

Hegel's Philosophy of Universal Reconciliation

Hegel's Philosophy
of Universal Reconciliation:
Logic as Form of the World

By

Stephen Theron

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P U B L I S H I N G

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CHAPTER ONE

BEGOTTEN NOT MADE

To question the reality of time, a move no more and no less esoteric than is philosophy generally, is to imply something richer, measuring more fully up to experience, not something poorer, a pace less petty, neither forward nor backward, but still a pace, as of music or dance. Only thus does timelessness signify an absence of time, as dynamic. We could not, for example, accept a view representing us vibrant human beings as immobile statues. That would not be perfection in the end perfected, not “realised end”. In this way, as Hegel expounds it, the End transcends the notion of a final *cause*.¹

One reason for our confidence in saying this is that, contrary to popular assumption, the doctrine of God was never one of immobility, even where it was one of immutability. In Western and Christian thought God is necessarily a Trinity, a universe of relations. Here God speaks “the Word”, God and “with God”, from whom God, “Spirit”, proceeds². Such uttering, equated with begetting or generating, is what the Father is. He was not, is not, anything prior to this generating.

Therefore any event that we experience, be it our own perception of something, or any event at all, is so to say undercut and supported by, as having at its heart, this eternal utterance or generation of the Word in which all things are contained. The very newness of things reflects *eternal*

¹ Cf. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, hereafter Enc., Part One, “Logic”, §204. Hereafter this reference will be EL for “Logic”, as EN for “The Philosophy of Nature”, EG for “The Philosophy of Spirit” (*Geist*). Hegel does not write here, in parity, “the philosophy of Logic”. For him philosophy is firstly logic, no longer therefore divisible into *logica docens* and *logica utens*. Thus Logic as such transcends previous metaphysics.

² Hegel suggests, in an early work explicitly, implicitly throughout, that Spirit proceeds from the Father *as* Son or Word (the Father as his own Other), thus transcending the ancient *filioque* quarrel while superseding the *language*, without contradicting it, of *hypostasis* and nature. “I and my father are one” in our differentiation, that is the thought.

novelty and freshness, and thus time is eternal reality's image and cipher, not its negation merely.

If therefore anyone would replace this religious view with, as in absolute idealism, a universe of immortal spirits, ourselves, in perpetual mutual relation, then should he or she not say, as preserving the insight of theology, that we in some way generate one another perpetually? We do not just find ourselves passively there. How could we? But nor is the individual alone responsible for all or everyone else. Rather, we must be as necessary to the whole community as the community is necessary to us. It could not exist without me, or you, and nor could I without it. We are "begotten" from one another, yet each has his own energy which is yet one with that of the whole.

In a way this is symbolised by the two births, of nature and spirit (baptism), which in reality, however, are not successive, or births at all. We are in ourselves and we are in all the others, as a whole. We are necessary, not born, not dying.

Yet we appear to come out and return, ceaselessly, so ceaselessly that our coming out is one with our returning and *vice versa*. Our life is the world's life, is life itself. To be alienated is, typically, to feel oneself contingent, from another exclusively. Lucifer or Satan knew or felt this. Yet this figure disappears when we understand, as in the realisation that God is himself the *atman*, my deepest self, "closer to me than I am to myself" (Augustine).

So the eternal perceiving of McTaggart's spirits is more profoundly their eternal begetting and breathing forth (of one another). More perfectly than in a still hierarchical if egalitarian Trinitarianism, their begetting is their breathing forth. There is just one, unitary action to each one's being. So there is no multiplicity of disparate processions, begetting, "spirating", being begotten and "spirated", seemingly at odds with the divine simplicity. If there is plurality then it is only of the persons who "proceed", each in the same way and with no first or Adamic person. Each of us is passively active and actively passive, begetting (all) the others in the very act of being begotten by them. Each and all, that is, are equally necessary to the whole and to one another. Each one is "the man" as, conversely, to speak within religious representation, "Christ was made sin for us", is every and each man.

What about the Trinity then? Well, either it foreshadowed this as a historical conception, our first guess in time at such a reality, heralding the overcoming of religious alienation, or there is in truth an antecedent or divine Trinity (as in Paul's "In him we live and move and have our being"), which we should now be seen as somehow explicating. Perhaps

we need not choose, may affirm both. Trinity is the act or life of the Idea itself, “in each of its constituent functions”.³

Our own birth, our newness, on our first day, this defines the character of each and every day, of each and every moment indeed, as eternal, ever new, not ageing in temporal process, each contained in all and all in each (the principle of music). So there is no first day. Birth, which causes time, is eternity’s deepest symbol, symbol of a world without decay. So also death, death as required for every particular seen on its own, not seen in the All, where each is “as having nothing yet possessing all things”. *Non moriar sed vivam*, I shall not die but live, and yet, *media vitae in morte sumus*, in the midst of life we are in death. There, sung in Gregorian, we have the speculative in artistic and religious form, “the true reason-world”.⁴ Life is an imperfect and still contradictory category, in other words. “Oh life that is no life at all”, exclaimed the mystic of Avila, high up upon the dialectical ladder.

To find our selves simply being there, passively, this would be a constraint, unfree, less than infinite. Rather, the Whole, and so we, wills to be. Even the most abject suicide wills this as the End, sought as it is in all actions. There is a primordial will, spirit moving on the face of the waters as foundation for the formation of things, necessity within their necessity, whole in each part. Here, in the end, necessity is freedom and freedom is necessity.

Satan as protest-figure is produced by religious alienation. In a true philosophy of identity in difference he has no place. The centre is everywhere, in each. Catholicism expressed this by seeing the local church as the whole Church, even the total universe of spirits. This is the positive rationale for the much decried “private” Mass able to be celebrated by a solitary person.

So all is eternally accomplished, not as in some primordial past, but as ceaselessly or in each moment definitively accomplishing itself beyond all movement or change. Movement after all is defined in philosophy as imperfect act merely, i.e. as long as the movement is still going on and is hence incomplete. It is incomplete for as long as it still exists as movement. Time itself, as cyclic, or as viewed whole, is beyond such motion, itself supratemporal, a flaming wheel. It does not “return”. Rather, an eternal return is the unbroken sempiternity of each and all.

³ EL160. From Hegel’s idealist standpoint such conceptions are self-validating, not requiring witness or empirical confirmation (the mistake of the Crusaders in seeking the empty grave at Jerusalem). But suppose the conceptions too admit continuous improvement or development....

⁴ EL82 add.

*

So birth and beginning, all that we seem to remember, simply is our forgetting our eternal begetting and being begotten. When we love we fragmentarily remember our eternal partners. The time-series upon which we are launched, precisely at birth, is the *signum formale* we have simply to see through (as we see past the image on our retina). It is thus the symbolic mode of perception proper to us as finite-in-infinite, as parts one with the whole, the universal in the particular and, which is more easily forgotten perhaps, *vice versa*.

Obviously we cannot without contradiction proceed beyond or after time itself. We have rather to “go out of” time, and that daily or continually. This happens through awareness. It can be helped by symbolic or even sacramental presentation, by art or participation in some religious or dramatic action.

This continual “going out of time” is life’s acknowledgement, again, of its own categorial finitude, due to which it is accordingly bounded by death, its end. This end, death, is present in every fibre of life’s essence, upon which actual physical death, always beyond our experience however (since it is as unreal and finite as life), sets the seal. We acknowledge where we have always been as we return to what we never left, and so do not return, do not “go away” (where to?). No birth no death, say the Buddhists.

The contradiction we mentioned, eternity after time, reappears in creation-narrative. Human beings are not really given earth, sky, gardens, any more than they are given their own being as if existing before it. Our necessary milieu is not external to us, except by the metaphor of sensation.

Man is nothing without earth, sky, air and so on, which he projects in symbol as outside of him, or as if he were formed from a pre-existent dust. The outside is the inside. These are also defective categories of thinking. There is no such duality *in concreto*. We should see that it is our symbolic form of representation merely. Yet more intimately, we individuals do not exist before or independently of one another. As I am nothing without air, a milieu, so that milieu is pre-eminently the Whole composed of spirits, i.e. a spiritual whole which is more essentially a whole than are the precarious organic wholes of sense-experience. Each and every individual is, like the milieu (since they are this), essential to my being and to my being me, just as I am essential to this milieu. For if some are essential then all must be so. The difference would otherwise be too great and definite.

I cannot be given, as an extra, as a gift, what is already essential to my being. Nor can I be given my being as if being there already to receive it.

The basic insight here was the replacing of perception with begetting or even a yet more dynamic conception as better approximating to the relation between the persons making up absolute reality. If we posit begetting exclusively of the individual subject, myself, we get solipsism. Solipsism, however, in so far as proposed, had always entailed a web of inter-related solipsisms, thus appearing to cancel itself out by internal contradiction. Its genuine attraction and merit, though, was practical. One should live as if begetter and lord of fate and of the universe. This though is the contradiction within, the impotence of the Kantian practical philosophy. Living “as if” is pretence and unbelief.

*

So, we conclude, we do indeed beget, as affirming and willing, our environment, our companions, as they us, in full reciprocity. This is the ultimate ground of the exhortation to accept in gratitude life and its gifts, as if from a purely yet infinitely *other*, though this is contradiction since otherness by itself is a finite category as bounded by the non-other, ourselves. Hence we are further exhorted, in the tradition, to be free, to be master of one’s destiny in eternal terms at least. This freedom is itself then explained as grace and ordination (“fore”-ordination is mere figure, the temporal within the timeless). This, however, is the familiar coincidence of opposites, making even or especially of Augustinian man a crypto-absolute, the *atman*.

But now, if all and each beget in this way then has not begetting itself collapsed back into mere perception again? One should rather say that we have uncovered perception’s own truth, that beauty is in the eye of the beholder precisely because beauty is in the power and will of the beholder. Yet if all others are not more in my power than I am in theirs as we spring forth eternally together, by free but by no means contingent choice, then power is so to say reduced to perception just as much as perception is promoted to power. Will, that is to say, volition, is saved from its (practical) separateness, is assimilated to cognition precisely as in the Hegelian dialectic.

This then is the meaning, the import, of our begetting one another. It is the truth of perception, and insofar as we are what we behold we beget ourselves too in one another. There is no limit to the identity in difference. This goes no further than, was implicit in, the position that each of the divine ideas, according to which all things were made, is identical with the

divine essence. Two things identical with a third thing are identical with one another. The truth of identity in difference does not abrogate the basic logical law of syllogism. Otherwise discourse would have come to an end, if it could ever have begun.

*

The physicists are now coming round to thinking space and matter as one, made up indifferently of quanta, as has already been mooted with light, for example. Space is as granulated as matter at the micro-level, the continuous mere appearance, as with moving film. The structures of quanta (ribbons, strings, membranes, webs) are not *in* space. They are space.⁵ In the same way we have found that man, spirit, is not to be thought of in separation from nature. He is within nature, rather, since he is not thinkable apart from nature. His body, the primary symbol of his spirit, of himself, is continuous with it, the outside is inside and so the inside is found projected outside.

Clearly the assimilation of space to matter, or *vice versa* indifferently, removes all reason for treating time in isolation. Space has now finally lost its absoluteness for the scientists, an event presaged in Kant's analysis, and time must follow suit. For Kant, held back by the Newtonians, space and time had retained a reduced autonomy as *a priori* forms of understanding. Nobody, except the absolute idealists, knew what to do with this result, least of all the physicists and astronomers in the field. Now, however, the trajectory, of central importance for contemporary man's self-awareness, of the history of modern philosophy comes into full and clear view.

Space and time are matter, it now appears. Yet matter is no longer herself as we knew her. She is never perceived in herself, that much may be retained from quantum physics, with the clear conclusion to be drawn that there is no in-herself. Hegel drew this conclusion long ago, however, making use of Kant's results. It is, at least, one view of the recently enunciated "anthropic principle" in (some) cosmology and physics. The common-sense objectivities must at this final level be discarded as misperception or, less harshly, as a symbolic view of things, like our art-products. They are forms of spirit's self-consciousness, of self in other, or other in self indifferently. This is the super-organic unity signified in

⁵ Lee Smolin, Perimeter Institute, Waterloo, Canada, as reported in *Focus*, Nr. 21, 23 May 2005, p.79, by Michael Odenwald.

religion but here demonstrated, or at least proposed as demonstrable hypothesis.

There is a similar coming together of disparate strands in anthropology and related sciences. After Aristotle had left us with the dualism of soul and body ("The intellect comes from outside" he tells us in *On the Parts of Animals*), we seesawed between materialism and spiritualism for a long time. With the advent of a monist evolutionary theory theologians tried to maintain an archaic notion of an "infused" soul (from outside?) in total divorce from the system into which it should be infused. This has gradually given way, helped along by such insiders as Teilhard de Chardin, on all sides to a notion of the world becoming conscious of its self. Nothing more radical can be thought so long as temporality is retained as objective determinant. This notion has now received strong encouragement from palaeontological discoveries showing that the (it was assumed) unsouled *homo erectus* laid the foundations, of course through intelligence and associated virtue, for man's domination of the globe and of the world's life when he pursued the larger prehistoric mammals into less than temperate regions and successfully hunted them, a million years or more before *homo sapiens* is recorded as appearing. An idealist philosopher would of course relate this insight, as coming at the right time, to the progress in dialectical thinking already going on, as here too in our becoming historically aware of it.

Man, in this way, can begin to be seen as taking his place as the embodiment, the realisation and incarnation, of the whole, with the outside as his inside, his inside fully at home with the supposed outside, as it should be once these categories begin to be cast aside.

I mentioned the history of modern philosophy. We should now understand better what was at stake in the period from Descartes on to Kant and up to Hegel. It is superficial and worse to speak here of German philosophy, as if discrediting by this particularising what is no less than the human advance. It is equally dishonourable to fasten upon Descartes' supposed vanities and failings in the neoscholastic manner, and to throw scorn upon the very concept of reform (Maritain). Scientific method was here born, and with it the power to penetrate beyond appearance. One should say reborn, in view of the Greek achievement. Yet here, more aware, after centuries of theological seriousness, of the need not to believe lightly, it gave birth simultaneously, to increased self-consciousness, the seed of idealism. This, and not the simplistic dualism, is the mark and merit of Descartes. There is no question but that the doctrine of creation, however open in itself to constant reinterpretation, has served as a bar at times to progress in knowledge of reality.

*

In a sense the primacy of consciousness is obvious, once thought. This was the advance of philosophers in the early modern era, to bring this into the open, whence it might be read back into Aristotelian and other earlier texts. This is why we find the physicist Smolin, who feels as it were professionally bound (he need not) to be a realist about time and matter, raising the question about the observer of the whole, the universe, as himself within this whole. His solution is to try to devise a theory that would be manifestly observer-neutral or the same for all possible observers. This though opens the way for coincidence with the view he would oppose, a universe of pure consciousnesses operating with a common cypher or, more harshly, illusion, *viz.* matter, time and change.

Smolin speaks of studying “a system that by definition contains everything that exists.” But this, quite plainly, would be the system, reality as a whole. We ask, in virtue of what would it be a system. Answer, nothing! This means, plausibly at least, that ultimate reality cannot be a system, must be simple, as Aquinas long ago so trenchantly argued. Aquinas went on, however, in apparent contradiction of simplicity, to claim that this reality formed a Trinity of “persons” who were one with their relationships with one another. In similar vein Smolin quickly deduces that there can be no “absolute properties” of the parts of his ultimate system. Rather, all properties will and can only be relational, such as to “define and describe any part of the universe only through its relationships to the rest.” This is precisely the situation of Trinitarian theology. The Father simply is the eternal begetting of the Son, the Word, which he perpetually and self-constitutively utters. The Holy Spirit is perpetual procession, in “spiration”, from Father and Son, so that Aquinas says that he is Gift, *donum*, as giving his name.

Aquinas is able at least to indicate the compatibility of this Trinity with the necessary simplicity, beyond system, of the First Principle. He argues that the more perfectly a thing proceeds from its origin, the more it is to be identified with it, backing this up by what is more than an analogy with human cognitive processes. The case is similar, if different, in McTaggart. The most perfect unity of all, that between spirits, who are persons, is that where the unity “has no reality distinct from” the individuals it unites but is somehow in each of them wholly. This follows once we grant, analytically, that “it is the eternal nature of spirit to be differentiated into finite spirits”, though this view differs in some respects from Christian Trinitarianism. As overcoming hierarchic differentiation more perfectly it might seem less at *prima facie* odds with the necessary simplicity, even

though the persons are maybe so many more than three (they might be just one in the end though). There is a real identity in difference here.

Just as the Father begets the Son, so, we claimed, must these persons beget one another, ceaselessly, in the truly mutual co-inherence of the absolutely autonomous, neither determining nor determined. In the illusory temporal series this is reflected by the ceaseless self-begetting of the human race. Like God the Father, it is plain that we would beget ceaselessly, given the requisite opportunity and physique. For the female such begetting includes the childbirth cycle, as genuinely erotic, therefore. Here we have the true reason for the centrality of sex, the urge of libido, beyond any doctrine of a deformed or “sinful” concupiscence. The urge is to do it again and again, as aping eternity, each satisfactory erotic act embodying in intention the whole, as if each time wanting to be the last or final act before dying. And each offspring too is the same, is the whole world begotten by itself, an individual person who is one with the unity, the Whole, which he or she has constitutively within himself, as his biological and mental development, death apart, will witness.

*

The view might seem bizarre. Consider, though, the alternative, contingency in time and a contingency apart from the other contingency of the created world. In an earlier paper I argued for a divine *fiat* as only possible explanation of one’s experienced contingency.⁶ Now I rather question the experience as misperception, calling out to be resolved but not in that way. What it shows, the perplexity at one’s self-being, is that one cannot be contingent. The postulation of a quasi-extrinsic divine and everlasting love or even “election” is a historic attempt at an explanation, not indeed to be rejected but to be itself more perspicuously presented, as mystics or people in mystical mood have indicated. We thus have Augustine’s insight, that “there is one closer to me than I am to myself”. Whatever is thus closer, one may claim, is I and not another. The empirical, seemingly contingent self is not the true or real self that we are urged to know, a truth which believers in reincarnation also can find strong indications for embracing.

In the paper I had suggested that the ancient belief in an eternal, non-evolutionary world, implying at least on some premises an infinite multitude of individuals, in fact prevented appreciation of the self as person, unique, subject. I was forced to admit the paradox, the greater

⁶ S. Theron, “Other Problems about the Self”, *Sophia*, Australia, 24,1, April 1985, pp.11-21.

difficulty, in admitting a finite number of men coming late in time and yet aspiring to understand the whole, as if by right. “All nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything” (*Meno*). Conditioned to an evolutionary perspective Plato might well not have come so far, so far, that is, as the presupposition of all science, *viz.* that nature is intelligible in terms of our human intelligence. Intelligence, that is, is human. In fact Plato already overcame the conditioning, not of evolution but of similar materialist views.

This brings us, all the same, to this question of the differentiation of infinity, should we deny now the contingency of this finite number of men of which we are used to think we form part by a certain creative election. The three of Trinitarian philosophy can be made to wear a certain necessity in relation to the infinite One. This will hardly apply to McTaggart’s finite but timelessly necessary spirits, whatever number we might assign. So shall we make them infinite in number? There seems no reason not to from the side of science, since the absoluteness of the finite temporal perspective has been rejected. This will apply even though the number of micro-particles be finite and unchanging, since the ban on infinite divisibility does not apply to spirit and the world seen in a grain of sand can itself be the world of this infinite number of spirits.

Alternatively we might replace three with one, analogously at least to the Pauline “You are all one person in Jesus Christ”. In the 1985 paper I referred to the evasiveness of “monopsychism”, thinking mainly of some medieval Aristotelians but also of Hegel. That is, we might still think of the finite number of consciousnesses as making up this One, as they do the Christian Church, sacrament of the human race as a whole for its supporters or members. However, it is possible to dispense with the individual self, as Hume had thought. Notions of collective and indeed “egoless” consciousness are common currency in many cultures, and awareness of this can embody the term or outcome of experiences typically classed as mystical.⁷ Be this as it may, the point is that we need not be saddled with the surd of an absolutely finite number where necessity and freedom meet. If, for example, we admit with McTaggart the possibility of reincarnation within an illusory time-series, then this way of viewing ourselves might just as well, it seems to me, be extended over the equally illusory extensions of space. That is, my (or “my”) consciousness might here and now be extending to what might seem to be other persons,

⁷ Axel Randrup, CIRIP, “Idealist Philosophy: What is Real?”
<http://cogprints.org/3373/01/evolutioncognition.html>.

some or all of them, though this be as unbeknown to me as my “previous” incarnations. Then, it might seem, the universe “has no grain”.

This, however, was precisely the objection felt by the early quantum physicists as they were forced, for reasons later codified by Bell’s theorem, to admit a universe no longer consisting of separate parts locally joined. Measurement of one particle “will instantly determine the direction of the other particle’s spin, thousands of miles away.” This has nothing to do with physical signals, unable to travel faster than light. Rather, we deal at any moment with an indivisible whole.⁸ The connections are non-local since in fact the particles (and why just they?) are the connections, the relationships, from which, since they are practically endless, we can in a sense choose which ones to highlight for this or that purpose. The world is not lawless, but it is fundamentally one, as perfect a unity, it seems, as McTaggart’s community of persons. Yet he thought that only persons, spirits, could be united in this way and in fact one can see the opening to idealism offered by the stress upon the observer in the new formulations, as Niels Bohr and others were well aware. Some scientists are scandalized by this readiness to abandon the physical, as they see it, as unscientific. Yet many of them, like perhaps David Deutsch, then go on to reinterpret the physical in a way that is indistinguishable from an idealist approach, like Hegel before them, e.g. if one affirms that whatever one can envisage or think is “somewhere” real (the “multiverse”).

Idealism, that is, as Wittgenstein said of philosophy as a whole, leaves everything just as it is. It is only that we now see how to think it. Any scientific development whatever is and was compatible with an idealist framework. If I suppose with Paul Davies that aliens have inserted messages in my DNA, if I admit the reality of evolution, yet all this reposes within a conception precisely of reality, which is interpretable according to the parameters of absolute idealism. Thus Findlay, it seems to me, misinterprets Hegel’s cautiously negative reaction to the first discoveries of fossil bones understood for what they were.⁹ Empirical phenomena are not as such absolute, since they are conditioned by the nature of the observer, as Quine, a philosopher certainly friendly to physics, has acknowledged. What Hegel would not have admitted would be the causal evolution of a power, spirit, thus dependent upon our present evolutionary state, which might without further ado give a scientific explanation of that very state, or maybe of anything else.

⁸ Cf. F. Capra, *The Turning Point*, Fontana, London 1983, II,3, “The New Physics”.

⁹ J.N. Findlay, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, Collier, New York, 1966, pp. 274-5.

So did we or did we not descend from the apes, i.e. from earlier now extinct primates? We should note first that any concept of development, such as we have, entails such intermediary creatures, and the very term “creatures” is significant, whether they be creatures of our own or some other mind or minds. In either case they are in some sense ideal, they proceed from or as an idea. Development, indeed, for one such as McTaggart, is cipher for a certain order within the supra-temporal C-series, while the concept of dialectic similarly frees development from temporality. So primates and dinosaurs will be as much or as little creatures of our consciousness as are any of our surroundings here and now. Alternatively, they are part of us and, as such, may be persons (which alone exist, it is claimed), Hegel’s “articulated spirits and shapes of eternity”. Here though we may recall our starting-point, that it must be that we beget one another. Similarly, I create the beings from which I come or descend, since this is just my symbolic way of thinking. In reality I have no beginning, am eternally necessary to an eternal reality. But since we beget one another we have a collective consciousness, which may be seen as more important, the domain of science. It is here that our common public past is generated.

Is not this though just a way of speaking, collapsing the concept of truth into that of warranted assertibility merely, as MacIntyre diagnoses the forms of “internal realism”?¹⁰ We answer no. There are those who would reduce or collapse truth in this way, not noticing or ignoring the fact that it leads them to self-contradiction “in performance”. Yet the avoidance of such contradiction, e.g. in relation to a supposed evolution of our cognitive powers, motivates adoption of idealism in the first place. Absolute idealism, anyhow, is not recognisable under MacIntyre’s description here. He comes close to admitting this when he stresses that “we” is “a keyword in the formulation of this kind of internalism in respect to truth and reality”. Yet he misses the essential in his analysis of this when he sees it as confining philosophy to a particular “community of enquiry”, instead of enhancing the role of the subject universally. What is essential is that absolute idealism absolutizes the subject. That is, it is seen as true, in the time-honoured old way, and not just “internally”, that the subject is theoretically normative, that the self, the conscious subject, is the first and fundamental reality. This is the reason for Hegel’s identification of the person with the universal, making of the thinking subject the antithesis of the particular individual. This situation leads to the discovery of the principle of identity in difference. As MacIntyre says, “it is only insofar as

¹⁰ A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, 1988, p.169.

we understand what follows from those premises that we understand the premises themselves.” It is not, anyhow, that truth is reduced, to warrantable assertibility or to anything else, though Putnam might be interpreted in that way. Rather, truth is expanded to fuller stature by a so-to-say material inclusion in it of the thinking consciousness as fundamental. Thus Aquinas himself says that the first reality to fall into the mind is being, i.e. mind is prior and being should not therefore be played off against it. Hence it is mind, *nous*, that provides “the terminus for all understanding” and which crowns Hegel’s dialectic as the Absolute Idea, thought thinking itself. This is the absolute category or, rather, the final transcendence of categorial limits by something that “necessarily... is whatever it is” (MacIntyre), which is itself, rather, necessity, though use of this term casts us back into a phase of the dialectic now overcome. God, any God, such as MacIntyre is referring to here, must be beyond necessity as he is beyond cause.

The sense in act is the sensible in act. The intellect in act is the intelligible in act (*in actu*), and *vice versa* in each case. These Aristotelian and scholastic realist tags will also bear an idealist interpretation. Indeed they call out for this. For how will the sensible become the sense, the knowable the knower, unless the reality (*cognitio sensus est de re*) is in essence a function of those who sense and know (*sensus est quaedam ratio*)? Also the scholastic doctrine was that *omne ens est verum*, understanding by *verum* a quality *in mente*. This was understood realistically (in accordance with a certain type of correspondence theory). Thus understood, however, it is incompatible with our evolutionary paradigms and to that extent, as evoking an “infused” soul or similar dualisms incompatible with a scientific view, archaic. One can, however, preserve the correspondence theory intact and simply claim that we do not know what we thought we did, *viz.* “common-sense” objects, as in fact Aquinas would agree. For Hegel too common-sense knowledge belongs within the sphere of essence, antithetical to being, with which it is not yet synthesised in the final and true sphere of the notion, which transcends common sense. A really evolving cognitive power, anyhow, would have no claim on true knowledge of any sort (the Lewis-argument against “naturalism”). Both realists and idealists admit that we know. What we know, however, we also generate, it is argued here, as Aquinas said exclusively of the divine knowledge as causing its object. Now divine knowledge must be knowledge absolutely speaking or archetypally. Doubts may arise about the integrity of the self as subject of such consciousness, for instance, as compared with accounts of collective or “egoless” experience. All the same, however, we need not commit

ourselves to mutual generation, but simply say, with McTaggart (and science), that in many cases of apparent perception we misperceive. What we rightly perceive, according to him, is a spiritual world of persons only.

What is at stake in both cases, viz. self and world, is the identification of *ens*, of that which, as object or subject, is *verum*. For idealists the world consists of mind or minds. This is the normal form of being, of a being, one which can be exchanged for the other as other while remaining itself, where the part can be one with the whole, where there is an identity in difference. Also Thomist thinkers will point out that spiritual reality, God, angels, souls, preponderates massively over the material, temporal and changeable. This they reduce to a vanishing point as far as their principles will allow, to the point of paradox indeed.

If we grant that evolution, taken as part of a realist or physicalist-materialist scheme, is in contradiction with any claim of knowledge, even knowledge of evolution, then the idealist solution, which leaves science as it is (even within science people claim now to find support for it) appears practically mandatory. A version of idealism was rejected by Aquinas at Question 85, article 2, of the First Part of his *Summa theologiae*. This was often hailed by neo-Thomists as having ruled out in advance the later idealist development in philosophy *in toto*. Yet what Aquinas rules out there, as it were analytically, is simply the endless regress of saying that the idea or image of some entity is what the subject apprehends (*id quod*) and never that entity itself by means of this “intentional species” (*id quo*). For absolute idealism, however, ideas are simply not intentional at all and there is no doctrine of representative perception (of a *Ding an sich*). Again, for Aquinas, this is the situation absolutely or in regard to God who, he claims, has no knowledge of us “in ourselves”. For him we are not, since he has no relation to us (as we, by contrast, have to him), and so he “only” has knowledge of us in his ideas of us. The clear conclusion is that the “we” should drop out of the picture, though this conclusion is by no means clearly drawn and is even denied. McTaggart, accordingly, will say that we make no judgements, but only appear to do so under the illusions of time and change. A judgement, as mental act, would be intentional of what is judged (second logical operation).

Under such conditions the collective activity of investigative science can be pursued at least as well as, though we claim better than, within realism. The sceptical questions about collective consciousness are if anything better guarded against in absolute idealism, where each is somehow identical with the whole, thus rendering perspicacious the Aristotelian insight *that anima est quodammodo omnia*. This confirmed Plato’s dictum that “the soul has learned everything”, including the root

knowledge that “all nature is akin” (*Meno*). This though is only explicable if nature comes from soul, is ensouled, whether we see it as “petrified intelligence” (Schelling) or, with the philosopher-poet, as “the workings of one mind.... Types and shadows of eternity.” The oneness of this mind is also best explained by the coincidence of all persons in the whole, which they somehow have within them in a more than organic unity such as is reached at the end of the dialectic in Hegel’s *Logic*, the absolute idea beyond the categories. Nature, on this view, is under a certain mode (*quodammodo*) what the soul is. Aquinas reached this conclusion in regard to angels, who can only be such as having the species of all things (but not of course all things themselves) concreated within each of them. This innateness reappears with Descartes in the human case, inspiring Maritain to dismiss his philosophy as a displaced angelism. Angels, however, more likely represent a displaced idealism within a realistic scheme.

Do we, on the other hand, identify the soul, souls, human persons rather, with God, with “the absolute source” in Merleau-Ponty’s words? Hegel, in the tradition of Nicholas of Cusa, asserts an identity in difference here, presenting to that extent a philosophy of *prima facie* contradiction, a feature he himself found in Leibniz’s thought. Nothing other than this, however, can lie behind Eckhart’s statement that “The eye with which God sees me, is the eye with which I see Him, my eye and His eye are one,” quoted by Hegel.¹¹ Behind this, in turn, is the Augustinian “There is one closer to me than I am to myself”, mentioned above, recalling the atman or true self of Indian philosophy. The religious tradition, indeed, seems the most likely source for the doctrine of identity in difference.

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Religion, indeed, would typically make the difference greater, infinitely greater, than any closeness of identity. “My thoughts are not your thoughts”, we read in Isaiah, while the Fourth Lateran Council specifies the primacy of unlikeness over likeness in any doctrine of analogy between God and creatures. This, however, is merely consistent, bearing in mind our own remarks above concerning divine knowledge of anything other than what is identical with himself or itself (the *ideae divinae*). He, who is this knowledge, has no relation to it; and the only possible reason for this seeming lack is that there is nothing with which he could be related.

¹¹ Hegel, *Phil. of Religion*, I.

A great deal of religious effort, typical of those burdened with what Hegel has called an “unhappy consciousness”, though he takes great pains to show that this is not a sufficient or even correct reflection of Christianity as the religion of freedom, has been expended upon the search for union with the absolutely Other. The plain fact is though that insofar as union is achieved this can no longer *be* other, which suggests, if that is the normative end-state, that it never was so. Thus St. Paul told the faithful that they sit with Christ in the heavenly places, here and now. McTaggart’s philosophy perfectly replicates this. If we were fully conscious we would know that we were in eternity, each of us one with the whole system in an all-embracing relation of love, succeeding to knowledge just as St. Paul described. Knowledge is in itself imperfect, which is why we only seem to make judgements. This is McTaggart’s conclusion after a long and rigorous chain of argumentation. My concern here is simply to illustrate the general appositeness of idealism.

There is a fear that without the transcendence identified with Otherness the reality of God, of the Absolute, will be lost. “Shall We Lose God in Outer Space?” was the title of a pamphlet by C.S. Lewis. One understands why he feared that, though one may not perhaps share the fear. Lewis, as popular but learned apologist, stressed transcendence above all else, and in apparent tension with his romanticism, one might think. God was not an idea, a figure in a type of discourse, but a real other, real because other. There is a kind of pathology, a “gut reaction”, in this, sometimes called the sense of sin. The transcendent is approached, if at all, by grace and faith, both gifts, like one’s creation itself and indeed the whole world. One needs someone to say thank you to, Chesterton asserted, and who could object to that? All the same, there is now increasing awareness, in Western religious circles, prompted by psychoanalysis maybe, though present in pre-Freudian sources, e.g. Dostoyevsky, even the Gospels, that one needs to *forgive oneself*! One would be stretching religious language in the same immanentist direction merely if one went on to speak of thanking oneself. There the verb would more strongly oppose reflexivity, so that one who spoke so would automatically be understood as posing a duality within the self, typically of the trans-empirical and true self or *atman*, who is also God or the All. At the end of the process, again, “all things are yours”, and of course the ascesis is as much a purification of knowledge as of will. A valid cognition comprises both. Thus Aquinas defined will, *mutatis mutandis*, as nothing other than the natural inclination of consciousness to its object.

Just as idealism leaves science untouched, though it modifies the philosophy of science, so here the wonder and sheen of being is not lost

because we are freed of our eternal alienation from it, in accordance indeed with religious and mystical promises. "You would not seek me if you had not already found me." Being is indeed the first idea.

Concerning grace, it was always the prime function of grace, as indeed of a postulated created freedom, to make a man's actions his own, as the *lumen gloriae* of the beatific vision shall make God's own sight of himself a man's own. "I live yet not I". This not-I, in fact, never was I. The empirical world, although it is our necessary starting-point, is yet itself misperception, as analysis will show. It is the ladder one must kick away, along with empty time and space, as Kant already saw and Einstein and later physicists increasingly confirm, and along also with that unreflective notion of matter which was never Aristotelian and which was denied by Plato and Parmenides. One of the *Psalms of David* (104, Vulg.103) refers to creation as a veil with which God covers or hides himself.

Grace, today's theologians will stress, is everywhere. Do yourself a favour, we say. For McTaggart each person is as necessary to the being of the whole as the whole is to each person, a doctrine already in Eckhart: "If God were not, I should not be, and if I were not, He too would not be." One might indeed say that here the dilemma between theism and atheism is blown away with the wind, the wind, we might wish to add, which can "blow where it will". The Christian incarnation-doctrine was already interpretable in this sense, as in its very uniqueness bearing upon each and all in identity of dignity, subject here in germ already replacing notions of substance. "Who sees me sees the Father.... I and the Father are one". Aquinas argues over many articles that any number of individuals, why not all, could be God incarnate, even though he did not consider that this was so. In contrast to McTaggart Hegel can be read as retaining this exclusivity, where the one lifted up (on the Cross, but "as Moses lifted up the serpent"!) has drawn all to him and lives in them. But still, in the sources themselves we read "You are all member one of another" or, again, "I in you and you in me". This argues a perfect reciprocity which the speaker has first glimpsed, as the Buddha once preached that he was present from the beginning and would be so until the end, caring for and teaching and helping those who suffer. The Catholic saints in their particularity do no less. One might argue, a trifle *ad hominem*, that if the mystical body or Church is not inessential to, makes up the "whole" Christ and is indeed "predestined" to do so, then McTaggart's and Eckhart's doctrine is confirmed. If what this leaves us with should no longer be called God, as McTaggart prefers against Hegel, well, this is a merely nominal preference.

In theology one worked with “foreseen” merits, all grace coming from Christ. Although one focussed here upon the eternal Mind and its effects in time, yet what one in fact launched was a concept of causality in reverse direction, future to past, which there is no reason not to generalise if it is valid at all. The idea, as encapsulated in the anthropic principle, is proving useful in physics and cosmology particularly, though not without conservative resistance. Generally applied, however, it means that all the past is generated in this instant and, I have argued, all other persons in one and the same act with their generation of me. The future, on this scheme, however, appears more than ever dark, since no causal lines stretch forward from the present.

This very present, on the other hand, testifies to a future now causally operative, the “realised end” (Hegel EL212 add.). This, in fact, converges with McTaggart’s finalised C-series, finalised not temporarily but in fully operative perception, not forgetting our interpretation of this series as ceaseless mutual generation rather than some type of “static time”. It is beyond all illusion of time.

Backward causality, that is, does not give us reversed time but eliminates time altogether. To a certain extent it remains a way of speaking in bondage to an imperfect or finite and to that extent untrue category, if we accept the Hegelian dialectic whereby causality at a certain point eliminates itself in self-contradiction, in favour of the Absolute Idea. For we have to realise that our true existence is one with the C-series viewed as a whole or all at once. Ultimately we are that series, Randrup’s work with collective and egoless consciousness, with an impressive array of evidence from other thought-cultures, might seem to suggest. This is allowed for in McTaggart’s thought by the identity in difference of the part with the whole, with the whole “system”. “I live yet not I”, as St. Paul put it, supplies the cultural ancestry here.

Randrup’s endorsement of the Now as alone real might seem to exclude as an opposite vision an existence including (but transcending) all times. His endorsement, however, of Rubin’s research into the nature of the Now, psychologically viewed, opens a window upon convergence for these two idealist schemata. For there need be no empirical limit to a psychological “now”. For us it is, at “present”, three or four ticks of a clock, maybe, but for the Lord, or ourselves in some more perceptive state, “one day is as a thousand”. Thus St. Peter consoled the early Christians for the unexpected delay in the Second Coming of Christ. Yet on the scheme we are considering any departure and return are simultaneous, as, again, the old

resurrection crucifixes collapsed passion and exaltation together.¹² Aquinas, indeed, conceives his whole theological system of creation and “redemption” as *exitus* and *reditus* of the eternal and immutable, in a *processio* beyond that of “process theology”, where this applies time to the Absolute. The ultimate being itself is seen in terms of (Trinitarian) processions. It is this vision, I have suggested, which Hegel raised to a kind of crisis as between theism and atheism, a crisis, however, which one might claim was inherent in Israelite religion, or non-religion, from the beginning. Thus the Psalmist records that the heathen cry reproachfully to him all the day long, “Where is thy God?” Where indeed?

¹² At the Catholic mass believers without effort conceive themselves as present at the event of two thousand years ago there commemorated, when the God-man saw each and every one of them individually, since he was dying for each of them personally. By the same token, he saw without effort all persons past or future or contemporary as equally present to himself. The tradition itself encourages generalisation of this situation, be it imaginary or real, and philosophy has taken the hint, however theologians may drag their feet.

CHAPTER TWO

FAITH, PHILOSOPHY AND THE FORM OF AFFIRMATION

Evangelical faith is represented in the Gospel as a removal of a mountain, i.e. as an action both powerful and self-chosen (we need not call it arbitrary, since moving a mountain might on occasion have its point). Here I plead for faith to move itself, a mountainous task indeed. Such self-transcendence, however, is a theological constant. As knowledge shall vanish away, it is said, in what has still to be a higher wisdom, so faith too passes insensibly to the same goal, a theme to which the second century Alexandrian Church Fathers in particular were alert. What for them, however, belonged to individual *askesis*, has now, and indeed, as I contend, for some time, become imperative for all. While this development, it is important to see, leaves the natural sciences unaffected it yet provides a more unitary holistic way of thinking *about* science at just the time when science is inclining towards its own form of holism.

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Before passing to the specific topic adumbrated above I want here to give the metaphysical setting for the study of the following contemporary problem. The view is personally styled only in the sense that is proper to a liberal “art”. That is, it is not private or, again, arbitrary but to the best of my ability rationally grounded. So then, it is customary to begin with being. Being, though, is an intractable problem for thought, as Heidegger has noted. “Why is there anything?” Postulating a necessary being, as “pure” act, *viz.* act *qua* act, seems to do no more than posit the problem anew. Nothing is solved thereby. Act, in fact, in our thought, is prior to being. For pure act, act *qua* act, may or not be an existent. As necessity it is more likely a formality, as use of “is” here, which seems to signify being over again, cannot be *assumed* to be more than a formality of our Indo-European predication system.

Thus any thought, once thought, or even just thinkable, is indestructible, that is, necessary. And thought, taken just *per se* (and forgetting how we ever came to know about it), thinks first, or above all, itself. What else should it think? Hence all else, if it is or is thought at all, is included in that “absolute idea”. There is no “ontological discontinuity”. God as creator of being just cannot mean that, and all the mystics in chorus insist upon it. So this absolute idea, in turn, is the ground of any thought or phenomenon whatever. Ground is a nearer relation than cause. A thing’s ground is what it ultimately is. Ultimately, I and you are each the divine absolute idea, and so, thus related, identical with each other too. These truths ecclesiology (whole church in the local church, I in you etc.) reaches at the end of its study. It does so because they are there from the beginning in the eternal designs, beyond either compulsion or contingency.

Once the primacy of act over being is seen then logic stands at the centre. *Logicus non considerat existentiam rei*, said Aquinas, meaning to put the logician second to the metaphysician, but if existence is a finite category merely then the logician, who has seen this, is himself the true metaphysician. Thus for Hegel, and he is our first name here, metaphysics meant the dogmatic systems of the early modern period which just his logic would replace. Aristotle too opposed substance to logic but Hegel posited substance as a category to be overcome within logic, within the doctrine (and category!) of essence more specifically:

The truth of substance is the Notion, - an independence which, though self-repulsive into distinct independent elements, yet in that repulsion is self-identical, and in the movement of reciprocity still at home and conversant only with itself (*Encyclopaedia* 158).

“This also is thou, neither is this thou.” Hegel adds a little later:

The Notion is the principle of freedom, the power of substance self-realised. It is a systematic whole, in which each of its constituent functions is the very total which the notion is, and is put as indissolubly one with it (*Ibid.* 160).

The notion, unlike being, waits upon no act of arbitrary creation. This would merely remove the problem a step further from us. The necessity, which the notion inherently is, itself renders it beyond all dilemma of being or non-being. It is quite other than being. In line with this, Hegel speaks of “spiritualisation, whereby Substance becomes Subject” (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, Harper Torchbooks, New York 1967, p.782).

If *esse* were “the act of acts” (Aquinas) then there would be no *actus purus*. Pure act, as necessary, cannot other than be. But it cannot be either, since it acts rather as thought. It is thinking, a verb which as verb is not substance. Being is substance. *Esse* could indeed be an act, but not act of acts, not unless an act has to have *esse* before it can be an act. But that is what is in question, nor may thought unthinkingly enslave itself to our system of predication in this way and call it metaphysics. Sartre’s view, in which nothingness as freedom triumphs over being, might be thought to preserve the prejudice in favour of being, the density of the chestnut tree’s roots, when he puts things in that way. Yet he might also be seen as overcoming the prejudice against negativity, essential for Hegel’s liberating doctrine of self in other, identity in difference (when he puts things in that way). As Hegel himself says, “The Nothing which the Buddhists make the universal principle, as well as the final aim and goal of everything, is the same abstraction” (*Enc.*87). The “definition” of God as being is “not a whit better than that of the Buddhists.”

The conclusion would seem to be a synthesis of being and nothing which is not therefore nothing as mere negation (*ouk on*) but as other than being (*me on*), to use an ancient distinction. This McTaggart regrets that Hegel called Becoming (*Werden*), as if setting forth a process-philosophy merely. It is well known that the names of his categories, though taken from ordinary discourse, receive their own precise, often different meaning in the dialectic and so it is with Becoming, since this must be compatible with the transcending of common-sense temporality. It stands rather for the “utter restlessness” of dialectic. Like Being and Nothing, which “vanish” into it (“and that is the very notion of Becoming”), so Becoming “must vanish also” (*Enc.* 89).

In fact “Becoming”, as appearing with Being and Nothing at the very beginning of the dialectic, is destined, along with these common-sense notions, to vanish from serious thought. Thus thought thinks in the end only itself, as Infinity. This, however, is necessarily differentiated, not into those elements of our finite thinking, which the dialectic successfully surmounts, but into ourselves as persons. This differentiation too, however, remains logical and not ontological, inasmuch as each persons is mutually identical with each of the others, thus constituting one person over again. This indeed is why “person” cannot have an exact reference in Hegel, any more than “self”, with which it becomes interchangeable. For the principle of personality, says Hegel, however persons be particularised, is universality, ultimately the ego as “universal of universals”.

Ultimately this requires revision of the notion of thinking itself, as Hegel revises Becoming. For the notion of thinking too is taken from