# Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions

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## Table of Contents

*Theme: Religious Wisdom and Perennial Philosophy: East and West*
***Theme Editor:*** Nikolaj Zunic

## *Non-thematic papers*

## *Book Review*

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**PRESENTATION**

*Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions* (*PCT*) is a publication of the World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies. A multi-lingual philosophical journal, it appears annually in print format. Selected papers, along with a supplementary volume, are published in an electronic format.

      *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions* draws on the important contribution of Catholic Christianity to philosophy. Since it aims at the fruitful exchange of ideas among philosophy and religious and cultural traditions, it also includes studies outside the Catholic Christian traditions.

      The journal publishes manuscripts in all areas of philosophy, although each issue will contain a number of articles devoted to a specific theme of particular philosophical interest. To encourage dialogue and exchange, the journal will include scholars from Africa, America, Asia, and Europe, and will represent a range of philosophical traditions.

      Of course, some may ask 'Why another philosophy journal?'

      The aim of the *World Union* is to bring scholars from the Catholic Christian traditions into contact and exchange with one another, but equally with philosophers from other religious and cultural traditions. More broadly, its aims are

> (i) to initiate and develop contacts with individuals and associations who are engaged philosophical research and study in, or in areas related to, Catholic Christian traditions – and particularly with those who, for social or political reasons or on account of geographical location, have not been able to do enter into close relationship with philosophers elsewhere;
> (ii) to serve as a conduit of information about meetings, conferences, and other matters of common interest;
> (iii) to help, when asked, and as far as possible, in organizing and sponsoring lectures and educational exchanges, particularly in those regions where there is an interest in the Catholic Christian philosophical traditions;
> (iv) to help, when asked and as far as possible, in the publicity and organisation of conferences on themes consistent with the work of the World Union and, especially, with world congresses of Christian philosophers

      Most philosophy journals have little interest in drawing explicitly on religious and cultural traditions, or in pursuing exchanges of ideas between philosophy and these traditions – and some might even be said to be opposed to this. Again, while some philosophy journals are published by Christian philosophical organisations or through religiously-affiliated universities, *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions* aims explicitly to promote exchanges between religious traditions and cultures, and philosophy.

Finally, to encourage the principle of exchange, *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions* will be thematic.

This orientation reflects the intentions of the encyclical *Fides et ratio*, and the view that such exchange is of mutual benefit to philosophy and religious and cultural traditions, without interfering with the proper autonomy of the philosophical enterprise itself.

Articles appearing in the journal will be of a serious scholarly character and more than just commentaries on issues of contemporary concern. Nevertheless, *PCT* is open with regard to methodology and approach.

The supplementary volume, published on the Internet, will include more general articles, discussion notes, interventions, as well as a selection of articles from the printed volume. The aim of this supplementary volume is to provide additional opportunities for the exchange of ideas.

The *World Union* hopes that *PCT* will provide a useful means of bringing scholars from across the globe into closer contact with one another – in a way that draws on insights and values to be found in the Catholic Christian and other religious and cultural traditions.


William Sweet,
General Editor

# INTRODUCTION

Nikolaj Zunic

It is not uncommon in certain humanistic disciplines, such as philosophy and religious studies, to be presented by a plethora of disparate perspectives and worldviews. Students who are first exposed to these subject areas are often bewildered by the sheer pluralism of views and opinions. Moreover, professors who teach in these areas usually do not provide any guidance in how to wade through this terrain. Which school of thought is the desirable one? Which is right? How do all these different philosophies relate to each other? In the end, the school of thought which one opts for is a largely arbitrary decision. One becomes either an analytic or continental philosopher; one is attracted to Eastern mysticism or Western spirituality. Is there any way of understanding the "big picture" here? Is there any way of bridging the divide between apparently incommensurable systems of ideas and ways of life?

This volume of *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions* aims to do just that. The theme of this volume, "Religious Wisdom and Perennial Philosophy: East and West," examines the similarities which exist between vastly different traditions of thought, ritual, and prayer, and fosters a dialogical approach to the excavation of the cultural riches which they hold in store for human civilization. Rather than starting from the premise that geographical, philosophical, and religious differences impede cooperation, the papers in this volume all express an optimism about the common roots and sources of philosophical and religious traditions.

The classical notion of a perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*) suggests that the impetus and form of philosophical reflection is an abiding characteristic of the human spirit, stretching over time from antiquity to the present. It eschews the point of view that there are myriad philosophies. Philosophy is, at bottom, singular, and its universal goal is wisdom. Similarly, religious traditions have proposed narrative and doctrinal frameworks to explain the deepest mysteries of life. Is it possible that the religious impulse, in its pursuit of wisdom and transcendence, could be an innate feature of human nature? The papers in this volume concur that this not only is possible, but is a reality of the religious dimension.

Modernity has introduced a radical secularization of human life and a rupturing of the bonds that held philosophy and religion in close proximity to each other. Today, many view philosophy and religion, reason and faith, as polar opposites and intrinsically immiscible. However, this was not always the case, and in fact the classical expressions of philosophical and religious wisdom give evidence of having much in common. The challenge now facing many a philosophical and religious tradition is precisely how to contend with the modern paradigm which treats them as antagonists rather than as companions, as foes rather than as friends.

Setting the tone for the volume as a whole is "Morality with and without God" by Jude P. Dougherty, who discusses various religious and philosophical conceptions of ethics. The most important question raised by Dougherty is: Is ethics dependent upon and rooted in God or is it not? The ancient Greek and Roman thinkers adhered to a natural law conception of ethics which not only emphasized the role of nature in morality, but also admitted the presence of God as the ultimate source of moral injunctions, as can be seen in Cicero's writings. God is most evident in the Christian ethics propounded during the Middle Ages, as in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. The traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism, by contrast, give expression to godless moralities, based more on custom and tradition than on reason and the divine. Dougherty clearly prizes the value of the natural law tradition and simultaneously sounds an ominous warning about the rampant atheism of modern times which threatens Western civilization, culture and life itself.

Shane Waugh's essay, "Humility, Self-Knowledge, and Wisdom," contrasts the ancient Greek philosophical concept of wisdom and the Christian notion of humility. Greek wisdom is understood along the lines of the Socratic exhortation to "know thyself!" As such, wisdom conveys the quality of self-examination. However, the attitude of humility exhibits a complete lack of attention to one's own self and a focus on something other – that other being God. By invoking the Biblical tradition, especially the idea of "fear of the Lord," Waugh argues for a revised understanding of wisdom which makes it compatible with humility, rather than at odds with it. Religious wisdom is about "enacting God's moral vision for human life" which is exemplified in the disposition of humility.

In "Rabindranath Tagore: How East and West Meet," Anne M. Wiles explores how the East and West can learn from each other through the life and ideas of the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore. The West can offer the riches of its scientific heritage, whereas the East can illuminate the West with its profound spirituality. The guiding principle of Tagore's life was that of freedom, freedom understood in both an interior and exterior sense. To be sure, the person must be free in his spirit as well as in political society. Human flourishing comes about by the attainment of a proper holism and in this way Tagore exemplifies the attempt to have the East and West come together in fruitful cooperation.

The philosophy of Josef Pieper takes centre-stage in Vincent Wargo's article "Tradition and Festivity: Josef Pieper and Post-modern Philosophy." Wargo presents Pieper's views on the role which tradition, especially the sacred tradition of Christianity, plays in the nature of philosophy. The philosophical act is ordained towards wisdom which is part of divine reality. To be a philosopher, therefore, means to be open to the sacred dimension of existence and to reach out to God. This is seen most sharply in the event of death which for Pieper involves a personal decision to give oneself over to God. Being the committed Thomist that he was, Pieper is always conscious of the interplay and mutual cooperation of

philosophy and theology, reason and faith, tenets which Wargo conscientiously emphasizes.

Today we are witnessing a sharp contrast between Western Christian civilization and Middle Eastern Islamic civilization. In his paper, "The 'Double Truth Theory' in the Context of Islamic and Christian Thought," David Lea delves into the background context of these cultural differences by tracing the divergent perspectives on truth in the thought of Averroes and Thomas Aquinas. For Averroes, truth can be arrived at in two ways: either through reason or through religious faith. This results in the view that reason need not influence faith and vice versa. This understanding has developed an Islamic civilization in which religious faith is predominant throughout society with a noticeable absence of intellectual engagement. In the Christian West, by contrast, Aquinas teaches that faith and reason are complementary and work together to arrive at truth. This view accounts for the cross-fertilization of faith and reason in the West, a context that was challenged in the modern Enlightenment which separated the two and in so doing apotheosized reason to the detriment of faith. This made the West to be a veritable antithesis to Islamic civilization, a tension we are witnessing today with the rise of Islamist terrorism.

Stefano Bigliardi's contribution to this volume, entitled "Some Characterizations of 'Miracle' according to Muslim Authors: Sketch of an Interpretation on the Footprints of S. H. Nasr and J. Hick," discusses the phenomenon of miracles in Islam. He examines views of various Muslim scholars, such as Seyyed Ahmed Khan, Bediüzzuman Said Nursi, Mehdi Golshani, Nidhal Guessoum, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, concerning the reality of miracles as portrayed in the Qur'an. Bigliardi also looks at John Hick's understanding of religion as an experience of the Real, and uses Hick to support the view that the belief that miracles exist is largely dependent on a private choice of the one who makes such an assertion to give certain events a miraculous interpretation. With such a wide variety of opinions about the nature and role of miracles in Islam, Bigliardi offers the thesis that there is no single, univocal concept of miracle to be found in the Qur'an, since the Qur'an, understood as being itself a miracle, is always open to new and fresh interpretations. The conclusion is that the concept of miracle is not a straightforward reality to understand in Islam.

Mediaeval and modern philosophy are brought together in dialogue in Robbie Moser's paper, "The Anti-Philosophy of Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī." It is striking when one considers the views of Ludwig Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī on the nature of philosophy how similar they are, despite their being separated in time by almost a millennium and by widely different cultural contexts. Moser deftly outlines the critique of philosophy as disputation and rational argumentation which these two thinkers advance. Philosophy is not supposed to perpetuate anxious questioning, but should, as a form of therapy, bring peace of mind. When it comes to the issue of religion and religious belief, both Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī maintain that philosophy should not be used to prove or justify

anything in this domain, such as the existence of God, as religious belief stands on its own foundation. The true religious believer does not come to this position through reason but through faith which is exhibited in a way of life, not idle speculation or theorizing.

The topic of the nature and scope of mysticism is central to Jason West's paper, "The Possibility of Natural Mystical Experience: The Evolution of Jacques Maritain's Position." West examines a puzzle in Maritain's understanding of mystical experience. In his early writings, Maritain suggests that a natural mystical experience is impossible, as an authentic mystical unity with God requires supernatural grace. However, later in his life, Maritain admitted the possibility of a natural mystical experience, as evidenced in Indian and other Eastern religious traditions. West wants to make the claim that Maritain does not retract his original view about the necessity of grace in mystical experiences. Rather, a natural mystical experience is one in which the mystic experiences his or her own self, not God directly. In this sense, a proper mystical unity with God is fully dependent on the intervention of divine grace, something that nature on its own powers cannot deliver.

My own contribution to this volume is entitled "Sacred and Secular Temporality: The Foundations of Human Rationality." In this paper I explore the relationship between time or temporality and modes of human thought or rationality. Sacred temporality is rooted in a commemoration of the divine act of creation, as exhibited in festivals and religious rites. The participation in such celebrations, which are engaged in for their own sake, is the establishment of a worldly context of human life in which thought and learning can be pursued for the sake of truth itself. However, the modern world has created a new foundation for rationality within the confines of secular temporality which is understood in terms of collective, social action. The result of the abandonment of sacred temporality and the instantiation of secular temporality is a new form of rationality which is immured within the boundaries of the social order and lacks a proper orientation towards transcendent truth. I argue that the modern paradigm of time and rationality is severely impoverished and even dangerous, especially when we consider topics as grave as the dignity of the human being.

Finally, Jānis (John) Ozoliņš argues for a centrality in education, in Eastern and Western traditions alike, of the formation of virtuous persons and, specifically, for the development of wisdom. In "Wisdom as Aim of Education in East and West," Ozolins draws on major figures of Eastern and Western educational thought – Augustine, Benedict of Nursia, and Thomas Aquinas from the Western tradition, and the Confucian tradition of Kongzi and Zhuangzi from the East – to show that different classical cultural traditions appear to share the view that the aim of education is the formation of persons in order that they become virtuous and wise. Ozolins acknowledges that modern education in both West and East seems to be increasingly focussed on skills and training. He adds, however, that, if students are to become genuinely happy, and are to be contributors to a

civil, prosperous, and harmonious society, something more than employment training is required. He then argues that the classical cross-cultural emphasis on virtue and, thereby, on wisdom, as objects of education needs to be revived, as it is important not only in modern education in East and West, but as a foundation for just and good societies everywhere.

The various essays collected in this volume present the dialogue between different philosophies and religious creeds in both the East and West. Such dialogue is not only possible, but urgent in our age, as the tightening of perspectives and an ever-growing intellectual myopia take increasing hold in societies around the world, as witnessed in alarming modes of rhetoric regarding "the clash of civilizations" and "the incommensurability of worldviews." Philosophy and religion are here to lead human beings to truth, wisdom, and peace, and there is every indication that they can and do cooperate in this aspiration. Any argument to the contrary must be regarded with the utmost suspicion.

# MORALITY WITH AND WITHOUT GOD[*]

Jude P. Dougherty

Historically considered, Western morality, since the advent of Christianity, has been characterized by an acknowledgment of God's existence, by the belief that union with God is the end of man, and by the conviction that man is morally free in the sense that he is not totally controlled by his desires and passions or by social forces, and that he is possessed of a soul immaterial in nature which permits him to enjoy life in God. From the time of the Stoics until the 18th century, moral reflection, for the most part, took God and an immaterial order for granted. In the 18th century, dramatic changes occurred. Hume freed morality from creed; Kant plucked it from its roots in natural theology. These deeds are well known, and there is no need to chronicle them here, but certain features of the moral theory of Hume and Kant are relevant to the present enquiry and may be briefly recalled. Perhaps one ought to begin with Hobbes, but it was Hume who drove home the point that religion and morality are distinct and even disparate in their respective bases and ultimate references, their motivations, and their consequences for human existence. Morality, says Hume, cannot afford to wait on the efforts of natural theology. Mankind must have some commonly available principles and grounds for moral judgment. Hume believed that as a matter of experience, a natural inclination to humanity and benevolence has a more constant and reliable effect on man's conduct than even the most pompous view suggested by theological theories and systems. In this as in other matters, Kant was to accept too much from Hume.

In his first *Critique,* Kant denies that our theoretical reason can provide evidence for the existence of God or for freedom or for immortality, but he is nevertheless convinced that these notions are required for morality. For Kant, it is axiomatic that moral law requires justice, defined as a measure of happiness in proportion to virtue. Because happiness may elude the virtuous in this life, Kant must posit the existence of God and a future life to ensure that virtue will be properly rewarded. He writes:

> There is only one possible condition under which. . . there can be a God and a future world. I know with complete certainty that no one can be acquainted with any other conditions which lead to the same unity of ends under the moral law. Since therefore the moral precept is at the same time my maxim (reason prescribing that it should be so), I inevitably believe in the existence of God and in a future life, and I am certain that nothing can shake this belief, since my moral principles would thereby be themselves overthrown, and I cannot disdain them without becoming abhorrent in my own eye.

Kant will go on to say that even though no one can demonstrate the existence of God, one can still say, "I am morally certain." He admits, "My conviction is not logical, but is morally certain, and since it rests on subjective grounds, I must not even say 'It is morally certain there is a God, etc.' I can only say, 'I am morally certain.'"[1]

For many Jewish and Christian thinkers who come after Kant, the only genuine basis for morality is religion. This is true of theologians such as Brunner, Barth, Niebuhr and Bultmann, who hold that without belief in God, there is no ground or reason for being moral. Elizabeth Anscombe has similarly argued that only if we believe in God as a lawgiver can we come to believe that there is anything a man is categorically bound to do on pain of being a bad man.[2] Anscombe maintains that the moral use of obligation statements makes no sense apart from a divine law conception of ethics. Anscombe's judgment focuses an issue that must be faced by anyone who takes up the problem of moral obligation. When in the l8th century God was removed as a source of moral law, something happened to the notion of obligation. It required a different sort of grounding. Enter the notion of "social contract" brought in to impose obligation and legitimate coercion by virtue of consent given to some hypothetical primitive state. Since the l8th century, the societal contract theory has been the prevailing one and perhaps the only modern rival for the doctrine that power proceeds from the barrel of a gun. The social contract is the keystone of John Rawls's celebrated examination of "justice."[3]

Leaving modernity aside for the moment, my topic, "Morality with and without God," demands at least a cursory examination of some pre-Christian or pagan codes of morality.

To begin with the Greeks, we note that classical civilization had its gods and took for granted an immaterial order. Every schoolboy knows the names of Greek and Roman gods. An immaterial order needed little defense in classical antiquity. Plato reasoned to a *summum bonum*, worthy of veneration; Aristotle reasoned to a self-thinking intellect, a first efficient cause, and an ultimate final cause. Cicero believed that the universe is governed by a divine plan and held that the mind or soul of each individual is a reflection, indeed, a part of the divine mind.

I take Cicero (106-43 BC) to represent the noblest expression of the Roman mind, indeed of the Hellenistic mind, on the subject of the moral life. Cicero claimed no originality but thought of himself as transposing Greek ideas about public life, specifically those of Plato and Aristotle, into a Roman context. In the *Discussions at Tusculum*,[4] drawing upon both the Stoics and the Peripatetics, and making use of Plato's *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus, Republic,* and *Laws,* Cicero begins: "If, my son, we adopt moral goodness as our guide – in each and every one of its forms, it will follow automatically what our practical duties or obligations must be…. The next step is to go to the various kinds of obligations which have a direct bearing on people's daily lives and needs." This he does elsewhere in *De officiis.*[5]

In the *Discussions at Tusculum*, he examines the essentials for a happy life. In the first four books of that treatise he concludes that death is not to be feared, that pain is endurable, that sorrow can be alleviated, and that disturbances of the mind can be conquered. Book Five is given to the thesis that moral goodness by itself is sufficient to make one happy.

> But just suppose, on the other hand, that the good way of life lay at the mercy of a whole lot of unpredictable accidents, so that if appropriate accidents were not forthcoming this goodness would lack sufficient strength to maintain itself independently by its own account. If that were really so, all we could do to achieve a happy life, it seems to me, would be merely to hope for the best and pray heaven that happiness might somehow come our way.[6]

"The happy are the ones who are alarmed by no fears, anguished by no cravings, dissolved into no voluptuous languor by fatuous transports of delight."[7] But is there such a man

> who is capable of regarding all the hazards and accidents of human life as endurable, a man who moreover is troubled neither by fear nor by distress nor by passion, a man whom all empty pleasures of whatever kind leave utterly cold – then if such a person exists, there is every reason why he should be happy.[8]

The issue is not resolved by Cicero, although one is left with the impression that in the absence of complete self-control there may be degrees of happiness.

In *De officiis*, Cicero discusses the nature of responsibility and obligation. Given that all mankind is one brotherhood, Cicero infers that we should not be indifferent to the happiness and well being of others. Recognition of brotherhood implies a tremendous social and communal obligation. From the very fact that every human being possesses a spark of the divinity, an essential and indissoluble bond is created with all his fellows. He must therefore treat them with respect and dignity. In fact we incur an obligation to the other, indeed, a responsibility for the other. Nature's law, says Cicero, promotes and coincides with common interest.

In *De re publica III*, 33, we find Cicero's famous definition of natural law, "True law," he says,

> is right reason, consonant with nature, spread through all the people. It is constant and eternal; it summons to duty by its orders, it deters from crime by its prohibitions. . . . There will not be one law at Rome and another at Athens, one now and another later, but all nations at all times will be bound by this one eternal unchangeable law and the God will be one common master and

general (so to speak) of all people. He is the author, expounder, and mover of the law.[9]

Justice, Cicero finds, is the crowning glory of the virtues, and close akin to justice is charity, which may also be called "kindness" or "generosity."[10] Like the law of nature, to which it is essential, justice is absolute, eternal, and immutable. He extends this concept even to punishment, "There are certain duties that we owe even to those who have wronged us; for there is a limit to retribution and to punishment."[11] It is no wonder that Petrarch could say of Cicero, "You could sometimes fancy that it is not a pagan philosopher but a Christian apostle who is speaking."[12] Turning to the Orient, we find that Confucianism represents a way of life that was followed by the Chinese people for well over 2,000 years. Although regarded by some people as a religion, it is non-theistic. Within its moral code there is no reference to God or to a teleological conception of nature.[13] Ethical issues, for the Confucian, are not determined or formulated apart from the social setting in which they arise. One does not find in Confucian ethics any clear demarcation between moral rules and other sorts of rules. There are no rules that are functionally the equivalent of the Mosaic Decalogue. One finds rather in Confucian ethics a theory of virtue rather than a theory of obligation. The sage follows his desires, satisfies his emotions but at the same time is restrained by a sense of propriety. That which is proper is that which is in accord with reason. The "reasonable" is a product of experience, both personal experience and that of the community. Yet classical Confucian ethics contains no division among the rational, the emotional, and the appetitive tendencies of man, comparable to their distinction in Greek morality.

Where difficult questions for ethical decision arise in a particular setting, their solution is to be found in the individual's sense of rightness. Whereas the exercise of the individual's sense of rightness in normal cases may well be the simple application of a rule, in complex issues that judgment may be challenged by a fellow agent. In such cases the agent proposing a solution must be prepared to offer a reasoned justification for his proposed course of action.

Confucius, like Plato, would have the ruler be a sage. Moral qualities, he maintained, are indispensable for leadership. To govern is to set things right, but he who would govern must first set himself right. He who would lead is the man who has cultivated, above all, the virtues of filial piety, magnanimity, loyalty, reciprocity, courage, and wisdom. Added to that list is the requirement that the superior man who would govern is one who loves his fellow man joyously from the innermost recesses of his heart. The superior man stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men, and in awe of the "world of sages." A just ruler derives his authority from and rules by the Mandate of Heaven, a mandate conferred upon him by reason of his virtue and talent.[14]

It is said of Confucius that he prayed and fasted, that he attended sacrifices, and that he once even swore by "Heaven." Heaven is to be understood here, not simply as the regularities found in nature, as it is understood by a later disciple, Hsun-tzu,[15] but as a cosmic-moral power. Obedience and trust in Heaven are said to have given Confucius courage in times of disappointment and physical danger and to have provided him with a sense of a Heavenly mission in a troubled time.[16] The Way of Heaven, Confucius held, should serve as the model for the way among men. The ruler is something like a schoolmaster whose purpose is to help his charges become better men.

Buddhism, like Confucianism, is sometimes regarded as a religion, even though there is no reference to God, to a transcendent reality or to personal immortality. Like most traditions, Buddhism is complex and to a significant degree heterogeneous. Buddhist ethics from the very beginning has been committed to a middle way between asceticism and hedonism but is perhaps best considered as asceticism. Gautama Buddha (b. about 563 BC) condemned all attempts to enquire into or to define the supreme good of life. Salvation is not to be found in theoretical speculation but in a strenuous moral endeavor which aims at the destruction of desire, the root of all suffering. The path to deliverance is the extinction of desire, a turning away from human life and the external order. It is such a path that leads to Nirvana, the eternal beatific silence. How sweet, he taught, would it be to be freed of all craving and of all passion? The path to such freedom is a life of virtue, the habitual choice of the mean. The ethical ideal thus becomes one of quietism and spiritual detachment. The wise man will take no part in the life of the state or in the business of human affairs. He will live in solitude, perhaps as a monk, conforming his spirit to the Absolute.

Although the Buddhist commits himself to a certain way of life, on the whole Buddhism eschews mandatory dogmas and specific injunctions to which the adherent must conform. There are, nevertheless, traditional precepts that are to be observed. There are five precepts for the layman, precepts that prohibit killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and the drinking of intoxicating liquor. There are an additional five precepts for monastic novices, i.e., not to eat during prohibitive hours, not to take part in festivals and amusements, not to use luxurious furniture and beds, not to accept money for oneself, and not to use garlands, perfumes, or ornaments. There is within the many strands of Buddhism a recognition of the obligatory nature of charity, of hospitality, and of love for every living thing. Thus the life of the fetus is to be protected, whereas Confucian ethics would permit its destruction in the early stages.

Viewed from a Greek perspective, that is, from classical Western philosophy, one is inclined to see in Confucianism and Buddhism intimations of a natural law philosophy, even though both lack an ontological foundation. There is no doubt that the transition from either Buddhism or Confucianism to Christianity is relatively easy to make, in the sense that little has to be given up. Though both Confucianism and

Buddhism are godless, the humanism characteristic of both is evident in their common admonition to self-restraint, charity and, in the case of Confucianism, its sense of propriety. We also find in both an appreciation of custom and tradition, and judged from a Christian perspective we have a sense of the fulfillment possible to both if only they were completed by the acceptance of divine revelation. Yet such "conversion" or fulfillment rarely happens. Confucianism and Buddhism are not a prelude to Christianity in the same way as Hellenic philosophy. It cannot be said of the East something we say of the intellect of the West – namely, that "Christ came in the fullness of time when the intellect of the West was prepared to receive the truths of the Gospel." Although one is compelled to admire the humanism found in Confucian and Buddhist moral codes, neither can be thought of as an expression of natural law morality. Natural law is distinctively Greek in origin and cannot be affirmed except in the Western context which gave it birth. It is the distinctive features of the Greek mind that I will attend to in a moment.

The Enlightenment, we know, challenged not only Christianity but the underpinnings of the moral philosophy characteristic of Aristotle and of those Stoics who followed his lead, notably by denying the reality of nature and human nature along with the principle of final causality or teleology in nature. Our topic compels us to ask: Is a systematic ethics possible without the implicit acknowledgment of those principles? Though he could not reason to either God or to personal immortality, Kant needed to posit both to ground his moral code. His ethics remains theistic, though it is not what we would call a natural law ethics. Affirmation of the intelligibility of nature, itself the product of intelligence, is the key to a natural law philosophy.

In both Aristotle and Aquinas there is the common affirmation that things have natures that are indicative of tendencies that beg to be fulfilled. Aristotle, for example, maintained that from a consideration of what a thing is in its tendential aspects, one can determine what is suitable for it – in other words, its good. From a consideration of what man is, one can determine what ends he ought to pursue. For Aristotle, the supreme end of man is happiness, which consists primarily in intellectual activity, all other pursuits being subordinate or instrumental to that one. Aquinas adds principally that ultimate fulfillment consists in an eternal beatitude in which man's intellectual and appetitive faculties find complete satisfaction. For Aquinas, ultimate beatitude is possible even if temporal beatitude of the Aristotelian sort escapes one by reason of chance or the poverty of the human organism. This is the natural foundation for the theological virtue of hope.

The foregoing conception of natural law rests upon two ontological pillars: one, the conviction that there are intelligible natural structures, and two, the conviction that the processes of nature are purposive – in the language of Aristotle, upon the principles of essence and finality. But do these principles exhaust the intellectual commitments necessary to support a

natural law outlook? We come back to the question, "Is it possible to subscribe to a natural law basis for morality without first establishing the existence of God?" The answer at first blush seems to be in the affirmative. We seem to find the rudiments of a natural law outlook in Confucian and Buddhist codes of conduct. Furthermore, in the West we find many who are agnostic with respect to the question of God's existence and yet who agree that arbitrary will is not final, that civil law and conscience are to be measured against an independent scale.[17] How account for this?

The Confucian, the Buddhist, and the neo-pagan of the West have in common a humanistic ethic but one that is not supported by an acknowledgment of God's existence or by a systematic philosophy of human nature. A difference between ancient moral codes associated with the East and those proclaimed in the contemporary West is this: Confucian and Buddhist moral codes were developed without any knowledge of Christ, whereas much of contemporary Western philosophy has known but has rejected Christ. Yet the moral outlook characteristic of Christianity has not been culturally eradicated and remains to a considerable extent, although unacknowledged, in Western secular philosophy. Dorothy Sayers made this point succinctly in her 1947 Oxford lecture, "The Lost Tools of Learning."[18] "The truth," she says

> is that for the last three hundred years or so we have been living on our educational capital. . . Right down to the nineteenth century, our public affairs were mostly managed, and our books and journals were for the most part written, by people brought up in homes, and trained in places where the Scholastic curriculum with its emphasis on the Trivium and Quadrivium was still alive in the memory and almost in the blood. Just so, many people today who are atheist or agnostic in religion are governed in their conduct by a code of Christian ethics which is so rooted that it never occurs to them to question it.

She then adds this cautionary note, "But one cannot live on capital forever."

Accumulated capital or tradition obviously plays a large role in how a people conduct themselves. St. Thomas, in discussing the role of tradition, gives it almost the force of law. Within Confucianism tradition plays an all-important role. It represents the collective wisdom of a people as they confront their daily affairs. For Mao, to complete his socialist revolution, the Confucian tradition had to be eliminated. To that end, he was aided by an intellectual class, tutored by John Dewey, who held that the function of education is to challenge rather than to perpetuate the inherited.[19] Within the West we know full well what happens when a theistic-grounded morality is repudiated in favor of an outright materialism. We have only to recall the atrocities committed in the name of communism and national socialism. More recently, given the ascendancy of the materialist, secular outlook within the West, we find a renewed threat to

Western civilization itself, as biblical and traditional moral standards have been called into question at all levels of society.

The cultural effects of atheism cannot be denied. Absent an acknowledgment of God's existence, worship and the things pertaining to worship have no basis, and the consequence of their being lost within a secular culture portends the loss of Western culture itself. No one can deny that the great achievements of Western art, i.e., in painting, architecture, music, and literature, have been motivated by a sense of the sacred. It is true that Kant's abstract and moralistic interpretation of religion attaches little value to visible manifestations of piety and worship. His pietistic upbringing may have led him to deprecate the cultural effects of communal religious practice, a position that is consistent with his purely moral religion, but contemporary atheism has gone much further, insofar as it seeks to suppress all public manifestations of religion – that, in spite of the fact that European culture has thrived on, and can almost be defined by, its feasts and pageants in celebration of sacred events.

By way of a concluding comment, it may be argued that a theistic natural law theory is best construed as a meta-ethic. Although a natural law outlook is purely philosophical, it opens one to religious testimony, testimony that may have some additional things to say about life's goals, about happiness, and about the norms by which they ought to be pursued. An important feature is its empirical character, that is, its fidelity to evidence drawn from common experience and the sciences of man, insofar as that evidence bears on human fulfillment. Often when natural law is invoked, it is both presented and criticized as a set of normative propositions, which, because of their universality and necessity, in some fashion, transcend periods and cultures. It has that feature, to be sure, but it is best understood as a meta-ethic. It can easily be shown that natural law theory, in addition to its openness to the transcendent has a contribution to make on several fronts, notably as they are discussed in contemporary literature. In providing a theory about the determination of moral norms, it speaks to topics such as ethical reasoning, the movement from descriptive to normative assertions, the extra-legal grounds for judicial decision, and the societal basis of law. Natural law when so understood is seen less as a code than as a metaphysics or philosophical anthropology that calls attention to certain time-transcending facts about human nature and society, facts that must be taken into account as the race grapples with ever more complex moral issues arising notably from the biological and natural sciences and the recent phenomenon of globalization.

The "Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights," adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on October 19, 2005, is perhaps the closest one can come to a transcultural declaration of moral objectives. Drafted by an international committee representing the major cultures of the globe, it deliberately eschews any reference to a divinely ordained moral order or even acknowledges that there are "laws of nature." Laudably it promotes the value of human dignity, human rights, and

fundamental human freedoms. It insists on honesty and the value of cooperation, dialogue, social responsibility, and the priority of the interest of the individual over that of the state. In the practice of medicine, it emphasizes the importance of consent to any medical intervention and speaks to the patient's right of privacy. The list goes on, but what is missing is an ontological grounding of the principles assumed. Although it speaks of human dignity and human rights, their derivation is not addressed. Omitted, too, is any reference to an important setting of human life – the family – and of that which contributes to its stability. There is no recognition of the destructive force of practices such as adultery, divorce, contraception, abortion, and euthanasia. In fact nothing is condemned; only the laudable, by universal consent, is affirmed. The genius of the document is that it is bland enough for the atheist, the theist, the Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian to sign onto. Clearly for the West, this "Declaration" is no substitute for the Mosaic Decalogue. Furthermore, in substituting vague aspirations for tradition, it is, for example, less a guide than Confucianism. One is left with the unintended thought that morality is specific to a culture, with or without God.

**NOTES**

* This paper was delivered at the 2012 meeting of the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association. It was later published in Hayden Ramsay, ed., *Truth and Faith in Ethics* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2011), pp. 22-32. It is reprinted here with permission from the publisher.

[1] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1929; reprinted, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 650.

[2] G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy* 33, (1958): 1-19; reprinted in Anscombe, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3: *Ethics, Religion and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[3] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[4] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Discussions at Tusculum* in *Cicero: On the Good Life*, tr. Michael Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1971).

[5] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De officiis*, tr. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913).

[6] Cicero, *Discussions at Tusculum*, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

[7] Ibid., p. 61.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De re publica III*, tr. D.R. Shackelton Bailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[10] Cicero, *De officiis, I*, op cit., p. 7.

[11] Ibid., p. 9.

[12] As quoted by Walter Miller in his introduction to *Cicero: On Duties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), p. xiv.; numerous reprintings.

[13] For a brief overview of Confucian ethics, see Anthony S. Cua, "Confucianism: Ethics," in A.S. Cua, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 72-79.

[14] May Sim, in a valuable study of Aristotle and Confucius makes the point that Confucius' defense of propriety by an appeal to nature or to the Mandate of Heaven is thin and inexplicable (May Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], p. 3.)

[15] Cf. Antonio S. Cua, *Ethical Argumentation: A Study in Hsun Tzu's Moral Epistemology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

[16] Yi Pao Mei, "Confucianism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, 1973, pp.1091-1099.

[17] An absurd exception is to be found in a passage from a U.S. Supreme Court ruling supporting a woman's right to abortion that declared: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning of the universe and the mystery of human life." *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa.* v. *Casey,* 505 U.S. 833.

[18] Available online at: www.cambridgestudycenter.com/articles/ sayers1.htm.

[19] Cf. Zhixin Su, "A Critical Evaluation of John Dewey's Influence on Education," *American Journal of Education,* 103 (1995).

# HUMILITY, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, AND WISDOM

Shane Waugh

## INTRODUCTION

Tradition tells us that emblazoned above the entrance to the oracle of Delphi was the dictum 'gnothi seauton', conventionally translated as 'Know Thyself.'[1] Following this dictum has, since the classical period, been taken to be a core or foundation of the wise life, capturing the attention of philosophers and poets alike. Yet for all its familiarity, the classical conception of wisdom encapsulated in the 'gnothi seauton' dictum is incompatible with any currently available account of humility.

I shall make two key assumptions about the conditions for wisdom envisioned in its classical conception in developing the argument of this paper. First, I shall assume that it is a condition of the wise life that it be a life of complete virtue; failings of virtue are therefore failings of wisdom. Second, I shall assume that the wise life requires that one exercise sustained self-directed attention. This second assumption connects self-knowledge to wisdom by requiring that the wise person be constantly self-critical, persistently monitoring themselves for any divergence from wisdom in thought or deed. Understood this way the wise life is an amplified version the Socratic examined life; we are to examine our life constantly, not just once.

As shall be explained below, the standard 'non-overestimation' account of humility violates the first of the above conditions; humility on this conception involves failings of virtue in addition to being incoherent on their own terms. So serious are these failings, and so obvious is the tension created with the classical conception of wisdom, that many have reacted by rejecting humility. Aristotle is frequently (although perhaps unfairly) interpreted as explicitly denying that humility is a virtue on the grounds that it makes excellence impossible and more recently Richard Taylor has presented a modernised version of this same perspective.[2] Nor are Aristotle and contemporary neo-Aristotelians historically isolated examples; Nietzsche and Montaigne expressed similar suspicions towards humility, as did David Hume.[3] The new account of humility defended below is also incompatible with the classical conception of humility in that it violates the second condition by making sustained self-directed attention unavailable to the humble. Thus on either account the tension between humility and wisdom cannot be avoided.

In section 1, I summarise the currently available accounts of humility, highlighting their central weaknesses. This will reveal the first of the four aspects of humility needed for the account I defend. In sections 2 and 3, I will turn to the concept of attention, highlighting the ways in which the humble must be thought of as being inattentive to themselves. This will

reveal the second and third of the four aspects needed to complete the account. In section 4, I highlight the important role played by service in an account of humility, thus providing the fourth and final aspect of the account of humility. In section 5, I will bring the four identified aspects of humility together and define humility as 'self-disregarding service'. In section 6, I will turn to a specifically religious extension of this theory of humility that implies a different way of understanding wisdom. In section 7, I shall return to the tension between humility and classical wisdom.

## 1. THE CONVENTIONAL 'NON-OVERESTIMATION' ACCOUNT OF HUMILITY

Philosophical analyses of humility (or modesty, with which it is generally taken to be synonymous) fall into two broad categories; inward-directed and outward-directed.[4] Outward-directed accounts of humility are those which define humility by reference to how the humble person behaves or is disposed to behave towards others. While often popular, all such accounts have been shown to be incapable of distinguishing false humility from true humility and so must be mistaken. As these problems are well known I will not say much about the outward-directed accounts. Inwards-directed accounts of humility are those which define humility by reference to how the humble person regards some aspect of themselves, especially their own achievements. These come in two varieties, non-overestimation accounts and under-estimation accounts. Under-estimation accounts have very few defenders and shall not be the focus of attention here.[5] Instead I will focus on the more popular, although deeply misguided, non-overestimation accounts.

Noted defences of the non-overestimation account include those by Owen Flanagan and Norvin Richards.[6] The common element here is to suggest that the essence of humility is that the humble lack any tendency to overestimate their own achievements. While they do not over-estimate the value of their achievements, they do form accurate self-assessments. The combination of not overestimating with forming an accurate self-assessment has proven to be problematic.

Take, for instance, someone who has some genuine moral achievements – Mother Teresa for instance. As an intellectually virtuous agent, Mother Teresa would have known that she had some moral achievements, and would also have known that her achievements were of greater moral worth than those of most other people. Thus, she would be right in thinking very highly of herself, just as we rightly think very highly of her. Unfortunately, adopting this attitude is regarded by defenders of the non-overestimation account as a violation of humility. What, then, is to be done?

Common to the logic of all non-overestimation accounts at this point is to emphasise the relative unimportance of the humble person's achievements. This unimportance is explained relative to some class or

agent; peers, other especially moral people, God, and the universe '*sub specie aeternitatis*' are examples of such. So, for instance, one might grant that Mother Teresa achieved more than most but, relative to the moral worth of God, her own moral worth fades into insignificance.

Non-overestimation accounts run into difficulty at precisely this point because it turns out that the humble person has no important achievements after all. But what, then, is it that the humble person is supposed to be humble *about*? Having nothing about which she could boast, nothing of which she could be proud or conceited, nothing for which she could demand recognition and superior treatment, the would-be humble person is robbed of even the possibility of being humble. In insisting that the humble person know themselves, we have made humility impossible as the humble person would have to know themselves to be someone with nothing to be humble about. While the attitude that such people take towards themselves might be accurate, it is hard to see that it is virtuous in anything more than the minimal sense that forming true beliefs is virtuous. It is even harder to see why we would have to think that the humble are also wise, for surely the wise as classically understood both have many excellences and know that they do so. The difficulties faced by non-overestimation accounts suggest the first element of an alternate account of humility: that the humble have some genuine achievements with respect to which they can be humble.

## 2. ATTENTION AND HUMILITY

To overcome to difficulties associated with non-overestimation accounts, I propose to reverse the direction of analysis. Rather than focusing on the ways in which the humble are supposed to see themselves, we ought to consider the ways in which the humble *fail* to see themselves. I suggest that the humility of the humble is grounded in an impermanent but characteristic lack of *attention*.

Here I follow Declan Smithies' account of attention as a "distinctive form of consciousness that makes information fully accessible for the rational control of thought and action."[7] Applied to the case of humility, we should say that the humble person *lacks* this distinctive form of consciousness when the content of that consciousness is their own merit or relatively high position in some hierarchy. What this means is that information which would warrant a judgement that the humble person has some special achievement or merit and so deserved some special social position or praise is not for the humble person fully accessible for the rational control of thought and action.

Smithies' account is a convenient one for use in an analysis of humility because it has a clear normative component. Attention places our actions in the space of reasons, allowing us to provide justifications and make judgements. Since a humble person won't typically attend to their own merit, appeals to that merit will not appear among any reasons that they

could give to justify their behaviour. One implication is that a humble person would not typically be expected to emphasise their merit or to insist on their rights as the holder of a high position in some hierarchy; the reasons necessary to both motivate and justify such claims would not be available to the humble person. This is not to imply that such appeals are strictly inconsistent with humility or that the humble could never have any reasons to make them. It is only to claim that the social interactions of the humble will rarely centre on the appeal to such reasons.

A further important feature of Smithies' account of attention is that it only requires that information be made available for the *rational* control of thought and action. This does not rule out the possibility that a lack of attention could still allow for information being available for the control of thought and action in *non-rational* or *a-rational* ways. When driving a car, for instance, we don't always attend to the way we are driving and so we don't consciously register all the stimuli relevant to driving the car safely. As a result, we can't always give coherent reasons about why we drove the car the way we did. Yet it is also clear that this information, of which we are inattentive, is guiding behaviour.[8] Likewise, information of which they are inattentive shaping their behaviour is a central feature of the lives of the humble. Consider the example of Professor Fred.

Professor Fred is the chair of his department in a prestigious university; his opinion is highly sought after. He realises that his elevated status places him beyond involving himself with mundane concerns and trivial questions and appreciates the value of being able to focus his time on matters of significance. One afternoon, a first year student, not realising the elevated position Professor Fred holds, knocks on his door and proceeds to ask him a series of rather trivial questions. Rather than politely point the student towards one of his lower-ranking colleagues, Professor Fred instead patiently and thoughtfully responds to the questions, even though doing so really is "beneath" him. Not only that, Professor Fred brings to bear the full resources of his knowledge and status in answering the questions. The student walks away satisfied and Professor Fred gets back to his work.

No doubt, the student would regard Professor Fred as a helpful person but there is little reason at this stage for him to think especially highly of Professor Fred. Somewhat later, our student relates his encounter to his peers, along with an appreciation of his helpfulness on that occasion. In doing so, he realises that his encounter was not just an isolated incident; many of his peers have had similar experiences with Professor Fred. While each of them had also come to appreciate Professor Fred for his helpfulness, none of them had realised that Professor Fred's behaviour towards them was typical of him. Reflecting together on this case, they each also come to fully grasp the elevated position that Professor Fred holds along with its implications. They each now feel somewhat embarrassed at having burdened Professor Fred with their trivial questions and see clearly that in no instance was he under any obligation to actually answer them. In fact, given his elevated position, he could reasonably have been anticipated not

to have answered them. Given this new perspective, how might we imagine that the students would re-describe Professor Fred to each other, and how might we, outsiders to the case, explain his behaviour?

Starting with our own explanation of Professor Fred's behaviour towards this group of students, it is clear that in responding to the student's requests all those years ago, Professor Fred must have taken himself to be in a position to answer the student's questions. Were this not the case Professor Fred surely would have asked each of the students to ask someone else. That is, Professor Fred acts on the basis of his authority and elevated position. Yet here the same features of Professor Fred's relationship with the students – features which enable him to answer – also suggest that he shouldn't answer these questions at all. How is it that Professor Fred is responsive to these features of his relationship to the student but doesn't manage to appeal directly to these same features?

One way of making sense of Professor Fred's behaviour is to suggest that at the moment that each of the inquisitive but misguided students came knocking on his door, he was in a state of inattention towards himself and, in particular, towards his elevated status relative to the student. From this it follows that Professor Fred would be prevented from appealing to his status as a reason for acting in any particular way. However, inattention allows for information exercising *non-rational* control over thought and action. This non-rational control of information explains why Professor Fred is able to respond in the detailed way he does; Professor Fred's authority and status shapes his response to the student's questions in much the same way that information about my capacities as a driver shape how I respond to an obstacle on the road ahead of me.

The students would probably explain Professor Fred's behaviour rather differently, and given the stable response to a given situation, appeal to a character trait would be a natural approach. Which character trait? At first they may perhaps be inclined to say that Professor Fred is kind or generous. While this is probably true, it doesn't capture the important differences in status and expectations due to the differing social roles in this case. A more fruitful explanation would be that Professor Fred is humble. Observe that there is in Professor Fred's behaviour that characteristic "downward" movement so commonly highlighted in accounts of humility; answering the questions is "beneath" him, but Fred "lowers" himself to answer them anyway.[9] In doing so, he is both not claiming everything to which he is entitled and concerning himself primarily with the good of someone other than himself, both of which are commonly associated with humility. In addition, Professor Fred also demonstrates all the other standard features of humility to be found in the literature. For instance, Professor Fred isn't insisting on his relatively high status in this circumstance and isn't asking for any special treatment on the basis of that status. Nor is he engaging in any ranking behaviour.

If Professor Fred is humble, then we ought to conclude that it was on the basis of his inattention to himself, and the resultant non-rational

control of information over behaviour, that he maintains this character trait. It is after all his inattention to himself which explains why he doesn't engage in ranking behaviour, call for special treatment or any other un-humble behaviour. All such behaviour requires a self-directed form of attention and the rational control information in the form of appealing to perceived special merits.[10] For the same reason, Professor Fred's behaviour cannot be thought of as a form of false humility. This brings out a second aspect of humility: the humble must have their behaviour controlled in non-rational or a-rational ways by information concerning their merits and the resultant social standing to which they are entitled.

At this point a few clarifications are in order. First, to claim that Professor Fred is humble is not to claim that he is a saint. Just as with related virtues of kindness and generosity, the virtue of humility ought not be understood as being so distant from everyday life and everyday people that it becomes unachievable. Second, it may be objected that, rather than being an example of humility, Professor Fred merely manages to act "decently" in that refusing to answer the students' questions would be rude, disrespectful or cause undue embarrassment. Although the objection is misguided, there is much to agree with in the intuitions behind this objection. There is a reasonable (although old-fashioned) conception of decency according to which "decent" behaviour requires, among other things, that we eschew self-importance, arrogance and carelessness with regard to the good of others. As each of these can stand in contrast to humility, it should be no surprise that "common decency" can thus be thought of as including the virtue of humility. Indeed, I am inclined to think that any attractive account of common decency would have to include humility. So if we insist on understanding decency in these robust terms then Professor Fred would be correctly described as being decent, although at the same time we should have to restrict the label of 'decency' to only those demonstrating some genuinely virtuous behaviour. In this case, Professor Fred's decency could not be "common" or "mere" decency. Thus, decency itself would require further analysis as to its content, and that content would have to include humility.[11]

Making inattention necessary for humility is the source for the irresolvable tension between humility and wisdom as classically understood. Classical wisdom requires of the wise that they constantly examine themselves, and so constantly appealing to their self-knowledge, as they pursue the life of complete virtue. Consequentially such a life requires a constant self-directed attention to enable the explicit appeal to self-knowledge. This is incompatible with humility, by definition. In the next section we consider whether humility is incompatible with self-knowledge itself, in addition to being incompatible with classical wisdom.

## 3. SELF-KNOWLEDGE, INATTENTION, AND ORIENTATION

Recall that in order for Professor Fred to have acted humbly there must have been information about his merits and status that exercised some (non-rational) control over his thought and action. Such information could not have come to play such a role at all unless Professor Fred had previously reflected upon and endorsed it. So Professor Fred was once in a position to have self-knowledge regarding these aspects of himself. Further, as we don't generally require that someone attend to all their knowledge at all times in order to be said to have that knowledge, it does not follow directly from his inattention that Professor Fred's humility has robbed him of his self-knowledge. To draw such a conclusion we would have to establish that Professor Fred is no longer capable of endorsing this knowledge.

Initially, it may seem that, due to the requirement that Professor Fred be inattentive to himself, he must no longer be capable of endorsing any self-knowledge he previously had. Making such an endorsement would require of him that he demonstrate self-directed attention, as what he would have to endorse is information about himself. Were Professor Fred to remain in this state, perhaps by constantly being asked to demonstrate his self-knowledge, then he could never attain humility. How then is the possibility of self-knowledge for a humble Professor Fred to be explained?

The question of Professor Fred's self-knowledge can be clarified by observing a hitherto unemphasised aspect of attention: that it has an orientation. We can say that a subject's attention is oriented towards those objects which, whenever they do appear in consciousness, tend to automatically and, without any conscious act of decision, become the subject of attention. In a parallel way, we can also recognise that attention can be oriented away from some objects if, were those objects to appear in consciousness, they would tend not to become the object of attention. Thinking of orientation this way does not require that the objects to which someone has their attention oriented need always or even frequently actually be present to that person. Thus, we must distinguish between the orientation of attention and its mere direction, or what it happens to be focusing on at any given moment. Nor does thinking of orientation in this way imply that orientations must be absolute or static to be genuine; some flexibility is allowed. So temporarily attending to themselves need not undermine the humility of the humble, provided that it remains the case that their attention is not oriented towards themselves.[12] It is also the case that the direction given to attention by an orientation can be overridden, possibly through a conscious choice to attend to something other than that to which an orientation directs attention.

An inattentional account of humility requires only that the attention of the humble is not *oriented* towards their own merits or relative standing in some hierarchy, etc. This is a requirement that Professor Fred meets in that several students had interactions with Professor Fred in which his own status or merit didn't become the object of his attention. Further, the

flexibility of an orientation allows us to show how his self-knowledge is possible, for it allows Professor Fred on occasion to reflect on and to endorse his self-knowledge, including knowledge of his own status, etc. Provided that Professor Fred's orientation does not become self-directed as a result of endorsing his self-knowledge, then supposing him to have self-knowledge need not threaten his humility.

The flexibility of the orientation of attention also allows that Professor Fred need not respond to every question from every student in order to safeguard his humility. If, on some particular occasion, Professor Fred was extremely busy or working on something very important, that in itself might trigger a moment of self-directed attention the outcome of which could be to politely request that the student ask someone else. That said, if Professor Fred responded to every situation with sustained self-directed attention and resultant appeals to his importance, we would have to conclude that his attention was oriented to some aspect of himself. As a result, we could no longer call him humble, although we wouldn't necessarily call him arrogant either.[13]

Clearly the flexibility of the orientation of attention is something of a double-edge sword for the humble for, while it allows space for them to have self-knowledge, it makes humility an inherently fragile state. This is because it is plausible to suppose that forcing attention to sustain a particular direction can alter the orientation of attention. It is for this same reason that appealing to the flexibility of an orientation cannot allow us to regard the humble as being wise on the classical model of wisdom. Were the humble to come to constantly make their own virtue the centre of attention, and to constantly appeal to their self-knowledge to verify that they were acting wisely, then we could no longer reasonably regard the orientation of their attention as being other than self-directed.

This now leads us to the third aspect of humility required for the present account: that the humble have an orientation to their attention such that their attention is oriented away from the merits and social standing of the self. Exactly what this requirement entails should be clear given what has been said above. However, even with this third requirement in place, the account remains incomplete, for while we know what the humble *will not* orient their attention towards, we don't yet know what they *will* orient their attention towards. Establishing that remains the task for the next section, before which one further note of concern for the account presented should be addressed.

A remaining concern arises from observing that, simply as a consequence of his profession, Professor Fred's attention would have to be directed towards those important intellectual projects with which he is professionally engaged; else those tasks would never be accomplished. It may even be the case that Professor Fred's attention could be oriented towards these projects as a consequence of this sustained direction. The concern is that, as these tasks are *his* tasks, pursuing these tasks inevitably involves Professor Fred in a self-directed form of attention incompatible

with humility. Addressing this concern reveals that the humble must view the completion of their projects as a good external to their own (personal) good.

This means that Professor Fred's project is his only in the sense that he is pursuing it; his pursuit of the project is not essential to what makes the project the thing that it is. It must not be the case that his project is *his* in the much stronger sense that, were he not pursuing that project, it would not be the same project that it is; *his* pursuit of the project must not be essential to what the project is. This also means that Professor Fred cannot think of the project as an aspect of himself. Were Professor Fred to think about his projects as being *his* in this much stronger sense, then humility would be impossible for two reasons. First, attending to these projects would become, for Professor Fred, a self-directed form of attention incompatible with attention, just as the above concern above supposes. Second, it would become impossible for Professor Fred to accept any help with his projects in any way that implied shared authorship or credit, for the simple reason that accepting help on his project would transform that project into some other project. This is problematic given that accepting help is a commonly accepted hallmark of the humble and a failure to accept is likewise grounds for attributing a failure of humility.[14]

## 4. HUMILITY AND SERVICE

The analysis of humility is still incomplete because it is not yet apparent where the orientation of the attention of the humble needs to be directed. In fact, the correct orientation of attention has been implicit in the analysis from the beginning, and given the method that has been adopted this could not have been otherwise. Looking back to Professor Fred, we see that he has his orientation directed towards the advancement of some good. For most of this time, Professor Fred's attention will be directed towards the pursuit of intellectual goods because it is oriented towards such goods. Yet, as orientations allow flexibility in the direction of attention, this need not be the only thing to which he ever attends.

Evidently, Professor Fred is also oriented towards the good of those occasional misguided students who come knocking on his door asking trivial questions. No doubt Professor Fred's orientation to the good of these students is in some tension with his orientation towards the important intellectual projects in which he engages professionally. This is no doubt a tension that many in Professor Fred's situation feel, yet explaining (while also allowing a place for) this tension is something of which any account of humility ought to be capable. In this case, the tension results from Professor Fred's attention being oriented in such a way that several objects can simultaneously claim to be possible objects of attention.

Reflecting on Professor Fred, we can clearly identify an attitude of *service,* where service is understood to be an active engagement in the advancement of some good. In Professor Fred's case, that attitude of service

is sometimes directed towards abstract objects such as his intellectual projects, and sometimes directed towards the flourishing of those misguided students who come knocking on his door. Further, were Professor Fred's orientation not towards advancing some good other than his own, he would also have to withdraw the idea that he was humble. If, for instance, Professor Fred were to respond to the occasional trivial questions of students with lectures based on whatever he happened to be thinking about at the time that didn't actually answer the question asked, but without actually directing his attention towards himself, we might say he was eccentric but we wouldn't say that he was humble. Note, though, that in such a circumstance he would still be avoiding all the behaviours generally recognised as being incompatible with humility, which is precisely why we must specify the orientation of his attention in more than the negative way that has been sufficient in the analysis up to now.

Given that Professor Fred has been identified as a humble agent, and given that his service is a necessary condition of us attributing humility to him, it is reasonable to suggest that his humility consists in part in his activity of advancing some good. Further, since this must be Professor Fred's typical activity, we can connect it to the orientation of his attention. Thus we arrive at the fourth and final component of the present analysis of humility: that the humble must direct their attention towards the advancement of some good, i.e., service.

However, one must be mindful at this point of not overemphasising the role of service played in this account. For humility to be a virtue it must be beneficial to the humble. Service, considered in itself, does not always have this feature. There are many forms of "service" that are either forms of exploitation or self-destructive vices. While the account here has been constructed such that these can be avoided, as will be clear in the following section, care must still be taken.

## 5. DEFINING HUMILITY

It is now possible to define humility by bringing together the four elements introduced above. Each of these four aspects is independently necessary for humility and they are jointly sufficient.

The humble person:

> (i) has some genuine merits with respect to which they can be said to be humble,
> (ii) has their behaviour controlled in non-rational ways by information concerning their merits and the resultant social standing to which they are entitled,
> (iii) has an orientation to their attention such that their attention is oriented away from the merits and social standing of the self,

> (iv) has an orientation directed towards the service of a project or person and is actively involved in serving the project or person to which attention is oriented.

The resultant picture could be simplified by positing that not orienting attention to the self is a consequence of orienting attention towards some good external to the self, in turn manifesting itself in an attitude of service. Thinking about service as having this explanatory priority allows for the definition of humility to be simplified to *self-disregarding service*.[15]

Non-overestimation accounts fail by not including – in fact disallowing – the first and second conditions. Someone who has been convinced that they are unworthy of being attended to through accepting such an account will likewise also fail conditions (i) and (ii). It is with often with tragic consequences that some (often women and the marginalised in general) have been encouraged to regard themselves as being unworthy of attention, even their own, in this way. The result is people who are easily confused with the humble but who in fact have merely lost the ability to direct their attention to themselves in any positive way. Rather than being genuinely humble they are best described as having been humiliated. As a result, they can also easily be taken advantage of or abused, and may even be unable to articulate that they are being abused when it occurs. While they may often be servants, they are not genuinely humble servants.

Alternately, it is also possible for someone to lose any sense of their own worth while retaining the intuition that they should be of great worth at least to themselves. This can easily lead to self-destructive acts of service in a desperate attempt to prop up a self-image prone to chronic undervaluation. In cases like this, the result is not humility through a failure of condition (iii); such people demonstrate a harmful form of self-directed attention and a self-destructive form of service. In a culture that retains humility as a moral ideal but adopts a non-overestimation account, this can be quite insidious.[16] In fact, many who reject humility as a virtue do so in reaction against identifying this sort of case with genuine humility.

Were Professor Fred to view his projects as *his* in some very strong sense, then he would also fail condition (iii); his attention is always oriented towards an aspect of himself. I take it that the actual Professor Fred meets all the conditions and is humble.

Finally, note that by not making the fourth aspect objective, the definition implies that the service aspect of humility may not be directed towards inherently ethical ends. This is as it should be; those building gas chambers in World War II could have been doing so humbly. What this implies is that, to reach its fullest expression as a virtue, humility needs to be placed within a broader framework in order to guarantee that it always be directed towards ethical ends. Establishing that framework finally connects humility with a rich and powerful conception of wisdom which is quite different to wisdom as classically understood.

## 6. HUMILITY AND WISDOM IN THE RELIGIOUS TRADITION

So far it has been established that, while the humble can be regarded as having self-knowledge and as being virtuous, so long as we continue to think of wisdom as being encapsulated in the "*gnothi seauton*" dictum, they cannot be thought of as being wise. There are, however, other ways of understanding wisdom and I shall focus on one derived from Christian Scripture in the final part of this essay.

In Christian Scripture, humility and wisdom are not incompatible. Moses, a paradigmatically wise man, is also explicitly called humble in Num 12:3. Indeed, he is said to be the most humble of all the people. Job, another agent closely associated with the wisdom tradition, also acts in ways we recognise as being humble at both the beginning and end of his encounter with God (see Job 1:21, 42:2-6). We also have the framing preface to the Proverbs in chapters 1-9 of that collection in which humility is clearly in view. Finally, we have the example of Jesus, the paradigm of wisdom (1 Cor 1:24). Jesus explicitly describes himself as being humble in Matt 11:29 and is described as an exemplar of humility in Phil 2:5-11. He explicitly recommends humility for his followers in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:5) and not long after counsels that, when acting generously, his followers "not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matt 6:3). In the context of a theory of humility that emphasises inattention to the self, this is an intriguing statement.

Assuming that the analysis of humility above is correct, and assuming that the Biblical witness to a harmony between humility and wisdom is coherent, then we clearly need to think differently about wisdom. I suggest that we replace "know thyself" with "humble thyself" as the foundation statement for our conception of wisdom, understanding humility to be self-disregarding service. Further, we establish that the orientation of attention characteristic of humility is directed towards God, more specifically God's glory. If we suppose that God's primary concern is for his own glory, then our orientation towards that glory is simultaneously a way of sharing in God's primary concerns. While perhaps radical, establishing this connection performs two important functions. First, it allows us to embed humility within an ethical framework that is capable of guaranteeing that it is always virtuously directed. Second, it allows us to explain exactly why a figure such as Moses, for instance, would be called both humble and wise.

In Numbers 12, Moses is called the most humble of all people, in spite of his elevated position. This becomes perfectly comprehensible when understood along the suggested lines. In this case, Moses' great humility consists in his seeking after God's glory more completely than anyone else. The accuracy of this paraphrase is born out in some of Moses' most characteristic acts, for instance, in the narrative concerning the "Golden Calf" in Exodus. In that incident, we initially find Moses arguing against God's intention to destroy the Israelites for their idolatry and to replace

them with a people deriving their linage from Moses himself, despite this intention conferring great honour on Moses. Almost immediately afterwards, we find Moses inciting a massacre of the same people whom he just argued, at great personal cost, ought not to be destroyed. These acts are each consistent with the definition of humility derived above. Moses' attention is oriented away from himself and his attention is directed towards the advancement of God's glory, i.e., serving God. This is to the exclusion of any self-directed attention and any appeal to his privileged position but in such a way that Moses still acts in light of his privileged position as God's designated authority. Moses is so perfectly humble, so perfectly directed towards God's glory, that he alone has the most privileged position of being the one with whom God will talk "face to face" (Ex 33:11).[17]

Even so, while acting humbly in this sense might make us better servants, it is not immediately apparent how it would make us *wiser*. After all, wisdom intuitively involves not just ethical aspects but also epistemic aspects, hence its long connection with knowledge and, in particular, self-knowledge. While the long-standing connection between continual appeal to self-knowledge and wisdom is mistaken, it is unlikely that it could have risen to dominance were it completely mistaken.

This concern is addressed, albeit obliquely, in the somewhat cryptic passage in Proverbs 1:7 that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." The "fear of the LORD" is a multi-faceted idea which cannot be fully exposited here. However, some preliminary comments are sufficient to bring out an important connection between humility as service and wisdom. Just after its initial introduction as the source of knowledge, the "fear of the LORD" is described as both something that we choose and also something that we do, where choosing not to "do" the "fear of the LORD" results in an unethical life and ultimately destruction (Prov 1:29). Not long after this, the "fear of the LORD" is again described as something we understand (Prov 2:5). These descriptions can be harmonised by suggesting that the "fear of the LORD" here stands for a way of life governed by a specific moral vision with its associated precepts, commands, and ethical practices. It is these precepts that we come to understand, and the promise is that as we enact, or do, them, we become wise. Wisdom thus does have more than a behavioural element.

This suggestion can be reinforced by observing that, at other extended meditations on the Law, such as Psalm 119, the same connection between adherence to, and understanding of, God's law and wisdom is found.[18] Consider the following passage from that magnificent Psalm:

> *Oh, how I love your law!*
> *I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me*
> *and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all*
> *my teachers,*
> *for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the*
> *elders,*

*for I obey your precepts...*
*I gain understanding from your precepts;*
*therefore I hate every wrong path. (Psalm 119:97-100, 104 NIV)*

Note that, once again, the Psalmist's wisdom is predated by his obedience to God's law. Not only that, his wisdom derives from this obedience.[19] However, in the final line, his wisdom also allows him to reflect back on why the precepts are correct, something that must have been unavailable to him had he not already been enacting them. Finally, if the wisdom under discussion in the Old Testament wisdom tradition is the same spiritual wisdom spoken of at 1Cor 2:8-15, then we would expect that this spiritual wisdom would also have a foundation in a specific practice understood as enacting God's moral vision for human life. This conforms with our experience, for virtually all those who have emphasised spiritual or religious wisdom have made a condition for its attainment a specific practice, or way of life, frequently understood as conformity to a moral vision.

Humility inevitably leads to (religious) wisdom and allows the world to open itself before us precisely because, in requiring that we orient our attention to God's glory, we are coming to see the world with the same set of priorities that God brings to the world.

## 7. TENSION AT THE HEART OF WISDOM

In the introduction it was suggested that there is a tension between wisdom, conceived of as being grounded in the "*gnothi seauton*" imperative, and humility. On the account I defend, this is because humility requires that attention be directed away from the self and towards something else. I have argued that the "something else" is best thought of as God, and that this will result in a life characterised by obedience and service of God's glory leading inevitably to an increasing wisdom – but one need not accept this. All the strictly philosophical analysis requires is that humility be a virtue resulting from an orientation of attention away from the self and towards some good. This orientation to attention makes the exercise of self-knowledge required by classical wisdom impossible. Recall from section 1 that the tension with wisdom remains even if humility is provided with a more traditional account.

As I have said, this forces us to choose between wisdom, as traditionally understood, and humility. Richard Taylor, in "Ethics, Faith and Reason," followed Aristotle in affirming the traditional conception of wisdom by endorsing a self-focused form of pride and corresponding elitism as virtues. This was to the explicit exclusion of humility as a virtue. I would, of course, choose to endorse humility as a virtue and reconceive wisdom by placing it in a theological context. However, the choice we make here is in some ways less important than the necessity of making a choice at all. The fact that a choice must be made highlights for us that there is a tension deep in the heart of philosophy, one that is particularly relevant for

anyone who would take seriously the claims both that humility is a central element in any wise life and that philosophy is autonomous of religion.

This tension was also realised by Coleridge in one of the last works he produced. I end with his poetic summation:

+Gnôthi seauton!+ – and is this the prime
And heaven-sprung adage of the olden time! –
Say, canst thou make thyself? – Learn first that trade; –
Haply thou mayst know what thyself had made.
What hast thou, Man, that thou dar'st call thine own? –
What is there in thee, Man, that can be known? –
Dark fluxion, all unfixable by thought,
A phantom dim of past and future wrought,
Vain sister of the worm, – life, death, soul, clod –
Ignore thyself, and strive to know thy God![20]

## NOTES

[1] Versions of this paper were read at the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association and the Australian Association of Philosophy. I would like to thank those who made comments, with special mention to my colleague Andrew Dunstall.

[2] For an interpretation of Aristotle along these lines see Alexander Sarch, "What's Wrong with Megalopsychia?," *Philosophy* 83 (2008): 231-53. For a Neo-Aristotelian version see R. Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Prentice-Hall, 1985).

[3] For a detailed account of the ways in which these thinkers rejected humility see Mark Button, "'A Monkish Kind of Virtue?' For and against Humility," *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 840-68.

[4] The terminology derives from J. L. A. Garcia, "Being Unimpressed with Ourselves: Reconceiving Humility," *Philosophia* 34 (2006): 417-35 The distinction without the specific terminology was present in Michael Ridge, "Modesty as a Virtue," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (2000): 269-83

[5] Underestimation accounts require that the humble person underestimate their own merit and the value of their achievements. Note that, in order to be an *under*-estimation, this opinion would have to be *inaccurate.* In addition, Julia Driver, the most prominent defender of an underestimation account of humility, argues that this underestimation must be held *dogmatically,* by which she means that the humble person must persist in their underestimation even in the face of evidence indicating its inaccuracy. Flanagan went so far as to claim that this implication amounts to a *reductio* of any underestimation account. See Julia Driver, "Virtues of Ignorance," *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989): 373-84; Julia Driver,

"Modesty and Ignorance," *Ethics* 109 (1999): 827-34; Owen Flanagan, "Virtue and Ignorance," *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 420-28

[6] Flanagan, Ridge, Snow, Richards and Statman all produce variations on this basic theme, as did Schueler before later changing his position to make it more outwards-directed. Ben-Ze'ev also developed an account along these lines, although he added to it an explicit egalitarian foundation. See Flanagan, "Virtue and Ignorance"; Norvin Richards, "Is Humility a Virtue?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988); Ridge, "Modesty as a Virtue"; G. F. Schueler, "Why Modesty Is a Virtue," *Ethics* 107, no. 3 (1997); Nancy E. Snow, "Humility," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 29 (1995); Daniel Statman, "Modesty, Pride and Realistic Self-Assessment," *Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 169 (1992); Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, "The Virtue of Modesty," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1993).

[7] For Smithies' account see Declan Smithies, "Attention Is Rational-Access Consciousness," in *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays*, ed. Christopher Mole, Declan Smithies, and Wayne Wu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 247-73. Note that Smithies' approach is broadly consistent with those found in Sebastian Waltz, "The Nature of Attention," *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 11 (2011); Sebastian Waltz, "Attention as Structuring the Stream of Consciousness," in *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays*, ed. Christopher Mole, Declan Smithies, and Wayne Wu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Wayne Wu, "Attention as Selection for Action," in *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays*, ed. Christopher Mole, Declan Smithies, and Wayne Wu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). These approaches all contrast sharply with the "adverbialist" approach taken in Christopher Mole, "Attention and Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15, no. 4 (2008): 86-104

[8] Whether we should describe the driver as being aware or conscious of the information towards which he is inattentive is hotly contested and fortunately it is not necessary to take a position on that in this paper.

[9] Emphasising this "downward" movement is a pronounced feature of explicitly Christian accounts of humility. For a recent example see John Dickson, *Humilitas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), ch. 6. For an older account which shares some of the same self-lowering features see Max Scheler, tr. Eugene Kelly, "On the Rehabilitation of Virtue," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2005): 21-37

[10] For all that has been said so far, it may be the case that Professor Fred could well be capable of self-directed attention in other contexts.

[11] In my experience, those who actually are humble but fail to recognise this due to a confusion between humility and common or mere decency, are among the most likely to raise this objection.

[12] It is the flexibility of the orientation of attention which allows a humble person to say on an occasion "I am humble" without that automatically being evidence for their lacking humility.

[13] Roberts has made the very important point that humility does not always contrast with arrogance, so in some cases the absence of one need not imply anything about the other. Robert C. Roberts, "The Value of Pride," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009): 119-33

[14] This could be either pride or humility, each of which can contrast with humility although in different ways. With a different emphasis and use, Schueler has also made the point that humble people do not view any success their projects might have as a reason for them to think of themselves as personally successful and so not grounds for pride. G. F. Schueler, "Why Is Modesty a Virtue," *Ethics* 109, no. 4 (1999): 835-41

[15] There are parallels here with Max Scheler's definition of humility. Humility, Scheler states, is "a steady inner throbbing of spiritual readiness to serve in the core of our existence, a readiness that is directed toward all things" (Scheler, "On the Rehabilitation of Virtue," p. 23). The context makes clear that, for Scheler, this readiness for service is a human counterpart to the divine lowering of itself in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Consider, for instance, the following quote: "Humility: this is precisely the movement of self-humbling, hence the movement of coming down from above, of arriving from the heights, of God allowing himself to come softly down to man; of the holy man descending to the sinner" (Scheler, "On the Rehabilitation of Virtue," p. 31).

[16] For similar reasons I take it to be dangerous at best to inculcate any attitude which systematically encourages people to view themselves as being worthless even when directed towards the noble end of developing an orientation of attention that is not directed towards the self.

[17] For a similar interpretation of how Moses could be humble see John Dickson and Brian Rosner, "Humility as a Social Virtue in the Hebrew Bible?," *Vestus Testamentum* 54, no. 4 (2004): 459-79

[18] Depending on how broadly we interpret God's promise to provide for his people, such thinking may also be behind the promise in Matt 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

[19] Heb 5:11-14 envisages a similarly tight connection between the practice of obedience (training oneself to distinguish good from evil) and wisdom (solid food).

[20] Samuel T. Coleridge, "Know Thyself," 1832.

# RABINDRANATH TAGORE: HOW EAST AND WEST MEET

Anne M. Wiles

> *Oh East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet,*
> *Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;*
> *But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,*
> *When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the*
> *ends of the earth![1]*

The first line of Kipling's ballad is often accepted as a truism. That it is so widely quoted, out of context and apparently with approval, shows that mistrust, based on the fear of someone who is "unlike" us, exists or can arise between cultures. The irony is that "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet," is precisely the opposite of what Kipling is really claiming. The argument of the last three lines of the stanza and the ballad as a whole is that persons from different cultures can meet and form a strong bond that transcends their respective cultures.

The poem sets the problem of how one can be true to one's own culture and tradition while remaining open to what other cultures offer. To put the question in one of its broadest formulations: "What can East and West learn from each other, and how best is this exchange brought about?" An answer worth our consideration is suggested by the writings and work of the Indian Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore.

This paper will first consider Tagore's early experiences with the cultures of East and West in which he experienced love, responsibility, freedom and tyranny. It will then treat some of his later writings, especially the poetry and his essay on nationalism in which he develops the meaning of these four realities and their implications for education and social structures. The paper will conclude with Tagore's philosophical reflections on the purpose of education, showing how he thought contact between East and West could contribute to their mutual enrichment. What is recounted in this paper barely scratches the surface of the "myriad minded"[2] man that is Rabindranath Tagore, but it may serve to suggest something of its value in helping East and West to a mutual appreciation.

## SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

One difficulty in addressing the question whether East and West can meet is that the terms "East" and "West" are variously understood – as geographic regions, as attitudes, and as approaches to understanding. If "East" and "West" are taken to represent attitudes, for example, if the "Eastern attitude" is taken to be more introspective while the "Western attitude" is taken to be more scientific, as Tagore sometimes holds, there will still be found within a geographic region some who are introspective, others with a

scientific turn of mind, and still others, like Tagore who, in his mature age, combined the two.

The influence of nationalism presents another difficulty. Nationalism, understood in a certain way, can be a barrier to a rapprochement between cultures. Nationalism can be limiting, pernicious and deadly, yet by robustly presenting different cultures, it can provide an opportunity for individuals and nations to learn about other ways of living that may enrich their own lives and culture. What makes the difference? Tagore addresses this topic at length, but, as we will find, his understanding of "nation" is somewhat idiosyncratic.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 into a wealthy Brahmin family in Calcutta. Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, and his grandfather, "Prince" Dwarkanath Tagore, sometimes referred to as the "oriental Croesus," were successful businessmen with large estates and business interests ranging from coal mining to tea growing to banking.[3] Both were well educated in European and Indian culture. Rabindranath inherited the material wealth, but even more significantly for his contribution in attempting to bring about some accommodation between the East and West, he received an education in both cultures. The religious instruction he received from his father, "Maharshi" Debendranath, was based on an enlightened form of the Hindu religion espoused by the Brahma Sabha, a monotheistic Hindu society, founded by Rammohun Roy, that opposed idolatrous rituals, *sati* (widow burning), and caste distinctions. The society later became a movement known as the Brahmo Samaj, the most influential movement of religious and social reform in nineteenth-century India. Debendranath was one of its pillars.[4]

Of his early childhood, Rabindranath writes:

> We [children] lived under the rule of the servants. To save themselves trouble they virtually suppressed our right of free movement. This was hard to bear – but the neglect was also a kind of independence. It left our minds free, un-pampered and unburdened by all the usual bother over food and dress.[5]

When Rabindranath's brother and nephew, both a year and a half older than himself, went to school, he cried and was allowed to go, though he was only three. He soon regretted it.

> What I learnt there I have no idea, but one of its methods of punishment I still bear in mind. A boy who was unable to repeat his lessons was made to stand on a bench with arms extended, and on his upturned palms were piled a number of slates. Let psychologists

debate how far this method is like to induce a better grasp of things.[6]

From this experience and similar ones, Rabindranath developed a life-long hatred of oppressive schools, though not of learning.

Young Rabindranath was not permitted in the company of his elders within the inner apartments, yet hearing the sounds of their joyous comings and goings, of music, and plays, and snatches of conversation, he developed a great hunger for these experiences. He was sensitive to the sounds and rhythms of words, and although he sometimes failed to understand everything, his imagination would work with whatever it got hold of. He later reflects that as a young boy the thought that occurred to him most often was that

> I was surrounded by mystery. Something undreamt of was lurking everywhere, and every day the uppermost question was: When. Oh! When, would we come across it? It was as if Nature held something cupped in her hands and was asking us with a smile, "What d'you think I have?"[7]

When Rabindranath was ten, his father came home to invest him with the sacred thread of Brahmanism.[8] In Hinduism, this investiture is regarded as signifying a spiritual second birth. It acknowledges one's entrance into the spiritual community, and requires spiritual instruction. The young Brahmin must learn to chant from the *Upanishads*. He is given special sacred passages on which to meditate, and after a period of private meditation, he must receive further instruction from a wise and holy man. Debendranath himself chose the passages from the *Upanishads* for his son's investiture, and after the brief period of secluded meditation, he took Rabindranath with him on an extended trip to the Himalayas to continue his instruction.[9]

During the several months of the trip, Rabindranath and his father chanted the *Upanishads* each morning as the sun was rising; he observed his father at prayer; he noted the books his father had brought along for his own use.[10] By the time they reached the Himalayas, Rabindranath had been entrusted with keeping his father's cash box for which he was held strictly accountable. On the other hand, he was given complete freedom to wander about by himself. His father taught him English, started his instruction in Sanskrit, and in the evenings seated under the stars, taught him astronomy. When Rabindranath and his father differed about the meaning of a phrase in a letter from one of Rabindranath's brothers, his father heard him out and patiently explained the reasons for his own view.[11]

Some forty years later, in *My Reminiscences*, Rabindranath, reflecting on the value his father placed on independence, wrote:

To the end of his life, I have observed, he never stood in the way of our independence. Frequently I have said or done things repugnant to his taste and his judgment alike; with a word he could have stopped me but he preferred to wait until the prompting to refrain came from within. A passive acceptance of the correct and the proper did not satisfy him; he wanted us to love truth with our whole hearts; mere acquiescence without love he knew to be empty. He also knew that truth, if strayed from, can be found again, but a forced or blind adherence effectively bars access to it.[12]

In the spring of his twenty-second year, while staying with his brother in Calcutta and spending time by himself, Rabindranath had two important insights. The first was that when his "self" was in the background, not on center stage, he could "see the world in its true aspect [which] aspect has nothing trivial in it, but is full or beauty and joy."[13] The second was one of which Tagore later remarked, "…it has lasted all my life." He writes,

One morning I happened to be standing on the verandah….the sun was just rising through the leafy tops of the trees. As I gazed, all of a sudden a lid seemed to fall from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side…the movements, figures and features of each one of the passers-by, whoever they were, seemed extraordinarily wonderful as they flowed past – ripples on the ocean of the universe.[14]

From this experience flowed Tagore's dramatic poem, "Nature's Revenge." This poem is the story of a hermit who tries to perfect himself by escaping from the bonds of desire and affection until a little girl brings him back to the bondage of human affection and he realizes that, "the great is to be found in the small, the infinite within the bounds of form, and the eternal freedom of the soul in love."[15] Of this poem, Tagore says, "it may be seen as an introduction to the subject on which all my writings have dwelt: the delight of attaining the infinite within the finite."[16]

Important to Rabindranath's understanding of himself and others was the freedom that accompanied his companionship with an older brother, a freedom he describes "as necessary to my soul after its rigorous repression as the monsoon after a fiery summer."[17] He reflects on this freedom:

for myself, at least, I can truly say that what little mischief resulted from my freedom always led me on to the means of its cure. I have never been able to make my own anything which others tried to compel me to swallow by getting hold of me, physically or mentally, by the ears.[18]

Freedom is not incompatible with obligation, if obligation is freely undertaken from love. As a youth, Tagore kept to his studies at home, enjoying especially music, science and literature. When he was twenty-two, his family arranged a marriage for him with a Brahmin girl then ten years of age; he accepted the arrangement, and his letters to his wife after their marriage show a tenderness for her and for family life. [19]

## POET, EDITOR, ESTATE MANAGER, AND EDUCATOR

When Rabindranath already had some reputation as a poet and as a magazine editor, his father asked him to assume the management of the family estates. After a mild protestation that he was a poet, a scribbler, and "knew nothing about such matters," his father rejoined, "Never mind that, I want you to do it." He acquiesced. "What could I do?" he later said, "Father had ordered me, so I had to go." [20]

His father's desire was that Rabindranath be an "on-site" landlord with his main headquarters at Shelidah, a village on the Padma River. In that remote area, apart from his family, Tagore wrote poetry, letters and short stories filled with the color and beauty of the region, and its people.

The tenants on the Tagore estates were generally ignorant, superstitious, distrustful of the wealthy, spiteful to each other and reluctant to do anything for themselves or for others.[21] Rabindranath tried in various ways to help them while still respecting their dignity. From close contact with his tenants, Tagore became convinced that the Indians must help themselves, and that India could not regenerate itself without regenerating its villages.[22]

Rabindranath was a poet, mystic, social and political reformer, philosopher, writer, and educator, as well as the manager of the extensive Tagore business enterprises. In 1913, he won the Nobel Prize for his collection of poems, *Gitanjali*.[23] In 1915, he accepted a knighthood from George V; in 1919, he resigned it, or attempted to resign it,[24] in protest against the British massacre at Amritsar. In the public letter Tagore wrote to the Viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford, relinquishing his knighthood, he described the massacre as a tragedy "without parallel in the history of civilized governments."[25]

Realizing that many of India's problems were the result of faulty or inadequate education, in 1901, on the site of the ashram established by his father, Shantiniketan (abode of peace), Rabindranath started a school. The school opened with five students, all Bengali boys, and five teachers, three of whom were Christian and two Roman Catholics. [26] Though open to western influence, particularly science, which Tagore respected, the school was at the time a non-conventional school in that it emphasized Indian culture. Some years later, it became a university, covering the whole range of Eastern culture.[27]

Although in the early twentieth-century, Tagore – in lectures, writings, and meetings – was actively promoting the ideal of a world

government and world citizenship, as were Mortimer Adler and Jacques Maritain, he came to believe that the best way to achieve harmony between cultures was through education, specifically education that is open to the best of East and West, embracing both science and contemplation. From September, 1916, through January, 1917, Tagore lectured widely in the USA, primarily on the dangers of nationalism. After a lecture in Santa Barbara, he spent a day relaxing on the beach and meditating in the fragrant groves of orange trees around Los Angeles. It may have been here that he conceived the idea of founding a university for, in October of 1916, he wrote to his son, Radindranath:

> I have it in mind to make Shantiniketan the connecting thread between India and the world. I have to found a world centre for the study of humanity there. The days of petty nationalism are numbered – let the first step toward universal union occur in the fields of Bolpur. I want to make that place somewhere beyond the limits of nation and geography.[28]

The foundation stone for the university that Tagore envisioned was laid on December 22, 1918 in Shantiniketan. He named the university "Visva-Bharati."[29] Regarding the newly founded university, Tagore wrote, "Visva-Bharati acknowledges India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best."[30]

Three departments formed the nucleus of his university, the department of fine arts, the department of music, and the department of Indology. The department of Indology was founded for the study of literatures and languages of various periods and cultures.[31]

A statement in his prepared speech for the formal inauguration of the university in December, 1921, captures what has been called a manifesto for Tagore's entire life concerning the relation between the cultures of the East and West. He writes:

> Let me state clearly that I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of outside forces is necessary for maintaining the vitality of our intellect… European culture has come to us not only with its knowledge but with its speed. Even when our assimilation is imperfect and aberrations follow, it is rousing our intellectual life from the inertia of formal habits. The contradiction it offers to our traditions makes our consciousness grow.
>
> What I object to is the artificial arrangement by which this foreign education tends to occupy all the space of our national mind and thus kills, or hampers, the great opportunity for the creation of new thought by a new combination of truths. It is this which makes me urge that all the elements in our own culture have to be

strengthened; not to resist the culture of the West, but to accept and assimilate it. It must become for us nourishment and not a burden.[32]

Tagore's interest in education was not limited to the establishment of a university. In 1922, Tagore prevailed upon Leonard Elmhirst, a young English student of Agriculture at Cornell, to move to India, live on Tagore's estate and help educate the farmers in the villages surrounding Shantiniketan. They founded the Institute of Rural Reconstruction near Shantiniketan. The institute was called Sriniketan (abode of prosperity); it was, and is, an integral component of Visva-Bharati. The main purpose of Sriniketan was to help the Indian villagers solve their own problems instead of having a solution imposed on them; he wanted to help them become self-reliant and to bring back a completeness of life to them that would include music and readings from the epics.[33]

## TAGORE AND GANDHI

At the same time, Tagore's contemporary, Mahatma Gandhi, was leading the non-cooperation movement, Tagore was quietly working on experiments in education. Of his own approach Tagore said, "my path…lies in the domain of quiet integral action and thought, my units must be few and small, and I can but face human problems in relation to some basic village or cultural area,"[34] a sentiment not unlike that expressed by his younger contemporary, Jacques Maritain.[35]

As part of the non-cooperation effort, Gandhi had introduced the *Charka* (spinning-wheel) Movement. He said that all true Indians must spin, make their own cloth, and bar foreign goods. Tagore accused Gandhi of manipulating the Indians with symbols instead of substance and warned that the movement was likely to lead to violence. Gandhi said it was legitimate to refer to foreign made cloth as "impure," since only a word like this could induce the people to burn foreign cloth and make their own. Tagore thought the approach shameful. Gandhi wanted him to join the movement, but he would not. "Well," said Gandhi, "if you can do nothing else for me, at least…you can spin…Why not get your students to sit down around you and spin?" [36] Showing that independence of mind his father had so appreciated, Tagore responded, "Poems I can spin, Gandhiji, songs and plays I can spin, but of your precious cotton, what a mess I would make."[37]

In essays and in person, Gandhi and Tagore debated the issue. From history books, universities, and the movie screen, one might get the impression that Gandhi won the debate, but a more carefully considered view is that

> India has espoused Tagore's ideas far more than it has Gandhi's whether Indians and the rest of the world know it or not. Tagore has given India ways to assimilate the West without becoming a

mockery of it; Gandhi was not interested in such assimilation, he thought the West should become more like (ancient) India.[38]

Tagore thought that his own view would more likely prevail in the long run. He compared Gandhi's approach to that of Sparta and his own to that of Athens:

> Sparta tried to gain strength by narrowing herself down to a particular purpose, but she did not win. Athens sought to attain perfection by opening herself out in all her fullness – and she did win. Her flag of victory still flies at the masthead of man's civilization. It is admitted that European military camps and factories are stunting man, that their greed is cutting man down to the measure of their own narrow purpose, that for these reasons joylessness darkly lowers over the West. But if man be stunted by big machines, the danger of his being stunted by small machines must not be lost sight of. The *chakra* in its proper place can do no harm, but will rather do much good. But where, by reason of failure to acknowledge the difference in man's temperament, it is in the wrong place, there thread can only be spun at the cost of a great deal of the mind itself. Mind is no less valuable than cotton thread.[39]

## TAGORE AND NATIONALISM

The history of Tagore's attempt to effect some reconciliation between East and West might well begin with an anecdote told of his grandfather, "Prince" Dwarkanath Tagore. In 1846, Dwarkanath was staying in Paris. The young Friedrich Max Müller, who later became the most celebrated Orientalist of the nineteenth century, sought him out. After they had talked about their shared taste of European music, Müller wanted to hear an authentic piece of Indian music. At first, Dwarkanath demurred, but after Müller's repeated requests, he played a piece on the piano and sang. Müller said that he could find in the music neither melody, nor rhythm, nor harmony. Dwarkanath's response to Müller shows an awareness of the existent cultural attitudes of both Great Britain and India, and the suggestion of a possible way of escaping from narrow nationalism, as well as the ambivalence that characterized much of Rabindranath Tagore's own work and writing. Dwarkanath said:

> You are all alike; if anything seems strange to you and does not please you at once, you turn away. When I first heard Italian music, it was no music to me at all; but I went on and on, till I began to like it, or what you call understand it. It is the same with everything else. You may say our religion is no religion, our poetry is no poetry, our philosophy no philosophy. We try to understand and

appreciate whatever Europe has produced, but do not imagine that we therefore despise what India has produced. If you studied our music as we do yours, you would find that there is melody, rhythm, and harmony in it quite as much as in yours. And if you would study our poetry, our religion, and our philosophy, you would find that we are not what you call heathens or miscreants, but know as much of the Unknowable as you do, and have seen perhaps even deeper into it than you have.[40]

Rabindranath Tagore thought the social structures of the early twentieth century were tyrannical to individual freedom, and that the ennui and antisocial behavior of that time resulted from dissatisfaction with living and working conditions that resemble a beehive, but he observes "Man has not really been molded on the model of the bee, and therefore becomes recklessly anti-social when his freedom to be *more* than social is ignored."[41]

Reflecting on the rising materialism of the era in western countries, Tagore said that the West was not introspective enough, while the East was so introspective that it was often reluctant to act. India seeks freedom, "…not in the man-made world, but in the depth of the universe, in the divinity inherent in all natural things, including other persons." [42] The parched soul of the materialistic West needs this life-giving interiority. India needs revitalization by the activity of the West; particularly it needs the *science* of the West: "Our people need more than anything else a real scientific training, that can inspire in them the courage of experiment and the initiative of mind which we lack as a nation…an atmosphere of rational thinking and behavior that alone can save them from stupid bigotry and moral cowardliness."[43] Tagore's hope was that the twin spirits of the East and the West, the Mary and the Martha, could meet to make perfect the realization of truth.[44]

In a work titled, *Nationalism*, [45] published in 1917, Tagore distinguishes the *spirit* of the west from the *nation* of the west. Society, as such, is a spontaneous expression of humans as social beings, a natural regulation of human relationships so that persons can develop ideals of living in co-operation with one another. The political aspect of a society is for a limited purpose – self-preservation. It is concerned primarily with power, not with human ideals. In the early stages of a society, this power is restricted to professionals but, aided by science and organization, the power can develop into a nation. Tagore defines "Nation" in the sense of the geopolitical and economic union of a people as "that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a political purpose."[46]

For Tagore, "nation" has a negative connotation; he thought that as the political and economic power grows

it goads all its neighboring societies with greed of material prosperity and consequent mutual jealously, and by the fear of other's growth into powerfulness, competition grows keener,

organization grows more vast and selfishness attains supremacy. Trading upon the greed and fear of man, it occupies more and more space in society, and at last becomes its ruling force.[47]

Tagore compares this luxurious growth of a nation that becomes all-powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life to a father who becomes a gambler and lets his family obligations slide. The father is no longer a man, but an automaton led by the power of greed. He is then capable of things that he would have been ashamed of doing before gambling got the upper hand. The same is true of society: "When it allows itself to be turned into a perfect organization of power, then there are few crimes it is unable to perpetrate, because success is the object and justification of a machine, while goodness only is the end and purpose of man."[48]

Tagore uses the concept of "nation" not only with respect to Great Britain; he holds it is a present danger in any society. He writes, "The moral man, the complete man, is more and more giving way, almost without knowing it, to make room for the political and commercial man, the man of limited purpose."[49] This process is aided by the progress in science and organization, and by the greed that arises from over-emphasis on material wealth; it upsets his moral balance, "obscuring his human side under the shadow of soulless organization."[50] Government by "the nation" is an applied science and therefore more or less similar in its principles wherever it is used: "It is like a hydraulic press, whose pressure is impersonal and on that account completely effective….It is the continual and stupendous dead pressure of the inhuman upon the living human under which the modern world is groaning."[51]

The *nation* of the west is tyrannical, starving the life of the personal man, reducing it to the life of the professional man. The *spirit* of the west is not tyrannical, but is born from the love of freedom. It allows for the elasticity of change, and encourages persons of power and spirit to feel that they have their destinies in their own hands. It allows for a more free play of imagination on the part of the governor and the governed, and it allows for the human power to overlook or discriminate among rules, according to circumstances.[52]

Where is the spirit of the west to be found? In its people. Tagore had many contacts with Europeans, and writes

I have a deep love and a great respect for the British race as human beings. It has produced great hearted men, thinkers of great thoughts, doers of great deeds. It has given rise to a great literature….the personal experience which I have had of their literary men has roused my admiration not merely for their power of thought or expression but for their chivalrous humanity.[53]

The spirit of the west is especially found in the habits of science when science is rightly understood as the servant of man and not his master, when it remains, as Aristotle suggested, one of the ways of knowing and does not become the tyranny of scientism. It is also found in the establishment and protection of law that provides the discipline necessary for the stability of civilization and for the continuity of progress when the positive laws point to a universal standard of justice to which all, irrespective of their caste or color, have equal claim.[54]

Tagore urges that the spirit of the west was most dramatically formed in the medieval period in Europe in the attempt to reconcile the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, when temporal and spiritual forces together molded a complete moral personality. He asserts, "Europe owes all her greatness in humanity to that period of discipline – the discipline of the man in his human integrity."[55]

## POETRY AND EDUCATION

Tagore is a poet. The poet, as educator, transmits the traditions of the culture. He tells the truth, but he selects and presents it in accordance with a definite ideal. As Werner Jaeger, writing on the ideals of Greek culture, observed, "Poetry cannot be really educative unless it is rooted in the depths of the human soul, unless it embodies a moral belief, a high ardor of the spirit, a broad and compelling ideal of humanity."[56] Poetry, in common with other forms of art, "has a limitless power of converting the human soul…for art alone possesses the two essentials of educational influence – universal significance and immediate appeal."[57] This is an alternate expression for what Tagore refers to as the experience of "finding the delight of the infinite in the finite."[58]

Clearly Tagore's poetry is educative in the sense identified by Jaeger. So, too, are the schools Tagore founded. In a short work of Tagore's titled, "A Poet's School," he explicitly makes this connection by speaking of the Sriniketan school as his "beginning to write a poem in a medium, not of words."[59]

While the infinite is expressed in finite being, Tagore recognizes that finite beings are not perfect. This leaves room for legitimate discrimination and criticism that requires for its basis an understanding of natural law. In the West, at least from the time of Heraclitus, this underlying natural law or natural order is referred to as the "logos"; in India, it is referred to as "dharma." Tagore understands the dharma of the human person to be that of a moral being: "Man's world is a moral world, not because we blindly agree to believe it, but because it is so in truth which would be dangerous for us to ignore."[60]

In educating the person, Tagore held one must consider four realities: love, freedom, duty, and tyranny. Freedom is the central reality from which Tagore's work flows. It is also his goal, and not his alone. He writes, "The ideal which lies at the heart of spiritual endeavor in India is

freedom."[61] Freedom is not to be understood in the sense of independence *from* something, for this negative has neither content nor meaning, but as independence *for* activities that are distinctive of human creativity. In a passage reminiscent of Diotima's discourse on love in Plato's *Symposium*, Tagore writes, "love is freedom: it gives us that fullness of existence which saves us from paying with our soul for objects that are immensely cheap. Love lights up this world with its meanings and makes life feel that it has everywhere that *enough* which is truly its feast." [62]

Tyranny is the uncreative and arbitrary restriction of one's freedom. The Tagore servants were tyrannical, as were the schools in Calcutta, the narrow-minded British rule over the Indians, and the ignorance of the Indians themselves. Even the spinning wheel, useful in its place, was tyrannical. Tagore was opposed to tyranny in all its forms, even to tyrannical attempts to create goodness. "Of punitive police," he writes, "political or moral, I have a wholesome horror. The state of slavery which they induce is the worst form of cancer to which humanity is subject."[63] Obligation imposed by tyranny does not have the same weight as obligation undertaken from freedom or love. The former kills the soul; the latter makes spiritual life possible.

In a late essay on education, "The Philosophical Approach to Sriniketan," Tagore writes, "In the morning of our career, our nature needs the pure perfect note of a spiritual ideal, in order to fit us for the complications of later."[64] Such an ideal Tagore found in the mantra or text for meditation from the *Upanisads*, given him when he was a boy. The text in English, is: "Brahma is Truth, He is Wisdom, He is Infinite, He is revealed in endless forms of Delight or Joy; He is Peace, He is Goodness, He is One."[65]

At first, Rabindranath used the text merely for recitation, but as his experience and understanding deepened, the words took on a deeper significance, which, even as he is writing the essay, is still being unfolded. The essay, in fact, is a collection of "unfoldings" or "teachings," or, it could be thought of as a commentary on the sentences of Tagore's mantra from the *Upanisads*.

Two of these reflections will illustrate something of the full bloom and fruit of Tagore's character: In the first, he says:

> The truth in us not only is, and knows, but it finds joy in expressing itself, in giving itself out. The truest form of our expression comes out of the deeper consciousness of our abundance…as a matter of experience, we find that the expression of all our highest delights seeks some form of the giving up of self…Our knowledge produces great concepts in the worlds of science and of philosophy, not through the compulsion of our immediate needs, but through the joy that comes to an imagination that is full and running over.[66]

In the second reflection, he says:

> Our ideal should be to make ample provision in our homes and in our schools for that development of our spiritual relationship with the Supreme Being, which may best give us a sense of freedom in all departments of life. We know full well that life divested of a deeper consciousness of the Infinite can breed only new and diverse forms of slavery under the appearance of liberty.[67]

This way of speaking is familiar to those in a Christian culture. In fact, it is so familiar that some have claimed Tagore was a Christian. He was not, at least he was not a member of any Christian church, orthodox or otherwise, but he knew Western literature and, as we have seen, appreciated the struggle between the temporal and spiritual forces that occurred in the Medieval period, a struggle that resulted in "the discipline of the man in his human integrity."[68]

A culture has its roots in a particular national setting, and appreciation of the best of another culture, especially when the culture is complex, requires the sort of education we have come to call "liberal." Tagore was educated in such a way that he could appreciate the best of Western culture. His own writings, while distinctly "Eastern" in tone, were appreciated by the receptive "Western" mind of W.B. Yeats who wrote the Introduction to the English (Tagore's own) translation of Tagore's *Gitanjali* (song offerings). Following are some passages from Yeats' "Introduction," which, though somewhat lengthy, are needed to show both the tone of Yeats' appreciation and something of how Tagore was received in his own country.

> A few days ago I said to a distinguished Bengali doctor of medicine, "I know no German, yet if a translation of a German poet had moved me, I would go to the British Museum and find books in English that would tell me something of his life, and of the history of his thought. But though these prose translations from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years, I shall not know anything of his life, and of the movements of thought that have made them possible, if some Indian traveller will not tell me." It seemed to him natural that I should be moved, for he said, "I read Rabindranath every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world." I said....For all I know, so abundant and simple is this poetry, the new renaissance has been born in your country and I shall never know of it except by hearsay." He answered, "We have other poets, but none that are his equal; we call this the epoch of Rabindranath. No poet seems to me as famous in Europe as he is among us. He is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the west of India into Burma wherever Bengali is spoken…. from his twenty-fifth year or so to

his thirty-fifth perhaps, when he had a great sorrow, he wrote the most beautiful love poetry in our language;" and then he said with deep emotion, "words can never express what I owed at seventeen to his love poetry. After that his art grew deeper, it became religious and philosophical; all the inspiration of mankind are in his hymns. He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of Life itself, and that is why we give him our love."[69]

Yeats then continues with the personal statement:

I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics – which are in the original, my Indian friends tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention – display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes.[70]

In the Kipling ballad, the protagonists recognize a common humanity, but it is based on a sort of rough courage, approaching bravado. Tagore's appreciation of the West is more sophisticated, as also is Yeats' appreciation of Tagore. Both require more than frontier culture. One wonders whether if Tagore had not been educated in a Western culture as well as in the culture of India, he would have had the concepts to express the views we find in "The Philosophical Approach to Sriniketan." Perhaps he would have, for as Jacques Maritain notes in an early work, education depends largely upon establishing certain habits, shaping a particular child belonging to a given nation, a given social environment, a given historical age, but in each case, it fundamentally shapes a human.[71] The views of Maritain and Tagore concerning beauty, art, the value of poetry, individual autonomy and freedom are, in fact, remarkably similar. Although their religious traditions differ, they both recognized and valued what Maritain referred to as "the divine destiny of man."[72]

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle says that the true poet while speaking of the particular, yet touches the universal; poetry is more philosophic and of greater import than history.[73] Leo Tolstoy, speaking of the power of the arts, says that

art should unite all men. And only two kinds of feeling do unite all men; first, feelings flowing from the perception of our sonship to God and the brotherhood of man; and, next the simple feelings of common life, accessible to everyone without exception – such as the feeling of merriment, of pity, of cheerfulness, of tranquility, etc.

Only these two kinds of feelings can supply material for art good in its subject matter.[74]

Tagore's *Gitanjali* fits this pattern.

Poetry of the sort described by Jaeger and Tolstoy speaks to what is distinctively human in each of us, transcending the merely cultural. Because human nature does not change, we can understand the emotion and interactions depicted in a work such as the Japanese novel, *Genji*, although the culture of 16th century Japan has little in common with the customs of life in 21st century America. So, too, we in the West can understand and appreciate the human experiences depicted in Tagore's *Gitanjali*.

There is a fundamental unity in the poetry, philosophy, and life of Rabindranath Tagore, based on time and culture-transcending principles, albeit colored by the rhythms of India and the Ganges. Tagore's own life and work have shown that one can accept the best of Eastern and Western culture without abandoning or diminishing the value of either.

Harmony between cultures does not require either a "world government," – in any case, a practical impossibility – or a bland unanimity; it does require openness to, and a deep appreciation for, what is noble in both East and West.

**NOTES**

[1] The ballad is reproduced at www.Kipling.org.uk/poems_eastwest.htm. The notes on this site by John M. Givering state that the ballad was first published in the Pioneer of 2 December, 1889.

[2] "Myriad minded" is part of the title of the excellent biography of Tagore, Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad Minded Man* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) of which I have made extensive use in this paper.

[3] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 17-26.

[4] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 28-29.

[5] Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, tr.. Surendranath Tagore (London: Papermac, 1991), p. 22.

[6] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 20.

[7] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 29.

[8] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 61.

[9] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 52-53.

[10] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 74.

[11] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 78.

[12] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 77.

[13] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 153.

[14] Tagore, *My Reminiscences,* pp. 154-155.

[15] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 167.

[16] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 167.

[17] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 97.

[18] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 97.

[19] See the passage from a letter to his wife, Mrinalini, in Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Short Stories*, tr. William Radice (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 274.

[20] William Radice, "Introduction," *Selected Short Stories*, p. 4.

[21] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 120.

[22] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 120.

[23] For reactions in India to Tagore's having received the Nobel Prize and Tagore's own reflections on the award, see Chapter 18, "*The Nobel Prize*" (1913) in Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 180-187.

[24] For various reasons, his resignation of the knighthood was not accepted, and in the United States, in Europe and even in India he continued to be referred to as "Sir" Rabindranath. See Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore,* pp. 215-218.

[25] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore,* p. 216.

[26] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore,* pp. 133-138.

[27] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 219-224.

[28] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore,* p. 205. [Bolpur-Santiniketan is a municipality in the state of West Bengal, India].

[29] The name is a compound of the Sanskrit word for the universe and Bharati, a goddess in the *Rig Veda* associated with the Hindu goddess of learning, Saraswati. Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 220.

[30] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 220.

[31] Dutta and Robinson, Rabindranath Tagore, pp. 222-23.

[32] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 222.

[33] See Uma Das Gupta, "Tagore's Ideas of Social Action and the Sriniketan Experiment of Rural Construction, 1922-41," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (2008), pp. 992-1004.

[34] Rabindranath Tagore and L.K. Elmhirst, *Rabindranath Tagore, Pioneer in Education. Essays and Exchanges between Rabindranath Tagore and L.K. Elmhirst* (West Bengal, Visva-Bharati, 1961, distributed by John Murray, London), p. 38.

[35] Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968) pp. 170-73.

[36] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 240.

[37] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 240.

[38] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 237, introducing their discussion of the difference in approach of Tagore and Gandhi in the attempt to gain India's independence from Great Britain. The statement quoted is prefaced by an extended comparison of Tagore and Gandhi in which Tagore is referred to as "the synthesizer of East and West" and Gandhi as "the Indian Chauvinist."

[39] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore,* p. 240.

[40] Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 7.

[41] Rabindranath Tagore, "A Poet's School," *Rabindranath Tagore, Pioneer in Education.* Essays and Exchanges between Rabindranath Tagore and L.K. Elmhirst (West Bengal: Visva-Bharati, 1961, distributed by John Murray, London), p.49.

[42] Tagore, "A Poet's School," *Pioneer in Education*, p. 49.

[43] Passage in a letter from Rabindranath Tagore to Leonard Elmhirst, quoted in Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, p. 56.

[44] Tagore, "A Poet's School," *Pioneer in Education*, p. 56. While there may be some truth in Tagore's observation, the contrast is too sharply drawn, for Tagore is well aware of the materialistic strains in India, for example in the servants of the Tagore household, as well as the contemplative aspect of Western civilization as noted in his praise of the spiritual accomplishments in medieval Europe. See below, n. 55.

[45] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, originally published (New York: Macmillan, 1917). The edition used for this paper is a reprint of selections from the original in a Kindle Digital Edition (Kessinger Publishing, Penguin Great Ideas, 2010). The digital edition has "location numbers" instead of page numbers. All references in this paper to Tagore's lectures on *Nationalism* are to the Kindle Digital Edition; the number following each reference is to the location number.

[46] *Nationalism*, 480.

[47] *Nationalism*, 486.

[48] *Nationalism*, 505.

[49] *Nationalism*, 510.

[50] *Nationalism*, 543.

[51] *Nationalism*, 631.

[52] *Nationalism*, 622.

[53] *Nationalism*, 543-550.

[54] *Nationalism*, 567.

[55] *Nationalism*, 696.

[56] Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*: *The Ideals of Greek Culture*. Vol. I. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford, 1965), p. 36.

[57] Jaeger, *Paideia*, p. 36.

[58] See above n. 16.

[59] Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, p. 45.

[60] *Nationalism*, 688.

[61] Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, p. 85.

[62] Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, pp. 57-58.

[63] Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 97.

[64] Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, p 85.

[65] Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, p. 85.

[66] Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, p. 88.

[67] Tagore and Elmhirst, *Pioneer in Education*, p. 93.

[68] See above n. 55.

[69] W.B. Yeats, "Introduction," *Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali (Song Offerings), A Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author From the Original Bengali* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 8-9.

[70] Yeats, "Introduction," *Gitanjali*, pp. 12-13.

[71] Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 1.

[72] Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 7.

[73] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b, 5-9.

[74] Leo N. Tolstoy. *What is Art*?, tr. Almyer Maude (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill/Library of Liberal Arts, 1960), p. 18

# TRADITION AND FESTIVITY:
## JOSEF PIEPER AND POST-MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Vincent Wargo

## INTRODUCTION

From his earliest work, *Über die Hoffnung*, Josef Pieper's thought can be characterized by his profound openness to the revealed wisdom of man's religious heritage and his thoughtful integration of this heritage into the contemporary philosophical question of human existence. His work on sacred tradition is no departure from this general theme and provides a further elaboration to the complex of Pieper's thought on festivity, hope, leisure, and the nature of the philosophical act. However, with the inclusion of his writings on tradition, the reader is given a fresh vantage point to survey this complex of ideas while at same time offered a unifying principle by which to appreciate the inner coherence of Pieper's philosophy. The goal of this paper is three-fold: first, to examine why Pieper thinks philosophy necessarily requires a sacred tradition if it is to actually live up to the promise of its own nature; second, to explain what the sacred tradition is, and finally, to show how this tradition is already at work in Pieper's thought, providing a source of inspiration for his writings on the philosophical act, festivity, the sacred, and being towards death.

Pieper was fond of saying of certain contemporary thinkers, such as Martin Heidegger, for instance, that one could taste the salt of theology in his work. While theology and philosophy are not identical, Pieper maintains that they are never far apart and that salt of theology preserves the integrity of philosophical reflection. Never has the possibility of a dialogue between pre- and post-modern thought been closer and more fruitful than at present. Although Pieper passed away at the beginning of the theological turn in phenomenology and continental thought, I think he would have welcomed the initiative of such postmodern thinkers to reconsider the divine within the themes of the event, the gift, the inheritance, and mourning. As part of this paper, I will try to show how Pieper's thought, informed by the sacred tradition, corresponds broadly with thinkers like Heidegger and Levinas.

## THE APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF TRADITION

What is most interesting about Pieper's treatment of sacred tradition is how he poses the question in general. For Pieper the inquiry into tradition is not theological in nature but philosophical. As paradoxical as it sounds, it is an inquiry that philosophy must seriously take up if it is to live up to its own essence. In *In Defense of Philosophy*, Pieper writes that "to engage in philosophy means to reflect on the totality of things we encounter, in view of their ultimate reasons; and philosophy, thus understood, is a meaningful

even necessary endeavor, with which man, the spiritual being cannot dispense." (IDP, 12) While it has never been Pieper's intent to simply mingle faith and reason homogeneously (IDP, 116), neither would he seek to characterize the philosophical act by the modern concern for purity of method. This latter would inevitably alter the nature of philosophy as a reflection on the totality of things, if it were to systematically exclude certain realities of human existence. However, this is exactly what modern philosophy has done as it sought to cut itself free from the sacred tradition when it came under the influence of the rationalistic and progressive doctrine of the Enlightenment (LBC, 113). Even more shocking for Pieper would be the intellectual dishonesty of a philosopher who held certain praeter-rational statements about the world in her concrete life only to exclude them when it came time to philosophically reflect on her existence. "What cannot be done," Pieper says, "is to accept the tradition, believe it, and then set it aside in order to philosophize." (LBC, 117) Why? Because the relation of theology and philosophy, as it emerges in Greek philosophy, has always asserted that theology is always prior to philosophy not merely in time, but what Pieper calls the "inner origin" and their relationship in that origin (LCB, 115). Philosophical enquiry, as the search for wisdom, always begins with a given interpretation of reality and the world as a whole. It is theology, for Pieper, whose beliefs are previous to all human experience (and whose object is invisible) that holds the true object of the philosopher's desire: wisdom as possessed by God. The radical difference between theology and philosophy is that theology is charged with preserving and defending the sacred tradition, while philosophy is to proceed inductively through experience and reason to understand the totality of things. Now, if the revelation teaches us that the world is created by the Divine Logos, then this is certainly a statement in Pieper's mind that concerns the whole of reality. The philosopher who considers concrete, visible things and realities of experience in light of this doctrine is likely to attain a knowledge that would be otherwise hidden. Thus, if sacred tradition and revelation are part of the realities which define human experience, and if philosophy is to remain faithful to the world as encountered, it must seek to take up the question of tradition. Pieper writes:

> How, then, does this type of questioner succeed in dealing with tradition, especially sacred tradition? We have to admit that he will not succeed in dealing with it at all – unless he stands *as a person* in a tradition and participates in it as a believing hearer. . . After and insofar as I as a person am actually participating in a tradition, or, to put it in another way, insofar as I actually accept the *tradita* of sacred tradition as truth for whatever reasons (but of course not uncritically or arbitrarily), then and only then do I have the capacity to practice philosophy seriously, i.e., to reflect on my subject under any possible considerations (TCC, 63).

In the end, a philosophy so characterized by what Pieper calls its contra-punctual relation with theology and the sacred tradition will experience a certain tension that makes its thought explosive, its questions challenging, and its insight more and more remarkable. The reason for this is that ultimately this kind of philosophizing is dealing with mystery. Reality is more truly and profoundly apprehended when the philosopher grasps being as a mystery, something which always eludes the all–embracing answer of the transparent and marvelously clear system (LBC, 120).

## TRADITION

Pieper begins his investigation of tradition with the word itself: the English word tradition is derived from the Latin *tradire* meaning to hand down. Along with *tradire,* the Latin also used the words *traditum* (that which is handed down) and *tradendum* (that which should/must be handed down). Of course this raises the further question: what is it precisely that should be handed down? Here Pieper seeks to distinguish sacred tradition from those traditions which derive from custom. Certainly there are objects, practices, values, and ways of living that are handed down from one generation to another, but for Pieper these do not have the character of tradition. What distinguishes tradition from custom is its source and our obligation to it. A tradition in Pieper's sense is something that has a divine and not human origin and, because of this, it represents something that must be handed down, a *tradendum,* in the fullest sense. Unlike the spheres of technology or knowledge, sacred tradition is not subject to an increase or progress by the continual efforts of human activity. Instead, because of its divine origin, Pieper argues that what is passed down, the *traditum*, remains profoundly the same from generation to generation. What begins to emerge from this picture is startling at first sight: among the entirety of human culture, its institutions, arts, technology, practices, and values, sacred tradition appears as something radically other.

Sacred tradition differs from human customs because of its source. Any custom, Pieper argues, whose source is human reason or art can (and should be) subject to further development and refinement. Every generation is allowed to advance their technology and practices as they see fit. For example, our own agricultural practices have changed over the millennia and will perhaps continue to change as our knowledge of plant physiology and the circumstances of our natural resources and environment continue to evolve. There is nothing wrong with this development nor are we particularly obligated to carry on the practices of our forefathers if we find them inefficient or inappropriate. In short, agriculture is an area where we admit to the idea of development and progress. To confuse sacred tradition with custom would be for Pieper to understand tradition as simply as a kind of social conservatism. Such a cultivation of customs on the erroneous notion of tradition constitutes a real hindrance to the transmission of what is

truly worth preserving (TCC, 43). Instead, Pieper sees the act of tradition – the handing down of *tradita* is at its heart something dynamic and originary.

The reason for this is that the source of the sacred tradition doesn't come from man but is understood to proceed from the divine directly. In the Christian religion, the sending of the Son is a handing down – a *paradosis* in Greek – the founding gift that establishes the sacred tradition of the Church. Pieper asserts that something like this has occurred in all cultures. Plato and Aristotle refer to the importance of the religious tradition received by the ancients who stood far back in the distant past at the dawn of prehistory who received a message, a *phéme*, something spoken, from the God, and they handed this message down to us (TCC, 27). Revelation as a *Theo Logos* is a gift from the gods, and tradition is that manner in which we receive and preserve the gift of the divine. Since the truth of the sacred tradition is not authored by men, it is something that we are neither free to change nor do we have the authority to alter. Theology may attempt to interpret or explain its message but it cannot add to it in any way.

Related to this idea of the sacred tradition as gift is the whole question of whether the tradition can be taught. Pieper remarks that the handing down of the tradition from one generation to another may outwardly resemble something like teaching, but it really has a different structure. To teach is to explain or instruct out of one's own resources, that is to say, we ultimately hold the first principles of what we teach. But the handing down of tradition is a transmission which it is more akin to reporting than teaching. Pieper explains that in the transmission of the tradition there are in fact three places: someone who stands in his own place, who hands something down from somewhere else to someone other (TCC, 14). In short, the one transmitting the tradition is handing down the gift which they have themselves received, and this is part of the act of reception. The original revelation of the divine to man becomes the source of tradition from which all individual traditions proceed. Pieper adopts the distinction made by the Dominican theologian Yves Congar between tradition with a capital 'T' and traditions with a lower case 't'. The former refers to the event of revelation while the latter refers all those individual practices and devotions that may come and go. It is the event of revelation in all of its modes that tradition seeks to preserve. Let us turn from the question concerning the nature of tradition to how it is experienced and appropriated in the life of a believer and thinker.

Pieper believes that the transmission of the tradition is not a lifeless mechanical process, but is part of the existential core of the human person. Here, will it helpful hermeneutically to unpack some of Pieper thoughts using the language of contemporary philosophers. We will begin with Maurice Blondel who sought to understand tradition beyond the dialectic of historical facts and Christian dogma. Tradition, according to Blondel, seeks to preserve not so much the intellectual aspect of the past but rather its living reality.[1] Blondel was careful not to see the tradition as static in nature; this kind of "fixism" he thought was virtually heretical, since it

could in principle lead the historian to claim to see the whole truth of revelation in its earliest version or the speculative theologian to confine the infinite reality of the divine to some completed synthesis of thought.[2] The tradition is a living reality whose transmission and reception marks an event of disclosure. Blondel writes:

> [Tradition] relies, no doubt, on texts, but at the same time it relies primarily on something else, on an experience always in act which enables it to remain master of the texts instead of being subservient to them. In brief, whenever the testimony of Tradition has to be invoked to resolve one of the crises of growth in the spiritual life of Christians, it presents the conscious mind with elements previously held back in the depths of faith and practiced rather than expressed, systematized or reflected upon. This power of conservation and preservation also instructs and initiates. Turned lovingly towards the past where its treasure lies, it moves towards the future, where it conquers and illuminates. It has a humble sense of faithfully recovering even what it thus discovers. It does not have to innovate because it possesses its God and its all, but it has always to teach something new because it transforms what is implicit and "enjoyed" into something explicit and known. So whoever lives and thinks as a Christian really works for this whether it be the saint who perpetuates Jesus among us, the scholar who goes back to the pure sources of Revelation, or the philosopher who strives to open the way to the future, and to prepare for the unending birth of the spirit of newness.[3]

Clearly, then, any understanding of tradition must take up also the living-present where the tradition is received. I would argue that the contemporary notion of event can apply both to the original gift of revelation and to the individual appropriation of tradition in the living present.

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL ACT

Where can we find evidence for such an interpretation of sacred doctrine in Pieper? I believe that it is to be found in the very nature of philosophizing itself. The philosophical act and the content of philosophical reflection as exemplified in his works on festivity and leisure are already profoundly shaped by the notion of a sacred tradition. This is manifested first in the character of philosophical wonder. Following Aristotle and Plato, Pieper sees wonder – *thaumazein* – at the origin of all philosophical reflection. Because wonder takes place in leisure, it moves out of the domain of the work-a-day world, the world that is structured by human reason according to practical ends. Yet, the full meaning of philosophical wonder for Pieper emerges when it is compared to the wonder that is the beginning of science. Pieper would certainly agree that science begins in wonder but scientific

questioning is quite different in nature from philosophy. In Pieper's view all scientific questions are in principle answerable (LBC, 140/WHP, 51-52). This means that the movement of questioning and wonder itself will come to an end and completion in the answer. There are many reasons why this is so, such as the principle of falsification and the pragmatic manipulation of objects by science, but, in the end, scientific wonder does not truly transcend the structure of reason in its pragmatic organization of the work-day world. This is made manifest in the very easy way scientific knowledge can be employed for both technological and political ends. However, since the aim of philosophy is wisdom and this is something in principle which is unattainable because it is synonymous with divine knowledge, the wonder that begins philosophy sustains the whole act. The philosopher does not cease to wonder at any one point unless she ceases to philosophize altogether (LBC, 135/WHP, 48). Wonder is a state that admits both knowledge and ignorance: It is the paradoxical recognition that one does not know. Wonder is a type of knowing that is along the way (*in via*), and this is properly the human way of knowing. Pieper likes to remind his reader of the ancient formula which states neither god nor fools are capable of philosophizing (LBC, 139/WHP, 51). The gods do not philosophize because they are already in the full possession of wisdom, while fools are satisfied to remain in ignorance. The philosopher alone sits between these two in the "middle" (between knowledge and ignorance) which is the truly human sphere. Being in the middle means always being on the way (*in via*): the status of those in the middle, along the way, is that wayfarer or *viatores* (LBC, 137/WHP, 50). The theological condition which describes this situation is hope. One who hopes lives in the absence of what one desires. For Pieper, hope is the existential condition for man during his lifetime: "Hope is confidently patient expectation of eternal life in a contemplative and comprehensive sharing of the triune life of God; hope expects from God's hand the eternal life that is God himself." (OH, 266/30) For Pieper, the philosophical act is so characterized by this existential structure that philosophy, insofar as it is identical to wonder, is identical to hope as well. Pieper concludes:

> It is because of the ambivalent structure of philosophy, because "marveling" sets one on a road that never ends, because the structure of philosophy is that of hope, that to philosophize is so essentially human – and in a sense to philosophize means to live a fully human life (LBC, 146/WHP, 56).

A philosophy born out of a close relationship with sacred tradition has not only a different content or problematic, but a different nature entirely. The meaning of wonder is now tied to hope which becomes the structure of the philosophical act. If we take this seriously, then the object of first philosophy and the manner and gesture of our thought must change. Contemporary philosophy speaks of the hospitality of thought, but here we

can see that Pieper is thinking of a relation with alterity that is every bit as radical as Levinas'. To affirm that the structure of the philosophical act is hope, is to be open to a relation with a mystery beyond the control of representational or objectifying thought. At the same time, it is possible to discern at the center of wonder that there is confidence at work which sustains the philosophical act.[4] Otherwise, wonder would be nothing more than an empty questioning without end, which is what Pieper accuses Heidegger of doing. Hope is confident that it will one day enjoy an end that it cannot fully bring about by its own power. Yet, this confidence seems to spring from the philosophical act itself. The philosopher striving after truth implicitly affirms the goodness of this truth. Barring this fact, philosophy would be nonsense for Pieper. The point I wish to make in connection with sacred tradition is that the confidence that is implied in wonder has its roots in affirmation. Yet, this affirmation is for Pieper neither the result of an assertion of the will (Nietzsche), nor the form of any external evidence that could be objectively inspected. Instead, it is the very finality of the philosophical act itself. In this way, philosophy begins with the affirmation that is similar to the phenomenon of festivity.

## FESTIVITY

The role of sacred tradition is highlighted when we realize that Pieper locates philosophy within the attitude of leisure and the mood of festivity. Leisure becomes an important foundation for Western culture because it makes divine worship possible. Through leisure, man enters the realm of the divine. Pieper reminds us that the third commandment of the Hebrew Torah is to rest and therefore to keep holy the Sabbath. He argues that the Sabbath represents a break with the world of work by making an offering of useful time to God (LBC, 73). A moment's reflection will show that the English and word "holiday" and the German word *Feierabend* [quitting time] have, in their core meaning, an element which refers to the divine and to what is celebrated. The idea of leisure as a foundation for intellectual culture is not exclusively Judeo-Christian – the Greeks prized leisure as well. Pieper reminds us that the original meaning of "school" comes from the Greek *scholé* and the Latin *schola* which both denote leisure. For both the ancient Greeks and Romans, education was a form of leisure (LBC, 26/ MK, 3). The academy of Plato combined the idea of leisure with the religious sense of *cultus* to form a society for the celebration of *cultus* (LBC, 21).

Leisure is imbued with a sense of festivity because the celebration of divine rites is a joyful occasion. It is also the active handing down of the tradition and what transpires at these events is something of crucial importance for leisure and philosophy: all secular and religious festivals have their roots in ritual worship wherein an affirmation takes place. To celebrate anything is implicitly to affirm it because festivity is nothing other than the living out of this affirmation:

> To celebrate a festival means to live out, for some special occasion and in an uncommon manner, the universal assent to the world as whole. (TW 240/30)

Pieper argues that the sacred tradition affords us a relation to reality as a whole due to these festivals. This is very much a kind of attunement in the sense that Heidegger speaks about. Our relationship to reality can be understood as an affirmation because life and the world are seen as gifts of creation. In religious celebration, man is asked to affirm the goodness of these gifts (TW 253/44-48). Only by affirming can we receive and begin to understand the gifts of creation. A gift must be received if it is to be appropriated. Otherwise, the whole of reality (life, world, self) stand before as mere objects to be used. The sense of celebration and festivity, which lies at the heart of a religious feast, makes this reception possible. By summoning us back to the giftedness of creation, tradition, as religious celebration, recalls our origins and heralds our future providing the believer with a beginning and end to time (TW 254/48). This wholeness of time, which comprises religious worship, demands from the participant an attitude of leisure, which is restful and receptive because it is a moment wherein the reality of the eternal is revealed (TW:246/39). The philosopher also participates in this basic sense of the affirmation because, if she seeks to understand the whole of reality, independent of any rationalistic schema, she must ultimately attempt to grasp it as a gift, since the joyfulness associated with festivity and celebration is a by-product of this affirmation, all leisure is joyful and a philosophy that proceeds from leisure is itself characterized by this act of affirmation. To wonder and to contemplate is to implicitly affirm creation.

## THE SACRED

Sacred tradition reminds the believer that the sacred is part of the world. To forget this point would be tantamount to missing the whole character of Pieper's philosophizing. If we are to understand how faith in the sacred tradition can inform our understanding of death, we must first endeavour to grasp how the sacred is encountered within our dwelling in the world. However, by saying this we are in no way suggesting that Pieper's position is simply one of fideism. As we have seen, Pieper claims that the critical attitude of the philosopher means being careful not to suppress anything. A philosopher who suspends his belief and tries to justify the human person's relation to the world on purely rational grounds alone, has not only failed to understand the nature of human reasoning, but has also failed to consider "the totality of things from their ultimate reasons." The inclusion of the sacred, whether it be by revelation of faith, myth, or religious action, has the effect of broadening our normal everyday experience by directing that experience beyond its normal confines.

Pieper begins his analysis of the sacred with an interesting observation: he believes that the sacred, along with poetry and philosophy in the modern world, share in a common fate. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we have witnessed what Pieper calls the de-sacralization (*Entsakralisierung*) of both man and the world; this has had profound effects on the intellectual as well as the spiritual situation of the West. Under the influence of logical positivists like Rudolf Carnap, philosophy was forced to shed the character of wisdom so that it could be turned into a rigorous science with verifiable results, while at the same time, contemporary poets like Bertold Brecht tried to blur the distinction between poetry and prose. All great poetry that triggered catharsis through the awareness of a deeper existential dimension of human existence was now becoming replaced with forms of non-poetry, through which poetry was reduced to political ideology, entertainment, sensationalism and empirical psychology. The present state of philosophy and poetry represents a sign to Pieper indicating the narrowing down of human existence into one dimension, one sphere, with potentially disastrous consequences for our understanding of both man and the divine. In contrast, true poetry and philosophy for Pieper flourish in that dimension of human existence which was traditionally called the life of the intellect or spirit (*Leben des Geistes*) where the person is opened up to the whole of reality. Traditionally, this extreme form of openness has been described with reference to the divine as *theo mania*. We are brought into contact with the whole of the world through our philosophical reflection and our consideration of the symbolic character of poetry, music, and all the visual arts. Thus, at the heart of the life of the spirit lies religious contemplation, where the contemplative self seeks the mysteries of God's speaking. Religious contemplation represents, for Pieper, the highest form of spiritual life because only here can the eye of the soul open itself in its extreme receptivity to which only the whole of reality is able to respond. All of this, however, becomes threatened when we attempt to secularize the whole of reality by doing away with the place of the sacred in the world.

In order to create a realm for the spiritual dimension of man, Pieper argues that human beings have always set boundaries in the world. There are times and places in the world that are set apart for the divine. The sacred exists only when there is a boundary that separates it from the everyday. Thus, in principle, where there can be no boundaries (in the *apeiron*, for instance) there can be no manifestation of the sacred. The domain of the sacred is a realm of freedom where things exist for themselves, and the arts and philosophy are naturally at home here. Because philosophy and poetry are radically free modes of human comportment, that is, because they cannot be reduced to the everyday world of work, they provide the basis for our thoughtful encounter with the sacred. Normally, the transition between the world of the sacred and everyday world is encountered in the form of a prohibition, where we put aside our everyday comportment.

In fact, we probably first experience the sacred in the form of a prohibition that not only sets off and delimits the sacred from the rest of the world, but also determines our action. What arises from these simple experiences is the realization that the world is not simply a homogeneous place where everyday coping alone could be the form alone of our dwelling:

> To repeat then whenever something is deemed "sacred" in this sense, there the preceding fundamental conviction obtains that world is not simply homogeneous, that neither space or time is such. . . .A sacred space is "different" from all other locations. And if Easter and Christmas, if the Sabbath and Sunday, are taken as periods of "sacred" times, then it is declared that they are not "just like other days." This, of course provides only negative information. The question remains as to what constitutes the special and separated character of the sacred and in what positive relation the sacred itself consists. (SS: 397/15)

The sacred exists as a boundary within the ordinary world. In fact, the etymologies of the words which constitute our vocabulary for the sacred reflect this insight. The Greek word for temple or altar, *témenos*, means to be carved out from the public domain. Even the Latin for holy, *sanctus*, is derived the verb *sancire* which means to fence off or to circumscribe. Yet, the border that differentiates the sacred from the profane is not established simply by locating the sacred in a specific space or time, otherwise we could be accused of defining the sacred in a worldly manner, i.e., by bringing the homogeneity of the world into the definition of sacred. Instead, Pieper wants us to see that the sacred realm is really circumscribed by the symbolic order. When we enter a church, we make the sign of a cross, we light candles, and perhaps we receive bread and wine. These gestures go beyond mere prohibition insofar as they constitute meaning by gathering together the orders of the visible and invisible. Although Pieper does not explicitly say so, it seems that the heterogeneity of the sacred over the profane resides in this ability to gather together the visible and the invisible. Pieper writes, "one who tries to separate the visible from the invisible, is incapable of understanding what a symbol is." Whoever seeks to explain the symbolic – for instance, the act of lighting a candle, in terms of a psychological disposition, a physical process, or an aesthetic experience – fails to keep the visible and the invisible together. But this is exactly the problem that faces our contemporary civilization; it is not only becoming increasingly difficult for modern people to understand traditional symbols but they also seem less inclined to use them (BB: 388). Pieper blames technological society and the type of pragmatic/expedient behavior (*Zweckmäßigkeitspraxis*) and thinking that it breeds. The reality to which symbols refer, like leisure, poetry and philosophy, cannot be reduced to a schema of human action. However, the real trouble, for Pieper, comes from

thinking that symbols are something that we make rather than something we are given.

In all symbolic acts, which the discussion up to now has been about, be they acts of poetic expression or even sacred celebration, it always seems to be about *our* signs, signs as posited by us: we give a sign. Could it not be perhaps that we were given a sign, from elsewhere, a sign, whose deciphering and interpretation we, likewise, could have expected (expected, entrusted, asked, authorized – however one takes it)? Could not the improbable happen, indeed the almost unbelievable? One can also say: the miraculous; it comes down to the same; this is exactly what constitutes the notion of the miraculous, something unexplainable, something shockingly incomprehensible happens. Could it not possibly happen that God would give us a sign, a likewise visible-evident sign (otherwise, we could not have perceived it at all)? (BB: 390)

The sacred demands of us that we realize that we are not the authors of the meaning of the world in which we live. We do not really understand, in a full and comprehensive way, the symbols we use in sacred action. This is an important point, for Pieper, because otherwise sacred action becomes a sort of magic. Viewed purely externally one might be hard pressed to show the difference between magic and proper sacred action and worship. Pieper believes that part of the difference consists in the attitude that goes behind them. "Magic is an attempt," Pieper writes, "to gain control over certain spiritual powers in order to make them serve human purposes." (SS: 410/36)

What is important to realize in Pieper's presentation is that what is sacred truly exists in the world, it does not refer to something otherworldly that is completely beyond any possible experience. The sacred has meaning and gives meaning to our understanding of the world. The sacred is, in fact, one way to experience the real world, and again the analogy with poetry and philosophy is also important for Pieper in order to understand how this becomes possible:

> In all of this I see analogies to the interpretation of "holy" (sacred) and "profane." Everything comes out wrong as soon as it is overlooked or denied that poetry and prose are but two different modes of speaking about what is real, and that philosophy no less than science attempts to know and understand the matter called "reality." Just so do we miss the point, by necessity, if we fail to see the contrast of the "sacred" versus "profane" equally within one common and comprehensive reality. (SS: 400/20)

The sacred and profane are two dimensions of the same world and this corresponds closely to what Aquinas says about the nature of theology as sacred doctrine. The subject matter of theology is God, but also all things insofar as they are related to God as their principle or end. Pieper's view reflects that of Aquinas, inasmuch as there must be an essential harmony

between faith and reason, otherwise we would be asked to believe by faith something that is ridiculous to normal experience. In this regard, Pieper is set against those contemporary ethnologists and historians of religions who try to radically oppose the orders of the sacred and the profane, because he sees in this opposition a certain violence to the moral and intellectual integrity of the human person:

> If it were really true, for example, that the sacred and the profane (as some questionable interpretation of the mythical-archaic worldview asserts) would confront each other like "two radically heterogenenous worlds (E. Durkheim), like "cosmos" and "chaos," like "reality" and "fiction" (or "pseudo-reality") separated from each other by an abyss (M. Eliade); if there were no *solidarité du sacré et du profane* (common ground between the sacred and the profane) whatsoever (J.-P Audet); if in other words, the world outside the temple gates could by no means be claimed to be "good" and to be in a certain sense "sacred" itself; if the absurd and simplistic claim were right that the existence of any "sacred" would imply total license "to do outside whatever you want" – if all this were the case, then a Christian would indeed have to reject the distinction between sacred and profane as unacceptable. (SS: 400-401/20-21)

For Pieper, there is a basic solidarity to our experience of the world. The profane world is not experienced as a Newtonian world that is essentially empty of meaning or value. Nor is the sacred experienced as a flight from the world to a faraway transcendent God. The ancients were never in the situation where they were forced to posit the divine due the meaninglessness of the world that confronted them; this is a purely modern problem. Instead, what is sacred for Pieper has the character of being sacramental! The world participates in the sacramental nature of the sacred because of the basic principle *omne ens est bonum*. Pieper understands this in the deepest sense to mean that every being is, as something real, willed and actually loved by the creator and every creature receives this being loved at the same time with the reception of it becoming real. In one sense, this intentional structure goes into the very ontological make up of all beings as creatures. All creation has the structure of being fundamentally a gift. The world is a place for man. Yet Pieper is not simply demanding that the world be understood as good because God created it. Rather he also realizes that our comprehending the sacramental character of the sacred depends on our first grasping the world as good. It makes no sense to affirm the reality of the sacred in a world that is basically evil. This was one of the earliest conceptions of the Greek fathers:

> Irenaeus stood with these principles in his struggles against the spiritual negation of the visible world, as it was formulated in

Gnosis. With full clarity he saw that it was impossible to have a true conception of the sacraments when at the same time and before one does not recognize the worth and the goodness of the visible world. It is the reality of this earth lying before our eyes, which is in some fashion raised and increased by the power of the word of God to become the flesh and blood of our Lord. (SAK, 377)

The world is fundamentally good and is sacramental in nature; this is why the religious feast is a celebration of this universal assent. We might even say that Pieper's understanding of philosophical wonder is deeply affected by the sacramental character of the world. At the core of every feast there is affirmation that everything is good and that it is good to exist. This constitutes our ability to receive creation as a gift. Yet, the affirmation that is the spirit of festivity is a human response to something or someone. For Pieper, the sacred makes a claim on us because not only is something expressed about the goodness of reality but also something is revealed to us. What the sacred reveals of itself is not something indifferent, but can only be grasped by our assent to it. At the heart of every religious celebration there is the sacramental presence of the divine either in terms of sacred action (*actio sacra*) or through the addressing of human beings by God (*Theo logos*). Although the feasts of the church are celebrated, i.e., made into a physical event, manifest in visible forms, audible language, bodily action and symbolic gestures, it is not man who effects sacred action. Our celebration proceeds from our acknowledgment of the sacramental presence of the divine in our midst and this is a matter of belief. It is this belief as a claim that the philosopher cannot deny when he begins to philosophize because this claim always already situates the philosopher in the world.

## DEATH AND HOPE

In what follows I propose a philosophical example that illustrates clearly how Pieper's own philosophical thought, being sensitive to issues of the sacred tradition of Christianity, is able to uncover a certain depth of relation between the realities of hope and death that would otherwise have gone unnoticed in a purely secular approach. From the purely objective perspective, death is an event that occurs to the dying person from the outside. And for this reason the objective character of its occurrence is not in the least affected by whether we are the agent of our demise, as in the case of suicide, or whether we die a "natural" death of old age. In either case, the substantial unity of the body and soul is destroyed. Yet, Pieper believes that alongside this objective occurrence something else is happening that is more akin to a personal decision:

One might say a man's end does not only "happen" but that the man himself "makes an end of it" [*ein Ende gemacht*] – and does so not insofar as he is an object, a part of nature, but insofar as he is a

subject, a spiritual person, which means not only a being capable of a free decision but also one who cannot avoid such decision. (DI: 353/74)

To understand what Pieper means by the idea that man makes an end for himself and how this making an end has the character of being a decision, we must try to comprehend that death also marks the termination of the *status viatoris*, the pilgrim character of man's earthly existence. For Pieper this is no mere sentimental way of speaking, but is rather the inward ontological dimension of the existence of the human person. Our earthly life, as a sort of pilgrimage, is structured by three constants: (1) becoming, (2) the "not yet," and (3) hope. Hence, the *status viatoris* represents the state of not-yet being, of still being unfulfilled but pointed towards completion. Pieper writes that we may have the power to alter the particular direction our life takes, but the essential nature of being-on-the-way is something we cannot change as long as we live (DI: 354/75). Being-on-the-way and hope are what structures the existence of the wayfarer throughout his life and what brings him to the encounter with death itself.

The concept of *status viatoris* reveals, in a special sense, the inner structure of man's creatureliness (OH: 261/18). Man is suspended between the poles of being and nothingness. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* certainly implies that the creature always exists within the possibility of a regress to nothingness. However, both Pieper and Aquinas argue that the orientation towards nothingness is not the proper motion of a natural being, which is instead always directed towards a good; hence, the orientation towards nothingness comes into existence precisely through the rejection of this proper movement. This indicates that the wayfarer, like Dasein itself, has a relation to being; the proper orientation of the wayfarer is toward being absolutely:

> To be a creature means "to be imprisoned in nothingness" (Heidegger); even more it means being grounded in absolute being and having an existential orientation toward being, toward one's own being and, at the same time, toward the being of God. (OH: 261/18-19).

Pieper concludes, then, that the whole span of our creaturely existence, i.e., the dynamization of our basic movement in life, can never be understood as if the relationship between being and nothingness were of equal rank. The "way" of the wayfarer is not a directionless back and forth between being and nothing, but away from nothingness and annihilation towards being, and realization (OH: 262/20). Of course, as Pieper himself admits, the complete realization of the wayfarer remains "not yet" fulfilled, just as the fall into nothingness has "not yet" been made impossible. Despite this, the "momentum" of human life is towards fulfillment, and we bear this momentum inwardly in the dimension of hope we have for ourselves. Hope

is in this sense the natural disposition of an intellectual being towards its perfection. Thus, for Pieper, we confront our death in hope!

The *status viatoris* comes to an end in the moment before the violent casting asunder of the body from the soul in what Pieper calls a "breathing spell" (*Atemraum*) that has not yet been claimed by coming catastrophe (DI: 360-361/82). One could contrast Pieper's notion of a breathing spell with what Levinas describes in his book *Time and The Other*. The breathing spell before the wayfarer's death does not provide him with some last chance or opportunity to exert his courage. The hope of the pilgrim does not consist in evading what is inevitable nor can it be characterized as a pure "passivity" to the "mystery of death." The hope of the pilgrim is hope against all hopes; "it is a religious act of loving devotion in which the individual, explicitly accepting death, offers himself up, and the life now slipping from him, to God." (DI: 370/92) In this moment, the inner existence of the wayfarer attains an irreversible form for, at death, a decision takes place for good or ill on life as a whole. (DI: 355/76). This is possible, according to Pieper, because only at the moment of imminent death are we disposed to the whole of our existence in a way that is radically and effectively different than at any other time of our life. The approach of death somehow compels us to make a decision, that is, we can do nothing else in that moment but make a judgment concerning our lives. Yet, the ability to make such a judgment comes about from the inside so that the decision, which ensues, constitutes our highest act and consummates our existence in freedom (DI: 356/77). The judgment that we render need be nothing more than an affirmation of the life we have lived up to that moment (DI: 365/87).

Although this account may sound fanciful to some, Pieper believes that it is in fact borne out in actual experience. As support for his thesis, Pieper cites the works of writer Ernst Jünger and prison chaplain Harold Poelchau, during the years of Nazi tyranny, to show how this might be the case. Both of these authors witnessed the executions of hundreds of prisoners and what they describe are two fundamental elements that make the acceptance of imminent death possible. First, according to Pieper, there is the tendency of all people in extreme situations to bring order within their interior existence and to put themselves in a fitting state of mind for this last step. Poelchau attests that the consciousness of guilt that many prisoners experienced did not consist in any neurosis that psychotherapy could cure but in the awareness of false decisions in life and that such guilt could only be removed by the symbolic forgiveness of God or man. He writes, "Unforgiven guilt was the greatest obstacle, particularly in cases of conscious dying, to a man's going to his death with composure and calmness."

The second element that makes the acceptance of death possible is the sense of freedom that arises when we confront the imminent possibility of our own death. Jünger relates exactly this element in his postwar diaries where he recounts his experiences as an officer during the occupation of

France. In particular, Jünger tells of his experiences surrounding the writing of the memorandum "On the Question of Hostages" in which he attacked a number of Nazi policies. As part of the memorandum Jünger attached copies of letters from victims to their loved ones in which they bade farewell immediately before being shot. He describes the state of mind of one of these doomed men as follows:

> Now the fear and hatred evaporates; an unclouded picture of the man emerges. The world of murders, grim retaliators, of blind masses and blind governors subsides into darkness, a great light casts its glow ahead. (DI: 363/85)

Pieper would certainly admit that not everyone goes to his or her death with the calm and serenity of a saint. Yet, he sees in both of these accounts an indication that the overpowering nature of death does not do away with the character of the human person's freedom to make an end to their life. What is important for Pieper is that any description of human dying must keep these two aspects of death together, otherwise we will not be accurately describing what it is for a person to die. Pieper criticizes both Heidegger and Sartre as examples of contemporary thinkers who have not kept these important aspects together. To consider only Heidegger, Pieper sees that there are conflicting tendencies in Heidegger's account of death. On the one hand, Pieper applauds Heidegger for his analysis of the everyday attitude towards death in which he shatters our reassuring references to the death of others and exposes the naked dreadfulness of death (DI: 347/68). Yet, on the other hand, Pieper cannot help but think that the earnestness with which Heidegger begins his analysis of death loses much of its appeal when Heidegger argues that resolute Dasein can "hand itself down to itself," i.e., the power of a finite freedom which is the freedom for its own death. This seems, to Pieper, to be less of an objective description of death and more of a heroic manifesto. "The necessity to die," Pieper argues, "is no longer to have the character of something imposed from elsewhere; rather man is exhorted to prove his autonomous freedom by choosing death in advance, anticipating it." (DI: 85) Heidegger's whole language of choosing death seems overly flamboyant to Pieper because it forgets the overwhelming power that death has over us. We do not have the power to choose life or death in an absolute sense any more than Adam had of knowing good from evil in an absolute sense.

Pieper would also take issue with anyone who would try to conflate his position with Heidegger's. The pilgrim does not choose his death at all, but makes a decision about his or her life and the orientation of that life. Ultimately, the *viator* can choose to lovingly surrender the gift of life back to the Creator, and in this moment, one "makes an end" to one's life. The termination of the *status viatoris*, Pieper argues, can be a consummation and the bringing to an end of life in a decision affecting the whole of one's existence. Whether this consummation of the *status viatoris* will be a

"fulfillment" depends on whether the one who decides makes the correct decision or not. It is quite possible for Pieper that the decision that marks an end to one's existence can be an act of refusal or negation. Pieper argues that this notion of fulfillment (depending on our ability to make a decision concerning the outcome of our life) is the properly human one, which provides us with a third possibility of thinking death that is neither one of mere cessation nor one of fulfillment along the lines of a natural fruition. Pieper wonders why this third characterization of death never occurred to Heidegger:

> Oddly enough, Martin Heidegger in his perceptive remarks on death has not seen this distinction. This failure is connected, I think, with the strange fact that in his *Being and Time*, although he analyzes every conceivable aspect of "ending" (ending as "stopping," as "getting finished," as "disappearing" as "being-at-the-end") he spends not a single word on the old image of "termination of the *status viatoris*." (This is strange because the phrase must have been familiar to the author from his childhood.) Thus it becomes understandable that Heidegger, while he recognizes every death as a conclusion accomplished in freedom, does not also see that it need not be a fulfillment. "With its death, Dasein has indeed 'fulfilled its course.' But in doing so, has it necessarily exhausted its possibilities? Rather, are not these precisely what get taken away from Dasein? Even unfulfilled Dasein ends. . . . Ending does not necessarily mean fulfilling oneself." These sentences from *Being and Time* sound highly convincing. Nevertheless, the antithesis expressed in them is incomplete and awry; only these two possibilities are presented: either purely factual ending and cessation, or fulfillment. But there is a third possibility. This third possibility is that of a free decision within the self which puts an end to existence may at the same time be an act of refusal and negation (DI: 359-360/80-81)

If Pieper's account makes sense, then this third possibility discloses an existential dimension within Dasein which has henceforth been left unthought by Heidegger and contemporary philosophy. It furthermore sets up a dynamic of the individual to the alterity of death which is distinct from Levinas'. No longer is the subject left powerless by the approach of death, but there remains a moment of integrity for the person in the face of death.

By now, it should be apparent that sacred tradition plays an essential role in Pieper's philosophical project. We recognize more clearly how Pieper's thought can be characterized as the solicitous integration of the themes given in the sacred tradition, with the existential dimension of lived experience, to produce a remarkably rich, compelling and profoundly true picture of reality. Hopefully, his work will and should serve as a model

for the integration of tradition and philosophical questioning for a generation of thinkers to come.

**Works by Josef Pieper in alphabetical order of the abbreviation.**

BB      "Bewirken und Bedeuten," in *Religionsphilosophische Schriften*, Bd. 7, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000).

DI      *Tod und Unsterblichkeit*, in *Schriften zur Philosophischen Anthropologie und Ethik: Grundstrukturen menschlicher Existenz.* Bd. 5, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997); *Death and Immortality*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2000).

IDP     *Verteidigungsrede für die Philosophie*. In *Schriften zum Philosophiebegriff*, Bd. 3, Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995; *In Defense of Philosophy*, tr. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

LBC     *Was Heisst Philosophieren*, in *Schriften zum Philosophiebegriff*, Bd. 3, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995). *Müsse und Kult*, in *Kulturphilosophische Schriften*, Bd. 6, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1999); *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, tr. Alexander Dru (London: Faber and Faber, 1963)

OH      *Über die Hoffnung*, in *Schriften zur Philosophischen Anthropologie und Ethik: Das Menschenbild der Tugendlehre*, Bd. 4. ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1996); *On Hope*, tr. Sr. Mary McCarthey, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

SAK     "Schöpfung und Sakrament," in *Religionsphilosophische Schriften* Bd. 7, ed Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000).

SS      "Sakralität und »Entsakralisierung«," "Was unterscheidet den Priester? Ein Notgedrungener Klärungsversuch," "Was ist eine Kirche? Vor-Überlegungen zum Thema »Sakralbau«," and "Nicht Worte, sondern Realität: Das Sakrament des Brotes," in *Religionsphilosophische Schriften*. Bd. 7, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000); *In Search of the Sacred*, tr. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

TCC     *Überlieferung: Begriff und Anspruch,* München: Kösel-Verlag, 1970. / *Tradition: Concept and Claim*, tr. E. Christian Kopff (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2008).

TW      *Zustimmmung zur Welt: Eine Theorie des Festes*. In *Kulturphilosophische Schriften,* Bd. 6. ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1999); *In Tune with the World: A theory of Festivity*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999).

**NOTES**

[1] Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics & The History of Dogma*, tr. Alexander Dru and Illytud Trethowan (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 276.

[2] Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics & The History of Dogma,* p. 275.

[3] Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics*, pp. 267-8.

[4] Jacques Derrida arrives at this same conclusion through the deconstruction of the Heideggerian notion of questioning as the essence of philosophical thinking.

# THE "DOUBLE TRUTH THEORY" IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAMIC AND CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

David Lea

The Qur'anic revelation presents itself as a reminder of previous revelations. Its teachings about creation have many commonalities with the Genesis texts. Mainstream Islamic theology considers creation "in six days", "some time ago", and "from nothing." After the contact of the Islamic faith with Greek philosophy, in which the cosmos is eternal, Islamic thinkers such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd had to address the issue of the apparent contradiction between religious teachings and the results of rational investigation. Ibn Rushd (often referred to as Averroes) is often regarded as having formulated the so-called "Double Truth Theory" that conceives of philosophy and religion as being distinct paths to the eternal truth. After his death, followers of Averroes in the European centers of learning, such as the University of Paris, were condemned for allegedly holding Averrosian views. In this paper, I consider the precise nature of Ibn Rushd's position on religion and philosophy, and consider whether his position could be equally compatible with both Islam and Christianity. I point out that Islam has a greater concern with orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, which allows for greater compatibility with the views of Averroes. I then go on to consider both Christian and Islamic approaches to apparent conflicts between science and religion – for example, with respect to evolutionary theory – and evaluate the comparative positions of Christian and Islamic scholars.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is clear that Islam is generally not as concerned as Christianity when it considers conflicts between scripture and rational inquiry. (This will be shown later in this paper.) An important indication of this difference in attitudes might be found in a comparison between Ibn Rushd and St Thomas Aquinas on matters of faith. H. A. Wolfson [1] offers an interesting perspective on the differences, tracing the issue back to the work of Aristotle. According to Wolfson's exegesis, Aristotle employs the term faith to indicate a judgment of truth. This did not entail an assent on the part of the agent, that is, an act of the free will, which is defined by him as a deliberate choice. For Aristotle, the term assent, as a verb, is identified with a judgment of the practical intellect as to whether something is desirable and good. The judgment that a thing on account of its superior excellence is desirable or good, is not a matter of faith but rather an assent. According to Wolfson, faith, interpreted as a judgment as to the truth of our claims to knowledge, is a function of the speculative intellect, which alone distinguishes between truth and falsity. In contrast, free choice and will involve the cooperation of the practical intellect and desire.[2]

According to Wolfson, the Stoics extended the Aristotelian term assent to include both judgments of the practical intellect and judgments of the speculative intellect. Assent as an act of the free will thus becomes associated with judgments of truth. This departs from Aristotle's understanding of scientific knowledge, to which he applies the term faith, which is not an act of deliberate choice. Aristotle held that scientific knowledge is knowledge that follows by necessity to conclusions based on primary premises, which was not a matter for voluntary assent. The Stoics subsequently modified the Aristotelian position, holding that assent applies to both matters of the practical and speculative intellects.

Turning to the Christian period, Clement of Alexandria notably wrestled with the problems of truth as revealed by philosophy and Scripture, and follows the Stoic view that assent applies to both matters of the practical and speculative intellect. As summarized by Wolfson, he argued that there are two kinds of faith and that both were roads to salvation, one being the long road and the other the short road. Individuals can dispense with reason and take the short road and assent to the teachings of Scripture.[3] Revelation in relation to philosophy is the short road. The long road involves individuals working out their salvation through reason. Since only a few individuals can devote themselves to philosophy and study, it is better for the great multitude to believe without reason on the strength of faith alone.

Ibn Rushd is recognized as the commanding philosophical figure of the Andalusian period in Muslim history. According to Averroes, the methods for imparting belief are described as either demonstrative, dialectical, or rhetorical. Averroes applies the term faith to scientific knowledge, i.e., conclusions that follow by necessity from their premises. Although others such as Clement of Alexandria had held that faith in scientific knowledge is an act of the free will and applies to all forms of knowledge, Averroes holds that belief that arises by reason of a proof is something compulsory and not voluntary. Faith in the religious sense means acceptance of the teachings of the Qur'an. Humans can come to acceptance in the above three ways according to their natures. Those who can reason rationally will come to an acceptance through demonstration. Others who lack this facility will come to faith through dialectical argument or rhetoric.

Assenting to the truth of the rhetorical mode of argumentation is appropriate for those who cannot follow the dialectical or demonstrative modes of argumentation. They need the guidance of others and are essentially swayed by emotion. Those who utilize the dialectical mode are misled as to the starting points of arguments, and therefore for them to arrive at valid conclusions requires the guidance of others who know the truth of the foundational premises.[4] Averroes sees the three modes as distinct ways assent is brought about, but it is only demonstration properly so called that achieves the truth with necessity in its conclusions and that necessarily causes knowledge. In the cases of dialectical and rhetorical arguments there is nothing in the arguments that compels consent. Assent

depends on the disposition of the individual, and this determines whether or not he or she is swayed by the argument.

According to Averroes, simple believers are assured that their beliefs are sufficient for them, but they are prohibited from professing their beliefs as they are understood by the philosophers. The philosophers are allowed to reason about certain religious beliefs, but they are prohibited from trying to profess their beliefs in the way they are understood by the common people. For example, the statement "God comes down every night to earth" would not be believed if the philosophers accepted the phrase literally. Conversely, those who are incapable of demonstration should not attempt to go beyond the literal interpretation, otherwise they would be guilty of disbelief or heresy. [5]

It is generally held that Averroes believes reason and faith are parallel routes to the same truth. On the other hand, St. Thomas holds that reason and faith are complementary, i.e., that reason can complement faith but faith is necessary for those truths that reason cannot grasp.[6] Thus reason is not sufficient to discover the truths of religion. However, one needs to dig deeper into the Thomistic position on this issue. Wolfson argues that for St. Thomas, faith is not identical with assent as it was for Clement and the others (Averroes etc.). Faith becomes a species of assent.[7] Faith is to be found only in those cases where some doubt and hesitation and indecision is present and the mind makes a voluntary decision. Once that decision is made the mind is free of all doubt. Therefore, first premises in demonstrations which are immediately known to be true, and conclusions in demonstrations (the truth of which follows by necessity), cannot be matters of faith. Faith applies then in the religious arena only to something which has not been demonstrated by reason. Accordingly, a person must accept by faith even those things which can be demonstrated by reason. Only after one has accepted them should one look for reason to establish them on rational grounds. Wolfson maintains that St Thomas can be still seen as holding a form of the theory in so far as there is acceptance of the teachings of Scripture either as immediately known proposition or as demonstrated conclusion, but only insists that truth and certainty should not be logically compelling at the time of acceptance. Faith, once accepted by voluntary assent, may later be transformed into intellectual certainty.

If we look into Averroes' intellectual beliefs, we can appreciate the divergence from the accepted literal meanings found in scripture. Averroes held, for example, the resurrection of the body was inconceivable and therefore could not be an object of belief for the Islamic philosopher.[8] In terms of God's creation of the world from nothing as maintained in Scripture, he held that in fact "nothing" referred to prime matter, and creation was equivalent to the imposition of form on the potency of matter. On the issue of survival after death, Averroes sought to answer Al Ghazali's accusation that philosophers deny the resurrection and the after-life. Averroes actually holds that those of the dialectical and rhetorical classes may give assent to the propositions of a future life in accordance with their

ability to conceive such beliefs in terms of personal immortality and continued existence of the individual *post mortem*. Philosophers give assent to the propositions of a future life but do so without interpreting this in terms of personal immortality because the demonstrative methods of philosophical psychology yield only an idea of a future life for the human species and not the continued existence of particular individuals.[9]

This position is in part determined by Averroes' epistemological psychology. The final view is to be found in the *Long Commentary* in which he argues for a single eternal material intellect for all mankind, rather than a plurality of material intellects.[10] More specifically, according to R. C. Taylor, the individual human knower is bodily and identified with the perishable cognitive power that perishes at the moment of death, while the immaterial separate intellects continue in their existence eternally functioning as powers of knowing for other transitory members of the equally eternal human species.[11] According to this understanding, the so called agent intellect is described as the formal cause of our knowledge and the material intellect is the receptor. The agent intellect abstracts the intelligibles that are impressed on the material intellect. In other words, the agent intellect generates the intelligible, which is transferred to the receptive material intellect. Because multiple human beings can share the same intelligible, the intelligible in act exists separately from particular human individuals, subsisting in a single transcendent material intellect shared by all human beings.

The powers of the intellect are present in human souls and connected to human rationality.[12] But a voluntary effort to achieve knowledge is grounded in the particular intention of the individual human agent.[13] Individuals remain therefore the initiators in the process of knowing, while the agent intellect is the formal cause and the material intellect is the receptor. The metaphysical natures of the agent and material intellects entail that they are therefore distinct in existence from the perishable individuals.

It is not unsurprising therefore that those who followed Averroes' teachings at the University of Paris were condemned, and his philosophy denounced as heresy. Moreover, these intellectually-held beliefs reinforce the necessity to prohibit ordinary believers from attempting to understand the religion according to the writings of the philosophers. Ordinary people might become confused and begin to question their religion because they could not understand the full meaning of the double truth theory, seeing only a contradiction of conflicting interpretations.

Although Taylor argues that the unity of truth plays a central role in Averroes' arguments, he offers the following quote to support the view that the primacy is given to the philosophical method of interpretation:

> We affirm definitely that whenever the conclusion of a demonstration is in conflict with the apparent meaning of Scripture [or Religious Law], that apparent meaning admits of allegorical

interpretation according to the rules for such interpretation in Arabic...Indeed we may say that whenever a statement in Scripture [or Religious Law] is considered carefully, and the rest of its contents searched page by page, there will invariably be found among the expressions of Scripture [or Religious Law] something which in its apparent meaning bears witness to that allegorical interpretation or comes close to bearing witness."[14]

Clearly, Averroes is saying that undemonstrated beliefs are to be understood allegorically by the philosophers and cannot be taken in their literal sense.

One notes a significant difference between St Thomas and Averroes, therefore. It is obvious that, for St. Thomas, reason has a decidedly secondary role in salvation. It is apparent that faith, the acceptance of the truth in conditions of uncertainty, has priority over the acceptance of truth based on reason. For Christianity, this is essential because many of its central truths are beyond rational comprehension, e.g., the miracle of transubstantiation during the sacrament of the Eucharist, or the truth of the Trinity. A Christian cannot hold that the Eucharist is merely a symbol for the body and blood of Christ; a Christian must hold that the body and blood of Christ is actually present in the Eucharist. Thus one cannot assert, as Averroes appears to say with reference to scripture, that only common people should accept such statements literally, whereas philosophers are free to search for an alternative meaning that is amenable to reason. For St. Thomas, truths of faith must be fully accepted in their literal meaning before reason is allowed to search for rational grounds for one's beliefs. In areas where no rational understanding is possible, the truth must be accepted without rational certainty.

## ISLAM: THE LAW AND THEOLOGY

The question remains why the double truth theory, as professed by Averroes, could be compatible with one of the leading philosophers of the Islamic religion, whereas, following St Thomas, it would be unacceptable for Christians. Wilfred Cantwell Smith states, following Bergstrasser, that the decisive expression of Islamic faith is law. This is so much the case that he argues that, in some ways, one may suggest that law is to Islam as theology is to Christianity. In Christianity, theology from very early on was central, but one cannot assume that theology and doctrine are essential in other faiths as well. Many Muslim religious leaders have repudiated theology as an unworthy subject of study, a distraction or human vanity. For Muslims, theology is peripheral to the main development, even though it may often be brilliant.[15]

Averroes was particularly hostile to theology. As Therese Bonin points out, this is due to the fact that Averroes perceived that Islamic theologians, unlike Christian theologians, did not follow rigours of the philosophical method. [16] In contrast, Christian theologians utilized

philosophy in their efforts to understand revelation. For example, Augustine referred to the thought of Plotinus in order to understand the literal sense of Genesis, and Porphyry on the problem of evil. In contrast to Christianity, Islamic philosophy and theology developed independently. More specifically, Averroes argued that Islamic theologians used dialectical arguments, i.e., arguments based on premises that were generally accepted but which had not been established as true. Accordingly, theologians did not have knowledge of reality because their conclusions were based on opinions and therefore their conclusions could only be opinions. Averroes felt that the theologians should keep their conclusions to themselves but they did (and do) not, and therefore the different schools end up confusing the ordinary believer. In contrast, philosophers, who understand the core meaning of religious doctrine, do not publicise their findings in order to avoid upsetting the more simple beliefs of non philosophers.[17]

This brings us back to the original point, the relation between Islam and law. Sunni Islam, for example, has nothing approaching a magisterium when it comes to doctrinal matters, but it does have authoritative teaching on practical matters. This necessarily underlines the point that, for Islam, orthopraxy, rather than orthodoxy, is of greater concern. This is to say that Islamic emphasis is on appropriate behaviour rather than appropriate belief. It is of primary importance that the Muslim observe the pillars of Islam, such as the five daily prayers, the Friday congregational prayer, fasting, alms giving, pilgrimage to Mecca, sacred formulae used in daily language, and a life conducted in light of religious axioms, rather than requiring universal orthodoxy in belief and thought. This is why Averroes as a lawyer, jurist, and judge believes it is acceptable for Muslims to entertain divergent beliefs and understandings on matters of doctrine as long as these beliefs entail behaviour that corresponds to Muslim law and teaching on practical matters. One can easily contrast the Averroist thinking on these matters with that of Martin Luther, who came to the conclusion that good works were of secondary importance for Christian salvation, whereas he was in favour of orthodoxy expressed in belief in Jesus Christ. In other words, Christian thought with Lutheranism, for example, was moving to embrace the converse and emphasize the primacy of belief over behaviour. This perhaps can be seen as a logical development from the Thomistic position in so far as St. Thomas holds that universal orthodoxy in belief is primary for all members of the Christian society, subsequent to which intellectual effort and understanding can supply additional support, whereas for Averroes right behaviour is primary and belief need not possess a universal character. It is therefore relevant that some have remarked that it is easy to become a Muslim because the beliefs are minimal in comparison to Christianity, but more difficult to remain a Muslim because it demands rigorous conformity to a code of behaviour and ritual.

## THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNITY

Having made these remarks, one might also point out that many Western academic conferences and seminars that focus on the decline of religion in the West, and specifically of the Christian religion, appear to be preoccupied with the issues of belief and the growing numbers of unbelievers. Consequently, such meetings often struggle with the issue of making Christian belief acceptable to contemporary Westerners. But this preoccupation belies a uni-dimensional understanding of religion. Religions are not simply groupings of individuals who have reached intellectual conformity on matters of spiritual reality; they are above all communities that are integrated behaviourly. This communal nature of religion entails that individuals are coordinated in communal endeavours on practical matters such as education, the construction of places of worship, as well as common ritualistic action that cement their harmonious self identity within the religious community. One might say that the communal nature of religion is foremost and the belief system secondary. Many academic conferences miss this central issue because they concentrate on religion as a system of beliefs rather than foremost a community. Therefore, as Alasdair MacIntyre has argued, in assessing the decline of religion in the West, it is the loss of community that may need to be addressed rather than preoccupation with issues associated with intellectualizing Christian beliefs.[18] These points also allow us to render Averroes's double truth theory more intelligible to Western thought, in recognizing that Averroes was viewing religion primarily in terms of community and thus understanding religious issues in terms of the viability of the religious community rather than conformity within a system of spiritual beliefs. Thus, for Averroes, intellectual conformity in belief becomes ancillary to following the law and conforming to behaviour that is expected of a member of the Muslim community. For Averroes, the divergence between what the common individual and the philosopher believe concerning religious doctrine is largely irrelevant so long as orthopraxy is maintained.

## RELATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND BELIEFS

Having made these remarks one does not want to take the extreme position that beliefs are largely irrelevant to religious practice. The point is that they are important to the religious community but, as MacIntyre has argued, understanding religious concepts and beliefs requires a shared context of community. As a philosopher, he concentrates on morality and ethics, emphasizing the confused and unsatisfactory nature of contemporary debate on such matters. In the academic context, one encounters sterile and inconclusive debates over the criteria that define right and wrong, while in the wider democratic society interminable disagreements abound because of the inability to ground a decisive consensus.[19] Morality, which is central to communal cohesion, has more to do with habits, virtues, and traditions that

guide our life, rather than disputes over rules. He argues that concepts such as virtue, justice, piety, and duty are at home within a given context, the community in which they were embedded, but have since lost their meanings because of loss of community. MacIntyre's by now familiar argument is that morality is not so much concerned with rational arguments about what is good or bad, right or wrong. Rather, morality emanates from an entire life of good character. The unreality of contemporary discussions on ethics and morality is due to the absence of social context that used to make these concepts intelligible, according to MacIntyre.[20]

These remarks apply similarly to religious concepts and beliefs, which are also integral to the intellectual and social life of the religious community. MacIntyre sees the dramatic change of social context as undermining the religious community, and in doing so effecting a loss of intelligibility on matters of belief, as well as morals. Although Christianity's emphasis on orthodoxy rather than orthopraxy may have rendered it more susceptible to sceptical enquiry, theologians during medieval times were still able to supply satisfactory answers to the issues being addressed. Difficulties in doctrine provided incentives for enquiry, but were not grounds for disbelief while in the contemporary secular context they are regarded as confirming the sceptical position and the decision to reject Christianity.

According to MacIntyre, it is the secularization of intellectual language and the secularization of life that have undermined the set of concepts that were indispensable in ordering social and intellectual life and thereby the viability of the religious community. For example, he believes these developments to be the effect of the Enlightenment thinking that stressed the role of reason operating independently of religious concepts. On the other hand, it has been argued that the Muslim religion has not suffered the same contagion of disbelief because Enlightenment thought did not engage Muslim thinkers or have an effect on Muslim society.[21]

## ISLAM AND SCIENCE

Having made these points, the reality is that Averroes actually had little effect on the development of Islamic thought and was more influential in the Christian and Jewish traditions. Averroes' philosophy declined in the Islamic world, perhaps because philosophers suffered a loss of political protection. In any event, the primacy of orthopraxy that renders Averroes' double truth theory intelligible continues to apply to the Muslim religion in general. This means that intellectualizing one's beliefs has not been a significant aspect of the Muslim tradition. As Averroes argued, simple beliefs are sufficient for the ordinary people, while the intellectuals should endeavour to keep their beliefs to themselves. One might thus cautiously generalize this case and assert that this has meant that a strong tradition of intellectual inquiry has been far less prominent in Moslem societies. Having said this, one might hazard that absent a tradition of intellectual inquiry in

religious matters, Muslim thinkers became intellectually unpractised in other areas such as scientific research. This has perhaps also contributed to the fact that conflicts between religious doctrine and scientific theory have not assumed the same prominence as they have in the West.

As evidence of this lack of intellectual curiosity, Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, has stated that

> From the first years of the 14th century we can say that the Ottomans were aware of the technical innovations in Europe (to which they were geographically close) and successfully took in and applied the techniques in their homeland. Ottomans in this context transferred the technical methods and information, especially war technology and mining, very early and used them as was convenient. The most specific characteristic in the technological transfer was their selective attitude – they could not understand the importance of the intellectual mentality and they became a technology-importing country, rather than a technology-producing country. They never adopted the new scientific understanding of conducting research on material place, time, movement and nature nor did they adopt a research attitude.[22]

This lack of intellectual engagement with scientific theory and concepts may well explain why disputatious conflicts between religious doctrine and scientific theories have not assumed the same prominence in the Islamic world as in the West. Evolutionary theory may well be a case in point. When the theory was defended and widely publicized by Charles Darwin, the establishment in the Church of England reacted with strong condemnation. The public debate at Oxford in 1860 between Thomas Huxley, who defended evolution, and the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, who was strongly critical of the theory, could be seen as emblematic of the conflict between scientific theory and religious beliefs. In contemporary times, this conflict can be seen to continue; in the United States, creationists strongly argue that evolutionary theory cannot be taught without teaching intelligent design in parallel.

Zainal Bagir of Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia, offers a different picture with respect to the Islamic world and its reaction to evolutionary theory. He writes that, despite the debates about the theory of evolution in the Arab Muslim world soon after *The Origin of Species* was published, the theory actually did not occupy an important place in Muslim discourse on religion and science.[23] Yet recently resistance to the theory seems to be increasing, especially at the popular level, initiated by the rise of a high-profile Muslim anti-evolution group in Turkey, which has spread to many areas of the Muslim world. But, Bagir argues the recent anti-evolution trend is an exception in the tradition of Muslim thought. Looking at the debates, especially in the literature of Qur'anic interpretation, he

argues that the views are neither pro- nor anti-evolution, but ambiguities of modes of creation. Second, he points out that, without denying that the theory does pose some theological challenges, the recent anti-evolution trend has to be understood not only as emerging from theological concerns. It has also become part of the Muslim politics of identity, which has heightened in recent years – which means it should also be understood and addressed as a political, not only theological, issue.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has sought to explain differences in attitude between Islamic and Christian thinkers with respect to conflicts between religious doctrine and intellectual thought. Beginning with Aristotle on matters of "faith," it proceeded to consider the differences between respective medieval thinkers on the relation between rational inquiry and divine revelation. In doing so we traced the development of the double faith or double truth theory with its origins in Aristotelian thought culminating in the ideas of Averroes and St. Thomas. We emphasized that for St. Thomas, universal orthodoxy in belief is primary for all members of the Christian society, subsequent to which intellectual effort and understanding can supply additional support, whereas for Averroes right behaviour is primary and belief need not possess a universal character. We argued that Averroes' position is actually an expression of Islamic thought in general in so far as Islam is more concerned with orthopraxy than orthodoxy. This is to say that Islamic emphasis is on appropriate behaviour rather that appropriate belief. We explained further that Averroes was viewing religion primarily in terms of community and thus understanding religious issues in terms of the viability of the religious community rather than intellectual conformity within a system of spiritual beliefs. Thus, for Averroes, intellectual conformity in belief becomes ancillary to following the law and conforming to behaviour that is expected of a member of the Muslim community.

We went on to mention Alasdair MacIntyre's view that the current contagion of religious scepticism that is prevalent in the Christian West is due to dramatic changes in the European social context, which undermined the Christian religious community, and in doing so effected a loss of intelligibility on matters of belief, as well as morals. MacIntrye identifies this development with the spread of secularism promoted by the ideas of the Enlightenment. MacIntyre holds that Christian beliefs appear to be undermined by scientific theory only because Christian beliefs are no longer supported by a social context that makes such beliefs intelligible. On the other hand, it has been argued that the Muslim religion has not suffered the same contagion of disbelief because the Enlightenment with its secular ideas did not engage Muslim thinkers or have a profound effect on Muslim society. In contrast, Islamic societies have largely been able to maintain the viability of their religious communities including religious beliefs and

practices, which explains in part why they appear to be less threatened by scientific theory.

With its emphasis on correct behaviour rather than orthodoxy in belief, one might generalize this case and assert that this has meant that a strong tradition of intellectual inquiry has been far less prominent in Muslim societies, at least since the time of Averroes. Having said this, one might hazard that, absent a tradition of intellectual inquiry in religious matters, Muslim thinkers became intellectually unpractised in other areas such as scientific research. This fact has also contributed to a reality in which controversies over the alleged incompatibility of between religious doctrine and scientific theory have not assumed the same prominence as within Western society. One can reasonably argue that the absence of intellectual engagement, which is central to scientific inquiry, explains the decline in scientific achievement in the Islamic world.

**NOTES**

[1] H.A. Wolfson, "The Double Faith Theory in Clement, Saadia, Averroes and St Thomas, and its Origin in Aristotle and the Stoics," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 33, No 2 (Oct. 1942): 213-264.

[2] Wolfson, "The Double Faith Theory," pp. 218-220.

[3] Wolfson, "The Double Faith Theory," p. 229.

[4] Richard C. Taylor, "Averroes: Religious Dialectic and Aristotelian Philosophical Thought," in P.A. Adamson and R.C. Taylor, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 185.

[5] Wolfson, "The Double Faith Theory," pp. 250-251.

[6] M.C. Hernandez, "Islamic Thought in the Iberian Peninsula," in S.K. Jayyusi ed., *The Legacy of Muslim Spain, Volume 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 777-804.

[7] Hernandez, "Islamic Thought in the Iberian Peninsula," pp. 252-261.

[8] This and the following is summarized by Oliver Leaman, in *Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[9] Taylor, "Averroes," pp. 188-189.

[10] Taylor, "Averroes," p. 192.

[11] Taylor, "Averroes," p. 194.

[12] Taylor, "Averroes," p. 193.

[13] Taylor, "Averroes," p. 194.

[14] Taylor, "Averroes," 186.

[15] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Understanding Islam* (Hague, Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 240-241.

[16] Therese Bonin, "A Muslim Perspective on Philosophy and Religion," paper presented at the Franciscan University of Steubenville,

Nov. 4, 2005, p. 19 .

[17] Bonin, "A Muslim Perspective."

[18] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1993).

[19] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 26.

[20] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 50.

[21] Adnan Aslan, "Why the Muslim Community has Maintained the Contextual Value of Morality," *The Islamic Quarterly* 55, No. 3 (2011): 233-251.

[22] Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, "Ottoman Science in the classical period and Early Contacts with European Science and Technology," in E. Ihsanoglu, ed., *Transfer of Modern Science and Technology in the Muslim World* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1992).

[23] Zainal Bagir, "Evolution and Creation in the Muslim World: Ambiguities and Politics of Identity," paper presented at The American University of Sharjah (Sharjah, 21 – 23 June 2011) conference entitled "The Belief in Dialogue: Science, Culture and Modernity."

# SOME CHARACTERIZATIONS OF "MIRACLE" ACCORDING TO MUSLIM AUTHORS: SKETCH OF AN INTERPRETATION ON THE FOOTPRINTS OF S. H. NASR AND J. HICK

Stefano Bigliardi

## INTRODUCTION

The present paper has a twofold aim. The first aim is to make the reader more familiar with the discussion on the Qur'anic concepts and narratives associated with the term "miracle" as well as with several characterizations of this very term put forth by some contemporary Muslim authors. The authors I have selected, despite deep differences in their respective backgrounds, work, and writing style, can be said to have one fundamental feature in common, namely, they all believe that natural science does not contradict Islam but rather enjoys some kind of harmony with it. I would like to contribute to the intercultural exploration of this concept that, within Western/Christian philosophy, is usually analyzed along Biblical narratives and/or investigated along the lines of David Hume's definition of "miracle."[1] The second objective of this paper is to sketch an interpretation of those very characterizations of "miracle" based on some ideas put forth by the Persian scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) and by the late British theologian John Hick (1922-2012).

"Wonder is the dearest child of faith" wrote J. W. von Goethe.[2] Miracles are hotly debated within philosophy and theology; they seem to be both vital to world religions and vulnerable to criticisms aimed at discrediting religion as irrational and contrary to science. The fact that different miracles are relevant for different religions can be held against the credibility of religions themselves, but it can also be suggested that they instead potentially constitute a field of inter-religious dialogue. I shall here postulate that a satisfying philosophical interpretation of "miracles" (i) does *not* coincide with a specific definition of what a miracle is but, rather, (ii) explains why miracles are so relevant within world religions and why philosophical debate rages over them. I shall carry out such an attempt in a way that is (iii) sympathetic towards world religions, though (iv) without broadly accepting all that is defined, even by religious authors and figures, or in a religious context, as "miraculous." My suggestion is that such an interpretation can be attained if we follow the footprints of Hick and Nasr; however, this does not entail that their respective doctrines taken as a whole can or should be fully amalgamated.[3]

The fact that Qur'anic narratives and terms are focused upon in these pages is not to be regarded as extrinsic and solely as the result of an intercultural outlook. First of all, as we shall see, Qur'anic narratives include reference to relevant Biblical ones; furthermore, I shall follow the

doctrine according to which the revelation bestowed onto the Prophet of Islam completes and complements those which substantiate Judaism and Christianity, an idea that Nasr himself fully accepts. Secondly, we shall assume the characterizations of "miracle" here illustrated, as a testing ground of the theory sketched along Hick's and Nasr's ideas. In the following pages I will therefore begin with an illustration of Qur'anic "miracles" (§1). I will then linger on some contemporary characterizations of the miraculous put forth, respectively, by S. A. Khan (§2), S. Nursi (§3), and Z. El-Naggar (§4) – an author here taken as representative of the interpretative trend focused on the so-called "scientific interpretation" and the "scientific miracles" of the Qur'an – and finally on the ideas on miracles put forth by two Muslim physicists: M. Golshani and N. Guessoum (§5). Subsequently, I will recapitulate the doctrines of Nasr and Hick and recall in greater detail their ideas on miracles (§6).[4] In the final section, I will use those very ideas to interpret the characterizations of "miracle" put forth by the six authors concerned, and will suggest their more general applicability as well as some challenges to be faced by the thinkers who might subscribe to them (§ 7).

## MIRACLES IN THE QUR'AN

*Stricto sensu*, the Qur'an itself, the descent of a revelation conforming to a heavenly archetype (cf. Q 17: 88) is the miracle of Islam, with its amazing uniqueness and inimitability (*ijaz*, from a root denoting *amazement*) being ultimate proof of its divine origin. This meaning is nevertheless not the only one. First of all, the Qur'an relates to deeds or episodes of the Prophet whose character might be judged, by modern standards, supernatural and hence miraculous; for instance, when a spider conceals the Prophet and his fellow Abu Bakr by weaving its net at the entrance of a cavern where they have taken refuge (Q 9: 40); the Prophet's instantaneous journey to Jerusalem overnight (Q 17:1); the Moon dividing into two parts (Q 54:1); when two angels open the young Prophet's breast, take out the heart, purify it with snow, then replace it (Q 94:1). Secondly, the Qur'an refers to the supernatural deeds of the Prophets that we encounter in the Old Testament as well: for instance when Abraham cannot speak after his wife's late pregnancy is announced (Q 3: 41); when Moses performs his prodigies in front of the Pharaoh and the Hebrews (Q 7: 106-108, 133; Q 20: 80); when Salomon commands the winds (Q 21: 80-81; Q 34: 12; Q 38: 36). Thirdly, the issue shows a degree of complexity in that all such deeds and episodes are defined with the term *aya* (pl. *ayat*), "sign". The attribute related to *aya*, *bayyina*, "clear", becomes itself, within the Qur'anic lexicon, a synonym of "sign." Such terms are also used in reference to:

> (i)    Natural phenomena (or processes) and their creation; e.g., fruits ripening (Q 6: 99); growth of plants (Q 13:4); rain (Q 16: 65); brewing (Q 16: 67); the alternation of night and day (27: 86);

(ii)    Historical or past events: for instance, when a sacred she-camel is sent by God to the people of Thamud (Q 7: 73; Q 11: 64; Q 17: 59; Q 26: 154-158); when a violent wind is raised against the Adites (Q 41: 16);

(iii)    The verses themselves of the Qur'an (Q 26: 2; Q 27: 1; Q 31: 2).[5]

Furthermore, we find in the Qur'an reference to deeds and episodes which display a supernatural character without being described as *aya*; e.g., slain birds are resurrected for Abraham (Q 2: 260); Abraham is preserved from fire (Q 21: 69).[6] It is also to be noted that the Qur'an also explicitly suggests a de-emphasis of the importance of miracles and extraordinary events (Q 6: 7-10).[7]

We should also not forget that miracles also flourished in the extra-Qur'anic tradition. First of all, many supernatural events which are not referred to in the revelation began being attributed to the Prophet and became part and parcel of popular beliefs about him.[8] Miracles were also attributed to the wandering ascetics of the first Islamic century, the Sufis, known for their ecstatic religious experiences. The corpus of the tales relating their wondrous deeds constitutes an extremely rich literature.[9] Theologians such as al-Baqillani (d. 403/1013)[10] or Ibn Kathir (1301-1373)[11] reacted to Qur'anic and extra-Qur'anic narratives, developing, by way of comparison, extremely fine-grained definitions and classifications of miracles. In particular, they outlined a further terminological and conceptual distinction between *mu'jizat,* miracles of the prophets, meant to confirm God's power rather than that of the prophets – thus similar to the Greek *dynámeis*) – and *karamat,* (cf. Gk. *charisma*), basically denoting the favoured condition conceded by God to the saints, which implies the capacity of performing supernatural deeds as well, sometimes kept secret by the saint.[12]

Apparently, there is neither a single word for "miracle," nor a clearly specific feature of all the narratives regarding Qur'anic events that are or can be defined as "miraculous," nor any univocal definition within Islam. We shall elaborate later on this observation. But still, "miracles" can be provisionally assumed in a broad sense. We can namely explore how "miracles," both meant as specific philosophical characterizations *and* as events reported in religious narratives that can be intuitively thought of as miraculous, are characterized by specific authors. We can then let the specific meanings of "miracle" emerge from the respective authors' usage of that very term, including reference to specific passages of the sacred scriptures, but also from other authors' characterizations.

## SEYYED AHMED KHAN

The first author we focus on is Seyyed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), an Indian reformer who was fascinated by Great Britain and aimed at developing an

updated form of Islam within (or together with) an appreciation of science and technology. Without knowing Arabic (as his critics do not fail to point out) Khan wrote, *inter alia*, a long commentary to the Qur'an and a rendition of the Prophet's life. The Indian author, curiously (and not very consistently) denied the presence of any supernatural elements in the Qur'an, and buttressed his refusal of supernaturalism as follows: the laws of nature are like promises of God, so advocating their interruption is tantamount to advocating God's unfairness. [13] Reading Khan's *Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (1870) – a somewhat clumsy text under modern philological standards, as its subtitle asserts, "*The original English text of these essays has been revised an* [sic] *corrected by a friend*" – proves a rather interesting experience. Khan gives us in the very *Preface and Introduction* a definition of nature:

> Again, what is Nature? It is law, in conformity to which all objects around us, whether material or immaterial, receive their existence, and which determines the relation which they bear to each other. This law exists in the objects themselves. We say *Nature* … that is, God, that supreme and perfect Being upon whom the existence of all other beings originally depends ….[14]

Throughout his treatise that he conceived for "the use of those Muhammedan youths who are pursuing their English studies," [15] Khan makes an enormous effort to present his version of the life of the Prophet in a way that ensures that he remains faithful to standards of both rationality and science while at the same time saving the extraordinary character of the Prophet's life itself. For example, in response to the strange events which, according to several traditions, accompanied the birth of Muhammad, such as the sudden drying up of the lake of Sala, Khan assures his readers that they are unreliable tales that "evidently appear to have been borrowed from the poets, who make use of the figure synecdoche [*sic*]." [16] In another passage, Khan subscribes to the tradition according to which the Prophet was born circumcised, but he immediately specifies that "[t]his, however, is by no means to be considered a marvel, or miracle, being merely a *lusus naturae*." [17] Similarly, the episode of Muhammad's night journey to Jerusalem is explained as a dream, something which "never occurred in the body, but was purely imaginary." [18] At the same time, Khan avoids any explaining away of episodes of revelation in a rationalistic fashion, e.g., as the result of epileptic seizures; there was no supernatural miracle involved, argues Khan, but divine agency is not questioned.[19] To the Christian critics who question the extraordinary tales related to the Prophet, Khan compares these tales to such extraordinary events like Jesus' multiplication of loaves and fishes.[20]

## BEDIÜZZUMAN SAID NURSI

An influential Qur'anic commentary was written at a different time and in a different cultural milieu by the Turkish religious reformer Bediüzzuman Said Nursi (1878-1960). The *Risale-i-Nur* or *Epistle of Light*, in fourteen books, was written by Nursi in order to explain the content of the Qur'an to large audiences.[21] Nursi faced the challenge of revivifying the Qur'an in a world that had just become disenchanted.[22] In addition, a major challenge was posed by Ottoman positivism at the end of the 19th century, with its conception of nature as dominated by impersonal forces.[23] Moreover, Nursi, who had travelled through St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Berlin, Vienna, and Switzerland,[24] knew and cherished the scientific-technological advancement of the "West," and he urged the Muslims to adopt it.[25]

In his writings, Nursi presents nature as a theophany, the display of God's signs, therefore reversing a materialistic discourse that he found in the Turkish philosophical debates of his times. [26] When it comes to supernatural events, Nursi subscribes to the traditional doctrine according to which they were given to the Prophet, as well as to other prophets and saints, to corroborate their claims.[27] However, Nursi adds to this another interesting doctrine; as the critic T. Edis observes, Nursi

> ...was not completely naïve about finding modern wonders in the Qur'an. He argued that the miracles in the Qur'an were described in obscure terms, to excite the curiosity of Muslims, to make it clear that wondrous feats were possible so that the believers would figure out how to realize these feats. In other words, Nursi combined the modernist tendency to naturalize scriptural miracle stories with the more traditional theme of locating all knowledge in the Qur'an.[28]

It is to be also remarked that wondrous, supernatural events were ascribed to Nursi himself in his lifetime, but he refused the role of miracle-maker.[29]

## SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATION AND SCIENTIFIC MIRACLES OF THE QUR'AN: ZAGHLOUL EL-NAGGAR

An interesting interpretative trend – one that had a major advocate and representative in the Egyptian Tantawi Jawhari (1862-1940), author of the *Jewels in the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (26 vols., 1923-1935) – is the so-called "scientific exegesis of the Qur'an" (*tafsir ilmy*).[30] According to this interpretative trend, numerous Qur'anic passages referring to natural phenomena can be best interpreted in the light of modern science. The supposed accuracy of such descriptions is taken as proof of divine revelation: who could have known these phenomena in depth? Certainly not the Prophet if even the most learned men of his time were unaware of them. So goes the argumentation. This approach was given unprecedented visibility in the twentieth century by a French surgeon and (supposed)

convert, Maurice Bucaille (1920-1998).[31] The scientific interpretation of the Qur'an, which already in the 1980s and 90s had inspired a flood of books and booklets, continues to flourish today on the Internet. There even exists a *Committee of Scientific Notions in the Qur'an*, a section of the Egyptian Ministry of Endowments, currently chaired by a professor of geology, Zaghloul El-Naggar (b. 1933), who is, himself, a media celebrity.[32] El-Naggar recommends approaching the Qur'an with both philological accuracy and scientific competence.[33] When it comes to the episode of the splitting of the moon mentioned in the opening of Sura 54, El-Naggar first advocates a strictly literal interpretation of its meaning: the verse refers to something that has actually happened, a miraculous and supernatural event beyond scientific comprehension. At the same time, El-Naggar propagates the popular narrative according to which the NASA astronauts, in one of their explorations of the lunar surface, discovered the signs of the Moon's fracture.[34] The discourse on "scientific miracles," as El-Naggar develops it, is therefore twofold: on the one hand, the meaning of "miracle" is defined with reference to the traditional concept of *ijaz* (the Qur'an's inimitability) though it is given a new meaning insofar as such inimitability coincides with the presence of notions unknown at the time of the Prophet; on the other hand, when it comes to the supernatural proper, a strictly literal reading is prescribed by El-Naggar. In the case of the splitting moon, for instance, we even have an intersection of the two strategies since it is claimed that a scientific discovery confirms the fact that the supernatural event took place.

## TWO MUSLIM PHYSICIST-PHILOSOPHERS: MEHDI GOLSHANI AND NIDHAL GUESSOUM

The contemporary debate on Islam and science is especially promoted by some Muslim scientists who, notwithstanding different ideas and nuances regarding the interpretation of specific matters, share some substantial traits; among those common traits relevant for the present essay I shall list their competence in contemporary physics, their rejection of the "scientific interpretation" of the Qur'an, their theistic outlook, their acceptance of science (even including Darwinian evolution) as methodologically independent and not in need of any reformation whatsoever, and their openness to other monotheistic religious traditions, which they consider to be equally able to establish a harmonious relationship with the natural sciences. Among such authors are the Iranian Mehdi Golshani (b. 1939) and the Algerian Nidhal Guessoum (b. 1960).[35]

Golshani is open towards the existence of miracles nowadays and interprets them by drawing on an argument elaborated by the Iranian cleric and thinker Murtaza Motahhari (1920-1979), and along a line of thought that is not extraneous to the analytical philosophy of science: miracles are events obeying laws of nature of which the witnesses of those very events are not aware. Such laws might cancel out the effect of known laws so to

give the impression of the suspension of the latter; that is not a supernatural suspension, however, but a natural one, according to principles unknown to the observer.[36] Golshani is also open to a metaphorical interpretation of Qur'anic verses describing supernatural phenomena.

Guessoum presents a nuanced interpretation. On the one hand, he embraces Golshani's theory, but he points out that in the case described by his Iranian colleague what we are talking about does not legitimately bear the label "supernatural" anymore: the existence of unknown laws is indeed constantly accepted as a possibility in scientific thought. On the other hand, "supernatural," meant as the suspension of the laws of nature, is rejected by Guessoum: in this sense, he cannot accept the literal reading of the splitting of the moon since it would entail phenomena that would not even be explainable by appealing to unknown laws – they would simply be against them and they happen to have left no detectable traces. Guessoum is rather inclined to save the expression "miracle" or "miraculous" for extraordinary events and, in a Muslim context, first and foremost for the Qur'an's inexhaustible openness to always new interpretations.[37]

## SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR AND JOHN HICK: GENERAL DOCTRINES AND IDEAS ON MIRACLES

Nasr's theories, expressed and defended in an impressive corpus of works, are based on extensive philosophical knowledge of Muslim and Christian/Western sources alike, as well as Sufi mysticism. World religions, according to Nasr, are all ultimately based on a primordial doctrine of unity; each and every revelation that substantiated them functioned as a "vertical" link between human affairs and divinity. Each world religion encapsulates a teaching whose core Nasr describes as *scientia sacra*; this reminds human beings of the transcendental unity of phenomena and of their divine source that can be grasped by a human yet, at the same time, divine faculty that Nasr calls intellect. The main distinction and shortcoming of science as it has been practised at first in post-Renaissance Europe, and later worldwide, is, according to Nasr, the missing appreciation of intellect in favour of purely quantitative reasoning. Science has thus been desacralized, and knowledge has been highly compartmentalized. The implementation of desacralized science results, according to Nasr, among other things, in contemporary ecological catastrophes. The solution, according to Nasr's vision, can only be a return to the traditional *scientia sacra*.[38]

An important historical stage in the gradual loss of awareness of the sacred, according to Nasr, was marked by Christian theological reflection; since Christian thinkers were trying to differentiate themselves from rampant Greek naturalistic doctrines they "drew an excessively tight boundary between the supernatural and the natural, leading to an impoverished view of nature"[39] By virtue of division, together with the constant emphasis on Christ's miraculous birth and life, according to Nasr, "the evidence of religion seemed to many a European mind to rely upon the

miracle which breaks the regularity of the laws observed in nature, whereas the regularity itself is no less evidence of…the Wisdom of God reflected in His creation."[40] Through Qur'anic concepts, according to Nasr, we can properly see the cosmos as theophany; in this perspective, "the fact that the sun does rise every morning is…as much cause for wonder as if it were to rise from the West tomorrow."[41] Nasr emphasizes the fact that in the Qur'an the same term, *ayat*, or "signs," that is used for supernatural phenomena, refers as well to natural ones and to the verses of the Qur'an itself.[42] "The Qur'an," in Nasr's words, "addresses not only men and women but the whole of the cosmos…[and] does not draw a clear line of demarcation between the natural and the supernatural, nor between the world of man and that of nature."[43] Furthermore, Nasr links the erroneous emphasis on the miraculous to another misled and misleading theoretical presupposition that he identifies in modern science and labels "uniformitarianism." It means "belief in the uniformity of 'laws of nature' over long periods of time and expanses of space." According to Nasr, such extrapolation is just another expression (and cause) of the ignorance of "multiple levels of existence."[44] Miracles, instead, precisely point to the existence of other levels: namely, they "mark an eruption of the Eternal order in the temporal." "In the occurrence of miracles," Nasr observes, "not only are the ordinary laws of physical existence penetrated by laws belonging to higher orders of reality, but the ordinary rapport between time and Eternity is drastically changed."[45] Once uniformitarianism is abandoned, according to Nasr, one can understand how "in days of old" one can have walked on water, and such a narrative is not perceived anymore as something that can be "explained away."[46]

The overall goal at which the reflections of the British philosopher and theologian John Hick aim, is to understand religion from a religious point of view,[47] attaining a justification of religion that focuses upon epistemological concepts[48] and is not bound to a specific confession.[49] Following Hick's theory, the basis of religion is an experience of the divine, which he calls "the Real" as well as "ultimate reality," and defines as "transcategorial," "beyond the range of categorial systems."[50] Such an experience, or encounter, is given through the human cognitive capacities[51] and is later conceptualized through concepts that are culturally determined: hence the many names given in different cultures to the same Real.[52] Religion as an institution, or as a corpus of doctrines, has the function both of a *constant reminder* and of a *filter* of the Real; in order to illustrate this latter point, Hick employs the image of a resistance in electronics.[53] Hick defines monotheistic creeds as post-axial religions: their emergence in his interpretation marked the realization not only of the existence of the Real, but also of a "limitless better possibility" disclosed to humanity,[54] whereas pre-axial religions had been oriented to the creation of a more stable sense of life.[55] The term "axial" precisely emphasizes the re-orientation of which consists, according to Hick, the liberation brought about by the major monotheistic religions, a liberation that is a transcending of the ego and of

the focus on humanity, or, in other words, the shift of balance from self-centredness to the Real;[56] moreover, the emergence of post-axial religions meant, according to Hick, the exhaustive identification and establishment of the ways of conceiving the ultimate itself.[57]

The human beings on whose life the Real impinges more directly are the saints, who have (or have had) "powerfully invasive experiences" stemming from the ultimate reality.[58] Beliefs can also be transmitted and inherited; therefore, more ordinary believers can be impressed by the moral and spiritual achievements of the saints themselves. However, this is, according to Hick, a "secondary kind of religious experience."[59] Faith, either stemming from the direct acquaintance of the Real, or emerging as a result of "second order" beliefs, is described by Hick as a cognitive choice: the choice to interpret the universe by assuming the existence and presence of God,[60] seen as an "anti-improbability factor"[61] and "experiencing events in history and in our own personal life as the medium of God's dealings with us."[62] The universe *per se* remains, according to Hick, "stubbornly ambiguous,"[63] and cognitive religious experience can well be delusive.[64] Hence, the cognitive choice of faith "has some of the characteristics of a wager."[65] However, Hick's central thesis is that it is rational to believe in God: "One who has a powerful and continuous sense of existing in the presence of God ought therefore to be convinced that God exists."[66]

Miraculous events are read by Hick in the light of his epistemological interpretation of religion; he summarizes his views on this point in a dense passage:

> a miracle, whatever else it may be, is an event through which we become vividly and immediately conscious of God as acting towards us. A startling happening, even if it should involve a suspension of a natural law, does not constitute for us a miracle in the religious sense of the word if it fails to make us intensely aware of being in God's presence. In order to be miraculous, an event must be experienced as religiously significant. Indeed we may say that a miracle is any event which is experienced as a miracle; and this particular mode of experiencing-as is accordingly an essential element in the miraculous.[67]

Elaborating on Hick's own principles, a miracle, as a mundane event among other events, shares the universe's stubborn ambiguity. In this sense, interpreting an event as miraculous, that is, as not only characterized by the amazement it immediately arouses, but specifically pointing at the existence and power of divinity, is equally the result of a private choice. Moreover, such an event is given within a private experience. Being a private event, it cannot establish someone else's faith as the element of a "demonstration." However, such an event, heard of or read of (i.e., in the form of a *narrative*), can equally be interpreted by another person, in his or her turn, as a miracle, by virtue of a *choice*.[68]

## SKETCH OF A HOLISTIC INTERPRETATION

To this point we have observed (a) what can be defined as "miraculous" within the Qur'an, (b) different attitudes towards the miraculous by Muslim authors and (c) Nasr's and Hick's general doctrines as well as their specific ideas on how to interpret miracles. It is time to let these elements converge and bring them together into a consistent, overall interpretation. We shall start by emphasizing again an observation drawn after perusing the Qur'an. Clearly, no univocal concept of "miracle" can be inferred from the revelation; and it must also be reckoned with the minimization of extraordinary events that we find in the revelation as well. It is also clear that the attitudes of the different authors cannot be reconciled with each other. How can we now sketch an interpretation that (i) respects the content of the scriptures, (ii) is sympathetic towards religion (and namely, that does not reject the religious relevance of miracles nor miracles *per se* and wholesale), that (iii) explains *why* so many different and sometimes irreconcilable characterizations of "miracle" emerge, and that (iv) does not coincide with a justification of each and any characterization of "miracle"?

In order to approach the goal that I have just stated I suggest, as a first step, to subscribe to Nasr's point according to which the Qur'an has to be read as containing a teaching that helps us to find the right approach, to be applied also to other sacred scriptures and traditions. Such teaching, I argue, is not a specific definition of miracle, but rather the multiplicity of meanings of the term "*aya*", together with the reference to the extraordinary events that we find as well in the Old and New Testament and the minimization of miracles (detectable in Jesus' doctrine as well). More precisely, what I am here defining as a teaching is not a single, specific definition of the term "miracle," supposedly to be obtained from the Qur'an, but precisely the richness of meanings that we are confronted with as soon as we try to identify any univocal notion of "miracle" or "sign:" whatever we choose as a starting point, we find ourselves in a net of terms and meanings. It can be observed that a similar richness is contained in the Old and New Testaments as well, yet the Qur'an, as Nasr himself points out, besides a recapitulation of the meanings that we find in the previous revelations, can be said to add an unprecedented emphasis on natural events presented as signs/miracles.

What I am pointing out is that the teaching consists in the multiplicity of meanings that cannot be reduced to a specific one without losing the others. In this sense, the explicit minimization of the importance of miracles such as the one we find in the aforementioned passage (Q 6, 8-10) is nothing but the explicit statement of a doctrine that emanates from the whole text *per se*. The Qur'an directs its readers' attention to signs, wonders, and natural phenomena, and at the same time, it lets their respective definitions intersect and overlap; in so doing it forces us to leave each and every one of these concepts open. Miracles, signs and phenomena are vital for acknowledging divinity but, at the same time, they are elusive.

The theoretician will never succeed in finding a specific, exhaustive definition: a definition can be more or less buttressed by Qur'anic passages, and therefore be more or less "Qur'anically solid," but it will never be *the* Qur'anic definition.[69]

In a sense, the existence itself of different interpretations of "miracles" seems to have just been explained: different interpretations are nothing but the different attempts at pinpointing a specific meaning of the term "miracle" or "sign." But we must not forget that we are specifically looking for an overall *epistemological* explanation, that is, an explanation of the existence of the *debate* on miracles (not of the concept of miracle!) that resorts to concepts related to the way in which we know and perceive reality. It is the Qur'an, once again, that helps us to find the right way, with its emphasis on the concept of "sign" *and* on the idea of "amazement" contained in the terms *i'jaz* as well as *mojiza*.[70] There is no such thing as "the" concept of miracle and yet there are similarities and relationships among all the terms and narratives I have identified.[71] Namely, they have in common what is defined (or perceived) as miraculous and *functions as a sign* pointing at divinity and what *is said to arouse amazement.*

Am I slipping back to an approach according to which "the" Qur'anic definition of "miracle" can be identified? No. Such similarities cannot be used as reductive and univocal definitions of "miracle" since they are both open. An *act of interpretation* is namely always needed to bestow on an event or an entity the function of being a sign for something else, and such an act is always given in a network of relationships and conventions that, in the end, depend on a *choice. Amazement,* in its turn, is equally open, since as a feeling, it is always culturally determined: for instance, a person later in life ceases to be amazed at things that amazed her at the age of ten, and it can be easily agreed that even the human beings most ahead of their time two hundred years ago would be amazed at some of the fruits of contemporary technology that we just take for granted. Finally, not all that is amazing is necessarily religiously significant and/or connected with the supernatural.

The epistemological interpretation of the existence of the debate on miracles is now gradually emerging. I propose that the reason why theologians and philosophers so heatedly debate "miracles" and define them so differently is that, while ignoring that there is no such thing as "the" concept of miracle in the sacred scriptures, these interpretations are also induced to ceaselessly define and re-define miracles by virtue of the openness itself of "signs" as entities that are treated as such by way of a decision, and of an "amazement" that is a culturally determined feeling.

We have seen that Nasr maintains that miracles were, despite their intrinsic openness in the foundational events and texts of Christianity, prevailingly defined as supernatural, when early Christian authors aimed at distinguishing their respective doctrines from Greek, naturalistic ones. Besides this specific, historical criticism, I think that Nasr shows himself here to have realized the existence of an important phenomenon. A second

step on the interpretation of miracles that I see realized by Nasr, and that I suggest we take, is that the debate on miracles, i.e., the specific ways in which the concepts of miracles are characterized, is historically and culturally determined. By virtue of their intrinsic openness, miracles were and are constantly debated and characterized in various ways that strictly depend(ed) on specific worldviews, and, in particular, on specific perceptions of natural science. In other words, specific discussions of the miraculous are nothing but negotiations over what has to be considered a sign and/or amazing within the horizon of a specific culture.

It shall at this point become clearer why the doctrines that I have chosen to take as a testing ground are particularly significant. Not only are they are based on the Qur'an, but they also mirror the phenomenon that I have just pointed out. Clearly, all the authors referred to here want to save the significance of miracles and signs, presented as amazing, But, at the same time, they strive to describe the amazement according to categories that they find in tune with the expectations of their respective readerships and/or what they perceive, by virtue of the state of the art in their time and/or of their individual competences, as scientifically sound doctrines. Khan tries to save the extraordinariness of the events connected to the life of Muhammad but, at the same time, he steers away from the "supernatural" that might hurt the positivistic feelings of the cultural milieu he admires so much. Nursi, on the one hand, shows caution in not venturing into an articulated theory of the supernatural, but he decisively adds to miracles, meant as amazing tales, a didactic role: whatever they really were, such extraordinary events point at what we might attain by virtue of science and technology. Such doctrine goes hand in hand with the emphasis on natural signs: they are referred to in the Qur'an in order to stimulate our own observation.

In the "scientific interpretation of the Qur'an," the emphasis shifts from the supernatural to the natural, but still, the role of the scientific notions which are supposedly to be found in the Qur'an and that are frequently emphasized in this kind of commentary, is analogous to that of supernatural narratives: both a supernatural event and the presence of a scientific notion in the revelation are indeed seen as amazing and unexplainable if not referred to the work of the divinity whose existence and power they confirm. Two birds are killed with the same stone, as it were, when the pre-existing doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'an hijacks the prestige of modern science, and science's supposed Western/foreign character is bypassed or neutralized. This can be explained in relation to the fact that the first authors who extensively embarked on this kind of exegesis worked and communicated in a colonial context in which science was perceived as culturally foreign and as an instrument of power. In more recent times, El-Naggar, as we have seen, tries to save both the way of reasoning typical of the scientific interpretation of the Qur'an *and* the supernatural, when he appeals to staunch literalism and at the same time to the inexplicability of supernatural events in scientific terms. His reader is,

therefore, invited to deepen (and perhaps extend) the Qur'anic references to the natural world in order to demonstrate the scripture's harmony with science. Yet the same reader should at the same time just accept miraculous narratives as simply having happened and not attempt any analysis whatsoever. Undoubtedly, this constitutes a very reassuring discourse for a readership that is looking for a way to consolidate faith in a modern world dominated by technology, and to feel that science and technology enjoy an original and superior connection to one's creed. Golshani and Guessoum, finally, redefine the amazement in terms that they find more consistent with a solid understanding of contemporary science and with a taste for philosophical rigour.

This kind of reading does not exclude, of course, that one specific interpretation can be deemed more sound, scientific, or consistent than another. For example, one can agree that Guessoum's definition of "miracle" is much more in tune with a scientifically updated culture than the concept of "miracle" emerging from the "scientific interpretation of the Qur'an;" however, what causes and characterizes the emergence of all such characterizations and doctrines is one and the same cultural phenomenon, grounded in an epistemological one. [72]

At this point it can be observed that the explanation of the emergence of the debate on miracles, in the terms so far suggested, leaves the door open to the ideas (a) that miracles can be falsely claimed and (b) that they can be the result of a deceptive experience. Moreover, the interpretation so far sketched clearly highlights and explains the variety and diversity of events and objects that can be defined as miraculous. This should defuse the refusal of miracles *en bloc* – as well as the idea according to which different miracles in different religions cancel out each other.

It is time to let Hick's ideas enter into the picture. So far, all the interpretative elements that I have highlighted can be said to be in tune with his particular interpretation of miraculous events – one concentrated in the passage that I have extensively quoted above. Hick, indeed, does concentrate on the semantic function of miracles, but at the same time de-emphasizes their characterization as supernatural, and, finally, points at amazement as a relevant feature of miracles. All this connects with the observations drawn from Nasr's suggestions. We can show that such elements can be seen as in tune with Hick's general interpretation of religion. We can focus on amazement and claim that such feeling is (not exclusively) the main emotional by-product of any individual experience of axial re-orientation. Amazement is, in other words, the emotion that accompanies the experiences that mark the irruption of Reality into the saint's life and/or that characterizes the impact of the saint's deeds on those who observe them or listen to the tales of such deeds.[73] If we subscribe to this last point, we understand why amazement is so central in religion without signifying what religion is all about. Amazement indeed is not only open in the way I have previously described, but is also a *private feeling*. In order to grasp the relevance of this last observation we shall recall at this

point Hick's distinction between first and second-order beliefs. A saint *can* well point at the amazement that she or he has intimately felt during an episode of revelation; yet, a specific feeling of amazement, individually experienced under particular circumstances, remains incommunicable, and as soon as it is narrated and/or conceptualized, the narrative and/or concept inevitably slip(s) into the culturally determined mechanism that I have previously reconstructed. Those who observe or listen to the saint's life and who consider a specific fact, event, or object as proof of divinity, can, in a stubbornly ambiguous universe, find justification for their view, but the ascription of a miraculous character to such events is basically the result of an individual choice. In other words, someone can claim that he or she has experienced a miraculous and amazing event, assume and narrate it as a sign pointing at divinity, but still, his or her narrative does not coincide with the original experience itself, nor does it necessarily carry the same emotional meaning for another person; it remains open to that person to believe or disbelieve it, and to understand it in his or her turn as a sign, except when some other, and stronger, reason has not divested that very fact of its aura of amazement.

From the interpretation that I have just sketched, it follows that the partially overlapping and essentially open concepts associated with the terms "sign", "amazement", and "miracle" are an essential part of religion but at the same time they *are not and cannot be* what religion and faith are all about. Religious thinkers are bound to discuss them endlessly, in the fruitless attempt at pinning them down to a specific definition. Any specific definition will irremediably (1) leave out some meanings mirrored in the scriptures, (2) be eroded by the shift of "amazement" as a culturally determined feeling and, finally, and perhaps even more essentially, any specific definition (3) will irremediably be useless as a "demonstration" of divinity and/or of the truth of religion, given both the privacy of feelings and the fact that the choice of considering something as a sign is individual and open. Unless she explicitly takes "miracle" as the short form for a specific cluster of concepts that she intends to discuss, any thinker who attempts to define miracles will resemble someone who is looking for the point where the rainbow touches the ground.[74] Similarly, no one will ever be able to produce an exhaustive and convincing refutation of religion through the criticism of miracles. Miracles, whatever they are and despite the fact that some religious authors may be convinced of the opposite, do *not* demonstrate the truth of faith, nor do they automatically induce faith; hence, even if we hypothesize that some especially committed and meticulous atheist may be able to debunk them all, their refutation will never amount to a destruction of faith itself.

What I have proposed is only a sketch. This interpretation has to be extended to the study of other characterizations of "miracle" put forth by other authors. Moreover, if fully embraced, it should induce a dramatic reconsideration of the way in which institutional religions deal with miracles (for example, in the Catholic procedure of canonization) but also

of the way in which the miraculous is dealt with in popular beliefs. Furthermore, an interpretative problem is posed by the fact that miracles are present and claimed also in pre-axial religions: an interpretation based on Hick's ideas should accommodate this fact. Finally, the subscription to Hick's principles seems to point to the irreducible privacy of religious experience that seems at risk of slipping into solipsism, with all the philosophical difficulties that this entails. What seems to always be decisive in religion is a choice: for the saints, the choice of interpreting individual amazing experiences as pointing at divinity and conducive to re-orientation; for simple believers the choice of interpreting the saints' narratives as equally faith-conducive. As the reader might at this point realize, all this calls for a critical re-thinking of theological concepts, as well as of religious beliefs and practices, on a large scale. However, such problem is beyond the ambition of these pages.[75]

## NOTES

[1] For an introduction to this debate, see for instance T. McGrew, "Miracles", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.) at URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/miracles/, accessed October 25, 2012. See also R. M. Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1952); L. Monden, *Het Wonder* (Antwerp: De Standaard; Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1960)— English translation, *Signs and Wonders. A Study of the Miraculous Element in Religion* (New York and Tournai: Desclee Company, 1966); C. F. D. Moule, ed., *Miracles. Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History* (London: A. R. Mobway & Co., 1965); R. Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (London: Macmillan, 1970); B. Bron, *Das Wunder. Das theologische Wunderverständnis im Horizont des neuzeitlichen Natur- und Geschichtsbegriffs* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979); R. M. Burns, *The Great Debate on Miracles. From Joseph Glanvill to David Hume* (London/Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981); C. Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984); D. Basinger and R. Basinger, eds., *Philosophy and Miracle. The Contemporary Debate* (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); R. Swinburne, *Miracles* (London/New York: Macmillan, 1989); M. Levine, "Miracles," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2003), http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/miracles/, accessed on Oct. 25, 2012; M. Corner, *Signs of God. Miracles and their Interpretation* (London: Ashgate, 2005); D. Corner, *The Philosophy of Miracles,* (London: Continuum, 2007); M. E. Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders. The Development of the Concept of Miracle*, 1150-1350 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); G. H. Twelftree, *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

For Hume's theory, see D. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section 10: *On Miracles*), in R. Swinburne, *Miracles*, pp. 23-40.

[2] *"Das Wunder ist des Glaubens liebstes Kind"* (*Faust* 1, 766).

[3] A. Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy. The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998) convincingly argues against such idea. However, this otherwise accurate and dense comparative study, enriched by interviews with the two thinkers, too often mixes empirical reconstruction and critical judgement, especially when it comes to Hick's ideas.

[4] My philosophical investigations over the past years have been focused on the debate on miracles, especially in the Muslim world, which I am striving to empirically reconstruct and holistically interpret. I have used the empirical sections (§§2-5), with some changes, in other essays; the interpretation through the ideas of Nasr and Hick, here offered to the reader, is original.

[5] Cf. also H. Stieglecker, *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1983), pp. 161-69; 189-338; 372-408; T. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran. Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), pp. 22, 49, 66 and chapter VI; T. Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), pp. 122, 124; D. Gril, "Les fondements scripturaires du miracle en islam," in D. Aigle, ed., *Miracle et kārāma* (Brepols: Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, 2000), pp. 237-49.

[6] A similar richness of meanings can be found in the Bible. Miracles in the Old Testament are usually performed by or through Prophets in order to confirm their power and affect history. The most well-known miracles are connected to Moses and the exodus: e.g., Moses' staff (actually his brother Aaron's) turns into a snake (Ex 4, 3), the waters of the Red Sea are divided (Ex 14,21), manna feeds the Hebrews in the desert (Ex 16,12). In Biblical Hebrew here is no single word for "miracle;" different terms are used, each one underlining a different aspect of the general concept obtained by connecting the different senses: (1) *'oth*, "sign" (e.g.: Ex 7,3; Dt 4,34; 6,22; 7,19, 34,11); (2) *mophet*, "portent" (e.g.: Ps 71,7); (3) *niphla'ot*, "wonders" (e.g.: Ps 107,24); (4) *geburah*, "act of power" (e.g: Dt 3,24); (5) *nes*, "signal" (only once: Nu 26,10—later largely employed in the Talmudic literature). In the New Testament, wonders are worked and signs are given mostly by Jesus but also by his apostles and later followers, for instance, Paul. Different terms occur in the New Testament as well: (1) *dynamis*, "power", or "mighty work" (e.g.: Mt 11,20 ff.; Mk 6,2); (2) *ergon*, "work" (e.g.: Jn 9,3); (3) *semeion*, "sign" (e.g.: Jn 2,11; 4,54); (4) *teras*, "portent", "prodigy" (combined with the preceding in the expression *semeia kai terata*, e.g.: Ac 2,43); (5) *thaumasia*, "wonders" (e.g Mt 21,15); (6) *paradoxa*, "paradoxical events" (e.g.: Lc 5,26).

[7] *"(7) And even if We had sent down to you, [O Muhammad], a written scripture on a page and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, 'This is not but obvious magic.' (8) And they say, 'Why was there not sent down to him an angel?' But if We had sent down an angel, the matter would have been decided; then they would not be reprieved. (9) And if We had made him an angel, We would have made him [appear as] a man, and We would have covered them with that in which they cover themselves. (10) And already were messengers ridiculed before you, but those who mocked them were enveloped by that which they used to ridicule."* Such de-emphasis is paralleled in the New Testament in a passage such as Mt 8, 11-13: "(11) *The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.* (12) *He sighed deeply and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.'* (13) *Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side*."

[8] Cf. J. Horowitz, "The Growth of the Mohammed Legend," in U. Rubin, ed., *The Life of Muhammad* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 269-278; and K. L. Woodward, *The Book of Miracles: the Meaning of the Miracle Stories in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), pp. 173-205.

[9] Cf. A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 284-302; R. Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes. Theologien und Erscheinungsformen des islamischen Heiligenwunders* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987); K. L. Woodward, *The Book of Miracles*, pp. 206-230.

[10] Cf. the 1958 edition of his *Treatise.*

[11] Cf. Ibn Kathīr, *The Miracles of the Prophet*, tr. Nancy Eweiss and Selma Cook (Alexandria, Egypt: Dar Al-Manarah 2002)—a partial translation of his treatise *al-Bidayah wa'an-Nihayah* (*The Beginning and the End*).

[12] Cf. Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes*, pp. 16-18; A. Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God. A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 187; É. Geoffroy, "Attitudes contrastées des mystiques musulmans face au miracle," in D. Aigle, *Miracle et kārāma,* pp. 301-16; B. Radtke, "al-Hakhīm al-Tirmidhī on Miracles," in D. Aigle, *Miracle et kārāma,* pp. 287-99. The topic of miracles did not leave indifferent the major figures of Islamic philosophy either. The problem of the extraordinary was particularly connected with that of causation, whose discussion was suggested by the Greek texts preserved, transmitted and interpreted by Arabic scholars. For instance, Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) defended the idea that miracles are possible as divine interventions in the setting of causes and effects whereas Ibn Rush (sometimes called Averroes, 1126-1198) rather defended the centrality of the miracle of the Qur'an. For a comparative analysis, cf. B. Kogan, "The Philosophers Al-Ghazali and Averroes on

Necessary Connection and the Problem of the Miraculous," in P. Morewedge, ed., *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (New York: Delmar, 1981), pp. 113-32.

[13] See the reconstruction and criticism in A. Ahmed, "Miracles: A Philosophical Analysis," *Science-Religion Dialogue*, at: http://www.hssrd. org/journal/fallsummer2003-2004/english/miracles.htm    (2003/2004), accessed Oct. 25 2012.

[14] S. A. Khan, *Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2008), p. 9.

[15] Khan, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 17.

[16] Khan, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 194.

[17] Khan, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 200.

[18] Khan, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 206. Cf. also pp. 329 ff.

[19] Cf. Khan, *Life of Muhammad*, pp. 209-10.

[20] Cf. Khan, *Life of Muhammad*, pp. 212-13. Khan's polemical target is mainly the Scottish author Sir William Muir, with his *Life of Mahomet* (1858-1861). Cf. also p. 337.

[21] Nursi's work is characterized by a peculiar convoluted and repetitive style. This is explained by various factors: Nursi was born in the village of Nurs, province of Bitlis, where Kurdish and Armenian were the languages of the local population while Turkish was the language of authorities and bureaucracy; he learned Turkish after the age of 20. Moreover, Nursi was influenced by works which displayed an elliptic style, for instance, by the mystic Ibn al-Arabi, and, finally, the blending of religion, poetry, and mythology was common in his milieu, which still displayed the characters of an oral culture. Cf. S. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey. The Case of Bediüzzuman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 36-7, 171, 176-77. The *Risale-i-Nur* is still very influential for the Nurculus movement, which emerged in Western Turkey in the 1920s. The commentary is not entirely available in English, but it rather circulates in single volumes, such as B. S. Nursi*, Prophet Muhammad and His Miracles* (Somerset, New Jersey: The Light, 2006).

[22] Cf. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, p. 37.

[23] Cf. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change,* p. 39.

[24] Cf. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, p. 89.

[25] Cf. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, p. 87. Nursi was also aware of the importance of technology in view of religious propaganda; he, for instance, compared the radio to a Qur'an reader with "a million tongues" (Cf. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, p. 38).

[26] Cf. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, p. 93.

[27] Cf. Nursi, *Prophet Muhammad and His Miracles*, pp. 1-19, 25-30 and *passim*.

[28] Cf. T. Edis, *An Illusion of Harmony: Science and Religion in Islam* (New York: Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2007), pp. 92-3. Mardin

states that in Nursi's "hybrid metaphors […] technology is made to serve the ends of religion" (Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, p. 82).

[29] Cf. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, pp. 75, 188.

[30] Cf. R. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary" in J. D. McAuliffe, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002), pp. 124-41; A. Rippin, *Muslims. Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 238-41; A. Dallal, *Islam, Science and the Challenge of History* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 169-72.

[31] Cf. M. Bucaille, *La Bible, le Coran et la Science. Les Ecritures Saintes examinées à la lumière des conaissances modernes* (Paris: Seghers, 1976); M. Bucaille, *What is the Origin of Man?* (Paris: Seghers, 1984); M. Bucaille, *Moses and Pharaoh: The Hebrews in Egypt—Teachings of the Holy Scriptures and History* (Tokyo: NTT Mediascope, 1994). Cf. also S. Bigliardi "Snakes from Staves? Science, Scriptures and the Supernatural in Maurice Bucaille," *Zygon, Journal for Religion and Science*, 46 (4), 2011: 793-805; and S. Bigliardi, "The Strange Case of Dr. Bucaille: Notes for a Re-examination," *The Muslim World*, 102/2 (2012): 248-63.

[32] Cf. G. Nkrumah, "Zaghloul El-Naggar: Scientific Being," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, available at: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/769/profile.htm (2005), accessed on Oct. 25, 2012.

[33] Cf. Z. R. M. El-Naggar, *Vérités scientifiques dans le noble Coran* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Marefah, 2008), pp. 17-23. See also Z. R. M. El-Naggar, *Scientific Facts Revealed in the Glorious Qur'ān* (Cairo: Shorouk Intl, 2006).

[34] Cf. Z. R. M. El-Naggar, *Scientific Precision in the Sunnah. Quotations from the Sayings of Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.)* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Marefah, 2010), pp. 69-73.

[35] I offer here a partial bibliography: M. Golshani, *From Physics to Metaphysics* (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997); M. Golshani, *The Holy Qur'an and the Sciences of Nature. A Theological Reflection* (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2003); M. Golshani, *Issues in Islam and Science* (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2004); N. Guessoum, "The Qur'an, Science, and the (Related) Contemporary Muslim Discourse," *Zygon* 43/2 (2008): 411-31; N. Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question. Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011). Cf. also S. Bigliardi, "Barbour's Typologies and the Contemporary Debate on Islam and Science," *Zygon, Journal for Religion and Science* 27/3 (2012): 501-19; S. Bigliardi, "The Contemporary Debate on the Harmony between Islam and Science: Emergence and Challenges of a New Generation," *Social Epistemology* 2013, forthcoming. While reporting "personal communication" I am referring to material acquired during one-on-one interviews and to be organized in the (unpublished) monograph *Islam and*

*the Quest for Modern Science. Five Conversations with Muslim Scientists on Islam, Science, and Miracles.*

[36] Personal communication. Cf. also Golshani, *The Holy Qur'an and the Sciences of Nature*, pp. 310-11.

[37] Personal communication. Cf. also Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question*, pp. 329-33.

[38] For an overarching reconstruction of Nasr's views, cf. L. Stenberg, *The Islamization of Science. Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity* (Lund: Religionshistoriska avdelningen, Lund universitet, 1996), chapter 2.

[39] Cf. S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p. 35.

[40] Cf. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 193.

[41] Cf. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 195.

[42] Cf. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred,* p. 192.

[43] Cf. S. H. Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (London: Curzon Press, 1993), p. 130.

[44] Cf. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred,* p. 209.

[45] Cf. Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science,* p. 34.

[46] Cf. Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science,* p. 161.

[47] Cf. J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. xiii, xxv.

[48] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* p. xv.

[49] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, pp. xxv, 1.

[50] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. xix.

[51] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. xxi.

[52] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 11.

[53] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 163.

[54] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 12.

[55] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 23.

[56] J. Hick, *A John Hick Reader*, ed. Paul Badham (London: MacMillan, 1990), p. 169.

[57] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 28-31.

[58] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 230.

[59] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 221-22, 259; cf. also *A John Hick Reader*, pp. 53, 55.

[60] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 210; cf. also *A John Hick Reader*, p. 46.

[61] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 86.

[62] *A John Hick Reader*, p. 58.

[63] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 104.

[64] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 226.

[65] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 210.

[66] Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 216, his emphasis.

[67] *A John Hick Reader*, p. 47.

[68] In this sense, rather than religion's dearest child, as Goethe held, wonder might perhaps be better described, metaphorically, as faith's brother (it can go hand in hand with faith) or parent (it can generate it). However, the ambiguity of "wonder," denoting both amazement and puzzlement, renders the translation of Goethe's verse particularly felicitous in the light of the theory just sketched. The witness to a miraculous event, or those confronted with miraculous narratives, will constantly oscillate, in amazement and wonder, between faith and doubt.

[69] Some authors rightly appreciate the multiplicity of meanings, but then identify "the" Qur'anic doctrine as, for instance, identifying miracles and signs, or miracles and natural phenomena (cf. for instance, A. Ahmed, "Miracles: A Philosophical Analysis"). All such interpretations are founded on the Qur'an, but they are not "the" Qur'anic teaching. It can be said that the Qur'an is the teaching.

[70] Such terms have Biblical/"Western" parallels in the terms *semeion* and *miraculum* respectively (cf. the German *Wunder* and the English *wonder*).

[71] Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* § 66.

[72] This pertains, in my opinion, also to Nasr's own usage of the concept of "miracle" when he himself emphasizes the characterization of miracles as supernatural in order to unhinge "uniformitarianism", or, in other words, what he perceives as the mainstream and misguided understanding of science. This is, once more, an instrumental usage of the concept of miracle, carried out to oppose a specific theory and in strict dependence on a (rather idiosyncratic) definition of science. I, therefore, suggest that we not incorporate this particular doctrine into the interpretation of miracles *à la* Nasr and Hick, but rather to take it as a specific example of how the cultural phenomenon of the discussion over miracles develops and in a way that Nasr himself helps us to understand it.

[73] My reader will not fail to realise that such a doctrine is in harmony with the specifically Muslim one I have previously recalled. This, in turn, reinforces the subscription to Nasr's doctrine of the special wisdom contained in Islam itself, which helps us to retrospectively understand also previous creeds.

[74] This kind of explanation allows us to draw some critical observations, and namely to deem some specific ways in which miracles are discussed as especially misguided. For instance, in the light of such interpretation, the discourse on the "scientific miracles of the Qur'an" (when, for example, an author claims that the Qur'an contains an allusion to quantum physics) can be interpreted as an invalid characterization of "miracle" in various ways: (1) it lets "natural" and "supernatural" unnecessarily overlap; (2) it depends on, and encourages, a maimed understanding of science; (3) it is upheld on the basis of a wrong understanding of science, since it is aimed at bypassing the (supposed)

Western character of science itself; and finally (4) amazement is needlessly invoked as a "demonstration" of the divinity of the Qur'an.

[75] The first version of this paper was delivered at the symposium on *Religious Wisdom and Perennial Philosophy: East and West - La sagesse religieuse et la «philosophia perennis» en Orient et en Occident* held on May 30-31, 2012 at St. Jerome's University, Waterloo (ON). I warmly thank all the participants for their constructive and inspiring criticism. These pages are dedicated to Giulia Lasagni, *compagna di avventure canadesi e amica di una vita*.

# THE ANTI-PHILOSOPHY OF WITTGENSTEIN AND AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Robbie Moser

## INTRODUCTION

Ludwig Wittgenstein is sometimes said to have invented a method of doing philosophy that is entirely unprecedented in the Western tradition. Here I would like to call attention to two parallels between Wittgenstein's method and the mature conception of philosophy set forth by the medieval Sufi mystic al-Ghazālī (*c.* 1056-1111). The first is that philosophy should be conducted as therapy. The second is that this conception of philosophy was borne from very similar considerations about misuse and abuse of language in the enduring human struggle for certainty.

I will present my case in three sections. In this introductory section I will state the conception of philosophy that al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein share. In the second section I give some background on how each came to his conception of philosophy, distinguishing between philosophy that aims at certain truths and philosophy that aims to relieve us of the craving for such certainty. In the third section I show how Wittgenstein's and al-Ghazālī's treatment of rational disputation in natural theology displays the central features of their shared vision of philosophy. In the fourth section I summarize the discussion and show how al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein may be said to share a view of philosophy that is called "anti-philosophy," taking care to distinguish between the sorts of philosophy discussed in section 2. Finally, I conclude by presenting some worries for al-Ghazālī's and Wittgenstein's vision and suggesting a possible reply to each.

Al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein both present the task of philosophy as purely therapeutic. Careful therapy relieves the would-be philosopher of the craving to ask philosophical questions. Since philosophical problems emerge only from misunderstandings – e.g., misunderstanding how words are used, or the differences between sciences – a person cannot be muddled in a philosophical problem if she commands a clear view of the norms and practices of her various communities (religious, scientific, socioeconomic, etc.). But attending to these norms and practices is not a "philosophical" endeavor, any more than studying and practicing music or accounting is philosophical. The safest way to avoid philosophical confusion is not to engage in the modes of disputation and argumentation so common in philosophy. Doing philosophy is an art that should be treated as therapy or medicine, and should be learned only by those who continually show their instructors an ability to guard against abuse and confusion of terms and discourses. These philosophers should do philosophical therapy only for those with particular illnesses, i.e., confusions about the proper role of

words and concepts. But the general rule is that the would-be philosopher maintains a healthy peace of mind by staying away from disputation.

For both al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein, this form of disputation was especially pernicious when it was used in natural theology. Al-Ghazālī treats these subjects explicitly in some of his written material meant for his students and the broader public. The remarks from Wittgenstein that I will draw on were recorded mainly in his private notebooks or relayed by friends and students. These remarks are not often taken to bear directly on Wittgenstein's philosophical method. But I hope to show here how central his few remarks on religious belief are to his entire conception of philosophy. Considering him alongside al-Ghazālī accentuates both how Wittgenstein's thinking about religious belief draws on and deepens his conception of human nature, and also the resultant quietism that is often taken to be a sort of 'anti-philosophy'.[1]

## PHILOSOPHY, GOOD AND BAD

Wittgenstein had been influenced early on by a style of philosophy that proceeded by analysis of concepts and terms, formal argumentation, and identification of first principles. He believed he had mastered and "solved all problems of philosophy" and subsequently went off to war and then to various occupations in his native Vienna. Gradually, Wittgenstein was persuaded that there was more to be said after all. But, as far as traditional philosophy goes, he seemed to remain convinced that his early work showed just how far it could be taken, and what its ultimate goals and consequences will be. When he returned to professional philosophy in 1929, Wittgenstein had begun to grow suspicious of the entire practice of philosophy. He began to use the term "philosophy" to refer to two very different practices. On the one hand, philosophy is a dangerous activity borne of the persistent misuse and abuse of language. This misuse of language generates confusions and neuroses about what must exist, what we must do, and what rules and principles guide and bind our thought and actions. We are plagued by "pathologies" in our thinking.[2] Not all of them are brought on by the practice of philosophy, but they are almost always exacerbated by it.

On the other hand, philosophy is also the name for the dialectical treatment of these very confusions and neuroses. Having been influenced by what he knew of Freud's psychoanalytic method, Wittgenstein developed a characterization of proper philosophical method as therapy and of the philosopher as therapist. Wittgenstein thought: "The philosopher treats a question; like an illness."[3] Wittgenstein considered himself not to be arguing for this conception and method of philosophy. Doing philosophy as if it was meant to proceed by disputation to establish enduring philosophical theses would be to practice philosophy as it always had been done. Rather, now Wittgenstein understood philosophy as a kind of persuasion. Doing philosophy properly means to persuade a student to consider perennial

philosophical problems as infections or pathologies, as a therapist urges a patient to see a persistent thought or behavior as a maladaptive hindrance. According to this view, philosophy and therapy are each more art than science. Therapeutic philosophy is a practice of apt and empathic gesture and articulation, to provide students and patients with reminders and reframing for how to see their predicament or confusion. The philosopher presents the student with "portrayals and descriptions" of the student's questions and intentions in posing philosophical problems.[4] It is eventually revealed that their confusion is the result of their own persistent clinging to a picture or practice that covertly puts demands on thought and language that are shown to be impossible or impractical. The most general case of this confused persistence is in what Wittgenstein calls "our craving for generality."[5] This craving for generality takes the form of looking for some familiar feature common to many different (indeed, all) things or subjects we encounter. For example, we often want new and unexplored subjects to be of the same character as our preferred and familiar subjects. It is often comfortable for new tasks to be very much like known tasks, with the same methods of proceeding and the same expectations for results.

The examples Wittgenstein has in mind are logic and mathematics – the methods of proof and the standards of exactitude in those practices are very impressive to us. We often want the level of certainty that we can find there to be available in other areas of our lives as well. But since other areas of our lives are not open to achieving such certainty, we grow anxious and cling to models or pictures of certainty that can be found in logical demonstration. But Wittgenstein wants to point out how we often very comfortably proceed in our normal, ordinary and customary rituals and practices. We do not need mathematical certainty in all parts of our life. In this way, the philosopher, like the therapist, aims only to lead people out of their own anxious preoccupations.

Al-Ghazālī was a well-known jurist and theologian in twelfth-century Baghdad. Today he is among the most widely read of the early Islamic philosophers and theologians. He began to read the works of the Sufi mystics around the year 1095.[6] During this period of study he fell ill, losing the ability to concentrate and even to speak, and was unable to continue his legal and academic work. He decided that his illness was brought on by his attachment to worldly cares. He left Baghdad and retreated to the Damascene wilderness to meditate on the Sufi way. After ten years studying, meditating, and informally teaching his new ideas, he somewhat reluctantly returned to teaching in state-sponsored schools. But the message of his teaching had changed dramatically.

Prior to his departure from Baghdad, al-Ghazālī taught that philosophy was full of confusions and fictions.[7] Now, after his 10-year period of practicing Sufi mysticism, al-Ghazālī had extended this same view to natural theology. The Islamic theologians, along with the philosophers, are guilty of propagating confusions and fictions. What is common to both the theologians and the philosophers is "systematic discourse." For al-

Ghazālī this means the art of disputation, adhering to the rules of a logical system with the goal of demonstrating and justifying a conclusion. [8] Theologians gradually have abandoned the proper activity of theology – which is to describe and safeguard revelation – and they have taken up the perverse task of many philosophers, "searching deeply into the nature of things […by] research into substance, accidents, and natural laws."[9] There is nothing wrong with such philosophical research in itself. But the problem, for al-Ghazali, is with its perversion: philosophers and theologians expect their investigations to yield the character of necessity and degree of certainty we expect from logic and mathematics. As part of their training, theologians and philosophers learn logic and mathematics among the dialectical arts. Many of them become convinced that conclusions about all other matters should have the same formal and epistemic qualities as the structures in logic and mathematics. What they do not see, says al-Ghazālī, is that logic and mathematics have nothing whatsoever to do with the important truths and practices that free and heal the human spirit from its trials and anxieties.

This perversion is one toward which intellectuals are especially prone. This is the perversion toward insisting on necessary truths. The quest for necessary truths is itself not a bad thing, for al-Ghazālī. That quest is a natural human inclination. But the perversion occurs when we think we have found irrefutable truths in any one science, and subsequently hold all other sciences and practices to the standard of exactness we find in our special domain. The result of the trials and anxieties of philosophy, for both Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī, is skepticism.[10] And both Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī stress that the sciences of logic and mathematics cannot help anyone out of their own skepticism.

Al-Ghazālī emphasized that disputation is like a potent medicine that can both harm and heal, and only the skilled and experienced practitioner should administer it. Philosophers are encouraged to learn logic carefully, under the keen and watchful eye of the master who has the best interests of the pupil at heart. But al-Ghazālī is quick to point out that it is not the *debate* itself that will cure the unbeliever.[11] The debate is merely the clinic in which the cure must be administered. Much like for Wittgenstein, the view here is that philosophy is only done in special circumstances, when a person "says something philosophical," or, in al-Ghazālī's case, heretical. Rational disputation by itself simply hardens the hearts of the disputants, especially those who are gifted in the dialectical arts. As a result, these disputants cling more fiercely to their philosophical or heretical conclusions, continuing to press on with logical disputation in search of necessary truths. Accordingly, al-Ghazālī insisted that Muslims have a moral obligation *not* to argue or offer reasons in dispelling heresy and atheism: it will only cause the unbelievers to persist in their heresy.[12] Wittgenstein likewise thought that professional philosophy was infected with many vices, and he often discouraged his students from pursuing careers in it.

It is important to note how it is the *misuse* of logic that is pernicious and damning. Nothing is wrong with logic and disputation taken by themselves. For both Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī, the tools of philosophers are perfectly helpful and innocuous when used in their proper place. For example, "disputation," for al-Ghazālī, is applied properly and usefully in jurisprudence and political matters. Again, some logical norms of disputation are important when a legislator or judge must decide upon a particular case, or how best to interpret new legislation to fit with the aims of the old. But the sort of rational disputation at work here does not concern philosophical proofs of the law's validity – that would be to question the revealed truths and principles of justice. Rather, disputation in legislation and jurisprudence concerns knowledge of the law and knowledge of how best to interpret and apply it in the light of revealed justice. This seems to be the sort of debate and practice of philosophy that Wittgenstein saw himself to be doing when practicing philosophy; it was "businesslike," the sort of philosophy that could contribute to a life, to help oneself and others.[13]

The problem is, we are always prone to misuse reason, like an inexperienced child is prone to mishandle an unwieldy object and cause himself harm. Just as we shouldn't try to move heavy objects or to operate complicated machinery without prior guidance, so also we mustn't conduct philosophical inquiry without the expertise of one who takes care to guide us away from confusions and to keep focused on what we already know. When logic is at the service of the already-confused philosophical problems, we are no longer fit to have logic help us find our way to understanding.

Before leaving this section it is worth noting an obvious difference between al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein that some readers may already have had in mind. For al-Ghazālī, the goal of the philosophical therapist is to keep the student mindful of the peaceful truths of revealed religion. For Wittgenstein, however, the therapist reminds the student of how she and others use words in various everyday circumstances, almost none of which have spiritual import. In other words, for al-Ghazālī, "what we already know" is given by the Islamic faith, whereas for Wittgenstein it is given by attending to our "forms of life," our ordinary linguistic and other ceremonial practices.[14]

This difference has great consequence for what we can say about what these men believed about religious matters. But what interests me here is the similar role that "what we already know" plays in al-Ghazālī's and Wittgenstein's common critique and reorientation of philosophy.[15] This is why it is of interest now to turn and look at the similarities between al-Ghazālī's and Wittgenstein's views of philosophical disputation at the service of natural theology.

## THE CASE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

In what follows, al-Ghazālī's remarks concern the practice of *kalam*, which is Islamic natural theology. The closest art or practice of the Latin-European

intellectual tradition to *kalam* is Christian natural theology, as practiced by the Christian Fathers and the mediaeval Scholastics. Specifically, *kalam* is rational investigation of the divine attributes including created nature. As such, *kalam* makes use of the arts of rational demonstration, such as logic, and it borrows principles, topics, and methods of discussing from philosophy.

Al-Ghazālī does not dismiss natural theology outright. He recognizes that natural theology may meet some people's needs.

> If you ask me what I think of this, I will say that the truth of the matter is that those who condemn [*kalam*,] absolutely and under all circumstances as well as those who praise it absolutely and undeservedly are wrong.…Natural theology (*'ilm al-kalam*)…has its advantages and disadvantages, usefulness and harm.[16]

> In any case, my purpose now is to set out my own case, not to deny that others have been cured by theology. Medications differ depending on the disease, and there are many medications that benefit one patient and harm another.[17]

And yet, despite recognizing the specific uses and benefits of natural theology, al-Ghazālī continues to insist that there is a special sort of knowledge that cannot be achieved by doing natural theology alone:

> Take it then, from one who has familiarized himself with disputation [in *kalam*] and, after a careful study and a thorough investigation of it in which he surpassed the extreme limits of its masters and went even further to study in great detail other cognate subjects, has come to dislike it, and has ascertained that *the road to the realities of knowledge is closed from this direction*.[18]

I will not discuss the character of this special sort of knowledge in the present work, but instead focus on the way both al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein appeal to it in distinguishing philosophy done poorly from philosophy done well. This means I will highlight how for al-Ghazālī, as for Wittgenstein, only certain everyday life experiences, and never rational disputation, can bring about this sort of knowledge:

> Admit, then…that you attain necessary knowledge and yet are unable to say specifically on what it is based. The case is similar to that of a man who receives from a multitude of people a piece of information which is a matter of common belief….He is unable to say that the certainty is derived from the remark of a single specific person; rather, its source is unknown to him; it is neither from outside the whole, nor is it from specific individuals. This is strong, intellectual faith. Immediate experience, on the other hand, is like

actually witnessing a thing and taking it in one's hand. It is only found in the way of mysticism.…Now from the sciences I had labored at and the paths I had traversed in my investigation of the revelational and rational sciences (that is, presumably, theology and philosophy), there had come to me a sure faith in God most high, in prophethood (or revelation), and in the Last Day. These three creedal principles were firmly rooted in my being, not through any carefully argued proofs, but by reason of various causes, coincidences and experiences which are not capable of being stated in detail.[19]

It is never rational disputation, but certain immediate experiences that bring about our adherence or commitment to a way of life. Notice it is after studying "the revelational and rational sciences" that al-Ghazālī says he achieved what he describes as "strong, intellectual faith." But he distinguishes this from knowledge reached "through carefully argued proofs." He also distinguishes it from the "immediate experience" of direct mystical union with the divine. The devout religious study fostered and nurtured his faith and made it strong – but none of this functioned as a demonstration of his beliefs in the credal principles.

Now compare Wittgenstein. In 1930, Wittgenstein told one of his students: "It is a dogma of the Roman Church that the existence of God can be proved by natural reason. Now this dogma would make it impossible for me to be a Roman Catholic."[20] This seems to me Wittgenstein stating a clear block to his religious belief, and it is precisely the claim that the existence of God can be proved. Wittgenstein completely rejects this, perhaps the most central claim of natural theology in both Christianity and Islam.

Further, Wittgenstein is clear that the certainty that interests him is not achieved by evidential reasoning. That is, whereas some natural theology relies on *a priori* reasoning about the nature of the divine, some religious believers may claim to have empirical evidence for their religious convictions. Natural theology can trade in both sorts of reasoning. Thomas Aquinas's famous "Five Ways" to prove the existence of God, for example, seem to combine both *a priori* conceptual analysis and *a posteriori* facts of nature as starting points. But Wittgenstein is clear that religious belief as such cannot be based in such rational demonstrations. Here are some remarks attributed to Wittgenstein in a series of lectures on the topic of religious belief:

Suppose somebody made this guidance for life: believing in the Last Judgment.…[He] has what you might call an unshakeable belief. It will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in his life.[21]

> We don't talk about hypothesis, or about high probability. Nor about knowing. In a religious discourse we use such expressions as: "I believe that so and so will happen," and use them differently to the way in which we use them in science.[22]

> There are instances where you have a faith – where you say "I believe" – and on the other hand this belief does not rest on the fact on which our ordinary everyday beliefs normally do rest.…The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business. Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me.[23]

Here we see Wittgenstein insisting that religious belief, as such, never relies on logical or scientific demonstration. The respectable religious person commits to a doctrine on grounds entirely different from such sorts of proof. She even continues to believe, profess, and practice the religion in moments of trial, and what Wittgenstein will call "repugnance."

But Wittgenstein did not reject the validity of religious practice. That is, he did not think any of the things commonly heard in atheist discourse today, e.g., that religious practice *per se* has a pernicious influence on human beings, or that it is a covert expression of a psychological insecurity or panic about death, or that it is a means of control of the weak by the strong. In fact, Wittgenstein had deep respect for the need for religious expression and practice, as long as such expression and practice met his standards of deep seriousness and sincerity, and kept away from hypothesizing. [24] Even the language and descriptions of natural theology play a legitimate role for religious persons. But the role of theology mustn't be to *justify* the religious practice, say, by offering cosmological, biological, or historical evidence for its truth, however that may go. The proper way to understand the way a religious person *believes* is to avoid treating this use of "belief" exactly as we treat the use of the word "belief" in the empirical sciences, or in mathematics, or in logic (each of which are different). The teachings of natural theology mustn't be used to justify our religious practice, only to describe it. What is the use of such descriptions? When they function as reminders, suggestions and appeals for how believers are to behave and orient themselves:

> Rules of life are dressed up in pictures. And these pictures can only serve to *describe* what we are supposed to do, but not to *justify* it.…Religion says: *Do this! – Think like that!* but it cannot justify this and it only need try to do so to become repugnant; since for every reason it gives, there is a cogent counter-reason. It is more convincing to say: "Think like this! – however strange it may seem. – " Or: "Won't you do this? – repugnant as it is."[25]

Wittgenstein also tells us how he thought a properly religious belief could be undertaken:

> It appears to me as though a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates [i.e., a system of reference]. Hence, although it's belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up *this* interpretation. And so instructing in a religious belief would have to be portraying, describing, that system of reference & at the same time appealing to the conscience.[26]

And in a remark dated a few years later:

> A proof of God ought really to be something by means of which you could convince yourself of God's existence. But I think that *believers* who offered such proofs wanted to analyse & make a case for their "belief" with their intellect, although they themselves would never have arrived at belief by way of such proofs. "Convincing someone of God's existence" is something you might do by means of a certain upbringing, shaping his life in such & such a way. Life can educate you to "believing in God."[27]

Like al-Ghazālī, Wittgenstein continually insists that religious belief does not come about as a result of rational demonstration. And, like al-Ghazālī, he believed that the descriptions and language of natural theology have their proper role in our lives. Again, like al-Ghazālī, such a role must be a limited to acting as a descriptive reminder of a picture the believer already knows and trusts (such as, e.g., the existence of God). Similarly, to "prove the existence of God" in the way so often attempted in natural theology is to attempt to justify our faith in God's existence. But here the words "prove" and "justify" are being used as we use them in logic, or, the natural sciences, and for both Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī, this is the cardinal mistake. It is the source of the danger and confusions in philosophy and theology.[28]

## ANTI-PHILOSOPHY

There are several parallels in these and other remarks from al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein well worth further investigation. Here I will articulate and focus on one parallel concerning the shared conception of the nature of philosophy that emerges from their remarks collected here.

First, both al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein are trying to distinguish a kind of religious knowledge that is separable from knowledge gained in other sorts of human activities like logic, mathematics and the sciences. They both insist that religious knowledge is not achieved by the kinds of

evidence, proof, and methods of rational disputation of these other activities.

Their common complaint seems to be as follows: the problem with the theologians is that they have adopted the method and requirements of the philosophers. And the problem with the philosophers is that they have adopted the method and requirements of the logicians and mathematicians. In other words, the problem is not with theology or philosophy as such, nor even with logic and mathematics. Rather, the problem is with holding one domain of inquiry up to the same procedural and evidential standards of an altogether different domain of inquiry. Theology and philosophy lead us into confusion when they undertake to prove or demonstrate their own principles in the same manner as one proves rules of logic.

The anti-philosophy of Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī, then, is as follows. They recognize the human condition of recurrent skeptical anxiety, and they locate its antidote outside the bounds of rational disputation. The knowledge we seek is beyond reason, partly because it is not best classified as 'knowledge" in the way we understand that term for logic, mathematics, and the sciences. The sought-after knowledge is closer to what religious traditions call peace of mind and rest of heart. Insofar as this is not accessible to reason, neither is it properly communicable in language. Herein lies the anti-philosophical "quietism" of Wittgenstein [29] and "misology" of al-Ghazālī. [30] And in abandoning the quest for rational articulation of this endpoint, we leave reason to its main task: understanding and mastering the arts and sciences, the causes and principles of each in their proper domain of inquiry. This involves relying on the special practices that each employs. To the extent that there is philosophical work to be done, it is done by putting rationality at the sole service of noticing linguistic misfires and undefended assumptions.

I think these considerations also offer some light on Wittgenstein's view that one does not defend any *theses* in philosophy.[31] This is because the conclusion of a philosophical argument is not the same knowledge as the conclusion of a demonstration. Rather the outcome of the therapeutic activity Wittgenstein calls philosophy is the dissolution of the worries, tensions, and anxieties that we have undergone in our attempts to make language and thought do what they will not do.

Our condition is such that we may not achieve articulation of what we find ourselves striving to articulate. The necessity and certainty we crave is of a sort we have seen in the seemingly rigid and mechanical procedures of logical and mathematical disputation – but we may not legitimately expect that level of certainty and necessity in other areas of our lives where we speak of "knowing." Seeing this brings Wittgenstein and al-Ghazālī to suggest that the only deliverance from this affliction is in the peace achieved from reorienting our conception of the task of philosophy.[32]

The character of this peace of mind is also similar in character and motivation in both thinkers. I cannot go into this in detail in the present work, but briefly: Al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein characterize religious

certainty as the peace of mind achieved when we stop asking philosophical questions. They reject both natural theology and philosophy because they see them as ineffective in achieving what is really valuable in a religious practice. Philosophy and theology can and should be put at the service of safeguarding and describing "unutterable wisdom." But they cannot be used to establish the truth or certainty that wisdom promises. That investigation falls outside the scope of those practices – it is not what they are for.[33] We can expect, then, the same from "traditional" philosophy and theology as from improperly using or abusing anything else: dissatisfaction, frustration, and anxiety.

## CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein share the same broad conception of philosophy as a medicine or therapy. They also share a view of the goal of this therapy: to cure us of the problematic assumptions that are the source of philosophical confusions. The result of philosophy practiced properly is peace of mind, an untroubled condition in which we no longer feel compelled to ask philosophical questions. Done properly, philosophy safeguards a certain sort of available truth. This truth is known by practical engagement with ritual and custom.[34]

This conception of philosophy is attractive to some, but it is very troublesome to others. There are some serious worries here for philosophy if this is the last word on its method of practice. First, anyone defending this sort of quietism owes us an account of how this view is any different from outright misology, or how it can avoid such a dismissive mistrust of human reason. The quietist has a reply ready, one that al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein both give – reason is fine and in perfect order. Just let it do the various activities it is meant for, and do not put it at the service of your immortal longings. For these, put yourself in the activity that will allay these longings, namely, a religious devotion of some sort.

Another problem for the quietist is the challenge to do something that perhaps cannot be done: to characterize and articulate the inarticulable. The religious wisdom of al-Ghazālī, and the special sort of belief that Wittgenstein allots to the religious person, are removed from many of our usual and technical standards of knowing and believing. And yet both al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein continue to speak of it as a kind of knowing. Al-Ghazālī says that its achievement serves the purposes of "comprehending the mysteries" of the Islamic creed and for "knowing things as they really are."[35] And Wittgenstein insists that the religious person has "unshakeable belief" and "guidance." The question is: isn't an unshakeable belief, and knowing how things really are, a matter of rational understanding?

I think the answer the quietist must give here turns on accepting the "reorientation" of philosophy. When al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein reached their new conceptions of philosophy, they had rejected the methods that had gone before in the same way: they diagnosed all philosophical questions and

disputations as confusions and errors resulting from importing standards of proof and exactitude into matters that do not admit of them. Wittgenstein famously held that all philosophical problems – such as solipsism, skepticism, the mind-body divide – can be cast as such abuses of language. Al-Ghazālī famously held that theologians and philosophers fail to meet the demands of demonstration that they have learned from logic, and yet they somehow persist in fooling themselves that they have seen necessary truths about the universe. The reorientation consists in recognizing this situation for what it is: the pathologies arising from an unchecked tendency of the human condition.

This condition is that human beings are unable to resist attempts to find greater certainty in what are called religious concerns than these can offer. And so, we are constantly in danger of reaching into other areas of human investigation and confounding them with one another, resulting in our own confusion. As a result, we are in constant need of philosophical therapy. Our sound expectations for philosophy, then, should be no different from our expectations of any other kind of therapy. We want only the best and most competent practitioners to expose our confusions, and to teach us skills to help sustain and continually recover our peace of mind.

So it is the philosopher who must undertake to give and receive therapy for these native human sources of perplexity. Surely this is too weighty a charge to be given to people practicing a trivial and unimportant art. Far from being misology, this anti-philosophy has a special target in mind, and a special method that deserves and receives proper respect and deference. Al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein also share a view of what drives the need for this philosophical therapy. For them, proper philosophical activity is therapeutic because we humans, by and large, have a craving to know some immortal and changeless nature outside of ourselves. In the search to satisfy this craving, we construct pictures and theories that have no basis in reality outside our insistence upon them – such as a proof for the existence of an afterlife, or a benevolent deity, and, indeed, many other attempts at universalizing. These pictures are the sources, we might say, of two kinds of despair. First, our pride can keep us fixated on those pictures, which causes us to persist in error. Or, we discover that the pictures are not necessary and are irrefutable after all, which drives us into skepticism. The therapeutic task of al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein is to prevent and rescue us from the twin despairs of pride and skepticism. Far from mistrusting reason, they wish to keep it in its proper place, to serve us as well as it can.[36]

## NOTES

[1] See, for example, Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Anti-Philosophy*, tr. Bruno Bosteels (London & New York: Verso, 2011). Also, see the brief and seemingly distrustful discussion of Wittgenstein by Nicholas Rescher in his *Philosophical Inquiries* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010),

pp. 201-02. See also Richard Rorty's characterization of Wittgenstein as an "edifying" philosopher over and against "systematic" philosophers; this distinction corresponds, if only in a rough and ready way, to the distinction I work with here between "good" and "bad" philosophy as envisioned by Wittgenstein. See Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[2] I have adopted this idiom of "intellectual pathologies" from the fine study by Rom Harré, "Grammatical Therapy and the Third Wittgenstein," *Metaphilosophy*, 39 (2008): 484-91.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th ed., tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §255.

[4] 'Portrayals and descriptions" of intentions and views is one of Wittgenstein's expressions for what philosophy, done rightly, can offer. He contrasts with what philosophy cannot do (and too often is thought of as doing), which to explain or justify intentions and views. The expression, collected in *Culture and Value*, revised edition, ed. G. H. von Wright, tr. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), is quoted in context below in the body of the paper. But also see *Philosophical Investigations*, §109: "And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light – that is to say, its purpose – from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these workings are recognized – *despite* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language."

[5] See *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Harper, 1960), pp. 17-20.

[6] For an excellent biography and study of al-Ghazālī see Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, 2009).

[7] This is the thrust of his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*), completed in 1095 just months before he took up his study of the Sufi mystical theologians and then abandoned his academic post. See *Tahafut al-falasifah [Incoherence of the Philosophers]*, tr. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963).

[8] Al-Ghazālī, *Rescuer from Error*, in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Cambridge, 2005), p. 65. This is a selection and translation of *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, written *c.*1108, as one of his last works.

[9] Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance From Error and Mystical Union with the Almighty* (*al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*), tr. Muhammad Abulayah, ed. George F. McLean (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and

Philosophy, 2001), pp. 71-2.

[10] This is George McLean's considered reading, namely, that skepticism is the "sickness" and "disease" al-Ghazālī thinks we are exposed to as we practice disputation. See McLean's note 47 of his edition of *Deliverance From Error*, p. 117.

[11] E.g., Al-Ghazālī says the principal harm of disputation is "confirming the belief of the heretics in their heresies and establishing them in their hearts so that their claims increase and their insistence on them becomes more stubborn." Taken from *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith*, *being a translation with notes of the* Kitāb qawā id al-aqā'id *of al-Ghazzāli's* Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn, Nabih Amin Faris (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963/1999) (hereafter *Ihya*), p. 27.

[12] Al-Ghazālī: "it is unlawful to argue with one who has fallen victim to doubt, since doubt should be removed with kindness by admonition and understandable proofs *free of excessive speculation and endless debate*." (*Ihya* 27); "Such disputation [i.e. using kindness and clear statements of faith] is praiseworthy under all conditions." (*Ihya* 34)

[13] Wittgenstein's friend and pupil Maurice Drury remembers Wittgenstein once remarking: "A bad philosopher is like a slum landlord. It is my job to put him out of business." See M. O'C. Drury, *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein*, eds. David Berman, Michael Fitzgerald and John Hayes (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), p. 117.

[14] *Cf. Philosophical Investigations* §415: "What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; not curiosities, however, but facts that no one has doubted, which have escaped notice only because they are always before our eyes." Also *Philosophical Investigations* §494: "I want to say: it is *above all* the apparatus of our ordinary language, of our word-language, that we call 'language'; and then other things by analogy or comparability with it."

[15] I might also suggest that the comparison I am drawing here with al-Ghazālī's view of the practice of philosophy can help make sense of Wittgenstein's famous remark: "I am not a religious man, but I cannot help but see every problem from a religious point of view. I would like my work to be understood in this way." But I will not do any further work to clarify this here, and I am mindful of Fergus Kerr's words: "How many of us who have studied Wittgenstein's work for decades understand that last remark?" See Fergus Kerr, *'Work on Oneself': Wittgenstein's Philosophical Psychology* (Arlington, Virginia: Institute for the Psychological Sciences Press, 2008), p. 35.

[16] *Ihya*, 25, 26.

[17] Al-Ghazālī, *Rescuer from Error*, in ed. Khalidi, p. 66.

[18] *Ihya*, 28, my emphasis. I am fond of Ali Allawi's characterization of al-Ghazālī's attitude and aim here: "Ghazzali…attacked the use of rational Hellenistic philosophy as a yardstick by which to gauge the veracity of religious faith." See Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*

(Yale University Press, 2009), p. 103.

[19] Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error* (*Mundiqh*) in Hyman & Walsh, eds., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Hackett, 1973), pp. 267-283, at pp. 276-7; the Hyman & Walsh selection is taken from *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*, tr. W. M. Watt (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1951).

[20] In Rush Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), p. 123.

[21] Remark attributed to Wittgenstein, collected in Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 53-4. The notes I draw from here were recorded *c.* 1938.

[22] *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 57.

[23] Remarks attributed to Wittgenstein, and collected in *Lectures and Conversations*, pp. 54, 56.

[24] It seems to me that Wittgenstein's reverential attitude toward the serious and clear-minded religious practitioner comes out in several of his written remarks, many of which are collected in *Culture and Value*. Perhaps the best place to see this is in the conversation Drury reports having with Wittgenstein about Augustine, and Drury's own gloss on this. See M. O'C. Drury, "Some notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in Rush Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, pp. 91-111, at pp. 104-05. Wittgenstein told Drury that Augustine expressed well contempt for the attitude that refuses to speak about the divine just because reason has discovered that it is inadequate fully to comprehend the divine. Then he tells Drury that he, Wittgenstein, will not refuse to talk about God or religion.

[25] *Culture and Value*, p. 34e, dated 1937.

[26] *Culture and Value*, p. 73e, dated 1947.

[27] *Culture and Value,* p. 97e, dated 1950. Here Wittgenstein also writes: "What is important is not the *words* you use or what you think while saying them, so much as the difference that they make at different points in your life. How do I know that two people mean the same thing when each says he believes in God? And just the same thing goes for the Trinity. Theology that insists on *certain* [i.e. particular] words & phrases & prohibits others makes nothing clearer.…It gesticulates with words, as it were, because it wants to say something & does not know how to express it. *Practice* gives the words their sense."

[28] On this conception of theology, there seems to be no room for the Catholic doctrine of *preambula fidei*. It strikes me that al-Ghazālī would seem implicitly to reject it. I do not yet know of any place where Wittgenstein discusses it. Wittgenstein may never have held any sophisticated notion of it. The nature of his remarks on religious faith – in private notes and in conversation with friends such as Drury – suggest to me that he didn't distinguish between dogmatic propositions of faith and dogmatic propositions that could also be demonstrated. Fr. Kerr comments,

I think rightly, that Wittgenstein was not at all "a well-informed or sophisticated theologian. Some of the remarks [between W and Drury] might seem to belong to the genre of late-night conversations between university students." See Kerr, *'Work on Oneself'*, p. 39.

[29] See for example, John McDowell, "Wittgensteinian 'Quietism'," *Common Knowledge* 15:3 (2009): 365-72.

[30] Majid Fakrhy links al-Ghazālī's mysticism to misology: "The progress of misology, whose seeds al-Ghazālī had been instrumental in sowing, continued in theological and philosophical circles long after the twelfth century. The two forms it took were (1) a return to the literalism and traditionalism of the early theologians and jurists, and (2) a repudiation of the rational process as futile and irrelevant and the consequent withdrawal into the inner fort of the Soul, where the antirationalist hoped to discover the truth through a more direct experiential process called *al-dhauq* (taste) or *al-kashf* (revelation)." See his *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Columbia, 2004), p. 323.

[31] *Philosophical Investigations* §128.

[32] As I see it, this is precisely what Wittgenstein is trying to display as the task and goal of doing philosophy: "... The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.—Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem" (*Philosophical Investigations* §133).

[33] I am reminded of the question, in the Christian Gospels, that if a child asks for bread, or a fish, who among us would instead give the child a stone, or a snake? See Matthew 7:9 and Luke 11:11.

[34] It goes beyond the scope of the present paper to note some ways in which al-Ghazālī and Wittgenstein address how philosophy can also *criticize* custom and ritual. But I do think that a full defense of their vision against the charge of misology must make that case, if it can be made.

[35] *Ihya,* 34-35.

[36] I would like to thank participants in the 2010 meeting of the Western New York Division of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, and participants in the 2011 meeting of the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association for helpful discussion on earlier drafts of this project. I would signal special thanks to William Sweet and Jane Dryden for their further helpful discussion and comments.

# THE POSSIBILITY OF NATURAL MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE: THE EVOLUTION OF JACQUES MARITAIN'S POSITION

J. L. A. West

In Maritain's early works,[1] he argues forcefully that a natural (e.g., non-Christian) mystical experience would be a contradiction in terms. The problem of mysticism is presented in terms of the mystic's natural efforts being insufficient to experience God. This experience is only possible if the mystic is rendered connatural to God through grace. However, in 1938, he presented a paper "Mystical Experience and the Void" arguing in favor of the possibility of a natural mystical experience in the Hindu tradition through an experience of the substantial being of the soul. In this article I examine Maritain's arguments both for and against such an experience. While on the surface this appears to be a dramatic reversal, I argue that he distinguishes two different types of mystical experience: one of God (Christian), the other of the soul or self (Hindu). Accordingly, his later paper is in fact a development of his views quite consistent with his earlier position.

## THE POSSIBILITY OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

One of the aspects of Maritain's *Degrees of Knowledge* that strikes readers unfamiliar with his philosophy as strange is that it begins with a discussion of philosophy and science only to end in a sustained reflection on mysticism. It is important that when Maritain speaks of mystical experience he is not referring to religious sentiment or feelings, even quite powerful ones. In fact, the first chapter addressing mystical experience begins:

> Let it be agreed once and for all that, in the present instance, we understand the word "mystical experience" not in a more-or-less vague sense covering all sorts of more-or-less mysterious or preternatural facts, or even simple religious feeling but, rather, in the sense of an *experimental knowledge* of the deep things of God, or a *suffering of divine things*, an experience which leads the soul through a series of states and transformations until within the very depths of itself it feels the touch of divinity and "experiences the life of God."[2]

The sense is that the things of God are imposed on the soul by God, rather than the more active process that is involved in natural cases of knowing.[3] Thus, Maritain understands mystical experience to be "an experimental knowledge of the deep things of God."[4]

Mystical experience is only one of three forms of wisdom involved in knowing God. The first and least form of wisdom is metaphysical

wisdom that functions entirely in the natural order and moves from ordinary sense experience of physical things to God through analogy.[5] The second mode of wisdom is the academic discipline of theology that applies the methods of reason, but is based in faith. In contrast to metaphysics, the proper object of theology is God in the guise of mystery: that is, in his essence and inner life.

It is essential to be clear about the differences between metaphysics and revealed theology. In metaphysics, analogy is the form and rule of knowledge; consequently, God is not attained in virtue of his own inner life. Rather God is made known in accordance with the limits of the human mind through the mirror of the created world. It is important to avoid any misconceptions about the role of philosophy here. Metaphysical knowledge is not a preparation for mystical knowledge of God. They function in fundamentally different orders; metaphysical wisdom is a natural form of knowledge, while mystical wisdom is rooted in the supernatural order. Theology illumines the revealed data of scripture and tradition by a faith that is intrinsically connected to reason, moving along with reason and making use of philosophy as an instrument for its own ends.[6]

The third way to wisdom is through mystical experience or as Maritain puts it "suffering divine things." There are two aspects to this: first, the sanctifying grace that puts us into relationship with God as an object of our love and understanding; and second, the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity within our souls. Authentic mysticism occurs through the operation of sanctifying grace making us sharers in the divine nature. Yet, this leads to a paradox, for how can the finite soul formally participate in the divine nature that is infinite? Grace brings the finite soul into relation with the infinite God, allowing God to be the soul's object. Formal participation in God through having God in his essence is impossible, but it is possible in the sense of having the Godhead as one's *object*.

Thomists give this answer: the soul is thus rendered infinite in the order of its relation to the object. A formal participation in Deity, which would be impossible were it a question of having Deity for its essence (for it is a pure absurdity that that which is not God should receive as its essence the very essence of God), is possible if it is a matter of having Deity as object. For a being which is not God to be raised up, in its very basic structure and in the energies from which its operations proceed, so as to have as the object of its understanding and love God Himself as He sees and loves Himself, that is indeed, impossible to the forces of nature alone. Yet no absolute impossibility can be detected in it. Grace bestows upon us, in a supernatural manner a radical power of grasping pure Act as our object, a new root of spiritual operation whose proper and specifying object is the Divine essence itself.[7]

Through grace, God is ontologically present in the soul as an object. The term object in this context is used in its Thomist sense, which means God's presence to the soul as an object does not undermine the transcendence of the Godhead. This manner of presence is importantly

different from God's universal presence throughout the universe, which is a presence through causality.[8] But, in this case God is present as the term the soul is inwardly turned towards. The soul is converted and ordered to God as an object of loving knowledge. This is a fruitful and "experimental" knowledge, by which Maritain means knowledge by experience or acquaintance. This leads to the next aspect of the mystical life; namely, the indwelling of the divine persons of the Trinity within our soul. Through knowledge and love, the indwelling of the divine persons puts us in possession of God and unites us to him not as a remote object, but renders him really present within us. Accordingly, the life of grace is eternal life begun. As he explains,

> Eternal life begins here and now. It begins here below and should grow unceasingly till the dissolution of the body in such a way as to realize by mystical experience and infused contemplation themselves, as far as possible on this earth, in the night of faith, in which what we shall be has not yet appeared, that possession of God to which sanctifying grace is essentially ordained.[9]

For Maritain, this mystical life is not an extraordinary privilege reserved to a few, but the summit towards which human life ought to normally tend.[10]

Sanctifying grace and the indwelling of the divine persons are the ontological foundations of mystical experience, its first principles. However, there remains a further question to be determined: what are the more immediate principles of mystical experience and how is it realized? Maritain's answer to this question is twofold. First, the mystical is a supra-human mode of knowing and, second, it is a connatural mode of knowing. Mystical experience is truly a supra-human way of knowing God, since the natural principles of our nature are not sufficient to account for it. Our natural and human mode of knowing is through concepts drawn from sense experience. Insofar as we know God in a natural manner, it is by analogy.[11] Even faith, through which we do reach God in his inner life, remains a *mediated* form of knowing. To know God as directly as possible in this life, requires a special inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the immediate principles of mystical experience are what have been traditionally called the "gifts of the Holy Spirit," which make the soul completely mobile under God's inspiration. As Maritain explains this poetically, "[w]e are like little children to whom a supernatural art, a pencil to write in heaven, has been given. God Himself must put His hand on our hand and guide the stroke."[12]

It is in light of this participation in God's nature that Maritain can speak of our mystical experience of God as a form of *connatural knowledge*. Connatural knowledge comes into play where the agent does not have scientific knowledge. She cannot offer a fully worked out justification or deductive argument for her position, yet she *knows* whereof she speaks because of a connatural agreement, a knowledge by acquaintance, with the object to be known. In the case of mystical union, there is a connaturality

with reality that is non-conceptualizable. In this case, the reality of God is grasped insofar as it is non-conceptualizable while at the same time being grasped as "the ultimate goal of the act of knowing in its perfect immanence." This is an interiorized goal in which knowledge is fulfilled, a connaturality with reality as non-objectifiable and yet as the goal of objective union. This is a form of connaturality unique to mystical experience and distinct from other forms of connaturality that Maritian discusses. It is a "possession giving not-knowing."[13]

But how can we explain mystical experience through connaturality? Wouldn't that imply that we were connatural with God? From what we have said already, the answer is clear. The human person is rendered connatural to the divine nature through sanctifying grace, which is manifested in the love through which we love God.

> What is it that makes us radically connatural with God? It is sanctifying grace whereby we are made *consortes divinae naturae* [sharers in the divine nature]. And what makes this radical connaturality pass into act; what makes it flower into the actuality of operation? Charity. We are made connatural to God through charity. Charity is not just any kind of love. It presupposes sanctifying grace, of which it is the property, and it lays hold on God as He is really present within us as a Gift, a Friend, an eternal life-companion. However, it wins to God immediately as God, in His very deity, in the very intimate and absolutely proper life with which He will beatify us. Charity loves Him in Himself and by Himself.[14]

This connatural union with God through charity is characteristic of supernatural Christian life at its highest point and makes possible genuine mystical experience.

## IS NATURAL MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE?

But how are we to understand the spiritual experiences of the non-Christian? Looking to other traditions, notably India, there are reports of spiritual experiences that it would seem premature to simply write off. This raises the question of whether there can be any natural spiritual experience of God.

Although we speak of the natural spirituality of the scientist, the mathematician etc., this is legitimate since the exercise of the intellect and the will always involves a spiritual element.[15] This is most evident in the work of the poet and the philosopher as their activities are primarily intellectual and, when authentic, aspire to the spiritual. Thus, while he denies that metaphysics is the gateway to the contemplative life, Maritain nevertheless holds that there is a *mystical aspiration at the heart of every authentic metaphysics*.[16] But this is spirituality only in a particular or

restricted sense. It is true that if the phrase "mystical experience" is given a vague, all-inclusive sense, then one could agree that there is a natural mystical experience, but this would remain more or less meaningless. The question is really whether there is an authentic mystical experience in the strict sense: 1. that is not a counterfeit or illusion; and 2. that bears on God himself, making us experience the divine reality through an experiential knowledge of God in the natural order.

Maritain's answer to this more precise formulation of the question was to develop over time. In one of his first discussions in *Réflexions sur l'intelligence* Maritain unequivocally answers no, stating: "A natural mystical contemplation is a contradiction in terms."[17] He takes the same position in *Degrees of Knowledge.* In these works he is speaking of mystical experience as an experimental knowledge of divine things. [18] Reconsideration of Indian mysticism convinced him there was an indirect form of natural mysticism through experience of the substantial being of the soul.

However, it is my contention that the main lines of his argument in *Degrees of Knowledge* remain unchanged, at least insofar as we speak of an experimental knowledge of God. In *Degrees*, Maritain argues that if a natural mystical experience were possible, then the whole distinction between nature and grace would be undermined. As we have seen, there are three key aspects necessary for genuine mystical experience. First, grace infuses a new spiritual nature in us. Second, the indwelling presence of the Trinity makes possible an experience of the divine reality and God's inner life. Finally, the gifts of understanding and wisdom inspired by the Holy Spirit raise the intellect to know in faith God himself in a supernatural manner through connatural charity, making this experience of him a reality. These supernatural elements are needed for both the possibility and the reality of any authentic supernatural experience of God.[19]

> [To admit a genuine natural mystical experience]...would be to confuse what is absolutely proper to grace with what is proper to nature. There is no "immediate grasp" of God in the natural order. A mystical contemplation (i.e., an authentic one) in the natural order is a contradiction in terms. A genuine experience of God's inner depths, a felt contact with God, a *pati divina*, can take place only in the order of sanctifying grace and through sanctifying grace.[20]

To this strong rejection of any natural mysticism one might object that God is supremely intelligible in himself and that he is spiritually present in our minds. Thus, it would seem that some natural experience of his presence would make sense and account for mystical experience. Maritain, however, argues that this mode of presence is not sufficient. A genuine mystical experience requires that God be present in us not merely in a vague manner, but as an object. For God to be present in us as an object

it is necessary that we be made proportionate to Him and this is not possible in the natural order, since the only way a finite being can be made proportionate to the infinite God is through sanctifying grace, turning us towards God as an object. A further objection could be drawn from St. Thomas Aquinas' position that every creature loves God more than itself. This seems to imply that there is a natural love of God that is distinct from theological virtue of charity. Why would this not suffice for a connatural knowledge of God? Maritain explains that such a love would not be connatural, since connaturality requires agreement in the same nature. We cannot be connatural with the supernatural unless we are made supernatural ourselves. Consequently, it is undeniable that connaturality with God through charity presumes supernatural love. This presupposes sanctifying grace in order that God as an object of love be made present to us as a Gift and a friend whose life we share. This can only arise from a supernatural faith that attains God in his essence and inner life. Concerning this he writes:

> The natural love of God has none of these characteristics. Even supposing it capable of making us love God efficaciously above all things (and this is not the case with our fallen nature), this love, which proceeds from our essence as creatures infinitely far removed from Pure Act, and which cannot constitute a friendship properly so called between man and God, nor achieve God as really present within us as a gift, a love, *in fine*, which can only love God through the mediation of the transcendental good (as supreme and subsistent Good) – since it is ruled by an analogical knowledge in which God is known only through the mediation of transcendental being (as First Being) – this natural love of God is incapable of rendering us properly connatural to things divine, incapable of providing a knowledge of God through connaturality, a mystical experience of the depths of God.[21]

A final objection that Maritain considers in relation to this issue is directly relevant to our present topic. This is the fact that the testimony from Islam, Buddhism, Brahmanism, and other traditions that speaks strongly in favor of the actuality of a non-Christian and natural mystical experience. Such experiences cannot come from the theological virtue of faith in the Christian sense, so it seems there must be a natural mystical experience. In *Degrees of Knowledge,* Maritain argues that if these cases are genuine, then they arise from divine grace and infused contemplation at work in these people in a modified way apart from the Christian sacraments and a visible acceptance of revelation. Accordingly, he maintains that cases of authentic mystical experience do occur in other traditions, but that these are not natural experiences, but ones where God's work of grace remains hidden. The unbaptized, although not in union with the Church, do participate in the proper work of the Church and can receive the supernatural life and belong

to the Church invisibly without knowing it. [22] In response to these phenomena, Maritain calls for a revitalization of studies of comparative mysticism that would avoid a facile syncretism and help to uncover the authentic visitations of God in the various mystical traditions, "for nowhere is He left without witnesses." What Maritain envisions is not a watering down of mysticism to the lowest common denominator, but rather an evaluation of other schools of mysticism in terms of the benchmark of Christian experience in order to determine what is authentic in them.[23] The theological point upon which he insists is that when such genuine experiences occur in the absence of the theological virtue of faith, they are not only natural, but they remain the work of God's grace, every bit as much as those within the Christian tradition.

In view of the position he argues so forcefully in *Degrees of Knowledge*, it is surprising to find that in 1938, just six years after its first publication, Maritain presented a paper, later published as "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," arguing in favor of natural mystical experience. [24] In fact, Maritain had been influenced by just the kind of studies of comparative mysticism that he had called for in this work. [25] These influences led Maritain to reconsider the possibility of an intellective, rather than affective connaturality that might, through the rigorous practices of Brahmanist spirituality, lead to a genuine mystical experience of the natural order. Yet, upon closer reading it is clear that this was not in any way a rejection of his earlier position so much as a supplement to it. Indeed, he is as clear in this presentation as he was in his earlier work that a genuine mystical experience is not a natural culmination of philosophical contemplation. He explicitly reserves the affective connaturality that had been the focus of his work in *Degrees of Knowledge* to the heights of Christian mysticism. Accordingly, it is reasonable to infer that he never changed his views about what he wrote regarding that supernatural experience of God.

What is new here is an "intellectual connaturality:" "a natural contemplation which by means of supra- or para-conceptual intellection attains a transcendent reality, of itself inexpressible in any human mental word. There we have the typical mode of knowing in the natural mystical experience." [26] Maritain begins his argument by adopting St. Thomas' position that we know the soul only through a reflection on its operations. We do not know our own soul immediately or directly, rather we encounter it through its acts of understanding and willing. In reflecting on these, we can turn our attention towards the principle of these acts. However, if we do so, Maritain insists we only encounter the existence of the soul, not its essence or nature. Thus, in our self reflection we can be led to a true experience of the soul's singular existence (its act of being or *esse*). This is a direct experience of the soul's being.[27]

This experience, however, tells us nothing about the soul's nature. All that we know is that the soul, whose existence we have experientially encountered, is the principle of the acts that we have observed, these

operations are the only possible content of my concept of my self. Further, as I give more attention to the existential experience of my soul, less is given to the diverse phenomena that have led to this reflexive apprehensive of it.[28] In this experiential encounter with the soul's own singular existence, Maritain finds an account that could reframe the experiences of Brahmanist mystics who claim to reach the absolute through an experience of Atman or "the Self." Accordingly, he asks if it is not possible that this penetration beyond the soul's operations, much like the Brahmanist's escape of the apparent ego, might not lead to an encounter of the absolute self. "This mysticism, reduced to its essential kernel, would above all be a metaphysical experience of the substantial *esse* [being] of the soul by means of negative, or rather annihilating, intellectual connaturality."[29]

In applying his philosophy of self-awareness to the mystical tradition of Brahmanism, Maritain is clear that there cannot be an experiential knowledge of the soul's nature. Rather, he insists that what those who practice this spirituality encounter is the substantial being of their souls, through a drastic purification of ordinary self awareness through reflexive knowledge of the soul's operations. For most of us, this experience is clouded through the phenomenal multiplicity of the operations by means of which the soul is manifested to us. This purification is an attempt to move beyond the operations to the substantial existence of the principle that underlies them. Describing the Brahmanist mystic's practice in this context Maritain says:

> Risking everything to gain everything, and thanks to assiduous exercise reversing the ordinary course of mental activity, the soul empties itself absolutely of every specific operation and of all multiplicity, and knows negatively by means of the void and the annihilation of every act and every object of thought coming from outside – the soul knows negatively – but nakedly, without veils – that metaphysical marvel, that absolute, that perfection of every perfection, which is *to exist*, which is the soul's own substantial existence.[30]

This negative and apophatic experience makes use of the void and abolition. In this experience, the substantial existence of the soul is known, as what is unknown. This is analogous to the supernatural mystic who knows as unknown the Godhead. In this case, the void or annihilation is a vital act in which the annihilation is consummated "and silence is made perfect."[31] Beginning with the knowledge of the soul's existence through its acts, the natural mystic annihilates those acts through this turn back to the void and thereby encounters the soul's substantial being, encountering it as a reality that is inexpressible by any concept, ineffably singular and unique. In this, it contrasts with supernatural mystical experience.

Here is the most purely existential experience possible, and it is an experience by means of not knowing. In the supernatural mystical

experience, the void is a condition of contemplation, a condition actively prepared by the soul and, much more, is sovereignly positive: it is the union of love under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the case under discussion, the void is not only a condition but also a formal means of the experience.

In the natural mysticism found here, the void becomes the formal means by which one is able to experience the substantial existentiality of the soul. However, at this stage, it is unclear why we would say that this is a natural *mystical* experience. Would it not make more sense to refer to this encounter with the substantial existence of the soul as a *metaphysical* experience? This is an especially important question given Maritain's own lengthy discussion distinguishing metaphysical from mystical experience. Moreover, in that account, he argued forcefully that metaphysical experience does not entail or naturally culminate in mystical experience.[32] Should we not then treat this experience of the soul as a paradigm of metaphysical experience rather than a form of natural experience? To do so, however, would be to fail to recognize the fact that substantial existence (*esse*) is fundamentally transcendent and polyvalent; it can be limited only by the essence that possesses it. However, in this case we know nothing of that essence. Accordingly, Maritain argues that in knowing the substantial existence of the soul, at the same time the mystic attains indistinctly "both this same existence proper to the soul and existence in its metaphysical amplitude, and the sources of existence." In encountering the existence of one's own soul, one also encounters in an indirect manner the fact that this soul emanates from and is suffused by an influx from which it attains all the reality and perfection it possesses. "This influx is not experienced in itself, of course, but rather in the effect which it produces [i.e., the substantial existence of the soul], and itself in and through this effect."[33]

In view of this explanation, Maritain argues that the experience advocated by Brahmanism seems to be a genuine mystical experience of the natural order insofar as it is *a possession-giving experience of the absolute*. The absolute that he encounters is the substantial being of his own soul, and in and by this he encounters indirectly the divine absolute through God's "presence of immensity" infusing and sustaining the being of his own soul. Maritain cautions that it is important to carefully distinguish the absolute in the form of the self from the divine absolute, and criticizes Brahmanism for frequently confusing these two senses of the word "atman" that it uses to designate both the human self and the supreme Self. However, with that qualification in mind, he argues that this approach offers an authentic example of a natural mystical experience without undermining the account of mysticism offered in *Degrees of Knowledge* or the fatal confusion of nature and grace that he leveled at any natural mysticism. There is no danger of that confusion here since this natural mystical experience does not make the non-Christian mystic proportionate to the divine nature. What is encountered directly is not "the deep things of God," but rather the substantial being of the soul, and it is accomplished, not through the means of sanctifying grace making the soul connatural to the divine through love,

but through the soul's own act of self reflection which occurs entirely in the intellectual order.[34] Maritain overlooked this possibility in his earlier work due to the fact that at that time he had only considered the affective connaturality appropriate to mystical experience of "the deep things of God."[35]

## CONCLUSION

Maritain's discussion of mysticism shows why no philosophy can rise to the level of a direct experience of God as a philosophy. For that to occur, as it does in the case of the Christian contemplative, the mystic must be made connatural with God through love. This can only occur through the twin principles of sanctifying grace and the indwelling of the Trinity within the soul. Since the methods of other mystical traditions do not admit of this grace, those experiences are to be explained not as natural forms of mysticism, but as cases where Christ's grace is at work without being made known explicitly to us or the mystics themselves. However, as we have seen, Maritain does suggest the possibility of a kind of intellectual connaturality that would make a natural mystical experience possible in the case of Hinduism where the mystic comes to a unique experience of the singular being of his own soul in a way which opens him to the divine source of that being. This is not a rejection of his earlier teaching on the uniqueness of Christian mysticism, but rather an extension of it through realizing the role that this direct and unique experience of the soul can play in coming to an authentic experience of the divine.

## NOTES

[1] *Réflexions sur l'intelligence* (Paris: Nouvelle librairie nationale, 1924) and *Degrees of Knowledge*, tr. Gerard B. Phelan (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), from the 4th French edition, 1932.

[2] *Degrees of Knowledge,* p. 263.

[3] See Heather McAdam Erb, "'Pati Divina': Mystical Union in Aquinas," *Faith, Scholarship and Culture in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), pp. 73-96.

[4] *Degrees of Knowledge,* p. 247. See Curtis L. Hancock, "Maritain on Mystical Contemplation," in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend,* ed. Deal W. Hudson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), pp. 258-59.

[5] *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 264.

[6] See the chart in *Degrees of Knowledge,* p. 269.

[7] *Degrees of Knowledge,* p. 271. See John of St. Thomas, *Curs. Theol.*, I-II, q. 110, disp. 22, a. 1.

[8] *S.T.,* I, q. 8, a. 1.

[9] *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 273.

[10] *Degrees of Knowledge,* p. 275. Also see *Liturgy and Contemplation*, tr. Joseph W. Evans, (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1960), pp. 48-50; and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, tr. Mary Timothea Doyle (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2013). A typical objection to this doctrine asks why, if contemplative prayer is the normal summit of holiness, so few people even among the saints seem to attain it. Maritain, however, insists on two things. The first is that the contemplative path is not the prerogative of a special few. The second is that contemplation can be manifested in a plurality of ways and is not necessarily the purest form as described by the great mystical theologians. Those who are engrossed in the active life due to their temperament or vocation may still experience contemplation in which there is a "tempered exercise" (*un exercice attempéré*) of the gift of wisdom. People engaged in the active life, yet living the virtues and receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit, will have a participation in mystical contemplation and may achieve an anticipation or "inchoate" form of properly mystical prayer at its heights. In this manner they have the ultimate disposition to infused contemplation. *De la vie d'oraison* (Parole et Silence, 1998), pp. 81-2. Also, see James Arraj, *Mysticism, Metaphysics and Maritain* (Chiloquin, OR: Inner Growth Books, 1993), pp. 62-4.

[11] "Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," *Ransoming the Time,* tr. Harry L. Binsse (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 260.

[12] *Degrees of Knowledge,* p. 276.

[13] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 263.

[14] *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 277. See *S.T.*, II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

[15] *Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 283-84.

[16] *Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 284-85. "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 261.

[17] *Réflexions sur l'intelligence,* p. 135.

[18] By "experimental knowledge" Maritain means knowledge based upon direct experience.

[19] *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 286.

[20] *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 287.

[21] *Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 288-89.

[22] "Because there is a sheep-fold, the shepherd who keeps it is also the shepherd of those *other sheep* who, without knowing it, receive of His fullness but who have not yet heard his voice. Because the Church has received the treasure of supernatural revelation in its entirety, it allows us to honor everywhere the various traces or marks or scattered fragments of that revelation." *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 292. Also, see p. 290. For a detailed discussion, see *On the Church of Christ,* tr. Joseph W. Evans (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), Chapter 10.

[23] *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 292.

[24] A similar point was also made, albeit briefly, in the Appendix V in

the subsequent editions of *Degrees. Degrees of Knowledge,* p. 471.

[25] Notably those of his friend Olivier Lacombe on Indian mysticism, which he considered in light of his reading of Fr. Gardeil's discussion of our knowledge of the self in his landmark work *La structure de l'âme et de l'expérience mystique*.

[26] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 264.

[27] "Such an experiential apprehension of the soul, not by its essence but by its acts, can be said to be immediate in this sense, that the reality it attains is not known by any other intermediary than its own actuation….Thus we truly have an experience of the singular existence of our soul: I mean to say, by and in its operations, and our concept of ourselves is an experimental concept." *Degrees of Knowledge,* pp. 471-72. Also, "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 270.

[28] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 271.

[29] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 272.

[30] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 274.

[31] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 275.

[32] *Degrees of Knowledge,* pp. 295-98.

[33] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 279.

[34] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," p. 284.

[35] "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," pp. 279-280, fn. 18.

# SACRED AND SECULAR TEMPORALITY:
## THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN RATIONALITY

Nikolaj Zunic

## INTRODUCTION

It is often remarked that one of the major achievements of modernity, particularly as expressed in disciplines such as philosophy and literature, was the reawakening of the human awareness of time. The point is not that human beings arrived at the concept of time only with the advent of the modern revolutions in culture and thought, but rather that human beings started to become more aware of their temporal or historical condition, which was a perspective, so the argument goes, that was largely absent in the ancient and medieval worlds. In contrast to the atemporal, abstract theorizing of the early modern period, still an offshoot of the late Middle Ages, as evidenced in the works of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, a spirit of self-consciousness came to pervade the late modern era, beginning in the late eighteenth century, which aimed to deliver a more authentic understanding of the human being's place in the world, but more importantly in the *modern* world. The project was to understand how human nature and human society are at bottom temporal, that is, determined by the flow of time and ensconced in the march of history. The purpose of this initiative, however, was on the surface to arrive at a deeper and more fundamental insight into the identity of the modern mind. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that tremendous *tour de force*, is widely regarded as the child of this inner stirring of modernity's quest for self-understanding and the true expression of the essence of the new civilization which was establishing itself in the West. More than a century later, Martin Heidegger continued in this same vein with the publication of his monumental work *Being and Time*, interpreting the most fundamental of all philosophical concepts – being – against the horizon of temporality. In the light of these currents, therefore, it would appear that the modern identity is stamped with an inveterate historical self-consciousness which marks out the qualifying difference between modernity and all preceding ages.[1]

This general presentation of events, however, needs to be modified if we are to understand matters correctly. It is misleading to suggest that modernity grappled with the phenomenon of time whereas the ancients and medievals did not. What is true is that the moderns were preoccupied chiefly with a *different* conception of time from that of their predecessors. It is a mistake to interpret time univocally, because there exist two basically disparate dimensions of time. The ancient and medieval worldviews experienced time principally as sacred, as ordered and defined by God or eternity. In contrast, the modern project of emancipationism and of seeking new foundations, led to the development of a profane or secular time, one

which was severed from a transcendent domain of divine providence. This difference between sacred and secular time helps us to grasp better the distinguishing features between modernity and the non-modern paradigms of human civilization.

In this paper, I wish to explore this distinction between a sacred and secular experience of time in order to shed light on the conditions of our contemporary age in the West. Yet my concern here is more pointed: I want to investigate how time is related to and even determines human rationality. The relationship between temporality and rationality is one that was already broached by the likes of Hegel and Heidegger. More recently, it was raised as a significant issue by Charles Taylor in his analyses of secularism.[2] The novelty of my approach is to complement these modern, secular projects with an analysis of the influence of sacred temporality on the canons of human rationality with the purpose of demonstrating what is deficient and impoverishing in the modern, secular framework. To achieve this end, I propose first to examine the nature of sacred time and how it affects how human beings think about themselves and their universe. This will be followed by a discussion of secular temporality and how it differs from the more original sacred temporality in producing a novel rationality shorn of the divine and the eternal. In the final section of the paper, I will argue for the rediscovery of an authentically holy time in our age which has become thoroughly secularized and thus diminished in its capacity to appreciate the true foundations of being itself.

## SACRED TEMPORALITY: CELEBRATING CREATION

Before we begin to examine the nature of sacred temporality, a word must be said about the meaning of the term "temporality" and how it is distinguished from the more common term "time." When we think about time, we naturally interpret this phenomenon in accordance with its threefold constitution of past, present and future. These three temporal dimensions make up the very substance of what we mean by time. Temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), on the other hand, denotes a more fundamental expression of time. This is the true or genuine ground of time, its inner reality, as opposed to the superficial features which everyone uncontroversially apprehends. Heidegger is very careful to maintain this distinction by describing temporality as an authentic understanding of the human being's place in the world, whereas the concept of time belongs to an inauthentic attitude towards the world which seeks to objectify things.[3] Temporality, although based on time, is a deeper appreciation of the essence of time. So, for example, if time is constituted by the elements of past, present and future, terms which lend themselves to a rather objectivistic reading, in the sense that they are presented as if they were things or substances, then temporality construes its three dimensions, what Heidegger calls *ecstases*, in terms of a more thoughtful and appreciative human experience. The future is therefore interpreted as an anticipatory

resoluteness, the present is a making-present, and the past is the already-having-been.

For Heidegger, temporality constitutes the way in which the human being lives in the world. At the end of his lectures on the history of concept of time, delivered in the summer of 1925, Heidegger offers a neat summary of the relationship between time and temporality:

> The being, in which Dasein can be its wholeness authentically as being-ahead-of-itself, is *time*.
>
> *Not "time is" but "Dasein qua time temporalizes its being."* Time is not something which is found outside somewhere as a framework for world events. Time is even less something which whirs away inside consciousness. It is rather that which makes possible the being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-involved-in, that is, which makes possible the being of care.
>
> The time which we know everyday and which we take into account, more accurately viewed, nothing but the Everyone to which Dasein in its everydayness has fallen. The being in being-with-one-another in the world, and that also means in discovering with one another the one world in which we are, is being in the Everyone and a particular kind of *temporality*.[4]

Heidegger's great philosophical achievement was to recognize two different experiences or modes of time which rest on basic ways in which the human being *temporalizes being*. There is no such thing as time, according to Heidegger, understood in univocal terms, but rather *times*, which emerge from different temporalities, which are nothing but particular modes of human being. As mentioned above, Heidegger describes this distinction in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity: the former is exhibited in the human being's basic concern with one's own existence, especially one's own death, and the latter is a flight or escape from one's own existence into the world, what Heidegger describes as falling into the everydayness of Everyone or The They (*das Man*).

It is clear that Heidegger adheres to the modern subjectivist viewpoint in his ruminations on the temporality of being by emphasizing the radical finitude of the human being (*Dasein*). This methodological framework allows Heidegger as a consequence to disparage any interpretation which posits time as something independent of human subjectivity. For Heidegger, to treat time as if it were a phenomenon which belonged objectively to the world as opposed to viewing it as the distinctive manner in which the human being exists in the world is to lapse into an inauthentic and hence erroneous understanding of time. It is precisely this standpoint which justifies Heidegger's dismissal of older definitions of time, such as Plato's which describes time as "a moving image of eternity"[5] or St. Augustine's which equally holds that time is rooted in eternity, the ever-present now which determines both past and future.[6] However, if we

release the term "temporality" from Heidegger's grip and understand it in a broader and more generic sense to mean simply a human experience or apprehension of the true foundation of time by penetrating to time's basic essence, then we are entitled to describe the Platonic and Augustinian definitions of time as explorations of temporality. Just as with Heidegger's fundamental ontology, Plato and St. Augustine equally desire to discover the true essence of time which they locate in the bosom of eternity, not exclusively in the human condition.

On this revised, non-Heideggerian account of the meaning and use of the term "temporality," therefore – and this is how I wish to interpret it in this paper – the concept of sacred temporality would refer to an understanding of time as grounded in or based upon that which is sacred. The idea of the sacred, in turn, connotes a dimension of reality which is separated and distinct from the worldly order of the profane. This distinction between two radically heterogeneous orders of being, namely, the sacred and the profane, is central to the very essence of the sacred, which gains its proper identity in its contrast with its opposite.[7] A worldview which cannot conceive of a totally different kind of reality from the everyday, terrestrial human existence and which treats reality as homogeneous throughout is blind and insensitive to the phenomenon of the sacred. The sacred represents that which possesses an absolute, inviolable value which transcends the normal human categories of interpretation. The aspect of the sacred which fills human beings with awe and reverence is that it emerges from a domain beyond the limits of human finitude. The sacred is given and discovered, not created or posited through the vehicle of human agency and initiative. In short, the sacred is not a human creation and does not derive its value from human operations, such as feelings and preferences, but holds its absolute value within itself in an objectively real sense. As a consequence, the sacred really does arrive as being completely other, something which cannot be reduced to and controlled by human desires, volitions and thoughts. The encounter with the sacred, therefore, quite appropriately instills in the observer an experience of being in the presence of something truly special and real.[8]

There is much debate in our culture about what exactly the foundation of the sacred is. There are many secular thinkers who insist adamantly that one can have a purely secular conception of the sacred, eschewing altogether any reliance on religious categories.[9] It is interesting to observe that this defense of a secular notion of the sacred usually crops up in discussions about human nature and the dignity of the human being. Human rights and the ethical challenges of biotechnology are two prominent areas where arguments for the inherent dignity and hence sacredness of the human being are advanced in the face of policies and attitudes which fail to recognize anything uniquely valuable about the human essence. I am not convinced by these attempts to promote a purely secular, non-religious idea of the sacred. The basis of my reluctance to embrace this line of reasoning is due primarily to my belief that such

positions fail to grasp the genuine nature of the sacred as a reality which is wholly other and irreducible to human categories. But more importantly, it is crucial in my view to situate these secular viewpoints against the broader background of the modern trend towards secularization that advocates for a secular conception of the sacred seem to embrace wholeheartedly and, I would even add, unreflectively.[10]

Thus I interpret the nature of the sacred as defined by the religious element. The sacred gains its being through its association with the divine. No one has done more to bolster this view than the influential historian of religion, Mircea Eliade.[11] According to Eliade, the sacred is an intrinsically religious phenomenon and cannot legitimately be divorced from a religious context. All religions venerate the sacred as an awesome reality which is grounded in the supernatural domain of God or the gods from where it derives its being. Eliade's portrayal of the sacred is firmly based upon empirical research and the data discovered in disciplines such as archeology, anthropology, and religious studies. Although Eliade's thesis about the inherently religious dimension of the sacred remains valid in our contemporary age, as evidenced by the practices of established religious traditions, it is undeniable that modernity has unleashed imposing challenges to this view with the widespread decline of religious observance and the secularization of society. If Eliade's thesis is supported by an empirical foundation (for example, the historical fact that primitive societies were thoroughly imbued with a religious sensibility), then the unprecedented attempt to separate the sacred from religion in modern times poses a daunting threat not only to this particular scholarly viewpoint, but to the human understanding of the nature of the sacred as such.

To return now to the concept of sacred temporality, we need to be careful not to identify too hastily this sacred dimension of time with eternity and its opposite, secular temporality, with finite, sequential time. Sacred temporality, on Eliade's interpretation, has to do with the "time of origins," that is, the time when the universe was first created and came into being.[12] This is the time of beginning, newness, and purity, before the upheavals and tribulations of cosmic and human history. It is not enough, therefore, simply to equate sacred temporality with eternity because such a view does not take into consideration the human perspective which partakes in *both* the natural and supernatural dimensions of being. It would not make very much sense for the religious person, who desires to know reality in its ontological truth, to seek to flee his material world in a rapturous embrace of the eternal. Hence the erroneous reduction of sacred temporality to eternity is corrected when we preserve a reference to the world in its definition. The intersection or intermediate point between the eternal region of the divine and the finite chronology of the world is the concept of creation. Only the doctrine of creation, which is the notion that the universe was brought into being as the result of a divine act – an act, incidentally, which is ongoing, conserving the world in existence at every single moment – can adequately describe the

essence of sacred temporality. That time is deemed to be sacred and holy when the world as we know it was created.

Sacred temporality, to be precise, is the human being's participation in that sacred time, that time of origins, which happens here and now. The experience of that original time in the midst of this evolving world occurs through rituals and festivals in human society which are events that human beings enter into in order to relive and thus to participate in that momentous time when the world came into being. It is important to recognize, however, that not every ritual and festival which serves this purpose of enabling a participation in the original time of creation is *explicitly* and *consciously* conducted to this end. In fact, one could argue that most human rituals and festivals have no specific reference to the creation of the world in their overt constitution. For example, the Saturnalian festivals of ancient Rome were devoted to paying homage to the god Saturn after the annual harvest; Walpurgis Night is celebrated in Germanic and Scandinavian lands to commemorate the advent of spring; and the Indian festival of Diwali – The Festival of Lights – signifies the victory of good over evil. In none of these festivals is there to be found an explicit articulation that its purpose is to repeat commemoratively the hallowed act of creation. Nonetheless, every authentic festival participates in making the original time of the creation of the universe present. How is this possible?

To elucidate this claim, we need to delve more deeply into the structure and meaning of a festival. The German Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper has written a great deal on the topic of festivals and their nature.[13] In a negative sense, a festival is placed in contrast to a workday. It is an occasion when human beings can take a break from their labours. However, this respite which the festival represents is not intended primarily in order to rest and relax, as if the sole purpose for having a day-off from work is to be inactive. Rather, festive days are moments of celebration when human beings turn their minds from the necessities of life, which is encompassed by the world of work, and are able to focus instead on that which has value in itself irrespective of its practical use. To partake in a festival is in fact to be rather useless, that is, impractical or inefficient (literally, not making anything), according to the paradigm of a utilitarian calculus. Dancing, singing, parading, eating and drinking – the very stuff of festivals – do not produce any marketable goods or contribute meaningfully to the economy, at least as an intrinsic aspect of their nature. These are actions engaged in for their own sake and not for the sake of achieving some extrinsic goal. Yet this negative description of a festival, which only contrasts it with work, does not fully reveal its content, for it is important to ask what it is that everyone is actually celebrating in the festival. A festival can be overtly about many things, such as commemorating a particular historical event or signaling the end of the yearly harvest, but at its core there exists an expression of joy and gaiety among the participants of the festival. This spirit of gushing mirth and exuberance is central to a festival;

without it, all we are left with an atmosphere of stifling moroseness and an event which is, quite frankly, not much fun. A festival is made possible by this fundamental positive affirmation of life itself, something which is not necessarily made in a conscious manner, but which belongs to the basic structure of a human being's place in the world. As Pieper describes it: "To celebrate a festival means: to live out, for some special occasion and in an uncommon manner, the universal assent to the world as a whole."[14] Only by an inner, deeply anchored and, one may add, pre-conceptual approval of existence in the souls of human beings, can the laughter and joy which belong to the festival be realized. In this sense, to borrow Pieper's phrase, the festival is the manifestation of the human being's attunement to the world.

If the festival is to be understood properly as grounded in a spontaneous affirmation of existence, then the best and most adequate form of such Yes-saying to life is to be found in religious worship. It is obvious that not every kind of festival is an explicit form of worshipping God, but Pieper argues that the true meaning of each and every festival actually does reside in such worship, which is a profoundly religious act. It is only in religious worship that the fullest affirmation of existence can be expressed. This is so because such an act acknowledges the fact of creation, that the world owes its existence, which is being embraced enthusiastically, to God. Put differently, the reason why human beings experience happiness in celebrating festivals is ultimately due, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, to God's act of creating the universe, the sheer bringing into being of the world. The reason why the world exists is due to the free decision God made to create it and this acknowledgement provokes a burst of energy to celebrate that which has been given as gift: the world itself. It is hopefully becoming more transparent why sacred temporality goes hand in hand with divine creation: the rupture in the normal time of the world, which usually belongs to the necessity of work, delivers human beings over to the celebration of creation in festivals in the customary guise of the holiday.

Certainly, what we are discussing here is the underlying meaning of human existence, that life is not only about toiling incessantly unto death, but that there is time which is allocated in this life of ours to engage in activities which are economically useless, yet intrinsically valuable. When we pause from our work to celebrate a holiday and enter into that sacredness of time which is ordained by God, a transformation overcomes our entire being. We become calm and collected and are able to think freely about reality without having to worry about how these ideas can be put to use in the world. Sacred temporality allows for genuine contemplation to occur when the mind is unmolested by worldly cares and is able to enjoy the pure cognition of truth. This type of temporality allows for the liberal arts to flourish as a university curriculum which pursues knowledge and truth for their own sake. The servile arts, by contrast, are wholly preoccupied with serving utilitarian ends and function on the basis of how knowledge can be

profitably applied. The future of education, one might say, is intimately tied to the possibility of recuperating and entering into a sacred temporality.

## SECULAR TEMPORALITY: FOUNDING COLLECTIVE ACTION

The rationality which sacred temporality makes possible accommodates a contemplative lifestyle and conditions the human person to value truth in itself and not in terms of certain pragmatic ends. In a society which is completely absorbed by a delirious work ethic, which is typically governed by the insatiable desire for ever-increasing profits, and is unable to make time for leisure, much less to enjoy it, the human pursuit of theoretical truth becomes an extremely difficult undertaking. It is precisely in such a climate that questions start to arise about the "usefulness" and "value" of a liberal arts education, *a fortiori*, of any intellectual way of life which prizes the pure cognition of truth as an end in itself. This skepticism about the integrity of the theoretical life ushers from a loss of the sense of the sacred in time because, to such a mindset, there is no convincing justification for stopping to work in order to engage in non-utilitarian activities. "Time is money" becomes the prevailing slogan in such a society.

As I have been arguing, sacred temporality is conjoined to a doctrine of creation by which it is understood that the universe is a created whole. Divine creation should be seen as the laying of a foundation for existence, the beginning of a new process in nature and humanity. This idea of creation as a foundation is one which thinkers such as the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) emphasized.[15] It can be found, for instance, in the well-used New Testament phrase "the foundation of the world" (*katabolé tou kosmou*).[16] In the act of creation, God establishes a new foundation for existence on his terms. A foundation is the basis upon which something else is built or developed, the underlying substrate, in this case, of the created universe itself. This explains why sacred temporality is received as a gift, as something holy and venerable, because its foundation lies in God's creative activity, not in any human initiative. The foundation, to be direct, is divine.

When we turn, then, to investigate the nature of secular temporality, there is no doubt that this claim to a divine foundation for time comes under fire. It needs to be stated at the outset that the concept of secularism or secularity is open to many interpretations.[17] In this paper, however, I follow the lead of Charles Taylor who has devoted much of his recent work to an exploration of the nature of secularity. In his magnificent study of this topic, *A Secular Age*, Taylor articulates three possible meanings of the notion of the secular.[18] First, it can mean, as most people tend to understand it, as the separation of religious elements from the public space of society. The political state and the economy, not to mention the public education system, for instance, should be independent and autonomous in the face of religion. The second sense of secularity deals with the widespread decline of personal religious observance. Statistics tell

us that fewer and fewer people attend church on a regular basis, and that increasing numbers of individuals in the Western world are jettisoning religious belief entirely in favour of an atheistic or agnostic creed. Although both of these types of meaning are valid in describing certain aspects of secularity, Taylor focuses on a third meaning which becomes the centerpiece of his reflections on this topic. For Taylor, the most significant aspect of modern secularity is that it has radically changed how we view religious beliefs and concomitantly other kinds of belief. In the past, particularly in the Middle Ages, belief in God was seen as the highest and most important aspiration in a human being's life. Even if one from a practical standpoint did not believe in God, all human beings still considered religious belief to occupy a privileged and unchallenged position in human affairs. Today this is no longer the case. Religious belief is now simply one kind of belief on par with other kinds of belief; it is one option among many others. So whether one is a Christian or a Jew or even an atheist or Marxist, all these types of belief and lifestyle are equal and none is more valuable or more important than the others. In this sense, therefore, secularization had a drastic impact on the very *conditions* of belief, those presuppositions and contexts that made religious belief possible and able to flourish as it did.[19] It took religion down from its lofty pedestal and altered how we value things. It would not be inaccurate to describe the result of secularization in Nietzsche's terms as a revaluation of all values.

Taylor is concerned first and foremost by how this secular state of affairs was made possible at all. What were the conditions that caused the process of secularization to happen? But more significantly, Taylor wants to understand how our *moral* universe was transformed. Something which was unthinkable in the not so distant past, has now become a mainstay of Western liberal societies. Taylor's fascination in exploring the "moral sources" of human agency, that was tackled in *Sources of the Self*, continues in his recent writings, such as *Modern Social Imaginaries* and *A Secular Age*. The key question here is: what happened to human civilization in the West that religion and belief in God are no longer valued as the most important aspects of human life? How was our moral worldview as a civilization so radically altered?

It is surprising to learn that Taylor locates the thrust of secularization in a new conception and experience of time. Taylor writes: "Modern secularization can be seen from one angle as the rejection of higher times and the positing of time as purely profane. Events now exist only in this one dimension, in which they stand at greater and lesser temporal distance and in relations of causality with other events of the same kind."[20] In a secular society, time has become purely horizontal by having relinquished its ties to a higher, vertical time. In concrete terms, this means that a secular society no longer abides by the prescriptions of religious traditions which dictate the course which a society is expected to tread. Celebrating religious holidays or even setting aside one day a week as special or sacred, such as the Sabbath or Sunday, becomes an obsolete

practice in a secularized environment. However, Taylor's point is more rigorous than this, insofar as he focuses on the element of social foundations. In more religious times, societies understood themselves as having been founded by some world-transcendent event or act. The most famous example of this phenomenon is the founding of the Jewish nation. But the result of secularization, as Taylor sees it, is for a society to redefine and reestablish itself on a properly temporal foundation independently of God or any source external to the group. The modern public sphere is an autonomous and self-standing entity which holds itself in existence by its common, collective action. Deeply influenced by Jürgen Habermas' theory of discourse ethics, Taylor affirms that reciprocity plays a crucial role in a secular society, by which is meant that the citizens mutually reinforce each other's belief systems and lifestyles and, in so doing, divest human life of the need to consult outside authorities for guidance and reassurance.

Secularization takes place, therefore, through the collective action of citizens, which lays the foundation for the society in which they live. Citizens possess a collective memory about the individuals who first established and governed their nation, and every step of the way in the development of this society is an ongoing exercise in self-determination, as in the imposition of laws and constitutions. Secularity rules out the possibility of explaining the prosperity of a nation as the consequence of divine providence, for instance, because prosperity can be measured and assessed in economic and political terms. Secular temporality comes about because an altogether new foundation is established, different from the original divine foundation set down in creation. Indeed, this new foundation is literally self-centred, founded on itself, and thrives on the cooperation of all the participants in this collective to maintain this innovative social arrangement.

Such a collective action unsurprisingly forms a novel type of human rationality. The parameters of rational thought are staked out now by what Taylor calls "the social imaginary" which is a commonly shared understanding in a given society about its foundation, nature and purpose. The social imaginary can be described as a version of common sense, that is, a form of knowledge which is deeply embedded in a culture, but which is not necessarily explicitly and rationally articulated. But the crucial difference is that the social imaginary includes the aspect of self-knowledge or introspective self-awareness. A secular society arrives at a self-understanding against the backdrop of its shared practices and mutually reinforcing mores. In this secular context, therefore, all human modes of thought are thoroughly saturated by this self-centred, immanentistic aura which belongs to the modern social imaginary.

## CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR TRANSCENDENCE

Although much more can be said about the relationship between temporality and rationality in both the sacred and secular dimensions, I would like to

conclude this paper by commenting on some of the limitations of the secular standpoint in regard to time, which is the predominant paradigm of our contemporary culture. The issues involved in this discussion are truly monumental as they reflect directly on the dignity of the human being and the underlying meaning of life. Taylor is adamant that secularity for him does not mean "not tied to religion," but that its meaning has principally to do with the nature of the constitution or foundation of society. One could describe it, for simplicity's sake, as a sociological thesis. The incoherence and final untenability of Taylor's position becomes clear when we attempt to balance the two poles of this association. On the one hand, the secular public sphere is supposed to be constituted, not by some transcendent event or act, but through the self-sustaining, collective actions of its citizens. On the other hand, on Taylor's model of secularity, religion is allowed to play a role in a secular society, alongside all other lifestyles and creeds. The tension arises when we try to mesh these two poles into a unified structure. The apparent unanimity of the collective voices in creating the secular public sphere breaks down under the weight of the inescapable pluralism of its fabric. Those individuals and groups who are supposed to be equal participants in this democratic exchange of ideas and yet who disagree with this secular model and are therefore unwilling to be constructive actors in this collective action, pose a formidable challenge to the rather clean and tidy presentation of how a secular society lives, moves and has its being. Furthermore, it is highly questionable that fundamental values about human life can be adjudicated and settled solely on the basis of communicative action, to borrow one of Habermas's pregnant terms. Human rights, for instance, are not determined on the basis of a democratic consensus. There is a palpable need for transcendence in such a secular setting in order to remain in contact with truth, rather than be imprisoned by propaganda or ideology. The possibility of transcending such socially defined limits is to be discovered in the order of sacred temporality, as I have argued in this paper, which enables the human person to exercise her rational soul for the noblest ends. Secular temporality counts our days in a sequential series until one day we die; sacred temporality bathes each moment of our existence with the light of eternity and the hope of everlasting life.

**NOTES**

[1] See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, tr. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 305-14.

[2] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2007); *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004); *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2011).

[3] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and

Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), p. 352: "If the ascendancy of the falling understanding of Being (of Being as presence-at-hand) keeps Dasein from the ontological character of its own Being, it keeps it still farther from the primordial foundations of that Being. So one must not be surprised if, at first glance, temporality does not correspond to that which is accessible to the ordinary understanding as 'time.' Thus neither the way time is conceived in our ordinary experience of it, nor the problematic which arises from this experience, can function without examination as a criterion for the appropriateness of an Interpretation of time. Rather, we must, in our investigation, make ourselves familiar *beforehand* with the primordial phenomenon of temporality, so that *in terms of this* we may cast light on the necessity, the source, and the reason for the dominion of the way it is ordinarily understood." See also sections 19 and 20 of Heidegger's work, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 229-302.

[4] Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, tr. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 319-20.

[5] Plato, *Timaeus*, tr. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 1167, l. 37c-d: "When the father and creator saw the creature which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the origin, and as this was an eternal living being, he sought to make the universe eternal, so far as might be. Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity, and this image we call time."

[6] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Penguin Books, 1961), Book 11, Section 11, pp. 261-62: "People who speak in this way have not learnt to understand you, Wisdom of God, Light of our minds. They do not yet understand how the things are made which come to be in you and through you. Try as they may to savour the taste of eternity, their thoughts still twist and turn upon the ebb and flow of things in past and future time. But if only their minds could be seized and held steady, they would be still for a while and, for that short moment, they would glimpse the splendour of eternity which is for ever still. They would contrast it with time, which is never still, and see that it is not comparable. They would see that time derives its length only from a great number of movements constantly following one another into the past, because they cannot all continue at once. But in eternity nothing moves into the past: all is present. Time, on the other hand, is never all present at once. The past is always

driven on by the future, the future always follows on the heels of the past, and both the past and the future have their beginning and their end in the eternal present. If only men's minds could be seized and held still! They would see how eternity, in which there is neither past nor future, determines both past and future time."

[7] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987).

[8] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 12-13: "The man of the archaic societies tends to live as much as possible *in* the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects. The tendency is perfectly understandable, because, for primitives as for the man of all premodern societies, the *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacity. The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between *real* and *unreal* or pseudoreal….Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires *to be*, to participate in *reality*, to be saturated with power."

[9] See Ben Rogers, ed., *Is Nothing Sacred?* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Margaret Somerville, *The Ethical Imagination* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2006).

[10] The chinks in the purely secular standpoint seem to be forming, as can be seen in recent remarks made by Jürgen Habermas, a renowned and formidable proponent of a secular, liberal ordering of human society. Habermas has stated that secular society needs to be receptive to and enter into a dialogue with religion if it is going to be able to maintain its commitment to its liberal values and not undo itself from within through intolerance and ideology. See Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).

[11] Other scholars who also affirm the fundamentally religious character of the sacred include: Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, tr. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959); Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, tr. David E. Green (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963); Louis Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

[12] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 80-5.

[13] See the following works by Joseph Pieper: *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1999); *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, tr. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1998); *In Search of the Sacred*, tr. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991); *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*, tr. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

[14] Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World*, p. 30.

[15] See Emilio Brito, *La création selon Schelling: Universum*

(Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1987).

[16] See, for example, Matthew 13:35, 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Hebrews 4:3, 9:26, 11:11; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8, 17:8.

[17] See Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013); Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, tr. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); John Finnis, "Secularism's Practical Meaning," in *Religion and Public Reasons: Collected Essays: Volume V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 56-79. For a treatment of secularism which points out its pernicious and destructive aspects, see Finnis's article, "Secularism and 'The Culture of Death'," from the same volume, pp. 328-43. For a discussion of secularism from a legal point of view, see Iain T. Benson, "Notes Towards a (Re)Definition of the 'Secular'," *U.B.C. Law Review* 33 (2000): 519-49.

[18] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 1-4.

[19] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 3-14.

[20] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 98. See also *A Secular Age*, pp. 192-6.

# WISDOM AS AIM OF EDUCATION IN EAST AND WEST

Jānis (John) Tālivaldis Ozoliņš

## INTRODUCTION

Modern conceptions of education in most Western nations treat it as a commodity that can be purchased just like any other. This is because they have been driven by economic imperatives that have convinced people that an efficient and effective education is one which has measureable outcomes. Although education is regarded as right, or at least a basic education is[1], the distinctions between training and education have become progressively blurred, so that there are increasingly fewer differences that can be observed to distinguish the two. In the post-modern age, ruled by access to information through the internet, knowledge is packaged and then accessed and used by those who have need of it. There is no doubt that access to vast amounts of information is a great boon to all humankind, but the possession of a vast array of information is of no benefit if no piece of information is connected to any other. If information is to become knowledge, it has to be integrated into a coherent understanding of related facts that we have good grounds for regarding as true. For knowledge to become wisdom, we need to be able to connect different areas of knowledge to each other, be able to discern what this means and to arrive at the right courses of action in different situations. At its highest level, wisdom gives us the clarity to discern the right moral path and act on this without hesitation, confident that we act in accord with what is good. This is not through arrogance or a sense of moral superiority – in fact, someone acting like this would not be considered wise – rather it is through a lifelong commitment to a search for truth and doing what is good in the service of others. In a literal sense, those who have wisdom at its highest level have become passionate lovers of wisdom itself, for they have glimpsed the inner beauty of the universe and, like all lovers, desire nothing more than to be merged with their beloved. Humbled by their own finitude in the face of the eternal, they thirst for the opportunity to be submerged and occupied at the very core of their being by the beauty of Wisdom.[2] Wisdom permeates everything we do, since it is concerned in its humblest and most practical guise with seeing the connectedness of disparate facts and isolated sensations. It is what enables us to begin the task of integrating what we know in order to build a conception of the world in which the number of isolated facts dwindles as our education increases. Though knowledge is about the truth and about what is real, it is also about what is good. What we learn and come to know therefore leads us to the good and, leaving aside the argument for this, to virtue.

This paper will argue what seems obvious, namely, that the aim of education should be aligned with the aim of human life, and that is the

attainment of virtue, which, in turn, is the attainment of wisdom. If more virtuous people result from the education that we offer, then there will be a more harmonious and contented society.

The consideration of wisdom as the aim of education will not be found in modern statements about education. Rather, in order to argue for this, we shall need to reach back to older conceptions of education, where the aim of education is not the attainment of marketable skills or training, but the formation of the character of persons. This is not to say that skills and training are not important, but to propose that, in their acquisition, the most significant element is wisdom, since it is this, even at the most practical level, that enables someone to carry out his or her role in the community in ways which serve the common good. It is a recognition that in the performance of even the humblest role we serve others through doing what we do to the best of our abilities. In this paper, we shall draw on Augustine, Benedict of Nursia (commonly referred to as St Benedict), and Thomas Aquinas from the Western tradition, and on the Confucian tradition from the East to show firstly that in these traditions, the aim of education is the formation of persons in order that they become virtuous and, so, wise. Secondly, we shall suggest that it is important to include this aim in modern education at all levels if we want to build a just and good society. The challenge for modern education is not to abandon its commitment to skills and training, but to see that this is not all that students need if they are to be happy and contented human beings aiming to create a civil, prosperous and harmonious society.

## THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION IN EDUCATION

In Confucian thought, education has been seen as having great importance and for being a vehicle for fostering social harmony. Education was a way in which human beings could be freed from poverty and deprivation, and any person could rise from humble beginnings with a good education. When the state system of education was begun in the Han dynasty, it was largely designed for those aspiring to a career in the public service, but developed quickly from this, changing very little right up to the beginning of the twentieth century. It has been roundly criticized for placing all its emphasis on rote learning and memorization, which initially, was required for memorization of the five classical Chinese texts, but in its modern counterpart for making rote learning the preferred teaching methodology.[3] It has also been criticized by western scholars for concentrating on creating the non-professional free man. As is well known, Max Weber criticizes Confucian education somewhat unfairly for creating the well-adjusted man who rationalized his conduct to the degree requisite for well adjustment and for reducing tension to a minimum.[4] It is true that the basic elements of Confucian education are designed to develop character that is to be formed through self-cultivation (*xiu shen* 自我修) of *li* (propriety) and *ren* (benevolence, or humaneness), but it is not simply a matter of rationalizing

one's conduct. There is a genuine concern with developing a virtuous person who can contribute to his community, a much higher aim than just adjusting one's conduct to reduce tension or to give the appearance that one is genuinely concerned for the other. Zhu Xi (朱熹), in the eleventh century (Song dynasty), is credited with reviving the Confucian conception of education – being concerned with moral and spiritual education. This is not just a preoccupation with an outer display of propriety and attention to outer rituals of behavior, but having the inner intentions and emotional states of which the outer display is the public manifestation. As Xinzhong Yao says, the purpose of Confucian education is not only to transmit and develop knowledge, but also to deliver and apply values. In his view, Confucian learning is not just an exercise in scholarship, but fosters values of self-discipline, solidarity with one's family, community and society, as well as public morality and social responsibility. [5] The purpose of Confucian education is therefore much broader than that for which it has been given credit.

Although Confucius (Kongzi 孔子) does not himself discourse at length on education in the *Great Learning* (*Da Xue* 大學), his commentator, Zang[6], on the other hand, says rather a lot about education and its purpose. As a result, since its emphasis is on the formation of character and the development of virtue, the assertion that its aim is the acquisition of wisdom is not startlingly unexpected. There are three major statements made at the outset of the text and these provide the starting point for the commentaries that come later. The aim of the *Great Learning* is to teach and to: (i) show what the highest of virtue consists in; (ii) renew or refresh the people; (iii) rest in the highest good (excellence). Each of these is further elaborated by the commentator, Zang, so that a cogent account of the purpose of education emerges.

Kongzi states quite clearly that the aim of the development of virtue is not simply for outward show. He says that if someone wishes to cultivate themselves, they need to rectify their hearts, but first they have to be sincere in their thoughts. To do the latter, they had to search for the truth, which is to say, extend their knowledge.[7] In what follows, we intend to briefly provide an overview of the central elements of a Confucian education and show that it shares a significant number of elements with the Benedictine, Augustinian, and Thomist conceptions of education. In each of these, there is an emphasis on the formation of character and the acquisition of wisdom.

Confucian education, as Kongzi proposes, is not a matter of individual education in the liberal tradition, but one in which the individual has his or her place in the community. He says that if persons are cultivated, which is to say, possess virtue, then their families will be regulated, by which we can take him to mean living in harmony with each other. Further, if families are living in harmony, the states in which they live will be governed well and it will be possible for everyone to live happy and peaceful lives. At the core of a happy and peaceful nation, he says, is the

individual, since if the root is healthy, so too will be the plant.[8] There is in the cultivation metaphor an understanding that the way to virtue is not easy, but requires that significant attention is paid to the pupil so that the right conditions are provided for moral formation and growth. Education is understood to be structured in such a way that the pupil grows in virtue and is able to assume his or her responsibilities as a good citizen and valued member of his or her community.

Growth in virtue is not just a matter of self-sacrifice in order to be a good and responsible citizen. There is also the emphasis on learning which enables the learner to become closely united with what he or she learns. This is vividly illustrated through a consideration of a practical example from the writings of Zhuangzi in which is related the story of Cook Ting who was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen-hui. Lord Wen-hui marvels at the dexterity with which the cook slices the meat, who in response says that what he loves is the Dao, which is to say that he no longer is focused on the carcass before him, but on allowing the knife to be guided along the natural lines of the body. In this way, the movement is natural and flowing; the cook is attentive to what he is doing and on nothing else. He no longer sees an ox's carcass before him but only the lines which he must follow with his knife in order to separate the meat from the bones. He has become closely united with what he has learnt.[9]

The choice of example here is illustrative precisely because it is not, as we might expect, of an abstract mental activity (such as might be undertaken by a philosopher), but of the physical activity of butchering. It is thus the physical activity chosen which demands some explanation, since it is not of the playing of a musical instrument or of a sport, but of a decidedly practical and unrefined activity. Butchers are not generally associated with highly cultivated persons – *junzi* – so the example gives us pause to reflect on what exactly Zhuangzi is driving at. Lord Wen-hui believes he understands the lesson to be learned, exclaiming that, having heard the cook's words, he has learnt to care for life. What this means is also not easy to interpret, but having due regard for the cook's dexterity, it is the attentiveness, delight and pride that he brings to the task which is the lesson to be learnt. In achieving an excellence in the physical activity, Cook Ting no longer has to pay attention to the physical movements that he has to carry out nor to the carcass itself. His skill is such that it is the mind which commands the body and is able to carry out the particular tasks that are demanded. The harmony between mind and body is such that the mind no longer consciously attends to the body and its movement. Instead, the mind has turned to the details of the cutting of the carcass itself and shuts out everything else. The knife is no longer a separate object, it is an extension of the body and mind of the butcher and the bodily movements are an expression of the will of the butcher. The *Dao* here is to be found in the carrying out of tasks in an as excellent a manner as possible. Caring about life can be understood as involving caring for the achievement of excellence

in everything that one does. It is the commitment to excellence, and this returns us to the central aim of Confucian education.

Zhuangzi is silent on the question of whether Cook Ting has displayed virtue in the sense of the four principle Confucian virtues of *ren*, *li*, *yi* and *zhi*, though there is in this example, echoes of the story of the gamekeeper who refuses to obey the summons of his master because the signal used to summon him was not one that was appropriate for one of his station.[10] This is not because the gamekeeper wishes to be disobedient or that he is not aware of the consequences of disobedience, but because he wishes to observe what is proper, right and accords with the gamekeeper's station. There would be a straying from what is the *Dao* of the gamekeeper if he should respond to an inappropriate signal. Mengzi says that doing what fails to respect the right order of things, such as using underhanded methods to increase one's bag while hunting, is wrong. In condoning doing what is wrong, people try to bend the *Dao*, but, as Mengzi observed, there was never a person who could straighten others by bending himself. [11] In following the *Dao*, both the gamekeeper and the cook need to practise the virtues, since what is the good for the person is what enables him or her to flourish and this means following the right path, the *Dao*. The first step in following the right path is through the cultivation and practice of the virtues. Confucian education, if it is to be labeled as such, is fundamentally aimed at the cultivation of virtue.

Not everyone agrees that Confucian education leads to a community or state which is as prosperous or as content as one might expect. It is criticized for being anti-democratic and resulting in a state where conformity is expected. This criticism could, however, be just as easily leveled against states that consider themselves democratic, since conformism is not necessarily a sign that a state is anti-democratic. Moreover, even states which describe themselves as having a form of democracy and that are considered to have a Confucian heritage, such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Singapore, vary significantly amongst themselves.[12] The assertion here is that there is only one possible form of the state which is the highest and most conducive to ensuring the well-being of its citizens, and that is a democratic state. While this may be so, this assumes that there cannot be more than one organization of the state which can be described as democratic. Aristotle advocates democracy, but argues that the requirements of citizens will be different in different forms of state. Citizens in an oligarchy, for example, will be required to be different kinds of citizens than those in a plutocracy. [13] This will also be the case for different kinds of democracies.

There may be different forms of democracy, but an important hallmark is that it would be expected that, in a democratic state, citizens would take an active role in the governing of the state. This need not mean standing for office, though for Aristotle, each citizen was expected to take a turn in serving the State, but it does mean being prepared to take an active part in public life. At a minimum, it could mean paying one's taxes, voting

in elections and participating in local events. A totalitarian state cannot be seen as virtuous, since it does not seek to create the conditions for its people to flourish, and for that reason, a democratic state is preferred. An authoritarian state is not necessarily totalitarian, but rather, exercises greater control over its citizens through strong laws and the punitive enforcement of them. A Confucian state, however, is not a democracy, since it is a hierarchical state in which the ruler receives his or her mandate from Heaven. The task of the ruler is to bring those whom he or she rules to lead lives of virtue and so to be fulfilled. A ruler who fails to do this is not fit for his or her position and may be removed by the people. In a Confucian state there are significant difficulties in determining the extent of its implementation of democratic principles, since this is not its primary purpose, except where there is an overlap between Confucian and democratic principles.

The Confucian education system had from the outset the very practical aim of educating sufficient numbers of people to take up roles in the vast army of public servants that was needed to administer the state. The methodology employed used could also be said to have been highly successful in what it aimed to accomplish. In large measure, this was not recognizably the Confucian education that we have been discussing, except that it sought to form persons who could take their place in the public service – so, to some extent, there was formation, but the emphasis on rote learning and memorization of classical texts could not have allowed for much reflection on the contents of what was being memorised. Condemnation of the system had its roots in the desire to modernize the Chinese education system, and in the emergence of modern theories of learning.

Rote learning and memorization, it must be added, were methods not unknown in the West. That these methods were so successful for over 2000 years needs explanation, since they were not abandoned until 1905. We do not intend to pursue this line of inquiry here since it would take us too far from our discussion, but it points to a disciplining of the mind that is no longer undertaken and which, as we shall see in the discussion of Benedictine education, can be considered an important element in the formation of virtuous individuals. Honing physical skills, as in the example of the butcher, requires repetition of the same movements over and over again, until the person becomes so habituated to them that they no longer need to attend to the movement, but only to the task of separating meat from bone. In the same way, memorizing a text can be a disciplining of the mind to recall what it has read. Certainly, if this is all that is accomplished, it is not a high level achievement, but if someone has at his or her command a large compendium of work that he or she can recall at will, this is a remarkable accomplishment. Once the text is memorized, like the butcher who no longer attends to the physical movements required in the cutting of the meat, the individual can concentrate on exploring the richness of the text

itself. Rote learning and memorization may well have their place in education, whether it is Confucian or Western.

Curiously, Confucian education was also condemned for not appreciating the importance of science or of specialization, the idea of progress, and rationalized economic frameworks. Yao, for instance, states that Confucian education is not scientific by definition, though he qualifies this somewhat by saying that it does encourage the exploration of one's inner world and openness to new learning. [14] There is no doubt that Confucian education first and foremost aims at the formation of a virtuous individual, but this need not be interpreted as indicating that it is not interested in science nor in specialization, progress and rationality as applied to various disciplines. Kongzi says in the *Da Xue* that in order to cultivate virtue we should search for truth and, in order to do this, we have to extend our knowledge and that this lies in the investigation of things.[15] Science, whatever else it might do, is certainly concerned with the investigation of things and the spirit of Confucian education is directed towards the growth of knowledge in all areas.

Although at their best, Western conceptions of education are concerned with the broader aim of the formation of human beings so that they can become autonomous, skilled, moral and responsible human beings, much of the rhetoric of governments emphasizes the skilling of young people so that they can take their place in the workforce. Work and its connection to self-worth is not to be down-played, since it is an important element in human fulfillment. It is, however, not the only one, and an education which treats it like a commodity fails to see the centrality of the formation of virtuous persons. This element has become forgotten in most modern conceptions of education in the West. Insofar as Confucian education is old-fashioned in its emphasis on the cultivation of the virtues, it adheres to a tradition of education which is in dire need of revival in the West. As we propose to consider below, there is a tradition of education in the West which also emphasizes the importance of education which aims at the cultivation of the virtues and hence the gaining of wisdom. While it begins from a different starting point, there are some remarkable parallels between the two ways of considering the aims of education. A fruitful dialogue between these two traditions may help to shift the balance from the current utilitarian conceptions of education to conceptions which recognize the centrality of the moral dimension of education and, as we proposed at the outset, of wisdom as an aim of education. Wisdom is vital if we are to create just and harmonious societies, since it is this which is the end point of virtue.

## AUGUSTINE, BENEDICT, AND THOMAS AQUINAS ON EDUCATION

There is little need to explain the choice of Augustine, Benedict of Nursia, and Thomas Aquinas as representatives of the Christian tradition in

education. These three are selected because they share an understanding of education as being as much about the formation of human beings in virtue as in learning about the world and developing skills that could be useful. Education is never just about gaining knowledge and skills, though these are important, but about human beings having some understanding of their origins, their nature, and their final destiny. Questions about what is the good for human beings cannot be easily answered unless we have some conception of what is the nature and purpose of human beings. In investigating what is the good for human beings, we quite quickly arrive at the conclusion that human beings want to be happy, that this means that they feel fulfilled, and that human flourishing is connected to the attainment of moral virtue and hence wisdom. In the case of Augustine, Benedict, and Aquinas, their understanding of human flourishing and what constitutes human happiness is grounded in their Christian faith and so is theological. For these three – and, one might add for Christian philosophers and theologians in general – human beings are created by God and their ultimate happiness is to be united with Him. Since God is love and goodness itself, human happiness will be attained through human beings living lives which are in harmony with their created natures and with each other. There is much that is in common between a Confucian conception of human destiny, which speaks of union with Heaven, and this Christian conception.

For Augustine, what constitutes happiness can be rationally understood in terms of our relationships with each other and with God, who is love. Augustine distinguishes between the things of this world which can be used in order to reach the end of the journey of this life and the joy which is to be then experienced. In other words, everything that we do in the world is directed towards the happiness which we experience when we have returned to God.[16] Ultimately, the true object of enjoyment – of happiness – is the triune God, the Blessed Trinity.[17] This object, by extension, is the same for all people, since he notes that if anyone is asked why they become Christians the response is that it is for the blessed or happy life and this is precisely what philosophers, whether Epicureans or Stoics, will also say.[18] Even a thief when asked why he steals replies that it is because he will have what he did not have before and this is better than the state of not having that thing. Augustine says the thief's mistake is to think that the good can be achieved by doing what is bad. The happy life is the reward of the good; goodness is the work and happiness is the reward. He comments that God orders the work and offers the reward.[19] This parallels the Confucian idea that in order to lead a virtuous life we must follow the right path, the *Dao*, which has been ordained by Heaven. So too, according to Augustine, there is a right path, ordained by God which leads us to happiness. In order to follow this path, mapped out by God, we need to be prepared to lead a life of virtue and to follow God's command. Augustine rejects the Epicurean conception of the happy life because it is limited to the body and turns inward, seeking only to do what gratifies the individual, and does not see that there is any obligation to another. Nor does it apparently see the limited

nature of sensual gratification – even the most exquisite of pleasures in time will no always provide the excitement it once did. Because it is fleeting, pleasure cannot be happiness. Similarly, he rejects the Stoic, who despite proposing that happiness lies in a virtuous mind, does not see that his happiness in having a virtuous mind does not emerge from himself, but from God, who is the source of virtue and who has given him the inspiration to desire it as well as the capacity to seek it.[20]

The task of education according to Augustine is to prepare us for happiness and this is a lifelong journey the final destination of which is God. It is of course one thing to claim that the final destination of human beings is God, it is quite another to provide some account of what is meant by God. Augustine explains that whatever else one wants to say about God, if there is a God, He is esteemed above all else and, since intelligent life is above nutritive and sentient life, God must be intelligent and supremely so. Noting that human beings are sometimes foolish and sometimes wise, wisdom itself must be such that it is never subject to change, else human beings would never know whether they were acting wisely or not, since their yardstick would be changeable. Since it is God who is supremely intelligent and unchangeable, it is also God who is wisdom itself.[21] Hence, if the task of education is to prepare us for happiness and this ultimately is God, then we can conclude that the task of education is to lead us to wisdom, which is to say to practise the virtues throughout our lives so that we become wise and through the attainment of wisdom united to God who is wisdom itself.

It is evident that, in focusing attention on the attainment of wisdom through the practice of virtue, Augustine at many points is in agreement with the Confucian conception of education as first and foremost a formation of the individual. In the Christian context, the way to virtue and wisdom is revealed in the life of Jesus Christ and so differs from the Confucian conception of the *Dao*. Nevertheless, both Confucian education and the education advocated by Augustine propose similar ends and both agree that the achievement of those ends requires a formation of persons in the virtues.

Aquinas echoes the thought of Augustine in considering the aim of education. Whatever else is achieved through the gaining of new practical skills and training, education as Aquinas conceives of it is intrinsically valuable because it is directed towards the gaining of wisdom where this means leading a life in active co-operation with God's Will and in which human fulfilment is recognised as contributing to the common good. God's Will here could also be understood in a Confucian context as being in accord with and in cooperation with the dictates of Heaven. Although the final end of human beings as a consequence of their rational nature is God, says Aquinas, it is difficult for them to discern what good actions are and so they need to acquire good character and virtue.[22] Education in these terms demands the formation of character and this means the preparation of human persons so that they are receptive to the gaining of virtue. Perhaps

more so than Augustine, Aquinas emphasises that education is about the common good and the search for knowledge and truth can take place only within the context of service to our fellow human beings. Aquinas does not deny the importance of practical skills and capacities, but these are to be seen as ways in which human beings can be brought closer to the truth and which are to contribute to the gaining of virtue, which first and foremost is the aim of education. Aquinas emphasises throughout his writings that love is an essential element in all human life and so if we understand that learning will bring us closer to the truth, then it follows that if we are to teach with any effectiveness, we need to prepare the ground so that pupils are receptive to what is to be taught and to be aided in the development of a love of learning.

Aquinas, like Aristotle, holds that if we are to acquire virtue, then the first step is to become habituated to doing what is right and good. That is, we need to practise the virtues first, as persuasive words will not be enough. Intellectual instruction in the virtues will have an effect only on those who already possess them to some extent.[23] This is not to say that persuasive words may not inspire someone to do what is good, but it this is likely to be rare. Some individuals, will not be moved to the good because they have no sense of shame nor fear disgrace, says Aquinas, and can only be coerced to do the good through fear of punishment. Such individuals live according to their passions and not through the use of reason, and so will not be convinced to do what is good by argument. This is why habituation is necessary for the development of virtue. It is not, nevertheless, the only way, as Aquinas acknowledges.[24]

Human beings cannot be left to their own resources to become virtuous. Habituation, which is to say practise of the virtues, is one of the ways, but Aquinas is aware that instruction is also one of the ways in which human beings will be helped in gaining the virtues. Like Mengzi, he acknowledges that human nature is good, but because not everyone is born with exactly the same inclinations to the good, some will find it easier to become virtuous than others. This does not mean that a person does not have to strive to perfect having a particular virtue, since a person still needs to learn how and when the virtue is to be exercised. Someone with the virtue of courage, for example, still needs to learn how to use it.[25] Moreover, having one virtue in a greater degree than another does not obviate the development of all the virtues, since human beings need all the virtues if they are to be wise. This is why instruction is needed, as well as the right kind of environment in which the virtues can be practised. This will be an environment in which the practice of virtues is taken seriously and in which the whole community strives for virtue and wisdom.

Aquinas is persuaded that, as we have seen in the example of Zhuangzi's cook, in practical matters the truth of one's assertions are not tested by argument but by deeds and way of life. This is because the kind of persons we are is shown not through what we say, but in how we act. Claiming to be courageous, for example, is different from acting

courageously. If we want to be thought of as upright and honest individuals, then we must tell the truth and act honestly. The person who is virtuous will seek to do the good and this will lead him or her to happiness which resides in having wisdom.[26] Aquinas demonstrates that there is to be a unity between what is thought and what is done. Authentic virtue is not simply a matter of observing the proprieties, but must go deep, heart and mind united in the actions that are performed. Though lacking the poetry of Zhuangzi, Aquinas emphasises the importance of authenticity when he states that in practical matters the truth is tested by a man's conduct and way of living, for these are the dominant factors. If we are to judge whether someone is acting from the right motives, we need to examine previously expressed opinions by judging them from the facts and from the actual life that the individual leads. If the opinions agree with the facts we should accept them; if they disagree we should consider them mere theories.[27]

Aquinas, says MacIntyre, develops a schema of the practical life defined in terms of goods, virtues, laws and the relationships between these three. This schema is presupposed by and embodied in those activities directed by practical reasoning which exemplify good human practice, he says. Moreover, it is through reflection on such practice that the relevant set of truths about that scheme is discovered by the inquiries of theoretical reason. Importantly, none of this depends on theology.[28] The schema of the practical life developed by Aquinas aims at bringing human beings to have wisdom and to reach their final destination, which for him is God. Since the schema does not depend on theology, it has a universality which allows it to be utilised in other contexts. If we think of the schema in Confucian terms, the person who has genuine wisdom will be one who has humaneness (*ren*) and who is able to practise virtue without difficulty because he or she has disciplined himself or herself through a period of training.

Benedictine education, as established in the Rule of Benedict, exemplifies the practical approach to the development of virtue. The purpose of the Rule is to order the lives of the monks living in community and to cultivate attentiveness to the task at hand, for each is an opportunity to pray – *ora et labora* – to pray and to work – being the motto of the Benedictines. It is this motto which provides us with the somewhat simple blueprint of the kind of education which can lead to virtue.[29] Benedictine education is both physically and intellectually disciplined, for it is not only the mind which must be trained, but the body also. It is this recognition of the importance of hard physical work in the formation of the person that is significant in the Rule of Benedict. The monk from the outset is required to formally pray at seven designated times a day, he is to keep silent, and to be obedient and humble, imposing upon himself significant disciplines on mind and body.[30]

The daily life of the monks, according to the Rule, is highly organised and directed towards becoming habituated to a very simple life that leaves the monk free to concentrate on prayer and contemplation. Each waking hour is occupied, either with manual labour, reading, or prayer.

Idleness should be avoided. Benedict envisaged that as far as possible, the life of the monastery should be self-sufficient, so that there was no reason to go outside the monastery. In particular, this required that those with various skills were expected to put these to use for the benefit of the community. Such a structured existence is not possible for everyone, but what the Rule describes is a highly disciplined way of life which requires the subordination of the self to service to God. Hard physical work is united with prayer and reading, nourishing the psychic, intellectual and spiritual life of the monk. It is, however, a balanced life, with no one part taking precedence over the other.

The regimen imposed by the Rule of Benedict recognises that our thoughts need to be kept under control, since these can lead us astray and can give rise to the desires of the flesh. In such matters, our will needs to be subordinated to the will of God, so that we seek to do what is good and right, rather than indulging ourselves. In order to be able to do this successfully, we need to be on constant guard that we do not succumb to the wrong kinds of desires.[31] The Rule through its disciplines seeks to help the monk focus on God and to be not distracted by anything that does not enable him to reach his goal. Hence, he has to discipline both his thoughts and his natural bodily inclinations, such as various desires for sex, drink, and other pleasures, so that these do not overwhelm him and he turns away from his goal. By degrees, the monk lets go of all traces of ego, so that his whole life is one of service to his community and to God. He becomes self-effacing both in his heart and in his whole demeanour. Moreover, through constant practice of humility in all its aspects, what was difficult at first becomes a habit that can be relatively easily maintained.[32]

A Benedictine monk who has succeeded in his goal of giving his whole life to service is very like the *junzi*, the wise and enlightened man that Kongzi urges us to become through the cultivation of the virtues. Although the virtue of humility is not much considered in discussions of the virtues, it is an important one for both the Benedictine and Confucian traditions, and also for Kongzi who speaks about humility in the *Lunyu*. The *junzi* considers righteousness essential and performs it according to the rules of propriety, bringing forth in humility.[33] In both cases too, the person who has reached his or her goal is able to maintain his or her virtue with ease and, it would seem, with joy.

## A COMMON EDUCATIONAL METHOD

The bulk of what we have argued through a comparison of at least one version of Confucianism and one tradition in Western thought represented by Augustine, Benedict, and Aquinas is that an important aim of education is human fulfilment and that this is connected with growth in virtue. Wisdom, being the possession of virtue, was thus the aim of education. A significant aspect of an education with an aim of developing wise persons was that wisdom could not be separated from the common good, since

human beings are social creatures who crave, for the most part, contact with their fellow human beings. Although we did not provide a detailed and full account of the differences between Confucian conceptions of virtue and the Western tradition represented here, the similarities are striking. To be sure, a more detailed look at each of these conceptions would have revealed significant differences, but each account argues that what is good for human beings has been given to them by God or Heaven (*Tian*) and that there is a path – a way or *Dao* – human beings must follow if they are to be happy. Living according to the dictates of Heaven or the law of God is only possible if human beings are willing to practise the virtues, and the end result of gaining the virtues is wisdom and union with God or Heaven.

Confucian education, despite its great success in providing educated persons for the administration of the Chinese government for over two thousand years, was roundly criticised for relying on rote learning and the memorisation of classical Chinese texts and, so, is quite unsuited to a modern age. In the account of Benedictine education, we also drew on an ancient tradition, established one and a half thousand years ago, the motto of which was prayer and work. While not relying on rote learning and memorisation, it, too, relied on a strict regimen of hard physical work, regular prayer and reflection. A feature of the Benedictine tradition is the formation of the individual monk in the twelve steps of humility.[34] The Benedictine tradition, which preserved Western civilisation for a thousand years and helped spark its renaissance[35], continues, but is restricted in its fullness to the monastic orders. Modern nations no longer need to rely on the self-contained monastic economy for either the preservation of civilisation and culture or education.

In both the Confucian and Western traditions of education considered here there is an emphasis on the formation of the pupil through habituation to the practise of virtue. Disciplining of the individual can be done in a number of ways. In the Confucian case, this was done though rote learning and memorisation, for it takes significant effort to memorise anything. Perseverance and persistence are important qualities and these can be applied in other areas of life. Rote learning too will have its place in an education where there is a scarcity of books or other means of maintaining access to texts and the treasures they contain. Learning to be disciplined in this way can readily be applied in other areas of life. This disciplining or placing oneself under a particular regimen is also mentioned in key Confucian texts.[36] The life of the Benedictine monk is similarly disciplined, with the Rule specifying how each day and hour is to be spent by the monk. In all things, he is to be obedient to his superior, the Abbot of his monastery. Such constant, sustained attentiveness and focus on the goal of virtue while not guaranteeing its achievement, in both the Confucian and Benedictine cases, appears to provide the best opportunity for succeeding in becoming a virtuous person.

The lesson for modern conceptions of education that focus on skills and the knowledge necessary for a profession or a place in the modern

workforce is that concentration on these to the detriment of moral formation is a mistake. First and foremost, human beings want to know how to live happy and contented lives. Such lives are not divorced from the relationships with others in their families, their communities or the wider world. An education which combines the learning of skills and knowledge that provides young persons the opportunity to earn a living with moral formation is best placed to enable them to have meaningful and fulfilled lives and to serve the common good. In learning to be less concerned with their own desires and wants, they will be contributing to the building of a more just and compassionate world for themselves and for many others. In practice, the kind of education which is needed is one which incorporates from an early age, service to others, particularly those with the greatest needs.

**NOTES**

[1] The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* says the following about education at Article 26:

"(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." See United Nations (1948) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 26, at URL http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/2007/hrphotos/declaration%20_eng. pdf Accessed 4/5/2012

[2] The capitalisation of Wisdom here is a recognition that for theists, Wisdom in the highest sense refers to God.

[3] See for example, David Yau-fai Ho, Si-qing Peng, and Shui-fun Fiona Chan, "Authority and Learning in Confucian-Heritage Education: A Relational Methodological Analysis," Chapter 3 in Chi-yue Chin, Farideh Salili and Ying-yi Hong (eds.) *Multiple Competencies and Self-Regulated Learning: Implications for Multicultural* Education (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2001), p. 29ff.

[4] Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (New York: Free Press, 1968), pp. 227-229.

[5] Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 283.

⁶ It is not entirely clear how much of the commentary can be attributed to Zang (also known as Zeng Shen, 曾參) since it was compiled by his students. Zhu Xi (朱熹) is responsible for its division into the classic text and the commentary.

⁷ Confucius, *The Analects* (*Lun Yu*), *The Great Learning* (*Da Xue*), *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong Yong*), tr. James Legge (London: Dover Publications, 1971), *The Great Learning* [hereinafter, *The Great Learning*] Para. 4.

⁸ *The Great Learning*, paras. 5-7.

⁹ James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The texts of Taoism*, [including Zhuangzi Writings] tr. James Legge (London: Dover Publications, 1962), *Zhuangzi*, Part III, The secret of caring for life.

¹⁰ Mencius, *Mencius (Meng-tzu)*, tr. D.C. Lau, [hereinafter, *Mencius*] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), Book III.B.1

¹¹ *Mencius*, Book.III.B.1

¹² A. Onsman, "Recognising the ordinances of Heaven: the role of Confucianism in Higher Education Management in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34 (2012), p. 176.

¹³ Aristotle, *The Politics*, tr. and intro. T.A. Sinclair (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), Book III, Ch.1. In an oligarchy, a state is ruled by a few privileged individuals; in a plutocracy, a state is ruled by the wealthy.

¹⁴ Xinzhong Yao, "Confucianism and its Modern Values: Confucian moral, educational and spiritual heritages revisited," *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 20 (1999), p. 36.

¹⁵ *The Great Learning*, para. 4

¹⁶ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana (On Teaching Christianity)*, intro., tr. and notes, Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1996), Book I, ch. 4.

¹⁷ *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book I, ch. 5

¹⁸ Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine*, Electronic Edition (2ⁿᵈ Release), Sermons (148-183) on the New Testament, Volume III/5 (New York: New City Press, 1992), *Sermon 150*, para. 4.

¹⁹ Augustine, *Sermon 150*, para. 4.

²⁰ Augustine, *Sermon 150*, paras. 7-10.

²¹ *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book I, paras. 8-9.

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1948) (hereinafter, *ST*), I-II, Q.1, Art. 4 and I-II, Q. 1, Art. 5.

²³ Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. C.I. Litzinger, Foreword R. McInerny (Notre Dame, Indiana: Dumb Ox Books, 1993) [hereinafter *Commentary N.E.*] Book X, lect. XIV, 2137-2139

²⁴ In his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aquinas says, "Next at "It is perhaps," he shows that habituation is required for a

man to become virtuous. To acquire virtue, Aristotle says, we ought not to be satisfied with mere words. But we ought to consider it a thing of great value if – even after possessing everything that seems to make men virtuous – we attain virtue. There are three views on these matters. Some philosophers maintain that men are virtuous by nature, i.e., by natural temperament together with the influence of the heavenly bodies. Others hold that men become virtuous by practice. Still others say that men become virtuous by instruction. All three opinions are true in some degree." *Commentary N.E.*, Book X, Lect. XIV, 2143

[25] *Commentary N.E.*, Book VI, Lect. XI, 1275-1278.

[26] *Commentary N.E.*, Lect. XIII, 2132.

[27] *Commentary N.E.*, Lect. XIII, 2132.

[28] A. MacIntyre, "Aquinas's critique of education: Against his own age, Against ours," in A. Rorty (ed.) *Philosophers of Education* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 98.

[29] It is not asserted that there is any educational method that can guarantee results, despite many education systems claiming that they can. The Benedictine way of education is not being offered as an example of a method which invariably makes those who are prepared to withstand its rigours virtuous and wise. It is offered as an example of a method which is not dissimilar to Confucian education.

[30] Benedict (1949) *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, tr. Boniface Verheyen OSB (Atchison, Kansas), electronic edition prepared by Boniface Butterworth OSB, [hereinafter *Rule of Benedict*] at URL: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/benedict/rule2/files/rule2.html    Accessed: 23/3/2012, Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

[31] *Rule of Benedict*, Chapter 7.

[32] *Rule of Benedict*, Chapter 7.

[33] Confucius, *Analects*, Book XV (*Wei Ling Kung*), Ch. XVII.

[34] *Rule of Benedict*, Chapter 7.

[35] Thomas E. Woods Jr., *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (Washington: Regnery Press, 2005), pp. 25-45.

[36] For example, see *Zhuangzi*, Ch. 6 "The Great and Most Honoured Master," Section 4, in James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The texts of Taoism*.

# THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TOLERANCE IN RUMI

Sayed Hassan "Akhlaq" Hussaini

## INTRODUCTION

Jalal al-Din Muhammad al-Balkhi Rumi (1207-1273), often referred to as Mawlana (lord/master) or Rumi, is one of the most important figures of Islamic Sufism. Rumi's work, I shall argue, is particularly timely today. There are tendencies among contemporary Muslim intellectuals to accept the Sufi interpretation of Islam and to present a picture of Islam as tolerant and peaceful, not only to counteract Western Islamophobia but also to counteract extremism within Islamic societies.[1]

In this paper, then, I wish to introduce some aspects of Rumi's thought and, specifically, his ideas on tolerance. The present discussion will focus on: knowledge of God and tolerance; human identity and tolerance; and spiritual journey and tolerance. My contention is that Rumi's concept of tolerance is not only of academic and historical interest, but of particular relevance to current discussions in Islamic intellectual life.

## BACKGROUND

Rumi is known in Islam as one of the most important scholars and mystical poets in its history. He is famous for his love poems that have been translated into many languages. But Rumi is celebrated for another reason. His followers established a mystical order called the "Mawlawıya," known in Western culture as the "Whirling Dervishes" or "Sama."[2]

Rumi was born in Balkh (today, in northern Afghanistan) to a religious scholarly family. After leaving Balkh because of the Mongol invasion, the family lived in various Middle Eastern cities during the next decade. Rumı was about 20 years old when they settled in the central Anatolian city of Konya. After his father died, Rumi was given a position in the local court and became a religious leader.

In November 1244, he met an itinerant Sufi named Shams ad-Dın (1185-1248) from Tabrız (in northwestern Iran).[3] Shams influenced Rumi to such an extent that Rumi's personality changed completely. Rumi described his spiritual journey in the following way: "The outcome of my life is not more than three words: I used to be raw, then I was cooked, and now I am on fire."[4] Rumi saw in Shams a perfect manifestation of God, a perfect man whose being, speech, behavior, and moods were signs of God. He was devoted to Shams and left his position as a religious leader and preacher. However, Rumi's students forced Shams to leave the city. Rumi was so devastated that he composed the *Divan-e Kabir*, a lyric poem of some 35,000 verses, in Shams's honor.

The Islamic intellectual movement includes three main schools: philosophy, theology, and Mysticism/Sufism. The first emphasizes reason (*Aql*), the second, religious tradition (*Naql*), and the last, love and intuition (*Kashf va shuhood*). Rumi belonged to the third school, but he also knew much about the first two schools and, to that extent, his ideas are particularly comprehensive.

## THE 'MATHNAWI'

Rumi wrote much more than the *Divan-e Kabir* – he also authored a book of discourses and a collection of letters. But his most influential work is the 27,000-verse didactic poem, *Spiritual Couplets* (*Mathnawı-yi ma'nawı*),[5] a record of his discovery of Sufism. This book has been recognized by many commentators, both within the Sufi tradition and outside it, as the greatest mystical poem ever written.[6] Referring constantly to Quranic verses and Islamic authorized narrations, the *Mathnawi* tries to explain mystical issues in metaphors and examples in order to help people reach God. Moreover, it has played a significant role in spreading Sufi ideas worldwide. The *Mathnawi* is for Sufism as important as the Holy *Qur'an* is among Muslims. Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414-1492), the great Muslim Sufi and hagiographer, described Rumi's book as follows: "What can I say in praise of that great one? He is not a Prophet but has come with a book; The Spiritual Masnavi of Mawlavi is the Quran in the language of Pahlavi (Persian)." Similarly, a poem by Shaykh Bahai (1547-1621), a great philosopher and Muslim jurist, states: "I do not say that this respected person is a prophet, but he has the book. His *Mathnawi* is a guide like the Quran that leads some people and misleads others." Finally, Mulla Hadi Sabzavari (1797-1873), an Iranian philosopher and mystical theologian, calls the *Mathnawi* "a poetic interpretation of the Holy Quran" and tries to show it as consistent with Mulla Sadra's transcendental theosophy.[7] (It should be also be noted that not only classical philosophers like Sabzavari, but modern philosophers like Muhammad Taqi Jafari (1923-1998), Muhammad Iqbal of Lahore (1877-1938), and the Islamic reformer Ali Shariati (1933-1977), were influenced by Rumi's ideas on Islam.)

What, exactly, is the subject matter of the *Mathnawi*? The *Mathnawi* is clearly the most detailed, systematic, and methodical of Rumi's poetic works. The *Divan-e Kabir* is limited to feelings and dialogues between the lover and the beloved, and it presents Rumi's experiences without reference to the rules of reason and logic, belief or unbelief, traditions and morals, or even the relationship between language and meaning. The *Mathnawi*, however, presents ideas regarding the rules of Islamic Sharia, theology, theosophy, public traditions and general morals, as well as the relationship between language and meaning. In other words, while the *Divan-e Kabir* is the immediate reflection of Rumi's mystical experiences, the *Mathnawi* gives a mediated reflection through language; the difference is like that between the emotional mode and the reaction or

expression of a depressed person.[8] This explains in part why I focus here on the *Mathnawi*, capturing the common transferable concepts, and pointing out how these ideas relate to the subject of this paper. However, this approach involves a paradoxical method.

Rumi is well-known as the master of love[9] – one who had experienced love in his entire being, especially after his meeting with the mysterious Sufi, Shams. What he says in both the *Divan-e Kabir* and the *Mathnawi* represents the outburst of his soul, and the words of the Beloved. He talks about love through stories: "The King and the Maid" in Book I of the *Mathnawí*, "Moses and the Shepherds" in Book II, "The Life of Sadr-e-Jahan" in Books Ill and IV, "The Story of Mahmood and Ayaz" in Book V, and "Leili and Majnoon" in Book VI; these provide only a few examples of Rumi's discussion of the concept of Divine love.[10] Also, in Rumi's perspective, all love is related to the love of God. He writes: "Except love of the most beauteous God everything, though (outwardly) it is (pleasant like) eating sugar, is (in truth) agony of spirit" (*Mathnawí*, Book 1:3684).

Rumi's approach is simply to share these insights, because it is not possible to teach them. His account of love is based on his personal and unique experiences, both in the style of his language and his style of life. Rumi was very flexible in style of speech, personality, and formation of his ideas. For example, he chose a very simple name for his great book: "The Spiritual Couplet." However, as history has shown, it had a huge impact on Farsi and Islamic culture, so that eminent Sufis and poets even tried to choose a special name for the work. Many strange forms are used in his poems, but are made natural.[11]

There is a well-known story in the *Mathnawi* entitled "How four persons quarreled about grapes, which were known to each of them by a different name" (Book 2:3668-3699), that encourages us to break free from the prison of language and names. It begins with this wonderful poem:

> Pass on from the name and look at the attributes, in order that the attributes may show thee the way to the essence.
>
> The disagreement of mankind is caused by names: peace ensues when they advance to the reality [denoted by the name] (Book 2: 3666-3667).

Because Rumi left formal study, stopped his teaching, and changed his scholarly approach towards people, his students turned against his master Shams. His positive view of Sufi dance was not common among religious scholars and should, again, be recognized as a sign of his flexibility. In the whirling dance, people leave behind all selfish pride and attachments.[12] Moreover, his telling of love is more a kind of self-unveiling. Here, we do not have a sermon and advice, but a statement of the facts of life. Rumi did not merely advise people as a common preacher, but exposed his soul, as well as our unknown souls, to his readers. He asked people to make a decision to change themselves.

One of the key aspects of Rumi's doctrine of love is his emphasis on tolerance. Rumi's invitation to tolerance is based on his understanding of God, the world, human being, and social life. Concerning tolerance, there is an interdependent relationship between the different aspects of Rumi's view and the foundations of Islamic Sufism. To see this, let us now turn to the most important and initial elements of Rumi's viewpoint on tolerance.

## KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND TOLERANCE

The best-known name for Sufism in contemporary Persian literature is "عرفان"'"Erfan," the Gnostic school.[13] This name indicates a relationship to special knowledge of God. With regard to our subject, if a person knows God with his or her heart through love and intuition, that by itself means reaching God, and the person will be tolerant. The question is: why and how?

"Reaching" God is the main purpose of the spiritual journey in Sufism.[14] What does reaching God mean? According to Rumi, it is appropriating as many of God's attributes that human capacity allows.[15]

> God created us in His image: our qualities are instructed by [and modeled upon] His qualities (*Mathnawí*, Book 4: 1194).

> Since the angels perceived in him [Adam] the rays of God, they fell in worship and hastened to do homage (*Mathnawí*, Book 1: 1247).

As I will explain later, each person is a unique manifestation of God. There is also a unity between the different names and attributes of God. Everybody must try to be more like God.[16] One name of God is the "Patient" (*Helm*). He constantly sees that people do many wrong deeds and have bad ideas, but does not intervene. He respects His creation and the fact that all people are different. According to Rumi's poem, God says:

> Within My [infinite] patience (*Helm*[17]) [the patience of] a hundred fathers and a hundred mothers at every moment are born and vanish.
>     Their patience is [but] the foam of the sea of My patience: the foam comes and goes, but the sea is [always] there (Book 1: 2673-4).

Here is another poem from Rumi that explores the manifestation of the Divine's "*Helm*" on the earth:

> This earth has the mark of God's clemency, in that it got filth and gave flowers as the produce:

> In that it covers our pollutions, [and that] buds grow up
> from it in exchange. (Book 2:1793-1794)

If the spiritual traveler, the desired audience of Rumi, tries to obtain God's attributes and realizes God's names, he or she has to become more patient and tolerant. As a matter of fact, Rumi added that life in this world is not possible without tolerance, not even a life of self-ignorance.

> Heedlessness (delusion), then, is in sooth the pillar [support] of
> this world (Book 4:1330, see also Book 1: 2065)

However, Rumi advises that we have to focus more on reaching God. We may ask: Can we reach God? How do we become aware of God's attributes? The position of people in relation to God in Sufism explains the point. What is the position of human beings to God? From Islamic mysticism's viewpoint (which differs from other orthodox points of view about creation), the world is God's manifestation[18]:

> Those progenies are not [produced] by means of these four
> [elements]; consequently they are not seen by these eyes.
> Those progenies are born of [Divine] illumination;
> consequently they are covered [from sight] by a pure veil.
> We said "born", but in reality they are not born, and this
> expression is only [used] in order to guide [understanding].
> (Book 6 :1812-1814)

According to Rumi, the position of human beings in the world is the highest manifestation of God.

> The deliciousness of milk and honey is the reflexion of the [pure]
> heart: from that heart the sweetness of every sweet thing is
> derived.
> Hence the heart is the substance, and the world is the
> accident: how should the heart's shadow [reflexion] be the object
> of the heart's desire? (Book 3: 2263-4)

This spiritual humanism is considered the main ethical point of Sufism:

> The tiara *We have honored* [the sons of Adam] is on the crown of
> thy head; the collar *We have given* thee hangs on thy breast.
> Man is the Substance, and the celestial sphere [the world]
> is his accident, all things are [like] a branch or the step of a ladder
> [secondary and subsidiary]: he is the object.
> O thou to whom reason and foresight and intelligence are
> slaves, how art thou selling thyself so cheaply?

> Service to thee is imposed on all existence as a duty: how should a substance beg for help from an accident? (Book 5:3574-3577)

This shows that the creativity and knowledge of humanity and the creativity and knowledge of God can be linked together. One cannot know God unless one knows oneself:

> Hence the Prophet expounded this [Matter], [when he said], "Whoso knoweth himself knoweth God" (Book 5: 2114)

There is no authenticity for each person in the person itself. It occurs only as a manifestation of God, as we will see – a special manifestation that dances, imitating other powers and songs:

> A babe does not contend with its nurse, but it weeps, although it knows neither evil nor good.
>       We are as the harp and thou art striking [it with] the plectrum [playing on it]: the lamentation is not from us, it is thou that art making lamentation.
>       We are as the flute, and the music in us is from thee; we are as the mountain, and the echo in us is from thee.
>       We are as pieces of chess [engaged] in victory and defeat: our victory and defeat is from thee, O thou whose qualities are comely!
>       Who are we, O thou soul of your souls, that we should remain in being beside thee?
>       We and our existences are [really] non-existences: thou art the absolute Being which manifests the perishable [causes of phenomena to appear].
>       We all are lions, but lions on a banner: because of the wind they are rushing onward from moment to moment.
>       Their onward rush is visible, and the wind is unseen: may that which is unseen never fail!
>       Our wind [that whereby we are moved] and our being are of thy gift; our whole existence is from thy bringing [us] into being.
>       Thou didst show the delightfulness of Being unto not-being, [after] thou hadst caused not-being to fall in love with thee. (Book 1: 597-606)[19]

But the limitations of reality allow us to realize only some aspects of God and of our being. This leads to differences in each being. So, if we wish to know this wisdom, we will try to examine God in its different manifestations, and do our best with "others." This alone will create a better world. So, the first thing is to understand and do your best with "others," instead of wanting to change them.

> Therefore [*a fortiori*] in the case of the [human] essences, which are the foundation of all fundamentals, know that there [too] there are differences and divisions.
>
> Neither is his [one man's] life like his [another man's] life, nor is his death like his death.
>
> Never deem his [this one's] grave like his [that one's] grave. How indeed shall I describe the differences [between them] in that [other] world? (Book 2: 3009-3011)

## KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN IDENTITY AND TOLERANCE

According to Rumi, the real identity of mankind is knowable by its relation to God as well as by its awareness of its limitations. How is this so?

Another way of reaching God is self-improvement, a fact that has a connection with tolerance. Rumi saw tolerance as a way that leads us to self-improvement. As mentioned above, it means that a spiritual traveler tries to discover his or her inner capacity and, thus, the names and attributes of God. Now, I have to add that the unity between the different names and attributes of God as well as common characteristics found in people reflect a number of things to those who want to learn. We can learn about our positive and negative characteristics by examining other personalities. We cannot know good things without facing bad things.

> He [God] continually turns you from one state [of feeling] to another, manifesting opposites by means of the opposites in the change. (Book 2: 1544)

> Thou dost not know evil till thou knowest good: [only] from [one] contrary is it possible to discern [the other] contrary, O youth. (Book 4: 1345)

And here is one more noteworthy point:

> The contrary is secretly enclosed in the contrary: fire is enclosed in boiling water.
>
> A [delightful] garden is enclosed in Nimrod's fire: revenues grow from giving and spending (Book 6: 3570-3571).

Everybody discovers a side of reality that is one shade of Truth. In Islamic doctrine, all things belong to God and He is the origin and the purpose of all. "All the beautiful names" (Quran 7:189; 59:24) – that is, the names of beauty (*jamal*), majesty (*jalal*), and perfection (*kamal*) – belong to this absolutely one and transcendent God. The divine names represent God's face toward the world and are the vessels to finding God in and through His creation.[20] His *Jamal* is visible in pleasurable things, as His *Jalal* in non-pleasurable things, and His *Kamal* in everything.[21] The finding of God in all

things is the ideal of the Sufis. This is also self-improvement. Thus, human self-improvement is based on love that is the result of spiritual knowledge. Rumi explicitly emphasizes a combination of knowledge and love:

> By love bitter things become sweet; by love pieces of copper become golden;
> By love dregs become clear; by love pains become healing;
> By love the dead is made life; by love the king is made a slave.
> This love, moreover, is the result of knowledge: who [ever] sat in foolishness on such a throne?
> On what occasion did deficient knowledge give birth to this love? Deficient [knowledge] gives birth to love, but [only love] for that which is [really] lifeless. (Book 2: 1521-1525)

Thus, we not only have to tolerate "others," but also must respect them as manifestations of God and as the best guide to self-improvement:

> The prophet said, "God has not given faith to any one in whose nature there is no patience." (Book 2: 598)

> Oh, Happy the soul that saw its own fault, and if any one told [found] a fault, wished eagerly [to take] that [fault] upon itself! – Because half of him [every man] has always belonged to the realm of faults[22], and the other half of him [man] belongs to the realm of the Unseen. (Book 2: 3021-3022)

> No one who perceives faults [*Aybdan*[23]] has got [even] a scent [inkling] of him that knows the things unseen [*ghaybdan*]. (Book 3: 571)

> [Yet] the bad associate is good [for you] because of the patience [which you must show him in overcoming desires], for the exercise of patience expands the heart [with spiritual peace].
> The patience shown by the moon to the [dark] night keeps it illuminated; the patience shown by the rose to the thorn keeps it fragrant.
> …The patience shown by all the prophets to the unbelievers made them the elect of God and lords of the planetary conjunction. (Book 6: 1407-1410)

> God created hundreds of thousands of elixirs, [but] man hath not seen an elixir like patience. (Book 3: 1852)

So, looking at things in a negative way shows a lack of the spiritual knowledge that is necessary for a life of love and self-improvement.

Self-improvement is not possible without self-consciousness as the core of ethical life. What is the ethical value of tolerance? Lack of a fair and understanding attitude toward others means that one seeks deficiencies in others, rather than in oneself. In regards to Rumi's ethics, this lack leads to two hard positions: ignorance of self, and ignorance of the unseen world. How can we consider ourselves and others at the same time? This ignorance will prohibit us from seeing the unseen world through the heart and is the main ethical problem: we will lose ourselves without gaining others. Consequently, the lack of self is not a benefit. Rumi wrote:

> Thou knowest what is the value of every article of merchandise; [if] thou knowest not the value of thyself, 'tis folly. (Book 3: 2650)

There is a beautiful story in the *Mathnawi* titled "Story of the Indian who quarreled with his friend over a certain action and was not aware that he too was afflicted with [guilty of] it." This story shows the possibility of ignorance of self in activities concerning others, including in worship. Rumi ended the story with this point:

> The faultfinders went astray more [than he who made the original mistake]. (Book 2: 3020)

> Patience [shown] to the unworthy is the means of polishing [purifying] the worthy: wherever a heart exists, patience purifies it. (Book 6: 2041)

Thus, if we want to be ethical beings, we have to focus on ourselves rather than on others. If we are concerned with others, we will not have time to reform our own personality and reach the unseen side of the world.

One outcome of self-consciousness is an awareness of the essential difference of people. Why are human beings different? According to Sufism, and as exhibited in Rumi's writings, each person is uniquely determined.[24] There is only one reality: God (*Haq*). Other entities are only His manifestations[25]:

> Know that [the world of] created beings is like pure and limpid water in which the attributes of the Almighty are shining.
> Their knowledge and their justice and their clemency are like a star of heaven [reflected] in running water.
> Kings are the theatre for the manifestation of God's kingship; the learned [divines] are the mirrors for God's wisdom.

> Generations have passed away, and this is a new generation: the moon is the same moon, the water is not the same water.
> The justice is the same justice, and the learning is the same learning too; but those generations and peoples have been changed [supplanted by others].
> Generations on generations have gone, O sire, but these Ideas [Divine attributes] are permanent and everlasting.
> The water in this channel has been changed many times: the reflexion of the moon and of the stars remains unaltered.
>     ...
> The beautiful are the mirror of His beauty: love for them is the reflexion of the desire of which He is the [real] object.
> This cheek and mole goes [back] to the Source thereof: how should a phantom continue in the water forever?
> The whole sum of pictured forms [phenomena] is a [mere] reflexion in the water of the river: when you rub your eye, [you will perceive that] all of them are really He. (Book 6: 3172-3183).

Humanity is the center and the perfect manifestation in which all creatures are included:

> Therefore Man is in appearance a derivative of the world, and intrinsically the origin of the world. Observe that!
> A gnat will set his outward frame whirling round [in pain and agitation]; his inward nature encompasses the Seven Heavens (*Mathnawi*, Book 4: 3766-7).

> The outward [aspect] on those stars is our ruler, [but] our inward [essence] has become the ruler of the sky.
> Therefore in form thou art the microcosm, therefore in reality thou art the macrocosm (Book 4: 520-1)[26].

This manifestation happened in a special and necessary order; God, His names, the permanent archetypes, and human destinies and talents. This is called the secret of determined destiny, "Serre Qadar," in Islamic mysticism.[27] It is the essential motive of our life as well as our way and purpose. Rumi wrote:

> [Only] that matters which has existed before the body: leave [behind you] these things which have newly sprung into being.
> That which matters belongs to the knower [of God], for he is not squinting: his eye is [fixed] upon the things first sown.

> That which was sown as wheat [good] or as barley [relatively evil] – day and night his eye is fastened on that place [where it was sown].
>
> Night gave birth to nothing but what she was pregnant withal: designs and plots are wind, [empty] wind.
>
> How should he please his heart with fair designs who sees the design of God [prevailing] over them?
>
> He is within the snare [of God] and is laying a snare: by your life, neither that [snare] will escape [destruction] nor will this [man].
>
> Though [in the meanwhile] a hundred herbs grow and fade, there will grow up at last that which God has sown.
>
> He [the cunning man] sowed new seed over the first seed; [but] this second [seed] in passing away, and [only] the first is sound [and enduring].
>
> The first seed is perfect and choice: the second seed is corrupt and rotten.
>
> Cast away this contrivance of yours before the Beloved-though your contrivance indeed is of His contriving.
>
> That which God has raised [and that alone] has use: what He has at first sown at last grows.
>
> Whatever you sow, sow for His sake, inasmuch as you are the Beloved's captive, O lover. (Book 2: 1047-1058)

The positive side of this idea is the importance of respecting and accepting difference; the uniqueness of every person means that we cannot expect others to live, think, believe, behave, and feel like us. Moreover, if they are in a situation that seems wrong and bad to us, it is not actually so. They also reveal God's name and attributes.

In addition, Rumi tells us about the influence of circumstances. Do we live in an isolated condition? Rumi notes the effects of circumstances on our views and behaviors. For example, in narrating a speech (*Hadith*) about the Prophet Muhammad, he tells us of the impact of village and city life over its inhabitants.

> Do not go to the country: the country makes a fool of a man. It makes the intellect void of light and splendor.
>
> O chosen one, hear the Prophet's saying: "Dwelling in the country is the grave of the intellect."
>
> If any one stay in the country a single day and evening, his intellect will not be fully restored for a month (Book 3: 517-520).

There is a famous story in the *Mathnawi* about God rebuking the prophet Moses, who had asked from an ordinary man same faith that he had:

I have bestowed on every one a (special) way of acting: I have given to every one a (peculiar) form of expression.

In regard to him it is (worthy of) praise, and in regard to thee it is (worthy of) blame: in regard to him honey, and in regard to thee – poison…

… In the Hindus the idiom of Hindi (India) is praiseworthy; in the Sindians the idiom of Sindi is praiseworthy. (Book 2: 1743-1747)

Thus, given that we live in circumstances that are predetermined (Serre Qadar) and that these conditions influence us, why do we not respect others? Why are we so proud?

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND TOLERANCE

Rumi's texts on the connection between God and His people lead us to a tolerant viewpoint and to being more tolerant about behavior. What happens on the Spiritual Journey that serves as a connecting link to God? From one perspective, the spiritual journey is nothing but the different features of a person that appear to him or her.[28] On such a journey, we see the faces of different human beings who have different abilities. This means that we cannot categorize human beings as simply completely right and good or completely wrong and bad.

Hence there is no absolute evil in the world: evil is relative. Know this (truth) also.

In (the realm of) Time there is no poison or sugar that is not a foot (support) to one and a fetter (injury) to another –

To one a foot, to another a fetter; to one a poison and to another (sweet and wholesome) like sugar.

Snake-poison is life to the snake, (but) it is death in relation to man.

The sea is as a garden to the water-creatures; to the creatures of earth it is death and a (painful) brand.

…

Zayd[29], in regard to that (particular) one, may be a devil, (but) in regard to another person he may be a (beneficent) sultan.

…

Zayd is one person – to that one (he is as) a shield, (while) to this other one (he is) wholly pain and loss.

If you wish that to you he should be (as) sugar, then look on him with the eyes of a lover.

Do not look on that Beauteous One with your own eye: behold the one Sought with the eye of a seeker.

> Shut your own eye to that Sweet-eyed One: borrow eyes from His lovers.
>
> Nay, borrow eye and sight from Him, and then look on His face with His eye.
>
> So that you may be secure from satiety and weariness: on this account the Almighty said, "God shall belong to him:
>
> I shall be his eye and hand and heart," to the end that His fortunate one should escape from adversities.
>
> Whatsoever is loathed is a lover and friend when it becomes thy guide towards thy beloved. (Book 4: 65-80)

There is a mirroring of our inner moods and the outer features of people. The different moods of humans can produce different characters. We are not allowed to reduce people to their deeds or speeches:[30]

> Do not judge from the (normal) state of man, do not abide in wrong-doing and in well-doing.
>
> Wrong-doing and well-doing, grief and joy, are things that come into existence, those who come into existence die: God is their heir. (Book 1: 1804-1805)

Thus, we have to understand and respect others rather than assess and reject them. "Others" are outer signs of God that lead us to our inner selves. Rumi extended this principle to cover people who are known as bad:

> Hark, you must not disdain them that have a bad name: you must set your mind on their inward parts (spiritual qualities) (Book 6: 2919)[31]

We will come back to the ethical aspect of this issue later. The only situation in which Rumi allows the spiritual traveler to separate him- or herself from others is when others are obstacles to his or her spiritual way, his or her way to self-realization!

The main device of this spiritual journey is purification. Let us examine the departure and arrival point of the spiritual journey. Because the highest manifestation of God is in human beings, human limitations toward God and to the human itself are the starting point and the end point of the spiritual journey (*Sulok*).[32] In this regard, the spiritual journey is only a self-unveiling (*Tazkiya*). This purification is the opposite of the 'education' (*Ta'lim*) that other Islamic intellectual schools emphasize. Rumi tells us:

> Hence all the world have taken the wrong way, for they are afraid of non-existence, though it is (really) the refuge (in which they find salvation).

> Whence shall we seek (true) knowledge? From renouncing (our false) knowledge. Whence shall we seek (true) peace? From renouncing peace (with our carnal selves).
>     Whence shall we seek (real) existence? From renouncing (illusory) existence. Whence shall we seek the apple (of Truth)?
>     From renouncing the hand (of self-assertion and self-interest). (Book 6: 822-824)

Why did Rumi, following Sufism, focus on purification instead of education? Because he believed that our creation is already the best form. Thus, we have to discover our souls, our inner selves, instead of trying to add to our minds by collecting from outside objects and other persons. In this process of purification, we constantly throw away the masks which others (such as the educational system, our parents, society, advertisements, politicians, institutional religion, and so on) impose on us.

> Since colorlessness (pure Unity) became the captive of color (manifestation in the phenomenal world), a Moses came into conflict with a Moses.
>     When you attain unto the colorlessness which you (originally) possessed, Moses and Pharaoh are at peace (with each other). (Book 1: 2466-2467)

Rumi explicitly said that we usually evaluate others instead of ourselves. We strive to change others, instead of trying to improve ourselves. We must respect and tolerate others, and continue reforming ourselves. We reach God by concentrating on our being. In other words, God is more visible in the inner world than the outer world.

Rumi was a religious man[33] and we can embark on this spiritual journey through religion. Is religion a simple entity? Rumi saw different levels of religion. The first and common level is that of formal rules – both individual and social – for worship and for dealing with others. This is called "*Al-Shariah*" (religious laws). The second level deals with ethical values; it tries to create moral and ethical people. It is called "*Al-Tariqah*" (the Path). The last and the third level is "*Al-Haqiqah*" (the Truth), the inner essence of religion that appeared in the prophet Muhammad.[34] Rumi, in the preface to the *Mathnawi*, described it as "the discoverer of the roots of the roots of faith principles," the highest level of religion.[35] This idea is well-known in the Islamic tradition through this gradual metaphor: "Sometimes you only have an Image of candle, sometimes you can see the flame or candle, and maybe you become a flame."[36]

Thus, referring to the prophet David, Rumi tells us the clear difference between faith based on common sense and faith based on existential sublimation:

(If) thou regardest as the (only) light this (light of the sun) which the animals too have seen, what, then, is (the illumination signified in the text) "*I bestowed honor on My Adam?*"

I am plunged in the Light, like the sun; I cannot distinguish myself from the Light. (Book 3: 2405-2406)

Here are two examples from Rumi explaining differences between the form and the spirit of the Mosque and the Holy Quran:

Know that words of the Quran have an exterior (sense), and under the exterior (sense) an interior (sense), exceedingly overpowering;

And beneath that inward (sense) a third interior (sense), wherein all intellects become lost.

The fourth interior (sense) of the Quran none hath perceived at all, except God the peerless and incomparable.

In the Quran do not thou, O son, regard (only) the exterior: the Devil regards Adam as naught but clay.

The exterior (sense) of the Quran is like a man's person, for his features are visible, while his spirit is hidden.

A man's paternal and maternal uncles (may see him) for a hundred years, and of his (inward) state not see (as much as) the tip of a hair. (Book 3: 4242-4247)

Fools venerate the mosques and exert themselves in maltreating them that have the heart (in which God dwells).

That (mosque) is phenomenal, this (heart) is real, O asses! The (true) mosque is naught but the hearts of the (spiritual) captains.

The mosque that is the inward (consciousness) of the saints is the place of worship for all: God is there. (Book 2: 3096-3098)

Thus, if there are rigid rules in Islamic laws against others, we do not have to follow them. Rumi many times condemned Islamic *Ulama* (lawful authorities) who judged others without looking at the higher levels of Islam. Here is an example:

He knows a hundred thousand superfluous matters connected with the (various) sciences, (but) that unjust man does not know his own soul.

He knows the special properties of every substance, (but) in elucidating his own substance (essence) he is (as ignorant) as an ass.

Saying, "I know (what is) permissible and impermissible." [37] Thou knowest not whether thou thyself art permissible or (impermissible as) an old woman.[38]

> Thou knowest this licit (thing) and that illicit (thing), but art thou licit or illicit? Consider well!
>
> …
>
> Thou hast become acquainted with the fortunate and inauspicious stars, thou dost not look to see whether thou art fortunate or unwashed (spiritually foul and ill-favored).
>
> This, this, is the soul of all the sciences-that thou shouldst know who thou shalt be on the Day of Judgment.
>
> Thou art acquainted with the fundamentals (*Usul*) of the (Islamic) Religion, but look upon thine own fundamental (*asl*) and see whether it is good.
>
> Thine own fundamentals are better for thee than the two fundamentals[39] (of the Islamic Religion), so that thou mayst know thine own fundamental (essential nature), O great man. (Book 3: 2646-2654)

On this view, tolerance based on love can change everything. The difference between appearance and substance, the accidental and the essential, and the priority of substance and essence to appearance and accident, are essential points in Rumi's perspective. Moreover, he looks at the goal of religiosity.

The above notes show that Rumi was not an ordinary religious man. Why? The answer is related to his reading of religion. On Rumi's view, the relationship between religion and humanity is the relationship between goal and vehicle. People are the goal and religion is the vehicle. The person becomes religious in order to find a more ethical and spiritual personality, not to be limited by legalistic religious laws:

> Mourn for thy corrupt heart and religion, for it (thy heart) sees naught but this old earth.
>
> Oh, if it is seeing (the spiritual world), why is it not brave and supporting (others) and self-sacrificing and fully contented?
>
> In thy countenance where is the happiness (which is the effect) of the wine of (true) religion? If thou hast beheld the Ocean (of Bounty), where is the bounteous hand?
>
> He that has seen (found) a river does not grudge water (to the thirsty), especially he that has beheld that Sea and (those) Clouds. (Book 6: 802-805)

Religious rituals without the proper disposition cannot help people:

> O soul, in the first place avert the mischief of the mouse, and then show fervor (zeal) in garnering the corn.
>
> Hear (one) of the sayings related from the Chiefest of the Chief (the Prophet): "No prayer is complete without "presence" (concentration of the mind on God)."

> If there is no thievish mouse in our barn, where is the corn of forty years' works (of devotion)?
>
> Why is the daily sincerity (of our devotions) not being stored, bit by bit, in this barn of ours? (Book 1:380-383)

The soul of religion is to change the person, not just to do and repeat some formal practices; religious practices are accidental but our attitude or personality is essential:

> You have a substance (essence) human or asinine (bestial): (bring that to God): how can you bring (to Him) these accidents (of word or deed) which have passed away?
>
> As regards these accidents of prayer and fasting – since (that which) does not endure for two moments becomes naught –
>
> 'Tis impossible to carry over the accidents (into another state); but they (may) take away diseases (defects) from the substance,
>
> So that the substance becomes changed by means of this accident, as when disease is removed by abstinence. (Book 2: 941-944)

Thus, there are goals and vehicles in regard to religion. The absence of seeing religion as a vehicle is a seed of religious radicalism. The substance and spirit of religion is freedom – freedom from bigotry and from all things except human entities.

> The house that is without a window is Hell: to make a window, O servant (of God), is the foundation of the (true) Religion.
>
> Do not ply the axe on every thicket: oh, come and ply the axe in excavating a window (Book 3: 2402-2403).

> His soul has never known the delight of (spiritual) freedom: the chest of (phenomenal) forms is his arena.
>
> His mind is for ever imprisoned in forms: he (only) passes from cage into cage.
>
> He has no means of passing beyond the cage (and going) aloft: he goes to and fro into (successive) cages (Book 6: 4510-4512).

> Since prophethood is the guide to freedom, freedom is bestowed on true believers by prophets.
>
> Rejoice, O community of true believers: show yourselves to be "free" (pure and noble) as the cypress and the lily (Book 6: 5441-5442).

On Rumi's view, there are more arguments for going beyond formal religious behavior, like the spiritual grades of the Sufi, the common substance of all religions, and so on – but we cannot examine them here due to the limitations of this paper. Furthermore, Rumi knows that salvation is a principal idea in religion; who will finally be saved? Clearly, religions try to save their followers in this world from suffering in the next world. The problem appears when they limit salvation only to their ways and followers. It leads generally to a lack of tolerance. But Rumi tried to expand the realm of saved people, especially nonbelievers. He does it based on two points: our ignorance about the final condition of a person, and the possibility of the salvation for so-called 'non-believers.' Here are some of his thoughts regarding this topic:

> Do not regard any infidel with contempt, for there may be hope of his dying a Moslem.
> What knowledge have you of the close of his life that you should once (and for all) avert your face from him? (Book 6: 2451-2452)

Rumi said on behalf of a spiritual Director who is described as "a heavenly Candle on the face of the earth"[40]:

> I have pity for all the unbelievers, though the souls of them all are ungrateful.
> …
> He (God) brought the saints on to the earth, in order that He might make them *a mercy to (all) created beings*.
> He (the saint) calls the people to the Portal of Grace; he calls unto God, saying, "Give (them) release in full!"
> He earnestly strives to admonish them in regard to this, and when it does not succeed, he says, "O God, do not shut the door!" (Book 3: 1798-1804)

Thus, if you are not an exclusivist about salvation, there is no reason for intolerance. Since there is no way to be certain that you yourself are saved and others unsaved, you cannot conclude that you are blessed by God's mercy and that others are not.

## CONCLUSION

Rumi, as a master of love, teaches us that tolerance is the outcome of the love for all, based on special knowledge: knowledge of God, of human identity, and of the spiritual journey. Tolerance is a necessity for a life that includes a relationship to God but also to one's fellow human beings. Here, the necessity of tolerance is not that it is scientifically or philosophically determined, but that it is required by the rule of love.

The preceding presentation of Rumi's views on tolerance reveals that he invites his readers to a spiritual and peaceful life. Rumi's work is a call to go beyond actions, human beings, religious advice, and even mystical schools. It is a search for transcendence and a higher level of religion, wisdom, and values. Nevertheless, it seeks to avoid a fundamental relativism and epistemological pluralism. It offers a positive tolerance, based on knowledge and love, not a negative tolerance based on nihilism and skepticism. This is why many find Rumi's view so encouraging, even after eight centuries. I would insist, then, that, even today, people need to listen to Rumi, because humanity needs tolerance more than ever.

Let us end our discussion with a poem of Rumi:

> This world is even as the tree, O noble ones: we are like the half-ripened fruit upon it.
>
> The unripe (fruits) cling fast to the bough, because during (their) immaturity they are not meet for the palace.
>
> When they have ripened and have become sweet-after that, biting their lips[41], they take (but) a feeble hold of the boughs.
>
> When the mouth has been sweetened by that felicity, the kingdom of the world becomes cold (unpleasing) to Man.
>
> To take a tight hold and to attach one's self strongly (to the world) is (a sign of) unripeness; so long as thou art an embryo, thy occupation is blood-drinking. (Book 3: 1291-1295)

**NOTES**

[1] The work of a contemporary Iranian philosopher, Abdul Karim Soroush, on Islamic theology is a good example of this kind of effort. Also see: Nevad Kahteran, "Rumi's Philosophy of Love in the Era of U-turned Islam", *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 2-2 (March 2009), pp. 51-62. My books, *From Mawlana to Nietzsche* and *From the Tradition of Balkh and the Modernity of Paris*, include some chapters discussing the potential in Rumi's ideas for Islamic modernization – e.g., an adjustment between Islamic doctrine and human rights, rationality, and humanism.

[2] *Sama* is a significant part of their spiritual path. The word "*Sama*" in Arabic means "the audition". The *Sama* dance consists of three parts: classical music, recitation of mystical poetry, and various forms of ritual and whirling movement. In Islamic mysticism, *Sama* started with Abu Said Ibn Abi L-Khayr (967-1449), who first introduced this dance. Ahmad Ghazzali (d. 1126) expanded the theory of *Sama*. Attar (1145-1221) and Iraqi (1213-1289) developed rules for the dance. It was finally completed by Rumi.

There is a significant debate on Rumi's view and position on *Sama*. The following poem by Rumi is a good example that shows that *Sama*

reminds us of the place people came from – Paradise – and offers an inspiration to peace:

> We all have been parts of Adam, we have [heard] those melodies in Paradise…
> Although the water and earth [of our bodies] have caused doubt to fall upon us, something of those (melodies) comes (back) to our memory….
> Therefore *Sama* (Music) is the food of lovers (of God), since therein is the phantasy of composure (tranquility of mind) (*Mathnawi* , Book 4: 736-742)

[3] For translations of the main descriptions of this meeting, see Franklin Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 154–61. My reading of this event appears in: Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, *From Mawlana to Nietzsche* (Qum: Sulok-e Javan, 1386/2007), p. 23.

[4] Rumi's poems from the *Mathnawi* are cited from the translation by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, the great translator of the *Mathnawi* into English, unless otherwise indicated. See Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, (translator and editor), *The Mathnawi of Jalal ud-din Rumi* (Tehran: Research Center of Booteh Publication Co., 1381/2002).

[5] A good comparison between the *Mathnawi* and the great books of European poetry is drawn by Nicholson:

"Judged by modern standards, the *Mathnawi* is a very long poem; it contains almost as many verses as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together and about twice as many as the *Divina Commedia*; and these comparisons make it appear shorter that it actually is, since every verse of the *Mathnawi* has twenty-two syllables, whereas the hexameter may vary from thirteen to seventeen, and the *terza rima*, like the Spenserian stanza, admits only ten or eleven in each verse, so that the *Mathnawi* with 25700 verses is in reality a far more extensive work than the *Faerie Queene* with 33500". Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalal ud-din Rumi*, p. li.

[6] Mojaddedi Jawid, tr. and intro., *Rumi, The Masnavi* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. xiii.

[7] Hadi Sabzavari, *Sharh-e Mathnawi* (Tehran: Intesharat-e Vezarat-e Farhang va Ershad-e Islami, 1373), Vol. 1, p. 9.

[8] Sayed Yahya Yasrebi, *Zabaneh-e Shams va zaaban-e Mawlawi* [The Fire of Shams and the Language of Rumi](Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1386), pp. 46-48.

[9] For instance see: William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Alireza Anushiravani and Fahima Nasseri, "A Comparative Reading of George Herbert's and Rumi's Epistemology of Divine Love," in *Journal*

[10] Anushirvani and Nasseri, "A Comparative Reading of George Herbert's and Rumi's Epistemology of Divine Love," p. 9.

[11] He describes his writings as follows: "How should I – not a vein of mine is sensible – describe that Friend who has no peer?" (*Mathnawí*, Book 1: 130); "When I speak of "lip," 'tis the lip [shore] of the Sea; when I say "not," the intended meaning is "except"." (Book 1: 1758); "What I am saying is according to the measure of your understanding: I die in grief for [the absence of] a sound understanding." (Book 3: 2096, also see Book 5: 1517). Rumi explicitly justifies his style of writings by saying that he did not want to say anything, but the words wanted to come: In such (mystical) intoxication (as his) observance of due respect (to the formal rules) will not be there at all; or if it be, 'tis a wonder (Book 3: 1392).

[12] Yasrebi, *Zabaneh-e Shams va zaaban-e Mawlawi*, p. 287. Here, he relates the well-known story of the grape (see Book 2: 3668-3688).

[13] It is proper that the term "Sufism" refers mostly to the social style of life for this group, while the term "Erfan" refers more to cultural and theoretical aspects of this group, especially in Farsi countries. See Mutaheri Murteza, *Ashenaee Ba Olume Islami; Kalam, Erfan, and Hekmat-e Amali* (Tehran: Sadra, 1376/1997), p. 83.

[14] Here is a good example: Dawud Qaysari (d.1350) began his introduction to the interpretation of Ibn Fariz's "Taeeyat" as follows: "You [...] have to know that there are two ways to reach God: speculative and practical. Although, the practical one is subject to speculative one. Since the doer has to do according to his knowledge": Sayed Yahya Yasrebi, *Erfane Nazari* [Theoretical Gnosis: a study of Sufism's development, principles and matters] (Qum: Bustan-e Ketab, 1384/2005), p. 205. In regards to Sufi doctrine in Arabic, Ibn Farez (d. 1235) is similar to Rumi. It is narrated that Ibn Al-Arabi (d. 1240), the father of speculative Sufism, asked him for permission to interpret his poem. Ibn Farez answered that Ibn Al-Arabi's big book, *Futuhat Al-Makeyah* (The Meccan Openings) was sufficient (Ibid, p. 170). Several great Sufis have interpreted them.

[15] See Abd Al-Hussain Zarrinkub, *Bahr dar Kuzeh* (Sea in a jug) (Tehran: Elmi, 1378), p. 45. Here is a clear story of the human journey, moving gradually, from God to God – from an inorganic state, endowed with growth, attaining animal life, becoming Adam, reaching out among the angels, escaping from the angelic state, and finally becoming non-existent, so that we return unto Him (Book 3: 3899-3904).

[16] See Yasrebi, *Erfane Nazari*, p. 254.

[17] Nicholson translates "*Helm*" as "clemency," but I prefer "patience."

[18] Muhyiddin Ibn Al-Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hekam*, Abu Al-Ala Afifi, ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Arabi ,1980), p. 80.

[19] Though we abandon our attributes, we obtain those of God in the

spiritual journey (Book 1:1743-1749).

[20] Qamar-ul Huda (ed.), *Crescent and Dove* (USA: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), p. 9.

[21] Yasrebi, *Erfane Nazari*, pp. 248-253. To see a good example of the marriage of beauty and glory as attributes of God, or the unity between different attributes of God, in the *Mathnawi*, look at Book 1:1565-1570.

[22] i.e. the world of evil.

[23] A Persian word that refers to one who notes incomplete points.

[24] There are two reasons for the Sufi claim of personal uniqueness: first, the constant manifestations of God as they appear in the Quran ["Every day (moment) He is (engaged) in some affair" (*Quran*, 55:29)], and, second, the position of humankind. The poems of Rumi remind us of these reasons: "Every moment the world is renewed, and we are unaware of its being renewed because it remains (the same in appearance). Life is ever arriving anew, like the stream, though in the body it has the semblance of continuity" (*Mathnawí*, Book 1: 1144-5); "This abode (the world) does not contain any form (that is) one (with any other one), so that I might show forth to thee as (complete). Still, I will bring to hand an imperfect comparison, that I may redeem thy mind from confusion" (Book 4: 423-4).

[25] Ibn Al-Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hekam*, p. 80.

[26] Rumi wrote these poems using this significant title: "Explaining that (while) philosophers say that Man is the microcosm, theosophists say that Man is the macrocosm, the reason being that philosophy is confined to the phenomenal form of Man, whereas theosophy is connected with the essential truth of his true nature" (Book 4: 1042).

[27] Ibn Al-Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hekam*, pp. 81-83 and 106.

[28] For more on "continuity of the self" in Rumi's doctrine see Yasrebi, *Zabaneh-e Shams va zaaban-e Mawlawi*, pp. 105-111; Muhammad Taqi Jafari, *Mawlawi va Jahanbiniha* (Tehran: Institute for the collection and publication of Allameh Jafari's works, 1379), p. 3.

[29] An Arabic name.

[30] The well-known poem of Ibn Al-Arabi describes how different deeds, practices, and beliefs can reflect the same faith and soul: "My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith." Ibn Al-Arabi, *Tarjuman Al_Ashwaq* (Royal Asiatic Society, 1911), p. 67.

[31] That the respectable and even the good deal with bad people, who have no regard for worldly reputation, has a clear basis in Sufism. This idea led to the creation of the *Malāmatiyya* or *Malamatis*, a Sufi group. Believing in the value of self-blame, that piety should be a private matter, and that being held in good esteem would lead to worldly attachment, they concealed their knowledge and made sure their faults would be known, to remind themselves of their imperfection. It is narrated that Rumi was

interested in a kind of *Malamatiyya* group (Sayed Yahya Yasrebi, *Falsafeh-ye Erfan* (The Philosophy of Mysticism), [Qum: Bustan-e Ketab, sixth edition, 1387/2008], pp. 156-159).

[32] Ibn Al-Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hekam*, p. 80.

[33] It is said that Rumi cited about two thirds of the Quranic verses in his works, especially in the *Mathnawi*. This is the reason that the great Muslim sage, Mulla Hadi Sabzawari (1797–1873), described the *Mathnawi* as an interpretation of the *Quran* (Muhammad Taqi Jafari, *Mawlawi va Jahanbiniha* [Rumi and Worldviews], (Tehran: Institute for collection and publication of Allameh Jafari's works, 1379), pp. 32-33).

[34] A relatively clear and detailed explanation of Sufism view of the different levels of Islam may be found in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 59-65.

[35] It begins as follows: "This is the Book of the Mathnawi, which is the roots of the roots of the roots of the (Islamic) Religion in respect of (its) unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty; and which is the greatest science of God and the clearest (religious) way of God and the most manifest evidence of God" (Book 1: 4).

[36] Rumi wrote in the introduction to the fifth Book: "This is the Fifth Book of the Poem in rhymed couples and the spiritual Exposition, setting forth that the Religious law {Shariah} is like a candle showing the way. Unless you gain possession of the candle, there is no wayfaring; and when you have come on to the way, your wayfaring is the Path, and when you have reached the journey's end, that is the Truth. Hence it has been said "if the truths (realities) were manifest, the religious laws would be naught."" (Book 2: 1310).

[37] According to Al-Sharia laws, or the science of jurisprudence.

[38] "The religion of old women" is synonymous with ignorance and superstition.

[39] Two forms of Islamic knowledge are: Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and Scholastic theology (*Kalam*).

[40] This poem follows the previous saying concerning the prophet's intercessions (Al-Shafa'a) on judgment day for the disobedient who have committed capital sins (see Book 3:1781-1786), and the similarities between Shaykh (the spiritual director) and the prophets (see Book 3: 1770-1895).

[41] i.e. "in remorse for having clung so tightly to the tree."

# THE "TAO" AND "SIN": THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCE OF ONTOLOGY AND HUMANITY IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

Ma Tianxiang

It goes without saying that every nation and every nationality has its own culture. That is to say, they all possess and continually cultivate their unique understanding of the universe and life itself in their specific geographical location and in their specific environment over a long period of time. Moreover, the concepts that are part of this understanding are influenced by "all the traditions inherited from their deceased ancestors"[1]; are continually perfected, developed and consolidated in the deep layer of the nation's psychology; and become a systematic notion in the actual, or the existing environment of time and space. A culture not only reflects the "creative" desires of human beings, but also demonstrates other characteristics of how it recognizes the world "in-itself."[2]

The world in which we live and the universe itself – where did they come from? How did they emerge and evolve? And what is the origin of human beings? What is the essence of humanity? And, further, what is the essence of the things that had 'determined' human beings? All countries and nationalities – regardless of whether they are oriental or occidental, strong or weak, economically advanced or backward – have to be confronted with questions of such kind, i.e., they should contemplate on the issues related to the "in-itself objects" (universe and life), to form their particular mode of thinking – especially about ontology and humanity. For these reasons, the understandings at any time and for any objective would naturally be deeply imprinted in different cultures.

Once the religion created and worshipped by the Hebrews was promulgated to the whole world, their scriptures – what became the Old Testament of the Christian Bible – though initially not known by most people, were translated into numerous languages. Yet when they mingled with different social beliefs in different countries, without exception they came to exhibit distinctive characteristics in thinking or other cultural idiosyncrasies. When we try to compare the Chinese and English translations of the Bible, we shall have no difficulty seeing the subtle differences between these cultures in respect of ontology and humanity.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CULTURES IN RESPECT OF ONTOLOGY

Every culture shows an awareness of, and a desire for maintaining, its origins, as well as of having a unique understanding of the production and development of the universe and all cosmic objects. Thus, it is necessary for

us here to be particularly careful in seeking the very origins of how a culture understands all objects and things, so as to uncover the form of ultimate support – the ontology. Beside the ancient Hebrews, the nationalities of China did the same. It was also the case for the ancient Indians who believed in the Four Classical Elements (Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind) plus infinite void, and for the traditional western cultures (writing in Hebrew or Greek). No matter what they were – the "Logos" or the word of God, or a "Tao" which had produced everything but could not be easily apprehended, or the "Void" (as in the saying, "void as it is, the true aspects are not the real essence") – all were efforts to understanding and explaining the form of ultimate support. Recall the saying of Master Zhang Tai Yan, a great thinker of early twentieth-century China: "Without exception, all creators of religions with their philosophy have established an object and used it as ontology. Though their elemental constructs are different, the forms wherein they stay are the same."[3] The same Bible – to be more precise, the Old Testament and the New Testament in their Chinese and English translations – had different imprints of different cultures and revealed their respective concepts of ontology.

The first time the present author accessed the Christian gospels, it was in a Chinese translation, and it was no doubt a translation that attempted to describe the creator in a way that could be understood in traditional Chinese culture. In the first chapter of the Chinese translation of John's gospel, the first sentence reads –

"**太初有道，道与神同在**" (In the beginning was a Word, and the Word was with the Divinity).

God was the "Tao" (the Word) and Tao was the God himself. At the very beginning of the universe, the "Tao" was mentioned and deeply believed by the Chinese people, but it could not be clearly interpreted. The nine Chinese characters "**太初有道，道与神同在**" expressing this verse from John's gospel, were very concise but absolutely comprehensible; the translators had subtly forged a God for Chinese belief reflecting the Chinese way of thinking and their understanding of the original universe. That is to say that God and the "Tao" are the same thing, though their names are different – they have the same origin as those objects that have nurtured and created everything in the universe. The interpretation of the notion of God, using the doctrine of "Tao" (the Word), had no doubt suggested to people that the Creator of Christianity was in fact the "Naught" that was "born before the universe" and acted as the mother of everything (as the great scholar Laozi said). It also suggested the Buddhist theory of the "Void"; for example, "when one side exists, its counterpart is also given a chance to be; and if one thing perishes, its counterpart shall soon become not to be", "the real aspects are not real," and "all four elements are void."[4] Therefore, this 'God' is the fundamental and absolute origin of everything, and it exists everywhere, but is not easily interpreted.

"Word becoming flesh" is an important claim of Christianity and a theological opinion emphatically described in the New Testament. The Bible, in Chinese translation, also adopted one character "道" (Tao) to replace the trinitarian God; this phenomenon had long before become a stable and invariable concept in Christian society in China. It had further emphasized Christ or the divinity of Jesus who was, with his deity father, God, and who should exist forever though he was borne after the universe. In other words, it lived together with the "Tao" (the Word); in Chinese culture we find reference to it in the aphorisms "it exists independently and acts unruly," "recycling endlessly." These are all aspects of the "Tao" acting as the mother of everything.[5] Philosophy also took the term "Tao" to replace "God" as the very origin of universe – a matter of ontology.

However, the English version of the Bible expressed this in a different way. In John's gospel, the all-knowing, almighty, holy, most wise and benevolent God, or life itself having gathered all supreme qualities, was translated as "Word" – a concrete and material phrase, i.e., it regarded the word as the very origin of universe, with a very clear characteristic of the English culture. In the first sentence of an English translation of the Gospel of John, we read:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Here, "the Word" could be logically assumed to be part of a speech by God, but in essence it was also a concrete phrase. Like the phrase "道成肉身" [Tao became flesh][6] in Chinese, the English version says "the Word became flesh." This fact emphasizes the "Word" as having a function in ontology.

The different renditions of "Tao" and "Word" have shown the translators' creative consciousness as well as the unconscious variation of different cultures with minute characteristics.

In fact, the Chinese "Tao" and the English "Word" both express the "*Logos*" in the Bible. The word *logos* originated in the Greek language, and was a philosophic term commonly used in Europe in ancient times and the Middle Ages, meaning the comprehensive rule of the universe. Though it had a meaning, the term had no clear limits, i.e., it was also somewhat vague, containing other terms such as 'reasoning,' and having a rich connotation; this was like the "Tao" – a phenomenon so unusual that it could not be mentioned easily in the Chinese language. Heraclitus introduced the term *logos* into the philosophical realm to explain the rule of production and destruction of all things. Aristotle also used it to show the essential attributes of the cosmic objects. In the western world, words referring to academic subjects often have a suffix of "–logy." The different ways of translating '*logos*' – "Tao" and "Word" – reflect the basic understanding of different translators, given their own respective cultural backgrounds.

"Tao" is also seen in *Psalm* 18. The Chinese version reads "As for the Divinity, his Laws are perfect." In the English version, "Tao" is translated as the "Way." The English version reads: "As for God, His way is perfect."

The next sentence reads as follows in the Chinese version: "Jehovah's speech is concise." The English version says: "The word of the Lord is proven."

The Chinese and English versions present no great difference in how they express the above-mentioned words; however, the Chinese translation shows its insight by using "Tao," while the English version replaces it with "way" and "word."

From these facts, I would argue that we can more or less discern which is better.[7]

The cultures of all regions, nationalities, and countries are the products of their families, schools, and societies over a long historical process. Each culture was built up from "all the traditions inherited from their deceased ancestors," and expanded in isolated geographical locations, before then breaking out of its location while it enriched and stabilized itself. Hence, while it was penetrating into, embracing, and integrating itself into other cultures, it also gave a view of the cosmos to its people and left an indelible imprint on their view of life, their philosophy of life, and their way of thinking. The Nobel Prize winner and world renowned poet, literary critic, and religious thinker T.S. Eliot once wrote that culture was a tree instead of a machine, and so it could be cultivated but could not be produced or transformed at will.[8] When a culture was contacting and exchanging with other cultures, it should never give up its core concepts. That is to say that the kind of seeds you have planted shall produce the same kind of saplings and fruits. The different translation for *logos* (as "Tao" and "Word") in the Chinese and English Bibles was determined by the different cultural attributes that had accumulated in the deep layer of the respective culture's psychology and showed itself vigorously in real life.

The "Tao" is the core-like concept of the Chinese Taoist School and one of the most important aspects of the theory. In the ontology of Chinese culture, it is also an important content and framework for people's contemplation and argumentation. In his literary work "On the Principles of the Six Schools of Thought," the distinguished scholar Sima Tan (165 BCE – 110 BCE) in the ancient Han Dynasty had criticized various literary schools at the time – the Confucians, the Legalists and the Yin-Yang school, etc. – in a comment that these men "claimed themselves as the most perfect but with a fraction of truth only." Therefore, he praised Taoism and deemed it as a "complete and perfect way." He said, "The Taoists take no action while they are able to act on everything. Action is easy, but the principles are hard to be understood. Its strategy is to take naught and void as its principle and act in accordance with the rule. That is to say that it usually takes no action while ready to do anything." Having no constant tendency or regular shape," the "Tao" is the original source to produce everything and a

universal rule governing the production and destruction of all objects in the universe. The other literary schools that emerged at later times all adopted the Taoist theory, and among them were the Huang Emperor's School and Laozi's school, the Hermeneutics School in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, and the Neo-Confucian School of the Song and Ming Dynasties, etc. Once we enter the earlier part of the Qing Dynasty and the contemporary epoch, many philosophers had also adopted the Taoist theory and used it as a complementary tool in their study of Confucianism. They regarded void and inaction as an ontology as well as narrated the hermeneutics macroscopically and discussed the government microscopically, which meant that they regarded the "Tao" as the very origin of the universe and took heaven and earth as the very foundation. It could be said that Tao had taken very deep root in the Chinese culture.

As Sima Tan mentioned, the concept of "Tao" emerged some 2000 years ago in Chinese culture. This philosophical school, first, took the concept of "naught" and "void" as its principle and, second, acted in practice in accordance with the rules so as to form a void – "Tao" – as the very origin. This origin would, in turn, produce an ontological principle that would produce the naught and void, as well as form one thing, then two things, and three, and so on, until it reached the countless number of objects in the universe., i.e., this was, however, still "vague and elusive."[9] This is the doctrine that "some objects were produced from chaos before the universe was born," which "can be the mother of everything" and those objects "having a shapeless shape and [were] like an unlike thing." Just because it was "恍惚" ("vague and elusive") and hard to be understood, it called "the Tao, the biggest, the furthermost and the extremely contrasted." [10] In other words, the so-called "Tao" is only a synonym representing the ultimate existence of everything in the universe. Later on, Zhuangzi fully explained and developed the theory of "Tao" – a shapeless, formless, unspeakable being, i.e., an almighty source, capable of producing the world and everything within it.

> Thus, the Tao was passionate and trustworthy, inactive and shapeless, could be learned but could not be possessed, and could be gained but could not be seen. It had its own origin and root, and it was already existing before the universe was born. It begat deities and ghosts as well as produced heaven and earth. It did not deem itself as the most senior though it was already there before the universe existed, and it did not regard itself as the most profound though it stayed underneath the Six Poles. It did not claim itself as having the greatest longevity for it was born before the heaven, and it did not boast itself as the most knowledgeable though it emerged earlier than time.[11]

The great scholar also pointed out in the meantime that "Tao did not care about its worldly fame" and that it "always conducted things by

other means." He also said that the "Tao" was an infinite and independent existence transcending time and space, i.e., an infinite and ultimate "creator" that "did things in an anonymous way."

After the entry of Buddhism into China in the Han Dynasty, religion was taught extensively in the scholarly sector. From then, Tao was understood as synonymous with the concept of "Void" – a Buddhist philosophical notion, holding that "the real aspects were not real, but were only called real,"[12] and associated with the theory of Panna-Dharma.[13] This further strengthened understanding the Tao as the key feature in ontology. Having already accumulated a deep layer of Chinese culture, the adoption of rational thinking in the translation of books imported from the West led to replacing the notion of a supernatural Creator with the word "Tao." It was said that translating the word "*Logos*" as "Tao" was proposed firstly by the scholar Yan Fu (1854-1921), a great Chinese translator and thinker of the contemporary period. In this case, the role of culture on the way of thinking was decisive indeed.

Unlike the Chinese tradition, the British and American cultures emphasized the importance of language in interpretation. What they were concerned about was not the Tao – a concept transcending time and space, infinite and unspeakable – but the "Word," that corresponded with natural phenomena, one by one, and even having the same structure as a natural, perceivable object. Whether it was the linguistic analysis of G.E. Moore, paying attention to the character of concepts and the relations among them, or the opinion of Ludwig Wittgenstein telling people to 'look but not think' in analyzing daily language, or the logical positivism of Rudolf Carnap, that saw philosophical problems as a question of language and led to the Linguistic Turn [14] in Western philosophy, or the schools of language analysis that emerged in the last century that regarded the language analysis as the primary, if not the only task – all of them confirmed the position of language in process of doing philosophy. Obviously, these were obstinate expressions of traditional European and American cultures concerning contemplation and human action. Therefore, the translation of the word "*Logos*" into "Word," or "God's word" in the English version of scripture should not have been a surprise at all, but reasonable and understandable.

If we look at Christian literary works back to the Middle Ages, we can also find this emphasis on language.[15] In these narratives, we find the existence and attributes of the God who had created the world from naught and void – whether it was that of a transcendent ontology that proved that God was pre-existent and most perfect[16], or of the natural law of motion or the cosmological principle of Cause and Effect that entailed a supernatural God as a "cause without a cause"[17], or of a teleology that proved that there had to be a God already existing in order to create and design the world according to natural laws[18] and to give an order to the universe, or of the supposition of God's existence as a supreme unity of goodness, benevolence and happiness[19] – all of these features had demonstrated the metaphysical attributes of God: namely, its independence, pre-existence, omnipresence,

infinity, invariability, and actual existence. In addition, all of these emphasized the identity between language or concept and ontology.

Of course, "Word" in the English Bible was in the phrase "the Word with God," and He could create the universe before the existence of the heaven and the earth. He said: In the beginning, the earth was shapeless and void, and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. The earth was void and shapeless in the beginning – a phrase that reminds us of the description of the "Tao." The Chinese version purposely added two Chinese characters "混沌" (meaning "chaos"), which was like the Chinese saga about the Deity Pan Gu who had created the primitive heaven and the earth.[20] The main difference is that Pan Gu created with his action and the God did so with his Word. God said: "Let there be light, and light appeared." God said "Let there be firmament, and the sky [– "air" in the Chinese translation –] appeared." God also said "Let there be oceans, grass, trees, sun, moon and stars," and He said afterwards, "Let the earth bring forth every kind of animals – cattle and reptiles and wildlife of every kind." Finally God said, "Let us make a man – someone like ourselves, to be the master of all life upon the earth and in the skies and in the seas." The world was shaped in a period of one week, and the "Word" had become predominant in the primitive universe.

However, it should be noted that the English translation used the word "Our" (the same as in the Chinese translation) to modify "the actor of human creation." In this way, the concept of divinity was generalized and the "Word" became a symbol instead of a concrete phrase. Why should God speak? And with whom would he talk, anyway? As a matter of fact, both the Word and God were an ultimate or an original existence, similar to the "Tao," i.e., a pretence of the infinity that transcended our finite knowledge. The Jesus who was one with Jehovah declared in a better way: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."[21] In fact, acting as an ultimate existence, God is truly the ultimate value of the way, the truth, and the life. The arguments, stated so carefully by religious scholars over a long period of time, were made just in order to show that God was really the very truth and the very life. Of course, the principal attribute of it was that of the "Tao" – what was omnipresent and born before the heaven and earth. This is similar to the view of Thomas Aquinas, who wrote that the essence of God's divinity was "the very origin of all things."[22]After we have understood this, we are able to realize better that the different cognitions contained in Chinese and English versions of the Bible accord with one another in respect of ontology, and the different translation styles are nothing but different ways of presenting this notion, resulting from different cultures and customs as well as from different ways of thinking.

An American friend once presented me with a book of his on inter-personal communication. The following words were written on the fly leaf:

*In the beginning was the Word.*
*Tao which can be spoken of is not constant Tao.*

In arranging these sentences in this way, I think that he understood the intrinsic differences between the Chinese and English languages, but also knew that they were almost the same in essence.

The Chinese translation tells us that the Tao became flesh and produced everything. Words were not enough to explain it, and whoever understood the meaning would forget the word, and so would become silent. Therefore, mastery of the "Tao" needs a full understanding of it.

The English translation said, however, that the "Word" had produced everything and had become flesh and blood. If such a "Word" actually existed and could explain meaning of things, it would be regarded highly by the people there. This means that "Word" was the ontology (in fact, an interpretation of same structure).

By this way of identifying a leopard by its spots, and while understanding that the differences between the Chinese and English languages are significant, we recognize in the meantime that the choice of "Tao" is a little better.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CULTURES IN RESPECT OF HUMANITY

At the beginnings of the Old Testament and the New Testament are praises to God who created the world. Of course, the purpose of these texts was to affirm God's holiness, power, and perfection. Besides these, they had no purpose. Then came the first woman, Eve, who failed in resisting the temptation of the great Serpent, and ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge together with her husband, the first man, Adam. Later in that chapter of *Genesis*, we find God's blessing on a righteous man, Noah, making an agreement with him. This narrative clearly shows salvation for all of humanity. God's salvation was not only for Noah, but for all human beings. This is the very core of Christian doctrine as well, and one of the most important issues in the Bible. With the help of this 'mythic' narrative, Christianity emphasized human nature as good by birth, but as fallen into evil once human beings entered society. In English this is called "Original Sin." The Chinese version refers to it as "原罪" (meaning, "original crime"). When we compare the two depictions, it should be said that the English translation expresses the original sense more perfectly. However, in the Chinese translation, we have the word "罪" (meaning "crime"), which had obviously resulted from the vagueness of Chinese language; it tends to mislead on humanitarian issues.

The Bible shows that human ancestry was in the form of a synoecious body, integrating both the husband and the wife. As a result, they had no feeling of shame, and consequently had no discerning eyes to distinguish the good from the bad, and the pure from the impure, etc., and they had neither desire nor anticipation. This is quite the same as the concept of "the innocence of a newborn baby" in Chinese culture. In this sense, we can conclude that both the occidental and the oriental worlds have

reckoned that the human beings are innocent at the beginning. From the perspective of Christianity, since Eve could not resist the temptation of the Serpent, and persuaded her husband to eat the forbidden fruits together with her, their eyes became opened, their minds became clear, and they were able to distinguish the good from the bad. Thus, the immaculate minds of innocent babies became able to discern good and bad, as well as honor and shame – which was the origin of the 'sex-is-evil' doctrine in the Western culture that we often hear about. As a result, God expelled them from the Garden of Eden, lest they would eat more from the tree of life and live forever.

This well-known tale tells us that both woman and the serpent were the origin of sin,[23] and it emphatically points out that the previously-innocent humankind was polluted with many kinds of desires. As a result, "his heart was only evil all the time," and consequently there would be no righteous person such as Noah living in the world, and "all people and all living things on earth were vicious and depraved"[24], "have all turned aside" and "fall short of the glory of the God."[25] This was the "crime" or the original crime mentioned in the Chinese translation of the Bible.

In the New Testament, the term for "sin" in Greek originally referred to an arrow that missed its target; in archery competitions, when the arrow missed, the checker called loudly "sin [target missed]!"[26] People who were deemed as evil, according to Bible standards, were living a worldly life. They formed bad habits postnatally, and turned aside from the innocence of a newly born baby against God's will. In God's view, they should be transformed back to innocent people who were capable of discerning righteousness from wickedness, as well as discarding the desires seeking worldly affluence and happiness. Only in this way of asceticism can they be led to the way of the Christ and be saved. Many examples were given in the Bible to describe the wickedness of mankind, such as: blasphemy against holy figures,[27] doing evil deeds,[28] uttering falsehoods and untruths and using bad language,[29] lechery and having a wicked mind,[30] worshiping idols, eating human flesh,[31] marrying heathen women[32] – all of these were sin, and the Chinese translation described them as "crimes."

So we see that, in the Bible, beyond the actions of not believing in God and disloyalty to God,[33] there are errors and immoral actions committed by humanity, such as those mentioned in St Paul's letter to the *Romans*: sexual immorality, wickedness, maliciousness, envy, homicide, controversy, craftiness, insolence, pride, boastfulness, cheating, slander, backbiting, double-dealing, disobedience to parents, as well as short-sightedness, discrediting others, being unloving and unforgiving, exhibiting malevolence – even though some of these actions accorded with existing morals and standards in society, e.g., on the topics of marriage and sexual life.[34] These focused on human imperfection and immorality in character. The Chinese translation of the Bible reckoned them all as "crimes" committed by humanity.

The Gospel of John states two contrasting aspects in humanity: "He who believes in him [God] is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already" (*John* 3: 18). And in *John* 16:8, we read: "And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." It is clear that the Bible accepted the belief that humanity is to be judged. So there was only righteousness and evildoing, instead of the "guiltiness" and innocence in the realm of the law. The English translation uses the terms "righteousness" and "sin," that demonstrates that the adoption of wordings such as "罪" (crime) or "原罪" (original sin) was not proper to the original sense.

Note that, according to an ancient Chinese text, *Explanation of Words & Articles*, the Chinese character "罪" developed from an older word "辠" (note the "自" on top), and meant "violating the law" – e.g., as in "The prisoners had wrinkled their noses because they felt miserable and worried." In the Qin Dynasty, the word "辠" was changed into "罪", because it resembled "皇" (meaning "royal") too much in the shape. It had primarily three senses as follows:

1. Evil doing and law breaking. (An ancient Chinese text, the "Script of Yi," explained that "a criminal action is purposely violating a law.")
2. The verdict that a person is guilty. (The "Four Books" said that to give "the guilty a verdict of 族" meant a death penalty for the entire clan of the criminal.) – and
3. Criminal Penalty (The text, the *Criminal Law Chapter of Han Dynasty History* states that: "500 criminals were killed.")

The first item above-mentioned also had a sense of purposely doing evil things except for violating the law – and so, having it translated into "original crime" was still acceptable to some extent, though it basically meant doing bad things rather than satisfying selfish desires. All other items involved violating the criminal law and the punishment for such crimes. In popular terms, these were law-breaking and crime-committing activities, i.e., the English translation of this word expressed "crime" instead of sin. Expression of it as "crime" in the Chinese translation obviously did not accord with the original meaning in the original scripture.

In Chinese history for several thousand years, there was a will-known and very familiar phrase – "the inherent good nature of people." It originated in Mengzi's teachings of more than two thousand years ago,[35] and so there was a saying that "everybody could become the Emperor Yao and the Emperor Shun" (two very famous good kings).[36] When Buddhism was imported into China and flourished in the nation, the doctrine of "completely believing Buddha with all one's heart" was popular in the priestly sector. Moreover, saying that "everybody can be a Buddha" prevailed in a society that had forged the mainstream notion and the

nationality's character – doing good things with one's full heart. When Neo-Confucianism emerged in the Song and the Ming Dynasties, people tended to explain humanity by reference to a theory about God, and to implement the doctrine to its fullest extent by performing good deeds. Though it still proposed the goodness of human nature, it also stated that human desire was not part of the nature of heaven and earth, and that there was still a disparity between character and property. A pure disposition would bring forth benevolence and virtue, while a filthy character would produce evildoing and stupidity. Evildoing was the product of an unhealthy personality and desire, as in the sayings, "a selfish mind is a dangerous thing,"[37] and "people should be aware of it and keep away from harm"; they "should maintain themselves carefully," and try to preserve God's way and eliminate all selfish desires, etc. On one hand, they declared that a "sound disposition was God's law," i.e., that people had a naturally innocent disposition from the beginning. On the other hand, they also pointed out that desire was a psychological instinct including both good and bad. As a result, people should be "good at resisting it" and actually restricting, suppressing and wiping it out totally![38] Moreover, there was a theory that went: "strong desire and unclear disposition will produce dishonesty, and God's way can be applied only when desire is suppressed." As a result, people often said that "a person having no desire was the strongest." Here, "desire" was deemed to be an obstruction that resisted God's teaching and was against a person's naturally good character; it was even seen as the source of evil deeds. The unrighteousness in human desire and the moral shortcomings referred to in the above-mentioned holy book (i.e., in the narrations about the bad character of humanity) were just the same as that of the selfish desire to depart from God's teaching, as mentioned by the Neo-Confucians. Therefore, being immersed in an ethical environment that regarded evildoing as the act of an enemy, it was only natural that the Chinese translators referred to it as a "crime." However, the choice of the word "crime" resulted in an ambiguous understanding of the Christian theory of humanity by the Chinese.

Though British and American cultures also regard "evil" as an act of an enemy, other people regard a person's desire as proper behavior and acknowledge that it is reasonable. Some English translations of the Bible describe humanity as having what has been called "original sin"; "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (*Psalm* 51:5). The English translations do not adopt wording similar to the words "crime" and "offence" that we find in Chinese translations of the Bible – and that (unconsciously) reveal the difference between (Western) Biblical and Chinese culture.

In the *Oxford Dictionary*, the word "sin" is explained as:

1. a. the breaking of divine or moral law, esp. by a conscious act.
   b. such an act.

2. an offence against good taste or propriety, etc.

It is not difficult for us to discover that the notion of "original sin" is that of an improper action against God's will. If we also refer to the scriptures, we can see that it is the wrong desire or "inherent bad nature" that resulted from a human being's inability to resist temptation.

In this regard, English translations of the Bible have used a great many different terms to express the word "sin":

> They have all *turned aside*.
> They have together become *unprofitable*.
> There is *none who does good*.
> Fall *short of* the glory of God.[39]

"Turned aside" was an action of deviation from the original, just way. "Unprofitable" meant "harmful." It is not necessary to explain "good," and its antonym "bad." "Short of" means "to lack for" something. Besides, there are also other terms – the "wickedness" of man was great on the earth; the inclination or intent of the thoughts of his heart was "evil all the time,"[40] as well as "unrighteousness," "sexual immorality," "covetousness," "maliciousness," "envy," "strife," "deceit," "evil-mindedness," "hatred," "violent," "backbiting," "proud," "boastful," "disobedient," "undiscerning," "untrustworthy," "unloving," "unforgiving," "unmerciful" – except for "murder," which has the nature of crime; all the others are only bad thinking and action. We can see from the above that the English translations of the Bible express a judgement of humanity using words expressing "sin" instead of "crime." It should be said that this preference is more correct and concise.

Thomas Aquinas thought that "evil" was produced when human beings did not follow reason but sought sensual happiness,[41] and that Christianity regarded unregulated desire as bad. Aquinas further explained that there were three orders in humankind's existence: the first was *logos*, the second was divinity, and the third was the ethical standard of humans in social life. Violation of these three orders was evildoing, which in fact was the violation of the ethical standards of social life. The reason for this was that 'divinity' covered and transcended the other two orders, and the ethical standard was the divinity as shown in social life. "Evildoing" was lie-telling, hypocrisy, and indulging in sexual lust.[42] Sensual behaviors such as passion, love, eating, sex, and happiness, were allowable as long as they accorded with reasonableness, caused no great harm, and were not all-pervasive. When Western culture explained human desire in such a way, and especially stated that sin was simply bad desire and immoral action not in accord with the ethical standard, it was obvious that the cultural character of some English-speaking countries had acknowledged the reasonableness of human desire.

Since desire was regarded as a sin, the way leading to perfection was inevitably "asceticism." As mentioned above, the path of Christian salvation was not to save people from hardships, but to lead them to believe in and follow God and to resist and eliminate evil desires, until they were ready for the divinity. This is clearly an asceticism. Here we can also see that there is some consistency between Chinese and Western cultures. The only difference is that Christianity referred to the 'end' as salvation through God's action.[43] Confucianism, especially the New Confucianism of the Ming Dynasty, referred to it as "recovery of disposition."[44]

Concerning Christianity, "salvation" from God the Father acting benevolently, and "atonement" through God's Son, Jesus Christ, seem to reflect a rather remote metaphysics. In the real world, the only thing that counted was the asceticism of human beings. The famous sociologist Max Weber has given a very good description of Christian asceticism.

According to Weber, the secular world has many realms of social relation, and consequently it is full of temptations of all kinds – like that offered by the Serpent to Eve – which are hard to resist. Confronted with so many strong temptations, people had to take the road of asceticism if they wanted to reach the divinity and be saved, i.e., achieve moral perfection. Even Moses, who had climbed up Mount Sinai to experience God's presence, had to return back to the secular world later – and, again, strive to resist worldly temptations. Max Weber emphatically pointed out that asceticism is a "type of attitude toward salvation, which is characterized by a methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation."[45] He divided it into "World-Rejecting Asceticism" and "Inner-Worldly Asceticism." He regarded the former notion of asceticism as a concept of the Middle Ages, where the only route to realize salvation was through the Church. Inner-worldly asceticism meant that the ardent believer of Christianity should not leave this world but stay with it as one of their responsibilities. Moreover, though display of wealth was strictly prohibited, engaging in economic activity was an important responsibility for these 'ascetics.' Economic activity was a rational and ethical activity that should be engaged in. Therefore, the economic activity in society was given an ethical significance, confirmed by the creation of wealth; the desire for profit was justified by these basic values. Seeking material wealth or profit was a response to God's calling, and the creation of wealth was a reward of God's blessing,[46] i.e., salvation. According to Weber's theory, Inner-Worldly Asceticism, i.e., the ethic of Protestantism, gave birth to western capitalism – though whether this is so is a matter outside the present topic.

It is without question that asceticism was seen as an attitude and a systematic method for the achievement of salvation. But one still notes the presence of bad desires, and it is only to be expected that the meaning of "sin" must be consistent with how humanity is understood in the Bible. Referring to "sin" in the Protestant tradition, and "crime" in the Chinese traditions, reflect their different cultures. It is clear which is better.

**CONCLUSION**

It should be noted that a culture does not only reflect the way of survival for a nation, country, region, and the people living in it, but also their way of thinking, including their aesthetics. Different cultures have different modes of thinking and, even for the same object or the same concept, the way in which they translate terms will carry an imprint of their own cultures, despite the effort to maintain the connection with the original idiom. The different senses of "Tao" and "Word" in the Chinese and English translations of the Bible, as well as the use of the Chinese term for "crime" as expressing "sin," are material illustrations of an underlying cultural diversity. The comparison and analysis contained in the present paper may be helpful for a correct understanding of Christian philosophy.

**NOTES**

[1] *The Marx and Engels Anthology* 《马克思恩格斯选集》 (People's Publishing House, 1973), Vol. 1, p. 603.

[2] On cultural philosophy, please refer to the author's book *Academic History in Modern China*, ch. 1, second section: "Cultural philosophy about the cultural debate." Western culture often shows a conflict between humanity and nature, while Chinese culture focuses on harmony. This is an often-mentioned difference between the cultural and value orientations of Chinese and western thought, but it overstresses the creative desire of the West and exaggerates the conformity to nature in the Chinese tradition. In fact, the cultural difference is more about the difference of "the universe of life itself."

[3] This is from the description of Zhang Taiyan's (1868-1936) "On Establishing Religion," in "Zhang Taiyan's collection" (《章太炎文集》). The understanding of reality is different, given the different philosophical connotations of 'ontology.' Nevertheless, the form is the same, meaning that the fundamental ontology is the same.

[4] See the first chapter of the book of *Genesis*. The second sentence says "the earth was without form, and void," and then said God divided the light from the darkness. This is similar to divine (*Pangu*, 盘古) creation in Chinese thought.

[5] Lao Zi （《老子》）

[6] See Chapter 1 of *John*.

[7] The author cannot refer to the original source texts, and can only speculate about original meaning from the English translation. The English translation means that the *logos* is correct and complete; perfect; proven. In the Chinese translation, it means that the *logos* is full and clear – but this is still not accurate enough as the translation of '*logos*,' much less 'Tao.'

[8] See T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (《基督教与文化》)

Chinese translation (Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1989).

[9] Lao Zi, Chapter 14 (**《老子》十四章**).

[10] Lao Zi, Chapter 25 (**《老子》二十五章**).

[11] Zhuang Zi, The Great Master (**《庄子》大宗师**).

[12] The "Diamond Sutra" says: "wheresoever are material characteristics there is delusion; but whoso perceives that all characteristics are in fact no-characteristics, perceives the Tathagata [the Buddha]".

[13] Buddhism upholds emptiness, Taoism is based on emptiness. Zhuang Zi said that Tao is not visible and not audible; it is not Tao if it can be seen and heard. Buddha said reality is empty; Lao Zi said that the Tao that can be spoken is not the constant Tao. Therefore, Buddhism and Taoism are completely consistent on ontology and on the unspeakable.

[14] This turn stressed that in philosophy, as well as in other social and human sciences and the natural sciences, a key role is played by language and semantics, and that many problems can be better addressed or resolved by a closer attention to language.

[15] Although the English and American languages belong to the Germanic language family, unlike the Latin / Romance character of most other European languages, they have a roughly similar cultural origin and historical background – which, in short, is what we call Western culture. In light of this, I will not address different Western linguistic and cultural traditions one by one.

[16] A representative figure here is Anselm, who is known as "the last of the Church fathers and the first schoolman." He claimed that everyone has an idea of God as that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Starting with *Psalm* 13, verse 1, that "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God," Anselm produces an argument that seeks to establish the necessity of the existence of God.

[17] According to the principle of causality used by Aristotle, there must be a first 'mover' or cause of the universe.

[18] Refer to Aquinas' famous 'fifth way' in the *Summa Theologiae*, I.

[19] See Kant's account of a moral argument for the existence of God; there are parallels in Buddhism.

[20] 《**太平御览**》("Tai Ping Yu Lan")："The sky and earth were muddy like an egg. Pangu was born within it. After 18,000 years, he separated heaven and earth. The yang egg white became heaven and the yin yolk became the earth. Pangu changed nine times each day, acquiring supernatural powers from heaven and earth. Each day, the sky became one zhang higher, the earth became one zhang thicker and Pangu grew one zhang taller. After 18,000 years, the sky was very high and the earth very deep, so the sky and earth were 90,000 li apart." See, "Concepts of Space and Time in Ancient China and in Modern Cosmology" by Fang Lizhi and Zhou Youyuan, in *Chinese Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Fan Dainian and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996)

²¹ See the New Testament, *John* 14:6: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' The way is in the company of the truth and the life, but placing 'the way' before the truth and the life is obviously wrong. "The way" here means that *logos* is similar to "Tao."

²² On 'the names of God,' see *Summa Theologiae*, I, 13. See also 上帝沒有激情 托马斯·阿奎那论宗教与人生 / *God Has No Passion: Thomas Aquinas on Religion and Life*, by Dezhi Duan; Qingping Liu; Chenglian Tang (Hubei People's Publishing House, 2001).

²³ This is also similar to Chinese culture – there is a contempt for women and, among common folk especially, women are blamed for causing troubles and disaster. In fact, we see this throughout the world.

²⁴ *Genesis*, ch. 6.

²⁵ *Romans*, ch 3.

²⁶ John Maisel, "Is Jesus God?" [http://www.biblequery.org/Doctrine/JesusIsGod/IsJesusGod.htm], Chinese version《耶稣是神吗？》

²⁷ Refer to the Old Testament book of *Isaiah*, ch 1. The other condemnations can be found throughout the Old and New Testaments. Whoever does not believe in the Christ, are condemned. If evildoers fall on their knees to God, even they can be pardoned. The New Testament Gospel of *Luke* 7, mentions the "adulteress who "stood at [Jesus'] feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment", then Jesus said to her, "your sins are forgiven", your faith has healed you". This is the core of Christianity: to be justified by faith.

²⁸ 1 *Samuel*, ch. 24: 11; David says "I have not sinned against thee."

²⁹ *Isaiah*, ch. 59

³⁰ *Jeremiah*, ch. 2.Cf. other texts, such as *Romans*, ch. 2.

³¹ This is similar to Chinese tradition.

³² *Ezra*, ch. 10; *Judges*, ch. 21.

³³ *John* 3:16: "whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

³⁴ This especially refers to sexual desire and the lack of rational control. Aquinas explains that sexual activity among men and women is not morally evil. While moral evil does come from the original human ancestors, men and women are compared to animals in the matter of procreation See *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a 2, resp.: "there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, *according to that nature which he has in common with other animals*: and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, "which nature has taught to all animals" … such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth." (Emphasis mine)

³⁵ Mengzi, *Gaozi*, 1: "There is no human being lacking in the tendency to do good" (6A2)' "one who lacks a mind that feels pity and

compassion would not be human; one who lacks a mind that feels shame and aversion would not be human."

<sup>36</sup> Mengzi, *Gaozi*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Cheng Testament, (《**程氏遗书**》) I, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Neo-Confucianists often quote Meng Zi's words: "for the nurturing of the heart there is nothing better than to reduce the number of desires in it." Hence saying that "human nature is good" does not deny the existence of moral defects in humanity.

<sup>39</sup> *Romans*, ch. 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Genesis*, ch 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q 49, a 1, ad 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q 73, a 2.

<sup>43</sup> 'Salvation' is often translated as **救赎** in Chinese. In fact it is more suitable to translate it as **拯救** or **救度**。The word **救赎** means 'soteriology.'

<sup>44</sup> Li Ao's *Fu-hsing shu* (*The Recovery of Nature*) had a great influence in Neo-Confucianism and in later thinkers.

<sup>45</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, English translation (Beacon Press, 1963), p. 164.

<sup>46</sup> "inner-weltliche Askese" (see Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 166).

# RELIGIONS, CULTURES, AND ETHICS

Peter Drum

## INTRODUCTION

R. C. Zaehner contends that

> [i]t is both dangerous and stupid to disregard the religious foundations on which any given civilization is built. [For], [e]ven the most rationalistic of us frequently prefer to ignore how many of the institutions that we take for granted are essentially Christian in origin. Few Englishmen, probably, feel any desire to have more than one wife: and this seems strange, for the practice of polygamy is hallowed by antiquity and enjoys the sanction of both the Moslem and the Hindu faiths. Again, few Europeans would nowadays advocate the seclusion of women; yet this is a practice for which Koranic sanction is most justly claimed … [Thus] … had Europe fallen to the Moslem conqueror, both polygamy and the seclusion of women would be part of our Moslem heritage.[1]

Zaehner may have a point, for the ethical dimension is evidently an important feature of the major religious traditions,[2] and religions are – or at least have been – very much a part of societies. It is no surprise, then, that it is sometimes thought that our institutions are so conditioned by religious and cultural factors that their moral acceptability is – to a certain extent, at least – dependent upon them.

Yet, surely ethics is not dependent upon religions – consider the ethics of Aristotle. Moreover, for religious moralities – such as the morality of Christians – to be recognizably ethical they presumably must share a certain commonality with their secular cousins. Further, even where there are divergences between ethical systems, surely there must be avenues for meaningful dialogue and dispute resolution. The purpose of this paper is to argue for these latter two claims, and that the ethicality of institutions is determinable quite independently of religions and cultural traditions.

## RELIGIONS AND ETHICS

Bernard T. Adeney asserts that "Christians believe that what is good is determined by the will of God …"[3]; and Daniel Brown concludes that Islamic ethics tends towards "an ethical system which holds that God alone defines the standard of right and wrong."[4] However, even if this were true, surely it cannot be right; because then 'good' would simply mean "the will of God," and the will of God could – logically – be anything. Thus, "[s]hould God have commanded theft and idolatry it would have been right

for humans to commit them."[5] This is theological voluntarism – viz. the Divine Command theory of ethics – which is nothing less than "[a] kind of divine despotism … decreed and imposed without reason by the Celestial High Command."[6] Adeney says that "[a]s a Christian, I am to make my critical standard for ethical analysis from the kingdom of God revealed in Jesus"[7]; and that "[i]f all religions are equal and the truth is equally unknown by all, then there is no standpoint from which to condemn any religious practices."[8]

But, why does the Christian think that he should accept the standards of Christianity? For, even if Jesus is believed to be God, "[his] infinite kinghood or creatordom does not seem evidently more worthy of obedience [than his infinite power] but [is simply] more difficult to disobey."[9] Consequently,

> [u]nless we accept Hobbes' consistent but repugnant equation of God's right with his might, we must be persuaded independently of His goodness before we admit his right to command. We must judge for ourselves whether the Bible is the inspired word of a just and benevolent God … this is to make a moral decision, so that in the end far from morality being based upon religion, religion is based on morality.[10]

Adeney's admission that "[t]he social dynamic of each of the world religions contains strengths and weaknesses that give rise to good and evil practices."[11] suggests that he is at least implicitly aware of the independence of ethics to God's will, and then explains why he chooses the standards of Jesus. However, this is difficult to square with his earlier statement. Thus, "[w]hen St Thomas [Aquinas] affirms that God is good … he means to be saying *at least as much* about God as one would say about, e.g., Socrates, if one were to affirm that Socrates is good."[12] For, "[e]ven the Holy One of the Gospels must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection, before we can recognize him as such."[13] Consequently, the assertion that "any code of morals springs from a faith, or if you prefer it, an ideology of which the code is a practical expression,"[14] cannot be right. Rather, faith springs from morals, because "God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good."[15]

## ETHICAL DIFFERENCES

Yet, not everyone accepts that there are grounds for a universal ethic generally agreed upon. For example, D. Z. Phillips and H. O. Mounce contend that

> [i]n 1958, moral philosophers were given rather startling advice. They were told that their subject was not worth pursuing further until they possessed an adequate philosophy of psychology. What is

needed, they were told, is an enquiry into what type of characteristic a virtue is, and, furthermore, it was suggested that this question could be resolved in part by exploring the connection between what a man ought to do and what he needs: perhaps man needs certain things in order to flourish, just as a plant needs water; and perhaps what men need are the virtues courage, honesty, loyalty, etc. Thus, in telling a man that he ought to be honest, we should not be using any special (moral) sense of ought: a man ought to be honest just as a plant ought to be watered. The "ought" is the same: it tells us what a man needs … Its [Elizabeth Anscombe's advice] implications have been worked out in some detail by Philippa Foot in a number of influential papers … It seems fair to say that the advice of 1958 has produced a climate of opinion, a way of doing moral philosophy. For this reason, it is all the more important to expose the radical misunderstanding involve in it.[16]

Their thesis is that

there is no settling of the issue in terms of some supposed common evidence called human good and harm, since what they differ over is precisely the question of what constitutes human good and harm. The same is true of all fundamental moral disagreements, for example, the disagreement between a pacifist and a militarist. The argument is unlikely to proceed very far before deadlock is reached … Their arguments are rooted in different moral traditions within which there are rules for what can and what cannot be said …The view that there are ways of demonstrating goodness by appeal to evidence which operates independently of the various opinions people hold is radically mistaken … There are no theories of goodness.[17]

This argument is also found in Alasdair MacIntyre: the Aristotelian view that from a "very general account of what human flourishing and well being consists in," we might agree upon what virtues are necessary to promote this. But this

ignores the place in our cultural history of deep conflicts over what human flourishing and well-being do consist in and the way in which rival and incompatible beliefs on that topic beget rival and incompatible tables of the virtues. Aristotle and Nietzsche, Hume and the New Testament are names which represent polar positions on these matters.[18]

The problem here is that if this is correct, we are doomed to rival moralities and irresolvable moral disagreement; which is a sure recipe for not taking

ethics – and consequently religion – seriously at all. So, is it true that – for example, Aristotle and the Christians – are at loggerheads about ethics; and even if they are, that their differences are irresolvable?

## JUSTICE AND PEACE

Aristotle says that "there really is, as everyone to some extent divines, a natural justice and injustice that is binding on all men, even those who have no association or covenant with each other."[19] And, indeed, it is a fact that

> [e]very culture has a concept of murder, distinguishing this from execution, killing in war, and other 'justifiable homicides.' The notions of incest and other regulations upon sexual behaviour, of restitution and reciprocity, of mutual obligations between parents and children – these and many other moral concepts are altogether universal.[20]

Therefore, the commands of the Decalogue are hardly exclusively Judeo-Christian. For, that "people who are puzzled to know whether one ought to honour the gods and love one's parents or not need [not perception, but] punishment …"[21]; and that "not every action … admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness … [thus] … adultery, theft, murder …"[22], are Aristotle's prescriptions too. Further, although Christians are meant to be peace loving – "[h]appy [are] the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God"[23] – they also appreciate that "[w]ar and conquest are a sad necessity in the eyes of men of principle … [for] … it would be still more unfortunate if wrongdoers should dominate just men."[24] But this is also the position of Aristotle: "[people should not] study war with a view to the enslavement of those who do not deserve to be enslaved"[25]; they should do so – in the first instance, anyway– to "provide against their own enslavement."[26] And, although

> [s]ome [Platonists] say that the guardians should be friendly towards those whom they know, fierce towards those whom they do not know … we ought not be out of temper with any one; and a lofty spirit is not fierce by nature, but only when it is excited by evil-doers.[27]

Further,

> [s]ince the end of individuals and of states is the same, the end of the best man and of the best constitution must also be the same; it is therefore evident that there ought to exist in both of them the virtues of leisure; for peace, as has often been repeated, is the end of war, and leisure of toil.[28]

**CHARITY AND FORGIVENESS**

MacIntyre alleges that

> [Medieval Aristotelians] had of course to recognize virtues of which Aristotle knew nothing. One of these merits special consideration. It is the theological virtue of charity. Aristotle in considering the nature of friendship had concluded that a good man could not be the friend of a bad man … [b]ut at the centre of biblical religion is the conception of a love of those who sin … [t]he virtue [of charity] is exhibited in forgiveness …the story of the thief on the cross is unintelligible in Aristotelian terms. And it is unintelligible precisely because charity is not a virtue for Aristotle.[29]

So, Christians are instructed that "if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either."[30]

Yet, Aristotle also says that "[nor] is [the great-souled man] mindful of wrongs; for it is not the part of a great-souled man to have a long memory, especially for wrongs, but rather to overlook them"[31]; and that

> the good tempered man tends to be unperturbed and not to be led by passion, but to be angry in the manner, at the things, and for the length of time, that the rule dictates; but he is thought to err rather in the direction of deficiency; for the good-tempered man is not revengeful, but rather tends to make allowances.[32]

Again, he says of the equitable person that he is "[someone who] is no stickler for his rights in a bad sense but tends to take less than his share though he has the law on his side, is equitable, and this state of character is equity …"[33] Furthermore, the good thief in the Gospel is forgiven precisely because he accepts that he is a sinner, and asks for forgiveness.[34] Hence, Aristotle says that "presumably no one would repudiate a son who was not far gone in wickedness; for apart from the natural friendship of father and son it is human nature not to reject a son's assistance"[35]; and that "[i]f they [friends] are capable of being reformed one should rather come to the assistance of their character or their property, inasmuch as this is better and more characteristic of friendship."[36] Therefore, for Aristotle, there is forgiveness.

So what about charity? In the Christian tradition "[c]harity is friendship,"[37] which for Aristotle is also a virtue: "we define a "friend" as one who will always try, for your sake, to do what he takes to be good for you."[38] Now, of course, it might be theological charity in the strict sense that MacIntyre has in mind. Thus: "[c]harity [in this sense] signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with him; which implies,

besides love, a certain mutual return of love, together with mutual communion."[39] If so, though, MacIntyre still misses his mark. For, Aristotle agrees that there is indeed such a thing as friendship with the gods:

> [now] he who exercises his reason and cultivates it seems to be in the best state of mind and most dear to the gods … and that they should reward those who love and honor this most, as caring for the things that are dear to them and acting both rightly and nobly.[40]

## HUMILITY

MacIntyre also alleges that "the only place in Aristotle's account of the virtues where anything like humility is mentioned, it is as a vice, and patience is not mentioned at all by Aristotle."[41] But is this correct? This is what Aristotle says:

> [n]ow the man is thought to be great-souled who thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them …he deserves and claims great things, and above all the greatest things … and the greatest of these, we should say, is that which we render to the gods … and which people of position most aim at, and which is the prize appointed for the noblest deeds, and this is honour …The unduly humble man falls short both in comparison with his own merits and in comparison with the great-souled man's claims. The vain man goes to excess in comparison with his own merits, but does not exceed the great-souled man's claims … Therefore the truly great-souled man must be good. And the greatness in every virtue would seem to be the characteristic of a great man … Therefore it is hard to be truly great-souled; for it is impossible without nobility and goodness of character.[42]

Hence, it is undue humility and not humility itself that is the vice, and most people should be humble because they have no right to consider themselves to be great-souled. Moreover,

> [i]t is the mark of the great-souled man … to be dignified towards people who enjoy high position and good fortune, but unassuming towards those of the middle class; for it is a difficult and lofty thing to be superior to the former, but easy to be so to the latter, and a lofty bearing over the former is no mark of ill-breeding, but among humble people it is as vulgar as a display of strength against the weak.[43]

For Aristotle, then, airs of superiority even where they are warranted are generally to be avoided. And, the great-souled man does know patience: he is not hurried or excited[44]; and is ready to "bear with resignation many great

misfortunes, not through insensibility to pain but through nobility and greatness of soul."[45]

## WEALTH AND WISDOM

MacIntyre maintains that

> according to Aristotle certain virtues are only available to those of great riches and of high social status … [a]nd those virtues are on Aristotle's view ones central to human life; magnanimity [pride] … and munificence [generosity] are not just virtues, but important virtues within the Aristotelian scheme … Moreover since the New Testament quite clearly sees the rich as destined for the pains of Hell, it is clear that the key virtues cannot be available to them …[46]

Yet, Aristotle is no especial friend of wealth, saying that

> [t]he type of character produced by Wealth lies on the surface for all to see. Wealthy men are insolent and arrogant; their possession of wealth affects their understanding; they feel as if they had every good thing that exists; wealth becomes a sort of standard value for everything else, and therefore they imagine there is nothing money cannot buy …In a word, the type of character produced by wealth is that of a prosperous fool.[47]

Admittedly, he does think that "a man must have so much property as will enable him to live not only temperately but liberally," [48] but are the Christians any different? St Paul also advocates temperate living and giving to others:

> I have never asked for money or clothes; you know for yourselves that the work I did earned enough to meet my needs and those of my companions. I did this to show you that this is how we must exert ourselves to support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, who himself said, 'There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.'[49]

MacIntyre says that "the New Testament … says nothing about virtues such as *phronesis* [practical wisdom] which are crucial for Aristotle."[50] But, this is also incorrect, as Christians are meant to be prudent. Thus, to "stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming"[51]; and to "be very careful about the sort of lives you lead, like intelligent and not like senseless people … do not be thoughtless, but recognize the will of the Lord."[52]

## FAITH AND HOPE

MacIntyre's position is that "the New Testament …praises virtues of which Aristotle knows nothing – faith, hope and love."[53] Now, that he is wrong about charity has already been shown, so what of faith and hope? Well, if "'[f]aith' …[ is] … the habit whereby one believes,"[54] then it is in Aristotle, who maintains that we often have to take people on trust: "[m]en in their prime … neither trust everybody nor distrust everybody, but judge people correctly."[55] And, if "[t]he object of hope is a future good, difficult but possible to obtain,"[56] then it too is in Aristotle, who maintains that "hope is of the future, memory of the past,"[57] However, once again it might be the strictly theological sense of these virtues that Macintyre has in mind – theological faith is trusting in a God who is trustworthy and theological hope is for our heavenly reward. Yet, Plato, Aristotle's teacher, believes that God could be trusted, prescribing that

> [e]very possible step must be taken to prevent anyone, young or old, either saying or being told, whether in poetry or prose, that God, being good, can cause harm or evil to any man. To say so would be sinful, inexpedient, and inconsistent.[58]

And, Aristotle agrees that the gods are worthy of worship: "[m]agnificence is an attribute of expenditures of the kind which we call honourable – votive offerings, buildings and sacrifices – and similarly with any form of religious worship."[59] Thus, as previously noted, Aristotle holds that "people who are puzzled to know whether one ought to honour the gods and love one's parents or not need [not perception, but] punishment"[60] And, regarding theological hope, the fact that Aristotle commissions statues to Zeus Saviour and Athena Saviouress in his will,[61] might well be for the wish of a possible heavenly reward.

## CONCLUSION

The allegation that Aristotle and the New Testament represent polar positions on what constitutes human flourishing and well being, has now been shown to be false. The same should apply, then, to any other ethical systems seriously worth considering.

But, even if this were not the case, irrespective of their religious beliefs and cultural traditions, people can – and indeed should – be ready to ask: "How would it be if everyone did this?', and 'How would we like it if someone did this to us?"[62] And, if the correct answers to these questions are that 'It would not be good,' and that 'We would not like it', then the practice is clearly wrong, regardless of any other considerations. So, whether or not the institutions of polygamy and the seclusion of women are acceptable or not should decided according to the common currency of ethics – that is, according to what we *reflectively and honestly* adjudge to be

conditions of human flourishing and well being – not simply by turning to entrenched and unexamined religious and cultural factors. Consequently, it is an overstatement to conclude that "[i]t is both dangerous and stupid to disregard the religious foundations on which any given civilization is built."[63] For, to be civilized in the first instance means to be decent, and what this means is accessible to us independently of religions and cultures, if we approach the question soberly, *and without any prejudice*.

## NOTES

[1] R. C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 434.

[2] E.g., see Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (London: The Fontana Library, 1969), pp. 19-20.

[3] *Strange Virtues – Ethics in a Multicultural World* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 15.

[4] "Islamic Ethics in Comparative Perspective," *The Muslim World*, LXXXIX, No 2 (April 1999), p. 181.

[5] "Islamic Ethics in Comparative Perspective," p. 184.

[6] Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy* (New York: Scribner, 1964), p. 91.

[7] Maritain, *Moral Philosophy*, p. 176.

[8] Maritain, *Moral Philosophy*, p. 178.

[9] Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 77-78.

[10] P. H. Nowell-Smith, "Morality: Religious and Secular," *The Rationalist Annual*, 1961.

[11] Nowell-Smith, "Morality: Religious and Secular," p. 175.

[12] Nelson Pike, "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin," in *Divine Commands and Morality*, Paul Helm (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 77.

[13] Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated and analysed by H. J. Paton (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 73.

[14] R. C. Zaehner, loc. cit.

[15] *Genesis*, 1:31.

[16] D. Z. Phillips and H. O. Mounce, "On Morality's Having a Point," in *The Is-Ought Question*, W. D. Hudson (ed.) (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 228-229.

[17] "On Morality's Having a Point," pp. 238-239.

[18] *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1990), pp. 162-163.

[19] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 13.

[20] Clyde Kluckhohn, "Ethical Relativity, Sic et Non," *The Journal of Philosophy* 52 (1955), p. 672.

[21] Aristotle, *Topics*, II.

[22] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6.

[23] *Matthew* 5:9.

[24] St Augustine, *The City of God*, IV, 15.

[25] Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 14.

[26] Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 14.

[27] Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 7.

[28] Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 15.

[29] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 174-175.

[30] *Matthew* 6:14-15.

[31] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 3.

[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 5.

[33] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V, 10.

[34] *Luke*, 23: 39-43.

[35] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 14.

[36] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 3.

[37] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae., 23, 1.

[38] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 5.

[39] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a2ae. 65, 5.

[40] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 8.

[41] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 177.

[42] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 3.

[43] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 3.

[44] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 3.

[45] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 10.

[46] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 182.

[47] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 16.

[48] *Politics*, II, 6.

[49] *Acts*, 20: 33 – 36.

[50] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p. 182.

[51] *Matthew*, 24: 43 – 45.

[52] *Ephesians*, 5: 15 – 17.

[53] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p. 182.

[54] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a2ae. 55, 1 ad 1.

[55] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 14.

[56] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae. 17, 1.

[57] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 13.

[58] Plato, *Republic*, II, 380.

[59] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 2.

[60] Aristotle, *Topics*, II.

[61] "Aristotle's Will," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Jonathan Barnes (ed.) (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 2465.

[62] See Renford Bambrough, *Moral Skepticism and Moral Knowledge* (London, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 26.

[63] Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, p. 434.

# BOOK REVIEWS

**Brian LEITER,** *Why Tolerate Religion?* **(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) pp. 334. ISBN 978-0-691-15361-2 (hardcover). Price: $15.00.**

Reasons for tolerating religion are not specific to religion but apply to all claims of conscience. Such is the central thesis that underlies Brian Leiter's book. The practical conclusion that he draws from that principle is that individuals with claims of religious conscience have no special right to request exemptions from generally applicable laws. In fact, unless their claims are not burden-shifting, they should be rather subject to the No Exemptions approach, alongside the individuals with the "merely" secular claims of conscience. In brief, Leiter's answer to the title question is that, if the state is to *tolerate* religion at all, it should do so only due to the ability of a particular claimer to prove his or her entitlement, not based on anything that has to do with religion as such.

The book is arranged in five sections. Chapter 1 examines the nature of the moral ideal of principled toleration as opposed to merely pragmatic ("Hobbesian") compromise, on the one hand, and indifference or neutrality, on the other. The author also outlines moral and epistemic arguments for such an ideal and the limits of toleration indicated by harm to others and damage to the public order. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the question, "What makes religious claims of conscience distinctive?" Leiter comes up with the two key-marks of religion, namely categoricity of religious commands and religious belief's insulation from evidence, and argues that none of these features warrants singling out religion for toleration. What is more, he cautions that special legal solicitude towards religious beliefs and practices may encourage precisely this conjunction of categorical fervour and its basis in epistemic indifference, of which he obviously disapproves. In Chapter 4, the concept of *respect* for religion, conceived as the moral foundation of religious liberty, is considered as an alternative to the ideal of toleration. Leiter makes a distinction between a mere "recognition respect," which he basically identifies with toleration, and "appraisal respect," tantamount to esteem or reverence, and he concludes that the religious belief system can hardly justify the latter attitude. Finally, Chapter 5 argues that, regardless of the nature of the claims of conscience (religious or irreligious), there should be no exemptions to general laws with neutral purposes if shifting burdens or risks onto others is involved. In addition, Leiter maintains that a tolerant state could, in principle, be either a religious or an antireligious one.

This provocative book provides the reader with a comprehensive framework for probing the phenomenon of preferential treatment of religion in both law and public discourse. Those interested in political philosophy and constitutional theory will certainly find it stimulating. However, as a

philosopher of religion and theologian, I cannot remain uncritical of Leiter's reflection on the features that distinguish religious belief from other kinds of belief potentially warranting toleration. Before turning to my critique of his reductionist – as I will argue – approach to religion, let me first acknowledge both the general strengths and shortcomings of his analysis.

Leiter guides us steadfastly through the jungle of definitions, distinctions, and controversies surrounding the concept of principled toleration. As an illustration, one could mention his criticism of the ideal of neutrality as being inconsistent with a state's commitment to a (however understood) "Vision of the Good," and thus illusionary. He masterfully depicts the discrepancies between legal practices characteristic of different states, with an emphasis on American "viewpoint discrimination," British establishment of a *religious* Vision of the Good (Anglicanism), and French *laïcité*. Those who have read Leiter's previous books – notably *Objectivity in Law and Morals* (2001) and *Nietzsche and Morality* (2007) – will certainly appreciate the same critical insight, wry humour, and remarkable clarity with which he grasps the challenges faced by Western democracies. *Why Tolerate Religion?* undeniably witnesses to his philosophical acuity and impressive background in legal scholarship.

Minor limitations of Leiter's work, in terms of a broadly understood methodology, can be found in slight inconsistency in defining toleration ("putting up with the *existence* of the other, differing, group" [8] in contrast to, actually purported by the author, "putting up with [*beliefs and*] *practices* of which one disapproves" [3]) as well as in the lack of terminological distinction between "tolerance" and "toleration" (the latter is understood by certain scholars as tolerance backed by law or judicial precedent, while Leiter happens to use the terms interchangeably [cf. 19]). It is also regrettable that the author does not refer to more and more diverse, case studies, leaving us basically with the textbook example of the Sikh boy who was allowed by the Canadian Supreme Court to wear his *kirpan*, a dagger symbolising religious devotion, while attending a public school.

However, the major deficiency of Leiter's argumentation, I would say, consists in his reductionist and arbitrary treatment of the distinguishing features of religious belief. While reading Chapters 2 and 3, one senses that Leiter is no longer *in his field*. The reasons he gives to prove that there is no principled argument for tolerating religion qua religion are likely to strike the impartial reader as theoretically weak and ideologically biased.

Leiter seems to impose on religion the criteria relevant, strictly speaking, only to science; in this sense, his interpretation of religious belief's insulation from evidence brings to mind the early Wittgenstein and logical positivism. To realise that there is a wealth of philosophical alternatives, one need only mention John Hick's concept of rational proof *without evidence* or the later Wittgenstein, for that matter, whose theory of language games maintains that there is something special about the very linguistic framework of religious believers – and that 'scientific' or empirical evidence definitely does not belong to it. The author correctly

assumes that a *metaphysics of ultimate reality*, involved in religious beliefs, neither claims support from empirical evidence, nor purports to be constrained by such. That leads him, however, to the oversimplified conclusion that a metaphysics of ultimate reality is but a "variation on the idea that religious belief is insulated from evidence" (47). By deeming religious views on the "ultimate nature" of things insignificant for his enterprise, he deprives himself of a promising candidate for a distinguishing feature of religious belief that could, at least potentially, grant it a special claim for toleration. If he took that aspect of religious belief for what it is, instead of wrongly reducing religious metaphysics to its epistemological ramifications, he might have found it more meaningful for his investigation. Several of Leiter's remarks suggest that *rational* cannot be conceived of differently than in conjunction with *verifiable* (i.e., empirically provable). If that was the case, religious belief would indeed have to be deemed *irrational* and, as the author puts it, epistemically indifferent. But what about categories such as *trans-rational* or *non-empirically provable*? They seem not to fit his somewhat positivist outlook.

The only challenge to his view that Leiter acknowledges in his book (and rightly so!) is that posed by Thomism and natural theology in general. Unfortunately, he is highly dismissive of both of them, reducing them to "post-hoc rationalization" which fails to follow the evidence where it really leads, manipulating it instead to fit preordained ends (40). One may wonder whether the author of this accusation has actually read *Summa Theologica* or simply repeats the stereotypes functioning in certain academic circles. He also states that "it is doubtful… whether these intellectualist traditions capture the character of popular religious belief, the typical epistemic attitudes of religious believers." (39) Even if he is right (and I am not too sure about this; after all, whether someone likes it or not, Thomism is constitutive of a Catholic intellectual tradition which can hardly be reduced to "high" academic theology), bracketing classical theism by no means follows. The fact that popular faith tends to be more "fideistic" than "rationalist" in no way prevents Catholics (to remain with the example) from defending the view of the compatibility and complementarity between faith and reason. In his criticism of John Finnis's Thomistic interpretation of "norm of rationality" (86-90), Leiter raises a few accurate objections, but again it seems that he discards its relevance to the issue of toleration/respect of religion all too hastily. Expressions such as "irrational" and "long-discredited" or "everyone outside the relevant sectarian group" indicate clearly where his philosophical sympathies lie.

To sum up, it has to be established how Leiter's view of religious belief is related to his central thesis. In many cases, one is inclined to agree with the disapproval of singling out religious liberty for special legal protection. But, as the author himself points out, fair legal solutions require case-by-case judgments in light of the prevailing cultural norms of the communities affected, since often we deal with the differences of degree, rather than those of kind. On the one hand, the selective application of

toleration to the conscience of *only* religious believers is not morally defensible. On the other hand, religious claims of conscience, when juxtaposed with secular ones, appear generally as more deeply integrated into the cultural and normative practices of societies and therefore provide a potentially richer evidential base for assessing their genuineness. When it comes to matters of religion, one can appeal to the *regulatory core* of religious doctrine to rule out certain claims as inconsistent with it or even manipulative, i.e., attempting to manoeuvre religion into justifying practices that are *de facto* unjustifiable. The evaluation of the individual or group claim that is not backed by the tradition and community of faith seems to involve more vagueness and relativism. In any case, Leiter's conclusions – however seemingly plausible – are unconvincing due to the major flaw in his argument. As he admits, there is no reason to think that principled toleration demands tolerance of religious beliefs in particular, *provided* he is right about the features that distinguish religious belief (54). If he is not (or if his reflection on what makes a claim of conscience distinctively "religious" is fragmentary and inconclusive), then the question that he tackles – "Is there any *special* reason to tolerate belief whose distinctive character is defined by the categoricity of its demands conjoined with its insulation from evidence?" (60-61) – must be simply considered irrelevant.

The above critique is by no means aimed at discouraging potential readers from taking interest in Leiter's book. Quite the contrary, it is highly recommended to all those interested in the relationship between religion and the state. It will certainly leave its readers with much to ponder.

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