

# Approaches to Metaphysics

Edited by  
WILLIAM SWEET

## APPROACHES TO METAPHYSICS

# STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

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Volume 26

*The titles published in this series are listed at the end of this volume.*

# APPROACHES TO METAPHYSICS

*Edited by*

WILLIAM SWEET

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# INTRODUCTION: TAKING METAPHYSICS SERIOUSLY

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To speak of ‘the nature of metaphysics’ would be considered by many philosophers today as begging at least two questions. First, it supposes that metaphysics is possible and, second, that it *has* a nature or a defining method.

This second charge is, perhaps, simply a reflection of the widely-held view that it is inappropriate to think of *anything* as having a nature. There may be metaphysical questions, one might say – questions that, for historical or genetic reasons, or based on ‘family resemblance,’ or out of mere convenience for categorization, people have chosen to call ‘metaphysical’ – but there is no ‘nature’ to metaphysics.

The first charge is more far reaching. For much of the modern period, many philosophers have argued that the subject matter of metaphysics lies beyond the capacities of human knowledge, that there is no way of establishing the truth of metaphysical claims, that propositions in metaphysics are not ‘cognitive’ (not being even in principle refutable) and, arguably, meaningless, and so on. Nor (some who make this charge continue) is there any good reason to believe that there is *a* reality about which a

systematic investigation can be undertaken, or to believe that questions posed and answers given, say, 2500 years ago, in another culture and context, can be adequately understood today, and therefore bear in any way upon the questions *we* raise.

The essays in this volume reflect some of the principal approaches philosophers have taken to metaphysics. While the immediate concerns vary, the essays also address, albethey in different ways, the preceding charges and related issues. Many of the authors focus on the work of leading figures in the history of metaphysics or on the ‘doctrines’ of some of the central ‘schools.’ In doing so, they not only raise and develop some of these criticisms, but clarify what metaphysics attempts to do, and what is involved in metaphysical inquiry. Nevertheless, to appreciate how far these authors can respond to challenges to metaphysics requires knowing something about the environment in which this topic has been, and is, discussed.

## I

Is it possible to describe or define ‘metaphysics’ in a univocal and unambiguous way? Philosophers have written on (what we would generally call) metaphysics or on metaphysical topics for about as long as there has been ‘philosophy.’ Yet if we look at this history, we find a diversity of definitions of metaphysics and a diversity of metaphysical traditions and methods.

The term ‘metaphysics’ is one that is associated first with Aristotle, though metaphysics and the philosophical discussion of metaphysical questions are of course to be found in the pre-Socratics and Plato. In this classical sense, metaphysics deals with “being.” Aristotle describes metaphysics (what he himself calls ‘first philosophy’ (*prôtê philosophia*), or ‘theology’ (*theologikê*)) as a science of ‘being as being’ (*peri tou ontos ê on – Metaphysics VI, 1026 a, 31*), and as distinct from those sciences which study only a part of being. Metaphysics seeks the highest or most ultimate causes, principles that are eternal and unchanging. And Aristotle is followed in this description of metaphysics – that it “is the science of the first principles” (see *Metaphysics IV, 1003 a, 26*) – throughout the classical and mediaeval periods by figures like Boethius, St Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, and Francisco Suarez.

Metaphysics, on this account, does not ignore concrete reality. What it means to study ‘being as such’ involves looking at being in its specific instances or determinations. Still, for Suarez, for example, metaphysics is defined as the science which “makes abstract palpable or material things [...]

and it contemplates on the one hand things that are divine and separated from matter, and on the other common reason of being, which can [both] exist without matter.”<sup>1</sup>

With the modern era, however, the nature and role of metaphysics in philosophy seems to undergo a shift. For Descartes, metaphysics was “first philosophy” – by which he meant “all those first things in general which are to be discovered by philosophizing.”<sup>2</sup> But before we can philosophize, we must understand what it is to know, and how far knowledge can extend. Locke and Hume, in their distinctive ways, were insistent on this so that, by the time of Kant, metaphysics came to be regarded as “a completely isolated speculative science of reason”<sup>3</sup> that “has as the proper object of its enquiries three ideas only: God, freedom, and immortality.”<sup>4</sup> And on later idealist views, metaphysics loses the fundamental place that many classical philosophers ascribed to it. For Hegel, logic and metaphysics are identified; logic “coincides with metaphysics, the science of things grasped in *thought*”<sup>5</sup> and “constitutes proper metaphysics or pure speculative philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> For F.H. Bradley, metaphysics is “an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance, or [...] the effort to comprehend the universe, not simply piecemeal or by fragments, but somehow as a whole” – but Bradley adds: “I do not suppose [...] that satisfactory knowledge is possible.”<sup>7</sup> By the end of the 19th century, as Baldwin’s *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* puts it, metaphysics is the “systematic interpretation of experience and the implication of all its implicates” that “must obviously coincide to a large extent with epistemology [...] or with logic in the Hegelian sense.”<sup>8</sup>

During the last 100 years, the understanding of metaphysics has become rather fragmented. For twentieth century authors who adopt a *realistic* metaphysics, like Jacques Maritain, metaphysics remains a part of speculative philosophy that deals with ‘being qua being’ or, more precisely, with three things: ‘criticism’ (or the metaphysics of truth dealing with intelligible being), ontology (that is, being as such), and natural theology (the existence and nature of God).<sup>9</sup> But few philosophers – in the Anglo-American world at least – would explicitly agree with such a description. On the other side of *La Manche* – the ‘English Channel’ – Maritain’s contemporary, G.E. Moore, for example, defined the term ‘metaphysical’ “as having reference primarily to any object of knowledge which is not a part of Nature – does not exist in time, as an object of perception” – and which “has reference to a *supposed* ‘supersensible reality’.”<sup>10</sup> (Emphasis added)

By the second half of the 20th century, many philosophers had abandoned metaphysics altogether – for reasons to be explained momentarily – and even those who remained committed to the study of metaphysics described it with varying degrees of comprehensiveness. P.F. Strawson – drawing on Kant –

pursued ‘descriptive metaphysics’ (as distinct from ‘constructive’ or ‘speculative’ metaphysics), which enquires into “our most general patterns of thought, and the nature of things themselves only indirectly, if at all.”<sup>11</sup> Recently, Peter Van Inwagen has defined it simply as that which “attempts to tell the ultimate truth about the world,”<sup>12</sup> and so it appears to include almost *all* of philosophy. John Paul II’s encyclical on truth, *Fides et ratio*, sees metaphysics as a fundamental philosophical enterprise that, in its search for truth, is “capable [...] of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational.”<sup>13</sup> Unlike philosophers of the first millennium and much of the second, at the beginning of the third millennium there is no obvious consensus on what metaphysics is.

The diversity of conceptions or definitions of metaphysics, evident in philosophy in Europe and the Americas, is easily matched when we consider philosophies and cultures in Asia and Africa. There we find lengthy and impressive traditions of speculation, such as the realist Nyaya, the atomist Vaisesika, and the idealist Advaita Vedanta in India,<sup>14</sup> the mysticism of Taoism and (to an extent) of Chuang Tzu in China, the classical Arabic philosophy of Avicenna and Averroes, and neo-Confucian and Buddhist philosophy (not to forget movements like the 20th century, Kyoto School<sup>15</sup>) in Japan, and so on.

The list of metaphysical systems, traditions, and methods is obviously a very long one, and the range of metaphysical questions and concepts is similarly vast. The problem of change has been a fundamental question of metaphysics since the pre-Socratics and Plato, but it is far from the only metaphysical issue; the nature of ‘being’ and of existence; the nature of substance; causation, purpose, and design; freedom; time; the transcendent (God) and the transcendentals (the ‘good,’ ‘true,’ and ‘beautiful’) and their opposites (evil and suffering; falsehood; the ugly); particulars and universals; the nature of consciousness and of reality – all are themes that can be found in the work of those who profess to do metaphysics.

It is, then, no surprise – given that metaphysics seems to be properly understood in a wide range of ways – that in today’s philosophical environment many have concluded that it makes little sense to speak of ‘the’ ‘nature’ of metaphysics. Or, to put matters in a slightly different way, they hold that there is no common theme that describes what those who *claim* to be doing metaphysics *are* doing.

But perhaps the principal reason why metaphysics has been challenged by so many in modern and contemporary philosophy is not because there are different ways of describing or defining what it involves, but because there are doubts whether there can be such a subject matter of enquiry. Is metaphysics – at least as Plato, Aristotle, and St Thomas understand the term

– genuinely possible? This suspicion or rejection of metaphysics – at least, of metaphysics as a ‘first philosophy’ – seems to be the result of attacks on it on a number of fronts.

In most studies of the history of philosophy, one of the first phases of this attack is considered to be ‘the turn to the subject,’ and the corresponding emphasis on epistemology over metaphysics, typical of figures of the ‘modern’ period, such as Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant. Particularly since the time of Locke, metaphysics has been challenged as extending beyond the capacities of human reason, or as jargon-ridden – as sophistry and illusion – and therefore as something to be viewed with deep suspicion, if not discarded altogether.

Locke maintains, for example, that “in books of metaphysics” we find “an infinite number of propositions” that nevertheless tell us nothing “of the nature or reality of things existing without us” – so that when metaphysical propositions are not tautological, they are merely “trifling.”<sup>16</sup> Again, according to Hume, metaphysics is “not properly a science” but arises “either from the fruitless efforts of human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding, or from the craft of popular superstitions, which, being unable to defend themselves on fair ground, raise these intangling brambles to cover and protect their weakness.”<sup>17</sup>

This emphasis on epistemology and concern with the character and limits of human knowledge, led to the Kantian suspicion of *any* philosophy that has as its object something transcendent and, thereby, to the *rejection* of metaphysics. For Kant, because metaphysics proposes to deal with what is beyond experience, it is doomed to failure. In the first place, à la Hume, we simply cannot know anything that lies beyond the realm of possible sense experience and, besides, our knowledge is so structured and modified by the *a priori* conditions of the understanding that there is no good reason to believe that we have any basis to infer anything beyond our sense experience. The views proposed by Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and others, then, challenge traditional metaphysics to such a degree that they might better be seen, not as distinctive metaphysical theories, but as *marginalizing* metaphysics altogether.

This turn to epistemology also led to questions about the relation of logic and metaphysics, and whether there is any significant difference between them. For Hegel, since any study is an object of thought, questions about the whole (of the nature of) reality become questions about thought, and thus fall into what Hegel calls ‘logic.’ And as science became increasingly regarded as providing the appropriate method of knowledge, metaphysics seemed to disappear. Thus, for students of the Vienna school, or A.J. Ayer, or Karl Popper, metaphysics is subject to the charge of not being ‘scientific’ – or not



being knowledge of any kind – because it is not verifiable or falsifiable. And even though these criticisms later came to be seen as question begging or self-refuting, the damage to metaphysics had already been done.

Later phases of the challenge to metaphysics and to its character as ‘first philosophy’ did not deal so much with ‘knowing’ but with the character of what it is that metaphysics claimed to know. Thus, the primacy, or even possibility, of metaphysics came under criticism as a result of the claim that all human knowledge was socially constructed, or context-bound, or that there were no natures – no essence or ultimate reality – to be known. What a thing is, is something that cannot be separated from its historical context and place within the historical period in which it is found. (This ‘historicism’ many see to be a challenge posed particularly by post-Hegelian philosophers.) But it is not just the turn to ‘historicism’ that gave additional weight to the attack on metaphysics, it was also the insistence by some of the importance of language in relation to thought – and, specifically, the claim that thought requires language to be even possible. On this view, if something cannot be coherently expressed or articulated in language, it makes no sense to affirm or deny anything about it. Thus, in the 20th century, the ‘linguistic turn’ called into question any attempt to talk of metaphysical truth – particularly whether metaphysical propositions could be true.

These, of course, have not been the only attacks on the possibility of metaphysics; there have been other challenges as well, though largely taking the form of suspicion, rather than an outright critique.

There has been, in the first place, a gradual suspicion about what exactly metaphysics does or is supposed to do. Metaphysics has classically been understood to have an explanatory function – to explain or account for ‘what is.’ But for many today, a speculative philosophy or metaphysics is unnecessary because of the way in which we think about reality. These philosophers challenge the claim that ‘everything,’ or the totality of things, needs explanation or accounting for – that ‘everything’ needs an explanation over and above the explanation of all particular things. Pragmatism, for example, would allow that we can account for most phenomena, but rejects a *prima facie* requirement for an explanation of *all* that there is. Or again, existentialism is concerned with ‘the human predicament,’ but denies both that there are general ‘answers’ and that there are realities ‘outside’ the world that could ever provide such answers. And other views – various strains of naturalism and positivism, including Marxism – would also deny that there might be some supersensible reality in terms of which ‘ultimate explanations’ might be given. Besides, if existence isn’t a predicate or a property or a quality, there is simply no need for *explaining* existence. There is, in short, no

point in searching for a general explanation or an explanatory ground of what is, and thus no need for any field devoted to finding one.

Second, there is among some philosophers in the ‘western’ world an increasing mistrust of reason and rationality. The concern here is not merely one about the difficulty of determining the proper limits of reason, as in Locke, Hume, and Kant, but that we have no reason to claim that there is a cross-cultural standard of rationality or a single, universal model of reason; this concern is found particularly in ‘post-modern’ authors. Even if there could be a universal conception of reason, critics also charge that metaphysical categories are not neutral; they ignore important elements of human existence and reflect biases of culture and of gender. For example, some feminist scholars argue that the concepts of ‘mind’ and ‘body,’ and taking the former to be superior to the latter, skew conceptions of the ‘self’ and of the human in relation to the rest of reality. And metaphysics itself is alleged to depend on a ‘reason’ which professes to be neutral, but is not. ‘Reason’ as such has been, and is, a tool that, without warrant, marginalizes certain aspects of experience – and certain groups – and thus is hegemonic and oppressive. Metaphysicians (it is claimed) have tried to hide these assumptions and biases but, as scholars uncover them, they also expose a flaw in the very enterprise of traditional metaphysics. Metaphysics may yet be possible, but only if we reject – as Nietzsche argues – those metaphysical systems that hide behind their abstractions and are removed from life, and focus instead on issues arising out of the real problems of living beings.

Third, in some circles one finds a widespread suspicion of *any* systematic metaphysics. At one level, this suspicion is ‘political’; one of Karl Popper’s concerns about metaphysics from Plato to Hegel is that comprehensive metaphysical accounts have tended to bring with them comprehensive *political* systems that allegedly leave no or little room for human (political) freedom and autonomy.<sup>18</sup> But at a more general level, some have asked whether there is in fact any ‘system’ that a systematic metaphysics can be about. If there is no stable core of philosophical problems, if reality is in large part, or wholly, ‘socially constructed,’ and if all knowledge and categories of knowing are ultimately ‘historical,’ a systematic metaphysics would be not just beside the point but impossible. Our energies, then, ought to be expended in discovering, not the conditions for what is, nor even the conditions of knowledge, but the *various* ways in which people might be said to know and (as Richard Rorty would say) how they can be influenced to be more just.

Finally, even if there can be a metaphysics, what method or methods might one use? Today, a multitude of options are on offer. It is not simply a choice of ‘analytical’ or ‘continental,’ but Thomistic, ‘phenomenological,’ rationalist, idealist, ‘process thought,’ empiricist, ‘speculative philosophical,’

‘feminist,’<sup>19</sup> a variety of non-western approaches – and one might even add ‘sceptical.’ Of course, not every philosophical school has an explicit metaphysical method, for not every philosophy admits a place for metaphysics – though one might still say that all such schools make presuppositions concerning subject matter and method, and that these presuppositions *are* ‘metaphysical.’

In short, when it comes to what has traditionally gone under the rubric of ‘metaphysics,’ we find so much diversity in definition, in method, and particularly in object, that some have doubts that there can be any coherence or fruitfulness to the metaphysical enterprise whatsoever. The old saying that ‘metaphysics buries its undertakers’ may be true in more than one sense. So, in many quarters – even if not all – by the end of the 20th century, metaphysics had come to have a ‘bad odor.’ The turn to ‘post modern’ philosophy in the last two decades of that century has, for many, simply cemented a four-century long move away from systematic metaphysics.

Do all these considerations entail, then, that metaphysics is *not* possible and that there can be no nature of metaphysics? Perhaps not. After all, interest in metaphysics thrives in many places ‘out of the spotlight’; it is to be found in many parts of Europe and North America, in Indian and other Asian philosophies, and in general in those cultures and traditions where religion also continues to have a place. And the term ‘metaphysics’ itself is commonly used by a variety of new age religions to describe sets of quasi-spiritual practices and principles of varying degrees of superficiality and incoherence. Nevertheless, those professional philosophers in ‘the west’ who engage in metaphysics often do so mainly in the context of the history of philosophy, or in a rather piecemeal way – concentrating on problems such as personal identity, freedom of the will, realism and anti-realism, and so on, though without then bringing those conclusions into relation with other metaphysical issues. And while metaphysics has recently experienced something of a revival in Anglo-American philosophy – not just following the earlier work of Peter Strawson or D.M. Armstrong, but the more recent studies by Crispin Wright, Fred Dretske, John McDowell, Gilbert Harman, Stephen Stich, Timothy Williamson, Peter van Inwagen, Kevin Mulligan, Roy A. Sorensen, and others – it is still of a rather etiolated variety, and seems to be largely a generic description for the philosophy of mind.

It seems clear that metaphysics today does not have the position it had even a hundred years ago. What needs to be asked, however, is how conclusive the preceding challenges and suspicions are. As one follows the essays in this collection, one can see both the force and the limits of these criticisms.

## II

Given the environment in which metaphysics finds itself today, it is easy to see why some would be wary about talking about metaphysics, its nature, and its method. As we have seen, the turn to epistemology in the modern era has certainly provided a challenge to classical metaphysics – for it reasonably raises the issue of whether any theory about what is (i.e., any metaphysical theory) *can* be given without already making a number of epistemological assumptions. And clearly, metaphysics as a discipline or study that attempts to describe what is, cannot be altogether separated from questions concerning the conditions under which any discipline, study, or science is possible. Yet despite the various criticisms and reservations outlined above, there are those who insist that a case can be made for doing not only metaphysics but systematic metaphysics.

The first papers in this collection provide some substantive reflections on the nature of classical metaphysics in relation to ‘being,’ logic, science, and history – and address some of the challenges of those who would ‘reduce’ metaphysics to logic, or who would ‘naturalize’ it to a species of mathematical science, or would historicize it.

Fr. Lawrence Dewan’s, “Does Being Have a Nature?,” addresses the questions of the nature of metaphysics and how metaphysics can be prior to epistemology. Dewan focuses on our knowledge of ‘being’ – both the being of things in their own proper nature and in the mind. He begins by presenting St Thomas Aquinas’s views on the analogy of being, as elaborated in his early *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, and particularly on the claim that being as ‘first intelligible’ is related to the intellect. Then, following John Capreolus (1380?–1444), Dewan argues that our knowledge of being is analogical, and that being as ‘first known’ and as ‘the first concept of the intellect’ makes all intellection (and therefore all other investigation) possible. Thus, the field of metaphysics has a *per se* unity, and any knowledge of being – even though abstract – depends on some kind of foundation in reality. Such a view of metaphysics not only rejects the epistemological challenges of Locke, Hume, and Kant, but would entail, *contra* Hegel, that metaphysics is broader than logic.

The shift from a classical metaphysics to a Hegelian identification of logic and metaphysics is striking. Riccardo Pozzo [“Logic and Metaphysics in German Philosophy from Melanchthon to Hegel”] provides some background to this move by situating the work of Hegel within German thought from the time of the Renaissance. Pozzo outlines the relation of logic and metaphysics, by starting with Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) (who saw logic as the means by which there can be a conceptual comprehension of being, with the

result that metaphysics is not part of the philosophical sciences), and then showing how metaphysics ‘disappeared’ from German philosophy, and how it reappeared with Kant but finally disappeared again with Hegel.

Richard Feist [“Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Pre-Established Harmony”] considers a similar shift, though here focusing on the relation between metaphysics and mathematical science. Feist investigates the claim that mathematics provides a means of presenting all possibilities for conceiving of experience – what he calls ‘theory moulds’ (or, roughly, metaphysical theories). One such theory mould or metaphysical doctrine to describe the universe (specifically, the plurality present in the universe, without abandoning unity) is pre-established harmony – a view associated with Leibniz. Feist notes that many mathematicians of the 19th and 20th centuries saw Leibniz as correct on the nature of scientific knowledge, but rejected the claim of pre-established harmony (which Leibniz saw as an essential part of that account), and Feist traces ways in which one might see mathematics as providing other ‘metaphysical theories,’ as found in the views of Cantor, Klein, and Husserl.

Kenneth Schmitz considers a further challenge to metaphysics, and that is the challenge of – and the possible positive response to – the ‘historical’ character of knowledge. In “The Integration of History and Metaphysics,” Schmitz considers two ways in which philosophers sympathetic to classical metaphysics have addressed the question of the relation of history to it. Recognizing the importance of history, Schmitz notes, Jacques Maritain elected to develop Thomism. On the other hand, Etienne Gilson, Schmitz claims, stayed close to St Thomas’ own views, which suggest that a solid knowledge of history can lead to an understanding of being. Specifically, history discloses being; it is the unfolding of being as act. Schmitz argues that history is one of four ‘intelligible horizons’ or ways of giving an explanatory account of the world. History, then, is a history of being, and while being transcends history, history nevertheless finds itself within the horizon of the metaphysical. Once this is recognized, Schmitz concludes, we will see that metaphysics has nothing to fear from history, but also that we need a new epistemology adequate to the contemporary disclosure of being by history – i.e., an epistemology that situates the singularity of being within the community of beings.

These first four essays recognise, then, that many of the strongest challenges to metaphysics have focused on method. And each responds that, even though the role of knowledge, or logic, or science, or history, must be acknowledged in speaking of reality, the recognition of the dependence of metaphysical *theorizing* on these features does not entail that *metaphysics* is secondary to epistemology. In fact, epistemology, one might argue, presumes

that the world is ‘fit’ to be known, and that human beings are ‘fitted’ to be able to know (or at least have some strong, reliable beliefs about) it – and so, for epistemology to be possible, there must be metaphysics (i.e., metaphysical truth about that reality and about the status of the knower). Again, these four essays suggest that those who engage in metaphysics need not be troubled by the importance of history in articulating and interpreting metaphysical propositions, or the context-dependency of language and (arguably) thought – for neither excludes the possibility of metaphysics. To allow that a proposition is made within a context – a matter of origin – does not require one to hold that the truth of the proposition is limited to that context, or that our being able to prove such propositions – a matter of validity – is so limited. In short, even though the *study* of metaphysics clearly depends on matters of epistemology, the reality described by metaphysics need not.

Of course, not all challenges to metaphysics have been to its method. One also finds a number of criticisms of the supposed content or scope of metaphysics – and those of Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger are often regarded by their followers as among the most trenchant. Similarly, the object of non-western modes of speculative thought seems so different from that characteristic of occidental philosophy that one may wonder whether there is a set subject matter to metaphysics at all. The three following essays, however, give us some reason to think that these challenges are more nuanced and less categorical than received opinion would have it.

Daniel Ahern [“Suffering, Metaphysics, and Nietzsche’s Path to the Holy”] focuses on Friedrich Nietzsche’s analysis of metaphysics and religion. Ahern insists, however, that the criticism of metaphysics – and of Christianity, so far as it embraced a classical metaphysics – was not (as is often claimed) so much that they promoted ‘the values of a tired and decaying culture’ – but rather, more specifically, because metaphysics focused on ‘another world.’ The central fault of classical metaphysics is that it failed to appreciate the reality of danger and suffering in the world. According to Ahern, rather than reject all that is characteristic of religion, Nietzsche in fact cared passionately for things that have gone under the name of ‘the holy.’

Peter Harris [“Can ‘Creation’ be a Metaphysical Concept?”] considers the work of another ‘post-metaphysical’ critic, Martin Heidegger. Harris discusses the concept of creation in Heidegger’s philosophy, particularly as it appears in *On the Work of Art*. Harris makes two claims: first, a ‘historical point’ – that, though Heidegger seeks to overcome metaphysics, it is really only a particular kind of metaphysics that Heidegger rejects; second, a ‘logical point’ – that the notion of ‘creation’ which has been essential to modern speculative thinking has its source in Christian speculative theology, not in the Platonic notion of ontological dependence (which Heidegger

criticises). Since Heidegger's view of creation in art is, Harris holds, close to the Christian notion of creation, perhaps Heidegger's general concept of creation has a proper place among metaphysical concepts.

In "Metaphysics West and East: Bosanquet and Sankara," Gautam Satapathy provides an outline of some of the basic principles of one of the most influential non-western metaphysical systems, that of Advaita Vedanta, as expressed by the Indian philosopher, Sankara. Satapathy points out a number of similarities between Sankara's views and the 'western' idealist metaphysics of the British philosopher Bernard Bosanquet – and that Bosanquet's view of metaphysics (that "Metaphysic [deals] with all degrees of reality and with all the leading experiences of our world"<sup>20</sup>) could also be Sankara's. Satapathy compares Bosanquet's and Sankara's views on the nature of Ultimate Reality, the finite self, the world, and the relations among them, and suggests that the concerns and solutions of this seminal Asian thinker are, in fact, not very different from those of 'western' metaphysics.

If some of the standard challenges are more nuanced or not as comprehensive as often thought, what does this say for speculative philosophy or metaphysics? The dominant theme present in the various descriptions given earlier is that metaphysics is the study or enquiry into what things – and reality as a whole – really are. It involves not only a "faith in real reality" – that there *is* a real – but a demand to move "from facts as they *seem* [...] to go deeper and deeper into the heart of facts as they *are*."<sup>21</sup> Metaphysics, then, looks beneath the surface of phenomena, to thereby discern and provide a statement of what animates them and, perhaps, to note certain guiding principles.

We may then be led to metaphysics and metaphysical inquiry in a number of ways – by looking at what is presupposed or involved in a wide range of topics: in ethics (e.g., evil and suffering), in action theory, in the philosophy of social science, and so on. The essays of Charles LePage, Leslie Armour, James Bradley, Fran O'Rourke, W.J. Mander, and Fred Wilson illustrate how metaphysics is necessarily involved in a range of intellectual investigations – and they offer a number of distinctive approaches to it.

One way in which we are led to metaphysics is through reflection on the existence of human freedom. In "Metaphysics and the Origins of Arendt's Account of Evil and Human Freedom," Charles LePage raises the question of the origin of evil and the place of human freedom and responsibility, and argues that we need a metaphysical account of freedom and human action in order to explain how someone can be held morally responsible for his actions. LePage takes an example described by Hannah Arendt – that of the chief coordinator of the transportation of prisoners to Nazi death camps, Adolf Eichmann – and claims that, to understand how Eichmann – or anyone—can

be held responsible, we have to ask what it is that makes human beings free. Arendt's account by itself, Lepage suggests, is incomplete, but he traces her reliance on, and debt to, a metaphysical framework derived from Augustine and Duns Scotus, in order to provide a more complete view. We see from this, LePage maintains, that to be fully human is to act and to love – a metaphysical claim – and it is because of his failure to 'consent to love' that Eichmann misused his freedom, acted as he did, and thus is held properly responsible for his crimes.

Leslie Armour ["Agents, Causes and Explanations: The Idea of a Metaphysical System"] focuses on two related concepts: agency and explanation. He starts with the notion of explanation, noting that what is presupposed by any attempt to provide an explanation is that those seeking such explanations live in a world about which they can talk meaningfully. This notion brings us to metaphysics, since to give an explanation is to provide that explanation in terms of what is real. Now, to explain how the world is as it is – i.e., which options get actualized in the world – we are led to 'agency.' Armour argues that agents must have a medium through which they can act, and so there is a logic – a logic of explanation – which has an ontological character, which sustains any hypothesis about agency and causality, and which can lead to or 'generate' a metaphysical system.

James Bradley ["Speculative and Analytical Philosophy, Theories of Existence, and the Generalization of the Mathematical Function"] also takes up this theme of explanation, but discusses it within the context of what is presupposed in a metaphysical theory – namely, the nature of existence. Bradley distinguishes between two 'theories' of existence – a weak theory, where (as in contemporary mathematical logic) it means simply 'instantiation,' and a strong theory, where (as in speculative philosophy) it is open to an ultimate principle of explanation and to the possibility that this principle is 'self explanatory.' Those who hold the (dominant) 'weak theory' – 'analytic' philosophers, such as Daniel Dennett and Donald Davidson, but also Hume, Kant, and Frege – adopt a kind of 'algorithmic naturalism' which "leaves to natural science, algorithmically interpreted, the explanation of most things." Such an approach to existence depends on a strategy of 'generalising' following a model of 'the mathematical function' or 'algorism.' But Bradley argues, if we scrutinize this functional structure, we are led to a theory of 'free activity' that is not reducible to such a naturalism and that demands more than what a weak theory of existence can provide. Thus we must turn to a strong theory, which defines existence in terms of some principle of actualization – i.e., a speculative theory of activity – such as we find in traditional metaphysics.



Fran O'Rourke ["Jacques Maritain and the Metaphysics of Plato"] holds that the most basic metaphysical insight is the intuition of being. While Aristotle recognised this in an "implicit and vital way," it was Plato who saw that "Being, though unnamed or disguised, is the aim and object of all endeavour." It is this 'intuition' that lies at the root of the notion of participation, that allows us to understand the transcendental notion of being. Given, however, Plato's deprecation of sensible being – seen in his methodological emphasis on 'division' rather than 'distinction' – it was left to Aquinas to draw on both Plato and Aristotle in order to provide a more complete account of experience. The particular contribution of Maritain is that he recognises the importance of Plato's approach to a Thomistic analysis of being, and to a theory of existence in general.

W.J. Mander ["Metaphysics and Idealism"] starts with the view that metaphysics is the attempt to discover the most general conceptual shape of ultimate reality. He argues, however, that for such an enterprise to be undertaken and an account of the fundamental conceptual structure of the world to be given, we cannot simply follow methodological principles (e.g., coherence or completeness), since they already presuppose a metaphysics and are simply a subset of metaphysical principles. Specifically, assuming that there is an answer to what the general conceptual shape of ultimate reality would look like and that this could be known, we have to accept, first, an identity of the realm of being and the realm of knowing and, second, that there is an absolute consciousness – God – which knows and through which all things are thought. This 'constructive' (rather than 'descriptive') metaphysics would, Mander believes, reflect the epistemological and metaphysical views characteristic of Absolute Idealism.

Fred Wilson ["Empiricism: Principles and Problems"] makes a case for an approach to metaphysics, quite unlike O'Rourke's Platonism, or Armour's or Mander's 'idealism' – for an empiricist approach. Wilson notes that empiricism is defined or characterised by its assumption of the 'Principle of Acquaintance' – that no entity is to be introduced into our ontology unless we are acquainted with it in our ordinary awareness of the world. He considers two principal objections to this view – the putative inability of empiricism to account for our 'awareness' of relations, and its alleged failure to explain our awareness of things *in* change or becoming. Sympathetic to (though not uncritical of) early empiricist arguments by Locke and Hume, Wilson suggests that these accounts, combined with later empiricist views – particularly, those of Russell and William James – can respond to these objections. Wilson concludes that we can have an empiricist ontology without having to add any non-ordinary form of knowing to the empiricist's 'Principle of Acquaintance.'

Critics may object that the arguments of the preceding essays do not address some important concerns. They assume the objectivity of metaphysical knowledge, but fail to take account of metaphysics as a ‘construction’ – as a response to particular questions that arise in concrete situations, but which may have no purchase beyond the specific question asked. Thus, R.G. Collingwood sees metaphysics as something radically ‘historical,’ and Richard Rorty would say that metaphysical systems are not ‘inferred’ from experience or observation, but are intentionally ‘designed’ in various elegant ways; they are interpretations, and not ‘read off from what there *is* in the world. The final two essays in this volume draw on these criticisms, though with quite different results.

In “Metaphysics as ‘de Insolubilibus,’” Martin Tweedale asks simply “What kind of metaphysics is possible?” Metaphysics is often held to aim at providing an account of the whole of what is real. Inspired by the arguments of Thomas Nagel, Tweedale argues that if we place ourselves (specifically, our intentionality) *in* the world to be explained, we end up in puzzles and paradoxes. The totality of what is real *is* the world – all the things there are – plus *matters related to human intentionality*. Therefore, Tweedale concludes, we cannot give a general theory of everything, but at best a piecemeal metaphysical account of particular things. He recommends, then, that all we can do is to try to understand our world and ourselves, not by turning to any systematic metaphysics, but simply through a case by case examination of the characteristics of things.

Although sympathetic to the general question of where metaphysical systems come from and, specifically, of the design of metaphysical systems, Elizabeth Trott [“Designing Metaphysics”] is led to a different conclusion. Trott’s principal concern is with what metaphysical systems *do*. She considers two examples of recent approaches to metaphysics – that of Thomas Nagel, and that of Leslie Armour. Her focus, however, is not with whether either provides a *complete* account of the world, but with whether either can give an account which can serve as an adequate basis for how to lead one’s life. Now, both Nagel and Armour think that the worldviews they arrive at can provide some hope. Nagel’s response is that subjective consciousness – individuality – is an irreducible aspect of reality, that there can be a reality beyond conceivability, but that we can have no unified conception of what is. Armour’s view is that individuals can have a strong sense of what their lives are, and that this reflects a unified and comprehensive account of the relation of the individual to the world, even though individuals do not admit of any precise definition. Armour’s metaphysical system, Trott maintains, is more systematic and is better suited to allow us “to live in hope.”

Still, should the ‘caveats’ concerning metaphysics in the preceding essays not lead us to be at least suspicious of comprehensive explanations of reality? If metaphysics is to be ‘above suspicion’ in every sense – if it is to meet not only the challenges enumerated above, but the further concerns motivating what Ricoeur calls the “hermeneutic of suspicion”<sup>22</sup> – doesn’t it have to address these issues first? There are certainly objections that must be addressed at some point by anyone who undertakes a metaphysical inquiry. But if one is simply ‘suspicious,’ it should be only after criticisms have been made and found telling – and, even then, the suspicion should apply only to that particular metaphysics or theory, not of the enterprise of metaphysics as a whole. Suspicion, after all, is not an argument – it is an attitude – and one has to realise that no hypothesis follows or comes of it. ‘Our’ Cartesian tendencies notwithstanding, a general method of suspicion establishes nothing, and runs the risk of being self-refuting. In all, then, there may be much greater room for systematic metaphysical inquiry than the challenges and suspicions summarized above would have us believe.

The preceding account is just one way in which we can see how the essays in this collection address the theme of ‘the nature of metaphysics.’ There are, of course, other ways – through a reflection on the different kinds of questions raised during the history of philosophy, through an analysis of central concepts (like ‘being’), and so on. Nor should this be unexpected, since the essays in this volume reflect a wide range of approaches to metaphysics. They include not merely the ‘analytical’ or ‘continental,’ but also Thomistic, phenomenological, idealist, process thought, empiricism, ‘speculative philosophical,’ and non-western approaches – and various combinations of the above.

These fifteen essays do not pretend to address or solve all of the problems associated with metaphysical investigation or of the nature of metaphysics. They do, however, (propose to) advance the debate on its possibility, its nature, and its methods. As its critics insist – and the authors of the essays in this collection would concur – metaphysics cannot ignore history, culture, epistemology, or the role of the subject. Thus, these essays not only respond to a number of classical metaphysical questions, but also give us some hints concerning what must be attended to if there is to be a metaphysics, and what method or methods it may have. They suggest that the situation of metaphysics is far less dire than some have said. But despite the various concerns and challenges, and despite the diversity in conceptions in metaphysics, the fact that one finds in a wide range of cultures, ages, and traditions, the presence of explanations and general theories of what is, provides a ground for believing that it makes sense for these authors to try to

go “from facts as they seem [...] deeper and deeper into the heart of facts as they are.”<sup>23</sup>

### III

Even when metaphysics has fallen out of favour with the likes of Hume or Kant or A.J. Ayer or Dan Dennett or Jacques Derrida, or has fallen under suspicion, there have always been those who have pursued it. And as those who would defend the enterprise of metaphysics would point out, this disfavour is often not shared by philosophers in countries outside of the European-American sphere. Nevertheless, metaphysics today may require approaching problems in different ways and working on several fronts. Arguably, it requires an awareness of the conditions under which philosophical problems arise, it requires a recognition of the different tools (such as, history, culture, and language) that the metaphysician can draw on, and it requires a readiness to meet challenges to metaphysics – to whether we can know, to whether there is anything objective to be known, and to whether metaphysics as such is possible. And perhaps it is worth reminding oneself that, so long as one can ask the question whether there *is* a ‘real’ beyond the empirical (and not just whether one can know that there is) – so long as these concerns are at least matters for discussion – even those who challenge metaphysics are holding a metaphysical position.

To many of the authors of the essays in this volume, one might still raise the question whether an ‘old’ metaphysics can provide an adequate response to the contemporary challenges, whether it is possible to ‘revitalize’ and integrate an old metaphysics into a modern discourse, or whether we need a new metaphysics. Here, it may be that a diversity of definition, of content, and of method is helpful. Some methods are clearly better than others in addressing particular problems, and it is obvious that concrete philosophical problems have arisen at particular times in history and culture and that the metaphysical methods and approaches appealed to in response have also had this ‘contingent’ character. Some methods are more comprehensive, some are more attentive to the contingent, some are more wide ranging, some have a greater explanatory power, and so on.

Perhaps the diversity in the approaches employed by the essays in this volume indicates that there are many methods open to us – that there are many ways of doing metaphysics. Just as there need not be any ultimate scientific method, but a range of methods that are more or less suited to particular problems at particular times (though with some having greater elegance, sophistication, or comprehensiveness than others), need there even

be an ultimate metaphysical approach? Whether it be due to the presence in human consciousness of an ‘intuition of being’ (e.g., Maritain), or the inclination of mind that leads many to seek an explanation of what there is, or simply the curiosity to attempt to resolve the paradoxes – evident in daily life – of appearance and reality, there is clearly an impetus to know basic truths of reality. And so it may be that, in addressing some problems, or in dealing with metaphysical issues as a whole, philosophers should be open to adopting distinct – though complementary – methods. It may, then, be in this way – by drawing on a diversity of insights and methods – that philosophers can take metaphysics seriously, and will have at least some measure of success in coming to know truths about things ‘as they are.’

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, cited in Jean Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians,” in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> Descartes, Letter to Mersenne, 11 November 1640.

<sup>3</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan, 1929, Preface to 2<sup>nd</sup> ed; B xiv.

<sup>4</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Kemp Smith, B xiv and B 395.

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic* [Part I of the *Encyclopaedia of philosophical sciences* with the *Zusätze*] tr. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991, sect. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, tr. A.V. Miller; foreword by J.N. Findlay, London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1969, Preface to 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

<sup>7</sup> *Appearance and Reality; a metaphysical essay*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (rev.) 9th impression, authorized and corr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, ed. J. M. Baldwin, New York: Macmillan, 1902, Vol. II, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> See Maritain, *Éléments de philosophie, I, Introduction générale à la philosophie*, 32<sup>e</sup> édition, Paris: Téqui, 1963, pp. 127–186.

<sup>10</sup> *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903, sect. 66.

<sup>11</sup> *Individuals: an essay in descriptive metaphysics*, London: Methuen, 1959.

<sup>12</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Fides et ratio*, sect. 83.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Stephen H. Philips, *Classical Indian Metaphysics*, Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> The “Kyoto School” of philosophy, rooted in the work of two leading Japanese philosophers, Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945) and Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), drew on both ‘western’ and traditional Japanese philosophy in producing a distinctive synthesis. See Kitaro Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good* [translation of: *Zen no kenkyu* (1929)] tr. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990; Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics* [translation of: *Zangedo to shite no tetsugaku* (1946)] tr. Takeuchi Yoshinori with Valdo Viglielmo and James W. Heisig, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, ch. 8, sect. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section I (‘On the Different Species of Philosophy’).

<sup>18</sup> Karl Raimund Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2 vols., London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1945.

<sup>19</sup> For widely differing approaches to the ‘project’ of feminist metaphysics, see Sally Haslanger, “Feminism and Metaphysics: Negotiating the Natural,” in *Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 107–126; Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*, Cambridge: Polity Press; New York: Routledge, 1998; Charlotte Witt, “Feminist Metaphysics,” in *A Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993, pp. 273–288.

<sup>20</sup> Bosanquet, “The Practical Value of Moral Philosophy [1903],” in *Science and Philosophy*, ed. J. H. Muirhead and R. C. Bosanquet, London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1927, p. 144.

<sup>21</sup> Bosanquet, “Idealism in Social Work,” in *Essays on ‘Aspects of the Social Problem’ and Essays on Social Policy, The Collected Works of Bernard Bosanquet*, ed. William Sweet, Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1999, Vol. 14, pp. 149–160, at p. 151 (originally published in *The Charity Organisation Review*, n.s. III [1898]: 122–133.).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Bosanquet, “Idealism in Social Work,” p. 151.

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PART ONE:

ISSUES IN CLASSICAL METAPHYSICS



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# Chapter 1

## DOES BEING HAVE A NATURE? (OR: METAPHYSICS AS A SCIENCE OF THE REAL)

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to focus on the nature of the field proper to metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> My title: “Does being have a nature?” reflects the usage of Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas commenting on Aristotle. In *Metaphysics* 4.1, Aristotle proposes a science of being as being, in contrast to sciences which have as their field of study only some part of being. It is a science that seeks the highest causes and principles, and these must be causes of some nature. As Thomas paraphrases:

... Every principle is the essential principle and cause of some *nature*. But we seek the *first* principles and the *highest* causes... therefore, *they* are the essential cause of some *nature*. But of no other nature than that of *being*....<sup>2</sup>

As presented by Thomas, the field of metaphysics has a *per se* unity. Nevertheless he insists that its unity is one of “analogy” or imitation.<sup>3</sup> It is this doctrine of analogy of being that I aim to take up today.

I am particularly interested in a presentation of analogy by Thomas in his early *Commentary on the SENTENCES of Peter Lombard*, a presentation of three modes of analogy, the third of which applies to the doctrine of being.<sup>4</sup> My interest in that text of Thomas stems especially from its use by John Capreolus<sup>5</sup> in combating the views of such opponents<sup>6</sup> of Thomas as Peter Aureol<sup>7</sup> and John Duns Scotus.<sup>8</sup> While Thomas in later texts does not use quite the same technique for displaying the analogy of being, Capreolus convinces me that the *Sentences* text has a special value for the understanding of the nature of metaphysics.

Thomas Aquinas, in presenting the analogy of names of the God<sup>9</sup> in the *Summa theologiae*, relies heavily on the technique of Aristotle presented in *Metaph.* 4.2, comparing speech about being with speech about health, where “healthy” is said in many ways. Thomas does note crucial differences between the case of “healthy” and the analogy used to speak of the being of creatures and of the God.<sup>10</sup> Still, the “healthy” model is extremely prominent. Moreover, the insistence is on the multiplicity of notions which are being signified by the “same” word.<sup>11</sup> For example, when “good” is said of the God, we are saying that what we call “goodness” in creatures exists by priority in the God, and in a higher way.<sup>12</sup> In a variety of things spoken of with the same word “by analogy,” the notion used about one of the things is not totally the same, not totally different, from that used about another. Thus, in this doctrine of analogy, there is much highlighting of *variety* of notions, and, I would add, *comparison* of one thing with another.

However, we are interested in metaphysics as a whole, and thus in the doctrine of being. Our interest in analogy is not merely about names said of the God and of creatures.<sup>13</sup> We start our metaphysics with the consideration of sensible, corporeal, material beings.<sup>14</sup> We are interested, as was Aristotle in *Metaph.* 4.2, in how “being” is said of substance and of accidents. There, it is the doctrine of being as a multiplicity with a *unity according to analogy* which is first established in the more accessible realm of the sensible.<sup>15</sup> It can then be extended to the doctrine of the existence and nature of a highest cause.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, we are interested in what we are getting at with words like “being,” and how there is a multiplicity of notions of being, and whether there is a unity in that multiplicity.

This brings me to what I might call my “second theme” today, viz. Thomas’s doctrine of the seed of intellectual knowledge. The intellect is presented as a power of the soul, and, like other powers, it is to be understood

in the light of its operation, and hence ultimately in the light of the object of that operation.<sup>17</sup> Thomas teaches that “being” [*ens*] is the “proper object” of intellect, and is the “first intelligible.” We read in *ST* 1.5.2:

... firstly in the conception of the intellect occurs *ens* [i.e. a being], because it is in virtue of this that every single item [*unumquodque*] is knowable [*cognoscibile*], [viz.] inasmuch as it is in act [*est actu*], as is said in *Metaph.* 9 [1051a31]. Hence *ens* is the proper object [*proprium obiectum*] of the intellect, and thus is the primary intelligible [*primum intelligibile*], in the way that sound is the primary audible...<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the notion of “a being” is crucial, and everything which gets into our minds gets into them through it. It cannot be envisaged as the fruit of intellectual *comparison*. It is the principle on the basis of which all intellectual comparisons are made.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Thomas has not forgotten his doctrine of analogy of being in declaring “*ens*” the first intelligible. Rather, he explicitly says that the first of all items predicated, viz. “*ens*,” is an analogue.<sup>20</sup>

This, then, is my problem. A doctrine of analogy suggests that one word is being used for many notions, one of which is compared to another. A doctrine of “being” as the first intelligible suggests a sort of simplicity which precludes an act of comparison. Yet Thomas wants both.

One might think that the point about being as the first intelligible has little to do with the doctrine of the field of metaphysics, where being as being is seen as having analogical unity. Many Thomists distinguish carefully between being as first known and being as the subject of metaphysics.<sup>21</sup> However, in a series of papers I have argued that Thomas’s doctrine affirms the *metaphysical* power of the first concept of the intellect. The first concept is not something that, in itself, can be improved upon.<sup>22</sup> And it makes all intellection possible. This does not mean that everyone, right from the dawn of intellection, is a metaphysician. The mind needs perfecting in order to be able to *draw conclusions* on the basis of the first principles.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, there is a poverty in consideration of things merely as beings. It is a confused knowledge, as regards the grasp of the nature which is proper to each thing.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, our knowledge of things from the viewpoint of universal being also is the power which makes possible all other investigation.<sup>25</sup> We should note the distinction Thomas makes between the universal as object known and the universal as causal principle of knowing:

... “to know something universally” [*cognoscere aliquid in universali*] is said in two ways. In one way, on the side of the thing known, such that

only the universal nature of the thing is known. And to so know something universally is more imperfect: for he imperfectly knows man who knows about him only that he is an animal. In another way, on the side of the medium of knowledge [*medii cognoscendi*]. And thus it is more perfect to know the thing in the universal: for that intellect is more perfect which through one universal medium can know the singulars as to what is proper to them [*singula propria*], than [the intellect] which cannot.<sup>26</sup>

Now, it seems to me that we must learn to consider the concept of *ens*, not only as universal *object*, but also as universal *medium* for knowing objects. So considered, first knowledge of being is a participation in divine knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

This is why I wish to consider how the doctrine of analogical unity of the field of metaphysics harmonizes with the doctrine of being as what is first known. The one suggests a multiplicity of notions and many acts of intellectual comparison. The other suggests simplicity and absolute consideration.

The virtue of Capreolus in this domain is to have explained the coherence of this doctrine. He does so in presenting the knowability of the God for the human intellect in its present terrestrial condition. His opponents are Peter Aureol (and others) and Duns Scotus (and others). Aureol insists on the *multiplicity* of meanings involved in “being,” to the point that “being” has *no* proper content at all: there is no one intelligibility common to substance and accident. Scotus insists on the *unity* of our knowledge of being, to the point where one must reject the doctrine of analogy of being. The one concept of being is a grasp of a univocal intelligibility. Capreolus affirms the unity of the concept of being, and the analogical character of the unity of the field.

## CONCLUSIONS 1 AND 9

Capreolus’s presentations take the following form. He proposes a general area of investigation, a “question”: here human knowledge of the God. He then presents a ordered series of “conclusions” involved in such an investigation, arguing for each of them by citing key texts of Thomas. After presenting the conclusions with their proofs, he goes on to present objections to some of the conclusions, coming from various authors. Lastly, he replies to the objections, generally explaining the doctrine of Thomas and how Thomas’s texts clear up the difficulties.

In the present case, we are looking at the first and the ninth (here, last) conclusions. The first conclusion is that the first and immediate [*primum et per se*] object of our intellect is *ens*. This provides the occasion, later, to consider arguments against it, arguments of Peter Aureol and “others.” The ninth conclusion is that by the same concept by which the wayfarer conceives of the creature it can conceive of the God, though the name signifying that concept is not said univocally of the God and of the creature. This brings forth counter-arguments from Scotus and “others.”

In the framework of the present talk I cannot enter into Capreolus’s lengthy debate with Aureol and Scotus in detail. My interest here is primarily in Capreolus’s approach to the doctrine of St. Thomas.

The proof of the first conclusion does not occasion much difficulty.<sup>28</sup> He quotes *ST* 1.5.2 (which we quoted above) and a few other passages, remarking that Thomas says this in numberless places.<sup>29</sup>

The proof of the ninth conclusion is more involved. The conclusion itself reads:

... that by the same concept by which the wayfarer conceives of the creature it can conceive of the God, though the name signifying that concept is not said univocally of the God and the creature. [124A]

He proceeds in two steps. First, he tackles sameness of concept, and secondly, non-univocity.

Sameness of concept is presented by means of three texts of Thomas. Two of them are from *DP* 7.5 and 7.6. The third, the most important text for our discussion today, is that from *Sent.* 1.19.5.2, on analogy.

The first of these texts bears upon the question: do such names as “good,” “wise,” and “just” signify the divine substance? The point made by Thomas, and featured by Capreolus, is that creatures, through their perfections, resemble<sup>30</sup> the God. Thus, when our intellect forms a likeness within itself of the perfections found in creatures, it is thereby rendered like the God, and through such likeness knows the God, albeit imperfectly. We read (this is Thomas):

... whenever our intellect through its intelligible form is assimilated to some thing, then that which it conceives and enunciates in function of that intelligible *species* is verified concerning that thing to which it is rendered like by its *species*; for science [*scientia*] is the assimilation of the knower to the thing known [*scientis ad rem scitam*]. HENCE, IT IS NECESSARY THAT THOSE THINGS WHICH THE INTELLECT, INFORMED BY THE LIKENESSES OF THOSE *SPECIES*, THINKS OR ENUNCIATES CONCERNING

THE GOD, TRULY EXIST IN THE GOD, WHO ANSWERS TO EACH OF THE AFORESAID *SPECIES* AS THAT TO WHICH ALL ARE SIMILAR.<sup>31</sup>

And Capreolus concludes:

From which it is clear that “being” [*ens*], “the good,” “the just,” which are said in common of the God and the creature do not say two concepts, viz. one of the God and another of the creature, but the same [concept], which nevertheless is an imperfect *ratio* of the God and a perfect [*ratio*] of the creature, by which concept, nevertheless, both the God and the creature are conceived [*concipitur*]. [124B]

Now, we go on to the text on analogy from the *Sent.*, though we are not yet addressing the *second* part of the 9<sup>th</sup> conclusion. References to this text will occur in the replies to many objections, not only regarding the 9<sup>th</sup> but also regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> conclusion. Here we are still on the idea that *one same concept* is used, and the particular way in which analogy is explained in the *Sent.* text is useful in this regard. Capreolus thus begins by stressing “one common *intentio*.”<sup>32</sup> We read:

[Thomas] proposes much the same thing [*consimile*] in *Sent.* 1.19.5.2.*ad* 1, where he intends that the God and the creature agree in one common *intentio* which the analogical name signifies, though according to priority and posteriority. For he speaks thus:

Something is said according to analogy in three ways [*tripliciter*].

EITHER ACCORDING TO *INTENTIO* ONLY AND NOT ACCORDING TO BEING [*NON SECUNDUM ESSE*]; and this is when one *intentio* is referred to many [items] through priority and posteriority, which nevertheless does not have being save in one [item]; as, for example, the *intentio* of “health” is referred to the animal and the urine and the diet, diversely [*diversimode*], according to the prior and the posterior, not nevertheless according to diverse being [*esse*], because the *esse* of health is only in the animal.

OR ELSE ACCORDING TO BEING, AND NOT ACCORDING TO *INTENTIO*, and this happens when many [items] are taken as equal [*parificantur*] in the *intentio* of something common [*alicujus communis*], but that common [something] does not have being which is one as to *ratio* [*esse unius rationis*] in all [the many items]; for example, all bodies are taken as equal [*parificantur*] in the *intentio* of corporeity: hence, the logician, who considers only *intentiones*, says

that this name, “body,” is predicated of all bodies univocally. But the being of this nature is not of the same *ratio* in corruptible and incorruptible bodies; hence, for the metaphysician and the physicist, who consider things as regards their being [*secundum suum esse*], neither this name, “body,” nor any other is said univocally of corruptibles and incorruptibles, as is clear from the Philosopher, *Metaph.* 10 (t.c. 26) and the Commentator.

OR ELSE ACCORDING TO *INTENTIO* AND ACCORDING TO BEING, that is, when they are taken neither as equal in the common *intentio*<sup>33</sup> nor in being; as, for example, “a being” [*ens*] is said of substance and accident. In such, it is necessary that the common nature [*NATURA communis* (!)] have some being [*aliquod esse*] in each of the things of which it is said, but differing according to the *ratio* of greater and lesser perfection.

And similarly I say that “truth” and “goodness” and all such are said analogically of the God and the creatures. Hence, it is necessary that according to their being all these are in both the God and the creatures according to the *ratio* of greater and lesser perfection. Thusfar [Thomas].

From which it is clear that the *intentiones* conveyed by these names said in common of the God and the creatures are in the God and in creatures, in that way in which the *intentio* is said to be in the thing, i.e. not subjectively, but as in the foundation of its truth; though those *intentiones* have a foundation more perfectly in the God than in creatures; and with that goes the fact that they represent the God in a less perfect way than [they represent] creatures; because they are immediately taken from creatures and not from the God.

And thus the first part of this conclusion is clear. [124B–125A]

Capreolus’s point, again, is that the *same concept* is used to conceive of the God and the creature, but that there is *inequality of representation and of foundation of truth*, contrasting the God and the creature.<sup>34</sup>

He then goes on to quote two texts of Thomas on the point that the one concept or *intentio* said of the God and the creature is not univocally verified<sup>35</sup> in them. One is *Sent.* 1.35.1.4, as follows:

Nothing can be said univocally of the God and a creature. The reason for this is that since there are two [items] to consider in the thing, viz. the nature or quiddity of the thing, and its being [*esse suum*], it is necessary that among all univocals there be community in function of the quiddity



of the nature and not in function of the being; because one being is [to be found] only in one thing [*unum esse non est nisi in una re*]; hence, humanity is not the same according to the same being in two human beings.<sup>36</sup> And so whenever the form signified by the name is being itself [*ipsum esse*], it cannot belong univocally; for which reason also “*ens*” is not predicated univocally. And therefore, since the nature or form of all [items] which are said of the God is being itself [*ipsum esse*], since his being is his nature, for which reason it is said by some philosophers that he is a being not in an essence [*ens non in essentia*] and is a knower not through science [*sciens non per scientiam*], and so on with the rest, that it be understood that [his] essence is not other than being [*essentia non esse aliud ab esse*], and so on with the rest, therefore nothing can be said univocally of the God and creatures.<sup>37</sup>

We should notice that this is a general theory of non-univocity, based on the distinction between being and quiddity in things. In that sense, it can well be called “Avicennian.”<sup>38</sup> One might reasonably ask whether this is the same argument for non-univocity as one will find in Aristotle.<sup>39</sup> However, we will leave that aside today.

## AUREOL AGAINST THE FIRST CONCLUSION

Peter Aureol denies *ens* any proper content at all. The primary targets of intellectual operation are such things as the Aristotelian categories, and they have nothing in common, as he sees it. One might be tempted to say that “*ens*” is empty, but what Aureol is saying is that it has as many meanings as there are categories. It has no *one* meaning. It is equivocal, we might say.<sup>40</sup>

What sort of argument is used to show this quasi-equivocity of “*ens*”? The first argument of Aureol is based on the problem of “addition” to the concept of “a being,” and is quite representative of his style. He says:

That concept which enters into complete identity [*incidit in identitatem omnimodam*], nothing at all being added, with every *ratio*, does not say any one *ratio*. This proposition holds in virtue of a first principle: whatever are identical with one and the same thing are identical with each other, with that mode of identity by which they are identical with the third. But it is clear that the proper *rationes* of beings are not identical among themselves, but distinct. Therefore, they cannot be identical with some one *ratio*, unless they add at least some proper *ratio* to that in which they agree, through which they are formally distinguished one from the

other. But the concept of “a being” [*ens*] enters into identity with every *ratio*, nothing being added to it. For either it coincides, something being added, or nothing [being added]; since something and nothing are contradictories. But if something being added, therefore “a being” being added, since “a being” and “something” are identical. But one cannot add “a being” to “a being.” Indeed, wanting to say that the concept of “a being” coincides with something added, one concedes [that it coincides] nothing [being added]; and thus the point is made. It remains, then, that the concept of “a being” does not include some one *ratio*.<sup>41</sup>

Aureol is saying that “being” has no one meaning of its own. This conclusion arises directly from the problem of conceptually adding to the concept of “a being,” a problem which arises from the universal predicability of “ens.”<sup>42</sup>

## DEFENSE OF THE FIRST CONCLUSION

We come now to Capreolus’s answers to these arguments from Aureol and the “others.” Before he gets into the replies to individual arguments, he sets out what he means by a “*ratio*.” What does Capreolus mean by “the *ratio* of *ens*” or “of the good,” etc.? He quotes two texts of Thomas, one from *SCG* 1.53, and the other from *Sent.* 1.2.1.3 (the well-recognized later addition to the *Sent.*)<sup>43</sup>

The *SCG* text<sup>44</sup> presents the two likenesses of the thing which are required for an account of intellection, viz. (1) the likeness impressed upon the mind and constituting the form of the mind as issuing in an act of understanding (the “principle” of the act), and (2) the likeness derived from the act of understanding, viz. the inner “picture” which we call “the concept” (the “terminus” of the act). It is the second likeness of the thing that Thomas, in this text, calls “the *intentio* of the understood thing,” “the *ratio*” of that thing, that precisely which is signified by a *definition*. “*Ratio*” and “*intentio*” are synonymous in this text. Thomas does not use the vocabulary of “concept” in this text at all. He argues for the necessity of this second likeness by pointing out that we understand material things even when they are absent, and furthermore, we understand them as separated from material conditions without which they do not exist in reality outside the mind.

The *Sent.* text is designed to explain how it is that in speaking of the God, a being which is altogether simple, we legitimately speak of many diverse targets of attention *in* the God. Thus, we speak of the God as “a being,” “good,” “wise,” “omnipotent,” etc. Thomas calls these targets of attention

“*rationes*” and so he is explaining the sense in which one can say that a *ratio* is, not merely in our minds thinking about the God, but *in* the God itself. The basis is *likeness* of our concepts to the thing understood. In this text Thomas distinguishes between what precisely we get at with a word like “*ratio*,” and our concepts. By the “concept” here he means the mental event. The “*ratio*” is, one might say, the *signifying function* of the concept. “*Ratio*” is a word like “definition” as expressing a target of our reflection on our knowing. Thomas distinguishes three different relations of our concepts to things. Some concepts are direct likenesses of things. Some, such as “genus,” “species,” “definition,” result, not directly from things, but from our thinking about things. Some, such as fantasies, break away from things altogether. When the likeness is direct, then the *ratio* is properly said to be “in the thing,” inasmuch as there is in the thing a *foundation* for the *ratio*. In a secondary way, the logical “*intentiones*” and mathematical conceptions relate to things, and so they are not false; there is some foundation for them. Chimeras as such, on the other hand, have no truth, no foundation in reality. The one *simple* God, by the intrinsic wealth of its being, is a foundation for the multiplicity of *rationes* we use to express that being. Only in that way, as regards the foundation of their truth, can the *rationes* be said to be in the God.

What relates to the project of Capreolus in this is the double “location” of the *ratio*. It is in the mind, but it is also in the thing outside the mind, taking that thing as foundation for the concepts we form. We read [these are Thomas himself]:

... [it] is clear how a “*ratio*” is said to be in a thing. For this is not said as though the very *intentio* which the name “*ratio*” signifies is in the thing, or even that the very conception to which such *intentio* belongs is in the thing outside the soul, since it is in the soul as in a subject, but it is said to be in the thing inasmuch as in the thing outside the soul there is something which corresponds to the soul’s conception as the signified to the sign.

And:

Hence, it is clear that the *ratio* is said to be in the thing inasmuch as the [precise] item signified by the name [*significatum nominis*], to which being a *ratio* happens [*cui accidit esse rationem*], is in the thing; and this happens properly when the conception of the intellect is a likeness of the thing [*EST SIMILITUDO REI*]. [133A–B]

As we will see, eventually Capreolus will distinguish between the *formal* concept of the thing, meaning by “formal concept” the concept in the mind, and the *objectal* concept of the thing, meaning by “objectal concept” reality as foundation for the truth of our conceptions.<sup>45</sup>

When Capreolus replies to Aureol concerning the latter’s first objection to one concept of *ens*, he cites both *DV* 1.1 and 21.1. Both texts explain that the proper division of being as such is by virtue of *modes*. Our discussion has to do with the sort of multiplicity of being which Thomas explains through his doctrine of the categories as *modes* of being. Thus, Capreolus does not include in his quotation of either text from the *DV* what pertains to the transcendentals (which was Thomas’s own primary subject in those texts).

The second of these two texts I would say is better than the first. The reason is that in the first Thomas uses the term “mode” to describe both how the categories add to “*ens*” and how the transcendentals add to “*ens*.” He calls the additions in the case of the categories “*special modes*” and the additions in the case of the transcendentals “*general modes*.” Now, in the case of the transcendentals the additions are additions of *reason*: “*bonum*” says exactly the same *thing* as “*ens*” but adds a *ratio* not expressed by “*ens*.” “Substance,” on the other hand, does not say the same thing as “quality.” Both terms express modes of being, which modes are *really* different. Thus, in *DV* 1.1 the term “mode,” serving to speak of both real difference and difference of reason, is somewhat compromised.

On the other hand, in *DV* 21.1, the term “mode” is used exclusively for the doctrine of the variety we have in the *categories*. There is no distinction into “special mode” and “general” mode, as in 1.1. The doctrine of the transcendentals as adding to “*ens*” is rather sharply contrasted with the way the categories add, precisely because the *division* into the categories has, let us say, a *proximate* foundation in things: each category adds “a *determinate mode* of being which has its foundation in the very existence of the thing” [*in ipsa existentia rei*]; whereas the addition in the case of the transcending predicates, such as “one,” “good,” and “true,” is something “purely of reason” [*rationis tantum*].

It seems to me that it is better to preserve a somewhat *realistic* sense of what we mean by a “mode” of being, if we are to understand analogy as a division through “modes.”

*DV* 21.1, while insisting on the realism of the foundation of the “addition to being” involved in the conceptions of the categories, nevertheless is quite clear on the fact that “a being” and “a substance” are two names for exactly the same thing, and that “a being” and “a quality” are two names for exactly the same thing. We should not be too surprised at this, it tells us, since “an

animal” and “a dog” are such, and so are “an animal” and “a spider”: generic name, specific name, individual name, all name “the same thing.”

Capreolus concludes:

From these [texts] it is evident that other concepts add something to the concept of *a being*. And when the person arguing says: if they add *something*, they add *a being*; I say that they add that which is *a being* [*illud quod est ens*], but not under the *ratio* of *a being*, but under another more determinate and more actual *ratio* [*sub alia ratione determinatiori et actualiori*]. Nor is it at all awkward that some concept thus add *a being* to *a being*, in the way in which something represented in particular is added to itself represented in a confused way [*in confuso*]. They add, therefore, not by signifying something else, but by [signifying] in another way; viz. more explicitly expressing what is implicitly designated by the concept of *a being*. [134A]

This ends Capreolus’s handling of Aureol’s first objection.

Here, the determinate notions are such as “substance,” “quality,” “quantity,” “relation.” Each of these is said to add to “a being.” “A being” is said of any one of them: “a substance is a being”; “a quality is a being,” etc. However, one is to understand the difference between, e.g., “a being” and “a substance” by saying that they are two names for the same identical item, but taken confusedly and taken more determinately (two sorts of representation).

It is to be noted also that it is in *DV* 21.1 that Thomas contrasts the conception of something as “*ens*” on the one hand, “substance” or “quality” on the other, as between the implicit and potential, the determinate and actual. And Capreolus uses this approach in speaking of “*ens*” as representing confusedly what e.g. “substance” represents more explicitly.

Obviously much depends on the distinctiveness of the notion of “*modus*,” i.e. measure or portion. We are in a doctrine of participation.<sup>46</sup>

It should be stressed that the difference in objects is only a difference in *ratio*, not in things. The being and the substance, e.g., are exactly the same reality, but it takes two acts of the mind to treat it adequately. Nevertheless, in *DV* 21.1 the foundation in reality for the difference in naming is brought out.

I now go on to Capreolus’s answer to the *third* argument from Aureol. The objection contended that the categories were primary as to diversity. The reply is important for our present purposes. We read:

To the third it is said that for some things to be primary as to diversity [*primo diversa*] can happen in two ways. IN ONE WAY, that they agree in

nothing real, nor in any form univocally participated in by them, nor do they have proper differences by which they be distinguished from each other under that [supposed] common [item]; and thus it is conceded that the ten categories are primary as to diversity, as St. Thomas holds in *SCG* 1.71 [#605], where he speaks as follows: “The first [items], which are distinguished by themselves, include mutually negation, by reason of which negative propositions in them are immediate, as for example: no quantity is a substance.” IN ANOTHER WAY, that they agree in no common *intentio*, and in that way I say that no two [items] are primary as to diversity, because all beings agree at least in the *intentio* of a *being* and in its concept.

Now, those things which are in the first way primary as to diversity can agree in some common concept. And when it is said that this is not so, because then it would be necessary to inquire by what they are distinguished and by what they agree, etc., I say that the argument does not hold. For, according to St. Thomas, *Sent.* 1.22.1.3.*ad* 2,

the univocal, the equivocal, and the analogical are divided each in its own way: for the **equivocal** is divided in function of SIGNIFIED THINGS [*secundum res significatas*]; while the **univocal** [is divided] in function of DIVERSE DIFFERENCES [*secundum diversas differentias*]; but the **analogical** [is divided] in function of DIVERSE MODES [or measures] [*secundum diversos modos*]. Hence, since a *being* [*ens*] is predicated analogically of the ten categories, it is divided among them in function of diverse modes [or measures]; hence, to each is owing its proper mode of predicating.

From which it is clear that items which are primary as to diversity can have one analogically common *intentio* or concept under which those [items] are distinguished, not through other differences, but by their very selves, as by diverse modes [or measures or degrees] of participating in that *ratio*, such that that *ratio* is more like [*similior*] to one than to another of the analogical items under that *ratio*. [135A]

I would say that this is a key illustration of the conception of analogy, one which is fully appreciated only through the text given in the 9<sup>th</sup> conclusion. The important thing is the way analogy is understood as a use of *one* concept or *ratio*, to which the real corresponds according to more and less, and which gives rise, *ultimately*, to many different *namings* (and concepts), one might say.<sup>47</sup>

## DEFENSE OF THE 9<sup>TH</sup> CONCLUSION

Let us look at the objections to the 9<sup>th</sup> conclusion and their replies. The presentation is quite lengthy. It is labeled as coming from “Scotus and others.” It is against the *second* part of the 9<sup>th</sup> conclusion that they argue, i.e. that no name is said univocally of the God and creatures. Notice this. Scotus does not mind (far from it!) the “one concept” approach of the first part.

First we get a statement of the general argument, as including two premises: (1) the unity of the concept of *ens* and its distinctness from any other; and (2) the reality of the concept of *ens*, i.e. that it is not a fabrication of the human mind. Next, we are given Scotus’s arguments for the first of these (eleven are given very briefly) [129B–130A], followed by a lengthy presentation to the same point from the “others,” no less than 25[!] in number [130A–132A]. Next we have six arguments from Scotus for the second premise [132A]. And this is followed by seven arguments from Scotus for the conclusion of non-univocity, given the two premises [132A–B]. As one can see, the bulk of the discussion bears on the unity of the concept of *ens* and its distinction from every other concept.

If we look also at the general line of reply by Capreolus [141A–144A], we see that he first grants the second premise but rejects the first. In rejecting the first, he explains the way the concept of *ens* is one and distinct from all others differently from the adversary. He then first replies to the 25 arguments from the “others” [141B–143A], and follows this with very brief replies to the arguments of Scotus [143A–B]. He follows this with some comments on the arguments from Scotus for the second premise [143B–144A]. And lastly, he criticizes the set of concluding arguments of Scotus [144A]. Much depends on the explanation of the sort of unity the concept of *ens* has (and what is meant by the “concept” of *ens*, as we shall see).

### The Unity of the Concept

Here I will begin by considering the arguments of Capreolus, coming back to the objections only for clarification. He starts with the problem of the first premise. After making a general statement of clarification and refutation, he begins by answering the 25 arguments of the others, and follows with the 11 from Scotus. Again, all of this pertains to the first premise, the sense in which the concept of being is one and distinct from every other concept. Capreolus begins (and this is the most important text from Capreolus):

To the arguments against the ninth conclusion, it is said that, though that which they secondly propose is true, nevertheless not the first [premise].

Hence, regarding all its proofs, it is to be said, generally, that they indeed prove well that *ens* has one concept common to the God and the creatures and the ten categories, taking “concept” [*conceptum*] for the conception [*conceptione*] which the intellect forms when it conceives *ens* [*concipit ens*].

But if we speak about the objectal concept [*de conceptu objectali*], which is nothing else but the intelligible which is presented [*objicitur*] to the intellect forming that said conception, as, for example, human nature would be called the “objectal concept” of that intellection [*intellectionis*] by which man as such is intellectually considered [*intelligitur*], then one must make distinctions concerning unity.

Because, either it can be understood concerning unity of attribution [*de unitate attributionis*], in the way in which many [items], having attribution to [something] one, are called “one” *attributively* [*attributive*]; or one can be speaking about the unity which is seen in function of some form or nature<sup>48</sup> which is participated in by many, of which sort is the unity of the genus or species: for humanity in all [humans] is one form; not in act or in potency outside the intellect, but aptitudinally, such that it does not result from the form that it not be one, but from another, i.e. from the principles individuating it or from the differences dividing it.

If we are speaking about the first mode of unity, thus it is conceded that *ens* has one objectal concept common to the God and creatures; one, that is, not by indivision of some form participated in by them, but one by attribution: because the creatures are called “*entia*” on the basis of imitation and attribution towards the God; and also the accidents on the basis of imitation of substance and attribution towards it. And therefore that objectal concept is not one with as great a unity as has the objectal concept by virtue of which the genus is called “one,” or the concept of the species, but by a far lesser [unity]. [141A–B]

This, then, is the general position. “Being” names reality as exhibiting a unity through imitation of one level by another. It is a lesser unity than the unity found within a species or even a genus. But there is one concept in the mind by which this real unity is signified.<sup>49</sup>

Let us now consider the first objection.<sup>50</sup> We read:

A certain concept and a doubtful concept cannot possibly be the same [concept]; otherwise contradictories, viz. certain and uncertain, would be present in the same concept. But the concept of “a being” [*entis*] can be certain concerning the God and the proper concept be doubtful; for I can know certainly that the God is, and nevertheless be uncertain what it is,



whether fire or a body or some spirit. For in this regard there were [various] opinions of some people, who nevertheless agreed that the God is a being. Similarly, we are certain that the powers of the soul are beings, and nevertheless we are in doubt whether they are the very substance of the soul or accidents, and if accidents, whether qualities or relations. Therefore, the concept of “a being” is other than the concept of the God and of the other [*sic*] ten categories; nevertheless, it is common to them all. [129B–130A]

The argument aims to show that “*ens*” is distinct from other concepts, and is one same concept said of the variety conceived by those very concepts. Capreolus replies:

... it concludes well that the concept of “a being,” concerning which it is certain that it belongs to that concerning which there is doubt whether the concept of substance belongs to it; and similarly with the concept of accident; that that concept of “a being” is indeed other than the concept of substance and of accident, and *that it is one by unity of attribution only*. [141B][my italics]

The *ad 8* is of interest. The objection runs:

Every proposition is ambiguous and uncertain in which is introduced a term which is multiple, not expressing [only] one notion [*rationem*]... But this proposition: “regarding anything whatsoever, [both] to be and not to be [cannot be affirmed]” [*de quolibet esse et non esse*], is not ambiguous and uncertain, since it is the first principle and most known [*maxime notum*]. But in it “*esse*” is introduced, which signifies the same thing as “*ens*.” Therefore “*unum*” and “*ens*” are not said in many ways; indeed they signify one *ratio*. [130B]

Capreolus replies:

... the multiplicity of the analogue which says many *rationes* in act and explicitly, *as perhaps is “healthy,”* renders the entire proposition in which such an analogue is introduced multiple; for example, if one were to say: “every healthy thing is an animal”; but the analogue which says one sole *ratio* explicitly, even though it is one merely by unity of attribution, speaking of the objectal *ratio*, which also says one *intentio* of the intellect representing the objectal *ratio*, though not equally as regards all the items contained under such a *ratio*, such an analogue, I say, does

not make the proposition multiple. Now “a being” is of this sort. And so the first principle, in which “*esse*” or “*ens*” is introduced, does not require distinguishing. [141B–142A][my italics]

This is interesting as drawing a distinction between the analogy of “healthy” and that of “a being,” and seeing in the former (“perhaps”) an explicit multiplicity of notions.<sup>51</sup> It also encapsulates the basic position of Capreolus very well.

The ninth reply is of importance because it reviews the *Sent*, text on analogy. The objection had noted the presence of the notion of being in every proposition. If it were a multiple expression (expressing now this, now that meaning), every proposition would be ambiguous, and all demonstration and certitude would break down. Capreolus replies:

To the ninth one responds in the same way [as above in the answer to the eighth]. For though “*ens*” or some equivalent occurs in every proposition, nevertheless not every proposition is multiple. For analogy is of three sorts [*triplex est enim modus analogiae*], in accordance with what was said in the proof of the 9<sup>th</sup> conclusion.

The first is when the analogue says one *ratio* principally, and besides that it says a relation or proportion to that *ratio*; as “healthy” sometimes says the form of health, sometimes the relation of the cause to the health; and thus such an analogue says DIVERSE RATIONES IN ACT AND EXPLICITLY.

Another is the analogue which says only one *ratio*, which nevertheless has diverse being [*diversum esse*] in the analogates, and [is] not [found in them] uniformly; as “body” when it is said of celestial [bodies] and inferior [bodies].

Another is the analogue which says one *ratio* in act, in which [*ratio*] nevertheless the analogates are not taken as equal [*parificantur*],<sup>52</sup> nor in the being [*esse*] of [that *ratio*]; as for example “a being” [*ens*], said of the God and a creature, of substance and accident.

And only the first mode of analogy renders the proposition multiple. [142A]<sup>53</sup>

Here, we see that the earlier “perhaps” regarding “healthy” is made more definite. It does involve a multiplicity of notions in a way not true of “being,” and does result in ambiguity in a way not true of “being.”

The 13<sup>th</sup> reply is of interest, again concerning things being radically diverse [*primo diversa*]. The objector, aiming to show that “*ens*” involves a *ratio* distinct from all others, considers things differing by ultimate

differences which are simply diverse. If “*ens*” is seen as formally included in these differences, they would have something in common, and then one would again have to seek a principle of difference, and so on to infinity. Thus, “*ens*” must stand quite apart from such ultimate differences. Capreolus replies:

... some things being prime in diversity [*primo diversa*] can be understood in two ways: in the first way, that they do not agree in anything univocally said of them, nor participate in some same nature; in the other way, that there is no common *intentio* in them.

Then I say that ultimate differences are prime in diversity in the first way, but not in the second: indeed, they agree in the *intentio* of “*ens*.” Nor is it necessary to seek something in which they differ, under that common concept; because the univocal is divided in one way and the analogical in another, as has been said. Hence it is not necessary that those items which agree in some analogue have *differences*, but it suffices that they dissimilarly participate [in] that [analogue or *intentio*], and that they are diverse *modes* of it. The argument would hold if the differences agreed as to something univocal. [142A]

We see that everything turns on that picture of imitation and modes. We know that the Scotistic doctrine of univocity of being requires a special status for ultimate determinations,<sup>54</sup> such as individuality. We seem to be seeing, in the above reply, why this does not apply in the doctrine of Thomas. One might suggest that what Scotus requires for ultimate differences, Thomas Aquinas requires for the entire approach to reality from the viewpoint of being.

To the 15<sup>th</sup> Capreolus says:

... when it is said: “substance is more of a being [*magis ens*] than accident [is], this comparison is made in function of the concept of “a being” [*entis*]; nor nevertheless is it necessary that that concept be participated in uniformly [*uniformiter participari*] by substance and accident, nor that it have perfect unity. [142B]

## The Reality of the Concept

We should look now at the discussion of *ens* as a *real* concept. I will concentrate as much as possible on Capreolus himself. The contention of Scotus,<sup>56</sup> as Capreolus presents it, is that the concept of *ens* is real, i.e. not fabricated by the intellect, taking “concept” objectively, and not in the

conceiving power or in its act. [129B] The first argument points out that the concept of *ens ut sic* is the object of a real science, namely metaphysics. [132A] Capreolus replies first with a general argument about the issue:

... the concept of *ens*, taken as it extends [*sumptus prout se extendit*] to the God and to the ten categories, is real, not fabricated by the intellect, speaking of the *objectal* concept. But speaking of such a concept inasmuch as it embraces both real being and [being] of reason, then I say that such a concept is neither real nor of reason, but abstracts from both. [143B]

Notice that the term “abstract” is used to speak of the *objectal* concept. This is to say that the things spoken of include both the real and beings of reason, a “group” whose unity is merely that of attribution.

And he immediately replies to the first argument:

To the first proof it is said that “a being” [*ens*], in its entire community or sweep [*communitate vel ambitu*], is not the subject of metaphysics, but rather real being [*ens reale*].

This, it seems to me, is important as showing how the mental event, the consideration of “a being,” is a powerful instrument which is able to cope with the diverse fields: its *abstractive* character allows this.<sup>57</sup> It is a consideration which finds verification in diverse ways, depending on whether one considers a God, or a creature, or a logical *intentio*, or one of our own fancies. We first form it in grasping sensible substance,<sup>58</sup> but it is of a nature to find verification in other spheres of being.

Scotus’s second argument ran:

... no power fabricates for itself the primary object of apprehension: which is clear from induction and reason, because as such it precedes the power and its act, from *De anima* 2... [132A]

Capreolus says:

... it proves well that the objective *ratio* of “a being” [*ratio entis objectiva*] is not something fabricated by the intellect; but, that being conceded, it does not follow that “a being,” in its entire breadth [*in tota sui latitudine*], says something real. [143B]

Here, the idea seems to be that “a being,” said of something which is not, nevertheless witnesses to what precedes all discussion. One might think of such a question as whether evil exists. It does, but it is not a nature and has no act of being. In affirming its “existence,” we are using the “exist” or “be” which expresses the truth of propositions, not the nature of real things. Cf. *ST* 148.2.ad 2: there is a sense of “*ens*” which is interchangeable with “*res*,” and a sense which is not.

The third argument from Scotus is:

... the good, which is a property [*passio*] of *ens*, is not subjectively in the soul; but the subject is not of lesser entity than the property. [132A]

Capreolus replies:

... the good is a property of real being and [being] in act [*entis realis et in actu*], but not [of being] in its entire breadth. [143B]

This accords very well with such texts of Thomas as *ST* 1.53.ad 4: mathematical as such are not good, but they have applied to them the *ratio* “*ens*”: they are *entia secundum rationem*.

Scotus’s fourth argument:

... substance more really agrees with accident than a chimera; which is clear, because quite apart from every act of the intellect, the first two [mentioned] are beings and the third is not a being [*non ens*]. [132A]

And Capreolus:

... substance and accident agree more in real being than substance with chimera. Nevertheless, it does not follow that the entire breadth of the concept of “a being” is real. [143B]

This seems to me good, and helps us see that we start with a knowledge of being, as discovered in real being, and subsequently see the applicability of the concept (the “formal” concept) to that which is not. Thus, the objectal concept is wider than real being. Consider *ST* 1.14.9, on knowledge of non-beings (which include even what are within one’s power to envisage in some way).

Scotus’s fifth argument:

... if to “a being inasmuch as it is a being” the concept of real were repugnant, taking the “inasmuch as it is” reduplicatively, then it would be repugnant to any being whatsoever; but the consequent is false; and the consequence holds, on the basis of *Prior Analytics* 2 (c. 5): if justice were the good inasmuch as it is good, justice would be every good. [132A]

Capreolus replies:

... to “a being inasmuch as it is a being” the concept of “real” is not repugnant, nor does it belong to it, but it abstracts from both, including thing and *ratio*. [143B]

We might wonder about “a being inasmuch as it is a being,” since that formula is used regarding the subject of metaphysics. Of course, Aristotle and Thomas set aside “being as the true,” i.e. the being which the mind fashions, and thus “being of reason,” as not *primarily* what metaphysics is about. Thus, being of reason is treated *somewhat* by metaphysics. Genus and species are the business of metaphysics.<sup>59</sup> The idea is that the *formal* concept is abstracted in such a way that, though it is best verified of real being, it is secondarily verified even in beings of reason. And thus, if one wants to describe the objectal concept in its entire range, one should say that it abstracts from real and of reason. But it includes all that only as one by attribution.

The last argument of Scotus, the 6<sup>th</sup>, runs:

... “non-real” is not included essentially [*per se*] in “real,” since they are opposites; but the concept of “a being” is included essentially [*per se*] in others, since it is predicated quidditatively [*in quid*]; therefore... [132A]

This argument is meant, I suppose, to show that “non-real” must be left out of “being,” and thus that “being” names a real unity. In any case, it prompts a lengthier reply:

... I say that “non-real” taken contrarily is not included in the *ratio* of something real; for example, the chimera, which is non-real contrarily, i.e. standing in a contrary way to “the real,” does not enter into the *ratio* of any thing [*rei*]. But in this way the *ratio* of “a being” is not said to be “non-real,” because then it would be, by virtue of itself, an object in name only [*quid nominis*]. But it is called “non-real” in a privative way [*quasi privative*] or separatively [*disparate*]; because it abstracts from “real” and

from “a being of reason”; and such an object [*tale quid*], which is called “non-real” in that way, can pertain to the *ratio* of the real [*potest esse de ratione realis*].

Thus, it is to be known that “a being” [*ens*] can be taken as it includes in itself only the ten categories; and thus it says one real concept or *ratio*, such that nothing is included under it unless it is apt to be in reality [*aptum esse in rerum natura*] without the work of the intellect.

But in another way, it is taken as it is extended to every real being, whether it be created or uncreated; and thus it says a real concept, but less one [*minus unum*] than in the first way.

Thirdly, it can be taken inasmuch as it is extended to every item which *is* in any way [*ad omne quod qualitercumque est*], whether it be real or of reason; whether positive or privative; and, in short, to every intelligible; and then the concept of “a being” has unity of attribution [*unitatem attributionis*], and is neither real nor unreal, but abstracts from both, including in itself every thing and reason [*omnem rem et rationem*]. [143B–144A]

It is to be noted that the middle way is not said to be merely of “attribution,” but probably would be called “unity of *imitation*.” Also, while I have used quotation marks in the above for the word “a being,” the point being made is about the *objectal* concept, not about the *formal* concept; there is always only one formal concept; can we not say that we sometimes mean by the word “being” only part of the range of the objectal concept? Thus, sometimes “*ens*” does not include the God and sometimes it does. Does this pertain to the “use” we make of the one formal concept? It would seem so.

This completes the discussion of the second Scotistic contention, namely that “a being” is a *real* concept. I must say that it is surprising that, at the beginning of the defense of the 9<sup>th</sup> conclusion, Capreolus said that what the adversary secondly laid down was true. This seems to pertain to the doctrine of real concept of being. Yet Capreolus certainly had much to disagree with in the Scotistic conception of that reality.

## Against Univocity

Capreolus now goes on to the third point, the arguments for univocity of the concept of “a being” as between the God and creature.

The first argument of Scotus:

... [the concept] has one common name and according to that same name the same common *ratio*; this is clear from the foregoing, because, not

only vocally [*vocaliter*] but also really, the God is a being and the creature similarly.

Capreolus replies:

... for univocation it does not suffice that there be the same name and the same concept of [i.e. “in”] the intellect [*conceptus intellectus*], unless that concept *equally* represents all [the items] which are conceived through that concept [*illo conceptu*]. Such is not the case regarding any concept common to the God and creature or to the ten most general [genera].<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, diversity in being [*in essendo*] impedes univocation, even if there be unity of *ratio*; as is exemplified in *SCG* 1.32 [#285], concerning the house which is in the mind of the builder and the house which is in matter; and in *DP* 7.7.ad 6, concerning the intelligible forms which are in the divine mind and concerning the forms of creatures, which are not univocal because of the diverse mode of being [*modum essendi*], though they are of one *ratio*. [144A]

These latter examples of Capreolus seem to me to pertain to the *middle* mode of analogy in our *Sent.* 1.19 text.

The second argument of Scotus is:

... “a being” covers [*distribuitur pro*] the God and the creature in a single sweep [*unica distributione*] when one says: “every being”; but this is not true in equivocals or in analogical. [132B]

Capreolus replies:

... the minor is denied. [144A]

I.e. the major is true even of analogical as Capreolus has presented the analogy of “a being.”

We should notice that Capreolus has indicated the possibility of restricting the scope of “a being” merely to the ten categories. This would have to be said, in the light of what Thomas says about “*totum ens*” sometimes.<sup>61</sup> Still, his point is that one uses the same mental concept to discuss how the God and creature stand to “a being” even in a text like *DN* 5.2, where the God is the cause of *ens commune* and is not under *ens commune*.<sup>62</sup> Or alternatively one can point out that Thomas is happy with the God being “*maxime ens*” in the “fourth way” of *ST* 1.2.3.



Scotus's 6th argument:

... everything which has a "what" [*quid*] is univocal, because predication as to what [*praedicari in quid*] expresses the quidditative *ratio*; but "a being" has a "what," as is clear from the first two premises. [132B]

Capreolus says:

... "a being" [*ens*] does not say "what" concerning any creature, because of no creature is its essence or quiddity being [*esse*]. But if it were said of anything in the role of genus or definition, then it would say "what." But "a being" [*ens*] is taken from being [*esse*]. [144A]

We see that we are at a very fundamental level of metaphysics here.

Scotus's last (7<sup>th</sup>) argument is:

... as per *Metaph.* 3 and 4, "a being" is not a genus, because it pertains to the notion [*est de intellectu*] of everything whatsoever; but if it were not univocal it could be outside the notion of some; therefore, "a being" is univocal. [132B]

And Capreolus:

... the minor is denied. For if "a being" were analogous in the way that "healthy" [is], it could be outside the notion of something, because it would have several concepts somehow agreeing, viz. in a relation to a numerically identical item, and under one [concept] it would be outside the other. But "a being" is not an analogue in this way. For it has one common concept which more perfectly represents one of the analogates than another,<sup>63</sup> though it is of the notion of each [*de intellectu utriusque*]. [144A]

This concludes the entire discussion.

I have often asked myself how well this approach to analogy by Capreolus, depending so heavily on the *Sent.* 1.19 text, agrees with the account in *ST* 1.13. I would now say that it accords well with 1.13, in that a distinction is made in both places between the "health" model and the analogy of being on the basis of the way in which the analogy is grounded in reality. The analogy of being is always the doctrine of attribution or imitation on the side of things, inequality of representation on the side of the concept.

## CONCLUSION

One general point, in conclusion, is that we are here involved in the question of the distinction between logic and metaphysics. This is especially so in the contrast between Thomas and Scotus. As Thomas taught, the reason for the distinction between logic and metaphysics is to be located in the distinction between the mode of being which things have in their own proper nature and the mode of being which they have in the human mind.<sup>64</sup> Thomas regards logic as properly an introductory procedure, one which focuses on things as thought about, i.e. as having the mode of being of things in the mind, leaving aside the foundation in reality for the modes of discourse. It is the responsibility of the metaphysician to consider both the real being of things and the being of things in thought, and to define the logical *intentiones* in terms of their having some sort of foundation in reality.<sup>65</sup> This command of the overall picture on the part of the metaphysician also makes possible a use of logical *intentiones* in a special way, viz. as a carefully controlled way of speaking about real things.<sup>66</sup> “Analogy” is a notion used in logic to describe the use of a notion relative to a set of notions. For the metaphysician, one of whose responsibilities it is to define such notions, it comes in several modes, varying with the sort of foundation in reality it has. The three modes are described in the *Sent.* 1.19 text. There we learn that the nature of being is conceived in terms of the third mode of analogy. This very doctrine leads us to understand the use of the term “analogy” to describe the objective unity of the field proper to metaphysics. Logic terms are sometimes adapted to express the nature of the real. “Analogy,” taken from logic,<sup>67</sup> is a primary case. The field of being, the object of metaphysics, has the nature of a group of modes, one only by imitation.

Gilson, speaking of the doctrine of the object of metaphysics found in the writings of Duns Scotus, stressed the influence on the mind of Scotus of Avicenna’s doctrine of the quiddity just in itself. He saw Scotus as conceiving of being itself as such a quiddity. In this connection he saw Scotus as having swallowed a larger dose of “Platonic realism” than did Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas.<sup>68</sup> This seems to me to be correct. Thomas and Scotus are disagreeing about the sort of foundation in reality that the concept of being has and must have.<sup>69</sup> Thomas Aquinas himself saw Plato as committing the error of confusing the two modes of being, the mode which things have in the mind and the mode which they have in their own proper nature. I.e. he saw “Platonic realism” as a confusion between the logical and the metaphysical.<sup>70</sup>

However, my own original interest in the above stems from the need to see how the unity of the concept of being harmonizes with the doctrine of analogy of being. Capreolus seems to me to have seen well, in the distinction

between the foundation in things (objectal concept) and the mind's representation (formal concept) a genuinely Thomistic conception of these matters. Based on the *Sent.* analogy text, it accords well with Thomas's doctrine in *ST* 1.13.6, that such a word as "a being" is said primarily of creatures, as expressive of knowledge taken from them and thus more perfectly representing them than the God, and is said primarily of the God, as naming that which is more truly found in the God than in creatures.

The original concept of being is so abstract as to be almost impossible to discern just in itself. We "sneak up on it" through notions of unity, and through the categories. It is "too self-evident." However, I think that the reflections of Thomas and Capreolus take us along the right path to understanding it.

This natural intelligible, *ens*, is so clear and useful that it is "invisible." I would willingly speak of a "natural intuition of being" in its regard. After all, it is the very first act in "the understanding of indivisibles" [*indivisibilium intelligentia*],<sup>71</sup> certainly not the fruit of reasoning or even of composition and division. But it is no accident that metaphysicians generally fill their discourse with such notions as "identity," "itself," etc. These are modes of *unity*, not of being. Unity is already a complex notion, compared to being, and is much easier to imagine. And the true and the good are even more complex.

Thus, Maritain was right to use E.A. Poe's story, *The Purloined Letter*, in discussing knowledge of being. The letter was hidden by being left in plain view. Some things are "too self-evident," as Dupin said:

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you *do* talk!" said the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! Who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little *too* self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha! – ha! ha! ha! – ho! ho! ho!" – roared our visitor, profoundly amused, "oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"<sup>72</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used: "SCG" is *Summa contra gentiles*; "ST" is *Summa theologiae*: I will sometimes cite the pagination of the edition published at Ottawa: Collège Dominicain, 1941; "CM" is *In XII libros METAPHYSICORUM Aristotelis Commentarium*; "CP" is *In libros PHYSICORUM Aristotelis expositio*; "DP" is *De potentia*; "DV" is *De veritate*.

<sup>2</sup> *CM* 4.1 (533), on Aristotle at 1003a26–32. Italics mine. In *ST* 1.45.5.ad 1 (288b35–38), Thomas qualifies his use of the term “nature” for the field of reality as falling under the cause of being as such:

... as this man participates human nature, so also every created being whatsoever participates, *if I may so put it*, THE NATURE OF BEING; because the God alone is his own [act of] being...

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, *Commentary on the SENTENCES* 2.1.1.1 (ed. Mandonnet, pp. 12–13) aims to show that there can and must be one and only one unqualifiedly first principle. He presents three arguments. The second is as follows:

... This is apparent ... from the very nature of things [*ex ipsa rerum natura*]. For there is found in all things the nature of entity [*natura entitatis*], in some [as] more noble [*magis nobilis*], and in some less [*minus*]; in such fashion, nevertheless, that the natures of the very things themselves are not that very being itself [*hoc ipsum esse*] which they have: otherwise being [*esse*] would be [part] of the notion of every quiddity whatsoever, which is false, since the quiddity of anything whatsoever can be understood even when one is not understanding concerning it *that it is*. Therefore, it is necessary that they have being [*esse*] from another, and it is necessary to come to something whose nature is its very being [*ipsum suum esse*]; otherwise one would proceed to infinity; and this is that which gives being [*esse*] to all; NOR CAN IT BE ANYTHING ELSE BUT ONE, SINCE THE NATURE OF ENTITY [*NATURA ENTITATIS*] IS OF ONE INTELLIGIBILITY [*UNIUS RATIONIS*] IN ALL, ACCORDING TO ANALOGY [*SECUNDUM ANALOGIAM*]: FOR UNITY IN THE CAUSED REQUIRES UNITY IN THE PROPER [*PER SE*] CAUSE. This is the route taken [*via*, i.e. the “Way”] by Avicenna in his *Metaphysics* 8.

“*Entitas*” seems to be used by Thomas, while not frequently, yet throughout his career. Not only in the *Sentences*, but in the relatively early *De veritate*, e.g. 20.2; speaking of the human intellect, he tells us:

... intellectus animae humanae est in potentia ad omnia entia. Impossibile est autem esse aliquod ens creatum quod sit perfecte actus et similitudo omnium entium, quia sic infinite possideret *naturam entitatis*. Unde solus Deus per seipsum sine aliquo addito potest omnia intelligere.

And in *ST* 3.75.4.ad 3 (one of the last things he wrote) we read:

... quia utrique formae et utrique materiae est communis *natura entis*; et id quod *entitatis* est in una, potest auctor entis convertere in id quod est *entitatis* in altera, sublato eo per quod ab illa distingebatur.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph McInerny, in a recent book, quite wrongly attacks Cajetan for reading this text in the *SENTENCES Commentary* of Thomas as a presentation of three types of analogy, among which the third type is most truly analogy (cf. Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1996, the whole of chapter 1). McInerny even contends that Thomas Aquinas does not use the language of “analogy of being” to describe the ontological causal hierarchy. He does allow that the sort of real situation meant by those who so speak is in accordance with Thomas’s view of the real. I find this sort of contention odd, to say the least, since it seems to me very clear that Thomas uses precisely the language of analogy to describe the objective field of metaphysics. I notice in McInerny’s conclusion, “The Point of the Book,” that he says:

My second thesis is that Thomas never speaks of the causal dependence in a hierarchical descent of all things from God as analogy. That is, terminologically speaking, there is no analogy of being in St. Thomas, (p. 162)

Is the above really true? I look at a most prominent text, one that McNerny obviously knows well, *ST* 1.4.3. It asks whether any creature can be like God. This is clearly a metaphysical question, a question about the intrinsic being of creatures. The notion of likeness involves community of form. The question is answered on the basis of the doctrine that every agent causes something like itself, so that in any effect there must be a likeness of the form of the agent. Degrees of such likeness are sketched, and the logical notions of species and genus are used to describe these degrees of likeness, but obviously this is a use of logical notions as stand-ins for metaphysical conceptions (cf. 1.29.1.ad 3). Ultimately one reasons to the case of the divine agent as “not contained in any genus.” Here THE SIMILARITY OF THE EFFECT TO THE CAUSE is called “according to some sort of *analogy*” [*secundum aliqualem analogiam*]. Notice that we proceed from the species to the genus to the analogously one. Thomas explains what he means: “... as being itself is common to all [*sicut ipsum esse est commune omnibus*]. And in this way those things which are from God are assimilated to him inasmuch as they are beings [*inquantum sunt entia*], as to the first and universal principle of being in its entirety [*totius esse*].” And one could cite many prominent texts in this line. McNerny is in error.

<sup>5</sup> Johannes Capreoli, *Defensiones theologiae divi Thomae Aquinatis*, ed. C. Paban et T. Pegues, Turonibus: Alfred Cattier, 1900, T. I, pp. 117 ff. In 1 *Sent.* d. 2, q. 1: whether the God is intelligible to us in the wayfaring state. References to this work will be in the main text for the most part, giving page and column, e.g. “142B.” Concerning John Capreolus, O.P. (Jean Cabrol), the “Prince of Thomists,” 1380–1444, see *Jean Capreolus et son temps 1380–1444 Colloque de Rodez*, ed. Guy Bedouelle, Romanus Cessario, and Kevin White [special number, #1 of *Mémoire dominicaine*], Paris: Cerf, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> I say “such opponents as” because Capreolus uses arguments from unnamed “others” along the same lines as those of Aureol and Scotus; in this paper I am not so much concerned with these two thinkers in particular as with the positions which Capreolus is having to cope with.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Peter Aureoli, *Scriptum Super Primum Sententiarum*, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert, O.F.M., St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1952–1956. He was a Franciscan Master of Theology at the University of Paris in the first decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Archbishop of Aix-en-Provence in 1321, and died in 1322. He criticized Bonaventure, Thomas, and Duns Scotus on the basis of “classical Aristotelianism” (cf. E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, New York: Random House, 1955, pp. 476–80).

<sup>8</sup> John Duns Scotus was born in 1266, joined the Franciscans in 1281, ordained priest in 1291, studied in Paris, 1293–1296, taught theology at Oxford, 1297–1301 (whence derives the *Ordinatio*), taught in Paris, 1303–1305 (save for a time of political banishment), and was sent to Cologne in 1307. He died there on 8 November 1308 (cf. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, p. 454). He was beatified by Pope John-Paul II on March 20, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> In this paper I use the word “God” as the name of a *nature*, and I translate “*Deus*” as “the God”; this is to bring out the point that, as Thomas Aquinas teaches in *ST* 1.13.8, “*Deus*” is the name of a *nature*. If it is translated as “God,” it strikes one as the name of a *person*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ST* 1.13.6.ad 3, especially; but the whole article is relevant, having as its precise purpose to complete the concept of analogy as pertaining to the God and creatures. The

doctrine of 1.13.2 is basic: the positive absolute names of pure perfections are said of the God substantially or essentially, not merely causally.

<sup>11</sup> *ST* 1.13.5 (81a38–48):

... And this mode of community holds a middle position between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For in those things which are said analogically there is neither one notion [*ratio*] as in univocals, nor totally diverse [notions], as in equivocals; but the name which is thus multiply said signifies diverse proportions to something one; as “healthy,” said of urine, signifies “sign of the health of the animal,” while, said of medicine, it signifies “cause of that same health.”

<sup>12</sup> *ST* 1.13.2 (77b42–53):

... when it is said: “the God is good,” the meaning is not: “the God is cause of goodness” or “the God is not bad”; rather, the meaning is: “that which we call ‘goodness’ in creatures exists by priority [*praeexistit*] in the God, and does so according to a higher measure [*secundum modum altiore*].” Hence, from that it does not follow that to be good pertains to the God inasmuch as he causes goodness; but rather conversely, because he is good, he pours out goodness to things; in keeping with the [statement] of Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*: “Inasmuch as he is good, we are [i.e. have being].”

<sup>13</sup> Though that is of supreme importance, since knowledge of the God, i.e. of something supreme in the orders of efficient, exemplar, and final causality, is the *goal* of metaphysics: cf. *CM* 1.3 (68) and (64–65); also, 1.2 (50–51); also 7.1 (1245). For Thomas’s presentation of the God as supreme with regard to every sort of causality, cf. *ST* 1.44 in its entirety. Note also *ST* 1.6.4 (31–44).

<sup>14</sup> *CM* 7.1 (1262 and 1269); 7.2 (1298–1305); 7.11 (1526).

<sup>15</sup> *CM* 4.1 (535–543); these paragraphs are a special lesson designed by Thomas himself to systematize what Aristotle was saying.

<sup>16</sup> This is especially clear in Thomas’s “fourth way,” i.e. *ST* 1.2.3 (14b16–35).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ST* 1.77.3, for the powers in general; for the object of the intellect, cf. 1.78.1 (473a24): “*ens universale*,” and 1.79.2 (481a10 ff.): “*ens in universali*.”

<sup>18</sup> *ST* 1.5.2. Thomas is asking which is prior in intelligibility [*secundum rationem*], being or the good. He replies:

... It is to be said that *ens* [a being] is prior in intelligibility to *bonum* [something good]. For the intelligibility signified by a word [*nomen*] is that which the intellect conceives from the thing [*concipit de re*], and it signifies that by the spoken word [*vocem*]; therefore, that is prior in intelligibility which occurs by priority in the conception of the intellect [*prius cadit in conceptione intellectus*]. But firstly in the conception of the intellect occurs *ens* [a being], because it is in virtue of this that every single item [*unumquodque*] is knowable [*cognoscibile*], [viz.] inasmuch as it is *in act* [*est actu*], as is said in *Metaph.* 9 [1051a31]. Hence *ens* [a being] is the proper object [*proprium obiectum*] of the intellect, and thus is the primary intelligible [*primum intelligibile*], in the way that sound is the primary audible. And therefore *ens* is prior in intelligibility to *bonum*.

Thomas, I might note, seems to prefer this reference to Aristotle in later writings, as for example in *ST* 1.87.1, whereas earlier (*DV*, *EE*) he used the reference to Avicenna saying that being is what the intellect first conceives as most known, and which occurs in every intellectual

representation. However, the doctrine is the same. Thus, in his *Commentary on the NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*, 6.5 [Leonine ed., lines 102–106; Pirotta #1181], we are told that the principles which pertain to being as being are most known, not only in themselves, but most known to the human mind. And in *CM* 4.6 (605), we see that it is through a consideration of *ens* that everything is understood.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas notes that “good” involves comparison, when he compares “good” to “true.” We read in *ST* 82.3.ad 1:

... the notion of cause is taken in function of the *comparison* of one item to another, and in such *comparison* the notion of the good is found to have priority; but “the true” is said more absolutely... [my italics]

And earlier, on somewhat the same point, we read:

... the true stands closer to being [*ens*], which has priority [in the order of notions], than does the good. For the true relates to being itself [*ipsum esse*] unqualifiedly and immediately [*simpliciter et immediate*]; but the notion of the good follows upon being [*esse*] inasmuch as it [sc. being] is in some measure perfect; for it is thus that it is an object of appetite.

And cf. *DV* 21.1.ad 1: “... *cum ens dicatur absolute, bonum autem superaddat HABITUDINEM causae finalis...*”

<sup>20</sup> *ST* 1.13.5.ad 1 (81b16–18): “... in predications, all univocals are reduced to one first, not univocal but analogical, which is *ens*.”

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Maritain distinguishes between the idea of being, i.e. of “the vague being of common sense,” and the conceptualization of the metaphysical intuition of being: cf. *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant*, Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1947, p. 48. In his *A Preface to Metaphysics*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1939, pp. 17–19, we see that, following Cajetan, he distinguishes between “the object first attained by the intellect,” viz. “being as enveloped or embodied in the sensible quiddity,” and “the object of metaphysics,” viz. “being disengaged and isolated from the sensible quiddity, being viewed as such and set apart in its pure intelligible values.” However, there he also says that “metaphysics... brings to light in its pure values and uncovers what is enveloped and veiled in the most primitive intellectual knowledge” (p. 19). And at pp. 32–33 he speaks of the “vague being” of common sense as *masking* the metaphysical concept of being. He actually says: “The metaphysical concept of being is present” (p. 33). He definitely means that it is present from the start. On the other hand, at pp. 43–44, it is called “the *ultimate* object to be attained by the intellect” [my italics], and requires, for its grasp, the “intuition of being,” “the intellectual perception of the inexhaustible and incomprehensible reality thus manifested as the object of this perception.” It seems to me that he is speaking, not about the concept of being, but about the domain of metaphysical *conclusions*. (For the French original, cf. Jacques Maritain, *Sept leçons sur l'être et les premiers principes de la raison spéculative*, Paris: Téqui, 1934; republished in Jacques et Raissa Maritain, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. V (1932–1935), Fribourg, Suisse: Editions Universitaires / Paris: Éditions Saint-Paul, 1982, pp. 515–683; see pp. 544–545, p. 559, and pp. 571–572.)

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ST* 1–2.51.2.in toto, especially ad 3, and 1–2.66.5.ad 4.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. my papers: “St. Thomas and the Ground of Metaphysics,” in *Philosophical Knowledge*, ed. John B. Brough, Daniel O. Dahlstrom, and Henry B. Veatch [*Proceedings of the American*

*Catholic Philosophical Association*, vol. 54], Washington, DC: ACPA, 1980, pp. 144–154; also “Jacques Maritain, St. Thomas, and the Birth of Metaphysics,” *Etudes maritainiennes/Maritain Studies* 13 (1997): 3–18; also “St. Thomas, Physics, and the Principle of Metaphysics,” in *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 549–566. Maritain, *Preface*, p. 18, contended that if the first object known were the object of metaphysics, a child would be a metaphysician as soon as it began to perceive objects intellectually (cf. French ed., p. 544). I say that the child is a proto-metaphysician.

<sup>24</sup> On the imperfection of knowledge of being, cf. *ST* 1.14.6 (97a7–34).

<sup>25</sup> Even for angels, i.e. purely spiritual creatures, the angel’s own essence has the role of principle of self-knowledge only when taken as standing under the notion of being: cf. *ST* 1.54.2.ad 2.

<sup>26</sup> *ST* 1.55.3.ad 2.

<sup>27</sup> *ST* 2–2.2.3 (1416a6–17):

... the created rational nature alone has an immediate order to the God. Because the other creatures do not attain to anything universal, but only to something particular, participating in the divine goodness either merely as to being, as inanimate things [do], or also as to living and knowing singulars, as plants and animals [do]; but the rational nature, inasmuch as it knows the universal note of the good and of being [*universalem boni et entis rationem*], has an immediate order to the universal principle of being [*universale essendi principium*].

Cf. also *ST* 1.105.3, *in toto*.

<sup>28</sup> Lest it be thought that Capreolus underestimates the difficulties which attach to questions about the object of the intellect and about knowledge of the God, let us at least list the series of conclusions he here defends. The first conclusion is that the first and immediate [*primum et per se*] object of our intellect is *ens*. The second is that the true [*verum*] is the first object of our intellect, i.e. the adequate [object], not nevertheless the immediate [*per se*], i.e. through its own intelligible note [*per propriam rationem*]. The third is that the material object of the intellect, and connatural and proportioned to us for understanding, for this present state, is the quiddity of the material thing. The fourth is that though the true is not the *per se* or formal object “that” [*quod*] of the intellect, it remains that it is the formal and *per se* object “by which” [*quo*] of the intellect. The fifth is that the God cannot be known by us “on the way,” i.e. in the present life, through his own essence, or in himself. The sixth is that while “on the way” we can know the God from and in his effects. The seventh is that the God can be known “on the way” immediately, such that the knowledge of the wayfarer attains to him, even though it goes through intermediates [*media*]; but once it attains to the God, it can think of him immediately, in such a way that then it does not need to think by priority of anything else in order to think of the God. The eighth is that in the state of “the way” we can have some proper concept of God; and I say the same about an intelligible form [*de specie*] proper to him. The ninth is that by the same concept by which the wayfarer conceives of the creature it can conceive of the God, though the name signifying that concept is not said univocally of the God and of the creature.

<sup>29</sup> He also quotes *SCG* 2.98, which I might note, in that it suggests how powerful the intellect is, in virtue of having being as its proper object. We read:

The proper object of the intellect is intelligible being [*ens intelligibile*], which indeed includes all possible differences and species of being: for whatever can be can be understood.



And again:

By the fact that a substance is intellectual, it can grasp being in its entirety.

The first text is from #1835, the second from #1836. The expression “*intelligible* being” is used to underline the point that it is not just actual being, but also what *can* be, that is included in the field.

<sup>30</sup> Resemblance and representation, albeit imperfect resemblance and imperfect representation, of creatures to the God is the cornerstone of Thomas’s metaphysics (cf. e.g. *ST* 1.13.2 and 1.4.3); in that respect, the means Etienne Gilson chose in order to contrast Thomas and Duns Scotus on analogy and univocity was ill-conceived: cf. Gilson, “L’objet de la métaphysique selon Duns Scot” in *Mediaeval Studies* 10 (1948): 21–92, at pp. 83–84.

<sup>31</sup> *DP* 7.5, quoted by Capreolus at 124B [the caps, italics, etc. are, of course, mine]. He does not find this as explicit as it could be, nevertheless, for he continues:

[Thomas] proposes the same point *more* expressly in the following article of the same question, saying:

*The conceptions of the perfections found in creatures* are imperfect likenesses and not of the same *ratio* as the divine essence. Hence, nothing prohibits that the one essence answer to all the aforementioned *conceptions* as through them imperfectly represented, and thus all those *rationes* are indeed in our intellect as in a subject, but they are in the God as in the root verifying these conceptions. Thusfar Thomas [*DP* 7.6]. [124B][my italics]

In this text it is clear that it is the conceptions of the perfections found in creatures which are used to know God; i.e. it is not immediately a *special* concept based on the concepts of creatures.

<sup>32</sup> “*Intentio*” was the word selected by the Latin translators of Avicenna to translate the Arabic *ma’na*; the fundamental Arabic verb involved here, ‘*ana*, they translated *velle dicere* (cf. French *vouloir dire*), i.e. “to mean” or “to intend to say.” Thus, “*intentio*” is best rendered by such English words as “meaning” or “notion” or “intelligible aspect.” It is misleading to put emphasis on the notion of *tendency* involved in the etymology of “*intentio*.” Cf. the Arabic-Latin lexicon contained in *Avicenna Latinus. Liber de Anima seu Sextus de naturalibus I-II-III*, ed. Simone Van Riet, Louvain/Leiden: Peters/Brill, 1972, pp. 346 and 536. I keep it in Latin here in order to show the uses of the two terms, “*intentio*” and “*ratio*,” which must be handled with care. “*Ratio*” is very often synonymous with “*intentio*.”

<sup>33</sup> Because of my own interest in a multiplicity of concepts in analogies, I have sometimes wondered if one should read “*THE* common *intentio*” or “*A* common *intentio*.” With the latter, viz. “*A* common *intentio*,” Thomas *might* be saying that in fact there is *no* common *intentio* at all in the picture. The former, viz. “*THE* common *intentio*,” is Capreolus’s reading. I would say it is justified by the way the first mode proceeds. Even in the case of “healthy,” Thomas is saying that there is *one* common *intentio* being used, but that it is referred to the many items “according to priority and posteriority.” Also, here as to the third mode, Thomas is really concerned to deny the *equality* which would not be a possibility without *the* common *intentio*.

<sup>34</sup> Notice that this is the same doctrine as we find in *ST* 1.13.6. “Inequality of representation” means that the name will be said by priority of the creature (priority as regards imposition of the name); “inequality as to foundation of truth” means that the name will be said by priority of the God (priority as regards the thing named). Thomas’s point, there in *ST* 1.13.6, about the

definition of one item being found necessary for speaking of all is Capreolus's point that there is one concept at the base of the discussion.

<sup>35</sup> This issue of *verifying* the concept, i.e. considering the degree of likeness of the concept with the things outside the mind, leads us into the realm of *judgment*: cf. *ST* 1.16.2 (115b3–6). Thus, there seems to be something to Gilson's stress on *judgment* in relation to Thomas's doctrine of analogy in metaphysics: see the previously mentioned "L'objet," pp. 83–84.

<sup>36</sup> Here I am translating the text given by Capreolus: "*unde humanitas non est eadem secundum idem esse in duobus hominibus.*" [125A] Mandonnet's edition of Thomas has: "*unde habitus humanitatis non est secundum idem esse in duobus hominibus.*" [ed. Mandonnet, p. 819].

<sup>37</sup> Capreolus, 123A, quoting Thomas at Mandonnet pp. 819–820. Thomas's response does not stop there. He next rules out mere equivocity, given that we actually do know something about the God. And he concludes as follows:

And therefore it is to be said that "science" is said analogically about the God and the creature, and similarly with all [items] of this sort. But analogy is twofold. One is through agreement in something one which belongs to them according to priority and posteriority; and there cannot be this analogy between the God and the creature, just as neither [can there be] univocation. But the other analogy is inasmuch as one *imitates* the other as much as it can, nor does it come up to it perfectly; and this analogy is of the creature to the God. [ed. Mandonnet, p. 820. My italics]

Capreolus will often focus on the term "imitation" in explaining analogy.

<sup>38</sup> One might easily take it as meaning that *esse* is a sort of principle of individuation, as Fr. Owens teaches. However, I think this is impossible: see my paper, "St. Thomas and the Individual as a Mode of Being," in *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 403–424. What it really maintains is that *esse* pertains to the subsisting thing more truly than to the essence; thus, since the subsisting thing is individual, the *esse* pertains to the individual as such: cf. *ST* 3.17.2.ad 1; nevertheless, *esse* is in its own nature something received and formal (speaking of the *esse* of creatures): cf. *ST* 1.4.1.ad 3. Cf. also *DP* 7.3, the first argument in the body of the article, which makes the same case as here for non-univocity (the God is not in a genus), and yet in 7.2.ad 5 it is clear that *esse* is individuated by its receiver.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas, in reporting Aristotle, regularly depends more on the view that "*ens*" cannot be a genus because every addition is already some sort of *ens*. Thus, its multiplication can only be through "modes."

<sup>40</sup> The "others" who are presented as arguing against the first conclusion take a line which minimizes the difference between analogical and equivocal. They say: "Analogues are true equivocal, save that they are not by chance." [127A]

<sup>41</sup> Capreolus, 125B, taken from Aureol, *Sent.* 1.2.1.4. This argument seems to be the same as that by which Thomas shows that "*ens*" is not a genus. Every nature is essentially an *ens*, and so one can find no specific difference quidditatively distinct from the would-be genus, "*ens*." Cf. e.g. *ST* 1.3.5, second argument in the body of the article; also, *DV* 1.1, which is quoted in Capreolus's answer to this objection.

<sup>42</sup> Besides Aureol, we should look at a typical argument (one of ten) from the "others." We find a heavy use of Averroes and Aristotle in these ten arguments. The first runs:

That which immediately and by its first signification says all those things which are in the ten categories does not have one common concept, because, if it had, it would firstly signify that, and signify the others through that item's mediation, just like "animal," which firstly signifies the sensible [i.e. the sensitive nature], and through the mediation of the sensible signifies the species contained under it. But the Commentator says, *Metaph.* 10 (cap. 8) that "a being" and "something one" [*ens et unum*] signify immediately and by [their] first signification what is in each of the categories. Therefore, it does not have one concept. [In Capreolus, 126B]

<sup>43</sup> *Sent.* 1.2.1.3, inserted later into his work by Thomas, is dated about 1265–7; see the introduction by H.-F. Dondaine, O.P. to *Responsio de 108 articulis*, in Leonine *Opera omnia*, t. 43, p. 265.

<sup>44</sup> *SCG* 1.53 (ed. Pera-Marc-Caramello, #442–444; Pegis #2–4).

<sup>45</sup> This is awkward in English (or French, for that matter). "Concept" suggests too strongly something solely in a mind. In Latin, the "*conceptus*" is most literally "the conceived." It is obvious that by "the conceived" we mean sometimes the mental item and sometimes the reality outside the mind.

<sup>46</sup> Concerning "*modus*," the most relevant text of Thomas seems to me to be *ST* 1.5.5, where Thomas explains goodness in terms of Augustine's triad: "*modus, species, and ordo.*"

<sup>47</sup> Gilson seems to have something of this in view when he speaks of "one same concept" and a variety of "uses," as Thomas's view of analogy, in the aforementioned paper, "L'objet," p. 84.

<sup>48</sup> Capreolus here does not seem to favour calling being a "nature."

<sup>49</sup> We see Thomas treat the modes of unity presented in *CM* 5.8 (876–880), commenting on Aristotle, *Metaph.* 5.6 (1016b31–1017a3): numerical, specific, generic, and *analogical*, as a logical presentation, i.e. in function of logical notions [*secundum intentiones logicales*]. Analogy is thus presented as one of the logical *intentiones*. However, at *ST* 1.29.1.ad 3, Thomas explains how and why logical notions are used to express the nature of things. Cf. also *ST* 1.1.1.1.ad 2 (57a9–22), where it is the Pseudo-Dionysius (rather than Aristotle) who is quoted. (At 57a10–11, I would say that, instead of "per unum simpliciter et *multa* secundum quid," it should read: "per unum simpliciter et *unum* secundum quid.")

<sup>50</sup> This is the first objection of the group of 25 taken from "others" but arguing to the same point as Scotus; Capreolus answers this group before he answers (using the answers already given) the 11 taken from Scotus, *Qq. in METAPH.* 4, q. 1.

<sup>51</sup> We have to refer back, also, to the way Capreolus treated "healthy" in defending the first conclusion: there, he said that it had one *intentio*, though he noted that it is a different sort of analogy than that of being.

<sup>52</sup> This appears to me to make clear that Cajetan is saying the same thing as Capreolus, as regards the concept of being. Cf. Cajetan, *Letter to Francis of Ferrera, Master of Students in the Friary of Bologna, concerning the Concept of Being* [*Super duo de conceptu entis quaesita, ad fratrem Franciscum de Ferraria, Magistrum studentium in conventu Bononiensi, responsio*], in Hyacinthe-Marie Robillard, o.p., *De l'analogie et du concept d'être*, Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1963, pp. 176–189. We read:

The concept [of being], numerically one in the mind as regards subjective being [*secundum esse subiectivum*], is one by analogy as regards representative being [*unum analogia secundum esse repraesentativum*]. Nor does it represent just one nature, but beyond the one which it represents in a determinate way (from which it is impressed [*a qua est impressus*]), it represents implicitly the others which are similar to the primarily represented [nature], on the basis of that in which it is proportionally like them: for the judgment is the same regarding the likeness of the things among themselves, and concerning the mental concept and the things.

Cajetan's "unity by analogy as to representative being" regarding the mental concept seems the same as Capreolus's saying (with Thomas) that the items are not equally represented by the concept or *ratio*.

<sup>53</sup> This made me wonder whether my presentation of the analogy of being in metaphysics courses did not need serious revision, since I have always posed the problem of the unity of the science of being in terms of the *ambiguity* of the word "being." However, when I review the presentation by Thomas of Aristotle in *CM 4* on "being" as said in many ways, I see that there the problem is whether the science of being studies both substance and accidents. It is *enough* that there be the sort of unity one has in the domain of "healthy" for there to be one science. This does not solve *every* problem about the unity of the subject. One would have to face questions as here, about the nature of the concept of being. I do wonder whether Capreolus goes too far (though it is a side-issue) in saying that *only* the first mode of analogy makes for ambiguity; it would seem that the second mode could also do so.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Iohannis Duns Scoti, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 3, pars 1, q. 3 (in *Opera omnia* III, ed. C. Balic, Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1954, #131–133, pp. 81–83).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Thomas, *Sent.* 1.36.1.3.*ad* 2 (ed. Mandonnet, pp. 836–837):

... the being of the creature [*esse creaturae*] can be considered in four ways: in the first way, according as it is in its proper nature; in the second way, inasmuch as it is in our knowledge; in the third way, inasmuch as it is in God; in the fourth way, commonly, inasmuch as it abstracts from all these [*communiter, prout abstrahit ab omnibus his*]. Therefore, when it is said that the creature has truer being [*verius esse*] in God than in itself, one compares [p. 837] the first and the third with respect to the fourth: because all comparison is with respect to something common; and just to this extent it is said that in God it has truer being, because everything which is in something [reading "*aliquo*" for "*aliquod*"] is in it by the mode of that in which it is and not by its own mode; hence, in God, it is through uncreated being [*esse increatum*], in itself it is through created being [*esse creatum*], in which there is less of the truth of being [*de veritate essendi*] than in uncreated being. But if the first being [*esse primum*] be compared to the second with respect to the fourth, they are found to have the roles of [both] exceeding and exceeded. For the being [*esse*] which is in the proper nature of the thing, by the fact that it is substantial, exceeds the being of the thing in the soul, which is accidental; but it is exceeded by it, inasmuch as this [*viz.* being in its proper nature] is material being, and that [*viz.* being in the soul] is intellectual [being]. And so it is clear that sometimes a thing has truer being where it is through its likeness than in itself. [Mandonnet, pp. 836–837]

St. Thomas's use of "abstraction" to conceive of the "being" which is used to compare created and uncreated being, proper and cognitional being, reminds me of Capreolus saying that "being" in its widest scope *abstracts* from real and of reason (or unreal).

<sup>56</sup> Capreolus is taking these arguments from Scotus, *Qq. in METAPH.* 4, q. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *ST* 1.87.3. *ad* 1 (on the universality of *ens* as making possible knowledge of knowledge and of things as having being in knowledge); 1.85.1.*ad* 2 on the abstractness of “a being”: it expresses pure perfection, without any matter or potency (cf. 1.13.3.*ad* 1).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. 57 1.5.1.*ad* 1:

For since “*ens*” says something properly being in act [*aliquid proprie esse in actu*], and act properly has an order to potency, it is in virtue of this precisely that something is called “*ens*” unqualifiedly, viz. in virtue of that by which first it is distinguished from that which is only in potency. But this is the substantial being of each thing [*esse substantiale rei uniuscuiusque*]; hence, through its own substantial being each thing is called “*ens*” unqualifiedly [*unde per suum esse substantiale dicitur unumquodque ens simpliciter*]...

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, commenting on Aristotle at *Metaph.* 4.2 (1003a33–b11), at *CM* 4.1 (540–543), includes negations and privations as the lowest mode of being, just as Aristotle himself points out that “being” is said even of non-being: “Non-being is non-being.” On genus and species as the business of metaphysics, cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 4.2 (1005a17), and Thomas, *CM* 4.4 (587).

<sup>60</sup> This once more makes the same point as Cajetan will make regarding the “representative being” of the mental concept, i.e. that it is a likeness of different things in different degrees.

<sup>61</sup> Consider such a text as *Expositio libri Peryermenias* 1.14 (ed. Leonine, t. 1\*1, Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: Vrin, 1989, lines 438–440):

... the divine will is to be understood as standing *OUTSIDE THE ORDER OF BEINGS [UT EXTRA ORDINEM ENTIIUM EXISTENS]*, AS A CAUSE POURING FORTH BEING IN ITS ENTIRETY [*TOTUM ENS*] AND ALL ITS DIFFERENCES.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *In librum beati Dionysii DE DIVINIS NOMINIBUS expositio*, ed. C. Pera, O.P., Rome/Turin: Marietti, 1950, 5.2 (660).

<sup>63</sup> Here again is what Cajetan will call inequality in “representative being.”

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Sent.* 1.2.1.3 (Mandonnet, p. 67); also, *CM* 4.4 (572–577, especially 574); and 6.4 (1233). Cf. also *De ente et essentia*, c. 3 (ed. Leonine, lines 73–119).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *CM* 4.4 (587), concerning Aristotle at 4.2 (1005a13–18):

[The metaphysician] ... considers the prior and the posterior, *genus and species*, whole and part, and others things of this sort, because these also are accidents of that which is inasmuch as it is that which is [*accidentia entis in quantum est ens*].

<sup>66</sup> *ST* 1.29.1.*ad* 3.

<sup>67</sup> See above, n. 48.

<sup>68</sup> Gilson, “L’objet,” pp. 91–92.

<sup>69</sup> However, Gilson also rejected the view of those critics of Scotus who held that he was guilty of confusing metaphysics with logic. We read:

The interpreters of Duns Scotus who as philosophers rally to his doctrine are thus entirely right to protest against those who would attribute to the Subtle Doctor any sort of confusion between the metaphysical and the logical. Nothing is more contrary to his

intentions than to make of the *ens rationis* the subject of metaphysics... Not only does he not confuse the two orders, but he forbids their being confused.

But Gilson goes on to say that the critics are perhaps not wrong if they are considered not as historians but as philosophers:

... what they are saying is not that Duns Scotus himself considered metaphysical being as identical with logical being, but that, from the point of view of another philosophy than his own and that they themselves hold nevertheless for true, the metaphysical as Duns Scotus conceives it is not, in fact and whatever were his intentions, anything but a logical being. [Gilson, "L'objet," pp. 87–88.]

We might suggest that here Gilson is forcing a rather restricted outlook upon the historian.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *ST* 1.84.1.

<sup>71</sup> *CM* 4.6 (605).

<sup>72</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Purloined Letter*, in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, London and New York: J. M. Dent and Sons; D.P. Dutton [Everyman's Library], 1908 (1962 reprint), p. 455. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Preface*, p. 88; at pp. 86–89 [French, pp. 615–619] entitled "*Ens Absconditum: Hidden Being*" he stresses how metaphysical being is hidden in "ordinary being." I am not happy with this distinction between the two conceptions of being. It seems to me that it is better to work on the problem of developing the scientific *habitus* of metaphysics, i.e., the ability to use knowledge of being as leading to conclusions.

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## **Chapter 2**

# **LOGIC AND METAPHYSICS IN GERMAN PHILOSOPHY FROM MELANCHTHON TO HEGEL \***

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The aim of this paper is to focus on the distinction between logic and metaphysics in German philosophy from Philipp Melanchthon to G.W.F. Hegel. Its scope is a temporal route that goes from the Renaissance to the 19th century, and which exhibits a movement from one extreme to another. Thus, Melanchthon – owing to his nominalistic background – was in fact repelled by metaphysical forms and chose not to include metaphysics among the philosophical sciences. For him, metaphysics was to be identified with logic. On the other hand, Hegel was repelled by logical formalism and did not include logic among the philosophical sciences. For Hegel, logic was to be identified with metaphysics. While Melanchthon and Hegel are the subjects, respectively, of the first and last parts of this paper, the second, the third, and the fourth parts are dedicated to the understanding of the relationship between logic and metaphysics in the work of Scheibler, Leibniz and Kant.



## I

The history of metaphysics in German philosophy closely parallels the teaching of metaphysics in the German universities. We begin with Melanchthon, to whom Martin Luther gave the task of reforming the university-curriculum in Protestant Germany. Like many other Renaissance philosophers, Melanchthon felt a profound need to harmonize Plato and Aristotle, whereby the latter, he said, would be valued for his clarity; and the former, for his depth.<sup>1</sup> But Melanchthon's specific approach to this harmonization changed over time. (Wilhelm Risse highlights the development in the three editions of Melanchthon's dialectic, from a Ciceronianism combined with Neoplatonism toward a progressive recognition of the primacy of Aristotle.<sup>2</sup>) Melanchthon's Aristotle, as Wilhelm Maurer stressed, "should be interpreted platonically – and this meant, as in the Middle Ages, neoplatonically."<sup>3</sup> Melanchthon's main contribution, according to Cesare Vasoli, was to combine in a new methodical unity the Ciceronian doxastic Topic, the Stoic distinction between *systema et ordo* and the Aristotelian theory of demonstration.<sup>4</sup> This rediscovery of the "metaphysical content" in Melanchthon's philosophy was one of the merits of Walter Sparn's book on the *Wiederkehr der Metaphysik*.<sup>5</sup> According to Sparn, Melanchthon's exhortation *ad res ipsas* implies a comprehensive metaphysical project aimed at retranslating the Aristotelian realist metaphysics in a system of ideal relations held together by mental procedures. Ulrich-Gottfried Leinsle, lastly, pointed out that Melanchthon's logic is "supported by metaphysical elements."<sup>6</sup>

Melanchthon, like many other Renaissance philosophers, completely neglected the systematic role played by metaphysics arguing that (a) logic can take the place of metaphysics with regard to assessing principles; (b) metaphysics is not only useless with regard to the concept of God, it is pernicious; and (c) the main advantage of metaphysics is to be seen in grammar – one needs only to think about the 32 definitions of logical concepts given by Aristotle in *Metaphysica* Delta or about the criteria for truth and certainty in Lambda.<sup>7</sup> On the other side, there is according to Leinsle a "real reference" in Melanchthon's logic in as far as it is aimed at "comprehending the *ordo rerum*, and individuating those *genera rerum* which permit us to distinguish among the sciences."<sup>8</sup> In a word: Melanchthon's logic is aimed at a conceptual comprehension of being and therefore of categories and universals as well. The appropriate tool for this purpose is the doctrine of the *loci communes*. The goal of logic consists in the individuation (*inventio*) and in the preparation for discussion (*iudicium*) of a system of epistemological relations (*loci*). With regard to the *loci communes*, Plato

provides the material content; and Aristotle, the formal requirements. And it is no wonder that although Melanchthon, following Aristotle, considers the universals (*praedicabilia*) nominalistically as *gradus vocum*, *voces*, or as *tituli vocum communium*, at the same time he holds to the real reference of the categories.<sup>9</sup>

Melanchthon argues that *omnes voces et res* be subsumed under the categories, so that eventually all *rerum natura* would be distinguished by means of the categories.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the real reference of the *loci* to the *rerum natura* necessarily presupposes the worldview of Plato's ontologically grounded dialectic, which is as much as to say that Melanchthon was a crypto-Platonist and therefore a crypto metaphysician as well. Plato's theory of knowledge in *Respublica* Zeta and Epsilon and the theory of the *genera summa* in *Sophistes* – but neither Aristotle's *Organon* nor his *Metaphysica* – are decisive for Melanchthon's *loci communes*. We can see an instance of this when we consider briefly Melanchthon's position about the problem of the universals. At a first glance, it seems as if Melanchthon would maintain the nominalistic approach aiming at reducing the universals to mental acts, "This form is not a thing outside the understanding... it is rather the act of understanding itself, the act painting that image, which is thus said to be common, because it can be applied to many individuals."<sup>11</sup> Seen more closely, however, this statement turns out to prefigure the notion of a subjectivity constituted by means of language, which fulfils the requirement of really referring to *rerum natura* as carrier and user of mental structures. We have here the opening up of the crucial question about logic being either a *system* or a *habit*.

## II

The next step in reviving metaphysics in the German university was taken by Christoph Scheibler (1598–1653), who is also known as the Protestant Suárez because of his program aimed at reshaping the content of Francisco Suárez's *Disputationes Metaphysicae* for teaching at Protestant schools.<sup>12</sup> Like Cornelius Martini (1568–1621), Scheibler felt the need of systematically redefining the relation of logic and metaphysics while evaluating once for all Melanchthon's legacy, together with the innovations proposed by Jacopo Zabarella (1533–1589) and Suárez.<sup>13</sup> His *Opus Metaphysicum*, whose first edition was published in 1617, in two volumes, is a giant work that was extremely successful in term of readership and adoption.<sup>14</sup>

Scheibler defines metaphysics as the science of being as being. He divides it into 'general' (book one) and 'special' (book two). The general part

deals with being in general, its general affection, and the transcendentals, from which categories find their origin.<sup>15</sup> The special part deals with pneumatology, that is, the doctrine of intelligences, and with natural theology.

As regards the nature (*genus*) of metaphysics, Scheibler declares it is neither *prudentia*<sup>16</sup> nor *ars*,<sup>17</sup> nor – as assumed by many – *sapientia*,<sup>18</sup> but rather *scientia*<sup>19</sup> and, more precisely, *scientia speculativa*.<sup>20</sup> Scheibler considers the definition of the subject of metaphysics<sup>21</sup> from the standpoint of the theory of abstraction. Just as physics and mathematics both abstract their own kind of being, namely bodies and numbers,<sup>22</sup> so metaphysics considers a very special kind of being, the *ens qua ens*. In this formula, Scheibler says, the *qua* should not be taken as *specificative*, but rather *reduplicative*, because metaphysics is a discipline that deals first and foremost with cognition, not with objects. The goal of metaphysics consists, according to Scheibler, in its being the leading science of all special sciences. As regards the division of metaphysics, Scheibler remarks that the unity of the subject of metaphysics, the *ens qua ens*, makes a division at first sight impossible.<sup>23</sup> A division is possible, however, based on how one looks at it – when one looks at it generally, one has ontology; when specially, one has pneumatology and natural theology.<sup>24</sup>

The doctrine of the transcendentals follows after these introductory remarks. Scheibler maintains that one could go beyond Suárez's understanding of *affectiones Entis* in terms *ens, res, aliquid, unum, verum, bonum*.<sup>25</sup> First, because the “the affections of being, which flow from the essence, as one says, one, true, good etc.” should be called more correctly attributes. Second, because the traditional understanding of the transcendentals has been too narrow. The transcendentals distinguish themselves from the transcendents as follows. The transcendents are such “because of the nobility, eminence and sublimity of being,” while the transcendentals are referred to the categories: “One should not call transcendent only what corresponds to being in metaphysics, but also what is a more determinate affection of being, although in so far as they are included within the categories, and in so far they can be found in individuals, just like existence and duration are to be numbered among transcendents, although they correspond only to actual being.”<sup>26</sup> The following sections of general metaphysics deal with the numerous transcendentals that satisfy the conditions of Scheibler's definition: the one, the simple and the composite, the whole and the parts, the individual and the collective, identity and difference, the good, the perfect, the complete and incomplete, the finite and the infinite, act and potency, existence, duration, location, necessity and contingency, stable and mutable, absolute and relative, principle and

principled, cause and effect, subject and adjunct, sign and signed, measure and measured, the *ens rationis*.

In the *Introductio logicae*, the first part of his *Opus Logicum*,<sup>27</sup> Scheibler explains how logic is to be distinguished from metaphysics. Elaborating on the various meanings of *subiectum*, Scheibler declares that metaphysics deals with *subiectum perfectionis*, because it deals with the noblest of all things, while physics deals with *subiectum adaequationis*, that is, with the *corpus naturale*.<sup>28</sup> Logic deals with *subiectum considerationis* insofar as it deals *de quo* (*kat' hupheimenon*) – i.e., it is taught theoretically to search for truth – and with *subiectum operationis*, insofar as it deals *in quo* (*en hupokeimenon*) – i.e., it is used practically to avoid error.<sup>29</sup> Logic's *subiectum operationis*, says Scheibler, is the *ens rationis* – i.e., concepts set by the understanding – but its *subiectum considerationis* remains the *ens reale*, which only can serve as the basis for the deployment of thought.<sup>30</sup> The problem is that logic, while dealing thus with the *ens reale*, is still not able to say anything about it; this is instead the goal of metaphysics. Unlike logic, metaphysics has *ens reale* as its *subiectum operationis* (because it deals with objects and the way we can classify them), while it has *ens rationis* as its *subiectum considerationis* (insofar as being is always something necessary).<sup>31</sup> In other words, as Risse puts it, logic and metaphysics follow various procedures, but have a common subject matter, which is being. Logic deals with the concept of the 'meant being'; and metaphysics, with the being of the 'meant concept.'<sup>32</sup> The *subiectum operationis* of logic is thus the ontologically based *conceptus formalis*; that of metaphysics, the *conceptus obiectivus*. The *subiectum considerationis* of logic is *universalitas*; that of metaphysics, the *universale*. Finally, one should be conscious of the fact that, while logical *praedicamenta* are determinations referred to being, metaphysical *transcendentia* are general affections of being.

### III

Leibniz's early studies were centered on Aristotelian philosophy. His first acquaintance with logic took place at thirteen, when he read the popular exposition of Peripatetic logic after Melanchthon and Aristotle by Johannes Rhenius.<sup>33</sup> Notwithstanding the eclecticism of their approach, all his teachers at Leipzig and Jena, namely Johann Adam Scherzer, Jakob Thomasius, and Erhard Weigel, professed to be Aristotelians as regards logic and metaphysics.<sup>34</sup> However, Scherzer's contribution to logic and metaphysics was minimal;<sup>35</sup> and Weigel was not a traditional logician and metaphysician, rather he taught Leibniz to see logic through the eyes of a mathematician.<sup>36</sup>

So, the most important source for Leibniz's acquaintance with Aristotle is Thomasius, who followed Leibniz's father, Friedrich Leubnitz, in the chair of moral philosophy at the University of Leipzig in 1653, switched to the chair of dialectic in 1656, and eventually held the chair of eloquence from 1659 until his death in 1684. Leibniz was his student from 1661 until 1663.<sup>37</sup> Thomasius, writes Giuseppe Micheli, was averse to the thought of Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, Grotius, and remained loyal to Aristotelianism; in fact, he upheld a form of "pure Aristotelianism."<sup>38</sup> He wrote a textbook on logic and another one on metaphysics, which have no pretense of originality, but aim instead to preserve and consolidate a version of Aristotelianism reformed according to the dictates of Melanchthon and of late sixteenth and seventeenth-century Lutheran scholasticism.<sup>39</sup> In the letter to Thomasius of April 1669, Leibniz too expresses his confidence that "Reformed Philosophy can be reconciled with Aristotelian Philosophy and does not adverse it."<sup>40</sup>

Leibniz was thoroughly acquainted with Aristotle's theory of demonstration, and he shows an extensive approach to the theory of concepts. In the same letter to Thomasius, however, he distances himself from late Scholastic theories of concepts by stressing the ontological independence of Aristotelian "form," which he ultimately sees as "principium moti."<sup>41</sup> Leibniz knew from Rhenius's textbook (which is Aristotelian but follows Melanchthon's interpretation) that categories are *ordines* or *classes rerum*, whose task is to provide materials for propositions and demonstrations.<sup>42</sup> In the letter to Gabriel Wagner of late 1696, Leibniz observes that as a youth he understood the different tables of the categories he became acquainted with while studying logic and metaphysics as "role-models of all things in the world."<sup>43</sup> In 1686, Leibniz has a double answer to the question of how do categories account for actuality. In the *Generales inquisitiones* he makes clear that metaphysics is anchored in logic insofar as (a) all concepts are constituted by absolutely simple elements, (b) all propositions are constituted by concepts, and (c) in any true proposition the predicate makes explicit only what is already in the subject.<sup>44</sup> In the *Discours de métaphysique* he explains that in order to know what an individual substance is, one needs to consider "ce que c'est que d'estré attribué véritablement à un certain sujet," because "il est constant que toute predication veritable a quelque fondement dans la nature des choses."<sup>45</sup> And in the draft of a philosophical letter addressed probably to the Duchess Sophie of Hanover (which Carl Immanuel Gerhardt dates to 1677–1702), Leibniz explicitly states that logic and metaphysics are identical. He writes, "I have understood that true metaphysics does not differ from true logic at all, that is from the art of inventing in general," because "Metaphysics is natural theology and the same God who is the principle of all good is also the principle of all cognition."<sup>46</sup> Here Leibniz assumes that logic

and metaphysics are identical insofar as they share the same domain, although they look at it under different aspects. The issue is connected to Leibniz's understanding of mathematics as a doctrine of the possible forms of deductive connections in general. Leibniz was well aware that ordinary algebra, as the science of quantity, needs to be complemented by a general science of quality, whereby the latter can only be the product of both logic and metaphysics. For logic provides the tools for conceptual analysis and metaphysics takes over the task of categorical deduction. This point was made clear by Heinrich Schepers in the paper he gave at the Hanover Leibniz Congress of 1966.<sup>47</sup>

The question is, what role did Leibniz assign Aristotle? In her monograph on Leibniz's metaphysics Christia Mercer has argued that Leibniz's views on metaphysics have a threefold source: (a) Renaissance humanism as the central source for Leibniz's "Metaphysics of Method," (b) Aristotelianism for his "Metaphysics of Substance," and (c) Platonism for his "Metaphysics of Divinity."<sup>48</sup> Throughout his career, writes Mercer, Leibniz felt it necessary to explain his "rehabilitation" of Aristotelian elements, because many of his contemporaries had rejected Aristotle and Aristotelianism. It is important to note, continues Mercer, that Leibniz considered his views on substance as thoroughly Aristotelian and that they correspond to the most fundamental of Aristotle's views.<sup>49</sup> I cannot agree more with Mercer's interpretation, assuming, however, one accepts Peter Peterson's claim that Leibniz was influenced by Aristotelianism rather than by Aristotle himself.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Leibniz's original source was the wide understanding of categories as *ordines rerum* of Melanchthon's logic, which was incorporated into the theory of the transcendentals in Scheibler's metaphysics, and finally was taken over both in Rhenius's logic and in Thomasius's logic and metaphysics.

#### IV

Hegel is close to Leibniz in maintaining that logic is one with metaphysics, but he goes beyond Leibniz's statement of identity insofar as he develops a whole system of logic *qua* metaphysics. Before turning to Hegel, though, it is necessary to look at Kant, who dedicated great efforts to keep apart logic and metaphysics. Kant was, it is worth noticing, in agreement with Aristotle and Scheibler and in disagreement with Melanchthon and Leibniz. He devoted a good deal of effort to distinguishing logic from metaphysics, which he approached in a twofold way; namely, by looking at reference, on the one hand, and at functionality, on the other. In the *Metaphysics Vigilantius (K3)*, a transcript from one of Kant's last courses on metaphysics (whose front page

is dated 1794/95),<sup>51</sup> Kant uses the form and matter distinction. “Metaphysics belongs to the material part of philosophy, or rather contains that within itself, and therefore, since it presupposes actual objects, it rests on laws, i.e., on grounds of cognition (*principia*) of and about that which belongs to the existence of things. From it, therefore, is separated the merely formal part of philosophy, or the laws of thinking expounded in logic, since the latter abstracts from the objects themselves.”<sup>52</sup> This passage shows Kant’s close affinity to Scheibler. In fact, when Kant says that the subject of metaphysics is “real objects” or the matter of thought, he means the *ens reale*; and when he says that logic deals only with abstractions from real objects or with the form of thought, he means the *ens rationis*. For Kant, then, the form of thought becomes *subiectum considerationis* of logic and, inversely, *subiectum operationis* of metaphysics, because metaphysics needs necessary laws. The matter of thought becomes *subiectum considerationis* of metaphysics and, inversely, *subiectum operationis* of logic, because logic too eventually refers to existing objects. We read in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that metaphysics deals with the “origin of knowledge” and “the different kind of certainty according to differences in the objects,” while “the sphere of logic is quite precisely delimited; its sole concern is to give an exhaustive exposition and a strict proof of the formal rules of all thought, whether it be *a priori* or empirical, whatever be its origin or its object, and whatever hindrances, accidental or natural, it may encounter in our minds.”<sup>53</sup>

In *Reflexion 3946* (dated by Erich Adickes to phase k), Kant explains that logic deals with conceptual relations; and metaphysics, with objects that are all ontologically grounded: “All pure philosophy is either logical or metaphysical. The former ... contains only the subordination of the concepts under the *sphere* of other concepts, either immediately in judgments, or mediately in inferences. Logic, however, leaves indeterminate the very concepts that are to be subordinated to each other, and it cares only whether the predicate inheres in things according to the laws of pure reason.”<sup>54</sup> One sees that Kant maintains that while logic limits itself to *entia rationis*, metaphysics has a much wider scope, namely to find “the first concepts by means of which we judge through pure reason... and the principles.”<sup>55</sup> This passage could not be clearer. Metaphysics is the true science and has all fundamental concepts and propositions as its object, while logic is just an instrument that has no object besides its own *entia rationis* and whose goal is to instruct all other science to use this object in a rational way: “Logic borrows concepts and sentences from metaphysics or from any other empirical cognition and teaches us how to use them.”<sup>56</sup>

The picture would not be complete, however, without a reference to Kant’s transcendental philosophy. In the *Metaphysik Volckmann* (dated by

Gerhard Lehmann to 1784–1785), we read that “Transcendental philosophy is with respect to metaphysics what logic is with respect to philosophy as a whole. Logic contains the general rules of our understanding, be it based on experience or not, and is thus an introduction to philosophy as a whole. Transcendental philosophy is an introduction to pure philosophy, which is a part of the whole of philosophy.”<sup>57</sup>

Just as logic is an introduction to the whole of philosophy, so is transcendental philosophy an introduction to pure philosophy. The subject of transcendental philosophy is thus no *ens rationis*, but rather *ens reale*, although a very specific one, that is, “all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*.”<sup>58</sup> In the *Metaphysik Volckmann*, Kant writes: “As regards the pure employment of reason, however, it will be necessary to have a particular logic that will be called transcendental philosophy. Here one does not reflect on objects, but rather on our reason itself, in the same way as it happens in general logic.”<sup>59</sup>

It is clear, then, that Kant has a convincing solution to the question of what the subjects of logic, transcendental philosophy, and metaphysics are. Logic deals indeed only with *entia rationis*; transcendental philosophy, in so far as it is “self-knowledge of our own reason,”<sup>60</sup> with the *a priori* modes of our knowledge; and metaphysics, with *entia realia*, provided one observes the critical reservation that reason cannot go beyond its transcendental ideal.

## V

It is well known that Kant’s understanding of the relation between logic and metaphysics was the subject of much debate. Even Kant’s immediate followers did not agree on it. For Jakob Sigismund Beck, Georg Mellin, and later the Marburg School, logic remained a formal science and metaphysics became theory of knowledge. For Johann Ludwig von Jakob, C.C.E. Schmidt, and Matern Reuß, transcendental philosophy was just the beginning of a reconstruction of metaphysics in the direction of critical philosophy. There is actually no need to go through the whole of Hegel’s work to find an assessment of the problem discussed by this paper. It is sufficient to look at the preface to the first edition of the *Science of Logic*. There Hegel comments on the Kantian turn by stressing the fact that, in contemporary Germany, “Philosophy and ordinary common sense” have cooperated in bringing about the “downfall of metaphysics.” As a result, one had “the strange spectacle of a nation without metaphysics – like a temple richly ornamented in other respects but without a holy of holies.” Even theology, which used to be the



guardian of the mysteries of its maidservant metaphysics, has given up metaphysics in favor of feelings, popularity, and erudition. Logic, continues Hegel, “did not fare quite so badly as metaphysics.” Probably “for the sake of a certain formal utility,” logic “was still left a place among the sciences, and indeed it was even retained as a subject of public instruction.” The point is that no one has recognized that “the science of logic which constitutes metaphysics proper or purely speculative philosophy, has hitherto still been much neglected.” It is necessary rather “to make a completely fresh start with this science.” And this is what Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is about.<sup>61</sup>

## NOTES

\* A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the VII Internationaler Leibniz-Kongreß: Nihil sine Ratione, Hanover, September, 2001.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Philipp Melanchthon, *De Philosophia, Opera quae supersunt omnia*, vol. 9, ed. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, Halle: Schwetschke, 1842; reprint, New York: Johnson, 1963, p. 423: “Id certamen diremit Theodorus Gaza, inquiring suum cuique locum tribuendum esse: ita lectionem Platonis multum profuturam esse, si quis in Aristotele recte institutus, postea Platonem legal. Nam cum afferet lector Aristotelicam methodum, facile quasi intra certas metas includet eas res, quae apud Platonem late dissipatae sunt.”

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Risse, *Logik der Neuzeit. Ed. I: 1400–1650*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964, pp. 83ff

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Cesare Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell’Umanesimo*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1968, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Sparr, *Wiederkehr der Melaphysik*, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1976, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich-Gottfried Leinsle, *Das Ding und die Methode*, Augsburg: Maro, 1985, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13f.

<sup>9</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, *Erotemata dialectices, Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, vol. 13, Halle: Schwetschke, 1846; repr., New York: Johnson, 1963, p. 518.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 514f, pp. 526f.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 520: “... non est quiddam extra intellectionem ... est revera actus intelligendi, pingens illam imaginem in mente, quae ideo dicitur communis, quia applicari ad multa individua potest.”

<sup>12</sup> On Scheibler’s biography, see Leinsle, *Das Ding und die Methode*, pp. 322f pp. 708f On Scheibler’s philosophy see Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1939, pp. 119–123; Risse, *Logik der Neuzeit*, pp. 470–477; Pietro Di Vona,

*Studi sulla scolastica della controriforma: L'esistenza e la sua distinzione metafisica dall'essenza*, Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968, pp. 85–89; *id.*, *Studi sull'ontologia di Spinoza*, Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968, 1: p. 237, 2: pp. 277–79; Jean-François Courtine, *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990, pp. 416–18.

<sup>13</sup> Among Scheibler's writings, see *Epitome Metaphysica*, Giessen, 1616; *Introductio logica*, ed. Secunda, Giessen, 1618; *Tractatus logicus de propositionibus sive axiomatibus*, Giessen, 1619; *Tractatus logicus de syllogismis et methodis*, Giessen, 1619; *Opus Logicum: Quatuor partibus, universum hujus artis systema comprehendens*, Marburg, 1634. His complete works were published with the title *Opera philosophica*, Frankfurt, 1665.

<sup>14</sup> Christoph Scheibler, *Opus Metaphysicum duobus libris universum huius scientiae systema comprehendens: Tum omnium Facultatum, tum, imprimis Philosophiae & Theologiae Studiosis utile et necessarium*, Giessen, 1617. For this paper I used the following: *Metaphysica duobus libris Universum huius scientiae Systema comprehendens: Opus, tum omnium facultatum, tum imprimis Philosophiae & Theologiae Studiosis utile & necessarium: Praemissa est summaria methodus, sive dispositio totius Scientiae, & Prooemium de Usu Philosophiae in Theologia, & praetensa eius ad Theologiam contrarietate*, editio nova emendate, Geneva, 1636.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Christoph Scheibler, *Metaphysica*, pt. 1, Ch. 1: "De definitione & divisione Metaphysicae"; Ch. 2. "De Ente in genere eiusque Principiis"; ch. 3: "De transcendentalibus affectionibus Entis in genere"; Ch. 4: "De Uno."

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, #12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, #14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, #20.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, #24.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, #35.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, #64.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, #41–63.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, #159.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, #167.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, #3. Cf. Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, vol. 3, #2–10. Cf. also John P. Doyle, "Suárez on the Truth of the Proposition 'This is my Body'," *The Modern Schoolman* 57 (2000): 145–163.

<sup>26</sup> Christoph Scheibler, *Metaphysica*, #7: "affectiones Entis, quae ad essentiam consequuntur ut quod Ens dicitur Unum, verum, Bonum, & sic deinceps ... a nobilitate vel eminentia vel sublimitate Entitatis... . Transcendentia non solum vocanda esse, quae recipiuntur ad Ens in Metaphysicis, sed etiam ea, quae etsi sint determinatiores affectiones Entis, tamen adhuc in tantum, non sunt determinatae, ut sint redactae infra classes praedicamentorum, sed adhuc aptae sint in singulis reperiri, quomodo existentia & duratio inter transcendentia sunt numerandae, etsi soli Enti actuali conveniant."

<sup>27</sup> Christoph Scheibler, *Opus Logicum: Quatuor partibus universum hujus artis systema comprehendens*, Marburg, 1634. For this paper I have used the 4th edition, Giessen, 1654, 55–66. I quote the individual sections.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, #45.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, #46.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, #58.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, #57.

<sup>32</sup> Risse, *Logik der Neuzeit*, I: p. 470.

<sup>33</sup> Johannes Rhenius, *Compendium logicae peripateticae ex Phil. Melanchthone et Aristotele*, Eisleben, 1620. For this paper I used the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Leipzig, 1626. On Leibniz's early studies of Aristotle see: Francesco Piro, *Varietates identitate compensata: Studio sulla formazione della metafisica di Leibniz*, Naples: Bibliopolis, 1990; *id.*, "Leibniz et l'Ethique a Nicomaque," in *Leibniz und die Frage nach der Subjektivität*, ed. Renato Cristin, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994, pp. 179–196; Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. The following works by Mercer on the topic dealt with by this paper also deserve attention: *ead.*, "The Vitality and Importance of Early Modern Aristotelianism," in *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*, ed. Tom Sorell, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 33–67; *ead.* and R. C. Sleight, Jr., "'Metaphysics': The Early Period to the *Discourse de Métaphysique*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. Nicholas Jolley, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 67–123; *ead.*, "Mechanizing Aristotle: Leibniz and Reformed Philosophy," in *Studies in Seventeenth Century European Philosophy*, ed. Michael Alexander Stewart, *Oxford Studies in the History of Philosophy* 2 (1997): 117–152; *ead.*, "The Young Leibniz and his Teachers," in *The Young Leibniz and his Philosophy (1645–75)*, ed. Stuart Brown, Boston: Kluwer, 1999, pp. 19–40.

<sup>34</sup> Mercer, "The Young Leibniz and his Teachers," p. 19. On the concept of eclecticism see Michael Albrecht, *Eklektik: Eine Begriffsgeschichte mit Hinweisen auf die Philosophie- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> On Scherzer's standpoint see Mercer, "The Young Leibniz and his Teachers," pp. 24–28.

<sup>36</sup> On Weigel's logic see Risse, *Logik der Neuzeit*, 2: pp. 143–146; Peter Petersen, *Geschichte der aristotelischen Philosophie im protestantischen Deutschland*, Leipzig: Meiner, 1921; reprint, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964, p. 362; Mercer, "The Young Leibniz and his Teachers," pp. 33–35.

<sup>37</sup> The most detailed account of Thomasius's position has been provided by Giuseppe Micheli in his chapter on "The 'Historia Philosophica' in German Scholastic Thought," in *Models of the History of Philosophy: From Its Origins in the Renaissance to the 'Historia Philosophica'*, ed. Giovanni Santinello, Engl. ed. C.W.T. Blackwell and Philip Weller, Boston: Kluwer, 1993, pp. 409–442. See also Risse, *Logik der Neuzeit*, 2: pp. 405–406 and Mercer, "The Young Leibniz and his Teachers," pp. 28–33.

<sup>38</sup> Micheli, "The 'Historia Philosophica' in German Scholastic Thought," pp. 410–411. More precisely, writes Micheli (*ibid.*, p. 411), Thomasius's Aristotelianism was "pure Aristotelianism... in the manner of the school of Altdorf (Michael Piccart and Ernst Soner) and of Christian Dreier, and he was against the ontological teachings favoured by the method of Aristotelian interpretation modeled on Suárez. However, seeing that this method was by now victorious in the university schools, he unwillingly adapted himself to it." For a definition of "pure Aristotelianism" see Risse, *Logik der Neuzeit*, 1: p. 201.

- <sup>39</sup> Micheli, “The ‘Historia Philosophica’ in German Scholastic Thought,” p. 414. The two textbooks are the *Erotemata logica pro incipientibus*, Leipzig, 1670<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leipzig, 1678, and the *Erotemata metaphysica pro incipientibus*, Leipzig, 1670; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leipzig, 1678.
- <sup>40</sup> *Brief an Thomasius vom 20.–30. April 1669*, in *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* (= PS), ed. Carl Immanuel Gerhardt, 7 vols., Leipzig, 1875–1890; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1960, 1: p. 17: “Philosophiam Reformatam Aristotelicae conciliari posse et adversam non esse.”
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, in PS 2:22. See also Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Late Scholastic and Humanist Theories of the Proposition*, New York: North Holland, 1980; *id.*, *Judgment and Proposition: From Descartes to Kant*, New York: North Holland, 1983.
- <sup>42</sup> Rhenius, *Compendium logicae peripateticae*, p. 54. Quoted in Schepers, “Begriffsanalyse und Kategorialsynthese,” p. 38.
- <sup>43</sup> *Briefan Gabriel Wagner vom Ende 1696*, in PS 7: p. 516: “Muster-Rolle aller Dinge der welt.”
- <sup>44</sup> *Generales inquisitiones de analysi notionum et veritatum*, ed. Franz Schupp (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982), § 62.
- <sup>45</sup> *Discours de métaphysique*, § 8, in PS 4: p. 433: “ce que c’est que d’estre attribué véritablement à un certain sujet,” because “il est constant que toute predication veritable a quelque fondement dans la nature des choses.”
- <sup>46</sup> *Brief an eine unbekante Dame*, in PS 4: p. 292.
- <sup>47</sup> Heinrich Schepers, “Begriffsanalyse und Kategorialsynthese: Zur Verflechtung von Logik und Metaphysik,” *Studia leibnitiiana supplementa* 3 (1969): 34–49. See also George Henry Radcliffe Parkinson, *Logic and Reality in Leibniz’ Metaphysics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, the papers collected in *Leibniz’ Logik und Metaphysik*, ed. Albert Heinekamp and Franz Schupp, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988, and those collected in *The Impact of Aristotelianism on Modern Philosophy*, ed. Riccardo Pozzo, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- <sup>48</sup> Mercer, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics*, p. 16.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18, p. 96.
- <sup>50</sup> Peterson, *Geschichte der aristotelischen Philosophie*, p. 362.
- <sup>51</sup> On dating *Metaphysics K3*, see Gerhard Lehmann in *Akademie Ausgabe*, 29: pp. 1091–1093. See the announcement of the course in *Vorlesungsverzeichnisse der Universität Königsberg (1720–1804)*, ed. Michael Oberhausen and Riccardo Pozzo, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1999, p. 621.
- <sup>52</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen über die Metaphysik*, in *Akademie Ausgabe*, 29: p. 945; Eng. tr. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 417: “Die Metaphysic gehört zum materiellen Theil der Philosophie, oder begreift ihn vielmehr unter sich, und beruhet daher, da sie wirkliche Objecte voraussetzt, auf gesetzen, d. i. auf Erkenntniß Gründen (*principiis*) deßen, und über dasjenige, was zum Daseyn der Dinge gehört. Von ihr scheidet sich daher der blos formelle Theil der philosophie, oder die in der Logic vorgetragene Gesetze des Denkens ab, da diese von den objecten selbst abstrahiret.”

<sup>53</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Bviii, in *Akademie Ausgabe*, 3: p. 8; tr. Norman Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan, 1929, pp. 18f: “Ursprung der Erkenntniß oder der verschiedenen Art der Gewißheit nach Verschiedenheit der Objecte... die Grenze der Logik aber ist dadurch ganz genau bestimmt, daß sie eine Wissenschaft ist, welche nichts als die formalen Regeln alles Denkens (es mag *a priori* oder empirisch sein, einen Ursprung oder Object haben, welches es wolle, in unserem Gemüthe zufällige oder natürliche Hindernisse eintreffen).”

<sup>54</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Reflexionen über die Logik*, in *Akademie Ausgabe*, 17: p. 359: “Alle reine Philosophie ist entweder logisch oder metaphysisch. Jene... enthält nur die Unterordnung der Begriffe unter die *sphaeram* der anderen, entweder unmittelbar: in Urtheilen, oder mittelbar: in schlüssen. Sie läßt aber die Begriffe selbst, die einander subordinirt werden können, unbestimmt und macht nicht aus, also praedicate den Dingen nach Gesetzen der reinen Vernunft zukommen.”

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*: “die ersten Grundbegriffe, womit wir durch die reine Vernunft urtheilen... und die Grundsätze.”

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*: “Die Logik entlehnt Begriffe und Sätze aus der Metaphysic oder irgend einer empirischen Erkenntnis und lehrt sich ihrer zu bedienen.”

<sup>57</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen über die Metaphysik*, in *Akademie Ausgabe*, 28: p. 363: “Die transcendente Philosophie ist das in Ansehung der Metaphysic, was die Logik in Ansehung der ganzen Philosophie ist. Die Logik enthält die allgemeinen Regeln unseres Verstandes, er mag auf Erfahrung gegründet seyn oder nicht, und ist also eine Einleitung in die ganze Philosophie. Die transcendente Philosophie ist eine Einleitung in die reine Philosophie, welche ein Theil der gesammten Philosophie ist.”

<sup>58</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B25, in *Akademie Ausgabe*, 3: p. 43; Eng. tr., p. 59: “alle Erkenntniß..., die sich nicht sowohl mit Gegenständen, sondern mit unserer Erkenntnißart von Gegenständen, so fern diese *a priori* möglich sein soll.”

<sup>59</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen über die Metaphysik*, in *Akademie Ausgabe*, 28: p. 363: “In Ansehung des reinen Gebrauchs der Vernunft aber, wird eine besondere Logik nöthig seyn, welche die transcendente Philosophie heißt; hier werden nicht Objecte sondern vielmehr unsre Vernunft selbst erwogen, so wies auch in der allgemeinen Logik geschieht.”

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*: “SelbstErkenntniß unsrer eigenen Vernunft.”

<sup>61</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Die Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 11: pp. 5–7; tr. A.V. Miller; foreword J.N. Findlay, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1989, pp. 25–27: “Indem so die Wissenschaft und der gemeine Menschenverstand sich in die Hände arbeiteten, den Untergang der Metaphysik zu bewirken, so schien das sonderbare Schauspiel herbegeführt zu werden, *ein gebildetes Volk ohne Metaphysik* zu sehen; — wie einen sonst mannichfaltig ausgeschmückten Tempel ohne Allerheiligstes... . Ganz so schlimm als der Metaphysik ist der Logik nicht ergangen... wahrscheinlich um einigen formellen Nutzens willens, wurde ihr noch den Rang unter den Wissenschaften gelassen, ja sie wurde selbst als Gegenstand des öffentlichen Unterrichts beybehalten... die logische Wissenschaft, welche die eigentliche Metaphysik oder reine spekulative Philosophie ausmacht, hat sich bisher sehr vernachlässigt gesehen... [daher] die Nothwendigkeit, mit dieser Wissenschaft wieder einmal von vorne anzufangen.”

## **Chapter 3**

# **METAPHYSICS, MATHEMATICS, AND PRE-ESTABLISHED HARMONY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

If one examines the literature of the major thinkers in early twentieth century mathematics – especially the so-called “Gottingen school,” guided by the ‘holy trinity’ of Felix Klein, David Hilbert and Hermann Minkowski – one cannot help but notice the frequent use of Leibniz’s term “pre-established harmony.” Consider the following examples. The first is from Minkowski:

Mathematics has the task of developing the tools necessary to grasp the logical coherence of external appearances. Its basic concepts, the axioms of physical quantities and of geometry, have arisen from experience. Mathematics constantly derives its most beautiful problems in applications from the natural sciences. And through a peculiar, pre-established harmony, it has been shown that, by trying logically to elaborate the existing edifice of mathematics, one is directed on exactly

the same path as by having responded to questions arising from the facts of physics and astronomy.<sup>1</sup>

The second is from Albert Einstein (who is not from the Göttingen school):

Nobody who has really gone deeply into the matter will deny that in practice the world of phenomena uniquely determines the theoretical system, in spite of the fact that there is no logical bridge between phenomena and their theoretical principles; this is what Leibniz described so happily as a “pre-established harmony.”<sup>2</sup>

This sounds rather mysterious. How is it that thought (that is, pure mathematics) can provide the possibilities from which physics selects? Another way of thinking about this is to ask for the explication of the very idea of a “pre-established harmony” between thought and being. This is the main question that I wish to address in this paper. Let us acknowledge that even though there is no means of deducing a theoretical system from the phenomena, it is nonetheless the case that the axioms of a theoretical system arise from experience. To fully answer this question, then, involves unpacking the sense in which mathematics arises from experience.

## **SCHLICK, REICHENBACH, AND THE USE OF THE CONCEPT OF PRE-ESTABLISHED HARMONY**

Before I pursue this discussion further, however, a caveat is in order. One should not read “pre-established harmony” as though it were merely a *façon de parler* – simply the favourite metaphor of the day. This is possible; but it would be a hasty conclusion. That the term was more than metaphor is somewhat suggested by its abundant appearances and more strongly so by the fact that it came under attack by philosophers otherwise impressed with Leibniz, for instance, Moritz Schlick and Hans Reichenbach.

Among Schlick’s many targets in his *General Theory of Knowledge* is the “philosophy of immanence” whose core descends from Hegel’s attempt to overcome the Kantian *ding an sich*. Schlick argues that immanence philosophy, which rejects the *ding an sich* on the grounds that any epistemology which transcends the given entails contradictions, nonetheless faces a serious problem. Immanence philosophy *maintains* that the real is limited to that which is given; but it *entails* that there are no environmental constituents shared by different subjects. There is no single, common world, just many, correlated worlds. Schlick writes:

The world picture that results is familiar to us from the history of philosophy: in its logical content it is completely identical with Leibniz' doctrine of the monads and preestablished harmony.<sup>3</sup>

Schlick admits that this identity in logical content does not refute immanence philosophy. It may be that a monadological metaphysics and attendant pre-established harmony accurately systematizes reality. What refutes immanence philosophy is its ultimate incompatibility with science. Accepting pre-established harmony is:

... nothing other than an explicit affirmation of a continuously occurring miracle, and thus a declaration of the abandonment and impotence of science.<sup>4</sup>

Reichenbach's reverence for Leibniz is based on the view that the philosophical result of relativity theory is that space and time form a unified causal structure – a view Leibniz somewhat adumbrated centuries before Einstein. (Leibniz did not *directly* anticipate relativity theory since he retained a classical conception of simultaneity.) Nonetheless, Reichenbach concludes, it is remarkable that:

... Leibniz, this genuine philosopher, was able to understand the nature of scientific knowledge to such an extent that, two hundred years later, a new development of physics and an analysis of its philosophic foundations confirmed his views.<sup>5</sup>

There is a puzzle here. Reichenbach lauds Leibniz's prescient understanding of the nature of scientific knowledge; however, Leibniz's understanding of scientific knowledge cannot be abstracted from his metaphysics which includes pre-established harmony. Yet Reichenbach follows Schlick arguing for a clash between science and pre-established harmony. Perhaps the solution is simply that Reichenbach had his own particular version of Leibniz. This would at least explain why Reichenbach's attacks on pre-established harmony never mention Leibniz by name.

One of Reichenbach's attacks on pre-established harmony is derived from a thought experiment. After describing a sequence of possible perceptions, he states two interpretations of it.<sup>6</sup> The sequence is embedded in *either* a causally anomalous, Euclidean space which necessitates an appeal to pre-established harmony, *or* a causally ordered, non Euclidean space which



obviates any such appeal. This, Reichenbach continues, leaves physics in a strange situation.

The principle of causality is one of its most important laws, which it will not abandon lightly; preestablished harmony, however, is incompatible with this law.<sup>7</sup>

The main point regarding Schlick and Reichenbach is that they take the concept of pre-established harmony seriously enough to argue against it. It would be safe to assume that those who spoke favourably of the idea also took it seriously.

## THE REVIVAL OF LEIBNIZ STUDIES AND PRE-ESTABLISHED HARMONY

The frequent use by scientists of the notion of pre-established harmony has not gone unnoticed by scholars; Lewis Pyenson, among others, has written on it.<sup>8</sup> What I want to do in what follows is to review briefly and then extend Pyenson's work by including Georg Cantor and Edmund Husserl.

(Now, Cantor's inclusion among scientists requires no justification. Husserl's inclusion may, for he is often viewed through the lens of later thought, existentialism. This is not entirely inaccurate as the roots of existentialism took hold in the warm soil of phenomenology. But the attack of thinkers such as Martin Heidegger on scientific thought and rationality would in no way be condoned by Husserl. Indeed, Husserl vehemently denounced any philosophy which challenged the fundamental tenants of rational thought. Wilhelm Dilthey, for instance, led a historicist philosophical movement – *Lebensphilosophie* – and was attacked by Husserl.<sup>9</sup> Phenomenology's goal – at least at the time of *Logical Investigations*, especially in the "Prolegomena" – was precisely to preserve and clarify the essence of what was already taken to be the quintessential rational knowledge: mathematics. Husserl states that it was through his analysis of higher mathematics that he achieved his breakthrough to phenomenology.<sup>10</sup> [Later, in *Ideas*, Husserl argued that mathematics could not be taken as the sole instance of rigorous rational thought.] Husserl's mathematical origins are alluded to as well by Bertrand Russell. While discussing some of the main trends in early twentieth philosophy he considers Husserl a member of a group which, based on a severely technical viewpoint, opposed idealism.<sup>11</sup>)

Pyenson holds that it is not surprising that one of Leibniz's central themes came to prominence in the early twentieth century. Leibniz himself, the

founder of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, was often praised in public addresses, for example, by the then current president of the Academy, Ernst Kummer. In addition, there appeared major studies on Leibniz by the likes of Bertrand Russell, the French mathematician Louis Couturat and one of the major philosophers of the time, Ernst Cassirer, who considered in particular the scientific foundations of Leibniz's thought.<sup>12</sup>

That Leibniz's popularity increased is also evidenced by Reichenbach's writings. In his earlier work, *The Theory of Relativity and A Priori Knowledge*, he attacks the *apriorism* of the neo-Kantians.<sup>13</sup> As we have seen, Reichenbach's net is widened in *The Philosophy of Space and Time* to attack what could be called "neo-Leibnizianism."

But a question remains. Are Schlick and Reichenbach attacking the same interpretation of pre-established harmony which its proponents held? This is not yet clear since we have to further articulate which interpretation they held.

Pre-established harmony, as is well known, was Leibniz's answer to the question regarding how the mind and body interact. Simply put: they do not; there could be no causal exchange between the mental and physical domains any more than between two corporeal objects. Nonetheless, this does not explode the universe into a radical plurality. God endowed *all* entities with future development plans which ultimately cohere.

But there is another sense to pre-established harmony. According to Leibniz, to explore the lawfulness of the physical world, one must appeal to mechanics and mathematics. Leibniz writes:

Nature must be explained mechanically and mathematically, provided one bears in mind that the principles of the laws of mechanics themselves do not derive from mere mathematical extension, but from metaphysical reasons.<sup>14</sup>

So the situation, then, could be run in reverse: abstract mathematical forms belong to the metaphysical realm and thus be expected to possess physical correlates. Pyenson expresses this well.

Adhering to a Leibniz-like understanding of the idea of pre-established harmony, especially after the foundation of the discipline of pure mathematics in the nineteenth century, would impel one to use mathematical forms and symmetries as a guide to discovering nature's laws.<sup>15</sup>

Hermann Weyl, sometimes referred to as Hilbert's "favourite son," provides a simple example of using a symmetry as a guide to discovering nature's laws. Weyl writes:

If conditions which uniquely determine their effect possess certain symmetries, then the effect will exhibit the same symmetry. Thus Archimedes concluded *a priori* that equal weights balance in scales of equal arms. Indeed the whole configuration is symmetric with respect to the midplane of the scales, and therefore it is impossible that one mounts while the other sinks.<sup>16</sup>

Weyl stresses that this does not mean that *all* physical situations are ultimately predictable or describable *a priori*; rather, to be an *a priori* statement in physics is to be rooted in the mathematical concept of symmetry.<sup>17</sup>

Again, there are two senses to pre-established harmony. The first is a harmony within the universe; its objects are endowed with mutually cohering future development plans. The second is between the (physical) universe and pure mathematics. Reichenbach's attacks, which we have briefly seen, are directed toward the first sense. Nonetheless, he attacks the second as well. But this time he attacks the idea as it occurs in the context of Weyl's mathematical investigations.

Weyl generalized the Riemannian basis of Einstein's general theory of relativity. Essentially, Riemann had assumed that in geometry lengths are invariant under transport. Weyl rejected this. Assuming that lengths could vary under transport led Weyl to extend Riemann's geometry and ultimately modify general relativity so that it not only accounted for gravity but electromagnetism as well. Since in 1918 (when Weyl modified Einstein's theory) gravity and electromagnetism were the only recognized forces in nature, Weyl trumpeted:

Everything real (*Wirkliche*) that transpires in the world is a manifestation of the world metric. Physical concepts are none other than those of geometry.<sup>18</sup>

Many reacted negatively to this declaration. But what Weyl seems to have intended is that geometry articulates the possibilities among which physics selects. Weyl writes:

The sole distinction between geometry and physics is this: that geometry investigates generally what lies in the essence of metric concepts, while

physics determines the law through which the actual world is singled out from among all possible four-dimensional metric spaces of geometry and explores its consequences.<sup>19</sup>

Reichenbach held that such a view of relativity was founded on a faulty epistemology. Reichenbach writes:

Physics is not a “geometric necessity”; whoever asserts this returns to the pre-Kantian point of view where it was a necessity given by reason. Just as Kant’s analysis of reason could not teach the principles of physics, neither can considerations of a general geometry teach them; the only way is an analysis of empirical knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

The very idea of a general geometry was, for Reichenbach, questionable. Reichenbach writes:

Weyl’s theory represents a possible generalization of Einstein’s conception of space which, although not yet confirmed empirically, is by no means impossible. But even this generalization does not represent the most general local geometry imaginable. In this context one can easily trace the steps of progressive generalization. In Euclidean geometry a vector can be shifted parallel to itself along a closed curve so that upon its return to the point of departure it has the same direction and the same length. In the Einstein-Riemannian geometry it has merely the same length, no longer the original direction, after its return. In Weyl’s theory it does not even retain the same length. This generalization can be continued. If the closed curve is reduced to an infinitely small circle, the changes disappear. The next step in the generalization would be to assume that the vector changes its length upon turning around itself. There is no “most general” geometry.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly Reichenbach opposes the second sense of pre-established harmony. It is completely wrong-headed to hold that physical laws are in any sense *given* by reason. Ultimately, we have two figures at loggerheads over the interpretation of relativity. Their clash has strong connections to their differing views regarding the second sense of pre-established harmony. I have mentioned that Reichenbach holds Leibniz in high esteem. The same indeed could be said for Weyl.<sup>22</sup> The point is simply that we should not regard the resurgence in the use of pre-established harmony to the resurgence in interest in Leibniz’s philosophy. It is here that I part company with Pyenson, who

makes this connection. The following is another account of the rise in the term's use.

## CANTOR AND THE FORMATION OF MATHEMATICAL CONCEPTS

I now want to bring in Georg Cantor, a figure not discussed by Pyenson. Cantor was enormously influential in the Göttingen school. Indeed, Weyl, a product of the school, once stated that he was raised a "strict Cantorian dogmatist."<sup>23</sup> More importantly, one can readily see the influence of Cantor's thought Weyl's publications prior to 1918.<sup>24</sup>

Any concept, Cantor states, is real in two senses: immanently (the mental reality of the concept) and transiently (the external reality of the concept's object). He then states that:

... there is no doubt in my mind that these two types of reality will always be found together, in the sense that a concept to be regarded as existent in the first respect will always in certain, even in infinitely many ways, possess a transient reality as well.<sup>25</sup>

Cantor claims that he holds this position in good company. For it embodies an epistemological principle which stretches back to Plato and appears in Spinoza's *Ethics*, part II, proposition 7, which Cantor quotes: "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, Cantor admits that the determination of a concept's transient reality is not always readily forthcoming since:

... frequently it must be left to a time when the natural development of another science reveals the transient significance of the concept in question.<sup>27</sup>

Despite Cantor's initial words, he eventually admits that not every concept will possess transient reality. Those which do fit into a coherent framework of concepts. One might argue that simply having an orderly framework of concepts in no way legitimates ascribing transient reality to them. For instance, connecting the concepts of transfinite numbers to those of finite numbers still only leads to an orderly framework of concepts. What justifies asserting that the system of coherent concepts which has immanent reality also has transient reality? Cantor's answer is not immediately clear.

This coherence of the two realities has its true foundation in the *unity* of the *all*, to which we ourselves belong as well.<sup>28</sup>

One might regard this as mysticism, and then dismiss or embrace it depending on one's "metaphysical sensibilities." However, *both* conclusions block any analysis of Cantor's doctrine of the coherence between immanent and transient being. Given Cantor's knowledge and respect for the rationalist tradition as well as his knowledge and disdain for the empiricist tradition (which, interestingly enough, he thinks stems from a post-Leibnizian epistemology) labeling Cantor a mystic is too hasty. Unfortunately, what exactly Cantor is on this particular metaphysical issue cannot be explored here. Suffice it to say for our purposes, Cantor's "unity of the all" was not embraced by scientists at large.

There is however, something of Cantor's which was embraced. He holds that because of the immanent/transient reality coherence, mathematics need *only* concern itself with the immanent reality of its concepts which are bound merely by the demands that they each be internally consistent and that new ones must stand in orderly relations to previously established concepts. Cantor continues:

I believe that it is not necessary to fear, as many do, that these principles contain any danger to science. On one hand the designated conditions under which the freedom of the formation of number can alone be exercised, are such that they leave extremely little room for arbitrariness. And then every mathematical concept also carries within itself the necessary corrective; if it is unfruitful and inapt this is soon demonstrated by its uselessness, and it will then be dropped because of its lack of success. Any superfluous confinement of mathematical research work, on the other hand, seems to me to carry with it a much greater danger, a danger that is some much the greater as there is really no justification for it that could be deduced from the essence of the science, for the *essence of mathematics* lies precisely in its *freedom*.<sup>29</sup>

The freedom view of mathematics, in this particular version, is an attempt to balance the limitations placed on conceptual development by both experience and the concern for consistency. It is not, by any means, a view that solely works under the auspices of consistency, which tends towards nominalism. The thinkers of the Italian school (Peano and associates) embraced precisely such a position. The particular freedom view of Cantor's, then, is not *radically* free.

But what role, if any does experience play in the *formation* of mathematical concepts? What grounds the initial concepts to which new ones must cohere? Not surprisingly, Cantor adheres to a rationalist line, holding a Platonist view of concepts. Experience, at best, stimulates or awakens the basic concepts of mathematics that already lie in the mind.<sup>30</sup>

## THE GÖTTINGEN SCHOOL

The Göttingen school accepted Cantor's limited freedom view of mathematics. Consistency was, of course, a major concern, but the origins of mathematics was articulated in more detail. Although it is risky to characterize an entire school of thinkers, it nonetheless could be said that the Göttingen school embraced mathematics as a "refinement of experience." I will now examine the idea of refining experience in an attempt to further clarify the sense of the pre-established harmony between thought and being. I will do so by considering a key representative of this school: Felix Klein (one of its founding fathers whom the great mathematician Hermann Weyl called "*Divus Felix*").

According to Klein, who follows Kant, we have an limited innate capacity to construct figures in our imagination according to a fixed pattern.<sup>31</sup> When we envision a right triangle for instance, we cannot be sure that it is exactly 90 degrees. But we can idealize our experience stipulating that it is exactly 90 degrees. We are predisposed, Klein holds, to idealizing our experiences. We *see* flat surfaces until, upon reflection and further examination, irregularities are revealed; and yet we often continue on as if these irregularities were never brought to our attention. Mathematics, then, is the activity of bringing the mind's natural tendency to idealize experience under conscious control.

For Klein our general space intuition is extremely weak in structure. Therefore, we have different possibilities for idealizing it, Euclidean geometry is one possibility while Riemannian geometry is another. Previously, Riemann's work had revealed various geometrical possibilities for space. The logical possibility of alternative geometries entailed that geometric postulates must be treated as hypotheses. Empirical research, not *a priori* intuition, determines their applicability to physical space.<sup>32</sup> As is well known, Klein connected these geometries. Edward Glas writes that "Klein showed that *both* Euclidean *and* non-Euclidean geometries could be subsumed under the more 'elevated' point of view of projective geometry..."<sup>33</sup>

Is there a relationship, then, between the space of geometric intuition and projective geometry? It seems that for Klein there is. In fact, Klein tried to

demonstrate such a connection. Klein tried to show that projective geometry has its foundations in intuition.<sup>34</sup>

In sum: Klein, one of the fathers of the Göttingen school, held that the basic concepts and axioms involved in mathematics are neither *a priori* (as for Cantor) nor arbitrary (as for nominalists). So, what are they? Klein writes:

The axioms of geometry are not arbitrary, but sensible statements which are induced in general by space perception and are determined in their precise content through expediency.<sup>35</sup>

This approach, namely that geometry articulates the basis of spatial experience, can be found in the works of Hilbert as well. In his seminal work on Euclidean geometry, Hilbert quotes Kant to the effect that human knowledge begins with intuition, passes through concepts and ends in ideas.<sup>36</sup> Normally this is interpreted as Hilbert's attempt to transcend Kant's linking knowledge and intuition, in this particular case linking geometric knowledge to geometric intuition. This is not entirely inaccurate; however, it must be taken with care. Hilbert did intend to eliminate the intuitions of objects from mathematics, but *not* the intuitions of relations between the objects. By concentrating on the relations between objects and not the objects themselves, the structure of space is laid bare. But which space's structure does Hilbert think he is articulating? Hilbert writes:

The establishment of the axioms of geometry and the investigation of their relationships is a problem which has been treated in many excellent works of the mathematical literature since the time of Euclid. This problem is equivalent to the logical analysis of our perception of space.<sup>37</sup>

With this idea, that geometric axioms are induced in general through space perception and then refined, let us turn to Husserl.

## EDMUND HUSSERL

Husserl's discussion of theoretical concepts and their phenomenological origins, although fascinating, is a philosophical briar patch. Hence, I will not discuss it in detail here.<sup>38</sup> My interest will be to look at some of the mathematical and philosophical discussion contained in the "Prolegomena" to *Logical Investigations*.

Unlike Cantor, Husserl has a fairly well developed notion of an axiomatic theory. Like Cantor, Husserl accepts the coherence between immanent and



transient reality. For Husserl, the actual theory with which we work, whether it be Euclidean geometry, Riemannian geometry, or Cantor's transfinite numbers, is the domain of the immanent. The corresponding transient domain is what Husserl, following Cantor, calls a "manifold" and grants it ontological status. (Today mathematicians call this a structure.) We have, Husserl maintains, great liberty in idealizing our experience. We can construct many possible theories corresponding to many possible manifolds. Indeed, Husserl calls this practice "manifold theory" and considers it to be the finest flower of modern mathematics.<sup>39</sup>

Like Cantor and Klein, Husserl insists on a restricted freedom. There are some elements lying at the base of experience, those elements which make experience possible. And ultimately, these elements are mathematical in nature. Philosophers, then, must seek the phenomenological origin of the building blocks of theory: the essence of concepts like "proposition," "concept" and the essence of formation and inference rules. Husserl writes:

... we must note that the mathematician is not really the pure theoretician, but only the ingenious technician, the constructor as it were, who looking merely to formal interconnections, builds up his theory like a technical work of art. As the practical mechanic constructs machines without needing to have immediate insight into the essence of nature and its laws, so the mathematician constructs theories of numbers, quantities, syllogisms, manifolds, without ultimate insight into the essence of theory in general, and that of the concepts and laws which are its conditions.<sup>40</sup>

The philosopher investigates the essence of theory, inquiring into the conditions of its possibility. This, Husserl states, is a *necessary* generalization of Kant's concern to articulate the conditions of the possibility of experience.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, Husserl is not clear on precisely how his project is an extension of Kant's, but I suggest the following. Kant holds that ascribing various representations to a single object involves two assertions regarding these representations. First, they form a unity and are governed by necessary laws. Second, these necessary laws are a basis for predicting which other representations belong to this unity. According to Husserl, Kant holds that the very idea of "experiencing an object" involves a rough type of deductive system. Mathematics, then, is the refinement of this rough deductive system lying at the heart of experience.

The concepts, rules of formation and transformation which Husserl says must be phenomenologically examined, are not *constructed*. Indeed, a phenomenological analysis, at least at the time of the *Investigations*, was anything but a construction. A phenomenological analysis is an investigation

that reveals, that is, brings to intuition, the basic logical structures *already* within experience.

Husserl's view of logic has a stronger ontological commitment than Kant's. For Husserl the world is a sensuous unity whose true being will forever escape being captured by human consciousness.<sup>42</sup> But, we must be careful here since Husserl stresses that this "true being" is the *content* of the sensuous unity. Content, according to Husserl, is the domain of the empirical, inductive sciences. So doubting whether any particular scientific construction of the world is *the* true picture of the world is perfectly reasonable. However, Husserl insists, it is:

... nonsensical to doubt whether the true course of the world, the true structure of the world in itself could conflict with the forms of thinking.<sup>43</sup>

So logic, for Husserl, does not merely articulate the possible forms of the world; rather, the phenomenological investigation into logic reveals the true logical structure of the world, regardless of its content.<sup>44</sup> Put another way: the logical forms of thought are the logical forms of being itself.

## CONCLUSION

So what light does this shed on the use of pre-established harmony? My purpose here has been to contribute to a demystification of the term within the context of twentieth century mathematical thought, particularly with respect to the Göttingen thinkers.

Earlier thinkers, such as Kant, attributed far too much structure (Euclidean) to our experience. Moreover, interpreting experience's structure as *a priori* engenders the question of why it should apply to "external" reality. Cantor, by understanding mathematical concepts as only aroused by the alarm clock of experience, was faced with this difficult problem. What seems to have been done in the Göttingen tradition is to view spatial intuition not as structuring the space of perception but de-structuring it.

Think of it like this: Kant thought that the *a priori* intuition of space was akin to a filter. But, of course, this filter added a structure to that which passed through it. Later thinkers, like Klein and Weyl, could be interpreted as saying that our *a priori* intuition of space is a filter which removes (nearly) all structure. As we have seen, Klein regarded our everyday spatial intuition as akin to a projective space. Weyl thought that philosophers had been too impatient in their attempts to articulate the structure of the space of intuition.

Mathematics, he thought, although it builds on experience, can also serve as a corrective to our interpretations of experience.<sup>45</sup>

So Cantor's freedom view of mathematics is preserved. Consider Weyl's expression of the freedom of mathematics:

Mathematics, the proud tree with its wide crown freely unfolding in the air, actually draws with a thousand roots its force from the soil of intuition and imagination. It would therefore be fatal, if one cut it with the shears of petty utilitarianism, or if one wanted to dig it up from the soil whence it springs.<sup>46</sup>

There is a residual Kantianism in all this. The structure of our experience, or better, the *lack* of structure of our experience, contains within in it all the possibilities for idealizing. The tree's crown, as it freely unfolds, will eventually cover the possibilities for the universe; it is only a matter of time before the various branches of mathematics find some type of physical application. Mathematics, then, in less poetic terms, is a creative idealization of our experience; its sole limitation is consistency. Attributing very little structure to experience opens the possibilities for its idealization. It is in *this* context that Klein uttered his famous declaration that "[m]athematics is not merely a thing of understanding, but quite essentially a thing of imagination."<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless there is definitely a non-Kantian strain in all this. The creative idealization of experience ultimately provides the possibilities for the actual geometric structure of the universe. These possibilities should be thought of as the set of metaphysical possibilities from which physics selects. Of course we do not know, as Husserl and the Göttingen thinkers stress, the true geometric structure in all its details; rather we know the projective geometrical outlines of it. Moreover, we do know, as Husserl stresses, the logical structure of reality. Metaphysically speaking, the mathematical and phenomenological investigations reveal the ultimate structures of being. In sum, the pre-established harmony can be described as an exact overlap of thought and being in terms of logical structure and projective geometric structure, thus leaving plenty of room for the inductive methods of science to engage in the ever continuing task of filling in the details.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Lewis Pyenson, *The Young Einstein: The Advent of Relativity*, Bristol and Boston: Adam Hilger Ltd, 1985, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Pyenson, *The Young Einstein*, p. 152.

- <sup>3</sup> Moritz Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, tr. A.E. Blumberg, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1974, p. 227.
- <sup>4</sup> Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, p. 228.
- <sup>5</sup> Hans Reichenbach, *The Philosophy of Space and Time*, tr. M. Reichenbach and J. Freund, New York: Dover, 1958, p. 269.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>8</sup> Pyenson, "Relativity in late Wilhelmian Germany: the appeal to a pre-established harmony between mathematics and physics," in *The Young Einstein*, pp. 137–157.
- <sup>9</sup> Husserl, "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science," in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, tr. Q. Lauer, New York: Harper and Row, 1965, pp. 127–147.
- <sup>10</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, tr. J. N. Findlay, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. 41–43.
- <sup>11</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1928) pp. 70–71.
- <sup>12</sup> Pyenson, *The Young Einstein*, pp. 142–144.
- <sup>13</sup> Reichenbach, *Relativity Theory and A Priori Knowledge*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965, pp. 61–74.
- <sup>14</sup> Quoted from Pyenson, *The Young Einstein*, p. 139.
- <sup>15</sup> Pyenson, *The Young Einstein*, p. 139.
- <sup>16</sup> Hermann Weyl, *Symmetry*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952, p. 126.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- <sup>18</sup> Weyl, "Reine Infinitesimal geometrie," *Mathematische Zeitschrift* 2 (1918): 384–385, at p. 385.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.
- <sup>20</sup> Reichenbach, *Relativity Theory and A Priori Knowledge*, p. 77.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.
- <sup>22</sup> Weyl, *Space-Time-Matter*, tr. H. Brose, New York: Dover Publications, 1952, p. 66.
- <sup>23</sup> Weyl, "Draft for a lecture at the Bicentennial Conference," quoted from Skuli Siggurdson, *Hermann Weyl, Mathematics and Physics, 1900–1927*, Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992, p. 39.
- <sup>24</sup> Richard Feist, *Hermann Weyl's Mathematics, Science and Phenomenology*, Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1999, ch. 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Georg Cantor, "Grundlagen einer allgemeinen Mannigfaltigkeitslehre" in Cantor's *Gesammelte Abhandlungen mathematischen und philosophischen inhalts*, ed. E. Zermelo, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962, pp. 165–209, at p. 181.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207–208.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Felix Klein, “On the mathematical character of space-intuition and the relation of pure mathematics to the applied science,” in *Lectures on Mathematics*, New York: Macmillan, 1894, p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Riemann, “On The Hypotheses Which Lie At The Foundations Of Mathematics,” in *Source Book in Mathematics*, ed. D.E. Smith, New York: McGraw Hill, 1965, pp. 410–425.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Glas, “From Form To Function: A Reassessment of Felix Klein’s Unified Programme of Mathematical Research, Education and Development,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 24 (1985): 611–631, at p. 616.

<sup>34</sup> Klein, “Über die sogenannte Nicht-Euklidische Geometrie,” *Cesammelte Abhandlungen*, Berlin: Julius Springer, 1921–23, 3 Vols., vol.1, pp. 254–305.

<sup>35</sup> Klein, *Elementary Mathematics from an Advanced Stand Point*, New York: Macmillan, 1939, pp. 186–187.

<sup>36</sup> Hilbert, *Foundations of Geometry*, tr. L. Unger from the 10<sup>th</sup> German edition, revised and enlarged by P. Bernays, Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> For a more complete discussion see my dissertation, ch. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, tr. J.N. Findlay, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 244.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 244–245.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 831.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Weyl, *Space-Time-Matter*, pp. 147–148.

<sup>46</sup> Weyl, “Über die Definitionen der mathematischen Grundbegriffe,” in his *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, ed. K. Chandrasekharan, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1968, Vol. 2, pp. 299–304, at p. 304:

und für die Mathematik, diesen stolzen Baum, der seine breite Krone frei im Äther entfaltet, aber seine Kraft zugleich mit tausend Wurzeln aus dem Erdboden wirklicher Anschauungen und Vorstellungen saugt, wäre es gleich verhängnisvoll, wollte man ihn mit der Schere eines allzu engherzigen Utilitarismus beschneiden oder wollte man ihn aus den Boden, dem er entsprossen ist, herausreißen.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted from Walther von Dyck, “Gedächtnisrede auf Joseph Fraushofer, Bernhard Riemann, und Felix Klein,” *Naturwissenschaft*, 14 (1926), p. 1043.

PART TWO:  
MODERN CHALLENGES TO THE SCOPE OF  
METAPHYSICS

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## Chapter 4

# THE INTEGRATION OF HISTORY AND METAPHYSICS

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A year after the death of Jacques Maritain in 1973, Etienne Gilson wrote to Armand Maurer with a most remarkable confession:

The last book of Maritain [*Approches sans Entraves*<sup>1</sup>] is of decisive importance for a correct understanding of his thought. Its reading made me realize that *I had never understood his true position*<sup>2</sup>

This is a grave concession, even after one has withdrawn from it the penchant toward felicitous exaggeration, so characteristic of Gilson. And yet it is not simply hyperbole. Indeed, twenty years earlier, he had written to Maritain that “despite our shared love for the truth we do not resemble one another very much.”<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, against a common counter-position, against explicit or suspected idealism, they had constantly formed a common front, none more telling than in the debate over Christian philosophy (in 1931 and the



following years). What, then, was the difference between them that Gilson had come to realize and formulate so late? Gilson continues:

I was naively maintaining that one cannot consider oneself a Thomist without first ascertaining the authentic meaning of St. Thomas['] doctrine, which only history can do.

Here speaks the historian. But he continues:

During all that time, he [Maritain] was considering himself a true disciple of St. Thomas because he was *continuing* his thought. To strive to rediscover the meaning of the doctrine such as it has been in the mind of Thomas Aquinas was [for him] straight historicism. We have been talking at cross purposes all the time.<sup>4</sup>

And then, with typical generosity, Gilson adds:

Of course, I have no objection at all to anybody *continuing* the philosophical reflection of Thomas Aquinas, but before continuing it, one must first go along with it at least as far as he himself [i.e., St. Thomas] ever went. That is something Maritain has not done.

This accounts, Gilson tells his correspondent, for

his [Maritain's] absence of scruples in parting company with Thomas Aquinas when he believes he is improving the doctrine. To object to him that Thomas has thought differently is precisely to commit the sin of "historicism." Unfortunately, on all the points on which he prides himself of improving, completing Thomas Aquinas, my own feeling is that he is distorting the true thought of the Angelic Doctor. In short, Maritain has been much more original a thinker than any true historian [surely Gilson has in mind himself] could possibly be. What Thomas himself would think of that kind of a disciple, I don't know. They now can discuss the problem between themselves. Still a little while and, as I fervently hope, I myself shall be informed of the result of the discussion.

Those familiar with the works of these two great thinkers can recall the points of disagreement: the intuition of being versus the act of judgment, the degree of negativity in the names attributed to God, the primacy of intelligence, the relation between subsisting essence and the act of existence (though somewhat modified by Maritain later), the proper context and

ordering of any philosophy that could claim St. Thomas as its father, and perhaps above all the *development* of Thomistic principles versus the *restitution* of St. Thomas's thought. Indeed, in the matter of principles, Gilson thought that Maritain had so far entered into the modern context of thought as to embrace the modern notion of first principles such as the principle of identity. Instead, Gilson insisted upon *esse* as *the* first principle.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, one must not exaggerate the difference.<sup>6</sup> Gilson recognized the vigorous realism of Maritain,<sup>7</sup> so that at a basic philosophical level, they were in substantive agreement on that issue. It is just that Gilson thought that Maritain had taken a wrong turn in giving too pre-eminent a status to the problem of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> A realist in metaphysics, Maritain had assigned an unwarranted role to the epistemological issue in his attempt to engage the modern temper. Since both Gilson and Maritain were above all realist metaphysicians, what is central to the issue is the history of thought as it impacts upon metaphysics.<sup>9</sup>

The difference is not to be sought in any supposed lack of historical knowledge on Maritain's part. In *Antimoderne*, one cannot fail to appreciate Maritain's refined understanding of modern European, particularly French, literature and history. Yet (as he tells us in the first volume of his history of ethics), his principal interest and purpose was not in retelling the history of ethical thought but in its service towards an establishment of an adequate ethics today.<sup>10</sup> One cannot escape the sense that Gilson expected much more from history; indeed, that for him the forgetting of history led to the forgetfulness of the true sense of being, leading to the conception of being as entity rather than to the judgment of being as act. This would account for his enthusiasm for Heidegger's critique of modern thought, even while he disagreed with him on the true sense of being as act.<sup>11</sup>

It is not too much to say that Gilson was a philosopher by way of its history.<sup>12</sup> Yet while he was a brilliant historian, fully conversant with the broad spectrum of the career of philosophy, and while he wrote clearly about the doctrine of knowledge in St. Thomas and others, he did not address the question as to what theory of knowledge was operative in his own use of history as it played a role within metaphysics. No doubt the early imprint of the consequences following upon the fortunes of modern philosophy brought about by the Cartesian and Kantian turn to knowledge left him suspicious of all idealisms and their penchant for epistemology.<sup>13</sup> This leaves open the issue of how one might address the use of historical knowledge within philosophical enquiry.

In the debate about the possibility of Christian philosophy, Gilson regularly pointed to its actuality as an historical fact. Its existence was not in doubt; one needed only to appeal to the history of philosophy to see that. It

was enough to show that ideas that had been originally framed within the context of one or another Christian philosophy had become standard concepts among modern philosophers – concepts such as the infinitude of God, the radical nature of freedom, and the central reality of the person. What remained to be discussed was the nature of the relation between Christian revelation and philosophy. And so, his reliance on the history of philosophy for the vindication of St. Thomas’s philosophy would seem to call for reflection on the service that the knowledge of the history of philosophy plays within a true appreciation of St. Thomas’s thought and of metaphysics itself. Before undertaking such a reflection, however, it is well to recall Gilson’s letter to Maritain (6 April 1932) in which he situates his own realism:

All our critique *of* [the various kinds of] knowledge is posterior to and interior to realism; [on the contrary] all critique *of* knowledge [*as such*] will be prior to and prohibitive of [the principle of] existence.

The point is phrased with a subtlety that deserves to be stated in the original French:

Toute notre critique *des* connaissances est postérieure et intérieure au réalisme; toute critique *de la* connaissance lui serait antérieure et lui interdirait d’exister.<sup>14</sup>

If we hold to Gilson’s demand for a posterior reflection on knowledge situated within a realist metaphysics of existence, such a reflection may still open up a legitimate consideration of the relation between history and metaphysics which avoids the alleged “wrong turn” taken by Maritain.

To see this better, I find it helpful to lay the foreground for a resolution of the issue in my own terms, in the hope that I avoid the very deviation from Gilson’s thought and his understanding of St. Thomas against which he warns us.

As we look over the vast panorama of the history of philosophy from the Greeks to the present day, we see four – and only four – basic ways in which the Western mind has sought to give an explanatory account of the world in which we find ourselves.<sup>15</sup> The *beginnings* of these explanatory modes are lost in the obscurity of the eighth century BC, though their *origins* can be read from the character that still resides within each of the four ways. The beginnings seem to be associated with a revolution within “that admirable people, the Greeks,” to borrow a phrase from Kant, who seems to have restricted it to mathematics.

We can guess at least two developments that contributed to the revolution: first, the appropriation and transformation of a written alphabet from the Phoenicians; and second, the foundation of the *polis*, with its *agora*. We are accustomed to translate the term *polis* with the couplet “city-state,” but of course it was neither a city in the sense of a modern metropolis, nor a state in the sense of a sovereign nation. It was among other things – and not only in Athens, though that *polis* was exemplary and endlessly fruitful for philosophy – a place of meeting in which issues of culture, religion, commerce and politics received an airing.

There emerged from such places an opening of “distance,” a sustained moment of reflection, in which the Greek wondered about himself and the world in which he lived. However, the distance was not the unbridgeable gulf between modern thought and reality, so condemned by Gilson, but rather a creative opening within the broad sweep of reality. It was a crevice that led thought back to the world of men and things, for thought had never wholly left it to hunker down in Cartesian fashion in an isolated human ego furnished only with its own innate ideas and dubious sensations. And so, Greek thought returned to the world enriched with concepts born of that reflection. Hegel remarked upon this when he said that the Greeks had come to understand their (quasi-subjective) actions as (quasi-objective) deeds in the world.<sup>16</sup> The transition was from the immediacy of their own agency to the status of realities within the cosmos, from actions to events in the cosmos.

This sustained moment of reflection splayed out into four paths of thought, each implying its own method (*met'hodos*), though the method became explicit only subsequent to the early stages of development along that path of thought. Here was method arising posterior to and interior to the encounter with reality. No Greek philosopher exhibits this better than Aristotle.

I describe these four explanatory modes briefly and in no privileged order, if only because we do not know the order of their emergence. All of them seem to have been implied in the reflective conceptualization of the cosmic order that gave birth to them. The first path is the search for the fundamental character of all that is. This account went through a number of early attempts to find its centre, until with Parmenides it found its proper name and was developed in breath-taking fashion by Plato and Aristotle. For they opened the horizon of interpretation in the name of *being (to on)*. Plato gave to this endeavour the honourable title of “love of wisdom” (*philosophia*).

The second path: the formulation of all things in terms of numerical relations; the geometers, astronomers and Pythagoreans developed this path, which was to eventually receive the name of “mathematics.” At the centre of

this path is *number* to which all relations are referred. In the third path time provides another avenue into the explanation of those things that come to be. This account is given in terms of *events*. It eventually received the designation “history,” though its full potentiality was not to be realized until centuries later. And finally, the Greek turned his analytic reflection upon his own language, giving to us the discipline of grammar, at whose axis is the *word*. In sum, four paths, four explanatory accounts whose currencies are: being, number, event and word; in recognizable modern names: ontology, mathematics, history and linguistics.

I have recounted these four paths in terms that we can recognize today, though throughout their careers they sometimes bore other names. Thus, some of the pre-Socratic philosophers referred to their own search for fundamentals as ‘*istoria*, while mathematics in twelfth-century Europe could stand for the science of abstract qualities. What is significant, however, is that each account developed in terms of its own horizon of intelligibility, sometimes realizing its specific character more or less clearly and fully only long after the Greeks were a cultural memory. The career of explanatory thought in Western culture is the story of the development of one or another of these accounts, often combined within one discipline or science.

For almost two millennia, philosophy as fundamental enquiry took shape as the study of being. *Being* provided the original and ultimate horizon for the understanding of reality, culminating – if we agree with Gilson – in the sign of being as *act*. Above all, it understood motion by resolving it into the categories of being, as a derivative mode that is dependent upon and participates in being which transcends becoming. Its explanation had recourse to the resolution of motion into unmoving causes or Cause. Towards the end of the middle ages, and for a complex of reasons (including the nature of the questions asked), such a resolution of motion gave way to the study of motion as such, to sciences which resolved evidence, not into the categories of being, but into the patterns of motion itself.

Whereas in the ontological account, being is the principle of reality and knowledge, in the sciences of motion itself is taken to be the first principle into which the evidence of nature is to be translated as into a primary and self-evident principle. In place of the philosophy of nature, which considered natural motions as effects of being, new questions, methods and experiments pressed upon the mind and demanded solutions in terms of mathematical precision. Whereas cause as origin, in the sense of ontological source or principle, had lit up the enquiring intelligence in the metaphysical account, the demand was for understanding in terms of mathematically precise formulas and laws; or more exactly, whereas cause might play a role in the

first stages of an enquiry, its intelligibility revealed itself in mathematically formulated laws.

The mathematization of nature occupied an almost unchallenged primacy in the most influential centres of thought during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and still occupies a place of almost unchallenged supremacy to this day under the popular rubric of the “hard sciences.” In the latter part of the eighteenth century, however, history lay claim to its rightful place, so that everything was seen to have a history – not only dynasties and wars, but also the Earth (geology),<sup>17</sup> organic life (zoology, biology) and the various expressions of culture: art, religion and even mathematics itself.<sup>18</sup> The historical mode of explanation found its niche as a principal mode of understanding in the social and human sciences, though these often utilized mathematics, and even to some degree ontological categories to form hybrid accounts.

Finally, in the twentieth century, the other horizons having been explored, linguistics pressed its claim among a wide range of philosophers, giving rise to developments in formal logics, to the “linguistic turn,” ordinary language, hermeneutics and postmodern deconstruction.

These successive juxtapositions of intelligible horizons have not simply abolished preceding horizons, but rather have displaced them even as they borrowed from them or have formed hybrid combinations with them. What is remarkable is that the same four accounts have retained their essential identity and their Greek names: metaphysics (or: ontology),<sup>19</sup> mathematics, history, linguistics (although the last term is Latin, its subdivisions bear Greek names: grammar, logic, rhetoric, topics, dialectics, analytics). The most obvious fruit of the historical account for philosophical purposes is that the preservation of the history of past thought has made all four paths and their horizons still available to enquiring minds and the pursuit of philosophical truth.

Let us consider the fortunes of philosophy in all of this.

If we look at the *actual* career of philosophy, at what it has been throughout these two and one half millennia, and not simply at what we are convinced philosophy is and should be, the remarkable outcome is that philosophy has survived somehow in and through its actual career. But, then, we must recognize that philosophy is the *first science* as fundamental enquiry and as such is ineradicable from our intellectual culture. That is, we can speak of philosophy in terms of what it most properly is and ought to be, and here, along with Gilson and Maritain, I would identify it with the ontological account developed in the metaphysics of being. But what if we ask what it actually has been and is? That is, what has happened to philosophy as

fundamental enquiry insofar as one or another horizon has claimed primacy and ultimacy?

In terms of what it has actually been, philosophy throughout its actual career has remained the discipline of fundamental enquiry, and has adjusted itself to each claimant as it has pressed its claims. To deny that, in deference to a stricter identification of philosophy as the philosophy of being, is to deny that the great practitioners of the discipline of fundamental enquiry are philosophers. It is to say that Descartes or Hume is not a philosopher, and many another whom we all recognize as philosophers.<sup>20</sup> This is the historical fact. It is not a judgment as to the truth of the accommodations that fundamental enquiry has made in our culture; but neither is it mere historical relativism. For if Gilson was wont to point to the *fact* of Christian philosophy, we must be ready to point also to the *fact* of a philosophy that has laid claim to pure rationality in the manner of Descartes. Is he not a philosopher? What would be gained for the discipline were we to deny him that sobriquet?

The question of the truth of these claims, then, calls for reflection on the adequacy of each claim. Paradoxically, the actual career of thought which deserves to be called philosophical is wider than what we – i.e., I or you – might identify as true philosophy. The discussion of what is true, however, takes place within the actual career of philosophy itself, and becomes a philosophical issue. Oddly, then, the immersion of philosophy in its own history does not lead to an historical relativism, but rather points up the question of the true horizon in which fundamental enquiry can best be advanced. What has just been said of the fortunes of first philosophy can be said also even within the ontological account, wherein a plurality of those who deserve to be called philosophers adds a certain richness to an expanded sense of the truth that is available to fundamental enquiry. For the plurality of philosophical positions within the ontological account neither calls us to condemn all but one as *wholly* false, nor releases us from the pursuit of that which is most adequately true.<sup>21</sup>

This paradoxical state of affairs has been brought about by the emergence of what has been called historical consciousness. We may avoid the subjectivism inherent in that term if we understand the situation as having been brought about by the historical account now come of age. Prior to the last part of the eighteenth century, the published works that bore the title, *History of Philosophy*, were actually doxologies arranged chronologically. Towards the end of the century, however, under a variety of causes, the historical account came into its own, not only as the modern historiography associated with Lessing and others, but in an expansive outreach that

intensified and interiorized the role of temporality within philosophical thought itself.<sup>22</sup>

And indeed, at least since Hegel, histories of philosophy have been written with the consciousness that philosophical thought itself is immersed in history and that history itself has something to tell us about philosophy and its search for true knowledge. *The history of philosophy then becomes the field upon which philosophy continually discovers and rediscovers itself.* History becomes a medium for the disclosure of philosophical truth, just because it is the carrier of existential act even as that act transcends it.<sup>23</sup> If history dwells within philosophy, it is because philosophy itself inhabits the world of historical development. If that is so, then, from the point of view of a philosophy of existential act, the past seven hundred years since St. Thomas must be seen as part of the history of being.<sup>24</sup>

When Gilson appealed to the fact of Christian philosophy, he was appealing not just to the *simple fact* that it exists, but also at least implicitly to that *fact whereby* philosophy itself lives out its own destiny and career. A comparison may help to clarify the point. While very different from the relation of philosophy to its history, we can gain insight from the relation between philosophy and revealed faith. It is perfectly correct to defend the integrity of philosophy within the embrace of faith by pointing to the character of the evidence appropriate to philosophy – namely, that philosophy is open in principle to all minds without requiring a profession of revealed faith, which in any case lies beyond the competence of a creature; and it is correct also to point out that philosophy is obliged to follow the canons of argument – namely, those same rules of argument that have been formulated by ordinary logic.

So far, then, we have philosophy *formaliter considerata*; but that defines the *nature* of philosophy, it does not adjudge its *being*.<sup>25</sup> The Christian philosopher is called upon to acknowledge that this formal character is sustained on the plane of validity, of formal correctness, but such a formal consideration does not yet acknowledge the existential condition of philosophy in its actual career, nor the dimensions of the truth which it seeks. For in its more complete state, philosophy is borne along its own path to new heights by an illumination that is operative in the full experience of the philosopher as Christian. Nor is this existential dimension of truth a mere accessory, since out of itself philosophy must ask itself: Whither am I, if not towards the fullness of the Truth?<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in its existential condition, philosophy cannot simply dismiss the plurality of philosophical insights which testify to the amplitude of truth, even as a philosophy of being argues for the primacy of *act* as at once the most comprehensive and intensive source of all that is.



So that, while we may correctly define philosophy in terms of its formality as a purely rational enterprise of the mind, such a definition remains abstract, less than complete, and forces us to go on to consider philosophy (to choose Maritain's words) *in actu exercito*. But such exercise of the formality of philosophy is not only pertinent to the subjectivity of the philosopher. It seems to me that Gilson's view requires something more, something objective and factual in the development of philosophy itself. Gilson relies upon and expects much more of history; and this, it seems to me, can be accounted for only by the intimate role that philosophy's own history plays within philosophy itself.

This leads to the further exploration of the nature of historical knowledge. We need to distinguish between making an *empirical* claim in the strict sense and making an *historical* claim. Both are held under the thrall of truth, but the bases of the two claims, their data, are different. The basis for an empirical claim is the instance or case which justifies some form of generality, either as law or type. The basis for an historical claim, on the other hand, is an event or series of events. Now, the epistemological constitution of the event includes a decisive element of temporality within it, so that its temporality is constitutive of the very content of the event. But the non-repeatability of time makes each event unique in a way in which the more abstract empirical instance (considered atemporally) is not. It follows that the justification of an historical claim travels a different route from the justification of an empirical claim.

For an empirical claim what is needed is a quantitative accumulation of repeated and repeatable instances. What is needed for justification of an historical claim is exact description of what is a unique event or series of events, meaning by unique, non-repeatable. A premise of my argument here is that history does not repeat itself, and that the common locution is untrue in any but a very general sense of similarity. The justification of an historical claim is empirical in that it requires *empiria* in the sense of putting the sources to a test (cf. *experimentum*). But the test differs from the experiments of the natural sciences.

Putting the sources to the test means critically weighing them as to their authenticity, the representative selectivity of facts, an accurate description of affairs, and the recognition of the difference between the situation of the historian and that of the event or series of events. In other words, the whole apparatus of modern historiography comes into play in order to bridge the difference between the present of the historian and the past of the event.<sup>27</sup> In some enquiries, as in the enquiry into the beginning of concept-formation, the initial stages are all but lost in the shadows of another time. The historian must then think back into the earlier situation of the beginning from more

secure evidences of later developments. To be sure, this is all risky, but it is not irresponsible or unreasonable. And it goes without saying that such a historical justification is open to challenge and to falsification.

At this point we need to pause for a cautionary. Would Gilson not say that I have converted history into hermeneutics and metaphysics into that ontology which he so firmly rejected? And that I have taken that very wrong turn which he objected to in Maritain? I can only reply that I do not think so, if we keep in mind the realist concordance between the fact of the historian and the event which it describes. The former (the fact) is a construction of the historian, lodged in the field of knowledge, but the latter (the event) is a constitution of being itself in its own unfolding in time. Fact is subordinate to being. Moreover, in the history of philosophy the significant events are already charged with knowledge and freedom, as indeed is every *actus humanus*.

Beyond their generic empirical quality, the distinctive character of facts and events is resident in the concreteness of facts (their irreplicability except in the narrative) and the one-time-only actuality of events. Here the actuality of history joins with the actuality of *esse*. In reclaiming history as the unfolding of being as act within the universal horizon of philosophy, we find just this double requirement of actuality and universality satisfied in fundamental enquiry within the ontological horizon of being, once it takes history seriously as a disclosure of being. And that is the justification of the marriage of fundamental enquiry with the metaphysics of being.

Moreover, the concreteness of being as act is the basis for Gilson's rejection of a concept of being,<sup>28</sup> since it would be by its very nature abstract. For only *being* encompasses all that is, while it is at the same time the most radically intensive principle of presence within each being. Paradoxically, only *being* understood as *act* (what Gilson called the "sign of an act") and recognized in the judgment is at once the most comprehensive and the most intensive, the most general and the most radical of principles. As St. Thomas has said, *being* is most universal encompassing all that is, and yet most intimate (*intimius*) within each being, for in its actuality it is the "perfection of all that is perfect" (*perfectio perfectionum*).<sup>29</sup>

If the foregoing is true, however, we need to look again at the main course of modern thought without pronouncing it simply a "wrong turn." We need instead to look at the modern history of thought as the field in which rather neglected aspects of being have disclosed themselves. Here, then, we seem to be back on Maritain's ground, who could appreciate the insights of modernity within a realistic intent. Gilson's experience of late nineteenth-century idealism at the Sorbonne may have contributed to his suspicion of modern thought, even as it drove him to recover a more adequate sense of

being in premodern thought. But, I would argue, that the principle of being as act advances with the centuries. For if being is at once comprehensive of all that is and yet radically intensive presence, then the truth in those centuries belongs to the history of being.

What is needed, however, – and here Gilson is correct – is the recognition of the principal role that *act* (*actus essendi*) plays in the concrete constitution of each being. What is further needed to accommodate this recognition is an epistemology that is adequate to it. What is needed is a recognition, not simply of the *universality* of all being, nor the *unity* of each being, nor even the *individuality* of each being; we need to recognize the *singularity* of each being. Finally, what is needed is an epistemology that can be incorporated within metaphysics by way of the consciousness of its history.

A word of explanation may be helpful. *Singularity* has been rather neglected in the philosophical tradition. The reigning theories of meaning have distributed meaning into universal and particular, and in modern times into class and member, generalization and instance, or law and case. But these modern variants have not altered the distribution of meaning in any basic way. To be sure, such a distribution is valid for many uses, but it is not appropriate for fundamental enquiry, because that needs to wed the demands of scientific generality with the demands of concrete reality. And this is just what metaphysics, for all its grandeur and misery, aspires to do. Instead, the conventional division distributes meaning into abstract generality and *equally abstract* particularity, thus effectively eliminating the concrete and giving the palm to the abstract.

Among modern thinkers, to my knowledge it is Kant who first signalled the singular as a distinctive category,<sup>30</sup> and though he did little more with it than to fill out his schema of transcendental categories, he did attribute to it both universal and particular properties. Hegel approached this paradoxical category with his notion of the *concrete universal*; however, in serving the aspiration of the absolute system, the concrete universal remained too abstract. In our own century, and without using the term, personalist philosophies have explored the sense of singularity, though within the context of the human person.<sup>31</sup> A metaphysics of being as existential act, on the other hand, acknowledges the singularity of each being within the community of beings. As the abstract is correlative to system, so is the (concrete) singular to community. Here the character of all-embracing unity is transformed from the abstract ideal of a system into the concrete reality of the community of beings.<sup>32</sup>

What Kant fleetingly and Hegel more consistently saw in the singular was that it is in itself a sort of *whole* (*totum*). And this is true, for the singular is not simply the particular. In the singular the order between what is common

and what is unique is reversed. Rather than being subordinate to the universal, as the particular is, the singular incorporates the universal within itself. This, it seems to me, is the fully developed sense of Aristotle's complex individual (*tode ti*) and of St. Thomas' *hoc aliquid*, for every singular is of some kind or other. And this is the basis within the singular for such commonalities as the specifics of nature and the norms of natural law.

It follows from this reversal of the order of the constituents of the singular that, what in the particular ties it to the abstract, now in the singular reverses that order and subsumes the universal into the concrete constitution of the singular, so that the concrete and the unique are primary. Nor is the singular open to the Heideggerian charge that it is simply an entity and hence derivative rather than fundamental. Here is where Gilson's insight into the primacy of existence comes into full play. For within each singular is that perfection of perfections that endows all else in the being (and by extension, the community of beings) with actuality, that is, with an amplitude that is at once more expansive and deeper than essence. St. Thomas brings this out forcefully when he speaks of *esse* and *praeter esse*.<sup>33</sup>

If we take the term *ontology* literally, it is the study (*logos*) of being in the sense of *entity* (*to on*); and for Gilson this does not penetrate to the truth of *being* as *act*. For that reason, too, metaphysics is not, as Heidegger contends, "a discourse on entity."<sup>34</sup>

But even as human intelligence and being itself transcend history, actuality is also disclosed in history, so that history finds itself already within the horizon of metaphysics. And although the history of philosophy discloses the actuality of thought, that history functions within metaphysics, not properly as a separate path or account, but rather it serves as a companion on the way to that truth which philosophy as fundamental enquiry seeks.

It points, too, to the primacy of the singular, the irreplicability of fact, and the uniqueness of events. Such a singular breaks free from the conventional distribution of meaning into universal and particular and is found in a judgment that returns fundamental thought to the community of beings. For the principal context of the singular is neither that of particularity, nor generality, nor laws, nor an abstract architectonic system. It incorporates all of these, finding within itself the basis for a community of relations, including those of law.

Gilson's insistence upon existential judgment as the key to a metaphysics of existential act is closely allied to the importance he gave to history in the fundamental exercise of thought and the elaboration of metaphysics. The very understanding of being as most comprehensive, embracing all that is, and most intensive, as penetrating and constituting the very actuality of each singular being, directs philosophy towards its own history. It redeems history

from the unfavourable judgment of Aristotle. For history is to be seen, not simply as the verification of fact, but also as the disclosure of being, even of those hitherto hidden depths that have been disclosed in the modern period. To realize this insight, we need an epistemology adequate to the contemporary disclosure of being, and one that situates the singularity of beings within the community of beings. In this work, history, while preserving its own integrity, becomes the *ancilla philosophiae*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Approches sans Entraves*, Paris: Fayard, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> The letter (dated 18 March 1974) is in the Gilson archives in Toronto. The original is in English, but receives a French translation in *Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain: Deux approches de l'être. Correspondance 1923–1971*, ed. Gêry Prouvost, Paris: Vrin, 1991. I am indebted to Owen Carroll for bringing this letter to my attention.

<sup>3</sup> “Hormis notre amour commun pour la vérité, nous ne nous ressemblons pas beaucoup” (Letter to Maritain, 29 January 1953).

<sup>4</sup> See Maritain, *Approches*, pp. 3–4:

Julien Green remarque dans son *Journal* qu'on ne prêche plus guère aujourd'hui sur les fins dernières. La cause en est sans doute que pour sertir les diamants éternels de la foi nous continuons d'user d'une imagerie et d'une conceptualisation qui ont peu changé depuis le temps des cathédrales et de Dante, et qui auraient dû être renouvelées et attentivement élaborées au cours de notre âge.

<sup>5</sup> Gilson arrived at the exclusive acknowledgment of *esse* as first principle (which needs no explanation because it explains everything else) surprisingly late. A review of the various editions of *Le Thomisme* reveals that the position was arrived at decisively only in the fourth edition, Paris: Vrin, 1942, “Preface,” p. 5. Gilson “insisted upon the essential constancy of his interpretation of St. Thomas, even though the various editions of *Le Thomisme* trebled in size, from 174 pages in the first edition (1919) to 552 in the fifth (1944).” For a fuller discussion, see my *What has Clio to do with Athena? Etienne Gilson: Historian and Philosopher* (Etienne Gilson Lecture 10), Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987, pp. 3ff. Gilson was not opposed to principles, of course, but insisted that they be rooted in the first principle, *esse*.

<sup>6</sup> “Que Maritain partage avec Gilson la même thèse ontologique de *l'acte d'être* comme ‘perfection des perfections’ et la même nomination de Dieu comme ‘Celui qui est’ son être même ... est incontestable” (Prouvost, *Correspondance*, p. 290). — And in a gracious compliment to Maritain on his book on Descartes, Gilson remarks that “it seems easier to make a philosopher into an historian than for an historian to become a philosopher” (Letter to Maritain, 18 June 1932).

<sup>7</sup> In this regard, Gilson clearly distinguished Maritain's realism from the transcendental Thomism of Maréchal, Noël and Mercier, which Gilson thought had conceded the starting point of philosophy to something like a Kantian idealism. As Prouvost restates Gilson's view [*Thomas d'Aquin et les Thomismes*, Paris: Cerf, 1996, p. 120]: “En fait, Maréchal n'a pas

suffisamment pris au sérieux l'idéalisme pour vouloir en sortir si vite ... . Les 'principes premiers de la connaissance' construisent une logique formelle, l'intelligible abstrait de l'expérience devient le transcendantal, condition de l'expérience." And referring to Msgr. Noël, Gilson writing to Maritain (Letter to Maritain, 6 April 1932; Prouvost, *Correspondance*, pp. 86–87) insists that he "begins with a problem that owes its being to Kant and not to St. Thomas." And contrasting his own "methodical realism" to Maritain's "critical realism," Gilson objects that "the critical point of view is specifically idealistic and consists in passing from thought to things."

<sup>8</sup> See Gilson, "Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism," *Modern Schoolman* 29 (1) (1 Nov. 1951): 1–10:

To those who request a new scholastic theology, founded on modern philosophy, there are others who reply that there is only one true philosophy, which is that of Aristotle, and that it is because scholastic theology is founded on this true philosophy that it itself is true. But neither Duns Scotus nor St. Thomas Aquinas *founded* their theologies on any philosophy, not even the philosophy of Aristotle. As theologians, they have made use of philosophy within the light of faith; and it is from this usage that philosophy has come forth transformed. What is of a metaphysical import in St. Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus is genuinely their own metaphysics. Each Aristotelian formula they take over and use receives from the notion of *esse* in St. Thomas Aquinas or from the notion of *ens infinitum* in Duns Scotus a meaning that Aristotle never knew, one that he would scarcely have understood and that only those who have inadequately penetrated it are willing to identify with the Aristotelian metaphysics of being. Consequently, to redo scholasticism *on the basis of* Kant or of Hegel – this would be to wish to redo what had never been done. The decisive achievement of the masters of the middle ages was perhaps this, that, because they were theologians, they did not think *on the basis of* any science or *on the basis of* any philosophy. We are therefore interpreting history in a misleading way if we say that scholasticism tied the Christian faith to the ancient philosophy of Aristotle, and, consequently, that we are invited by its example to do the same thing with the philosophy of our age. What scholastic theology did was rather to create, in the human meaning of this word, a new metaphysics, whose truth being independent of the state of science at any given historical moment remains as permanent as the light of the faith within which it was born.

It is worth mentioning that what is permanent is open to development without basic alteration, and that is a possibility that Gilson does not seem to take into account in the above argument.

<sup>9</sup> Despite Gilson's defence of history in the service of metaphysics, Mademoiselle d'Alverny noted that he was not trained as an historian in the strict sense ("Nécrologie," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale (X–XII s.)* 22 [1979], p. 426). And Jean Madiran ("Un témoignage chrétien: le philosophe Gilson et la théologie," *Itinéraires: Chroniques et Documents* 44 [June 1960], p. 48) remarked that:

Gilson is *not* an historian of philosophy. [I mean] he is not, in the sense in which Napoleon Bonaparte was not a captain of artillery, or Pius XII was not a canon lawyer ... Gilson has been an historian of philosophy in the way in which [Charles] Peguy was an editor, – because that was needed for his project. But [Gilson's] project is not that of an historian. He interrogates history. From the beginning his enquiry has been a philosophical one: into Christian philosophy.

<sup>10</sup> What was planned as the first volume of *La philosophie morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) traces the history of ethical systems, but Maritain warns the reader in the first two lines of the preface: “Je voudrais dire ici quelques mots de la nature de cet ouvrage. Son dessein est d’ordre doctrinal, non historique.”

<sup>11</sup> It is said that, after spending some time with Heidegger, Gilson pronounced him the most significant philosopher he had met in the flesh. Prouvost puts the matter well (Prouvost, *Correspondance*, p. 294): “Cependant, il n’y a pas là, comme pour Heidegger, une histoire de *l’oubli de l’être* mais plutôt une histoire progressive vers la vérité de l’être qui décline après saint Thomas.”

<sup>12</sup> I recall a seminar on late thirteenth-century Franciscan texts in which Gilson challenged Maritain on whether Aristotle had held the demonstrability of the immortality of the soul. When Maritain replied “yes,” Gilson went through a rapid parade of the pertinent texts in Aristotle, the Greek and Arabic commentators, ending with the Paduan Averroists. He then repeated the question, to which Maritain answered, once again, “yes!” He did not engage Gilson in a debate over the interpretation of Aristotle, but seemed quite confident that, had Aristotle not explicitly held for the demonstrability, his principles dictated that he ought to have.

<sup>13</sup> Anton Pegis puts it well in his Introduction to *A Gilson Reader*, Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1957, pp. 12f:

The Purism of Gilson appears in all its distinctiveness when the question of the modernization of Thomism is raised. Why should not Thomism establish itself as a philosophy in the modern world, deal with modern problems, put on modern dress, and speak as a modern philosophy among other philosophies? In the presence of this question, Gilson has raised two issues that go to the heart of the matter. Can Thomism become so modern as to answer questions whose existence is *incompatible* with its own point of view? Descartes and Kant are modern philosophers, and they are both distinguished by beginning philosophy with an effort to save the human mind from skepticism. ... Moreover, it is a matter of history that Descartes and Kant, instead of saving the certitude of human knowledge, were the founders of idealism. ... Now, not only did St. Thomas Aquinas not know the problem of Descartes and Kant, but his philosophical outlook could not be directed toward their problems. Why not? Because he thought that knowledge was naturally evident and naturally realistic. This point is part and parcel of the Thomistic outlook. How, then, can there be a Thomistic answer to the Cartesian problem of knowledge? If this problem is an authentic one, Thomism as a philosophy is worse than out of date; it is dead. If the problem is not an authentic one, no one gains by proceeding as though it is.

Once, upon his return to Toronto, Gilson asked me with some concern whether reports he had heard of my interest in Hegel had turned me into a Hegelian. When I replied that I was no such thing, but rather simply a student of Hegel’s writings, he seemed mollified. It was as though he had feared losing “one of his own” to modern idealism.

<sup>14</sup> Prouvost, *Correspondance*, p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> The recourse to these explanatory modes is central to my own understanding and I have developed them with differing nuances and in differing detail elsewhere.

<sup>16</sup> The prefix “quasi-” is meant to differentiate the Greek sense of reality from the modern epistemological sense of the terms “*subjective*” and “*objective*.”

<sup>17</sup> In this rapid survey, I have in mind by the history of the Earth, the great debate at the beginning of the nineteenth century between the “uniformitarians” and the “catastrophists” over the age of the Earth. At issue was Bishop Butler’s alleged biblical chronology.

<sup>18</sup> The emergence of historical consciousness had earlier received expression in Vico’s demand for a method appropriate for the subject matter of history in opposition to the Cartesian demand for a single uniform mathematical-like method; but that demand was to take different forms in such diverse thinkers as Lessing and historical criticism (eighteenth century), Auguste Comte and an historically based sociology, Darwin’s theory of biological evolution, and Marx’s revolutionary critique of economics (nineteenth century).

<sup>19</sup> I am aware that Gilson rejected the identification of metaphysics with ontology, on the grounds that the latter term was infected by the modern idealistic penchant for epistemology, and more basically, because it concentrated on entity (*to on*), with the primacy of being *as possible*, rather than on *actus essendi*, as the central feature of being. It seems to me, however, that the term can be redeemed for realistic purposes, once one recognizes the centrality of *actus essendi* within each entity.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gilson, *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education* (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1948), p. 47:

At the very moment when we give up the mirage of a self-subsisting philosophy, we find ourselves surrounded by the friendly company of the philosophers. They are all here, this very day, around us, ready to assist us in our task, provided only that we apply to them for help. In all that they have said there is nothing that cannot be of assistance including, as Thomas Aquinas himself once expressly observed, their very failures.

<sup>21</sup> Here we meet with Gilson’s argument against a monofom scholasticism, and his historian’s respect for the serious pursuit of truth by philosophers who disagreed with St. Thomas.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle’s recounting of his predecessors in the *Metaphysics* and St. Thomas’ brief account of the growing sense of being (*Summa theologiae* I, 44) are anticipations of the use of history in and for philosophy, but are not yet a methodic insistence on the historicity of thought itself.

<sup>23</sup> The Heideggerian error, seen from the metaphysics of existential act, is not its placing of being in history, but its exhaustion of being in temporality.

<sup>24</sup> There is a curious parallel between this claim and the theological understanding of history as the governance of divine Providence. If the history of modern thought is not a tale told by an idiot, it must tell us something significant about being that we had not known before. It was this conviction that moved Maritain. At the same time, Gilson’s caution about reading the times without an adequate sense of being as act must be taken seriously.

<sup>25</sup> Gilson writes:

Philosophy has no existence of its own outside philosophers, and even that superhuman wisdom which transcends time is given to us in time... the trouble is that philosophy pure and simple is a pure and simple essence, not a being. If *ens* means *habens esse*, a philosopher is a being, whereas philosophy is not. Exactly, the only actual being which philosophy may have is that of the philosophers. ... Here, and nowhere else, lies the foundation for the very possibility of a *philosophia perennis*; for it is, not a perennial cloud floating through the ages in some metaphysical stratosphere, but the permanent possibility



for each and every human being to actualize an essence through his own existence. (Gilson, *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*, pp. 44–46.)

- <sup>26</sup> This is a constant, unifying theme in the recent papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.
- <sup>27</sup> I have sketched the difference between the time of the historian and the time of the events in “What happens to Tradition when History overtakes it” (*Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 1994) *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Supplementary Volume 68 (1994): 59–72.
- <sup>28</sup> “J’aime mieux dire qu’il n’y a pas là de concept [d’existence], mais le signe d’un acte” (Prouvost, *Correspondance*, p. 166).
- <sup>29</sup> *Summa theologiae* I, 8, 1 and *De Potentia Dei* VII, 2, ad 9m.
- <sup>30</sup> But see A. Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham*, Toronto: PIMS, 1999, for a nominalist or conceptualist usage.
- <sup>31</sup> I have considered the singular in relation to Gabriel Marcel’s “philosophy of the concrete” in “Created Receptivity and the Philosophy of the Concrete,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 339–371.
- <sup>32</sup> The search for a more concrete mode of thought can be seen in Heidegger’s *Sein-zum-Tode*, as well as in Sartre’s existentialism, and more recently in the *différance* of Derrida’s postmodern deconstruction. But these fail to give just place to the *commonality* that is resident within the singular.
- <sup>33</sup> *Contra Gentiles* II, 52–54.
- <sup>34</sup> Gilson took Heidegger’s charge seriously that metaphysics is ontotheology: “elle est une considération de l’être plus encore qu’un discours sur l’étant. Elle n’est même pas une ontothéologie, pour la simple raison qu’elle pose Dieu au-delà l’étant, comme l’Être même: *ipsum purum esse*” (*L’Être et l’Essence* [2nd ed.] [Paris: Vrin, 1981], p. 372). Gilson’s charge of *essentialism* against much of scholasticism after St. Thomas, while sometimes needing more nuance, stems from the conviction that metaphysics is a science of *l’être (esse)* and not of *l’étant (ens, entity)*. He reserved his sharpest criticism for Cajetan, even at one point saying (perhaps unguardedly) that Aristotle is the bane of St. Thomas’ philosophy, and Cajetan is the Greek’s prophet.

## **Chapter 5**

# **SUFFERING, METAPHYSICS, AND NIETZSCHE'S PATH TO THE HOLY**

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Here are hopes; but what will you hear and see of them if you have not experienced splendor, ardor, and dawns in your own souls? I can only remind you; more I cannot do.

*The Gay Science*

## **INTRODUCTION**

“God is dead, God remains dead. And we have killed him.”<sup>1</sup> These words, born of Nietzsche’s confrontation with his own death, still haunt us even at the dawn of a new millennium. In the presence of death even the brightest sun seems dim, but when a god dies, we may with Nietzsche ask, “Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning (GS 125)?” If we want to cast our lamps in the direction of the holy, stumble onto one of the many bright pathways to the sacred, can Nietzsche help?

Our first impulse might be to say a flat, firm “No!” to this question, since he was, after all, the sworn enemy of Christianity and its God. But does his rejection of Christianity constitute a simultaneous rejection of religion *in toto*? This paper seeks to demonstrate that the very ardor of this rejection cannot be seen as Nietzsche’s rejection of all approaches to religion.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, his passionate disavowal of Christianity betrays precisely how much he cared for the many things that have gone by the name of the holy. He once described how, “One day the wanderer slammed a door behind himself, stopped in his tracks, and wept. Then he said: ‘This penchant and passion for what is true, real, non-apparent, certain – how it aggravates me! ... I often look back in wrath at the most beautiful things that could not hold me – *because* they could not hold me’” (GS 309). Christianity was certainly an object of Nietzsche’s wrath. But the questions before us now are: a) Why are some of his loudest thunderbolts of vitriol and polemic directed at it? and b) Where do we turn to find a feasible response to our initial question?

To respond to the last question, we can try the traditional approach of looking at the source of Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity via his analyses of *ressentiment*, the distinction between master and slave moralities, or his view of Christianity as a mode of nihilism, and so on. These approaches, however, risk confusing the source of Nietzsche’s critique with the critique itself. They are, no doubt, essential to an explication of the dynamics of Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity. But they are already abstracted from their foundation, which is, I think, best expressed in his oft-quoted remark, “Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author.”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere he says, regarding his own philosophizing, “I speak only of what I have lived through, not merely of what I have thought through; the opposition of thinking and life is lacking in my case.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, the reasons underpinning Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity were very personal ones. And we need not look far for these reasons. The most common-place acquaintance with our fellow beings provides not only the basis of his critique of Christianity but is itself one of Christianity’s central concerns: namely, the everyday event of human suffering.

That Nietzsche was no stranger to suffering is well known, and his concern with it pervades the primary motifs of his thought.<sup>5</sup> Regarding his own experience, he had come to the point where at times his physical illness was a “constant pain, a feeling much like seasickness several hours each day, a semi-paralysis which makes speaking difficult and ... furious seizures (the last involved three days and nights of vomiting; I lusted for death).”<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, he described his solitary, friendless life: “for years not a word of comfort, not a drop of human feeling, not a breath of love.”<sup>7</sup> We cannot be

surprised, then, that at times the potential comforts promised by “the barrel of a revolver ... [were] a source of relatively pleasant thoughts.”<sup>8</sup> Being, as he was, on an intimate basis with suffering, and having been occasionally brought to the limits of his own endurance, Nietzsche's thought rotates around this fact of human existence. His critique of Christianity hinges on how, at least from his point of view, it ultimately offered him nothing in the midst of suffering.

At this point, there may emerge the temptation to reject Nietzsche's attack on Christianity because it is simply too “personal,” too “biographical.” But it was just this experience of his, quite concrete and familiar to the majority of us, which opened the door not merely to a critique of Christianity,<sup>9</sup> but also allowed him to anticipate how this religion would eventually lose its grip on the hearts and minds of contemporary western culture.

Thus far, our search for a feasible path into Nietzsche's critique of Christianity has merely suggested that his views on *ressentiment*, master-slave morality, Christianity as nihilism, etc., presuppose the suffering that fueled their expression. Somehow, this religion failed him and he actually cared enough to give a damn – at least to the extent of an incessant attack upon it. But to see if this care reveals Nietzsche as an offended guardian of interpretations of the holy, we have to widen the scope of our inquiry into the theme of suffering in such a way as to excavate his perception of the metaphysics of Christianity. This is essential to our task, since he by no means saw Christianity in a philosophical vacuum. On the contrary, aside from its own unique failure before the example of Jesus of Nazareth,<sup>10</sup> the roots of Christianity are for Nietzsche anchored deep in the soil of Plato's metaphysics. And it is in this direction that we now turn to find the beginning of the end of a religion yet to be.

## THE TRAGIC MYTH: COSMOLOGY

Nietzsche points out that suffering, in whatever mode, is something we can generally endure. But the worst, most debilitating pain is when we “find no answer to the crying question: ‘why do I suffer?’”<sup>11</sup> In short, the most anguished suffering is the “meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself” (GM III 28). It is a small step from pointless misery to “the deed of nihilism, which is suicide.”<sup>12</sup> But even if at times tempted to commit the deed, the desire for something conferring some semblance of value and meaning to his own suffering led Nietzsche into a life and death spiritual struggle. He looked to the spiritual prospect of western culture – the humanism of the Greeks and

Christianity – only to find them, as he says, among “the most beautiful things that could not hold me” (GS 309).

The problem of suffering informs Nietzsche’s critique of western philosophy, as well as that of Christianity. To appreciate this, we will consider the spiritual landscape wherein Nietzsche sought a meaning to suffering, one that allowed him, not merely to endure, but to say a “yes” to life, no matter the suffering it requires. We must, therefore, turn to “the best turned out, most beautiful, most envied type of humanity to date, those most apt to seduce us to life, the Greeks – .”<sup>13</sup> The ancient-Greek thinkers revealed a powerful vitality and health still discernable even when their thought had, for Nietzsche, degenerated into the metaphysics embodied in Socrates and Plato. In the philosophizing of these two giants, Nietzsche recognized “symptom[s] of decay ... agents of the dissolution of Greece.”<sup>14</sup> Who then were the thinkers Nietzsche saw as representing the “truly healthy culture” of the Greeks?<sup>15</sup> They are, he says, “the great Greeks in philosophy, those of the two centuries before Socrates.”<sup>16</sup> “Today,” he says, “when suffering is always brought forward as the principle argument against existence, as the worst question mark, one does well to recall the ages in which the opposite opinion prevailed” (GM II 7). Hence we should recall the “the philosophers of the tragic age”<sup>17</sup> and the emergence of the pre-Socratic thinkers.

It is among them that we find, Nietzsche says, an “intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence” (BT SC 1). This was the age “of the *tragic* myth among the Greeks of the best, the strongest, most courageous period” (BT SC 1). Moreover, we must not be deceived by the elegant and “colourful warm light” in poetic portraits of this age. On the contrary, “no longer led and protected by the hand of Homer” we find, Nietzsche says, myths revealing a “life ruled only by the children of Night: strife, lust, deceit, old age, and death.”<sup>18</sup> And, finding the myths “not pure, not lucid enough for them,”<sup>19</sup> it was the pre-Socratics who first confronted “the big question mark concerning the value of existence” (BT SC 1). Being “men of frightful ages” (GM III 10), the philosophizing peculiar to the pre-Socratics was, Nietzsche says, “well on the way toward *assessing correctly* the irrationality and suffering of human existence.”<sup>20</sup>

We humans have always had a gift for making and therefore living in frightful ages, so why were the pre-Socratics so special? Why does Nietzsche see them on the way to this “correct assessment” of human existence? The answer lies in precisely the point of view he strove to adopt toward his own suffering. In short, the cosmology of the pre-Socratics did not denigrate life and the value of our existence *because* of the suffering it entails. On the contrary, Nietzsche seems to identify the epoch of pre-Socratic thought as one wherein suffering and the willingness to suffer were not only understood as

the norm, but also the path to greatness.<sup>21</sup> Without the shield of mythopoetics, the pre-Socratic thinkers advanced toward the “*brighter sun*” (HH 261) of what would later be called philosophy. They gambled the protection of a world of myth to create “the great possibilities of the philosophical ideal” (WP 437). The *risk* of philosophy as embodied in pre-Socratic thinking betrays, from Nietzsche’s point of view, precisely what allowed the Greek culture to emerge and flourish as it did: namely, the “sharp-eyed courage that tempts and attempts, that *craves* the frightful as the enemy, the worthy enemy ... [f]rom whom one can learn what it means ‘to be frightened’” (BT SC 1).

Is Nietzsche’s perception of the Greek cosmologists too romantic? Perhaps, but their step from a familiar spiritual landscape toward the creation of an entirely new one remained in Nietzsche’s eyes one “prompted by ... overflowing health, by the *fullness* of existence” (BT SC 1). Suffering was “understood” as a requirement of life,<sup>22</sup> and though Nietzsche says the pre-Socratics are examples of philosophers who “empathize to the utmost with ... universal suffering,”<sup>23</sup> they never see suffering as an argument against the value of our life here on this earth. Striving to come to terms with his own circumstances, the philosophers of “the tragic age” revealed to him the source of “that broad proud stream which we know as Greek philosophy” (PTA 1).

## THE CONCEITS OF DECLINE: METAPHYSICS

With Socrates, Nietzsche says, “something changes” (WP 437). This “change,” multifaceted as it is within Nietzsche’s thinking, bears a central feature, namely, the view that Socrates’ philosophizing is symptomatic of a decaying Greek culture. Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*, with whom Nietzsche so intensely identified his own philosophical task, nevertheless marks the beginning of philosophy’s decline into *metaphysics*.

Though Nietzsche recognizes this descent as embodied in Socrates and the post-Socratics, it’s not as if, on the other hand, he sees the collapse of “the great possibilities of the philosophical ideal” (WP 437) as the personal fault of poor Socrates. Rather, for Nietzsche, Socrates’ philosophizing betrays the cultural conditions within which any philosophy happens. No philosophy ever takes place in a cultural vacuum and that of Socrates reveals the decline of Athenian culture. In short, Socrates is the philosopher who diagnosed and sought to cure his culture from what Nietzsche called “symptoms of a decline of strength, of impending old age, and of physiological weariness” (BT SC 4). And since Socrates, like the rest of us, could not jump out of his skin, Nietzsche will characterize his thinking as actually “infected” with precisely the symptoms Socrates sought to eradicate from Greek culture.<sup>24</sup>

Nietzsche's interpretation of how Socrates' thinking betrays the overall "physiological weariness" of his culture can be approached from a few different directions. But the roads seem to generally converge upon Nietzsche's insistence that with the Greek culture's "decline of strength," its philosophers tend to turn away from this world, as merely "apparent," and begin to pine for a truer, more real, more valuable world transcending our own. We find he suggests, philosophers who are essentially offended at this world; thinkers who "want out" via the affirmation of a world devoid of chaos, becoming, death, and decay. In short, Nietzsche says post-Socratic thought reveals a culture that can no longer endure the suffering inherent to being a human being. Suffering is somehow unacceptable – unjust. There is, as it were a yearning for a world without change, terror, falsehood, an eternally unchanging world more "real" than the one within which they are philosophizing.

"Beginning with Socrates," Nietzsche says, "the individual all at once began to take himself too seriously."<sup>25</sup> In Greek metaphysics there is an overestimation of the value of the self – that is, its capacity for reason, goodness, justice, and passion for the truth – disclose our world to be lacking in precisely these "virtues." And in so far as *our* possession of these virtues provide no shield from the suffering in this world, an eternal and unchanging "true world" corresponding to the virtues of the philosopher *qua* philosopher is posited as the path to acquiring the "happiness" that all of us – especially philosophers – apparently deserve. The inherently self-centred character of metaphysics – wherein, as Nietzsche says, "anxiety concerning oneself becomes the soul of philosophy"<sup>26</sup> – stands in marked contrast to the pre-Socratics, among whom Nietzsche recognized none "who consider the 'salvation of the soul' or the question 'what is happiness?' so important that they forget the world and men on that account."<sup>27</sup>

Precisely this forgetfulness as a turning away from the world and human beings is, for Nietzsche, symptomatic of metaphysics – a mode of philosophizing infected with the degeneration marking the culture wherein it took root. Ultimately then, Nietzsche sees metaphysics promoting the values of a tired and decaying culture: values that "... affirm [another] world ... contradicting] this world," all of which stand "... against the preconditions of life ... against partisanship in favor of life" (WP 461). And, as far as he was concerned, these very values unfortunately permeated our intellectual history. Or, as he puts it, "Destiny has ordained that the more recent and decadent Hellenism has had the greatest historical force."<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche spent his philosophical life combating the influence of this force.<sup>29</sup>

## THE AUTHORITY OF SUFFERING: CHRISTIANITY

This combat was a declaration of war on all fronts with Christianity – a religion he saw promoting the metaphysics he identified with a philosophically exhausted and essentially nihilistic Greek culture (T X 2, 3, 4).<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is, I think, an extension of the one he directed at Greek metaphysics. I noted above that Nietzsche's attack on Christianity is usually approached via his views on *ressentiment*, master-slave morality or Christianity as a form of nihilism. I said, too, that approaching his critique through these views is basically too abstract. That is, these approaches both presuppose Nietzsche's perception of ancient-Greek thinking and leave unexplored Nietzsche's views on how the event of human suffering had already been diminished before Christianity had absorbed "decadent Hellenism." Ultimately this Hellenism exerted "the greatest historical force" through precisely what Nietzsche called Christian *ressentiment*, master-slave morality, and so on. Though the cultural origins are quite distinct in Nietzsche's mind,<sup>31</sup> he recognized Christianity's promotion of Greek metaphysics in at least two ways: a) its desire to leave this world behind for a better, more just, and truer one, and b) its overestimation of the significance of the individual.

Nietzsche's incessant complaining about the "otherworldliness" of Christianity is fairly common knowledge. The complaint hinges on the idea that the more Christianity – like metaphysics – affirms "another world," it simultaneously slanders this one (WP 461). That is to say, both seek to leave this world behind, due to the event of suffering. This event is regarded as "unjust" by the metaphysicians who, since they are so fundamentally rational and thereby "virtuous," nevertheless have no shield against suffering, decay and death. This essentially self-centred feature of Greek metaphysics is, from Nietzsche's point of view, deified in the Christian affirmation of the "infinite value" of each of us. This value is conferred upon us by God who sees our loneliness and loves us, witnesses our suffering and commiserates, attests to our sojourn through time with the promise of our eternal validity.

Nietzsche recognized an enormous conceit here, a moldy self-absorption that – like metaphysics – insists on an eternal and infinite value upon human existence *because* of our confrontation with suffering in a world profoundly indifferent to us. This is the traditional response, he thought, to the question: "why do I suffer?" (GM III 28). In the case of Christianity, Nietzsche believed suffering fueled that unmitigated hatred of life on this earth he called Christian *ressentiment*. This hate will ultimately seek the revenge upon life through which any happiness on this earth is condemned as evil – this is the essence of that dichotomy he called master-slave morality. The inevitable



collapse of this hatred and revenge into the overarching death-wish he called nihilism is, as I have noted, the general map followed in articulating Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. But this critique derives its, at times, all too shrill tone from Nietzsche's confrontation with his own pain and suffering.

Meditating on his life of illness and the loneliness peculiar to such suffering, he once said, "I've been, body and soul, more of a battlefield than a human being."<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, this experience of "great pain, the long, slow pain that takes its time – on which we are burned, as it were, with green wood – compels us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths" (GS Preface 3). Within such depths, Nietzsche found the metaphysical comforts of philosophy and Christianity entombed within himself and hence as useful as the "knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor in danger of shipwreck" (HH I 1, 9). Thus, in the midst of his suffering, all "craving for some Apart, Beyond, Outside, Above" (GS Preface 2) was now simply impossible.

## AN ASTONISHING INNOCENCE

Yet it was in precisely this situation – one from which Nietzsche could neither run nor hide – that he struck upon an insight which not only gave him courage but also allowed a glimpse of what he described "as the *holy way*" (T X 4). A central feature of this insight is Nietzsche's coming to see that in the midst of suffering our "judgements of value, concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true ... in themselves such judgements are stupidities" (T II 2). Only fools attempt to jump out of their skin, and thus no amount of suffering, no matter how intense, confers upon us the cosmic credentials authorizing us to make judgements regarding the value of existence. Anticipating the characteristics of what Heidegger would later call "facticity,"<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche saw that it is to this earth that we are abandoned, and into this time we are thrown. "*No one* is accountable for existing at all, or for being constituted as he is, or for living in the circumstances and surroundings in which he lives" (T VI 8).

To realize that one is fundamentally unified with life and this earth is to return to "the most deeply buried of all Greek temples" (WP 419), the tragic insight Nietzsche identified with the pre-Socratic thinkers. For them pain "is *not* considered an objection to life" (E Z 1) and, rather than betraying this world through flight into "another world," their cosmologies affirm our being integral to and unified with all that is and will be (WP 437). In this vein, Nietzsche states that the "fatality of ... [our] nature cannot be disentangled

from the fatality of all which has been and will be. ... one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole – there exists nothing which could judge, measure, compare, condemn our being” (T VI 8). And since the standpoint of eternity essential to the “transcendent worlds” of metaphysics and Christianity were already dead to him, then the only path to determining value and whatever might go by the name of “virtue” and “holy” lay in overcoming the “self.” Such overcoming demands that we relinquish “the *hyperbolic naiveté* of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of all things” (WP 12). The human being is “but one particular line of the total living organic world” (WP 678), and our suffering is not a passport to blaming life or seeking revenge upon it. On the contrary, one “must by all means stretch out one’s fingers,” Nietzsche says, “and grasp this amazing finesse, *that the value of life cannot be estimated*. Not by the living for they are an interested party ... not judges” (T II 2).

## GRATITUDE: THE POSSIBILITY OF VIRTUE

Marooned on the earth and stranded in time, what could Nietzsche have meant with his reference to “the *holy way*” (T X 4)? Surely nothing to do with Christianity. “The conception of ‘God,’ ” he says, “was until now the greatest objection to existence” (T VI 8). The “*holy way*,” then, is an affirmation of existence and one which, given the impossibility of escape, stands on this side of life – stands on the side of suffering. And if as Nietzsche says, the greatest suffering has always been meaningless suffering (GM III 28), then whatever may be revealed as “meaningful” is manifest in this life, without any referent to “another world.” So where does Nietzsche turn? Where can he go if the path to all the value and “meaning” inherent to the “otherworldly” has amounted to nothing? He had little choice – he was compelled to turn to everything post-Socratic and Christian thought had reviled, as unjust, untruth, unholy. In short, he looked at the fate of all living things – decay, “death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth” – everything which to metaphysicians and theologians “are to their minds objections – even refutations” (T III 1).

Nietzsche accepted his fate, but he wanted more than mere “resignation” here. He wanted to affirm it in a manner that allowed him, despite loneliness and suffering, to *love* his brief sojourn on this planet. He refused “the *conclusions of pain*” (GS Preface 1) – suicide – as flatly as he did those of metaphysics and Christianity. Hence, as we’ve seen, he aligned himself with the fate of all living things and thereby with the spirit of the pre-Socratics – those philosophers who, in attempting to articulate the unity of all life, are

motivated “by a drive similar to the one that created tragedy.”<sup>34</sup> That you as a human being are condemned to suffering and death is a *given* – here our *intimacy* with every living thing past, present and future is located. For the philosopher to be offended at this and “see a problem in the *value* of existence ... constitutes an objection to him, a question-mark as to his wisdom, a piece of unwisdom” (T II 2). In this vein we may say that for Nietzsche it is not really a question of the “value of existence,” it is more a matter of the value of our inevitable destruction. Through openly embracing what Heidegger would later call “Being-towards-death,”<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche discerned the tragic insight that the risk of oneself is essential to one’s growth as a human being.<sup>36</sup> And it is in this embrace that he found not only the key to “everything genuinely Hellenic” (WP 427), but also to what appeared as “the holy way” for these ancients and for himself. When he looked at the ancients, Nietzsche thought that in the phenomenon of self-overcoming – *risking* themselves – they cultivated and provided the example of whatever would eventually be called “noble.”

Overcoming of the self hinges on a passion which allows us to subdue our own instinct of self-preservation. Nothing, Nietzsche says, “is older, stronger, more inexorable and unconquerable than this instinct” (GS 1). This powerful drive to preserve oneself at all costs can be overcome when, out of an intoxicated joy at finding oneself *here*, the individual embraces their inevitable suffering and destruction. The affirmation and acceptance of this fate is the condition through which we are liberated from concern with “self-preservation.” Nietzsche would have us turn away from that musty old “self – suffering and destruction *is* our fate – accept that, and learn that standing on the side of life, standing on the side of everything priceless, means risking it all. “For believe me,” he says, “the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyments is – to *live dangerously!*” (GS 283). Through the affirmation of one’s fate to suffer and be destroyed the individual attempts to be *worthy* of the gift of life by *risking* the possibility of making *oneself inestimable*.

“I love,” says Zarathustra, “those who do not wish to preserve themselves.”<sup>37</sup> He is referring here to those who *suffer* from their gratitude for the measureless gift of existence – and, if returning the gift requires their destruction, then this is the measure of an individual’s generosity. “This is the will of those of noble soul: they desire nothing *gratis*, least of all life.” Noble individuals, then, “are always considering what we can best give *in return*” (Z III 12). From Nietzsche’s point of view, this passionate desire to surpass our natural self-centred instinct of preservation is the foundation for the ancient virtues of courage, honour, duty, justice and goodness within the culture of “the older Hellenes” (T II 4) – a foundation thoroughly undermined by Greek

metaphysics and later Christianity when these virtues were exiled to the "Other World."

Nietzsche's view of the passion to "give in return" is the basis of the idea of "recompense" we find in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The "good" man acknowledges the "gift," repays it – the noble is not defined then in terms of possessions so much as in their "capacity to give," the ability to give of themselves in order to be worthy of the gift of life. Consequently anyone incapable of "acknowledging the debt" is "a bad man."<sup>38</sup> Thus, to pass judgement on the value of life *because* one "suffers" betrays the lack of gratitude peculiar to whatever is ignoble. Such an individual is presumptuous and irreverent – not to mention laughable in thinking that their suffering confers some special authority to make such a judgement. The grateful one, however, does not see pain and suffering as objections to life; on the contrary, they can look at life as the priceless gift and say, "If you have no more happiness to give me, well then! *You still have suffering*" (E Z 1).

## THE HOLY WAY

This enormous gratitude for life – peculiar, Nietzsche thought, to "the 'noble Greek' of the old stamp" (WP 435) – pointed to an interpretation for suffering that went beyond resignation to life. This spirit of gratitude was manifest in the pre-Socratic vision of ourselves *unified* with the cosmos. The religious experience of this was personified, Nietzsche thought in Dionysus, the enigmatic "god of darkness" (E GM).

This deity constitutes a flagrant *rejection* of the perspective of self-preservation. Dionysus remained, for Nietzsche, "that mysterious symbol" through which the post-Socratic tradition would be judged "too short, too poor, too narrow" (WP 1051). Forever pregnant with the possibility of growth, Dionysus is condemned to the throes of birth through which "*pain* is pronounced holy" (T X 1), and, in this, he is the "Yes," in response to Nietzsche's question: "Is it possible to suffer ... from overfullness?" (BT SC 1). He is *burdened with excess*: the overwhelming creative power through which all living things are hurled to growth and radiant bloom. The deliverance of this power is the mad, orgasmic bliss through which every smile, mask and glance, every idea, philosophy, interpretation, and gesture of expression is given birth – only to be murdered by the very force that returns to give birth again and again – forever. Dionysus remains the creative power of life eternally destroying him toward his rebirth.

This is why Nietzsche sees the pre-Socratic attempt to articulate the unity of all life, as motivated "by a drive similar to the one that created tragedy."<sup>39</sup>

To exist is to stand in the blizzard of suffering and pain. To be haunted by the constant possibility for further growth beyond what one “is” marks the presence of life itself in all of us: we are always unfinished. Dionysus is always tempting us, luring us ever on into the labyrinth toward ... what? That is a seductive and terrifying question. What shall we risk? What shall we preserve? Whichever way we go, suffering is there as the sign of growth or decay. So ...?

Greek metaphysics and Christianity are, Nietzsche thought, offended at the impossibility of avoiding pain and the constant realization of our incompleteness – and they judge the world accordingly. The tragic age of the Greeks betrays a gratitude for the gift of life itself, wherein, by accepting destruction, they are worthy of it. Contrasting this age with Christianity, Nietzsche says we must “see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning” (WP 1052). The former suffer from the fact of the destruction life requires and, through the condemnation of this, they thereby strive for the “virtue” essential to their eternal *preservation*. In “the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering.*” Ultimately, then, the “god on the Cross is ... the signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction” (WP 1052).

## CONCLUSION

In Nietzsche’s appreciation of how “the most profound instinct of life ... is experienced religiously” (T X 4), we see that he was by no means indifferent to interpretations of the holy. Indeed, his high estimation of the pre-Socratic attitude toward suffering, in contrast with that of both post-Socratic metaphysics and Christianity, rests on an admiration for the sacred symbol of the god Dionysus. Christianity turns, with Greek metaphysics, against life *because* of suffering. And in so far as these offered nothing to Nietzsche in terms of his own suffering, he turned to the ancient “yes” that refused pious resignation to, or condemnation of, life.

How did he fare? Sometimes he gained ground. The idea of a “Yes, a sacred Yes” (Z I 1), declaring Eternal Recurrence, was the ardent affirmation of his life *exactly as it is* again and again for eternity. At other times he was at the end of his rope: “My health is back to where it was three years ago. Everything is wrecked ... . What a life! And I’m the great affirmer of life!!”<sup>40</sup>

The problem of human suffering is the background out of which Nietzsche philosophizes. It informs his approach to western intellectual

history, as well as his critique of Christianity. The latter, for Nietzsche, is the deification of a tradition<sup>41</sup> which, when confronted with suffering, recoils from life's darkest face by condemning it as "unjust" and "irrational." Here, the more one condemns, the higher one soars into the "holy," and the promise of one's eternal and infinite value. This kind of self-importance as the path to the sacred offended him. It lacks the essential character of a noble individual – that of generosity. The noble individual is not primarily concerned with self-preservation. Giving, risking, chancing oneself – these lead to suffering, failure, loss and destruction, but they are also the path to growth. In order to grow, one simply cannot take one's "self" too seriously. This is the spirit of Dionysus – creation requires destruction. For Nietzsche, the age of the tragic myth, embodied in Dionysus, opened a path both for an interpretation of the holy and for the critique of religion in general. But "the personal confession of its author" (B 6) endured in his battle with the specter of meaningless suffering. And yet, even here in the midst of such a struggle, the "last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus" (T X 5) would want to remind us that staying "cheerful when involved in a gloomy and exceedingly responsible business is no inconsiderable art: yet what could be more necessary than cheerfulness?" (T Foreword).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1974, p. 181. Abbreviated "GS," followed by section number.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is not concerned with validating Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. We are more interested in what his critique reveals in terms of his views on religion.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1966, p. 13. Abbreviated "B," followed by section number.

<sup>4</sup> The translation is taken from the Appendix in Nietzsche's, *Ecce Homo*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p. 340. Abbreviated "E," followed by essay title and section numbers.

<sup>5</sup> This fact is a prerequisite to any thorough investigation into his thinking, since suffering is either the direct or indirect "personal confession" (B 6) of his philosophizing.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Dr. Otto Eiser, January 1880, in *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, ed., tr. Peter Fuss and Henry Shapiro, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Reinhardt von Sedlitz, February 12, 1880, in *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Franz Overbeck, March 22, 1883, in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed., tr. Christopher Middleton, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> It also allows access to his critique of religion in general.

<sup>10</sup> Cf., for example, section 40 of Nietzsche's *The Anti-Christ* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed., tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Penguin Books, 1984. Abbreviated "A," followed by section number.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p. 162. Abbreviated "GM," followed by essay and section numbers.

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, p. 143. Abbreviated "WP," followed by section number.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1967, p. 17. Abbreviated "BT," followed by section number. References to the "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" will be made with "BT SC," followed by section number.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 39–40. Abbreviated "T," followed by part and section numbers.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, tr. Marianne Cowan, Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1962, p. 28. Abbreviated "PTA," followed by section number.

<sup>16</sup> E, essay on "The Birth of Tragedy," 3. I speak in greater detail of Nietzsche's distinction between the pre- and post-Socratics in my *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom," in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, ed., tr. Daniel Breazzeale, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1990, p. 149. Nietzsche's identification of the pre-Socratics with the "tragic age" originates from his earliest writings. This particular reference goes back, for example, to 1872. The attitude he took toward the pre-Socratics, as a young man, never really changed over the span of his life – nor did his view that the cosmologists were a far healthier species of philosopher, in contrast with the post-Socratics.

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Penguin Books, 1984, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 122. Hereafter referred to in parentheses with the abbreviation "HH," followed by the volume, part and section numbers from which the reference is taken.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom," p. 136.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. M. Clark and B. Leiter, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 16; B 225, 257, 262; BT SC 1.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche develops this idea in his later works in terms of his conception of *resistance* as the path through which creation and overcoming are required according to the order of rank manifest in all living things as will to power.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, "The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle Between Art and Knowledge," in *Philosophy and Truth*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, T II; BT SC; GS 340. This perception of Socrates is consistent through the Nietzsche *corpus*. For more detailed exploration into the relationship between Nietzsche and Socrates see: Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician*; Werner Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of*

*Socrates*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974; Hermann-Josef Schmidt, *Nietzsche und Sokrates: Philosophische Untersuchungen zu Nietzsches Sokratesbild*, Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1969; Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, New York: Vintage, 1968; Ernst Sandvoss, *Sokrates und Nietzsche*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, "The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom," p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche adds, "For this reason the older Hellenism was always falsely judged." This contrast between pre- and post-Socratic philosophy, or cosmology and metaphysics is fairly consistent throughout the Nietzsche *corpus*. See Nietzsche, "The Struggle Between Science and Wisdom," p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> His "revaluation of all values" as an attack upon western philosophy and everything remotely associated with "modernity" hinges, I think, on the two radically different epochs Nietzsche recognized in Greek philosophy.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, A 22; WP 427, WP 438; B 12, 21, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, A 21, 22, 24, 31, 41, 51; GS 137; WP 180, 196, 198; Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician*, ch. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, July 25, 1882, in *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper & Row, 1962, p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, "The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle Between Art and Knowledge," p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 277.

<sup>36</sup> In this we see that, at least in the sense expressed here, Nietzsche anticipates in his own peculiar way Heidegger's descriptions of Dasein as authentic or inauthentic "Being-towards-death." See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 304.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975, p. 217. Hereafter referred to in parentheses with the abbreviation "Z," followed by the part and sections numbers from which the reference is taken.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, parts I and especially II. His interpretation of Christian *ressentiment* hinges on the conception that the gift of life – its value – "cannot be estimated" (T II 2).

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, "The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle Between Art and Knowledge," p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Franz Overbeck, February 22, 1883, in *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> Greek metaphysics in the guise of post-Socratic thinking.



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## **Chapter 6**

# **CAN ‘CREATION’ BE A METAPHYSICAL CONCEPT?**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

It may seem strange to raise the question of creation as a possible metaphysical concept in the context of the work of Martin Heidegger, who notoriously announced the end of metaphysics. However, the question as to whether Heidegger was successful in this enterprise remains open to debate in spite of his intention to “leave metaphysics to itself.”<sup>1</sup> There can be little question that Heidegger’s work at least belongs to the history of metaphysics, if for no other reason than its ongoing engagement with the tradition of metaphysical thinking in western philosophy.

This essay makes a choice between two available approaches to the question of the concept of creation and the nature of metaphysics. One approach would be to question in a rather general way whether the concept of creation has a place in metaphysical thinking in general, along with other concepts like being, time, causality, etc. The other possibility is to examine it

in a particular instance, e.g. the place of the idea of creation in the metaphysics of a particular philosophical view such as that of Hegel or Bergson or Whitehead or Heidegger. For the most part it seems to the present writer that the latter contextualized approach is more fruitful, and it has determined the main theme of the paper. However, I have felt it useful to begin by asking in a rather general way about a distinction between creation in a strong sense and what for want of a better term I have called "ontological dependence." In particular I will ask the question: What does the concept of creation add above and beyond the notion of ontological dependence?

By ontological dependence I mean something like the positions reached by the philosophers of antiquity, by Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and other neo-Platonists, according to which the world remains unintelligible in the final analysis without a relation of dependence on some principle or ground such as the Good, God, the One, the One "beyond being" and so on. In each of them an ultimate principle or ground is assigned. Although Plato does indeed, in the *Timaeus*, make use of a creation myth to account for the mediation between chaotic matter and ideal order, there is little to suggest that this was for Plato anything more than a useful myth serving to bridge the world of becoming with the world of pure intelligible being. It is quite clearly other than the Christian doctrine of creation in both its premises and its import and intent. The Platonic myth does not, in my view, add anything substantive to the notion of ontological dependence. Whether this ultimate reality is called the Good, God or the One, Greek thinking designates a term for the ontological dependence of the cosmos. This end point of speculative thought is, as Aquinas repeatedly points out in the five ways, what all people at least mean by God. Nothing more is established by these arguments than the notion of ontological dependence. The conclusions of the five ways offer points of connection for the incorporation of Greek speculative thought into the service of *fides quaerens intellectum*.<sup>2</sup> They do not establish that the nature of this dependence is one of creation in the strong sense.

Nevertheless, the primary source for Christian theology and, in the present context, for the strong notion of creation was never unaided human thinking but rather the event of divine self-disclosure or revelation. For Christian speculative theology or theological science the question has always arisen as to the measure of agreement and contradiction which might exist between rational, philosophical conclusions and the vision of things disclosed by divine revelation. Is the Christian believer justified in importing humanistic speculation into the understanding of faith? For the medievals, grace does not destroy but perfects nature. This essential optimism with regard to human nature and knowledge is what underlies the belief of the scholastics that a ground for agreement can be found between Greek

philosophy and Christian belief. It is therefore not surprising that the philosophical notion of ontological dependence should be tied into the distinctively Christian doctrine of creation in medieval thinking, while nevertheless including quite new elements derived from revelation. The Protestant tradition from Luther to Barth has, on the other hand, tended to draw a more radical divide between philosophy as merely human conjecture and the saving faith which condemns speculation as mere vanity and untruth. The close integration of ontological dependence with the Christian belief in creation remains in that context much more dubious.

While still at this rather general level it is already interesting to note the position adopted in these matters by Heidegger in a relatively early, but important, essay on "Phenomenology and Theology."<sup>3</sup> Heidegger embraces elements of both positions – drawing a hard "fideistic" ("Protestant") line between philosophy and theology and accepting the "necessary atheism" of philosophy, yet at the same time recognizing that theology inevitably builds upon, even as it transforms, the essential structures of the analytic of *Dasein*. Unfortunately, at least as far as I know, Heidegger did not return to a formal discussion of the relation after the turn from this analytic to the question of Being as he approaches it in his later work. This rather formal statement of position, however, probably does not do full justice to the reality of Heidegger's implication of theology into his speculative thought about Being – as, I hope, the present essay will go some way to show.

## ONTOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE AND 'CREATION'

At this point I want to raise in a preliminary and rather general way the question: What does the Christian doctrine of creation add over and above the bare notion of ontological dependence? I think there are three essential elements: creation *ex nihilo* (certainly questionable for Aristotle); creation in time (the world has a beginning – also rejected by Aristotle), and divine freedom in creation (perhaps excluded also in neo-Platonic theories of emanation). It is certainly not my aim here to go into the medieval treatments of creation to show how the biblical material concerning the divine making of the world was amalgamated with the notions of ontological dependence derived from the Greek tradition. I have elsewhere argued that in Aquinas, for example, the analogies of emanation and causal production are combined in the treatment of creation to realize just such a fusion.<sup>4</sup> What is quite clear is that the direction of the argument is *from* the divine creator as the first article of faith *to* conclusions about the nature of the relation of the created world to Him, rather than the other way about. In other words, the argument does not

move from ontological dependence to creation in the strong sense, but rather the other way about. As Aquinas recognizes, without this privileged source, no certain conclusion could be reached, for example, about the creation of the world in time. Nevertheless, in giving an account of creation *ex nihilo*, Aquinas imports, with suitable qualifications, an Aristotelian causal-productive analysis of the divine creative act.<sup>5</sup> Although Plato's *demiurgos* is the closest prefiguring of this aspect of the doctrine of creation, extremely important differences are to be noted: the activity of the *demiurgos* does not include the creation of matter as such, which pre-exists as the elements in a chaotic state; the activity of the creator is subject to and limited by the eternal, pre-existent forms; and time is patterned upon eternity in its orderliness. It is a myth of creation based simply on a theory of ontological dependence. In the Christian version and its development in medieval theology, in spite of the dependence on the speculative instruments of Greek philosophical concepts, the dependence on pre-existing matter and the patterning on eternal pre-existing forms is progressively eliminated and the creation of the world in time is directly linked to a linear historical sense of time, rather than to the eternal regularity of cyclical time.

It might therefore be argued, in the light of these considerations, that what we now have is a good example of what Heidegger rather scathingly referred to as "onto-theology" – in other words, Greek philosophical insights, debased through their subordination to the "positive" science of theology. Nevertheless, it could be well argued that a great deal in modern speculative metaphysics results precisely from the new view of the world heralded by these developments in medieval theology. It was precisely through the recognition of the unlimited freedom of God in creation that events and beings in the world could be seen as essentially individual and as autonomous, as radically temporal and as in some sense self-structuring. The question of the metaphysical validity of the concept of creation cannot therefore be answered, I think, by reference backward to Greek metaphysics, but rather by reference to developments in modern speculative thinking.<sup>6</sup> It was no doubt a long road historically that eventually led to the demise of "eternal ideas" and in general to the causal-productive way of thinking about the essential nature of things and events in the world, but the developments just briefly alluded to made possible a new kind of metaphysical analysis.

## HEIDEGGER, THEOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

It may seem that validation of creation as a metaphysical concept by way of Heidegger is doubly doomed. In the first place, Heidegger formally denied

any possible dependence of philosophy upon theology on the grounds that theology is by nature a positive science and therefore deals with the ontic rather than the ontological.<sup>7</sup> In the second place, Heidegger saw the doctrine of creation as exacerbating the obscurement of Being introduced by Plato's subordination of the being of beings to the notion of form.<sup>8</sup> Overtly, at least, Heidegger's view of the Christian doctrine of creation is a hostile one and its implication in onto-theology suggests that he would not make use of it. It may further be argued that even if it could be shown that the notion of creation does re-emerge in Heidegger's thought about *das Ereignis*, it would not be as a metaphysical concept, but rather as a thematic idea in that kind of "thinking" which he sees as displacing metaphysics in the accepted sense. All this, however, forms part of the unresolved question of the true nature of Heidegger's relationship to what, for want of a better word, we may refer to as the "tradition." Some very useful recent work by Herman Philipse has built on the work of Kisiel, Sheehan and Van Buren in reconstructing the threads which link Heidegger's later thinking with his earlier interests in both theology and metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> Philipse speaks of a "post-monotheist analogue of the creation myth" (p. 192). He draws attention specifically to the *Letter on Humanism*, to *The Anaximander Fragment* as well as to passages in the *Beiträge*. I should want to add some reference to two other important sources: *The Origin of the Work of Art (OWA)* and to *Time and Being (TB)* and it is to these that I turn my attention.

In *OWA* Heidegger explores the nature of "coming to be" in works of art yet makes it quite clear that works of art are only one instance of strikingly creative events, and it is not unreasonable to see the focal instance as, in this case, exemplary for creative events generally. The burden of the *OWA* argument is to wean the reader away from a causal-productive account of the origin of such works in order to focus on the work itself as an event of the disclosure of truth in the work. Heidegger does not deny that works have both creators and preservers but that what has primary significance is what we can only call the self-origination of the work – the reality of the work is what it *is* in itself and cannot be reduced to the conditions of its coming to be. In the measure that it is thus irreducible and in the measure that we come to see it this way, it is an event of creation *ex nihilo*. Heidegger does not *say* this, but it is what lies unsaid in the strenuous effort to overcome the model of causal production. Heidegger accomplishes this by way of replacement of a matter-form account of the essential nature of the work of art, substituting his pair of *earth* and *world*; and he draws attention away from the act of creating through the suggestion that the artist's business is not to impose form on matter but rather to *allow* the work to come into its own being.<sup>10</sup> Viewed (in a way certainly not intended by Heidegger) as a theological position, it is a

doctrine of immanent creative presence in creative events in which what is essentially new and unpredictable comes into being.

In other words, to use Philipse's very useful expression of "post-monotheist analogue," we might identify the three elements I earlier suggested as what differentiates creation proper from ontological dependence: creation in time, *ex nihilo* and with that essential freedom which allows the essentially *new* to emerge. Heidegger's view of creation in *OWA* has very much greater kinship with the Christian doctrine of creation in these important respects, than with a Platonic or Aristotelian notion of becoming, or with the limited notion of ontological dependence.

In *OWA* we are dealing essentially with an exemplary analogy. In *TB*, however, we are dealing in terms which have all the appearance of *transcendental concepts*, in spite of the fact that Heidegger is at great pains to say that they are not concepts in any accepted sense at all. But I will leave the question of conceptuality to the final part of the paper in which I try to answer the question posed in my title in the case of Heidegger.

In *TB*, the persistent questioning as to the nature of Being returns in all its generality. Heidegger is explicit that this generality is to be restricted in no way by reference back to particular beings at all. Although all actual appearances or disclosures of Being are situated historically and are therefore specific to moments or epochs of history as well as of place ("the west," etc), the analytic of both Time and Being in this essay seems to be transcendental in a sense akin to, but importantly different from, Kant's usage. The kinship lies in the apparently *a priori* universality; the difference in the total absence of a transcendental subject. Of course, this element of relation to, and yet departure from, the tradition of German idealism is not the least of the sources of difficulty and obscurity in Heidegger. It is intimately bound up with the single-minded determination to break free from metaphysical thinking while yet remaining in a necessary dialogue with the metaphysical tradition. (Apart from the well-known remark in *TB* about "leaving metaphysics to itself," the complexity of Heidegger's position becomes clear in some lesser known passages in *Identity and Difference*, to which I shall return in the final section).

If the notion of creation reappears in *OWA*, it is primarily in that quality of the work which Heidegger refers to as "createdness"; and this createdness appears in the work precisely as its "composition" and its autonomy or self-subsistence, in addition to its essential character of newness. In the more transcendental concerns of *TB*, in which Time and Being are the *Sache des Denkens*, createdness is characterized as "being given" and "being sent." I have come to think that it is not without significance that these terms echo precisely the medieval notion of the immanence of God, not simply in created

things in general but specifically in the immanence of the divine Trinity in human beings through grace. In medieval theology the immanence of the divine Trinity is to be discerned in all created beings, but the language of *donum* and *missio* ("gift" and "sending") is reserved for the gracious presence of the divine Trinity in human beings. Now, it can certainly be argued that the recurrence of just these terms in *TB*, in a rather different context, is simply one of coincidence. But Heidegger's elaborate concern to give substance to the *es gibt* of "there is being, there is time," which forms the central theme of this essay, the most direct treatment of the essential nature of *das Ereignis* suggests that the terms are not without direct analogy to their counterparts in the medieval doctrines of creation and grace. What is at issue is not simply the Being of beings (creation in general) but the disclosure of the truth of Being in and to human beings. (In theological terms, we are dealing with revelation precisely as grace.) We could say then that *TB* offers a post-monotheist analogue of creation and grace which insists on the essential withholding of the source of the gift, of the sender from the sending. Createdness turns up in the ontological structure of the human world as *sending* and *giving*. The essential structure of the *Ereignis*, heralded by the *es gibt* is to be found in the three notions of *sending*, *giving* and *withholding*.<sup>11</sup>

## HEIDEGGER AND METAPHYSICS

Our chief concern here, however, is not with the theological analogies directly – although I have tried to indicate that in Heidegger's appropriation of the tradition they are inseparable – but rather with the status of the notion of creation in Heidegger in reference to metaphysics. My general argument is that the necessary relations of creation with the *ex nihilo*, with time and with creative freedom, all find their counterparts in Heidegger's notion of the creative Event. I have also argued that at least implicitly in *OWA* and more explicitly in *TB*, we are dealing with transcendental matters and this inevitably suggests that we are here doing metaphysics. Yet, in *TB* very explicitly, Heidegger rejects the notion that what he is engaged in is metaphysics (*TB* 24). The whole nerve of his thinking, when it seeks to reach beyond the tradition, is the *overcoming* of metaphysics.

On many occasions I have turned to the commentators to get a clearer understanding of precisely what it is about metaphysical thinking which Heidegger identifies with the *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetfulness of Being, which reaches its extreme in contemporary technological attitudes. I have not generally found them helpful, but would suggest that the following are at least essential aspects of the case against metaphysics as it emerges from



Heidegger's thinking. There are at least two *principles* which Heidegger sees as endemic to metaphysical thinking and which can be traced in the history of philosophy from Plato to Hegel. They are the *principle of identity* and the *principle of sufficient reason*.<sup>12</sup> Both are treated by Heidegger in what I would call a post-idealist context. Both have similar implications: the unity of thought and being. What the history of western metaphysics reveals is the emergent dominance of thought over being, from the Platonic to the Hegelian Absolute Idea. The principle of identity suggests that even though  $A=A$  or  $I=I$  is a synthetic principle and not a mere tautology, the synthesis is one of perfect resolution, with, so to speak, no remainder. The principle of sufficient reason spells this out – in Heidegger's expression of it: Nothing is without reason. Reason is the source of all truth. For Hegel, the perfection of Revelation which Christian thought represents imaginatively, becomes the self-conscious certainty of Reason in philosophical science in which the Concept, *das Begriff*, is the instrument of expression of a completed truth about Being. This of course does not imply that the subjective philosopher possesses the whole truth of being but rather that in philosophy there is a self-conscious awareness of the necessary relation of thought and being.

Put very simplistically, Heidegger's view is that the identity suggested by the historic dictum of Parmenides that "being and thought are the same" may be understood as a misreading of the identity which Parmenides has in mind. As Heidegger sees it, has been understood as identity without difference. He suggests that the identity be reconstrued as a "belonging together" which does not exclude difference. Thought and Being indeed belong together, but Being cannot be encompassed by or resolved into thought. The "sending" which grants "truth" always withholds itself. The Nothing from which Being appears is not the mere negative of negation in thought but is, to put it very crudely, an ontological Nothing. I grant immediately that Heidegger on the "Nothing which nothings" is perhaps the aspect of his writing most obscure and difficult to interpret and I feel far from confident that I am doing it justice. But the upshot, I think, has to be that the force of the *ex nihilo* in the doctrine of creation has, in Heidegger's view, really been devalued in subsequent attempts to produce a metaphysics of creation.

## CONCLUSION

The original question whether creation is a metaphysical concept is answered in the negative by Heidegger. But this is not on account of the lack of transcendental import in the idea of creation, but rather because metaphysics as a legitimate mode of thought is no longer possible. Its demise results from

what Gadamer rather understates in his nice phrase: “over-confidence in the Concept.”<sup>13</sup> The Will to Power reveals this over-confidence for what it is: the total reduction of being to availability to calculative thinking in the technological era, the assignment of all being to the status of “standing reserve,” the reduction of human being to “human resources,” etc. No return to metaphysics is possible, nor could it be helpful. The idea of creation in Heidegger’s thought belongs to a new kind of philosophical enterprise which he refers to as “the task of thinking.”

The question arises: What name do we give to ideas (used in a very loose sense) which in an identifiable corpus of work like that of Heidegger have at least some of the characteristics of what we would traditionally have called *concepts*? I suppose we would have to call them something like “key words.” The thinking which situates itself in the wake of the metaphysical tradition has in no way renounced the asking of questions about Being from which that tradition took its origin. Nor is it to be confused with poetry from which it remains distinct. Yet it has in common with poetry the engagement of thought with being in the medium of language. The essential difference (between poetry and thinking) is difficult to identify, other than that thinking concerns itself endlessly with questioning, whereas in poetry, language simply speaks. Language is, for Heidegger, the essential locus of the belonging together of thought and being for post-metaphysical thinking, and in this locus not only “creation” but the “nothing” from which creation emerges, the “temporality” of creative events and the possibility of the “new” which is allowed when freedom replaces necessity all belong to the idea or key word of creation in Heidegger’s post-metaphysical philosophy.

## CLOSING COMMENT

I would like to note that I am not in agreement with Heidegger’s or others’ pronouncements about the closure of metaphysics. It seems to me that the announcement of the demise of metaphysics is at least somewhat premature and can be understood as following from a particular way of telling the story of metaphysics which does not impose itself. Heidegger’s and kindred positions seem to result from a forcing of that history through what I would term the idealist bottleneck. In a certain sense it is only when that history has as an obligatory final chapter, something like an Hegelian system, that the criticism of the whole tradition as Heidegger sees it becomes mandatory. But there are other ways of reading the links and connections between the succession of metaphysical philosophies than that of an ineluctable necessity. There are no doubt lessons and cautions of an important nature still to be

taken in and pondered by the contemporary metaphysician, but the proclamation of the winding-up of speculative metaphysics seems to me to be an over-dramatization of the essential finitude of philosophical systems and projects.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *On Time and Being* [*Zur Sache des Denkens*], tr. Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> See my essay “The Argument from Contingency Then and Now,” *God and Argument*, ed. William Sweet, Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See the essay “Phenomenology and Theology,” *Pathmarks*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998. German text is in *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1967; 1978.

<sup>4</sup> See note 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Summa theologiae* I, qq. 44, 45. For Aristotle himself the relation between the world and God is limited to one of final causality and does not include any notion of efficient causality.

<sup>6</sup> Important aspects of these developments are surveyed in a forthcoming essay by James Bradley: “Transformations in Speculative Philosophy, 1870–1945.”

<sup>7</sup> See note 1.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. *Identity and Difference* [*Identität und Differenz*], tr. Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper & Row, 1969, and “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” *Pathmarks*.

<sup>9</sup> H. Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> I have explored this in greater detail in yet unpublished papers: “Creativity in Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*” and “Creation *ex nihilo* – Creative Events.”

<sup>11</sup> Theological note: Just as there is sometimes difficulty in theology in establishing the need for *two* divine processions of Word and Spirit, or at least some difficulty in adequately distinguishing them, it is not altogether clear why Heidegger needs both terms in his account of the essential structure of *Ereignis*.

<sup>12</sup> See *Identity and Difference*, *op. cit.*, and *The Principle of Reason*, [*Satz vom Grund*], tr. Reginald Lilly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

<sup>13</sup> H-G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, tr. and ed. David E. Linge, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, pp. 125ff.

## Chapter 7

# METAPHYSICS WEST AND EAST: BOSANQUET AND SANKARA \*

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## INTRODUCTION

Although there are six ‘orthodox’ (*astika*) schools (*shad-darsana*) of Hindu philosophy, metaphysics in India is almost indissolubly linked with the school of Vedanta and, particularly, with its development within what is now called Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism). Its best-known exponent is the Indian philosopher Sankara (Sankaracarya) (788–820 CE), and it is in Sankara that we find the most developed statement of *advaita*. Though a figure of the eighth and ninth centuries of the Common Era, Sankara’s *advaita* has had a profound effect on later Indian thought, particularly in the 20th century, in the work of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, P.T. Raju, G.R. Malkani, and others.

In order to bring some of the basic principles of Sankara’s metaphysics into clear view, over the next few pages I want to compare it with a ‘Western’ metaphysics with which it has much in common – British absolute idealism – and, in particular, with the work of one of the leading figures of that

movement, the British philosopher Bernard Bosanquet (1848–1923). Notwithstanding the fact that these two thinkers came from different cultures, belonged to different times, and had separate backgrounds, their metaphysics bear close resemblances. Each seems to have employed similar concepts, used similar methods and explained the nature of ultimate reality, self, and the world in a similar manner. In seeing some of the underlying broad similarities between Bosanquet and Sankara, the reader will be better able to appreciate the insights of Sankara’s metaphysics.

## BOSANQUET

Bosanquet was, with F.H. Bradley (1846–1924), one of the two principal figures of the ‘British idealism’ of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Also well-known for his work as a social critic<sup>1</sup> and his publications in political philosophy, aesthetics, and logic,<sup>2</sup> Bosanquet made important contributions to metaphysics, and his premier metaphysical texts are his two Gifford lectures – *The Principle of Individuality and Value* and *The Value and Destiny of the Individual*.<sup>3</sup> In the next few pages, I want to outline and discuss four related concepts in Bosanquet’s metaphysics – Absolute, world, individuality, and ‘concrete universal.’ This will provide a basis on which to better understand some parallel notions in Sankara.

### Bosanquet on the World and the Absolute

In *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, Bosanquet points out that “the essential argument in metaphysics might be described in general as an argument ‘a contingentia mundi.’”<sup>4</sup> But this should not be understood as an argument ‘from contingent being,’ as we find in Thomas Aquinas. Rather, it is the view that there is a fundamental logical process “which works by the creative method of meeting and removing contradiction through its development of the world of thought”<sup>5</sup>; it is the “inference from the imperfection of data and premises.”<sup>6</sup> To understand ultimate reality, then, one must start with the fragmentary, incomplete, and ‘contradictory’ nature of finite experience and one will see that as that experience becomes more stable and satisfactory through the elimination of contradiction, it ends as an all-inclusive coherent whole.

According to Bosanquet, then, reality has a teleological character; there is a consistent tendency of the finite to develop or expand itself. This expansion progresses towards completion and coherence. This kind of experience or

inclusive whole is what Bosanquet calls ‘the Absolute.’ To quote Bosanquet: “This, then, is the fundamental nature of the inference to absolute; the passage from the contradictory and unstable in our experiences alike to the stable and satisfactory ... .”<sup>7</sup>

On Bosanquet’s view, then, the world as we experience it “at first look” is incomplete and full of contradiction, and to take it as *all* that there is would be to misunderstand *what* it is. In this sense, it is appearance. What the philosopher and the metaphysician must do is seek to remove the incompleteness, “error or contradiction [in experience] by means of a positive union in which data or premises destroy each other’s defects.”<sup>8</sup> This tendency to coherence and completion shows itself in individuals as well – the whole of our being points towards a kind of perfect experience in which all opposition is overcome. In this way, by “merely insisting on what our given nature implies”<sup>9</sup> we are led to the Absolute or ultimate reality.

Commenting on this, Copleston<sup>10</sup> explains that the Absolute must exist. It cannot be something that exists simply in the human mind, as mind depends on physical preconditions and thus on an inferior level of reality. The Absolute at the same time cannot be equated with God or the object of some religious experience, as the Absolute is distinct from any part of the world, does not have ‘personality,’ does not ‘overcome’ evil, but is, rather, “the theatre of good and evil.”<sup>11</sup> Bosanquet in this context declares that:

The whole, considered as a perfection in which the antagonism of good and evil is unnoted, is not what religion means by God, and must rather be taken as the Absolute.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the Absolute is the fundamental principle of reality and is a teleological principle. As a principle of totality, then, the Absolute is the ultimate standard of value, truth and reality. This is evident from the title of his first series of Gifford Lectures – *The Principle of Individuality and Value*.

## **The Absolute and Individuality**

Bosanquet also describes this ultimate reality – the Absolute – in terms of ‘individuality,’ but the term ‘individual’ has many senses.<sup>13</sup> In general, an individual is what is independent, stable and unique. This reference to uniqueness does not mean that there is some internal, idiosyncratic, private and inaccessible part of it. Rather the term focuses on an independence and an inclusiveness of the individual so far as it contains within itself what is necessary for its existence.

Individuality in a preeminent sense, then, belongs to Absolute – it is the perfect, self-complete and fully coherent individual. In a secondary sense, the term applies to individual human beings so far as they manifest these characteristics. But when we speak of the finite individual, ‘individuality’ in this second sense should not be understood in a negative way. Individuality should be conceived of positively as describing the richness and the completeness towards which the finite self is moving.

The finite self is always proceeding towards completion, and it is in this sense that it is always on its way to the Absolute. And Bosanquet writes that it is a matter of simple observation that with its various experiences and various kinds of experience, the individual self tends towards – and is gradually comprehended in, and transformed into – one unified and all-inclusive experience, which is the Absolute. Bosanquet writes,

The evanescence of the limits of personality, or rather, their absorption in an experience which is deeper as well as wider than our minimum self, as in the supersocial activities ... are in their general type familiar facts of every day.<sup>14</sup>

We can see a relation between these two senses of ‘individuality’ at work in social morality, art, religion and philosophy. As one commentator remarks, it is in these activities that the finite mind begins to experience something of what individuality ultimately means. For example, in social morality, the human person transcends its limited self-consciousness and its private will to become united with other wills. In religion, the human being transcends the level of the narrow and the poverty-stricken self and moves towards a higher level of richness and completeness.<sup>15</sup>

The Absolute, then, is ‘individual’ in the primary sense of the term – that is, so far as it is complete and coherent. And this leads to another term used by Bosanquet to describe the Absolute. The Absolute is the concrete all-inclusive synthesis of every thing and thought. It is thus the ‘concrete universal.’

## **The Concrete Universal and the Finite Individual**

Bosanquet contrasts the notion of ‘concrete universal’ with abstract universals. Abstract universals, he says, are attained after generalisation is made from particulars by omitting their individual peculiarities. This kind of generality is reached by focusing on the common qualities of individuals and disregarding their differences. Such a universal, then, is identity without

diversity. There is no synthesis, no harmony and no coherence in the abstract universal as it is effectively empty of content. The Absolute, being all-inclusive and the harmonious synthesis of all particulars, cannot be such an abstract universal.

A ‘concrete universal,’ however, is a universal *with* content. It is a universal so far as it is “a world” – it provides a content and context “which throws light on something beyond itself.”<sup>16</sup> The concrete universal contains diversity; Bosanquet remarks, “it takes all sorts to make a world.”<sup>17</sup> Bosanquet points out that the notion of the concrete universal alone shows how diverse aspects of experience can be unified into one inclusive whole. It is a universal which contains and unifies the many into one, without omitting and effacing the multiplicity. As Bosanquet puts it, it is a macrocosm is constituted by microcosms.<sup>18</sup>

The Absolute, according to Bosanquet, is therefore both a concrete universal and at the same time an individual – a perfect individual. (For here we have a complete whole and a clear-cut absence of contradiction.) But this account of concrete universality as a perfect individual does not ignore the role or place of the finite human individual.

In the first place, all experience presupposes individuals who have the corresponding experience. Moreover, Bosanquet writes that the existence of the self is experienced in every act and thought as a condition of act and thought. There is an ‘intentional unity’ that exists in every being and it is more than the life force that we have in us. Nevertheless, Bosanquet suggests that the finite individual thing in nature has no separately distinguishable essence. The self is an existent unity of experiences which is made up of cognition, conation and feeling. And yet the self is something more, for in our existence the factor of individuality is not realized. Bosanquet points out regarding individual that “there are indications which point in this direction, and suggest in what kind of worlds, or higher complexes, we might find our completion.”<sup>19</sup> As Edward L. Schaub writes concerning Bosanquet’s view,

There are two phases to his life and in each of them his finite – infinite character appears. On the one hand, finite minds exist only through nature. [...] But this bit of nature is continuous with the whole of reality [... And so] To learn the full nature of a self, therefore, one must always go beyond its manifestations at any moment in time.<sup>20</sup>

What counts, many critics have therefore argued, are the qualities or characteristics of the Absolute that human beings manifest, not the human individual him- or herself. Bosanquet points out that



The Absolute lives in us a little, and for a little time; when its life demands our existence no longer, we yet blend with it as the pervading features or characters, which we were needed for a passing moment to emphasize, and in which our reality enriches the universe.<sup>21</sup>

The value and reality of the finite individual are not confined to its temporal existence as a soul or a self. They seem to lie in the temporal appearance of some character of 'the whole.'

The issue here is, however, more complicated than the preceding quotation suggests. For example, for Bosanquet, finite individuals are also, in some sense, concrete universals. Moreover, the finite self or subject contains the clues to that greater reality. And yet, for Bosanquet, the self is something quite different from that nature and the structure of reality. He asks: "Yet, what is the nature and structure of this reality? Is it the self as we experience it in detail?" And he replies " Surely not; or it is that self, but in an illumination more intense than the customary, and revealing a further structure."<sup>22</sup>

How, then, is the finite self related to the Absolute? How can we describe the teleological movement from the finite individual to the Absolute?

There are three ways in which Bosanquet speaks of this relation or movement – in terms of self-transcendence and negation, in terms of the principle of 'dying to live,' and in terms of the principle of evolution and consciousness.

### **Self-transcendence and Negation**

Perhaps the first and most obvious way to understand the relation or the movement from the finite individual to the Absolute is to see it in terms of negation and self-transcendence. These two go together for Bosanquet; the teleological principle involves (though it is not restricted to) a process of noncontradiction, and it is this that allows for self-transcendence.

First, what is meant by 'negation' here? As we saw above, the logical process in reality is the 'principle of noncontradiction'<sup>23</sup> – that one finds *in* experience a natural tendency or endeavour to remove contradiction. The 'method' is, at least in part, one of 'contradicting mundane things one by one' – though it is in fact a positive, and not a negative, method. There is, then, a process "backwards and forwards between 'is' and 'is not.'"<sup>24</sup> Thus, this logical process "is just that character of experience which overcomes 'is not' but redeeming it to an element harmonious with and collaborative of the 'is.'<sup>25</sup>

We see this move to self-transcendence, at a micro level, when we see how individuals transcend their purely private will in order to realize to some degree (what Bosanquet calls) their ‘real will.’ “In order to obtain a full statement of what we will, what we want at any moment must at least be corrected and amended by what we want at all other moments.” Yet the process does not stop here. Bosanquet continues: “this cannot be done without also correcting and amending it so as to harmonise it with what others want, which involves an application of the same process to them.”<sup>26</sup>

This same process is at work at the level of the self. A paradigmatic case of self-transcendence is that which occurs in love.<sup>27</sup> To realize the self is to go beyond the self as it is and into what it is not, or not yet. Bosanquet starts with the finite individual, phenomenal in character. But to know the complete nature of a self, one has to go beyond its manifestation at a particular point in time. The individual self has to come out of its limitations and incompleteness and particularity, and ‘transcend’ these limitations by looking at what it has in itself to be. It involves striving towards the unity and coherence of a fully developed human personality. Such a self-realization is also self-transcendence.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, at all levels of experience and thought there is a movement from the contradictory and partial, to the noncontradictory – i.e., as Copleston aptly summarizes it, to the idea of the Absolute, which is the totality, the motive force and the final end of all thought and reflection.<sup>29</sup> But what exactly is involved in this process of self-transcendence? According to Bosanquet, the self attains ‘salvation’ only by passing out of itself. In order to achieve this, the self has to die, as it were, to live.

## **Dying to Live**

In Bosanquet’s ethics and political philosophy, the notion of ‘self-transcendence’ is often associated with a line Bosanquet borrows from a poem by Goethe: “Stirb’ und werde” – “Die to live.”<sup>30</sup> We see the same expression in his metaphysics as well. To live the moral life, then, one must ‘die to live’ – that is, ‘die’ to one’s purely self-interested desires in order to ‘live’ in a more fully human way. This echoes a principle that animates Bosanquet’s own account of religious belief – and one which he borrows from the New Testament, namely, “He that loseth his life shall find it.”<sup>31</sup> To lead an emancipated or truly human life, then, one must die to one’s particular interests and desires. Thus, the self has to die to those parts or constituents that limit it to the ‘here and now,’ to the partial and the incomplete. To ‘live,’ then, is to affirm those elements in that content which

reflect the most consistent and coherent principles that are part of developed human personality – and it is in this way that individual selves approximate the Absolute. Thus, Bosanquet refers to the Absolute as “the high-water mark of fluctuating experience.”<sup>32</sup>

For Bosanquet, such a move is paradigmatically ‘religious’: Bosanquet notes that one’s ‘religion’ is to be found “wherever man fairly and loyally throws the seat of his value outside his immediate self into something else which he worships, with which he identifies his will, and which he takes as an object solid and secure at least relatively to his private existence.”<sup>33</sup> This process of ‘dying to live’ is often a conscious one; we *see* what it is that we are really committed to and that in some way we only imperfectly realize, and we may endeavour to work towards it. But this process need not be conscious, and Bosanquet would seem to allow that this process is an evolutionary one. But how is ‘self-transcendence’ evolutionary?

### **Evolution and Consciousness**

Though Bosanquet does not dwell on this feature of his metaphysics – and certainly not as much as his contemporaries David Ritchie and R.B. Haldane – the teleological process of ‘noncontradiction’ that is found in human consciousness, is an evolutionary one. As noted above, in his ethics and political philosophy, but also in his metaphysics, Bosanquet refers to the real or general will being developed or articulated through the process of ‘noncontradiction,’ and in *The Value and Destiny of the Individual*, he speaks of the development of the self as a kind of ‘soul making.’<sup>34</sup> In this sense, ‘evolution’ is an explanatory principle. Just as in the natural world “it is Evolution which enables us to grasp the unity of the organic or inorganic world, so it is Evolution by which alone we can genuinely apprehend the unity of human nature and of man’s highest consciousness.”<sup>35</sup> But this process is not necessarily a conscious one – it is, as we have seen, teleological, but it need not be purposive. Moreover, the end of this activity is not the individual’s ‘soul’ but something greater; Bosanquet writes that “soul making passes into ultra individual and ultra social experience.”<sup>36</sup>

We see this process in the history of aesthetic consciousness (which Bosanquet records at length in his *A History of Aesthetic*<sup>37</sup>). We see Bosanquet’s account of the development of religious consciousness as well.<sup>38</sup> For example, Bosanquet discusses the evolution of religion, from its earliest phases, in ‘objective’ religion, through “the ‘subjective’ religions, such as Buddhism, Stoicism, and the later Judaism, when on the whole the mind has turned in upon itself and ‘finds the voice of God mainly in the inner shrine of

the heart ””<sup>39</sup> to the Absolute or Absolute Religion. This “unresting process of the Evolution of Religion,” he writes, shows that “There are degrees of reality, and of divinity, as man more fully apprehends his true humanity and his oneness with the spirit which is in the world.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the history of religion is more accurately described as the history of the evolution of religious consciousness. It is not surprising, then, that Bosanquet sees self-transcendence and the development of human consciousness, as such, as evolutionary.

## Summary

In the preceding outline of Bosanquet’s metaphysical views, we have seen generally how Bosanquet describes the world, the Absolute, the relation of finite individuals to the Absolute, and the process by which this relation takes place. The sequence from individual to Absolute runs as follows: finite individuality – the true individual – Absolute. Bosanquet insists that the universe is different from what it seems to us to be. When we go deep into facts as they are, we see that there are determinate degrees of perfection and value in the universe and that finite individuality is just one of them.

If we understand the concepts of individual, Absolute, and world, as they appear in the writings of Bosanquet, we can have a sense of what is meant by *Brahman*, *atman*, and *maya* in the metaphysics of Sankara. The concept of the finite or imperfect individual in Bosanquet could be seen as similar to *jiva* in Sankara. Moreover, an analogue to the gradual progression of the development of human consciousness from finite individuality to the Absolute in Bosanquet is Sankara’s progression of *jiva* through *atman* becoming *Brahman*. Further parallels will become obvious as we proceed in this paper. But with the preceding vocabulary and tools in hand, let us now turn briefly to some of the basic principles of Sankara’s metaphysics.

## SANKARA

Sankara – sometimes called Sankaracarya (‘acarya’ meaning ‘the great teacher’<sup>41</sup>) – was one of the most influential metaphysical thinkers of the Hindu tradition. Born a saivite Brahmin, he led a very austere and religious life. He came from the southern part of India called Kaladi, in the state of Kerala, and he is known not only as an eminent philosopher, but as a saint and poet. His metaphysical views fall within what is called Kevala Advaita or Advaita Vedanta, that is, non-dualistic Vedanta. In this Vedanta, there is no

distinction between self and ultimate reality. Sankara elucidated this doctrine of non-dualism through discourses on the Upanishads and on other texts. (His best-known works are commentaries on the Brahmasutra, Bahgavat Gita, Gaudpada Karika, Yogasutra Bhasya, Adhyatma Patala of Apastamba Dharmasutra, and Upadesasahasri.) In these writings, he maintains that the multiplicity of selves is an illusion, since there is only one reality, called *Brahman*. His famous *mahavakya* of the Chhandogya Upanishads – one to which he frequently referred – reflects the non-duality of self and ultimate reality, that is: ‘Tat Tvam Asi’ or ‘that thou art.’<sup>42</sup>

### **Sankara on *maya* (the world) and *Brahman* (universal self)**

As we have seen, Bosanquet makes a distinction between the world and the Absolute. Bosanquet describes the world as we experience it, and our experiences themselves, to be limited, fragmentary, incomplete and incoherent. The world, and our experiences of it, are always finite and subject to criticism and doubt. Because the world is contingent and fragmentary in this way, containing incoherence and contradiction, it is not real – i.e., it is appearance. But for the self to recognize this is difficult.

Sankara’s position is quite similar to Bosanquet’s view.

Sankara describes ultimate reality as ‘*Brahman*.’ The term can also be translated as ‘the universal self’ or as ‘the Absolute.’ According to Sankara, the term ‘*Brahman*’ is etymologically derived from *brh* (growth; development). It is an ever-growing and ever-evolving reality. As in Bosanquet, this growth or development is inherent in reality; it is not purposive. But if this reality is ‘one’ (as it must be), then multiplicity is illusory. For this reason, the world is described by Sankara as illusion (*maya*).

But to say that the world is *maya* does not mean that the world is imaginary. Like Bosanquet, it is rather that it is not what is ultimately real. The world is an amalgam of real and unreal. It is called *satyanrte-mithunikrtya* or, in other words, it is full of superimposition, error, illusion and ignorance (*avidya*). To say that the world is *maya*, then, is to say that it is ‘appearance.’ According to Sankara, individuals are intuitively aware of the *Brahman* but, due to *avidya* or ignorance, they come to impose characteristics on *Brahman* that never were actually possessed by *Brahman*, and thus their understanding of reality becomes confused.

What precisely is *maya*? *Maya* is considered to be material and unconscious and opposed to *Brahman*, which is pure consciousness. Yet *maya* is also said to be non-different from *Brahman*. The relationship between them is called *tadatmya*; they are neither identical nor different, nor

both. *Maya* is indescribable and indefinable, as it is neither real nor unreal. It is not real, as it has no existence apart from *Brahman*, yet it is not unreal, as it projects the world of appearance. It is not real as it vanishes at the dawn of knowledge. It is not unreal, since it is 'true' as long as it lasts.

In general, *maya* is phenomenal, incomplete and relative in character, having *vyavaharikasatta* (momentary or worldly existence). The act through which it is known is designated as *adhyasa* (superimposition). Superimposition is a way of knowing something wrongly (*atasmintatbuddhih*) or of knowing something which it is not. Our fixation on *maya* – on appearance – can be removed, but only by the right kind of knowledge. This kind of knowledge comes from, or is indebted to, intuition – and it is through this that *Brahman* itself can be proved.

It is, however, difficult to say much about *Brahman*. It is *anirvacaniya* – by its very nature, indescribable. It can be suggested only through the lofty terms like *satyam*, *jnanam* and *anantam*, thus it can be identified with truth, knowledge and unlimited reality. This way of describing the nature of ultimate reality is, however, always going to fall short of what it is. As noted above in the discussion of Bosanquet's Absolute, Bosanquet goes to some length to assert that the Absolute cannot be God. Sankara understands *Brahman* in a similar way. *Brahman* (or the universal self) is not God; God is inferior to *Brahman* or ultimate reality. According to Sankara, *Brahman* supersedes God or *Ishvara* (or the Lord of all Being).

Yet there is a relation between *Brahman* and God. For example, if we look at things from our ordinary standpoint or *vyavaharikadrsti* – where we take the world to be real – then we can speak of God – as an omnipotent and omniscient being and as creator, sustainer and destroyer. God is called *Ishvara* in this sense and thus can be the object of worship. And as God here possesses qualities, he thus is called '*saguna Brahman*.' The description of God as conscious, real and infinite is simply an attempt at describing its essence or *svarupa*. It could be described thus: *Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma* (Taittiriya Upanisad – 2.1)

Thus, those who believe in the reality of the world-show (*maya*), take God to be the director of this show and call Him its creator. But for those people who know that the world is a mere show, there is neither any 'world' nor any real creator for them. *Ishvara*, then, is considered to be lower *Brahman*, i.e. *Apara Brahman*. *Apara Brahman* is bound to reality.

In contrast, *Para Brahman* is said to be beyond this world as Absolute, and is described as *Nirgunaguni*. This *Brahman* is said to be the only reality, which is absolutely indeterminate and non-dual. It is beyond speech and thought. It is, as we have seen, indescribable, or *anirvacaniya*. But it is indescribable because no description of Him can be complete.

The best way in which we can speak about *Brahman* is through the method of *neti* and *neti*, or ‘not this’ and ‘not this.’ But this does not mean that *Brahman* is a or nonentity; rather, it is simply non-objectifiable. It is the background of all affirmations and denials.

On a deeper, ‘non-worldly’ view, as Sankara points out, creatorship of the world is strictly speaking not one of the God’s essential qualities (or characteristics) or *svarupa lakshana*; rather it is one of the accidental qualities which he calls “*tatastha lakshana*.” The description of God as creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world or in similar terms is only an accidental description. Thus God can be analyzed from the non-worldly point of view or paramarthika drsti which points to its ultimate status.

To sum up, then, *Brahman* is *para* or beyond worldly activity. When *Brahman* becomes *tatastha* or worldly, It becomes God. God, according to Sankara, is the lord of *maya* or the world. When God becomes endowed with qualities, he then becomes *saguna* and, as he has name and form, can be worshipped. But it is more precise to say that *Brahman* is *nirguna*, having no qualities, and thus, like Bosanquet’s Absolute, can never be worshipped – though it can be realized.

### ***Brahman* and the Concepts of *jiva* (finite self), *maya* (world), *atman* (true self) and *avidya* (ignorance)**

What is the relation of the individual or self to *Brahman*? Like the Bosanquetian notion of individuality, Sankara’s notion of ‘individual’ or ‘self’ can be understood in different senses.

To begin with, there is the individual or ‘self’ that we commonly identify with human beings. Human beings are beings of Body and Soul. For Sankara, our body is like any other material object and is therefore considered to be an appearance. That reality that remains ‘inside’ us or underlies us is the soul.

When the self is awake, it identifies itself with this ‘gross body’ – i.e., its internal and external organs. When it falls asleep it is still conscious of itself as an object whose characteristics arise from its momentary impressions. But whenever it is in deep, dreamless sleep, it ceases to have any idea of ‘object’ and it no longer feels that it is limited by its body. Strictly speaking, it ceases to be a knower. However, consciousness does not cease in this state of dreamless sleep, and it is when we study this state of dreamless sleep – when the self becomes dissociated from its feelings of identity with the body – that we get a glimpse of what the self really is,.

But there is another sense of ‘self’ – the notion of the ‘true self’ (*atman*). ‘*Atman*’ is derived from the term ‘*an*’ which means ‘to breathe’; it is

independent of the body. The soul in itself, then, is not finite material being. But 'soul' is also not some kind of individuated separate substance. It is not something separate from the rest of existence and is not an 'I' which is opposed to 'thou' or 'this' or 'that.' Moreover, unlike *jiva*, which is temporal and subject to the conditions of the empirical world, *atman* is emancipated. The self which is emancipated naturally transcends the subject-object duality and the trinity of knower, knowledge and known. It is the unqualifiedly Absolute. The self actually is unlimited consciousness and bliss.

According to Sankara, this self can never be denied or doubted. It is self-proved and original; it is *swayamsiddha*. All cognition is founded on it – including the knowledge of *Brahman*. Since 'He who knows *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*' (as the Brhdaranyaka Upanisad proclaims), *atman* is the same as *Brahman*, having pure consciousness as its nature. This is the ultimately real; everything else is relative. The saying 'that thou art,' means that there is an identity between the soul that underlies the finite man, and ultimate reality. 'Thou,' here, refers to the pure consciousness underlying the human being, and 'That' refers to the factor of pure consciousness, which is the essence of ultimate reality.

What precisely is the relation between *jiva* and *Brahman*? Sankara refers here to the notion of *Ishvara* (qualified *Brahman* or the Lord of Being), mentioned above. The Mundaka Upanisad declares,

*Dva suparna sayuja sakhaya samanam vrksam parisvasjate Tayor anyah pippalam svadv atty anasnann anyo'bhicakasiti* (Mundaka Upanisad – III, I, i)

This states that one bird eats the sweet fruit, while the other (*Ishvara*) merely looks on. One is the enjoyer and the other is the ruler. The self as *jiva* acquires experiences of pleasure and pain, merit and demerit, while the latter, *Ishvara*, is not at all touched by them. The *jiva* is limited and does not become liberated as long as it continues to enjoy mundane felicity. *Jiva*, in its ignorance, is caught in the false notions of the 'I' and 'mine.' This arises when mind, through the senses, comes into contact with fleeting sensations or ideas.

So long as the *jiva* continues to be trapped in nescience (*avidya*), there is duality, and thus the *jiva* fails to know its true nature. This notion of *jiva* is clearly related to that of *maya*. *Maya* has two major aspects of *avarana* and *vikshepa*. *Avarana* is the negative aspect of concealment and *vikshepa* is the positive aspect of projection. Whenever *Brahman* becomes reflected in *maya* then it becomes *Ishvara* and when *Brahman* becomes reflected in *avidya* it is called *jiva*. (*maya*, *avidya*, *adhyasa* and *vivarta* are often used



interchangeably in Sankara's system.) *Jiva* being limited with *avidya* is often spoken of as *paramarthika* in nature.

Yet, ultimately, there is no distinction between *jiva* and *Brahman*. Slumbering long in ignorance, when *jiva* is awakened by *sruti*, it realises that it is not body, sense or mind, but it is the non-dual universal self. Bondage – and even liberation – are merely phenomenal, because *jiva* is ultimately non-different from *Brahman*.

The following couplet, taken from his famous text *Brahmanamavali*, summarizes Sankara's Advaita Vedanta:

*Brahma Satya Jagan Mithya Jivobrahmaiva naparah' Ehamevatu  
Satsastram iti Vedanta Dindindimah'* (*Brahmanamavalimala*, verse 21)

*Jiva* is *Brahman*, but due to its identification with the world, or *maya*, it remains ignorant of it.

When the finite individual overcomes its finiteness, it is said to be Absolute. It is in this way that *jiva* and *Brahman* are said to be one and the same. Similarly, *atman* and *Brahman* are said to be the same. As Sankara maintains, they are designates of the same reality residing subjectively and objectively. Individuality, then, is what is meant by the Absolute, and it is not negative, but positive in nature.

## The Realization of the Self and the Absolute

In Bosanquet, as we have seen, the realization of the self or, alternately, the process from the finite individual self to the Absolute, takes place in three steps: finite or imperfect individual – individual, as such – Absolute. Something similar can be seen in Sankara: the movement or process of *jiva* (imperfect or finite self) – *atman*–*Brahman*.

How does this movement or process take place in Sankara's work? Interestingly, Sankara's account also appeals to a process of self-transcendence that follows from a pattern of negation, that involves a 'dying to oneself,' and that has an evolutionary character.

### Self-transcendence and Negation

In Bosanquet, we noted an emphasis on self-transcendence – that the finite individual has to come out of, and overcome, its limitations, incompleteness, and particularity to become 'real.' In a similar manner, the *jiva* of Sankara

must come out of its limitations to become *atman*. The particular or finite self has the ‘germ’ of perfection in it; the self has only to realize it. What the self must do is recognize that individuality is not what is peculiar – what distinguishes itself from all others. The self is more than what it appears. It is more than its content. Its nature is in contradiction with its existence since its being is a mixture of finite and infinite. It requires seeing its potential and moving towards realising it.

It is true that the nature of the self is derived from the world. But to know the complete nature of a self, one has to go beyond its manifestation at a particular point in time. Sankara points to the factor of realization of self by citing, in the following *mahavakyas*, or great sayings, of the Upanisads:

*Aham Brahmasmi* – I am *Brahman* (Brhataranyaka Upanisad);  
*Ayam Atma brahma* – this very self is *Brahman* (Mandukya Upanisad);  
*Prajnanam Brahma* – knowledge is *Brahman* (Aiteriya Upanisad); and  
*Tat Tvam Asi* – that thou art (Chhandogya Upanisad).

In Bosanquet, we see this movement of self-realization as one of eliminating contradiction. Similarly, in Sankara, we can see that the process of self-transcendence reflects a general method of ‘eliminating contradiction’ or ‘negation.’ Specifically, Sankara employs the method of *neti, neti* – ‘not this, not this.’ Like Bosanquet, Sankara holds that the world is appearance, and our experience of it is unstable, accidental and fragmentary. The uncovering or discovery of reality requires a negation of this ‘world.’ Therefore, we have to employ what looks to be a negative method of searching for Absolute; the search for ultimate reality begins with a nihilistic note of contradicting mundane things, one by one. But this method of Sankara is in fact a positive one, as it finally results in comprehending ultimate reality.

### **‘Dying to oneself’ and Liberation**

In Bosanquet, we see this process of self-transcendence as a process of ‘dying to live’; in Sankara, there is a similar ‘dying’ to oneself, but it is part of a process of ‘liberation.’ What does this mean concretely?

Bosanquet does not provide any specific technique that enables one to ‘die to oneself,’ but an awareness of the ‘higher experiences’ found in art, philosophy, and religion, and the attempt to bring one’s desires and views into coherence, allow one to go beyond his or her finite self in order to recognize what true individuality is. In the process, it has to pass out of itself in order to regain itself.

Sankara, too, calls for a recognition of the supreme individuality that is inherent in each particular self. This individuality ultimately consists in the richness and completeness of the self, and one's recognition of this leads to liberation. Sankara refers here to *sruti* and certain methods which are imperative for the sake of obtaining salvation.

According to Sankara, the study of Vedanta helps us to conquer the deep-rooted effects of ignorance and to prepare ourselves for 'liberation.' The experience of identity of self-authentication is not to be achieved directly; rather it is evoked by Vedic texts and austere discipline. The first step here is to pursue *nityanitya vastuviveka*. It is the path of differentiating eternal from non-eternal knowledge. The second is *ihamutrartha bhogaviraga*, which means that one should strive to give up all desires and enjoyment of objects here and now. Thirdly, through *samadamadi sadhanasampat*, we should control our mind and the senses, and develop qualities like detachment, patience, and power of concentration. Lastly, the self should have the ardent desire for liberation (*mumuksatvam*).

Along with this kind of preparation of the intellect, emotion, and will, one should also study Vedanta with a teacher who has himself realized *Brahman*. The first stage in this method is listening to the teacher (*sravana*). The second stage is understanding the instructions through reasoning, until all doubts are removed (*manana*). The third stage is repeated meditation on the truth, or *nididhyasana*.

When wrong beliefs are removed and the truths of Vedanta become evident, then the student is taught '*Tat Tvam Asi*' – 'thou art *Brahman*.' Then there is illumination. The physical body of the student may continue to exist even after the self has realized *Brahman*. It happens due to the previous effects of deeds or *prarabdha* karma. Nevertheless, the liberated soul seldom becomes ensnared by the world. As Bosanquet has said, in a figurative manner, the finite self must die in order to live. Like Sankara, it is in doing away with its fixation on the 'I' and 'mine' that it is able to achieve liberation.

### **The Evolution of Consciousness and *swapna*, *jagrata* and *susupti***

Like Bosanquet, Sankara also describes the process of self-transcendence that the individual self must undergo in order to reach 'the Absolute' as an evolutionary process. In Sankara's account, the Upanisad, being scientific in its approach, analyzes the *kosas*, or the sheaths, from *anna*; that is, from the vegetative level through to the *anandamaya* level of eternal and unending pleasure. The whole process can be described in the following manner:

*Annomaya–pranomaya–manomaya–vijñanomaya–anadamaya*  
Vegetation–life–mind–knowledge – eternal pleasure

The theory of evolution that is provided here is, as in Bosanquet, ultimately a theory of the evolution of consciousness. We start at the grassroots level. But as the self lives through the *swapna*, *jagrata* and *susupti*, it does not lose memory of the self. Sankara says that, at first, when the self is awakened, it is identified with gross-body experiences. Then we speak of it as ‘mind,’ even when it falls asleep, since it is still conscious due to the confirmation of the consciousness which arises from memory impressions. When it reaches the level of deep dreamless sleep, it ceases to have any ideas of objects and thus ceases to be a knower. However, here the chain of ceaseless consciousness makes it aware that it is the true self that lives throughout. So the various kinds of experiences and levels of consciousness that are had by the self can never strip it of its essential characteristics. In the gradual process of these sheaths, we follow various kinds of elimination, which ends in liberation – i.e., which enables us to achieve the Absolute, which is nothing but pure and unmixed pleasure.

## SOME FINAL REMARKS

In the preceding pages, I have wished to present some of the basic metaphysical views of the Indian philosopher Sankara. To do so, I have drawn out some of the remarkable similarities or parallels between Sankara and the British idealist philosopher, Bernard Bosanquet. Such similarities are to be found not only in their method but also in their principles and conclusions.

Both Bosanquet and Sankara take the world to be ‘false.’ Sankara argues that the world is *maya* and is illusory in nature, but it has the capacity in itself to become Absolute. The Absolute, or *Brahman*, has the status of ultimate reality. Sankara maintains that the self, namely *jiva*, is also incomplete being. Moreover, *jiva*, after realization, becomes *Brahman*.

The logic and reasoning that both Bosanquet and Sankara have employed are subtle and yet simple. Both have arrived at an answer to the long-standing problem of the relation between the finite individual and the Absolute. The reconciliation of the individual with ultimate reality can take place only by recognizing the incomplete and contradictory nature of the finite. Bosanquet provides, then, a way for Western philosophers to begin to appreciate Sankara’s approach and analysis of the nature of reality. There may, of

course, be many points where Bosanquet and Sankara disagree with one another. However, a study of these aspects lies outside the purview of this paper.

## NOTES

\* I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer, and particularly Professor William Sweet, for their suggestions on an earlier version of this essay. Professor Sweet's careful reading of that version, along with his many comments on and criticisms of standard readings of Bosanquet's metaphysics, were very helpful. Whatever misunderstandings may remain are, of course, my own.

<sup>1</sup> See Sandra den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, and A.M. McBriar, *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles: The Bosanquets versus the Webbs; A Study in British Social Policy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. See also Bernard Bosanquet, *Essays on 'Aspects of the Social Problem' and Essays on Social Policy, The Collected Works of Bernard Bosanquet*, ed. William Sweet, vol. 14, Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> For political philosophy, see Peter P. Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists: Selected Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; William Sweet, *Idealism and Rights*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997; for aesthetics, see Berel Lang, "Bosanquet's Aesthetic: A History and Philosophy of the Symbol," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26 (1968): 377–387 and Dale Jacquette, "Bosanquet's Concept of Difficult Beauty," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1984): 79–88; for logic, see Anthony Manser, *Bradley's Logic*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, and Phillip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (originally, London: Macmillan, 1912), *Collected Works*, ed. Sweet, vol. 6; *The Value and Destiny of the Individual* (originally, London: Macmillan, 1913), *Collected Works*, ed. Sweet, vol. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 262.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Copleston, S.J., *Modern Philosophy: Empiricism, Idealism, and Pragmatism in Britain and America, A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7, London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1967, pp. 224–225.

<sup>11</sup> *Value and Destiny of the Individual*, p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>13</sup> See here, William Sweet, "'Absolute Idealism' and Finite Individuality," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 24 (4) (1997): 431–462.

- <sup>14</sup> *Principle of Individuality and Value*, pp. 378–379.
- <sup>15</sup> Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 224.
- <sup>16</sup> *Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. xix.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>19</sup> “Do Finite Individuals Possess a Substantive or an Adjectival Mode of Being?,” in *Science and Philosophy and Other Essays by the Late Bernard Bosanquet*, ed. J.H. Muirhead and R.C. Bosanquet (originally, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1927), *Collected Works*, ed. Sweet, vol. 19, p. 112.
- <sup>20</sup> Edward L. Schaub, “Bosanquet’s Interpretation of Religious Experiences,” *The Philosophical Review*, 32 (1923), p. 656.
- <sup>21</sup> “Do Finite Individuals Possess a Substantive or an Adjectival Mode of Being?,” p. 112.
- <sup>22</sup> “Do Finite Individuals Possess a Substantive or an Adjectival Mode of Being?,” p. 104.
- <sup>23</sup> *Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 264.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>26</sup> See Bosanquet’s *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, ed. Gerald F. Gaus and William Sweet, South Bend, IN: St Augustine’s Press, 2001, p. 133 (see 4th ed., London: Macmillan, 1923, p. 111).
- <sup>27</sup> *Value and Destiny of the Individual*, p. 327.
- <sup>28</sup> The issue of finiteness and self-transcendence is discussed at length in *The Value and Destiny of the Individual*, pp. 16–18.
- <sup>29</sup> Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 225; see *Principle of Individuality and Value*, pp. 243–244.
- <sup>30</sup> *Some Suggestions in Ethics* (originally, London: Macmillan, 1918), *Collected Works*, ed. Sweet, vol. 16, p. 161.
- <sup>31</sup> “How to Read the New Testament,” *Essays and Addresses*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1889, pp. 131–161, p. 144; See Mt. 10.39, 16:35.
- <sup>32</sup> *Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 378.
- <sup>33</sup> *Value and Destiny of the Individual*, p. 240.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 69; pp. 79–82; p. 90.
- <sup>35</sup> See Bosanquet’s “The Evolution of Religion,” (originally published in *International Journal of Ethics*, 5 [1894–1895]: 432–444) in *Collected Works*, ed. Sweet, vol. 1, pp. 17–28.
- <sup>36</sup> *Value and Destiny of the Individual*, p. 91.
- <sup>37</sup> *A History of Aesthetic*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892.

<sup>38</sup> See his work on religion and religious consciousness, such as *What Religion Is*, London, Macmillan, 1920, *Collected Works*, ed. Sweet, vol. 17; “Religion (philosophy of),” (originally published in *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, ed. J. M. Baldwin, vol. 2, New York: Macmillan, 1902, pp. 454–458) in *Collected Works*, ed. Sweet, vol. 1, pp. 29–39, and “The Evolution of Religion,” *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> See Bosanquet’s “Religion (philosophy of),” *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> See “The Evolution of Religion,” *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> “A person is an acarya because he imparts the meaning of holy scriptures to his disciple, makes him act in accordance therewith and also follows himself the same” (from a Sloka of Sri Vedanta Desikar); a ‘spiritual teacher’ or someone who is qualified to instruct others concerning transcendence. Sankara’s teacher was Govinda, whose was, in turn, Gaudapada, the ‘founder’ of Advaita Vedanta.

<sup>42</sup> See D.M. Datta and S.C. Chatterjee, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1984. See also D.M. Datta, *The Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy*, Calcutta: Bharati Printing Works, Calcutta University Press, 1961.

PART THREE:

ON THE ROAD TO METAPHYSICS – FREEDOM,  
AGENCY, AND EXISTENCE



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## **Chapter 8**

# **METAPHYSICS AND THE ORIGINS OF ARENDT'S ACCOUNT OF EVIL AND HUMAN FREEDOM**

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Reflecting on his experience as a witness at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, Elie Wiesel recalls how the defendant, Eichmann, sat in his glass cage impassively taking notes. What struck Wiesel was how Eichmann could be so utterly unmoved by the recitation of the crimes against humanity and the Jewish people of which he was accused. In an encounter with Hannah Arendt at her home in New York City after the trial, Wiesel and Arendt discussed her theory of the banality of evil – a theory based on her observation that Eichmann's evil was rooted in the staggering thoughtlessness of an ordinary and unreflective man. It is with a profound sense of pain that Wiesel recalls how chillingly aloof Arendt seemed as she elaborated on her theory. The question that he posed seemed simple enough: "I was there, and I don't know. How can you possibly know when you were elsewhere?" Arendt's reply: "You're a novelist; you can cling to questions. I deal with human and political sciences. I have no right not to find answers."<sup>1</sup> What lessons can be

drawn from this encounter? Surely when we are grappling with the issue of evil, we must bear in mind whether we are seeking answers or whether we are limited to raising questions.

The question raised by Wiesel suggests that evil is not a problem seeking a solution but rather it is a mystery that is suffered through human experience. If we accept the theological principle that human freedom is fully expressed when we love, and are loved by, God, then how are we to reconcile love and freedom with the dark night of Auschwitz? Wiesel suggests that this attempt at reconciliation leads not to a solution to the problem of evil but rather to an inevitable encounter with the mystery that lies at the heart of evil. What would be an appropriate response to such a mystery? Wiesel maintains that he will never cease to rebel against those who committed or permitted Auschwitz, including God. He states: "The questions I once asked myself about God's silence remain open. If they have an answer, I do not know it. More than that, I refuse to know it. But I maintain that the death of six million human beings poses a question to which no answer will ever be forthcoming."<sup>2</sup> Following this line, the fertile soil of theology and metaphysics may give us the courage to continue posing those questions which lead us to encounter the heart of darkness which stains our humanity. As Wiesel suggests, we may someday come to understand humanity's role in the mystery that Auschwitz represents, but never God's. Yet we remain responsible to ourselves and to others. We must, therefore, continue raising these questions, despite the silence of God and the inadequacy of solutions which may never lead us into an encounter with the mystery of evil.

The theodicy of evil – that which comprises the problem of evil and its resolution – may help us to formulate an appropriately reasoned approach to the existence of evil in the world. One initial objection may be that evil is so terrible that any attempt to think calmly and dispassionately about it must be lacking in either moral seriousness or human compassion.<sup>3</sup> As John Hick suggests, one can sympathize with this feeling, but to deny the reasoned consideration of evil and suffering would be to abandon the vocation of philosopher or theologian. He states: "The problem of evil is an intellectual problem about agonizing realities, and probably no one who has not first agonized in their presence is qualified to think realistically about them in their absence; but nevertheless the agonizing and the thinking are distinct, and no amount of the one can do duty for the other."<sup>4</sup> Can the search for a proper theodicy be vindicated? Hick believes that the partial validity and the ultimate invalidity of this feeling that the search for a theodicy is improper can be found by reference to Gabriel Marcel's distinction between a problem and a mystery. After defining a mystery as a 'problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, and thereby transcending itself as a simple

problem'<sup>5</sup> Marcel maintains that there is no hope of establishing an exact frontier between a problem and a mystery. He sees this as being particularly evident in the case of the problem of evil.<sup>6</sup> What this means is that the evil that is only stated or observed is no longer the evil that is suffered; indeed, it ceases to be evil. In other words, I can only grasp evil insofar as it touches me or involves me. Should we accept Marcel's distinction?

According to Hick, while it is true that the intellectual problem, which invites rational reflection, is distinct from the experienced mystery, which must be faced in the actual business of living, it does not follow that the intellectual problem is a false or unreal problem, or that our obligation to grapple with it is in any degree lessened. Hick's point is well taken; however, it would seem that any attempt to grapple with evil in a purely intellectual manner would leave us with an inappropriately sterile grasp of the experienced mystery of evil. A purely intellectual grasp would be not so much false or unreal but rather lacking in compassion. What seems to be required is an approach that combines compassionate engagement in the actual business of living with rational reflection. It is via this complementary relationship that we may someday come to understand Eichmann's role – and by extension, humanity's role – in the mystery that Auschwitz represents.

In the spirit of striving to understand humanity's role in the mystery that Auschwitz represents, let us raise two questions: What does it mean to be free? How was Eichmann free to resist evil? In her final work, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt's inquiry into the concept of will is driven by her desire to come to grips with the notion of freedom. Arendt seems to suggest that it is only in the elaboration of the concept of will that we may develop a coherent and cogent conception of freedom.<sup>7</sup> Linked to this inquiry is a meditation on the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Despite her concession that totalitarian political culture makes it difficult for those who live under its domination to think and act freely, Arendt insists that Eichmann was culpable for his actions. Arendt claims in the introduction to *Thinking* that the impetus for her writing *The Life of the Mind* was her renewed interest in evil as it arose in the context of the trial. The problem of evil, then, is an appropriate background in which to understand her exploration into the freedom of the life of the mind.

In her outline of the charges brought against the accused, Arendt states: "Adolf Eichmann stood accused on fifteen counts: together with others he had committed crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity, and war crimes during the whole period of the Nazi regime and especially during the Second World War."<sup>8</sup> As a result of witnessing the testimony given by Eichmann at his trial, Arendt revised her conception of evil which she had elaborated in her earlier work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In this earlier work, Arendt had linked totalitarianism to radical evil. What made

totalitarianism evil was that it could not be explained by evil motives. It was simply evil for its own sake, possessing an overpowering reality.<sup>9</sup> Upon witnessing Eichmann's testimony, however, she put forth the notion of the banality of evil – simply “thought-defying” and possessing neither depth nor demonic dimension. Indeed, in an exchange of letters between Arendt and Gershom Scholem (which took place shortly after Arendt's report on the Eichmann trial), Arendt states:

It is indeed my opinion that evil is never “radical,” that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension ... . It is “thought-defying” ... because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. Only the good has depth and can be radical.<sup>10</sup>

One of Arendt's major concerns in *The Life of the Mind* is to develop this notion of thought-defying evil. Yet, to claim that only the “good” has depth and can be radical suggests that Arendt is operating with a notion or concept of good. But what is this notion or concept of good which enables us then to identify and condemn evil. This is the key to solving the questions: What does it mean to be free? and How was Eichmann free to resist the totalitarian impulse toward evil?

Arendt understood that it is good, and not evil, which has depth and can be radical. This echoes Saint Augustine's rejection of Manichean dualism, where the Manichean response to the question of the origin of evil was simply inconsistent with Augustine's commitment to an omnipotent God. In order to preserve both the omnipotence and goodness of God, Augustine rejected the Manicheist doctrine of the powers of Darkness. Augustine was thus able to shift the burden of responsibility for evil from the Manicheist conception of a clash between Light and Darkness to human beings themselves. Augustine states: “... For I discovered them [the Manichees], whilst they inquired into the cause of evil, to be most full of maliciousness; they thinking that thy substance did rather suffer ill than their own commit evil.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the burden of evil falls upon human agency. Arendt's analysis of the Eichmann trial leads us ineluctably to a discussion of good and evil. Her characterization of the banality of evil – as that without depth or demonic dimension – echoes Augustine's position that evil has no ontological status, but is in fact a defect of will. Yet Augustine is guided by a notion of transcendent goodness in his rejection of Manicheism. What this means is that the transcendent importance of the human being is linked to a transcendent good which has depth and is radical.

In view of Arendt's support for the verdict brought against Eichmann, it would seem that Arendt's reformulation of evil as banal may have been introduced as an attempt to justify the position that Eichmann had the capacity both to contribute to totalitarian rule and to resist it. But how are we to understand this banality as evil?

Arendt focused her judgment of Eichmann on his active participation in making human beings superfluous – that is, on having carried out the Nazi policy of denying, on principle, certain groups of people the right to share the Earth with others. Yet what enabled Arendt to draw attention to Eichmann's "active" participation was her insistence on the banality of his participation – as represented in his monstrous thoughtlessness. Richard Bernstein argues that what is striking about Arendt's formulation of evil as banal is how closely it resembles her earlier conception of evil as radical.<sup>12</sup> As Bernstein suggests, there is no evidence in Arendt's discussion of radical evil to suggest that monsters and demons had engineered the murder of millions of people. Indeed, in Arendt's 1948 article, "The Concentration Camps" – written long before she witnessed the Eichmann trial – Arendt makes a sharp distinction between what happened when the camps were run by the SA and what took place when they were run by the SS. While she acknowledges the perverse and sadistic behaviour of the SA, her point is that such brutality can be understood in terms of humanly understandable motives and that it was quite different in kind from the behaviour of the SS. The point is that as early as 1948, Arendt had begun to move away from demonization as an explanation for the behaviour of the SS.

In Arendt's view, the ultimate horror began when the SS took over the administration of the camps. Arendt states:

The old spontaneous bestiality gave way to an absolutely cold and systematic destruction of human bodies, calculated to destroy human dignity. ... The camps were no longer amusement parks for beasts in human form, that is, for men who really belonged in mental institutions and prison; the reverse became true: they were turned into "drill grounds"... on which perfectly normal men were trained to be full-fledged members of the SS.<sup>13</sup>

Here we see that Arendt not only rejects the popular image of the Nazis as "insane" monsters, but rather she makes the provocative claim that radical evil cannot be accounted for in terms of evil motives. As Bernstein suggests, this is compatible with her thesis in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* – that we cannot extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from Eichmann.<sup>14</sup> By portraying the SS as "normal" men whose participation in the systematic destruction of

other human beings could not be accounted for in terms of evil motives, Arendt seems to be implying not only that radical evil and banal evil are compatible concepts but that the inability to extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from the experiences of either the SS administration of the camps or of the Eichmann trial would mean that there is neither excuse nor justification for one's thoughtless participation in totalitarian rule.

Given that Arendt is intent on assigning guilt to Eichmann for having participated in making other human beings superfluous – and in the absence of any demonic or evil motives that might otherwise be imputed to Eichmann – Arendt appears to be suggesting that Eichmann had both the ability and the freedom to resist the totalitarian impulse. Yet, in claiming that radical evil cannot be accounted for in terms of evil motives, Arendt seems to have unwittingly removed the basis upon which to justify her condemnation of Eichmann. During the period in which she wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt seems to have been guided by a rather banal and inarticulate conception of evil as rooted in thoughtlessness. In order to better articulate this conception of evil, Arendt needs to articulate some notion or concept of good.

Arendt's revulsion at Eichmann's thoughtlessness led her to wonder whether the activity of thinking itself might condition one against evil-doing. Indeed, her aim in *The Life of the Mind* is to show that there is an analogy between freedom in the political realm and freedom in the mind, with the three faculties of thinking, willing, and judging checking and balancing each other like three branches of government.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to her earlier works, Arendt here argues that political freedom is ultimately related to mental freedom. Her overall project, then, was to establish the possibility of freedom for the life of the mind. In setting up this mental republic, Arendt was guided by the principle of *amor mundi* (love of the world). She relies on this principle in her bid to rehabilitate those mental powers whose anatomy of perversion was exhibited in Adolf Eichmann.

By referring to Eichmann's thoughtlessness, Arendt suggests that this mental oblivion lacks an inherent human quality. But is she not then creating a monster out of Eichmann? Allowing him a wicked heart would leave him with a humanly recognizable sense of freedom – thereby permitting our condemnation. Surely Arendt must be operating with some notion of good, which then enables her to identify and condemn Eichmann's evil. Indeed, there is a Hebraic-Christian sensibility that underlies and guides Arendt's principle of *amor mundi*. It is this sensibility which informs Arendt's notion of the good and which provides a foundation for our radical (or rooted) sense of freedom.

In her initial attempt to articulate a conception of freedom, Arendt looked to the political realm for evidence. She argued that freedom required the company of others, where freedom arose solely as a result of people acting together in the creation of public spaces. Here the emphasis was on action itself within a politically guaranteed public realm. It was only after reflecting on the writings of Saint Augustine and Duns Scotus that Arendt was able to establish a bridge between political freedom and the life of the mind. For Arendt, it is with Augustine's elaboration – and Duns Scotus' refinement – of a will that is both spontaneous and unpredictable that the philosophical tradition was able to promote an awareness of a mental faculty corresponding to human freedom. It is because of these qualities of spontaneity and unpredictability that our actions are invested with the promise of tremendous freedom.

The Augustinian and Scotistic models that give depth to Arendt's discussion of the life of the mind and illuminate her concept of *amor mundi* teach us that it is because of our capacity to love and to respond to love that we are able to make contact with what is good. This represents the dynamic relationship between God and human beings. Hence, love of the world is possible only because the love that opens up the interior space of the life of the mind connects us to the reality of goodness. Love may give depth and meaning to our actions, and provide us with the motivation to share the world with others, but it is ultimately the responsibility of human beings to consent to this love. These theological models teach us that just as we share the world through the freedom of the public realm, so too are we connected in our common humanity through the freedom that manifests itself in the life of the mind. The root of Eichmann's evil was his profound failure to love and to respond to love. The evil that arises out of this failure – however horrifying – is without depth or meaning. Indeed, it is a terrible mystery.

To understand Eichmann's failure, let us frame Arendt's account of love and freedom within the Augustinian and Scotist models. As early as her doctoral dissertation on Augustine's concept of love, Arendt acknowledges a debt to Augustine for having provided a structural model for public freedom in the form of social charity – this is the basis for neighbourly love, and it is at the root of our desire to share the world with others.<sup>16</sup> Despite the phenomenological tone of her dissertation, Arendt relies on theological principles based on her reading of Augustine and Duns Scotus to show how we may learn to love others through an intensified personal dynamic of friendship with God. In her reading of Augustine, every human being carries the image of God. By loving other human beings, we come to love God. When we meet others in social charity, we acknowledge an intersubjective world of shared meanings, for God is expressed through all created being. In



her reading of Duns Scotus, the highest form of intersubjectivity would be to love others as God does. The theological account in which all are called to share in a graced origin through Christ expresses the intersubjectivity of God and man. It is by entering the world through Christ that God becomes a neighbour. This is the basis for neighbourly love, and this form of love is at the root of our desire to belong and comport ourselves in a world that we share with others.

Scotus' position on grace and freedom has an Augustinian echo and is perhaps close to the position that Augustine may have articulated had he not been influenced by his battles with the Pelagians.<sup>17</sup> According to Pierre Poiret, Augustine erred in claiming that God had predestined only a part of fallen humanity to eternal life – consigning the rest to perdition. He states:

Such has been the error of predestination in Saint Augustine. ... that God had predestined a part of fallen humanity to an invincible and particular grace, or to eternal life; and that he had consigned the rest to perdition; that he had done this without regard for the difference of the state nor the behavior of these particular people: that none of those who are thus predestined can perish finally; and that none of those who are reprovéd can be saved ...<sup>18</sup>

Poiret cautions against the view that Augustine was incapable of committing an error of this nature. Indeed, he points out that Augustine had the humility to write books in which he recognized and retracted his known errors; and that, had he realized his other errors, he would have retracted them as well.

But how do we explain Augustine's error vis-à-vis predestination? Poiret suggests that Augustine was armed with overwhelming zeal in his battle against the Pelagians, and this zeal led him to adopt an extreme position on the question of predestination. Poiret states:

This great saint, having taken up the battle ... wanting to press more his Antagonists by all kinds of circumstances, to attribute all the good to God and nothing of salvation nor of light to the operation of man, he [Augustine] became engaged badly and without necessity in the evil step of Predestination, where having no just idea of the liberty of man, he came to limit it by the decrees of God, without leaving man not to operate or not to operate the saving good; but to admit or to refuse the saving operation that God presents without reserve to all men.<sup>19</sup>

For Poiret, this misapprehension of human liberty did not permit Augustine to perceive that his position on predestination was simply unnecessary and

unjustifiable in the face of the Pelagian heresy. He adds that Augustine could have abandoned his late conception of predestination and at the same time silence his Pelagian antagonists, but that he was fearful, or at least tentative, about conceding victory to the Pelagians. Augustine's revulsion over Pelagianism seems to have influenced him to adopt a distorted notion of human freedom, which misrepresented the operation and cooperation of man and God, in order to reserve to God alone the power to operate. The purpose of this analysis is not to undermine the connection between grace and freedom, but simply to suggest that Augustine's battle with the Pelagians led him to adopt an extreme position vis-à-vis predestination.

Eugene Portalie provides a useful outline of various attitudes to Augustinian predestination.<sup>20</sup> Three answers are given to the following question: Does God, in his creative decree and before any act of human liberty, determine by an immutable choice the elect and the reprobate? The first is the Semipelagian answer: The Semipelagian system decides the problem in favour of man. God predestines everyone equally to salvation and gives to all an equal measure of graces. Only the free will of man, by resisting or consenting to grace, decides whether one will be saved or lost. All special predestination, if it is not founded on the real or conditional merit of the elect, would be opposed to the justice of God and to human liberty. Moreover, the number of the elect is neither determined nor certain.

The Predestinarian answer asserts not only a preferential choice of the elect by God from all eternity, but at the same time the predestination of the reprobate to hell and the absolute powerlessness of both classes to escape from the irresistible impulse which leads them on to either good or evil. According to Portalie, these two assertions constitute the essential character of the predestinarianism attributed to Saint Augustine by the Semipelagians but really taught by Calvin.

In Portalie's view, the Catholic answer lies midway between these two positions. The eternal choice of the elect by God is very real, very gratuitous, and constitutes the grace of graces; this decree, however, does not destroy the divine will to save all men and moreover is realized only through human freedom of choice, leaving full power to the elect to fall and to the non-elect<sup>21</sup> to rise again. Portalie suggests that this third answer most accurately represents the thought of Augustine.

In defending the Catholic answer, Portalie insists that we pay close attention to Augustine's language: "To ascribe all to God does not deny man's action, but rather the fact that this action can accomplish nothing without grace, not even a good desire or a short prayer."<sup>22</sup> According to Portalie, far from denying the part of man and his merits, Augustine asserted their importance till the end of his life. This may help to soften Poirer's

objection that Augustine misstated the value of human efficacy in his late anti-Pelagian writings; however, what does appear to be lacking in Portalie's remarks is a coherent explanation as to why divine grace should not be given to all. This remains a vexing problem in Augustinian predestination, for which there does not appear to be a clear answer.

At this point, it may be useful to highlight some key aspects in the work of Duns Scotus – with a view to furthering our inquiry into the relationship between grace and human freedom. The point has been made that Scotus' position on grace and freedom has an Augustinian echo and that it is close to the position that Augustine would have articulated had he not been influenced by his battles with the Pelagians. Let us try to articulate this position insofar as it bears upon Arendt's understanding of love and human freedom.

Arendt suggests that Scotus understood the implications of Augustine's attempt to link love and human freedom. Indeed, according to Arendt, it is only with Duns Scotus that we may appreciate fully the link between love and human freedom. For Arendt, a defining difference between Augustine and Scotus can be traced to the role of grace in human freedom. Arendt states: "The schoolmen, following the Apostle Paul and Augustine's philosophy of the Will, were in accord that divine grace was necessary to heal the Will's misery. Scotus, perhaps the most pious among them, disagreed. No divine intervention is necessary to redeem the willing ego."<sup>23</sup> In her interpretation of Scotus, however, Arendt insists that the fact that the will is free, undetermined and unlimited by either an exterior or an internally given object does not mean that man qua man enjoys unlimited freedom. Arendt states:

The human will is indetermined, open to contraries, and hence broken only so long as its sole activity consists in forming volitions; the moment it stops willing and starts to act on one of the will's propositions, it loses its freedom – and man, the possessor of the willing ego, is as happy over the loss as Buridan's ass was happy to resolve the problem of choosing between two bundles of hay by following his instinct: stop choosing and start eating.<sup>24</sup>

For Arendt, the inherent delight of the will in itself is as natural to the will as understanding and knowing are to the intellect, and can be detected even in hatred; however, the perfection of the will – that is, the final peace or reconciliation of willing and nilling – can come about in the transformation of willing into loving.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the key to this transformation is human action.

The notion of the will's transforming power (with its inherent *delectatio*<sup>26</sup>) requires certain qualifications if we are to correctly understand

the relationship between human willing and divine grace. According to Mary Ingham, the background provided by God's action as the supreme paradigm for Scotus' discussion of human freedom is no small element in his overall theory. Ingham states: "The exemplar for human freedom is, of course, the divine will. ... It heightens the importance and value of moral objectivity and the essential perfection of freedom (and thus, the will) as an imitation of and participation in divine activity."<sup>27</sup> As Ingham suggests, a correct understanding of the will and freedom in Scotist thought is impossible in abstraction from consideration of divine perfections. Again, the key to human freedom – in the Scotistic sense – is the ability to identify with the ecstatic love of God. While it may be that the inherent delight of the will in itself is as natural to the will as knowing and understanding are to the intellect, it is not at all evident – as Arendt's interpretation of Scotus would seem to suggest – that the perfection of human willing can be achieved in the absence of divine grace. Let us then briefly sketch this process of perfection of the will.

According to Ingham, the completion of the human journey toward perfection can be apprehended more clearly in light of Scotus' conception of the dual affections of the will. Let us then draw out the significance of this conception. As Ingham indicates, Scotus identified within the natural constitution of the will both a desire for perfection and well-being (*affectio commodi*) and a natural orientation for moral objectivity, that is, to love according to the value of the object (*affectio justitiae*). Ingham states:

The will's natural (or native) rational freedom for self-determination does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it always exists in relationship to the Good (as object of desire), and this in two ways. The will can either love the Good as good in and for itself alone (*affectio justitiae*) or the will can love the Good as possession to be used (*affectio commodi*).<sup>28</sup>

According to Ingham, it is this affection for justice which represents the key moral desire within the will, Allan Wolter maintains that this affection for justice has several distinguishing features: it inclines us to love a thing primarily for what the latter is or has in itself (absolute value) rather than for what it can do for us (relative value); it leads one to love God in himself as the most perfect and adorable of objects, irrespective of the fact that he happens to love us in return; it enables one to love his neighbour as himself (where each individual is of equal objective value); and finally, this love is not jealous of the beloved, but seeks to make the latter loved and appreciated by others.<sup>29</sup> Wolter stresses that the *affectio justitiae* – which is both native to the will and represents the first tempering influence on the self-seeking tendency of the *affectio commodi* – is nevertheless a disposition or

inclination, and such an inclination is in accordance with a rule of justice received from a higher will.<sup>30</sup> The notion of the human will in accordance with a higher will recalls Ingham's claim that a correct understanding of the will and freedom in Scotist thought is impossible in abstraction from consideration of divine perfections. Ingham claims that the will is not simply desire but rational desire and that while such selfless or other-centred loving is an activity for which the will is naturally constituted, its maximal perfection can only be realized with the aid of divine grace.<sup>31</sup>

The notion that the will is both free and rational is crucial to understanding how it is that the will may fail to imitate and participate in divine activity. While love for God may be a natural activity accessible to all moral agents,<sup>32</sup> Ingham raises the puzzling question as to how a rational will can know the highest object and still fail to respond appropriately. She directs us to Scotus' discussion of the fall of Lucifer (cf. *Ordinatio*, II, 6, 2), where Scotus outlines three possibilities which explain how a rational will can know the highest object and still fail to respond appropriately. Ingham states: "One might try to possess God as an object or fail to respect the appropriate divine timetable, or even wish to control the reception of a divine gift, by trying to earn what is given freely. In every case, the issue of control is at stake, whether it be control of God or of those circumstances surrounding divine friendship."<sup>33</sup> As Ingham suggests, it is in Scotus' discussion of the relationship between the will and virtue that we arrive at the core of Scotus' concern with nature and grace. She directs us to Scotus' discussion of the infused virtue of charity, where Scotus defines charity as a virtue which perfects the will insofar as it has an affection for justice.<sup>34</sup> Ingham maintains that while love for God is a natural act of which the will is capable; yet, charity intensifies and perfects this act. She adds that the purpose of virtue – whether it be moral or theological – is to intensify the activity of the will. Virtue, therefore, does not replace the will as central moral element but rather increases the ability of the will to will properly.<sup>35</sup>

Given this connection between the natural constitution of the will and divine aid in the form of charity, what would it mean to participate in divine activity? Ingham asserts that love for God is the supreme virtue and goal of the moral life. Ingham states: "In charity there is no trace of selfish love or concupiscence. Charity increases the natural capacity of the will to love God not as a personal good, but as that infinite good which alone is worthy of absolute love."<sup>36</sup> At this stage, the notion of an infinite and common good means that God is to be loved not only selflessly but also in conjunction with others. Ingham then directs our attention to a passage in the *Ordinatio*, where Scotus relates charity to God and neighbour:

Charity is defined as the habit by which we hold God to be dear. Now it could be that someone is considered dear because of some private love where the lover wants no co-lovers, as is exemplified in the case of jealous men having an excessive love of their wives. But this sort of habit would not be orderly or perfect. Not orderly because God does not want to be the private or proper good of any person exclusively, nor would right reason have someone appropriate this common good to himself. Neither would it be perfect, because one who loves perfectly wants the beloved to be loved by others. Therefore, God, in infusing the love by which all tend towards him in a perfect and orderly way, gives this habit by which he is held dear as a good that is to be loved by others as well.<sup>37</sup>

For Scotus, it is in loving God that I love both myself and my neighbour out of charity; and if God is to be loved perfectly, then He is to be loved by all who are able to love Him and whose love is pleasing to Him. However, while charity may intensify and perfect the act of willing, it is only through divine acceptance of human action that human beings ultimately participate in actions that promote the divine end.

The notion of divine acceptance can be traced to Scotus' delineation of the four orders of goodness. Ingham directs our attention to a passage in Scotus' work, *The Quodlibetal Questions*, where Scotus places the rational or moral dimension within a larger dynamic of four possible orders of goodness: natural, moral, charitable and meritorious. Scotus states:

The first expresses a relationship to the potency which freely elicits the act; the second adds to this a relationship to the virtue which inclines to such an act, or rather to the rule of virtue, i.e., a dictate of right reason; the third expresses a relationship to charity which inclines the will to such an act; the fourth adds a relationship to the divine will which accepts the act in a special way. The third adds some goodness over and above that conferred by the second and is itself required for the fourth, not indeed by the very nature of things, but rather by a disposition of the accepting will.<sup>38</sup>

Ingham maintains that the perfection of freedom, which begins in the will as self-mastery, is gradually realized via the will's natural love for the good in itself and with the help of grace. She adds that it is by virtue of its own acts of choice that the will moves toward an increasingly better exercise of love for the highest good. Ingham states: "This entire dynamic of moral praxis takes place against the background of divine goodness and within a context where the natural and supernatural collaborate. The harmony of grace with nature, a

major concern for Scotus, is especially operative within the moral domain.”<sup>39</sup> For Ingham, the necessity for grace in the completion of the human journey toward perfection is an important aspect which supports Scotus’ ethical insights. She states: God is intimately present to the Scotist universe, both as epitome of creative freedom and as gracious judge whose acceptance raises natural goodness to its supernatural reward.”<sup>40</sup> Divine acceptance is thus the ultimate manifestation of human moral perfection. Yet what is the significance of achieving this moral perfection in terms of the relationship between God and human beings?

According to Ingham, the fulfilment of the moral order through meritorious perfection fundamentally alters the relationship between God and human beings. She states: “Here the will’s highest motivation is rewarded as it enters into an intensified personal dynamic of friendship with God, no longer seen as infinite goodness but as this very personal being, whose essence is selfless love and who wills to be in relationship with all.”<sup>41</sup> For Ingham, the moral order perfects internal motivation while the meritorious finalizes the moral act by creating a relationship with God. It is by entering into this personal relationship that human activity comes to resemble or imitate divine activity. As Ingham suggests, nowhere does Scotus identify pure autonomy as the moral goal of human life; indeed, she insists that the will is autonomous and capable of free choices, but in light of rationality and the natural disposition to love what is good in itself. Yet it must be underscored that the imitation of divine activity does not mean the loss or dissolution of the self. Ingham states: “The moral person is always in relation to goodness, to God, to others. Scotus advocates an other-centered moral dynamic: love motivated by the value of the other, love culminating in self-sacrifice for the other. This moral goal creates a community where each member seeks the good of all.”<sup>42</sup> Ingham suggests that in imitation both of Trinitarian mutuality and Incarnational selflessness, human moral action is that action whereby persons enter into the dynamic of divinity.

For Arendt, it is only with Scotus that we may fully appreciate the link between love and human freedom. Yet it would appear that in her interpretation of Scotus, she has misrepresented the role of divine intervention in the activity of the will. To claim – as Arendt does – that no divine intervention is necessary to redeem the willing ego, is to ignore or eschew the Scotistic position that divine acceptance represents the ultimate manifestation of human moral perfection. How, then, are we to account for this misrepresentation? Joanna Scott maintains that Arendt’s work with medieval sources, though far more extensive than that of her contemporaries in the enterprise of political philosophy, was fundamentally flawed in her Augustinian premises. She adds that Arendt’s narrow interpretation of

Augustine reduces his pivotal concept of love as grace-strengthened free will to a self-generated will to action – resulting in a misleading existential interpretation of Augustine's defense of free will. This echoes Ingham's claim that nowhere does Scotus identify pure autonomy as the moral goal of human life. Scott states:

Inevitably, in relating subsequent theorists as counterpoints to Augustine, Aquinas slips into the guise of a rational determinist and Scotus, though Arendt was aware of the larger theological context of his work, is transformed into an advocate of unrelenting contingency generated by sovereign Wills colliding in a proto-nominalist universe. Alone among the medieval participants in the debate on free will, asserts Arendt, Scotus fully understood the implications of Augustine's work and extended the Christian defense of freedom into full-fledged voluntarism.<sup>43</sup>

According to Scott, what emerges from Arendt's reworking of medieval sources, beginning with Augustine, is a view of the medieval debate on freedom which is largely abstracted from its historical context and the substantive concerns of theology. In regard to Arendt's position on the problem of free will, Scott insists that the diminished importance of transcendent ends, and the power to achieve them, is central. Scott states: "In order to salvage the possibility of autonomous self-transformation, Arendt selectively interprets her medieval sources, setting aside their distinctive teleology of moral reasoning, linking a posited natural impulse to goodness with the ultimate source of goodness and Being."<sup>44</sup> How, then, are we to correct this selective interpretation?

According to Scott, it is because Arendt posits an incipient voluntarism in Augustine that she then contrasts his focus upon willing with what she feels are more complete arguments in Aquinas and especially Duns Scotus. However, Scott insists that no matter how concerned Augustine and Scotus seemed to be that free will be defended from the implications of Providential determinism and the Aristotelian teleology of causes, they never interpreted the price of freedom as a society of sovereign wills battling each other for power and calling into question all traditional systems of value, including those of religion. Scott states:

The consequence of free Will [for Augustine and Scotus] was personal responsibility for the choice of good or evil no more and certainly no less. What is most remarkable in comparing the works of those authors Arendt cites, is not the radical disjunctures of their conclusions, but rather the ways in which they participated in a consensus about the interrelatedness



of Will, Reason and Appetites, and the crucial role which a transcendent Being had to play in the flowering of human potential.<sup>45</sup>

For Scott, Arendt's methodology did attempt to evoke subtle nuances of Augustine's and Scotus' explications, but through a lens of very narrow focus – the result being a selective interpretation which ignored the deeper context of man's relationship to God. Scott states: "At its worst, Arendt's relentless trawling yielded the startling conclusion that Augustine was no theologian and that Scotus, despite his piety, believed that no divine intervention is necessary to redeem the willing ego."<sup>46</sup> What appears to be missing in Arendt's work is more careful and coherent attention to the theological context in which her analysis of the will takes place.

But despite the purely phenomenological tone of Arendt's early work on Augustine and her claim that 'Augustine was no theologian,' Scott overlooks the possibility that Arendt had, by the end of her life, begun to consider more carefully the deeper context of man's relationship to God which underpinned her analysis of the will in *The Life of the Mind*. For example, in her concluding remarks on Duns Scotus in *Willing*, she states: "I have tried to show that in Scotus we meet not simple conceptual reversals (such as Scotus' ontological preference of the contingent over the necessary) but genuine new insights, all of which could probably be explicated as the speculative conditions for a philosophy of freedom."<sup>47</sup> If we consider the crucial role which a transcendent Being has to play in the flowering of human potential, then we must reconsider Arendt's view that Scotus fully understood the implications of Augustine's work and extended the Christian defense of freedom into full-fledged voluntarism.

Arendt's notion of contingency appears to derive from what she understands to be a central feature of Scotus' conception of freedom – an identification of freedom with action. Yet, if the contingency of the will is to mean anything within the Scotist framework, it must surely take into account that freedom consists in the ability to participate in divine activity. For Scotus, it is only because of God's acceptance of human action that we are ultimately raised and perfected as persons. Though we may choose to do otherwise, we are nevertheless free to participate in divine activity through our power to align ourselves with the will of God. Because Scotus advocates an other-centred moral dynamic (where love is motivated by the value of the other) love of others is ultimately liberating. Scotus is coming to a kind of intersubjectivity in which cooperation is possible between us and other people and, ultimately, between us and God. This relationship may be schematized as follows: If X values Y, X values Y more than X. This represents the freedom from self-love which Arendt was able to mine in her

analysis of Augustine's concept of love – where we begin to overcome self-love as we meet the *other* in social charity.

It is by overcoming this self-love that we find ourselves on the rightful path to freedom. Yet, what are we to make of Scott's charge that Arendt reduced the pivotal concept of love as grace-strengthened free will to a self-generated will to action? Arendt's claim 'that no divine intervention is necessary to redeem the willing ego' is clearly inconsistent with Scotus' position on the relationship between God and human beings. Had Arendt clearly acknowledged the Scotist position that divine acceptance of human action unifies love and freedom, then surely she would have led us to a deeper understanding of Eichmann's monstrous evil. It is by reintroducing this substantive metaphysical-theological framework into Arendt's reworking of Saint Augustine and Duns Scotus that we may grasp the basis for Arendt's claim regarding the connection between political freedom and human action. By situating Arendt's notion of thinking within this metaphysical-theological context, we hope to elucidate the basis of thinking, and how it is that if one were not thoughtless, one would not have done what Eichmann did. If we take Scotus' claim seriously that imitation and participation in divine activity ultimately takes the form of divine acceptance of human action, and if we can demonstrate that this is indeed the basis for Arendt's claim regarding the connection between political freedom and human action, then her attempt to find Eichmann guilty for his actions may have a certain justification. The tragedy of Eichmann may, therefore, be understood as a monumental failure on his part to love what is good in and for itself and an abdication of personal responsibility for choosing good over evil.

It is because of our love of others that we are able to accord them respect in the public realm and it is through our love that we express the fullness of our humanity and our freedom. Arendt's notion of *amor mundi* appears to have deepened by the end of her life and her claim 'that in Scotus we find genuine new insights' must surely include the insight that it is only when we freely consent to love that we connect our actions to the reality of all that is good. Had she clearly acknowledged the Scotist position on the question of consent, then her investigation into Eichmann's monstrous evil would have shown why it is that love gives depth to our actions, and ultimately makes us free. The transcendent significance of the human being goes beyond self-interest. We are drawn to others not only because we feel responsible to them as fellow sufferers in the world, but also because there is a transcendent dignity to all human beings. An understanding or sympathy with the suffering of others contributes to human solidarity. But surely we are not just fellow sufferers. We also have a fellowship in the good, and we confirm this fellowship through our actions in this world.

How God could have permitted Auschwitz is an unbearable mystery; likewise, we may never come to fully understand Eichmann's role – and by extension, humanity's role – in the mystery that Auschwitz represents. Yet, this does not exonerate humanity for the responsibility to act so as to promote a fellowship in the good. Indeed, we must never surrender the profound sense of responsibility we have to ourselves and to others. What makes us free is what makes us fully human, and to be fully human is to act and to love. To freely consent to this love means that we are free to act spontaneously and unpredictably. In consenting to our fellowship in the good, we are able to overcome self-love and thereby direct our actions to a world inhabited by others – whose dignity should be honoured and protected. Eichmann ought to have known this, for he was human and therefore capable of consenting to this love. His failure must stand as a searing indictment of the terrible misuse of human freedom.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Elie Wiesel, *Memoirs: All Rivers Run to the Sea*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, pp. 347–348.

<sup>2</sup> Wiesel, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, London: Macmillan, 1966, p. 9.

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

<sup>5</sup> Sec Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, tr. M. Harari, London: Harvill Press, 1948, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> While Arendt's line of thought may suggest that freedom is the object of the will, Arendt must be operating with some notion or concept of good – which surely is the object of the will.

<sup>8</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1961), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Sec Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948), 3rd ed., San Diego; New York; London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1973, p. 459.

<sup>10</sup> This exchange was part of an exchange of letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt. It was reprinted in *The Jew as Pariah*, ed. and intro. Ron Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978, pp. 250–251).

<sup>11</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Loeb) 1: p. 341.

<sup>12</sup> See Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966, esp. pp. 137–153.

<sup>13</sup> See Hannah Arendt, "The Concentration Camps," *Partisan Review*, 15 (7) (July 1948): 743–763.

<sup>14</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 288.

<sup>15</sup> See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 370.

<sup>16</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. and tr. J.V. Scott and J.C. Stark, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996, esp. Pt. III, "Social Life."

<sup>17</sup> Augustine's position on the problem of predestination remains vexing and was no doubt influenced heavily by his battle against Pelagianism. In brief, the Pelagians held that the state of man before original sin was not much different from that of post-Adamite man. It follows that since original sin effected almost no change in man, it would be easy enough for man to recover his original rectitude without need of the divine operation of interior grace. While it is true that Augustine holds that we are saved only by the grace of God, there is evidence to suggest both in *De Trinitate*, Bk. 4, Ch. 21, and in his later work, *The Enchiridion*, Ch. 36, that the grace of God is available to us only because human nature is somehow taken into – and, therefore, commingled with – the divine nature. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that Augustine's quarrel with the Pelagians led him to misstate his position on the question of efficacy (either God's work or ours), and that otherwise he accepts some form of cooperation between man and God. This is not to say that we could do without grace, but that we cooperate with God, who moves us. Indeed, the view that God and man cooperate in the raising of human nature to the divine nature helps to elucidate the relationship between grace and freedom. Cf. Pierre Poiret, "De la Cooperation de l'Homme avec l'operation de Dieu, Tome VI," *L'Oeconomie Divine ou Systeme Universel et Démontré: Des Oeuvres et des Dessesins de Dieu envers les Hommes*, Amsterdam: Henry Wetstein, 1687, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

Telle a été l'erreur de la Prédestination dans Saint Augustin. ... que Dieu ait prédestiné une partie des hommes tombés à une grace invincible ou particulière, ou à la vie éternelle; et qu'il ait laissé l'autre dans sa perdition: qu'il ait fait cela sans avoir égard à la différence de l'état ni de la conduite des particuliers: que nul de ceux qui sont ainsi prédestiné ne peut périr finalement; et que nul des reprouvés ne peut être sauvé ... .

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

Ce grand Saint l'ayant entreprise... voulant presser d'avantage ses Antagonistes par toutes sortes d'instances, attribuer tout le bien à Dieu, et rien de salutaire ni de lumineux à l'opération de l'homme, il s'est engagé mal à propos et sans nécessité dans le mauvais pas de Prédestination, où n'ayant point d'idée juste de la liberté de l'homme, il est venu jusqu'à la borner par les décrets de Dieu, sans laisser l'homme libre je ne dis pas à opérer ou à ne pas opérer le bien salutaire; mais à admettre ou à refuser l'opération salutaire que Dieu présente sans reserve à tous les hommes.

<sup>20</sup> See Eugene Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, tr. R.J. Bastian, S.J., Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960, esp. 213–229.

<sup>21</sup> For Augustine's discussion of the existence of the non-elect – i.e., why the devil is bad precisely as demon – see *On Genesis against the Manichaeans*, II, xxviii, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Portalie, p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *Willing*, p. 141.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> See Arendt, *Willing*, p. 143. For a discussion of willing and nilling, see Arendt, *Willing*, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Ingham, "Scotus and the Moral Order," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 67 (1) (1993), p. 131.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>29</sup> Wolter draws our attention to Scotus' discussion of the love of God and neighbour in *Ordinatio* III, d. 28, n. 2. In Wolter's translation, Scotus is quoted as follows:

Now it could be that someone is considered dear because of some private love where the lover wants no co-lovers, as is exemplified in the case of jealous men having an excessive love of their wives. But this sort of habit would not be orderly or perfect. Not orderly, I say, because God, the good of all, does not want to be the private or proper good of any person exclusively, nor would right reason have someone appropriate this common good to himself. Hence, such a love or habit, inclining him to this good as exclusive to himself and not to be loved or had by another, would be an inordinate love. Neither would it be perfect, because one who loves perfectly wants the beloved to be loved by others. Therefore, God, in infusing the love by which all tend towards him in a perfect and orderly way, gives this habit by which he is held dear as a good that is to be loved by others as well (cf. Allan Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, tr. and intro., Allan Wolter, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986, p. 449).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ordinatio* II, d. 6, q. 2, n. 8 in Wolter, p. 471.

<sup>31</sup> Ingham, p. 130. Ingham insists that Scotus lays the groundwork for this position in his *Prologue to the Sentence Commentary*, where he claims that the natural desire is fulfilled by a power beyond nature, and that this position is superior to that of the philosophers who argue for nature. "Igitur in hoc magis dignificatur natura, quam si suprema sibi possibilis peneretur illa naturalis; nec est mirum quod ad maiorem perfectionem sit capacitas passiva in aliqua natura quam eius causalitas activa se extendat" (cf. *Ordinatio*. Prologue, p. 1, q.u.n. 75 [Vatican edition 1: 46]).

<sup>32</sup> Ingham directs us to Wolter's translation of *Ordinatio* III, suppl. d. 27, art. 1:

I say that to love God above all is an act conformed to natural right reason, which dictates that what is best must be loved most; and hence such an act is right of itself, indeed, as a first practical principle of action, this is something known per se, and hence its rectitude is self-evident. For something must be loved most of all, and it is none other than the highest good, even as this good is recognized by the intellect as that to which we must adhere the most (cf. Wolter, p. 425).

<sup>33</sup> Ingham, p. 140.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143. Cf. Allan Wolter's translation of passage in *Ordinatio* III, suppl. dist. 27, art. 1: "Hanc itaque virtutem perficientem voluntatem in quantum habet affectionem iustitiae voco 'caritatem' [This virtue which thus perfects the will insofar as it has an affection for justice, I call 'charity']" (Wolter 427).

<sup>35</sup> Ingham directs us to *Ordinatio* I, d. 17, n. 40 (Vatican 5: 154), which she translates as follows:

However, it [the will] works less perfectly without the *habitus* [virtue] than with it (and this granted equal effort on the part of the will) as when two causes concur toward one effect, one alone cannot by itself [cause] the effect as perfectly as the two can together. And in this way [the position] is saved whereby the act is more intense coming from the will and virtue than from the will alone (cf. Ingham, p. 145).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>37</sup> See Wolter's translation of *Ordinatio* III, d. 28, art. 1 in Wolter, p. 449.

<sup>38</sup> Duns Scotus, *The Quodlibetal Questions*, tr. and intro. Felix Alluntis and Allan Wolter, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 398. This is a translation of the Vivès edition, Vol. 26, qu. 17.34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>43</sup> Joanna Scott, "Medieval Sources of the Theme of Free Will in Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind: Augustine, Aquinas and Scotus*," *Augustinian Studies*, 18 (1987), p. 109.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113. For a reference to the conclusion that Augustine was no theologian, Scott directs us to Young-Bruehl, pp. 74–75. To support this conclusion, Young-Bruehl cites a passage from the Arendt–Jaspers correspondence, July 13, 1955, where, in a discussion of Bultmann, the nature of theology, and the inability of most theologians to think politically, Arendt remarked: "Augustin war noch kein Theologe."

<sup>47</sup> See *Willing*, pp. 145–146.

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## Chapter 9

# AGENTS, CAUSES, AND EXPLANATIONS: THE IDEA OF A METAPHYSICAL SYSTEM

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## THE NATURE OF METAPHYSICS

This is a paper about causality and explanation, specifically it is about the relation between the ideas of causality and agency, and about the connection between causality and the problems of properties, events, continuing states of affairs, and substances. But its real purpose is to expose some issues about the nature of metaphysics.

Metaphysics, as McTaggart insisted, is about the ultimate nature of reality. If that is so, the task of the metaphysician is to deal with the whole, for one could not tell what was ultimate if one did not know what there was. Metaphysics is thus about *what there is* in the sense of what counts, finally, as being, or, if being is somehow a derivative notion, then it must be about what being is derived from. There is a sense in which Quine is right: There is one ontological question: What is there? And there is one answer:

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everything.<sup>1</sup> But not everything is ultimately real. There are optical illusions in which a still line seems to move, and there are dream objects which have no counterparts in the outside world. One who dreams of a dragon menacing his village lives in a world in which this dragon and village play a part – but they are a dream dragon and a village displaced into another space–time. Dream dragons and villages displaced in this way are part of the world, but they are derivative, or so we think. The space–times of their adventures are another matter. They might be real but not our space or our time. Reflection suggests that dream objects and the spaces in which dreams take place pose two different sorts of problems. The metaphysician hopes to find out from what they are derivative, not in the sense of the psychologist who may hope to show that the dream is the outcome of a suppressed hostility or a latent fear, but in the sense of trying to find out what kinds of things dreams are and how they depend, if they do, on another kind of thing. Materialist metaphysicians, for instance, think that there is a basic kind of thing, matter, which can take on certain forms, that of the human brain, say, and that this in turn can generate the circumstances in which we say we dream. Mathematical idealists, by contrast, think that the basis of reality lies in mathematical entities. On such a view it is mathematical objects which are “ultimately” real. Our physics is expressed in formulae of which particular states of affairs are expressions, and for which scientific enquiry provides the values which fill the variables. The mathematical objects are suggested by experience, but do not wholly originate in it. From mathematical objects, however, there arise theories which make the experienced world itself intelligible. Such objects figure in a kind of knowledge which is in a special sense “certain,” and provide the foundations for other explanations. It is from this that the claims of mathematics to be the source of our knowledge of the “real” stem. The germ of this notion – a sort of accommodationist Pythagoreanism – may be in the writings of Thomas Bradwardine before the end of the middle ages, and it has popped up here and there from the 14th century onwards. Kurt Gödel in our own time was a mathematical idealist. The effect of mathematical physics is to enable us to order our experiences in a way which provides logical links between apparent events.

We call this explanation, and if mathematical idealism is true, *explanation* is crucial to the notion of what is ultimate. But even if one does not accept the primacy of mathematical objects, what it is, really, I suppose to be a theoretical theist, is to say that a certain chain of explanations leads ultimately to God. What it is to be a materialist is to say that all explanations begin in matter.

No speculation of this sort leads to a perfectly clear doctrine. For one thing, they all involve a common belief which is probably at the very root of

the possibility of metaphysics. They all suppose that we live in a world about which we can talk sensibly and in which we can carry out the sorts of projects which enable us to make at least some decisions about what has been explained and what has not. One cannot deny that one can talk sense in and about the world, for if one does one's denial fails to make sense.<sup>2</sup> The reason we think that such a belief is defensible is that we have language. We carry on discussions and we use this discourse as the vehicle for all our tests about what is acceptable and what is not. The "linguistic turn" in 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy bred many disasters, but in this sense it was justified, and, if I am right, there are certainly places in our metaphysical inquiries in which we shall have to turn to language.

Language must be part of the enquiry. But if explanation is the key notion, experience and logic must be part of it, too. There has to be something to be explained and there has to be some logical analysis which tells us when we have reached what might reasonably count as an explanation. Another way of putting it is that whatever there is is some part of the possible. In a limiting sense, logic is the science of the possible. It has been suggested that logical truths are those truths which hold in any and every possible world. So one sense of what there is is given by logic. But not everything possible is actual and the obvious hope is that experience will tell us something about which possible things, events, or states of affairs are actual.

None of this amounts to much, though, unless we can produce some argument in which these elements come into play and unless we can then show how they are to be balanced off. Explanation calls to mind causality. Explanation and causality are far from being identical, but someone who has found the cause of something usually thinks in some sense that an explanation has been found.

## **A SENSE OF EFFICIENT CAUSALITY**

I want to argue that causality in the sense of efficient causality, making things happen, is really intelligible only in the context of the actions of agents. Mere successions of events, as Hume insisted, never lead us to a notion of causality. For, in this sense, when we say that *x* is the cause of *y*, we mean that it is not just accident, fortuitous connection, or habitual regular sequence that is involved, but that there is some necessary connection between the events. "Necessary" is a difficult term, a term of art to which philosophers tend to give their own meanings. But we all know that mere regular sequences do not constitute causes. It may be that every time the 9 a.m. train for Manchester leaves Euston Station and more people aboard are reading

*The Independent* than are reading *The Guardian* there is a train wreck, but we would not say that reading *The Independent* causes train wrecks. Sometimes we are not sure. If every time Tony Blair visits Nottingham there is an outbreak of suicides among single mothers and elderly widows, we may say that visits from Mr. Blair cause despair but we would not be sure that despair is the cause of suicide. But that is because we do not quite see how one series of events necessitates – or even makes very likely – the other. Of course, if we find that tobacco tar contains chemicals which interfere with the good working of cells lining the lungs, we will become quite sure that smoking cigarettes is a cause of lung disease. But this is because we can in some sense *see* the connection. We become surer, however, only when some scientific law emerges which presents something like a necessary connection. Thus one can grasp at once that, if one has force-diffusion phenomena in a uniform, noninterfering three-dimensional space, one will get a lot of inverse-square laws.<sup>3</sup> The law of gravitation is a good example. We can see that the force can be diffused only in the dimensions that are there. If we had four-dimensional spaces we would get inverse-cube laws. The universe we live in runs to inverse-square laws which govern forces among middle-sized objects – bigger than atoms and perhaps smaller than some collections which comprise our physical universe. This is a kind of conceptual necessity and again poses problems about the idea of necessity, but it gives us a clue. Scientific laws, however, cannot really be said to make things happen; they govern the forms of whatever happens. At any rate, the law of gravitation does not bring into existence the things which it governs.

## IDEAS ABOUT AGENTS

Now consider the behaviour of agents. Thomas Nagel has said “I do not find the concept of agent causation intelligible.”<sup>4</sup> I am not sure that the words “agent causation” are intelligible. At any rate they do not seem to be an instance of normal English. But the idea intended *is* intelligible.

Nagel’s judgement, though, gives us a chance to look at the notion of intelligibility. I have no trouble raising my arm. I may do it because I decide to, or on whim, or just for the fun of it, or out of habit, as coach drivers do when they pass another coach, especially one run by the same company. If I decide to raise my arm and it won’t go up, I go to the doctor. It is a fair guess that the doctor will almost always find something wrong with my nerves, my muscles, my brain or my psychological states. If he doesn’t, he will suppose that further investigation will reveal a cause.

When people decide to raise their arms, they do. What would be unintelligible would be the case in which my arm stayed down and there was absolutely nothing wrong with me. Indeed, if I go to the doctor and say “I’m very troubled as a philosopher because every time I decide to raise my arm it goes up,” he *may* say “that’s a problem only philosophers have.” He may also suggest that I should see a psychiatrist.

We can explain why this is so in a number of ways. First of all, perhaps, it is worth noting that a living human body is precisely the sort of thing which expresses a set of intentions. When a body can no longer express any intentions we suspect that it is dead. A sleeping body shows signs of some inner life in a way which leads us to suppose that it can still express intentions. An unconscious body – so long as it shows certain signs of life, such as appropriate brain-wave patterns – leads us to suppose that it, too, may later express intentions. It is the conviction that it can never do so again that leads us to suppose that it is dead, and it is the difficulty of ascertaining this that gives rise to doubts as to just how we should define death. The problem with various sorts of reductionist and eliminationist materialism is not so much that it does not deal with minds – to have a mind is essentially to have a tendency to have experiences and this notion is susceptible of various understandings – as that it does not give an adequate account of human bodies as expressions of agency. If some sort of reductionist or eliminationist materialism were true, we should need the kind of explanation we cannot have as to why when I decide to raise my arm, my arm goes up.

Even more importantly we have certain experiences of being in charge of our own affairs. Philosophers have disputed whether or not there is an experience of something called “willing.” But we do not need to follow this vexatious path. The central fact is that we can all use a variety of linguistic distinctions: “I decided,” “I acted after deliberation,” “I did that on whim,” “I was overcome by emotion,” “I was pushed” are all expressions which all of us know how to use and which all of us understand when others use them. If they did not mark out any distinctions in our experience, they would be useful only for what is now called spin-doctoring. We would use them, that is, only when we wanted to put a certain gloss on our affairs so as to win the understanding or applause of our fellows. But in fact we surely use them to review our own affairs. “I didn’t think that out well enough,” “that was an impulse purchase,” “if I had reflected on how she might understand what I did, I would have done something else.”

Language and experience are intertwined. The fact that language has a use suggests that there is some experience on which it is founded, but there is more to it than that. Experience and language are not really separable. It is not as if – as the sense-data theorists of the 1930s thought – we receive a lot

of raw data and then proceed to name it. When people said that expressions like “red, here, now” represent something indubitable, they forgot to ask what words like “red” mean and how they work in discourse. There are some easy roads to certainty. If I name my dog “Pluto,” that is his name, and it will stay that way no matter what anyone does, as Professor Kripke reminds us. So if “red” is only a proper name like Fido and Pluto, I can be sure that if I say there is “red here and now,” there is something “red” here and now. But “red” is usually taken to be a colour which occupies a certain portion of the standard spectrum. In that case the word “red” names a universal and there are criteria for deciding if something is red or blue. There is much certainty about that. And our experience is moulded by our choice of language, for language calls our attention to some things and away from others. A geology course will alter what you see when you go mountain climbing because you will pick out differences which you would have missed without the geologist’s vocabulary. The language of medical symptoms is an essential ingredient in identifying diseases correctly or perhaps, sometimes, an inevitable ingredient in identifying them wrongly.

The world is constantly being interpreted. It does not really consist of univocal entities which have one and only one correct description. It is not wholly accident or taste that we have both science and poetry.

The language of poetry may not work well for medical diagnosis, but the language of medicine may not make great poetry either, though there are always surprises. Would the poetry of Donne and Milton be feasible without their theological vocabulary, and could the experience the poetry engenders be the same if it were rendered theologically neutral?

Not all vocabularies continue to work. Seeing the devil is not so popular as it was in the days of the early Quakers, and the earnest disputes between Quakers and Muggletonians as to how Satan might best be characterized have left us. This makes us suspect that the phenomena were never really well-focused and that the language of some of those disputes is dead.

But the language of reflecting, deciding, acting, being overcome by emotion and so on is very much with us, and no one would get through much of life without it. When language survives there is a good reason to suppose that it does useful work. These are real enough experiences and this is too often forgotten. Kevin Magill has recently argued trenchantly that the free will debate has been carried on much too often without paying attention to the actual experiences.<sup>5</sup>

Such claims are suggestive. But can they be buttressed by arguments which depend more clearly on the logic of explanation? I think that they can.

Could we, for instance, both explain why, when I decide to raise my arm, my arm normally goes up and why sometimes it fails? If we are explaining

steam shovels to prospective purchasers, we will want to tell them how the mechanism which lifts the shovel works and also to explain to them what to do when something goes wrong. The handbook will explain the working mechanism. It will also have a section called “trouble-shooting.” The steam shovel is a mechanism. So is my arm. I can explain both in the same way if what is wanted is an account of muscles and nerves. But when I decide to lift my arm, I do not decide to send messages down the nerve paths and move the muscles. I am probably unaware of all these things. It is possible that for a ballet dancer a good working knowledge of nerves and muscles is a help, but only in the sense that it gives clues about what is impossible and what is merely difficult, what can be done over and over again, and what may impart some temporary or permanent damage. The ballerina does not glide about the stage with her mind on muscles and nerves. The distinction has been made in various ways. John Thorp noticed its relevance to questions about willing; A.I. Melden marked out the difference between doing things and making things happen.<sup>6</sup>

For the moment, the significance of this fact is just that explaining how the muscles and nerves work does not explain what the ballerina is doing. She is acting out – in significant part creating – a work of art and she could succeed perfectly well in moving whatever muscles one specified without actually producing a work of art. What she is doing entails that muscles and nerves move. But analytical works on the dance are not meant to be essays in human physiology, and one who wanted to learn about physiology would be unlikely to consult the records of *Sadler’s Wells Ballet*.

So one thing does not explain the other. “Agency,” if you like, is a different sort of thing, though in our world at least one has to be a human being or perhaps one of the other members of the animal kingdom in order to achieve agency. To be an agent you have to have a world of a certain kind. But to be a world of that kind is not enough to explain the activities of agents.

## AGENCY AND THE METAPHYSICAL DIVIDE

Indeed, we are faced now with a metaphysical divide. Its sharpness can hardly be exaggerated, and if it should prove to be an uncrossable abyss, it would prove a *reductio ad absurdum* of my argument so far. I think that when philosophers like Abraham Melden raised this kind of question nearly 40 years ago, it was often thought that what was at issue was that two ways of talking which exist together in the world cannot easily be reduced to one another. And this, of course, is what arguments about the successful uses of language essentially imply. But this cannot suffice. For what is at issue are

two modes of explanation on which very much hangs. I do not love and trust my wife because I understand how her mouth and vocal chords work, but because she is a continuing agent whose actions in the world have made it permanently different, and because they sustain love and trust. If she were to have trouble moving her arm or speaking, however, her doctor would be concerned with quite different things.

On the one side is the world we confront. On the other side are agents. The world is a stage on which our actions take place. It consists of many bits and pieces. Science is about it, but the ontological questions which at least partially govern what will count as explanations are distinct. Science is about such things as how much iron and how much oxygen there is in the world and how they work together to produce rust. The ontological questions are about events, substances, relations and properties, the categories which make the scientific explanations intelligible in the sense that they enable us to relate them to the way in which we should interpret scientific language to give us a meaning to our experience. These questions interlock in practice, for they suggest how, when there is a choice, we should go about deciding whether to adopt field or particle theories and which models of causality best fit the scientific data. But they are distinct. Physicists do not debate about whether or not continuants are expressions of properties rather than substances.

On the other side are agents. If agents are not systems of wheels and pulleys and if explanations in terms of agents are distinct from mechanical agents, then agents are something else. They are continuants, but they are not literally things in the world. There is a hint dropped by Wittgenstein – that agents may appear as the boundaries of worlds – which may be, as we shall see, useful even if it is puzzling and even though it raises questions which he would have preferred to leave untouched.

Let us look at each side of the divide in turn.

## **THE WORLD OF OBJECTS**

About the world of objects, there are important questions which confront any metaphysician at the end of the 20th century: Does it consist of events, as Alfred North Whitehead and perhaps Samuel Alexander thought? Is it a seamless network of interlocking properties with a single subject, as F.H. Bradley thought? Is it perhaps even a pure flow which isn't a flow of anything, as Henri Bergson thought? Does it instead consist of a number of continuants, associated in some way with relations, properties and relational properties? If so, are these substances in a traditional sense, possessors of relations and properties without being relations and properties themselves?

And are such substances what Descartes thought a real substance must be, self-contained and not dependent on other substances? Or are these continuants something quite different? They might be, for instance, continuing expressions of properties. Or they might be states of affairs which can be explicated by an analysis of their continuing properties and of the relations between them without being a kind of ontological substratum in which such properties have their anchors. I would guess from reading the recent literature that much of the current interest is about how to construe continuants, whereas it may be that in the period from, say, 1910 to 1940 – the heyday of Bergson, Alexander, Lloyd Morgan, and John Eloy Boodin, and a period in which Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet were still influential – there was much more interest in what one might call field theories about the world. There are various reasons for this. One has to do I think with the notion that philosophers have to explain the world as common sense and science confront it and describe it. Science these days runs heavily to field theories but common sense prefers the idea of continuants which are conceived as if they were substances. Philosophers of recent years have seemed to feel more at home with common sense. Fashion suggests that philosophers, in any case, are not supposed to create new visions of the world, and this is an issue which I cannot entirely ignore in a paper about the nature of metaphysics. Another reason for the preference has to do with the fact that, when philosophers like Professor Lowe undertake to explore the metaphysics of the logically possible, the “logic” in “logically possible” tends to be of the traditional Aristotelian kind or of its rather Russellian successors, both of which favour propositions which are of the form “All S is P,” “Some S is P” or of the form “ $(x) (fx \supset gx)$ ” and “ $(\exists x) (fx \cdot gx)$ .” McTaggart, the last great metaphysician untouched by science, had the same preference. Here the “S’s” and “x’s” are things which are marked out as, at any rate, the subject matter to be talked about, the “P’s”, the “F’s” and the “g’s” represent properties assigned to them. Russell had early noted the metaphysical perils of such logics in his work on Leibniz, though he did not perhaps grasp that he had removed only some of them when he and Whitehead developed an alternative. Whitehead did not use this logic in *Process and Reality*,<sup>7</sup> and reported in *Modes of Thought*<sup>8</sup> that it was not very useful, though he insisted on the importance there of the use of logical variables. Bradley rejected outright the metaphysical implications of such logics. But fashion – and if I may say so, a certain logical ineptness in its opponents – has kept Russellian logics in a dominant position, and so it is not surprising that the philosophers who rejected the metaphysics of substances and continuants in favour of various theories involving fields and events do not figure in Professor Lowe’s index. There are, however, open questions here.



Is there any clue in the problems being posed here as to how one might go about making decisions about these philosophical questions or, at any rate, are there any clues about how one might get an account which would enable us to talk sense in and about a world in which there are both the acts of agents and the events or states of affairs which comprise the world as it figures in physics, chemistry, and physiology? Such a world in the end, of course, is the common sense world in which there are both people (and other animals who may act) and things.

Such a world at any rate must have two properties. Sufficient continuity for ordinary explanations is one of them. The world must hang together over spans of time in a way which yields to description in language. We might call this the principle of minimal tidiness. The other is a certain openness. Not everything must be firmly fixed in a way which would make it impossible for agents to be free in the perfectly ordinary sense that they can sometimes do what they want to do, and in which the choice they make makes a difference to the world. This, as we shall see, is rather far from what might be called “indeterminateness,” and so I prefer the term openness.

Before we speculate as to how these conditions might be met, it will be as well to see what we might need for agency. For though we could conduct the enquiries separately and allow one to follow the other, such a procedure would be too uneconomical for a short paper.

## **MORE IDEAS ABOUT AGENTS**

About agents the questions are somewhat different. Surely agents must be continuants. But what is their relation to the world? I have already drawn your attention to the logical tension which such ideas generate. It is because we have human bodies that it seems perfectly natural to us that we should be able to raise our arms when we want to. Yet agents and the objects in the world seem very different kinds of things.

Are agents, then, to be conceived as what one might call naturally disembodied spirits? Or are they to be conceived as whatever it is that animates things which can be animated – like human bodies. If the latter, is there an implied duality to the nature of the body? Though the “philosophy of the body” has had a certain vogue in France, it rarely appears in the English-speaking world as a separate topic like the philosophy of mind. Yet there are questions about it which are very pressing. There are people, of course, who think that we have two bodies, the normal one which doctors fix and policemen arrest, and an astral body which is quite independent of it. But, though such notions play some part in what are charmingly called “New Age

religions”, they are perhaps not easy to recommend to philosophers. For if we have two bodies, the relation between them is going to be problematic. It may be easier to hold, with St. Paul, that in the end we shall have different and better bodies, but this, too, raises some questions about personal identity. It may well be better for some of us if we are confused with someone else on the final day of judgement, but it is as well to hold a theory which will make it possible for God to know who is who. We need therefore some way of putting together two notions – the body which figures in physiological and physical explanations and the body which figures in our accounts of the doings of agents.

## **THE CENTRALITY OF COMPLEX PROPERTIES AND PREDICATES**

The answer to the difficulty has to be found in a universe some of whose properties are complex. That is, if the correct description of the world does not consist of properties designatable as P, Q, R, S, and so on, but rather, in some cases at least, of properties designatable as  $P \vee Q$  or even of  $P \vee Q \vee R$  and, of course, as much more sophisticated complexities, then we have a world which has the kind of structure to which ordinary scientific laws can apply and yet which is open to the actions of agents.

Our scientific laws in any case are probabilistic. But if the world consists of simple predicates then there is a sense in which this reliance on probability is the result of our own ignorance, for everything is either P or not-P. If, on the contrary, complex predicates really characterize the world then its description includes options and there is no reason as to why agents should not make a difference to it in a straightforward way.

It is important to be as clear as one can about this vexed subject. What it is to be free has been well defined by Sir Alfred Ayer:

To say that I could have acted otherwise is to say, first, that I would have acted otherwise had I so chosen; secondly that my action was voluntary in the sense in which the actions, say, of a kleptomaniac are not; and thirdly that nobody compelled me to choose as I did...

If more than this seems to be required it is, I think, because the use of the very word ‘determinism’ is in some degree misleading. For it tends to suggest that one event is in the power of another, whereas the truth is that they are merely factually coordinated.<sup>9</sup>

That is to say, there can be explanations for events in circumstances in which one event is not in fact, literally, in the power of another, though they are coordinated. The complex options of the world in which we live suggest that when I decide to raise my arm, it goes up. Other things also happen – nerves send signals, muscles move and so on, but this is because there is a package of options which, once activated, work together.

Yet our ability to say this does depend on our ability to understand the nature of complex predicates and on the possibility that we might accept arguments in favour of them. D.H. Mellor has argued that there cannot be “complex properties like  $P$ ,  $P \vee Q$  and  $P \& Q$ .”<sup>10</sup> Such compounds apparently consist of one or more properties which are in some sense “simple,” together with a logical connective like “and,” “or,” and “not.”

Mellor’s argument, developed from F.P. Ramsey,<sup>11</sup> is that, if there were such properties and they were of the form which at first we would expect, we would end with a contradiction. Suppose we take not- $P$ ,  $P$  or  $Q$ , and  $P$  and  $Q$  and regard them as properties in themselves so that we can call them  $U$ ,  $V$ , and  $W$ .

Let me state Mellor’s argument this way: We cannot make any one of the complex properties into a single property unless the single property somehow amounts to something which can be distinguished from the simple sum of the two properties we started with. We can start with  $P$ ,  $Q$ , and the logical connective “or.” If we insist on the combination without claiming that anything exists other than the two original properties and the logical connective, then we both claim the two are identical in that one is equal to the other, and that they are different in that they have distinct properties. If, by contrast, we claim that there is something which is not one of the two original properties and not the logical connective, we seem to undermine the whole point of our original claim. For now “not- $P$ ” is not equal to  $U$ . “ $P$  or  $Q$ ” is not equal to  $V$ . “ $P$  and  $Q$ ” is not equal to  $W$ .

On the face of it, we need more information. Our interest is most strongly in the possibility of complex predicates of the form “ $P$  or  $Q$ .” But complex predicates like “not- $P$ ” and “ $P$  and  $Q$ ” must also be of interest to us. For, of course, there is a suggestion, if we say “ $P$  or  $Q$ ,” that we mean “If  $P$ , then not- $Q$ ” and “ $P$  or  $Q$ ” surely precludes “ $P$  and  $Q$ .”

It may be simplest to start with “not- $P$ .” One can see right away that “not- $P$ ” is ambiguous. Is it the absence of  $P$ ? Then it is not another property,  $Q$ , for, if  $Q$  is a property, it cannot be merely the absence of a property. Not having a certain property is itself a property, but if the property something does not have is  $P$ , then not having it is not “having not- $P$ ,” but rather having a compound property, the property of being something or other (being something which possesses a property) and the property of having a certain

positive characteristic. This characteristic is that of having one of those properties which are lists of the properties of things which exist and which do not include P. But “P” does not actually figure in this designation at all, though its absence does.

Is “not-P” itself a positive property? It might be the property of lacking P or the property of excluding P. If something lacks P the suggestion is that it would normally have P or even that it ought to have been P. If it excludes P then the suggestion is that it has some other properties which preclude or are incompatible with P. Obviously, in these cases the property is not merely “not-P.” It is much more than a property composed of P and a negation sign. And “not-P” does seem to represent an exclusion, just as “P or Q” seems to represent something new, an option, and “P and Q” represents a possible state of affairs which is a real conjunction.

The suggestion, naturally, is that the problem is one of relations, and that the cases we have been talking about really are cases in which relations make a difference to their terms. It will surprise no one to learn that, though Professor Mellor does not mention it, Ramsey’s original argument actually begins with a discussion of the problem of relations. If we follow it we may see quite quickly what is at issue.

Ramsey began by addressing the general problem of relations. Relations – at least those that interested Ramsey – can be expressed in the form “ $a R b$ ,” where  $a$  and  $b$  are the terms to be related and R is the relation which holds between them. Obviously, “P or Q” is a case of “ $a R b$ .”

F.H. Bradley had argued that such expressions are absurd.<sup>12</sup> For if  $a$  and  $b$  are taken to be distinct, and the relation is taken to be a third thing, then we need other relations to complete the structure – we need a relation between R and  $a$  and another between R and  $b$ . This process could go on forever without ever actually getting the terms related. But if we suppose that R is attached to  $a$  (so as to make  $aR$ ), then we need to know how  $aR$  is related to  $b$ . The same result follows if R is attached to  $b$  to make  $Rb$ . If there is only one quality  $aRb$  then there is no relation. Ramsey was addressing the proposed solution, which claimed that  $aRb$  represented one quality but a complex one, and urging that this cannot work since, really, the notion of a complex property only disguises the problem. The way in which it disguises the problem is put by suggesting that the complex property  $a-R-b$  is such that the “ $a$ ” is not identical with the  $a$  of “ $a R b$ ” and with the  $a$  of  $aRb$ . And this became the basis of Professor Mellor’s argument.

But this reminds us that the problem here has often been thought to be the very essence of Bradley’s philosophy. The problem is essentially that, in the terms chosen by Bradley and carried on by Ramsey, the idea of a relation is anomalous. Relations are not qualities or properties in the sense required.

Yet there seems an evident solution: If the world is to contain complex properties they must be relational properties, and, indeed, the solution to Bradley's and the other dilemmas would seem to be to abandon the notion of relation in this sense in favour of some notion of relational property. Such a notion, if properly constructed and understood, will enable us, I shall argue, to dispose of the problem. This will undermine the Ramsey–Mellor reduction and enable us to have real complex properties.

We are familiar with relational properties such as brotherhood – a property which requires for its instantiation that there should be two male persons who have parents in common. The property is obviously complex, though it can be analyzed into a cluster of properties. If George and Sam have two parents in common, then it follows inevitably that they are brothers. But the analysis does not simply result in a collection of properties joined by certain logical connectives, and this should give us pause. Brotherhood is a complex property the possession of which makes a difference to its possessors. In a number of different senses, Sam could not be the same person if he were not George's brother. He would, for instance, have to have had parents who were not George's, and, then, if he were a brother at all, his brotherhood would have been significantly different.

This example can be generalized: It follows necessarily from having certain properties that one is a brother and therefore that brotherhood is one of one's properties. There are not qualities somehow hanging about waiting to make brothers. The qualities required and the relational property go together inevitably. The problem comes from conceptualizing relations as though they were like the related qualities. One can regard properties like "being to the left of *a*" or "being greater than *b*" as we regard brotherhood. Suppose there is a lion in the zoo and a tiger in a cage to its left. Now we have a tiger and a lion and a relation "to the left of." The picture of these as distinct properties – some tigerhood, some lionhood and a little leftness which helps to tie them together as a bit of string does – is one which one might imagine from F.H. Bradley's formulation or, for that matter, from F.P. Ramsey's statement of the problem. Such a picture perhaps has its roots first in the notion that spatial relations are a good model of all relations, and then in the notion that space is a kind of empty bucket in which things are stretched out, and held in place by various "relations." But, of course – quite apart from the other grounds that there are for such a position – it seems much more reasonable to think of space as defined by the objects in it. In that case the sort of thing which lionhood is requires some space for its expression. The lion and tiger cannot normally occupy the same space (unless one eats the other and even then the molecules are presumably ordered in a way which makes this statement somewhat doubtful), and each defines a

space just as being born of the same parents defines a family relationship. It follows that, if there are lions and tigers, then one of them will, if not partially digested, be, if not to the left or the right of the other, then above or below the other, or both. It seems even simpler in the case of “being greater than,” at least where “greatness” has a quantitative sense. Seven is “greater than” five precisely because of its place in the series of integers and because of the kinds of entities which integers are. It would be absurd to say that the number which occupied the second place after 5 was smaller than five. Where no such quantitative sense of “greater than” is intended, the result may be different. But this is instructive as well. Suppose that we say that Ruggiero Ricci is a greater violinist than Jack Benny. If we think that this is merely a subjective judgement then, indeed, the relation does not follow from any description of either violinist. In that case we might well say that no “real” relation between them is designated by “greater than.” But if we think that the meaning is “objective,” then, of course, it must specify some actual property of each violinist. Thus, if I am a Platonist, I will assert that the relation between things is determined, in the end, by their relation to the form of the good, and it is incumbent upon me to show how this is so. If I am not, the “real” relations must be determined in some other way.

The instantiation of any one property determines the form of at least one other property unless there are or could be unipropertyed entities in the world. That is, if anything has two properties or more, then the two properties must be ordered so as to make up the thing. If there could be possible entities with only one property, then there might be something – a possible unipropertyed entity – with no property which determined any other property. But even this would depend on the possibility that a unipropertyed entity could exist without having a property which determined the structure of any other properties. And this seems doubtful. But there cannot be unipropertyed entities, for an instance of a property requires some quantity in which it expresses itself, some place in which it is expressed, or analogously, some context for it. Even if there were nothing but redness in the universe, there would be *unending* redness. If there is some property which can be anywhere at any time at all it requires to be expressed in a world which has a variety of times and places. A property might be eternal, ubiquitous, and without limit – as it is sometimes said that the property of being God is – but all this demands an elaborate context in which to be expressed. The only exception, evidently, would be the property of being an entity which is inexpressible, the property of being a thing with no possible expression in any possible world. But this is surely a handy definition of nothing and therefore a handy definition of not being a property, either.

Thus in principle we can express relations *as* relational properties and must, indeed, generally do so or be able to do so unless we want, in the end, to face some such muddle as the one which is usually ascribed to Bradley.<sup>13</sup> We must be sure, though, that we understand what we are saying. H.W.B. Joseph, looking at the germ of the same suggestion in Leibniz, said that relational properties did not solve the problem at all.<sup>14</sup> For we would still have to relate the relational properties to one another and to their subject. And the difficulty, he thought, was not merely the somewhat curious Bradleyan one about how abstract entities like “relations” could be joined to one another. Rather, it seemed to him that when, say, my dog beats your dog in a race, what is related is not the dogs but the velocity of the dogs, and attempts to introduce relational properties raise problems about how velocities are related to dogs. If my dog is “faster than yours” its speediness is not related to it as its ears are, and the idea of a relational property may muddle this situation. The answer is that the solution only works for properties which form organic wholes with the nonrelational properties – i.e., relational properties. Such properties are *analogs* of internal relations. They must be “internal” in the sense that something which possesses them is genuinely different because it possesses them. If there are other relational properties they must be arbitrary. Thus one can ask whether “brotherhood” is one sort of relational property or the other. And one can hardly think that brothers would be just the same if they were not brothers. But when Mr. Blair says that Britain is “cool Britannia” we must suppose that Britain would be just the same if it did not have this curious property. There is only a name involved.

Clusters of properties which are organic in the sense that brotherhood is and “coolness” is not have to be genuine unities, and their analyses into properties must not destroy that unity. We must not think of our analysis as producing a collection of distinct things. We have a single property – perhaps the property of being a dog’s life – which is expressed through a variety of relational properties. When we talk about two dogs and a dog race, then we postulate a different unity and the relational property of being “fastest dog in the pair” applies only within that unity. The world of objects if it can be talked about at all as a whole must be talked about as such a unity. Final distinctions do not appear on that side of the divide. If there are really distinct entities they are agents who express themselves through the structure of the world and if they can exist it must be because the unity of the world really does include complex properties which are alternands.

## THE DELINEATION OF COMPLEXITY

This theory of relational properties which are internal now allows us to have “P or Q” in a way which avoids Mellor’s objection. The reason that “P or Q” did not appear to be either identical or different from the complex property which Mellor calls “U” is now obvious. “P or Q” is not identical to U because there are now relational properties like the property of being a genuine option which are not given by the original specifications. But it is not something which miraculously appears as a new property other than “U” because these new relational properties are just the necessary consequences of bringing “P,” “Q,” and the logical “or” together.

A combination of simple properties and logical connectives is not enough to explain the complexity of the predicate they produce. For, if it were, we could perform the analysis proposed by Ramsey. That is, we would have only simple relations and logical connections. But we cannot do so because the analysis leaves us without anything which actually succeeds in producing a relation and I take it that it is a given that there are relational situations in the world – that some things are to the left of others, are bigger than others, are events which are later than others and so forth, even though some of these states of affairs (like being later than) may well not be quite what they seem to be.

It would seem, therefore, that the clue to the matter is just this: Sometimes properties with two or more components are made up of simple properties and logical connectives such that the properties and/or the logical connectives remain unchanged when the situation is dissolved, and sometimes there is more to it than this. Such designated unities are not organic wholes. That is to say, the properties are arbitrarily assigned to them. This is not to say that such entities are of no significance. It is possible that quite a bit of science consists of the delineation of complexes which only figure in theories because it is useful to talk about them this way. But I suppose that if, as is generally hoped, sciences like physics and chemistry actually describe the world, references to these pragmatic entities will be replaced by references to entities which are genuine unities. But there is a sense in which only the whole physical universe could meet this standard, and the sub-entities to which we refer have status because they can be understood as components of the whole. The theories which we have are likely to contain pragmatic elements.



## UNDERSTANDING A UNIVERSE WITH COMPLEX PREDICATES

How are we to conceive the components of a universe with complex predicates? Complex predicates of the form “P or Q” do not, evidently, figure as the essences of substances in the sense of bearers of properties which are continuing entities undergoing changes, influencing one another, and constituting a kind of basic furniture of the universe. Nor are they events. They are just what their logical structure suggests: Patterns of properties awaiting instantiation. They have to form, as I said, a unity, but it need not be the perfectly seamless unity of Bradley’s all-absorbing Absolute. It can be an interlocking set of properties and relational properties which depend for their form on one another. The argument is that when the lion is to the left of the tiger we are not facing absolutely distinct things. We do not have some space, a lion, a tiger, and an ordering of them, but a set of properties each of which determines its neighbour.

To be something or other in such a universe is simply to be an instantiation of some property or set of properties. Together they are the universe. As in Bradley’s universe, one can say that there is only one ultimate subject, so that all properties are properties of the universe (and we do not have to predicate all properties of one another in a way which leads to absurdity), but this universe is simply an instance of the complex property of being a universe.

Instead of the seamless unity of Bradley’s universe, we have something like the physical side of the universe described in Bernard Bosanquet’s *The Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*<sup>15</sup> – something very like it, indeed, though, as we shall see there may be one significant difference. Physics has taught us to accept the interrelational participation of everything in one system, and chaos theory reminds us that a butterfly flapping its wings in Boston can cause a tornado in Ohio. More prosaically, we know that if the earth were a little nearer to or just a little farther from the sun, life as we know it would likely be impossible unless, perchance there had developed an equally unlikely phenomenon such as the ice sheets which may keep some of the moons of the distant planets warm.

It is an interlocking world, not the world of absolutely discrete things nor the world of Bradley’s seamless unity, which we have reason to suppose that we inhabit, anyhow. The world of contemporary physics is a world of forces and fields governed by general laws expressed as mathematical formulae which in turn are particular instances of logical formulae. The simple world of hard lumps of matter, beloved of the Greek atomists and perhaps of 19<sup>th</sup> century chemists, is long gone, although there are many cases in which we

can optionally view phenomena such as light either as streams of particles or as fields.

Indeed this world always has options for interpretation. Philosophers have long been sceptical of the old distinction between the ordinary world of tables, chairs, donkeys and people and the sophisticated world described in the physics of sub-atomic particles. Both worlds are real. But each is an interpretation of the presented data in the light of theories, linguistic customs, and the need for shared experience. They are two readings of the same thing, and some reading is a necessary part of any claim to knowledge. The things themselves are not, however, something over and above the interpretations. They are the sorts of things which are expressed through interpretations. This perhaps is the difference from Bosanquet's universe: Bosanquet's universe seems more likely to have one single correct interpretation, though this is not certain.

Furthermore we are now actually aware that it is not just in quantum mechanics and economics that knowing something changes it. All knowing makes a difference. The role of the agent therefore becomes clearer.

## **HOW AGENTS FIGURE IN SUCH A UNIVERSE**

Agents are not extraneous to such worlds. To talk of any world is to talk of some interpretation of it. We must be careful about this. To say such a thing is not to say that there is a "subjective" element in the sense that anyone's view of physics might be as good as anyone else's. A scientific opinion is precisely one which, ideally, any educated person, armed with the same data, the same rules of interpretation, and the same idea of the science concerned, say physics or chemistry, would come to. Since there are many variables and many unknowns, there is, of course, room for disagreement. Physicists and chemists do not quite see thermodynamics the same way, but that is not because one is right and the other is wrong.

The activity of agents is, in any case, necessary to the practice of science itself. Talk of "controlled" experiment is not just loose talk. The practitioner in many cases must, indeed, be able to exercise an influence on the environment if the results are to have any value.

The universe I have been describing permits such activities because it, indeed, has options built into it. But there is more to it than this. Such a universe needs agents not just in the sense that it is the kind of thing which stands open to investigation and interpretation but in the sense that something must explain the options which really get actualized.

The laws of the universe depend upon its having the options that it does indeed have. They cannot explain which options are exercised or, indeed, that any options get exercised at all.

This opens questions about the way in which agency is involved in the ultimate order of the universe. It is tempting to use this model to extrapolate at once to a rather traditional kind of natural theology, and that may well be a sound strategy. Yet we must be careful. For in the case of agents we know well that the relation between agency and the world, as I said at the beginning, is very special.

I have a body and it responds naturally to what I decide. Yet even here we must beware. It is tempting to suggest that each of us has a “will” which is like a pool cue with which we can push things around. But a moment’s thought rules this out and makes the vehement denials of philosophers like Spinoza who suggest that there is no such a thing as the will quite intelligible. If the will is another thing like an arm, though one which pushes more things around, it in turn will need an explanation.

## **THE WILL AND THE BOUNDARIES OF EXPERIENCE**

Wittgenstein wrote in his *Notebooks 1916–1918* and again in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that the ideas of person and self occur as the idea of a boundary, and the will is to be understood in the light of this boundary. “I do not find myself in the world as an object.”<sup>16</sup> Russell, who was his teacher though not always his admirer, also noticed that the “I” is always found at the centre of experience.<sup>17</sup> These boundaries and centres seem to define our worlds.

Wittgenstein insisted that “The philosophical ‘I’ is not the human being, not the human body or the human soul, but the metaphysical subject, the boundary (not a part) of the world.”<sup>18</sup> In a sense, the world can be seen, as Wittgenstein suggests, as the outcome of the boundary setting. He expressed doubts about the thinking subject, for it must be expressed in its thought, but he insisted that “the willing subject exists.”<sup>19</sup>

When we turn our attention from one thing to another we establish boundaries for our experience. There is always a shifting horizon. But we also know that our boundary setting does not fix terms for all of the boundaries, for our knowledge opens to us an objective or at least intersubjective world. Wittgenstein also says: “That is why we have the feeling of being dependent on an alien will... we are in a certain sense dependent and what we are dependent on we can call God.”<sup>20</sup> But he adds, importantly for our purposes, “To believe in a God means to see that the facts

of the world are not the end of the matter.” Such a God might even enter into our experience. In an echo of John Henry Newman, Wittgenstein says “Conscience is the voice of God.”<sup>21</sup> He adds “Good and evil only enter through the subject. And the subject is not part of the world, but a boundary of the world.”<sup>22</sup> Suppose we see the universe in these terms. Then values always express themselves in the way that the boundary is set, in the limits of being. If I will it to move, my experience acquires new boundaries. My will does not manifest itself as a thing in the world. It never appears as the preferred explanation of the way in which the elements in the world fit together.

Within the world, there are always explanations of a different sort. It is necessary, as we saw, to explain that when I will to move my arm I do not will to move each muscle in turn but only to be in that position from which my arm stands in a certain relation to the events. Within the framework of my experience this entails that all the appropriate objects be comprehensible as properties of a certain system. They must have explanations which are independent of my will.

Yet these explanations do not entail, as such, anything about the location of the centre of my experience. These two ways of talking about causality are not in any evident way in conflict with one another. We may surmise from this that, though there is always a natural order to things in the universe, events depend upon the framework from which they appear. Indeed, certain features are missing, in any case, from the purely physical framework. As Sir Fred Hoyle remarks there is no present in physics in the sense of a privileged moment of time from which everything else is ordered.<sup>23</sup>

## **COULD ANYTHING MOVE A “WILL”?**

What could move such a will? Pure caprice? But rational expectation is not so badly met as to suggest a wholly capricious universe. One’s will could not be moved by another thing, but only by a value. Indeed, it is only, I suppose, when our wills are moved by values that we are prepared to go so far as to say that we really did will an action. Otherwise we say we were pushed or moved by our glands or by the janglings of our ganglia. The two ideas seem to go together in a natural way, so it makes sense to say that my will is moved by my values in a way in which it does not so easily make sense to say that the world, purely and simply, is moved by values. For we understand that a will is, also, not a thing and, if we follow Wittgenstein’s suggestion, it is not in the world, either.

It was not Wittgenstein's purpose to explore the metaphysical implications of these remarks and it is widely accepted that he thought that such explorations must end in some kind of intellectual disaster. Yet there is a clear sense in which there is a mystical element behind the seemingly dry and aphoristic sayings of the *Tractatus* and the *Notebooks* alike. The question raised is one of finitude and infinitude.

Wittgenstein himself was uncertain about the infinite when he wrote the *Notebooks* and the section of the *Tractatus* which are relevant here. He tended to be more sceptical about it later. A little reflection makes clear however that, if the "will" and the "I" are not things in the world, they are not mere finite entities at all. To be finite is exactly to have a place in the world which is determinate.

## THE DISJUNCTIVE TRANSCENDENTALS

The world in addition to having complex predicates involving alternands as part of its actual description, also has what Duns Scotus called disjunctive transcendentals. It is not merely the case that everything is either finite or infinite. It is also the case that one cannot have one without the other. The infinite if it is not expressed in the finite is wholly formless and unintelligible. But the finite if not informed by the infinite is equally unintelligible.

For if the finite universe really does have complex alternands among its descriptions, something must decide between them when the time comes. It cannot be merely another finite thing if the alternands are genuinely a part of reality and not self-determining. It is *possible* that the universe contains material objects like stars and balls of burning gas. It is not *necessary*. Once we have such things physical laws determine what will happen to them – within the limits of what can be determined. But they do not determine that there should be such things in the first place.

We certainly live in a chancy universe. But not all the structure of the real can be ascribed to chance. If there are agents, then there have to be real choices. That there "real chances" for one thing or another to happen cannot itself be a fact ascribed to chance. Any such universe will have some bias if the possibilities are actually discrete and determinate and open to calculation (and this is what having a real choice means.)

A universe of pure chance is one in which nothing is inherently more likely than not. Thus, given discrete and determinate probabilities, if such a universe has one possibility in it, the probability of that state of affairs will be one half. If it has two possibilities, the probability that both of them will

occur will be  $\frac{1}{2}$  multiplied by  $\frac{1}{2}$  – or  $\frac{1}{4}$ . The probability that at least one will occur, however, is  $\frac{1}{2}$  plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  – or 1. If the universe has three possibilities, the probability that at least one will occur is, alas,  $\frac{1}{2}$  plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  – or 1 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  – and that is a contradiction. Every possible event must have a probability which lies between zero and 1. What this means is that every possible universe which has three or more possible states of affairs has some bias or other. Russell and Keynes noticed this “paradox.” Whitehead, I think, had it at least in the back of his mind when he insisted that every universe has some conceptual bias, a notion which was at the heart of his idea of the primordial nature of God. Not everything happens by chance but something must determine which of the infinity of alternands becomes a determinate event. Thus we see how natural it is to move from the model of agency that I have been arguing for to the notion of a theistic agency. But, as I said, we must have care.

## THE TENSIONS IN THEISM

Theists have always been involved in a basic tension. On the one hand, they have always wanted to keep God as separate and distinct from the world as possible. On the other hand, they have naturally wanted to link God to the world in a way which allows him to figure both in explanations of the world and in human life.

The model of agency that I have been talking about makes it clear that, as agents, there must be some medium through which we express ourselves. In our case, it is the human body. Live human bodies respond to the decisions of the agent. Dead ones do not. Nothing else normally responds to the decisions of the agent unless it is connected to the body by some causal link, like the accelerator of your automobile or the fuse of a stick of dynamite. It is fair to say that we have gradually connected much of the universe to the system of human agency, and this of course, gives us good ground to fear for the future of the universe.

If there is a God, God also can only act in a world. I suppose that when people say that God created the world *ex nihilo* they may well mean that God determined which of the logically possible alternands should exist. For the way that our agency works is, of course, that we are free when we are able to be clearly aware of possibilities which are open and that our freedom is dependent on the subset of actual possibilities of which we are actually aware. There must be possibilities and we must be aware of them. Thomas Aquinas insisted that God can only do what is logically possible. If so, God chooses from the real possibilities. He understood, too, that a universe which

includes an agent must include real choices. In this case God is aware of all of them. On such a view we function as sub-agents because God acts so as to create beings like us who have access to specific sets of possibilities. On this view, too, the dreadful issue of predestination simply does not arise. God has determined that some possibilities are open. Whether such a deity then knows or only guesses which ones we will choose is a matter of the finely tuned definitions of what it is to “know,” and a question of the sense in which alternands are known. These issues need not detain us here.

What must worry us is the status of the agent as the counterpart of the finite structure it faces. Are God and human agents substances? It depends of course, on just what one means. The traditional definitions of substance have usually contained a number of elements. Aristotle’s substances were linguistic subjects, the bearers of predicates. Predicates themselves designated “secondary substances.” All sorts of difficult questions arose, such as whether or not being itself was substance or something else, but the idea was fairly clear. Tradition also suggests that substances are more or less independent. In the extreme version of this notion Descartes believed that there was only one ultimate substance, God, because only God depended on nothing else.

We must, it seems to me, follow William Temple and see that there is no such thing as simple independence or dependence among agents: The “universe is necessary to God. Being God He must create.”<sup>24</sup> This would be true, even if, as Temple thought, apart from God the universe would not exist as a determinate entity, though God would still exist without the determinate universe.

What is at least clear in the system I have been entertaining is that the world of states of affairs can be conceived simply as a collection of instances of properties, some of which are relational properties. But the agents who are expressed through the choice of possibilities are more than this, they are genuine continuants. Furthermore, they are either infinite or tinged with infinity. Though it is possible that one of these agents could occupy a special position, none of these agents can be truly infinite in, as it were, all dimensions, since to be so is to be limited only by the possibilities which define the objective world. Once there is more than one agent every agent’s choice will be related to those of the others. A God would have to act in and through us with respect to some choices and the whole would have to be construed as a community, though one agent might share in the subjectivity of all the others.

*Perhaps* this is why from an early date Christians conceived the deity in Trinitarian terms and *perhaps* this is the meaning of God becoming man, but this is not the place for intricate theological speculation. Philosophically,

most likely the relation of a God to the agents is the relation of a concrete universal.

Agents are not just collections of properties but they are not things in the world. The world does not contain stones, oceans, mountains, human bodies *and* agents. To say something like this would be to make an obvious category mistake.

Agents rather are expressed through events and bodies. They are like universals in that they transcend the particulars through which they are expressed, but they are “concrete” universals in that their nature is to be found in the full range of these expressions. So, if there is an originating and ordering agency, it must be expressed through the whole community of agents, and each agent can only grasp his or her own nature through an understanding of the others.

Indeed, the notion of an originating agency must be understood in the light of the fact that all the agents are tinged with infinity in the sense that their activities are not exhaustively describable. They are infinite from the perspective of their openness to a range of possibilities. You and I can always do one more thing – there is no limit to the number of things we can do and no limit to the range of things we can know.

Yet we are also limited. We know that experience extends beyond our personal immediate experience in two dimensions. The successor to any experience is always another experience in the same sense that the successor to each integer is another integer. But it also true that we can always probe the depth of our experience further. One can always experience more than has been experienced. Our experience is a kind of ocean in which we are fish. The passion for limiting it to our sensory inputs is difficult to explain. Our imaginings are as Coleridge insisted not mere fancies. Poetic experience does not merely juxtapose, it exposes what we were not aware of before. Oddest of all, perhaps, history does not just replay the experiences of the dead, it brings to light things of which they were never fully aware, even when what is exposed are events in their own minds. It is the sense that we swim in a greater ocean of experience which surely underlies and makes sense of the passion for theistic hypotheses, even if it is the logic of the case which sustains such hypotheses. But this ocean is itself evidently a community.

Thus, again, we see how logic and experience mix to generate a metaphysical system. Such systems are full of thorny problems, but the process of their generation is surely neither irrational, nor divorced from our common sense concerns, nor unsusceptible to rational improvement.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Willard van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> I have explored this idea at length in *The Rational and the Real*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> This has been noticed by philosophers from Kant to Whitrow. See, G.J. Whitrow, *The Structure and Evolution of the Universe*, New York: Harper, 1959, pp. 199–202.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Nagel, “Subjective and Objective,” *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. John Rajchman and Cornell West, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 31–48.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Magill, *Freedom and Experience, Self-Determination Without Illusions*, London: Macmillan, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> John Thorp, *Free Will: A Defence Against Neurophysiological Determinism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980. Thorp’s account must owe something to A.I. Melden’s *Free Action*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, pp. 18–25. Both capitalize on some hints in Wittgenstein. See Anthony Quinton, “Wittgenstein,” *From Wodehouse to Wittgenstein*, Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1998, pp. 335–356.

<sup>7</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (originally, London: Macmillan, 1929), re-edited New York: Free Press, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1938, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> A.J. Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity,” *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson, Oxford: The University Press, 1982, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> D.H. Mellor, *Matters of Metaphysics*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1991, p. 179. The symbol “v” designates the logical “or” while “&” designates logical conjunction. In his examples, Mellor uses “V” as the name of a property. This may be confusing since “v” and “V” are symbols of radically different logical types, but to keep the quotations unchanged, I have left this possible ambiguity unchanged.

<sup>11</sup> F.P. Ramsey “Universals,” *Philosophical Papers*, ed. D.H. Mellor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 14–15.

<sup>12</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930, Chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>13</sup> In fact the ascription is probably unfair because Bradley was evidently working his way to some sort of dialectic, perhaps like the one which I shall ascribe to Duns Scotus as our discussion unfolds.

<sup>14</sup> H.W.B. Joseph, *Some Problems in Ethics*, London: Oxford University Press, 1931, pp. 73–75.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *The Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*, London: Macmillan, 1921, esp. Ch. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1918*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979, p. 82e. Mostafa Faghfoury and I have tried to interpret some of Wittgenstein’s dark sayings in “Insight and Religion in Wittgenstein’s Philosophy,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 22 (1) (1984): 33–48.

<sup>17</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge, Its Scope and Limits*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948, pt. II, Ch. 4. See also pt. IV, Ch. 4, pp. 263–265. For a discussion see my paper “Russell, McTaggart and ‘I’,” *Idealistic Studies*, 9 (1979): 66–76.

<sup>18</sup> Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 82e.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80e.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74e.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74e, p. 75e.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79e. See also *Tractatus* 5.632.

<sup>23</sup> Fred Hoyle, *Man in the Universe*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1966, p. 32:

My difficulty with consciousness is that it forces on one a concept that lies outside physics, the concept of the present, the present moment of time. According to physics the events that constitute the physical world form a four-dimensional continuum, and physics does not permit us to attach any more significance to any (one) moment of time than to another. There is no such thing as the present moment in the motion of the Earth around the Sun.

<sup>24</sup> William Temple, *Christus Veritas*, London: Macmillan, 1924, p. 275.

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## **Chapter 10**

# **SPECULATIVE AND ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY, THEORIES OF EXISTENCE, AND THE GENERALIZATION OF THE MATHEMATICAL FUNCTION**

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## **THEORIES OF EXISTENCE**

Theories of existence come in two versions: strong or weak. While speculative philosophy characteristically defends a strong theory of existence, other kinds of philosophy – most notably empiricism, neo-pragmatism, and analytical philosophy – strenuously maintain a weak theory. So fundamental is the difference between strong and weak theories of existence to any account we give of the nature of things that, since at least the seventeenth century, the debate between them has lain at the very heart of philosophy. It is the dwarf in the machine, driving the conflicts and oppositions, and generating the immense proliferation of arguments and alternatives, which,

since Kant, have characterized modern philosophy and indeed modern culture in general. Without some understanding of what is at issue here, that nature of philosophy, and in particular the nature of speculative philosophy, will remain mysterious and inaccessible.

## THE WEAK THEORY OF EXISTENCE

Admittedly, to make existence central to philosophical debate, except as merely a matter of historical record, is contentious. For weak theorists characteristically regard existence as a notion about which there is little that can or should be said, except as a corrective to strong theories. In general, weak theorists follow Hume in treating existence as a given which is not further derivable or explicable. This is basically the position which Kant articulates in his theory of cognition when he makes existence a modality of empirical judgments. As far as cognition goes, Kant maintains that 'exists' is not a real but a non-determining predicate: affirmations of existence add nothing to the content of a concept, but simply posit an object corresponding to a concept. Because the Hume–Kant view of existence is nowadays usually stated in the form which Gottlob Frege, the founder of modern logic and analytical philosophy, gives it, a brief summary of some of the basic features of his position is relevant here.

Frege's fundamental idea is to generalize the mathematical function beyond mathematics and to use it as a model or analogue for the analysis of the logical structure of propositions. In a mathematical function such as  $(x)^2$ , the variable or sign of the argument is  $x$ , whereas the function itself – the schema or matrix – is the rest of the formula:  $( )^2$ . The schema explains what is going to be done; but nothing is done until something is put in the slot marked  $x$ , i.e. until the variable or sign of the argument is given its value. Until then, the function is 'incomplete' or 'unsatisfied' or 'unsaturated'; when the variable is given its value or argument, the function is 'complete' or 'saturated.' Depending on what the value of the variable is, either the function yields a sentence which is true (when, e.g., for the variable of the function  $(x)^2 = 6$ , the value 3 is substituted) or false (when any other value is supplied). The true and the false are the two correlative 'truth values' of a function, and they are understood as disjunctively related: all sentences are either true or false *simpliciter*.

In Frege's account of propositions, the subject in subject–predicate propositions has the status of the variable, while the predicate has the status of the function schema. This analysis gives rise to the so-called modern predicate. Subject–predicate sentences such as 'Socrates is human' are not to

be analyzed in the fashion of traditional logic as Subject: Socrates, Copula: is, Predicate: human. Rather, such sentences are to be analyzed as Subject: Socrates, Modern Predicate: is human, represented as  $Fa$ . Propositions, in short, are to be analyzed in terms of the logical structure of the function.

This approach to the nature of propositions is termed 'logical analysis.' Logical analysis has important technical advantages of various kinds, but its enormous philosophical implications are registered in the way Frege uses it to analyze existence statements. The basic point is that propositions can be hierarchically ordered according to the range of the values of the variables of their arguments. First-order propositions are those whose arguments are individual objects and which contain predicates such as '... is a horse.' Second-order propositions are those whose arguments are not individual objects but first-order propositions. Now, existence statements are statements which contain, explicitly or implicitly, either an 'existential quantifier' of the form 'there is ...' or 'something is ...' or a 'universal quantifier' of the form 'everything is ... .' Frege's claim is that statements such as 'There is (there exists) a horse' are second-order propositions which state of first-order propositions that they have actual objects falling under them.

On this analysis, statements of the form ' $x$  exists' are not, as one might ordinarily suppose, statements about  $x$  in the sense that they predicate existence of  $x$ . Existence is not a predicate of  $x$ , for  $x$  is not an individual object but a first-order class or kind. Indeed, on this analysis existence statements do not ascribe any predicate or property to individual objects at all. Instead, as has been shown, statements of the form ' $x$  exists' are second-order statements about the *term*  $x$ , the first-order class or kind  $x$ . That is, such statements say of a class or kind  $x$  that there are objects falling under it; or, to put it otherwise, they say about a certain *kind* of object that there are objects of that kind. Statements of the form ' $x$  exists' are thus to be interpreted as quantificational statements about the term  $x$ , to the effect that the term  $x$  refers to a class which is not empty but has instances or examples.

On this view, existence is exhaustively definable as the satisfaction or instantiation of the quantified variables of the proposition. To exist is to answer a description. Whether one is talking about prime numbers or about concrete entities, such as stones and people, statements of existence are defined in the same way: as saying that something (or everything) satisfies a description. In this respect, logical analysis can be regarded as putting a premium on rationality; for the existent is now through and through describable in terms of its predicates, with no mysterious residues.

There can be no doubt that the weak or quantificational theory of existence has some very attractive features. First, for example, weak theory gives a meaning to ' $x$  exists' such that a precisely corresponding meaning can

be given to 'x does not exist'; for statements of existence and non-existence alike can be analyzed as a matter of the quantification of the variable of the propositional function. Thus, for example, the statement 'mermaids do not exist' can be understood as a quantificational statement about the term or class 'mermaids', to the effect that such a term or class has no instances or objects falling under it. There is no danger on this analysis of construing statements such as 'mermaids do not exist' as having the contradictory form 'Something has being which does not belong to the class of being' or 'Something has being which is not.'

A second and more important advantage of quantificational existence is that it accounts for the distinction between concept and existence in a clear and straightforward fashion. Questions such as 'What is added to the possible when existence is asserted?', 'What is it about the object of a concept that is more than its definition?' or 'What is being as opposed to non-being?' are answered by the conceptually primitive notion of instantiation. Once again, there is no place for abstruse metaphysical speculation here. Indeed, it is evident that a quantificational analysis of existence is not properly a *theory* of existence at all. Existence is simply removed from the realm of reflection and replaced by an analysis of the logical structure of propositions. Hence the generic title, 'analytical philosophy.'

## **SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND THE SELF-EXPLANATORY**

Such claims do not, however, impress the strong theorists of existence, the speculative philosophers. For speculative philosophy holds that existence is much more than the silent, featureless pendant of logical-functional structure. Speculative philosophy denies the primitivity of the function, at least as that is usually understood, and thus it refuses to assimilate the 'is' of existence to the 'is' of mere instantiation. The reason for this resides in the basic differences between speculative and other kinds of philosophy. The first basic difference can be stated as follows.

All philosophical accounts of the nature of existence attempt to define it in terms of that which is incapable of further demonstration, that which is not further derivable, that which is ultimate in the order of analysis, over against which anything else can be shown to be derivable, partial, abstract or whatever. However, speculative philosophy maintains that the so-called ultimates of other kinds of philosophy are open to further inquiry and derivation. For speculative philosophy pushes philosophy's commitment to intellectual inquiry to its limits by asking whether or not whatever is claimed

to be ultimate can be understood to be *self-explanatory*. The self-explanatory, if there be such, is whatever may turn out to satisfy intellectual inquiry in that its description shows that its nature is not further demonstrable or derivable, in the sense that it carries all the reasons for itself in its own nature. In that sense, and in that sense only, can the self-explanatory – whatever it may be – legitimately be said to be ‘complete.’ Even so, that term has often been given a greatly expanded meaning in pre-modern speculative philosophy, where the completeness of the self-explanatory has traditionally been taken to mean that whatever is self-explanatory is also completely realized or completely actual in nature. This is what lies behind the standard speculative analyses of the nature of God, for example. As such well-known features of the speculative tradition can give rise to misunderstandings about the nature of the speculative search for the self-explanatory, the minimal requirements involved in undertaking the speculative project have to be carefully defined and delimited. This will help to indicate that, contrary to the usual prejudices of many weak theorists, the initial commitments of the speculative enterprise are quite unexceptionable.

First, the speculative search for the self-explanatory does not carry with it any assumptions about the scope of the principle of sufficient reason (the principle that *Nihil est sine rationem* [nothing is without a reason]). On the contrary, the speculative search for the self-explanatory is an attempt to determine the scope of the principle of sufficient reason. The speculative project is not based on or justified by the principle of sufficient reason, but is an inquiry into the status or range of application of that principle. The speculative project thus turns the principle of sufficient reason into the principle of experimental reason, for it inquires just how far reason can go in the analysis of the ultimate. The speculative project has the status of an ideal experiment, at the outset of which there is no knowledge in advance of what the self-explanatory may be. Indeed, the speculative project assumes neither that there is such a thing as the self-explanatory, nor that the self-explanatory must itself have the nature of a reason; for that which provides reasons is not necessarily itself a reason.

Secondly, the speculative search for the self-explanatory is not to be conflated with questions such as ‘Why is there anything at all?’, or ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’, at least as they are sometimes construed. That is, the speculative search for the self-explanatory does not depend upon the debatable claim that nothingness is conceivable, nor upon the even more contentious claim that nothingness is in some way prior to the fact that there is something, so the fact that there is something is held to need a special kind of explanation. The speculative project does not deny the priority of the actual, either in respect of the possible or as the starting point



of all inquiry. Rather, it is to attempt to discover just how far reflection can go in the analysis of the actual. Furthermore, the speculative project is not at the outset to be understood as a causal investigation; that is, an investigation into the nature of the real as a matter of causal activity in the sense of productive causality, efficient or final. For the self-explanatory, if there be such, is that which defines the nature of reasons, causes, and their relation. Thus the speculative project does no more in the first instance than inquire as to the possibility of a description of the ultimate in terms of the self-explanatory. There is no assumption that the self-explanatory is necessarily a matter of productive causality or constitutes an explanation in terms of productive causes.

Thirdly, notice that the speculative project does not at the outset make any appeal to the logical analysis of existence statements. This is one of the traditional ways in which speculative philosophers have defended a strong theory of existence, arguing that the proper analysis of the 'is' of existence demonstrates that it is irreducible to the 'is' of instantiation – a claim which has been strongly resisted by weak theorists.<sup>1</sup> Yet whatever the merits of the arguments presented on both sides, it will become evident that the search for the self-explanatory can lead to a strong theory of existence which is defended on quite different grounds.

## **SPECULATIVE AND ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY: THE ACTIVITY DEBATE**

However, none of the points made so far on behalf of the speculative project need disturb the weak theorist. The fact is, speculative philosophy since Plato has maintained *activity* to be an essential element in the analysis of existence. This is the second basic difference between speculative and other kinds of philosophy. The speculative claim is that the search for a self-explanatory ultimate is only satisfied by defining existence primarily in terms of some principle of 'actualization', of 'active existence', over and above any kind of logical analysis. A strong theory of existence is thus a theory of the activity of actualization in which existence is held to be more than the instantiation of logical structure and to be irreducible to logical analysis. This is the crucial difference between speculative and analytical philosophy in particular.

Admittedly, it is now evident why speculative philosophers are unembarrassed by the fact that they cannot claim the convenience of giving to statements of existence and non-existence a precisely corresponding meaning. Whatever may suffice in more limited contexts of analysis, in the context of the strong view that existence is primarily a matter of the activity of

actualization (whatever it may be), true affirmative existential statements are only possible where there is active existence. It follows that negative existential statements register the lack, absence or privation of active existence in some respect. Active existence, in other words, is their ultimate basis. In speculative analysis, active existence is prior to existential quantification and is that which makes existential quantification possible. Thus speculative philosophers do not regard the weak or quantificational analysis of existence as having any final philosophical import.

Nevertheless, it is the appeal to a theory of active existence implied by the strong question which for weak theorists vitiates the speculative enterprise *tout court*. In support of this view they offer three main arguments, two positive and one negative. The positive arguments, which have been strenuously developed in analytical philosophy, defend the view that the generalization of the mathematical function renders speculative theories of activity redundant.

The first positive argument is directed at a claim implicit in much premodern speculative philosophy, and explicitly made by the late-nineteenth century idealist F.H. Bradley.<sup>2</sup> The claim is that no logical analysis of the concept of relations can explain the connectivity of relations, and that relations therefore require a further connective power which lies outside the realm of logical analysis. The claim is presented in the form of a regress argument: if there is a reason for the connectivity of relations, it must apparently be more than any relation, for, were it not, it would require some further reason for its connectivity, and so *ad infinitum*. To this the analytical philosopher has a ready reply: that the concept of a mathematical function is a concept of the intrinsic connectivity of relations in virtue of the very nature of a functional matrix or schema. To ask how relations relate, as do speculative philosophers such as F.H. Bradley, is mistakenly to view the concept of a relation as the concept of an abstract object or third term over and above its relata, rather than, with Frege, as the concept of a functional matrix or schema. Defined in terms of a functional matrix or schema, relations are structurally incomplete, partial objects which cannot occur without relata to complete them. They are, as such, intrinsically connective. In other words, once defined as functional matrices or incomplete objects, it is evident that relations are self-explanatory in respect of their connectivity and that there is no need to invoke any other principle as a third term or glue which holds together relations and relata, functions and values. That it is the very being of a function to have values is expressed by its variables.

The second positive argument is also based on the nature of the mathematical function. The mathematical function has a key feature: in contrast to the traditional concept of the genus, which neglects all specific

differences, a function represents a rule of connection which includes in its variables all the values for which it holds. To put this another way: a function is exhaustively explanatory of the values of its variables. What thus emerges from an analysis of the nature of the mathematical function is that it is self-explanatory both in respect of its connectivity and in respect of the nature of the values of its variables. On these issues, there is simply no need for any reference to an extra-logical activity – a point which has been very effectively exploited in the various generalizations of the mathematical function undertaken by analytical philosophers.

## THE GENERALIZATIONS OF THE FUNCTION

The power and range of the logical analysis of the function is indicated by the fact that, including Frege's, four basic types of generalization of the mathematical function have been developed in analytical philosophy. In all versions, the basic model is mathematics, where, given a particular function or rule, such as the successor operator  $n + 1$ , it is possible to derive any series of natural numbers simply by following the rule. The crucial claim is that in mathematics rule-following requires no reference to any special activity of synthesis or decision-making on the part of a directing subject, cognitive or otherwise, for the function is self-explanatory in respect of its connectivity and of its instantiations. The logical structure of the function is thus held to define a set of 'operations' which, because they are independent of any appeal to activity, constitute an 'automatic' or algorithmic 'process', as Wittgenstein graphically calls it.<sup>3</sup>

The four types of generalization of the mathematical function characteristic of analytical philosophy are different versions of what I shall generically call a theory of algorithmic 'process', or a theory of the 'algorithmic function', or 'algorism' for short. I use those terms in the largest sense (and independent of the particular interpretation Wittgenstein gives them) to mean that all reference to an extra-logical principle of activity is dispensed with, and that the relational structure of the function is held to provide an exhaustive explanation of its nature. The analytical generalization of the mathematical function is always at bottom a generalization of the mathematical function understood in one way or another as an algorithmic function, even though this fact is nowadays so much taken for granted as to be almost invisible.

There is first of all Frege's neo-Kantian generalization of the mathematical function, where the mathematical function defines the logical structure of the concept and is the primitive and underivable principle of

'thought.' The logical structure of the concept replaces all the complex machinery of Kant's analysis of the conditions of cognition, and, in particular, Kant's theory of the synthetic subject is relegated to the realm of psychology: meanings are intuitively grasped, determinate 'senses', and identity of reference is held to be accounted for by functional-logical structure. Secondly, Russell generalizes the mathematical function in an empiricist context as the 'propositional function.' Although, as in Frege, functional-logical structure is taken as primitive, reference or instantiation is not, and the propositional function is held to require a theory of reference based on the subject's sensory acquaintance with the world. The propositional function is here the cognitive rule whereby the objects of ordinary experience are logically constructed out of 'sense-data.' Thirdly, the later Wittgenstein extends the model of the function beyond cognition and generalizes the mathematical function as a theory of the nature of language and social practise or action. Just as following the rules of a game is what constitutes a game, so by following the rules of a language or social practise we constitute ourselves and our world. The Fregean dissolution of the cognitive, synthesizing subject is here extended to the realm of discourse and action. Once it is recognized that to understand a rule is to operate with it, and that the rule itself constitutes a decision-making procedure, there is no need to appeal to a principle of connection over and above the rule itself. Human subjects or persons are thus nothing else than the effects of those functional structures which define their behaviour. Finally, there is the most recent type of generalization of the mathematical function, which extends that notion to the realm of physical nature. All natural entities, including human beings, are exhaustively interpreted as the products of complex algorithmic processes. It is the business of natural science to define these algorithmic processes in terms of the laws of physics and of evolution, and they are presumably contingent in that they have themselves evolved out of antecedent algorithmic processes in the past history of the cosmos. This type of generalization can be called 'algorithmic naturalism.'<sup>4</sup>

Quine sums up the basic principle of functional-logical analysis in his well-known formula 'to be is to be the value of a variable.' For all forms of the generalization of the mathematical function, a more complete formulation might be: 'to be is to be the value of the variable of a function which, in one way or another, defines an algorithmic process that requires no reference to any principle of activity to explain its operations.' While it may well be the case that any given functional structure is an evolutionary or historical contingency, the claim is that the ultimacy of functional structure in general requires no further explanation; or, more precisely, that no further *reasons* can be given for its ultimacy.

## ACTIVITY AND INEFFABILITY

The nature of reasons is a central issue in the third main argument against the speculative appeal to activity. As presented by analytical philosophers, and indeed weak theorists in general, this third main argument is negative in character and can be called the objection from non-relationality. It is based on the fact that strong theorists have traditionally regarded relations as requiring a further principle of connection, and have defended this view in the form of a regress argument. To formulate the same point in functional-logical terms: if there is a reason beyond the relation of instantiation which is the reason for that relation, such a reason must apparently be more than a relation, for the relation of instantiation includes the instantiation of any relational expression. Thus, if there is a reason for the relation of instantiation beyond the fact of instantiation, that reason must apparently be non-relational or supra-relational in nature. The upshot of strong theory thus seems to be that whatever may be the reason for the connectivity of relations, it cannot itself be a relation and so must be non-relational or supra-relational.

This is why Hume, Kant, Frege and the algorithmic naturalists object to any attempt to define existence as more than matter of instantiation. They readily grant the intelligibility of strong questions such as ‘Why are there impressions?’, ‘Why are there transcendental conditions of cognition?’, ‘Why is there sometimes that which answers a description?’, or ‘Why is there functional structure in physical nature?’.<sup>5</sup> Yet they hold that any attempt to answer them is pointless. While no one claims that the algorithmic function, or any of its philosophical ancestors, is fully or strongly self-explanatory in the sense that it contains *all* the reasons for itself in its own nature, the fact is that reason or reflection operates in terms of relations, so non- or supra-relationality is beyond the grasp of reason or reflection. It would therefore seem that the speculative search for the self-explanatory inevitably ends up in the realm of the ineffable.

The ineffable is whatever at some point turns out to be describable only as that which cannot be rendered rationally intelligible. It is not rationally determinable, for it cannot be brought under a relational order or a rule. It follows that it is not through and through knowable or intelligible, for, even if it is usually claimed to be in some sense irreducibly given in experience, its nature is such that it cannot be understood – except as an irreducible given which is knowable only as that which cannot be understood. In consequence, even if there were a peculiar feature of experience which could not be subsumed to some version of the algorithmic function, to overstep the limits of reflection as defined by the function is to take reflection into realms where, apparently, it has no business to be. This is a conclusion which seems to be

borne out by the mystery or ineffability usually associated in the speculative tradition with principles of actualization, whether Plato's Good, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, the neoplatonic One, the transcendent Creator God, Spinoza's divine substance, the Kantian subject, the Idealist Absolute, Bergson's *durée* ('duration'), Peirce's boundless, primordial spontaneity, or Heidegger's *Ereignis* ('the event').

## THE STRATEGY OF GENERALIZATION

So powerful is the analytical critique of speculative philosophy, the only effective response the speculative philosopher can make to it is to scrutinize closely the nature of the function and its implications. To that end, like the logical analyst, the speculative philosopher can test the nature and significance of functional structure by generalizing it. And there is no better way to find out what the generalization of functional structure means than to undertake an unrestricted generalization of it: that is, to generalize functional structure over any identifiable entity, including concrete objects such as stones and people. This is something like what the algorithmic naturalist does. But, whereas the algorithmic naturalist usually understands herself to be generalizing over an ocean of naturalistically conceived objectivity, for the speculative philosopher it is undetermined prior to the generalization whether identifiable entities are something or nothing, ultimate or derivative, real or apparent. Thus there is nothing dogmatic about the speculative procedure of unrestricted generalization. It is experimental in nature: no direct access to the real is assumed, and the success of the experiment depends on the coherence and comprehensiveness of its results.

The relevance to functional analysis of the basic speculative strategy of unrestricted generalization resides in a peculiar feature of the theory of algorithmic process that has been tacitly acknowledged in the history of logical analysis since Frege: namely, that the adequacy of a theory of algorithmic process as a theory of mathematical procedure depends largely on the success of the generalization of algorism beyond mathematics to other areas. For, on the principle of simplicity of explanation alone, algorism is likely to be acceptable as a theory of the generation of the mathematical objects only if it is acceptable as an exhaustive account of the nature of human subjects. Herein lies the significance of the later Wittgenstein's work: it is a generalization of algorithmic process not just as a theory of cognition (Frege, Russell), but as a theory of language and social practice, with the result that human subjects become exhaustively definable as an effect of functional or rule-following structures. And herein lies the significance of

algorithmic naturalism, which generalizes the algorithmic theory of mathematical procedure as an exhaustive theory of all natural objects. In both cases, the power of the generalization provides justification for the initial starting point, the theory of mathematical procedure as algorithmic process. In these contexts, the point of the unrestricted generalization of functional structure is to place both the initial starting point and the generalizations of algorithmism under close scrutiny. The question at issue is: what is the nature of functional structure? Or, more pointedly: does algorithmism provide an exhaustive account of the nature of functional structure or rule-following operations?

In experimentally undertaking the unrestricted generalization of functional structure, the speculative philosopher aligns himself with the most basic tenets of logical analysis: he holds that relational analysis is the principle of intelligibility and that the concept of relations is the concept of incomplete, partial objects which cannot occur without relata to complete them. He thus takes relationality to be ultimate and irreducible, and his experimental generalization can be said to represent an inquiry into what the principle of the primitivity of relations means. Moreover, like the logical analysts, the speculative philosopher takes the function as a model or tool for the analysis of relations. That is, he accepts as ultimate Frege's definition of a relation as a function with two arguments.<sup>6</sup> The question now is: in terms of what function with two arguments is the experimental generalization of functional structure to be undertaken? What rule or 'algorithm' is it that is to be unrestrictedly generalized in order to test the nature of functional-logical analysis?

## THE THEORY OF SERIAL RECURSION

The obvious thing to do at this point is to generalize unrestrictedly the simplest possible rule or algorithm: namely, the modern mathematical definition of natural numbers. On this definition no number is a collection. The statement that  $3 = 2 + 1$ , which is the definition of three, does not mean that 3 is 'a 2 and a 1', but that 3 is the term of the integer series which comes 'next after' 2. There is, in other words, no principle which is prior to the series of numbers. Rather, each number is a serial relation or connective in series with the functional structure  $n + 1$ , known as the 'successor operator', and its relata are themselves relations or connectives in series with that structure. When the successor operator is unrestrictedly generalized as the basic structure of all things, I shall call any instance of it a 'serial connective.' The initial result of the experimental generalization can thus be

formulated in this way: anything that exists is a serial connective, or instance of the functional rule  $n + 1$ . (Given the plurality of things in the world, it follows that there are multiple series of connectives running parallel with each other. This will be taken for granted in what follows. There is no space here to argue for the speculative necessity of multiple series.)

What is now required is some unexceptionable account of the nature of the successor operator, in order to see what its generalization as an account of existence amounts to. So let it be agreed, first, that the claim that anything that exists has the structure  $n + 1$  is a way of establishing a description of the nature of existence in terms of predecessor-successor relations. That is, existence is analyzed as a matter of series, and series is a matter of *real* series or *real* succession, for its structure can be minimally, though not necessarily exhaustively described in terms of predecessor-successor or before-after relations.

Secondly, let real series be described in terms of a form of recursion: the functional structure  $n + 1$  takes for its basis the result of its own antecedent operations. As a matter of recursive succession, every serial connective requires an 'initial value', which is the result of its predecessor connectives, and it is said to 'contain' its predecessors in the sense that it contains its predecessors' results in its arguments. In other words, a serial connective stands in a 'cumulative' relation to its predecessor connectives in precisely the sense in which mathematics uses that term, in contrast to a mere additive concatenation. This more precisely states why existence is a matter of real series or succession and not of mere random sequence.

Granted the unrestricted generalization of the successor operator in terms of these two simple principles of succession and recursion, what is the result? Part of the significance of the unrestricted speculative generalization of recursion is that there is no threat of entanglement in Russell's Paradox, the paradox of the class of all those classes which are not members of themselves.<sup>7</sup> For, defined recursively, no serial connective includes itself; it includes in its arguments only the results of its predecessor connectives and its own results are included only by its successors. (Formally stated: functions of stage  $n + 1$  accept in their arguments only the results of functions of stage  $n$ .) In other words, the serial connective is intrinsically a matter of finite iteration, so there is in a serial analysis no completely realized real to generate reflexive paradoxes. Yet this by no means exhausts the significance of the speculative generalization.



## THE DEDUCTION OF FREE ACTIVITY

The key here is this. When the recursive function is unrestrictedly generalized, the speculative claim is that the functional order of recursive succession must necessarily be understood as a matter of free activity. However, recursive succession is not for the speculative philosopher, as it is for the mathematical intuitionists, a matter of free activity understood as the mental activity of the mathematician or directing mathematical subject.<sup>8</sup> The speculative argument is quite different, and runs as follows: if the recursive rule  $n + 1$  is generalized as the structure of all things, *any instance of that rule – any serial connective – necessarily involves free activity in that it (and nothing else) constructs its own nature out of its predecessors.*

Here we reach the heart of the matter: the unrestricted generalization of a basic functional structure or rule-following operation discloses the indispensability of the speculative notion of free activity. This remains hidden, or can be more easily repressed, when the generalization of the function is restricted to special kinds of objects, mathematical, logical, linguistic, or social; or when, as in the case of algorithmic naturalism, the algorithmic account of mathematical procedure is taken for granted. The claim to the ineradicable role of activity in functional analysis made by the unrestricted generalization of the rule  $n + 1$  can be more precisely stated by considering the recursive relation of a successor connective to any immediate or consecutive predecessor connective.

This means, first and obviously, that a serial connective can neither be identified with, nor overlap with, any of its predecessors, for it has them as its objects; in other words, it can accept in its arguments only the *results* of its predecessors, not the functional operations whereby those results were achieved. It follows that a serial connective cannot be exhaustively derived from or explained by its predecessors. In that sense at least, it is relatively independent of its predecessors.<sup>9</sup>

The independence of a serial connective is further defined, secondly, by the fact that no serial connective can be accepted into the arguments of any other connective until its values have been realized. It cannot, that is, be the predecessor or recursive object of any other connective until it has produced its results, for otherwise there is nothing for any other connective to accept as its arguments. In the context of the unrestricted generalization of the rule  $n + 1$ , what this means is that there can be no direct relations at all between the operations of contemporary connectives in the multiple series of connectives which constitute all that exists. The only direct relations between different serial connectives in multiple series of connectives are the relations of predecessor and successor. It follows that a serial connective is not just

relatively independent of its predecessor term or phase; it is also completely independent of its contemporaries. Necessarily, therefore, a serial connective constructs itself out of its predecessors with complete contemporary freedom. That is, a serial connective is the sole cause of its own activity of realization.

The upshot is that the unrestricted generalization of  $n + 1$  means that where there is serial structure there is activity, the activity of actualization, which, as recursive, is finite and situated yet is nevertheless free activity. This finite, situated freedom is that character of a serial connective whereby, as sole cause of its own activity, it actualizes itself out of its predecessors. A serial connective is a free agent in the sense that it is self-actualizing.

## **SOME FEATURES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE GENERALIZATION**

The extraordinary result of the unrestricted, experimental generalization of the rule  $n + 1$  is that free activity turns out to be an ineradicable feature of the rule's operation. This carries with it a number of features and consequences, some of which can be briefly stated.

1. The argument from generalization is not based on any appeal to some privileged phenomenological experience of freedom, nor, for that matter, to any other special kind of experience (whether of individuality, time, will, action, or whatever). There is only the experiment of unrestricted generalization of the functional rule  $n + 1$  and its consequences.

2. One striking consequence of the speculative strategy of unrestricted generalization is that it demonstrates that functional rule and free activity are not to be regarded as two primitive kinds of entity which have somehow to be combined, and, so understood, give rise to absurd and unanswerable questions such as 'What is their relation?' or 'What higher principle combines them?.' Functional rule and free activity are not fundamentally different in kind. Where one is under discussion, the other is just the common residue of a set of relations of a single serial connective or set of connectives. It would appear to follow that the same can be said for many of the standard oppositions of traditional philosophy, speculative and otherwise: for example, relationality and subjective individuality, universal and particular, infinite and finite, possible and actual.

3. The fundamental identity or unity of opposites and its implications are perfectly expressed by the functional structure of the serial connective. That is, functional structure is the perfect expression of the nature of things, just as the algorists claim, but in ways quite different from their accounts of the matter. Three considerations are particularly relevant here.

First, note that the free acts of individual serial connectives are instantiations of the functional rule  $n + 1$ , and that there is no further relation to be specified between function and value, rule and connective, other than that of instantiation. That is, the identity of rule and freedom, form and act, is not a *tertium quid* which is higher than either term. The concept of instantiation is thus the perfect expression of the fundamental identity of rule and freedom which constitutes the nature of things.

Secondly, it is evident that the variables of the functional rule  $n + 1$  are the markers or placeholders for the free acts of individual serial connectives. On the side of the functional rule, what this means is that it is on this ground, and this ground alone, that the rule can be said to contain in its variables all the values for which it holds: it does so only if the rule is non-deterministically interpreted as a principle of free activity.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, it is on this ground alone that the functional rule can be said to be meaningful only in virtue of its values: the rule is operative, or, more precisely, actual, only in virtue of its free instances. It follows that the functional rule  $n + 1$  is a perfect expression of the nature of things, not only in respect of the identity of opposites, but also in respect of the fact that its variables mark the limits of concepts, the gap between thought and existence: beyond the conceptual is the actual, the free acts that are the individual serial connectives. In other words, the fundamental alorist assumption that the connectives and variables of a function in its different instantiations are merely numerically different is rejected by speculative analysis.

Thirdly, however, and this is absolutely crucial for the speculative significance of functional analysis, the individual serial connectives which lie beyond the conceptual are not ineffable but *non-conceptual*. In other words, an individual serial connective is only describable by the same concepts or set of concepts, and its freedom is not derivable from concepts in that it is a matter of activity; yet it requires no problematic higher principle or *tertium quid* to explain it. It follows that an individual serial connective is rationally intelligible through and through in the only relevant sense: it can be brought under the non-determinist interpretation of the rule of free recursion. The dogmatic conflation of necessary structure with complete determination is here rejected. To put the same point another way: in serial analysis there is not any kind of completely realized real, nor, in consequence, is there any opposition between realism and constructivism, for the real itself is a matter of free construction. But these are considerations of a kind which will have to be more fully dealt with elsewhere.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Gottlob Frege, "Dialogue with Punjer," *Posthumous Writings*, ed. Hans Hermes et al., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979, pp. 53–67; W.V.O. Quine, 'On What There Is,' *From A Logical Point of View*, Harvard MA: Harvard University Press, 1951, pp. 1–25; C.F.J. Williams, *What is Existence?*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981; Michael Dummett, 'Existence,' *The Seas of Language*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 277–307. For a critical treatment of weak theory, see Peter Geach, "Form and Existence," *God and the Soul*, London: Routledge, 1969, pp. 42–64; and Julian Roberts, *The Logic of Reflection*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, Chs. 1 and 2.
- <sup>2</sup> See F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (1893), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930, Ch. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> For Wittgenstein's view of 'process,' see his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G.E.M. Anscombe, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983, esp. pp. 68, 69, 95, and 246.
- <sup>4</sup> The most distinguished representative of algorithmic naturalism is Daniel Dennett; see especially his *Elbow Room*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984. However, it lies at the back of the work of many North American philosophers, such as Donald Davidson, Arthur Fine and Richard Rorty. It is the most up-to-date version of that kind of 'scientism' which leaves to natural science, algorithmically interpreted, the explanation of most things.
- <sup>5</sup> See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, Bk. I, Pt. III, s. V. On Kant, see G. Buchdahl, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Science*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969, Ch. VIII. On Frege, see Peter Geach, *God and the Soul*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, Ch. 5; and Leila Haaparanta, "On Frege's Concept of Being," *The Logic of Being*, ed. S. Knuutila and J. Hintikka, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986, pp. 269–289.
- <sup>6</sup> See G. Frege, "Function and Concept" [1891], *The Frege Reader*, ed. M. Beaney, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 146.
- <sup>7</sup> The paradox of the class of all those classes which do not contain themselves can be formulated thus: If such a class contained itself, it would not contain itself; for it contains *only* those classes which do not contain themselves. But, if it did not contain itself, it would contain itself; for it contains *all* those classes which do not contain themselves. Thus, contradictorily, any such class would contain itself if and only if it did not contain itself. See Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910–13, Ch II. On the role of reflexive paradoxes in modern philosophy, see Hilary Lawson, *Reflexivity*, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985.
- <sup>8</sup> Indeed, it can be added that an ontology of the recursive function places constructivism, in mathematics as elsewhere, on a philosophical basis quite different from that found in Kant, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Brouwer or Dummett.
- <sup>9</sup> There is no space here to consider the senses in which a successor connective can be derived from its predecessors, or can be said to 'contain' them. That would require the development of a theory of immediacy quite different from anything to be found in F.H. Bradley, Russell, C.I. Lewis or Wilfred Sellars.
- <sup>10</sup> The proper development of the analysis of speculative series presented here should show that, *mutatis mutandis*, some specific form of free activity, however minimal, is involved in the

'operation' of all functional rules. Also relevant at this point is the observation that, although the speculative generalization can be said to start out from the weakly self-explanatory concept of a functional rule as that which contains all the values for which it holds, it demonstrates that the weak version of self-explanation is only half the story. As a principle of free recursive activity, the rule is self-explanatory in the strong sense: only on account of the fact it is a rule of freedom can it properly be said to contain all the reasons for itself in its own nature. Thus the claim of the speculative generalization is: that which contains in its variables all the values for which it holds is properly only that which contains all the reasons for itself in its own nature, and it is the latter which explains the ultimate meaning of the former.

PART FOUR:

METAPHYSICAL THEORIES IN A CONTEMPORARY  
CONTEXT

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## Chapter 11

# JACQUES MARITAIN AND THE METAPHYSICS OF PLATO

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An enduring image for the 'step beyond' which characterizes the impetus and dynamism of metaphysics is the ascent from Plato's cave: out of, and beyond, the subterranean, unintelligible caverns of the imagination. A modern equivalent of the closed and seductive world of unreal images is the medium of television. The intelligible world of perception, the real world, is replaced by the virtual world of images. The image is not only the medium; it has become the reality: *homo sapiens* has become *homo 'zapiens'*! Plato's challenge remains: to step beyond the world of the inauthentic and transitory to the plane of the enduring and the abiding. The soul must turn from darkness to light and ascend to real being; this is true philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Jacques Maritain was one of the most inspiring metaphysicians of the 20th century. It is striking how he repeatedly engaged with the challenges, moral and political, of each decade and delighted in the newest discoveries of the natural sciences as witness to the continuing unfolding of the perennial mysteries of the world, the concrete and the universal.<sup>2</sup> Against those,



however, who would consign metaphysics to the graves of academe and lend absolute status to the science of the day, Maritain recognized that scientific theories – in which he rejoiced – scarcely outlive their authors, but that metaphysics indeed survives to bury its undertakers.

Maritain had a profound admiration for Plato: “Let us pity those who have never felt the flame rise within them upon reading Plato and Plotinus.”<sup>3</sup> He extolled what he considered the very poetry of Plato’s thought.<sup>4</sup> Plato’s phrase, “music” of the spirit (μουσική), conveyed for him the comprehensive universality of philosophy itself. Concretely, he shares Plato’s fundamental attitude regarding the individual, personal, quest of philosophy: “I am inclined, now more than ever, to think with Plato... that the most important thing for a philosopher is to ‘turn toward the internal city he bears within himself’.”<sup>5</sup> What is here intended becomes clear through the contrast of philosophy with science. In science, intelligence

functions, so to speak, separately, as detached from the personal roots of the thinking human subject. ... On the contrary, intelligence in wisdom functions in actual unity with the personal roots of the thinking human subject, in actual unity with the whole man; in this sense, Plato was right in saying that we must philosophize σύν ὀλῆ τῆ ψυχῆ; moreover, the entire being of the wise man is engaged in the work of wisdom, his body as well as his soul needs therefore a certain purification.<sup>6</sup>

On the intrinsic arduousness of philosophy, Maritain quotes Plato: “Difficult are the beautiful things: they summon us to beautiful dangers.” Χαλεπά τα καλά: this Greek saying, cited by Plato, is quoted by Maritain at least half a dozen times. “Plato has told us that beautiful things are difficult, but that we must not avoid the beautiful dangers. The human species would be placed in peril, and soon in despair, if it shed the beautiful dangers of intelligence and reason.”<sup>7</sup>

Maritain frequently refers to what he calls the “natural Platonism of the human mind.” What is this so-called *anima naturaliter platonica*? He is explicit only on one occasion:

Let me add – since otherwise I am not a Platonist at all – that the Platonism in question amounts to something Plato was able to infer about the essence of man: if I speak here of a Platonism natural to our mind, it is only so far as our mind is naturally drawn to admit eternal truths and transcendent values.<sup>8</sup>

This echoes the view of James Adam, for whom the central doctrine of Plato's religious teaching is the essential divinity of the human soul: "The doctrine of man's relationship to the divine is perhaps the most fundamental of Plato's doctrines... it is the ultimate source of all his idealism, religious and metaphysical."<sup>9</sup>

Man, according to Plato, is a creature not of earth but of heaven (φῦτὸν οὐκ ἔγγειον, ἀλλ' οὐράνιον).<sup>10</sup> Plato's devotion to the eternal and transcendent is illustrated for Maritain in Raffaello's depiction of the School of Athens and expressed by Goethe in the following word-portrait, which he quotes at length:

Plato seems to behave as a spirit descended from heaven, who has chosen to dwell a space on earth. He hardly attempts to know this world. He has already formed an idea of it, and his chief desire is to communicate to mankind, which stands in such need of them, the truths which he has brought with him and delights to impart. If he penetrates to the depths of things, it is to fill them with his own soul, not to analyse them. Without intermission and with the burning ardour of his spirit, he aspires to rise and regain the heavenly abode from which he came down. The aim of all his discourse is to awaken in his hearers the notion of a single eternal being, of the good, of truth, of beauty. His method and words seem to melt, to dissolve into vapour, whatever scientific facts he has managed to borrow from the earth.<sup>11</sup>

But herein, precisely, lies the peril. This natural élan towards eternal truth and transcendent value, the "natural Platonism of the mind," brings with it the beautiful danger of metaphysical hubris, the gnostic temptation to overstep its powers. The desire and capacity to know outstretch the means and method which are our measure. Intelligence is destined for being, but it is our lot to search it out in corruptible things. In seeking Being it finds only the elusive becoming of sensible flux in individual and changing reality. Deceived and scandalized, Plato turns his gaze to a separate world of essences, a spectral world; he sketches a metaphysic of the *extra-real*, conceived after the manner of mathematics, a metaphysical mirage, while the sensible world is delivered over to δόξα or opinion.<sup>12</sup>

To the question "In what ways can the real enter into us?," Maritain replies there are but two, one natural, one supernatural: the senses, and the divine Spirit. The light which descends from heaven is not metaphysics, but the highest and most pure spiritual wisdom, whereby we open our soul to the gift of grace. Likewise the light which springs from earth is not metaphysics but an inferior wisdom which depends upon sense experience. Metaphysics

lies midway between the purely spiritual and the sensible. "It is not directly open, as the platonists taught, to an intuition of divine things. The intuition with which it deals lies at the summit of the process of visualisation or abstraction which begins with the sensible order."<sup>13</sup>

This safer path was forged by Aristotle:

With Aristotle the genius of the West safeguarded our intellectual respect for the being of things we touch and see. His metaphysic is a metaphysic of the *intra-real*. From the very heart of sensible things, so to say, it seizes the pure intelligibility of being: which it separates out in so far as it is being, and divests of what is sensible. And if this can happen it is because the intelligibility of things is not transcendent but immanent in them.<sup>14</sup>

Plato and Aristotle both recognize the great truth that contemplation is of itself superior to action, but understand it differently. Plato seeks contemplation in an ecstasy where metaphysical eros attains through intuition the transcendent being by the light of the transcendent itself; Aristotle, in an interiorization where wisdom makes being its own and attains to its causes by the light of the active intellect. Platonic contemplation is for Maritain one of natural mysticism – in the broad sense of a natural mystic aspiration to a vision of the absolute.<sup>15</sup>

In an essay entitled "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," Maritain defines "natural mystical experience," as a "*possession-giving experience of the absolute*."<sup>16</sup> Suggesting that there is knowledge by intellectual connaturality due to the *habitus* of the speculative man as such, he claims that a metaphysician can arrive at his own natural contemplation of divine things. Such natural contemplation of divine things, however, is not a natural mystical *experience*. On the scope of natural contemplation and the nature of mystical experience, Maritain contrasts two approaches which are represented by certain 20th-century Thomists. There are those, on the one hand, who exaggerate the Aristotelian doctrine *nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu* and conclude that

metaphysical effort, far from preparing us for union with God, makes us despair of such a union. ...The philosopher as such cannot contemplate divine things; he is, as it were, an Icarus of contemplation, and the movement proper to him hopelessly casts him down into the realm of the multiple and the created.

He continues:

Others, on the contrary, follow Platonic tendencies, even if they do not go so far as to admit that there is in the soul a door other than the senses whereby the soul naturally opens out over the real by an immediate existential contact; they believe that metaphysical effort can lead ... either to a mystical experience in the natural order, a natural mystical union with that One or that Good which Plato placed above being, or else at least to a contemplation which, by its specific dynamism and in order to satisfy its constituent desire, demands that it pass over the threshold of supernatural realities, and that it become, by means of the gifts of grace, the supernatural mystical union, conceived above all as an intellectual intuition of the absolute Being.

According to Maritain, Aquinas occupies a position midway between these extremes regarding philosophic speculation. The intellect is moved by its natural dynamism toward the cause of being, well aware that the divine reality infinitely exceeds all human means of knowing and that it cannot be circumscribed by human concepts. Yet it seeks a stable and simple meditation of that prime reality.

Doubtless such a contemplation is more speculation than contemplation, and its fixity remains very imperfect with respect to the superior fixity of supernatural contemplation. "It flies, it is not at rest," whereas of mystical contemplation one must say: *Et volabo et requiescam*. Yet on its own account it merits the name of contemplation, albeit in an analogical fashion. St Thomas admits the existence of such a philosophical contemplation, and he admits that it has God for its object.<sup>17</sup>

This natural contemplation of God, however, is not a mystical experience, even in the natural order.

It is not a possession-giving experience, it occurs at the summit of the powers of the abstractive ideation of the intellect, it knows God by means of things, at a distance, and in an enigmatic fashion. ...It is not the hidden God attained in His uncommunicable life by the experience of union. ...In short there is no natural intuition, as Plato would have had it, of the supersubstantial One. And the philosophical contemplation of divine things doubtless corresponds ...to that natural desire to see the First Cause which ...is at the deepest depth of spiritual creatures. ...The natural desire to see the Cause of being *derives* from the natural desire of

knowing being; it is a corollary thereof; it is in no way identified therewith. From this it follows that every great metaphysic is indeed pierced by a mystical aspiration, but is not built thereon.<sup>18</sup>

Plato's root error is essentially one of method; it concerns the means whereby man discovers reality, and the nature of him who knows. Maritain criticizes Plato's spiritualism which, like that of Descartes, scorns the body and the sense faculties.<sup>19</sup> In his *Introduction to Philosophy*, Maritain states: "The radical source of Plato's errors seems to have been his exaggerated devotion to mathematics, which led him to despise empirical reality."<sup>20</sup> He also attributes these errors to an overambitious view of the scope of philosophy as the means of the purification and salvation of man. His judgment is harsh: "It is on account of these false principles latent in his system that all those philosophic dreams which tend in one way or another to treat man as a pure spirit can be traced directly or indirectly to Plato."<sup>21</sup>

Maritain indeed lays the blame for many of the deviations of the entire philosophical heritage at the feet of Plato:

The great philosophical doctrines can be summarily divided into two groups. In the first group could be classed those philosophers who venerate the intellect and philosophy, but who limit themselves to considering essences, possibles and intelligibles contemplated in the heavens of abstraction and cut off from effective existence. Those philosophers, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibnitz, Spinoza, and Hegel, are all more or less enchanted by the magic flute of Plato. They have a knowledge, not of the universe, but of a picture book. They leaf through the pages of that lovely book and think they are touching reality. What an illusion! Reality, human life, the inner depths of man, these can be reached only by breaking through the book.

The philosophers of the other group are the anti-Platonists, the great pessimists of the human will, or of the elemental life, such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who shatter at the same time the picture book, philosophy and reason itself. Maritain declares: "I honestly believe that between these two groups of philosophers there is only St Thomas who truly respects human life and the inner depths of man and reaches *existence* itself through the *intellect* itself."<sup>22</sup>

In Maritain's view, the error of Platonism is to presume that there is a royal road to metaphysical truth, a revelation like that of the goddess to Parmenides, bestowed on one who is transported by divine messengers beyond the ways of men. The reality is that there is no high road to the

transcendent for metaphysical speculation. But while Maritain rejects Plato's claim for a privileged intuition of the supersubstantial One, he concedes that he is privileged with that singular intuition, the intuition of being, which is the indispensable condition of the metaphysician, the bond of existence and intellect within the inner depths of man which, uniquely, Aquinas brought to full fruition.

On two occasions, *obiter dicens* – literally between dashes – Maritain credits Plato with the intuition of being. In a lecture “Man's Approach to God,” delivered in 1951, he writes:

True existentialism is the work of reason. It is so because the primary reality grasped by the intellect is the act of existing as exercised by some visible or tangible thing; and because it is the intuition of being – disengaged for its own sake, and perceived at the summit of an abstractive intellection – it is the intuition of being – even when it is distorted by the error of a system, as in Plato or Spinoza – which causes a human intellect to enter the realm of metaphysics and be capable of metaphysical intelligence.<sup>23</sup>

So Plato is a true existentialist! Let us recall the importance of this intuition for Maritain, as outlined so eloquently in *Existence and the Existent*: “A philosopher is not a philosopher if he is not a metaphysician. And it is the intuition of being – [here he repeats the remark concerning Plato and Spinoza] – that makes the metaphysician.”<sup>24</sup> There is no one single recipe for this intuition. It may “spring unexpectedly like a kind of natural grace at the sight of a blade of grass or a windmill, or at the sudden perception of the reality of the self.”<sup>25</sup> It may proceed from the abrupt evidence of the implacability of things independent of ourselves:

What counts is to take the leap, to release, in one authentic intellectual intuition, the sense of being, the sense of the value of the implications that lie in the act of existing.<sup>26</sup> ... Let us call it a matter of luck, a boon, perhaps a kind of docility to the light. Without it man will always have an opining, precarious and sterile knowledge, however freighted with erudition it may be; a *knowledge about*. He will go round and round the flame without ever going through it.<sup>27</sup>

All of this, it must be recalled, applies to Plato who despite all the excesses of an unwieldy system is graced with the intuition of being. Is it not, therefore, strange to read in an article published in 1968, entitled “Réflexions sur la nature blessée et sur l'intuition de l'être,” that, in contrast, Aristotle,

“notre vieux maître,” “la grande tête de la *philosophia perennis*,” only had the intuition of being in an implicit and *virtual* manner? It was implicit without his awareness in the fundamental impulse of his realism:

With him we are dealing with an authentically realist philosophy. ...The immense universe of rational aristotelian wisdom is a universe of essences grasped by the first operation of the spirit, simple apprehension, centred no doubt in being, or existence, which is in fact there and which imposes its primacy, but is not *formally* grasped; on the contrary, it is still only present to thought in a blind or *virtual* fashion, not yet perceived in full light.<sup>28</sup>

Aristotle indeed restored the metaphysical integrity of sensible things. This is well expressed in the words of the Northern Irish poet, Louis McNeice:

Aristotle was better who watched the insect breed,  
The natural world develop,  
Stressing the function, scrapping the Form in Itself,  
Taking the horse from the shelf and letting it gallop.

However, despite his avowed commitment to the things of experience and his stated pursuit of the question of being – that which has been sought of old – he does not share the metaphysical passion of his master.

The thought of Plato is marked by a profound zeal for Being as the object and goal of all authentic thought and endeavour. This is largely masked, perhaps, under the quest for the Good, which Plato claims lies beyond Being. Nevertheless, if we look more closely at the language, presuppositions, thrust and spirit of his thinking, we cannot but notice that it is imbued with a desire for *that-which-is*: for what possesses being in the fullest sense of the word – even though it is conceived in terms of essence: of *what* something is, rather than the more radical presence whereby it is – its being, its *to be*.

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato gives a colourful thumbnail picture of the philosopher. He is not interested, he tells us, in the rivalries of political cliques, in meetings, dinners, flutegirls and merrymakings. “Disdaining all such things as worthless, his thought takes wings, in Pindar’s word, ‘beyond the sky, beneath the earth,’ searching the heavens and measuring the plains, everywhere seeking the true nature of everything as a whole, never sinking to what lies close at hand” (173d–e). He keeps his eyes fixed on the whole (175a). In *Republic* V, Plato repeats that knowledge is related to being and knows it as it is (478a). The philosopher loves such knowledge as reveals the

essence of permanent and unchanging reality and seeks this reality in its totality (485b). His gaze is fixed upon “all time and all existence.” Habituated to thoughts of grandeur, his mind seeks integrity and wholeness in all things human and divine (486a). Such wholeness and permanence, untouched by multiplicity or change, is for Plato the mark of true being – pure being, τοῦ ὄντος εἰλικρινῶς (479d). Such being exists *more*, to a *fuller degree*, than limited, changing reality. The philosopher, in contrast to the lover of opinion, seeks each true reality (480).

The fully real is the fully knowable, even if it remains unknown. Being, though unnamed or disguised, is the aim and object of all endeavour. Being is the universal and ubiquitous element of the human spirit: the ebb and flow of all we do, the buoyancy and ballast of what we know, the keel on which rests each intellectual advance. It is the anchor of every affirmation, the north which guides our quest – equally each point which encompasses the boundless sphere both of what we know and what remains as yet uncharted.

In his seventh letter, Plato describes the philosophic experience when “at last, in a flash, understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light.”<sup>29</sup> Compare these words of Plato with Maritain’s account of the intuition of being in *A Preface to Metaphysics*:

It is a sight whose content and implication no words of human speech can exhaust or adequately express and in which in a moment of decisive emotion, as it were, of spiritual conflagration, the soul is in contact, a living, penetrating and illuminating contact, with a reality which it touches and which takes hold of it.<sup>30</sup>

So if we take seriously Maritain’s twice expressed admiration for Plato as a metaphysician graced with the intuition of being, the question remains why Aristotle, who only enjoys the intuition “*d’une façon aveugle*,” is heralded as “the old master” at the fountainhead of perennial wisdom. The answer lies essentially in the matter of method: Aquinas chose Aristotle as his guide, the *philosophus* who would lead along the path to wisdom. Plato, he comments, had a bad way of teaching (*habuit malum modum docendi*), saying everything figuratively by means of symbols; intending by words something other than what they pronounce.<sup>31</sup> But in attaining the goal of speculation he finds that he shares much of the vision of Plato. He distinguishes between a *via Platonica* and a *positio Platonica*, sometimes arriving at a Platonic position via a more secure route under the guidance of Aristotle.<sup>32</sup> However, a position attained through the method of Aristotle may well, at times, rest more profoundly upon a Platonist intuition.



Both Maritain's admiration and admonition point to the ambivalence of the χωρισμός, the great dividing line, the tectonic faultline which sends a fissure deep down through the platonic universe. His own emphasis on distinction – *distinguer pour unir* – rather than *separation* escapes the snare of Platonism: distinction rather than dichotomy or division. *Qui bene distinguit, bene docuit*. Aquinas would have found Maritain to be a good teacher!

Aristotle, Aquinas and Maritain alike reject Plato's deprecation of sensible being; it is for them the domain of our first encounter with the actuality of existence, of what really is and what is really known. They reject his ideal reality, subsisting in itself with the selfsame characteristics which it enjoys in thought – abstract, universal, unique, eternal, immaterial – and which is furthermore the true source of the reality of sense objects. They reject the unnatural dualism of Plato, his metaphysical and epistemological apartheid. With Plato, method triumphs over content; with Aristotle reality determines the method. Must one agree with Sertillanges, who invokes the "great principle that, in philosophy, doctrine and method always coincide"?<sup>33</sup>

There is, however, one Platonist principle of method, a royal *via Platonica* embraced by Aquinas with enthusiasm: the principle of participation, which is the foundation and coping stone of Plato's vision. While he rejects the formal causality of subsistent Ideas, Aquinas agrees that when many individuals possess a common perfection, there must be a single causal source. He applies this radically to the most universal and intimate perfection of being: the common perfection of existence requires a single creative cause. "And this," he declares, "seems to be the *ratio* of Plato."<sup>34</sup> Norris Clarke remarks:

No Aristotelian causal theory can deliver that every "many", precisely because it is "many", requires *one* cause, nor determine the mode of possession of the common perfection in the cause and the participants, since there is no theory of the limitation of act by potency in Aristotle. Yet St. Thomas could find all this most explicit in the line of Proclus, the Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, the *Liber de Causis*, etc., all stemming from Plotinus, and no matter how profoundly St. Thomas modified the Platonic "many-one" principle, it seems to me impossible completely to "de-Platonize" it.<sup>35</sup>

Maritain's harshest pronouncement upon Plato may be found in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*: "Platonic dialectics succeeded in dividing; it was unable to unite. The sin of Platonism is separation, and a separatist conception of transcendence."<sup>36</sup> Plato grounds the universe beyond being, in

the Good; however, while he departs from being and sacrifices the reality of sense objects in a ‘separatist transcendence,’ the Good is also fundamentally a principle of unity. The dominant aspiration of Platonism is the search for both unity and transcendence. The key to this quest is the synoptic, synthesising, principle of participation.

Aquinas attains a unified ground of all things by affirming a transcendent source, but without departing from being. He can do so because of his analogical grasp of being. Enthusiastically adopting the Platonist motif of participation, he recasts it within the primacy of the actuality of being, which is at once the plenitude of perfection. There is but one fullness which is shared through participation, namely subsistent divine being. In his corrective to Plato’s theory of ideas, Aquinas had already the example of Augustine. Maritain writes:

The really remarkable feature here, and one that should be regarded as a stroke of genius, of Augustine’s holy genius, is the certainty of instinct, the supernatural tact with which, whilst remaining a Platonist and in strict dependence on Plotinus in philosophy, he avoids the most dangerous pitfalls of Platonism: ...magnificently setting his Greek masters right (as when he constructs the world of divine Ideas out of the Platonic exemplars).<sup>37</sup>

Given Maritain’s criticisms of Plato, it may appear strange that Maritain expounded and fully endorsed the participation metaphysics of Aquinas long before the comprehensive studies of Fabro (1939) and Geiger (1942).<sup>38</sup> In a wonderfully lucid and comprehensive article entitled “Connaissance de l’être,” published as early as 1922 in the collection *Antimoderne*, we find a carefully articulated aperçu of the hierarchy of reality and the degrees of being, which is unmistakably Platonist/Neoplatonist in nature, and an argument for the existence of God, based on participation.<sup>39</sup>

Maritain endorses the dialectic of participation, reasoning from the many degrees in multiple beings to a single, supreme, plenitude which is the causal source of all finite individuals. He begins by remarking that

Things which are in the world differ from one another by their very being, if one differs from the other by “this” or “that” which the other does not have; the first must have *more of being*; it must *be more* (in a certain respect) than the second, because “this” or “that” is itself being. I am obliged to say that things are more or less, or that being has degrees.<sup>40</sup>

Maritain recognizes the Platonist origin and Neoplatonist transmission of this doctrine. In *Approaches to God* (1953) he writes:

It is a fact that there is a qualitative “more or less,” that there are degrees of value or perfection in things. There are degrees in the beauty of things (Plato saw this better than anyone); degrees in their goodness; in fine, things *are* to a greater or lesser degree. Knowledge is more highly and more perfectly knowledge in intelligence than in sense; life is more highly and more perfectly life in the free and thinking living thing than in the animal living thing, and in the animal living thing than in the vegetative living thing.<sup>41</sup>

In an article entitled “Spontanéité et indépendance” (1942), he remarks: “It is known that thomist metaphysics is a metaphysics of the degrees of being [*une métaphysique des degrés de l'être*], – which implies the double movement of procession or descent from the Source of being, and of conversion or re-ascend towards this Source.”<sup>42</sup> He notes that this idea was central to Plotinus and was further elaborated as a doctrine by the *philosophia perennis* under the impulse of Judeo-Christian revelation in a transfiguration of Plotinus.

The view of reality as a graded scale of being is detailed comprehensively in *Antimoderne*.

When I say *more and less*, my imagination envisages things which are extended and measured. But here it is not a matter of quantity, but solely of being. I am simply saying that one thing *is more* than another when to pass from the first to the second, it is sufficient by thought to *deny* this or that, some intelligible determination, of the first. Thus defined, this notion of *more or less* is in itself, and for my intelligence, free from every consideration of space and quantity.<sup>43</sup>

The transcendental notion of *being*, considered as lacking nothing whatsoever, but implying fullness or achievement, is identical with the notion of *perfection*. “To speak of degrees of being is, therefore, to speak of degrees of perfection.” Because there is diversity and inequality among beings, the perfection of being is analogous; it embraces in its amplitude all possible perfections: “Being and perfection thus belong together.” Maritain immediately draws to its conclusion this insight into the nature of participation and its foundation: “If a thing exists which, as it were, exhausts the entire plenitude of being, if a thing is Being itself, this thing is necessarily of infinite perfection.”<sup>44</sup>

He proceeds to explain this conclusion by reference to the distinction between essence (*that which* a being is, that which *has being*) and existence (the act of being). Existence is the act or perfection through which a thing is placed *extra nihil* or *extra causas*; this perfection of being must be recognized as the perfection *par excellence* since, through it, all that constitutes and characterizes a thing is placed in reality, i.e. all 'other' perfections of that thing.

According to the degree of perfection of essence which receives existence, this perfection *par excellence*, which consists in existing, is received with more or less plenitude and therefore measured to the measure of the essence which receives it. But suppose there were a thing which were Being itself, i.e., whose essence were to exist, in that case, this supreme perfection, which consists precisely in existing, would be measured by nothing, and the essence of such a thing, by the very fact that it does not measure or limit the perfection of existing, will contain in itself all the infinity of the perfection.<sup>45</sup>

The existence of such an infinite being is, as yet, a hypothesis. Maritain establishes its reality through the following four self-evident axioms:

- I. The greater cannot come from the lesser; that which has less being and less perfection cannot be the cause or *raison d'être* of that which has more being and more perfection.
- II. The cause has more being and perfection than that of which it is the source [*que ce dont elle est la raison*].
- III. That which does not exist *per se, per suam essentiam*, presupposes, (at least in priority of nature), that which exists *per se*.
- IV. Everything which has being or perfection by participation is reduced to that which has this perfection through its essence, which is its principle and cause.

For our present purposes, let us consider more closely the nature of participation and the plenitude of metaphysical perfection.

Perfections such as humanity, whiteness or goodness may be considered, not as present according to a limited mode in a subject (e.g., Socrates), but as such in themselves, simply and without limit; there is thus a plenitude of being proper to these perfections. If each existed in reality, in its pure state, it

would have this plenitude. Were Socrates as individual to constitute the fullness of man, he would have everything that could possibly belong to humanity: the wisdom of Aristotle, the art of Phidias, the science of Archimedes; he would have the myriad perfections dispersed throughout the multitude of men. If an individual lily were whiteness itself in its fullness, nothing could be whiter or have a different whiteness.<sup>46</sup>

Compared, however, to the plenitude of being which a perfection would necessarily have were it to exist in a pure state, it is diminished in the subjects which share it. It is not possessed by them with all the plenitude of which it is capable. This diminution occurs either when a perfection is shared by a multitude of individuals of the same degree (e.g., one individual is not more or less man), or according to different degrees: whiteness or goodness in themselves do not admit of more or less, but the things in which I see them *are* more or less white and more or less good. The quality itself of whiteness or goodness is present in things with more or less intensity or perfection.

This perfection is in its subjects, not according to its total possible plenitude, but according to part. I would say that these subjects have part of this perfection, or that they participate rather than exhaust it; or again that this perfection is in them by participation. ...On the contrary, a perfection which is in the subject according to all the plenitude of being which may belong to it, and which is thus exhausted by this subject, is in it through its essence, *per essentiam*.<sup>47</sup>

An individual may through its own essence possess a perfection while not itself being the very essence of that perfection. The distinction, expounded by Cajetan, between '*per suam essentiam*' and '*per essentiam*,' Maritain suggests, together with the corrected notion of participation, allows Thomism to save the essence of Plato's thought.

A further distinction is necessary: between those analogous perfections, related to being itself, which do not imply any limit, but may exist in a mode other than finite, while retaining their proper name and intelligible value (goodness, beauty, intelligence) and those perfections which are restricted to determinate genres of being, such as whiteness or humanity. The latter cannot exist as other than finite and still retain their name and intelligible value. Maritain asks:

Should I platonize and believe that there exists a suprasensible world of eternal archetypes, such as humanity in itself, in which "participate," I know not how, the things of this world below? Do I not clearly see that there cannot be humanity in itself, or whiteness in itself? Because

humanity can exist only in these flesh and bones, and whiteness only in things with surface and dimensions; they cannot exist in a pure state.<sup>48</sup>

The solution to this question lies in the modes whereby these distinct kinds of perfection are present in the plenitude of their single subsisting source. Intelligence, beauty and goodness exist *formally*, as such, with all their intelligible value. The restricted perfections of finite modes exist *virtually* or *eminently*, according to a *higher* mode, within the power of absolute Being, which is the plenitude of perfection. “The essence of man, of the angel or lion, whiteness or light, the colour of the sky and the meadow, the freshness of flowing water, tastes and perfumes, all the perishable delights, all that is true in false goods”<sup>49</sup>: all these have, as it were, a sublimated presence in God, in virtue of his causal power. Maritain declares: “Because of all these perfections which are in things through participation, the natural movement of my reflection upon being has led me straight to God,”<sup>50</sup> and concludes: “Blessed be Plato for having divined these things. And even if he lost his head a little, a mythologue Pygmalion, let us not forget that it is enough to situate the ideas in their true place, in the divine intelligence, in order for Platonism to become true.”<sup>51</sup>

Given the wholehearted endorsement in *Antimoderne* of the path to God via participation, the following remark by Maritain in *Degrees of Knowledge* will certainly appear enigmatic: “The main difference between St. Augustine and St. Thomas in the philosophic and noetic order [is], as Father Gardeil has so well shown, the substitution of efficient causality, the dominant Aristotelian–Thomistic note, for *participation*, the dominant Augustinian note.”<sup>52</sup> As Maritain observes, Gardeil is commenting on and generalizing a thesis expounded by Etienne Gilson in his 1926 article “Pourquoi Saint Thomas a critiqué Saint Augustin.” And since Maritain clearly accepts Gardeil’s interpretation, we are entitled to ask if he also agrees with Gilson’s conclusion that Aquinas

was obliged to choose, once and for all, between the only two pure philosophies which can exist, that of Plato and that of Aristotle. Reduced to their bare essences, these metaphysics are rigorously antinomical; one cannot be for the one without being against all those who are with the other, and that is why Saint Thomas remains with Aristotle against all those who are counted on the side of Plato. ...As a philosophy, therefore, Thomism was born out of a pure philosophical option ... to chose against the philosophy of Plato, in favour of that of Aristotle.<sup>53</sup>

This is a critical judgment, with profound consequences for the evaluation of Aquinas' reading of Plato. Did Aquinas choose efficient causality in preference to participation? Was he obliged in consequence to make a clear philosophical option for Aristotle over Plato? I suggest not: there is no antinomy or opposition, it seems to me, between efficient causality and participation. Participation is exactly how God, in creating the universe, exercises efficient causation. (At most one can suggest that Aquinas substituted, as we have seen, a metaphysics of virtual or preeminent participation for the formal participation causation of Plato.) Maritain's remarks in *Degrees of Knowledge* refer, not to the metaphysics of being, but to the metaphysics of cognition, i.e. to the question how knowledge is achieved: through an illuminative participation in subsistent truth or through the efficient causation of the agent intellect.

Before concluding, a brief note on the language of degrees. Maritain speaks of *grades of being*, a characteristically Neoplatonic notion; he is also familiar with the notion of *intensive magnitude*.<sup>54</sup> However, he does not bring the two concepts together; this would have been illuminating. In speaking of the 'more or less' intrinsic to being, we are dealing, he states, not with quantity but simply with being. However, Aquinas' distinction between 'intensive/virtual quantity' and 'extensive/dimensive quantity' allows precisely such language of quantity to be applied to existence. Aquinas, in the most disparate of contexts, exploits the concept of intensive quantity or quantity of power (*quantitas virtutis*, virtual power) to express the gradation of perfection in whatever order of being. This provides him with the most suitable terminology to articulate the gradation of being itself. This has been brought to light by Cornelio Fabro. *Actus essendi* is thus identical with *esse intensivum*, or *virtus essendi*, of Dionysian inspiration: the power of being which is exercised in varying degrees of intensity, according to the measure of essences and determining the place of each within the grand scale of being.<sup>55</sup>

Much has been written on the mutual enrichment to be gained by fusing the wisdom of the Academy with that of the Lyceum. Aquinas took to heart the words of his teacher, the great Albert: "*Scias quod non perficitur homo in philosophia nisi ex scientia duarum philosophiarum, Aristotelis et Platonis.*"<sup>56</sup> The oeuvre of Jacques Maritain is a prism through which the genius of all three again appears in new light.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Republic* 521c.

- <sup>2</sup> *Science and Wisdom*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1954, pp. 64f: “The splendid renewal which physics owes to Lorentz, Poincaré and Einstein on the one hand and to Planck, Louis de Broglie, Dirac and Heisenberg on the other has renewed and stimulated a sense of the ontological mystery of the world of matter.”
- <sup>3</sup> *Oeuvres complètes* XIII, p. 861: “Plaignons toutefois ceux qui n’ont jamais senti monter en eux la flamme à la lecture de Platon ou de Plotin.”
- <sup>4</sup> *Oeuvres complètes* XII, p. 957; see *The Peasant of the Garonne*, Toronto: Macmillan, 1969, p. 255: “There is an admirable poetry in the life of a Christopher Columbus or a Benedict Labre, in the thought of a Plato or an Einstein, in the movement of the galaxies.”
- <sup>5</sup> *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, ed. J.W. Evans and L.R. Ward, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956, p. 14. See *Republic* 591e: “πρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ πολιτείας.”
- <sup>6</sup> *Oeuvres complètes* VII, p. 1050 (see also p. 1180), XI, p. 173.
- <sup>7</sup> *Oeuvres complètes* XI, p. 15: “Platon nous a dit que les choses belles sont difficiles, et que nous ne devons pas esquivier les beaux dangers. L’espèce humaine serait mise en peril, et serait bientôt au désespoir, se elle se dérobaît aux beaux dangers de l’intelligence et de la raison.”
- <sup>8</sup> *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, p. 281; see also p. 289. For the original, see *Humanisme intégral*, Paris: Aubier, 1936, p. 50.
- <sup>9</sup> James Adam, *The Vitality of Platonism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911, pp. 3, 131.
- <sup>10</sup> *Timaeus* 90a.
- <sup>11</sup> *An Introduction to Philosophy*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1947, p. 68, n. 1. Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* II/3, Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1893, pp. 141f
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. *Science and Wisdom*, p. 36.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- <sup>15</sup> *Questions de conscience*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1938, p. 99. See p. 121, n. 1: “... la contemplation de type platonicienne peut être appelée une contemplation mystique naturelle, — je dis mystique en un sens impropre et élargi, parce qu’elle est ‘donnée’, comme l’inspiration du poète, et parce qu’elle répond à une aspiration mystique naturelle à la vision de l’absolu.”
- <sup>16</sup> *Redeeming the Time*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943, pp. 225f
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229f.
- <sup>19</sup> *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, New York: Greenwood Press, p. 246.
- <sup>20</sup> *An Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 60.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.



<sup>22</sup> *De Bergson à Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris: Flammarion, 1944, pp. 307f. Trans., "The Humanism of St Thomas Aquinas," *Living Schools of Philosophy*, ed. D. Runes, Ames, IA: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1958, p. 259f. This charge is also expressed in the following passage of *Science and Wisdom*, pp. 12ff, where Maritain gives a wonderful reading of the grand sweep of Greek philosophy, its limitations and the dangers to which neoplatonism succumbs:

The peculiar beauty of Greek wisdom is that of a sketch or draft, a creation of genius whose outline and essential points are traced with infallible art. It could not finish the work and the work is nowhere complete. It is incomplete on the metaphysical side. We know how Aristotle, faced with the questions that concern the spiritual realities shut his eyes: we know his errors and how small a following his great speculative discoveries won in the ancient world. ...And when this human wisdom tried to complete itself by its own unaided efforts, it took a bad turn. It was not content to fulfil its mission and affirm the ontological consistency and value of creatures. Instead of paying honour to the principle of created being, as shown in created things themselves, it divinised them. For this it earned the condemnation of St. Paul. In the end it called in vain for the help of the East, of a syncretism without existential roots, and sought a remedy for the great melancholy of paganism in mystagogy and magic. It renounced the realism in orienting thought to which its original strength had lain: and contented itself with a substitute, a dialectical world in which the search is only for an ideal procession of essences, and for an ecstasy which lies beyond being. The neglect of the singular, and more profoundly of existing things, the primacy of the generic and the logical which it is the fashion (quite wrongly) to blame on Aristotle – really represents what was a temptation for Greek philosophy and finally brought about its defeat when it showed itself no longer capable of sustaining Aristotle. The Renaissance of platonic idealism during the Alexandrine period was a punishment on human wisdom which had grown degenerate. And I am not sure that the same cannot be said of every platonist revival during the course of history.

<sup>23</sup> *Man's Approach to God*, Latrobe, PA: The Archabbey Press, 1960, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Existence and the Existent*, New York: Vintage Books, 1966, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21ff. On the intuition of being, see the concluding remarks in John C. Cahalan, "Wittgenstein e Maritain: verità, esistenza, logica," *Per la filosofia* 34 (1995): 8–17. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr Cahalan for his valuable comments on my paper.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ST I*, 75, 6: "The senses indeed do not know existence, except under the conditions of here and now, whereas the intellect apprehends existence absolutely, and for all time."

<sup>27</sup> *Existence and the Existent*, pp. 21ff.

<sup>28</sup> "Réflexions sur la nature blessée et sur l'intuition de l'être," *Revue Thomiste*, 68 (1968), p. 17:

Avec lui nous avons affaire à une philosophie authentiquement réaliste ou ontosopique. ... L'immense univers de la sagesse rationnelle aristotélicienne est un univers d'essences saisies par la première opération de l'esprit, la simple appréhension, et sans doute centrées sur l'être, ou l'exister, qui, de fait, est là, et impose sa primauté, mais sans que celle-ci ait été *formellement* saisie; au contraire, elle n'est présente à la pensée que d'une façon encore aveugle ou *virtuelle*, sans avoir été perçue en pleine lumière.

<sup>29</sup> *The Seventh Letter* 344a-b.

- <sup>30</sup> *A Preface to Metaphysics*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946, p. 46.
- <sup>31</sup> In *I de An.* viii: “Plato habuit malum modum docendi; omnia enim figurate dicit et per symbola, intendens aliud per verba, quam sonent ipsa verba.”
- <sup>32</sup> R.J. Henle’s work, *Saint Thomas and Platonism* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965], has documented the important distinction between the *viae* and the *positiones* of Plato and their place in Aquinas’ system. See W. Norris Clarke’s review in *Thought*, 32 (1957): 437–443.
- <sup>33</sup> A.M. Sertillanges, *St Thomas Aquinas and His Work*, London: Blackfriars, 1957, p. 91.
- <sup>34</sup> *De Potentia* 3, 5.
- <sup>35</sup> *Thought*, 32 (1957), p. 442.
- <sup>36</sup> *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, London: The Harvill Press, 1954, p. 88.
- <sup>37</sup> *Les degrés du savoir*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1940, pp. 585ff. I follow the translation given in “St. Augustine and St. Thomas,” *St. Augustine. His Age, Life and Thought*, Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1969, p. 204. See *An Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 61: “But of Plato himself we may say that his false principles grew in an atmosphere too pure to allow them to yield their full fruit and poison the essence of his thought. St Augustine was therefore able to extract from Plato’s gold-mine the ore of truth.”
- <sup>38</sup> Geiger thanks Maritain for carefully reading the manuscript of his book (*La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris: Vrin 1942, see p. 8). Since Maritain did not consider himself primarily as a historian of philosophy, one need not be surprised that he does not consider the conclusions of contemporary research regarding the Platonic element in Aquinas – a charge which, on the contrary, one might justifiably make of Etienne Gilson. Maritain cites Geiger’s book on participation in support of the view that ‘the metaphysical concept of being is an eidetic visualisation of being apprehended in judgment,’ and refers to his book *Le problème de l’amour chez saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1952) for a discussion of the Thomist positions on love (*Oeuvres complètes* XI, p. 813, n. 90). Maritain praises Fabro as one of the best interpreters of Kierkegaard (*Oeuvres complètes* XI, p. 858) but does not refer to his studies on Thomist participation. Both Maritain and Fabro took part in a colloquium in Rome in the late 1940s, when Maritain gave a lecture entitled “L’existentialisme de saint Thomas.” Maritain also comments on a negative review by Arthur Little of *Art and Scholasticism*, but makes no reference to his work *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism*. It is remarkable that Maritain in later writings does not attribute the same importance to the theory of Thomist participation. John Wipfel has suggested to me as a possible explanation that participation was not emphasized by John of St Thomas, upon whom Maritain greatly relied in his reading of Aquinas.
- <sup>39</sup> Albert Keller notes: “From this platonic thought, close to the doctrine of participation, Maritain arrives at an understanding of being as perfection” (*Sein oder Existenz? Die Auslegung des Seins bei Thomas von Aquin*, Munich: Max Huber, 1968, p. 108). Peter Nickl, in what is one of the most thorough investigations of Maritain’s metaphysics in any language, points out that Maritain’s earliest reference to the ontology of participation occurs in *Art et scolastique* (1920). See Peter Nickl, *Jacques Maritain. Eine Einführung in Leben und Werk*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992, p. 153.
- <sup>40</sup> *Oeuvres complètes* II, p. 1064.
- <sup>41</sup> *Approaches to God*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> *Mediaeval Studies*, 4 (1942), p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> *Oeuvres complètes* II, p. 1064.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1065.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1065f.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1069.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1070.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1073.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1075.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Degrees of Knowledge*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1959, p. 305.

<sup>53</sup> Etienne Gilson, "Pourquoi Saint Thomas a critiqué Saint Augustin," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age*, I (1926–27), p. 125f:

Si bien qu'à ses yeux, le problème de critiquer l'un quelconque des systèmes qui s'offrent à lui, se trouve résolu par le choix qu'il a dû faire, une fois pour toutes, entre les deux seules philosophies pures qui puissent exister, celle de Platon et celle d'Aristote. Réduites à leurs essences nues, ces métaphysiques sont rigoureusement antinomiques; on ne peut être avec l'une sans être contre tous ceux qui sont avec l'autre, et c'est pourquoi saint Thomas reste avec Aristote contre tous ceux qui se rangent du côté de Platon. ... Le thomisme serait donc né, en tant que philosophie, d'une décision philosophique pure. Opter contre la doctrine de Platon, pour celle d'Aristote, c'était s'obliger à reconstruire la philosophie chrétienne sur d'autres bases que celles de saint Augustin.

<sup>54</sup> *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, p. 255:

There is an intensive quantity (*quantitas virtutis*) which differs completely from quantity properly so-called, from dimensive quantity (*quantitas molis*), for it also belongs to the transcendental order, and refers to the being itself, of the things concerned without adding to them any accident (as is quantity properly so-called or spatiality), so that this intensive quantity cannot be mathematically measured, at least in itself.

In a footnote (*Ibid.*), he remarks:

A notion is transcendental when it is defined in relation to being. Now in order to define the more and the less one may say that one being is more than another when in order to become that other it would have to cease to be in some manner. The idea of degrees of being or perfection is thus a transcendental notion, defined solely by means of the notions of being and non-being, and in itself independent of any idea of dimensive quantity and space.

<sup>55</sup> See F. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 155–187.

<sup>56</sup> *Metaphys.*, lib. I, tr. V c. XV, p. 89, ll. 85–87, *Opera omnia*, XVI, 1, ed. Bernhard Geyer, Münster Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1960.

## **Chapter 12**

# **METAPHYSICS AND IDEALISM**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The basic thesis of this paper is that metaphysics, although it is an unavoidable component in all philosophical thinking, is something only possible in a universe of the kind described by idealism. The paper has two parts. In the first, critical, part I consider some of the problems facing any attempt to pursue metaphysics. These difficulties, I go on to argue in the second, more constructive part, are ones which can be met only if idealism is true. Inevitably, given the magnitude of this conclusion and the limited space available in which to defend it, the argument I shall sketch out will be a very general and schematic one. But I offer it in the belief that large-scale route planners are, in their way, at least as important in philosophy as highly detailed small-scale maps of individual sections of the journey.

## I

Metaphysics has been defined in many different ways which, although they are far from all equivalent, I see no real need to adjudicate between. Each, I should say, legitimately picks out one or other side of the enterprise. And for the purpose of this paper I shall describe metaphysics as the attempt to discover the most general conceptual shape of ultimate reality. There are two, quite closely related, points I would like to draw attention to in this definition.

In the first place it is saying that there *is* a most general conceptual shape to ultimate reality. There is something the case here that we can be right or wrong about. Perhaps that is obvious, but many have denied it, opposing the whole idea of ‘ultimate’ or ‘objective’ reality, and arguing that there is nothing more to the way things are than the way we take them. I think we should reject any such nihilism or relativism. Because they cannot regard their own pronouncements in the same way they regard other truths, views like this are ultimately self-refuting. Metaphysics, we must conclude, pursues the truth; which is something different from just whatever we happen to think.

The definition put forward tells us, not only that there is an answer, but secondly that this is something which we need to *discover*, something we do not yet have. This too might seem obvious, but again it is something that is commonly denied. For many think that the metaphysical answers we seek lie waiting for us in our language or in our ‘common-sense,’ implicitly possessed already and needing only to be highlighted or uncovered. I think we should reject all such attempts to read off metaphysical answers from our current conceptions and modes of speech.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, I doubt whether there really exist the kind of clear, settled and universal common-sense conceptions that such attempts would require, but even if there do, we need still to ask ourselves whether such conceptions might not be confused or incomplete or just plain wrong. It seems to me that metaphysics is a constructive or creative rather than a descriptive activity. We could make a distinction between working within a conceptual scheme and devising a new one, between a creativity that exploits existing possibilities and a – much rarer – creativity that opens up new ones. It is this latter which I see as the task of metaphysics.<sup>2</sup>

## II

Our aim then is to create a theory which correctly captures the fundamental conceptual structure of our universe. But how are we to proceed in this? Are we simply shooting in the dark, throwing up ideas at random, or is there some guide or standard we might use to limit our otherwise completely free hand?

The first and most natural suggestion which might be made is that the way to find out about the world, either in its everyday detail or in its overall metaphysical structure, is to observe it. The world is something we experience, and so the true theory of it will be the one that matches our experiences. ‘How *else* could you ever expect to learn anything?’ challenges the empiricist.

Does sensory experience give us the world? We need spend but little time on this suggestion. Philosophers from every age have shown that sense experience does not passively record the world before it, like a camera. Rather what we experience is also a function of our organs, expectations, desires, interpretations, assumptions and general conceptual structures. It is as much our creation as that of the world. If there is a way the world is, it is not just given us in sense experience.

Probably the simplest way to illustrate this truth is to focus on those situations where different individuals experience the same thing in different ways – where, for example, a thing is one shape, size or colour to me but another to you, or where from my point of view time drags but from yours it just flies by. But, of course, such contributions on our part need not vary from person to person, and many are endemic to the human condition, ways in which we all must interpret our world, such as the spatial illusions generated by perspective drawing or the way in which the appearance of one colour is affected by those which surround it.

All this, of course, is hardly news. But probably the reason why philosophers have not been more worried about it than perhaps they might have been is that they have thought our contribution to be both limited and capable of being separated out.<sup>3</sup>

Yet this confidence is misplaced. For it was the lesson of the Kantian philosophy that there can be no experience whatsoever that is not permeated and structured by our concepts, that they are present in even the most primitive experience, indeed that without them there could be no experience at all. To experience is always to experience *as*. The basic concepts of self, not-self, number, thing, causation, and the like are preconditions for the possibility of *any experience at all*. Though sometimes Kant talks a little in this way, we should not think of experience as made by *placing together before the mind* two preexisting kinds of elements (form and matter); for

without the other neither of these elements is *anything to the mind* at all. We could perhaps compare the case with those kinds of glue which work by adding an active agent to a base material. You don't here have two sticky agents added together to form a kind of 'combination-glue', rather it only becomes glue at all when they are combined. In the same way, only by being conceptualized can things be experienced at all. There is simply no way of experiencing how things are without our conceptualization – to take away all thought would be to leave nothing.

### III

If sensory experience is unable to provide us with any clear or straightforward guidance in the construction of our metaphysical theory, might a consideration of our conceptual powers do the trick instead? Many philosophers have argued that, rather than our having a completely free reign, there are limits to what we can think or imagine, that our cognitive space is, as it were, circumscribed. Clearly, were some such limitation the case then the range of thoughts that it was possible for us to think, the range of theories that we could come up with, would be restricted. And were it further the case that these limitations were ones which held in consequence of the ways things are – that things are inconceivable because they are impossible, undeniable because they are necessary – they would be restrictions, moreover, which served the cause of true theory.

General ways in which one might try to rein in our conceptual abilities include extreme empiricism (we can only think that which could be empirically verified or taught) or social relativism (the concepts, structures and possibilities of our thought are determined for us by our social context), but the two most obvious examples here are Kant and Hegel. Each in his own way not only argued that the possibilities of thought are limited, but also set out to show in detail the precise conceptual range available to us.

Can metaphysics be set on its path in this way? I think not. In the first place, as Wittgenstein famously observed in the Preface to his *Tractatus* – though many before him had made the same point – there is something self-refuting about any attempt to set the limits to thought. How could we specify what cannot be thought without thereby thinking it and breaking our own rule?

But secondly, and more importantly, it seems to me that there simply are no limits to thought. Concepts and theories are born into a social and intellectual context which, along with our cognitive faculties, evolves and grows. In this way, what can be thought and what seems or does not seem

self-evident change over time. Unlike Kant, Hegel saw that concepts develop, but even he was too prescriptive, detailing an exact course the development must follow. For in truth the process is a creative one and can be neither prescribed nor predicted.

In place of the view of mind as a rigid and limited organ I would advocate a picture of it as wholly plastic and infinite in potential. While there are clear limits to what we can conceive *at the moment*, these are temporary and contingent, and I can see no reason why there should be anything which could not in principle *become* thinkable by us; why we should not *become* creatures capable of thinking that. It seems to me that mind can represent anything, in the same way language can express anything. It is plastic and can take on any shape. Both the history of ideas and the very nature of thought itself impress this view upon us. The evolving story of human thought can give us no confidence to say, 'Here is a concept or principle in accordance with which we are constrained to think now and for ever.' This can only offer up a hostage to fortune. And besides, why should such limits hold? For what is there to a thought besides its content, what it is of? But if it has no further intrinsic nature of its own, why should its capacity to entertain be in any way limited?<sup>4</sup>

#### IV

It seems then that the relationship between observation and interpretation is an interpenetrating and dynamic one, and that neither can be held fixed long enough or securely enough for us to construct a metaphysical theory around it. How are we to find our way through such a swamp? It might be wondered whether there does not exist some methodological rule, some set of principles, that we could use to bring the whole into some order. Deductive coherence, comprehensiveness, dialectic, the law of non-contradiction, explanatory power, or simplicity are all the kinds of methodological tools that might suggest themselves here.

But, what reason have we to suppose that we can trust any precepts or guides put forward? For such methodological principles are already just metaphysical ones. For example, the prohibition on accepting contradiction is based on a metaphysical denial that reality contains any. But as such, there is no reason to think them any more foundational or certain than any other metaphysical principles. Methodology is no more firmly anchored than anything else. Its rules do not form a special class of certainties. There is no one unassailable 'method' that can be fixed on in advance before we attempt



to ascertain ‘the principles’ – for the method just is a certain subset of the principles.<sup>5</sup>

Besides, to propose some such principle as ‘the way the mind does, or ought, to work’ seems to me to fall foul of the kind of essentialism about cognition I have already inveighed against. As though *method* were some kind of fixed oracle from God. As our experiential data and conceptual tools have grown, each apace with the other, so has our understanding – the principles to which we adhere – approximating we hope towards truth. But in the same way, and just because they are only further metaphysical principles, so too has our method grown. We have now more complex, more powerful and (we hope) more adequate ways of working than we had in the past. The clearest statement that I know of the way in which methodology evolves is to be found in Spinoza’s *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (1632).

... as men at first made use of the instruments supplied by nature to accomplish very easy pieces of workmanship, laboriously and imperfectly, and then, when these were finished, wrought other things more difficult with less labour and greater perfection; and so gradually mounted from the simplest operations to the making of tools, and from the making of tools to the making of more complex tools. ...in like manner, the intellect, by its native strength, makes for itself intellectual instruments, whereby it acquires strength for performing other intellectual operations and from these operations gets again fresh instruments ...and thus gradually proceeds till it reaches the summit of wisdom.<sup>6</sup>

## V

I want now to move on to the second more constructive part of this essay. Our experience, our concepts, our methods – none of them, it seems, is fixed or able to provide us with a clear guide for the construction of an adequate metaphysical theory. Where does this leave metaphysics? How in this complex and ever-changing sea can we ever find the truth? Which out of the swarm of propositions that present themselves before us should we believe?

In one sense this is a pointless thing to ask. To the question, ‘Which propositions should I believe?’, the only answer that can be given is, ‘Believe the ones that seem true to you,’ which of course is no more than to say, ‘Believe the ones that you believe.’ For it is a fact that not all propositions strike us in the same way; some we find obviously and irresistibly true, some highly plausible, some slightly more likely than not, and some utterly implausible, even absurd. This variable experience, we might call ‘certainty,’

‘conviction,’ ‘intellectual satisfaction,’ ‘the absence of doubt,’ or simply ‘belief.’ Belief just is the acceptance of what seems right to us.<sup>7</sup> Nor do I want to deny the value of searching for some general criterion of acceptability for propositions (such as empirical verifiability or Descartes’ test of ‘clarity and distinctness’). Such criteria may exist (and if they did, it would certainly be good to know them), but, without begging the question, they too must be found acceptable – in their general statement more than any rival criterion, and in each specific application more than the denial of any proposition they would seem to support.

That we must believe what satisfies us is, I hold, just an inescapable psychological fact. It is the way human beings think, and so if you wish to try to think your way through the great puzzles of metaphysics, this is how you must proceed. There is no alternative. It is the minimal assumption that we have to make, in practical terms, as part of playing the game of thought. Such acceptance is implicit in the rules of the game. The only question is whether you wish to play.

But, as unavoidable as it may be, the practice could be one that leads us in fact into error. It might be that the account of the world which most satisfied us (and which compelled us to believe it) was wholly unlike the way things really are, while the true account of the structure of the world was one that we found completely implausible, unilluminating and dissatisfying. Perhaps certainty is just a social, psycho-analytic, or even biological phenomenon, with no relation whatsoever to truth. This basic realist possibility I do not argue for, I simply assert, for it seems to me quite undeniable that, though we cannot but assume it, there may in fact be no harmony between us and the world.

But even so, it is I think a mistake to ask for a *justification* of our procedure, for some kind of *guarantee* that in accepting what seems certain to us we are at the same time accepting what is true. For these are not matters which admit of proof. That what satisfies us intellectually is true, that what we believe to be the case really is so, either as a general rule or in any specific instance, is properly a matter of *faith*. It could never be proved except through some argument, but that, in so far as it would itself need to be accepted as sound, would presuppose the very thing we were trying to prove. There can be no facts about acceptance which do not themselves have to be accepted. At the bottom of philosophy lies an unavoidable act of faith, faith that our best efforts yield the truth.<sup>8</sup>

But, while this cannot be *proved*, it need not be left a brute and isolated datum. Though we cannot *justify* this link, we can (and indeed we must) seek an explanation which makes it *reasonable*, or which *supports* it. Take a comparable case. Empiricism as a method cannot justify itself, but were all

the empirical evidence to suggest that the only way humans ever learn things is through experience, that would be a result of great moment. Again (as Alvin Plantinga has shown) even if belief in the existence of God is something we must simply take as basic, it can still be used to show that that stance itself is a natural and grounded one, rather than something arbitrary and unsupported. Again, it is no insignificant fact that democracy is the political system that the majority of people would choose. Nothing can pull itself up by its bootstraps, but, so long as it is recognized for what it is, the use of a starting point to build a support and explanation for itself is both permissible and worthwhile. Indeed we expect it.

Can such explanatory support be found for the practice, with which we humans would seem to be saddled, of treating our own certainty about things as a guide to their actual truth? If we are persuaded of something, we cannot help but think that it is true, but have we thereby any *good reason* for thinking that it really is (or is likely to be) true?

‘Why is the fact that we believe something any reason, or any good reason, to think it true?’ sounds a very odd question. ‘Surely,’ it might be said, ‘conviction of certainty is not the *basis on which* we accept or reject ideas, but our very acceptance or rejection of them *itself*, and to believe something *just is* to think that we have reason to take it as true.’ There is nothing wrong with this perspective. What I am trying to get at, however, is the fact that we as humans are *also* capable of standing one step further back than this and asking whether our sense of certainty may not be subjective only. And from *this* perspective we need to find out whether what we are doing is reasonable as well as inevitable.

Have we then any *good reason* for thinking that the things of which we are certain really are (or are likely to be) true? I think so. In the rest of this paper I want to put forward an argument that it is indeed *reasonable* to take our certainty or intellectual satisfaction, our subjective state of believing, as a guide to truth.

But before I present the argument let me be just a little clearer about the conclusion I seek to demonstrate. The aim is to show that certainty is a guide to truth, but, of course, not all guides are equally reliable, and it must not be thought that I am trying here (with Descartes) to show that there is a mental state which can serve as some kind of a *guarantee* of truth, for obviously a belief can be certain and yet false. Subjective confidence is no guarantee of objective legitimacy, we may well have to give up beliefs of which we are or were certain, but the crucial fact to note here is that we should never do this unless they conflict with, or are disproved by, other beliefs of which we are *even more certain*. It is this rule that provides us with the sense in which intellectual satisfaction may be taken as a guide to truth. Although an

individual belief might be certain and yet false, and although in moving from one to another even more certain belief one might in fact be moving away from the truth, it remains generally the case that the more certain a belief is, the more reason we have to think it true.

To get this quite straight, what I seek to prove is not that, were we to somehow work our way up through all the world's beliefs in ascending order of the certainty with which they are or were held, each new belief would be closer to the truth or more likely to be true than its predecessor. For some of the things that have seemed most certain have been most wrong. All I want to claim is that, were we to do this, we should be acting rationally each time we rejected something lower down on the scale because it conflicted with something we had reached higher up, and thus that it is *generally* to our advantage to take as true what most seems to be true.

## VI

How can this claim be justified? Only through metaphysics, I would argue. Indeed more specifically, the thesis that I wish to advance here is that only if some version of Absolute Idealism is true would this be a reasonable thing to hold.

That Absolute Idealism is the correct account of the world and that it is able to provide us with such an epistemic backing are neither of them, of course, novel theses,<sup>9</sup> but it is worth sketching out again this basic answer, not least because it is no longer well known or understood.

With unlimited space at my disposal I would at this point offer a full explanation and proof of the Absolute Idealist view I favour. But while I believe this is something that *could* be done, most certainly it is *not* something that could be done here. So all I shall do instead is to offer the very briefest sketch of the kind of position I would advocate and the kind of way I would advocate we get there. But really this is just preliminary to my main task of showing how this conclusion can be used to rationally ground the taking of certainty as a guide to truth. That, I should add, is a prize which would equally hold for other forms of Absolute Idealism arrived at by other routes.

In setting out my case I would begin with a very strong realism about universals, arguing, not only that universals exist, but that strictly speaking they are *all* that exists. Both of these seem to me undeniable truths of observation. For what are universals but properties or character? Yet do we not perceive properties all around us, and what is there to a thing but its character? Properties are the very stuff and content of the world – without

them there would be nothing. The point is not to deny that particulars exist, simply to deny that they exist as anything *extra* besides universals.<sup>10</sup> For Aristotle the individual particular material object was *primary substance*, the property or universal only *secondary*. I want to completely *reverse* this, and say rather that the individual or particular being is secondary or parasitic on *its character*. A particular is less real than a universal; it is merely a vehicle for, or embodying of, the thing's nature or properties.<sup>11</sup>

Leaving universals for a moment, we can approach a cognate result by reflecting on the nature of mind and of thought. Descartes and Locke introduced into modern philosophy the technical term 'idea' to cover broadly whatever the mind is aware of in cognition. Both philosophers tended to think of ideas in highly subjective or psychological terms, as unique dateable occurrences in the minds of individual believers (like pains or tickles). But this view of cognition (sometimes called 'psychologism') is one which has from the start been heavily criticized. I would put my weight behind those criticisms and argue (with Frege and Popper) that ideas, or that which the mind employs or attends to in thinking, are not subjective and transitory events taking place within the inner history of some individual, but need rather to be thought of as *sui generis* items belonging to some separate extra-psychological realm. To the objection that, while this works perhaps for thoughts and concepts, it can hardly account for everything of which the mind is aware, and that in particular it does not work for our perceptions or sensations which are individual intuitions, I should reply that all perception (however apparently basic) is theory or concept laden.<sup>12</sup>

Looking at what we have said about the world and about mind, a suspicion grows that perhaps we have been approaching the same point from two different sides. Might it not be that the ideas or forms which we identified as the essence of objects and the ideas or thoughts we identified as the contents of minds are in fact the very same things; that 'to be' and 'to be believed' are one and the same? Might not there exist an *identity* between the realm of being and the realm of knowing?

Such an identification would have both ontological and epistemological advantages. Ontologically, by combining together into one the two parallel realms of forms and ideas it would satisfy Ockham's razor, while epistemologically it would allow us to hold that the immediate objects of our knowledge are the very things themselves. In so far as it identifies the essences of things with the objects of knowledge, this is a form of idealism. We need not object, however, to one who wanted to call it instead a species of Platonism, for it is an idealism that is neither subjective nor psychological.

Notwithstanding its advantages I recognize that such an identification of thought and being is also highly counterintuitive. 'How can the realms of

objects and of ideas be identical,' it will be said, 'when (switching for a moment to the first-person mode of speech) not everything real is thought by me, and not everything which I think is really the case?' It is necessary to respond briefly to both of these two worries and in so doing sharpen somewhat our basic idealism.

If the stuff of being is the stuff of mind, but there exists more than just what I know, then it seems to me necessary that we postulate further mind to take up the excess. If the reality I know is but a part of a larger reality, then so must the mind which knows it be part of a larger mind. This must be an all-encompassing intelligence that thinks 'through' its parts (that is to say, us), for while I do not know all reality, I know at least some, and hence my view must be included as one element within this wider whole which defines what is real. In other words, we need to assert the existence of a super-consciousness – God or the Absolute – of which all finite or limited minds are just parts or aspects, a whole which (without denying that there is almost certainly more to it than this) lives in and through us. Ultimate reality (we should say) is not simply what appears to me but what appears to such an omniscient (and perhaps infinite) consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

But how, if we identify the order of mind with that of being, can there occur any errors? The best way to account for this is to stress heavily the *unity* of the Absolute, and then focus on the consequent difference between the whole and its parts. For clearly, since it is simply identical *with* what it is *of*, God or the Absolute experience cannot be in error about anything. But if the unity which binds its elements is so intimate that nothing out of context looks quite the same as it does in context, then the possibility is opened up for saying that particular thoughts may contain errors, when viewed, that is, as distinct individuals standing alone and out of relation to their surrounds, rather than as pieces at home in their real place within the complete system. In other words, what we seem to see and what at the same time the Absolute sees through us, must inevitably look very different, for we are but tiny parts of a wider whole and do not enjoy its full perspective. In this way we might say that the difference between truth and error is the difference between our ideas, considered in context as part of the experience of God, and the same ideas abstracted out of that context and considered in isolation as self-standing entities, or to put it more simply, between 'what God believes through us' and 'what we believe on our own.' Putting all this more positively, the more we can identify with that wider vision, the less distortion our own perspective will suffer, and the more we shall come to see things as they truly are.

## VII

I have just sketched both the kind of idealistic system which I think is correct and the kind of way in which I think one might set about showing that. But let me now return to my main task and go on to explain why I think that, only if such a system is right, would our unavoidable impulse to take as true what seems certain to us, be one that was reasonable as well.

Very briefly my argument is this: were such a system of idealism true, were it the case that truth or reality is something that God believes in and through finite minds, then I think it would be reasonable to take the certainty of our beliefs as evidence (I do not say conclusive evidence) that this is what is happening in the case of beliefs thus characterized, and from that it would, of course, be reasonable to infer that they were true. That is to say, it is reasonable to think on this view of the world, that in so far as our beliefs are certain, thus far are they ones which God thinks 'with' or 'through' us, and to that degree they are true. The more we and God 'think together' the more confident we will be, while doubts, lack of confidence, etc., could be thought of as the mark of 'a house divided against itself.'

This is no doubt very strange, but we can find help considering a view slightly more familiar, namely the Christian doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. According to this belief the spirit of God dwells within the life of the believer. The spirit inspires us in a great many ways, but one of these is cognitively, and in this respect it is significant that it is described as the 'Spirit of truth' who "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is God's coming to us in an inner way to enlighten us. In a non-coercive way God 'opens our eyes for us.' Where the more familiar Christian doctrine is here limited to truths of a religious character, I want to widen it to all truths. In all things in so far as we see matters right we see them with God.

Why is it reasonable on the Absolute Idealist view to interpret certainty in this way as the mark which distinguishes between what we believe 'on our own' and what God believes 'through us'?

In part this may be defended phenomenologically. For there is an important sense in which what we end up believing is something not really 'up to us'. Our convictions are not things we *choose*. Rather there is a temptation to turn to the passive voice and say that we find ourselves convinced or inspired or our eyes are suddenly opened, that we find ourselves not simply our own masters, our convictions coming upon us as something 'given' or 'from the outside.' It is not that such certainty is *not* our own, an alien imposition overriding our own freedom and activity, but there is a sense of our participation in something wider and higher than our narrow selves. And just as those decisions which you do not quite know how you arrived at

are often the firmest, or the things you think or believe along with your class, age or culture tend to be more certain, more deeply embedded and hard to shift than those which are simply your own, so we might conclude that what God or the *Zeitgeist* 'thinks through you' produces more certain belief than what you just come up with on your own.<sup>14</sup>

But this association between our own certainty and God's thinking through us is not based solely on phenomenology, it can be seen to be a plausible consequence of the idealism developed.

We can begin by noting the fact that God's beliefs will be absolutely certain. Since (according to this theory) the property of 'God's believing something' is identical with the property of 'its being the case,' in God there is no epistemic gap between belief and reality. God can have no doubts but is rather absolutely certain.<sup>15</sup>

Next we should note that the thesis that 'God thinks through us' is an empty one if by 'God's view' we mean nothing more than the basic sum of our individual views. If the suggestion means anything, our actual experiences of things must be somehow different for being also part of God's view. They must be intrinsically altered, elevated as elements in a divine whole. Yet our view is not and never can be God's view; though one with God, each of us remains our individual and fallible selves. It is my suggestion that we can fill out, and thereby make some sense of, this paradoxical consequence of our general theory if we view the sense in which our beliefs are also those of God as something reflected in their certainty, and the sense in which they remain ours and never quite God's as something reflected in the fact that they are never wholly certain. And thus it would seem that the more we see things through God's eyes (or the more he sees things through ours), the more certain we will be.

But not only does this theory make reasonable the link we habitually make between conviction and truth; it is, I suggest, the *only* theory which can satisfactorily do so. Of course the one wholly adequate way to show this would be to consider and dismiss all rivals, but space precludes such an approach, so let me just try to look at the situation more generally. The heart of the issue is this. How, just by inspecting the state of our own minds, can we tell which of the things we think about are true and which not? There are two ways one might approach this problem. One would be to argue that how things seem is a test of how they are because there is nothing more to how they are than the way they seem, that is to say, we could understand truth in such a way as to be straightforwardly identical with some clear observational mark of the ideas we entertain (such as their certainty, utility or felt immediacy). But this is, of course, to adopt a radically subjective idealism that simply flies in the face of the fact that things are not always the way they



seem and not everything which works or which is felt is true. The alternative approach is to hold apart the way things seem from the way they are, but attempt to build some bridge between them. Perhaps, it might be said, we have evolved into creatures who are satisfied by truth, or perhaps God has set our minds in harmony with the world. Yet this approach too seems doomed from the start. For on this account the question of whether or not a belief is true is an issue wholly external to that belief. But how then could any internal mark be of any use? How could anything about the belief itself (such as its certainty) tell us anything of its relation to something wholly beyond it?

It is between the Scylla and Charybdis which await any attempt to forge a link between certainty and truth that our Absolute Idealism attempts to pass. For whether or not a belief is one that God thinks through us is a matter that takes us far outside the compass of just our thoughts. Yet, as I have suggested, it is also something that affects the belief itself, producing a mark of certitude. It is something we could reasonably tell from the inside.

That what is being presented is a form of *Absolute* Idealism, where the parts share, however imperfectly, in the view of the whole, allows us to head off the charge that our feelings about the way things are are just *ours* – they are also God's. The charge that our feelings are just *feelings*, a mere psychological category of no relevance to reality, is something we can head off by appeal to the *idealism* of our view. For if idealism is right, belief can be taken as a sign of being, since being just is belief.

But let us not get carried away. I have argued it is reasonable to take the certainty of our beliefs as evidence that they are ones that God thinks through us, but I have not said that this is *conclusive* evidence. For of course it is not; it is possible to be certain and wrong, and possible too in moving from a less to a more certain belief to be moving *away* from the truth. Not all certainty is from God. We can be certain in ourselves of our own fictions in a way that is indistinguishable from the certainty we share with the Absolute in the truth. But what then is left of our program of using certainty as guide of God's thought and thus of the truth? What help is it to show that the more true a belief is the more certain it will be, when what we need really to know is the reverse of this, that the more certain a thing is the more likely it is to be true?

The solution to our difficulty is this. While there can be no guarantee that moving to a more certain belief will not take us to a more false one, it is still rational to make this move, because there is a general connection between truth and increased certainty, and no general connection between increased certainty and anything else. There is no reason to think one false fiction more likely to induce certainty than another. Given two beliefs that differ in certainty, no other account can see any good reason for preferring one to the other, yet if we bring the idealist answer into the picture, we bring on at least

some evidence for thinking that in adopting the more certain we may be ascending to something more true.

Although it *could*, we have no reason to expect a new fiction that comes along to have a different, let alone an increased, level of certainty. Yet this is just what we would expect if the belief was more true. In this case it is reasonable to take the increase in certainty as a sign of increased truth (while admitting it need not be an infallible sign). Consider an analogy. Although they might just happen to, there is no reason to expect someone who has never been to Paraguay to know significantly more about the place than we do. Yet if they had been there that is just what we would expect. So if we meet someone who knows significantly more about Paraguay than we do, it is reasonable to take this as a sign (although admittedly not a conclusive one) that they have been there.

The key point is that in general there is no reason to think one false fiction more likely to induce certainty than another. Although possible, we have in general no positive reason to *doubt* that a more certain belief is more true, but at least some positive reason to suppose that it might be. Idealism gives us clear grounds for taking certainty as a general indicator of truth. I make no claims about how *strong* an indicator it is.

## VIII

Clearly I've covered a great deal of ground here with much generality. Objections might be made and defenses mounted at many points along the route. But if the general argument is sound; metaphysics is seen to support idealism in two ways. Firstly, metaphysical arguments may be constructed that justify an idealist position – and this not something I actually did in this paper, just something I sketched and asserted to be possible. But secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, metaphysics itself turns out to be something that it can only be rational to pursue if idealism is true anyway.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> That study of language may offer us certain metaphysical *clues* is something I would not wish to discount.

<sup>2</sup> Although there is no reason why natural science could not at times also perform this same creative role. Indeed on occasions in the past it has certainly done so.

<sup>3</sup> Locke, for example, isolated but a handful of what he called 'secondary' qualities easily distinguishable from a thing's 'primary' nature. F.H. Bradley thought our contribution much

more widespread and difficult to remove – the process involving a descent below the level of conceptualisation to a postulated level of ‘pure feeling’ or ‘immediate experience’ – but at the end of the day, like Locke, he believed that this could be done.

<sup>4</sup> The plasticity of mind calls into question the traditional distinction between realism and anti-realism. For while I admit that there is nothing beyond thought, this is not because reality is relative to thought, but because thought itself is unlimited.

<sup>5</sup> To require a methodology in advance of doing metaphysics is, as Hegel quite correctly observed, like requiring swimming proficiency before one ventures near the water.

<sup>6</sup> *Works of Spinoza*, tr. R.H.M. Elwes, New York: Dover, 1955, vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to deny the role of evidence and argument, either in support of, or to effect changes in, what seems right to us, but simply to point out that evidence, its connection with the facts that it is held to support, as well as that conclusion itself, still need to be individually weighed for plausibility. (The first two must be found more certain than the denial of the third.)

<sup>8</sup> The faith proposed here is the very minimum needed in order to think at all, like a workman’s faith in his tools.

<sup>9</sup> Consider, for example, F.H. Bradley’s claim that:

it is after all an enormous assumption that what satisfies us is real, and that reality has got to satisfy us. It is an assumption tolerable, I think, only when we hold that the Universe is substantially one with each of us, and actually, as a whole, feels and wills and knows itself within us. For thus in our effort and our satisfaction it is the one Reality which is asserting itself, is coming to its own and pronouncing its own dissent or approval. And our confidence rests on the hope and the faith, that except as an expression, an actualization, of the one Real, our personality has not counted, and has not gone here to distort or vitiate the conclusion. (*Essays on Truth and Reality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914, pp. 242–243)

<sup>10</sup> Universals become particularized or instantiated, but this is something that happens to them – a modification in *their being*. There is *no further entity* (such as a bare particular) to which they are added.

<sup>11</sup> That the particular and the material exist simply to symbolize or convey the true universal and spiritual reality which underlies them is the idealism of Plato, Hegel and Thomas Carlyle.

<sup>12</sup> In talking of ‘minds’ here, it should not be thought that the self is some ‘extra item’ over and above its perception, any more than an individual is some ‘extra item’ over and above its properties. Hume was unable to observe besides his impressions and ideas a self which ‘had’ or ‘entertained’ them, proving not of course that the self does not exist, but rather as Kant showed, that it is something which exists only in and through the unity of its elements. The synthetic unity of apperception has no being apart from its synthetic activity in unifying the manifold.

<sup>13</sup> Contra pragmatism, this must be an actual existent, in order to properly ground our modal claims about how things *would* appear under certain circumstances.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Caird, *University Sermons*, Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1898, pp. 78–86.

<sup>15</sup> That God should be ‘very confident’ or ‘extremely certain’ seems odd. It is better to view this negatively as the absence of all doubt. Rather than being ‘more certain’ God has ‘less doubts,’ God stands to his beliefs in a way wholly without (even the possibility of) doubt.

## Chapter 13

# EMPIRICISM: PRINCIPLES AND PROBLEMS

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Empiricism is defined by its basic principle, the Principle of Acquaintance (PA), which asserts that no entity is to be admitted into one's ontology unless one is acquainted with that entity in ordinary awareness of the world, either sensory awareness or inner awareness of our own conscious states. As William James once put it, this metaphysical first principle states that "everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real."<sup>1</sup> James was merely restating what others had earlier stated. David Hume was making essentially the same point when he insisted that all our ideas derive from impressions. As he argues, "...all our simple ideas in their first appearance, are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent."<sup>2</sup> When Hume says that all our ideas derive from impressions, what he is maintaining is that there is no kind of thought, no form of cognition, which gives us access as it were to a world that is somehow beyond the world given to us in sense experience. All our ideas or concepts

are ideas or concepts of things in the world of sense experience, either things given to us in sense experience or things that could be experienced.

When Hume states that all our ideas or concepts derive from impressions he means that they derive from entities as they exist in the world presented to us in ordinary sensible experience. They either, as names of individuals, refer to particular things presented in experience, or, as predicates, refer to the kinds of things, where things of these kinds have been presented in experience. There can of course be kinds of kinds as well as kinds of individual things, that is, genera as well as species.

As Hume indicates, we can, using these basic concepts, form other concepts. "I observe," he tells us, "that many of our complex ideas never had impressions that corresponded to them, and that many of our complex impressions never are exactly copied in ideas. I can imagine to myself such a city as the New Jerusalem, whose pavement is gold, and walls are rubies, though I never saw any such. I have seen Paris; but shall I affirm I can form such an idea of that city, as will perfectly represent all its streets and houses in their real and just proportions?"<sup>3</sup> If we take as basic or undefined the concepts that apply directly to things and kinds of things as these are presented in experience, then we can use these to introduce complex or defined concepts. These defined concepts permit us to think of kinds of things that are not themselves given in sense experience. We can, for example, form the concept of a unicorn. This is a kind that is not itself presented to us in sense experience, but it is a kind that is experienceable because the concept is defined in terms of kinds which have been presented in ordinary sensible experience. There are also what Hume refers to as "relative ideas,"<sup>4</sup> for example, the idea of "the father of Caius." Concepts of this latter sort came later to be called "definite descriptions."

The concept of a unicorn refers to a kind of thing which does not exist: there are no unicorns. Things of that sort are, however, possible. Definite descriptions also enable us to refer to things that do not exist, for example, the present king of France. Again, while there is no present king of France, such a thing is possible. In enabling us to conceive of things which are possible but not actual, these concepts are to be contrasted to supposed concepts of things, for example, Platonic forms, which rationalist philosophers argue exist but are not given in sensory experience. Given the empiricist principle PA, Platonic forms will not be admitted into an empiricist ontology, nor will one be able to form a genuine concept of such entities: we lack any form of thought or cognition in which such entities are presented to us.

We can think of or conceive things that do not exist. Defined concepts such as that of a *unicorn* and definite descriptions such as *the present king of*

*France* enable us to think about what does not exist. But these concepts are all defined on the basis of concepts that do refer to things or sorts of things which are presented in sensible experience. Since all concepts which are legitimate are defined on the basis of the latter, if the concept of a thing cannot be defined on that basis, then such things are simply *not possible*. Thus, the basic concepts that refer to things and kinds of things that are given in ordinary sensible experience establish the *limits of the possible*. Or to put it another way, for the empiricist the possible is contained in the actual.

It was John Locke who introduced the essential empiricist themes into modern philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

The philosophers against whom Locke was arguing were the Aristotelians and the rationalists. These philosophers shared the view that causal relations have an objective necessity which, once grasped, gives the knower knowledge of causal connections that is certain, not only beyond all reasonable doubt but beyond all possibility of doubt. It was, moreover, agreed by these thinkers that knowledge of these objective necessary connections does not derive from sense experience.

The Aristotelians and the rationalists argue that causal relations are objectively necessary. Thus, suppose when a thing is F then its being F causes it to be G. Then the position is that there is a connection, label it “ $\rightarrow$ ,” between F and G such that there is a guarantee with regard to anything that is F that it is also G. We have, in other words, the connection

$$(*) F \rightarrow G$$

This connection is necessary and guarantees that an event being F implies that there is an event that is G. If we take

$$Fa_{t_1}$$

to represent the event that *a* is F at  $t_1$ , then, using the symbols of formal logic, we may represent the regularity by

$$(**) (x)(Fx_{t_i} \rightarrow Gx_{t_{i+1}})$$

Since, on this position, (\*) guarantees the truth of (\*\*), it is also a necessary truth that

$$(***) (F \rightarrow G) \rightarrow (x)(Fx_{t_{i+1}} \rightarrow Gx_{t_{i+1}})$$

Suppose that the individual *a* which is F is presented to us in ordinary experience. We can represent this by “*a* is F,” or, in the symbols of logic, by

$$(\#) Fa_{t_1}$$

Since we are presented with the property F, and since (\*) holds of F of necessity, we can discern the fact (\*) in the situation (#). And since (\*\*\*), too, is a necessary truth, we can infer from what we discern in (#) not only that

$$(\#\#) Ga_{t_2}$$

but also the general fact of regularity (\*\*):

$$(x)(Fx_{t_i} \supset Gx_{t_i+1})$$

We discern in *a*'s being F not only the connection among properties (\*) but also the fact that *a* is determined by being F to also be G, and moreover the general fact that anything which is F will be G.<sup>6</sup>

On this account there will be a distinction between casual regularities, which are objectively necessary, and “mere” or accidental regularities. Both regularities have the form (\*\*). But the causal regularities will be supported by inference from facts like (\*) and (\*\*\*). Accidental regularities, in contrast, have no such support in a necessary connection holding between the properties.

Because of the objective necessity that ties the properties F and G to one another, it is *not possible* for something to be F and yet not be G. The properties are such that if (#)

$$Fa_{t_1}$$

obtains then it is not possible that the negation of (##)

$$(###) \sim Ga_{t_2}$$

be true. The truth of (#) excludes the possibility of (###). What this means is that the objective necessary tie represented by (\*) *guarantees* that one will never discover a counterexample to the generalization (\*\*). That, of course, is but another way of saying that the causal regularity is objectively necessary. In contrast, if there is no fact of necessary connection (\*), nor, therefore, a fact like (\*\*\*), then the regularity – the “mere” regularity – (\*\*) will be such that there is no guarantee against a counterexample. In other words, where there is no objective necessary connection, a regular connection will always be contingent.

Since the event (#)

$$Fa_{t_1}$$

guarantees the existence of the event (##)

$$Ga_{t_2}$$

these two events are *inseparable*: if the one does not exist, then neither does the other exist. Where one has a regularity which is a mere regularity, then it is the separability of the properties that are regularly connected – “merely” regularly connected – that permits the possibility of counterexamples.

Locke developed an empiricist case against the objective necessary connections of the Aristotelians and the rationalists, the connections that we have represented by ‘ $\rightarrow$ ’. His appeal was to PA: we are acquainted in ordinary experience with the properties of things but with no connection that ties them necessarily to other properties. In terms of our schemata, we are acquainted with properties such as F and G but not with a connection  $\rightarrow$  that would make (\*) true. Here is his argument:

'Tis evident that the bulk, figure, and motion of several Bodies about us produce in us several Sensations, as of Colours, Sounds, Tastes, Smells, Pleasure and Pain, etc. These mechanical Affections of Bodies, having no affinity at all with those *Ideas*, they produce in us, (there being no conceivable connexion between any impulse of any sort of Body, and any perception of a Colour, or Smell, which we find in our Minds) we can have no distinct knowledge of such Operations beyond our Experience; and can reason no otherwise about them, than as effects produced by the appointment of an infinitely Wise Agent, which perfectly surpasses our Comprehensions ... .<sup>7</sup>

Properties are perceived to be just as they are, in themselves; to know them as they are we need not know any of the relations in which they stand to other entities.

... the immediate perception of the agreement or disagreement of identity being founded in the mind's having distinct ideas ... affords us as many self-evident propositions, as we have distinct ideas. Every one that has any knowledge at all, has as the foundation of it, various and distinct ideas: And it is the first act of the mind (without which it can never be capable of any knowledge) to know every one of its ideas by itself, and distinguish it from others. Every one finds in himself, that he knows the ideas he has; that he knows also, when any one is in his understanding, and what it is; and that when more than one are there, he knows them distinctly and unconfusedly one from another.<sup>8</sup>

Locke's appeal to an empiricist's PA is clear.<sup>9</sup>

Given that the empiricist principle PA is a principle in ontology, this is an ontological argument: from the fact that the necessary connections are not presented in ordinary experience, the appeal to PA means that that sort of connection does not exist: it is not to be admitted into any ontology that pretends to be empiricist.

It follows that properties are all *ontologically separable*, and therefore logically separable. And in the absence of the excluded necessary connections, it follows that events such as (#) and (##) are *logical atoms*: they have no ontological, and therefore no logical, connections to each other or to other events. Or, to put it another way, since the events have no necessary connections to other events, they are ontological or logically *self-contained*.

Since the events are logically separable, the truth of (#) is compatible with both the truth of (##) and the falsity of (##). Though (#) be true, there is



no guarantee that (##) be true. Even if the regularity (\*\*) holds as a matter of fact, it is only contingently true. To put this point another way, since there is no objective necessary connection that makes (\*) true, neither can (\*\*\*) be a truth. The distinction of the Aristotelians and the rationalists between causal regularities, which are objectively necessary, and accidental generalities, which are not, disappears. Furthermore, it is no longer possible to find in a single instance the guarantee that a causal regularity is true. Since the regularity is true of a population while all we ever observe is a sample, and nothing in the sample guarantees the truth of the regularity, it follows that the evidence on the basis of which the regularity is believed to hold must always be partial. It can, therefore, never be asserted with complete certainty: there will always be a logical gap, as it were, between evidence and assertion. Thus, on the empiricist ontology based on PA, casual judgments will always be tentative.

These features of an empiricist ontology were clearly recognized and defended by Hume. He argued in particular that all causation is regularity. He developed the argument against objective necessary connections in two ways.

Both arguments are based on PA. The first argument is to the effect that we are not acquainted with any entity that might reasonably be said to be a power the exercise of which establishes a necessary connection between events. "All our ideas are derived from and represent impressions. We never have any impression that contains any power or efficacy. We never therefore have any idea of power."<sup>10</sup>

The second argument also appeals to PA. This argument is of a piece with Locke's argument, that properties are presented as not standing in necessary connections to one another. Hume has two versions of this argument.

The first version of this argument turns on the *logical separability* of events. If we take the idea of some cause and the idea of its effect, then there is no contradiction in supposing the former to exist and the latter not: "the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause."<sup>11</sup> There is no contradiction in separating the ideas because these ideas derive from perceptions and in perception there is no necessary connection that is presented to us: "as all our ideas are deriv'd from impressions, or some precedent *perceptions*, 'tis impossible we can have any idea of power and efficacy, unless some instances can be produc'd, wherein this power *is perceiv'd* to exert itself ... . [But] these instances can never be discover'd in any body ... ."<sup>12</sup> This argument is simply an application of Locke's argument that properties given in sense experience are separable in the sense of being logically self-contained.

Suppose the event (#)

$Fa_{t_1}$

causes the event (##)

$Ga_{t_2}$

On this argument, the properties F and G are logically separable, and therefore the event (#) is logically compatible not only with (##) but also with (###)

$\sim Ga_{t_2}$

There is therefore no guarantee that a's being F will bring about a's being G.

Hume's second version of this argument turns on a more stringent account of separability, call it *structural separability*. On this notion of separability, the event (#)

$Fa_{t_1}$

is separable from the event (##)

$Ga_{t_2}$

just in case that *a* which is F at  $t_1$  would exist unchanged even if *a* at  $t_2$  were to not exist, nor, therefore even if the event of a being G at  $t_2$  were not to exist. Hume holds that events given in sense experience are separable in this sense also. He puts the point this way,

... as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, it will be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation therefore of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity ... .<sup>13</sup>

Or, as he says elsewhere,

... upon the whole, there appears not, throughout all nature, any one instance of connexion, which is conceivable by us. All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem conjoined, but never connected. And as we can have no idea of any thing, which never appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion seems to be, that we have no idea of connexion or power at all...<sup>14</sup>

The claim that events are separable in this second sense has implications for metaphysics that are not made by the claim that events are separable in the first sense.

Suppose that there is a relation  $R$  that holds between the two events:

( $\&$ )  $R(a_{t_1}, a_{t_2})$

In that case, the property

( $\&\&$ )  $R(x_{t_1}, a_{t_2})$

holds of  $a$  at  $t_1$ . But ( $\#$ ) is structurally separable from ( $\#\#$ ). That means that, even if  $a$  at  $t_2$  were not to exist,  $a$  which is  $F$  at  $t_1$  would exist unchanged. But if  $a$  at  $t_2$  were to cease to exist, so would the fact ( $\&$ ). And if ( $\&$ ) ceases to exist then the property ( $\&\&$ ) ceases to hold of  $a$  at  $t_1$ . Hence, given the structural separability of the two events, there can be no property ( $\&\&$ ) which  $a$  at  $t_1$  ceases to have. And that in turn means that ( $\&$ ) cannot exist. The point is general: if the two events are structurally separable then there can be no genuine relations that hold between the two events.

If a relation  $R$  holds between the two events, then it must be reducible to nonrelational properties, called the foundations of the relation. That is, ( $\&$ ) must be logically equivalent to

( $\&\&$ )  $r'(a_{t_1}) \& r''(a_{t_2})$

Hence, if events are structurally separable, there can be no genuine relations; all relations must be reducible to nonrelational foundations. Hume's second argument for the nonexistence of objective necessary connections thus has the metaphysical implication that there are no genuine relations. Hume accepts this conclusion: he tells us "that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences."<sup>15</sup>

This is not an implication of the first argument, based on the weaker notion of logical separability. On this notion the two events ( $\#$ ) and ( $\#\#$ ) are logically separable because one can both assert ( $\#$ ) and deny ( $\#\#$ ), that is, assert ( $\#$ ) and assert ( $\#\#\#$ ) which is the negation of ( $\#\#$ ). But it is logically consistent to assert both ( $\#$ ) and ( $\&$ ) and to deny ( $\#\#$ ). So the logical separability of ( $\#$ ) and ( $\#\#$ ) does not have the implication that a relational fact like ( $\&$ ) cannot exist, or, if it does, that it must be reducible to nonrelational foundations.

The Aristotelians and the rationalists had in fact agreed in part with these empiricist theses and arguments with regard to the entities given in sense experience. They argued that in fact Locke was correct: the objective necessary connections are not given in sense experience. But, they also argued, they are given in another form of experience, in what can be called a rational intuition – "rational" because it discerns the reasons for things and 'intuition' because it grasps the connections like ( $\ast$ ) among properties. But

the Aristotelians and the rationalists disagreed as to how we come to have such a rational intuition.

The Aristotelians argued that we come to have such an intuition through a process of “abstraction” in which the active intellect as it were lifted from the events given in sense the formal facts like (\*).<sup>16</sup> The rationalists argued that such a process of abstraction was simply not possible. Descartes made the case using the example of wax. During a causal process of melting, wax goes through a series of changes. He first notes the changes in the sensible qualities such as colour, taste and smell. These all change while the wax remains the same.

What is it then in this bit of wax that we recognize with so much distinctness? Certainly it cannot be anything that I observed by means of the senses, since everything in the field of taste, smell, sight, touch, and bearing are changed, and since the same wax nevertheless remains.<sup>17</sup>

It follows that there are no necessary connections that link these to the wax: one can, as Descartes says, “reject” these while affirming the wax. He proposes to do just this in order to discover just what, essentially, the wax is.

Let us consider it attentively and, rejecting everything that does not belong to the wax, see what remains.<sup>18</sup>

What remains the same throughout is that the wax is extended and capable of change in shape.

Certainly nothing is left but something extended, flexible, and moveable.<sup>19</sup>

But this extended thing during the process of melting undergoes a series of changes in shape. This series is a *continuous series*. Since this series is continuous it contains an infinite number of shapes. The formal facts that provide the links between the parts of the process are therefore infinite in number. But sense is finite, and can discern only a finite number of shapes. The formal facts which link the parts of the process could never *all* be lifted from the events that are presented to us in sense experience. No process of abstraction could provide the knowledge of the necessary connections that link the parts of the process.

But what is meant by flexible and moveable? Does it consist in my picturing that this wax, being round, is capable of becoming square and of

passing from the square into a triangular shape? Certainly not; it is not that, since I conceive it capable of undergoing an infinity of similar changes, and I could not compass this infinity in my imagination. Consequently this conception that I have of the wax is not achieved by the faculty of imagination.<sup>20</sup>

The argument from the continuity of processes in which the parts are linked by necessary connections is a strong one. It turns on the mind not being able through sense experience to grasp the structure of such an infinite continuous series.

Descartes therefore concluded that the knowledge of the objective necessary connections that link events is innate. The rational intuitions of the connections of things are therefore always present in the mind, and learning is a matter not so much of discovery but of bringing to the level of conscious or explicit awareness what is already there in the mind implicitly.

Since the Aristotelians and the rationalists agreed that objective necessary connections are not given in sense experience, it follows that the claim by empiricists such as Locke and Hume that these are not so presented is one with which they would agree. Where they would disagree is with regard to the limitation of ontology to the entities that are given in sense experience. There are, they argue, further entities, such as necessary connections, that are not given in sense experience, though they are, they also insist, otherwise given in experience, namely, by rational intuition. What Locke and Hume insist upon is that there are no such rational intuitions. They agree with Descartes that the Aristotelian account of how we acquire knowledge by abstraction is not acceptable. As for innate ideas, Locke provides a systematic sceptical argument that there simply are no innate ideas of necessary forms such as (\*) nor innate knowledge of principles such as (\*\*\*) .

Hume takes for granted this argument against innate ideas, taking for granted that without innate ideas the appeal to PA for the absence of necessary connections is conclusive.

... 'tis impossible we can have any idea of power and efficacy, unless some instances can be produc'd, wherein this power *is perceiv'd* to exert itself. Now as these instances can never be discover'd in body, the *Cartesians*, proceeding upon their principle of innate ideas, have had recourse to a supreme spirit or deity, whom they consider as the only active being in the universe, and as the immediate cause of every alteration in matter.<sup>21</sup>

Later thinkers objected to the empiricist ontology that Hume was defending. Specifically, they objected to the consequence of Hume's empiricist arguments for the separability of things that there are no relations. To the contrary, it was argued, the world as we experience it is a *structured* world. In other words, *relations are presented to us*. Here is what the idealist F.H. Bradley says:

We must get rid of the idea that our mind is a train of perishing existences, that so long as they exist have separable being, and, so to speak, are coupled up by another sort of things which we call relations.<sup>22</sup>

What we are presented with is not a whole consisting of separable parts but a whole in which the parts are so related *that they are not separable*.

If we turn to what is given this [a train of perishable existences] is not what we find, but rather a continuous mass of presentation in which the separation of a single element from all context is never observed, and where, if I may use the expression, no one ever saw a carriage, and still less a coupling, divided from its train.<sup>23</sup>

The empiricists' ontology of relations that is part of Hume's metaphysics makes it impossible to recognize this *fact, that what we are presented with in sensation and thought are wholes in which the parts stand in relations to one another*. But if we are presented with relations, then they must, on empiricist grounds, be admitted to one's ontology. *The empiricists' PA requires the inclusion of relations in one's ontology*. However, the arguments developed by the empiricists in criticism of objective necessary connections require the nonexistence of genuine relations. It follows that the empiricists' PA imposes an ontology which is inconsistent with the empiricists' arguments against objective necessary connections. The idealists concluded that one had therefore to admit into one's ontology objective necessary connections, for otherwise relations would be excluded.

Bradley proposes that genuine relations are incompatible with the independence or separability that is a consequence of the view of relations consequent upon Hume's arguments against necessary connections. He tells us "... a mode of togetherness such as we can verify in feeling destroys the independence of our reals."<sup>24</sup> Bradley therefore proposes an ontology that acknowledges the reality of relations. Specifically, he argues that "Relations are unmeaning except within and on the basis of a substantial whole, and related terms, if made absolute, are forthwith destroyed."<sup>25</sup> On this account, unlike that implied by Hume's argument regarding structural separability,

there are relations that are genuine in the sense that their relata are not independent, or, equivalently, in the sense that the being of one relatum is not separable from the being of the other relatum.

If it [a relation] is to be real, it must be so at the expense of the terms, or, at least, must be something which appears in them or to which they belong. A relation between *A* and *B* implies really a substantial foundation within them. This foundation, if we say that *A* is like to *B*, is the identity *X* which holds these differences together. And so with space and time – everywhere there must be a whole embracing what is related, or there would be no differences and no relation. It seems as if a reality possessed differences *A* and *B*, incompatible with one another and also with itself. And so in order, without contradiction, to retain its various properties, this whole consents to wear the form of relations between them.<sup>26</sup>

Bradley concludes against the account implied by the claim that things are structurally separable that “there must be a whole embracing what is related.” From this he infers his own account of the nature of this whole. The relata *A* and *B* are different things within a whole (*A, B*). This whole then “consents to wear the form of a relation”; thus, if *A* and *B* stand in the relation *R*, then the correct representation of this fact consists in attributing a property corresponding to *R*, say *r*, to (*A, B*). Thus, according to Bradley’s account, the correct way to represent the fact reported by

(@) *a* is *R* to *b*

is given by

(+) (*a, b*) is *r*

or,

*r*(*a, b*)

Like the empiricist account of relations, this account reduces statements such as (@) that apparently have two subjects to statements which have only one subject. The traditional empiricist account, however, does this in a way that makes the subjects of predication the two individuals *a* and *b*; the result is two facts in which these individuals are separable. In contrast, the account that Bradley gives makes the subject of predication an individual or particular thing, only now it is a *whole*, a single thing of which *a* and *b*, the apparent subjects of (@), are but aspects and not the real subjects of predication.

On Bradley’s view, then, the whole (*a, b*) is itself a particular thing,<sup>27</sup> of which the two terms *a* and *b* are but aspects, and where the arrangement *r* characterizes this whole: it is the form which this whole takes. But this whole consists of the relata as parts. Thus, the relation holds of the relata, not

separately as in the account implied by the structural separability argument, but jointly<sup>28</sup>: “where the whole, relaxing its unity, takes the form of an arrangement, there is coexistence with concord.”<sup>29</sup>

In another sense, however, the relational form  $r$  on this account is itself part of the experienced whole, that is, the whole which we experience when we experience a relational state of affairs of the sort that we express in ordinary terms as (@). Bradley makes this point in his late essay on “Relations”:

Certainly every content and aspect of the relational situation as an experienced fact may and must be taken as qualifying in some sense the situation as a whole; and, without so much as this, we cannot have a relation at all. But you cannot take the particular terms as thus qualifying the relation, even if you could take them, so far as they are particular or individual, as qualifying the whole. In short, to experience a relational situation as one whole and one fact, you must take it so that, as relational, the whole is not, and cannot be, qualified by its aspects or parts. The relation, as soon and so far as the whole situation has become relational, has become no more than one of the parts. And to regard this part as itself the entire whole is an obvious absurdity.<sup>30</sup>

If we take our experience of relational facts as given, then our experience of them is as wholes. That is, the experience that we ordinarily express by statements like (@) is an experience of a whole. But within this whole it is possible to distinguish parts or aspects. On the one hand, there are the entities that are related,  $a$  and  $b$ . And on the other hand, there is the way in which they are connected, what in (@) is represented by  $R$ . These three things are *within* the experienced unity or whole. They are not qualities separable from the experienced whole. Nor, as Bradley emphasizes in the last sentence, can the structuring relation be regarded as the whole of what is experienced: one cannot ignore the things that it structures. But these parts are all inseparable parts of what is taken ontologically to be a seamless whole. This has been characterized as an “absolutist” view of things.

It is clear that Bradley in an important way accepts Hume’s conclusion, based on the structural separability argument, that things which are real do not stand in genuine relations to other things, that is, to other distinct things. William James thus quite correctly notes that “Taken thus in all its generality, the absolutist contention seems to use as its major premise Hume’s notion ‘that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences’.”<sup>31</sup>



What Bradley does with regard to these experienced wholes or unities is argue for a certain *ontological account* of them. This account consists in his rendering of the experienced fact represented by (@) as being more perspicuously represented by (+), that is, his account of relations as the form of the whole which has *a* and *b* as its aspects. But at the same time he also argues that substantial whole

(*a,b*)

is *not* given in ordinary experience. In experiencing, say, *a* being to the left of *b*, we experience two particular things, *a* and *b*. We also experience the unity of a being to the left of *b*, the sort of unity represented by (@). But Bradley asserts that there is a *further* entity, a further particular thing, present in the situation. That is the whole (*a, b*) that is the subject of the arrangement. *This further whole is not given in ordinary experience.* In ordinary experience we are presented with *two* individual things, *a* and *b*, and are *not* presented with what is as it were a third particular thing of which these two are but parts or aspects. Bradley accepts this point. He therefore argues that this whole, this thing of which the two presented things are but aspects, is, rather, something discovered by the faculty that Bradley calls “thought.” The object of thought is not something given in sense experience: “That it [the object of thought] is not mere sense-experience should be a commonplace.”<sup>32</sup> Rather, “judgement, on our view, transcends and must transcend that immediate unity of feeling upon which it cannot cease to depend.”<sup>33</sup> Thought “grows from, and still it consists in, processes not dependent on itself. And the result may be summed up thus; certainly all relations are ideal, and as certainly not all relations are the product of thinking.”<sup>34</sup> And since relations are in effect not known by sense experience our knowledge of them is *a priori*; and since they are all ideal, transcending the entities of sense experience, they hold necessarily.

Bradley thus lines up with the rationalists such as Descartes in holding that there are objective necessary connections that we know by a cognitive means other than sense experience. He appeals to our experience of things – we experience them as related or structured. This appeal is used against the claim made by empiricists such as Hume that there are no relations – this is an implication of the claim that things are structurally separable. But then it is argued that this experience is not of the sort which the empiricists would allow. The idea is that, since sense experience is of separable particulars, the structure of which we have experience cannot be given in ordinary sensible experience. The experience in which it is given must therefore be some nonsensible form of experience. This form of experience is what Bradley calls “thought.”

There were two responses to Bradley’s critique of empiricism and to his alternative ontology. These two responses came from William James and

Bertrand Russell. Both involve rejecting Hume's claim that things given in experience are structurally separable. That permits these philosophers to accept the argument deriving from Locke and Hume that things given in experience are logically separable while rejecting the implication of the structural separability argument that there are no genuine relations. And because they reject the principle that only those things are real that are logically separable they also reject the absolutist position of the idealist critics of empiricism such as Bradley.

James simply insisted, with Bradley, that we are presented with things as related. He accepts the empiricists' PA but insists, contrary to Hume, that relations are among the entities that are presented to one in ordinary experience. James refers to this position as "radical empiricism." He makes clear that such a position accepts PA:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced.

His point in emphasizing the latter is that the empiricism of Hume fails to admit relations even though they are indeed presented to one. James continues:

For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as "real" as anything else in the system.*<sup>35</sup>

On this point he agrees with the idealist critics of Hume. But contrary to these critics he also emphasizes that things as related are given in experience as *distinct things*. Contrary to the implication of the absolutist account of relations, James insists that this separateness does not disappear upon the recognition that the distinct things are after all related: "... whatever separateness is actually experienced is not overcome, it stays and counts as separateness to the end."<sup>36</sup>

James elsewhere uses a perceptive metaphor. The stream of consciousness, he tells us, "Like a bird's life, it seems to be made an alternation of flights and perchings." The latter are the "substantive parts" of the world as we experience it, the former are the "transitive parts."<sup>37</sup> The flights are the relations, the properties of things are perchings. In these terms, the upshot of the argument from structural separability is that one must treat flights as perchings. But the idealists such as Bradley, in their account of relations, also treat flights as perchings. Only, instead of their being perchings

on particulars in the stream of things as experienced, they are perchings on substantial wholes into which the particulars as experienced are absorbed. James' argument is that a consistent empiricism must admit both perchings and flights into its ontology, and that the error into which Hume's empiricism falls is that it omits flights, or, rather, tries to transform flights into perchings. And in their own way the idealists, while recognizing the need to admit structure, relations, into one's ontology, do so only, if you wish, confusedly, because they also insist that there are no genuine flights, only perchings.

Like James, Russell accepts the reality of genuine relations, and accepts that objects that are related maintain their distinctness. Russell's argument is that unless one accepts such an account of relations one comes into conflict with facts about relations that likely should be taken to be obvious but which were long neglected by philosophers and logicians. He develops this argument against both the Humeans and the idealists: in both cases, the account of relations simply will not do.

On Bradley's idealist or absolutist view, relational states of affairs consist of a relational property  $r$  being predicated of a complex individual whole  $(a, b)$ . The relation of  $a$  to the whole  $(a, b)$  is the same as the relation of  $b$  to that whole. That is, the role of  $a$  in that whole is symmetrical with the role of  $b$ . Thus, Bradley's schema (+)

$$r(a, b)$$

represents indifferently *both* the fact that

$$(\wedge) a \text{ is } R \text{ to } b$$

and its converse, the fact that

$$(\wedge_c) b \text{ is } R \text{ to } a$$

Where  $R$  is a symmetrical relation, one for which we have

$$(x)(y)[Rxy \supset Ryx]$$

then we have no problem: if  $(\wedge)$  obtains so does  $(\wedge_c)$ , and (+) can represent the two indifferently. But the same does not hold for *asymmetrical* relations.<sup>38</sup> Where  $R$  is asymmetrical, we have

$$(s) (x)(y)[Rxy \supset \sim Ryx]$$

In this case  $(\wedge)$  obtains while  $(\wedge_c)$  does not. In the case of an asymmetrical relation, there is a difference – an ontological difference – between a relational fact and its converse that is not captured in any account, like Bradley's, that requires both facts to be represented indifferently by the same notation. But the monistic account was introduced to solve the problem of relations. Since it cannot do that, it must be rejected.<sup>39</sup>

To this objection, Bradley replies,<sup>40</sup> that the incompatibility between a relation and its converse, that is, the law (s), if it is to be more than a matter of chance, must be the expression of a real relation that obtains between a relational fact constituted by  $R$  and the converse of that fact. It will, therefore,

be a necessary fact about  $R$ , part of the meaning of  $R$ , that its obtaining excludes its converse obtaining. Now, this may well be the case, *given* the monistic account of relations. It does not, however, adequately reply to Russell. For, even if it is somehow a necessary truth that the obtaining of a relation excludes the obtaining of its converse, that is, if it is somehow a necessary truth that a relation is asymmetrical, it still does not follow that one has provided an account of relations that adequately captures the difference between a relation and its converse. The point remains that  $(+)$  represents both  $(\wedge)$  and  $(\wedge_c)$  indifferently, this because  $a$  and  $b$  occur symmetrically in  $(a, b)$ . There is therefore nothing that accounts for the *difference* between  $(\wedge)$  and  $(\wedge_c)$ . Bradley looks at the contrariety between  $(\wedge)$  and  $(\wedge_c)$  rather than the difference between them that is presupposed by the contrariety.<sup>41</sup>

The same sort of argument can be made against the account of relations that is implied by the Humean claim that things are structurally separable. On this account, a relational state of affairs

$(\%) Rab$

must be reducible to a pair of nonrelational states of affairs:

$(\%)\% r'(a) \& r''(b)$

where  $r'$  and  $r''$  are the foundations of the relations. Suppose that  $R$  is the relation of being a father of. Then the relative product of  $R$  with itself

$(R|R)xy = (\exists z)(Rxz \& Rzy)$

is the relation of being a grandfather. Suppose that  $a$  is the grandfather of  $b$ :

$(R|R)ab$

Then we have

$(\exists z)(Raz \& Rzb)$

If we now reduce  $R$  to its foundations we have

$(\exists z)[r'(a) \& r''(z) \& r'(z) \& r''(b)]$

Notice that this implies

$r'(a) \& r''(b)$

so that not only is  $a$  the grandfather of  $b$  but also the father of  $b$ : my grandfather turns out to be necessarily also my father. Hardly what mother nature intended! Moreover, whatever the  $z$  is that is said to exist as the son of  $a$  and the father of  $b$ , it is implied that

$r'(z) \& r''(z)$

that is, that this individual is its own father: every son who has a son is also his own son. Again, not what nature intended!

That there are relations which are relative products of other relations is a simple fact. But the account of relations implied by the structural separability of things requires that the grandfather of a boy is the father of that boy and that a son who has a son is also his own father. So much the worse for that

account of relations. Like the idealist account of relations, it simply cannot account for simple facts about relations.

As Russell sees it, both the account of relations implied by Hume's claim that things are structurally separable and the alternative account of relations proposed by the idealists assume that predication always involves only one term. This is the "common opinion ... that all propositions, ultimately, consist of a subject and a predicate."<sup>42</sup> Russell rejects this common assumption. In rejecting this assumption, Russell is making essentially the same point as James when the latter insisted that there are both perches, that is, nonrelational predications, and flights, that is, relational predications, and that where a relation relates two distinct things those things retain their distinctness in the relational state of affairs.

Russell's account of relations takes the grammatical form of (@) to perspicuously represent its logical form. The objective fact represented by (@) does not dissolve into a pair of facts about individuals – (&&) – as on the account implied by the structural separability argument. But this unity is not a whole *of which* the relation is predicated, as on Bradley's account. Rather, the relation is *predicated of the terms jointly*. It is *a* and *b* being related that is the unified whole, rather than *a* and *b* being constituted into a whole of which the relation is then predicated.

Notice, however, that on the James–Russell account of relations, as on Bradley's idealist account, when we have a relational state of affairs (@)

*a* is R to *b*

or

*Rab*

the two things *a* and *b* are located in a genuine unity in the sense that, if one of *a* or *b* were not to exist, that unity could not exist. Thus, if *b* were to cease to exist the thing *a* would cease to have

*Rxb*

predicated of it. Thus, if *b* were to cease to exist, *a* would change in the sense that what could be predicated of it when *b* exists cannot be predicated of it when *b* ceases to exist. And so, upon the James–Russell account of relations, as upon Bradley's account, things that are related are *structurally inseparable*.

It follows that if the empiricist, or, in James' term, the radical empiricist accepts the reality of genuine relations, then one must reject Hume's claim that things are structurally separable. And if one rejects this point, one must reject the argument based upon it that Hume uses to deny the reality of objective necessary connections.

Now, Bradley and the other idealists similarly rejected the structural separability of things and the argument against objective necessary

connections that was based upon that notion. They saw correctly, as James and Russell were also to see, that if one allows into one's ontology genuine relations, then one must accept that things are structurally inseparable. The idealists went on to develop an account of relations which allowed for things to be structurally inseparable. But upon their account, objective necessary connections returned to the ontology, along with a nonsensible form of experience, what Bradley called "thought," as a way of knowing these connections.

James and Russell, in contrast, locate the relations which they admit into their empiricist ontologies in the world of ordinary experience. There is nothing in the account of relations which they proposed that requires them to hold that these entities and the states of affairs into which they enter are outside the world of sensible experience and can be known only by some form of rational intuition or nonsensible form of experience. What it is important to notice is that this acceptance of relations and of the notion that things as related are structurally inseparable does not require us to reintroduce objective necessary connections. The first of Hume's arguments, already given as we saw by Locke, based on PA, that properties are logically separable, yields the empiricist conclusion that there are no objective necessary connections. This argument is independent of the argument based on the claim that things are structurally separable; one can consistently accept this argument while rejecting the notion that things are structurally separable.

The introduction of genuine relations into an empiricist ontology by James and Russell had important consequences. Thus, for example, it became possible to describe how the world as actually experienced contains within itself and points towards a world that lies outside and beyond itself. As James has put it, "Mainly ...we live on our speculative investments, or on our prospects."<sup>43</sup> It is hard to see how this is possible either on Hume's empiricism, given its account of relations, or on Bradley's idealism, given its account of relations. On the former, there is, in James' phrase, no "hanging-together."<sup>44</sup> Hume does allow that we have "relative ideas," and in terms of these he suggests that we can think of things that are not themselves presented but that are related to what is presented. The suggestion is a good one. But given the account of relations implied by his claim that things are structurally separable, the experienceable but unexperienced entities thought of by means of such concepts are in fact wholly unconnected to the things of the world as experienced. There is an ontological gap between the world we experience and the world beyond what we experience. As for the idealist account of relations, here we do have genuine connections. But they do not point to a beyond that is coordinate with what is given in ordinary experience. The relation points not to another particular thing like the thing that we are

presented with in ordinary experience; rather, it points to a whole which is *not* given in ordinary experience. There is a beyond but this beyond is an entity that is outside not only the world as experienced, that is, sense experience, but the world as experienceable.

Both these views can be contrasted with what we have upon the James–Russell account of relations. On this view, “... we at every moment can continue to believe in an existing *beyond*. It is only in special cases that our confident rush forward gets rebuked.” This *beyond* is one that is of a piece with the world as we experience it. “The beyond,” James argues, “must ... always in our philosophy [radical empiricism] be itself of an experiential nature.”<sup>45</sup> To see how this goes, consider a person *a*, who, let us assume, we are acquainted with in our ordinary experience; *a* has a father and this father has a father and so on: for every person there is another person who is his or her father. If R is the relations of *being a father of* then we can form the relative product of R with itself

$$R|R = R^2$$

to give the relation of grandfather, and the relative product of this with R

$$(R|R)|R = R^3$$

to give the relation of great grandfather, and so on to the concept

$$(v) R^n$$

Using this concept we can form with regard to *a* the idea that there is a person who is his or her great, great, ... great grandfather:

$$(vv) (\exists y)[Py \& R^n ya]$$

Furthermore, we can infer this is in fact true. Since we know it to be a fact about the relation R that for every person there is another person who is his or her father, that is, that

$$(vvv) (x)[Px \supset (\exists y)[Py \& x \neq y \& Ryx]]$$

Given the general fact (vvv) that is confirmed in our experience of things in the ordinary world we can form the idea (v) and with that not only think of things outside the world of experience but can have a reasonable expectation that those things exist. The things with which we are acquainted thus point towards a beyond, towards things which are not experienced but which we can reasonable expect, in the right circumstances, to come to experience.

In this way things in this world point to things that are not presented, and the latter are firmly connected with the things that are presented to us in ordinary experience. There is a beyond that is experienceable but not experienced and this beyond is solidly linked with that which is experienced. This linkage is provided by the relations such as R which connect things, and our knowledge, confirmed in the world as experienced, of general facts such as (vvv) about these relations.<sup>46</sup>

A second important consequence of the introduction of genuine relations into the empiricist ontology has to do with causation. Again the problem for the empiricist ontology lies in the implications of the claim that things are structurally separable.

Consider one of the standard examples of causation, “the communication of motion, which I see result at present from the shock of two billiard balls.”<sup>47</sup> We have here a case of cause and effect: the first billiard ball strikes the second, and the motion of the first is communicated to the second. Now, Hume argues that cause and effect are distinct. This is not merely a matter of logical separability but also structural separability. Thus, he tells us that

...as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, it will be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation therefore of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity ...<sup>48</sup>

The cause and the effect are related to each other; they are, Hume argues, “contiguous in time and place, and that the object we call cause precedes the other we call effect.”<sup>49</sup> Contiguity in time and contiguity in place are relations. But if things are structurally separable, as Hume asserts, then these relations have to be understood as reduced to their foundations; otherwise the one thing cannot remain unchanged if the other were to cease to exist. So there is a problem here. But there is worse. Hume’s account implies that, while the cause and effect are contiguous, the cause immediately precedes the effect: that is the point of speaking of *contiguity*. But events which are contiguous have no other events between them. The problem is that this will not do for the case of transfer of motion from one billiard ball to another. This latter is a *continuous* process. A process of this sort involves a *relational structure* in which the events related are *compact*, in the sense that between any two events there is always another. There is therefore, contrary to what Hume’s account of cause requires, *no immediate predecessor* for the event that consists of the second billiard ball acquiring the motion of the first. Furthermore, the very moment when the one billiard ball loses the motion is the moment when the second gains it: the “transfer” is instantaneous. Hume in fact argues that such instantaneous transfer is not possible. For it would imply that the effect is contemporaneous with the cause, and “if one cause were contemporary with its effect, and this effect with its effect, and so on, it



is plain there would be no such thing as succession, and all objects must be coexistent."<sup>50</sup> However, to repeat, if we understand the process in the way required by Newtonian physics, then the process *is* continuous, and the transfer occurs instantaneously. In order to deal with the problem, it is necessary to hold that the series of events in which the one billiard ball strikes the second are *related* by the relation of *successor*, where this relation has the properties of compactness and continuity. (The latter implies the former.) Thus, if *S* is the successor relation, then we will have the law that if one event is a successor of a second then there is a third event which succeeds the first and is succeeded by the second:

$$(w) (x)(y)[(x \neq y \ \& \ Sxy) \ (\exists z)(z \neq x \ \& \ z \neq y \ \& \ Sxz \ \& \ Szy)]$$

There are further axioms that define compact and continuous relations, (w) and the other properties of compact and continuous relations are analogous to the property (vvv) of the relation *R* that we noted above. They state a regularity about succession. It is a generality that implies the existence of events in a certain order. It is confirmed in experience, though, of course, since it is a regularity we have not confirmed all its instances in experience. In other words, like (vvv) and *R*, (w) and the other axioms imply that there are events in the series which are not themselves given in experience. In particular, many of the events implied by compactness are below the threshold at which it is possible for us to distinguish. But that of course simply means that they are part of the *beyond* that is implied by the relational structures such as (vvv) or (w).

It is important to note that to say that a relation presented in sense experience has a property such as (vvv) or (w) is to state a matter of fact. It is not a matter of necessity, and certainly not a matter of logical necessity.

Note, moreover, that Descartes' criticism of Aristotelian theories does not apply. Descartes objected to the Aristotelian account of knowledge that it could not account for our knowledge of the changes in the sample of wax as it melted and transformed itself through an infinity of shapes. The imagination, he argued, could not encompass an infinity. Since there was in fact an infinity to be known there must therefore be some form of knowledge other than that of sense experience. This objection applies to Hume's account of causation. The transfer of motion from one billiard ball to another is a continuous process, and therefore involves an infinity of events. That is the implication of the compactness axiom (w). It would seem that Descartes' objection to Aristotelian theories of knowledge apply equally well to Hume's account of causation. There is, Descartes can argue, a continuous process; this process involves an infinity of events; but the imagination can form ideas of only a finite number of things; our empirical intellect can therefore not grasp the infinity of things; there must therefore be some other way of knowing

causation – so at least it could be argued. It is Russell's account of relations that provides the reply. What we need in order to conceptualize the relevant notion of infinity is not an actual infinite of images of the series of events in the process. One needs a concept that enables one to think of them as it were simultaneously. This we can do by means of a law such as (w). A generalization enables one to think of a population without having to think of each member of the population. All that the empiricist requires is that the nonlogical terms that appear in the statement of the generalization are empirical concepts, that is, concepts that refer to what is given in ordinary experience or can be defined on the basis of such concepts. In a generalization like (w) the relational concept "S" refers to something that is given in ordinary experience. That is the force of James' radical empiricism that insists on the basis of the empiricist's PA that relations be admitted into one's ontology. The generalization (w) is therefore an empirical generalization. Because it is a generalization it enables us to think of the entire population of intermediate events, the infinity of events that the compactness implies exist. So, contrary to Descartes, the empiricist can hold that an infinity is thinkable on the empiricist account of things.

Once one has a relation of succession that is compact and continuous, the problems for causation created by the billiard-ball example are solved. But the simplistic notion that causes are separable but contiguous must go. Not so, however, the notion of law or regularity: this remains, and so does the notion that there is no objective necessity to such regularities, that is, the notion that they are simply matter of fact generalizations. These regularities will be such that there is no contradiction in supposing that they are false. This is the substance of Hume's claim, based on PA, that cause and effect are logically separable. What has disappeared with the new notion of relations is the notion that things are structurally separable, not the notion that they are logically separable. And so, as Hume claimed, it is logically possible that the second billiard ball not move off when struck by the first. Thus, the substance of Hume's view that causation is regularity can still be defended against its rationalist and Aristotelian critics.<sup>51</sup>

One of the main theses of empiricism has been the notion that causation amounts to matter-of-fact regularity. However, so long as one holds onto the notion that things are structurally separable, there can be no genuine relations. But without genuine relations the empiricist account of causation becomes problematic. It simply cannot be made to fit standard examples of causation, e.g., the transfer of motion consequent upon the impact of one billiard ball on another. What James did with his radical empiricism was argue that genuine relations are in fact compatible with PA, and that they ought therefore to be admitted into the empiricist ontology. It was Russell's

contribution to work out in detail the logic of relations, and to show how to fit such properties as compactness and continuity into a world that admitted genuine relations. In this way the contributions of Russell and James amounted to showing how to solve problems implicit in the claim that things are logically separable.<sup>52</sup> Essentially, what they argued was that this notion simply had to be abandoned. Once it is, nothing essential to empiricism is lost – causal relations remain matter-of-fact generalizations –, while at the same time the problems with that view disappear.

The new view of causation did not go unchallenged, however. Henri Bergson argued that one has in the experience of activity in the case of the will a phenomenon which no empiricist could consistently admit into his or her ontology: we experience it, he argued, but cannot capture it in empiricist conceptual scheme.

Locke had already argued that it is from the will that we obtain our idea of a necessary connection, or, as he puts, our idea of an active power. He proposes “to consider here by the way, whether the mind doth not receive its idea of active power clearer from reflection on its own operations, than it doth from any external sensation.”<sup>53</sup> He argues that it is not through sensation that we obtain the idea of active power: here events are, as he argues, separable, and all that one can obtain is regularity, the passing on of motion (in the case of billiard balls) rather than the initiation of motion.

when by impulse [one billiard ball] sets another ball in motion that lay in its way, it only communicates the motion it had received from another, and loses in itself so much as the other received: Which gives us but a very obscure idea of an active power of moving in body, whilst we observe it only to transfer, but not produce any motion.<sup>54</sup>

It is from inner awareness that we obtain our idea of an active power. Specifically, we obtain it from our experience of the action of the will in volitions that cause bodily action.

The idea of the beginning of motion we have only from reflection on what passes in ourselves, where we find by experience, that barely by willing it, barely by a thought of the mind, we can move the parts of our bodies, which were before at rest.<sup>55</sup>

Hume was later to argue, however, that the case of the will is no different from the case of the billiard balls: in both, the effect is separable from the cause.

Some have asserted that we feel an energy or power in our own mind; and that, having in this manner acquired the idea of power, we transfer that quality to matter, where we are not able immediately to discover it. The motions of our body, and the thoughts and sentiments of our mind (say they) obey the will; nor do we seek any further to acquire a just notion of force or power. But to convince us how fallacious this reasoning is, we need only consider, that the will being here considered as a cause has no more a discoverable connexion with its effects than any material cause has with its proper effect... . The effect is there distinguishable and separable from the cause, and could be foreseen without the experience of their constant conjunction. We have command over our mind to a certain degree, but beyond that lose all empire over it: and it is evidently impossible to fix any precise bounds to our authority, where we consult not experience. In short, the actions of the mind are, in this respect, the same with those of matter. We perceive only their constant conjunction; nor can we ever reason beyond it. No internal impression has an apparent energy, more than external objects have. Since, therefore, matter is confessed by philosophers to operate by an unknown force, we should in vain hope to attain an idea of force by consulting our own minds.<sup>56</sup>

This argument goes through whether the notion of separability is that of logical separability or that of structural separability. If the latter, then of course there is no continuity between the volition and the action. Indeed, taking the volition or activity as an event that takes a finite amount of time, then it is an event that has temporal parts. These too will be structurally separable. So there will not even be continuity within the volitional activity itself. But, in contrast, if the argument is made in terms of logical separability, then there is no reason to deny that there is continuity within the volition itself and between the volition and the bodily action.

It was Bergson's argument that, although we are experience, and therefore are aware of, activity, nonetheless an empiricist cannot consistently admit it into his or her ontology. His argument is that the empiricist account of concepts provides for ideas of how a thing *is* but not how it is becoming, that is, how it is changing or moving. But in activity we are aware of a *change*, a *becoming*, a *movement*. The correct philosophy is one of "dynamism," where "Dynamism starts from the idea of voluntary activity, given by consciousness."<sup>57</sup> Contrary to Hume, this dynamic feature of reality involves a continuity that cannot be captured in empiricist concepts. Since there is more to the world than the empiricist account of concepts allows, the empiricist ontology is inadequate. It is inadequate, ironically enough, because it does not allow for something that we experience. Since we do experience

activity, and since the empiricist cannot account for that, it follows that there is a kind of experiencing, a kind of intuition, which is beyond the empiricist intellect, its object uncapturable in empiricist concepts: "... in default of knowledge properly so called, reserved to pure intelligence, intuition may enable us to grasp what it is that intelligence fails to give us... ." <sup>58</sup>

Bergson argues that movement is a passage from something being somehow or somewhere to its being somehow or somewhere else. Thing *a* is F and it moves from being F to being G. When the thing *a* is it is *at rest*. The movement consists of the passage from being F to being G, from being at rest in one state to being at rest in another state. The movement itself involves a continuity: it is *a* passing from one state of rest to another. "Every movement, inasmuch as it is a passage from rest to rest, is absolutely indivisible."<sup>59</sup> In this dynamic feature of the universe, there is *continuity*; the parts are not genuine parts, they are inseparable. He considers moving one's hand from A to B. "My consciousness gives me the inward feeling of a single fact, for in A was rest, in B there is again rest, and between A and B is placed an indivisible or at least an undivided act, the passage from rest to rest, which is movement itself."<sup>60</sup> Our ideas, however, represent the ways in which things are similar; they represent properties that things have in common. But these similarities are themselves, as the empiricist insist, distinct, or separable. There may well be contiguity between ideas considered as occurrences in the mind. As Bergson puts it, "...between any two ideas chosen at random there is always a resemblance, and always, even, contiguity..."<sup>61</sup> But contiguity implies separateness, not continuity. The similarities are of the way things *are*, and when they *are* they are at rest. The ideas do not capture the continuity of movement: "... we must not confound the data of the senses, which perceive the movement, with the artifice of the mind, which recomposes it."<sup>62</sup> Our ideas, the intellect of the empiricists, represent motion as a series of states at rest, a series of stills, as it were, which, however rapid, however close the contiguity, are still a series of separable images, not the genuine continuity given to us in sense experience.

The senses, left to themselves, present to us the real movement, between two real halts, as a solid and undivided whole. The division is the work of our imagination, of which indeed the office is to fix the moving images of our ordinary experience, like the instantaneous flash which illuminates a stormy landscape by night.<sup>63</sup>

The real movement is not the passage of contiguous parts as represented by empiricist concepts. It is rather a continuity, in which the end of one part is the beginning of the next.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Bergson contrasts "[t]he simultaneities of

physical phenomena, absolutely distinct in the sense that the one has ceased to be when the other takes place, cut up into portion, which are also distinct and external to one another...," with "an inner life in which succession implies interpenetration..."<sup>65</sup> Our inner life involves "succession without externality," a succession where the parts are "interpenetrating."<sup>66</sup>

This is one part of Bergson's argument. There is a second part to which we shall return shortly. But first we have to look at the reply by Russell to this first part of Bergson's argument.<sup>67</sup>

Bergson's argument is very much of a piece with Descartes' criticism of the Aristotelian doctrine of abstraction, that the infinity of motion cannot be represented by the finite concepts derived from sense. Bergson makes essentially the same point. Descartes argued that we must rely upon a rational intuition to give us insight into the infinity and continuity of motion. Bergson makes essentially the same point: in order to know activity we need a form of knowledge beyond that which is available to empiricists. But where Descartes relies on a "rational intuition," Bergson relies upon a sensory intuition. Bergson's view is also akin to that of Bradley, but where Bradley has a special form of experience which he calls "thought," akin to the "rational intuition" of Descartes, Bergson again has sensory intuition. This, as James once stated, places Bergson closer to the empiricist tradition than are Descartes and Bradley; "[a]s one who calls himself a radical empiricist," he says, "I can find no possible cause for not inclining to Bergson's side."<sup>68</sup>

Bergson finds volitional activity in our ordinary experience and correctly makes the same sort of appeal as the empiricist – the radical empiricist – that this must therefore be included in one's ontology. The issue is whether what is thus admitted is of a sort that eludes ideas as traditionally understood by the empiricist, whether the empiricist has an account of the concepts of things that allows this entity to be thought. Bergson argues that the volitional activity cannot be captured in empiricist concepts. Russell disagrees.

Bergson's argument has two aspects. On the one side, there is the argument that activity is inconsistent with a picture of the universe in which a thing only *is* and is never besides a thing that *becomes*. Our concepts are always concepts of the way that a thing *is*. We therefore need to suppose that there is another way of knowing, a form of intuition, through which we become aware of the becoming of things. Only through this other way of knowing do we become aware of the "absolute" movement of the thing where one, according to Bergson, is "attributing to the moving object an interior and, so to speak, states of mind..."<sup>69</sup> On the other side, there is the argument that our concepts are all of distinguishable aspects of things, which are therefore separable. Thus, we can never think the continuity of becoming of which we become aware in our intuition of activity. Moreover, the

imagination through which we form our concepts of the qualities of things is finite, and can therefore never grasp the infinity that exists in the continuity of inseparable parts of activity. The activity of things is a simple indivisible thing in itself but at the same time insofar as it is changing it has an indefinite multiplicity of states: it is truly something infinite, for “that which lends itself at the same time both to an indivisible apprehension and to an inexhaustible enumeration” and is thus “by the very definition of the word, an infinite.”<sup>70</sup>

Russell replies to the first aspect by pointing out that it simply assumes that, when a thing is changing, there must be a *state* of change, that is, that “[t]he thing must, at each instant, be intrinsically different from what it would be if it were not changing.”<sup>71</sup> The reply to this is simply that there is no need to suppose that there is a state of change; a change consists of nothing more than a transition from what a thing *is* at one time to what a thing *is* at another time. To this Bergson replies that it “implies the absurd proposition that movement is made of immobilities.”<sup>72</sup> This, however, simply begs the question: it is simply to assert that motion is not a process in which a thing *is* in different ways *successively*.

Of course, if the motion is continuous then to speak of “successive” states is perhaps misleading. ‘Successive’ suggests that the state that succeeds is *contiguous* with the one that precedes. But where the motion is continuous, the successive states are not contiguous. For, as we have noted, any continuous motion is compact, where any two (separate) successive states are such there is a third distinct state between them.

As for the second aspect of Bergson’s argument, the reply consists in pointing out that where one has a continuous series one must have a *relation*, and that there is nothing inconsistent with the empiricist account of concepts and of ontology with the admission of relations: that is the point of “*radical empiricism*.” As Russell says, “... a motion is made out of what is moving, but not out of motions. It expresses the fact that a thing may be in different places at different times, and that the places may still be different however near together the times may be.”<sup>73</sup>

William James accepted Russell’s argument. He granted the point that activity as we experience it is a continuity without distinguishable parts. In this respect he rejected the notion that activity consists in separable parts. In other words, James agreed with Bergson that our inner life involves “succession without externality,” a succession where the parts are “interpenetrating.”<sup>74</sup> But he disagrees with Bergson with respect to the claim that the continuity of such inner activity cannot be adequately represented by concepts that conform to empiricist principles. It can be so represented once one admits relations, as the radical empiricist will do, rejecting the notion that things are structurally separable. The continuity we experience in our inner

activity can be conceptually decomposed into the infinity of parts that is required by the notion of continuity. As he put it, “[t]he infinite character we find in it is woven into it by our later conception indefinitely repeating the act of subdividing any given amount supposed.”<sup>75</sup>

James thus rejects the first part of Bergson’s argument.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, however, he did accept the second part of Bergson’s argument. It is to this second part that we now turn.<sup>77</sup>

Bergson argues that causation on the empiricist account is regularity and that involves as a basic principle the rule that “...the same causes produce the same effects.”<sup>78</sup> There are, however, exceptions to this rule: “the principle of causality,” he argues, “admits of an incomprehensible exception.”<sup>79</sup> These exceptions are to be found in our inner mental activity. This activity therefore shows the inadequacy of the empiricist account of causation.

Bergson argues that “[t]o say that the same inner causes will reproduce the same effects is to assume that the same cause can appear a second time on the stage of consciousness.”<sup>80</sup> However, “...the same feeling, by the mere fact of being repeated, is a new feeling.”<sup>81</sup> The crucial fact is memory: when on the next occasion the feeling is called forth, the memory of the earlier occurrence affects the feeling and gives it a new shape. “Our past, ... as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulse....”<sup>82</sup> For this reason, the same cause in our inner life never produces the same effect. “From this survival of the past it follows that consciousness cannot go through the same state twice. The circumstance may still be the same, but they will act no longer on the same person, since they find him at a new moment of his history.”<sup>83</sup> There is therefore something to causality which is more than regular connection. To be sure, with regular connection the idea of the effect is implied by the idea of the cause. But regular connection is not enough. “It seems... that, if the idea of the second phenomenon is already implied in that of the first, the second phenomenon itself must exist objectively, in some way or other, within the first phenomenon.”<sup>84</sup> We find this connection in the way in which the end of a mental activity is prefigured in its beginning, with the former flowing continuously out of the latter. “We go, in fact, through successive states of consciousness, and although the later was not contained in the earlier, we had before us at the time a more or less confused idea of it.”<sup>85</sup> Intuition thus gives us a notion of causation which is more than regularity, where there is a real objective connection between cause and effect. The source of this concept of necessary connection is not the rational intuition of Descartes. It is our sensible intuition. The Cartesian notion implies that the phenomena can be put into a mathematical formula. But this is simply a rationalistic version of the empiricist principle of “same cause, same effect,” and fails to take account of the fact of our having a history: “That under the



influence of the same external conditions I do not behave to-day as I behaved yesterday is not at all surprising, because I *change*, because I *endure*.”<sup>86</sup> The continuity is not that of the mathematical formula but rather the special sort of continuity that we discover in the inner awareness of our own mental activities, in which the future grows out of the past that prefigures it.

William James accepts this argument. We discover novelty as part of our mental activities: “...the perpetual flux is the authentic stuff of each of our biographies, and yields a perfect effervescence of novelty all the time.”<sup>87</sup> It is here that we find the truth about causality: “... real effectual causation as an ultimate nature, ... is *just what we feel it to be*, just that kind of conjunction which our own activity-series reveal.”<sup>88</sup> The necessary connection that is there is our activity, the connection to which Locke directed our attention; it is, however, not the rationally pellucid connection of the rationalists. “Even so our will-acts may reveal the nature of causation, but just where the facts of causation are located may be further problem.”<sup>89</sup> And so “... the [empiricist] attempt to treat ‘cause,’ for conceptual purposes, as a separable link, has failed historically....”<sup>90</sup> What is crucial is the fact of *novelty*. Whether we accept Hume’s account of causation or that of Descartes, “... no real growth and no real novelty could effect an entrance into life.” “This negation of real novelty seems to be upshot of the conceptualist philosophy of causation.”<sup>91</sup>

It is the fact of novelty that provides the basis for the argument that regularity theories will not do:

... the concrete perceptual flux, taken just as it comes, offers in our own activity-situations perfectly comprehensible instances of causal agency. The transitive causation in them does not, it is true, stick out as a separate piece of fact for conception to fix upon. Rather does a whole subsequent field grow continuously out of a whole antecedent field because it seems to yield new being of the nature called for, while the feeling of causality-at-work flavors the entire concrete sequence as salt flavors the water in which it is dissolved.<sup>92</sup>

James has already granted that the feature of relatedness can be captured by an empiricist ontology; that, after all, was the point of “radical empiricism.” He has also already granted that the empiricist can allow that there is continuity in the process. For James, as for the second part of Bergson’s argument, what is crucial is the fact of novelty; it is not so much continuity as *growth* that is central.

However, is it really the case that novelty and growth cannot be captured in the empiricist ontology of causation?

It is certainly true that if one thinks in simple-minded “stimulus–response” terms, then Bergson is correct: that is not the way that people work. We cannot simply say that

$$(\alpha) R = f(S)$$

As Bergson points out, the same external stimulus will evoke a different response the second time it occurs. Our second reading of a poem will yield a different response than our first. What we need, rather, is something like

$$(\beta) R = f(S, H)$$

where “H” represents the history of the individual. Once we see this, however, it is evident that one can well fit the fact that history is relevant to determining the response to a stimulus into the regularity view of causation. It is just that the regularities are of the form  $(\beta)$  rather than of the form  $(\alpha)$ .

Regularities of the sort  $(\beta)$  can be fit into mathematical form. The relevant form is that of integral-differential equations first explored by Volterra.<sup>93</sup> Psychologists involved in the study of behaviour have long been familiar with the fact that there is an “historical” dimension to human being. In order to predict what a person is going to do – or a white rat, for that matter – one must know the schedule of reinforcement.<sup>94</sup> where S is the stimulus; D is the motivation; T is the training or previous experience; and I is the individual differences. In fact, the laws of association that the empiricists defended are historical in precisely this sense: the strength of the association depends upon the past history of observation.

There is, however, the idea implicit in Bergson and James that somehow the novel occurrences cannot be predicted. The mere fact of historical background will not, contrary to Bergson’s views on memory, establish this: as  $(\beta)$  makes clear, there can be regularities of a perfectly good empiricist sort that relate past history to present response. Nonetheless, there are other possibilities with regard to novelty.

Processes can produce new configurations of things. But this is hardly an interesting sense of novelty, since there is no problem with prediction in such a case. A.O. Lovejoy has suggested two cases of a more interesting sort. There is novelty in the sense of “[n]ew qualities ... attachable to entities already present, though without those accidents in [the antecedent phenomena].” And there is novelty in the sense of “[p]articulate entities *not* possessing all the essential attributes characteristic of those found in [the antecedent phenomena], and having distinctive types of attributes (not merely configurational) of their own.”<sup>95</sup> But contrary to what Bergson and James seem to suppose, there is no reason why there should not be regularities which relate the antecedent phenomena to the novel qualities or entities.<sup>96</sup> In the first place, something could be novel in either of these senses without being novel in a *temporal sense*. Thus, the properties of water may be

emergent relative to the properties of hydrogen and oxygen, without however being temporally subsequent to hydrogen and oxygen. In the second place, even if the property or entity is novel in the temporal sense, so that we have not observed things of that kind, it does not follow that there is no regularity connecting those properties to the antecedent phenomena. All that follows is that we cannot *know* those regularities prior to observing things of the novel kind. But an incapacity to know is compatible with causation. Of course, in the absence of knowledge we cannot predict, but again the incapacity to make a justified prediction is consistent with causation in the sense of regularity. So the notion on which Bergson and James base their argument, that novelty is inconsistent with regularity, is simply mistaken.<sup>97</sup>

The other point that perhaps ought to be made is that when we experience mental activity, we are not at the same time making a causal judgement about it. When I am writing a philosophy essay, the various stages emerge one after the other, in a process that is at once piecemeal and yet united not only by a continuous stream of thought but also by the intention of writing an essay. The intention does not of course include from the outset the details of the words that emerge, but it does serve to organize the whole process. The process is causally united, and it is experienced as a united process. But in so experiencing it, I am not at the same time *judging* that it is causally united. And certainly, while I am *intending* the outcome, I am certainly not *predicting* it. It is only in subsequent reflection that I become aware of the causal structure of the process; only later after its completion can I reflect upon it and recognize it as an instance of a regularity. In that sense, Bergson and James are correct: the experience of causation in activity is prior to any knowledge of such activity as an instance of a regularity.

It follows that the second part of Bergson's argument, and James' version of it too, fails in its aim to introduce into philosophy a category of causation that is inconsistent with Hume's empiricist ontology: the regularity view can stand. Nor is there any need to introduce some nonordinary form of knowing through which we are supposed to be able to know or experience the entities that elude the empiricists' categories or violate PA.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> William James, "The Experience of Activity," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, intro. Ellen Kappy Suckiel, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, pp. 155–189, at p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

- <sup>4</sup> Cf. Hume, *Treatise*, p. 68. Cf. D. Flage, "Hume's Relative Ideas," *Hume Studies* 7 (1981): 53–73; and "Locke's Relative Ideas," *Theoria* 47 (1981): 142–159.
- <sup>5</sup> John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- <sup>6</sup> On these issues, see F. Wilson, *Logic and the Methodology of Science in Early Modern Thought: Seven Studies*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, Study Two.
- <sup>7</sup> Locke, *Essay*, IV, iii, 28, pp. 558–559; see also IV, vi, 10, pp. 384–385.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, viii, 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. F. Wilson, "Acquaintance, Ontology and Knowledge," *The New Scholasticism*, 54 (1970): 1–48; also "Moore's Refutation of Idealism," *Current Issues in Idealism*, ed. P. Coastes and D. Hutto, Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996, pp. 23–25; and "Perceptual Ideality and the Ground of Inference: Comments on Ferreira's Defence," *Bradley Studies*, 1 (1995): 139–152.
- <sup>10</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, p. 160.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160; Hume's italics.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- <sup>14</sup> David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902, p. 61.
- <sup>15</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, p. 636.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Wilson, *Logic and the Methodology of Science in Early Modern Thought*, Study One.
- <sup>17</sup> R. Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," *Philosophical Essays*, tr. L.J. Lafleur, New York: Macmillan, 1964, p. 87.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, p. 160; Hume's italics.
- <sup>22</sup> Bradley, "Association and Thought," *Mind*, os 12 (1887): 354–381, at p. 357.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897, p. 125.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Bradley, "Relations," *Collected Essays*, London: Oxford University Press, 1935, Vol. 2, pp. 635–636.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 636.
- <sup>29</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 19.

- <sup>30</sup> Bradley, "Relations," p. 636.
- <sup>31</sup> James, "The Thing and Its Relations," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 103 (referring to Hume, *Treatise*, p. 636).
- <sup>32</sup> Bradley, "Association and Thought," p. 357.
- <sup>33</sup> Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, London: Oxford University Press, 1914, p. 231.
- <sup>34</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 426.
- <sup>35</sup> James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 42.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- <sup>37</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology* (1890), New York: Dover, 1950, Vol. I, p. 343.
- <sup>38</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Mathematics*, 2nd ed., London: Allen and Unwin, 1937, p. 221.
- <sup>39</sup> For a more recent discussion of the problem of order, see E.B. Allaire, "Relations: Recreational Remarks," *Philosophical Studies*, 34 (1978): 81–89.
- <sup>40</sup> Bradley, "Relations," p. 672.
- <sup>41</sup> The difference is there also in the case of symmetrical relations, and is equally overlooked in such cases also. But in those cases it is open to the monists to dismiss the difference as ontologically irrelevant. In the case of asymmetrical relations, such dismissal is not possible.
- <sup>42</sup> Russell, *Principles of Mathematics*, p. 221.
- <sup>43</sup> James, "A World of Pure Experience," p. 88.
- <sup>44</sup> James, "The Thing and Its Relations," p. 107.
- <sup>45</sup> James, "A World of Pure Experience," p. 88.
- <sup>46</sup> On these points, cf. G. Bergmann, "Remarks on Realism," *Metaphysics of Logical Positivism*, New York: Longmans, Green, 1954, pp. 153–175. It is clear that, contrary to what P. Ferreira suggests, empiricists as well as Bradley can accept that there is a "beyond." Cf. P. Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 159ff.
- <sup>47</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, p. 164.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- <sup>51</sup> Cf. B. Russell, "On the Notion of Cause, with Applications to the Free-Will Problem," *Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953, pp. 387–407.
- <sup>52</sup> Russell first argued these points in his *Principles of Mathematics* in the first edition of 1903; see Russell, *Principles of Mathematics*, p. 221.
- <sup>53</sup> Locke, *Essay* Bk. II, Ch. 21, sec. 4.

54

*Ibid.*

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*Ibid.*

56

Hume, *Treatise*, p. 162.

57

Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, tr. F.L. Pogson, London: Allen and Unwin, 1916, p. 141.

58

Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, tr. Arthur Mitchell; foreword by Irwin Edman, New York: Modern Library, Random House, 1944, p. 195.

59

Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, tr. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, London: Allen and Unwin, 1911, p. 246.

60

*Ibid.*

61

*Ibid.*, p. 213.

62

*Ibid.*, p. 247.

63

*Ibid.*, pp. 247–248.

64

Cf. Aristotle's definition of continuity:

That which, being successive, touches, is contiguous. Since all change is between opposites, and these are either contraries or contradictories, and there is no middle term for contradictories, clearly that which is between is between contraries. The continuous is a species of the contiguous; two things are called continuous when the limits of each, with which they touch and are kept together, become one and the same, so that plainly the continuous is found in the things out of which a unity naturally arises in virtue of their contact.

See *Metaphysics* 1069a5ff in J. Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

65

Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 228.

66

*Ibid.*, p. 109.

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Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Bergson," *Logical and Philosophical Papers 1909–13*, ed. J.G. Slater, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 313–337.

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James, "Bradley or Bergson?" *Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1910): 29–33, at p. 33.

69

Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. T.E. Hulme, London: Macmillan, 1913, p. 2.

70

Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 6.

71

Russell, "The Philosophy of Bergson," p. 332.

72

Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 325.

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Russell, "The Philosophy of Bergson," p. 333.

74

Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 109.

75

James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, intro. Ellen Kappy Suckiel, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, p. 184.

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of some of these points, see Ivar Segelberg, “Zeno’s Paradoxes,” *Three Essays in Phenomenology and Ontology*, tr. H. Hochberg and S.R. Hochberg, Stockholm: Thales, 1999.

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of a number of these points, see Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, Ch. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 199.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>82</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 203.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>87</sup> James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 151.

<sup>88</sup> James, “The Experience of Activity,” p. 185.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204–205.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>93</sup> V. Volterra, *Theory of Functionals*, London: 1930, pp. 147ff.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. G. Bergmann and K. W. Spence, “The Logic of Psychophysical Measurement,” *Psychological Theory: Contemporary Readings*, ed., M.H. Marx, New York: Macmillan, 1951, pp. 256–276. Bergmann and Spence point out (p. 272) that the best version of “ $R = f(S)$ ” would be “ $R = F(S, T, D, I)$ .”

<sup>95</sup> A.O. Lovejoy, “The Meanings of ‘Emergence’ and Its Modes,” *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy*, ed. Edgar S. Brightman, New York: Longmans Green, 1927, pp. 26–27.

<sup>96</sup> For a good discussion of the problem of novelty, see G. Bergmann, *Philosophy of Science*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957, Ch. III.

<sup>97</sup> Popper advanced a variation on Bergson’s argument in his *Poverty of Historicism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), Preface (though he does acknowledge his debt to Bergson). He restricts the novelty to new knowledge, arguing, correctly, that one cannot predict new knowledge, and inferring, incorrectly, that therefore there can be no laws governing the development of social processes. All that follows here, as in the case of Bergson and James also, is that we cannot *know* the laws. But, to repeat, this does not mean that there are no laws. For an insightful discussion of Popper’s views on this point, see L. Addis, *The Logic of Society*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975, pp. 106–111.

PART FIVE:

THE POSSIBILITY OF METAPHYSICS



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## Chapter 14

# METAPHYSICS AS “*DE INSOLUBILIBUS*”

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More than other areas of philosophy, I think, the field of metaphysics is populated by problems that never seem to get resolved, only reformulated. Some philosophers have lamented this state of affairs, but I come to honor it and promote it as what gives metaphysics its function in the general economy of intellectual pursuits. My claim will be that if metaphysics is an attempt to construct an overall conception of the whole of what is real, that attempt turns out to be not just a failure but a very instructive failure. What we learn is that it is doomed to failure because we ourselves are real, but any attempt to give a coherent total account of the world we inhabit as fully containing ourselves encounters insurmountable obstacles, which in philosophy take the form of paradoxes or in Greek *aporiai*. In this endeavor I have been very much inspired by the writings of Thomas Nagel; and, if this paper in the end amounts only to a rephrasing of his ideas, I justify the effort on the grounds that really insightful ideas ought to be rephrased again and again until lots of people get the point.

***DE INTERPRETATIONE 9 REVISITED***

Start with the conundrum of truth. What we say about the world, if it has a clear meaning, is either true or false, or has some degree of truth inversely related to some degree of falsity. Also it is the world which makes what we say about the world true or false; if the world were different, something we now say about it would go from being true to being false and other things we say about it would do the reverse, and the difference in the world would explain the shift from truth to falsity or the reverse. But the converse does not hold; a shift in truth value of what we say does not explain why the world is different, even though it entails that. Now this can only be because what we say either stands in some sort of relation to the world or does not, a relation of agreement let us say.

But now make such relations part of the world we were originally describing. Any sayable 'p' will at any given moment either bear that relation, and thus be true, or not bear it and thus be not-true. If 'p' is true, then p; and if 'p' is not true, then not-p, i.e. the contradictory of 'p' holds. So at any given moment for any sayable 'p', it is in just one of two relations to the world, agreement or non-agreement, and its being in the former entails p, while its being in the latter entails not-p. All of this might seem fine, except that at a given moment of time reality is not entirely determinate; in particular large stretches of the future are so to speak open. In that case, although reality does not agree with some future tense sayable 'Fp', it does not agree with 'not-Fp' either, and thus neither bear the relation required for truth. But since the non-truth of 'Fp' entails not-Fp, and not-Fp certainly entails the truth of 'not-Fp,' we have a contradiction.

Can we block this argument by challenging the assumption that the non-truth of 'p' entails not-p. I don't think so. If that entailment failed to hold, then it would be possible for 'p' not to be true while not-not-p. But isn't 'not-not-p' equivalent to 'p'? Hence it would be possible for 'p' not to be true even though p. But it is surely axiomatic with any notion of truth that p entails 'p' is true. It may be thought that if we introduce a third truth value corresponding to indeterminacy that perhaps 'not-not p' may not be equivalent to 'p'. But I have an argument, which is too long to introduce here, which I believe shows that as long as we accept that p if and only if 'p' is true' and not-p if and only if 'p' is false, we can in fact show that 'not-not-p', and 'p' are equivalent.

Nor will it do any good to say that maybe the future is indeed already determinate, for such a thesis surely should not be a conclusion to be reached from considerations about truth alone. The view of truth as a real relation allows us to infer in a straightforward way from the law of excluded middle

as applied to the future that the future is already determinate. Either  $Fp$  or not- $Fp$ . Now work disjunctive syllogism. Given  $Fp$ , then ‘ $Fp$ ’ is true, i.e. the agreement relation holds between ‘ $Fp$ ’ and reality; so reality is determinate as regards the future event in question. Given not- $Fp$ , then ‘not- $Fp$ ’ is true, and thus the agreement relation holds between ‘not- $Fp$ ’ and reality, and so reality is again determinate as regards the future event. But it is silly to suppose the law of excluded middle is incompatible with the future’s now being indeterminate.

Something has gone wrong with the whole idea that truth is a real relation. Putting truth-bearers into the world they say something about has led to a paradox.

## ABELARD’S PARADOX<sup>1</sup>

Sayables are paradigmatically the subjects of logical relations. That there is a dog and that there is a mammal are clearly things we can say, and just as clearly the former logically entails the latter. Now, if we put sayables into the world, then the relations between them become real relations in the world. But these relations have to hold whether or not the sayables that are related exist or not. Whatever it is in reality which makes it be true that if there is a dog there is a mammal, is clearly there whether or not there are any dogs or mammals, and even whether there are any statements about dogs and mammals, or any ideas of them. In fact we can do away with minds altogether and still whatever it is that makes that true is still there. Indeed, do away with all of reality, and still whatever is required is there. In other words, it seems nothing at all makes such conditionals true, i.e. makes entailments hold. But if nothing is required, why aren’t all proposed conditionals true?

Can we meet this paradox by claiming that the entailment relation is an internal one and does not require the actual existence of the relata? Such relations would then be like what is expressed when we say that orange is more like red than blue is. This is the case even if there are no colors in the world. This proposal would allow that some sayables, however, are in fact in the world, and this is enough to create paradox. If we say that a sayable is in the world just in case the world is such as to make it true, then how do we handle negative sayables like that there are no animals. Whatever is required to make this true is around *even if there is no world*. Obviously in that case there is nothing that is making it true, yet it is true.

If we treat sayables as linguistic items, then they are things like spoken sound strings which have logical relations to each other only when made use of by a language to communicate about the world. But that implies that

logical relations are *external*, and thus not the sort of relation that can persist even when their relata cease to have actual existence.

Another and periodically very popular way around Abelard's paradox is Platonism as regards sayables. On this view they have a timeless, necessary existence, and thus logical relations are assured of existent relata. Somehow, however, they can relate to the temporal world so that some of them are made true by that world, others false. The total absence of a temporal world is also sufficient to render some of them true. But they never exist as things in that temporal world.

Since the time of Plato himself, however, it has been realized that "Platonism" has a tendency to lead to vicious regresses, and the just mentioned proposal about sayables is no exception. On the Platonist account conditionals hold *because* the sayable in the antecedent entails the sayable in the consequent, i.e. that relation holds between those eternal things. But this entailment relation will have no effect unless certain principles necessarily hold of it, e.g. transitivity. Another conditional has to hold, viz. if any sayable A entails a sayable B, and sayable B entails another sayable C, then A entails C as well. By parity of reasoning the Platonist must say that now there are two other sayables, corresponding to the antecedent and consequent of this conditional, and that that conditional holds just *because* those sayables are related by the relation of entailment. But that conditional was something that had to hold if entailment was to be a reason for anything. Hence we are into a vicious circle. What is required for entailment to secure the truth of conditionals is something which itself requires that the entailment relation already be able to secure the truth of conditionals. The Platonist could try to resort to levels of sayables, each level with its own entailment relation, but this only gives us a regress which goes on *ad infinitum*, and it is a vicious regress for the truths at each new level are explanatorily prior to those at the earlier levels.

Again we have seen that making sayables part of the world's furniture leads to paradox. But we do really say things; the content of what we say is real in the sense that no full description of what is real can leave them out and still be complete. We cannot describe all the propositional attitudes we have without saying something about what we say or assert. The propositional attitudes are real but they are nothing if there are no sayables they are attitudes toward. The paradoxes show, nevertheless, that including them among the real things of the world is incoherent.

## THE LIAR

We have conceptions of reality, and these conceptions really exist. But if we make them things in reality, then they must somehow be related to the rest of reality so that they are conceptions of it. Then if we have a conception of the whole of reality it must conceive itself and its relation or relations to reality that make it a conception of it. Thus self-referentiality must be built into the conception we have of all of reality. Imagine this conception as a set of assertions about reality. Some of these assertions will be true of themselves; others will not. And now the so-called “heterological” paradox sets in. Take the assertion which will have to be in our total conception of reality which says some proposition is not true of itself. Is this assertion itself true of itself or not? Let us define what it means for a proposition to be true of itself. An affirmative proposition is true of itself if and only if it itself is one of the items its predicate holds of. A negative proposition is true of itself if and only if it itself is one of the items its predicate does not hold of. The proposition we are considering is

Some proposition is not true of itself.

Let us call that proposition ‘A.’ Now A is certainly true, since there are many perfectly true propositions which are not true of themselves in the proposed sense. For instance, ‘Something is an animal.’ Being an animal will not hold of that proposition or any other. Now A is a negative proposition, so if it is true of itself then the predicate ‘true of itself’ does not hold of A; but if it does not hold of A, A is not true of itself, which contradicts our assumption. On the other hand if A is not true of itself, then it is *not* the case that the predicate ‘true of itself does not hold of it, i.e. the predicate does hold of it, i.e. A is true of itself, which contradicts our assumption. So we reach the absurd conclusion that A is neither true of itself nor not true of itself.

Another way of seeing how laden with paradox is this proposal that our conceptions of the world are themselves things in the world, is to imagine that our conception of the whole of reality is a story which includes in itself how it itself came to be composed. After all, if our conception of reality is something in reality there must be series of real events resulting in its creation, and, given our conception of reality includes everything that happens in reality, it will include a story about that series of events. But there is something deeply incoherent about such a story, for the story must be created before it is finished. The author can only know how his story came about after it has come about, and that means that he could only include the part about its coming about after it has come about. But it has not fully come

about until that part is included. Hence no such story could ever come about. Analogously, a conception which includes in itself a conception of how it came about could never come about.

## AGENCY<sup>2</sup>

It is a common experience of life that we often decide what to do on the basis of our conception of the world and of ourselves in it. In deciding we set ourselves toward one course of action rather than alternatives which we were considering. We are determining our own future actions. But at the same time our decision has to be on the basis of our own prior knowledge, priorities, and practical reasoning. When we are inside this process that dependence does not at all seem to threaten our status as the ultimate determiner, i.e., agent; we are evaluating and making up our mind by considering these things. But if we try to include such an agent in the world as a whole – stand outside ourselves, so to speak – the whole process seems to be nothing more than a chain of causally linked events the last of which is the decision. The causal chain does not have to be deterministic to have this dissolving effect upon the agent. States of the psyche interact with awareness of alternatives and the consequences of those alternatives, and the end result, perhaps non-deterministically, is the decision. Where is the agent here?

This problem emerged centuries ago in medieval theology. Abelard thought that it was not possible for God to have created a world other than the one He did, because given His nature He could only choose the best possible world.<sup>3</sup> God's choice is seen as the necessary result of God's perfect evaluation of the relative merits of the alternatives available. This view did not play well in the following centuries. Almost all the late scholastics viewed it as compromising God's freedom, by which they meant God's acting as a decider for whom evaluations of alternatives are simply considerations which the decider can follow or not. But does it really make sense to suppose that God could ignore his own perfect evaluations? To ignore one's own best judgment is a mark of weakness of will, not strength.

But the sense that, even after all the considerations are in and all our desires have had their day in court, still the decision is up to us and is neither already determined or simply the probabilistic result of what precedes it, cannot be eliminated and is important in our sense of responsibility for our own actions. That sense of ourselves as agent, however, finds no respondent once we place ourselves out in the world with everything else. In that picture the self becomes but a node of causal interactions and agency exists, if at all, without any agent. On the one hand, an agent standing outside all the causal

nexus makes no sense because if unaffected by the considerations that weigh in one direction or another it would not deliberate, and that is just what an agent must do. On the other hand an agent which is affected by these considerations is just a node where various causal influences interact in sometimes chaotic fashion. That is not an agent of the sort we view ourselves to be when we know ourselves from within a process of deliberating.

## ***ENTIA OBJECTIVA***

It seems to me beyond doubt that I often know what I am thinking, I often know what I meant when I said something (though this less often than I would like), I often know what I take myself to be seeing, and I often know what I take myself to be doing. In other words I can know the contents of many of my intentional states and acts. It follows that intentional contents are often determinate.

But once I view such knowledge from without, i.e. take it as part of the objective world, there seems to be no reason for this confidence. What makes my thinking have the content that I suppose it to have? The problem arises whether we treat thinking as a play of images or as some sort of brain activity. Why would the images be *of* anything? Why would neuron firings *represent* something?<sup>4</sup> Bringing in language does not really help the situation, as Quine and others have shown. Viewing a language from outside will leave its translation into one's own inevitably indeterminate. After all the causal connections between our dispositions to use words and frame assertions, on the one hand, and our non-linguistic behavior and the external world, on the other, have been brought to light there will still be many different ways to translate what the expressions of a language mean.

As Quine makes clear, the point is not that the true meaning is somehow hidden from us so that we can never be sure exactly what it is. Rather, there is no fact of the matter as to which of the alternative translations is correct. The content of the assertions of the language is simply indeterminate. I remember when I read this for the first time as a graduate student I realized that the point could not be limited to exotic languages; if Quine was right, in using my own language I used it without any determinate meaning. If the language could be treated as equally well dealing with an ontology of what the scholastics called “successive” entities (things with temporal parts) as with persistent entities, then I could not be said to know that I was talking about the persistent ones rather than about the successive ones. At that point I rebelled, for surely, I said to myself, I do know that I am talking mainly about beings without temporal parts and only rarely about ones with such parts. I



know which of these ontologies I am committed to. That seemed to be a *reductio* of Quine's position.

I now think that Quine's arguments do show that when we try to put intentional states and acts into the world with everything else, their content becomes extremely indeterminate, if indeed any sense of having content can be made at all. Content is something that is clear to us only as we are engaged in having the intentional states or acts as part of our dealings with the rest of the world; it fades quickly once we stand outside those states and acts and examine them as themselves objects in the world.

Putnam's mesmerizing brain-in-the-vat story<sup>5</sup> has, in my view, much the same lesson to teach. If we just examine what is going on the brain and its relationships to the actual world of the vat, there is no reason at all to think that the brain activity is representing familiar things of the world the brain used to inhabit before it got pickled. The brain no longer has any causal connections to things like vats that would justify thinking it ever thought about vats. And yet if we took up the stance of the brain itself, we know that it is having thoughts about familiar things just like it did before, because we know we are giving it the same sorts of experiences as it had in its fully embodied life and we ourselves know what sorts of experiences it was having then.

Another good reason to reject reductionist approaches, which make things have intentional content in virtue of non-intentional extrinsic relations, is the following. If they were true, then I would have no privileged access to the contents of my own thoughts; I would be no better off than an external observer who saw how I was interacting with the world, and presumably I would be even worse off than such an observer if that observer could also know what was going on in my brain.

Again medieval theology can be counted on to drive the point to its extreme. When Duns Scotus defended his doctrine that although nothing intrinsic to God can be anything other than it is, God's will being certainly intrinsic to Him, and yet God might have willed something other than He has, he explained the difference between the will as it is and the will as it might have been as a difference not in anything real in God but only as a difference in the *entia volita*, by which he meant the content of God's will.<sup>6</sup> Scotus is saying that the entirety of real things does not make determinate what the intentional contents of those real things are. Nevertheless, the deployer of the intentional states can make determinate what that content is.

Something of this capacity Scotus ascribed to the deity to determine the content of His own will, surely lies in each of us, but it is impossible to find that once we place the bearers of intentionality into the world with everything else. *Entia volita* and all the other *entia objectiva* are not to be found attached

to things in the world and no amount of causal context is ever going to make it determinate what those contents are. Something we know from the first-person perspective is definitely the case cannot be, it seems paradoxically enough, a part of the world. If it were we would not be privileged in knowing the contents of our own willings and thinkings.

## THE SELF

I cannot recall experiencing and doing things in the past without supposing that it was the same person having those experiences as is now recalling them. This was the secure intuition on which Locke founded his account of personal identity. From within my own experience of the world it is not possible for me to question my past existence as numerically the same person I am now. But take up a stance which places this person out in the world with everything else and this identity of the self through time becomes strangely difficult to defend. If I identify myself with a portion of my body, namely my brain or central nervous system, and in that way secure my continued existence in the world of time, it becomes clear that I am identifying myself with something that is only contingently me. If we rearranged the brain's neural net and in the process eliminated all its first-person memories as well as radically revising its personality, priorities, and mental capacities, what reason would there be to say that the person the brain was originally supposed to be was still in existence? Yet clearly the same brain would be there.

Also there are the split-brain thought experiments. The experts tell us that the brain contains virtually the same information in both hemispheres. It follows that if half my brain were somehow transferred into another body, there would be two bodies and two independently acting persons with equal claim to be me. The same occurs if we treat what makes something be me as a program, a piece of software if you will, which is realized in my brain. Another brain could equally well realize that program and thus equally be me. But it is inconceivable from the first-person perspective that I am two persons.

Problems like these sometimes compel philosophers back to a more mentalistic view of what constitutes personal identity. But once the self is conceived as the subject of experiences, both active and passive, it is hard to find it in the world. The problem here is akin to what we saw afflicting agency. What we find is a series of experiences which have some causal connection with a certain body. If we adhere to a mentalistic approach to the self, the best we can do is claim that there is a certain “connectedness” of

these experiences which makes them all experiences of the same “self in the way that properly connected innings are innings of the same baseball game. But there is nothing in this conception which rules out the simultaneous existence of experiences which are equally “best continuers” of the connected series, and this can lead to a splitting of the self into two series rather than just one. But it is absurd that I should be two persons, either simultaneously or consecutively.

The belief that there is something that is necessarily me and only me forces itself upon me only when I am thinking, experiencing, and doing; once I start searching for that self in the world I think about, it is not there. There is nothing there that is necessarily me in the way that this stone is necessarily this stone. The belief in human souls of the sort that can exist independently of human bodies seems to me to rest on a simple positing into the world of something that is necessarily a certain person and serves as the subject for that person’s mental states and acts. This imposition of souls into the world is understandable; after all, we know from our first-person stance that we are something and we really exist. Well, then we must be within that world of really existing things. If nothing we actually find in the world fills the bill, then this can only be due to the limitations of the way in which we know the world.

I myself do not think that this belief is inherently incoherent; it is just empirically disproven. If there were such a soul there would have to be a host of mental properties which it possessed independently of the body. But as a matter of fact there are no mental properties of me that cannot be destroyed or modified simply by destroying or modifying certain parts of my body. Nothing could show more convincingly the dependence of those properties on the physical. Now, to exist at all a thing has to have some properties, and if the properties a soul has in its disembodied state are not any of the usual mental properties I attribute to myself, then there is no case for its being me in that state. So it turns out not to be necessarily me after all, and the whole point of positing it is lost.

## THE MORAL?

I remember once seeing the cover of a magazine which pictured a person holding the magazine with its cover toward the viewer. A moment’s reflection shows that the cover cannot be entirely accurate. The pictured cover will have to itself picture the cover, and that pictured cover in turn will have to picture the cover, and so on *ad infinitum*. For complete accuracy the original cover would have to contain an infinity of nested pictures of itself.

Something like this occurs, I think, if we try to place ourselves and our intentional states within the world we think about and deal with. The chief task of metaphysics, I now like to think, is to show the absurdities that develop when we try to do this.

But there are several wrong morals that it is tempting to draw from the paradoxes I have been describing. We might decide that intentional states and their subjects simply do not have any real existence. This seems to be the proposal that goes by the name of “eliminative materialism”. Such a view is like saying that the magazine cover does not exist because it cannot picture itself. Certainly this is a view to be avoided if at all possible. No commitment to a theory about the world could ever equal in certainty our belief in the existence of our own thinking and willing, and hence any theory which implied that intentional states have no real existence provides a *reductio ad absurdum* of itself.

Another approach is the reductionist line which views intentionality as something we can fully account for in non-intentional terms. I take it that this view is refuted, as mentioned earlier, by the Quinean arguments for indeterminacy of translation.

Then there is the old approach which introduces into the world special subjects for intentional states and agency, call them souls or minds. Intentionality is then a special relation only such subjects, as opposed to physical subjects, can have to intentional contents. This leads to all the paradoxes which at the beginning of this paper we saw attend the insertion of the objects of propositional attitudes into the world.

Are we then involved in absurdity no matter which way we turn? I hope not, and in conclusion let me sketch all too briefly the outline of an escape route from the *aporiai* we metaphysicians have discovered for the effort to think of everything that is real. One way to think about this is to make a distinction between what we might call the “world” and the totality of what is real. The world is all the things there are plus all the facts *about those things*. I.e., we have subjects for properties and the properties, both monadic and polyadic, belonging to these things to give us all the basic facts. Then, of course, there are facts which correspond to truth-functional molecular sentences and facts that correspond to all the sentences arising from the apparatus of quantification. In other words, the facts in the *world* can all be expressed in the first-order predicate calculus. The exit from the *aporiai* discussed above lies in realizing that reality extends beyond this world; there are facts that are real but are not facts about the world; or alternately, there are facts that are real that are not expressible in the first-order predicate calculus. Another way to put this is that there are real facts but they do not

have the subject-property ontological structure nor are they the logical results of facts that do.

My suggestion involves admitting that as often as not the logical structure of statements is not a good guide to the ontological structure of reality. Statements apparently relating objects of propositional attitudes, or relating such objects to intentional states, or talking about the apparent subjects of propositional attitudes, cannot be taken at face value so far as ontology is concerned, even though we may still accept their syntactic structure as a guide for formal logical analysis. None of these are things, and *a fortiori* they are not things standing in relations to each other. We have no idea what the ontological structures of such facts are; in fact, I doubt that it makes sense to talk of ontological structures here at all. Nor does it make sense to think of such statements as true because they *correspond* to something in reality. Nevertheless, they can be true, and they are true because reality is the way it is.

Facts like these which are outside the “world” can nevertheless be reasons why things in the world are the way they are or behave the way they do, for they are just as real as the facts that are in the “world”. Also it is perfectly possible, and, in my opinion, empirically obvious, that many of these facts are ontologically dependent on facts that are in the world, or at least supervene on such facts. But I doubt that all of them are so dependent.

This solution to the “*insolubilia*” of metaphysics, if it works, would liberate our thinking from the vain search for a general theory of everything and allow us to get on with the effort of understanding the world and ourselves in a piecemeal fashion, while living with the fact that things do not *all* fit together in any intelligible fashion, because we would realize that such a fit is logically impossible.

## **APPENDIX: THE PROBLEM OF INTENTIONALITY**

The “*insolubilia*” described in this paper all point to an underlying *aporia*: how to represent in the world intentional states and acts. Grammar suggests that they be analyzed as external relations which minds have toward something else, intentional objects. But the first two *insolubilia* show how these objects refuse to get involved as things in the world. Efforts to see the relation as directed toward ordinary objects in the world have also been shown to be futile, whether we take the relation as basically causal or treat it as something *sui generis* (what Putnam calls the “magical” theory of reference). On the other hand, efforts to treat it as a relation to something internal to the mind lead to the absurdities of idealism, while not treating it as

a relation at all but as just a disposition to behavior of some sort is another well refuted approach.

It seems to me it is time to look at the possibility that the intentional, both its presumed subjects, objects and relations, cannot be part of the world as the term ‘world’ is understood here. And yet we are doomed to talk as though it were. Dualism is the grammatically induced illusion that the problem can be solved by a thorough-going division of the world into two radically different realms. Equally we have to resist the illusion that the intentional really is just part of the non-intentional realm which can be fitted into the world with no problem. The solution is to continue talking in the way that invites the dualist illusion while bracketing all that talk with the caveat that dualism is not something that can possibly be the case.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The argument here is an adaptation of one given by Peter Abelard in his *Logica Ingredientibus* (see *Peter Abaelards Philosophische Schriften*, ed. B. Geyer, Munster i.W.: Aschendorff, 1919 / 1933 [*Beitrage zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Bd. xxi], pp. 365–367).

<sup>2</sup> This section is obviously very indebted to the chapter on freedom in Thomas Nagel’s *The View from Nowhere*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> See Abelard’s *Theologia Scolarium* III, in *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* XIII, ed. E.M.Buytaert and C.J. Mews, Turnhold: Brepols, 1987, pp. 511–524.

<sup>4</sup> Here I am in debt to the first chapter of Hilary Putnam’s *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> See Scotus’s *Ordinatio* I, dist. 38 and 39 (in the section where Scotus replies to the arguments given at the beginning).

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## Chapter 15

# DESIGNING METAPHYSICS

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To inquire about design in relation to any metaphysical system is to suggest that metaphysical systems have form as well as function. In other words, they not only have a purpose they have some mode of presentation that engages the reader's attention. A designer of a metaphysical system labours not just to amuse his or her colleagues (one hopes) but because others can use the metaphysical design to reassess a worldview or rethink theories in other domains. (For example, Hegelian metaphysics had a profound effect on the ethical theories of F. H. Bradley, T.H. Green and other Idealist philosophers.) Metaphysical models which have particular audiences in mind will also have form as part of their execution goals. The poems of T.S. Eliot are undeniably metaphysical. Religious essayists and surrealist painters offer us models of reality designed to challenge our comfortable convictions while holding our attention long enough to make their case. Philosophers will lay out designs that sustain marginal orderings (the neatly numbered paragraphs of McTaggart's *The Nature of Existence* of 1921)<sup>1</sup> or have gripping examples which create visual inspiration to promote reading (e.g., the dialogues of



Plato, Berkeley, and Kierkegaard). Philosophers may include narrative reflections that engage our attention as we work our way through the labyrinth of logical moves to the grand finale. (Marx and Nietzsche come to mind.)

The primary question for designers of philosophical metaphysics is that of function. What are metaphysical systems supposed to do? Metaphysical systems can: 1) explain the nature of reality, 2) explain the relation between reality and claims about reality, 3) create a structure within which reality (existence) has or can be argued to have value, 4) create a conceptual expression of reality that coheres with other systems or theories of reality, e.g., talk about reality in a way that does not conflict with other domains of discourse (such as physics or theology or psychology), or attempt to subsume such domains within the system itself, 5) establish some principle that may or may not be contingent upon the theory of reality that one holds. For example, one could be promoting any of the following agendas: a) support or deny the existence of God; b) argue for some purpose to reality and our experience of it, perhaps that reason is progressing toward a better life for all; c) argue that we can never know reality, only some phenomenological representation of it or some linguistic expression of it.

The design of a metaphysical system addresses a problem, one chosen by the metaphysician. Perhaps a problem within the discipline intrigues the philosopher. His or her rational inquiry furthers the discipline of philosophy in the way that professional mathematicians solve problems for each other. But as we have noted in the above remarks on the form and content of design, a metaphysician may have a wider mission, that is, to actually present a theory about existence that is not just written for philosophers, but that offers a worldview he or she hopes will influence the way in which others may view the world, perhaps by reading the philosopher's works, or being exposed to those who have, through teaching or through the interaction of that theory of metaphysics with other domains of discourse. Such a metaphysical design is not just intended to amuse those within the profession, but to say something to the world at large.

Two examples of metaphysical systems designed to speak to a worldview can be offered to support these observations, though many others, it could be argued, have had the same motivation on the part of their authors: Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (1986; hereafter *TVFN*), and Leslie Armour, *Logic and Reality* (1972; hereafter *LR*).<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Nagel describes his book as being about a "single problem: how to combine a perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of the same world, the person and his viewpoint included" (*TVFN* 3). This problem is shared by those who aspire "to conceive of the

world as a whole” (*TVFN* 3). He suggests that attempts at illustrating how “the internal and external standpoints are related” would amount to a worldview (*TVFN* 3). Yet, striving for a worldview that reflects “a highly unified conception of life and the world” would produce false reductions, or a denial of part of what is real (*TVFN* 3). Nagel wants to argue that an objective point of view, which attempts to surpass the subjective, may not give a precise view of reality, simply because it may not be able to adequately present reality in a way that accounts for the subjective, especially when the two views (objective and subjective) are at odds. (Reality for Nagel is presupposed as a measure of understanding.)

Nagel’s claim about subjective and objective perspectives is one that recognizes a standard method of characterizing various accounts of experience. Objectivity he refers to as “a method of understanding,” one that will incorporate more and more general data (*TVFN* 5). Objectivity relies “less on the specifics of the individual’s makeup and position in the world,” or on an individual’s character or what kind of creature she or he is (*TVFN* 5). (A wolf’s experience of reality is different from a man’s.) Objectivity relies more on how extensively the accessibility of the form of understanding is. Theory is more objective than a single viewpoint. Physics, he suggests, is more objective than morality. “We may think of reality as a set of concentric spheres, progressively revealed as we detach gradually from the contingencies of the self” (*TVFN* 5). But objectivity has its limitations. Even the world of science will not give us a complete picture because it leaves “undescribed the irreducibly subjective character of conscious mental processes, whatever may be their relation to the physical operation of the brain” (*TVFN* 7). In other words, the further we move in our objective stance the less likely we are to do justice to the subjective perspective, and ultimately we may totally neglect it. Objective science is still a form of understanding for Nagel which he describes as a “special form of idealism” (*TVFN* 9). (Nagel refers to the contemporary intellectual life committed to science as the source of all answers as scientism.) Objective science provides no special insight as to the relation between mind and body. Subjective consciousness “without which we couldn’t do physics or anything else,” is, for Nagel, an irreducible aspect of reality, one which “must be presumed to inhere in the general constituents of the universe and the laws that govern them” (*TVFN* 8). Although the objective perspective can give us partial glimpses of reality, full knowledge may be conceptually inaccessible. In this way, Nagel presumes a reality beyond conceivability.

Surely we can grant Nagel’s claim that we may not come to know everything that there is to know, but does it follow that what there is, by definition, is beyond our ability to conceive it? Let us consider objectivity

further. Nagel has characterized objectivity as a method of understanding, one that has its place in a hierarchical scheme. He has also characterized objectivity as a component of a logical dichotomy – the subject–object relation. What it is for something to be objective can be pursued from the point of view of the subject, and from the point of view of the object. Beyond that, according to Nagel, is the view from nowhere – the possible world that is inconceivable to us.

Another approach to the perspective which includes the first two is to consider the logical framework from within which the other two perspectives derive their meaning. This is the perspective explored by G.W.F. Hegel in *The Science of Logic*<sup>3</sup>). Hegel’s writings on logic were published after his seminal work, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 1807. J.B. Baillie (Hegel’s translator) writes in the introduction to *The Phenomenology of Mind*:

Hegel takes experience to mean the inseparable and continuous interrelation of subject and object. The interrelation takes the form of conscious awareness of an object. The moments are distinct, and the unity of these factors is simply the mental process of holding them together in a single mental situation and distinguishing them from each other within that situation. The moments are inseparable, and have neither existence nor significance except in conscious relation to each other.<sup>4</sup>

Our rational capacity to articulate this perspective is the subject of *The Science of Logic*. Rather than positing a view from nowhere, presumably at the apex of Nagel’s hierarchy, one needs to acknowledge the perspective of the logical framework within which distinctions such as subject–object are made. The subjective and objective perspectives are both required for any claim to be intelligible. Nagel has not denied this in his criticisms of objectivity. But he does suggest that the limitations of the subjective and objective perspectives are an argument for positing a reality beyond the logic of our understanding. The failure of each perspective to thoroughly account for the other, he argues, suggests a reality that is possibly conceptually inaccessible. (Admittedly Nagel is careful. He writes: “But human objectivity may fail to exhaust reality for another reason: there may be aspects of reality beyond its reach because they are altogether beyond our capacity to form conceptions of the world” (*TVFN* 91). Of course, if they only *may* be beyond our conceptual capacities, they also *may not*. The fact that he introduces his position on conceiving of the inconceivable on p. 23 and continues to pursue it through several chapters to p. 91 and beyond suggests that Nagel does not doubt his premise.) Is this a point at which we can inquire what purpose the

idea of a reality beyond conceivability would serve? Is this a clue to the reason behind Nagel's design?

Nagel's position rests on his claim that we can conceive of that which we cannot conceive. But why do we need to engage in such an exercise? He writes: "It certainly seems that I can believe that reality extends beyond the reach of possible thought" and goes on to claim this fact to be "actually the case" (*TVFN* 95). He is careful to point out that his reality is not one that involves logical contradictions. "I am not claiming that much of what we find *positively inconceivable* ... like round squares, may nevertheless be possible" (*TVFN* 92). He is proclaiming a reality "with which creatures like us could never make such a connection, because we couldn't develop the necessary responses or the necessary concepts" and adds, "I do not see how this supposition violates the conditions of significant thought" (*TVFN* 109). This reality beyond conception is partially shorn up by the limitations that either the subjective or objective perspective places on us. When we recognize limits, we can conceive of not just *that* which is limited but *that* which is beyond our knowledge of limits – the possible. This inconceivable possible does underlie Nagel's choice of method because it adds dimension to a finite life. Here we find a clue to a reason for his design for everyone, that is a worldview with hope.

Nagel, at the end of his book, turns to discuss the meaning of life and death. His view from nowhere does not cease with the loss of our experience (restrained by the duality of self and other) at death. Death can be thought of as an event in the graspable world of experience. But we cannot grasp the annihilation of one's self. For this is to comprehend the possibilities of which we can conceive but have no real conception.

Nagel's is a Godless view, and so he struggles to locate value in experience. To remove oneself objectively too far reduces one to an observer; things and person of value reduce to nothing. On the subjective side "never having been born seems nearly unimaginable, my life monstrously important, my death catastrophic" (*TVFN* 209). As we juggle objective and subjective perspectives at the conceptual level, we become puppeteers of our own lives. Nagel suggests that there would be value in a third perspective that unites our bifurcated mental life, but he cannot find a way to express what that might be. Increasing subjectivity makes life isolated and inhumane or transcendent and self-annihilating. Increasing objectivity makes life appear pointless and absurd (*TVFN* 218). Nagel reminds us that objectivity is a perspective we have developed; its extreme extension strips us of our humanity. The artifice of morality seems the closest we come to reconciling the subjective-objective concepts essential to experience but inadequate to our capacity to reflect on it. Nagel refers to death as the abyss, nothing. But conceiving of that of which

we cannot conceive expands our options for warding off indifference to life and to others, or warding off mental panic. A world of possibilities, even inexpressible ones, gives one's annihilation a place in a scheme of things, and a motivation for Nagel's excursion into metaphysics. Even the objective standpoint will be consumed at death, but knowledge of its limitations makes speculation in life on possibilities more engaging.

Nagel's design includes speculation on the unknowable, birth, death, and the meaning of life. For atheists, there are options to think about. The appeal of Nagel's metaphysics lies in its immediacy. Talk of life and death invokes intrinsic narrative forms recognizable by all readers. His design draws our attention through its appeal to our rational imagination as a tool for overcoming the finiteness which we cannot escape. His tiny narrative of the life and death of a hapless spider reminds us that possibilities, even just conceptual ones, give grounds for confronting despair. If one resists the leap of faith, one can at least think about possible worlds even if only as a celebration of thought. Nagel's metaphysics, resting on the logic of exclusionary reference (I can conceive of the conceivable and therefore of the inconceivable,) recognizes the conditions of significant thought (*TVFN* 109) but does not see those conditions as the perspective which makes reality comprehensible in its totality.

Leslie Armour's design for metaphysics in *Logic and Reality* focuses on Hegel's third perspective, the domain of logical discourse. Whatever we may wish to say about reality, however we choose to formulate our conceptions, these conceptions will be subsumed under the structural principles of thought. That is, the subject-object distinction, as a mode of discourse about experience, includes conceptualization. Concepts have limits: they are of *this* and not *that*. Nagel is aware of this capacity of concepts when he writes: "Every concept that we have contains potentially the idea of its own complement – the idea of what the concept doesn't apply too" (*TVFN* 97). Armour preceded this observation when he wrote: "Every concept insofar as it serves to mark out, identify or 'come to grips' with anything refers indirectly to everything by reason of the fact that it separates the thing it seeks to identify from everything else. It must specify, by implication, what it is not in order to specify what it is" (*LR* 3). For Nagel, this class (referred to by its exclusion), barring contradictions, could extend to concepts that are inaccessible to us and have members about which "we can say nothing" (*TVFN* 98). Armour claims that such a class makes sense only *within* the rules of thought; it doesn't guarantee any referent beyond those rules. Certainly if we look at modes of discourse there are domains which exclude others, e.g., physics, and rap lyrics, and there are domains of discourse which imply others, e.g., mathematics and music. Poetic discourse extends the limits of

conceptualization to create new meanings, and new ranges of conceptual applicability. Conceivability, no matter where Nagel thinks it leads, is still a member of the domain of logical discourse. Conceivability confirms the logical domain out of which it is born. Nagel's inconceivable reality is still inextricably grounded in thought. Expressing the principles of this domain was Armour's undertaking.

Armour does not begin with the dialectic of subject and object, but focuses on "determinate being" (with homage to Hegel) and "systematic unity." The particular and the one stand in a dialectical relation. The domain of determinate being – of individual atomic things – excludes the idea of unity, of a relational or single totality. But these, he suggests, are concepts of "static states" (*LR* 67). Furthermore "determinate being and systematic unity seemed to be mutually entailing but also mutually exclusive and there seemed no effective way of unifying them" (*LR* 67). But we are not left with two categories that are perpetually disjointed for both have in common the "joint exclusion" of "process." The point is that the "exclusion reference" which accompanies the negation of any concept doesn't logically entail an increasingly inaccessible class. It may be that our logical categories can be constructed in an interrelated but finite way. The conceivable is a category rendered intelligible by the domain of dialectical logic. But what is inconceivable, what is excluded from the conceivable class, acquires meaning under some other organizing idea, even if it is the idea of the logic of exclusion reference.

The inconceivable, it might be suggested, might result from an increasing level of "density of reference" in our logical categories. But increasing levels of density are not mathematically dense, resulting in a level of *unintelligibility*. Armour points out that densities of reference all "involve some special combination of reference to a system in which the intended subject matter is located, and also a set of referential objects which give body to that system" (*LR* 242). One could consider the family as a system with densities of reference. Seldom does anyone know what is being said, or what is going on, but the system identifies the members in their dense confusion. All take their meanings from reference to each other. "The system is continuous in the sense that the categories are unintelligible if separated, and they lead necessarily and naturally to each other" (*LR* 242).

We need to explore this notion of exclusionary reference a little further – the idea that a concept indicates not only what it refers to but also what it excludes. The exclusion reference of Nagel's inconceivability argument does not point to an unintelligible reality. Rather it illustrates the logical function of categories of thought which makes any and all other categories intelligible. The dialectic of conceivable and inconceivable (categories of thought)

informs me that my knowledge and experiences are limited. But those limits change with every change in my perception of reality. The above categories order my experience but do not limit it. The possible will still be so under the rubric of my capacities to understand and make sense of the next experience. To regard the world as potentially confusing and incomprehensible in its totality is a choice that we can make. But there are other choices. There is more than one concept alluded to as being excluded from *the* concept of *nowhere*. There is not only *somewhere* – the duality of the subject–object perspective – there is also *everywhere*. Both *nowhere* and *everywhere* transcend the limitations of *somewhere*. Yet, each carries a vastly different connotation, and they are meaningful as such because they are meaningful in relation to each other. And each is a possible perspective one can adopt when contemplating the limits of one’s knowledge of the world. Thus the inconceivable takes its place in the discourse and domain of dialectical logic.

What is it that animates Armour’s excursion into systems and overlapping systems of discourse and the dialectical structure of thought that makes them possible? Can this journey toward the articulation of concepts for conceptualizing speak to a worldview? One might suspect that with an increasingly dense logical system, an ordering idea or unifying principle might be in the works.

Armour raises this question at the beginning of *Logic and Reality*: Can one find one concept so general as “to be entailed by and involved with every possible system of rational discourse,” a concept that would have connections with all possible concepts including the negation of life itself (*LR* 3)? Armour resists a concept that signifies a single system of understanding (God, or the Hegelian Absolute) and opts for the dialectic of “pure being” and “pure disjunction” (*LR*, pp. 36–38). The synthesis is determinate being which functions as an indicator of multiple systems of discourse which “specify some distinction which can actually be made in the world” (*LR* 30). Determinate being identifies the common ground of all systems – “the domain which consists of all the distinctions which are actually there to be made in the world and the domain of all possible intelligible discourse” (*LR* 30). The key word here is *possible*, for it signals that there can be realms of discourse as yet undeveloped. Consider the new languages surrounding computers and technology, inconceivable 500 years ago, but still intersecting at some point with other discourses of present and past intelligibility, that is, discourses of mathematics, of literature, of human nature. These points of intersection confirm determinate being, that crucial link between thought and reality. There are not two separate domains of logic and experience, there is only the ongoing dialectical process of discourses creating the world. From those creations, new discourses arise. For example, if we consider the word

*Canada*, many meanings that one associates with the word, e.g., multiculturalism, have evolved from earlier ideas such as immigration or bicultural. The discourses of colonialism and British heritage have been replaced by political and sociological ones unknown a century ago. Armour's point is that asking about the meaning of a word can trap one in the grip of logical atomism and the unreliabilities of correspondence theories of truth. Points of intersection between systems of discourse will fluctuate. Neither language nor the world admit of precise definition. Nor, in the worldview of Leslie Armour, do individuals.

This plethora of systems and discourses means there is no clear juncture at which an individual or a community will shine forth. Conscious individuals, like all other particulars, participate in various systems and so can be both universal and particular. Individuals are understood only against a background of possibilities. Armour refers to a human being as a "tendency-pattern which can be traced against the background of possibilities which enter his life" (*LR* 164). One way of recognizing such a being is through moral intentions and actions. He writes: "The continuing identity of an individual human being, for instance, is significantly a matter of continuing moral aim and of continuing moral responsibility" (*LR* 169).

We should not regard individuals as subjects to which we can predicate an individuating tag, or properties. Individuals are exhibited in the dialectic of particularizing themselves within determinate being. The ebb and flow of emerging possibilities, as systems interact, is the universal process through which an individual becomes unique – "a special perspective on the whole" (*LR* 215). Armour explains: "A man may be imagined as the sum of the events of his life, or his life may be regarded as a series of instantiations of him" (*LR* 178). He is a particular amongst the universal (humankind) by those who know him; he is an expression of the universal by those who do not; and he is manifestation of identity-in-difference when he knows himself to be both particular and universal. Yet, this self-awareness exists as a process, not a static state. It is structured by the categories of thought, yet full of the tensions and the freedoms that the dialectical process provides (*LR* 245). The self, for Armour, is more like a bobbing float than an anchor, appearing and disappearing as the world flows around, in and over, submerging at one moment, sparkling unexpectedly in a shaft of sunlight the next. With each new system of understanding developed we seek to stabilize and control our lives. When the man who serves as the president of General Motors becomes the President of the General Motors, the birthday of his son may become a memo to the said president's secretary.

There is a design plan in Armour's choice of metaphysical methodology, a plan that urges recognition of a place for all persons, things and ideas. We



can understand each other better if we can juggle our available discourses and interpretive models. To herald the conceivable is to relish the multiple distinctions that can enrich the particularization that each perspective on the world can offer. To acknowledge the inconceivable is merely to reflect on the structures of understanding that locate us today but do not necessarily lock us into distinctions that result in incommensurable truth claims. Armour's view urges patience under stress, inquiry instead of accusation, and a continuing pursuit of knowledge.

What is inconceivable today may be revelatory tomorrow. Armour's design for metaphysics reaches far beyond the technical philosophical specialists who may grapple with the details. In content it seeks the universal without the finality of a singular end or point of arrival. In form he achieves the zenith of aesthetic interest – the particular as universal. All good designs, be they cars, political systems, or metaphysical treatises, as Armour knows, will speak to the universal in aim – the will to get along in the world – and address the individual in operation, the place in which one carves out each day as one's own. Armour's design, structured with certainty about our relationship to the world (the world is something which comes to know itself [LR 234]) still invites us, as does Nagel's design, "to live in hope" (TVFN 245).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> J.M.E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921, vol. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; Leslie Armour, *Logic and Reality: An Investigation into the Idea of a Dialectical System*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (1812–14), London: Allen and Unwin, 1921, vols. I and II.

<sup>4</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J.B. Baillie, London: Allen and Unwin, 1931, p. 53.

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