The One,” and the like to state the Plenitude in which all participate. This was done in order both to illustrate and to test the conviction that the real content of a so-called “theistic metaphysics” is not incompatible with, but dependent upon and indeed coterminous with, one that is articulated in terms of the Absolute. I have never subscribed to the oft supposed opposition between the so-called God of the philosophers and the God of revelation and scripture. That opposition would appear to be predicated upon an inadequate understanding of either one or both terms

Unfortunately, the term ‘God’ and the theism predicated thereupon are subject to the continual recurrence of the destructive anthropomorphic tendencies which had overtaken the Greek myth in the days of Xenophanes. A.C. Bose gives a more recent list of such tendencies in the Introduction to his *Call of the Vedas*. A monotheistic God must, he thinks, be masculine, father, patriarch and king, who lives in a particular place and is locked in combat with an anti God.⁴⁸ This is reflected in the notion of divine action after the pattern of a despot, against which Spinoza wrote in his *Ethics*. All such notions imply limitation, for they situate the divine within a set of contrary notions each of which, as distinct from its contrary, implies limitation. Such limitations require the correction which is expressed by the notion of the Absolute articulated in a philosophy of participation as the in-composit and subsistent Plenitude of Being.

Conversely, the term ‘absolute’ also has its vicissitudes. In order to protect this from limitation, affirmations of its positive perfection are at times denied, leaving in the final analysis an impersonal essence expressed in double negatives ungrounded in positive affirmation. A systematic metaphysics of participation concludes instead to the Absolute as subsisted, indeed, supreme being, the plenitude of perfection and expressed in terms of knowledge and love.

We saw that the controlled purification of the transcendental characteristics of being, in conjunction with reasoning from participating beings to the Plenitude in which they share, manifested the Absolute as Unity, Truth, and Goodness. If being that is unique, intellectual, and loving in whatever degree is thereby personal, then being which is subsistent Unity, Knowledge, and Love must be so above all. It was seen also that, as such, unity, truth and goodness are explicitations of what is actually but only implicitly stated by being. Hence, they carry no implication of limitation or contrariety. The same must be said of these three as identity, knowledge, or love which are the characteristics of the person. They are as open as is the meaning of existence itself which each of these affirms in a progressively more explicit manner. Consequently, as such, person is not a closed or contrary notion, but is as open as is truth and love. The more perfect the person, the more open and sharing. The more personal the communication the more it is able to be shared without diminution of its source—again our paradigm is the poet. The plenitude of perfection is the subsistent Person who without loss share love, truth, and being itself.

Of such being, Absolute and personal, the term God is appropriately predicated. Jaeger says of the pre-Socratics, “the predicate God, or rather Divine, is transferred from the traditional deities to the first principle of Being (at which the philosophers arrived by rational investigation), on the ground that the predicates usually attributed to the gods of Homer and Hesiod are inherent in that

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, III-I, 69,16 and II, 45, 7-8.

⁴⁸ Abinash Bose, *The Call of the Vedas* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1970), pp. 19-21, 50.

principle to a higher degree or can be assigned to it with greater certainty.”⁴⁹ The same is true of the Absolute in the thought of Thomas at the juncture of the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Christian traditions.

This is not to say that human being gave a comprehensive knowledge of God, or indeed of any existent; nor is it meant to imply that man can grasp the unique way in which God exists, the eminent and proper mode of deity. Neither is within the capabilities of man. But it does question the common assumption that there is an opposition, rather than a necessary identity, between the notion of the Absolute and that of the Personal God. In the systematic philosophy of Thomas they are identical and indispensable one to the other. Today, when our awareness of the meaning of person is subject to equally to great threat and great development, this is perhaps the most creative element in religious metaphysics.

The Task of Systematic Philosophy. Taken together the two prior considerations generate a paradox for the human mind and suggest the importance of the work of philosophy. The first conclusion concerned the reality of the participated and differentiated universe, including men. These, we said, were both from God as their origin and toward God as their goal. The second conclusion concerned the absolute character of God as the unparticipated, undifferentiated and incomposit. From the conjunction of the two we concluded to the paradoxical consideration that both man and his universe are directed toward that which definitively transcends them both.

It is the task of a metaphysics of participation to resolve this paradox, not by eliminating the reality of either the compost or the incomposit, but by uniting them in their affirmation of being. Reality acts according to its nature and can share only what it is, for, as Parmenides notes, to derive being from non-being is an all impossible way.⁵⁰ Thus, the effect of the causality of the incomposit being, whose essence or nature is precisely existence or to be, is the existence or act of being of its creatures. In other words, it is precisely because of the definitive transcendence of the divine as the unique, subsistent Being that God is present to us in his very essence, by his power causing our being. In this light, two conclusions follow. Because our essence is distinct from our existence, as is the case for all compost beings, it can truly be said that God is more present to us than we are to ourselves. Further, because his immanence is in proportion, rather than in tension, with his transcendence, it is more proper to say, not that God is in us who participate in Him, but that we exist in God.

This vision has been the well spring of the world’s scriptures. The old and new Testaments expressed the transcendence in terms of heaven. The *Vedas* point especially to that which is within. Both say that God is beyond all and that man must lose himself in order to find Him. As lived, it has been the basis of the great schools of asceticism and of yoga developed in India and greatly admired by those engaged in the spiritual quest the world over.⁵¹

It must stand also as a test for every philosopher, drawing one beyond the successes of one’s system and urging one ever forward to more adequate awareness of the infinite correlation of Transcendence and Immanence. This is the eminently worthwhile task and one which will ever challenge and elicit the combined efforts of humankind.

Dasgupta summarized the vision of the *Upanishads* as follows.

In spite of regarding Brahman as the highest reality they could not ignore the claims of the exterior world, and had to accord a reality to it. The inconsistency of this reality of the phenomenal

⁴⁹ Jaeger, pp. 31, 203-206.

⁵⁰ McLean and Aspell, p. 40, fr. 2, 6, 7.

⁵¹ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974), pp. 30-34, 64-65.

world with the ultimate and only reality of Brahman was attempted to be reconciled by holding that this world is not beside him but it has come out of him, it is maintained in him and it will return back to him.⁵²

Every philosophical System must ask whether it or any other has succeeded in taking full account of, and giving definitive expression to, all the elements in that rich statement of the common patrimony of mankind. If the answer is yes then our philosophic work is completed. If not then in this age of science and technology, of rapid development for society and person, the philosophy department must be the most exciting place in the university. It is there that one can reach most deeply into one's heritage to retrieve meaning long since forgotten. There also, and in concert with other metaphysical systems in the heritage of mankind, one is invited to evolve the more ample systematic vision of participation in Plenitude which in those increasingly complex times is required for the communion of men in God.

⁵² Dasgupta, I, 51.

Chapter IV

Redemption in an Ambiguous World: Unity in Resurrection

The systematic philosophic elaboration of participation in the divine described in the previous lecture was predicated upon the deepening awareness of being as existence at the time of the Christian Fathers. It made possible a new awareness of the importance of men and of physical nature. They were not, as had been thought by Plato, significant only in terms of their forms whose reality existed in a somehow separated world. Nor were they, as understood by Aristotle, bent only upon the continuation of their species in imitation of the permanence of higher bodies. Rather, each was a unique existent, a living participation of divine perfection in this world in a manner which had never before been realized, nor ever would be again. What the person did not accomplish of his possibilities for sharing divine life no one else would ever be able to realize.

This vision of the unique value and beauty of men and of each thing in nature as participations in God was lived by St. Francis of Assisi in simplicity and bliss. The same vision was also a dangerous temptation to many others. If nature and human persons were so important, would it not be helpful to focus upon them exclusively? In that case it would be advantageous to employ types of knowledge which were less holistic and unitive, but rendered more detailed information. Bacon saw that such knowledge would enable many to redirect the order of nature and of persons as well.

Scientific projects concerning nature and political projects concerning men, to which the mind originally had been attracted on the basis of the unitive participational vision, came to be separated therefrom. In that state they produced a new and ominous problematic, often appropriately termed alienation. A contemporary phenomenology of the term would include, not only the divorce of the laborer from the fruit of his work, but the pervasive sense of isolation of man from the whole of nature, as well as the rapture of the meaning of each thing from that of every other.

This might be traced to the conceptualist's rejection of the foundation of the order of existing things, and ultimately of the creative will, in divine knowledge. Without this there was no stable or dynamic between existents; nature came to be understood not as a unity of *physis*, but as a construction from alien objects. What was dismantled was thereby devalued. Clear description and transformation of nature became the sole purpose of human knowledge. Man was defined as an administrator of objects for progress, which was defined in terms of progress itself; physical resources were squandered and nature disfigured. Today, the adequacy of any such notion of progress is strongly questioned, and a new understanding of man's relation to nature is sought. The need to understand the relation of realities among themselves and to God has once again come to be of central importance.

The appreciation of the meaning of 'person' does not seem to have fared notably better than that of 'world'. Though there have been remarkable developments in the appreciation of both subject and subjectivity, they have been carried out in relative isolation and even in reaction against the development of the physical sciences and their technological derivatives. In striking parallel to the phenomena of isolation, devaluation, and destruction regarding nature, in the social and political order independence has given birth to loneliness, human life has lost its inherent value, and social values have been sacrificed to individual goals. The awareness of self is marred by

selfishness; its concomitant, violence, looms large both within families and cities and between nations.¹

From this one should not conclude that the developments in the understanding of nature and of person which characterize the modern and contemporary worlds should—or could—be dispensed with. Rather, they constitute the new dimensions of awareness which are the proper advance of our times and upon which the institutions and even the number of men largely depend. What has been said above, however, suggests that the problems we face today reflect the difficulty in carrying forward the foundational wisdom from earlier ages in order that the process be one of authentic transformation resulting in a richer and more adequate synthesis.

In these circumstances to rediscover the divine and, as a participation therein the meaning of contemporary man, it is not sufficient merely to evoke their earlier philosophical articulation; it is that experience of the positive meaning of the world and man which is questioned. Instead, we need to retrieve more of the original, if implicit, experience of the founding unity experienced in the joys and tragedies of social life, lived in the simplest societies in terms of the totem, articulated in hymns and myths, and celebrated as the substance of family life. A phenomenological method for this search into human experience was elaborated, especially, by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and his assistant, Martin Heidegger. We shall look at the thought of three philosophers who have employed it to rearticulate for our times the meaning of participation in plenitude.

Paul Tillich: Manifestation through Meaninglessness

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) constructed a dialectic of divine revelation through a phenomenological analysis of man's contemporary experience. In the first step or thesis the essence of God is articulated as the basis for the relation between subject and object. The second step, or antithesis, states the recent experience of the loss of this meaning in man's existential condition as 'standing forth' from God. The synthesis unites both thesis and antithesis as the revelation of the divine in contemporary life.²

The thesis is stated succinctly as follows. "Reason in its correspondence between objective and subjective structures points to something which appears in these structures but which transcends them in power and meaning."³ Logos becomes the point of identity between God, self, and world. Of these three, the logos of God is central and is participated in by self and world as they acquire their being. Thus the logos of reason gives us a first introduction to the concept Tillich has of participation: it is that of God overcoming the separation of subject and object to provide a deeper synthesis of the reality of both.

Human intuition of the divine always has distinguished between the abyss of the divine (the element of power) and the fullness of its content (the element of meaning), between the divine depth and the divine logos. The first principle is the basis of Godhead, that which makes God, God. It is the root of his majesty, the unapproachable intensity of his being, the inexhaustible ground of being in which everything has its origin. It is the power of being infinitely resisting nonbeing, giving the power of being to everything that is.⁴

¹ See my "Foundations of Unity," *Philosophes critiques d'eu-memes*, ed., Andre Mercier (Munich: Lang Verlag, 1977), pp. 61-71; "Theory and Praxis in the Sciences of Man," *Teoria e Prassi* (Roma: Centro di Studi Culturali, 1977); and "Inter-American Philosophy and Development," in *Filosofia e desenvolvimento*, ed. T. Padilha (Rio de Janeiro: Edition Americana, 1977).

² George F. McLean, "Paul Tillich's Existential Philosophy of Protestantism," *The Thomist*, XXVIII (1964), 1-50.

³ *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 79.

⁴ "Symbol and Knowledge: a Response," *Journal of Liberal Religion*, 11 (1941), 250-51.

The possibility of existential estrangement, the second stage of Tillich's dialectic, is traced to man's finite freedom. Finite man is excluded from the infinity to which he belongs. This negative phase in the dialectic is mediated to the level of consciousness by the general, and presently acute, phenomenon of anxiety which arises from the non-being in finite reality. The non-being of finitude and estrangement is present on each level of being in three ways: ontic, spiritual and moral. This produces three corresponding types or characteristics of anxiety. Ontic anxiety is awareness that our basic self-affirmation as our being is threatened proximately by fate, the decided contingency of our position, and ultimately by death. Spiritual anxiety is the awareness of the emptiness of the concrete content of our particular beliefs. It is, even more, awareness of the loss of a spiritual center of meaning resulting in ultimate meaninglessness in which "not even the meaningfulness of a serious question meaning is left for him."⁵ Moral anxiety is awareness that, in virtue of that very freedom which makes us men, we continually choose against the fulfillment of our destiny and the actualization of our essential nature, thus adding the element of guilt.⁶ All three elements of anxiety—death, meaninglessness and guilt—combine to produce despair, the ultimate or "boundary" situation.

The first stage of Tillich's existential dialectic presented the essential or potential state of finite reality in union with the divine. The second or negative moment of this dialectic placed individualization in its present context of meaninglessness. This expressed the difficulty in actualizing the element of union or participation in the divine which is indispensable to religion. Let us see how the third stage attempts to provide this element in a contemporary fashion. Because the existential separation and disruption leaves man opaque to the divine, Tillich does not consider that an awareness of the divine can be derived from an analysis of man's experience. If God is to be the answer to the existential question of man, he must come "to human existence from beyond it."⁷ The divine depth must break through in particular things and particular circumstances.

In the mind there corresponds to the stigma of non-being the shock of non-being, the anxiety of death, meaninglessness, and guilt. These tend to disrupt the normal balance of the mind, to shake it in its structure and to force it to its boundary line where it openly faces non-being. It is there, face to face with the meaninglessness and despair which one must recognize if he is serious about anything at all, that one is grasped by mystery. In the act of despair one accepts meaninglessness and the acceptance itself is a meaningful act; it could be done only on the power of the being it negates.⁸ In this way there is manifested within oneself the reality of a transcending power.

In this experience it is necessary to distinguish the point of immediate awareness from the breadth of content. The point of awareness is expressed in what Tillich refers to as the ontological principle. "Man is immediately aware of something unconditional which is the prius of the interaction and separation of both subject and object, both theoretically and practically."⁹ Generally, this point is experienced in a special situation and in a special form. The ultimate concern is made concrete in some one thing. It may, for instance, be the nation, a god, or the God of the Bible. This concrete content of our act of belief differs from ultimacy as ultimacy in that it is not immediately evident. Since it remains within the subject-object dichotomy, its acceptance as ultimate requires an act of courage and venturing faith. The certainty we have about the breadth

⁵ *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 48; see *Systematic Theology*, I, 189 and II, 74.

⁶ "Freedom in the Period of Transformation," in *Freedom: Its Meaning*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940), pp. 123-124 and 131-132.

⁷ *Systematic Theology*, I, 64-65. The alternative would, he says, be a humanist, naturalist or dualist approach to God.

⁸ *The Courage of Be*, p. 176. Despair supposes something positive. "The negative 'lives' by the positive which it negates." Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), pp. 38-39.

⁹ "The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, I (1946), 10.

of concrete content is then only conditional.¹⁰ Time may reveal this content to be finite. In that case our faith will still have been an authentic contact with the unconditional itself. It is only the concrete expression which will have been deficient.¹¹

Tillich's phenomenological analysis of the revelation of God is contemporary; it enters into the lived experience of alienation and nothingness to find therein the revelation of the Absolute as ultimate concern. The dialectic begins from the absolute essence as thesis; for its antithesis it passes through the experience of negation in the structures of the composit; the synthesis is the revelation of the divine in concrete, but now theonomous, phases of human life.

His elaboration of the dialectic is rich and sophisticated. The addresses in which he articulated its significance for a vast array of scientific and professional societies shows that it effectively articulates the meaning of participation in plenitude, not only for those disaffected from modern life, but for those most engaged in building the contemporary world. By revealing how their concern and commitment in their professional activities could manifest the divine he opened to them the deep unity, meaning, and beauty of their complex and often frenetic lives.

Martin Buber: I and Thou as a Test of Authenticity

To all of this Martin Buber (1878-1965) adds a cautionary note, a kind of *via negativa*. Buber had developed Husserl's phenomenological insights in terms of relations, noting that these may be either 'I-it' or 'I-thou'. The former is impersonal, and in it the 'I' is a thing; the latter is personal, and in it the 'I' is a person. Speaking thus of Max Scheler, he states an important caution which is relevant to Tillich's position regarding the concrete reality which becomes a revelation of God.

A modern philosopher supposes that every man believes of necessity either in God or in "idols"—which is to say, some finite good such as his nation, his art, power, knowledge, the acquisition of money, the "ever repeated triumph with women"—some good that has become an absolute value for him, taking its place between him and God; and if only one proves to man the conditionality of the good, thus "smashing" the idol, then the diverted religious act will all by itself return to its proper object.¹²

Buber objects that this presupposes that the relation of man to finite goods is the same as that of man to God, and that revelation is simply a matter of substituting the proper for the improper object. In fact, he notes, the relation to a "particular something" which has come to replace eternity as the supreme point in one's values is directed to the experience and use of an "It". This can be healed only by a change, not merely of the goal, but of the nature of the relation from "I-it" to an "I-thou".

If one serves a people in a fire kindled by immeasurable fate—if one is willing to devote oneself to it, one means God. But if the nation is for him an idol to which he desires to subjugate everything because in its image he extols his own—do you fancy that you only have to spoil the nation for him and he will then see the truth.¹³

With many intellectuals in Germany, Tillich had once looked to National Socialism as the coming divine revelation, only to have had to oppose it with heroism when the real nature of Nazism became manifest. If one is concerned that all things participate in and proclaim the glory of God, however, is it sufficient to say that such faith had been an authentic contact with the

¹⁰ "The Problem of the Theological Method," *Journal of Religion* (1947), 99-73.

¹¹ *Dynamics of Faith*, Vol. X or *World Perspectives*, ed Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 18.

¹² *I and Thou*, trans., W. Kaufmann (Edinburgh: Clark, 1970), p. 153.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 154. See also Rollo May, *Paulus: Reminiscences of a Friendship* (London: Collins, 1974), chap. v.

unconditional itself, that only its concrete expression was deficient ? If it is the life of God which is being shared, then its implications for peace in unity, for justice in truth, for love in goodness, are not incidental but substantive to the participation. Thus the concerns for the quality of life today—of the effect of our industrial development and in general of personal growth in society—are central. In this light the work of the playwright-philosopher, Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), will be of particular significance to our project.¹⁴

Gabriel Marcel: Participation as Communion

Marcel's attention is directed first to the quality of contemporary life and its effect upon the person's self-understanding. What he finds is ominous. Economic and political structures interpret man's entire meaning and value simply in function of a rationalized system of production. Marcel points out, as Carnap eagerly insisted, that our being as persons is ignored by the modern scientific world-view. This focuses upon the surface; it understands man in terms of his operational or functional relations; intentionally, it ignores the person's interior being or autonomous center.¹⁵ Marcel called this attention to the surface, that is, to empirical detail only, primary reflection; it is objective, universal, analytic, and verifiable.

Personally, it had always been clear to Marcel that the fragmentary and partial data of the senses and of abstraction were inadequate. At first, however, he attempted to pass beyond this by means of abstraction to an Hegelian Absolute Knowledge or Bradlean Absolute Experience as self-sufficient, concrete, and more genuine than sense experience. From the beginning and throughout his life Marcel was in profound agreement with Bradley's affirmation in *Appearance and Reality* of an original and immediate awareness, on the level of feeling, of the One.¹⁶ In science analytic reason fragments this unity in order to reunify it in a conscious manner. Science, however, can never fully realize this goal, and it remains for metaphysics to recapture unity on the level of thought.

On further reflection, however, similar to Plato's enrichment of, rather than revolt against, Parmenides, he noted that the Absolutes of Hegel and Bradley allowed no place for the thinking by which they were demanded.¹⁷ They were abstractions. By this he did not mean that they were not real, for they were requirements of human thought. He meant rather that they needed to be opened to the reality of the person who is the subject of that thought.

This enabled Marcel not only to understand more deeply the dilemma which modern rationalism has constructed for man, but to derive some orientation for its resolution. On the one hand, when understood by idealism as the supreme principle of meaning and creativity, the self is "transcendentalized" as the universal and unifying principle. As a result, the portrait of the individual self which is dialectically derived therefrom by pure thought is too flattering; it is man as he should be, not as he is.¹⁸ On the other hand paradoxically, because the person is seen only as

¹⁴ *The Existential Background of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963). In this series of lectures delivered late in his life, he surveys and evaluates the development of his thought. This will be the principle source for interpreting the main emphases in his philosophy.

¹⁵ Rudolf Carnap et al, *Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung: Der Wiener Kreis*, chaps. ii-iv, trans. by A. Blumberg in J. Mann and G. Kreyche, eds., *Perspectives on Reality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), pp. 483-494. See also G. Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, trans. by M. Hariri (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 1-30; B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Destiny* (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 25 and 197.

¹⁶ *Existential Background*, p. 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

a limitation of the Absolute Essence, man is devalued before this Unity.¹⁹ To the incursions of pragmatic functionalism, mentioned above, this adds the totalitarian and no less pragmatic oppressions of the dialectical rationalisms both on the right and on the left.

The threat, however, is not only from without. The gravest danger in philosophy is that if its vision is not sufficiently open, it will result in one devaluing oneself. The idealist position, wrote Marcel, “that each one of us is perfectly alone in life and that isolation is, as it were, the price paid for freedom...obstructs communication with other people by preventing him from even imagining them in their concrete reality.”²⁰

From all that has been said in these chapters, one can suspect that so strong a stricture upon idealism from one who remains committed to its major concern for a conscious unity bespeaks the development of an added level of awareness. This is concerned, as he says, “with other people...in their concrete reality; it is the essence of the very general contemporary revolt against the essential as abstract and impersonal, and in favor of the existential as concrete and personal. This is a dimension of meaning with which any contemporary philosophy must grapple for, like the knowledge of good and evil, it enables what previously had been seen only in its positive meaning to be seen in its ambiguity. For example, Marcel even urges that, understood in the restrictive context of a Bradlean idealism self-consciousness, which previously had been seen only in its unlimited positive meaning, now “far from being an illuminating principle, as traditional philosophy has held, on the contrary shuts the human person in on himself and this results in opacity rather than enlightenment.”²¹ If humans cannot do without that light, however, the question now is how the ambiguity can be clarified and the negative side surmounted so that the light might once again illumine the human path.

Conversely, if self-consciousness is understood concretely, that is, as being realized in the body, in the world, and especially in relation with other persons, there is a striking parallel to the growth in self-awareness implied by the personal and free response to the redemptive invitation. In the previous lecture, we saw how that made it possible for the awareness of being to develop from form to existence which, in turn, made possible the Christian synthesis of the Platonic and Aristotelian visions. It will be important to see what Marcel’s existential awareness of the concrete will contribute to an understanding of plenitude and participation and what this will imply for the meaning of the person in society.

To take account of the concrete person, says Marcel, a new type of reflection, called secondary reflection, will be needed. Unlike primary reflection this does not abstract and universalize; it does not seek information about an object or treat it simply as an instance of a specific type. Rather it is concerned with the full concrete reality of being, with what Marcel calls their ontological weight.²² This is being taken not as a noun but as a verb, with all the active affirmation that implies. Whereas primary reflection was an attempt to obtain complete and fixed data which will enable anyone to carry out an exhaustive analysis of an object, secondary reflection concerns this personal reality of the subject in its ontological weight as self-affirmation which is not subject to exhaustive analysis.

Secondary reflection, as phenomenological method, has a further implication for Marcel. If the one to whom we relate must not be reduced to an object, neither must we ourselves be omitted from the concrete reality of this encounter. On entering personal relations we are not abstract and

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

inert as measuring rods, but concrete and active as selves.²³ Here, there can never be the Cartesian ideal of a perfect problem after the analogy of mathematics.

Marcel's main effort was to carry out secondary reflection upon the inter-personal "I-thou" relation and such of its characteristics as hope and courage. His objective was not to reason to the active reality of being itself, but to allow its plenitude and participation to reveal itself to us. This converges with, and explains, the principle which we drew from Ricoeur and applied in the first lecture, namely, that the fundamental existential unity is both affective and cognitive and is to be found in the feeling of kinship between men lived in the unity of family and of society.

One such reflection might help to trace the main lines of Marcel's thought; it is his reflection upon creative fidelity, elaborated in his book by the same title.²⁴ Step by step its reflection upon personal experience reveals the character both of personal participation and of the plenitude which is its precondition. Typically, it is carried out in terms, not merely of "two persons" for that would be an abstraction, but of, for example, Arthur and Agnes. Further, the circumstances also are concrete, as in a play. At no point in the phenomenological reflection on these acts will there be a process of universalization; the reflection will move rather by convergence of the concrete details of what actually occurs. It is in this existential convergence or syneidesis that the ontological weight or true meaning of life and its preconditions will be revealed.

For example, Agnes is visited by Arthur when she is teaching in a distant village, and Arthur promises to return in a few days; or in a moment of exaltation Arthur asks Agnes to marry him, promising to love her always. Marcel notes that Arthur's promises are not factual statements that he is visiting Agnes or does love her; they state that he will visit her and will love her always. What is important here is that such promises, while concrete, are not conditioned upon the particular circumstances of their time and place. These conditions in their partial, conflicting, and incoherent nature are treated as negligible. He promises to love her as it were, despite them—no matter what.²⁵

Moreover, this ability to make such promises, to commit ourselves definitively and in terms which are not able to be characterized in objectively verifiable conditions is not incidental to human life. It is the very alternative to anarchy in human relations and hence is a condition of possibility for life that is human. The extent of this unconditional character increases as one moves from matters which are less personal, to those which are more so: from a bank loan in which one binds oneself, no matter what the circumstances, to repay at a certain time a definite amount; through an oath of office by which one binds oneself, whatever be the circumstances and for the full duration of his term of office, to fulfill the particular duties specified by the law; to the marriage promise to love made precisely "for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, till death do us part," and open to the totally pervasive care and concern that is love. In explicit negative terms this mutual commitment of Arthur and Agnes rejected any merely empirical, objective, abstractive, or partial understanding of their life with one another; it was a total commitment made despite all the unforeseeable and changeable circumstances. Positively, they promised to love and cherish each other till death did them part.

The radical totality in this mutual act of freedom by Arthur and Agnes manifests a transcendent Presence, for this totality can be understood only through its direction to being more fully, and basically to the plenitude which is Being Itself. This is the condition of possibility for their life together being not a mere succession of separate and dissociable actions, but a continuous

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-42.

²⁴ Trans. by R. Rosthal (New York, 1964).

²⁵ *Existential Background*, pp. 65, 72, and 74.

and unified whole. Due to this their fidelity to each other is not static, inert, or immobilizing, but active and creative.²⁶ Formal correspondence to an abstract law which is clear, distinct, and univocous for all will be necessary, of course, but not sufficient. Rather, their life will constitute an actively developing recognition of a living, personal, and transcendent ontological Presence. This can never be grasped and can even be forgotten or betrayed. Nevertheless, it is continually evoked as that in terms to which each moment of fidelity is lived; it is the living Plenitude of truth and love of which all that is true and good in men's lives are participations.

Participation, then, does not imply that one's life is set and predetermined as a part of the whole. The transcendence of this Presence enables one's life to be spontaneous and yet in its freedom to be united with others. We are not an assemblage of isolated individuals playing prefixed roles which, in a Bradlean manner, are designed to coincide. We are ever new creations shaping our lives in active communion as in an orchestra, that is, in the act of living with others.²⁷ Other persons are neighbors who stand before me, not as objects, but as selves to be greeted. Together we form a fraternity or community built, not upon a deadening equality resentful of difference, but upon a common sonship lived by a diversity of persons. The success of one enriches and ennobles the others; the sufferings and sorrows of each are matters of common concern.

When Arthur and Agnes said "for richer or poorer, in sickness and health," they did not become indifferent to each other's concerns. On the contrary, the relative and limited past and future concerns of Agnes took on for Arthur an ultimate meaning which they could never have for Agnes herself. Arthur is passionately, unconditionally concerned for Agnes if she is even moderately sick, as is Agnes for Arthur and for her child, Mary. It is a concern which a doctor, nurse, or other professionally involved person can seldom, if ever, share. It manifests that abiding Presence which transcends all the differentiated conditions of name and form and in which, through participation, our lives have their ontological weight, their real meaning for ourselves, and their communion with others.

This is more than a mere relation of given individuals, even one that is stable and lasting. More properly it is a communion, for in this each finds his or her being and freedom.²⁸ "This tie not only does not fetter him, but frees him from himself...Each one of us tends to become a prisoner of himself not only in his material interests, his passions, or simply his prejudices, but still more essentially in the predisposition which inclines him to be centered on himself and to view everything from his own perspective."²⁹ The more intense the recognition and response to others the more one breaks away from this self-centeredness and the greater the intimation of the suprapersonal "real and *pleromic* unity where we will be all in all."³⁰ From this comes hope, not as a series of particular claims to be achieved by our efforts, but as a relaxation, humility, and patience which enables us to see things whole and to respond with total love, dedication, and perseverance.

Is the "*pleroma*" or plenitude in which all participate personal? If by personal is meant someone related as a contrary to others, then this would not apply. Rather, the "*pleroma*" should be called, not impersonal, but suprapersonal. Thus, in his *Metaphysical Journal* he refers to God as the "Absolute Thou" which is not an object, a "he."³¹

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³¹ Trans. by B. Wall (Chicago, 1952), p. 281.

Conclusion

The previous chapters concerned ages long past when communication between continents was, at best, little and slow. That this is no longer the case has been taken by some to mean that it was time to form a global culture predicated upon a single philosophy. Like esperanto, that would devalue our cultural pluralism; we would all be the poorer. What was said above concerning development and retrieve, however, may suggest a more comprehensive model for the manner in which shared problems can generate culturally diversified responses.

It was noted that a transformation takes place when a need arises, that to respond to that need we must reach back to retrieve more of our foundational wisdom, and that the new equilibrium will be a synthesis of this rediscovery with the structured content of the prior stage of development. In the present situation of highly developed media for communication there is no reason to believe that the needs will arise separately in the East and the West—quite the contrary. In the West the combined development of science and technology channeled thought too exclusively into primary reflection restricted to the empirical at the expense of secondary reflection. This has generated an experience of alienation and created a need to rediscover the person and God, as was described above. What is now being communicated most actively from West to East, would appear to be (a) the same scientific worldview, which educational systems are extensively involved in disseminating, and (b) similar industrial and technological means which both the public and private sectors are fully engaged in developing. To this should be added the implied threats to the person as these attitudes are applied in the areas of commerce and public administration. It is not surprising then to find arising in both East and West a similar set of needs gravitating around the understanding, protection, and promotion of the person in private and social life. This is manifested in the combined search by the older and younger generations more adequately to realize civil rights and a greater sensitivity to disadvantaged minorities. On the part of the young, especially, it is manifested negatively in their heightened scepticism regarding social structures and the Absolute, and positively in their insistence upon a more active role in decisions by which they are affected.

If the problems are common, however, the response should be distinctive to the several cultures. It should not take the nihilist path of rejecting one's cultural foundations or the alienating path of substituting another's. Rather, it should consist in a creative transformation of one's heritage. As seen above this will require reaching back to one's roots to find elements not previously developed. For a detailed and controlled effort it will require also the systematic philosophic tools developed thusfar, especially in one's own and perhaps also in other traditions.

This raises three questions: First, what is the condition of these tools? Second, how can they develop the heritage of wisdom regarding plenitude and participation to aid men to find their way in this period of intensive development? Third, what implications does the new interpersonal sensitivity have for the philosopher's effort ?

Co-operating Systems

Regarding the condition of the tools for systematic philosophy, Dasgupta's *History of Indian Philosophy* and most other studies of Indian philosophy present the systems in parallel fashion, distinct and almost separate one from another, much as did Madhva in his *Sarva-darsana-samgraha* in the Thirteenth century, Dasgupta notes that "As a system passed on it had to meet unexpected troublesome criticisms for which it was not in the least prepared. Its adherents had therefore to use

all their ingenuity and subtlety in support of their own positions, and to discover the defects of the rival schools that attacked them.”³²

What might now be accomplished in philosophy for India and humankind if the new spirit blowing across this land meant that after 1500 or even 2500 years it were possible to draw upon the combined wisdom of these carefully developed systems! By this I do not mean simply an impoverishing compromise based upon a least common denominator, but a combination of resources which would realize more perfectly the distinctive contributions of each. Above, we saw the elaboration by Thomas, at a new level of awareness, of a creative synthesis of Plato’s insight regarding participation in the One with Aristotle’s scientific concern for the reality of the physical order. This suggests some questions.

First, is there implicit in the contemporary Indian concern for the physical development of the country’s resources a newly developed awareness of the reality of the universe which might enable the thought of Madhva and Shankara to be seen as complementary rather than as contradictory positions? Certainly, Madhva’s lack of a causal dependence of differentiated reality must be corrected in the light of Shankara’s affirmation of the Absolute as One.³³ But would not some causal participational model also make it possible to understand and articulate, not only how the universe finds its reality in the One, but how the One proclaims its reality by sharing it as universe?

Second, is there in the Indian affirmation and reaffirmation of freedom democratically shared among men an implicit deepening in awareness of personal affirmation which might enable the thought of Ramanuja and Shankara to be seen as complementary rather than as mutually exclusive insights? Certainly, Ramanuja’s notion of attributes which qualify the divine would need to be corrected in the light of Shankara’s clear proclamation of the Absolute’s unity and Plenitude of perfection. Parmenides will always say the most important world.³⁴ But to take account of the person will it not be important to trace participation to its source in some sequential pattern of truly transcendental properties? As personal, each would be open and unlimited in its affirmation of being; hence, they would not qualify or limit the divine which they progressively explicate. This might help, not only to ground the personal in the One, but to articulate the life of the Absolute, and to uncover the meaning of that life for ours in this increasingly complex society.

Such a system could be extended further. It is said that Shankara was not interested in developing a logic because systems of logic were already at hand. The same might be said of systems of combinations of elements for understanding the material or physical universe. Such systems become logicisms or materialisms only when not employed within a larger and more integrating vision. Aristotle’s system of the sciences is an example of one way in which this has been done so that each body of knowledge can make its proper contribution to a philosophy which is an integrating understanding of all things. In this each part is related to the highest knowledge which concerns the Absolute Consciousness, by whose attractiveness all is moved in the physical and ethical orders. A coordination of the combined resources of Indian thought done in its own terms might prove to be no less impressive, nor less needed in order to face the problems of contemporary life.

³² Dasgupta, I, 64.

³³ Bede Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith* (Dehra Dun: Jyoti Sahi), p. 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-24.

Participation and Technology

The implications of the contemporary awareness of the person must be carried beyond the interaction between men, however. One of the major factors in the contemporary problematic is the development of scientific and technological capabilities which threaten to depersonalize their creators. It is not enough to decry these capabilities, for they have shaped the present world in which we live and we cannot now survive without them. Nor is the problem immediately resolved by noting that man carries out his inventive role as a participation in the divine plenitude, for this would still be a depersonalization if man's intellect were merely carrying out a preformed plan within the limitations of its definitive categories. In a merely mechanical, imitative process there would be none of the creativity of freedom which man experiences in his newly found capacity to transform matter. There would be no recognition of the fact that nature now appears to man as material for his creative activity, rather than as an exterior limit imposed upon him.

In this the roots of the real dilemma begin to appear. It is not simply a question of whether man has either absolute freedom in his actions in the sense of an absolute indeterminacy (and empty gratuitousness), or a structured relationship to an ordered and determined body of nature. This dilemma can be overcome by the appreciation of both man and nature as dependent upon the Divine; as expressions of the same perfection they complement rather than exclude each other so that human freedom can express itself in nature. The real question is whether and how this order of nature actually relates to the area of freedom in the divine, and hence to what degree man can exercise a creative freedom as he images the divine in the technological area. It is in the solution of this problem that the roots of man's intellectualization of nature are to be found. Progress can be made on this problem by reflecting upon the nature of God Himself as absolute and perfect, being in His simplicity the plenitude of all perfection. This combination of the infinity of perfection with the unity of the Divine is most important for our problem, because it means that there is no perfection, actual or conceivable, which has not been included in the simple unity which is the Divine itself.

The vast possibilities which open before man in this technological culture, the new usages for matter and new forms of material and social perfection conceivable by the endless capacity of the mind—all are included within the unity of the infinite simplicity which, having neither past nor future, is the eternal now of which God is the perfect possession.³⁵ The term 'possession' is, however, capable of still further meaning. The Aristotelian conception of knowledge has always identified knowing with unity, rather than with the dichotomy of subject and object: This appears in Thomas Aquinas. God as Truth itself is the perfection of divine Unity. He is unlimited perfection, thus unlimited intelligibility; further, he is unlimited act and therefore unlimited knowing. The identification of both of these constitutes in a most perfect way the one act of understanding, or truth itself.³⁶

This identification of the source of all being with an unlimited and simple absolute truth is the guarantee, the inspiration and the challenge of technological man. It is the guarantee because it assures that no structure or category which expresses a limited degree of perfection or of being can ever be identified with truth itself or can ever stand as a limit to his striving toward further perfection. Thus if the forms of nature are increasingly relativized and transcended, it is not a movement towards irrationality or arbitrariness, but rather towards a new, more complete and more profound manifestation of truth itself. Striving towards a new realization of perfection, man is

³⁵ *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 25, a. 3.

³⁶ *Truth*, q. 8, a. 6.

always striving towards a new participation in the infinite perfection of the Divine. In doing this rationally, he is participating in the knowledge had by the ultimate exemplar cause according to which God understands the ways in which His absolute perfection is imitable in an unlimited number of ways.³⁷ Thus one can draw a parallel between the Divine Word as containing the intelligible perfection of all creatures and the human artisan who contains in his mind the plans for that which he will produce.³⁸

There is here also the source of man's inspiration, for since the principle of this knowledge is the divine infinity itself, there is no limit to the amount of perfection which can be conceived. Finally, since this knowledge of the good in conjunction with the will is the principle of love, neither is there any limit to the impetus to progress through the creative intellectualization of nature which is characteristic of our technological culture.

From this there follows the true dimensions of the present challenge for philosophy in an increasingly industrialized technological and scientific culture, and an indication of the full dimensions of the task which lies before it. It would be insufficient to define this in terms of conquering matter as an evil opponent, or of improving the means to an end. Rather, what is called for is the appreciation that man in his technological activities is giving glory to God by participating in the creative intellectual work of God's creation. In this he stands as subordinate to God in his being and in his work of intellection, but he is responsible and creative on the pattern of the Divine intellect. In his own less perfect manner, through a continued actualization of his intellectual capacities, man proceeds to an understanding of ever new ways in which the plenitude of perfection can be participated in the present circumstances of nature. He does this by himself participating in the divine light and carrying that light into the midst of nature. Thus, his task is never simply his own because it opens onto a truth—and hence onto a meaning and value—which transcends all else and is absolute in itself.

There are dangers here that man will not look high enough, that he may look upon nature only as a limit, or that he may look at nature as mere indeterminacy manifesting nothing. In that case, he would be driven back upon himself where, finding nothing absolute and final, he must dash the great promise of technology on the rocks of materialism, pessimism, and atheism. There is no protection against this but truth itself. In these times of intensive development man must look above himself in an active contemplation which includes the full notion of communion with the divine as the source and goal of his intellectual endeavors. There he will find both the key to the intelligibility already existing about him and the inspiration to work with nature so that it might respond more fully to the needs of men.

Philosophizing and Communion

Finally, as personal, one must not only be free oneself and exercise one's high priesthood in relation to nature, one must also commune with others. Above we saw Marcel's concern that Idealism, especially in its British form, contained a danger of closure upon the self. This is a special problem today due to the convergence of a number of factors: the increasing demands placed upon resources by the extended longevity and hence the numbers of people, the increasing pressure placed upon persons by the technological and industrial coordination of their work, the increasing human expectations due to the development of both personal self-awareness and communication.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 2, a. 9 and q. 7, a 8 ad 2.

³⁸ *Summa contra Gentiles*, IV, 3.

All of these combine to underline the importance of the concern for others which was reflected above in a number of the indices of the contemporary mind.

In the light of such factors philosophers must continually reassess the adequacy of their work. Buddhism's addition of the ideal of the Bodhisattva is classical in this context. Like the extension of the cycles of rebirths of the *Jivanmukta* it provides an important pointer, but may not take sufficient account of the newly developing personal and interpersonal awareness. The classical Christian notion of participation understood as sharing by our existence in Being itself is an essential contribution, for it enables us to be more fully aware of the reality of persons, of the transcendent importance of the life they lead and of the sufferings they undergo. It implies as well an appreciation of a brotherhood between men as sons of the same Father.

The contemporary awareness of persons goes further, however. As articulated by Buber and Marcel, men now understand themselves as persons precisely in relation to other free persons; the personal I is discovered in my I-thou relations. This develops the notion of participation in the Absolute in at least three ways. First, I-thou relations require and participate in an I-Thou relation. Second, the I-Thou relation is achieved in an I-thou relation. Third, for us living is not only sharing in God and returning to Him, but sharing His truth and goodness with our neighbors. The latter is not merely an implication of the former; it is the present human mode of its realization.

Liberation or salvation is then not something we achieve by ourselves and then put off in order to help others. Particularly today, our truly personal acts—those with full ontological weight—are lived above all in Communion with others. There is here the basis for a social philosophy in the Gandhian spirit. But one would not be true to that spirit if one were to see in it merely an ethics, for it is not only a question of what we should do; more fundamentally it is a question of metaphysics, of what we are and how we can live more fully.

Marcel joins the great tradition of Eastern philosophy when he says that basically the answer to this question requires overcoming the tendency to center upon ourselves. His antidote may point the way to a contemporary road to liberation; it is to oppose this centering upon oneself by opening to others in loving service our communion with our brother is our participation in Presence, the Plenitude of being in which we live.

Even this, however, must be tested to be sure that we do not look to others only for what we can receive from them, thereby ultimately remaining closed upon ourselves. This is corrected by assuring that we are conscious of others as persons, free centers, for whose good we are concerned. There is a test of this; it lies in our response to those who have nothing to give but their suffering. There is then a criterion for the authenticity of a contemporary philosophy of participation in plenitude. It is not merely deductive certitude, for beyond this a new test has been added by which we can judge our work in philosophy. It is our concern, not only to understand emancipation or realize it in our lives, but to bring the good news to the poor.

Chapter V

Hermeneutics of Cultures and Religions in Global Times: Unity in Dialogue

In recent decades, new insight into human subjectivity has made it possible to understand human valuing and its implied development of cultural traditions. Writ large these constitute as well the civilizations which Samuel P. Huntington refers to as the “largest we” and which he sees as rooted in the major religions. Hence the issues of the unity of man in God today requires that we look into the development of cultural traditions and the relations between the religions in which they are rooted.

Cultures as Synchronic: The Essential Dimension

While cultures are rightly considered to be constituted of freedom, it is not sufficient to consider only the freedom of single actors for that could leave a human, and *a fortiori* a social life, chaotic and inconsistent. Hence, it is necessary to see how the exercise of freedom is oriented and enabled over time by persons and peoples.

Value

The drama of this free self-determination, and hence the development of persons and of civil society, is a most fundamental matter, namely, that of being as affirmation or as definitive stance against non-being. The account of this and its implication was the work of Parmenides, the very first metaphysician. Identically this is the relation to the good in search of which we live, survive and thrive. The good is manifest in experience as the object of desire, namely, as that which is sought when absent. Basically, it is what completes life; it is the “per-fect,” understood in its etymological sense as that which is completed or realized through and through. Hence, once achieved, it is no longer desired or sought, but enjoyed. This is reflected in the manner in which each thing, even a stone, retains the being or reality it has and resists reduction to non-being or nothing. The most that we can do is to change or transform a thing into something else; we cannot annihilate it. Similarly, a plant or tree, given the right conditions, grows to full stature and fruition. Finally, an animal protects its life—fiercely, if necessary—and seeks out the food needed for its strength. Food, in turn, as capable of contributing to an animal’s realization or perfection, is for the animal an auxiliary good or means.

In this manner, things as good, that is, as actually realizing some degree of perfection and able to contribute to the well-being of others, are the bases for an interlocking set of relations. As these relations are based upon both the actual perfection things possess and the potential perfection to which they are thereby directed, the good is perfection both as attracting when it has not yet been attained and as constituting one’s fulfillment upon its achievement. Goods, then, are not arbitrary or simply a matter of wishful thinking; they are rather the full development of things and all that contributes thereto. In this ontological or objective sense, all beings are good to the extent that they exist and can contribute to the perfection of others.

The moral good is a more narrow field, for it concerns only one’s free and responsible actions. This has the objective reality of the ontological good noted above, for it concerns real

actions which stand in distinctive relation to our own perfection and to that of others—and, indeed, to the physical universe and to God as well. Hence, many possible patterns of actions could be objectively right because they promote the good of those involved, while others, precisely as inconsistent with the real good of persons or things, are objectively disordered or misordered. This constitutes the objective basis for the ethical good or bad.

Nevertheless, because the realm of objective relations is almost numberless, whereas our actions are single, it is necessary not only to choose in general between the good and the bad, but in each case to choose which of the often innumerable possibilities one will render concrete.

However broad or limited the options, as responsible and moral, an act is essentially dependent upon its being willed by a subject. Therefore, in order to follow the emergence of the field of concrete moral action, it is not sufficient to examine only the objective aspect, namely the nature of the things involved. In addition, one must consider the action in relation to the subject, namely, to the person who, in the context of his/her society and culture, appreciates and values the good of this action, chooses it over its alternatives, and eventually wills its actualization.

The term ‘value’ here is of special note. It was derived from the economic sphere where it meant the amount of a commodity sufficient to attain a certain worth. This is reflected also in the term ‘axiology’ whose root means “weighing as much” or “worth as much.” It requires an objective content—the good must truly “weigh in” and make a real difference; but the term ‘value’ expresses this good especially as related to wills which actually acknowledge it as a good and as desirable.¹ Thus, different individuals or groups of persons and at different periods have distinct sets of values. A people or community is sensitive to, and prizes, a distinct set of goods or, more likely, it establishes a distinctive ranking in the degree to which it prizes various goods. By so doing, it delineates among limitless objective goods a certain pattern of values which in a more stable fashion mirrors the corporate free choices of that people.

This constitutes the basic topology of a culture; as repeatedly reaffirmed through time, it builds a tradition or heritage about which we shall speak below. It constitutes, as well, the prime pattern and gradation of goods or values which persons experience from their earliest years and in terms of which they interpret their developing relations. Young persons peer out at the world through lenses formed, as it were, by their family and culture and configured according to the pattern of choices made by that community throughout its history—often in its most trying circumstances. Like a pair of glasses it does not create the object; but it focuses attention upon certain goods involved rather than upon others. This becomes the basic orienting factor for the affective and emotional life described by the Scots, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, as the heart of civil society. In time, it encourages and reinforces certain patterns of action which, in turn, reinforce the pattern of values.

Through this process a group constitutes the concerns in terms of which it struggles to advance or at least to perdure, mourns its failures, and celebrates its successes. This is a person’s or people’s world of hopes and fears, in terms of which, as Plato wrote in the *Laches*, their lives have moral meaning.² It is varied according to the many concerns and the groups which coalesce around them. As these are interlocking and interdependent a pattern of social goals and concerns develops which guides action. In turn, corresponding capacities for action or virtue are developed.

Aristotle takes this up at the very beginning of his ethics. In order to make sense of the practical dimension of our life it is necessary to identify the good or value toward which one directs one’s life or which one finds satisfying. This he terms happiness and then proceeds systematically

¹ Ivor Leclerc, “The Metaphysics of the Good,” *Review of Metaphysics*, 35 (1981), 3-5.

² *Laches*, 198-201.

to see which goal can be truly satisfying. His test is not passed by physical goods or honors, but by that which corresponds to, and fulfills, our highest capacity, that is, contemplation of the highest being or divine life.³

But what is the relation of this approach from below, as it were, to religion as seen from above, that is, from the point of view of revelation and grace which point to a more perfect goal and fulfillment? Thomas Aquinas's effort in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, analyzed by G. Stanley,⁴ is to show the way in which this latter sense of religion is not a contradiction or substitution of the former, but rather its more perfect fulfillment than is possible by human powers alone. In eschatology the vision of God is not a negation of the contemplation of divine life of which Aristotle spoke, but its fulfillment in a way that exceeds human hopes.

Virtues

Martin Heidegger describes a process by which the self emerges as a person in the field of moral action. It consists in transcending oneself or breaking beyond mere self-concern and projecting outward as a being whose very nature is to share with others for whom one cares and about whom one is concerned. In this process, one identifies new purposes or goals for the sake of which action is to be undertaken. In relation to these goals, certain combinations of possibilities, with their natures and norms, take on particular importance and begin thereby to enter into the makeup of one's world of meaning.⁵ Freedom then becomes more than mere spontaneity, more than choice, and more even than self-determination in the sense of determining oneself to act as described above. It shapes—the phenomenologist would say even that it constitutes—one's world as the ambit of human decisions and dynamic action. This is the making of the complex social ordering of social groups which constitutes civil society and even more of the value pattern and culture by which they live.

This process of deliberate choice and decision transcends the somatic and psychic dynamisms. The somatic dimension is extensively reactive; the psychic dynamisms of affectivity or appetite are fundamentally oriented to the good and positively attracted by a set of values. These, in turn, evoke an active response from the emotions in the context of responsible freedom. But it is in the dimension of responsibility that one encounters the properly moral and social dimension of life. For, in order to live with others, one must be able to know, to choose and finally to realize what is truly conducive to one's good and to that of others. Thus, persons and groups must be able to judge the true value of what is to be chosen, that is, its objective worth, both in itself and in relation to others. This is moral truth: the judgment regarding whether the act makes the person and society good in the sense of bringing authentic individual and social fulfillment, or the contrary.

In this, deliberation and voluntary choice are required in order to exercise proper self-awareness and self-governance. By determining to follow this judgment one is able to overcome determination by stimuli and even by culturally ingrained values and to turn these, instead, into openings for free action in concert with others in order to shape my community as well as my physical surroundings. This can be for good or for ill, depending on the character of my actions. By

³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 9, 1159b25-1160a30.

⁴ Gerald F. Stanley, "Contemplation as Fulfillment of the Human Person," in *Personalist Ethics and Human Subjectivity*, vol. II of *Ethics at the Crossroads*, George F. McLean, ed (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1996), pp. 365-420.

⁵ J.L. Mehta, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), pp. 90-91.

definition, only morally good actions contribute to personal and social fulfillment, that is, to the development and perfection of persons with others in community.

It is the function of conscience, as one's moral judgment, to identify this character of moral good in action. Hence, moral freedom consists in the ability to follow one's conscience. This work of conscience is not a merely theoretical judgment, but the exercise of self-possession and self-determination in one's actions. Here, reference to moral truth constitutes one's sense of value and duty, for the action that is judged to be truly good is experienced also as that which I ought to do.

When this is exercised or lived, patterns of action develop which are habitual in the sense of being repeated. These are the modes of activity with which we are familiar; in their exercise, along with the coordinated natural dynamisms they require, we are practiced; and with practice comes facility and spontaneity. Such patterns constitute the basic, continuing and pervasive shaping influence of our life. For this reason, they have been considered classically to be the basic indicators of what our life as a whole will add up to, or, as is often said, "amount to." Since Socrates, the technical term for these especially developed capabilities has been 'virtues' or special strengths.

But, if the ability to follow one's conscience and, hence, to develop one's set of virtues must be established through the interior dynamisms of the person, it must be protected and promoted by the related physical and social realities. This is a basic right of the person—perhaps *the* basic human and social right—because only thus can one transcend one's conditions and strive for fulfillment. Its protection and promotion must be a basic concern of any order which would be democratic and directed to the good of its people.

But this is only a right to one's conscience; religion goes further in that it looks to divine grace for help. Some virtues are the result not only of human practice, but of divine action. In other words the perspective shifts from the secondary causality of the human creature to the primary causality of the divine existent itself. Its effect is created existence with its truth, justice and faith; love that expresses the goodness of the creator as source and goal; and ecstasy in response to the sublime beauty of the divine.

Cultural Tradition as Synchronic

Together, these values and virtues of a people set the pattern of social life through which freedom is developed and exercised. This is called a "culture." On the one hand, the term is derived from the Latin word for tilling or cultivating the land. Cicero and other Latin authors used it for the cultivation of the soul or mind (*cultura animi*), for just as even good land, when left without cultivation, will produce only disordered vegetation of little value, so the human spirit will not achieve its proper results unless trained or educated.⁶ This sense of culture corresponds most closely to the Greek term for education (*paideia*) as the development of character, taste and judgment, and to the German term "formation" (*Bildung*).⁷

Here, the focus is upon the creative capacity of the spirit of a people and their ability to work as artists, not only in the restricted sense of producing purely aesthetic objects, but in the more involved sense of shaping all dimensions of life, material and spiritual, economic and political. The result is a whole life, characterized by unity and truth, goodness and beauty, and, thereby, sharing deeply in meaning and value. The capacity for this cannot be taught, although it may be

⁶ V. Mathieu, "Cultura" in *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), II, 207-210; and Raymond Williams, "Culture and Civilization," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), II, 273-276, and *Culture and Society* (London, 1958).

⁷ Tonnelat, "Kultur" in *Civilisation, le mot et l'idée* (Paris: Centre International de Synthèse), II.

enhanced by education; more recent phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiries suggest that, at its base, culture is a renewal, a reliving of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation.⁸ This leads us beyond self and other, beyond identity and diversity, in order to comprehend both.

On the other hand, “culture” can be traced to the term *civis* (citizen, civil society and civilization).⁹ This reflects the need for a person to belong to a social group or community in order for the human spirit to produce its proper results. By bringing to the person the resources of the tradition, the *tradita* or past wisdom produced by the human spirit, the community facilitates comprehension. By enriching the mind with examples of values which have been identified in the past, it teaches and inspires one to produce something analogous. For G.F. Klemm, this more objective sense of culture is composite in character.¹⁰ E.B. Tyler defined this classically for the social sciences as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits required by man as a member of society.”¹¹

In contrast, Clifford Geertz came to focus on the meaning of all this for a people and on how a people’s intentional action went about shaping its world. Thus he contrasts the analysis of culture to an experimental science in search of laws, seeing it rather as an interpretative science in search of meaning.¹² What is sought is the import of artifacts and actions, that is, whether “it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said.”¹³ For this there is need to be aware “of the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs.”¹⁴ In this light, Geertz defines culture rather as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of intended conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”¹⁵

Each particular complex whole or culture is specific to a particular people; a person who shares in this is a *civis* or citizen and belongs to a civilization. For the more restricted Greek world in which this term was developed, others (aliens) were those who did not speak the Greek tongue; they were “*barbaroi*,” for their speech sounded like mere babel. Though at first this meant simply non-Greek, its negative manner of expression easily lent itself to, perhaps reflected, and certainly favored, a negative axiological connotation; indeed, this soon became the primary meaning of the word ‘barbarian’. By reverse implication, it attached to the term ‘civilization’ an exclusivist connotation, such that the cultural identity of peoples began to imply not only the pattern of gracious symbols by which one encounters and engages in shared life projects with other persons and peoples, but cultural alienation between peoples. Today, as communication increases and more widely differentiated peoples enter into ever greater interaction and mutual dependence, we reap a bitter harvest of this negative connotation. The development of a less exclusivist sense of culture and civilization must be a priority task.

The development of values and virtues and their integration as a culture of any depth or richness takes time, and hence depends upon the experience and creativity of many generations. Taken as cultural inheritance, it reflects the cumulative achievement of a people in discovering,

⁸ V. Mathieu, *ibid.*

⁹ V. Mathieu, “*Civilta*,” *ibid.*, I, 1437-1439.

¹⁰ G.F. Klemm, *Allgemein Culturgeschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig, 1843-1852), x.

¹¹ E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London, 1871), VII, p. 7.

¹² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

mirroring and transmitting the deepest meanings of life. This is tradition in its synchronic sense as a body of wisdom.

This sense of tradition is very vivid in premodern and village communities. It would appear to be much less so in modern urban centers, undoubtedly in part due to the difficulty in forming active community life in large urban centers. However, the cumulative process of transmitting, adjusting and applying the values of a culture through time is not only heritage or what is received, but new creation as this is passed on in new ways. Attending to tradition, taken in this active sense, allows us not only to uncover the permanent and universal truths which Socrates sought, but to perceive the importance of the values we receive from the tradition and to mobilize our own life projects actively toward the future. We will look at this more active sense of tradition as diachronic below.

The Genesis of Culture in Community

Because tradition has sometimes been interpreted as a threat to the personal and social freedom essential to a democracy it is important to see how a cultural tradition is generated by the free and responsible life of the members of a concerned community or civil society and how it enables succeeding generations to realize their life with freedom and creativity. This will be considered with special attention to ways to religious traditions as lived in religious communities and their role in enlivening and supporting persons and groups on their way to God.

Autogenesis is no more characteristic of the birth of knowledge than it is of persons. One's consciousness emerges, not with self, but in relation to others. In the womb, the first awareness is that of the heart beat of one's mother. Upon birth, one enters a family in whose familiar relations one is at peace and able to grow. It is from one's family and in one's earliest weeks and months that one does or does not develop the basic attitudes of trust and confidence which undergird or undermine one's capacities for subsequent social relations. There one encounters care and concern for others independently of what they do for us and acquires the language and symbol system in terms of which to conceptualize, communicate and understand.¹⁶ Just as a person is born into a family on which he or she depends absolutely for life, sustenance, protection and promotion, so one's understanding develops in community. As persons we emerge by birth into a family and neighborhood from which we learn and in harmony with which we may thrive.

Similarly, through the various steps of one's development, as one's circle of community expands through neighborhood, school, work and recreation, one comes to learn and to share personally and passionately an interpretation of reality and a pattern of value responses. The phenomenologist sees this life in the varied civil society as the new source for wisdom. Hence, rather than turning away from daily life in order to contemplate abstract and disembodied ideas, the place to discover meaning is in life as lived in the family and in the progressively wider social circles into which one enters.

If it were merely a matter of community, however, all might be limited to the present, with no place for tradition as that which is "passed on" from one generation to the next. In fact, the process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition in relation to a people's evolving sense of human dignity and purpose, constitutes a type of learning and testing laboratory for successive generations. In this laboratory of history, the strengths of various insights and behavior patterns

¹⁶ John Caputo, "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," in George F. McLean, Frederick Ellrod, eds., *Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), pp. 199-222.

can be identified and reinforced, while deficiencies are progressively corrected or eliminated. Horizontally, we learn from experience what promotes and what destroys life and, accordingly, make pragmatic adjustments.

But even this language remains too abstract, too limited to method or technique, too unidimensional. While tradition can be described in general and at a distance in terms of feedback mechanisms and might seem merely to concern how to cope in daily life, what is being spoken about are free acts that are expressive of passionate human commitment and personal sacrifice in responding to concrete danger, building and rebuilding family alliances and constructing and defending one's nation. Moreover, this wisdom is not a matter of mere tactical adjustments to temporary concerns; it concerns rather the meaning we are able to envision for life and which we desire to achieve through all such adjustments over period of generations, i.e., what is truly worth striving for and the pattern of social interaction in which this can be lived richly. The result of this extended process of learning and commitment constitutes our awareness of the bases for the decisions of which history is constituted.

This points us beyond the horizontal plane of the various ages of history and directs our attention vertically to its ground and, hence, to the bases of the values which humankind in its varied circumstances seeks to realize.¹⁷ It is here that one searches for the absolute ground of meaning and value of which Iqbal wrote. Without that all is ultimately relative to only an interlocking network of consumption, then dissatisfaction and finally ennui.

The impact of the convergence of cumulative experience and reflection is heightened by its gradual elaboration in ritual and music, and its imaginative configuration in such great epics as the *Mahabharata* and in dance. All conspire to constitute a culture which, like a giant telecommunications dish, shapes, intensifies and extends the range and penetration of our personal sensitivity, free decision and mutual concern.

Tradition, then, is not, as in history, simply everything that ever happened, whether good or bad. It is rather what appears significant for human life: it is what has been seen through time and human experience to be deeply true and necessary for human life. It contains the values to which our forebears first freely gave their passionate commitment in specific historical circumstances and then constantly reviewed, rectified and progressively passed on generation after generation. The content of a tradition, expressed in works of literature and all the many facets of a culture, emerges progressively as something upon which character and community can be built. It constitutes a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn, provided it be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated.

Hence, it is not because of personal inertia on our part or arbitrary will on the part of our forebears that our culture provides a model and exemplar. On the contrary, the importance of tradition derives from both the cooperative character of the learning by which wisdom is drawn from experience and the cumulative free acts of commitment and sacrifice which have defined, defended and passed on through time the corporate life of the community.¹⁸

Ultimately, it bears to us the divine gifts of life, meaning and love, and provides a way both back to their origin and forward to their goal, their *Alpha* and *Omega*.

¹⁷ Gadamer, pp. 245-53; Muhammed Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1989).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Gadamer emphasizes knowledge as the basis of tradition in contrast to those who would see it pejoratively as the result of arbitrary will. It is important to add to knowledge the free acts which, e.g., give birth to a nation and shape the attitudes and values of successive generations. As an example one might cite the continuing impact had by the Magna Carta through the Declaration of Independence upon life in North America, or of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in the national life of so many countries.

Reason and Hermeneutics

As the recognition of the value of tradition would appear to constitute a special problem for heirs of the Enlightenment, it may be helpful to reflect briefly on why this is so. Enlightenment rationalism idealizes clarity and distinctness of ideas both in themselves and in their interconnection; as such, it divorces them from their concrete existential and temporal significance. Such an ideal of human knowledge, it is proposed, could be achieved either, as with Descartes, through an intellect working by itself from an intellectually perceived Archimedean principle or, as with Locke and Carnap, through the senses drawing their ideas exclusively from experience and combining them in myriad tautological transformations.¹⁹ In either case, the result is a-temporal and consequently non-historical knowledge.

Two attempts to break out of this have proven ultimately unsuccessful. One might be termed historicist and relativist. In order to recognize historical sequence while retaining the ideal of clarity and distinctness, it attempted to attain detailed knowledge of each period, relativizing everything to its point in time and placing historicity ultimately at the service of the rationalist ideal. The other, the Romantics, ultimately adhered to the same revolutionary Enlightenment ideal even in appearing to oppose it, for, in turning to the past and to myths, they too sought clear and distinct knowledge of a static human nature. Tradition thus became traditionalism, for all was included in the original state of nature and our only way of obtaining a firm grounding for human life was simply to return thereto.

In the rationalist view, in contrast, any meaning not clearly and distinctly perceived was an idol to be smashed (Bacon), an idea to be bracketed by doubt (Descartes), or something to be wiped clean from the slate of the mind as irrational and coercive (Locke and Hume). Any judgment—even if provisional—made before all had been examined and its clarity and distinctness established would be a dangerous imposition by the will.

This points toward the importance of civil society for realizing human life in a manner that reflects and ultimately leads toward the divine. First the enlightenment ideal of absolute knowledge of oneself or of others, simply and without condition, is not possible, for the knower is always conditioned according to his or her position in time and space and in relation to others. But neither would such knowledge be of ultimate interest, for human knowledge, like the human being, develops in time and with others.²⁰ This does not exclude projects of universal and necessary scientific knowledge, but it does identify these precisely as limited and specialized. They make important but specific, rather than all-controlling, contributions. Hence, other modes of knowledge are required in order to take account of the ongoing and varied life of human freedom and its creative results. Further, this is not a solitary, but a group matter. Hence society, especially civil society, becomes the focus for the appreciation and evaluation of things and for the responses which build our world.

Secondly, according to Descartes,²¹ reason is had by all and completely. Therefore, authority could be only an entitlement of some to decide issues by an application of their will, rather than according to an authentic understanding of the truth or justice of an issue. This would be “hastiness” according to Descartes’s fourth *Meditation*. Further, the limited number of people in authority means that the vision of which they dispose would be limited by restricted or even

¹⁹ R. Carnap.

²⁰ H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1975), pp. 305-310.

²¹ R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, I.

individual interests. Finally, as one decision constitutes a precedent for those to follow, authority must become fundamentally bankrupt and hence corruptive.²²

In this manner, the choice of clarity as an ideal, first by Plato and then by Descartes, has generated an exclusivist mind-set ruled by a reductivist mechanism. It is not only that what is not clear is put aside as irrelevant. Even more, the dynamism whereby we reflect the love by which we have been made and respond to it with openness and generosity comes to be seen in a negative light as cognitively blind, while freedom appears in a negative light as affectively arbitrary. The only way these could achieve a redeeming clarity for the human mind is to be reduced to the unambiguous and simplest visceral violence of Hobbes's struggle for survival, that is, by being reduced to the animal level where, precisely, human freedom is dispensed with.

In this light, too, there has been a tendency to isolate public authority from the shared moral sense of community. This, in turn, compromises the moral quality of government, which needs to include and be addressed by those who comprehend and share in the social good which government is to address. This we shall see is civil society.

If the cumulative experience of humankind in living together in peace is to make a contribution to the development of modern life, then it will be necessary to return human knowledge to the ongoing lived process of humane discovery and choice in society. This, in turn, takes place within the broad project of human interaction and an active process of reception by one generation of the learning of its predecessors. The emerging consciousness of the importance of this effort has led to broadening the task of hermeneutics from the study of ancient, often biblical, texts to a more inclusive attention to the integral meaning of cultures. There it has found not a mere animal search for survival, but a sense of human dignity which, by transcending survival needs enables human creativity in society and encourages a search for ever higher levels of human life leading ultimately to God.

The reference to the god, Hermes, in the term "hermeneutics" suggests something of the depth of the meaning which is sought throughout human life and its implication for the world of values and culture. The message borne by Hermes is not merely an abstract mathematical formula or a methodological prescription devoid of human meaning and value. Instead, it is the limitless wisdom regarding the source of all and hence its reality and value. Hesiod had appealed for this in the introduction to his *Theogony*: "Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are forever....Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be."²³

Similarly, Aristotle indicated concern for values and virtues in describing his science of wisdom as "knowing to what end each thing must be done;...this end is the good of that thing, and, in general, the supreme good in the whole of nature." Such a science will be most divine, for: "(1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others. All the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than this, but none is better."²⁴ Rather than evaluating all in terms of reductivist clarity and considering things in a horizontal perspective that is only temporal and totally changing—with an implied relativization of all—hermeneutics or interpretation opens also to a vertical vision of what is highest and deepest in life, most real in itself and most lasting through time. This is the eternal or divine in both being and value, which is the key to mobilizing and orienting the life of society in time.

²² H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1975), pp. 305-310.

²³ Hesiod, *Theogony* trans. H.G. Everland-White (Loeb Classical Lib.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 85.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 2.

In this light one is able to understand better the character of religious communities which come together under the inspiration of the Prophets and great examples of the religious life as lived existentially: a Buddha, a Christ or a Muhammad—paradigmatic individuals in A. Cua's term. Each set a distinctive pattern of values and virtues which has been lived through history and unfolded by a community of persons who have attempted singly and together to live the multiple modes of this example. This we will see is a seminal source of the groupings which constitute a society with a distinctive culture.

At the same time, while still echoing Socrates by searching for the permanent structures of complex entities and the stable laws of change, in redirecting attention to being in time contemporary attention is open to the essentially temporal character of humankind and, hence, to the uniqueness of each decision, whether individual or corporate. Thus, hermeneutics attends to the task of translation or interpretation, stressing the presentation to those receiving a message, their historical situation and, hence, the historical character of human life. It directs attention not merely to the pursuit of general truths, but to those to whom truth is expressed, namely, persons in the concrete circumstances of their cultures as these have developed through the history of human interaction with nature, with other human beings and with God. It is this human history as heritage and tradition which sets the circumstances in which one perceives the values presented in the tradition and mobilizes his or her own project toward the future.

Anton T. Cua²⁵ traces to Vico²⁶ attention to the unreflective cognitive consensus on common needs and to Shaftesbury²⁷ the affective sense of common partnership with others that this entails. The result is the synchronic constitution of a community of memory whose members revere and commemorate the same saints and personages who have sacrificed to build or exemplify the community's self image. This results in a community of vision or self-understanding, as well as of hope and expectation. A cultural tradition, in this sense, is the context of the conscious life and striving of a person and of the communities of which one is a member; it is life in its fullest meaning, as past and future, ground and aspiration.

In this light, Cua notes that in his *Great Learning* Chu Hsi stresses the importance of investigating the principles at great length until one achieves "a wide and far-reaching penetration (*kuan-t'ung*)." Read as *Kuan-chuan*, this suggests an aesthetic grasp of the unique interconnection of the various components of the *tao* as the unique unifying perspective of the culture. This is not only a contemplative understanding, however, but implies active engagement in the conduct of life. If this be varied by subgroups structured in the patterns of solidarity and subsidiarity of civil society then the accumulation of corporative life experience, lived according to *li* or ritual propriety and *i* or sense of rightness, emerges from the life of a people as a whole. "For the adherents of the Confucian tradition, the tradition is an object of affection and reverence, largely because the tradition is perceived as an embodiment of wisdom (*chih*), which for Chu Hsi is a repository of insights available for personal and interpersonal appropriation, for coping with present problems and changing circumstances."²⁸

The truly important battle at the present time is, then, not between, on the one hand, a chaotic liberalism in which the abstract laws of the marketplace dictate the lives of persons, peoples and nations or, on the other hand, a depersonalizing sense of community in which the dignity of the person is suppressed for an equally abstract utopia. A victory of either would spell disaster. The

²⁵ "The Idea of Confucian Tradition," *The Review of Meta-physics*, XLV (1992), 803-840.

²⁶ Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. T. Bergin and M. Fisch (Ithica: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988).

²⁷ *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), Vol. I, p. 72.

²⁸ "Confucian Tradition" and "Hsun Tsu and the Unity of Virtues," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 14 (1978), 92-94.

central battle is, rather, to enable peoples to draw on their heritage, constituted of personal and social assessments and free decisions, and elaborated through the ages by the varied communities as they work out their response to their concrete circumstances. That these circumstances are often shifting and difficult in the extreme is important, but it is of definitive importance that a people's response be truly their own in all their variety and of their society with all its interrelated sub-units. That is, that it be part of their history, of the way they have chosen to order and pattern their social life, and in these terms to shape their free response to the good. This is the character of authority exercised in and by a civil society. It reflects, and indeed is, the freedom being exercised by a people in all the varied groupings in which they have chosen to live and to act.

Cultures as Diachronic: The Existential Dimension

Thusfar we have considered the exercise of freedom as forming a consistent and integrated pattern of life which constitutes the inheritance or patrimony of everyone born into a human community. But each generation must live this inheritance in its own time and circumstances and is concerned to pass it on as a patrimony enriched and adapted to its children and children's children in succeeding generations. This process is tradition taken not in the passive sense of receiving, but in the active sense of *tradere* or passing on.

A first requisite for this is a dimension of transcendence. If what we find in the empirical world or even in ourselves is all there is, if this be the extent of being, then our life cannot consist in more than rearranging the elements at our disposition—newness could only be accidental in character. It is, however, the decisive reality of our life that it is lived in a transcendent context which goes beyond anything finite and indeed is inexhaustible by anything finite. Hence we are always drawn forward and called to radical newness. A tradition then is not a matter of the past, but of new applications. As reflecting the infinite creator and goal this is the decisively religious characteristic of human life.

As an active process tradition transforms what is received, lives it in a creative manner and passes it on as a leaven for the future. Let us turn then from the cumulative meaning and value in tradition, its synchronic aspect, to its diachronic or particular meaning for each new time, receiving from the past, ordering the present and constructing the future. This is a matter, first of all, of taking time seriously, that is, of recognizing that reality includes authentic novelty. This contrasts to the perspective of Plato for whom the real is the ideal and unchangeable forms or ideas transcending matter and time, of which physical things and temporal events are but shadows. It also goes beyond rationalism's search for clear and distinct knowledge of eternal and simple natures and their relations in terms of which all might be controlled, as well as beyond romanticism's attention to a primordial unchanging nature hidden in the dimly sensed past. A *fortiori*, it goes beyond method alone without content.

In contrast to all these, the notion of application²⁹ is based upon an awareness that "reality is temporal and unfolding." This means that tradition, with its inherent authority or normative force, achieves its perfection in the temporal unfolding of reality. Secondly, it shows human persons and social groups, not as detached intellects, but as incarnate and hence as enabled by, and formative of, their changing social universe. Thirdly, in the area of socio-political values and action, it expresses directly the striving of persons and groups to realize their lives and the development of this striving into attitudes (*hexis*) and institutions. Hence, as distinct from the physical order, human action is a situation neither of law nor of lawlessness, but of human and, therefore,

²⁹ Gadamer, pp. 281-286.

developing institutions and attitudes. These do not determine and hence destroy human freedom, but regulate and promote its exercise.³⁰ This is the existential or diachronic dimension of culture which is a matter not only of choice between multiple human alternatives, but of living the divine gift of existence, by which we are constituted in being, of which freedom is the properly humane exercise, and for which culture is then the cumulative exercise.

This can be observed in an emerging pattern at each level of reality, indeed this is the emergence of reality. Pamenides was the first to make clear philosophically the opposition of being to nonbeing or nothing, but we experience this constantly in our inability to reduce anything at all to nothing. Pound a rock as one will, there will always remain a powder or residue. More positively, we see this in plants which, given proper conditions, can be counted on to grow, blossom and bear fruit. Animals with their additional competencies of motion and sensation are able to search out their food, water and partners, and to defend their lives and those of their offspring, even viciously when necessary.

When humans add to these capabilities those of intellect and will this thrust of being, of life over death, reaches its physical summit. With imagination humans can work out an almost infinite number of ways to exercise and promote their personal and corporate life. Taken synchronically, as these constitute patterns of choices on how to live, they constitute cultures.

But more fundamentally they are not simply options between different patterns, which as such constitute kinds of culture different in nature or essence. Rather they are active responses to the gift of existence whereby we have been created. They are the ways in which we can act with the dignity of images of God and concretely raise our children to share in this dignity. Nothing could be more tragic – worse than death itself – than to lose one's culture as the ability to communicate to one's children these keys to humanity, their ability to live humanely rather than be reduced to a beastly state. In this light one can understand the utter seriousness with which the undermining of a culture is taken and the ferocious character of responses thereto.

Conversely, one can understand the definitive seriousness and high artistry involved in the process of shaping and adapting these cultures over time to changing circumstances. These are the corporate response of a people to God as source and goal, image and guide of their life.

There are broad guidelines for the areas of ethics and politics in the application of cultural traditions as guides for historical or diachronic practice. The concrete exercise of human freedom as unique personal decisions made with others in the process of social life constitutes a distinctive and ongoing process. Historicity means that responses to the good are made always in concrete and ever-changing circumstances. Hence, the general principles of ethics and politics as a philosophic science of action cannot be purely theoretical knowledge or a simple accounting from the past. Instead, they must help people consciously exercise their freedom in concrete historical circumstances and groups which change and are renewed.

Here, an important distinction must be made from *techné* where action is governed by an idea as an exemplary cause that is fully determined and known by objective theoretical knowledge (*epistéme*). As in the case of an architect's blueprints, skill, such as that of the engineer, consists in knowing how to act according to that idea or plan. When it cannot be carried out perfectly, some parts of it simply are omitted in the execution. In contrast, a society and culture with its ethics and politics, though similar in the possession of a practical guide and its application to a particular task, differ in important ways. First, by shared action toward a common goal subjects and especially societies themselves are as much constituted as productive: if agents are differentiated by their action, societies are formed or destroyed by their inner interaction. Hence, moral knowledge, as

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

an understanding of the appropriateness of human action, cannot be fully determined independently of the societies in their situation and in action.

Secondly, adaptation by societies and social groups in their application of the law does not diminish, but rather corrects and perfects the law. In relation to a world which is less ordered, the laws, rules and regulations of groups are imperfect for they cannot contain in any explicit manner the adequate response to the concrete possibilities which arise in history. It is precisely here that the creative freedom of a people is located. It does not consist in arbitrary choice, for Kant is right in saying that without law freedom has no meaning. Nor does it consist in an automatic response determined by the historical situation, for then determinism and relativism would compete for the crown in undermining human freedom. Freedom consists, rather, in shaping the present according to the sense of what is just and good which we have from our cultural tradition. This we do in a way which manifests and indeed creates for the first time more of what justice and goodness mean.

The law then is not diminished by distinctive and discrete application to the varied parts of a complex culture or society, but corrected and enriched. *Epoché* and equity do not diminish, but perfect the law; without them the law would be simply a mechanical replication, doing the work not of justice, but of injustice. Ethics, politics and especially aesthetics which takes account of the unique is then not only knowledge of what is right in general, but the search for what is right for this group or sub-group with its goal and in its situation. Adaptation of the means by the social group, whether occupational, religious or ethnic, is not a matter of mere expediency. Rather, it is the essence of the search for a more perfect application of a law or tradition in the given situation and therefore the fulfillment of moral knowledge.³¹

It is important to note that this rule of the concrete (of what the situation is asking of us) is not known by sense knowledge, which simply registers a set of concrete facts on the horizontal level. In order to know what is morally required, the situation must be understood in the light of what is right, that is, in the light of what has been discovered vertically through tradition with its normative character about appropriate human action. Only in this light can moral consciousness as the work of intellect (*nous*), rather than of sensation, go about its job of choosing the right means.

Therefore, to proceed simply in reaction to concrete injustices, rather than in the light of one's tradition, is ultimately destructive. It inverts the order just mentioned and results in manipulation of our hopes for the good. Destructive or repressive structures would lead us to the use of correspondingly evil means, suited only to producing evil results. The true response to evil can be worked out only in terms of the good as the highest discovery by a people, passed on in tradition and applied by it in each time and place.

Where there are multiple traditions this must be not a reason for abandoning these humanizing dimensions and proceeding in a lesser manner, but of searching for the ways in which they can be related in a yet more rich and adequate realization of human life.

The importance of application implies a central role for the virtue of prudence (*phronesis*) or thoughtful reflection which enables one to discover the appropriate means for the circumstances. This must include, also, the virtue of sagacity (*sunesis*), that is, of understanding or concern for the other. For what is required as a guide for the agent is not only the technical knowledge of an abstract ideal, but knowledge that takes account of the agent in relation to other persons. One can assess the situation adequately only inasmuch as one, in a sense, undergoes the situation with the affected parties, living and suffering with them. Aristotle rightly describes as "terrible" the one who is capable of manipulating the situation, but is without orientation towards moral ends and without concern for the good of others in their concrete situations.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-286.

In sum, application is not a subsequent or accidental part of understanding, added on after perfect understanding has been achieved; rather it co-determines this understanding from the beginning. Moral consciousness must seek to understand the good, not as an ideal to be known and then applied, but rather through discerning the good for concrete peoples in their relations with others.

Cua finds similar notions in the distinctions of Chu Hsi in the neo-Confucian tradition regarding the diachronic sense of *tao* as residing between the substantial (*t'i*) and the operational (*yung*), the stable basic or latent schemata and its operational sense in changing circumstances (*fei*). Hsün Tzu distinguishes the constant (*ch'ang*) and the changing (*p'ien*), and Mencius the constant rule (*ching*) and the sliding scale (*ch'üuan*). Use of the latter as an exercise of moral discretion based on *li* is essential for moral life due to the imperfections of our knowledge and the urgent complexity of life. In these circumstances, to hold to a static mean would undermine the realization of the holistic goal of the *tao*.

Creativity in the application of the tradition in the concrete circumstances of life thus becomes essential. In this context Cua cites J. Pelican's deft aphorism: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."³²

Metaphysical and Religious Roots of Cultural Traditions

The notion of application can help in sorting out the human dilemma between an absolutism insensitive to persons in their concrete circumstances and a relativism which leaves the person subject to expediency in public and private life. Indeed, the very statement of the dilemma reflects the deleterious aspect of the Platonic view of ideas. He was right to ground changing and historical being in the unchanging and eternal. This had been Parmenides's first insight in metaphysics and has been richly developed in relation to human action through the medievals' notion of an eternal law in the divine mind.

But it seems inappropriate to speak directly in these terms regarding human life, for in all things individual human persons and humankind as a whole are subject to time, growth and development. As we become increasingly conscious of this, the personal character even of our abstract ideals becomes manifest and their adapted application in time can be seen, not as their rejection, but as their perfection. In this, justice loses none of its force as an absolute requirement of human action. Rather, the concrete modes of its application in particular circumstances add to what might have been articulated in merely abstract and universal terms. A hermeneutic approach directs attention precisely to these unfoldings of the meaning of abstract principles through time. This is not an abandonment of absolutes, but a recognition of the human condition and of the way in which this continually and, in endlessly marvelous manners, unfolds the ultimate richness of the source and goal, and hence the principles, of social life.

For Confucius, the aesthetic vision is integrated in drama, of which dance is one moment. In the actual performance of *li* (ritual or liturgy), there is a combination of poetry, liturgical action and music. Confucius saw that in the poem our spirit can rise and achieve complete transcendence in the ecstasy of the spirit. This gives access in aesthetic terms to a source, not only of inspiration, but of vision that both draws one to aspire to greater perfection and opens the way for creative thought regarding ways in which this can be achieved.

Some suggest, however, that Confucius may have looked upon aesthetics more as a matter of appreciation and conservation, rather than as original, creative and free expression. This suggests

³² Jaroslav Pelican, *Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 65.

that, in the works of Confucius, there are resources important for developing a modern vision which were unmined by Confucius himself and his schools.

If so what should be the attitude of a philosopher in our day to this mode of aesthetics? If it be itself appreciative and conservative, is one who interprets it subject to the same approach and limited to the same content, or can interpretation legitimately open up new meaning in old texts? In other words, must ancient texts be read only with an ancient outlook? Indeed, is it even possible today to have an authentically ancient outlook—to see with eyes long closed in death—or does the attempt to do so require so much make-believe as to be in effect impossible? Even if one were to succeed in reconstituting the past, would one be faithful to the text which was written as a vital expression of the process of life, or would one instead be rendering lifeless a living text³³ (not unlike the biologist who makes a slide of once living tissue)?

It would seem, therefore, that our goal should be not simply to reiterate ancient times in reading ancient texts, but to recognize that we come to them from new times, with new horizons and new questions. We should allow them to speak anew to us; in so doing, the texts and philosophies are living rather than dead—and, therefore, more true. Texts read in this sense are part of a living tradition in which is situated our struggle to face the problems of life and build a future worthy of those who follow.

Some would fear that to give such importance to the horizon of the reader of a text might constitute a relativism and lose the permanent significance of the insights of the author. But this would seem to reflect a material and mechanical model ruled by successive discrete moments of time in which universality is a function only of abstraction. This leaves what is universally applicable as relatively vacuous and reduces one to pragmatism as one's only response to concrete and changing circumstances.

Here, the real issue regards one's metaphysics: what is the nature of being, what does it mean to be? If the answer, as the Confucian sense of community would be the first to suggest, is not that reality is reductively matter trapped in time but at least the human spirit living through time, then to look for meaning in terms of the reaches of the spirit across time is not to lose, but to find meaning. This is the sense of being emerging through the consciousness of Heidegger's person as *dasein*. Being is not merely what was, but what blossoms ever fresh in the human heart. In the same way, philosophy in reading ancient texts is not archeology but, like every human act, a creative unfolding of being in time. This creative freedom is the essential characteristic of the person.³⁴

Moreover, it is precisely as this is seen in the context of an understanding of being as infinite and transcending that we are opened beyond ourselves and even beyond the present state of our society and our culture.

Our mind and heart are directed toward an inner transcendence, Being itself which is the source from which the *dasein* emerges into time. This was the dynamic of the investigations of Heidegger as he moved from his earlier period of *Being in Time* to the so-called later Heidegger which concentrated rather on Being itself, the infinite source of all beings. As the source precisely of our conscious intentional life this is Spirit marked not only by conscious self-awareness but celebrating its own perfection in and as love. Shankara at the heart of the Hindu religious tradition would express this by his advaitan (or non-dualist) metaphysics of the absolute as existence,

³³ B. Tatar, *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of the Author: H.-G. Gadamer vs E.D. Hirsch* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998).

³⁴ Musa Dibadj, *The Authenticity of the Text in Hermeneu-tics* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998).

consciousness and bliss. The Christian sense of creation would express it as the life of the Spirit not only as creative source and ultimate goal (alpha and omega), but as lived by persons and peoples, individually and socially in the exercise of responsible freedom through time. We are moved thereby to pursue the realization in time of a social life reflecting the Unity, Truth and Goodness of the divine in which being is founded and life consists. In this lies stimulation for progress and hope for success.

What, then, should we conclude regarding the root of the actuality, the good or the perfection of reality which mankind has discovered, in which we have been raised, which gives us dominion over our actions, and which enables us to be free and creative? Does it come from God or from man, from eternity or from history? Chakravarti Rajagopalachari of Madras answered:

Whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation's faith and ideas are produced by its literature is a question which one is free to answer as one likes....Did clouds rise from the sea or was the sea filled by waters from the sky? All such inquiries take us to the feet of God transcending speech and thought.³⁵

Religious Pluralism and the Progress of Cultures and Civilizations

We encounter here an issue especially pregnant for progress in our time of globalization and interchange between cultures and civilizations. That is, if the diachronic character of tradition as prospective and progressive is founded in the Transcendent articulated explicitly in their religions how can the religious traditions themselves find a fidelity that is progressive.

Thus far, we have treated the character and importance of a cultural tradition as bearing the long experience of persons interacting with their world, with other persons and with God. It is made up not only of chronological facts, but of insights regarding human perfection and its foundations which have been forged by human efforts in concrete circumstances, e.g., the Greek notion of democracy and the Enlightenment notions of equality and freedom. By their internal value, these stand as normative of the aspirations of a people.

Secondly, we have seen the implication of historicity for novelty within the context of tradition, namely, that the continually unfolding circumstances of historical development not merely extend or repeat what went before, but constitute an emerging manifestation of the divine roots of being that is articulated by the art, religion, literature and political structures of a cultural tradition.

It remains for us now to treat the third element in this study of tradition, namely, to see how the hermeneutic method can contribute to enabling the religious roots of cultures to be unfolded through mutually questioning in order to contribute to the progress of humankind. That is, we have seen how synchronically the infinite and eternal perfection of God be participated in patterns that constitute cultures lived in the many social groupings. We have seen also how diachronically these cultural traditions are more prospective than retrospective when unfolded in ways that are relevant, indicative and directive of our life in present circumstances? Thirdly we have seen how the potentiality for this rich adaptive character of a cultural tradition lies in their transcendent and religious roots. Now we must see how the two of these can combine so that the religious foundations of the many peoples interact in a way that enables each and all to proceed jointly in facing the future?

³⁵ *Ramayana* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), p. 312.

The Hermeneutics of a Cultural Tradition: Unfolding by Questioning

If we take time and culture seriously, then we must recognize that we are situated in a particular culture and at a particular time. All that can be seen from this vantage point constitutes one's horizon. This would be lifeless and dead, determined rather than free, if our vantage point were to be fixed by its circumstances and closed. Hence we need to meet other minds and hearts not simply to add information incrementally, but to be challenged in our basic assumptions and enabled thereby to delve more deeply into our tradition and draw forth deeper and more pervasive truth. How can this be done?

First of all, it is necessary to note that only a unity of meaning, that is, an identity, is intelligible.³⁶ Just as it is not possible to understand a number five if we include only four units rather than five, no act of understanding is possible unless it is directed to an identity or whole of meaning. This brings us to the classic issue of the hermeneutic circle in which knowledge of the whole depends upon knowledge of the parts, and vice versa. How can this work for, rather than against, the development of social life?

The experience of reading a text might be suggestive. As we read we construe the meaning of a sentence before grasping all its individual parts. What we construe is dependent upon our expectation of the meaning of the sentence, which we derived from its first words, the prior context, or more likely, from a combination of the two. In turn, our expectation or construal of the meaning of the text is adjusted according to the requirements of its various parts as we proceed to read through the parts of the sentence, the paragraph, etc., continually reassessing the whole in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole. This basically circular movement continues until all appears to fit and to be clear.

Similarly, in regard to our cultural tradition and values, we develop a prior conception of their content. This anticipation of meaning is not simply of the tradition as an objective past or fixed content to which we come; it is rather what we produce as we participate in the evolution of the tradition and, thereby, further determine ourselves. This is a creative stance reflecting the content, not only of the past, but of the time in which I stand and of the life project in which I am engaged. It is a creative unveiling of the content of the tradition as this comes progressively and historically into the present and through the present, passes into the future.

In this light, time is not a barrier, separation or abyss, but rather a bridge and opportunity for the process of understanding, a fertile ground filled with experience, custom and tradition. The importance of the historical distance it provides is not that it enables the subjective reality of persons to disappear so that the objectivity of the situation can emerge. On the contrary, it makes possible a more complete meaning of the tradition, less by removing falsifying factors than by opening new sources of self-understanding which reveal in the tradition unsuspected implications and even new dimensions of meaning.³⁷

Of course, not all our acts of understanding about the meaning of a text from another culture, a dimension of a shared tradition, a set of goals or a plan for future action are sufficient. Hence, it becomes particularly important that they not be adhered to fixedly, but be put at risk in dialogue with others.

In this, the basic elements remain the substances or persons which Aristotle described in terms of autonomy and, by implication, of identity. Hermeneutics would expand this to reflect as well the historical and hermeneutic situation of each person in the dialogue, that is, their horizon or

³⁶ Gadamer, p. 262.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-64.

particular possibility for understanding. As an horizon is all that can be seen from one's vantage point(s), in dialogue with others it is necessary to be aware of our horizon, as well as that of others. For it is precisely when our initial projection of their meaning will not bear up under the progressive dialogue that we are required to make needed adjustments in our projection of their meaning.

This enables one to adjust one's prior understanding not only of the horizon of the other with whom one is in dialogue, but especially of one's own horizon. Hence, one need not fear being trapped; horizons are vantage points of a mind which in principle is open and mobile, capable of being aware of its own limits and of transcending them through acknowledging the horizons of others. The flow of history implies that we are not bound by our horizons, but move in and out of them. It is in making us aware of our horizons that hermeneutic consciousness accomplishes our liberation.³⁸

For this, we must maintain a questioning attitude. Rather than simply following through with our previous ideas until a change is forced upon us, we must remain sensitive to new meanings in true openness. This is neither neutrality as regards the meaning of the tradition, nor an extinction of passionate concerns regarding action towards the future. Rather, being aware of our own biases or prejudices and adjusting them in dialogue with others implies rejecting what impedes our understanding of others, of their religious or cultural tradition, or even of our own. Our attitude in approaching dialogue must be one of willingness continually to revise our initial projection or expectation of meaning.

The way out of the hermeneutic circle is then not by ignoring or denying our horizons and initial judgments or prejudices, but by recognizing them as inevitable and making them work for us in drawing out, not the meaning of the text for its author,³⁹ but its application for the present. Through this process of application we serve as midwife for culture as historical or tradition, enabling it to give birth to the future.⁴⁰

The logical structure of this process is the exchange of question and answer. A question is required in order to determine just what issue we are engaging—whether it is this issue or that—so that we might give direction to our attention. Without this, no meaningful answer can be given or received. As a question, however, it requires that the answer not be settled or determined. In sum, progress or discovery requires an openness which is not simple indeterminacy, but a question which gives specific direction to our attention and enables us to consider significant evidence.

If discovery depends upon the question, then the art of discovery is the art of questioning. Consequently, in working in conjunction with others, the heart of the democratic process is not to suppress, but to reinforce and unfold the questions of others. To the degree that these probabilities are built up and intensified they can serve as a searchlight. This is the opposite of both opinion which tends to suppress questions, and of arguing which searches out the weakness in the other's positions. Instead, in democracy, understood as conversation and dialogue directed toward governance, one enters upon a mutual search to maximize the possibilities of the question, even by speaking at cross purposes, for it is by mutually eliminating errors and working out a common meaning that we discover truth.⁴¹

In this there appears the importance of interreligious dialogue. Rather than being merely an external act of mutual acknowledgement, in view of what has been said above it is a true requisite

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 235-242, 267-271.

³⁹ B. Tatar.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, pp. 235-332.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-332.

if our cultures are to be open and developing. As religion is the basic conscious recognition of the transcendent horizon which invites progress, interchange between religions is important in order that this relation of cultures to their infinite source and goal remain open and be renewed. Indeed this would seem to be the more important the more education especially in its modern rationalist context advances, for the more a tradition is rationalized, philosophized or theologized the more it is made stable and fixed, and the greater the danger of its becoming closed in upon itself and becoming inadequate for its task of reflecting the infinite and transcendent.

Religious Pluralism: Dialogue and Progress

Further, in the present context of globalization such interchange provides an alternative to the much feared conflict of civilizations projected by S. Huntington. It should not be presupposed that a text, such as a tradition, law or constitution, will hold the answer to but one question or can have but one horizon which must be identified by the reader. On the contrary, the full horizon of the author(s) is never available to the reader, nor can it be expected that there is but one question to which a tradition or document holds an answer. The sense of texts reaches beyond what their authors intended because the dynamic character of being as it emerges in time means that the horizon is never fixed but is continually opening. This constitutes the effective historical element in understanding a text or a tradition. At each step new dimensions of its potentialities open to understanding, so that the meaning of a text or tradition lives with the consciousness and hence the horizons—not of its author—but of people in dialogue with others through time and history.

This is the essence both of democracy within a nation and of religious interchange in a time of globalization. They are processes of broadening horizons, through fusion with the horizons of others in dialogue, that makes it possible for each to receive from one's religious and cultural tradition answers which are ever new.⁴²

In this, one's personal attitudes and interests remain important. If our interest in developing new horizons is simply the promotion of our own understanding then we could be interested solely in achieving knowledge, and thereby in domination over others. This would lock one into an absoluteness of one's prejudices; being fixed or closed in the past, they would disallow new life in the present. In this manner, powerful new insights can become with time deadening pre-judgments which suppress freedom. This would seem to be the supposition of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. He sees civilizations as grounded in religions and develops at length the reason for the expectation that these will become ever more influential as time progresses. Unfortunately, he sees all identities as essentially self-centered and conflictual.

In contrast, an attitude of authentic religion as well as of democratic openness appreciates the nature of one's own finiteness. This has two dimensions. One is that of time, by which one is able at once to respect the past and to be open to discerning the future. Such openness is a matter of recognizing the historical nature of man and his basis in an Absolute that transcends and grounds time. The other dimension is horizontal, across civilizations, cultures and their religious foundations. This too is based in the absolute which no culture can adequately reflect. This enables us to escape fascination with externals and delve more deeply into the deeper reaches of religious awareness by learning from other's experiences.⁴³

This suggests that openness does not consist in surveying others objectively, obeying them in a slavish and unquestioning manner or simply juxtaposing their ideas and traditions to our own.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 336-340.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-324.

Rather, it is directed primarily to ourselves, for our ability to listen to others is correlatively our ability to assimilate the implications of their answers for delving more deeply into the meaning of our own religious and cultural traditions and drawing out new and ever more rich insights. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that our heritage has something new to say to us.

The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is, then, not methodological sureness, readiness for new compromises or new techniques of social organization, for these are subject to social critique and manipulation on the horizontal level. Instead, it is readiness to draw out in democratic dialogue new meaning from a common cultural and religious tradition.⁴⁴ Seen in these terms our heritage of culture and values is not closed or dead, but dialogically remains ever new by becoming even more inclusive and more rich.

This takes us beyond the rigid rationalism of the later Enlightenment and the too fluid moral sentiment of the earlier Enlightenment. It enables us to respond to the emerging sense of the identity of peoples and to protect and promote this in a religiously pluralistic society marked by solidarity and subsidiarity.

In this as a social work one guiding principle is to maintain a harmony or social equilibrium through time. In addition the notion of application allows the religious tradition to provide resources and guidance in facing new issues and in developing new responses to changing times. With rising numbers and expectations, economic development becomes an urgent need. But its very success could turn into defeat if this is not oriented and applied with a pervasive but subtle and adaptive human governance sensitive to all forms of human comity. This is required in order to orient all suavely to the social good in which the goal of civil society consists.

This will require new advances in science and economics, in education and psychology, in the humanities and social services, that is, across the full range of social life. All these dimensions, and many more, must spring to new life, but in a basic convergence and harmony. The values and virtues emerging from a religiously grounded tradition applied in freedom can provide needed guidance along new and ever evolving paths. In this way cooperation between religions can be a key to social progress.

Cooperation among Cultures and Civilizations as Religious Thanksgiving

Thus far we have articulated cultural traditions as emerging from human experience and creativity in the exercise of human life, both personally and in the social groups. We have seen also how the force of this reflects its foundation in the absolute unity, truth and love of the divine in time.

That sense of gift may make it possible to extend the notions of duty and harmony beyond concern for the well-being of myself and those with whom I share, and whose well-being is then in a sense my own. The good is not only what contributes to my perfection, for I am not the center of meaning. Rather, being, understood as received, is essentially out-going.

This has two important implications for our topic. Where the Greek focus upon their own heritage had led to depreciating others as barbarians, the sense of oneself and of one's culture as radically given or gifted provides a basic corrective. Knowing and valuing oneself and one's culture as gifts implies more than merely reciprocating what the other does for me. It means, first, that others and their culture are to be respected simply because they too have been given or gifted by the one transcendent source. This is an essential step which Gandhi, in calling outcasts by the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325.

name “harijans” or “children of God,” urged us to take beyond the sense of pride or isolation in which we would see others in pejorative terms.

But mere respect is not enough. The fact that I and another—my people or culture and another—originate from, share in and proclaim the same “total absolute,” especially as this creates not out of need but out of love, implies that the relation between cultures as integrating modes of human life is in principle one of complementarity and out reach. Hence, interchange as the effort to live this complementarity is far from being hopeless. In the pressing needs of our times only an intensification of bonds of cooperation between peoples can make available the needed immense stores of human experience and creativity. The positive virtue of love is our real basis for hope.

A second principle of interchange is to be found in the participated—the radically given or gifted—character of one’s being. One does not first exist and then receive, but one’s very existence is a received existence or gift. To attempt to give back this gift, as in an exchange of presents, would be at once hopelessly too much and too little. On the one hand, to attempt to return in strict equivalence would be too much, for it is our very self that we have received as gift. On the other hand, to think merely in terms of reciprocity would be to fall essentially short of one’s nature as one that is given, for to make a merely equivalent return would be to remain centered upon oneself where one would cleverly trap, and then entomb, the creative power of being.

Rather, looking back one can see the futility of giving back, and in this find the fundamental importance of passing on the gift in the spirit in which it has been received. One’s nature as given calls for a creative generosity which reflects that of its source. Truly appropriate generosity lies in continuing the giving of which I have received. This means shaping one’s cultural tradition creatively in response to the present needs not only of ourselves but of others, and cooperating with the creative gifts at the heart of other cultures so that they may be fully lived and shared.

This religious vision requires a vast expansion or breaking out of oneself as the only center of one’s concern. It means becoming appreciative and effectively concerned with the good of others and of other groups, with the promotion and vital growth of the next generation and those to follow. This is the motivation to engage with others in the creation of an harmonious culturally pluralistic world of civilizations and religions and to contribute thereby to the good of the whole. Indeed it means advancing Iqbal’s insight regarding religious thought a step further to a total harmony of man and nature which reflects what he terms “the Total Absolute” as the condition of possibility of all.

Conclusion: The Religious Reconstruction of Life in Our Times

The implications of such generosity are broad and at times surprisingly personal. First, true openness to others cannot be based upon a depreciation of oneself or of one’s own culture. Without appreciating one’s worth there would be nothing to share and no way to help, nor even the possibility of enjoying the good of the other. Further, cultural interchange enables one to see that elements of one’s life, which in isolation may have seemed to be merely local customs and purely repetitive in character, more fundamentally are modes in which one lives basic and essential human values. In meeting others and other cultures, one discovers the deeper meaning in one’s own everyday life.

One does more than discover, however. One recognizes that in these transcendental values of life—truth and freedom, love and beauty—one participates in the dynamism of one’s origin and hence must share these values in turn. More exactly, one comes to realize that real reception of these transcendental gifts lies in sharing them in loving concern in order that others may realize

them as well. This means that passing on one's cultural and religious heritage is not done by replicating it in others, but by promoting the response of others to God and thus what others and subsequent generations would freely become.

Finally, that other cultures are quintessentially products of self-cultivation by other spirits as free and creative images of their divine source implies the need to open one's horizons beyond one's own self-concerns to the ambit of the freedom of others. This involves promoting the development of other free and creative centers and cultures which, precisely as such, are not in one's own possession or under one's own control. One lives then no longer in terms merely of oneself or of things that one can make or manage, but in terms of an interchange between free persons and people's of different cultures. Personal responsibility is no longer merely individual decision making or for individual good. Effectively realized, the resulting interaction and mutual fecundation reaches out beyond oneself and one's own culture to reflect ever more perfectly the glory of the one source and goal of all.⁴⁵

This calls for a truly shared effort in which all respond fully, not only to majority or even common needs, but to the particular needs of each. This broad sense of tolerance and loving outreach even in the midst of tensions is the fruit of Iqbal's religious attitude of appreciation as mediated through a phenomenology of gift. It has been described by Pope John Paul II as a state in which violence cedes to peaceful transformation, and conflict to pardon and reconciliation; where power is made reasonable by persuasion, and justice finally is implemented through love.⁴⁶

There is an image for this in the Book of Isaiah. It is that of the many nations, each proceeding along its own way marked out by its own culture, and all converging toward the Holy Mountain in which God will become All in all.⁴⁷ Today we are conscious of and effected by this process, not only in the lives of our own people and civilization but in others as well. Here we have tried to see how this can be a process of enrichment which does not destroy but evolves our own identity and that that process in turn depends upon and contributes to others. In this the lynchpin is transcendence: the ability to open by interchange with others ultimately to the religious resources of our culture and by going more deeply into our own identity to find this relation to others. This is the hermeneutic interchange of whole and part in which we are the actors, the life of humankind is the text, and religion is the foundation.

⁴⁵ Schmitz, pp. 84-86.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, "Address at Puebla," *Origins*, VIII (n.34, 1979), I, 4 and II, 41-46.

⁴⁷ *Isaiah* 27:13.