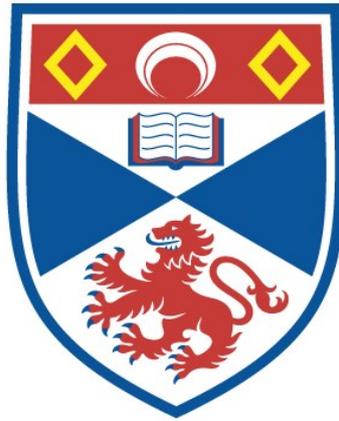


METAPHYSICS AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Philip Dean Bailey Flanders

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews



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METAPHYSICS AND RELIGIOUS

EXPERIENCE

by

Philip D. B. Flanders



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ABSTRACT OF THESIS OF PHILIP D.B. FLANDERS.

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF MPhil. UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

RICHARD N.W. SMITH, OF THE DEPT. OF LOGIC AND METAPHYSICS,

UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS. THESIS SUBMITTED 20th JUNE 1981

The thesis is entitled Metaphysics and Religious Experience and is concerned, in the main, to explore the degree to which metaphysical argument can, if at all, corroborate the professed insights of those who claim, or have claimed, to have personally encountered God, or a Divine Being.

The thesis is divided into an introductory chapter and nine subsequent chapters.

The introductory chapter is entitled "Does Religious Language convey an Intelligible Message?" and is concerned to clear the ground for talking about religion, by rebutting verificationist-inspired claims that religious language is not, and cannot be, cognitively meaningful. In Chapter One, which is entitled "Religious Experience and Knowledge of God" the question of whether it is legitimate to make truth-claims on the basis of ostensible religious experience is examined, and it is concluded that critics of religious experience such as Hepburn and Martin ultimately fail to prove their case.

Chapter Two moves away from the critique of verificationism with which the first two chapters (including the introductory chapter) are concerned, to a consideration of whether the various subjects of supposed religious experience have in all ages and cultures been led through their experiences to make similar claims. It is argued that those whose experiences are the outcome of serious spiritual training and effort have indeed been led to make similar affirmations about the existence and nature of a Divine Reality. The chapter adopts the method of showing that the mystic etc. have made such similar claims, by refuting the most well-argued case for there being a plurality of forms of mysticism, each of which is distinctive and incompatible with other forms.

Chapter Three is entitled "The Possibility of Metaphysics" and sets out to examine the major criticisms of the enterprise of metaphysical argument. This task is undertaken because if any "a priori" objection to the very enterprise of metaphysics were found to be valid, no metaphysical system or argument could possibly be such as to confirm claims based on religious experience. The chapter concludes that the major anti-metaphysical arguments, be they in the Humean, Kantian or Wittgensteinian tradition, are all and equally invalid.

Chapter Four is entitled "The Nature of Finite Individuals" and is concerned to argue for a metaphysical proposition, which, on the basis of more immediate intuitive experience, the mystics (and other subjects of ostensible religious experience) would also uphold. That proposition is that finite individuals are not ultimately distinct from one another, since each is a particular and limited manifestation of something transcending the finite nature. It is pointed out that this proposition has been upheld and argued for

by a number of philosophers, in particular by Hegel, Bosanquet and Findlay. It is also stated that the position to be taken in this thesis will emerge as the outcome of an assessment of the arguments of these philosophers. The examination of Hegel, Bosanquet and Findlay carries on through chapters five and six, and it is not until the end of chapter six that final conclusions about the matter are drawn (though provisional conclusions are drawn throughout). Chapter Four is mostly concerned with an appraisal of Hegel's arguments for there being an ultimate unity, or confluence, of finite selves. Chapter Five is entitled "Bosanquet's Refutation of Pluralism" and Chapter Six is entitled "The Position of J.N. Findlay on the Nature of Finite Individuals." The chapters primarily deal with the philosophers' respective arguments for the truth of the metaphysical proposition mentioned above.

Chapter Seven is entitled "Man, Nature and the Primacy of the Subject" and is concerned to appraise arguments for and ultimately to defend the view that a further metaphysical proposition, supportive of the mystics' (& etc.) claims, may plausibly be affirmed, that proposition being that in addition to there being an ultimate confluence of finite minds, there is also an ultimate unity between mind and nature. The precise nature of this unity is outlined in detail in the thesis, but we may say briefly that it is brought about by the creative reconciling power of subjectivity. The rift between subject and object in any (finite) subject-object relationship can only be finally overcome through the labour of an Absolute Subject.

Chapter Eight is entitled "The Testimony of Religion as it is Practised" and deals with the question of whether the ritualistic religious consciousness of the ordinary religious believer contains any element of genuine insight. It is argued that when we reflect deeply on this form of consciousness, it is revealed that it does contain such an element, but that we need to pass beyond its own self-understanding to adequately grasp its full significance. The chapter proceeds largely through an examination and modification of Hegel's arguments to this effect.

Chapter Nine, the final chapter, is entitled "Moral Experience as Evidence for the Mystical Absolute." This chapter is concerned to argue that deep philosophical reflection on the nature of our moral experience provides us with strong evidence that finite individuals have an acute consciousness of a universal spiritual "state of being", transcending their natures as particulars. This "state of being" corresponds closely to the "Divine Being" or "Spiritual Presence" which mystics (& etc.) claim to have encountered, and thus moral experience provides further support for their claims. The Spiritual Reality revealed through metaphysical reflection transcends finite beings, but is immanent to them nonetheless. It constitutes a Reality which shows up the tragic limitation of finite life. Yet it also shows that the potential, value, and destiny of all finite life is to express an essence which goes far beyond the finite.

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Philip D. B. Flanders.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own composition, that the work of which it is a record has been done by myself, and that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a higher degree.

This research was carried out as a research student under Ordinance General No.12 and as a candidate for the degree under Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No.1.

Philip D.B. Flanders

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

This thesis, submitted for the degree of M.Phil is the result of research carried out in the Faculty of Arts at the University of St. Andrews under the supervision of Richard N.W. Smith of the Department of Logic and Metaphysics. Studies were pursued on a full-time basis between 1974 and 1977 and on a part-time basis from 1977 to 1981. The thesis is entitled Metaphysics and Religious Experience and is concerned, in the main, to explore the degree to which metaphysical argument can, if at all, corroborate the professed insights of those who claim, or have claimed, to have personally encountered God, or a Divine Being.

CERTIFICATE

I certify that Philip D.B. Flanders has fulfilled the conditions of the Ordinance and Regulations pertaining to the degree of M.Phil in the University of St. Andrews and that he is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

.....
(Supervisor of Candidate)

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I would like to acknowledge, with much gratitude, the advice, help, and encouragement which I received from my Supervisor, Richard N.W. Smith, during my period of study at the University of St. Andrews.

I also wish to acknowledge with sincere thanks the help received from the other members of staff of the two Philosophy Departments at St. Andrews, and also of those I have had contact with at the University of Dundee.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

DOES RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE CONVEY AN INTELLIGIBLE MESSAGE?

In the past, before philosophy had felt the impact of linguistic analysis and before philosophers had begun to see themselves as needing to pay special attention to the problems concerned with language, philosophers of religion usually went about their task by immediately proceeding to deal with questions about the truth and justification of religious beliefs. Today however, any philosopher of religion who went about his task in this way would find himself immediately challenged, not just by those with arguments against his thesis on the truth and justification of religious beliefs, but also by those with arguments purporting to show that his very enterprise was unintelligible, since it rests on the assumption that religious language can be factually informative.¹

In this thesis, we shall ultimately be concerned with questions concerning the truth and justification of religious propositions. But before we do this, we must attempt to meet the challenge of those who deny that religious propositions can be factually meaningful. For if religious language cannot by its very nature be factually informative, then it is a nonsensical task to ask questions about the truth and

1. By the phrase religious language I mean to embrace not only specifically Christian or theistic language (though most of my examples will be drawn from this form of language) but also other statements about a transcendent spiritual reality, such as those statements about the Absolute which occur in Idealist metaphysics.

justification of religious propositions.²

The preliminary question, with which we shall be concerned in this chapter, may therefore be formulated in the following way: Irrespective of any truth or falsity in particular religious utterances, is this form of language one in which it is possible to make statements, such as may be true or false?

The Case against Factually Informative Religious Propositions

It is argued by those philosophers who deny that religious statements can be factually significant that upon inspection these statements turn out to be no more than expressions of feeling, or to belong to stories designed to enforce morality. They do not, it is held, yield any cognitive insights; their function is purely performative. The reason for this, according to protagonists of this view, is that religious believers appear to allow no conceivable states of affairs to count as evidence against their assertions. Thus, for example, no matter how bad the world becomes, religious believers continue to claim that there is a God who is both all powerful and all good. It is not difficult to see how this gives rise to a problem. For what can it possibly mean to speak of a Being who is powerful enough to prevent evil yet who doesn't prevent evil, as being all good? The word "good" does not seem to be being used in its natural sense. Anthony Flew has formulated the problem as follows:

2. In particular, we shall be asking the question to what degree (if any) experiences of alleged religious significance and metaphysical argument can justify religious conclusions.

"Now it often seems to people who are not religious as if there were no conceivable event or series of events the occurrence of which would be admitted by sophisticated religious people to be sufficient reason for conceding "There wasn't a God after all" or "God does not really love us then." Someone tells us that God loves us as a father loves his children. We are reassured. But then we see a child dying of inoperable cancer of the throat. His earthly father is driven frantic in his efforts to help, but his Heavenly Father reveals no obvious degree of concern. Some qualification is made - God's love is "not a merely human love" or it is an "inscrutable love", perhaps, and we realize that such sufferings are quite compatible with the truth of the assertion that "God loves us as a father (but, of course ...)." We are reassured again. But then perhaps we ask: What is this assurance of God's love (appropriately qualified) worth, what is this apparent guarantee really a guarantee against? Just what would have to happen not merely (morally and wrongly) to tempt but also (logically and rightly) to entitle us to say "God does not love us" or even "God does not exist?"³

Considerations such as those of Flew have led to the many theories which see religious language as non-informative. For greater clarity, and to facilitate systematic examination of the argument against factual religious language, we may set out this argument in the form of a simple hypothetical argument. The premises of this argument capture, I think, what is most fundamental in the objections against cognitively meaningful religious language in the writings of such philosophers as A.J. Ayer, L. Wittgenstein (in his positivist phase) and A. Flew. This argument is as follows:

3. New Essays in Philosophical Theology. (Edited by A. Flew and A. MacIntyre) Chapter VI, pages 98-99.

- Premise 1 If a statement is to be factually significant then there must be some (knowable) state of affairs with which it is incompatible, and thus it must allow certain possible (knowable) states of affairs to count against it, and at some point falsify it.
- Premise 2 Religious believers will not admit that anything (knowable or unknowable) does or ever could count against their propositions.
- Conclusion Religious statements, being compatible with anything and everything, are vacuous and do not assert facts.

The statement of the argument in this way is intended to throw light on how the conclusion could be prevented from following. The conclusion will not follow if we can find reason to deny the truth of either premise one, premise two, or both.

Philosophers who have sought to vindicate religious language have normally done so by attempting to produce arguments aimed at demolishing one or other of the premises. We may therefore go about our investigation by way of an examination of the validity of the arguments which have been brought against these two premises.

Examination of the First Premise

The first premise states that for a statement to be factually meaningful it must be, in principle, falsifiable, through our coming to know of some state of affairs with which it is incompatible. Some philosophers have attempted to vindicate religious statements by denying this. It has been argued by these philosophers that a statement can both convey information and be unfalsifiable.

It is not very easy to see how we can vindicate religious language by means of any argument which successfully shows the inadequacy of the first premise. For it seems that if we are to know the meaning of a statement we must always have an idea of the

circumstances under which it is true and those under which it would be false, otherwise how could we single out the determinate state of affairs whose existence the statement is trying to convey? A knowledge of what a statement may include and what it excludes is surely necessary if we are to identify its reference. And it seems that although we may not have to know precisely at which point the counter-evidence falsifies a given statement, it would be irrational not to accept, at least at a point where the counter-evidence is overwhelming, that the statement has finally been falsified. "Counting against" in a sense which cannot ever finally falsify a statement is not really "counting against" in any relevant sense at all. For this reason, we may not get out of our difficulties by saying, as Basil Mitchell tries to, that things do *count against* religious statements, but are not (in principle) able to finally falsify them.⁴

Having made these general remarks, we may now proceed to consider two important recent arguments both of which aim to show that religious statements can be informative and unfalsifiable at the same time. The first of these has been put forward by Henry Allison.⁵

Allison's view is that religious statements are unfalsifiable because they are disguised counterfactual conditionals. As such he believes that they are genuine and possibly false assertions. Allison tells us that in order to understand how religious propositions work, we need to recognize the "dialectical nature of faith." This means that our faith is not because of, but in spite of, the facts. According to

4. Basil Mitchell - *ibid* pp 103-106.

5. Article: Faith and Falsifiability Review of Metaphysics Vol. 22 (1968-69) pp 499-522.

Allison, Soren Kierkegaard was the first theologian to become aware of this. He quotes from Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript in order to establish his point.

"I contemplate the order of nature in the hope of finding God, and I see omnipotence and wisdom; but I also see much else that disturbs my mind and excites anxiety. The sum of all this is objective uncertainty."⁶

Allison thinks that Kierkegaard gets carried away and transforms the objective uncertainty into a glorification of the absurd. But he thinks that from the notion that faith is an objective uncertainty we gain a profound insight. The believer, says Allison, can specify the types of things which would count against his faith, but he can't say at what point the instances would actually falsify his belief. To know at what point suffering or evil is incompatible with God's existence, we would have to see the world under the aspect of eternity, and this is something we can never do. The point is that from the point of view of the human individual, no perspective on the whole is possible.

Allison goes on to say that Flew's claim, like the old verification principle, cannot account for counterfactual conditionals, or at least not all of them. He remarks that:

"There are however many other statements of this form (counterfactuals that the verification and/or falsification principle can't deal with) which refer to a particular person, place, thing or event in its uniqueness and in which the subjunctive is unfulfilled. For example, 'if he had only been on time, he

6. Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript p 182 of David F. Svenson and Walter Lowrie translation. Quoted by H. Allison in Review of Metaphysics Vol 22 (1968-69) p 508.

could have saved her life', 'if Caesar had not crossed the Rubican, the republic would not have fallen'. Judgements like these are unfalsifiable, yet obviously cognitive."⁷

Also, although these judgements are unfalsifiable, Allison maintains that things do count against them. Historical discussion can meaningfully take place but there can be no guarantee that the disputants will reach agreement. As in the case of faith, we have no ultimate perspective on what would have happened had Caesar not crossed the Rubican. Certain factors are relevant to our deliberations but we can never be absolutely sure that everything has been taken into account. In logical form, says Allison, statements like "God loves mankind" are counterfactual, for the believer appeals to a situation that he "explicitly denies he is capable of observing."⁸ Despite this, the believer still knows what he is saying. For although the believer neither knows nor claims to know what it would be like to view things "sub specie aeterni", he's able to use references to the transcendent in a significant manner. This is because such references are not intended to depict an inaccessible realm of being, but to be relevant to the present facts, even if they affirm a framework of interpretation which goes beyond them.

Allison's remarks seem to be plausible enough if taken as a reason why it is impossible, in the cases he considers, to know the precise point at which such a proposition is falsified. But this does not mean that these propositions are in principle unfalsifiable, in the sense of nothing (knowable) being finally able to count against them. Allison admits that we know what counts for or against such propositions,

7. Review of Metaphysics Vol 22 (1968-69) pp 515-516.

8. *Ibid* p 518.

and it may well be that the point at which various people would accept the truth of any of these may differ. But looking at the matter from the point of view of any individual who affirms the truth of the proposition, there must be for each one a point at which he would accept that the proposition has been falsified. If he would not, then he is, as we have seen, not letting evidence *truly count against it*.

Consider Allison's example about Caesar crossing the Rubican. Suppose that some historian believes the proposition "had Caesar not crossed the Rubican, the Republic would not have fallen". Suppose further that he went on affirming this proposition no matter what historical evidence was brought against it. More extreme still, let us imagine that he actually admits to the view that no further evidence could *ever* change his mind. In such circumstances, it would not seem out of place to question whether his statement of belief was a normal historical statement at all. If religious statements really are like *this* type of historical assertion, then the objections which have been made against them would have to be taken seriously indeed.

Happily however, this type of thinking is not characteristic of historians.⁹ No historian would ever admit that he would hang on to some historical belief in spite of any possible evidence, and the fact that he could never be absolutely certain how much counter evidence was sufficient to disprove it for him, would give him no warrant for holding that nothing ever could.

If it were true that religious statements were really incapable of being falsified by any (knowable) state of affairs whatsoever, the

9. We shall later attack the view that it is characteristic of those who maintain the truth of religious propositions.

analogy between religious statements and historical statements would break down. For we have seen that even counterfactual conditionals are falsifiable in a certain way of their own. What is objected to by philosophers like Flew is precisely that religious believers seem to proceed *unlike* historians; they do not (it is claimed) allow facts to count against their assertions. Religious statements are charged with being vacuous in just the way that historical assertions are not. Allison's attempt to defend the meaningfulness of religious statements on the ground that they are on a par with other unfalsifiable but meaningful statements is therefore unacceptable.

Another attempt to explain how religious statements can be both factually significant and unfalsifiable has been made by Alastair McKinnon.¹⁰ McKinnon, like Allison, accepts that religious statements *are* unfalsifiable, but tries to vindicate them by showing that in a certain context they are on a par with other obviously meaningful but unfalsifiable statements. McKinnon compares religious statements with a scientist's remark that "the world has an order", in a case where the scientist wants to say nothing *determinate* about the world. The order he is concerned with is simply that order which is a necessary consequence of there being anything at all. The phrase "the order of the world", in this sense, necessarily has a reference. McKinnon suggests that as it is with the world's order, so it may be with God. He considers the situation of the young man dying of cancer who firmly maintains that God loves him. The young man's conception of God must be such that his tragedy is reconciled with his belief. McKinnon

10. See American Philosophical Quarterly 1965 pp 224-9.

suggests that in such circumstances the victim would not claim to know *how* to reconcile them, for this would be merely to solve his problem by claiming to see what he could not see. He would rather use the word "God" as a sort of marker for ultimate reality, whatever that should turn out to be. McKinnon says that a believer who maintains that God exists in this sense is not claiming to know the nature of God.

So far from refuting Flew, it seems to me that such an argument merely emphasises Flew's point. McKinnon here seems to have revealed just how vacuous statements which cannot in principle be falsified by anything at all in fact are. The assertion that "God loves mankind" he admits cannot be understood in the normal sense since all the evidence seems to count against it. But somebody, he feels could meaningfully continue to believe it, so long as he accepted that he didn't know the nature of God at all! The believer, he says, is only asserting "the existence of Being or Reality as such." Apart from the peculiar contradiction in claiming to know nothing of the nature of a Being who we know loves us, the sort of Being whose existence is asserted tells us nothing determinate about the nature of the world. It is reminiscent of the "pure being" with which Hegel begins his Science of Logic which is prior to all determinations. As such, it tells us nothing which is factually informative. Belief in such a Being would indeed be vacuous, in just the way that the protagonists of the "unfalsifiable - therefore meaningless" view claim.

The mistakes of Allison and McKinnon suggest that we have been looking in the wrong direction for a vindication of factual religious language. For we have seen that if it is really true that we cannot know what counts against a particular statement then we have no way of defining the limits of its reference.

Premise One of our syllogism must therefore be allowed to stand. But this does not mean that we have conceded the validity of the arguments of Flew and his supporters. We have conceded only that for a statement to be factually meaningful there must be some (knowable) state of affairs which could count against it. Allison and McKinnon, throughout their arguments, made the assumption that religious assertions are unfalsifiable in a fairly absolute sense. It is this assumption which we shall challenge, in our examination of the foundations of premise two.

Examination of the Second Premise

According to the second premise, religious believers refuse to admit that anything does or ever could count against their propositions. But is it really true that believers of religious statements are believers in statements which are radically unfalsifiable to the point of being compatible with every state of affairs which we could conceivably imagine to occur? If we look carefully at the details of what has been argued by those who have upheld the truth of premise two, we find that they have done so, not really because religious believers allow (in principle) nothing to count against their claims but because they will not allow any "observations"¹¹ to count against them.

11. "Observations" in this context refers to that part of experience which involves an emotionally detached conscious subject perceiving publicly observable phenomena by means of sense - experience. It is thus a form of cognition in which the subject is essentially passive, the subjective contribution to the process of knowledge construction is at its lowest point. It is thus in no way commensurable with total human experience and it is, as we shall see, highly dubious to claim that it is commensurate with total cognitive experience.

F. Copleston, a philosopher who is a Christian and who seeks to defend cognitively meaningful religious language, remarks in his book Contemporary Philosophy that he has no objection to verificationism if it means only that "reflection on the nature of descriptive language will show that a statement which asserts a certain state of affairs excludes a contradictory state of affairs."¹² And in another essay in the same book¹³ he asserts that if a statement such as "God loves all human beings" were to exclude no other factual statement then it would indeed be vacuous. But Copleston points out that the statement "God loves all human beings" does exclude other statements. It excludes for example the statement that "God wills the eternal damnation and misery of all human beings."¹⁴ And he further maintains that the reason why the believer is led to assert the one statement and not the other is because something in his experience points one way and not the other.

As it is with Copleston, so it is with most religious believers, it is not the case that they allow nothing in experience to count for or against their propositions. On the contrary, they are normally concerned to emphasize the importance of certain experiences in bringing them to their religious commitments. However, it is the fact that these experiences are of a certain nature which worries the verificationists. For the type of experience which gives rise to religious conviction (other than more dramatic mystical experiences) usually consists

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12. F. Copleston Contemporary Philosophy in his essay entitled "A Further Note on Verification" p 58.
13. *ibid* Essay entitled: "The Meaning of the Terms Predicated of God." p 100.
14. *ibid* p 100.

largely of a personal "sense of the presence of God", and the propositions based on this type of experience are not readily translatable into statements about possible observations of publicly observable phenomena. To the verificationist, if a statement cannot be verified by observations, it cannot be verified at all, irrespective of the fact that experiential evidence of a different sort is claimed.

But why? It is not just because observations are held to give us better evidence, than do the more subjective experiences on which religious propositions are based. It is rather because knowledge claims which are incapable of being verified by observations are held to be logically incoherent. From the work of the logical positivists and the verificationist influenced functional analysts¹⁵ it is possible to separate out a number of strands of argument for this view. It is to a consideration of three of these strands of argument - which seem to be the main ones - that we must now turn.

Observations as a Precondition for Conclusive Verification

It was maintained by the early logical positivists, who held the verification principle in what is now called its "strong form" that any proposition which was not conclusively verifiable was not really verifiable at all in any genuine sense. It seemed to them that any

15. The school of philosophy which maintained that "every language has its logic" and followed the later Wittgenstein, will be referred to throughout this thesis as the school of functional analysis. The reason why it is claimed that they were influenced by verificationism will be explained later.

propositions which could not be verified conclusively were devoid of meaning, because if anybody made an assertion which he couldn't conclusively verify then he didn't really know under which conditions his assertion was true. Thus a mode of experience was sought which could conclusively verify, and it seemed natural to logical positivists such as Waismann and Schlick to think that the mode of experience which had produced so much success in the natural sciences was the obvious candidate for conclusive verification. Only the observational mode of experience it seemed to them, could be capable of unambiguous and conclusive verification. It was assumed, rather naively we now know, that the natural sciences had achieved their success through a series of "conclusive verifications."

The verification principle, in its strong form, was seen to have serious deficiencies soon after it was put forward. And one of its main deficiencies was that it could not allow for the cognitive meaningfulness of many statements at the heart of the natural sciences. R.W. Ashby sums up these deficiencies in the following way:

- "1. A strictly universal statement, that is, a statement covering an unlimited number of instances (for example any statement of scientific law), is not logically equivalent to any conjunction of any finite number of observation statements and hence is not conclusively verifiable;
2. Any singular statement about a physical object can in principle be the basis of an unlimited number of predictions and hence is not conclusively verifiable;
3. Statements about past and future events, and statements about the experiences of other people are not conclusively verifiable."¹⁶

16. R.W. Ashby. Article entitled the "Verifiability Principle" in Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, pp 241-2.

These criticisms of strong verificationism are now almost universally accepted even by philosophers who are sympathetic to some form of verificationism. From looking at the first two of these, we can see that the strong verificationist test of meaningfulness would assign not only metaphysical and religious propositions to the realm of nonsense, it would also exclude many scientific statements.

It is now clear that observations as they are employed in science, cannot be used to develop a conclusively verifiable body of knowledge. Scientific knowledge incorporates within itself many well established and certainly meaningful propositions which cannot be conclusively verified. Conclusive verification then is not necessary for science. But even if it were, it would be quite impossible for the observational mode of experience to provide it.

We must therefore abandon the strong verificationist view that observations alone give us cognitive experience, since they provide us with a vitally necessary means of verifying our propositions conclusively. There have however been other reasons why verificationists have insisted that only through observations do we acquire cognitive insights.

Verification by Observations as a Precondition of the Prediction
of Future Experience

Verificationist philosophers quickly came to see the flaws in the conclusive-verification formulation of the verification principle, and the demand that factually informative propositions must be conclusively verifiable was soon dropped. What was not dropped was the view that only observations were relevant to the verification of informative propositions in the required, though weaker, sense. Thus

A.J. Ayer writes, in Language, Truth and Logic:

"We say that the question which must be asked about any putative statement of fact is not, Would any observations make its truth or falsity logically certain? but simply, Would any observations be relevant to its truth or falsehood? And, it is only if a negative answer is given to this second question that we can conclude that the statement under consideration is nonsensical."¹⁷

In this passage Ayer is making the point that only propositions which are verifiable (in the weak sense) by observations can exclude a determinate range of phenomena, and thereby give us factual information about how we can expect to experience the world. Or to put this another way, any statement which is not verifiable (in the weak sense) by observation, is compatible with any prediction whatsoever about the nature of our future experience. And a statement which is compatible with any prediction about the course of our future experience cannot possibly be informative. In another passage Ayer writes:

"We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person if and only if he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express, that is, if he knows what observations would lead him under certain conditions to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth or falsehood is consistent with any assumption whatever concerning the nature of future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition."¹⁸

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17. p 38 Language, Truth and Logic, Second Edition (Gollancz).
A.J. Ayer.
18. *ibid* p 35.

We have already accepted the view that a meaningful factual statement must refer to a state of affairs which can make itself felt, somehow in our experience. But Ayer wants more than this. He wants to say that no prediction about our future experience is at all possible from statements which are not verifiable by means of one type of experience, i.e. that type which involves the observation of publicly observable phenomena. This would effectively rule out any statement expressing religious convictions which characteristically arises from an alleged non-observational mode of cognitive experience, even though religious believers usually hold that *certain* predictions about future experience can be made on the basis of their statements.

Why then does Ayer claim that only statements which are verifiable by means of observations can provide a legitimate basis for making predictions about all future experience? Why does he refuse to accept, in spite of what religious believers would themselves affirm, that religious statements do yield information which is relevant to the future course of experience, and as such are capable of telling us something determinate about how we can expect to find the world?

In Language, Truth and Logic Ayer does not really attempt to deal with this question directly. He tends rather to equate cognitive experiences with observations, without explicit argument. It sometimes looks as though he feels it doesn't need argument, it being so self-evident that observations and cognitive experience are one and the same. However, despite Ayer's lack of explicit argument for this, a careful scrutiny of his writings reveals his reasons.¹⁹

19. A careful scrutiny of his writings, that is, at the stage in his development when he wrote Language, Truth and Logic.

Ayer's main reason for thinking that religious propositions tell us nothing that will make any difference to our future experience seems to be as follows: Religious believers, as we have seen, base their assertions on experience, but not on the experience of observing publicly accessible phenomena. The experience they describe is more personal, and depends not on the senses, but on what might be called an "inner sense". Thus, as Arthur Pap puts it " ... devout Christians often speak of the ways in which God manifests himself in human experience; they profess to feel certain indescribable emotions which cannot but be manifestations of God."²⁰ The problem with this, however, is that the Being which supposedly manifests itself is not experienceable apart from its manifestations. God has never in the past, appeared in his total fullness, thus enabling us to make the connection between the manifestations (which are his partial appearances), and the fullness of his Being. If it is not possible to observe God apart from these manifestations then it follows that in asserting his existence you assert nothing else than the existence of the manifestations. Pap, summarizing Ayer's argument asks, "Why not just report the psychological fact, then, that during worship you feel unique emotions?"²¹

The point is that we might legitimately make predictions about future experience on the basis of our past experience but, in religious statements, the reference to the transcendent Being tells us nothing about our future experience which we couldn't equally well know without it. Precisely the same prediction about our future experience can be made if we confine ourselves to descriptions of our subjective (religious)

20. A Modern Introduction to Philosophy edited by P. Edwards and A. Pap p 546 - (Published by The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc.).

21. *ibid* p 548.

emotions. And because there are no predictions which follow specifically from statements about God²² (other than those which could equally well be made from non-religious statements) we cannot test the truth of these statements by seeing whether the predictions come true.

Religious statements, for Ayer are untestable and therefore vacuous.

But is it really the case that religious statements add nothing to our knowledge of how we can expect to experience the world, beyond that which we could know perfectly well without them? In attempting to answer this question it is useful to consider a comparison between statements about God²² and statements about physical objects.

It has often been pointed out that when we believe in physical objects we are believing in a transcendent reality no less than when we believe in God. For physical objects cannot be observed otherwise than by means of their manifestations, and we can never get behind these partial manifestations to experience their total being, since the series of their possible appearances is infinite. Belief in any physical object's existence thus is belief in something which transcends anybody's experience. If Ayer were to be consistent, he would have to say that the reference to the transcendent in statements about material objects is as redundant as it is in statements about God, since it would enable us to predict nothing more, (which could be confirmed in our future experience) than that which could be predicted from statements about subjective sense - impressions. If it is true that a description of the world in subjectivist phenomenalist terms leads to precisely the same expectations as does a description of the world in terms of transcendent physical objects, then we would have to concede that the

22. Or a non-theistic spiritual reality.

reference to the transcendent is redundant. But if it is not true that the reference to the transcendent is redundant, that is, if assertions about physical objects really do lead to *different* expectations about how we will experience the world in the future, from the expectations we would have if they were based on patterns of our sense - impressions alone, and if it is possible for these expectations to be fulfilled and for the statement from which they follow to be thereby confirmed, we shall be forced to admit that statements about a transcendent reality are not reducible to statements about our subjective states.

When we compare statements about physical objects with the statements about sense - impressions which correspond to them, it becomes clear that the same predictions about future experience cannot be derived from both. That is, a statement about a physical object will enable us to make some different predictions (though some will be the same) from a statement which merely describes the subjective sense - impressions which are associated with our perception of that thing. But what are these differences in the predictions which can be derived from the two different types of statement?

Perhaps the most important difference between a phenomenalist and a non-phenomenalist description of experience is that from the latter it is possible to predict *more* than from the former. Anybody who would confine his descriptions of his experiences to statements about subjective sense - impressions would have to base his predictions on regular conjunctions between sense - impressions which he had observed in the past, i.e. if X had always been followed by Y in previous experience, he could conclude with a fair degree of certainty that if X were to occur again, Y would follow. The phenomenalist could thus grasp patterns and structures in his mental life, but what he is

prohibited from doing is locating the reason for them in any external objective structure.

The non-phenomenalist, on the other hand, can grasp objective structures and can therefore say more about how he expects the world to unfold in his experience. For he is not confined to observing regular conjunctions between his sense-impressions and basing his predictions on them, he rather sees the world in terms of objective structures, and because of this he can predict, with a fair degree of accuracy, the probable occurrence of (partial) manifestations of even those objective structures which have never appeared to him before. To the non-phenomenalist, the manifestations of an object which have appeared to him are a clue to that object's total structure, and the object's total structure is the key to knowledge of its infinite series of possible appearances, most of which have *not* appeared to him. As opposed to the phenomenalist, the non-phenomenalist is not confined to predicting repetitions of sequences of sense-impressions which have already occurred in his experience. The former can base his future expectations on observations such as "Y has always, in the past, followed X", whereas the latter can see that Y follows X because of an objective structure Z of which X and Y as well as (possible appearances) A and B are all integral parts.

Another consequence of the phenomenalist's translation of the language of sense-impressions is that, again because he does not see the world in terms of objective structures outside himself, he cannot be equally certain about *any* of his predictions. A prediction that Y will follow X because it has always done so in the past is, however probable, still not as certain as if the prediction can be made with the additional knowledge that objective structure Z is the reason why Y has always follows X in the past, and is the reason why we can expect Y to

follow X in the future.

A further and final difference between the phenomenalist's and the non-phenomenalist's (justified) expectations about future experience is that the latter can expect to intervene more and to be more creative in the world which he describes. Because of his ability to grasp objective structures and his consequent ability to predict more about what is likely to happen in his experience if he does such and such, he is in a better position to manipulate the objects of experience to bring about an end which he desires. As for the phenomenalist, he will of course be able to learn that he can voluntarily influence the course of his sense-impressions, but every new way of producing an effect would have to be learnt by rote as a new "brute fact", a fact which is ultimately unintelligible. Compared to the non-phenomenalist he will stand passive and helpless before the series of those sense impressions which parade across his mental "screen".

From this comparison between the phenomenalist's descriptions and the descriptions of those who speak of material objects, it is clear that statements about material objects are not reducible, without any loss, to statements about sequences of sense-impressions. In translating the former into the latter we alter the scope and nature of what can be predicted about future experience - in particular we lose, (a) the range of predictions which can be made from any given statement, (b) the certainty with which those predictions can be made, and (c) the intelligibility of the world of experience described in the statements whose implication is that we have a high capacity for creative manipulation of this world.

In the case of material object statements we can now see that the reference to the transcendent does add something (relevant to predictions about future experience) which cannot be conveyed by

statements about subjective experiences alone. And just as the reference to the transcendent adds something in the case of these statements, so it does too in the case of religious statements. Statements about God²² give us information which leads us to expect our future experience to be of a certain nature, a nature which we would not be justified in expecting if we did away with the reference to the transcendent Being, and restricted ourselves to expressing our religious convictions in terms of statements about such things as our subjective feeling during worship. The "test" of religious statements, would be the test of whether future experience fell within the limits of the type of experience expected.

One expectation about future experience which statements about a transcendent God would give rise to, but which statements about, say, emotional feelings during worship wouldn't²³, is the expectation that no event or series of events would ever occur which signified that evil had ultimately triumphed in the world, and that the influence of love and goodness had been totally withdrawn. The believer in a God of supreme goodness could, on the basis of his religious statements, predict that he would never find himself in a world in which, however hard and sincerely he tried to make contact with the force of love and goodness, he would still be left utterly alone and desolate. Such a believer in God could also predict that his religious awareness would

22. Or a non-theistic spiritual reality.

23. Or at least wouldn't be justified in doing so.

not suddenly vanish²⁴, and also that his (sincere) prayers would always be answered in some way which was intelligible to him. Finally, he would be led to expect very different things concerning death (different, that is, from the things concerning death which he'd be justified in expecting if he had to translate his religious convictions into statements about subjective emotions), for, if there is such a transcendent God death cannot be absolutely final. For either there would be some sort of survival after death for each individual or else we would, as particular individuals finally die but only because we had, as particulars, played our part in the fulfilment of the divine purpose, a purpose in which we would not be ultimately annihilated but rather transformed, in such a way that the essential meaning of our lives did not perish in death.

None of the predictions about future experience which have been mentioned above as possible expectations of a religious believer could ever be made by somebody who was confined to making statements about exalted feelings. Yet these predictions which follow from religious statements are not completely untestable, since they consist of expectations which can be borne out, or not borne out, in future experience. As against Ayer, we can say that religious propositions are verifiable in the weak sense, since they convey information which can be confirmed or disconfirmed by way of future experience. The only real difference between the predictions which can be made about future experience on the grounds of religious statements and the predictions that can be made on the grounds of ordinary factual empirical statements is that, in the former case, the predictions are a little less precise

24. This could not be predicted if religious awareness had to be translated into terms of subjective emotions, since the cause of these emotions would not be known, and it would not be known whether the cause, whatever it was, would continue to operate.

since religious statements allow us to predict more that a certain range of experiences will not occur and that a certain type of experience will tend to occur rather than that we will have an experience of a certain precise nature. This lack of precision in our predictions about precisely how a divine Being will reveal itself is to be expected when we contemplate the self-determining nature of such a Being, but it is not so great as to militate against our having *any* expectations on the basis of religious affirmations, and these expectations will either be fulfilled, or remain unfulfilled, in our lives.

Thus we may conclude that neither Ayer nor any philosopher who rests his case on the verifiability principle in the weak sense, has succeeded in demonstrating the truth of premise two.

The Problem of the Intelligibility of the Concept of
'Inner' Experience

We have seen that religious propositions are, in a certain weak sense verifiable, but not by observations, in the strict sense of that word. They are 'verifiable' rather by experiences which are really self-conscious apprehensions of being a certain type of subject standing in a certain type of subject-object relationship. This means that such experiences as pertain to our inner conscious life will be highly relevant to initial belief in, and subsequent confirmation of, religious assertions. Predictions such as the one that we won't experience the ultimate triumph of evil in the world, or that we won't be left in the world utterly abandoned and desolate if we sincerely seek God's care, can be confirmed, not by observations of publicly accessible phenomena, but by our lives taking one course as opposed to another. They concern the things that will and won't happen to us 'inwardly', in the course of

our mental and spiritual development.

This mode of verification presents a grave problem from some philosophers, who say that we cannot even speak or think coherently about events in any inner conscious life, let alone allow these events to verify propositions. Such philosophers hold that we cannot deny the truth of the second premise, since religious believers allow nothing (relevant to cognitive experience) to count against their statements. The only thing that believers would admit could (logically) count against their statements is an alternative development of an inner conscious life (an alternative, that is, to the development of conscious life we'd expect if religious statements were true) the content of which cannot be coherently thought about. If these philosophers are correct then it will indeed be necessary to affirm the truth of the second premise, and to conclude that religious statements are vacuous.

The philosophical school which held these ideas is the school which followed the later Wittgenstein (of Philosophical Investigations) and has often been referred to as the school of "functional analysis". It did not see itself as a branch of logical positivism but rather as a move away from logical positivism, towards the view that "every language has its logic". This school held that it is impossible to lay down a priori criteria of meaning. Although functional analysis looked at first like being a liberalizing influence as regards what was to be allowed to count as factually meaningful language, the movement did not become more tolerant towards religious language.

The reason for this was that religious statements are the (alleged) expressions of the insights of some sort of "inner sense", and are confirmable only by further evidence from this "inner sense". But language, which depends on public conventions, cannot reach down beyond the publicly observable circumstances which render a factual statement

true or false, to descriptions of insights which are essentially private, and which no public conventions can in principle be established for. Therefore, it was held, religious statements cannot be descriptive, since there are no public rules which can be applied to enable us to talk about the difference their truth would make to our experience, given that the experience they would make a difference to is of this "inner" sort. Those who take religious propositions as factual are, according to the functional analysts, simply confusing the conditions of utterance of factual assertions with the conditions of utterance of non-factual assertions. Cognitively meaningful language must always be linked to publicly observable conditions of correct utterance.

Now this view of language looks suspiciously as if it might be based on the *a priori* criterion of meaning which the analysts claimed they were trying to avoid. For as we have seen, religious statements were deemed cognitively meaningless on account of a link between the factual and the publicly observable. The analysts themselves however held that this link was not introduced as an *a priori* assumption, it was rather the outcome of an unbiased look at the facts about how language operates.

We have said already that the link between observable conditions of utterance and factually informative statements had to do with the analysts' acknowledgement that public rules must govern the application of terms if a statement is to convey information. But we have not yet seen precisely why it was held that public convention for the use of language can *only* come about by statements being correlated with publicly observable phenomena.

The notion that all factual statements derive their total meaning from the observable circumstances which are their conditions for correct assertion seems especially odd when applied to first-person psychological statements, such as the statement "I have a pain in my left hand".

For this assertion is surely factual, yet it seems to refer to something which is not observable. It seems impossible therefore for anybody to have learnt the public convention governing the application of the term "pain" by merely correlating it with the observable conditions under which it is (correctly) uttered. Yet this is precisely what Wittgenstein and his followers did want to claim.

The reason for this was because they realized that language, if it is to convey information, must be intelligible to both the speaker and hearer. A statement such as "I love her" must be translatable into "he loves her" in the mind of another person. And it seemed to the analysts that if this was to be possible then the criterion of meaning must be the same in the case of the third person proposition as it is in the case of the first person one. So when the analysts asked: "under what conditions is an informative proposition correctly uttered?", it seemed to them that the conditions must always be accessible to the first and third person alike. That is they must always be observable.

The analysts' way of thinking seems understandable enough but the result which it produced was queer. It meant that in the case of first person propositions about psychological states, the logically relevant conditions for their correct assertion are publicly observable phenomena. The person who utters the statement, "I am in pain" uses the concept pain, on this view, because he knows that he has, in this particular state, a tendency to behave in certain ways characteristic of others when they utter this statement.

The third person use of psychological statements was taken as primary because we learn our language from other people. How could I be in a position to assert that "I love her" had I not watched the behaviour of others who have claimed to love somebody? The need to take third-person statements as primary, the analysts reasoned, comes

out even more clearly when we consider what the result would be if we tried to take the first-person utterance as fundamental. Suppose I were to contend that when he says "he loves her" he is (metaphorically) pointing to an inward feeling which is the same as mine when I say "I love her". In this case I would be trying to explain his feeling by comparison with my own. But the problem here is that I have to have a way of pointing to my own feeling. Obviously this cannot be done ostensively in the same way that I can point to a tree or a barn. It is difficult to see how it could be done at all. A language, it is argued, must have public rules of use, and how can such public rules be invoked to talk about an inner feeling or (alleged) awareness which is peculiar to myself? It is not difficult to see why the analysts felt that the simplest answer was to maintain that factually significant language can only be concerned with the world of outward behaviour.

The simplest explanation however, is not always the best, especially if it achieves its simplicity by leaving something fundamental out of consideration. And in the case of the analysts' view of language we are left with the uneasy feeling that something important has been missed out. What seems to have been left out, especially in the analysis of first-person psychological statements, has something to do with the capacity of language to convey, at least in part, something of the depth and richness of subjective conscious life.

We must therefore look again at the functional analysts' view of language to see whether it is the only possible one. If it isn't, and if it entails an impoverished picture of human thought and experience, it seems clear enough that we should reject it in favour of one of its alternatives.

The main strength of the functional analysts' case lies in their insistence that the use of language must be governed by public

conventions. However, we can accept this without accepting in toto the analysts' theory about how these conventions come about. In particular, we may challenge the view that conventions of descriptive language always work by linking a symbol with some publicly observable phenomenon, as well as its underlying assumption that third-person utterances are the descriptive norm, and that first-person utterances should be interpreted always by reference to third, rather than sometimes third-person utterances by reference to first. We should note also that in challenging this view of language, we are challenging a view of language, which, despite claims to the contrary, really went little further towards allowing different types of language to acquire their meaning in different ways than did logical positivism. As even A.J. Ayer pointed out, the functional analysts were committed, not to an enquiry without philosophical presuppositions, but to a particular form of analysis, from the very beginning.

How then can we challenge this view that the conditions of utterance of factual statements must be publicly observable phenomena? How can the conventions which govern the application of descriptive terms be developed for mental events which are private? If we cannot point them out to anybody, how can we have public rules for making statements about them? How indeed can we even have names for them? And, even more importantly, how can we convey in language any cognitive insights which they yield?

The answer to all these questions lies in the fact that although we cannot point to the object of an inner awareness or the content of emotional feeling in the same way that we can point to a tree or a barn, we can nonetheless acquaint people with such an object or content through a series of hints. The hints may not be totally unambiguous, but then neither is my pointing to a tree or a barn, since even there my

gesture has to be interpreted by another conscious being. If it is admitted that such things as barns and trees cannot be unambiguously pointed out but that we can still have public rules for the use of descriptive statements *about* barns and trees, the fact that we cannot unambiguously point to the content of our inner conscious life does not raise any *special* problem.

But how is it possible to use these hints, even granting that they must be ambiguous, to convey information about an inner life whose essential nature is private?

We may reply at once that the mistake here is to regard the inner mental life as essentially private. If it were, it would be, by definition, cut off from penetration by others. But to call the inner mental life essentially private would really be to beg the question.

We can give others an idea of what is going on in our minds in various ways. In the case of emotions, the explanation that what we feel makes us want to *do* such and such, and (therefore) disposed to *do* such and such, can convey to another person not just that we are disposed to behave in a certain way but that we are inclined to behave in this way because our behaviour is part of a subjective-objective structure (only a part of which is the actual behaviour) which the other person finds intelligible as a whole. In the case of (alleged) intuitive awareness of such things as God, I could describe to another person the type of future I expected to have (and expected him to have) on account of the truth of my theistic statements, and this would enable him to build up for himself a picture of my object of awareness.

Because it is possible, in one way or another, to reveal at least in part the contents of one's inner mental life, there is no reason why public rules cannot be developed for descriptive statements whose terms refer to that life. And if this is the case, then there is

no reason to assume that the more "inner" experiences which are the initial reason for, and subsequent confirmation of, religious assertions, cannot be identified by terms whose application is governed by rules in a public language.

Indeed, it seems very clear that the (grammatical) first and third persons are on precisely the same footing. The same statements are made, or can be made, in sentences of either form. What differs is not the content, but the point of view from which the assertion is regarded by whoever utters it. Translation between first-person and third-person statements is regular, frequent, and necessary, and is accomplished without loss or even alteration of content. The third person is not, really, any more "impersonal", impartial, or general, either in its reference, or in respect of its intelligibility.

Thus we may conclude that we can talk, in a way which is perfectly intelligible, about the experiences which are compatible and those which are incompatible with the truth of religious assertions. And because of this we may further conclude that the functional analysts have given us no reason to affirm that religious statements are (logically) immune from falsification by any type of experience which can be described in (coherent) language. We still have no reason to affirm that premise two is true, on the ground that religious believers do not allow that anything can (logically) count against their statements.

The Argument that Religious Language makes Illicit use of Analogy

A further objection to (factual) religious language, which has been put forward by C.B. Martin²⁵ and W.P. Alston²⁶, is based on the

25. See his Religious Belief, Chapter 1.

26. Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Article entitled Religious Language.

observation that theological predicates seem to have meaning by analogy with the meaning of the predicates in other forms of discourse, but that, upon closer inspection, the analogy appears to break down.

Alston states the problem as follows:

"When one reflects on the use of predicates in theological assertions one comes to realise two fundamental facts:
 (i) this use is necessarily derivative from the application of predicates to human beings and other observable entities;
 (ii) the theological use of predicates is markedly different from the application of predicates to human beings." 26

Alston goes on to explain how this gives rise to the problem of how we are to make sense of theological predicates, especially, as Professor Ronald Hepburn points out,²⁷ we cannot overcome this by ostensibly pointing to an object which is the subject of such discourse. The question arises, for Martin and Alston, how can such talk single out anything at all? But this question only arises because it is assumed that theological predicates cannot have meaning otherwise than in a precise mathematical way, sharply delimiting the object of their reference. And anybody who assumes this is surely denying the possibility that ideas can be expanded and new ideas conveyed by means of analogy, not only in relation to religion, but in general.

Consider the statement "God loves mankind". It has long been recognised by theologians and by ordinary religious people that the term "loves" in this statement does not mean quite what it does in statements about human love. However, the term is still useful in the

26. Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Article entitled "Religious Language".

27. See his Christianity and Paradox, Chapter 3 entitled "Encounters".

statement, for the statement evokes in us a feeling which is suggestive of something which is already part of our experience yet which goes beyond it. In understanding our own capacity for love as a partial and inadequate manifestation of that capacity which occurs, in a wholly adequate way, in God, (and it is easy for anybody to offer the explanation that this is the relation God's love bears to human love) it is possible to understand something of the nature of the Being whose name occurs in the statement.

Religious predicates make suggestions by comparing God's qualities with the finite manifestations of those qualities with which we are more familiar, and these comparisons can help to illuminate the nature of God, provided that the differences are also explained, and the loose resemblances are not equated with identities.

Conclusion

We are now in a position to finally conclude that, although we must accept the first premise, there are no arguments which convincingly establish the truth of the second. Religious statements can (logically) be falsified, and they can be falsified by experiences which can perfectly well be thought and spoken of. The converse of this is that there are conceivable and logically possible experiences which are relevant to the confirmation and initial acceptance of religious statements. In rejecting the second premise, we have no reason to accept the conclusion which follows from the two premises, and thus have no reason to embrace the position that religious statements are vacuous.

So far, we have been concerned mainly with the question of whether religious language is factually meaningful, and not with whether religious beliefs are true or can be justified. It is to these questions which we must address ourselves in the chapters which follow.

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

AND

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

We shall begin our enquiry into the truth and justification of religious assertions by considering, in this chapter, the most common piece of experiential evidence, and one which people often offer in support of their claims; that is the feeling or intuition that (at a given moment) they have, or (at some time have had), some sort of personal experience of God, relationship with God, or direct awareness of God.

There are, of course, many types of religious experience falling within this broad range, and in particular there is an important distinction to be drawn between the more spectacular mystical experiences which normally occur in a particular place at a certain time, and the more serene "sense of the presence of God" which is the sort of ongoing awareness of a divine reality which is closer to the experience of most ordinary believers. But for the purposes of this chapter it will not be necessary to discuss these kinds of experience separately, since our epistemological considerations will apply equally well to all of them.¹

1. Neither do we, at this stage, need to distinguish between those who have claimed to experience the presence of a personal being like the Christian God and those who claim to have had experience of some non-personal transcendent spiritual reality. For, in our present discussion, the objections against religious experience to be examined are objections to the idea that any experience which is as inward and subjective as that of alleged encounters with transcendent spiritual realities can provide sound evidence (or indeed any evidence) for any assertions about the objective world.

What we do have to bear in mind here is that we are considering the claims of those who have wanted to say that they've had some sort of special experience of a Divine Being, as against those who have inferred God's existence by reflecting, at a deep level, on ordinary worldly phenomena. These inferential knowledge-claims are also, in a sense, rooted in experience, though here the rational side of the experient is far more active. We shall deal with them in some detail in later chapters, in our discussion of the question, whether metaphysics can yield knowledge of a Divine Being.

Philosophers who have commented on religious experience, of the sort we are concerned with here, may, for convenience, be divided into four categories. In the first category, we may place those philosophers who regard this sort of religious experience as logically irrelevant to the conclusions about the objective nature of things which religious believers often claim are based on it. Another way of putting their criticism is to say that religious experience is the worst form of evidence possible if we are attempting to establish the truth of religious assertions (taken as cognitive), for such evidence is utterly irrelevant to them. In this category we may put C.B. Martin², Terence Penelhum³, and possibly Ronald Hepburn⁴. In the second category are those philosophers who, while not totally committed to the view that religious experience is logically irrelevant to the truth of religious claims (taken as cognitive) hold nonetheless that such evidence is, at best, extremely weak. Ronald Hepburn seems sometimes to fall into

2. See C.B. Martin's Religious Belief Ch. 5 "Seeing God".

3. See T. Penelhum's Religion and Rationality, Ch. 13.

4. See R. Hepburn's Christianity and Paradox, Chapter entitled "Encounters".

this category, but a much better example is C.H. Whiteley, as represented by a paper he wrote in reply to H.D. Lewis for an Aristotelean Society Symposium⁵. There are very few modern philosophers who can be squarely placed in this second category, since nearly all who have been critical of religious experience in recent times have upheld the logical objections, and by doing so have placed themselves in the first category. Better examples of philosophers who fall into this second category may be found among rationalists such as Descartes, although these were sceptical about learning anything about the world from any form of experience, not just religious experience. In the third category we find those philosophers who, while not totally unsceptical about what can be revealed to us on the basis of religious experience, nonetheless do not find the problems of basing factual claims upon that mode of experience so very much greater than the problems involved in having claims about the external world upon our ordinary perceptual experiences. Two philosophers in particular, W.J. Wainwright⁶ and Professor C.D. Broad⁷, have explored the analogies and disanalogies between religious experience and sensory experience in a most interesting way, in the attempt to discover whether the epistemological status of the two modes of experience is utterly different. Both conclude that there are some differences, but not such as to totally vindicate ordinary experience and condemn religious experience. Finally, in the fourth category, are to be found those

5. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society. Sup. Vol. XXIX (1955). Paper entitled: The Cognitive Factor in Religious Experience.

6. See W.J. Wainwright's article Mysticism and Sense Perception. Religious Studies Vol.9 (1973).

7. C.D. Broad. Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research. See second part of essay entitled Arguments for the Existence of God, pp 190-201.

philosophers who are firmly convinced that religious experience provides extremely good evidence of the truth of religious assertions. Among these we may number Professor H.D. Lewis⁸, H.H. Farmer⁹, Martin Buber¹⁰, and R. Otto.¹¹

However, possibly the most famous exponent of the view that religious knowledge is adequately grounded on religious experience was the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Romantic philosopher, Friedrich Schleiermacher¹².

It is unfortunate that the philosophers of the fourth group have often said very little about the logical objections of the first group of philosophers. Sometimes such philosophers even write as if there is no problem about the epistemological status of knowledge claims based on religious experience, from the point of view of somebody who has a "direct" encounter with God. Both those philosophers who would (in the end) defend religious experience, and those philosophers who are more critical of it, should deplore any attempt to by-pass the logical and epistemological problems to which it unquestionably gives rise, whether or not these problems turn out to be insurmountable. Bearing in mind Hegel's remark that those who base their religious "knowledge" on the "unrestrained ferment of sheer

8. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Sup. Vol. XXIX (1955). The Cognitive factor in Religious Experience. See Lewis's contribution.

9. See H.H. Farmer's The World and God.

10. See Martin Buber's I and Thou.

11. See R. Otto's The Idea of the Holy.

12. See F. Schleiermacher's On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers.

emotion" are likely to conceive and bring forth only dreams,¹³ we shall proceed at once to a detailed examination of the logical objections to those knowledge claims which purport to be based on religious experience.

Logical Objections to Knowledge of God through Religious Experience

One of the most articulate expressions of the view that there are insuperable logical difficulties in making claims about the objective world on the basis of (ostensible) religious experience is put forward by C.B. Martin in his book Religious Belief. Like all the first category philosophers, Martin tries to show that religious experiences, which are essentially inward and subjective, can never provide adequate grounds for our being able to pass from a psychological statement about our own state of mind to a cognitive statement about knowledge of the objective world.

Martin begins his discussion of religious experience by offering his readers a "useless deduction". The statement that "I have direct awareness of God" he tells us certainly includes the assertion that "God exists". But, he claims "to be useful, the addition of the existential claim to the psychological claim of having religious experiences would have to be shown to be warrantable, and this cannot be done".¹⁴

13. Hegel. Phenomenology of Mind. p.10 in translation by J.B. Baillie, Vol.I.

14. C.B. Martin Religious Belief, Ch.5, p.67.

We may accept Martin's assertions that on deductive grounds religious experiences do not entail the existence of God, in so far as it would not be self-contradictory to speak of somebody reporting an experience "of God", yet at the same time God failing to exist. However, Martin wants to claim also that the jump from the psychological claim that one has had a religious experience to the existential claim that "God exists" is not justified by inductive argument either. The reason for this he states quite clearly: "There are no tests agreed upon to establish genuine experience of God and to distinguish it decisively from the non-genuine".¹⁵

This (alleged) absence of agreed tests is a serious problem for Martin, not because it means that we can never be quite sure about whether any ostensible religious experience is genuine, but because it means that there are no criteria for the identification of any Divine Being. But how, we may ask, does Martin arrive at his view that there are no (such) criteria?

Martin is aware of course that people of various religious, and of no (institutionalised) religion, have different conceptions of the nature of God, and would therefore disagree about the criteria which would suffice to establish the identity of God in a (seemingly) religious experience. But this empirical fact of disagreement between people about the criteria which are relevant to deciding whether a genuine encounter with God has taken place is not Martin's main concern. For his point is not just that there are no agreed tests, in an empirical sense, but that there *can* be no agreed tests, in a logical sense, if our knowledge of God comes from direct personal encounters with Him.

15. *ibid*, p.67.

The logical problem about identifying genuine cases of experiencing God arises, for Martin, because the directness of these encounters seems to make them logically immune from criticism. Those who claim to have knowledge of God on the basis of their personal religious experience are unconcerned about whether anybody else can have the same type of experience or whether the alleged object of their experience can be detected in any other way than through their own subjective awareness. They rather believe that (supposedly) religious experiences yield direct and self-authenticating insights into the nature of the Divine Reality. Because nothing, beyond the experience itself, is allowed to count for or against the validity of such experience, the subject of a religious experience has no criteria which enable him to correlate his subjective experience with any objective structure transcending his experience. Thus, he has no warrant for saying that his experience is an experience of an objectively existing God, and in his claims about the (supposed) object of his experience, he fails to refer to anything beyond the content of the subjective experience itself. As Martin puts it:

"Because 'having direct experience of God' does not admit the relevance of a society of tests and checking procedures, it tends to place itself in the company of other ways of knowing which preserve their self sufficiency, uniqueness, and incommunicability, by making a psychological and not an existential claim. For example, 'I seem to see a piece of blue paper' requires no further test or checking procedure in order to be considered true." 16

But "The presence of a piece of blue paper is not to be read off from my experience as of a piece of blue paper. Other things are relevant; what would a photograph reveal? Can I touch it? What do others see?" 17

16. *ibid.* p.72.

17. *ibid.* p.87-88.

Thus "Ontological reference is something to be earned."¹⁸

We shall see however that we do not need to deny that we need criteria of objectivity, or that "ontological reference is something to be earned" in order to reject Martin's critique of religious experience.

Objections to Martin's Position

Against Martin's position may be levelled two inter-related types of objection. In the first place, we can challenge his view that religious experience is direct in the sense of being logically immune from criticism by the application of any standards of objectivity. And secondly we may challenge what seems to be the underlying assumption behind this view, which is that if certain types of tests and checking procedures are not being applied, then no (valid) tests or checking procedures are being applied. We need to ask whether there are not perfectly valid tests and checks being applied by the reporters of religious experiences (and by those who would accept the cognitive validity of their claims) which Martin overlooks on account of somewhat arbitrary preconceptions as to the types of tests and checking procedures which can be relevant.

In What Sense is Religious Experience "Direct"?

Much of Martin's argument, as we have seen, starts from the fact that many religious people have often claimed that their experience of God or of the Divine Reality is in some way direct. Martin interprets this claim to have had "direct" experience of God

18. *ibid.* p.88

as meaning that the experience is logically immune from criticism, and this interpretation generates the logical objections to religious experience which we have outlined above.

Now it is true that many religious people, and even some philosophers, have encouraged this interpretation by holding that genuine religious knowledge comes from unmediated encounters with God, in which thought and reason play no part and in which they could in principle play no part. As regards the views of such people, we must accept that Martin's objections to direct experience apply with the greatest force. Martin is right to say that those who refuse to submit their personal experience to criticism by (appropriate) standards of objectivity have no right to make assertions about anything other than their own states of mind.

However, it is far from clear that the great majority of those who claim, and have claimed, to have knowledge of God on the basis of religious experience would want thereby, or at the same time to claim, logical immunity from criticism. They may be thoroughly convinced that their experiences are cognitively valid but still not claim that they are direct in the sense of being logically immune from criticism. And this may be so, even if such people persist in using the phrase "direct experience".

Logical immunity from criticism is not the only, nor even the most obviously implied meaning of the phrase "direct experience". Martin assumes that if an experience is described as direct, then the knowledge of what is experienced is absolutely unmediated by any consideration outside the single experience itself. But it is possible to have "direct experiences" which are not unmediated. For example, if I encountered a material object which I had not previously seen (or felt, or smelt etc.) or if I became personally acquainted with

somebody whom I did not previously know, then I could quite correctly describe my new knowledge as being the product of a direct encounter. I might be quite certain that my experience in either case was cognitively valid, having no particular reason to think otherwise, but that would not mean that the interpretation of the experience as cognitive would be unmediated by criteria of objectivity, even though these criteria might be unconsciously assumed rather than explicitly stated. The fact that religious people sometimes speak of their experiences as direct does not mean that they employ no criteria of objectivity.

However, it might be objected at this point that some religious people describe their experience of God, not merely as "direct" but also as "self-authenticating". If one can have a *direct* experience which isn't logically immune from criticism, surely one can't have a *self-authenticating* one which isn't? Well, when some people speak of their experiences as being self-authenticating, they probably do intend to claim that they are logically immune from criticism. And against such people we must say, once again, that Martin's objections apply. However this interpretation of "self-authenticating" is by no means the only possible one, for there is a way in which religious experiences might be self-authenticating which does not render them logically immune from criticism. Martin, throughout his discussion always assumes that a sharp distinction is to be drawn between a religious experience, (which he always takes as an immediate, unreflected-upon, mental perception) and the reflective process by which we come to an understanding of the nature of the object of experience. But it is in fact at least equally realistic (and I contend, considerably more realistic), to regard this reflective process as part of the total experience itself. The immediate unreflected-upon "awareness" is

after all an abstraction from what might be called the total religious experience, and if we include within this total religious experience the process of appraisal of the more immediately "felt" elements of that experience, such an experience might well be called self-authenticating but not because it had somehow managed to make itself immune from criticism; it would rather be self-authenticating because it had taken that criticism into itself, faced it, and survived it. The self-authenticating and direct nature of such an experience would then have been established precisely as a result of the mediation.

It is no doubt the claims of those theologians and religious believers who have wanted to dispense with reason and reflection in religious matters entirely, that have misled Martin into a view of "direct" and "self-authenticating" experience which is too narrow. The fact that they have misled Martin, however, does not mean that they need to mislead us.

Relevant Tests and Checking Procedures

That there should be relevant tests and checking procedures for evaluating¹⁹ particular subjective experiences is not something which we have found cause to deny. But when Martin claims that "other things are relevant" (besides the subjective experience of a particular individual) to any attempt to distinguish between cognitive and non-cognitive experiences, it is fairly clear that his other relevant things are really the sort of things which are relevant to deciding whether somebody has had a genuine cognitive experience of a material

19. Evaluating, that is, in the sense of trying to determine their cognitive content.

object. Martin does not explicitly say that he is taking one type of cognitive experience as his paradigm. Indeed, the fact that he does so is sometimes veiled by the fact that he tends to vacillate between a mere demand for criteria which enable us to identify objective structures in our subjective experience, and a demand that these criteria of objectivity should be of a certain sort. But that Martin's tests and checking procedures are relevant only to one particular type of cognitive experience, the type which consists of observing material objects, becomes apparent when we consider his emphasis on checks which take the form of other people's sensory observations. Martin says that what is relevant to establishing the genuine objectivity of an ostensible object of experience is whether people in general can see it, touch it, etc., or can at least detect its (sensory) effects through the medium of an instrument. He assumes that for all forms of experience, irrespective of their specific (professed) objects, no special training or state of consciousness is necessary in those other observers whose pronouncements count for or against the original experient's claim to have experienced a genuine object (or Being). All that is necessary is that the "checks" should be carried out by observers whose sensory apparatus is intact. Martin even remarks at one point that the judgment of a numerical majority of persons is an appropriate criterion for judging whether somebody has experienced something which has genuine objectivity. Thus he writes:

"Absolute confidence and indifference to the majority judgment is bought at the price of reducing the existential to the non-existential." 20

Martin totally ignores the consideration that only a limited range of things can be discerned by the untrained majority, and that many things which can be dimly apprehended by the untrained majority cannot be apprehended by them in their fullest depth and richness.

The type of objects for which Martin's tests are appropriate is that of those whose apprehension is possible with a minimum degree of subjective effort and involvement. They are objects which constitute that aspect of reality perceived when a conscious subject somewhat passively "gazes", and does not (at a highly theoretical level) reflect on the world which he encounters. Material objects, existing in space and time, are of this character (at least as they appear on the surface), in that they reveal themselves easily to observers, without arduous struggle or effort, and that is why, in relation to these, Martin's tests are not inappropriate. But for objects, which, by their very nature, require a higher level of subjective involvement in order to reveal themselves (or to fully reveal themselves), Martin's checking procedures are utterly inadequate.

In relation to experiences of God or a Divine Reality, the inappropriateness of Martin's tests is particularly clear, since the nature of any Divine Being must be radically different from the nature of the objects for which Martin's tests are constructed.

In the case of our experiences of material objects and other people, our checks must presuppose the spatial and physical separateness of oneself and the other object or person. And this separateness of the object or person in question means that the presence of such a person or object will make an incursion into the experience of anybody with normal sensory apparatus who happens to be in the vicinity, in such a way as to (at least partially) delimit that person's field of thought and action. Such an "other" cannot be ignored. Thus the sense

experiences of the average observer are appropriate, if we are trying to check up on the genuine existence of some separate spatio-temporal reality.

With God, however, the matter is rather different. If we take seriously the notion of the infinite power, majesty, duration, etc. of God, we must say that God is ultimately not separate from his creatures, in the way that these are separate from one another (or seem to be, from the standpoint of finite experience). God being infinite and uncreated, and they being both created and finite, God includes, as well as transcends, each and every one of them. We therefore do not have an identity wholly separate from that of God, and therefore cannot detect the Divine Reality by observing something, existing outside ourselves in space and time, which makes the same type of incursion into our experience as do material objects. Checks on experiences of God must be appropriate to the nature of such a Being. There is after all no point in using a litmus paper test in an attempt to determine the speed of a vehicle.

Notwithstanding, we have argued that Martin's tests and checking procedures are irrelevant to determining whether anybody has had a genuine experience of God, but have said also that there must be some sort of test (appropriate to God's nature) for determining the validity of such experience, it may (aptly) be asked; just what are these alternative tests and checks which are supposed to be specifically appropriate to the Divine nature?

If we bear in mind our previous remarks about God being transcendent yet not wholly separate from us (or from any of his creatures) we would not expect the observation of phenomena in the external world to provide clear evidence in favour of, or against, an ostensible religious experience. But if God exists in the way we have

outlined, we would expect to find any account of our thought and experience which failed to allow for such a Being somehow incomplete. For a genuinely existing God must inform the nature of and provide the unity for, self-conscious thought and experience. Thus one relevant test of the genuineness of a religious experience would consist of reflecting upon the question of whether the deliverances of the experience taken as deliverances about something transcending subjective experience - can be corroborated by these conclusions which arise from the deepest reflections on the nature and unity of our experience as a whole. A second test closely related to the first, which we would apply, is to try to determine whether non-cognitivist interpretations of the experience can do adequate justice to it. That is, we would ask whether psychological or sociological reductionist-type explanations can deal adequately with the various facts of the experience, or whether we have the uneasy feeling that something has been left unexplained, something which would not be left unexplained on a cognitivist interpretation. (It must be remembered here that the ability to explain an experience in sociological or psychological terms does not necessarily mean that we must combine this explanation with a non-cognitivist view of the experience. God might have given us such psychological equipment or made us in such a way that we would develop religious social institutions, precisely because he does exist and wants us to know it!)

A third test which we might apply to try to determine the validity of a (supposedly) religious experience would be to ask people who have tried to educate themselves in spiritual matters whether they have ever been able, through their own experience, to discern anything which seems to be similar to the object of the enquirer's experience.

Against regarding this third type of test as appropriate, it has sometimes been argued that although people who put themselves through similar courses of training (meditation is often cited here) tend to have similar experiences as a result, this in no way shows that those experiences are cognitive. It is pointed out that if large numbers of people take certain hallucinatory drugs then similar experiences often result, but that doesn't mean that these experiences are cognitive, and it is also pointed out that a person's particular religious training and tradition tends to influence the form which his religious experience is liable to take. MacIntyre remarks that Alphonse Ratisbonne's Vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary would have been a most unlikely occurrence had Ratisbonne not been a Roman Catholic.²¹

Our response to this objection must be to begin by acknowledging that we do have to be suspicious of reports of religious experience which are the products of practices which, by their very nature, strongly suggest that those who participate in them can expect to have certain sorts of experience. We have also to be suspicious of those forms of religious training which subject the mind to stress and disorientation to the point where hallucination is more probable than genuine cognitive experience.

However, if we find that a vast number of those who have tried to educate themselves in spiritual matters have made claims on the basis of their experiences which are strikingly similar to each other, despite the fact that such people have lived in very different cultures and at very different times, and have adhered to religious

21. See A. MacIntyre's article: Visions. In New Essays in Philosophical Theology. (edited by Flew and MacIntyre).

traditions having very different suppositions about the nature of God, then the chances of the experience being an hallucination or a product of the power of suggestion are very greatly decreased. For firstly, the types of spiritual training which the individuals would have subjected themselves to would be very varied, and there would be no particular reason to suppose that, if the practices employed were to result in hallucinations, the participants would hallucinate in the same way. The similarity of the experiences would be better accounted for if there were a genuine object (or Being) to be experienced. And secondly, if the spiritual endeavour of individuals who are likely to have very different preconceptions about the nature of the Divine, nonetheless leads to a fairly uniform experience, it is most unlikely that the claim made on the basis of this experience are such as to merely reflect what the experients expected to happen all along. Again, the uniformity is better accounted for by the existence of a genuine object of experience.²²

If there is such a uniformity in the experience, and in the religious claim based on that experience, of people who have been concerned to educate themselves spiritually (though in very diverse ways), then there is a good chance that the spiritual training of such people was genuine (i.e. likely to lead to knowledge of the

22. C.D. Broad, writing as a religiously uncommitted philosopher in Religion Philosophy and Psychical Research expresses this point well. He asserts: "Where there is a nucleus of agreement between the experiences of man in different places, times and traditions, and when they all tend to put much the same kind of interpretation on the cognitive content of these experiences, it is reasonable to ascribe this agreement to their all being in contact with a certain objective aspect of reality unless there be some positive reason to think otherwise." p.197.

truth, rather than error and illusion).²³ Thus, the objections to our third test would be overcome, since we would be testing the experience in question against the experiences of those whose spiritual education could be seen to have a high probability of validity. This test will not, of course, provide an absolutely guaranteed method of sifting genuine from non-genuine.

A fourth test, and the final one which we shall mention here (though there may indeed be many others) might consist in considering whether the facts about that aspect of experience which consists of our moral awareness, point to, or are rendered more intelligible by, a transcendent being such as subjects of religious experiences claim to encounter. In our application of this test we must remember that we do not need, and can hardly hope for, anything like a *proof* of God's existence based on the facts of ethical life. What we shall most likely discover from this test, if anything, is that the concept of God or the Divine Reality helps us to make the facts about our moral consciousness and our capacity for value judgments a little less absurd, a little less unintelligible, than they would be otherwise.

23. We must beware at this point of begging the question of whether religious experiences corroborate one another, by only calling those experiences religious which do corroborate one another. As Copleston warns, in relation to mysticism: "The wider we extend the application of the term 'mystic', the greater become the differences between their utterances. Hence there is a danger of narrowing down or restricting application of the term in such a way as to diminish these differences in advance, thus enabling us to find the sort of agreement which we are seeking. Indeed some might question whether any real measure of agreement can be found, except through the policy of selective attention or of being very choosy in our admission of people to the class of mystics." F.C. Copleston, Religion and Philosophy, p.77. It was to avoid this difficulty that it was suggested that we compare the experiences of people who had, in their various ways, attempted to educate themselves in spiritual matters, rather than simply comparing the experiences of those who had had (ostensible) religious experiences.

We shall not, at this point, attempt to determine the precise results which the application of tests such as those we have outlined would yield. For we are concerned here rather to establish that there *are* tests which can be applied to religious experience, and that it is (logically) possible for the ontological reference of the claims of those who have reported religious experiences to be earned. We shall deal with the application of our tests in the chapters which follow.

Before proceeding to this however, we have yet to consider the objections to religious experience which have been put forward by another philosopher, a philosopher who, unlike Martin, acknowledges that, if God exists, his presence will not be verifiable in the same way as is a material object's but who claims that the alternative nature which is ascribed to God presents its own logical problems of verification.

Ronald Hepburn's Position

Hepburn begins by observing, quite rightly, that if God is personal then we wouldn't expect his presence to be verified in the same way as is a physical object's. There seems to be, he says, a fundamental difference between the way in which we have knowledge of such objects and the way in which we know persons. Thus he writes:

"We approach things in detachment, confident that they will passively suffer our scrutiny, that our discoveries about them can be corroborated by others. Persons on the other hand reveal themselves fully only if we renounce our detachment and enter into reciprocal relations with them." 24

24. Ronald Hepburn Christianity and Paradox, p.24. Chapter "Encounters"

So, Hepburn suggests, perhaps "The living God, the God of Abraham, can be authentically known only to the man who addresses him as Thou, who finds him in the unique directness of personal contact."²⁵ Hepburn goes on to examine the question of what an I - Thou encounter would be like. He points out that it is possible to have a sort of I - Thou relationship with a natural object, for example a mountain. Also it is not possible to have a totally pure I - Thou relationship with a human being.²⁶

Hepburn suggests that perhaps an encounter with God is an encounter with a pure Thou, and that if we try to "think away" all the descriptions of material features which are indispensable in encounters with human persons and yet which make those encounters impure, we can get some way towards understanding what it would be like to encounter a pure Thou. He mentions certain theologians who would understand by an experience of God an encounter of such a kind. Martin Buber in his main example, but he also refers to H.H. Farmer and Karl Barth.

Hepburn proceeds to examine the nature of pure I - Thou relationships and concludes that they don't make sense. The problem is one of identity. Hepburn describes the situation in this way:

"If we seriously try to conceive circumstances in which we might claim to have done away with all behavioural checks in communing with someone we will find that we have in a peculiar way failed to maintain the separate identities of the two people concerned, and that we have no means of knowing whether we are in rapport with someone or not, which do not ultimately rely upon the behavioural checks themselves." 27

25. *ibid.* p.24

26. We shall see why later.

27. *ibid.* p.35

Thus, although Hepburn is prepared to accept that there is more to an I - Thou encounter than these I - it relationships, it is still the case that for him the sense of an I - Thou encounter is logically dependent on the I - it relation. Acquaintance *with* always involves a certain amount of knowledge *that*. Hepburn gives some examples of cases which bring this out further. He cites cases which seem to come close to Brunner's "purity" of encounter. But he points out that even though such relationships are not reducible to encounters with material features, the presence of the latter is nonetheless necessary.

Hepburn is perceptive enough to see that the possibility of mistakes about encounters with human beings would "not necessarily upset the scale of purity."²⁷ But he adds:

"What does upset it is a fact brought out by the same examples - namely, the continuing importance of 'knowledge about' and 'knowledge that' even in the most intimate relationships. Only the unexpected disappointment brings home to us that although we rarely, or never list the characteristics our friend displays, we presuppose them during every moment of our relationship." 27

At another point in the book, Hepburn brings out his objection to I - Thou encounters by way of a report of a debate between Black and White. Black, in this debate, says to White:

"Here is the crux. You wish at all costs not to distort your I - Thou encounter with God. This pushes you towards excluding descriptive elements from the word 'God'. But if you do exclude them, you cannot also consistently claim 'directness' and 'immediacy' for your judgment that the one you encounter is Father Creator, and so on. What you are doing is giving an illusion of immediacy through oscillating between descriptive and proper-name uses of the word 'God'. 28

Hepburn shows, through remarks such as these, that he recognizes the inadequacy of trying to observe God, in the way that one would observe a material object. God does not have the nature of a material object, and so we would not expect to be able to verify claims of his presence in the same way. But Hepburn makes the assumption that if God cannot be perceived in the same way as can be a material object, then his presence can only be detected through a "pure encounter" of a sort which turns out to be logically incoherent. He presupposes, throughout his discussion that either,

(1) God can be described and his existence can be verified by virtue of the same criteria and procedures employed in relation to material objects, or

(2) God is purely personal and such that experiences of him are utterly unique, and no criteria can be laid down which enable us to identify him as a Being of a certain kind since we cannot capture his identity by using general terms. Hepburn admits that the criteria of (1) for describing God and the corresponding procedures for verifying the existence of God, are obviously inappropriate; yet if we opt for alternative (2), we are faced with an identity problem which is so great that it bars us from having any knowledge of God at all.

What Hepburn does not consider is the possibility that God does not have to be a pure "Thou" with no describable features, just because his existence cannot be verified in the same way as can be a material object's. God might after all be unlike a material object yet have features which can be discerned and described, and verified by one or more of the types of tests listed below. But Hepburn makes the strictly positivistic assumption that descriptive statements can only meaningfully convey information about those things which can be verified by universal sense - experience. He then concludes that God

must be a pure "Thou" with no features which could be verified at all.

Thus, although Hepburn promises at the beginning of his discussion of religious experience to pay special attention to the specific nature of God, he presupposes throughout that if God has no existential or behavioural characteristics which can be discerned by everyday sense experience or through the techniques of positive natural science, then we cannot ascribe descriptive predicates to him, and cannot therefore form any coherent idea of him at all.

It is quite possible that had Hepburn taken more notice of the actual descriptions of the nature of God which have been given by mystics and others who have claimed to have had some sort of religious experience, he would not have been misled into thinking that if God is not like a material object then he must be a "Pure Thou" of whom no general terms can be used.

We shall discuss some of these reports of religious experience in our next chapter in greater detail. For the present, it is sufficient to have seen that Hepburn has not managed any more than Martin to put forward arguments to demonstrate convincingly that there are logical errors in all existential claims about God which result from (ostensible) religious experience.

Martin and Hepburn together encapsulate the logical objections which are normally raised against basing existential claims on religious experience. We therefore do not need to look in detail at other philosophers, such as Penelhum, who say what is essentially the same thing.

Philosophers of the other Categories²⁹

We have now seen that philosophers of the first category have failed to show that there are no tests or checking procedures for the appraisal of religious experience. We have seen that, if a dogmatic positivistic stance is avoided, it is possible to specify what such tests must consist of, in a fairly straight forward way. (We specified four, though we did not claim that our list was exhaustive). It should now be noticed that these tests which were produced in response to the logical objections to religious experience, as upheld by philosophers of the first category, are also relevant in a fundamental way to the claims of the philosophers of the other three categories. For they (the tests) provide us with criteria by which the claims of these philosophers can be assessed.

We shall, in the chapters which follow, employ these tests in an attempt to establish the plausibility of the claims made by the philosophers of categories two, three, and four. That is, we shall employ them to determine, as far as possible, whether the evidence for the claims made on the basis of religious experience is (a) very weak, (b) more or less on a par with the evidence which can be produced for the claim that sense perception is veridical, or (c) very strong indeed. The more the various tests tend to corroborate each other's results, the stronger the evidence will be, one way or the other.

29. It was stated earlier that Hepburn sometimes seems to fall into the second group of philosophers, i.e. those who believe that religious experience provides weak (as opposed to no) evidence for existential claims. In Christianity and Paradox however Hepburn seems to fall fairly clearly into the first category, and for convenience, we have dealt only with his views as expressed there.

We shall take as our starting point that test which consists of considering whether those who have been concerned to find out about spiritual matters have reported, despite their having lived in very different cultures that they have had experiences which are similar enough to be suggestive that the various experiences represent a common cognitive insight into a genuine spiritual reality.³⁰ We shall start with this test because it is the one which leads us, fairly immediately, into detailed descriptions of the phenomena which mystics and (some) other religious people claim to have experienced. And it is obviously necessary, throughout our various attempts to appraise religious experience, to have before our minds a clear picture (or a picture which is as clear as possible) of the nature of the phenomena supposedly experienced.

Having dealt with this question (of whether reports of religious experience from different ages, cultures, and religions, tend to corroborate one another) we shall proceed to the question of whether any (or some, or most, or all) of the claims based on such experience are further corroborated by the outcome of valid metaphysical argumentation. That is, we shall ask whether it can be demonstrated that if we reflect deeply on the nature and unity of all our experience - ordinary as well as extraordinary, we shall see that this experience can only be adequately understood if we postulate a spiritual Absolute, of the sort that (at least some) religious people claim to encounter in a more immediate way.³¹

30. This test corresponds to the third in the above list.

31. This corresponds to the first test in the above list.

Finally, we shall consider whether any type of ethical awareness, such as can be ascribed to a self-conscious rational being, is capable of providing any evidence for a transcendent Divine Reality.³²

The attentive reader will have noticed by now that although we have mentioned four possible tests or checking procedures we have promised to deal with only three. The second test, which consists of assessing the plausibility of trying to explain religious experience by way of naturalistic psychological or sociological explanations, has been omitted. This however is quite deliberate. The adequate application of this test would require a knowledge of the sociology and psychology of religion beyond the scope of the present writer. We shall therefore concentrate on what we may learn from the other tests, and we must be content to discover whether these other tests point to the plausibility or implausibility of reductionist naturalistic explanations of the phenomenon of religious experience. But we must bear in mind that our conclusions would be strengthened (whatever they may eventually turn out to be) if they were supported by strong sociological and/or psychological findings.

32. This corresponds to the fourth test in the above list. It should be noted that although we shall refer briefly to aesthetic, as well as ethical, awareness, we shall deal primarily with ethics. This is because more philosophers have been impressed with the idea that (genuine) morality either presupposes God, or requires God as a postulate.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES AND THE
QUESTION OF GENERAL AGREEMENT

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In this chapter we shall be concerned with the question of whether ostensible religious experiences of all ages and cultures are phenomenologically such as to lead us to suspect that these experiences represent valid insights into the same Absolute or Divine Being. To avoid begging the question by adopting a selection procedure by which we admit to the class of religious experiences only those experiences which support a presupposed thesis (see footnote twenty-three to Chapter One) we shall deliberately adopt a procedure in selecting experiences for consideration, which cannot beg the question in this way. The essential element in our procedure shall be to compare with one another those experiences which are the most intense and profound of those which the experiencers themselves call religious, according to the dictates of their own spiritual education, the validity of which we shall not prejudge, except insofar as we require that experiences which are correctly labelled as religious should be the result and culmination of a deliberate and arduous process of training.¹

Are the mystical experiences selected by this procedure similar enough to each other to strongly suggest that they are all (or nearly all) genuine cognitive apprehensions of the same underlying

1. Because in this Chapter we are seeking to compare those religious experiences which are of the strongest intensity, we shall refer henceforth primarily to mystical experiences.

reality? It is the contention of many that this is so, notably of W.T. Stace in Mysticism and Philosophy and Aldous Huxley in The Doors of Perception. But there are also those who have argued the other way, one of the most interesting being R.C. Zaehner in Mysticism, Sacred and Profane. We shall deal with Zaehner's arguments in some detail. If we are to decide whether experiences which are descriptively different point to conflicting truth-claims, we must particularly take into account *how* they differ. If any two mystical experiences are very different from each other, this does not necessarily mean that they cannot both be apprehensions of the same reality, though of course if they are such they cannot differ in such a way as to exclude this. Thus Zaehner, to establish his case must do more than merely show that mystical experiences are sometimes different from each other. He must also show that the differences are sufficiently fundamental to rule out the possibility that such religious experiences can yield insights into the nature of a common reality.

There are at least four possibilities, it seems, regarding the way in which variation in the descriptive content of different mystical experiences relates to the possibility of their being indicative of a common reality. These are as follows:

- (1) Mystical experiences are sufficiently similar or complementary to suggest that they could well be apprehensions of the same reality.
- (2) Mystical experiences are so variegated that they do not suggest this, but they are not different to the point where we must rule out the possibility.
- (3) Mystical experiences are different from each other to the point when it would be absurd to say that any one truth is supported by their occurrence.

(4) Mystical experiences are everywhere and always identical, and the claims which are based on any one such experience therefore receive the strongest possible corroboration from the experiences of other mystics.

Our enquiry in this chapter requires us to attempt to decide which of these four possibilities is most likely to be an actuality. At the outset, we may begin by dismissing (4). Even those most sympathetic to the idea that there are similarities between mystical experiences have not wanted to claim this, and even a cursory glance at the writings of a few of the mystics is sufficient to dispel the idea. It is therefore possibilities (1), (2) and (3) which need to be taken seriously.

According to Zaehner, it is (3) which is true, since he believes that there are three distinct categories of mystical experience, and that it is quite impossible to interpret them all, or even any two of them, as suggestive of the same truth. They lead, he argues, to quite incompatible beliefs regarding the nature of the divine reality.

Zaehner's three mutually exclusive categories of mysticism are (a) nature mysticism, (b) monistic mysticism, and (c) theistic mysticism. As Zaehner has forcefully argued that these three types of mysticism show that there is no general agreement between mystics, we shall proceed in this chapter, by asking whether the descriptive accounts of mystical states which Zaehner produces in support of his conclusions really serve to warrant those conclusions. If we find that Zaehner's examples, which are supposedly those which most fully highlight the differences between mystical experiences, are not capable of supporting his conclusion, we shall be in a position to look more confidently for evidence of the affirmation of the truth of (2) or (3) in the above list of possibilities. In the course of our

examination, we shall find reason to maintain that what Zaehner calls nature mysticism is not so profound or so properly religious in character, as either of the other two species of mysticism here recognized. It lacks an important characteristic which is common to the other two in decidedly not being the outcome of spiritual labour and effort.

It will be our contention in this chapter that Zaehner's examples do not support his conclusions and that Zaehner's classification of mystical experiences into three distinct and exclusive categories is only made possible by a tendency to superimpose religious doctrines on top of the actual phenomena of mystical experience. If the doctrines of religion were more closely tied to the beliefs which the experiences themselves give rise to, then (we shall see) these doctrines would not diverge as they do.

Zaehner's category of monistic mystical experience is an especially good example of the way in which a category of mysticism is produced by entangling the doctrines of a particular religious standpoint with a form of experience, and then, on the basis of doctrinal differences now taken as the essential outcome of the experience, this category is shown to be incompatible with other categories of mystical experience which have been (falsely) identified with other religious doctrines.

In his discussion of monistic mystical experience Zaehner tells us a good deal about Sankara's Hindu school of Vedanta, with which, we are told, this form of mysticism is mainly associated. According to this school, says Zaehner:

"There is only one reality - Brahman who is identical with the individual soul. The Brahman - soul, quite pointlessly, it seems, imagines both the inner world of ideas and

the external world of objective phenomena, and is deceived by his own imaginings. This condition which is the state of normal human consciousness, is usually described as the state of one 'found'. Release (moksa or mukti) consists in the destruction of the illusion imposed on oneself (the Self!) by oneself and against one's own will (the will of the Self). The state of release, the so-called 'fourth' state (turiya) is absolutely unqualifiable but more akin to dreamless sleep than to anything else: it is equivalent to the eighth and final stage of release in Buddhism in which one pauses 'entirely beyond the stage of neither consciousness nor non-consciousness' and 'attains and abides in the stage of the cessation of perception and feeling'. In such a state, there is no perception of external objects, nor is there any discursive thought, not because one has detached oneself from them as purusa (the soul) does from prakrti (nature) in the Samkhya² system, but because one realizes that they do not exist ... " "Once release is achieved, it is realized that nothing exists except the one, realized as oneself ... " ³

This, it should be observed is an account of the *doctrine* of (Hindu) monism and is not an account of the phenomena of anybody's experience. It is basically a description of the only possible road to salvation left open once the monistic premises have been granted.

After giving this outline of the Vedantic system, Zaehner

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2. The Samkhya system is that analysis of reality which came to be more and more accepted in the classical period of Hinduism. Zaehner tells us that "in the Purusha Upanisad (4.8) the essentials of the system are already present, whereas the Svetasvatara and the Maitri, generally regarded as the last of the Upanisads, are thoroughly permeated by it. Its classical formulation, however, is in the Samkhya-Karika ascribed to one Kapila who may or may not be identical with a sage mentioned in the Svetasvatara Upanisad.

The Samkhya (which means 'enumeration') divides existence into twenty-five categories. Twenty-four of these are evolutes of prakrti or nature, and are subject to modification and change: the twenty-fifth is purusa, the 'person' who is indestructible and not subject to change; she is the soul." (See R.C. Zaehner's Hinduism pp 67-68, O.U.P. 1962).

3. R.C. Zaehner. Mysticism Sacred and Profane, p.143.

proceeds to tell us that the system is incoherent. He argues that any purely monistic system is incoherent, and the very fact that Sankara found it necessary to account for the diversified phenomenal world by the introduction of the concept of maya (illusion) shows up duality in the system. Zaehner writes:

"Starting from the premise which he (Sankara) derives from selected passages of the Upanisads, that reality is One without a second, that the individual soul is identical with that reality, and that all individual souls are therefore the same reality absolutely, he can only account for the phenomenal world by stating that it is maya or illusion, a concept for which Upanisadic authority is singularly poor: and once illusion is admitted the simple monad is shattered."⁴

As well as arguing against the absurdities of monism on logical grounds, Zaehner also claims that there is something very odd about it from the ethical standpoint. Thus he asserts:

"It does much credit to the heart of the ultra-monist Vedantins that they have always been ready to help others towards liberation; it does very little credit to their head, for what logic can there possibly be in seeking to free from illusions a person who, from the point of view of the would be liberator, is, by definition, illusory?"³

Now we may agree with Zaehner in his view that thorough-going monism (as opposed to those types of monism which allow for the Absolute to find its self-expression in a differentiated world of finite creatures) is incoherent, at least insofar as the universe contains any conscious beings. For consciousness must always be consciousness of some other thing, and this is sufficient to introduce diversity.

4. idem.

But just because we may agree with Zaehner that thorough-going monism is an absurd *theory*, it seems very odd to associate with this theory a distinctive type of experience. If monism is really absurd on logical grounds, how can monistic metaphysics provide us with useful concepts for the description or explanation of anybody's experience? Presumably Zaehner does not really think that there is a form of logically absurd experience, which is best described in terms of a logically absurd theory!

It seems that what Zaehner must really have been trying to express though he never succeeds in clearly doing so, was the idea that there is a distinctive type of experience which, though not truly supporting monistic theory, is the sort of experience which *misleads* people into thinking that monism is true. This form of experience would be associated with monism then because, unlike the other forms of experience, it tends to mislead people in that direction.

If this solution is adopted we shall have solved the logical problem of how Zaehner can tie a distinctive category of experience to a logically absurd doctrine. But we have still to decide whether Zaehner is actually right in thinking that there is a distinctive type of mystical experience which has an inherent tendency to mislead the experiencers in the direction of monistic metaphysics. Where, somebody might justifiably ask, do we find descriptions of the sort of experience which Zaehner has in mind?

One obvious place to look, it might be thought, would be in the autobiographical accounts of the mystics who have upheld monistic doctrines. But, according to Zaehner, we will not get very far this way, since the only modern writer worthy of consideration is Sri Ramakrishna who, though technically a non-dualist Vedantin has strong theistic tendencies, and the ancient writings are by and large not autobiographical

or even biographical reports but rather "mystico-magical tracts like the earlier Upanisads, or expositions of mystical doctrines in verse like the late Upanisads and the Bhagavad-Gita". All in all, there seems to be a marked dearth of actual reports of this type of experience.

How then does Zaehner arrive at the view that there is a distinctive type of mysticism with the peculiar tendency to mislead people towards monism? What is the source of his information about the existence of such mystical phenomena?

That Zaehner's source of information can only be the Upanisads (which by his own confession do not consist of reports of the experiences of particular people) is clear when we consider the list of characteristics which Zaehner ascribes to this form of mysticism. It is useful to set out this list in some detail, so as to be in a better position to see whether mystical experience with characteristics of the sort mentioned is best regarded as a distinctive type. (We shall refer henceforth to this type of mysticism as "monistic mysticism" although as we saw earlier, this is strictly inaccurate).

According to Zaehner, there is a distinctive type of mystical experience which involves the following:

(1) A sense of the isolation of the self from the phenomenal world, (which in monistic theory is regarded as illusion), a sense of isolation which is achieved by emptying the mind of all empirical content.

(2) Being in a state which corresponds more closely to deep dreamless sleep than anything else in ordinary consciousness.

(3) A final release in which a person passes beyond consciousness and non-consciousness.

(4) A final stage which is accompanied by the cessation of perception and sensation.

(5) An "emptiness" which is very blissful, in fact supremely blissful.

(6) A state of mind which is the culmination of a number of previous stages.

(7) A state of mind in which the experient feels himself to have passed beyond good and evil, as well as beyond space and time.

Is it true that these characteristics delimit a distinctive type of mysticism? According to Zaehner they do, and this distinctive type of mysticism suggests very different views about the nature of reality than do the other two categories. In particular, Zaehner thinks that this "monistic mysticism" is very much in conflict with theistic mysticism, and he tries to show this by comparing a number of the characteristics mentioned above with the features of theistic mysticism.

Perhaps the most fundamental disagreement, Zaehner claims, between monistic and theistic mysticism is about the monist's claim to be, in the mystical stage, somehow above moral obligation. The monist, as we have seen in our last point to be mentioned above, feels himself to have passed "beyond good and evil". The theist, Zaehner tells us, could never go along with this. Zaehner contrasts theistic and monistic mystical perceptions of moral value in the following way:

"For he, (the monist), is intent on realizing his own soul, or to put it into the terminology we have been using in this chapter, he is intent on realizing his immortal spirit in detachment from his mental frame. This is his bliss, and he is quite convinced that it is the supreme bliss; but so long as he sticks to his monistic view of life and feels that his philosophy is confirmed by his experience, then I do not think that his bliss can be identified with that experienced and described by the Christian and

Muslim mystics (insofar as these remain theist) whose bliss consists rather in the total surrender of the whole personality to a God who is at the same time love."⁵

A number of replies are in order, in respect of Zaehner's comment.

Firstly, we should note that the Upanisads do speak of moral value, and when they do, the sort of moral value spoken of seems to be very close indeed to the Christian idea of love. For example, there is a comparison of the mystical experience with the case of a man who is embraced by a beloved wife. And this corresponds very closely with the Christian image of Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride of Christ. Also Zaehner himself compares what he conceives to be mystical union with God to the union between a man and a woman.

"If man is made in the image of God then it would be natural that God's love would be reflected in human love, that the love of man for woman should reflect the love of God for the soul." ⁶

There are also passages in the Upanisads which describe the mystical state in terms of apprehending the Supreme Good⁷ and even passages which describe this awareness as being in a state of pure love. Passages such as these ought to be enough to make us look again at Zaehner's interpretation of the Upanisadic statements that the mystic is beyond good and evil.

5. *idem.*

6. *ibid.* p.151.

7. See especially the Isa Upanisad.

Secondly, it would be hard to know what the bliss of the Upanisadic supreme state could be were it not the bliss of an experience infused with moral worth. Certainly it cannot be sensual bliss; Hinduism and Buddhism are both adamant in their condemnation of dependence on the senses which to them are the root of all desire and, - since desire is normally unfulfilled - of all suffering.

Thirdly, Zaehner himself admits that Vedantin monists have not been led by their experiences to live amoral lives, and it would be very strange if this had nothing at all to do with those experiences which they themselves regard as supremely important.

In view of these considerations it seems most plausible to say that in the mystical states described in the Upanisads the mystic is only beyond good and evil in the sense of having no need for rules of conduct or appeals to moral authority. At this level one's inclinations are permeated with and transformed by the power of love, and rules and regulations appear ridiculous and superfluous. Because the terms good and evil are very often associated with moral injunctions, which presuppose a cleavage between duty and inclination, it is necessary sometimes for the Upanisads to speak of the mystic being beyond good and evil.

We have now seen that Zaehner fails to show that "monistic" mysticism is radically different from theistic mysticism, on the grounds of their having very different attitudes to moral value.

But there are other points at which they may differ. Another point at which Zaehner claims they do differ is in their attitudes towards the isolation of the self from the phenomenal world. The isolation and state of emptiness which characterises monistic mystical experience, Zaehner argues, can never characterise genuine theistic mystical experience.

"Monism, in practice, means nothing more than the sort of emptiness or detachment from the world which may, if one is rightly motivated, make possible union with God. But delectable though this state obviously is, it is not a Beatific Vision, nor is it in any sense a union with God, it is only the purification of the Vessel which can, if it will, be filled with God. Emptiness is the prelude to Holiness."⁸

But it is also possible, says Zaehner, that such emptiness might *not* be a prelude to holiness, and to remain in the state of "natural rest" without the impulse of love (and he thinks there can be no love in such a state) may lead to disastrous consequences.

"To rest in this emptiness is dangerous, for this is a house swept and garnished, and though it is possible that God may enter in if the furniture is fair, it is equally likely that the proverbial seven devils will rush in if either the remaining furniture is foul, or if there is no furniture at all."⁸

We may agree with Zaehner that an interpretation of isolation and emptiness based on monistic metaphysics would be of the nature which he describes. However, if we dispense with monistic metaphysics, and look to the descriptions of what a subject of mystical experience will actually experience, contained in documents such as the Upanisads, we find that although they speak of the mind's isolation from the phenomenal world through the emptying of its normal content, this is only because this normal content comes to be replaced by content *of a totally different kind*. There is then isolation from the world of surface appearances, but not from the world as such. This is often expressed in paradoxical language, but careful examination makes it quite clear that the emptiness which mystics describe is understood by

8. *ibid.* p.173.

them not as emptiness pure and simple, but rather as a sort of fullness-in-emptiness. In the Isa Upanisad, for example, we read:

"That One, the Self, though never stirring,
is swifter than thought ...
Though standing still, it overtakes those
who are running ... it stirs, and it stires
not." ⁹

There are many other passages which could be quoted which are suggestive of this fullness-in-emptiness. But what is most telling against Zaehner's view of the soul's isolation through emptiness, is the set of very positive descriptions given of Brahman in the Upanisads. The Kena Upanisad teaches that all power comes from Brahman, the Mundaka Upanisad teaches that he is the source of all goodness, and the Svetasvatara Upanisad teaches that he is the creator of the world. In a mystical encounter with a Being as determinate as this, one could hardly be said to have a totally empty consciousness.

Many of the passages in the writings which speak of the Void or Emptiness which is experienced in a mystical encounter, tell us a good deal about the type of emptiness involved. For example, in the following passage¹⁰ *which is actually quoted by Zaehner in support of his own view of emptiness*, it is fairly clear that the emptiness referred to is of a very specific sort, that is, the soul is not wholly empty, but empty of one particular type of content.

9. Isa Upanisad 4 and 5.

10. This passage is not from the Upanisads but that does not matter, since similar ones may be found there, and in any case this passage is quoted by Zaehner as being descriptive of monistic mysticism.

"It is then, when one resorts to emptiness, characterized as blissful and as the disappearing of all discursive ideas, that all discursive ideas, which are a net of thought construction, disappear. When discursive ideas have disappeared discrimination comes to rest, and with it all Karma and defilement, and all kinds of rebirth. Hence one calls emptiness Nirvana, and it brings to rest all discursive ideas." 11

The emptiness spoken of in this passage then, refers to the absence of discursive ideas, not to an absolute emptiness. Zaehner has failed to show that there is a type of mystical experience which is characterised by absolute isolation and emptiness of the soul such as misleads people to adopt a belief in (or to find a confirmation of their belief in) thorough-going monism, and he has failed to do this, even from his own specially selected examples. If even Zaehner, with all his knowledge and scholarship, cannot find convincing examples of experiences which mislead people into monistic metaphysics, then the deep suspicion is that there are none.

Because Zaehner misunderstands the nature of the isolation and emptiness of the soul or self as they occur in monistic mystical experience, he is unable to see that these phenomena, rightly understood, also occur in theistic mystical experience. We shall now examine some of the correspondences and similarities between monistic and theistic mystical experiences. And here we must stress one important correspondence between the situations of the two kinds of mystics. Both alike come to their experiences only after a sometimes long and always rigorous course of discipline and religious preparation.

11. From *Candrakirti, Prasanna pada*, quoted by E. Conze, Buddhist Texts through the Ages, pp 168-169.

Zaehner chooses Jan van Ruysbroeck as a theistic mystic whose writings serve to show up the incompatibility between the monistic experience of isolation and emptiness and the union with God which he claims characterizes theistic mystical experience. Zaehner quotes Ruysbroeck in an attempt to show that the latter regards mystical states which involve isolation and emptiness as deeply unsatisfactory:

"When a man possesses this rest in emptiness, and when the impulse of love seems to him to be a hindrance, so in resting he remains within himself, and lives contrary to the first manner which unites man with God; and this is the beginning of all spiritual error." 12

Ruysbroeck himself may have intended his words as a criticism of the monists' experience of emptiness. But if so, it is probable that he too misunderstood the nature of the monists' emptiness, and thus failed to see how close was their experience to his own. If we look closely at the passage quoted by Zaehner we can see that Ruysbroeck is not saying that *any* state of emptiness is reprehensible but rather that *without love* it is impossible to attain the highest mystical state. And if we look at Ruysbroeck's descriptions of his own experience, it is apparent that he exhibits distinct tendencies towards just that sort of emptiness which, according to Zaehner, he repudiates. Thus Ruysbroeck writes:

"The God-seeing man ... can always enter, naked and unencumbered with images, into the inmost part of his spirit. There he finds revealed an Eternal Light ... If (his spirit) is undifferentiated and without

12. Quoted by Zaehner from Blessed Jan van Ruysbroeck - The Spiritual Espousals translated by Eric Colledge.

distinction, and therefore it feels nothing but the unity." 13

Or again:

"Such enlightened men are, with a free spirit, lifted above reason into a bare and imageless vision, wherein lives the eternal indrawing summons of the Divine Unity." 14

From passages like these it can be clearly seen that the similarities between Ruysbroeck's theistic mystical experiences and the descriptions of mystical states which are found in documents like the Upanisads are much more important than are the differences. Yet Ruysbroeck was chosen by Zaehner specifically as a good example of a theistic mystic whose mystical experiences supposedly highlight the differences between theistic and monistic mysticism. Thus Zaehner's case for a total divorce between monistic and theistic mysticism is weakened to the point of beginning to totally break down. The fact that emptiness and isolation takes the form which it does (that is, it is emptiness in one sense but fullness in another) explains why theistic mystics speak of union with God in a sense which they clearly do not regard as involving the coming together of two quite distinct entities. Thus, even mystics like St. Teresa, whose intellectual orientation was in no way towards deep metaphysical speculation, describe an experience which involves the total interpenetration of God and man. St. Teresa's imagery is as anthropomorphic as it could be, but through this imagery we can still see that the idea that she

13. From Jan van Ruysbroeck's *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage. The Book of the Supreme Truth, the Sparkling Stone.* Translated by C.A. Wynschenk. Quoted by W.T. Stace in *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp 94-95.

14. *idem.*

is trying to convey is that of being a finite creature permeated with the Infinite. Thus she asserts speaking of how God's love once appeared to her in the form of an angel:

"In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul then content with anything but God." 15

St. Teresa found it difficult to express herself in less anthropomorphic terms than she does here, but behind these terms is an idea about the permeation of the finite by the Infinite to be found almost always in the writings of the so-called monistic mystics. Theistic mysticism is found, once again, not to be in conflict with monistic.

The conflict between monism and theism, which is admittedly a real one, has little to do with the claims of the mystics of these two major traditions. It has rather more to do with a theological tendency in the former to emphasize the immanence of God, and a tendency of the latter to emphasize his transcendence. The mystics of both traditions have, on the whole, wanted to say, on the basis of their religious experiences that God is *both* immanent and transcendent.

Thus if one considers the experiences of mystics rather than the theology of the religions to which those mystics adhere, one finds that there is not a division between the ways in which God is

15. Quoted from The Life of St. Teresa (Penguin Books) by Ben-Ami Scharfstein in Mystical Experience. (Oxford. B. Blackwell) p.6.

(ostensibly) experienced, corresponding to the division between the ways in which he is understood in theology.

We have now discussed the most important points at which theistic and monistic mysticism are alleged to differ. We have also seen that Zaehner is not justified in coming to the conclusions which he does. However, it is important to note that there is no fundamental difference in the phenomena experienced by theistic and monistic mystics in respect of those other (less significant) features which we have not yet specifically discussed.

It is clear that theistic and monisticism are in agreement, not only about isolation, emptiness, and the experience of value, but also on the other features of the mystical experience.

For example, the state of deep dreamless sleep which we earlier claimed was typical of the monist's experience, is, correctly understood, characteristic of the theist's experience also. We must remember that although deep dreamless sleep was held to be the nearest that ordinary experience comes to the mystical state, mystical experience was not identified with it. The aim of saying that there is a sort of analogy between the two is surely, for the monist, to point out just how different from the mystical consciousness is the state of ordinary consciousness. And how close this comes to the theists' repeated assertion that the experience which they seek to describe is ineffable! In deep dreamless sleep there is an absence of empirical content, including that content which is the conscious awareness of the barriers of selfhood, such as is found in the mystical experience of theists and monists. There is, as in mysticism, a total absence of desire and anxiety. But in this dissolution of the old self, the self is not totally destroyed. It is rather reduced to what Eckhart calls "one little point", and finds its essential nature as an expression

of the Divine Unity.

In both theistic and monistic mysticism the finite individual experiences himself as being absorbed into the being of God, and thereby transmuted into an expression of the Infinite. And this has the further consequence that the mystics (of both traditions) feel themselves to have passed, in their experiences, beyond space and time.

We have now arrived at the end of our comparison between monistic and theistic mysticism. It was said earlier in this chapter that we would proceed by comparing the religious experiences of those who had made an effort to educate themselves in spiritual matters, without prejudging what counts as a genuine spiritual education. In our comparison of mystical experience as it is attributable to monists with that which is ascribable to theists, we have taken two traditions which are, in their theological perspectives sufficiently opposed to have as widely different ideas about what counts as valid spiritual endeavour as any pair of religious traditions. But despite the differences in form which spiritual education takes in the two traditions, the awareness which results from this education (at least when this awareness is heightened to the degree of mystical experience) is strikingly similar in the two traditions. It seems therefore that when an understanding of spiritual matters is sincerely sought, and a great deal of effort is put into the seeking, then despite the precise methods which the seeker has used in his attempt to educate himself in these things, and despite the theological assumptions of his own tradition, it is most unlikely that he will come to an experiential understanding of God which differs in fundamental ways from the understanding of others who have claimed to experience God.

Having established that monistic and theistic mysticism are similar to each other in all the fundamental respects, we have now to

enquire whether there are any other forms of intensified religious experience in which the phenomena experienced are different from those experienced by monistic and theistic mystics.

According to Zaehner, there is at least one other form of mysticism (besides monistic and theistic) which is distinctive and unlike any other form. This is what he calls "nature mysticism". We shall now examine this type of mysticism.

Zaehner is at pains to sketch the phenomenology of nature mysticism, to show that it differs sharply from the other forms. It is possible to pick out, from what Zaehner says on the subject, a number of qualities which he regards as characterizing what he calls the pan-en-henic experience.

Firstly, in this type of mystical experience, the experient feels himself to be dissolved into the phenomenal world. The walls of self-identity fall away, but one is aware of oneself as a being who is not ultimately distinct from the surrounding world. A good example of this type of experience is given by Aldous Huxley in The Doors of Perception in which he reports that under the influence of mescaline he "became" the bamboo chair legs at which he had been gazing.

Secondly, in nature mysticism one feels that one "owns" the Infinite, a feeling somewhat akin to the feeling of awe and wonder which may be felt in gazing at a scene of great natural beauty.

Thirdly, there is a feeling of time ceasing to matter, a sense of eternity.

Fourthly, this state is discontinuous with ordinary consciousness, and often comes upon people suddenly and unexpectedly.

Fifthly, there is the feeling that matter is "ennobled and sanctified by spirit".

Sixthly, there is a feeling that opposing forces are reconciled, that (seeming) opposites melt into unity.

Seventhly, the experience is accompanied by the metaphysical notion that the nobler and better is always ultimately victorious, by soaking up and absorbing its opposite into itself.

Eighthly and finally, there is in nature mysticism an experience of elation which seems to bear a close relation to the manic phase of the manic-depressive psychosis.

From this outline of the fundamental characteristics of nature mysticism, it seems clear that this phenomenon is descriptively very different from theistic and monistic mysticism. But we should notice at once that nature mysticism does not meet our "spiritual effort" criterion, and so strictly should not have been selected for consideration in the first place. The monistic and theistic experiences which we discussed previously are characteristically the outcome of a long and arduous struggle to come to an understanding of spiritual truth, but this experience of nature mysticism comes upon people who have in no way prepared themselves.

It is therefore not surprising that this experience is descriptively different from those experiences undergone by people who have subjected themselves to lengthy preparation and training. Nor does it mean that there is disagreement about what the nature of spiritual reality is like among the (relevant) subjects of a religious mystical experience. We had to have criteria for deciding whose experiences should be compared with whose, and our criteria were such as to exclude the range of intense experiences into which nature mysticism falls.

Whatever nature mysticism were found to be like, it would not count against the hypothesis that those who have sincerely sought

spiritual truth in various religious traditions and cultures have tended to have experiences - ostensibly of God, which are remarkably similar to each other. But even if we did have to take nature mysticism seriously, its descriptive features are not, in any case, such as to suggest that spiritual reality as perceived by the nature mystics is utterly different from that which is suggested by monistic and theistic mystical experience. It is most plausibly interpreted as a more limited insight into the same transcendent Being that lies at the root of monistic and theistic experience.

The nature mystics do not in their experiences identify the ordinary finite world with God, as Zaehner seems to think. It is rather that, in this form of experience, the phenomenal world is transformed into an expression of a deep underlying unifying principle. It is experienced as a manifestation, an externalization, of God. The difference between nature mysticism and the mysticism previously discussed seems to be best accounted for by saying that in the deeper mysticism of isolation and emptiness one makes contact with the Infinite source of the differentiated finite world, whereas in nature mysticism one makes contact with the externalized differentiated world, recognized as the work of this source. The world of nature is seen, in this experience, as a manifestation of the unifying work of the Absolute, but not as the unifying principle itself. Thus William James speaks of his deepest experiences of the phenomenal world in the following way:

"It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they as contrasted species belong to one and the same genus, but one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposite into itself. This is a dark saying, I know, when expressed in terms of common logic,

but I cannot wholly escape from its authority." 16

Nature mysticism, although not strictly an (ostensible) experience of God himself which is the outcome of a spiritual education, nonetheless serves to add support to the insights of monistic and theistic mystics.

So far, the evidence which we have considered points to the conclusion that mystical experiences are sufficiently similar or complementary to suggest that they could well be apprehensions of the same reality. Indeed, it seems that the deepest mystical experiences display a striking uniformity, and that this uniformity is broken only when we begin to consider the experiences of those who have had little or no preliminary spiritual education and whose effort in spiritual matters is minimal.

Thus, when William James tells us in his famous book¹⁷ of the diversity of religious experience, we find on close inspection that his "Varieties" have been produced by uncritically including within religious experience many forms of experience which are not the outcome of deliberate spiritual struggle and effort. Indeed, if we take our spiritual effort criterion seriously, we may dismiss nearly everything James tells us about the varieties of religious experience. For as James proceeds with his discussion of the varieties of (supposedly) religious experience, it becomes fairly clear that he only manages to produce a number of distinct varieties because he allows into his survey a number of forms of experience whose claim to be regarded as

16. William James. Varieties of Religious Experience pp 388-389.

17. Varieties of Religious Experience.

religious is in reality highly dubious. Where James discusses those experiences which are undergone by people in the course of a serious spiritual search which the experiencers themselves claim to be genuine encounters with God, those experiences display a strong similarity with the monistic and theistic mystical experiences discussed earlier.

It would of course be an impossible task to catalogue for the purposes of comparison the whole gamut of allegedly religious experiences which have occurred, even over a relatively short period of history. That is why we have had to have recourse to the procedure of examining those modes of experience which have been presented by writers such as Zaehner for the purpose of showing their diversity. The point of adapting this procedure was because if, even when we look at those experiences which are chosen specifically to highlight the differences between forms of religious experience, we still find that there is a striking uniformity among all the relevant experiences, then the chances are high (unless, as Broad says, there is some independent reason to think otherwise) that the subjects of these experiences have had a genuine cognitive insight into the same transcendent reality.

Our investigations have revealed that there is indeed a striking uniformity between the mystical experiences of those who have adhered to various religions and lived in very different cultures, a similarity which is strongly suggestive of the experiences being insights into a commonly perceived reality. Thus we now have the result of one of the relevant tests of religious assertions (the third) mentioned in the second chapter.

The fact that we have seen that mystical experiences are very similar to each other in the various ages and cultures means that the probability of their being insights into a genuine reality is greatly increased. But of course it does not *prove* that they are genuine

cognitive insights. There is such a thing as mass hallucination, and certain drugs can produce experiences which are falsely taken to be cognitive and which are strikingly similar for everybody who takes them¹⁸. How do we know then that religious experiences are not similar to each other in the same way that the individual experiences of mass hallucination are?

The answer is that we cannot provide a water-tight guarantee, but if we can see no specific reason to think that religious experiences are illusory, and if their cognitive validity is confirmed by our other "tests"¹⁹ then it is reasonable to conclude that it is highly probable that religious experiences represent genuine insights.

In this chapter, we have drawn our conclusions from the starting-point of an examination of the phenomena observed or reported by some people and these constitute rather special and unusual experiences. But it is important to remember that these special experiences are not supposed to tell us only about a world which is totally divorced from the world of ordinary experience; they rather claim to tell us the deepest truth about that world.

Therefore, it is appropriate to consider whether, if we take as our starting point ordinary experience, and reflect deeply upon it, we shall come to the same conclusions that others have arrived at by way of their extraordinary experiences. If we find that justifiable metaphysical argumentation, which takes as its starting point the phenomenal world, leads to the conclusion that we can gain a deeper understanding

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18. However, it should be remembered that similar religious experiences are produced through different types of spiritual endeavour, and this makes it less likely that religious experiences are on a par with the experiences produced by drugs.
19. That is, those tests or checking procedures of religious assertions which were outlined in our second chapter.

of the nature and unity of our experience if we postulate a divine reality, then the notion that religious experiences yield genuine cognitive insights is greatly supported.

We shall therefore, in the chapters which follow, attempt to determine what metaphysics can tell us, if anything, about the nature of spiritual reality.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POSSIBILITY OF METAPHYSICS

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Can the deliverances of religious experience, taken as valid insights into something transcending subjective experience, be corroborated by those conclusions which arise from the deepest possible reflections on the nature and unity of our experience as a whole? We raised this question in Chapter Two; it was our first "test" for determining the probable validity of an individual's religious experience. To answer it, to find out whether a transcendent divine Being such as the mystics claim to have encountered serves to make the world and our total experience of that world more intelligible, we need to ask questions about the precondition of human experience, in all its richness and fullness. And that is to say that we need to engage in metaphysics.¹

However, before we can begin our metaphysical enquiries, we are brought to an abrupt halt by the large number of philosophers who have put forward objections to the very enterprise of speculative metaphysics. The objections are very different from the type of attack which might be levelled against a particular metaphysical system, for example that

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1. Since, in this chapter we shall be concerned with the capability of metaphysics to lend support for specifically religious conclusions, it is inevitable that we shall be discussing the possibility of (what has been called) speculative, transcendent or transcendental metaphysics. When the term metaphysics is used in this chapter without further qualification it should be also borne in mind that we shall, in the course of this chapter, find reason to reject a sharp division between transcendent and descriptive metaphysics.

of Bosanquet or Hegel. For they are concerned, not with disproving the results of particular metaphysical enquiries, but rather with establishing that a whole method of enquiry, a whole way of approaching philosophy, is entirely misguided.

This view, that the whole enterprise of metaphysics must be discarded "en masse" is a view often associated with the logical positivists. But we saw, in our introductory chapter, that their old tool for making metaphysical and religious statements redundant, the verification principle, has now itself been made redundant. However, although the verification principle is no longer accepted, at least not in its original form, still many objections to the possibility of metaphysics are put forward which seem to have their deepest roots in the epistemological theories of Hume, Kant, and Wittgenstein².

The most obvious reaction to these attempts to exclude metaphysics "en masse" is to say with A.E. Taylor - "You can never tell till you try".³ That is to say, the only refutation of the possibility of metaphysics would be a refutation of every metaphysical theory one by one, there can be no general refutation of metaphysics for all time.

These "a priori" objections to the possibility of metaphysics seem initially to reflect that very sloppiness of thought and lack of attention to detail which the metaphysicians have themselves so often been accused of. However, underlying the critics' objections is the assumption that metaphysics, taken as a whole, represents a way of

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2. There is also an attack on metaphysics from the existentialist tradition, associated with such continental philosophers as S. Kierkegaard and J.P. Sartre. However, the critique from this standpoint has had relatively little impact on British philosophy.
 3. Elements of Metaphysics, p.8 (Methuen & Co.Ltd. 1903 edition 7).

trying to understand the world which is distinctive enough and unified enough for all metaphysical theories to be, despite the variation between particular metaphysical systems, misguided in the same way. We are not justified in dismissing this assumption, as Taylor seems to do, without examination. Metaphysics might correctly be ruled out "in toto" if we discover it to be a distinctive method of enquiry characterized by some major defect.

What is Metaphysics?

In the introduction to Appearance and Reality, F.H. Bradley wrote:

"We may agree, perhaps to understand by metaphysics an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance, or the study of first principles or ultimate truths, or again the effort to comprehend the universe, not simply piecemeal or by fragments, but somehow as a whole." ⁴

Most philosophers would probably agree that Bradley's remark is a fairly good description of metaphysics as it has been traditionally conceived, and of what is now called transcendent, or speculative metaphysics. It is metaphysics in Bradley's sense which is nearly always being attacked when philosophers say that it (i.e. metaphysics) is impossible.

Bradley's attempt to know reality "somehow as a whole" is regarded as an example of transcendent metaphysics because it is supposed to involve speculation which transcends experience in that its conclusion, according to the critics, has no grounding in experience and

4. Appearance and Reality, p.1 (Oxford University Press 1930).

cannot be supported by empirical phenomena. Any philosophy which produces conclusions about such things as God, the soul, substance, free will, and the unity of reality is thought by such critics to be paradigmatic of the sort of philosophy which indulges in illegitimate metaphysical speculation.

Now if it were true that any attempt to know reality "somehow as a whole" must inevitably lead to speculation freeing itself from all reference to evidence or experience, then speculative metaphysics of the sort which arrives at conclusions about God, the soul etc. would certainly have to be prohibited. But is speculative metaphysics really like this? We would be begging the question to say that it must be, just because it arrives at a certain type of conclusion. If speculative metaphysics is to be rejected, its method of argument must be shown to be transcendent in the sense of making no reference to experience.

In recent years, it has become commonplace for a large number of philosophers to counterpose to (what they call) transcendent metaphysics, a metaphysics which is purely descriptive or immanent. The former is alleged to be illegitimate, the latter is thought to be legitimate. The late Cambridge philosopher, A.C. Ewing, describes this division thus:

"Metaphysics is not such a disreputable subject as it was thirty or forty years ago, but a sharp distinction is made between immanent metaphysics which makes a system of what is known to us in our ordinary experience and of the concepts we need to organize it, and transcendent metaphysics which goes beyond this." ⁵

5. Value and Reality, p.24 (George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1973)

Although philosophy which produces conclusions about God or Absolute spirit etc. is nearly always thought to belong firmly to the transcendent side of this division, it is too often forgotten that metaphysicians have nearly always arrived at these through an attempt to discover the basic concepts we need in order to make a system of our ordinary experience, that is, through an attempt at descriptive metaphysics.

Descriptive and transcendent metaphysics coalesce if the very concepts we need to make a system of our ordinary experience happen to correspond to the concepts usually associated with transcendent metaphysics. And this possibility cannot be rejected a priori, for that would be to presuppose without argument that transcendent concepts cannot be useful in describing human experience. As Ewing puts it:

" ... suppose human experience itself when adequately studied drives us by its inherent nature to go beyond itself, as the realist holds is the case with sense-perception, which can only be explained by physical things that are not themselves experiences but exist quite independently of the human mind. The possibility of this cannot be dismissed a priori. Nor can the claim of the religious man who likewise holds that our experience leads us beyond ourselves, though in quite a different way, pointing to God, or being unintelligible without God." ⁶

Speculative metaphysics then does not proceed by ignoring human experience or by attempting to deduce matters of fact by means of a priori reason. Its procedure is really no different from that of descriptive metaphysics. If some metaphysical thinkers have used concepts which are transcendent insofar as they are useless for helping us to explain our experience, then these errors are attributable

6. idem.

to particular metaphysical systems; they are not a feature of speculative metaphysics as such.

The argument that metaphysics is impossible because it pays no attention to experience we may declare to be false without further consideration. We have seen that this view is based on a total misconception of the nature of metaphysics. However, an opponent of metaphysics might concede that metaphysicians do make reference to human experience, but claim that metaphysicians universally misrepresent and misunderstand the nature of that experience. Concepts like God and the soul, he might argue, do arise from experience if experience is understood in a certain way. But he might add, precisely the mistake of all speculative metaphysics is that it does understand experience in the way it does, when it has no justification for doing so. The argument about the possibility of metaphysics would then turn on the validity of the view of experience which metaphysicians operate with. We need therefore to ask which conception of experience gives rise to metaphysics, and whether that conception is warranted.

The Genesis of Metaphysics

In his major metaphysical work, A.E. Taylor described the origin of metaphysics as follows:

"So long as our various direct perceptions are not felt to conflict with one another, we readily accept them all as equally real and valid, and no question arises as to their relative truth and falsehood. Were all our perceptions of this kind, there would be no need for the correction, by subsequent reflection, of our first immediate impressions about the nature of ourselves and the world, error would be a term of no meaning for us, and science would have no existence. But when two immediate perceptions equally authenticated by ourselves stand in direct conflict with one

another, we cannot without doing violence to the fundamental law of rational thinking regard both as equally and in the same sense true." ⁷

Metaphysics arises for Taylor because our immediate impressions of things do not always hang together harmoniously, yet we must seek to avoid contradiction in our thought if we are to find the world we experience intelligible. When rival perceptions conflict, and seem to tell us contradictory things about the nature of the world, metaphysics attempts to discover that "whole" which is the truth behind and the explanation of such (apparently) contradictory perceptions. ⁸

Radical empiricist philosophers like Comte and Mill together with their (less radical) empiricist followers have consistently refused to recognize that we can have conflicting perceptions (unless we be suffering from outright delusion, as in hallucination) in our most basic levels of experience. And they refused to recognize this, it seems, because to them, the only alternative to formal contradiction was non-contradiction. They perceived, quite correctly, that we cannot have two conflicting perceptions together constituting an experience of it raining and not raining in the same place at the same time, but concluded from this that experience contains no conflicting perceptions of any kind. ⁹

7. Elements of Metaphysics, p.2-3 (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1903. Edition 7.)

8. Here we use the term 'perceptions' in the sense in which it seems to have been meant by Taylor; that is, to refer to ways of perceiving reality, as opposed to the narrower sense in which it refers to immediate sense impressions.

9. See Gottfried Martin - General Metaphysics - Its Problems and Method (Allen & Unwin 1961) for a fuller treatment of the radical empiricists' attack on speculative metaphysics.

The type of conflicting perceptions upon which metaphysics is based is not one which issues in formal contradiction. Taylor perhaps does not make clear enough what he means by "conflicting perceptions" and he does at times write almost as if he believes that something akin to formal contradiction is a feature of our experience at its primitive levels. However, a careful reading of Taylor's writings reveals that when he speaks of conflicting perceptions he has in mind something more like equally plausible but conflicting ways of apprehending, or, at a very elementary level, interpreting the world. He does not believe that metaphysics exists as a cure for any schizophrenic tendency we might have to affirm and deny the same proposition, as a result of two strange contradictory perceptions.

Once we understand the true nature of the contradictoriness which Taylor and others claim to be inherent in human experience, it becomes clear that what they have in mind is a type of tension which is readily identifiable as an important aspect of our experience at its more primitive levels. J.N. Findlay makes this considerably clearer than Taylor, when he speaks of and gives examples of the sort of contradictoriness which resides in (what he calls) our "natural view" of the world. Speaking of our tendency to regard the concepts of space and time in each of two conflicting ways, Findlay writes:

"It seems part of the idea of body, on the one hand, to demand a space and time that are quite void and neutral, and this from a point of view that is truly and purely bodily, one which states the central claims that the idea of body involves, rather than its half-hearted reservations and implications. Space and time are from this point of view merely loose containers of bodies, which leave all states and changes open without dictating their course, which bring things together and make mutual influence possible, without necessitating it at any point. But when deeply reflected upon, void neutral space and time

show themselves up as not being truly self-sustaining, as being no more than a foil to bodies and bodiliness, as organically related to body and as shown in bodily behaviour and pattern and inseparable from these last. To enter into this new point of view is to view body in a manner which demotes it from its independence, its pure bodiliness, it becomes as dependent upon its foil and as moulded by its foil's permanent structure as that structure depends on it. We are introduced to the possibility of queer spaces which are as positive in their nature as the bodies which occupy them, which in a sense decide what forms bodies may take and where they may go, though it is in bodily manifestation that their deciding influence is made known. We are introduced to the possibility of times geared to particular bodies and regions, and to what can be brought to bear on them and in a sense determining bodies and their states revealed only in the latter." 10

Another good example of the sort of contradictoriness which resides in our "natural view" of the world is to be found in the concept of selfhood. We are, on the one hand, tempted to think of the essential self as mental and immaterial; on the other hand, when we look for this substantial self we find it elusive, and are thus tempted to regard the self as a set of behavioural dispositions.

The task of metaphysics is to postulate a context or "whole" wherein the contradictions which inhere in our "natural view" of the world are both explained and dissolved. If experience really does contain such contradictoriness, then metaphysics is both possible and necessary. It is necessary, not in a formal sense, but in the sense that the world would not be wholly intelligible without it.

Metaphysicians usually go about their task by postulating more and more adequate wholes to explain and dissolve more and more "natural

10. J.N. Findlay. The Discipline of the Cave, p.143 (George Allen & Unwin. 1966).

view" contradictions, and the final whole within which they are all dissolved and explained is that which has usually been called the Concrete Universal. Metaphysics could well be described as the search for this Universal. Hegel, for all his obscurities, saw and expressed this clearly, and although there have been many ideas about the precise nature of the Concrete Universal, the notion that (speculative) metaphysics is the search for the Concrete Universal has never been abandoned.¹¹

It is clear now that a philosopher who recognizes a tremendous depth, richness, and complexity in human experience of the world is more likely to find within it levels which present us with the contradictoriness which gives rise to metaphysics, than a philosopher who accepts a more reductionist account. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to finally *prove* that the non-reductionist is right and the reductionist is wrong. This is because anything to which a non-reductionist might point as an element which ought to be included in an adequate account of human experience will not have its existence denied by the reductionist, but will simply be reinterpreted in the reductionist's categories. Thus a reductionist would not deny that we have such a thing as conscious awareness, he would simply say that the meaning of this affirmation is to be located in the fact that we can observe other peoples' behaviour. It is because we cannot finally

11. The various dualisms with which western philosophy has concerned itself may well be regarded as manifestations of the contradictoriness which is inherent in our 'natural view' of the world. For example, the tendency to oscillate between seeing human actions first as free and then as causally determined, between regarding a thing with properties first as a substance with properties and second as a mere congeries of properties, provides us with illustrations of the mode of contradictoriness which metaphysical speculation has usually set out to overcome.

refute reductionist accounts of experience, that it is always possible for philosophers to insist, without logical absurdity, that metaphysics is redundant. The only "refutation" of a view of experience which is narrow enough to avoid the need for metaphysics is the felt awareness of those who are sensitive enough to the richness of experience to be left with a sense of unease with such reductionist accounts.

"Metaphysics" Daly writes, "begins with the recognition that there is mystery in being and in experience. But it is not merely the recognition of mystery. Metaphysics cannot end until it has rendered such reason of that mystery that it shall not become instead absurdity."¹²

It seems strange indeed to seek to avoid metaphysics, considering the view of experience and the world with which we are left when we attempt to do without it. It may not lead to formal contradiction to dispense with metaphysics, but if a metaphysical approach can render being and experience more intelligible, then only the strongest epistemological reasons should prevent us from adopting it.

We have already discussed some of the general epistemological arguments against metaphysics, but have found them to be wanting. In view of the difficulties presented by the non-metaphysical views of experience, it may well seem strange so many philosophers have continued to maintain that experience is such that it cannot justify metaphysics. Perhaps, since they insist on it in the face of obvious

12. C.B. Daly, Prospect for Metaphysics (ed. I Ramsey) Essay entitled: Metaphysics and the Limits of Language (1961 Allen and Unwin) p.204.

H.D. Lewis writes convincingly about the way in which non-metaphysical reductionist accounts of aspects of human life and experience inevitably fail to render such reason of their mystery as to save them from absurdity. Thus he writes: "In my actual writing more is involved than the physical movement, and this movement is not merely of a dispositional kind ... It (*this more*) is my part, and to my mind, the essential part, of what goes on and my continuous purposing to do it. This cannot be dissolved into dispositional attitudes." The Elusive Mind, p.51 (1969 Allen & Unwin Ltd.).

difficulties, these philosophers have had some stronger reasons for their claims. We shall therefore, in the sections which follow, turn to the detailed arguments of the three major critics of metaphysics mentioned earlier, that is of Hume, Kant and Wittgenstein.

Hume's Criticisms of Metaphysics

Hume's critique of the possibility of metaphysics was among the first of the famous general attacks on metaphysics and set the tone for all the later ones. It is of course true that before Hume particular metaphysical systems had been criticized, and severely. We need only to remember the much maligned Spinoza to assure ourselves of this. But the idea which was suddenly introduced into western philosophy that the whole enterprise of metaphysics was misguided was something totally new. This type of attack on metaphysics was rooted in a strong awareness of the limitations of the powers of human reason. As Penelhum points out, prior to the time of Hume, the successes of the natural sciences had led to an increase, not a decrease in respect for the powers of human reason.¹³ But Hume and others like him noticed that such successes relied heavily upon experimentation and observation, and that in this area the best results are obtained when the mind does not make postulations which are not warranted by the data. Scientific knowledge, as knowledge which can be established by observation and experiment, is of course more readily assented to, than are the knowledge claims which arise as the outcome of speculative philosophy. So impressed by this were the empiricist philosophers that it came to be held that only knowledge which was established by the methods of the natural sciences

13. See Religion and Rationality, p.93 ff (1971 Random House Inc.)

was really knowledge at all, and metaphysical speculation came to be regarded as an attempt to make claims for which there is no basis in experience. It was further held that because there is no warrant in experience for metaphysical assertions, there are no criteria for deciding which ones are true and precisely this accounts for centuries of disagreement between speculative philosophers of differing schools.

According to Hume, all knowledge can be divided into two distinct classes, the first being concerned with relations of ideas and the other being concerned with matters of fact. Hume insisted that, for the establishment of matters of fact, we may appeal to experience only. There can be no a priori demonstration of factual statements. This view of human knowledge was put forward by Hume, in connection with the discussion about the possibility of proving the existence of God, in the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. Thus Cleanthes is made to remark:

"I shall begin by observing that there is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by argument a priori. Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no Being whose existence is demonstrable. I propose this argument as entirely decisive and am willing to rest the whole controversy upon it." 14

The argument is aimed at showing that if we cannot experience God then it is absurd to suppose that we can, as it were, argue him into existence. Reason is concerned with relations between ideas, and

14. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p.77 (Bobbs-Merril Co. Inc. 1970).

we can have no idea of anything without first having had an experience of it. Or, in Hume's language, to have an idea of something we must first have had a corresponding impression. Human reason can only organize what has been "given" in experience, and when it tries to do more, as Hume thinks it does in natural theology and metaphysics, it runs amuck. It is clear then that Hume regards all metaphysics and natural theology as attempts to demonstrate matters of fact a priori. What has already been said about the nature of metaphysics suggests that, in the case of metaphysics at least, this view is not justified. However, further argument against Hume may be adduced.

The most obvious objection to Hume's account of the nature of knowledge is that even our scientific and common-sense beliefs, that is, those beliefs which Hume would regard as being most firmly anchored in experience, often transcend the impressions upon which they are based. It is easy to see how this applies to such propositions as "the sun will rise tomorrow". This statement clearly exceeds the evidence upon which it is based and so, on Hume's account, it should represent an illegitimate a priori attempt to demonstrate a matter of fact. It is however, clearly an example of a statement arrived at inductively. If we really were tied down to basing knowledge only on experience in the Humean sense of "impressions", then we would not be entitled to say any more than that the sun has risen a number of times in the past.

Penelhum tries to defend Hume at this point. He claims that common-sense beliefs such as the one we have been considering are rooted in experience in a way in which theistic and metaphysical beliefs are not. Thus he (Penelhum) writes:

"Even though I have not seen tomorrow's sunrise, at least what I believe will happen tomorrow is of the same kind as the sunrise I have already seen. But the philosophical belief in the existence of substance or the theist's belief in a designer of nature exceed the evidence available in a far more marked way." 15

Now even in Penelhum is right, and there is a greater gap between evidence and conclusion in inferences to God and substance than in inferences to common sense beliefs, this only shows that such (former) inferences have more scope for going wrong, and their conclusions are less probable. And this in no way gives Hume what he wants, which is to claim that such inferences are always and necessarily invalid.¹⁶ Penelhum has actually implicitly admitted, in spite of his intentions, that the difference between the inference to the conclusion that the sun will rise tomorrow and the inference to the statement that God exists is if anything, a matter of degree.¹⁷

Penelhum however might defend himself in this way. He could point out that in inferences to such things as God or substance we run such a high risk of going wrong that we should never trust the conclusions arrived at. A difference in degree if pressed far enough can sometimes be transformed into a difference in kind. But why, we may ask, does Penelhum think there is such a high degree of difficulty in making the inference "from world to God"?

15. T. Penelhum Religion and Rationality, p.96.

16. The phrase "always and necessarily invalid" means, in this context, not merely formally so, but in a manner which renders the inferences as inherently unsound, as modes of reaching a particular sort of conclusion from a certain species of premise.

17. T. Penelhum Religion and Rationality, p.96 ff.

It is important to notice that Penelhum does not base his view on the simple consideration that the world as we know it affords no evidence for belief in a divine creator. His argument is rather that it must inevitably be more difficult to make an inference to such things as God and substance, than it is to infer one thing which is found within (immediate) experience from another. The difficulty of making an inference to something outside immediate experience seems to turn, for Penelhum, on the assumption that it is extremely difficult if not impossible for the human mind to frame conceptions of such things at all.

It is not however so very difficult for the human mind to conceive of things which fall outside the sphere of immediate sense experience. The fact that we often do this in fact is sufficient to show that we can. Many of the concepts with which we operate in the nature sciences, although they help us to understand the empirical world, are not such as could present themselves to immediate sense experience. In scientific and in common-sense statements then as well as in metaphysical ones, we frequently make assertions which take us beyond experience in the Humean sense of "the present testimony of my senses and the records of memory."¹⁸

If metaphysics is the attempt to transcend the world of immediate sense experience in order to explain and complete it, and if, as we have argued, there is nothing inherently wrong with the logic employed in this process, it follows that Hume's view that all metaphysics and natural theology is an attempt to demonstrate matters of fact a priori is totally unsubstantiated. For that metaphysical beliefs nearly always

18. Quoted by T. Penelhum Religion and Rationality, p.95.

arise from reflections on the nature of experience there can be no doubt; even a cursory glance at the remarks of the great metaphysicians is enough to establish that.

It was because Hume underestimated the scope and depth of human experience that he could not see how experience itself gives rise to metaphysics. And not seeing this, it was only left open to him to conclude that metaphysics is the attempt to establish facts by unaided reason. Hume, in his narrowing down of experience, selected from self-conscious experience as a whole just those aspects of experience least likely to issue in metaphysics to feature in his account.

There is no better illustration of this than in Hume's treatment of the concept of the self. The concept of the self, taken as a concept arising from experience, is a problematic idea highly likely to lead to metaphysical speculation. The self seems, on the one hand, to be a substantial entity, constant throughout changes affecting the external world and the subject itself, but on the other it seems to be merely a name given to a loosely unified bundle of perceptions and dispositions which are constantly changing or being forced to change. Metaphysics is needed to help us to know what to think about the self but Hume avoided the problems associated with the concept of selfhood by ignoring that aspect of self-conscious awareness in which we experience ourselves, not merely as bundles of perceptions, but as unifying subjects of experience. Thus metaphysical speculation was avoided, but at the cost of an unrealistic reductionist view of experience. Hume's reductionism is clearly presented in the following passage:

"It must be some one impression that gives rise to every idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of the self, that impression must continue invariably the same, through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable.

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception and can never observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of myself and may be truly said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is further requisite to make me a perfect non-entity."¹⁹

There are basically two arguments in this passage. The first is that we have no reason to believe that there is a substantial self since experience provides us with no impression of such a self. The second argument is that what we speak of when we speak of the "self" is perfectly well accounted for by the sum of our perceptions. This second argument is particularly weak. Hume begins from the premise that in the absence of perceptions, the self cannot exist. This in itself has been disputed. In our third chapter we saw that many mystics have claimed that in the absence of all perceptions what is left is a species of "pure self". But even allowing that Hume's assumption here is perfectly correct, it still does not follow that because without perception there would be no self, the self is no more

19. David Hume. A Treatise of Human Nature, Book 1 Section VI, p.251, Selby-Bigge Edition.

than those perceptions. It may well be that the self cannot continue to survive without oxygen, but it does not follow from this that the self *is* oxygen.

The real reason however why Hume believed that the self is no more than a bundle of perceptions is not, it seems, that he relies (too heavily) upon this weak argument. For Hume relies mainly on the first argument, that is on the consideration that when he tried to look into himself, he never had an impression of his ego, in the form of a direct visitation. He found instead only impressions of things none of which could be identified with himself. Had Hume been prepared to accept that the self might be a very different kind of thing from an impression, he might have realized that awareness of the self does indeed play a part in human experience.

What Hume failed to notice was that every perception and every thought presupposes a thinking subject, and our awareness that there is such a subject is part of the experience of thinking or perceiving itself. In the article by Daly quoted earlier, there is a striking passage in which Daly points out the phenomenological significance of Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" as against critics like Ayer who maintained that the "Cogito" argument makes only a trivial point.²⁰

"Descartes' 'cogito'-experience is of 'I thinking, "there is a thought now"; 'I knowing or doubting that I know many things'; 'I who doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines, perceives'; 'I co-existing with and involved in every

20. A.J. Ayer writes: "... if I start with the fact that I am doubting I can validly draw the conclusion that I think and that I exist. That is to say if there is such a person as myself, then there is such a person as myself and if I think, I think." The Problem of Knowledge, p.47 (Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1958).

experience'. The empiricists are looking for some perceptible thing or object of experience corresponding to 'I'. Obviously there is no such 'thing' or 'object'. They conclude that there is 'no such thing' as 'I'. Descartes' whole point is that there is an 'I', but it is not an object of thought but a subject thinking, without which there could not be any objects of thought." ²¹

The non-reductionist account of selfhood will certainly lead to metaphysical problems and speculation in a way which the Humean account can avoid. For Hume's phenomenalism, in which the self is identified with what it experiences, by-passes the whole question of how subject is related to object, which is one of the very problems to which metaphysics has traditionally sought to provide an answer. Hume's epistemology is never obliged to face the conflicting ways in which we tend to characterize and apprehend the subject-object relationship, and thereby can avoid the metaphysical criteria which arise in the attempt to assess rival standpoints. But Hume wins his avoidance of metaphysics at the cost of reducing human existence and experience to something less than human. And if this is so, it is surely preferable to be rid, not of metaphysics but of Hume's account of experience, an account which has been specially chosen so as to avoid the mystery and wonder that makes human life what it is.

Kant's Criticisms of Metaphysics

Immanuel Kant is another major philosopher in whom we find the origin of the modern suspicion of metaphysics. Although Kant was, in his younger days, a metaphysician himself,²² his mature critical writings

21. C.B. Daly Prospects for Metaphysics, p.184 Edited by I. Ramsay
Essay entitled: Metaphysics and the Limits of Language (1961)
(Allen & Unwin).

22. See Kant's Inaugural Dissertation of 1770.

contain what is perhaps the sharpest attack on speculative metaphysics in the history of modern philosophy. The Critique of Pure Reason, Kant's major critical work, is like the writings of Hume, a plea for caution in the use of reason, a plea which Kant attempts to justify by means of a rigorous attempt to trace the limits of human knowledge. The Critique of Pure Reason falls into two main parts; the first part consists of the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Analytic, and attempts to provide a deduction of the condition of what Kant regards as legitimate human knowledge, whereas the second part entitled the Transcendental Dialectic purports to explain how human reason is led to leap to conclusions which are unwarranted, through attempting to operate independently of the basis of all knowledge, namely, experience. Metaphysics, according to Kant, is the product of these flights of reason, and so for Kant, as for Hume, metaphysics is seen as the attempt to demonstrate matters of fact by means of unaided reason.

Kant was more open-minded than Hume since he was prepared to admit that "though all knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience."²³ That is to say that not all human knowledge consists of us being passively receptive to a given series of impressions. Kant was in that remark acknowledging that experience, if we are to make sense of it, must be interpreted, and that in this process of interpretation the original form of experience, the mere intuitions must be transcended.

Our contention will be that had Kant remained true to his initial insight, he would never have come to the conclusion that

23. Critique of Pure Reason. Translated by Norman Kemp-Smith. (Macmillan Second impression 1933) p.41.

metaphysics is always the attempt to demonstrate matters of fact a priori. He would have realized rather that metaphysics is usually the product of an attempt to make sense of the world of experience, once sufficient attention is given to the richness and depth of that experience. Thus he would have seen that metaphysics "begins with experience", no less than his own categories and conditions of sensibility.

It is of course impossible to undertake a depth study of the Critique of Pure Reason in this short section, as such a mammoth task would require a thesis in itself. We must therefore be content to consider only certain points from the "Critique" concerned mainly with Kant's general procedure in criticising metaphysics as such. Our task will be to discover where Kant went wrong, but we may take as our starting point an insight in which Kant seems to have been perfectly correct.

Kant saw that if the world of experience is to make sense as an objective unified structure then there must be conditions which facilitate the unity of that structure. If the world is not to collapse into chaos, or rather if it is to be capable of appearing to intelligent consciousness at all, we must have definite ways of identifying the various aspects of experience and relating them to each other. Kant saw, as against Hume, that these conditions are certainly objects of knowledge for which there are no impressions; they are rather established a priori as the necessary conditions of our having any experience at all. The type of argument which proceeds in this way, by asking how a particular state of affairs is possible (in this case the "state of affairs" is human knowledge) has become known as a transcendental argument.

Kant fully recognized that such a priori concepts are absolutely necessary, and that this is so because consciousness must always unify its diverse experiences or "manifold". The conditions according to which this "manifold" is synthesized in a subject constitute the necessary conditions for all possible experience. Thus Kant says that:

"This unity of possible consciousness also constitutes the form of all knowledge of objects; through it the manifold is thought of as belonging to a single object. Thus the mode in which the manifold of sensible representation (intuition) belongs to one consciousness precedes all knowledge of the object as the intellectual form of such knowledge, and itself constitutes a formal a priori knowledge of all objects, so far as they are thought (categories). The synthesis of the manifold through pure imagination, the unity of all representations in relation to original apperception, precedes all empirical knowledge. Pure concepts of understanding are thus a priori possible, and, in relation to experience are indeed necessary ... " 24

The categories of the understanding, together with the conditions of sensibility, namely, space and time, Kant regards as the entirety of those a priori conditions of any possible experience. Most philosophical discussion of Kant's categories has revolved around the question of whether his deduction of them is in fact valid, but our task will not involve us with the details of the validity of Kant's deductions. We shall rather try to discover whether Kant's procedure generally, of deducing the necessary conditions of experience, opened the way for the elimination of metaphysics.

24. *ibid.* p.149-150.

We may begin by noticing that Kant went some way towards metaphysics himself in his recognition that experience must be organized by the human mind, and that the organizing principles are a priori. It is the need to make sense of the world - to see the unity through the diversity - which gives rise to the need for the categories of the understanding and the conditions of sensibility. Insofar as Kant sees this need, he shares an insight which has produced the most ambitious metaphysical schemes, the insight which apprehends that the world of immediate sense experience, or intuitions, does not fully make sense on its own; it can only be made sense of by being transcended. But what then prevents Kant's list of synthetic a priori conditions of experience from constituting a thorough-going metaphysical theory? Since on Kant's own admission we need a priori categories in order to make sense of experience, and since, ex hypothesi, these a priori concepts are not given in experience, we might ask why Kant regarded himself as an opponent of speculative metaphysics rather than as a metaphysician himself.

One very obvious difference between Kant's transcendence of immediate experience in the metaphysics of a philosopher such as Hegel, is that for the former we do not require the great degree of transcendence without which Hegel would argue that experience cannot make sense. For Hegel, that transcendence takes us to the Absolute Idea, the infinite ground of all Being (including all that is finite) which is a synthesis of freedom, love and rationality, and which is the reconciling principle underlying all contradiction and diversity in the lower levels of experience.

For Kant, transcendence takes us only as far as concepts such as causation, negation, necessity and contingency. The difference between the transcendence advocated by Hegel and that advocated by Kant

seems at first to be only a matter of degree.

Neither Hegel nor Kant however would have accepted that the differences between the forms of philosophizing which led to their respective conclusions were a matter of degree alone. But in that case, what could it be, that makes the Hegelian transcendence of immediate sense experience different in kind from the Kantian one, and why did Kant believe that the injunction against any further transcendence should come at just the particular point at which he arrives?

Kant, in his attempt to make sense of our experience by going beyond the world of sensible intuitions, stopped at the point at which he did because, in this view, it is at this point that we have all the a priori concepts without which experience could not exist at all. But Kant, in this approach, entirely overlooked the possibility that further concepts may be the precondition of human self-conscious experience as it actually *is*, even if they are not necessitated by a minimal self-conscious experience. Thus this injunction against metaphysics is based on the presupposition that our transcendence of immediate sense experience need only go as far as is necessary to avoid the collapse of a minimal world of self-conscious awareness not the real world of human experience. And in this minimal world of experience, we find none of the tensions and "contradictions" which, as we mentioned previously, we find in our actual experience.

Kant, like Hume, was able to overlook the tensions and "contradictions" within experience because he focused his attention not on our experience as a whole but rather on one aspect of it, an aspect in which, when taken by itself, the dialectical tensions and contradictions simply do not arise. They do not arise because here we assume the attitude of the passive observer. Kant has, like Hume, taken scientific observation as his paradigm for *all* human experience, and thus he

thinks that once the conditions for this type of experience have been found we have discovered the conditions for all consciousness. Kant's list of categories and his conditions of sensibility relate only to the scientific mode of cognition, and whatever their defects in this area, they do not even attempt to tell us anything about how we can interpret experience as a whole which embraces other modes of awareness. Yet it is the totality of our experience which is the origin of metaphysics, and had Kant realized this he would have seen that speculative metaphysics itself "begins with experience". Hegel in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy comments poignantly on the Kantian view of experience; "Experience and observation of the world mean nothing else for Kant than a candlestick standing here and a snuff box standing there"²⁵. Hegel goes on to point out that if experience is thought of like this, it is not surprising that we do not need metaphysical postulates such as God or the Absolute Idea in order to explain it.

Another way of putting this point of Hegel's would be to say that Kant sees the nature of our experience of the phenomenal world undialectically. For Kant the world of immediate sense experience makes perfectly good sense by itself; it contains no inherent tensions. In Kant's idea that the phenomenal world contains no tensions or dialectical contradictions we see the origins of the Wittgensteinian view that philosophical problems do not arise from the nature of the world, but rather from our misuse of language. Indeed it would not be too much to say that this Kantian undialectical view of human experience

25. G.W.F. Hegel Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Vol.III. Translated by E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simpson, p.444-445. (Routledge and Kegan Paul. First published in England 1896).

has dominated modern analytical philosophy.

One of Kant's general arguments against metaphysics is that once we engage in metaphysics we end up with antinomies, or conclusions which are no more justified than their opposites. This is so, says Kant, because metaphysics involves reason taking flight beyond experience, and thereby allows there to be nothing in experience to which we can appeal when we wish to settle the issue.²⁶ We have seen however that equally plausible but conflicting apprehensions of things

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26. According to Kant, when the categories are employed to make inferences beyond the limits of possible experience to that which is unconditioned, they become transcendental ideas, from which paralogisms ("a syllogism which is fallacious in form, be its content what it may") and antinomies result. There has recently been much discussion of whether Kant's logic is valid with respect to the particular examples he chooses. But even were Kant's reasoning perfectly correct in the cases which he discusses, this would certainly not show that all metaphysics is the outcome of reason divorcing itself from experience. His criticisms would apply only to one mode of metaphysical argument, which he rightly thinks should be avoided. To show how very different is Kant's presupposition about the nature of all metaphysical reasoning from the account which we have given, it is only necessary to look at the chapter in the *Transcendental Dialectic* section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled "The Dialectical Inferences of Pure Reason". Kant writes:

"Although a purely transcendental idea is in accordance with the original laws of reason, a quite necessary product of reason, its object, it may yet be said, is something of which we have no concept. For in respect of an object which is adequate to the demands of reason, it is not, in fact possible that we should ever be able to form a concept of the understanding, that is, a concept that allows of being exhibited and intuited in a possible experience. But we should be better advised and less likely to be misunderstood if we said that although we cannot have any knowledge of the object that corresponds to an idea, we yet have a problematic concept of it.

The transcendental (subjective) reality of the pure concepts of reason depends on our having been led to such ideas by a necessary syllogism. There will therefore be syllogisms which contain no empirical premises, and by means of which we have no concept, and to which, owing to an inevitable illusion, we yet ascribe objective reality. These conclusions are, then, rather to be called pseudo-rational, although in view of their origin they may well lay claim to the latter title, since they are not fictitious and have not arisen fortuitously but have sprung from the very nature of reason. These are sophistications not of men but of pure reason itself."

Critique of Pure Reason, pp.178-9 Kemp-Smith translation.

arise at the most primitive levels of human experience, and not just in philosophical speculation. And therefore we may well suspect that conflicting views of things, when they arise, are more a product of reason not having gone far enough, rather than having gone too far. If some metaphysical speculation generates antinomies, perhaps this is precisely because we have ceased to employ our rational faculties at a point before they have been overcome, when really we should have speculated until we had explained and dissolved them. If metaphysical speculation leads us into problems, it does not follow that we should immediately give it up. It may well be better to allow the problems to arise and then squarely face them.

The view that we should overcome philosophical problems by avoiding whatever type of thinking generates them rather than by facing them head on is characteristic of that whole tradition in philosophy which has had as its guiding principle since Hume a love of caution, and which has its modern expression in much British analytical philosophy. But it must be remembered that the method of the "caution philosophy" which has its roots in Hume and Kant, is only one method of approach in philosophy, and it stands in contrast to an alternative tradition which seeks not so much to avoid philosophical problems, as to recognize such problems as there really are and then to try to find their solution. The major spokesman for this tradition is Hegel, whose basic idea was that there are perfectly genuine tensions within human experience, and that the only way of resolving them is to find that whole wherein the apparently conflicting aspects of experience are seen ultimately to rest together in a single harmony. As a very crude generalisation, we may say that this bolder approach to philosophical issues has been prevalent on the continent of Europe and the cautious approach has been more prevalent in the English speaking countries. Each tradition has

its own characteristic pitfalls. European philosophers are continually accused of lacking rigour in their thinking, whereas the British style philosophers are accused of aridity and infertility of thinking.

While it is true that many of the accusations of sloppiness in particular metaphysical systems are perfectly justified, this does nothing to prove that metaphysical thought as such must inevitably lack rigour. There is nothing inherently non-rigorous about a bold approach, indeed we have seen that concern with caution can lead us to conclusions which are so absurd that the acceptance of them is most definitely extremely sloppy. Our contention is that we need to adopt the bold approach if we are to hope to get anywhere towards the solution of philosophical problems and then once this approach has been adopted, we should concern ourselves with careful argumentation.

In conclusion, we have now seen that two ideas of Kant which are supposed to lead to the elimination of metaphysics are simply not justified. These are, firstly, that we can have a perfectly adequate account of the phenomenal world once we have laid down a set of categories which are the conditions of synthesizing the sensory "manifold" at any given moment in an individual's experience. And secondly, that metaphysical problems only arise when we do not accept that the categories of the understanding and conditions of sensibility cannot be applied outside sense experience.

Wittgenstein's Objections to Metaphysics

It was mentioned earlier that the critical method in philosophy, the method of trying to discover the limits of human knowledge so as to guard against going beyond them, has been prevalent in British philosophy since the time of Kant. But since Kant, the respect for

caution which figures so highly in the critical method has been taken even further, to a point where Kant himself is seen as having been over-ambitious. For Kant tried to trace the limits of possible human knowledge. But it has been asked: how can we possibly have any idea of what the human mind can *know* before we are acquainted with the limits of what the human mind can *think*? Thus there has been a strong shift from questions of epistemology to questions of meaning, the latter being dealt with through the analysis of various types of proposition. This it was thought was a less ambitious project and the chance of success was therefore considered to be correspondingly higher. Attention to strict detail in our use of language has now become the order of the day, and the old traditional philosophical problems about how we can apprehend an ordered objective world and what such experience tells us about the nature of reality had dropped out of mainstream philosophy.

Of itself, an enquiry into the true nature of meaning in human discourse is not necessarily anti-metaphysical. It could lead into an investigation of the depths of the consciousness from which such language springs, as indeed it did with Chomsky. In attempting to discover what it is like to have thought of the richness and complexity of human beings, we would be doing nothing less than metaphysics in the grand sense. An enquiry into the nature of meaning in discourse is not therefore inherently less ambitious than a metaphysical enquiry. It is only the manner in which that enquiry has been conducted in the philosophy of modern linguistic analysis which makes it so.

Linguistic analysis is a somewhat loose label for a school of thought whose work was largely inspired by the writings of the later Wittgenstein. It saw itself as having progressed beyond logical

positivism, although the younger Wittgenstein and other logical positivists were also extremely interested in language. Thus it rejected such dogmatism as the view expressed in the Tractatus²⁷ that there are only elementary and logical propositions, but held the view, no less than the logical positivists, that we are often misled by language.

We have already, in an earlier chapter, dealt with the objections to (supposedly) non-verifiable statements which have been advanced by logical positivists. In this section therefore, we shall be concerned with the ideas, not of the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus but of the (later) Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations.

The Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations was chiefly responsible for bringing into philosophy the idea that every form of language has its own logic, and that conceptual confusions can take many forms. But (the later) Wittgenstein also held that all philosophical problems are reducible to linguistic muddles, a view which is not only dogmatic in itself but which also presupposes a very definite delineation of the ways in which language can legitimately be used. Wittgenstein's seemingly liberal view of the various types of language thus became somewhat attenuated. What is more, it left no more scope for metaphysics than did the philosophy of the Tractatus.

The point that all philosophical problems are a result of linguistic muddles Wittgenstein states quite clearly in the Philosophical Investigations, in words which have now become famous. In section thirty-eight he remarks:

27. For a useful summary of Wittgenstein's ideas as expressed in the Tractatus, see Gottfried Martin's General Metaphysics: Its Problem and Method, p.12 (Allen and Unwin 1961).

"Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday." 28

We would do well to begin by discovering how Wittgenstein defends that remark; how he shows that philosophical problems arise purely as a result of conceptual confusion. His method is by way of elimination, by showing that when conceptual confusions are ironed out, the problems of metaphysics are exposed as pseudo-problems. Wittgenstein makes his programme plain in the Investigations:

"We must do away with all explanation 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; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language; and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language." 29

This type of sentiment Wittgenstein repeats many times during the course of the Investigations. But it leads us on to the question, precisely how can philosophical problems be solved, or rather dissolved, by arranging what we have always known? Wittgenstein's reply to this question is illustrated by his treatment of the traditional philosophical problem of our knowledge of other minds.

The existence of other minds has been a perennial problem for metaphysics, arising from our "natural view" of the world. On the

28. Ludwig Wittgenstein Philosophical Investigations translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Section 38, p.19 (Blackwell 1972).

29. *ibid*, Sec. 109, p.47^e.

one hand it seems utterly obvious that we can know that there are other minds and that we can know, to a certain extent at least, the contents of those minds. On the other hand it seems totally incomprehensible how we can have such knowledge, since there is no way of experiencing for ourselves the contents of other consciousnesses. For Wittgenstein however the problem of other minds provides us with a good example of how a clear description can render superfluous any metaphysical solution. Wittgenstein's attempt to clearly describe how we can have knowledge of other minds is set out in the Philosophical Investigations and runs as follows:

"'What is internal is hidden from us.' - The future is hidden from us. But does an astronomer think like this when he calculates an eclipse of the sun?

If I see someone writhing in pain with evident cause I do not think "all the same, his feelings are hidden from me."

We also say of some people that they are transparent to us. It is however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions, and what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language, we do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves). We cannot find our feet with them."

'I cannot know what is going on in him' is above all a picture. It is the convincing expression of a conviction. It does not give the reasons for the conviction. They are not readily accessible.

If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.

It is possible to imagine a guessing of intentions like the guessing of thought, but also a guessing of what someone is actually going to do.

To say "he alone can know what he intends" is nonsense: to say "he alone can know what he will do" is wrong. For the prediction contained in my expression of intention (for example 'when it

strikes five I am going home') need not come true, and someone may know what will really happen" 30

"I can be as certain of someone else's sensations as of any fact. But this does not make the propositions 'he is much depressed', '125 x 125 = 625' and 'I am sixty years old' into similar instruments. The explanation suggests itself that the certainty is of a different kind. - This seems to point to a psychological difference. But the difference is logical." 31

Before we attempt to discover the basic doctrine being expressed by Wittgenstein here, a few preliminary comments are in order. For whether or not these comments constitute a *clear* description of our knowledge of other minds, their *truth* at certain points is highly questionable. For example, in relation to Wittgenstein's assertion: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" we may ask 'why not?' Is it really so impossible to understand a non-human intelligent creature? We communicate, now, with some apes, and they with us. Why would a lion, if he could talk, be so different?

Another example of a dubious claim of Wittgenstein's is to be found in his assertion: "To say, 'he alone knows what he intends' is nonsense. For the prediction contained in my expression of intention ... need not come true."

If I say, at 4 p.m. "I am going home when it strikes five", and when it strikes five I do not go home, this has no tendency whatever to show that at 4 p.m. I did not intend to go home at five. I could have changed my mind, even as late as 4.59 - or later! Besides: even if someone else predicts that I shall not go home, it does not follow that he knows my intention, or knows it better than I do.

30. *ibid.* p.223e-224e, II, xi.

31. *ibid.* p.224e-II,xi.

He may know no more than that I am notoriously weak-willed or impulsive.

From these two examples it becomes clear that certain aspects of Wittgenstein's account of our knowledge of other minds are highly suspect. It seems to avoid metaphysical speculation about other minds by means of a reductionist account of our experience of them. However, before we can finally dismiss Wittgenstein's view that clear description dissolves the philosophical problems associated with other minds, we must look more closely at what Wittgenstein is saying in his attempted clear description.

The passages which were quoted are, like the rest of Wittgenstein's work, often difficult to make sense of, and take the form not of a dogmatic statement of a position but of a report of an arduous intellectual struggle. Nonetheless, a definite viewpoint tends to emerge in them. What Wittgenstein seems to be saying is that it seems at first mysterious how we can have knowledge of somebody else's inner mental states, but it is only mysterious because we put the question in a general, and therefore mysterious way. We ask, "how can we have certainty concerning another person's inner mental states?" The generalisation about a person's inner states leads us to regard these as something mysterious and elusive. But if we abandon this way of asking the question, and instead look at what happens in a particular concrete case when we would naturally claim knowledge of another person's state of mind, there is, argues Wittgenstein, no longer any mystery left. This faith in paying attention to the concrete and particular has characterised the British tradition in philosophy ever since Wittgenstein.³²

32. It should be noted that the Hegelian tradition has held precisely the opposite view to that of Wittgenstein, i.e., it has held that it is just by paying attention to the concrete and particular that we see those dialectical contradictions in reality which require metaphysical solutions.

In the particular case, says Wittgenstein, we can be "as certain of someone else's sensations as of any matter of fact". And in reply to the question "But, if you are certain, isn't it that you are shutting your eyes in the face of doubt?" Wittgenstein answers: "They are shut."³³

This, of course, does not explain why our eyes are shut, or tell us why it is justifiable that they should be shut with regard to the situation. At face value, it only tells us that we are prone to jump to conclusions without sufficient reflection in the situations of practical life. All this is true, but how does this observation do away with our intellectual need to discover how we have knowledge of other minds? How does the mystery of the inner mental state dissolve once we see what happens in the particular case? Wittgenstein gives a sort of answer by way of this passage:

" "He alone knows his motives" - that is an expression of the fact that we ask him what his motives are. - If he is sincere he will tell us them; but I need more than sincerity to guess his motives. This is where there is a kinship with the case of knowing". 34

The point here is that the statement "he alone knows his motives" may mislead us into thinking that this means he has a private mental state which only he can be familiar with. This way of putting the matter gives rise to the idea that there is a philosophical problem involved in our coming to know his mind. But it is just here that we are being misled. For all that is really the case when we talk like this, i.e. when we say that somebody knows his own motives, is that in this situation we ask the person what his motives are. There need be

33. *ibid.* p.224e II, xi.

34. *idem.*

no qualitatively different type of knowledge of his motives possessed by him for us to say this, it is something we say and regard ourselves as warranted in saying in situations determined by observable external criteria. This is the type of clarification which is supposed to dissolve the mystery. For Wittgenstein the reason we are misled eventually boils down to our tendency to make generalisations. This is true in ordinary language and it is even more true in philosophy. When we make generalisations we get far away from what really happens in the particular case, or in reality, and thus our generalisations give rise to problems which result purely from this way of using language, and not from the world itself. Metaphysics is therefore not required, because the reality which we experience - construed as the particular and concrete - makes perfectly good sense by itself. If we are to refute Wittgenstein, we have to show that attention to the particular leads us not away from but towards metaphysics. We need to show that the problems and tensions which seem to require further explanation are not only in language but in the world itself. And it seems that it is not difficult to do this with reference to the Wittgensteinian treatment of the other minds.

According to Wittgenstein, in actual cases we do not doubt whether we know the contents of someone else's consciousness. We do not worry about the theoretical justification of our knowledge. And this is not, for Wittgenstein, simply because we are indulging in sloppy thinking or are basing our judgment on a probable inference. It is because we actually do not need justification. We do not need justification because, in the particular case "all lies open to view." But this can only mean that when we describe what is going on in someone's mind we mean nothing more than that he is liable to do such and such given some particular situation and we attribute the same descriptive features to our own

psychological states when we are prone to behave in similar ways. And if this really is *all* we mean, then it is certain that the metaphysical problem of other minds is rendered redundant.

But that this is not an adequate account of how we regard other minds can be seen by looking at the very particular and concrete case which Wittgenstein valued so highly. For it is just here that the total experience of what it is like to communicate with other minds comes before us in its inescapable fullness. The first thing we can say is that in a concrete experience of this sort we do not, and cannot, think of another person's state of mind as no more than a tendency to behave in a certain way given certain conditions. This way of thinking of another mind is only the result of seeking for the way to get rid of a philosophical problem, it is itself the result of being misled by philosophy and *not* looking at the facts of the concrete situation. In the particular case, in real life, we can never perform this reduction, and we regard other minds as transcending a list of behavioural characteristics, however much we rely upon the latter as indicative of the thoughts of another person. Wittgenstein goes some way towards recognition of this when he asserts that one person can be a complete enigma to another. In communicating with others, we presuppose that they have minds somewhat like ours. It seems that they must have, yet those minds are far from being open to view. Our actual primitive experience is like this, it is the task of phenomenology to give a complete description of it and the task of metaphysics to try to make sense of it (i.e. to interpret the primitive experience). It is because of how we regard other minds from the start, as living feeling consciousnesses like ourselves, that we do not stop to doubt when we see somebody writhing in pain.

Once we accept that our experience of other minds has a richness and depth which arises from human experience itself, we see that the

thesis that the human mind is not mysterious or elusive is only viable when we ignore important facets of our experience. We see too that once we give minds their full status, it becomes pointless to give simple solutions as to how they communicate with each other. We need to realise the full depth and wonder of the situation we are dealing with before we can even begin to hope to produce a correct answer. It is the attempt to make sense of human experience in its fullness which is the essence of metaphysics. Wittgenstein's view that all mysteries which seem to require further explanation are due to tension in our language only holds when we reduce our experience to something less than human.³⁵

Wittgenstein is unsuccessful then in demonstrating the redundancy of the need for metaphysics even in relation to an example he chooses especially in order to illustrate this point. We have seen that his method here involves a form of reductionism which cannot be tolerated. Here, as much as anywhere, a close attention to the particular and concrete situation leads to the need to posit explanations beyond the world of immediate sensory experience. And if Wittgenstein's view does not work even with his own example, we must be all the more suspicious of an attempt to dispose of metaphysics generally in this way.

Indeed, even if it were to be proved (and it no doubt *could* be) that in some cases at least metaphysics arises because of misuse of language, this would do nothing to show that metaphysical conclusions

35. That Wittgenstein does take such a narrow view of experience can be seen from the following passage:
 "Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us."
Philosophical Investigations Sec. 126, p.50e.
 The assumption here that things must be absolutely open to view or absolutely hidden is obviously wrong. For there could be things which are hidden to the unreflective consciousness which become revealed - at least in part - to the reflective mind.

are always arrived at in this way. It would be very difficult for Wittgenstein to show that every metaphysical problem arises because of some specific type of misuse of language. It seems that to establish his thesis, he would have to go systematically through every philosophical problem and show by just *which* misuse of language that problem had arisen. This type of attention to the particular case would demand *no less than* this, yet it is evident that this is a nearly impossible task. Wittgenstein, however, does not attempt to go systematically through even the major philosophical problems. He rather speaks generally about how philosophical problems arise when language is misused, and shows at most only how they *can* arise in this way not that they *must*.

Contemporary objections to metaphysics owe their origin largely to the work of Wittgenstein. What Wittgenstein put forward can be seen as the work of a mind grappling with deep problems, and the struggle itself is reflected in a certain reticence in putting forward dogmatic assertions. The Philosophical Investigations has the flavour, not of dogmatic statements, but of "this is how it seems to me", and the Tractatus shows us that Wittgenstein had a mystical side to his nature which perhaps explains why he could never wholly swallow the conclusions of the Investigations. What Wittgenstein could only accept with difficulty, however, certain later philosophers have had no trouble in accepting dogmatically.

The work of the modern philosophers of this school has taught us a useful lesson: that is, that if we are not careful in our use of language, pseudoproblems may be generated. We need to be more careful than was, say, Hegel, in passing from one stage to another in argument. But though this is a useful lesson, it in no way entails that all metaphysics must rest on misuses of language. For the impetus for

metaphysics lies in the roots of experience itself, once we have paid full attention to the richness of our experience. It will be our task, in the following chapters of this thesis, to show in detail how the nature of human experience is such that we must pass beyond our "natural view" of the world to metaphysics in the effort for complete understanding. That is, we must show where the tensions in our experience actually lie, and the sort of reality which could restore sense and harmony to these apparent conflicts. In the words of J.N. Findlay, we shall attempt to "*bridge the gulf* between this alienated surface-world, on the one hand, and the mystical unity which explains its puzzles and appeases its stresses, on the other."³⁶

36. J.N. Findlay The Transcendence of the Cave, p.203. (G. Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1967).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NATURE OF FINITE

INDIVIDUALS

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NATURE OF FINITE INDIVIDUALS

We saw in Chapter Two that mystics and others who have claimed to have had religious experiences, are invariably committed to propositions of a metaphysical nature. They hold, on account of their experiences, beliefs about such things as God, the soul, and the nature of ultimate reality.¹ But how far can these mystical metaphysical propositions be backed up by (valid) metaphysical *argument*? Or, to put the question another way, to what extent does our ordinary self-conscious experience, when deeply and systematically reflected upon, suggest conclusions which coalesce with those arrived at in a more immediate way by mystics and others.²

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1. We must qualify the comment that subjects of religious experience hold certain propositions to be true by acknowledging that they are often at pains to stress that no verbal formulae can ever fully or adequately capture the truth about what they have experienced. However, such people do attempt to communicate, at some level, what they believe their experience tells them about the nature of the universe, and the propositions which they enunciate are the most adequate vehicles for this which they have at their disposal. Therefore we are justified, in our attempt to discover whether metaphysics lends any support to the deliverances of religious experience, to ask to what degree metaphysical reasoning can validate such propositions, so long as we remember that they are limited in their capacity to convey what the subject of religious experience is trying to express.
 2. The word "ordinary" in this context is used to distinguish non-mystical everyday experience from the form of experience in which the apprehension of something spiritual (however loosely we may define the term "spiritual") seems to be, or is, explicitly present in one's consciousness.

This question may now be approached directly, for we have seen that there can be no general refutation of the possibility of metaphysics for all time, and that metaphysics arises, not in spite of, but because of, our experiences. Thus we shall examine, in this and the chapters which follow, many of those arguments which take as their starting point, features of ordinary self-conscious experience, but arrive at conclusions which represent a final view of the world which is as mystical as that of the mystics themselves. In particular, we shall consider the alleged mystical or spiritual implications of:

- (a) Our experience of our own selfhood and that of others;
- (b) Our subjective interaction with an objective external world;
- (c) The sense of the Infinite as mediated through the definite religions, adhered to by ordinary religious believers; and
- (d) Our capacity and need to make value judgments.

In this and the two subsequent chapters, we shall concern ourselves with the first of these, that is, with the arguments which purport to demonstrate that the deepest reflection upon the nature of our own and others' selfhood will disclose to us the characteristic mystical view of selfhood, namely, the view that finite individuals are not ultimately distinct from each other.

This doctrine, as espoused both by mystics and metaphysicians, must be distinguished both from thoroughgoing metaphysical monism in which individuals' souls are literally identical with the One,³ and therefore with each other, as well as from individualistic pluralism according to which we are just as distinct from each other as it appears is the case to unreflective commonsense. It is rather the case, in this

3. In the Hindu monism of Sankara, this doctrine takes the form of saying that Atman is Brahman.

view, that finite individuals are manifestations of a universal essence, an essence which transcends their finite individuality and which yet requires such finite individuality as the vehicle of its self-expression.

Various metaphysical philosophers have sought to defend this standpoint and therefore we shall consider the arguments offered in its support by three of the most prominent ones. We shall consider the work of the most famous representative of classical German Idealism, G.W.F. Hegel, first of all; secondly, the work of a representative of late nineteenth/early twentieth century British Idealism, B. Bosanquet, and thirdly, the writings of the contemporary Yale Philosopher, J.N. Findlay. However, before we proceed to our discussion of these philosophers, some general remarks are in order.

The idea that we are not, in the final analysis, totally separate from each other has been called a difficult doctrine.⁴ And in a certain respect it is indeed difficult. The view is anathema to commonsense, and even for more reflective thinking, it does not immediately recommend itself. For it seems that whatever criteria of personal identity we finally come to accept, surely it is utterly impermissible that such criteria should allow for an overlapping or confluence of persons. However, whatever the difficulties of this doctrine, that does not mean that there are not facets of human experience which strongly and deeply suggest it. When commonsense decrees that the idea is utterly implausible, it does so at the cost of compelling us to refuse to follow through the implications of forms of consciousness which one does not have to be an academic philosopher to experience. Commonsense

4. See H.D. Lewis The Elusive Mind, p.274-297, (1969).

sets up one mode of consciousness as its paradigm, and blinds itself to those other forms which do not suggest its own outlook. In poetry, prose, and sacred literature, we find expressions of just that consciousness of self-transcendence which becomes a carefully formulated doctrine in the philosophy of the Idealists. These words of Jesus, for example, capture its essence:

"If any man would come after me, let him
deny himself and take up his cross and
follow me. For whosoever would save his
life will lose it, and whosoever loses his
life for my sake will find it." 5

Although these words could be interpreted to mean simply that someone who dies (physically) or is willing to die (physically) will be rewarded with an eternity of continued existence, the emphasis on *denying oneself* strongly suggests that Christ was speaking of something much deeper than this. The passage is more plausibly understood as saying that we can only attain real life by giving up an illusion of life, an illusion which makes us seem to be mere particular historical individuals quite distinct from the external world as well as from each other. It is this type of selfhood or individuality which we must sacrifice and gladly so, if we want to discover what we are more truly. And once we make this discovery, we will find that we are not simply self-complete and self-sufficient units whose relations with the world are merely accidental, but are rather expressions of something deeper and all-embracing, and something which it is the value and destiny of the finite individual to know itself as.

5. Matthew 16, v. 24,25.

The words of Christ quoted above are echoed in the poetry of T.S. Eliot⁶ and at various points in the Hindu Upanisads. And in many other writings we find references to an experience in which a loss of individuality is keenly felt. Often these references are to an experience of a special and sudden nature, but mystical experience, we should remember, has its analogue in more ordinary experiences. Whether it be in playing a game, or loving another person, we have a strong feeling of self-transcendence.

Can this feeling of self-transcendence be defended philosophically as a valid insight into the way things really are? Our contention in this thesis shall be that it can be, and that our profoundest thought can make explicit and justify an awareness which is implicit in some of our most primitive experiences, as well as in nearly all of our deepest. For our first clue as to how this is possible, we shall turn to the writings of Hegel.

Hegel's View

In the famous preface to the Phenomenology of Mind, Hegel writes as follows:

"The life of mind is not one that shuns death and keeps clear of destruction, it endures its death and in death maintains its being. It only wins to its truth when it finds itself in utter desolation." 7

In this passage Hegel is expressing the same idea about finite selfhood as is typically expressed by the mystics, namely, that in any

6. See T.S. Eliot's Little Gidding in The Four Quartets.

7. Phenomenology of Mind, pp 30-31. Baillie Translation, Vol.I.

finite individual's ultimate realization of his true essence, there is a loss of individuality in which the finite individual is not simply annihilated, but in his dissolution finds that all the while he was potentially more than finite. Only in this destruction of the finite individual qua finite individual can we overcome the death and limitation which are inevitably characteristic of finite things. And once we attain to this truer essence, and cease to be alienated from it, the apparent separateness between finite individuals begins to break down, since we find that we are one in being (differentiated) expressions of the infinite.

In the Phenomenology of Mind we find Hegel's clearest attempt to defend these ideas, and to understand how he arrives at them we need to delve deeply into the philosophical ideas expounded there. We shall therefore reconstruct his arguments in some detail, before attempting to assess them.

For Hegel, the development of human consciousness, and consequently of human history, whether it be political, philosophical, or religious history, is the struggle of the universal to express itself through the particular, that is to say, of the dialectical interplay between them. To put this another way, the development of consciousness is the discovery of and the making explicit of that universal essence which was implicitly contained in the particular from the beginning. For in the beginning, the universal essence is expressed by the particular in a distorted and inadequate way. By this distortion, the particular conceals from itself its own true nature. The process of making explicit what was implicit from the beginning Hegel speaks of in this way:

"When devoid of that sort of reality (i.e. when it expresses its essential nature only in an attenuated form) science is merely the content of mind qua something implicit or potential (An sich); purpose which at the start is no more than something internal; not spirit, but at first merely spiritual substance. This implicit moment (An sich) has to find external expression, and become objective on its own account." 8

Most importantly then, Hegel's philosophy is an *essentialist* philosophy⁹, arrived at by way of one of the most exciting and comprehensive studies of the nature of consciousness in the history of western philosophy. Starting with the most primitive mode of consciousness, the consciousness of immediate sense certainty, Hegel shows how consciousness is forced through many stages and forms, being driven always onward to new levels by virtue of inadequacies in the previous ones. We become aware of the universal essence implicitly present in all of "the series of shapes, which consciousness traverses on this road" when we become aware of the inadequacies which inhere in any one of those shapes - taken by itself rather than as part of the structure of a whole which embraces them all. The Universal is developed, or rather develops itself, from the most primitive modes of consciousness - the Absolute as the totally adequate Universal thus emerges as the result. In this Universal self-conscious Mind, the previous phenomenological shapes are not simply dissipated, rather they find their true meaning. This meaning turns out to be that they are the preliminary ways in which Absolute Mind manifests itself, they are its presuppositions, but from their own standpoints, they have not come to see themselves in this light. And this is why, in their truest essential natures, individuals are not finally separate from each other.

8. *ibid.* p.25.

9. We shall later deal with Popper's objection that Hegel's essentialism contains a built-in immunity from criticism, which renders it, in his view, so much nonsense.

"It (the development towards the Universal or Absolute Mind) is the process of its own becoming, the circle which presupposes its end or its purpose, and has its end for its beginning; it has become concrete and actual only by being carried out, and by the end it involves." 10

"The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only at the end is it what it is in very truth ... ". 11

No matter where we begin in the Phenomenology of Mind, we can see how Hegel is trying to establish his dialectical principle as the moving force of the world. For each mode of consciousness breaks down always because the dialectic of particular and universal is not perfectly balanced. Sometimes particularity is stressed at the expense of the universal. However, although in principle it is possible to begin at any point in the Phenomenology, there are two main starting points which illustrate the dialectical development particularly clearly.

The first beginning is to be found in the very first chapter of the Phenomenology of Mind, where Hegel describes the world of "Certainty or Knowledge at the level of sense". This is the type of consciousness which strongly reminds us of Russell's knowledge by acquaintance, and seems initially to provide us with the most satisfactory type of knowledge since there is no room for errors of interpretation, the latter becoming more likely the more theoretical knowledge becomes. Hegel, no less than Russell, sees how this type of knowledge would appeal to those seeking absolute certainty.

10. Phenomenology of Mind, p.16, Baillie translation, Vol.I.

11. *ibid.* p.17.

"It seems to be the truest, the most authentic knowledge, for it has not as yet dropped anything from the object; it has the object before itself in its entirety and completeness." 12

We thus have a world made up totally of empirical atomistic particulars.

"I, *this* particular conscious I, am certain of *this* fact before me." 13

The problem with this type of knowledge is that at the very moment when we try to recognize this level of awareness as knowledge, it inevitably breaks down. For the moment that we try to say anything at all about particulars, we are forced to use words like "here", "now", and "this". But these "pointing words" are actually universals, and in fact the most universal of all our concepts - absolutely anything can be "this". In trying to think the particular, we cannot avoid thinking the universal too, and the more we try to grasp the particular entirely on its own, we succeed only in grasping it through impoverished and abstract universals. We therefore grasp it even its particularity much less adequately than we would if our universals were more fully developed. As J.N. Findlay points out, the actual particulars of sense cannot be reached by language at all.¹⁴

The first chapter of the Phenomenology of Mind thus enables us to see why all conscious life is a dialectical interplay between particular and universal. Abstract universals are empty, they need the moment of the particular if they are to relate to determinate contents.

12. *ibid.* p.90.

13. *ibid.* p.91.

14. This view is expressed repeatedly by J.N. Findlay in his two volumes of Gifford lectures, The Discipline of the Cave and The Transcendence of the Cave.

If I am to be a thinking being, consciousness must be intentional, that is, it must have an object. But because I must necessarily differentiate myself from that object, I must view it from a certain perspective at a specific moment in time. Thus my apprehension of it is limited by my *particular* relation to it. Without the moment of particularity in conscious experience, consciousness would be *identical* with its object. And a consciousness which is totally identical with its object, without any sort of differentiation, would be, as Hegel points out, an utterly abstract and empty self-identity, as in the proposition, $A=A$. Reality would be nothing more or less than one static homogeneous substance. And what would be the difference between this and there being just nothing at all?

The moment of the particular also requires the universal in order to be understood meaningfully. Without the universal moment, consciousness has no grid into which to fit the particulars, and its world would be a chaos, or rather there would be for it no world.

Immediate sense-certainty shows up the inadequacy of a one-sided emphasis on the particular, it shows up the need for the universal. Indeed, since knowledge of pure particularity turns out to be knowledge through pure abstract universality, we pass to a level of *consciousness* where the moment of the particular is regarded as *totally non-essential*. This is the level of Perception, where the percipient is seen as a universal, an "I" which could have *any* content, and what is perceived by this "I" is seen as a set of objects or "Things" which are sheer congeries of properties. We have therefore one universal confronting another. But Hegel goes on to say how such a one-sided emphasis on the universal can only lead to the "thing" of perception containing a contradiction, a contradiction which can only in the end be healed by

Perception giving up its claim to be absolute knowledge.¹⁵

Even before the contradiction which inheres in the "Thing" is made explicit to consciousness, there is the rather obvious and embarrassing problem of having two universals from the beginning. According to Hegel, consciousness simply and arbitrarily postulates one side as non-essential; this side falls to the perceiver. Mistakes of perception do not arise because of the nature of objects themselves, it is the subjective side which is held to account for them.

The main contradiction which concerns Hegel, we have said, lies in the very notion of the Thing of perception itself. It is on the one hand a mere congeries of properties, since we are here operating totally without particulars. Hegel, in his illuminating way, helps us by describing something of this nature as an "Also". But the problem with this is that there can be two or more quite separate things with exactly the same properties; and what can distinguish these from each other except their internal particularity, called by Hegel their Unity, which gives them an independence as separate particulars? At this point of course, we have a dialectical contradiction between the character of "Things" as Alsos, and also as Unities. Findlay makes all this reasonably clear when he explains as follows:

If the distinctness and universality of the properties be stressed,

"the Thing's unity and separateness become shadowy: this unity deteriorates into a mere "also" in which the properties are externally related. But if, on the other hand, the unity and separateness of the Thing are emphasized, the mutual distinctness of its properties, as well as their genuine universality, falls into jeopardy." 16

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15. It should be noted that each level of knowledge, for Hegel, proclaims itself to be the absolute level of knowledge, or else, what knowledge is.
16. See J.N. Findlay's Hegel A Re-examination, p.91 (G. Allen & Unwin 1958).

Thus Hegel shows with reference to Perception, that the phase in which knowledge claims to be composed one-sidedly of universals needs to be surpassed. Perception breaks down into understanding, the details of which we need not go into for the time being.

So far, we have spoken about the need to operate with universal concepts, but at the end of the Phenomenology of Mind we find that Hegel affirms that there is only one true concrete Universal, or Absolute. We have seen that universal concepts are necessary in order to make sense of the world of particulars, to give them some meaning transcending the sheer effect they have upon a subject, a form of consciousness which cannot be properly called knowledge, since here the subject's awareness is reduced to and totally limited by his perspective. But why should there be, in the end, only one Universal? Why can we not grasp the true nature of particulars through a plurality of universals?

The answer to this becomes clear when we remember the basic reason for which we employ universals - that is, to transcend our particular perspective. By employing universal concepts to speak and think of things, we begin to transcend our own finite and limited vantage points, since through these concepts we can make contact with an inter-subjectively¹⁷ shared world which goes beyond our immediate experience.

However, so long as we employ a plurality of universals in order to understand one particular part of the world, we still remain limited by (rather than fulfilled through, by being able to transcend) our own particular perspective, which is to say that the moment of the particular

17. Hegel would argue that the way objects are *for-another*, that is, the way that they appear to self-consciousness, is in fact nothing less than the way in which they manifest their essence. Thus there is ultimately an identity of being-for-another and being in itself. See Phenomenology of Mind Vol.1, p.139 ff.

is not abolished, but rather subsumed under the Infinite. The Concrete Universal therefore is the source of all finite perspectives, and a view of the Whole which is complete would not do away with these. It would rather imbue them with their true meaning.

Earlier we said that Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind contains two beginnings, and we are now ready to discuss the second of these. In the first three chapters, Hegel is concerned with forms of consciousness which are essentially passive. This section has been called the epistemological section, but so to call it actually presupposes precisely what Hegel was expressly concerned to deny, namely that when we speak about questions of knowledge we are concerned with a passive cognitive process, totally divorced and separate from the modes of consciousness associated with action. Nonetheless, in the first three chapters, Hegel is concerned with those types of knowledge where one assumes the standpoint of the observer. The observer comes to see how all thought involves the dialectical interplay of particular and universal, but he sees this principle as it were, on a screen before him, it is something which relates to knowledge in the narrow, passive sense. This type of knowledge, he, (the observer), sees as something over against him, detached from his essential being and his life. But he cannot forever remain a *mere* observer.

The full truth of the dialectical principle, involving as it does, the overcoming of estrangement and alienation between universal and particular, is only implicitly realized in even the most developed form of passive cognition.¹⁸ It is made explicit when it emerges that the principle infects not only the realm of passive cognition, but

18. This for Hegel is the level of the analytical Understanding (as opposed to synthesising Reason).

rather the whole world of social and political activity. At this point there is a major qualitative break in the dialectical development, as consciousness passes into self-consciousness. Spirit, at this stage, becomes aware of itself as more than individual consciousness passively confronting the various objects of knowledge. It realizes rather, (though at first only in a dim way), that in any adequate expression of its universal essence, it has the task of forming the world which we know. Spirit's knowledge of itself as a dynamic subject-object interaction, in which the subject knows itself to be creatively and rationally expressing itself through an objective world shares with other, yet not wholly separate, self-conscious beings; this is the truth of self-consciousness. Hegel puts it as follows:

"What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is - this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'. It is in self-consciousness, in the Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present." 19

Knowledge of the fact that finite individuals are not ultimately separate from each other then, is rooted for Hegel in the understanding of our subjectivity (interacting with objectivity) which initial attempts to know objectivity by itself invariably lead to.

We can only understand a subjective/objective relationship if we are active and creative. This is why, for Hegel, the knowledge which

19. Phenomenology of Spirit, p.110-111. A.V. Miller translation, Oxford University Press 1977.

accrues to Spirit at the level of self-consciousness is dependent on total involvement with the world, an involvement not of a purely detached intellectual sort, but an involvement which has room for the element of volition, as well as that of cognition.

It is now necessary to say more about the way in which, for Hegel, the dialectical interplay of particular and universal is worked out in the social and political sphere. In this sphere, it is *desire* which first brings particularity and finitude to attention. For desire, which is the sense of being unfulfilled and dependent on something "other" for fulfilment, first brings to the view of finite consciousness the fact that it is limited, and thereby leads to the struggle of a finite, self-conscious being to overcome its limitations. Taken abstractly, the moment of the particular corresponds to the phenomenon of total bondage, deprivation, and limitation in the social world.²⁰

In the social and political sphere, the moment of the universal (which taken abstractly is the absolutely unlimited) corresponds to the social existence of freedom. But just as the absolutely limited is too limited to even exist by itself, so the absolutely unlimited cannot exist entirely alone either. For freedom, by itself and without the finite, involves no element of determinateness. Everything remains a possibility and nothing is actual. Yet a freedom which must not actualize itself by the production of determinate (and therefore limited) content, if it is to remain freedom, can hardly be said to be free, for it is precluded from doing anything at all. Pure freedom is an abstraction, a vacuousness corresponding precisely to the abstract universal,

20. Since the *absolutely* limited would be nothing, the moment of the particular can never exist in concrete reality in a pure form.

whose content is an empty self-identity. Freedom therefore needs the world of bondage and limitation to express itself as freedom.

The dialectical interplay of particular and universal is made explicit in the historical world as the interplay of freedom and bondage. There can be no mode of freedom totally devoid of finitude and limitation, that is of unfreedom, and no form of bondage which contains no element of freedom. And just as the Concrete Universal seeks not to annihilate the particular but to subsume it under itself and give it meaning, so freedom does not try simply to destroy the finite, but to express itself through it. And it is of the nature of the world of limitation and unfreedom to come to know itself as nothing less than the expression of infinite freedom. Sorrow and alienation exist in the finite world, insofar as that world sees itself as *merely* finite, but by coming to know that its own essence is to express freedom, it can transcend its finitude.

History is the story of the overcoming by self-consciousness of the alienation brought about by a one-sided emphasis on either the (abstract) freedom or the finitude and limitation of the human spirit. The former tends to issue as blind wilfulness and the following of personal inclinations, be they expressed as primitive urges or unreflected-upon-formulae which masquerade as rational laws, but which turn out in the end only to constitute what Hegel calls "the law of the heart".²¹ And the latter tends to issue in various forms of abject self-abasement, the prostration of the human spirit before a God or an earthly master conceived of as infinite (e.g. various Roman emperors) whose transcendence and authority over the finite (from which he is

2. See the Phenomenology of Spirit, p.221-228 (A.V. Miller translation).

totally separate) is total, such that the finite consciousness can only cringe before it in humility, obedience, and fear.

The aim and outcome of the dialectical interplay between freedom and bondage is freedom, but not a freedom which is abstract and involves merely lack of restraint. It is rather a freedom in which all the fragmentation and alienation of self-consciousness is overcome, a freedom whose essence is to manifest itself in a determinate world harmoniously, such that the finite world no longer strives for independence from its essence, which in actuality means choosing its own unfreedom. We have before us now a concept of freedom which is not the freedom which says "take any road, it does not matter which you choose." We rather have before us a freedom which finds its being in necessity.

In morality, this freedom is achieved by the harmonisation of duty with inclination, and in political life, by the coalescence of the individual and the social good. In Hegel's organic state, which is the outcome and culmination of more primitive and one-sided forms of social organisation, a perfect balance of freedom and necessity is achieved. The individual citizen transcends his individuality and expresses his nature more truly by way of his participation within the whole.

In the opening section of Hegel's discussion of dialectical development at work in the social sphere, we are shown with reference to concrete historical examples why epochs which embody one-sidedly the principle of freedom or bondage must inevitably be *superseded*. In the chapter of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind entitled "Independence and Dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage" we are introduced to the sort of freedom which self-consciousness seeks to gain from wilful and immediate self-assertion. And we are shown why, as an attempt to win freedom, it must inevitably fail. Hegel is

discussing here, historical societies in which there have existed direct forms of slavery, where one man has literally been able to own another.

When self-consciousness first becomes aware of itself, it becomes aware too, that it is demarcated from a world which stands over against it as a not-self. It finds itself to be limited both by the external material world and by other self-consciousnesses. It responds to this aspect of reality which is alien self-consciousness by attempting to subdue it in a life and death struggle. The struggle is one for recognition so that each tries to make the other an expression of his own will, that is to say, a slave. Each participant in the struggle thus aims to be Infinite, a Universality which embraces its "Other" within itself. The struggle is one in which one stakes one's life, but this does not mean that the one always goes so far as to *kill* the other. Were this to happen, the one could not express his will through the other. What often happens is that one participant gives in - refuses to fight on to the death, and becomes a slave of the other in order to save his life.

The domination of the slave by the master makes the slave into something object-like and thing-like, the sort of thing whose recognition must inevitably *fail to satisfy the master*. The master is alienated from the work by which he sustains himself, that is, the work of the slave, because it is merely presented to him as it were "on a plate" and is in no way the product of his own creative effort. In this way, the master in no way is able to achieve his ambition of becoming infinite, he is instead acutely reminded of his finite limitations. The attempt to express universality and overcome limitation by an arbitrary exercise of the will leads to the master's efforts collapsing into a form of bondage and limitation. The slave too, is alienated (though through the mere fact that he can be in some small way creative through his work,

less so than the master), for his work is carried out at the command of another, and is not an expression of his free creativity.

The type of freedom which accrues to the master, who has believed that this forcible domination is the way in which to be Infinite, is beautifully described by Hegel:

"Since the entire content of its natural consciousness has not tottered and shaken, it is still inherently a determinate mode of being; having a "mind of its own" (der Eigen Sinn) is simply stubbornness (Eigensinn), a type of freedom which does not get beyond the attitude of bondage." 22

Abstract freedom thus collapses into the finitude of the particular self-consciousness which is therefore forced to find ever more subtle ways of overcoming this alienation from its not-self, since it now sees that direct domination defeats its own purpose. The next type of freedom which it seeks to find is radically different from the abstract freedom of the master, it is a freedom in which self-consciousness seeks freedom through or at least in spite of bondage. This is Stoicism, which "is a freedom which can come on the scene as a general form of the world's spirit only in a time of universal fear and bondage ... " 23

In Stoicism, the only freedom which is believed to matter is freedom of thought, the type of freedom which can be enjoyed by the meanest slave.

"The essence of this consciousness is to be free, on the throne as well as in fetters, throughout all the dependence that attaches to its individual existence, from effective activity as well as from passive endurance, into the simple essentiality of thought." 24

22. See Phenomenology of Mind, p.188 (J.B. Baillie translation) Vol.I.

23. *ibid.* p.193.

24. *idem.*

This freedom is certainly less abstract than that freedom conceived of as a master's arbitrary will. However, it has its own pitfalls. Freedom of thought can only exist in isolation from freedom as it manifests itself in our activity in the world, insofar as thought itself can exist in isolation from activity in the world. And we saw earlier that one of Hegel's main aims is to deny precisely this. Thought abstracted from activity in the world is not the highest intellectual faculty of human self-consciousness, it corresponds rather to the most primitive forms (which were discussed earlier) of cognition, the totally passive ones. Freedom of thought thus cannot exist by itself, it is accordingly not a form of being which can satisfy the demand of self-consciousness to be Infinite. It is only, says Hegel, "an incomplete negation of otherness."²⁵ Thus as a stage in the struggle towards the liberation of self-consciousness, Stoicism too must collapse. It collapses, according to Hegel, into scepticism, but the details of this we need not go into here.

It is now apparent that in the sphere of passive cognition as well as in the sphere of social activity, the general drift is towards the universal expressing itself through the particular, in progressively more adequate forms. The series of stages which Hegel describes invariably break down because they are one-sided embodiments of particular and universal.

We have now set out the basis for Hegel's view that finite individuals are not ultimately distinct from each other. The development of consciousness is the story of the attempt of finite selves to break free from their limitations, to know themselves as expressions of the Infinite, a truth which was dimly apprehended but not explicitly

25. *ibid.* p.194.

grasped from the very beginning. And if Hegel is right, we can see too the connection between his key concepts of freedom, reason and love, all of which are ways of representing the transcendence of finite individuality, and of expressing the essence of Absolute Mind. But is Hegel right? We must now, as promised earlier, turn to an appraisal of the arguments by which Hegel arrives at his conclusions.

We have seen that Hegel may be called an essentialist philosopher, because of his notion that there is in self-consciousness a form of necessary development.²⁶ This necessity infuses all finite consciousnesses, and it is by being so infused that they are enabled to transcend their finitude. The necessity is the drift of self-consciousness, which as Findlay puts it, "is dispersed among a number of distinct centres in all of which it recognizes itself. It is an I which is a We, a We which is an I."²⁷ Most of the objections to Hegel's view that finite individuals are not absolutely separate from each other, aim therefore against the type of necessity which Hegel employs in working out his dialectical development. There are three widely held objections to Hegel's dialectical necessity. The first is that the dialectical development moves not by necessity but by the obfuscation which arises when one takes what amounts in fact to a contradiction as the principle which generates the movement. A movement which is based on sheer contradiction, so far from being a necessary development, can go one way as well as another, which is to say that the direction of the development is completely arbitrary. This brings us on to the second objection, which has to do specifically with arbitrariness in the Hegelian system.

26. As we shall see later, this is not the strict necessity of formal logic.

27. Hegel, A Re-examination, p.97.

This is not the arbitrariness of the first objection, which follows from the supposed self-contradictoriness of dialectical premises; it is the arbitrariness which is thought to exist as a result of a simple failure on Hegel's part to show why any one of the stages in the development of self-consciousness *must* follow from its predecessor. Hegel's outline of the facts of the historical development of self-consciousness, it is claimed, in no way supports the sort of necessity which Hegel claims for it. There is no reason, it is argued, why Stoicism has to arise out of slavery, or perception out of immediate sense-certainty. Hegel thus made the mistake of claiming a priori necessity for what is in fact purely contingent. Thirdly and finally, we are confronted with the objection that what Hegel produced was a closed system, with a built-in immunity to falsification. This immunity from criticism, it is argued, is injected into Hegel's system by a series of equivocations, and by the (deliberate) general unintelligibility of the system.

The first objection is concerned with Hegel's idea that dialectical movement is the result of contradiction in the concrete world, and that by basing his principle of movement on contradictions in the latter, Hegel has based his whole system on a piece of evasive and mystifying nonsense. This objection, which utterly misunderstands the type of contradiction which Hegel is concerned with, would hardly be worth discussing were it not the case that so many eminent thinkers seem to have been convinced by it. Popper, for example, displays his total ignorance of the nature of dialectic, when he writes in Mind that Hegel "simply said that contradictions do not matter. They just have to occur in the development of thought and reason."²⁸ Popper follows

28. Mind 1940 p.416. Article entitled What is Dialectic?

this up by saying that for Hegel "it is this very fact, namely that the world is full of contradictions, which shows us from another side that the law of contradictions, has to be discarded. For this law says that no self-contradictory proposition, or no pair of contradictory propositions, can be *true*, that is, can correspond to the facts."²⁹ Popper goes on to "clarify" matters, by giving us an example of an Hegelian dialectical contradiction:

"An example of a contradiction would be the following two sentences:
'The body here was, on the 1st of November 1938, between 9 and 10 a.m., charged positively,' and an analogous sentence about the same body, saying that it was at the same time not positively charged." 30

It is Popper and those who think like him who have made a mystery of the notion of contradiction in dialectics, by making it appear as formal contradiction, which it quite patently is not. Yet from this mistaken belief Popper concludes that Hegel can, and does, deduce anything (arbitrarily) so that Hegel's whole outline of how self-consciousness develops is utterly arbitrary.

"From two contradictory premises, we can logically deduce anything, and its negation as well. We therefore convey with such a contradictory theory - nothing. A theory which involves a contradiction is entirely useless, because it does not convey any sort of information." 31

The sort of contradiction which Hegel operates with in his discussions of dialectic was never intended to be anything like formal

29. *ibid.* p.419.

30. *idem.*

31. *ibid.* p.410.

contradiction. We saw in our exposition earlier, that the basic dialectical concepts with which we are concerned are the universal and the particular, two opposites which mutually require and complete each other. It is the interplay of these two moments which determines the course of development which self-conscious spirit is to take, and which issues in various historical forms in the concrete world. The general drift is towards the perfect harmonisation of particular with universal, but everything which exists is imbued with these two moments. It is the presence of these two moments which enables all that exists to have "difference and opposition in itself."³²

It is important to realize however that it is not *simply* the infusion of the world with the two complementing opposites of universal and particular which comprises the contradictoriness in concrete reality. The real contradictions arise when concrete reality expresses one of the moments one-sidedly, at the expense of the other. And these contradictions are not formal (logical) contradictions, but oppositions, disharmonies, failures of things and institutions to function satisfactorily. This is to say that were the opposites of universal and particular perfectly balanced, this would be precisely the *negation* of all contradiction in the concrete world. (Why they do not easily reach this balance has to do with the independence of the particular, which we discussed earlier, and which will be elaborated upon in relation to the second objection).

Once we see that it is the *one-sided expression* of universal or particular which constitutes the real contradiction, we can see how such contradictions suggest a definite line of movement. An historical state

32. Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences. The Logic Sec. 119 Ss. (Wallace translation).

of affairs which embodies one-sidedly the moment of the particular (or bondage) will become one in which a general malaise arises, and this malaise will contain within itself a strong tendency to bring to birth a new epoch; one in which the universal (or freedom) is more fully represented. And this is the answer to Popper's view that a dialectical development can go one way as well as another. (There is one way in which it is more likely to go, or better fitted to go, than any other).

We can now understand clearly why Hegel asserts:

"Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world, and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable. The only thing correct in that statement is that contradiction is not the end of the matter, but cancels itself." 33

The second objection is the most convincing of the three, so it is necessary to take it seriously. It is the objection which has to do with arbitrariness in the dialectical development and is well put by Findlay:-

"Hegel is, of course, wholly wrong if he thinks that the particular dialectical trail that he blazes is the *only* one that thought can follow: quite obviously his embarrassments (due to the dialectical tensions at any given phase) could have been developed in different ways at every point." 34

Part of the answer to this is that there is no reason to suppose that Hegel ever held that the particular dialectical trail which he blazes is the only one that thought can follow. But then we are led

33. *idem.*

34. Hegel, A Re-examination, p.95.

to ask just what *sort* of necessity is induced by dialectical tensions? What sort of necessity was it that Hegel saw as running through self-consciousness in the course of its historical and epistemological development?

We may reply at once that Hegel's necessity has not to do with the rigorous necessity of formal logic, but rather with a natural drift, or tendency to develop in a particular way, of consciousness. It is a necessity which gives full weight to contingency, indeed it is a necessity which explains why *there must of necessity be contingency* in the world. The drift may be always towards the Concrete Universal, but we saw in our earlier exegesis that the particular has a strange sort of independence, which means that it is often alienated from that universal essence, the adequate expression of which would be the fulfilment of its own meaning and nature. This means that *precisely how* the interplay between universal and particular will be worked out in concrete form is not totally determined a priori. The development of self-consciousness might indeed have been different if the moment of the particular had behaved otherwise. The overall drift however, would have been the same.

This independence of the particular, which is contingency existing *of necessity* in a dialectical development, may be illustrated by way of an analogy with the Christian faith. If God created the world, then it is the meaning and fulfilment of his creatures to know themselves as his artefacts and to express the God-like qualities which he has imbued them with. But if these things are truly to be a creation (rather than an abstract identity with the Creator) they must stand over against the creator as retaining some degree of independence. If they had no independent choice in whether or *not* to express their creator's purpose, they would be no more than a direct expression of the creator's will,

which is to say, they would be part of the creator's nature. Thus a genuine creation must have the freedom not to express its own essence in varying degrees (though of course, it can never wholly escape from it), which implies the freedom to choose slavery. This freedom to choose slavery constitutes the genuine independence of the particular and the history of self-consciousness in Hegel is infused with its contingent and arbitrary aspect precisely as the independent particular chooses slavery in varying degrees at various times.

What Hegel sets out to do is to explain how the dialectical development of self-consciousness has *in fact* been carried out; his explanations are in retrospect and take into account the moment of contingency. In prospect, all historical development appears capable of going in any of several directions. But in retrospect, when we see that there is only one in which it *has gone*, it may well appear to have been necessary. But of course such necessity would not be of an a priori logical kind, since a necessity of that kind would have no place for human will and freedom. It is necessary that a dialectical struggle must be what is the fate of self-consciousness, but the precise stages along the way, the points at which there are qualitative transitions, are *not* of necessity located where they are. It is not necessary, for example, that slavery had to collapse into Stoicism in the precise historical form which the latter took. The break with lordship and bondage was necessary since alienation had risen to an extreme pitch, but the precise way in which self-consciousness sought solace was not. Hegel's aim was to explain the rationale of what actually did happen, which is quite different from attempting to explain why it *must* have happened. That qualitative breaks will occur we can know, but the precise time when they occur and the exact form they are to assume, cannot be predicted in advance. Spirit would not be free were it

otherwise.³⁵

Hegel's dialectic is then something which he uses to help us to understand the development of self-consciousness, but its justification does not lie in the precise sequence of the historical stages themselves. We would not have to discard the dialectical principle had history taken a somewhat different course, nor must we discard it when we discover (as in fact we do) that Hegel's historical knowledge was often inaccurate.

But is then the dialectical movement compatible with any and every course of history, and if so, what definite information about how we should understand history can it possibly give us? And what, in any case, is the justification of the dialectical principle if its justification does not lie in the temporal development of self-conscious spirit?

The answer to this last question is that part of the justification for the dialectical way of understanding history is indeed to be found in the temporal development, but in the essential nature of the temporal development, not in the precise details of the events along the way. This essential nature of the temporal development has to do with the structure of consciousness, which involves the interplay between

35. The element of surprise and suddenness in the development of self-consciousness is beautifully captured by Hegel in the following passage:

"Frivolity and again ennui, which are spreading in the established order of things, the undefined foreboding of something unknown - all these are hints that there is something else approaching. This gradual crumbling to pieces, which does not alter the general look and aspect of the whole, is interrupted by the sunrise, which, in a flash and at a single stroke, brings to view the form and structure of the new world."

Phenomenology of Mind (Baillie translation) p.10, Vol.1.

subject and object, between particular and universal. This interplay must manifest itself in an historical spatial world, if it is to be anything at all.³⁶

We are now in a position to answer our first question, and to affirm that there are indeed historical processes which are *logically*³⁷ conceivable but which are excluded by a dialectical understanding. Dialectic then does tell us something definite about how we should understand history; it is not compatible with every and any historical pattern. Any historical pattern which did not involve the dynamic interplay of particular and universal, and thus of bondage and freedom, and which did not entail alienation and its overcoming in the drift towards concrete universality and a genuine liberation, would be incompatible with a dialectical understanding. In principle I could write down an undialectical history of, for example, beings perpetually at the level of immediate sense-certainty, without this issuing in formal contradictions. But I could never write down this type of history as my own history. For in the very act of writing I become aware of the distinction between (my) finite self and its Other. I become aware of consciousness and its object, and express something whose truth

36. Hegel argues, and quite successfully, that the notion of a noumenal world which does not manifest itself to consciousness is incoherent. There cannot, he argues, be two worlds, a world of appearances and an inner supersensible world. For were it not the very essence of this supersensible world to appear as phenomena, what would it mean to affirm the existence of such a world? It would be, says Hegel, a complete vacuity which could only be filled up with dreamings. The world of pure noumena, says Hegel "would have to be content with being treated so badly, for it would not deserve anything better, since even dreams are something better than its own barren emptiness." (Phenomenology of Mind, p.140, Vol.1. Baillie translation). The whole point Hegel is making is that the essence of what it is to be real lies precisely in the real's creative power to make itself manifest to subjective consciousness.

37. Using "logically" in the sense of "avoiding formal contradictions".

stretches beyond myself through myself. An interpenetration of universal and particular would have begun in which the drift of self-consciousness is toward liberation and self-transcendence. Beings at the perpetual level of immediate sense-certainty could never read or understand the history I wrote of them. An undialectic history is the history of something less than human.

Hegel's great attention to the details of historical epochs has led many to think that he derives his view of dialectical necessity by focusing upon these details. We may perhaps admit that Hegel takes a somewhat one-sided interest in those details, at the expense of a fuller discussion of the implications of the intentionality of self-consciousness as such. When we come to discuss Findlay's version of Hegelianism, we shall see that he to some extent at least corrects this one-sidedness. But this one-sided emphasis is the most that Hegel can be accused of, for the place he gives to contingency in his system is quite deliberate and definite, and it shows that Hegel was hardly so blind as to take all the details of historical development as necessary a priori.

We now come to Popper's claim that Hegel produced a system which contains an artificially built-in immunity to falsification and indeed even to criticism. The Hegelian philosophy, it is claimed, was expressly invented in order to be able to deal with any conceivable new evidence on its own terms, so that it could never in principle be subject to revision. Yet for this very reason - by being compatible with anything and everything - the philosophy is vacuous, and serves in the end only to confuse and confound. Popper puts all these ideas forward in Volume II of The Open Society and its Enemies.

Popper's work generally is nothing less than a total travesty of Hegelian scholarship. We find that here, condensed into a few pages, almost all of the commonest and crudest misunderstandings of Hegel's

thought are represented. According to Popper, Hegel thought that formal contradiction was a feature of the concrete world and indeed a highly desirable feature.³⁸ Hegel made absurd use of what he claimed was contradiction in the actual world says Popper, to set up a rigorous a priori deduction of historical empirical facts. (The absurdity results from the fact that anything follows from a formal contradiction, and not, as Popper tells us that Hegel held, from there being one strict line of development). Hegel's aim in producing this dialectical gibberish we are told, was to stupefy, and to make his system immune from criticism by placing it outside the bounds of rational discussion altogether. "By making argument and criticism impossible" Popper writes, "he (Hegel), intends to make his own philosophy proof against all criticism, so that it may establish itself as a reinforced dogmatism, secure from every attack, and the insurmountable summit of all philosophical development."³⁹ And Popper goes on to say that Hegel combined his nonsense about dialectics with an equally nonsensical philosophy of identity, according to which "everything that is now real or actual exists by necessity, and must be reasonable as well as good."⁴⁰

Popper further claims that Hegel produced all these absurdities quite knowingly and intentionally, in order to serve the interests of his employer, Frederick William III of Prussia. To conceal the absurdities, we are told, Hegel had to couch them in a terminology which made them almost unintelligible (Popper never tells us, however, just how a philosophy as unintelligible as he considers Hegel's to be could have assisted the absolute monarchy). If we are to believe Popper, Hegel

38. See The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol.II, p.39.

39. *ibid.* p.40.

40. *ibid.* p.41.

had not an ounce of intellectual honesty.

We have seen already just how distorted is Popper's understanding of Hegel's dialectic. Hegel was not playing around with formal contradictions, nor did he seek to derive empirical facts a priori.

We have seen that Hegel's dialectical principle makes perfectly good sense if we have the patience necessary to properly understand it; it is not made immune from rational criticism by way of being simply unintelligible. Insofar as the principle defies criticism, this is a reflection of how well it can deal with objections, not of its unintelligibility. It is difficult indeed to think of a way to falsify a theory or principle which can be seen to be deeply true, but this is a possibility which Popper never considers.

There is no justification, we may conclude, for Popper's view that the Hegelian dialectic is immune from appraisal, for its immunity from objections is wholly dependent upon its ability honestly to meet them. Popper thus cannot claim that Hegel has produced a closed system, unless he wants to claim that Hegel has produced a perfect system (in which case it would be immune from criticism entirely!). But perhaps, it may be said, there is a basis for this claim in the aspect of Hegel's thought which Popper calls the philosophy of identity.

Of the philosophy of identify Popper asks:

"How is this doctrine derived?" And he replies:

"Merely by a series of equivocations. Plato, whose Forms or Ideas, as we have seen, are entirely different from 'ideas in the mind', had said that the Ideas alone are real, and that perishable things are unreal. Hegel adopts from this the equation Ideal = Real. Kant talked, in his dialectics, about the Ideas in the mind'. Hegel adopts from this, the doctrine that the Ideas are something mental or spiritual or rational, which can be expressed in the equation Idea = Reason. Combined, these

two equations, or rather equivocations, yield Real = Reason: and that everything that is real must be reasonable, and that the development of reality is the same as that of reason." 41

The philosophy of identity, taken in Popper's way, says no more than that whatever happens to exist at a certain time is both rational and justifiable, "it must be reasonable as well as good." The doctrine is thus compatible with anything, since anything is rational just by way of coming to exist. But if it is compatible with anything, then this makes it (artificially) immune from criticism, for any historical epoch, or any empirical facts, come under the head of rationality just insofar as they manage to exist. There is no way to falsify the philosophy of identity, because it excludes by definition anything real from being non-rational. Popper is quite confident that Hegel was perfectly aware that the philosophy was nonsense, but that he invented it for ulterior motives.

"For behind the apparent confusion there lurk the interests of the absolute monarchy of Frederick William. The philosophy of identity serves to justify the existing order. Its main upshot is an ethical and juridical positivism, the doctrine that what is, is good, since there can be no standards but existing standards; it is the doctrine that might is right." 42

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41. *ibid.* p.41. In this passage we should note that Plato, as well as Hegel, is assailed without cause. Plato, in the Republic, says that the Ideas, the objects of which we have knowledge, have true Being; perishable things are not said to be unreal but to oscillate between Being and not-Being. The only thing that is unreal is (abstract) "Not-Being" itself; for this cannot even be an object of opinion or belief, but corresponds to a cognitive state of total nescience. Further, in the Sophist, Plato expressly says that - contrary to the views of certain misguided "Friends of the Forms" - not only the Ideas are real, but also souls, or the possessors of life, mind, and intelligence. And in the Timaeus he makes it quite clear that what Popper here calls "perishable things", though they are continually changing and both begin and cease to be, do nevertheless have that existence which is conferred on them by the Demiurge or Artificer, who makes all things (in the physical universe) after the pattern of the Forms.
42. *ibid.* p.41.

The claim that Hegel's connection between the real and the rational was argued for in the way that Popper outlines and made true by definition is simply ridiculous. Hegel spends volumes upon volumes attempting to demonstrate how and why the structure of reality is deeply rational. The Phenomenology of Mind, the Philosophy of History, the History of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Right, all aim to show that epochs in social and political history as well as in the history of ideas are not mere conglomerations of discrete events, whose relations to each other are external and contingent.⁴³

So far from artificially making his philosophy of identity immune from criticism, Hegel is constantly arguing for his view against a quite logically conceivable alternative, an alternative which, if true, would certainly falsify his doctrine.

This alternative is the type of empiricist existentialism which views the universe as a massive heap of contingencies - as a universe in which (in Hume's words) all events are "loose and separate". Hegel in no way tries to dispose of this world-picture by means of a series of facile equivocations. His procedure is rather to argue against this picture by attempting to show that the telos of all being lies in self-conscious rational thought, and that the world of empirical particulars can only be coherently accounted for when seen as incomplete manifestations or "moments", of a context which transcends them. Whether Hegel actually succeeded in demonstrating that his world-view is correct, is of course an important question, and one which it would be wrong for anybody to prejudge. But Popper's criticism is not, we should note, just that Hegel's arguments lack cogency, his point is rather that Hegel

43. At the very end of Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion he states this aim explicitly.

does not bother to adduce any arguments, because he (Hegel) regards that which exists to be rational, *simply because it exists*. Yet it is only because Hegel finds it quite conceivable that what exists *may not be rational* that he writes many pages and volumes specifically to prove that the opposite is in fact true.

For our part we shall, later on, find reason to firmly agree with Hegel that the world of mere empirical particulars is, given as a world of empirical particulars, an incomplete and inadequate expression of something more. We shall see that Hegel gives us at least a basis for cogent arguments which show, that finite individuals and the finite material world are unsatisfactorily conceived of as a contingent heap of meaningless empirical particulars, and we shall contend that this basis consists in Hegel's demonstration that all particulars presuppose universals (and ultimately one Concrete Universal). However, whatever we ultimately conclude about the cogency of Hegel's arguments, this is quite irrelevant to our necessary rejection of Popper's criticism. For Popper's criticism arises, not from an appraisal of Hegel's arguments, (since he never addressed himself to those arguments) but from the erroneous view that Hegel advanced not arguments, but equivocations. When we consider all that Hegel says about why finite individuals, things, and historical epochs, are incomplete taken in isolation from a transcendent whole, it becomes very clear that Hegel could never have merely assumed that "the real is the rational."

In any case, Popper seems to have misunderstood what Hegel means by "the rational." By rational, Hegel did not mean, as Popper assumes he did, morally defensible and therefore good. Many of the historical forms which Hegel discusses are forms where alienation and apprehension have risen to a tremendous pitch. Hegel would hardly have called them good. But they nonetheless are imbued with a deep

rationality, which means that if we look at the preceding forms of conscious life, we can explain how they gave birth to the new society, and see the rationale underlying the alienation and oppression.⁴⁴

It is the fact that we can offer this type of explanation that Hegel had in mind when he produced his philosophy of identity. From this, and the other misinterpretations we have discussed, it is quite clear that Popper had no clue whatsoever as to what Hegel was trying to say. He misunderstands Hegel at every point. Or does he? If we were inclined to Popper's own way of thinking, we might think it interesting to notice just how well Popper's own view of what it is to be an "Open Society" accords with the type of openness upheld by actually existing western liberal democracies. That Hegel's philosophy had at least deeply radical implications which in no way upheld totalitarianism is a truth known well to many. But Popper's philosophy contains no trace of anything which is not in accord with the political system which happens to be his own employer.

We shall however, not be so invidious. It is kinder to assume Popper's sincerity and ascribe to him only lack of understanding. It is unfortunate that the nonsense he writes about Hegel is so readable and clearly written, that his book is certain to deceive many. It is difficult to know how the injustice done to Hegel could be compensated for.

We have now considered some of the major objections to Hegel's arguments for the view that finite individuals are not ultimately distinct from one another. None of the arguments considered so far

44. It might surprise Popper to learn that Hegel was prepared to classify the Prussia of his day as such an alienated society. This becomes clear in the final sections of his Philosophy of Right.

has been convincing, since all of them rest on a misunderstanding of what dialectical development means within the Hegelian system.

However, not all the objections to this view of the non-ultimacy of finite individuals consist of an attack on alleged bad logic in the conception of dialectical developments. There are other objections, put forward by pluralist philosophers such as Pringle-Pattison and H.D. Lewis, which purport to show that some of the major phenomena of human life (e.g. love, morality and religion) cannot be accounted for within the terms of any doctrine according to which we are not ultimately separate from each other. Hegel himself could not answer these objections, since they were put forward in a later age than his. It has therefore been the task of more recent philosophers, sympathetic to the Hegelian viewpoint, to try to answer them.

Philosophers like Bernard Bosanquet and J.N. Findlay attempted to restate the case against the ultimacy of separate, finite individuals in such a way as to take account of the objections which have been raised by the recent pluralist philosophers. They realised, as we must too, that no verdict about the nature of finite individuality could be *finally* arrived at until the pluralists' arguments had been fully considered. It is therefore to an evaluation of the way the Hegelian position was defended against the pluralists' attack that we must now turn.

CHAPTER FIVE

BOSANQUET'S REFUTATION

OF PLURALISM

CHAPTER FIVEBOSANQUET'S REFUTATION OF PLURALISM

Bosanquet is the most Hegelian of the British Idealist philosophers. In essence, his account of finite individuality is the same as that of Hegel. Finite individuals are not ultimately finite, they are modifications of the whole of reality, of the Infinite. In Hegelian language, they express through their particularity the universal. Or to use Bosanquet's own language, they have an adjectival rather than a substantial mode of being.

Bosanquet arrives at this position, as does Hegel, by a phenomenological account of self-consciousness. But Bosanquet's phenomenology is clearer and more directly concerned with the form which experience invariably must take for all finite consciousnesses, and we are not confused by having this basic structure of experience related back (as it is in Hegel) to contingent historical events, which might have been otherwise. By leaving out the historical discussions which Hegel involves himself with, Bosanquet is able to concentrate on a more thorough and detailed account of the relation between self and its Other, which enables us to see much more easily why there is, in the last analysis, a sort of confluence of finite individuals.

Bosanquet is quite clear about what it is which he wants to refute. It is "the popular attitude" which "in considering finite individuals, whether things or persons, is frankly pluralist. Alike in contemplating the natural and human world, it models itself on the

apparent self-identity of the moveable and self-coherent body".¹

Bosanquet is quite prepared to admit that there is a certain substantiality about finite individuals which cannot be claimed for material things. This felt substantiality is the phenomenological base of the popular pluralistic view of selfhood for it gives us a feeling of existing as independent and self-complete beings. The other side of this, which is that at every moment, our independence and self-completion are broken down by factors outside our control, is overlooked by the popular attitude, since here self is overwhelmed by the impact of knowing itself as substantial.

If we were mere things, we are told, we would not have definite limits set to us as individuals. For "there is no ultimate reason for taking one complex, at least below conscious individuals, as a single thing more than another. They include one another in innumerable subordinations, from the Sahara for example, or any patch of it, down to any grain of sand in it."² We, however, as finite consciousnesses or spirits, are qualitatively different from mere things. The walls of personal identity are not arbitrary demarcations which we merely use for convenience. There is a very good reason why we distinguish ourselves from each other as we do. It is because we feel ourselves to be unities, or unifying centres, both of cognition in the passive sense and of (free) activity.

"Turning to the spiritual, finite individual,
"says Bosanquet, "we feel ourselves here at
last attempting to deal with him in his proper
character. We have no doubt of his unity, his

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1. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society. Supplementary Vol.1, p.89 (Journal henceforth referred to as P.A.S.).
 2. *ibid.* p.79.

freedom, his real and substantive being, which in principle and on the whole, though still subject to limitations springing from our impotence, yet reveals the individual in the general or typical light in which he must be taken as truly experienced within the universe." 3

Moreover,

"It is our nature to be a single self. We claim it is as a right and accept it is a duty. Our very repudiation of elements within our existential complex means the rejection of what we cannot unify." 4

To deny the existence or the ultimacy of the individuality such as we seem, at this level, to possess, looks at first, as if we are not only denying what appears to be a clear and evident truth, but we are also removing the basis of many aspects of human life, such as moral responsibility, religion and love. For if we are merely modifications of the Absolute and not true individuals, how can we be held, as individuals, responsible for our actions? And if we are ourselves expressions of the Absolute, what is there, apart from ourselves, to worship? And if we are all in the end not separate, how can I genuinely love another?

That there are answers to all these questions which lead us, not to despair, but "to a wider outlook," is something we come to understand when we see precisely in which way, for Bosanquet, individuality collapses. For this collapsing is not mere annihilation, it is rather sublation, since the finite individual is preserved yet transformed and transcended in the Absolute.⁵

3. *ibid.* p.92.

4. *idem.*

5. The term sublation, as used here, refers to the finite individual's being subsumed within, yet transcended, in the Absolute.

We can know that finite individuality breaks down in this way, by looking more deeply at precisely that feature of our consciousness which seems strongly to confirm our idea of our self-completion and our independence as individual units, - that is, our experience of ourselves as unifying centres or focal points of experience. For it emerges that although we certainly are, each of us, centres which are attempting to unify experience, the unification is never completed in any one of us. Our unrealized (i.e. uncompleted, or imperfect) unity is merely a pretension, and not an actuality.

"We carry with us a pretension to be ourself, which includes less and more than we find in our existence. Our unity is a puzzle and an unrealized aspiration. It is demanded by thought and action, but we cannot find it in existence."

"Philosophy tells us, as we agreed, that if we possessed our unity, we should no longer be what we experience our existence as being."

Bosanquet goes on to tell us exactly how it is that we fall short of being completed unities. Of the finite individual, he says, -

"Its existence, as an existence, bears the unmistakable stamp of the fragmentary and provisional. Can there be anyone who does not feel it to be so in every act and every thought? But through all this, and operative in it, there shines the intentional unity. It is not my monad nor my star. It is the life which lives in me, but it is more of that life than I succeed in living." 6

The unity such as I do in fact have, thus derives its being from a great and more complete unity than I actually measure up to. The unity which I regard as myself is an abstraction from the whole, the

unity which I aim to be but cannot be. It is only by forgetting the abstraction that I

"set up to be a self-centred real",

and in this way,

"I become *ipso facto* in the main a false appearance and all but worthless. This is when I come nearest to being a substantive in my own right, in error and in sin."

It is very simple to see how I can come to have this illusion of myself.

"I can mistake the character in which I appear. I seem to myself, perhaps, to be the King, and I am the fool." 7

To become aware of our non-ultimacy as individuals is to become aware of that true self-complete unity from which we are merely abstractions. And this is to become aware of a sort of lateral identity between selves, as well as the continuing identity (through temporal change) of individuals. By caring only about the continuing survival of individuals, we find that we were "like a horse in blinkers, blind to all that is not straight ahead."⁸ Bosanquet protests against the fact that all too often this lateral identity is not even taken into account as a possibility.

"Hope, anxiety, and expectation fix themselves at every moment on the linear future, and if this basis is shaken, the substitute is not a wider outlook, but despair." 9

7. *idem.*

8. *ibid.* p.94.

9. *ibid.* p.91.

Once we adopt this wider outlook, however, we have less reason to despair, in the face of the hazards and hardships of finite selfhood, and in the face of the ultimate death of each finite individual, than we should have if we adopted views which emphasize the importance of linear continuity. Our conceptions of such prominent features of human life as morality, freedom, religion, and love, are in no way negated, but are rather deepened. They cease to be as puzzling as they are if we adopt the suppositions which regard finite selves as ultimate.

Consider, for example, freedom. There appears at first to be an incompatibility between the idea that finite individuals are not ultimately independent units and the attribution of freedom to them. As Lewis puts it: "To be accountable, it would seem, we require to be beings whose actions can be regarded as pre-eminently their own."¹⁰ And if we are modifications of the Absolute, how can this be? Bosanquet replies to this quite directly:-

"A man is free - insofar as he wills the universal object. The reason is obvious. It is only what is universal that is free from self-contradiction, that can be willed without obstruction. Every contradiction in my world of experience obstructs my action and embarrasses my will; and every pain or defeat or confusion of which I am aware, in any subject or object apprehended by me, is a contradiction in my world. I am free in such objects of volition as confront with adequate solutions the situations which I apprehend. Thus, in accordance, with a familiar paradox, it is only in a will above my own that I can find my own will and my freedom and independence. Here again, it is only by acknowledging myself adjectival and under necessity that I can become substantive and free." 11

10. The Elusive Mind, p.283.

11. P.A.S. Sup. Vol.I., p.94-5.

In this passage, Bosanquet shows how it is possible to solve, or rather to avoid, difficult problems which are, or come to be connected with freedom when freedom is regarded as a characteristic which is ascribable to the finite individual self. On the existential view, which insists on the absolute division between selves, (since each self expresses only its own particularity) human freedom can only be regarded as a matter of sheer individual choice. The choices actually made may be prompted by feeling, and inclination, or they may be made totally arbitrarily - as leaps in the dark. A freedom based on feeling is no real freedom, and indeed ends in tyranny, since the more this type of freedom is achieved, the more dominated the individual will be by his momentary whims. The culmination of this freedom is absolute bondage, when the whole personality becomes the slave of its passions, over which it no longer has control.

Existentialists are of course aware that this domination by feeling is in no sense real freedom, but what account remains to them? Only the account which identifies freedom with caprice. The more free the action, on this view, the more fortuitously it is carried out. And the freest actions of all are those for which no reason whatsoever can be given. They are a product of the decision of the subject, and decision alone.

It is a strange type of freedom which rises to a pitch as it becomes most difficult to give reasons for our actions. For it means that the more detached I am from what I do, the more freely I do it. The existentialist doctrine of freedom is really nothing less than a doctrine that alienation is freedom!

The existentialists themselves are not unaware of the emptiness which inheres in the conception of freedom which they espouse. In Sartre's novel, The Age of Reason, we are presented with the story of

the search for just this (individualistic) mode of freedom. The hero, Mathieu Delarue, has throughout the novel a burning desire - to do at least one thing in his life totally freely, to bring something about by sheer force of his own decision, a decision in no way determined or influenced by anything in his past life, his upbringing, his personal situation, and so on. He demands the absolute in (abstract) freedom. Towards the end of the novel he manages to do something which embodies everything that his own conception of freedom demands. He leaves his lover, Marcelle. Sartre describes how Mathieu came to see this supposed expression of freedom as an empty freedom, for having left Marcelle, he feels so detached from his action that he realizes that any alternative course would have been just as adequate as a realization of freedom. The fact that Mathieu's decision was purely arbitrary, meant it was more like the outcome of chance than an expression of human freedom.

By willing this individualistic freedom then, we defeat our own purpose, and contradict ourselves. For even if we achieve individualistic freedom, we discover soon enough that we are not free but in a state of bondage. We have done nothing less than to choose our own unfreedom.

To be truly free, we must express our essential nature. We must will that which is the highest expression of rational self-consciousness, which is to say that we must not give our personal perspective undue weight. For if we do, we find that we have limited ourselves by not allowing our vision to rise beyond one narrow point in space and time. The freedom of this standpoint is the freedom of an extreme parochialism, which is no less than the extreme of limitation; it is the attitude in which human consciousness is most dominated by contingent factors.

To want to have only the freedom which can accrue to finite individuals is to seek bondage, since finite individuals have no ability for self-transcendence. They are (or would be if they could actually

exist in this attitude) at the extreme point of the scale of subjection.

In real freedom the moment of subjectivity does not serve as a limitation, but rather as a vehicle by means of which we transcend the walls of our finite selfhood. In knowledge, for example, we are freest when the subjective conveys to us information about things-in-themselves, when there is no opposition between subjective and objective. This principle finds its analogue in action, for action is freest when it is least determined by the mere contingent features which limit and delimit the particular. The particular is used as a vehicle for the expression of something which transcends its own standpoint, if the latter is abstracted from the whole and taken in isolation. Free action will not put the stress on my particular interests, it will rather express what I essentially am, someone capable of more than these particular interests.

The Platonic view that evil is a form of ignorance is thus not entirely misguided. It arises because we misunderstand what our interests, as beings with the capacity for rational self-consciousness, ultimately are. We see ourselves as isolated individuals, separate from and in competition with similar individuals. From this viewpoint, freedom seems to involve the necessity to subdue such antagonistic creatures which, at every point, stand in our way, from whom fulfilment is impossible, and who would subdue us given only the opportunity. Our ill intentions towards others are based on these pluralistic assumptions. It is these assumptions then which give rise to moral evil, assumptions which are a product of ignorance. Yet the type of ignorance here is not one which renders the finite individual totally devoid of responsibility, since the ignorance is not merely a matter of a lack of (essentially passive) experience or information, it is an ignorance which is in a sense freely chosen. For as we explained previously, we are endowed with a strange sort of freedom which enables us to choose bondage. Moral evil

is indeed based on a type of ignorance, and ignorance is certainly limitation upon our free activity, yet the ignorance is not purely the result of a cognitive process, it is the product of a *refusal* to take a wider view of things than individualistic pluralism permits.

Turning now to mankind's inclination towards religious worship, Bosanquet's account not only explains why this impulse is present as a feature of the phenomenology of self-conscious life but at the same time rids us of idfficulties which arise when this impulse manifests itself through the worship of a Divinity conceived of as utterly transcendent. Broadly, the religious impulse is essentially a desire for self-transcendence. It is the desire to get beyond our finitude and to apprehend something which transcends the limitations of our individual perspective. Religion conceives of God as totally transcendent when the *difficulties* of self-transcendence are most keenly felt by consciousness. For this form of religious worship the eternal is regarded as something quite outside human consciousness, it stands over against us as an "other". Human consciousness in this posture is overwhelmed by the boldness of its ambition to transcend its finite limitations (to which it feels itself inexorably bound). We have seen that the moment of the universal, which necessitates transcendence beyond a finite personal perspective, is part of the nature of any self-conscious life. In an utterly transcendent theism, this universal aspect is abstracted from worldly self-consciousness, which has not the confidence to acknowledge that this moment is its own; it is projected outside itself into an other-worldly realm, such that the universal moment presents itself in the form of an unfathomable "Beyond".

This abstraction from human self-consciousness of what is in truth its own essence means that the infinite appears to the finite as something alien and external, something whose transcendence only is known

but whose immanence is forgotten.

This view of the Infinite, which indeed may be identified with the God of certain theistic sects, gives rise to grave epistemological problems. For how can something so utterly "wholly other" than man even begin to be known by him?

Theologians and philosophers of religion have spent much time and effort grappling with this question, without much reward for the intensity of their energies. To take just one example Kierkegaard acknowledges that for Christianity, the relation between the finite and the eternal is an absolute paradox; he admits that if the Infinite really stands beyond the finite, the idea that a finite mind could have knowledge of the Infinite is a literal absurdity to the understanding. Kierkegaard wants to claim that it is only by a sort of miracle that man comes to have knowledge of God. The miracle consists in our being able to be "in the truth" about God, even when it is *logically* unintelligible that we, as the purely finite, can know God's nature. In the Philosophical Fragments Kierkegaard exalts in the miracle with these words:

"This thought did not arise in my own heart! ... And is it not altogether miraculous and does not this word come as a happy omen to my lips, for as I have just said, and as you yourself involuntarily exclaim, we stand here before the Miracle." 12

In spite of his raptures about the Miracle, it is quite clear that Kierkegaard cannot be true to a belief in what he admits to be a logical absurdity. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript and The Concept of Dread, he elaborates further upon the nature of his "Miracle"

12. Philosophical Fragments, p.45.

until so much is explained that some of its miraculousness begins to disappear!

When we stand before the miracle we are looking into ourselves, into our inwardness, our subjectivity. Kierkegaard specifically says that this is the *only* way in which we may find God. For he says that "Nature, the totality of created things, is the work of God. And yet God is not there; but within the individual man there is a potentiality (man is potentially spirit) *which is awakened in inwardness* to become a God-relationship, and then it becomes possible to see God everywhere."¹³

Knowledge of God then comes to us while we are looking into our own finite selves, into our inwardness. But what sort of miracle is this? A miracle is something whose whole essence is to be unintelligible. It is a phenomenon which cannot in principle be explained. Yet here we have an account of how we know God which renders such knowledge perfectly intelligible. We know the infinite through the finite because the finite itself expresses the Infinite. A full knowledge of our own nature leads us to a knowledge of the divine nature. To put this another way, self-conscious life is a synthesis of particular and universal, and the universal is known by turning our attention inward, and attending to the condition which is the condition of our particular experiences of ourselves and of things in the external world. Kierkegaard falls back finally on the view that God is not "wholly other" than man, and is forced to concede that his God is immanent as well as transcendent.

That Kierkegaard cannot sustain the position which holds that God is purely transcendent comes through especially strongly in The Concept of Dread. We need only quote one important passage to illustrate how Kierkegaard had to concede in the end that (human) self-conscious life is a synthesis of the finite and the Infinite. Speaking

13. Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.220-221.

of the knowledge we have of our (potentially) infinite freedom,
Kierkegaard says:-

"Thus dread is the dizziness which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself." 14

Kierkegaard's miracle, through which we know the nature of the Infinite, turns out to be nothing more than the miracle of the universal finding expression through the particular. It is indeed the miracle which allows for the possibility of all self-conscious life. But this type of miracle, which Kierkegaard is forced to describe in this way, is quite incompatible with his other-worldly theism and his idea that Christianity is an Absolute Paradox, such that Infinite and finite are so utterly opposed that the latter could not even begin to know the former through its own efforts.

Kierkegaard begins with a determination to preserve the otherness of God and ends up by stressing the dialectical interdependence of Infinite and finite: -from which it follows that the otherness of God vanishes. For to be infinite is to have a potential for self-conscious life, and self-conscious life is here, on this earth. Kierkegaard, in spite of all his efforts to do precisely the opposite, commits himself in the end to a view the implications of which are essentialist and dialectical, rather than existentialist. And it is interesting to remember that Hegel, no less than Kierkegaard, thought that the Infinite - finite relation was an absurdity and could not be grasped by the (analytical) Understanding. It could only be grasped by the higher synthesizing faculty, which he called Reason.

14. Concept of Dread, p.55, Lowrie translation.

Kierkegaard's exertions show how problematic are attempts to show that God is "wholly other". Those who have tried have always espoused various brands of irrationalism, the gist of which is captured by Barth's assertion that faith cannot argue with unbelief, it can only preach to it. Any attempt to explain further inevitably leads to the abandonment of the view of God as totally transcendent and "Beyond". It comes to be seen that such views are arrived at simply by abstracting the infinite moment of human self-consciousness and projecting it heavenward, so that the universally valid and infinite appears as something outside of self-consciousness. When this happens we can say no more. We can worship something which we do not, and cannot, understand.

The irrationalism and alienation which arise from a conception of God as an utterly transcendent Being may be explained and overcome if we adopt Bosanquet's view of the nature of finite selves and the Concrete Universal. For according to Bosanquet we are all partial manifestations of an unlimited fully rational "Whole", and are therefore imbued with a nature which is at once particular and universal. Our consciousness of God, as expressed in our feelings of religious worship constitutes, in Bosanquet's view, an awareness of a Being which is, in reality, immanent as well as transcendent. The fact that religious feelings of worship have led many to posit a Divinity which is "wholly other" than human beings is not surprising when we consider how seldom we manage to reach the highest (moral and cognitive) levels of our own nature. The divine nature, although perhaps correctly conceived of as the ultimate potential of any being imbued with self-consciousness and rationality, is nonetheless a potential which human beings persistently fail to make actual, and this is why God appears so frequently as utterly transcendent.

Yet it is necessary for God (or the Absolute) to be immanent (as well as transcendent) if we are to have any determinate knowledge of the Divine nature. If God really were "wholly other", or wholly transcendent, we could know nothing of his nature. Only the view advanced by Bosanquet, that the Absolute is at once immanent and transcendent, can satisfactorily explain why we seek to do the impossible, that is, to worship a Being which is wholly transcendent yet whose nature we can (at least partially) know.

Having discussed the implications of Bosanquet's view of individuality in relation to moral responsibility and religious feelings of worship, we come finally to the problem about love. If we are not ultimately separate individuals, it could be argued, how could it be that there can exist love as we experience it?

Pringle-Pattison in particular raises this objection. Love, he claims, is impossible, so long as there is not a plurality of finite beings. In his reply to Bosanquet in the Symposium we have been quoting from, Pringle-Pattison states:-

"If love, then, becomes the ultimate expression of the divine nature, as it is in the Christian conception, self-centredness must disappear; the divine life must be a life with and for others, and the otherness must be real and not only apparent." 15

With regard to love, we may begin with a question which is analogous to the one we asked about freedom. If individualistic pluralism were true what would *then* be the nature of love? How would such a view make it possible for self-centredness to disappear, in a way that in Bosanquet's view it could not? And we may reply, as we

did with respect to freedom, that such love would either be based on pure feeling, or else it would be a matter of an arbitrary decision. Love between individuals who are *merely* individuals could have none of that lasting and eternal significance which we want to convey through it. To love someone for the individualist is nothing less than tragic, since his experience of love seeks to exact something from another which that other cannot, as an individual, provide. He knows his love, experienced at first as something with infinite power and significance, to be illusory, for nothing in his own nature conceived of as a particular finite being, tells him that love is anything more than the product of whim or chance. Bounded by a sea of contingencies, it flickers for a short time and then goes out for ever. Also associated with this individualistic conception of love is the notion that the only reason which we can have for loving is our own personal satisfaction.

If love, then, is impossible on a theory which holds that there is no ultimate division between finite individuals, it is certainly no more possible on individualistic premises.

The objection that if we are not ultimately separate we cannot love, since there is no genuine otherness, may well be an objection to a thorough-going monism but not to the theories upheld by Hegel and Bosanquet. For their theories hold that our particular natures, through which we express the universal, have a certain substantial independence - indeed it is for this very reason that Bosanquet tells us that finite individuals have a type of individuality which is not shared by mere things (which are delineated as units only for practical convenience). This substantiality is so definite that we have the power to assert our particular interests against our higher nature, (in which we would transcend this mere particularity and thereby become free) even though, in so doing, we choose our own unfreedom. We are then, in a sense,

genuine selves, but these selves contain the potential to be more than what they are in all their finitude and limitation, they are more than they experience themselves to be in any single moment. They are incomplete unities whose pretensions to be complete are not actualised. The completion of these intentional unities transforms them into something which is other than they appear to themselves to be, something which coalesces and is one with the other finite selves when so completed. The essence of knowledge, as well as morality, lies precisely in the way in which we are able to overcome the limitations imposed by our own particular perspective. Knowledge aims to cease regarding things purely instrumentally, as objects which are merely useful to our practical purposes. It tries to get beyond this and know how things are more truly, either as they are in themselves or at the very least, as they are intersubjectively, that is, for all self-consciousnesses. And there could be no such thing as morality if self-consciousness did not have an attitude in which it refrains from putting its particular interests first, before those of others. There is widespread disagreement about how such impartiality is best achieved and over the details of what it consists in, but from Plato to Hare, some sort of capacity to not give our special needs predominance and to formulate and live by universally binding moral rules has been seen as the driving force behind, and the reason for, the existence of such a thing as moral consciousness. Returning to love: it seems that it is best explained as a sort of limiting case of the moral consciousness, in which the tendency to put oneself first as a particular is not even felt. The morally-aware consciousness, which lives by universal rules and binding duties, keeps these firmly before it since at this stage it is aware of the strong temptation of the mind as a particular to assert itself against these universals. There is fragmentation within

the personality; two sides are at war, the side which makes claims for itself as particular and the side which seeks transcendence of self as particular. This explains why the very word "duty" often has a loveless and harsh ring about it; when one does one's duty, one defies one's inclinations. For when I do my duty, the principle of universal self-transcendence and my spontaneous inclinations have not been fully reconciled. Once the reconciliation has been completed, and the self-transcendence of the particular (by realising itself as the expression of a higher will) takes place without strain, that is, when duties and inclinations are perfectly harmonised, then what emerges is neither duty nor inclination, but a synthesis which is qualitatively different from either. This synthesis is love. And it is *only* on a view of finite individuals which sees the individual as ultimately an expression of the Absolute that such a reconciliation between duty and inclination can be effected.

The absence of ultimate otherness, then, so far from being an obstacle for love, is its very precondition. For only on this basis can transcendence of self-as-particular be a real possibility. It is true that I direct my love towards an object, an object which is, in a sense my *other*, but just in so far as I overcome my estrangement from this "other" do I succeed in loving. I do not become at any time absolutely identical with this "other" since there must indeed be some genuine otherness if there is to be love. But genuine otherness does not mean ultimate otherness, and Bosanquet's view fully allows for differentiation and particularity within the universe. The problem with critics such as Pringle-Pattison is that they have failed totally to perceive that genuine otherness may exist without this requiring that there be *ultimate* otherness.

In love, we recognize more fully¹⁶ what this chapter has been arguing for all along, that the dividing line which seems to separate finite beings from each other is not impregnable. In love, we experience not identity with the "other" but a sort of ultimate closeness and unification therewith, which is the experience of a self-transcendence which is as near as we come in daily life to what can be made manifest only in the life of union with the Absolute.

Further Objections of Pringle-Pattison

Pringle-Pattison puts forward what are basically two types of argument against Bosanquet's position. Firstly, he argues that we are committed on Bosanquet's view of selfhood to unacceptable propositions concerning our moral responsibility, our religious impulses, and our ability to love. Bosanquet's theories, we are told, contradict what Pringle-Pattison regards as the elementary certainties of life. Pringle-Pattison, we should note, gives no argument to show why we have to regard the things he mentions as elementary certainties, and in the case of his main example he simply states:

"The authorship of our own acts and our responsibility for them - this is the innermost meaning of our freedom and independence and any theory is self-condemned which can find no room for this elementary certainty." 17

In view of the philosophical arguments which have been adduced for

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16. But not necessarily completely fully. For with love often we recognize the principle only as it relates to one or a very limited number of individuals.
17. P.A.S., Sup. Vol.1, p.114.

determinism, together with the strong fatalistic feelings which mankind has experienced and written about down the ages (e.g. in the Greek tragedies) it seems highly dubious to regard human freedom as something which is immediately self-evident. If it is a certainty at all, it is not an immediate one. We can know it to be so only at the end of a deep and wearisome process of thought. We saw previously that there is, in any case, no conflict between the aspects of human life which Pringle-Pattison seeks to preserve and Bosanquet's view of selfhood. It is indeed only by way of the latter that we explain and understand the former. Thus we have already seen that Pringle-Pattison's first set of arguments, his attempts at a *reductio ad absurdum* of Bosanquet's position, cannot get off the ground.

The second type of argument which Pringle-Pattison advances, proceeds by trying to show more directly that there are deficiencies in Bosanquet's phenomenology. The idea here is that Bosanquet has come to his view of the nature of finite selves by overlooking certain important considerations. Arguments of this type we now have to consider.

The arguments which try to show that Bosanquet's phenomenology is deficient, rest on a view of Bosanquet's phenomenology which is itself deficient. Often it looks very much as if Pringle-Pattison has totally misunderstood Bosanquet's notion of finite selfhood. What he cannot seem to grasp is that although Bosanquet does not believe in the self-completeness and total autonomy of finite individuals, this does not mean that he regards them as mere appearances or illusions. Pringle-Pattison forgets that when Bosanquet uses terms like "apparent" and "superficial", these terms are not intended to qualify the finite individuals themselves, but rather their seeming independence and distinctiveness from each other. For Bosanquet, finite individuals are

the expressions or modifications of the one reality. We have already seen, in our discussion of Hegel's dialectic, just how important is the moment of the particular, to which the finite individual corresponds. We saw that the universal absolutely requires the particular, if it (the universal) is to be creative and dynamic, and not to collapse into the nothingness of an abstract self-identity. Further, Bosanquet shows an awareness of the limited independence possessed by finite individuals when he points out that, in this case, unlike that of inanimate things, we do not and cannot delimit what counts as a unit arbitrarily or for practical convenience. The nature of spiritual finite individuals as *intended* unities dictates that we should distinguish one from another as we do. Because the unification is not complete in finite individuals, such individuals cannot by themselves be taken as self-complete. But this certainly does not mean that he wants to claim that finite individuals are in the end non-existent, for this would be to espouse the extreme form of thorough-going monism which denies the moment of the particular.

Granted this major misinterpretation of Bosanquet's theory on Pringle-Pattison's part, we can see that the two leading arguments which presuppose it and by which he seeks to establish his position must inevitably fail.

The first of these holds that Bosanquet can only establish his position by attending to the content of finite selves, and not to the form. By so abstracting the content from the form, Pringle-Pattison maintains, Bosanquet is able to ignore the significance of numerical identity, or the plurality of egos which binds the content of experience together. Pringle-Pattison maintains that he does not want to claim that there is a mere plurality of *externally* related selves, since he would not want to affirm what this would imply, the existence of unrelated

reals. Nonetheless, he still wants to emphasize the importance of numerical identity.

By contrast, says Pringle-Pattison, "Professor Bosanquet appears to think of contents as a self-existent continuum and of the conditions of individual existence as comparable to partitions introduced into this continuum (as we might let down vessels of different shapes into a stream) by which one section or area is temporarily enclosed and to its own misfortune, isolated from the rest."¹⁸

This picture is a total distortion of Bosanquet's idea of finite selfhood. For vessels of any size could be let down into a stream at any point and such enclosures would have bounds which are utterly arbitrary. Bosanquet does not ignore the significance of numerical identity, except insofar as he regards each finite individual as more than a result of numerical addition.

It is the distortion of Bosanquet's views as exemplified by the "vessels in the stream" analogy that enables Pringle-Pattison to claim that Bosanquet draws a conclusion (concerning the ultimate confluence of finite selves) based on ignoring the form of experience in favour of the content. Pringle-Pattison perceives that it would be plausible to hold that vessels let down into a stream contain a content which is part of the same stream! And from this he concludes that if Bosanquet wants to say that we are manifestations of the same Absolute, he can only have reached this conclusion by attending to the content of experience and ignoring the form in a way analogous to the way we ignore the form of the vessels. (But whereas in the stream analogy this does not matter, here, Pringle-Pattison maintains, it is crucial). Bosanquet's phenomenology, we are told, contains a vital omission, and renders his

18. *ibid.* p.108.

conclusion unjustified.

Pringle-Pattison, we can see, mistakes the nature of Bosanquet's conclusion, for it is quite evident that on Bosanquet's view we are not parts of the Absolute in the same way that water is part of a stream. But because Pringle-Pattison regards being an expression of the Absolute as like being part of a stream, he concludes quite correctly, granted this (mistaken) premise, that the only way of reaching this conclusion is to attend exclusively to the content. Yet if we attend only to the content in the case of selves, no justifiable conclusion can arise.

We can see now that Pringle-Pattison does not conclude that Bosanquet's phenomenology ignores the form of experience by examining how Bosanquet actually looks at finite individuals. He rather looks at a mistaken interpretation of Bosanquet's conclusion and says, in effect, that if Bosanquet can come up with such a theory, he *must* have ignored the form. For it seems to be the only possible way to arrive at Bosanquet's conclusion.

If we look at Bosanquet's actual procedure, instead of discovering what it must have been by looking for the presuppositions of a view he did not hold, it becomes quite clear that Bosanquet did not abstract the content from the form of experience. It is true that Bosanquet does not specifically tell us why his view of finite selfhood arises from a consideration of firstly the content and secondly the form of human conscious experience, but that is because, for Bosanquet, there is no sharp distinction between the form of such experience and the content. In taking account of the content of experience in all its depth and fullness, one becomes aware of oneself as an experiencing subject, so that awareness of the form of experience is actually internal to awareness of the content. The experience that comes before me does so as

essentially my experience. The quality of "my-ness" infects the basic nature of the objects of experience itself.

That Bosanquet takes due account of subjectivity, or what Pringle-Pattison chooses to call the form of experience, becomes plain when we look at what he has to say about how we experience ourselves. Contrary to Pringle-Pattison's remarks, we can see that Bosanquet constantly argues for his position by stressing features that concern how an ego experiences itself. He speaks for example of the fragmentation and limitation of finite subjectivity that we all know as finite subjects.

"Every contradiction in my world of experience obstructs my action and embarrasses my will; and every pain or defeat or confusion of which I am aware, in any subject or object apprehended by me, is a contradiction in my world." 19

Thus,

"The existence of the self is not adequate to its implied unity, which is a pretension inherent in a thinking being." 20

The second objection raised by Pringle-Pattison is that Bosanquet arrives at his conclusions by taking up the standpoint of the observer. According to Pringle-Pattison, Bosanquet never looks at what it is to be a self as it were, "from the inside." Thus he remarks, "The truth is, Professor Bosanquet's view is of the type mentioned above, in which the logical analysis of knowledge is substituted for an account of living experience." The view that finite selves are merely "peepholes, so to speak, from which an identical content is contemplated" is arrived at by failing to look at the self as it experiences itself.

19. *ibid.* p.95.

20. *ibid.* p.97.

The view that Bosanquet takes up the standpoint of the observer is in line with the view that he attends only to the form. And we can answer it in exactly the same way. It is simply false to say that Bosanquet does not look at finite selves "from the inside". The quotations already cited are sufficient to show this. But we may cite one more quotation concerning how Bosanquet establishes his position precisely by considering finite individuals, as they appear to be to themselves, from the inside. Here, in the following passage, it is a very specific attention to subjectivity which leads Bosanquet to speak in the first person and say: "I cannot believe that the supreme end of the Absolute is to give rise to beings such as I experience myself to be."²¹

In this passage Bosanquet, so far from failing to take up his stand "within the self" is more in danger, if anything, of being one-sidedly subjective than a detached observer. Were it not for the rest of his argument, one might accuse him of taking his stand so much within the self that he was relying far too much on his immediate feelings and perceptions. If this is, as Pringle-Pattison claims "the logical analysis of knowledge" substituted for "an account of living experience" one is led to wonder what an account of living experience would be like for Pringle-Pattison. One wonders too, just how *living* would be the type of experience which could not be described in any intellectual or philosophical terms at all.

We have now seen that the two interrelated objections with which Pringle-Pattison attempts to refute Bosanquet are both totally unfounded. They arise from a basic misunderstanding of Bosanquet's doctrine. But why was Pringle-Pattison led, in the first place, to misunderstand?

21. *ibid.* p.88.

Why was he so anxious to defend a pluralism of finite selves that he overlooked important aspects of Bosanquet's view which greatly weaken his case? The answer to be given is indicated by one remark which he let slip in his paper: "It is certain, at all events, that our conclusions as to the value and destiny of the individual must ultimately depend upon our conception of God and of his relation to his creatures."²²

For all his insistence that a correct view of selfhood depends upon carefully studying what it is to be a subject and for all his condemnation of Bosanquet for not taking up his stand "*within*" the self, Pringle-Pattison suddenly comes out with the admission that our view of selfhood depends ultimately, not on a close scrutiny of subjectivity, but rather upon something which, on his own pluralistic view, is quite external to it, that is, our conception of God. We now see why Pringle-Pattison is so anxious to defend pluralism. It is because pluralism of selves is alone compatible with the type of theism which he wishes to espouse. He realises that Bosanquet's view of selfhood is a threat to the absolute transcendence of God, which he wants at all costs to emphasize. One thing which he does not misunderstand about Bosanquet's view is that it holds that finite beings are in some way expressions of the Infinite. This is too close to deifying man for Pringle-Pattison's liking, it is too close to claiming that finite beings are in themselves divine, that they are in the end identical with God. The objections of Pringle-Pattison do not we may conclude, seem to be so much motivated by a desire to avoid certain philosophical errors, (such as not abstracting content from form or taking too detached a viewpoint), as by a strong and pervasive determination to avoid

22. *ibid.* p.113.

what he considers to be blasphemy.

The Pluralism of H.D. Lewis

H.D. Lewis is a Cartesian dualist, a Christian theist, and a fervent advocate of the independence and plurality of finite selves. But he regards Pringle-Pattison's arguments for pluralism as weak, and in particular, weaker than the arguments of his opponent Bosanquet, in spite of the fact that he sees the conclusions of the latter as ultimately less defensible. The reason for this, Lewis tells us, is because both Bosanquet and Pringle-Pattison accept a presupposition about the nature of the self from which Bosanquet's view more plausibly follows. To have got the better in the debate, Pringle-Pattison would have had to repudiate this initial assumption. By failing to do this, however, Pringle-Pattison allows Bosanquet "to score heavily, in point of rigidity and consistency of argument over his immediate opponent in the symposium."²³

Since Lewis admits that once we locate the essence of selfhood where Bosanquet and Pringle-Pattison do, a non-pluralistic view follows, we need to discover just where it is - for the latter two - located, and where and why Lewis would re-position it.

Lewis asserts that for Bosanquet, the fundamental feature of a finite self is that it is a unifying centre of experience. "The point to note especially," writes Lewis, "is the preoccupation with the content of experience and its unification, whether in thinking or in action."²⁴

23. The Elusive Mind, p.285.

24. *ibid.* p.284.

It is quite true that for Bosanquet it is indeed the unifying feature of finite individuality that constitutes its essential selfhood. It is this that makes finite selves genuine individuals whose bounds are drawn for us so that we can delimit the units as we do with "things", for convenience. It is also this unifying feature of selves which leads us to notice that in any particular finite self the unification is never complete, but is such that selves are only intended unities. Lewis admits that:

"Once this move is made, the important thing about us, as persons, seems to be the unification and extension of experience by which it becomes identical with the experience of others ... " 25

Once we accept that the essence of selfhood is to be a unifying centre of experience, Lewis agrees that it follows to say with Bosanquet that if the intended unity became actualized, we would be "the absolute, for certainly we would be blended with innumerable other selves."²⁶

Pringle-Pattison, Lewis tells us, shares Bosanquet's initial assumption about selfhood. He then proceeds to argue for the ultimate separateness of finite individuals by employing arguments whose weakness Lewis is fully prepared to admit. Lewis mentions in particular the argument of Pringle-Pattison which insists that there must be individuation and differentiation which he (Lewis) claims is quite compatible with Bosanquet's position. To Pringle-Pattison's remark that "every part of the whole exhibits the same characteristic of concrete thisness," Lewis replies that "it is by no means clear what is at issue here which

25. idem.

26. *ibid.* p.285.

Bosanquet could not accept."²⁷ For, "Bosanquet certainly does not want to regard the finite self as a mere appearance. The absolute would not be what it is without it."²⁸ In these comments Lewis recognizes the truth of what we argued for earlier, that Pringle-Pattison only makes his arguments look plausible by grotesquely distorting Bosanquet's position.

Lewis, having disposed of Pringle-Pattison as the "ineffective champion of a worthy cause", sets out on his task of attempting to demolish the assumption which renders Pringle-Pattison's arguments so ineffective. Concerning that assumption, he asks:

"Have we still not too rarefied a view of the individual person, and is the independence required in morality and religion so keenly championed by Pringle-Pattison, guaranteed at all by 'a unique focalisation of the universe?'" 29

This rarefied view of the individual, Lewis claims, "might have been avoided if Pringle-Pattison had followed out more effectively his own insistence that we should look at finite selves from the inside. For it is then that we properly see how the self is not merely a focus to which our various experiences are referred, but a reality on its own account, however much also involved in having its experiences, a reality which is known to itself uniquely in a way which cannot be reduced at all to the specification of distinctive characteristics."³⁰

Two points may be made in reply to Lewis. The first, which is

27. *ibid.* p.287.

28. *ibid.* p.288.

29. *ibid.* p.289.

30. *ibid.* p.290.

the less important of the two, is that we cannot dismiss a view of the individual as rarefied simply because it does not support a particular religious or moral view of the self. Or at least, if we wanted to claim its inadequacy by virtue of its being so incompatible, we would have to argue for the religious or moral view on independent grounds. If Lewis tells us that Bosanquet's view of the self is incompatible with the independence required in morality and religion (which he seems to equate with *Christian* morality and *Christian* religion), this does not tell us anything until he has successfully argued for the proposition that we should accept such a morality and such a religion. If what Lewis means is that a Bosanquetian view of finite selves is incompatible with *any* religion and *any* morality, we have seen already why this is not so.

If a view of selfhood does not go along with moral responsibility and religion as understood in Christian terms, this does not make it self-evidently false.

Lewis earlier argues that we should attend to what he calls the element of inescapable brute fact in experience. "There seems," he writes, "to be an element of brute fact in all that we encounter in the world around us."³¹ And he agrees with Pringle-Pattison's remark that we should not substitute a logical analysis of knowledge for an account of living experience. His idea is that theories should be made to accommodate what we find to be deeply true in our experience, it is indefensible to perform a reduction of the latter to make it fit a theory. With this idea, which is formal only, we may agree. The problem arises when Lewis assumes that we will accept a specific content as brute fact.

31. *ibid.* p.278. Even if we do not wish to hold that there are *absolutely* brute facts, which involve no element of interpretation, we could no doubt accept at least that some facts are more brutish than others.

This content has to do with our moral and religious awareness. We could perhaps accept that *some sort of* moral and religious awareness is a basic feature of human experience. But then, *some sort of* moral and religious experience is quite compatible with Bosanquet's position; such details could not plausibly be regarded as being in the realm of brute fact.

We pass on now to our second and more important argument in reply to Lewis's claim that the Bosanquet/Pringle-Pattison idea of the self is rarefied. Lewis, as well as telling us that our view of selfhood must allow for moral and religious awareness, also tells us that the individual experiences himself as more than a mere unifying centre of experience. The idea here is that once we attend to the richness and depth of self-conscious experience, we cannot avoid the conclusion that we have the sort of ultimate independence which Lewis wants to claim for us.

We may reply at once that we may admit that we are more than mere "principles of unification." For there is also the content which is unified and this, in a sense, is part of ourselves.³² This particular content is different for each one of us, and also the degree to which we succeed and fail in the task of unification will vary greatly. Our experience of ourselves will naturally be an experience which includes experience of what has been unified, and not purely and simply an experience of a *consciousness-in-the-act-of-unifying*. We may agree with Lewis too that the particular content of consciousness, that which is unified, is just as important for self-conscious life as the activity of the subject. Indeed, once we accept that the self is a unifying

32. Although we may be more or less estranged from such content, the alienation can never be total.

centre we are absolutely compelled to regard it as something more as well for the act of unification presupposes a determinate content to be unified. It would indeed be not only a rarefied but a self-contradictory view of selfhood to affirm that selves are nothing more than the formal principle of unification.

Having accepted these considerations about the importance of the specific content of experience, one could well be led to wonder why Lewis regards them as lending support for pluralism. The fact that a finite self is *more* than a focalising centre of experience does not mean that it is not that as well. And if it is, we can still argue for Bosanquet's position on the grounds of the finite individual's intended unity. Bosanquet's view can quite well accommodate the fact that for each finite self-consciousness there is a different overall content of experience, this is the moment of the particular which must always be present so long as the unity is only intended.

It is no use for Lewis to argue against Bosanquet then on the grounds that finite individuals are more than mere unifying centres of experience³³. The only possible way in which he could prove his case is by showing that the *specific nature* of this "more" is such as to make non-pluralistic views of finite selfhood totally implausible. But Lewis does not seem to think it is possible to even attempt this approach. For he tells us that the self has a "peculiar elusiveness" and that it is impossible in the end to specify its "distinctive characteristics". How then, we might ask, is it possible to be so sure that these avowedly elusive distinctive characteristics are specific enough to exclude Bosanquet's view of the self?

33. Lewis, we should note, never attempts to argue that selves are *not* unifying centres of experience, but only that they are more as well.

The only answer to this lies in the fact that there are times when Lewis does not hold to his view that it is impossible to specify the distinctive characteristics of selfhood. When he talks of moral and religious awareness, this, if anything, is surely an attempt to specify some of the features of selfhood. And it becomes clear too once again that it is Lewis's understanding of the specific nature of such awareness that for him excludes Bosanquet's view. Insofar as Lewis's arguments sound plausible, this rests on his enshrouding of the fact that he has a very precise conception of certain specific features of selfhood. This leads us to overlook what is the case, namely that he excludes Bosanquet's position on the grounds of his very detailed conceptions about selfhood, conceptions which - in such detail - he at no point justifies.

Although Lewis's very detailed conception of selfhood remains unargued for (he does not argue for a detailed and specific view of the nature or the value of selfhood on the grounds that he hasn't got one, the self being elusive), we do not need to look very far to discover from where he surreptitiously imports it. Echoing the words of Pringle-Pattison which we quoted at the end of our last section, Lewis too gives himself away.

"It seems *peculiarly* inconsistent with the Christian religion to identify ourselves in this fashion with the being of God rather than understand ourselves as separate created finite beings, distinct from God and from one another." 34

34. The Elusive Mind, p.286.

Lewis is certainly right when he says that Bosanquet's view is *peculiarly* inconsistent with the Christian religion, at least as he understands it, for he has not been able to show that it is incompatible with anything *except* his interpretation of the Christian religion.

CHAPTER SIX

THE POSITION OF J.N. FINDLAY

ON THE NATURE OF FINITE SELVES

CHAPTER SIXTHE POSITION OF J.N. FINDLAY ONTHE NATURE OF FINITE SELVES

In the preceding two chapters, we have been concerned to demolish the objections which have been levelled against Hegel's and Bosanquet's view of the nature of finite individuals. We have seen, in the course of our discussion, that the view has (broadly) two types of opponents. There are firstly opponents such as Popper, who attack the dialectical logic by which Hegel and other Idealists arrive at this view, and secondly, there are opponents such as Lewis and Pringle-Pattison, who seek to show that the account is incompatible with important facets of human life and experience. Regarding both types of critics, we have seen that the arguments upon which they rest their case break down. However, although we have rejected the arguments adduced by the critics of the Hegelian position, we may strengthen our case still further if we can say a little more about the positive reasons why that view is right. Thus in this chapter, it is necessary to try to indicate more fully than we have done hitherto, why it is that on any adequate understanding of the nature and unity of our experience, it is utterly implausible to view finite beings as wholly separate from each other. To help us in this task we shall take as our starting point the philosophical ideas of J.N. Findlay, and carry out our investigation by way of an appraisal of his arguments.

The reason for choosing Findlay is that he is a contemporary philosopher who has done a vast amount of work in the area of our present

concern, perhaps more than any other.

Findlay, in his two chapters on "The Realm of Minds" from The Discipline of the Cave, sets out a phenomenological account of the nature of mind. He begins his account by attempting to pinpoint just what it is which gives finite egos such individuality as they in fact possess. He is very careful to give a full phenomenological account, and to avoid all forms of reductionism. Thus he pays special attention to the way in which a finite individual experiences itself. Yet Findlay hopes to show that it is precisely when we have given the fullest possible account of the world of minds as that world initially appears, that is, when we have before us the most complete picture of communicating minds, that we shall have to "compass the collapse" of this world. For Findlay, it is not by way of reducing the finite mind to something less than it is that we are able to see (or imagine) the breakdown of its ultimacy. It is rather the building up of the substantiality of the finite mind - even qua individual finite mind - to its highest possible degree, that finally secures its collapse, or rather, transcendence. It is in this "building up" procedure that Findlay elucidates the general dialectical principle upon which the unity of minds ultimately rests, that principle which issues in the more general unity of subjectivity and objectivity.

To show the degree to which individual minds are substantial, Findlay asks the question: "what happens when we try to deny their existence entirely?" It is through reflection upon Descartes' cogito argument that Findlay arrives at his answer. His assessment of Descartes' argument is that it is no trite logical syllogism telling us only that "thought is not predictable of non-existent thinkers" but rather a fine phenomenological description of what inevitably must happen when a thinking subject tries to deny his own existence. As Findlay puts it, Descartes saw that the cogito argument:

"was no ordinary syllogism complete with major, minor and middle terms, and other formal machinery, but he was inclined to construe it as a simple intuition of a necessary connection between thinking and being: something that thinks is also something that must be held to be. This view of the argument is reflected in the unfortunate formula, Cogito Ergo Sum, which, we can say, does not represent the true course of the Cartesian argument and which, so far from expressing a worthwhile intuition really makes the emptiest of assertions, a mere application of the tautological transformation of 'something is X' into X exists." ¹

The real and positive lesson of Descartes' cogito argument is for Findlay a dialectical one. The importance and (tentative) independence of finite minds becomes most clear just when we most try to deny it. Descartes, in his attempt to deny everything which he normally perceived to be true about the world, became more clearly aware of the undeniability of one thing than he had ever been before - his own existence as a thinking subject. He became aware of his own thinking existence with a degree and mode of certainty which he would never have had had he not undergone the supreme intellectual struggle to cancel everything including his own perception of himself and even to deny his existence. What Descartes discovered, Findlay tells us, was that if we attempt to carry the denial of all perceived reality to its logical limit, there emerges an affirmation, an affirmation of selfhood which reaches the logical limit of certainty. When uncertainty is most fully itself - only then can we truly be certain.

1. Discipline of the Cave, p.166.

"There may be no sun, no moon, no animate or inanimate bodies, none of the things in short, which we say enter into nature. It is then, when doubt in this undermining sense is at its greatest, that we switch to the other kind of doubt in which unqualified existential assertion replaces undermining; the non-being of the natural world which has become increasingly likely suddenly points to the being of the psychological processes, the doubts in which that possible non-being has made itself felt. And the being of these psychological doubts is as much assured as the being of their objects was in doubt." 2

The way in which the undeniable concrete existence of finite individual selves, such as Descartes, is built up, gives us a clue as to how, as ultimately individual and undifferentiated, they break down. For just as the most forceful denial of all one's perceptions and knowledge leads to the most positive affirmation of individual selfhood, so it is only when individual selfhood is affirmed most positively and reaches a peak of substantiality, that it breaks down. At that point, it finds its truth in passing over to being an expression of that which utterly transcends its own finitude. In this breaking down the finite self is not annihilated but rather fulfilled.

When Lewis and Pringle-Pattison characterise the Idealist denial of the ultimacy of finite individuality as a simple immediate cancellation they show that they have misunderstood that it is only by way of affirming individuality in the most absolute way possible that the finite mind finds it is forced to deny its total independence.

In his discussion of Descartes' cogito argument, and in the implication of this concerning the way in which finite minds ultimately collapse (just when they are most satisfactory even as individual minds), Findlay has revealed to us in broad outline the dialectical

2. *ibid.* p.167.

nature of thought and reality. He has given us that principle which lies at the base of the wider unity we mentioned earlier between subjectivity and objectivity generally. For we have here the dialectical principle which tells us that for any finite particular, when that finite particular is most adequately grasped, it can no longer be seen as a mere finite particular, standing in abstract isolation.

When we consider the way in which Findlay is led to his dialectical conclusions, much light is cast on why so many modern philosophers have not felt it necessary to think about the world dialectically. Findlay, it must not be forgotten, is led to a dialectical philosophy by giving non-reductionist phenomenological accounts of various aspects of the life of mind. It is possible, however, to avoid dialectics by way of reductionism. For example, if one puts forward a reductionist account of finite selfhood, one never develops the concept of selfhood to the point where it is seen to pass beyond finite individuality. But what are these reductionist accounts of the life of mind and in what way do they portray the individual ego as less than it is?

There are two types of reductionist account of mental phenomena and it is to Findlay's credit that he deals with them both. Firstly, there are the accounts, so popular in much recent philosophy, which seek to reduce the mental to a set of behavioural dispositions. The driving force behind this type of reduction is the idea that we can only communicate thoughts if they can be translated into the realm of the publicly observable, that is into the objective. The second type of reductionism is that reductionism which attempts to deal with the mind one-sidedly in terms of subjective inwardness, an approach which assumes that only through introspection can one reach the inner recesses of the mind. This second type of reductionism is admittedly less common in modern philosophy than the first but it has been a popular approach

in the past, and indeed has had much influence in the sphere of psychology. All introspective psychologies from Wundt onwards hold in common that a subject's behaviour is a kind of barrier to our knowledge of a subject's inner life, and it is only by penetrating this outward "screen of illusion" that we can really know the subject's mind. We shall see however, that one does not need to fall into behaviourism to hold that the behaviour of a subject, the way in which it fulfils its conscious intentions in the external world, is essentially related to the nature of mind.³ Accounts that attempt to reduce mind to inner life alone are as one-sided and inadequate as those which attempt to reduce it to behavioural dispositions.

The Inadequacy of Behaviouristic Reductionism

Findlay gives two arguments against behaviouristic reductionism, both of which we may accept. In the first place, Findlay points out that the reduction of mind to behavioural dispositions relies on the fundamental mistake of equating the criteria of identity with the whole of what is identified. It assumes that because our knowledge of another mind is necessarily mediated by the way in which that mind expresses itself in the corporeal world, then all we can know is that corporeal world itself. Any attempt to go beyond this is idle speculation. This reductionism ignores what Findlay calls the "touching off" role of criteria of identity. The fact that we require behaviour to identify an other as the other he or she, is, does not mean that the other (or our knowledge of that other), is wholly commensurate with the behaviour (or our knowledge of the behaviour) of that other. It means only that

3. Precisely in what way we shall see later.

our knowledge is mediated. There is no reason why we should not know that other as a mind whose total being transcends the mediating signs.

A philosopher who insists on ignoring the "touching off" role of criteria of identity and who steadfastly refuses to accept that a person can be more than the behaviour through which he is known to others, will inevitably be led to take a pluralistic view of finite individuals. For he will see before him distinctive sets of actions and dispositions, and, by avoiding the conception of selfhood according to which there is an inner mental world as well as an outer objective world, he will preclude himself from the possibility of discerning in the subject-object relationship any structure which might be suggestive of a non-pluralistic view of finite individuals. Yet a pluralism which arises as a result of the behaviouristic refusal to fully acknowledge the subjective (and consequently the relationship between subjective and objective) is profoundly unsatisfactory. It rests on an attenuated view of finite beings even qua finite beings, which serves to guarantee that the case for the dialectical transformation of finite individuals into manifestations of something more than merely finite, does not get a chance to be considered.

Findlay's second argument against behaviouristic reductionism consists of a brilliant attempt to show how the demand which is the motivation of this form of reductionism, the demand for absolute objectivity through the construction of a world wherein all lies open to view, - a world in which the shadowiness of inner mental life has no place and presents no problems - is a demand which can be met in its most total purity only for the solipsist. Findly argues that such an "objective" world would then cease to be objective in the sense originally intended, and it would make as much sense to say that such a world would be purely mental or subjective as to say that it would be

objective. Or rather, it would make little sense to describe such a world in either way since there would be no way of distinguishing between them. According to Findlay, Wittgenstein actually accepted the solipsism which is the presupposition of the limiting case of objectivity. It is necessary however, to elucidate further.

Findlay explains in The Discipline of the Cave how solipsism and ultimate objectivity are really two sides of the same coin. He writes:

"solipsism seriously entertained immediately swings over into the purest of realism: if there is no sense in seeking to pass beyond the limits of my own experience, there ceases to be sense in treating it as personal and subjective. It makes no sense to say that I alone feel, think, etc., if there is no conceivable other to which I could oppose myself. If solipsism therefore becomes absolute, all discussions of language and meaning can blessedly take place in the clear daylight of objectivity, without any cross-lights from the inner life of anyone. It is hence not remarkable that we should come to deny the possibility of a language whose meanings are not pinned down by physical criteria, and which is not, in reality, a purely physical language." 4

Findlay, in the passage quoted, tells us that solipsism seriously entertained passes over into the purest of realisms. This does not of itself imply that "the purest of realisms" can *only* be arrived at through solipsism, and that solipsism and absolute objectivity pass over into each other. We may criticise Findlay's carelessness here for he fails to make his meaning absolutely explicit. However it seems clear that Findlay has in mind the idea that absolute objectivity passes into solipsism just as much as the converse. For starting from the objectivity standpoint, we may say that it is only in a world where there are

4. Discipline of the Cave, p.186.

no "cross-lights from the inner life of anyone" that the use of meanings can be wholly adequately "pinned down by physical criteria." And what could such a world be if not a solipsistic one?

The attempt to give an analysis of the nature of mind in utterly objective behaviouristic terms is transformed when it reaches the point of greatest purity, for pure objectivity collapses into an all-embracing subject. And in such a subject, the corporeal external world and subjective conscious intentions completely coincide.

That behaviouristic reductionism collapses into solipsism is sufficient to enable us to decide, once and for all, that a behaviouristic account of a self-conscious ego is not one which can coherently be sustained. If it could be, then it might lend support for a pluralistic view of finite individuals. But the solipsism into which it collapses is hardly such as to confirm the position of the behaviouristic pluralist. Behaviourists themselves, of course, do not notice the collapse of their reductionism into solipsism. If they did, they would not remain behaviourists, but become solipsists. It is because they fail to notice the implication of their own reductionism that behaviourists can build a case for pluralism on a restricted account of the human mind whose implications they have failed to think through. On such an inadequate phenomenology, a transformed view of the finite individual is excluded even as a possibility.⁵

It is utterly impossible, therefore, to completely reduce the inwardness of subjectivity to the terms of objectivity, but it is equally impossible to reduce objectivity to subjectivity (except in a very special sense of subjectivity which implies the unity of subject and object, as we shall see later). Accounts of the nature of mind like

5. Transformed, that is, from the common-sense pluralistic view.

those of the subjective idealists, which emphasize the subjective and inward aspect of mind and of reality at the expense of objectivity are also one-sided and reductionist. And again, just as with the behaviouristic reductionism, we never arrive at the need for the dialectical transformation of finite selfhood if we leave our characterisation of selfhood so attenuated. For in leaving out the objective sphere, we deprive ourselves of grasping the subject-object relationship in which the need for dialectical transformation is rooted.

We saw earlier, in our section on Hegel's phenomenology, that consciousness must have an object and it must grasp that object by means of universals which go beyond its limited particular perspective. That is to say, the object of consciousness must be a *genuine* other, which exists independently of its being apprehended from a particular perspective at a particular moment, yet part of whose essence it is that it can be apprehended in that way at that moment. It is because objects of consciousness are apprehended by way of universals which give them meaning beyond any absolutely particular and unique experience, and which bestow upon them universal intelligibility, that we can make sense of the world and communicate our intentions to others. If self-consciousness had no objective world, the universals of thought and meaning could never find concrete expression, and thus thought and communication would be impossible.

It is the essence of self-conscious life that it should manifest its thought-intentions in an outward way. The objective is that necessary medium through which subjectivity expresses itself, although because the former must be in a sense independent - that is, it must transcend the finite apprehensions of finite selfhood just in order to be encountered through universal concepts - for this very reason the objective world must also be a foil to subjectivity.

Speaking of the corporeal dimension of mind, Findlay states:

"The character of an inner state comes across in the gestures that express it, and in the fancifully modified introspective language that describes it, only because such gestures, and the normal sense of such a language, have a true affinity with it, because they represent something which is continuous with it and that fully deploys it, not some adventitious outward sign that might have been wholly different. It seems clear that there can be no communication among egos that does not either ultimately look backward upon or look forward towards some such detailed and sensuous bodily deployment. An ego may involve an aspect of metaphysical depth and purity, but it must possess contingent and variable as well as transcendental and necessary properties if it is to be a fully concrete being at all, and these must, in the last resort, point to possible bodily manifestations and realization. Egos can certainly be given to each other as 'bodiless presences' as they in fact often are given when we dwell in certain recollecting or prayerful intentions upon our friends, whether living or dead. But such a givenness, if it is not to be wholly empty, must 'condense' many bodily as well as spiritual states. Thoughts we know may be impalpable, but that does not hinder them from being of things gross and palpable." 6

Consciousness must have an object, against which it at first stands as an alien "other", precisely in order to allow for the development of creative spiritual life. This presupposes some sort of spatio-temporal world upon which subjectivity can and must impose its form. What happens, however, when this objectivity, this object of consciousness, is oneself? Findlay does not face this question, but we must do so here.⁷

6. Discipline of the Cave, pp.196-197.

7. We shall see later that the corporeal dimension of reality is not the most ultimate case of the non-subjective, since when we speak of bodies we have already employed universals, and have ascribed to the objective world that which is of the nature of mind. For the time being however, we shall overlook Findlay's identification of the corporeal with the essentially objective, to concentrate upon what he says about the relation between subjectivity and its "other".

It is not inconceivable that a conscious being, at least throughout a certain period of its life, should have before it itself and only itself as its object of consciousness. And if so, surely here we have found a mode of thinking which does not require mediation through the bodily world? Is it not then in the end possible to produce an account of at least one mode of consciousness in terms of subjective inwardness alone?

The answer to this is that by the time one's consciousness becomes aware of itself with this degree of sophistication, that is, as an object for itself, then one has risen to the standpoint of apprehending oneself as imbued with specific (universal) properties, which are not only graspable by the consciousness whose properties they are. To know oneself as an object-for-oneself one also knows oneself truly as one is-for-another. Now if I am to be for-another because of the essential nature of my being-for-self it is also of my essence that I must be identifiable for those others. The universal properties which determine my egohood as egohood and also as the particular determination of egohood, which I am, enable me to be an object to myself as well as to others. And these universals, to avoid being abstract and empty, must be concretized in the spatio-temporal world. They *necessarily* encompass the way in which I fulfil my conscious intentions in the spatio-temporal world, through my dispositions and behaviour generally. To be a living consciousness, for myself as for others, I must necessarily manifest myself in bodily fashion.

Subjective Idealism, like behaviouristic reductionism, cannot therefore be coherently sustained. But those who think it can be are, like the behaviourists, inevitably led to a pluralistic view of finite beings. For finite beings are seen as separate "centres of thought" and problems regarding how it is that they seem to perceive and

communicate through the medium of a transcendent objective world can always be (shakily) patched up by the postulation of something like Leibniz's Pre-Established Harmony which enables the separate beings to co-ordinate their thoughts in such a way as to take account of and communicate with each other.

At this point, it is germane to examine the ideas of a school of philosophy which has indulged in the second form of reductionism we have been discussing, by trying to account for the depth and richness of the subject/object relationship, in terms of subjectivity alone.

This school, the school of subjective idealism, is the obverse of behaviouristic reductionism, since it seeks to reduce human experience and consciousness, not to an objective "outer" but to a subjective "inner". It is of extreme importance for our purposes to demonstrate why subjective idealism is as unsatisfactory as behaviouristic reductionism, for only once we have done so will it be absolutely clear that we must reject both the possible forms of reductionism, and therefore reductionism itself.

The Mistake of Subjective Idealism

Hegel, contrary to the view of the positivist tradition, had a keen sense of what can legitimately be meaningfully said. He was extremely quick to point out that when we talk about that which in principle can never appear to any form of consciousness, our talk soon becomes empty and vacuous. Thus he criticises Kant for postulating a world of things-in-themselves whose essence it was never to appear in the outward world. Hegel comments: "It is manifest that behind this so-called curtain, which is to hide the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless we ourselves go behind there, as much in order that we may thereby see, as that there may be something behind there which

can be seen."⁸ Hegel acknowledges, in the very next sentence, however, (and herein lies the nub of his disagreement with the positivists) that it is not the world of immediate outward appearances that is exhaustive of reality, for he writes; "But it is clear at the same time that we cannot without more ado go straightway behind there. For this knowledge of what is the truth of the idea of the realm of appearance and of its inner being, is itself only arrived at after a long and devious process."⁹

Hegel's point is that what we do and must mean when we speak of the real is just that this real manifests itself in the world of appearance. For anything which exists, its truth and essence is the infinite series of its possible appearings to possible subjects. It is in this sense that the world of mind is as dependent upon the world of nature as nature upon mind.

We have said that our apprehension of the world is by means of universals, but we have to ask whether these universals are the work of mind, or whether they inhere in the objective world itself. Or is it rather the case that we fall into one-sidedness if we locate these universals on either side of the subject/object dichotomy? Some materialist philosophers have taken the first view, and have held that what exists in the external world is absolutely particular, saying that in no way do universals inhere in the very nature of the objective. For such philosophers, universals are merely a sort of tool which the mind brings to bear on the objective world, in order to make sense of that world. Yet if the view which we have been considering is correct, and the essence of the real is precisely that it manifests itself, then it becomes necessary to say that we can as well ascribe those universals

8. Phenomenology of Mind p.162. Baillie trans. Vol.1.

9. idem.

by which the mind makes sense of its world to the objective world itself as to the realm of subjective mind.

The Subjective Idealists noticed this.¹⁰ They were deeply impressed by the fact that universals, those seemingly mind-like entities, are as much attributable to what is apprehended as to the subject's activity of apprehension. And this amazed them so much that they leapt to the conclusion that the whole of reality must be reducible to mental subjectivity.

Insofar as the Subjective Idealists saw that the universals which are so often considered merely mental actually inhere in what is normally thought of as corporeal and external, they were absolutely right. But this observation should never have led them to *reduce* objectivity to subjectivity, for when we said that mind-like qualities inhere in that part of reality normally thought of as non-mental, we transformed our view of the objective and bodily to the point where we might just as well have said that the mental realm is made up of bodily-type qualities. We could have said this, that is, if we were really determined to follow

10. It is not always an easy matter to decide whether a particular philosopher should be defined as a subjective idealist. Berkeley is often viewed as a major example, but there are problems with this. For Berkeley, although an antinaturalist, cannot adequately be regarded as an antirealist, since the created world (for him) although totally dependent on God, is nonetheless in a certain sense God's "other". That is to say, although the world is created by God's power, it is nonetheless coeval with the manifestation of that power. A better example than Berkeley of a subjective idealist is the less known philosopher Arthur Collier, whose Clavis Universalis appeared posthumously in 1713. In this work Collier made no attempt, as Berkeley had done, to reconcile his view of the external world with common-sense. He simply stated without reservation that the material world is unreal, when conceived of *as* material. In the end however, it does not much concern us precisely which philosophers should be placed in the subjective idealist camp. For it is a philosophical position which we are attacking rather than particular individuals, and it is a position which has often enough been held in the history of philosophy.

through the implications of the insight of Subjective Idealism, which was that there is a deep affinity between the subjective and the objective, such that when self-conscious life reaches what is in principle its highest possible level, it would make as little sense to locate that which was apprehended through a wholly concrete Universal on one side of the subject/object dualism as on the other. And the Subjective Idealists would have said this, had they been truly convinced that bodiliness itself partakes of the universal qualities which the mind requires in order to apprehend it.

The Subjective Idealists' problem, it seems, was that they could never bring themselves to really believe that there is such a profound affinity between the subjective and objective. At a deep level, they went on accepting the old materialist contention that the mental and the corporeal must inevitably be so different and utterly disconnected, that when they discovered that the mental does indeed bear an essential relation to the objective world, they could only deal with it by denying that the objective has any independence whatever, in short, by reducing it to subjectivity.

For our part, we may hold that it is possible for there to be a genuine objective world, which may transcend subjectivity, not because the nature of that objective world is utterly alien to subjectivity, but because the universals through which we apprehend the world but which are of the essence of both subjectivity and objectivity, are, from any finite perspective, inadequately and incompletely realized. The essence of the objective is its capability of being-for-a-subject. But because the whole does not appear to finite consciousness immediately and at the same time, and because objectivity serves not only to express but also to resist subjective intentions, it cannot be merely reducible to subjectivity. Were there to be no independence attaching to the objective

world, and thus no possibility of that world behaving as a foil to subjectivity, it would be the case that there would be no vehicle for our self-expression, and rational free creative life would be rendered impossible.

The Ultimate Unity of Subject and Object

We have now seen that the reduction of objectivity to subjectivity is no less one-sided and inadequate than the opposite reduction, and that any complete phenomenology must in consequence allow for the ultimate unity of subject and object. We have now to elucidate further the precise nature of this unity, by looking more fully at how the breakdown of finite minds as isolated units rests upon it and presupposes it.

We said previously that according to Findlay, it is just as that point when our phenomenology of the *individual* mind is most complete, and when it seems that the mind has been endowed with the greatest dignity and independence possible, that the seemingly ultimate independence of the individual mind is exposed for the sham that it is. Findlay discusses this in his chapter, "The dissolution of the Realm of Minds" in The Discipline of the Cave.¹¹ We have already seen that minds require the bodily world in order to communicate with each other. What Findlay stresses is that this bodily world is something alien to our subjectivity, as well as something deeply adapted to it. It is the "other" which resists our will, or as Hegel calls it, "the negative", yet this "other" is absolutely necessary for the development of our powers of creative self-expression. We have seen, in our section on Subjective Idealism, that this bodily world is adapted to mind, so much

11. Discipline of the Cave p.203 ff.

so that it is pointless to try to locate the universal properties through which we apprehend it on one side or other of the subject/object dichotomy. However, this does not mean that it is not also alien to us, for the material world resists our will, and we cannot transform it by means of a simple volition. In this sense, the bodily world is not commensurate with and is alienated from mind. And it is alien to us the more precisely because we need it; we require this resisting externality, if we are to manifest ourselves in the world, and therefore to be what we are, self-conscious beings with creative freedom.

The dialectical interdependence of subjectivity and its alien otherness is best exemplified when minds are attempting to be at their most independent, to communicate with each other as independent minds. For, here, it is literally senseless to suppose that minds might communicate without something resembling the independent bodily world. Findlay says that it represents a deep crack in our conceptual structure that "bodies and their changes are essential to ego-life and ego-communication, and yet bodies also represent something alien, anti-thetical to the ego-life in question, that cannot simply be taken up into or shown to be a phase of it."¹² We need the resisting bodily world since we need something reliable and stable which we can call upon to express ourselves through and "bodies are the very type of the reliable and credible".¹³ They not only provide the necessary foil for our subjectivity, but they provide that subjectivity with the basic materials for all its higher achievements.

In communication with others and in the most creative forms of life the need for the bodily is obvious. But also in thinking to our-

12. *ibid.* p.206.

13. *ibid.* p.207.

selves, we find that the precondition of this is the bodily world:

"Plainly acts of mind, being second or higher order affairs, must busy themselves with something or other, and though they may busy themselves with other acts of mind, or with various abstracts which represent things or situations just insofar as the mind refers to them, and no further, still all such higher-order subject-matters must, on pain of vacuity, ultimately lead back to something of lowest order, and nothing known to us is more essentially of lower order than a body. While it may stand in many relations, and even be the seat of forces and tendencies pointing to things which do not as yet exist, it has a core to its being which is not all tendentious and relational, and which is certainly not thought of as capable of anything like conscious reference." 14

In rational thinking and communications with others, and thus in the very highest activities of self-conscious life (at that very moment when we are most truly ourselves), we find that we are not ourselves, as we thought we were. For we find that we cannot separate ourselves except as empty abstractions from the natural world, and precisely because we are so inseparable, we are (ultimately) inseparable from each other as well.

To communicate with others, and even to think to ourselves, we require something of a low order through which to express ourselves. That something must have a sort of independence and stability, otherwise how could we make use of it? It is through bodily manifestations that we carry out our mental intentions, and it is just because mental intentions can manifest themselves in the concrete world (a world which taken by itself we may aptly describe as the finite), that we can have meaningful mental intentions at all. For what would it mean to have a

14. idem.

mental life which could not manifest itself in the world of appearance? Surely it would mean no more than the type of noumenal world which can never manifest itself to consciousness, which in principle, could never appear. A world which cannot appear to any consciousness turns out to be the same as a world which is no world at all, for as Hegel says: "The result is, of course, the same if you place a blind man amid the wealth of the supersensible world ... and if you place one with sight in absolute darkness, or if you like, in pure light, supposing the supersensible world to be this. The seeing man sees in that pure light as little as in absolute darkness, and just as much as the blind man in the ample fullness which lay before him."¹⁵

Rational self-conscious mind, in order to be creative, whether that creativity be merely thinking or communicating with others in some way, must express itself in the world of finite appearances. To put this another way, if mind is essentially the capability to deal with universals, still this presupposes the world of particulars which are apprehended and/or formed *through* the universals. It is just the way that minds subsume these particulars under universal terms, and the way in which conscious mind requires the particular to express universal ideas, that explains the breakdown of any supposed ultimate separation between mind and its "other" (this "other" consisting for the most part of the natural world, the environment in which the ego finds itself) and also the apparent separation of finite minds from each other. It is the universals through which we apprehend the particular which enable us to apprehend a world which is intelligible to ourselves and other minds alike, albeit that these other minds apprehend the world from their own particular vantage points. Through universals, we are enabled to

15. Phenomenology of Mind p.139. Vol.1. Baillie translation.

transcend our vantage points, and to avoid becoming solipsists of the moment. The limiting case of perceiving the world of finite particulars through universals, a limiting case which all rational beings tend towards is precisely that point at which there would be a confluence of minds, and where the individual differences which arise from the limitations of finite perspective would fade away. Insofar as we know the world as it is in its very truth, just to that degree do we become one with others.

It is, then, through our relation to the object of consciousness that we are inseparable, not only from that object, but from other minds. Findlay sees that we are so inseparable from our "other" but that its genuine independence means that we are also alienated from it. But he does not go on to explain fully why we are not totally distinct from other minds; he rather limits himself to affirming *that* we are not totally distinct from other minds.

The reason for this is that he regards the lowest order necessary as the vehicle for conscious expression of intentions to be the corporeal, rather than the sphere of the particular. This is a mistake on his part. For once we speak of bodies, or even bodiliness, we are already dealing with universal concepts. And this means that there is something of a lower order still, which the concepts are being used to subsume. We saw earlier in relation to Subjective Idealism, that when we are concerned with material bodily things, it makes as little sense to locate the universal properties through which we apprehend them on one side of the subject/object dichotomy as on the other. We cannot therefore equate bodily entities with particulars. Particulars are pre-conceptual, and the moment we employ a universal term we lose the element of sheer particularity. As Hegel puts it: "We utter what is universal; in other words, we do not actually say what, in this sense-

certainty, we really mean ... It is not possible for us to express any sensuous existence which we 'mean'." ¹⁶

Findlay is right in saying that we need the bodily world to think and communicate but he is wrong to regard the bodily world, when conceived of under the term "bodily", as the lowest (in the sense of least mind-like) mode of existence. "The bodily" is a stage in the development of the interpenetration of particular and universal, although at this stage there is a one-sided bias towards the estranged otherness of particularity. It is this bias which no doubt misled Findlay into the view that in "the bodily" we have the limiting case of particularity.

Findlay finds it unintelligible that the two opposites of mind and its objective "other" (which he regards as the bodily, but which we have recast as the realm of particulars) are at once necessary and alien to each other. For Findlay, this case of two opposites hanging together in a single whole is a sort of dialectical brute fact, something which can be seen to be the case, but which defies rational explanation. However, he is so bewildered by it that on this bewilderment he builds the idea that the only final reconciliation there can be between mental subjectivity and natural objectivity is a reconciliation that must take place within the context of another world, a world which utterly transcends, to the point of displaying a sharp discontinuity with, this one, and of which we can have little knowledge. Yet the bewilderment which leads to Findlay's postulation of such a transcendent world is nothing more than the bewilderment which arises from his failure to weld together two supposedly ultimate opposites - which are not really ultimate opposites - into the type of dialectical unity which in reality arises

16. *ibid.* p.152.

from the synthesis of the true ultimate dialectical opposites, of particular and universal.

When Hegel found a dialectical contradiction in any sphere of social or individual life, he realized that the contradiction arose within a given context. For dialectical contradictions do not appear in vacuo; they are internal to a given context, a whole which the dynamic of the contradiction reveals to be inadequate. Thus a more adequate whole is postulated, within which the contradiction is resolved and also in which one may see why it had to arise given the previous inadequate whole.

Findlay, unlike Hegel, sees no way in which dialectical tensions such as the one between mind and nature can be resolved in this world. A new context, a new whole, can only be provided by the postulation of another world, a beyond. Hegel is attacked for his belief that any form of earthly rational free self-conscious life can transform the world we find ourselves in, to the point where it would be the final whole such as would explain and sublimate the contradictions of the previous world. Findlay thinks that this would be too much to ask of terrestrial life, as, for Findlay, free rationality cannot supply the whole. Findlay in arguing his case, refers to the limits of free rationality itself, but as we have seen, his view is coloured by the fact that for him free rationality cannot weld together two non-ultimate dialectical opposites as ultimate dialectical opposites. Findlay remarks that Hegel's view is inadequate because:

"For the sort of teleological idealism we have been considering there is no end beyond rational conscious activity, which aims primarily at perpetuating and maintaining and enriching itself, and ultimately at becoming clearly conscious that it is itself its own aim and the aim of all other things. For Hegelianism the Idea, the final, all-explanatory goal of

everything, is simply rationality which sees itself to be the goal of everything. These Hegelian ideas do not so much, therefore, point out a way beyond the cave in which we are immured, and whose arrangements we find so absurd, as that they seek to transform our life in the cave." 17

In objecting to the modesty and inadequacy of what Hegel proposes, Findlay forgets that for Hegel, rational self-conscious subjectivity has not merely the potential to transform our life within the cave, its essence and potential is to transform the world such that it ceases to be a cave.

In spite of Findlay's misunderstanding of Hegel, there is something in what led him to his conclusions which was at least partially right. Any Whole or Absolute which could explain and resolve the dialectical tensions of the world we now exist in would be so unlike this present world that it is scarcely likely that we in our finite state would find any continuity with it. If the Absolute is no more and no less than human potential, it is also true to say that if human beings ever realized their potential, they would be so different from us as to be hardly recognizable as human. Findlay is correct to emphasize the transcendence of the Absolute, a transcendence which goes far beyond the present human condition. Also, even if this Absolute is Universal Mind, and Universal Mind is no more than the limiting case of rational self-conscious subjectivity, there is still an important sense in which we must accord independence to this Absolute. For even if Universal Mind is never expressed through human beings, or through any actually existing conscious being, it would be nonetheless true that this Absolute would be the force which expressed itself albeit in inadequate form, through

finite consciousness, as well as being the ultimate precondition for any finite life.

Findlay, however, takes his transcendence so far that the Absolute becomes discontinuous with the world we experience, and his heaven thus becomes something "beyond" or other than this world, rather than the creative essence of this world.

Yet if the Absolute is to be truly Absolute then it must be the essence of the *whole* of reality, and one aspect of that whole is the world experienced by finite minds. Were this not so, the "Absolute" would stand over against the world, as something outside, and as such it would be limited. The true Absolute can be outside the world only in the sense of transcending it, and then what it transcends is not the world as it is in its fullness, but an abstraction from the world which we are so prone to (falsely) mistake for the whole.

The fullest creativity is achieved when the absolutely limited overcomes, through self-activity, this limitation, to become the absolutely unlimited. Were this emancipation not the product of the Absolute's own self-activity, that Absolute would not be Absolute, for it would not be that "than which nothing greater can be conceived." Indeed, that "than which nothing greater can be conceived" must develop itself from the lowest conceivable mode of existence, from the utterly finite and limited. Otherwise something greater *could* be conceived, namely, that which could overcome those limitations. For this reason, the "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" must be a development from the lowest, one-sidedly particularist level of being, and thus would include that level of being which comprises our everyday reality.

In addition to the argument which we have now outlined, in which reasons have been adduced to show why the reconciliation of dialectical

tensions cannot occur purely outside the world, we may offer a further argument for the proposition that the ultimate reconciliation cannot be confined to heaven. (Heaven being conceived of here as another world - quite outside the spatio-temporal world as we know it.)

Dialectical tensions cannot be resolved in another noumenal type of world because the idea of such a world does not make sense. What does make sense, is that we should first look for the creative source of the world in such a beyond. It is the reaction to the realisation that the world which appears to us is limited and finite, that leads us to seek the unconditioned in such a beyond. Hegel very well explains the genesis of the Kantian noumenal realm as well as the genesis of Findlay's other world.

"A supersensible world ... henceforth opens up as the true world, lying beyond the sensuous world which is the world of appearance. Away, remote from the changing vanishing present lies the permanent beyond; an 'in-itself' which is ... the pure element where truth finds its abode and its essential being." 18

Ultimately, however, such a world fails to make sense because either (i) it does manifest itself in the spatio-temporal world and is not genuinely noumenal, or (ii) it remains noumenal - does not go out into the world to appear at all, and thus lacks all creative power whatsoever. Indeed, by not going out, but by remaining one with itself, it remains an abstract self-identity which is no more than an empty void.

The lesson for us is now clear. A world which lacks the power to exist also lacks the power to provide a context wherein our dialectical contradictions are to be resolved. The world we posit to resolve them must be, not a world discontinuous with the world of our experience, but

18. Phenomenology of Mind Vol.1, p.191, Baillie translation.

a whole which is the essence of and the creative force behind that world. And as we have also seen, it must be a world in which finite individuals are united by being (partial) manifestations of the life of the Concrete Universal.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAN, NATURE, AND THE PRIMACY

OF THE SUBJECT

CHAPTER SEVENMAN, NATURE, AND THE PRIMACY OF THE SUBJECT

In the previous three chapters of this thesis, we considered and defended the view that finite individuals are not ultimately distinct from one another. We saw that the main philosophical objections to this view could not be substantiated, and also that there were good reasons for adopting it. We saw too, in the course of our discussion, that not only must there be an ultimate unity, or continuity, between finite subjects; there must also be an ultimate unity (of the same sort) between subjectivity and objectivity. We found that all intersubjective relations must have an objective world as their essential precondition, and that objectivity makes no conceptual sense if not construed as that which can, under certain circumstances at some particular time appear to some form of consciousness. In conceptualising the world, it was argued, we inevitably make use of universals, and although it may seem *prima facie* that they are purely mental constructions, in the end it makes as little sense to attribute them to one side of the subject-object dichotomy as to the other. And this is to say that the subject-object dichotomy breaks down.

To say that the subject-object dichotomy breaks down is to assert that there is an ultimate unity between man, as self-conscious thinking spirit, and the unconscious world of nature. They require each other and are, in the end, inconceivable without each other. However, although this is so, it shall be our contention in this chapter that there is nonetheless a sense in which the subjective side of the subject-object

relationship may correctly be said to be primary. This is because (as we shall argue later) the reconciliation of subject and object can only be the product of subjective effort.

Our doctrine of the primacy of the subject, it must be admitted, sounds at first like a contradiction of what we have already said about the ultimate breakdown of the subject-object dualism. For surely, it will be argued to assert that the subject is primary is just to deny that there can be any ultimate subject-object unity. Aren't we, in making the subject primary, continuing to take one of the terms of the unity and set it against the other?

Now this objection would be perfectly valid if we were ascribing primacy to the empirically existing finite subject, in any given subject-object relationship. To say that the finite subject, or for that matter the finite object, was the major term in an empirical subject-object relationship, would certainly destroy the possibility of the two terms' reconciliation and unity. For if either finite subject or finite object were the major term, the one finite term would be imposing its own finite form upon the other, rather than reconciling the other term with itself through a "whole" which transcends them both.

However, although it is true that if we adopted the view just criticized, we would be contradicting our view of the ultimate subject-object unity, it is not the case that we contradict ourselves if we ascribe primacy to the *principle* of subjectivity as such. In our earlier claim that the subjective is ultimately reconciled with the objective through a whole which subsumes and transcends both, we intended to convey the idea that the separateness of the *finite* terms is in the end transcended and lost. And this is quite compatible with the view that the new unity, brought into existence by the reconciliation of (what was once) finite subjectivity with (what was once) finite objectivity, is the

product of subjective labour. Indeed, it shall be our task in this chapter to try to show that this reconciliation through which a new unity is produced, not only can be, but also must be, the result of subjective labour.

We shall also, in the course of our discussion, attempt to discuss in depth the nature of that subjectivity which is the essential precondition of the ultimate unity of (what was once) finite subject and finite object. Having done this, we shall then be in a position to decide whether the primacy of the subject, understood in a specific way, has any bearing on the validity of religious experience.

The Emergence of the Primacy of the Subject

The primacy of the subject first begins to emerge when we consider those philosophies which seek to uphold the ultimate unity of subject and object, and man and nature, without seeing the reconciliation as the product of a fully developed subjective self-consciousness. These accounts are useful for our purposes, for they serve to bring out the inadequacies in any philosophical attempt to reconcile man with nature which does not base itself on the reconciling power of a fully fledged subject.

In what follows, we shall consider three philosophical perspectives, all of which attempt but in the end fail to provide a basis for a unification of man with nature. These are, firstly, (what we shall call) the interpretive vision of the world, secondly, the post-Enlightenment view of the world,¹ and thirdly, the Hegelian view that

1. The post-Enlightenment view of the world referred to here and subsequently in this chapter, excludes the Hegelian view even though Hegel would be correctly regarded as a post-Enlightenment thinker. This is because Hegel represents an advance on the mainstream of post-Enlightenment thought, and shall be dealt with in a separate section.

substance is a subject. We shall see that although all three views misunderstand the vital role of subjectivity in overcoming the subject-object dualism, they nonetheless represent a line of progress towards an increasingly more adequate understanding. Through an examination of the mistakes and insights of these three philosophical perspectives, we shall seek to achieve a more adequate understanding of the reconciling role of subjectivity.

The Interpretive Vision of the Unity of Man and Nature

In the first chapter of his recent impressive book entitled Hegel Charles Taylor sketches those early visions of the unity of man and nature which (according to him) the philosophers of the Enlightenment reacted against, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to these pre-Enlightenment visions, Taylor tells us, the world was seen as a text, as a locus of meanings, and man was considered to be united with nature through being part of a pre-ordained and "given" cosmic order. The task of man, on these views, was to discover his own place in the order and live in accordance with it. Thus Taylor writes:

" ... the view of the subject that came down to us from the dominant tradition of ancients, was that man came most fully to himself when he was in touch with a cosmic order, and in touch with it in the way most suitable to it as an order of ideas, that is, by reason. This is plainly the heritage of Plato; order in the human soul is inseparable from rational vision of the order of being. For Aristotle, contemplation of this order is the highest activity of man. The same basic notion is present in the neo-Platonic vision which through Aristotle becomes the foundation for much medieval thought." 2

2. C. Taylor. Hegel p.6. (Cambridge University Press 1975).

The unity of man and nature, according to the ancients, Taylor tells us, is discerned by the subject's reason, but in no way is created by the subject. I find my own identity in relation to a meaning which I "read off" from the universe when I am at my most rational. According to this vision, the union with nature is achieved through conformity with a pre-given cosmic order; the emphasis is on the subject's contemplation and discovery, not on creativity. Individuals have no identity which they can define for themselves.

Taylor goes on to comment on how the view of the ancients about the cosmic order was carried over in Medieval and early Renaissance thought, and how this view was challenged by the thinkers of the Enlightenment. Thus:

"As epistemological innovators, the moderns of the seventeenth century directed their scorn and polemics against Aristotelean science, and that view of the universe which had become intricately with it in Medieval and early Renaissance thought. Final causes and the related vision of the universe as a meaningful order of qualitatively differentiated levels give way first to a Platonic-Pythagorean vision of mathematical order (as in Bruno, Kepler, and partly too, in Galileo), and then finally to the modern view of a world of ultimately contingent correlations, to be patiently mapped out by empirical observation. From the modern point of view, these earlier visions betrayed a deplorable if understandable weakness of man, a self-indulgence wherein they project on things the forms which they most desire to find, in which they feel fulfilled or at home." 3

Taylor goes on to criticise the way in which the Enlightenment thinkers saw the interpretive vision of things as a view arising merely

3. *ibid.* p.4.

from wishful thinking and therefore "suitable to an age in which man was not fully adult."⁴ We cannot merely see the issue, Taylor tells us, as a struggle between two tendencies in the self, one deploying comforting illusions, the other facing stern realities."⁵ The transition to the "modern" (Enlightenment) view should rather be seen as "a revolution in the basic categories in which we understand self."⁶

"The essential difference" says Taylor, "can perhaps be put in this way: the modern subject is self defining where on previous views the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order." 7

Now Taylor is no doubt quite right in his claim that it is extremely unfair to hold that the ancients' vision of the world (and the vision which Medieval and early Renaissance thinkers developed from it) was based merely on illusions arising from wishful thinking. Nonetheless, the vision of these thinkers does present serious problems as an account of the relationship between man and nature. It posits, on the one hand, a unity between self-conscious selfhood and the realm of the not-self, but, on the other hand, it presents a cosmic picture which cannot hold together this unity. Certain things which we inevitably confront in the world are totally omitted from this "unity" and it therefore cannot be truly said that here we have a unity at all.

This so-called unity leaves out, firstly, an essential part of the life of a self-conscious being. That is, it leaves out the active, volitional, and emotional side, since the unity posited is one which

4. *ibid.* p.5.

5. *idem.*

6. *idem.*

7. *ibid.* p.6.

serves to unify only contemplative reason (as opposed to a reason which expresses itself through activity in the objective world) with the (alleged) order of things. And secondly, just as only one aspect of man enters into the unity, so does only one aspect of the external world. This is the aspect (corresponding to the Forms of Plato and Aristotle) which can be grasped by detached contemplative reason. Why the world of perceptible nature can only approximate to the Forms remains forever an enigma, the gap between the shadow-world of our sense experience and the intelligible world graspable by reason can in no way be bridged by self-conscious transforming activity. The world as experienced through the bodily senses is thus outside the posited unity of subject and object, and man is therefore most reconciled with the world when he is most alienated from his perceptual experience. It is hardly difficult to see that a posited "unity" which leaves, as this one does, a residue, cannot be regarded as a genuine unity at all.

The type of "unity" we have been discussing, which is in truth a unity between a mere aspect of subjectivity and a mere aspect of objectivity, is one which falls far short of the kind of unity envisaged by the mystics and the great majority of subjects of religious experience. For such people are usually at pains to stress that an encounter with the Divine involves the whole personality, not just the rational or affective side in isolation from the other. And such an encounter, we are told, involves the whole personality in a union through God or the Absolute - with the whole of reality, a "whole" in which the perceptible world of nature has a place.

If we properly follow through the full implications of our view, outlined at the end of our last chapter, that there is and must be an ultimate unity between subject and object, it becomes clear that such a unity must consist in the objective world of the not-self being an

appropriate vehicle for subjectivity. This does not mean that the external world must present itself as the malleable material perfectly suited to the self-assertion of finite egos, as such egos are in their limited finite state. But it does mean that the world must be the appropriate vehicle for the expression of subjectivity at its highest; that is, for a wholly rational Absolute Subject, or, if we like, God.

Clearly the view of the ancients, at least as interpreted by Taylor, fails to follow the implications of its own posited subject-object unity through to their logical conclusion. It therefore fails to come to terms with what is necessary for a unity of man and nature. Thus the fact that it fails to corroborate what the mystics and subjects of religious experience have said about the nature of this unity need not worry us at all.

The Post-Enlightenment View of Man's Unity with Nature

Many heroic attempts were made by philosophers in the climate of post-Enlightenment Europe to understand and elucidate the mode of unity which can most truly be said to exist between self-conscious beings and the unconscious natural world. These attempts are especially interesting because they show a respect for the role of subjectivity which was lacking in earlier visions, a respect which manifests itself through a realisation that any unity of man and nature which is genuine must consist of a unity between an active creative subject and an objective realm whose essence is to-be-for-a-subject. Whereas the thinkers who upheld (what we have called) the interpretive vision sacrificed the fullness of the subject, by making it the passive recipient of a cosmic order imposed from outside, the post-Enlightenment thinkers saw a much more full-blooded subjectivity as the essential precondition for any subject-object synthesis. How, we may ask, did this new respect

for the subject come about?

We have already mentioned how the thinkers of the Enlightenment reacted against the interpretive vision of the ancient, Medieval, and early Renaissance thinkers, and how the Enlightenment brought with it a pluralistic empiricism in which disbelief in a "given" cosmic order made way for the view that human subjects are self-defining, having no pre-ordained role. To self-conscious subjectivity was ascribed a new freedom; a freedom accompanied by a strong feeling of exhilaration at the prospect of a subject's being able to manipulate the world, and shape it after its heart's desires. What Enlightenment thinkers held to be the essence of a free creativity, turned out in reality to be a somewhat arbitrary mechanistic manipulation of the world by subjects who were quite distinct from the "other" which they proceeded to hammer into shape. But although this was a defect, consisting (as it did), of a shallow interpretation of what it means to be free, the new confidence in the essential freedom of the subject was a tremendous breakthrough. The Enlightenment view of free subjectivity, it must be admitted, had the effect of severing man from nature, but in later philosophies, when the need to restore the lost unity of man and nature was again keenly felt, it was still found that the Enlightenment ideal of free self-defining subjectivity had to be retained. The restoration of man's unity with nature had now to be carried out on the basis of free, self-defining subjectivity, rather than, as was previously the case, at the subject's expense.

Indeed, it is true to say that one of the main reasons why the Enlightenment vision had to break down was because the notion of self-defining subjectivity clashed with the empiricist epistemology to which the thinkers of the Enlightenment also subscribed. For according to this epistemology, all knowledge is the product of our observing

empirical regularities and relationships, but this meant that man too had to be studied in this way. Man in other words had to be treated as a part of nature, his uniformities and regularities being dispassionately catalogued. And this was hardly compatible with the view that man is a free self-defining subject. Thus there was a kind of contradiction running through the heart of the Enlightenment view of man; man was seen as at once a self-defining subject, set over against nature, and also a part of nature, the latter being characterised as a great machine.

The problem inherited by later thinkers from thinkers of the Enlightenment was how to reconcile man's existence as a free self-defining subject with his existence as a part of nature. From this attempted reconciliation arose some of the profoundest insights into the nature of the unity between man and the world outside him.

Post Enlightenment philosophers came gradually to see that free subjectivity, so far from being an obstruction to, is the essential precondition of the actualisation of a potential union of man with nature. For only the most radical form of freedom would be capable of overcoming all alienation between a dirempted subject and object, and of restoring the unity between them.

The story of post-Enlightenment philosophy may well be understood as the story of the struggle to come to a satisfactory understanding of the radical mode of freedom, which could enable an (idealized) subject to overcome the separation and alienation between finite subject and object. Many of the attempts to restore the unity of man and nature on the basis of subjective spiritual freedom, proved, in the end, to be inadequate, but one definite insight common to nearly all European philosophers of this period was to be found in their view that if subjective freedom was to be, as it must be, the vehicle for restoring the unity between man and nature, then such freedom can in no way

consist of spontaneous arbitrary volition. That is to say, there must be necessity for freedom. The task therefore was to try to discover just which sort of necessity free subjectivity must embody, if it is to be able to restore, rather than erode, the unity of man with nature.

The first major reaction against the shortcomings of the Enlightenment view of man's relationship with nature occurred in and around the decade of the 1770's, a period which has come to be known as that of the Sturm and Drang. In this period, one theory in particular attempted to build a union between man and nature on the notion of free subjectivity - the theory which is associated chiefly with Herder, and which Charles Taylor has dubbed "Expressivism".⁸ Taylor describes the main motivation behind "Expressivism" as follows:

"The expressivist anthropology was a response to a mechanist, atomist, utilitarian picture of human life. If we can think of Enlightenment anthropology as recommending itself through the sense of freedom, even exhilaration, of self-definition, the reaction to it experienced this picture of man as dry, dead, as destroying life. For the sense of freedom as self-defining was won by objectifying nature, and even our own nature in so far as we are objects for ourselves. It was won at the expense of a rift between the subject who knows and wills, and the given things as they are in nature. And this realm of the given includes not only external things in the world, but also what is given in the subject, his desires, feelings, leanings, and affinities.

The Enlightenment developed a conception of nature including human nature, as a set of objectified facts with which the subject had to deal in acquiring knowledge and acting. Of course, nature as a harmonious whole whose parts meshed perfectly also represented a model or blue-print for man, as well as offering the raw material for his fulfilment. But the rift was still there between nature, whether as plan or instrument, and the will which acted on this plan.

8. *ibid.* p.13. See footnote 1.

It was this rift which the originators of the expressivist theory - Rousseau, Herder, later the Romantics - could not tolerate. They experienced this vision of things as a tearing apart of the unity of life in which nature should be at once the inspiration and the motive force of thought and will. It was not enough that nature provided the blue-print for the will, the voice of nature must speak through the will." 9

It is clear enough from the above passage that the Expressivists held that the Enlightenment conception of subjective freedom was badly mistaken, since it would not heal the diremption between man and nature. The type of freedom which they thought could, and which they sought to put in the place of the view they rejected, centred on the category of "expression". Taylor comments on how "expression" came to be at the centre of a new view of freedom as follows:

" ... the expression theory both alters the notion of freedom and greatly enhances its importance. It alters the notion in that the standard Enlightenment view of freedom was that of independence of the self-defining subject in relation to outside control, principally that of state and religious authority. Now freedom is seen as consisting in authentic self-expression. It is threatened not only by external invasion but by all the distortions that expression is menaced by. It can fail through a mis-shaping which is ultimately of external origin, but may become anchored in the self." 10

Freedom then is *authentic* self-expression. It is not any arbitrary assertion of self which a particular individual happens to will. Authentic self-expression must be imbued with the element of necessity. But in what does this necessity consist?

9. *ibid.* p.22-23.

10. *ibid.* p.24.

According to the Expressivists, and in particular according to Herder, the necessity involved in an authentic self-expression consists in a process of clarifying to ourselves, through expressing ourselves, what we most truly are. Thus expression is not merely self-assertion but a coming to self-awareness and this is as much a discovery as a creation. If we characterise self-expression as a discovery, it becomes easier to see why there must be an element of necessity. Taylor describes the expressivist view of authentic self-expression as follows:

" ... the notion of human life as expression sees this not only as the realization of these purposes but also as the clarification of these purposes. It is not only the fulfilment of life but also the clarification of meaning. In the course of living adequately, I not only fulfil my humanity but clarify what my humanity is about. As such a clarification my life-form is not just the fulfilment of purpose but the embodiment of meaning, the expression of an idea. The expression theory breaks with the Enlightenment dichotomy between meaning and being, at least as far as human life is concerned. Human life is both fact and meaningful expression; and in being expression does not reside in a subjective relation of reference to something else, it expresses the idea which it realizes.

This provides a new interpretation of the traditional view of man as a rational animal, a being whose essence is rational awareness. This idea is now formulated in a new concept of self-awareness. As we saw, our life is seen as self-expression also in the sense of clarifying what we are. The clarification awaits recognition by a subject, and man as a conscious being achieves his highest point when he recognizes his own life as adequate, a true expression of what he potentially is - just as an artist or writer reaches his goal in recognizing his work as a fully adequate expression of what he wanted to say. And in one case as in the other, the 'message' could not have been known before it was expressed. The traditional view reaches a new formulation in expressivism: man comes to know himself by expressing and hence clarifying what he is and recognizing himself in this expression. The specific property of human life is to

culminate in self-awareness through expression." 11

Taylor goes on to remark that, according to Herder, language must be seen, not as consisting of symbols which refer to objects they are only contingently related to, but rather as a vehicle for human self-expression, when self-expression is conceived of as a mode of cognitive awareness in which feelings and emotions play a part just as much as judgment and ratiocination. True awareness is seen here as a function of the whole, unified person.

For Herder, although all language is a vehicle for the expression of our self-awareness, when self-consciousness rises to the pinnacle of its creative capabilities, it expresses itself through art. Language is continuous with art, in that both are essentially forms of human expression, but only through art can feeling be adequately incorporated into the expression. Art expresses the deepest feelings of the artist, and so, in a sense completes him (Goethe uses the term "Purification") but at the same time transforms nature to bring out its highest potentialities. Thus at this point we can begin to see the extent to which, for the Expressivists, human freedom links up with communion, or union, with nature. As Taylor puts it: for Expressivism "the highest art is so because it is true to Nature; but not in the sense of an imitation, rather as the highest and fullest of its potentialities."¹²

Does Expressivism really succeed in its attempt to unite man with nature through the concept of free subjectivity as the latter is understood by philosophers such as Herder? Taylor makes no attempt to answer this question, despite his excellent exposition of Expressivist theory.

11. *ibid.* p.17.

12. *ibid.* p.20.

It is essential however, for us to try to answer it here.

We must begin our answer by pointing out that, however much we must praise the Expressivists for seeing that authentic self-expression cannot be an arbitrary matter, and for seeing that it must involve a process of self-clarification, in the end these philosophers totally fail to locate exactly where the necessity in the work of the artist lies. True, it lies (according to them) in self-clarification, but what sort of self is being clarified (other than simply a self which is of such a sort as seeks to clarify itself!), and according to which rules must this process of self-clarification be carried out? Expressivism provides us with no criteria for distinguishing an authentic self-expression from an inauthentic one. Since for the Expressivists the "true self" is merely the one which expresses itself most truly, and since there is no necessity in freedom apart from authenticity of self-expression, there is no reason why (on Expressivist assumptions) a self with evil intentions should not find freedom and self-clarification through expressing these; freedom being maximized when the evilness of the actions is truly commensurate with the evilness of the intentions.

The necessity through which freedom is achieved on the Expressivist account, therefore turns out to be quite empty. And despite the explicit intentions of Expressivist theorists, the content of freedom had in the end to be filled in with arbitrary volitions, for sheer lack of any necessary content. Although the Expressivist thinkers grasped the truth that subjective labour alone can reconcile man with nature, the vacuity of their conception of authenticity showed that what they had in mind when they spoke of subjectivity was a subjectivity which was finite. It is no wonder that their attempted reconciliation failed.

That subjectivity of a finite mode can never provide a basis for the reconciliation of man with nature, the Expressivists themselves

sometimes seem to have been almost unconsciously aware of. For they did not even attempt to say just how finite beings could produce this reconciliation, apart from saying that it must be through a self-expression which is authentic (which tells us very little). At the very point where it would have been appropriate for the Expressivists to have developed their conception of subjectivity to show how a free subject can unify man with nature, they seem instead to speak as though the final man-nature reconciliation is produced by man's coming to fit in with the "great current" of nature. It is almost as if the Expressivists, despairing of the incapacity of their own conception of subjective freedom as an instrument for healing the rift between man and nature, are driven through desperation to look around for a *finite* action which could, without total absurdity, be held to overcome the division between man and nature, and manage only to find it in the finite subject's act of self-sacrifice. In the end, the Expressivist thinkers upheld a view of the role of the subject which takes us little beyond the Interpretation View, which we have already discussed and rejected.

Taylor brings out how the Expressivist view of unity of man and nature is, in reality, based on the sacrifice and annihilation (rather than the fulfilment) of finite subjectivity, and indeed all subjectivity, in the following passage:

"It is this greater current, and not just the life of my own body, which has to be united with higher aspiration to freedom and expression, if there is to be unity in the self. Thus our self-feeling must be continuous with our feeling for this larger current of life which flows through us and of which we are a part; this current may nourish us not only physically but spiritually as well." 13

13. *ibid.* p.25.

We have discussed the theory which Taylor calls Expressivism at some length, because it exemplifies one of the main ways in which the unity of subject and object has been misunderstood. That is, it shows us how easily one can slip into positing a unity, supposedly of subject and object, which in the end is only able to hold together as a unity because that unity is a world from which the subject has in reality disappeared.

The mistake of Herder and the Expressivists was repeated or magnified by many of the later Romantic thinkers. Schiller is an example here, speaking as he does of a great unifying force, "Joy", which flows through everything but which is not the serious product of subjective freedom and effort. Many other examples could be cited, and we shall return to some of these later. But it is clear from what we have said so far that because finite subjectivity can never be adequate to effect a reconciliation between man and nature, any theory which views human activity such as language and art as the vehicle through which reconciliation can be finally achieved must stand condemned. This does not mean that we cannot, through art and language, come closer to such a reconciliation, or even that we cannot at times come very close, nor does it mean that art and language can never express anything more than particular finite perspectives on life. What it does mean, however, is that as long as the artist, or the language-user, must remain a finite individual, he will never be in a position to totally overcome his alienation from the external world.

Our critique of Expressivism, therefore, leads us on to a critique of other post-Enlightenment thinkers who would not normally be regarded as Expressivists, but who were nonetheless committed to the view that finite subjectivity was sufficient to bring about a reconciliation between man and nature. Of course, many of these thinkers held overtly that it was not finite subjectivity itself which could bring about a

reconciliation, but a principle of subjectivity which worked through finite subjects. Nonetheless, the very fact that such philosophers presupposed that the principle of subjectivity could be embodied in finite subjects to such a degree as to effect a total reconciliation shows that in the end their reconciling subjectivity amounted to finite subjectivity, whatever they actually said.

Numerous examples of philosophers who made this mistake abound in the period following the Sturm and Drang. As Taylor tells us, young Romantic philosophers such as the Schlegels and Novalis drew on Boehme, Spinoza, and Goethe to develop a view of nature as "a kind of poetry of cosmic spirit, with which men can unite through their own poetic expression." The Romantics were strongly influenced by Fichte, who also attempted but failed to arrive at a non-naturalistic view of man's unity with nature based on subjective freedom. For Fichte, as Taylor says "the self posits a not-self which it struggles to overcome. But subjectivity needs to be related to something else in order to be. Consequently, the overcoming of the not-self can never be completed, if the subject himself is not to disappear. It must therefore be seen as an infinite progress of self-realisation towards a goal which ought to be realised but never fully is."¹⁴

This passage reveals quite clearly how Fichte made the same mistake as the young Romantics he influenced, the mistake of equating the *principle* of subjectivity with *finite* subjectivity. The implication that the process of reconciliation (of man and nature) can never be completed only follows once this equation has been made. Had Fichte distinguished between finite subjectivity and the principles of subjectivity as such, the destruction of the finite subject qua finite

14. *ibid.* p.40.

subject in a reconciling unity would have been no problem. For this reconciling unity would be a more adequate expression of the essential nature of subjectivity. It would not, as Fichte suggests, have to stand over against an alien "other" in order to be. This is true only of finite subjectivity, but Fichte, through his failure to distinguish finite subjectivity from the essential nature of subjectivity, thinks that because finite subjectivity must be counterposed to an alien "other" then so must be subjectivity as such.

A post Enlightenment philosopher who came a little closer to grasping how subjective effort can reconcile man with nature is to be found in Hegel's contemporary and colleague at Jena, namely Schelling. Schelling, like Fichte, looked to human subjective effort to effect this reconciliation, though for Schelling, this took the form of art, rather than (as for Fichte) moral activity. For Schelling, as against Fichte, the process of reconciliation can be completed without totally destroying subjectivity, for the former saw that a new unity could be arrived at in which finite subjectivity was destroyed only qua finite, through the finite subject's being subsumed and transcended in a more all-embracing subject.

Unfortunately however, the new reconciling subject which Schelling presented us with turned out to be an Absolute without differentiation. It was, as Hegel was later to remark, like "a night in which all are black." Thus, although the abnegation of finite subjectivity was supposed to give rise to a new and higher form of subjectivity, it turned out in the end to be indistinguishable from a state of affairs in which finite subjectivity is submerged in an objective realm. There is no *genuine* subjectivity left in an Absolute without differentiation. But Schelling, like Fichte, simply could not see how a genuine principle of subjectivity could sustain itself once finite subjectivity ceased to

exist in its finite form.

It becomes clear that although Schelling tried hard to avoid the Fichtean equation of finite subjectivity with the principle of subjectivity as such, in the end he did not succeed. For when finite subjectivity is transmuted, in Schelling's philosophy, through subsumption within a new whole, nothing resembling genuine subjectivity is left. Schelling's Absolute turned out to be a total failure as a Cosmic Subject which could unify the whole world. But his insight that it was only a Cosmic Subject of some sort which could unify the world, was one from which later philosophers had much to learn.

Hegel's View that Substance is a Subject

The post- Enlightenment insight that only in free subjectivity can we find the basis for overcoming the diremption and alienation between subject and object, man and nature, came to a culmination in the Hegelian development of the idea of Cosmic Subjectivity. For Hegel shows, more adequately than any of the philosophers we have already mentioned, just why subjectivity must be primary in any subject-object reconciliation, and what form that subjectivity must take. In the Preface to his Phenomenology of Spirit Hegel writes:

"In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the true, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject." 15

In exploring the Hegelian view that substance is a subject, we shall, in what follows, find reason to disagree with Hegel about the

15. Phenomenology of Spirit, p.9-10. A.V. Miller translation.

precise way in which this subject must actualise itself in order to bring about a reconciliation with objective world. But we shall see that the very possibility of making this criticism is based on a justifiable acceptance of the deepest insights of Hegel, insights which led him in the first place to affirm that substance is a subject. In criticising Hegel, we shall therefore be attempting to work out the implications of his deepest insights with greater consistency than he did.

What then were these insights which led Hegel to conclude the substance is a subject? In order to confront this question, it is necessary to understand just what Hegel meant by this affirmation that substance is a subject.

The Hegelian statement that substance is a subject arises, primarily, as a reaction against Kantian scepticism, a scepticism which holds that the true nature of things is hidden from us, and thereby sets up an eternal and insurmountable opposition between subject and object. For Kant, the only objective world that can be known is an intersubjectivity constructed phenomenal world, since the realm of things-in-themselves can never be apprehended, let alone shaped, by a subject. Hegel however saw that being, if it is to have any meaning at all, must involve being-for-a-subject (actually or potentially existing), and that this means that there must be an ultimate unity or continuity between subject and object. Thus subjectivity divorced from objectivity and objectivity divorced from subjectivity must be regarded as abstractions. But this new substantial unity (Hegel's "substance"), a unity which overcomes the initial alienation between (what was once) finite subjectivity and (what was once) finite objectivity, can only be actualised through subjective toil and effort. The unity, although always implicit in any subject-object relationship, can only be made explicit when the objective world

becomes the vehicle for the expression of rational self-conscious and free subjectivity. To this new unity as a whole can be ascribed the qualities of rational self-awareness and self-determination, attributes which are the product of the transformation of (what was once) the unconscious world of nature.

Freedom's necessity consists then for Hegel in the discipline of reason, there can be no subjective freedom which is the product of whim or caprice. The new free unity, which is the product of a transformation in which finite subjectivity is subsumed and transcended, is correctly characterised as a subject, and indeed as an Absolute Subject, because in its life no part is played by blind unconscious forces, mere fortuitousness, or brute "givenness". It is a unified self-conscious rational spirit which has overcome all forms of limitation and ignorance. But it is important to remember that the mode of subjectivity here is quite different from finite subjectivity, since the former subsumes the objective world, whereas the latter is an abstraction from the subject-object unity, a unity which, by its mere existing, excludes finite subjectivity from ultimate or separate existence.

When Hegel declares that substance is a subject, therefore, he means that implicit within the everyday world of partial self-consciousness, finite limitation, and alienation between subject and object, there exists an ultimate unity between subject and object (substance), a unity which itself bears the properties of the ideal self-conscious subject.

In arriving at his view of the primacy of the subject, Hegel had learned much from his predecessors. In particular, he had learned from the hopeless inadequacies in those philosophies which sought to unify man and nature through the finite subject's coming to "fit in" with the great current of nature. He had also learned from the pitfalls encountered by philosophers such as Schelling, the pitfalls of trying to create a unity

of man and nature by positing an Absolute Subject which merely cancels the finite moments of subjectivity and objectivity. From all this, arose the insights to which reference has already been made. It was clear to Hegel that if (a) implicit within any subject-object relationship there exists a subject-object unity and (b) the new unity does not arise through the mere cancellation of one (or both) of the finite terms in the subject/object division, then the new unity must be such as can overcome the alienation existing between the finite terms through *free*, and therefore wholly rational, self-activity.

The account which Hegel gave of the nature of this reconciling Absolute Subject represents one of his highest philosophical achievements. We can begin to understand how his account took shape when we reflect upon how "substance", i.e. the new reconciling unity of subject and object, is implicit within any, even the most alienated, subject-object relationships. The reason why this is so becomes clear when we remember that for Hegel, alienated subject-object relationships can only be understood as partial manifestations of the complete subject-object relationship; the former have (as it were) no autonomous or independent existence.

The world of finitude and limitation, shot-through, as it must be, by blind unconscious forces, irrational givenness, and chance, is then an incomplete expression of the Absolute Subject. A definite picture of the nature of the Absolute Subject begins to emerge when we come to understand why the finite world must be regarded as somehow incomplete, since the Absolute Subject is just that which is required to bring it to completion. It is necessary, therefore, to say a little more about our characterisation of alienation between subject and object as a form of incompleteness, in order to grasp more fully what is required for completion.

Alienation and the Completion of the Finite World

Alienation between subject and object arises in and is a perennial feature of the completion of the finite world because of the inability of either the subjective or the objective side to reconcile the other side to itself. In the case of the objective side it is self-evident that this is so, since the very concept of an objective realm contains the idea of a world of passive and finite non-consciousness, a world which is capable only of being shaped, that is of having things "done" to it. An objective realm which ceased to be like this would be, as we have said, subsumed into the being of a subject. However, in the finite world, it is not only the objective realm which has no final reconciling power, for in this realm the same applies to finite self-conscious beings. Such beings cannot, qua finite individuals, ever succeed in bringing about a reconciliation between themselves and the objects to which they stand opposed. And this is true, even if they manage to form the world in accordance with their own desires, since these desires are in themselves at least in part the product of caprice, ignorance, and limitation. In forming the world, finite beings cannot be wholly conscious of the full meaning and implications of what they are doing, and therefore the alienation between them and the objective realm must remain. Or to put this another way, finite subjects do not have the power to totally overcome their alienation from the objective world, because their subjectivity is attenuated, and they are themselves partially object-like. Finite substances can thus never be substances in the Hegelian sense, nor can they effect, so long as they remain finite, the act of reconciliation which produces a "substance".

However, although it is true that finite subjects have an incomplete subjectivity, it is also important to remember that they have quite

genuine subjective attributes. That is to say, we must of necessity, in describing finite subjects, make use of concepts which are really only appropriately applied to a perfect, or absolute, subject. We must ascribe subject-like properties to finite subjects, even though the latter can never wholly measure up to such a description. For example, we cannot avoid using concepts such as freedom, rationality, and self-conscious awareness in our quest to apprehend the mode of being of finite subjects; if we refused to use such categories we would be forced to assimilate finite subjectivity to the realm of unconscious nature through the use of object-predicates, and this would be to misunderstand finite subjectivity to a much greater degree than we should misunderstand it as a result of its having subject-predicates ascribed to it. Finite subjects do indeed fall short of possessing subjective attributes in their fullness and perfection, but they have to be understood as falling short of *these* attributes, and not merely possessing others. Truly subjective attributes are what finite subjects aspire to. It may seem strange, but it is true nonetheless, that the very terms which are necessary to describe a thing (in the present case, finite subjects) also can have a critical edge. For not only do they bring out what the thing is, they can, in cases such as the one in question, go beyond this and show us how a thing's existence is not commensurate with its essence. They show us, that is, how the thing in its present mode of existence is somehow incomplete.

Finite subjectivity is alienated from the natural world therefore, because it at once falls short of and aspires towards genuine subjectivity. It requires its own completion through a reconciliation with the objective, but lacks the power to provide it. It is the task of the Absolute Subject to resolve this dialectical contradiction; the path whereby this is achieved constitutes the path of subjective freedom's necessity.

The Nature of the Absolute Subject

The Absolute Subject must be such as to reconcile subject with object through the completion of finite subjectivity. This much we may accept, through our previous development of the Hegelian line of argument. However, at the point where we have to decide just how the Absolute Subject is able to achieve the completion of finite subjectivity, we shall be forced to part company with Hegel. And, as we said earlier, we shall disagree with Hegel on the basis of a working out of his own insight, that is, by working out with greater consistency what the completion of finite subjectivity must involve.

Our contention shall be, as against Hegel, that the Absolute Subject can never fulfil its task of bringing about the completion of finite subjectivity through a perfect, or allegedly perfect, social order or state, realized at some latter-day point in human history. For even if a political state or society could be brought 'about in which alienation were totally overcome, and in which finite individuals found total freedom and self-fulfilment through their participation in the social "whole" (a state of affairs which is, in itself highly improbable) the very fact that such a state would comprise merely a small portion of human history, and would be bounded by spatial, geographical factors, this fact alone, would be sufficient to preclude that state from being the ultimate manifestation of the reconciling power of the Absolute Subject. The Absolute Subject must be limited by no temporal or geographical power if it is to be truly absolute, its reconciling power cannot be narrowly contained within a finite period and place, somewhere towards the end of human history. If the Absolute Subject is to genuinely complete the finite world, it must complete it throughout eternity, that is to say, it must be coeval with it.

Hegel's notion that the Absolute Subject is realized at a latter-day point in human history, seems to arise from his view about the way in which the Absolute Subject must develop itself out of the finite world, as the completion of that world. That is, Hegel seems to think that because the Absolute Subject is necessary for the completion of the finite world, then it must be actualised in its fullness at a point late in time. However, this totally conflates two senses of the term "completion", the one logical and the other temporal. Hegel's greatest insight was that the world of finite subjects is inadequate as it stands and it needs "completion" to be transformed into that substantial unity which is always implicit within it. But it does not follow from this that the "completion" must take place towards its temporal end. The completion of the finite world is not the same as the completion of an essay, for the former sense of "completion" is logical, it involves placing the finite world within a context which can alone make sense of it, through resolving its dialectical contradictions. A realization of the Absolute Subject in the final or latter days of human history would not provide this context, and an Absolute which completed the world in a temporal sense could not possibly complete it in the (relevant) logical sense.

The "greater context" which seems to complete the finite world may of course be apprehended and expressed more or less adequately in the lives of finite individuals of different societies and in different ages. There may be some societies which have become so corrupt and some individuals who have become so evil that from their standpoint it is almost impossible to grasp the "overall context". But there is no a priori reason to suppose that there will be a linear progression in which the Absolute Subject is more adequately expressed in the lives of finite individuals as history advances. The Absolute Subject, which is

the overall completion throughout all time of all self-conscious (and lesser forms of) life may express itself through the finite world more or less adequately at any point in history. Communion with the Absolute Subject is available at any time to all finite spirits who are sincerely seeking their own completion and fulfilment.

The Absolute Subject and the "Cunning of Reason"

One objection which might be levelled against our critique of (what we may call) Hegel's historical thesis, is based on the notion that the Absolute Subject develops itself from the finite world through a process which Hegel calls the "Cunning of Reason". Once we understand, it may be argued, what the "Cunning of Reason" is and how it works, it will be seen that the completion of the finite world by the Absolute Subject must be understood chronologically, as well as logically. What then, we may ask, is the "Cunning of Reason"?

The Hegelian doctrine of the "Cunning of Reason" is well summed up by Peter Laska in his essay Hegel and Kant on Practical Reason. In this essay, Laska writes:

"'The universal' Hegel argues, 'must be actualised through the particular.' The rational will which must be developed from the universal through its opposite the particular is for Hegel 'The Cunning of Reason' (die List der Vernunft). Reason in the sense of the universal rational community (i.e. the Kantian Kingdom of Ends) is realised in the concrete world of human history, as a result of individuals pursuing their own particular interests rather than consciously pursuing this Ideal. He sees it as part of the notion of the cunning of reason that human civilisation has advanced not through conscious intent *but* rather in spite of it." ¹⁶ Thus, "Spiritual or social

16. Published in Hegel and the History of Philosophy. Proceedings of the 1972 Hegel Society of America Conference, p.136.

development then, is a process which goes on 'behind the back of consciousness.' The 'cunning' in the 'cunning of reason' is that the human individual acts freely, (i.e. spontaneously) in his own interest but actualises a 'universal', a rationally necessary constraint on his power of arbitrary choice. This 'universal' of rational thought attains objective existence in the institutionalised relationships of human society, that is, in what Hegel calls the 'spiritual' or 'cultural' aspects of human life." 17

The cunning of reason then is the process by which finite individuals come to express, in spite of themselves, something of the Absolute Subject. As Hegel quite rightly saw, a consciousness of the universal comes to be formed in the course of struggles for the particular. For once we have achieved our particular aims and goals it soon becomes clear - even if we have fully achieved them - that we cannot rest contented in this state. The very fact that we have fulfilled our particular purposes and still are not wholly contented brings to light our deeper and more universal needs. That is, our continuing alienation brings to light more clearly what it is we lack as finite beings, and what is required to overcome this lack.

It may seem therefore, that as time advances, finite beings will be in a position to express the nature of the Absolute Subject with progressively increasing adequacy. That is to say, it looks at first as though the Absolute Subject can only serve as the completion of the finite world once the world of finite individuals has managed to overcome its alienation. And this surely, it may be argued, must be a process which takes place in time.

However, on closer consideration, the doctrine of the Cunning of Reason, though seeming *prima facie* to lend support to Hegel's historical

17. *ibid.* p.137.

thesis, serves, in the end, to undermine it. For if it is true that finite subjects can advance and tend to advance towards a more genuine subjectivity in spite of their conscious intentions, then this is surely because the influence of the Absolute Subject is present from the beginning. If the Absolute Subject only arose out of the efforts of finite subjects, towards the end of history, there would have been nothing to guide those efforts at the beginning, and the emergence of an Absolute Subject from the action of (unguided) finite beings would have been the most incredible and unlikely coincidence.

The force which is capable of guiding finite subjects towards the expression of Absolute Subjectivity in spite of their conscious intentions, cannot be actualised as a full reality, *post festum*, that is only after that guidance has been completed. The operation of the cunning of reason, whereby reason, freedom, and self-conscious awareness are developed even in spite of conscious intentions, only makes sense if we posit an Absolute Subject which is always present and which is capable of guiding us, in spite of ourselves, towards goals which are truly universal.

The Absolute Subject and Religious Experience

From our critique of Hegel's historical thesis, a positive view have emerged of the nature of an Absolute Subject, which alone can bring about the "completion" of the finite world. It cannot, we have seen, be identified with one particular period in the life of human society; it must rather be an external influence running through the whole history of self-conscious life on this, and possibly on other planets. Finite spirits may come more or less close to expressing this Absolute Subjectivity, but so long as they remain finite, they can never wholly express it. The more adequately, however, that Absolute Subjectivity is

expressed through the lives of finite spirits, the more free, rational, self-conscious, and morally good they become.

All this has been established by our metaphysical reflections, by means of which we have attempted to establish, and work out the implications of, the ultimate unity of subject and object. But what do our metaphysical conclusions tell us about the validity of religious experience? Do the subjects of religious experience really have a direct intuition of the primacy of a subject, corresponding to the Absolute Subject which we have described?

We may reply at once that, so long as we are not tempted to entertain the historical thesis that the Absolute Subject only actualises itself, as a result of human labour, at a certain point in history, the answer is resoundingly yes.

Mystics and others who have claimed to have encountered the divine have consistently reported an experience in which they have been liberated from their everyday concerns as a finite particular, made more conscious of themselves and their continuity with nature, and have overcome the conflict between duty and inclination. Above all, such people have, through their experiences, been led to feel that the various aspects of the perceivable world, including themselves, are ultimately unified through a supreme conscious awareness, a power or being from which nothing is hidden, and which serves to complete the attenuated self-consciousness of the finite subject. Thus for the mystics, as well as for metaphysicians, it is a liberating, reconciling Subjectivity which stands at the apex of all self-conscious life. It would be difficult to imagine what the Absolute Subject of metaphysics could be, if it is not the God of the mystics.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TESTIMONY OF RELIGION

AS IT IS PRACTISED

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At the beginning of Chapter Four it was promised that, in the course of this thesis, we would attempt to confirm the conclusions of mystics and others who have claimed to have encountered the Divine, through metaphysical analysis of self-conscious life and experience. And already, in the past four chapters we have begun to fulfil this promise, firstly through our discussion of the nature of finite selfhood, and secondly by reflecting upon the subject-object relationship. In those chapters we found reason to come to conclusions which were highly favourable to a mystical view of the world.

In this chapter, it shall be our task to see whether this mystical view of the world can be further substantiated, by reflecting upon yet another important aspect of self-conscious life and experience. We shall be concerned to discover the deepest meaning of that species of religious consciousness in which a conception of God is arrived at, not through any striking or mystical religious experience, but through participation in the ritual and devotional practice of one of the world's religions. And this enquiry will be attempted, in order to determine whether within this ritualistic religious consciousness, there is to be found a conception of God which can in any way corroborate the views of the mystics, and others who have claimed more direct experience of God.

That it is important to consider the meaning of this ritualistic religious consciousness for the purposes of our enquiry becomes clear as soon as we remember what an important part it has played in shaping the

ordinary person's "sense of the Infinite" down the ages. Unlike the more unusual religious experiences which we discussed earlier and whose validity we are now trying to corroborate, the consciousness generated by devotion and ritual has been experienced, not by only a small minority of people; it has rather been an important facet of the self-conscious experience of a vast number, and possibly the majority, of human beings who have lived throughout history. It would therefore be something of an oversight to fail to consider the question of whether religion as it is practised has anything to tell us about the nature of religious truth.

If religion as it is practised is to lend support to the mystical world view, two conclusions must be established; firstly, it must be established that devotion and religious practice reflect a genuine awareness of something which is true about the world however incomplete and inadequate the ritualistic expression may be, and secondly, it must be established that the religious awareness reflected in ritual and devotion is ultimately in line with the mystical world view. The first question must be answered before the second, because there would be little comfort in a conclusion that the consciousness of God in ritualistic religion is supportive of a mystical world view if the ritualistic consciousness were itself seen to be the product of illusion. We shall therefore turn to that question at once.

Hegel and the Ultimate Meaning of Religion

Is the devotional practice of the ordinary religious believer expressive of anything deeply true about the world? The most striking affirmative answer to this question is to be found in the works of Hegel. Indeed Hegel's treatment of it is so comprehensive, and so thorough, that we shall seek to arrive at our own conclusion through a detailed analysis of the meaning of religion which Hegel presents us with, and by an

examination of how his analysis might be improved upon.

It is well known of Hegel that he sought to understand the meaning of religion by comprehending it through philosophical speculation, and also that he located the chief significance of religion in its being the expression of a supreme truth which is only partially grasped from the standpoint of its own self-understanding. This much has been enough to offend a good many theologians and adherents of religious faiths; consequently regarding Hegel's philosophy of religion little more is widely known. In particular, it is not widely known what Hegel thought the ultimate meaning of religion to be, nor how he developed and attempted to justify his view. Yet it is just these aspects of Hegel's philosophy which must be considered here.

In order to understand Hegel's view of the ultimate meaning of religion, it is necessary to begin by looking at why he rejected its own self-understanding as inadequate. For it is largely through a critique of the self-understanding of religion that Hegel claims to arrive at a more adequate grasp of its real meaning; a meaning which the various religions themselves are half-blindly groping towards.

Hegel's dissatisfaction with religion left as it stands, uncomprehended by philosophy, first comes to light in his Early Theological Writings. In his essay, the "Positivity of the Christian Religion", Hegel argues that underlying the message of Jesus there is deep truth, but that this was totally distorted by the way in which it was presented. Hegel tells us from the outset what it was which in his view was the essential truth which Christianity distorted: "The aim and essence of all true religion," he remarks, "our religion included, is human morality ..."¹.

1. On Christianity, Early Theological Writings (referred to henceforth as E.T.W.) T.M. Knox translation, p.68.

This sounds at first as if Hegel were advocating a reduction of religion to morality, and is disregarding the question of whether Christian beliefs are actually true. This however cannot be so, for there is a total link in Hegel's thought between ethical truth and other forms of truth. The point is that all truth for Hegel is a matter of expressing the Universal, or pure rationality. Pure rationality is achieved once the Universal wins mastery over the particular, so that all one-sidedness is done away with. Morality is the expression of rationality through human actions, for in acting morally I express my rational nature, rather than my subjective interests which correspond to my nature as a mere isolated particular. If one approaches all that one does from this rational standpoint, one is then expressing the deepest truth, a truth in which theory and practice are in total harmony. It is impossible to be rational in practice without being rational in theory. By affirming that the aim and essence of all true religion is human morality, Hegel was saying no more than that the life of God or the Universal must be worked out through the lives of human beings. Hegel had no time for other-worldly gods, at least not as the ultimate truth of the matter, and to this view he remained faithful throughout his life.

The problem with the Christian message as Jesus taught it, says Hegel, was that it issued from him as positive commands. Jesus was forced to present his teaching in this way, we are told, because only by doing so could he get the legalistic society of his day to pay attention. Therefore he talked a good deal about his own personality and performed miracles, thereby shifting the emphasis away from his teaching and towards his authority. The greatest shift in this direction, however, was not brought about by Christ himself, but by his disciples. These were simple men who, as Hegel says, "had found the basis of their conviction about the teaching of Jesus principally in their friendship

with him and dependence on him. They had not attained truth and freedom by their own exertions; only by laborious learning had they acquired a dim sense of them and certain formulas about them".² The fact that the Christian message was chiefly promulgated by such men led to its being imbued with a strong authoritarian element.

Hegel is emphatic however, when he tells us that although for the Jews of Christ's day the moral teaching could only come to their attention as commands, its essential content is really nothing other than the expression of the Universal nature in man.

"The assertion that even the moral laws propounded by Jesus are positive, that is that they derive their validity from the fact that Jesus commanded them, betrays a humble modesty and a disclaimer of any inherent goodness, nobility and greatness in human nature; but it must at least suppose that man has a natural sense of obligation to obey divine commands. If nothing whatever in our hearts responded to the challenge to virtue, and if therefore the call struck no chord in our own nature, then Jesus' endeavour to teach men virtue would have had the same character and the same outcome as St. Anthony of Padua's zeal in preaching to fish." 3

In the "Positivity of the Christian Religion" then, we see the early origins of Hegel's mature view about the ultimate unity of the divine and human nature. Man does not forever remain finite, with the Infinite standing over against him. He rather contains within himself the divine potential.⁴

2. ibid. p.8.

3. ibid. p.73.

4. It was just this view of Hegel's which Kierkegaard so severely criticized. According to Kierkegaard, man can never rise to such dizzy heights; the individual is and must remain "a poor existing individual" in a constant process of "becoming". In spite of this however, Kierkegaard is at times unable to avoid the Hegelian conclusion himself. Consider, for example, the description of the nature of man which we find in "Problem One" of Fear and Trembling. W. Lowrie translation. pages 64-65. (Continued p.278)

4. (contd)

"Conceived immediately as physical and psychical, the particular individual is the individual who has his *telos* in the universal, and his ethical task is to express himself constantly in it, and to abolish his particularity, in order to become the universal. As soon as the individual would assert himself in his particularity over against the universal he sins, and only by recognizing this can he reconcile himself with the universal."

Kierkegaard goes on to tell us that if there is such a thing as faith then it must be possible for the individual to rise above the universal, and stand in an "absolute relation to the absolute". I want to argue that Kierkegaard's notion of an "absolute relation to the absolute" is precisely what Hegel has in mind when he speaks of the human individual as having a universal nature. And it is important to be clear from the outset about the different ways in which Hegel and Kierkegaard use the term "universal". For Kierkegaard, as we have said, it is not the highest category. He thinks of it in a more Kantian way as the sort of reasoning which in ethics produces "rational love". When, through one's life, one expresses this type of universal, one lives by impersonal values, and insofar as it is the ability to do this which distinguishes us from animals, it is not to be despised. Kierkegaard calls a life on this level the ethical way of life.

Both Hegel and Kierkegaard saw however, that so long as one remains at this level, full human potential is not realised. They saw that insofar as one remains at the ethical level one only subordinates one's inclinations to universal principles, thereby retaining a gap between duty and inclination. Although these universal principles are apprehended by reason, and do not constitute merely unreflective obedience to positive commands, they nonetheless are not an expression of the whole individual, whose inclinations still strive against them. Thus, from the point of view of a total ethical person, the moral law still appears as having a positive element in that it comes as an incursion from outside, being as it is, an expression of only one side of the person's nature. In the continued efforts to put down one side of one's nature, as it were, by violence, one loses some of the passion which is essential for a totally fulfilled human being. Thus we see Kierkegaard depicting the ethical way of life as the least passionate of the three ways he describes. In the highest way of life, there must be no disreption or tension between duty and inclination. This absence of tension is discovered for Hegel in the expression of the Universal, and for Kierkegaard in the religious way of life. In this we have the ultimate consummation of the moral law through which it ceases to be law and becomes an expression of freedom. The view of the moral law as law is simply the distortion which must appear to the finite alienated individual. The fulfilment of the law which Christ preached, turns out to be nothing other than love expressing itself freely.

In the "Spirit of Christianity", written only a year later than the "Positivity of the Christian Religion", Hegel has come to a much more sympathetic understanding of Christianity. We here see Christianity presented, not as a religion having an overdose of positivity, but as having the minimum degree of positivity possible for truth which is couched in religious terminology and rests upon religious ways of thinking. Here we see the origins of his later view that in true religion we are presented with infinite content in a finite form. He has not yet worked out, however, his detailed view about how it is that the limitations inherent in religious ways of speaking and thinking can and must be overcome.

In the "Spirit of Christianity" Hegel begins by telling us how the sharp hostility which the Flood introduced between man and nature resulted in a strong positive element in the Jewish faith. For it gave people the idea that they must *conquer* nature, and this brought with it the type of consciousness which had great respect for power. Hegel writes:

"If man was to hold out against the outbursts of a nature now hostile, nature had to be mastered; and since the whole can only be divided into idea and reality, so also the supreme unity lies either in something thought or in something real. It was in a thought-product that Noah built the distracted world together again; his thought-produced ideal he turned into a (real) Being and then set everything else over against it, so that in this opposition realities were reduced to thoughts, i.e. to something mastered. This Being promised him to confine within their limits the elements which were his servants, so that no flood was ever able again to destroy mankind. Among living things, things capable of being mastered in this way, men were subjected to the law, to the command so to restrain themselves as not to kill one another; to overstep these restraints was to fall under the power of this Being and so to become lifeless." 5

Abraham, Hegel tells us, carried on this tradition:

"The first act which made Abraham the progenitor of a nation is a disseverance which snaps the bonds of communal life and love." "Abraham wanted *not* to love, wanted to be free by not loving." 6

Hegel goes on to expound his view, which was to remain with him throughout his life, that if one does not love, one is alienated from oneself, and therefore cannot be free. What Abraham tried to do was impossible, and its only effect was to negate his freedom and make him the slave of the very world he tried so hard to master. Abraham's attitude eventually came to infect the whole Jewish nation, Hegel tells us, and it led to the result that in Jewish eyes slavery came to be regarded almost as a virtue.

"It is no wonder that this nation, which in its emancipation bore the most slave-like demeanour, regretted leaving Egypt, wished to return there again whenever difficulty or danger came upon it in the sequel, and this showed how in its liberation it had been without soul and spontaneous need of freedom." 7

When Jesus came into Jewish history, Hegel continues, a great effort was made to reverse the tendencies which had been so deeply ingrained into the Jewish faith. It was the task of Jesus to do away with the positive element in morality, and to replace it with an ethic whose foundation was in the needs of man. Hegel writes that "Against purely objective commands Jesus sets something totally foreign to them, namely, the subjective in general."⁸ We are told that Jesus' distaste

6. *ibid.* p.185.

7. *ibid.* pp.199-200.

8. *ibid.* p.209.

for positive law was so great that it would be, from his point of view, better to give way to the merest whim, which at least has some (albeit distorted) basis in human need, than to carry out an action simply because it is commanded. Jesus, says Hegel, taught us love, not obedience. For example: "Over against *dutiful* fidelity in marriage and the right to divorce a wife, Jesus sets love." "In the face of love so long as it lasts, or even when it ceases, there can be no talk of leave or rights."⁹

We now turn to Hegel's Berlin Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. These were composed towards the end of Hegel's life, and represent his mature thinking on the philosophy of religion. These may in a certain way be regarded as a sort of synthesis of the "Positivity of the Christian Religion" and the "Spirit of Christianity". He retained the view that the essence of religion is love, or the free expression of the Universal, but he came to grasp the necessity of why this Universal had, at certain times in history, to appear in the guise of ritualistic, positive religion. Positivity he saw, was linked with the fact that in religion our mode of thought is partly pictorial or sensuous; thus we cannot, from this standpoint, avoid treating the truth which such thinking presents as to some degree external. That there should be this level of thinking is not a bad thing, not only because the masses need such a way of thinking of the divine content, but because a truly Infinite and creative absolute *must* express itself on all the various levels of finitude. For Hegel, we may say, religion is the highest of such levels - it is only one step from here to the Infinite. Hegel sums up his view that God or the Absolute must express itself on all the levels of finitude, and therefore through human religion, in the following way:

9. *ibid.* p.216.

"The expression that God as reason rules the world, would be irrational if we did not assume that it has reference also to religion, and that the Divine Spirit works in the special character and form assumed by religion." 10

Religion then, for Hegel, is an expression of the life of Spirit, or free rational self-consciousness, and Christianity is this expression in its most developed form. For the purposes of this chapter we shall not discuss the mature Hegel's claim regarding the particular status of Christianity as the Absolute Religion, but shall rather be concerned only with his attempts to grasp the essence of the phenomenon of religion in general.

The mature Hegel of the LPR continues to uphold his earlier view that the true significance of religious life and devotion only emerges fully once it has been comprehended by philosophy, and that the impetus for this comprehension springs from a tension in religion's self-understanding.

Religion, left to itself, does not make any more sense for Hegel than does the world of sensuous immediacy left to *itself*. It is only in its collapse that it discovers its true nature and value, for this breakdown is not destruction but the attainment of its true destiny and essence, as a moment of the Absolute Whole.

Just how this collapse from within occurs, and how it gives to religion its true value as an expression of pure rational self-activity, is dealt with by Hegel in his LPR under the general heading of "The Conception of Religion".

Hegel begins his LPR by giving various descriptions of the nature of the religious consciousness. These descriptions do not yet diverge

10. Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (henceforth referred to as LPR). Vol.1, p.33.

from the self-understanding of religion, although in a certain way they go deeper; they are aimed at setting that which is the essence of the religious consciousness apart from what could be described as its trimmings. For example Hegel states:

"We know that in religion we withdraw ourselves from what is temporal, and that religion is for our consciousness that region in which all the enigmas of the world are solved, all the contradictions of deep reaching thought have their meanings unveiled, and where the voice of the heart's pain is silenced - the region of eternal rest, eternal truth, eternal peace." 11

We are next told that there is an important connection between freedom and religion, and in particular, that religion is free because it is infinite, it has no "other" which might limit it.

"Religion, as something which is occupied with this final object and end, is therefore absolutely free, and is its own end; for all other aims converge in this ultimate end, and in presence of it they vanish and cease to have value of their own." 12

We are then told that the religious consciousness is to be found in all peoples, and that through religion we can overcome all sorrow:

"Whatever awakens in us doubt or fear, all sorrow, all care, all the limited interests of finite life, we leave behind on the shores of time; and as from the highest peak of a mountain far away from all definite view of what is earthly, we look down calmly upon all the limitations of the landscape and of the world, so with the spiritual eye, man, lifted out of the hard realities of the actual world, contemplates it as something having only the semblance of existence which seen from this

11. *ibid.* p.1.

12. *ibid.* p.2.

pure region bathed in the beams of the spiritual sun, merely reflects back its shades of colour, its varied tints and lights, softened away into eternal rest." 13

After stating all these propositions, Hegel remarks:

"Such is the general sensation, consciousness, or however we may designate it of religion. To consider, to examine, and to comprehend its nature is the object of these present lectures." 14

Although Hegel proffers these descriptions at the outset, we are not supposed to be able to grasp their full significance at once. Only after much argumentation are we able to see why there is and must be such a form of consciousness, indeed, only after we have grasped that which is the truth of religion.

The philosophical comprehension of religion, Hegel stresses, must be a comprehension of definite religion: religion as it is actually practised. This shows that, even if Hegel does not explicitly discuss religion as it is understood by its own believers, he does not intend to ignore this. If religion truly contains the unfolding of the life of Spirit, albeit in the form of "Vorstellung", then the Absolute must express itself in the definite religions of the world. Thus Hegel scorns those who would seek to understand the nature of God apart from all doctrine by way of a Theology of Reason. The Theology of Reason was doomed to failure, says Hegel, because it would not be led to God by his manifestation in the world, it rather tried to conceive of "the infinite in its own finite fashion."¹⁵ Because such a conception rests on finite

13. *ibid.* p.3.

14. *ibid.* p.4.

15. *ibid.* p.29.

understanding, any content we give to God will be inadequate for such an Infinite Being, and thus we can have no idea of the nature of God, and are left with an empty abstraction. If we want to know the nature of God, we must look at his self-expression in the world. We can only know the nature of a creator by looking at his artefacts.

Hegel then goes on to show how the Theology of Reason, though itself misguided, gives rise, in its breakdown, to our first glimpse into the true nature of religion. It does so because it is bound up with the view that man has immediate knowledge of God.

"For with the thought that all objective determinateness has converged in the inwardness of subjectivity, the conviction is bound up that God gives revelation in an immediate way in man; that religion consists in just this, that man has immediate knowledge of God." 16

Immediate knowledge, however, Hegel tells us, contains an internal inconsistency, for we find that it presents us with an object of knowledge for which this mode of knowledge is inadequate. Hegel says - and here it is worth quoting him at some length - that:

"If, however, we bring out what is inherent in the principle of immediate knowing, that is what is directly affirmed in it, we find it to be just this, that God is spoken of in relation to consciousness in such a way that this relation is something inseparable, or in other words, that we must of necessity contemplate both." 17

Thus, from a form of knowledge which is said to be immediate, we are led to a contemplation which has to acknowledge the distinction between subject and object.

16. *ibid.* p.42.

17. *ibid.* p.45.

"It implies, in the first place, the essential distinction which the conception of religion contains; on the one side, subjective consciousness, and on the other, God recognized as Object in himself, or implicitly. At the same time however, it is stated that there is an essential relation between the two, and that it is the inseparable relation of religion which is the real point, and not the notions which one may have concerning God. What is really contained in this position, and really constitutes its true kernel, is the philosophical Idea itself, only that this Idea is confined by immediate knowledge within limitations which are abolished by philosophy, and which are exhibited in their oneness and untruth." 18

This conception of immediate knowledge of God, then, is ultimately to be seen as a one-sided apprehension of the truth, whose very one-sidedness moves us on to a more adequate standpoint. Immediate knowledge tries to stress only the unity between God and consciousness, but in so doing, it is forced to pay attention to the other side, to the differentiation. So far, however, our insight into the life of Spirit is very incomplete, for we have before us only that there is an essential relation between subject and object and an essential difference; the nature of this relation and difference and their relation to each other are not yet grasped. There is a huge gap between this and the ultimate Hegelian conclusions about the nature of Absolute Spirit. For that there is an essential relationship between subject and object, and an essential difference, is not of itself enough to suggest that this unity in difference is something spiritual. We find after all such a relation in the phenomenology of Sartre. Further arguments therefore need to be adduced for the conclusion that in this difference in unity we find the essence of Spiritual Reality.

18. *ibid.* pp.45-46.

Hegel's detailed account of how religion as it is practised expresses the development of Spirit is set out in LPR. The "Notion" of religion, we are to be shown, unfolds itself by way of three distinct movements. These Hegel calls the moments of the "Notion". Hegel explains in this way:

"In the first place, the notion or conception of religion will be considered in its universal aspect; then, secondly, in its particular form as the self-dividing and self-differentiating notion that is under the aspect of judgment, of limitation, of difference, and of finiteness; and thirdly, we shall consider the notion which encloses itself within itself, and had it not this movement, it would be something dead." 19

In an important section of the first volume of LPR, Hegel describes these moments of the notion of religion in some detail. His treatment is however confusing, since in this section he outlines these moments as a programme for dealing with religion, (so that the exposition and development of the "Notion" of religion can be presented in three parts), but leaves most of the argument for why he makes such a division until later. However, it is important to realize that this presentation is not *just* a programme for dealing with religion, it is rather the only rational way of understanding it. Its necessity however, does not emerge in full, until the arguments in Part One of the book have been expounded. In the sections of Part One, A, B, and C correspond to the three moments of the "Notion". To make matters worse however, we do find some argument for the necessity of this division in the outline of the programme itself. We shall therefore attempt to draw the two relevant sections together for each moment of the "Notion". Later in his lectures, Hegel goes on to apply the moments of the notion to his understanding of definite religions,

19. *ibid.* p.59.

but for the purposes of this chapter we shall continue with Hegel's general conception of religion.

The first moment which religion contains, says Hegel, is that of universality. This is because the most fundamental thing about religion is that it is a "departing from sensuous finite objects".²⁰ In religion we try to grasp what is not limited and finite, but universal. In this, says Hegel, religion expresses the highest thought, for "The object is the Universal which, as active, is thought."²¹ It is clear that Hegel equates this moment of the "Notion" with very abstract conceptions of God. Hegel offers several such definitions.

"God is the absolutely true, the Universal
in and for itself." 22

and God is also

"The all-containing, the all-comprehending,
that from which every thing derives
subsistence." 23

Hegel tells us that it is this conception of God which forms the foundation of the religious consciousness. However, we cannot remain at this standpoint. We have here only an empty notion of the divine unity which needs to be filled in before we can know anything of God at all. "The unity of God", says Hegel, "is always Unity, but everything depends upon the particular nature of this Unity."²⁴ Hegel shows how different the various conceptions of this unity can be by contrasting the type of view which holds that God is simply the sum of all contingent

20. *ibid.* p.62.

21. *ibid.* p.61.

22. *ibid.* p.90.

23. *ibid.* p.90.

24. *ibid.* p.100.

things with the view, which he attributes to all genuinely pantheistic religions, that God expresses his essence through the created world. This latter view which Hegel attributes, quite rightly it seems, to pantheism proper, is to be in the end very close to Hegel's own view, though from this abstract universal which we now have before us, the concept of a God who expresses his essence through the created world, has yet to emerge.

Because the abstract universal is, as abstract, incomplete, it has to be given content. As soon as we give it content, we introduce diversity into what was previously an abstract unity. For we now have the Universal, or that which unifies, and that determinate content which is held together as a unity by it. Universality, or infinite creative freedom, cannot then remain as abstract self-identity, but must express itself in a determinate way, and with this we have the second moment of the "Notion". It is this expression of the Universal in determinate fashion which gives rise to consciousness and religion. Hegel sums all this up in this way:

"What we have first is this divine Universality - Spirit in its undetermined Universality - for which there exists absolutely no element of difference. But upon this absolute foundation, (and this we state for the moment as fact), there now appears that element of distinction which, in its spiritual character, is consciousness, and it is with this distinction that religion as such begins. When the absolute Universality advances to the stage of judgment, that is to say, when it proceeds to posit itself as determinateness, and God exists as Spirit for Spirit, we have reached the standpoint from which God is regarded as the object of consciousness, and Thought, which at the beginning was Universal, is seen to have entered into the condition of relation and differentiation." 25

It is not difficult to see why the Universal must differentiate itself in this way in order for consciousness to begin. Consciousness depends on there being a distinction between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, and in order to have such a relation there must be a differentiated world. Religion arises at this level because with consciousness comes awareness of the distinction between the particular finite world through which the Universal expresses itself and the unconditioned creative power itself. In the following passage Hegel explains how it is that the differentiated universal gives rise to the religious consciousness:

"The relation of these two sides which are so sharply opposed - the absolutely finite consciousness and being on the one hand, and the infinite on the other - exists in religion for me." 26.

The particular finite side of the opposition is that which makes for the possibility of sin and suffering, since this is the world of frustration and limitation. This possibility of sin and suffering is for Hegel an essential moment in the life of an Absolute which is infinite. As he so well puts it in the Phenomenology of Spirit :

"Thus the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as the disporting of Love with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience and the labour of the negative." 27

In religion we are aware of both sides, the finite and the infinite, as well as their relation to each other. This relation is, as Hegel says, that "Both sides seek each other, and both flee from each other."

26. *ibid.* p.63.

27. The Phenomenology of Spirit A.V. Miller translation p.10.

Religion arises then because of the conflict which goes on within me, as well as the unity which contains that conflict.

"I am the feeling, the perception, the idea alike of this unity and this conflict, and am what holds together the conflicting elements, the effort put forth in this act of holding together, and represent the labour of the heart and soul to obtain mastery over this opposition." 28

In the second moment of the "Notion" of religion, what is stressed is the opposition between the Infinite and the finite. There is unity implicit in this, for clearly an infinite which stood over against the finite and stopped at the latter's borders would not be infinite. The unity is brought explicitly to consciousness in the third moment of the "Notion", that is, in worship.

"It is this unity, reconciliation, restoration of the subject and of its self-consciousness, the positive feeling of possessing a share in, of partaking of this Absolute, and making unity with it actually one's own - this abolition of the dualism which constitutes the sphere of worship." 29

In worship then, we are bridging the gap between the finite and the Infinite, or reconciling our particular with our Universal nature. At this point we should notice that Hegel has so far been arguing that, assuming we start from the abstract universal, we can see that this must give rise to the beginning of consciousness, and to religion. That is, the abstract universal must become concrete if it is to be aware of itself, and it must be aware of itself if it is to be truly Universal.

28. LPR p.64, Vol.1.

29. ibid. pp.66-67.

But why do we need, in the first place, to see the world as a concretization of such a Universal? Why can we not have simply the empirical world? The Absolute may not make sense without an empirical world, but that is not to say that the empirical world makes no sense without an Absolute. We need then to ask, what is Hegel's justification for starting with the abstract Universal anyway? He says at one point that "At first it is the simple, the abstract, which enters into consciousness."³⁰ However, this is a confusion, for Hegel has shown that the Universal must be differentiated before consciousness can begin.³¹ Further, he explicitly states that as soon as consciousness does begin one is aware of the conflict between the Infinite and the finite. Hegel then is not justified in starting from the abstract universal - neither is he justified in showing that we must go on to see the world as a concretization of this. He will only be able to prove his case if he can start with the phenomenology of ordinary experience and from here go on to show that the world is only plausibly regarded as an expression of the Absolute. In the section of LPR entitled "The Necessity of the Religious Standpoint", Hegel announces his intention to attempt just this. He states: "We have now, therefore, to consider Nature as it really is in itself - as the process of which the transition to Spirit is the ultimate truth, so that Spirit proves itself to be the truth of Nature."³² It is

30. ibid. p.93.

31. It could be objected here that Hegel, in saying that it is the simple and abstract which enters into consciousness at first, does not intend "at first" to be interpreted temporally. It might be held that what Hegel is really saying is that when we reflect philosophically, we see that this is, of all possible contents of consciousness, that which is logically the most elementary, and in that way enjoys a certain species of priority. However, if this is what Hegel does mean, he does not explain adequately just how or why this is so.

32. LPR p.109, Vol.1.

shown that "It is the essential character of Nature to sacrifice itself, to consume itself, so that the Psyche comes forth out of this burnt offering and the Idea rises into its proper element, into its ethereality."³³

If philosophical thought is, as Hegel says it is, infinite, it ought to be possible for it to grasp the necessity of why Spirit is the truth of Nature. If it cannot do this, then the so-called philosophical comprehension of religion is no advance upon the self-understanding of the ritualistic consciousness. For Hegel, the fact that religion has the form of pictorial or partly sensuous thought is tied up with the fact that in religion we do not grasp the necessity of the development of the life of Spirit; it appears as something which just *is*. Religious symbols and imagery do not allow us to grasp the necessity of the truth which they represent. Even in the Absolute Religion, which for Hegel is Christianity, the relation of the Infinite and finite is pictured by the relation of God the Father to Christ the Son. This makes the relation appear external and contingent, a mere matter of fact. In religion says Hegel, we have faith in God, "insofar as we do not have any perception of the necessity which constitutes God."³⁴ The necessity only becomes apparent, Hegel tells us, when religion is comprehended by philosophy. And it is only when this necessity becomes apparent, that the deep truth which religion can only express in a limited way becomes clear. Hegel finds this necessity in our being unable to make sense of the finite world if it is not regarded as the expression of Absolute Spirit.

33. *ibid.* pp.109-110.

34. *ibid.* p.118.

In arguing for this claim, that is that the finite world makes no sense on its own, Hegel asks us to begin by considering the lowest form of finiteness, feeling.³⁵ It is in feeling that religious awareness first arises. If Spirit is to be truth for Nature, then religious feeling must come to be seen as necessarily an expression of Spirit. That is, religious feeling must truly have reference to a spiritual Reality, and Thought must be able to see why. Hegel wants to argue that feeling does provide a basis for our understanding of the spiritual principle, for we find revealed, in its inevitable breakdown and in its provision of the impetus for advance to more developed forms of consciousness, the necessary development of Spirit itself. Hegel explains the breakdown of feeling in this way:

"Now, if feeling be the essential religious attitude, this attitude is identical with my empirical self. Determinateness, representing the eternal Thought of the Universal, and I as wholly empirical subjectivity, are in me comprised and comprehended in feeling. I am the immediate reconciliation and resolution of the strife between the two. But just because I thus find myself determined on the one hand as a particular empirical subject, and on the other raised into a wholly different region, and have the experience of passing to and fro from the one to the other, and have the feeling of the relation of the two, do I find myself determined as against myself, or as distinguished from myself. That is to say, in this very feeling of mine I am driven by its content into contrast or opposition - in other words to reflection and the distinction of subject and object." 36

From feeling, therefore, we have to advance to reflection. We have to advance because we find it impossible to be content with the

35. *ibid.* p.118 ff.

36. *ibid.* pp.127-8.

state of being divided against ourselves, in which we were left, when we did not go beyond the condition of "feeling". And the reason why we cannot halt the advance until we arrive at the stage of reflection is that the first step takes us only as far as perception, or becoming aware of the existence of an object of consciousness - but, at that stage, we remain divided, or separated from the object.

The life of feeling can never be known by feeling alone, for, as Hegel tells us, feeling can never guarantee the truth of what is felt. Before we can decide whether something is true, it must present itself to our view as an object for consciousness. It is this putting before itself its object which Hegel calls Perception.³⁷ Hegel says that the most perfect form of perception is art perception but here we shall be concerned only with his general remarks. The most important thing about perception is that as soon as consciousness arrives at this level, it immediately begins to break down. It breaks down because, in perception, one puts the religious object over against oneself and is therefore still estranged from it. The necessity of its truth cannot be seen because the relation between self-consciousness and its object is thoroughly external. Or, as Hegel puts it:

"In perception the elements of the totality of the religious relation, namely, the object, and self-consciousness, have got separated." 38

From this it follows that: "The advance now necessary is this, that the totality of the religious relation should actually be accepted as such, and as unity".³⁹ Consciousness strives to express its own truth, but this truth stands over against it as an object and its initial

37. *ibid.* p.138 ff.

38. *ibid.* p.141.

39. *ibid.* p.141.

alienation therefrom is the precondition of their ultimate unity. It is in overcoming the estrangement between itself and the object that consciousness comes to recognize this object as reflecting a truth which is internally related to its own being. I have, as Hegel says, "identified myself with it, and have maintained myself in it ... "40 This identification I represent to myself in worship at the level of ordinary conception, by way of religious myths and imagery. But even though I represent the truth to myself in a partly sensuous way, I know that this truth has an essential relation to me. "The content, it is then said, commends itself to me for its own sake, and the witness of the Spirit teaches me to recognize it as truth, as my essential determination."⁴¹

It should be added that so long as one remains on the level of ordinary conception, the unity which *is* my essential determination is only implicitly recognized as such by consciousness. The unity of subject and object, of finite and infinite, is represented in all religions, certainly, but the full significance of what is represented is not grasped. The fact that one finds this unity represented through events in history, and such-like, means that one is still looking outside oneself to external forces in order to find this unity, which shows that one does not fully realise how essentially one is involved in it. We may say that in the religious mode of thought, we have not come to realise the seriousness with which the affirmation that truth is my essential determination is meant. Thus definite religions have a quality of remoteness from life which for Hegel is a distortion of the truth and must be overcome.

40. *ibid.* p.150.

41. *ibid.* p.151.

We are now in a position to understand the sort of internal tension which religion contains, and why, because of this, its own self-understanding must collapse. The infinite content, which religion is, cannot be contained happily within a finite form. By this inner discord we are pushed on towards a level where the infinite content can find its infinite form. This, according to Hegel, is Thought.

Thought comes to the explicit awareness that truth is my essential determination. It perceives that the drift of consciousness is towards greater and greater unity with its object, inspired by the drive towards completeness. When completeness is achieved, religious truth is seen as nothing more than the expression of true *human* potential. What appeared previously as knowledge, and as such stood in need of being grasped by a subject, now appears as the product of rational free self-activity. From the Absolute standpoint we can look behind us at all the previous levels of finite consciousness and understand their place in the struggle to reach the Absolute. For as Hegel says: "In the ego, as in that which is annulling itself as finite, God returns to himself, and only in this return is he God. Without the world, God is not God."⁴²

It is now possible to understand why Hegel can give such a strong affirmative answer to the question of whether ordinary religious practices reflect an awareness of the truth. It is because religion, when fully understood, can be seen to be a further development of the same conditions which make possible any form of conscious awareness. There is no *special* problem about religious truth, since the religious consciousness is an inevitable consequence of the precondition of all consciousness, the Concrete Universal expressing itself through the finite

42. *ibid.* p.200.

differentiated world. Hegel does not have the problem which other philosophers of religion have grappled with, of finding justification for a subject's awareness of a Deity which exists totally outside himself. Religious truth for Hegel is a truth about ourselves, as beings which are not ultimately alienated from the Absolute. Thus, the devotional religious consciousness is a form of our own self-awareness, it tells us as much about ourselves as about that which lies beyond. Self-awareness can be achieved in varying degrees, so it is not surprising that the religious practices and ideas of finite human beings do not express a self-awareness which is utterly complete. But Hegel's account of the consciousness of the ordinary believer being the outcome of an attempt to complete self-conscious experience and thus to create greater self-awareness is one which seems to make good sense. In putting forward this account, Hegel has found what is probably the only way of surmounting the formidable epistemological problem involved in accounts of man's knowledge of God which do not see God as a completion of self-conscious experience.

Hegel seems therefore to have produced a good case for his view that there is a natural drift of consciousness away from the tensions of its lower levels, and towards a goal of completeness which is not misleadingly regarded as spiritual. Religion as it is practised points towards this goal. Hegel seems right too, in his view that Thought is the appropriate faculty for apprehending these tensions in the light of their effect on the trend of consciousness. But when he says that Philosophical Thought is itself to be *equated* with this goal of consciousness, I find what he says both unproven by him and highly dubious in itself.

Hegel is suggesting that Philosophical Thought is commensurate with the expression of infinite truth in a way that religion is

not.⁴³ He seems to think that because philosophy can point out the onesidedness in various other forms of thought and discourse, it must of itself be entirely complete. This however does not follow. What is more, it is not difficult to show that Philosophical Reflection does not measure up to Hegel's task of grasping the infinite in infinite form.

We only need examine some of the concepts used in philosophical thought to show this. Consider, for example, Hegel's use of the concepts 'infinite' and 'finite'. Hegel tells us that what is expressed by sensuous imagery in the Incarnation doctrine is expressed in its pure speculative form when we grasp it as the interpenetration of the infinite and the finite. Yet the term 'infinite' here does not express directly what Hegel wants it to; it works by suggestion in rather the same way as does the Incarnation doctrine. To do this work of suggesting, it even makes use of the sensuous world, since any conception of infinity which I form, however unlike Hegel's "bad infinite", seems always ultimately to be based on some sort of analogy with a continuous series of things in the sensuous world.

Furthermore, it is not easy to see how Philosophical Thought can grasp the internality of internal relations in their purity. When Hegel says that the finite and the infinite totally interpenetrate one another,

43. When we refer here and subsequently to Philosophical Thought, we are referring, not to the thinking that is empirically carried on by people claiming to look at things philosophically, but to the idealized thinking which our actual thinking may very well fall short of. Thus, when we assert that thought cannot adequately comprehend the full meaning of religion, we do not mean *only* that finite thinkers must fail to comprehend it (though of course they always do). We mean rather that thought is, by its very nature, an inadequate vehicle with which to grasp the full meaning of religion. Because all thought must make use of finite concepts, even if a thinker could achieve the supra-personal level of idealized thought, the very form of thought would prevent him from grasping the deepest meaning of religion.

there remains a residue of externality in the relation thus thought of, shown up by the very fact that one uses the conjunction "and". The best we can do, in trying to understand such thoroughgoing interpenetration, is to think of it by analogy with something like a chemical compound.

My contention is then, that so long as thought remains thought, it has the form of the finite and not the infinite. Spiritual truth, if presented in philosophical form, will therefore always contain an element which appears simply as a matter of fact, whose necessity cannot be grasped. To grasp what Hegel wants to grasp in its true form, one would have to step outside the bounds of thought and discourse all together. Whether this could be done is questionable, but at any rate it is the only hope of success. Many mystics have reported experiences which have far more in common with what Hegel calls Philosophical Speculation than has philosophical thought itself, and these are always said to have a degree of ineffability. I would agree with F.C. Copleston when he writes, in his essay "Hegel and the Rationalization of Mysticism"⁴⁴ that :

"Hegel attempted in my opinion to do what cannot be done, namely to make plain to view what can only be apprehended through the use of analogies and symbols."

This does not mean, of course, that one must not try to make things plainer so that one is less likely to be misled by the symbols. In this, Hegel did a valuable service to religion. For his insistence that we must comprehend religion by way of thought meant that he was

44. F.C. Copleston. Talk of God - Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, Vol.2, p.132.

able to get closer to those deep affirmations of religion which underlie the often superfluous clutter of imagery. It is interesting too, that once the essence of religious life and consciousness is made clearer in this way, the gaps which separate the various religions of the world begin to close.

However, not all philosophers have been happy with the view that a more adequate understanding of religion can be attained by using philosophy to transcend religion's own self-understanding. Søren Kierkegaard is a major example here. In a spate of volumes, Kierkegaard never tires of railing against attempts to locate the truth of Christianity (which to him is the true religion), in a metaphysical system which purports to go beyond it. But although Kierkegaard repeatedly said that one could only accept or reject Christianity, and not philosophically understand it, the very fact that he tried in his major works to describe its essential nature meant that he was doing something very similar to that which he so much repudiated in Hegel. Their conclusions may have been somewhat different, but their programme was the same.

Probably, or so it seems to me, the reason why Kierkegaard so much condemned in Hegel that which he did himself was because he thought that Hegel was using external criteria in order to judge Christianity, thus ruling out, a priori, the possibility that the Christian faith is absolute in which case the ultimate measure of truth could only be found in its own content. We have seen however that Hegel did not do this. That which leads to his philosophical comprehension of Christianity and religion generally is contained implicitly within Christianity and religion themselves. Oddly enough, also, Hegel and Kierkegaard saw the same problems with Christianity from the standpoint of its own self-understanding, and upheld solutions which had a great deal in common.

Both saw that in Christianity, the relation of Unity between God and man is not amenable to the finite understanding. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript and Philosophical Fragments the central problem raised is how a finite human being can ever come into contact with the Eternal. In the end Kierkegaard can only conclude that we have in this divine-human relation the Absolute Paradox, which cannot be grasped by the understanding but only through one's inwardness, that is, by looking into oneself, into one's true spiritual nature. Man can only grasp the Eternal, the divine essence, because he is not limited to the finite channels, he is ultimately infinite himself. That one finds God when one truly discovers oneself is a fundamental tenet of both thinkers; the stress which Hegel too puts on inwardness may be seen from the following quote:

"When however, by this means, I am transplanted into an intellectual world in which the nature of God, the characteristics and modes of action which belong to God, are presented to knowledge, and when the truth of these rests on the witness and assurance of others, yet I am at the same time referred into myself, for thought, knowledge, reason are *in me*, and in the feeling of sinfulness, and in reflection upon this, my freedom is plainly revealed to me." 45

Not only does this quote bring to attention the regard which Hegel had for inwardness, it also shows us that he located our knowledge of the divine specifically in our awareness of our own freedom. Sin is seen as the way in which this freedom is forced upon my attention, since sin is freedom's product. And this is precisely the view which Kierkegaard outlines in The Concept of Dread. There we are told that only through our awareness of our freedom do we come to know our true

spiritual potential, and that this awareness - though always with us even in innocence as a "dreaming awareness" - is brought explicitly to consciousness by the possibility of sin. In this way, Kierkegaard assigns a positive function to sin, just as Hegel tells us that for the Absolute to be what it is, it must not lack the suffering of the negative.

Kierkegaard tells us that the individual who discovers the real meaning, even of the basest sin, discovers that it is nothing less than the product of a spiritual freedom which can enable him to find the courage to overcome evil's enslavement. In this way, says Kierkegaard, such an individual can find faith. In the last chapter of The Concept of Dread, Kierkegaard describes this as follows:

"He sank absolutely, but then in turn he floated up from the depth of the abyss, lighter now than all that is oppressive and dreadful in life." 46

What one learns from sin and limitation, is, says Kierkegaard, that if one "does not wish to sink in the wretchedness of the finite" then one "is constrained in the deepest sense to assault the infinite."⁴⁷

For both Hegel and Kierkegaard, philosophical thought is necessary to bring out the true meaning of religion. Both their philosophies involve accounts of religion which transcend the self-understanding of the ordinary religious believer. However, because Kierkegaard will not admit explicitly that thought has any place in grasping the true meaning of religion, he is unable to see the real reason why philosophical thought cannot understand the meaning of religious truth in its fullness. For Kierkegaard, what is wrong with thought (according to his explicit

46. Kierkegaard. Concept of Dread, p.142.

47. *ibid.* p.144.

comments, if not according to his philosophical practice) is that it takes us too far beyond the self-understanding of religion. But the real reason as we shall see, why metaphysical thought cannot capture the ultimate meaning of religion (although it can help us to clarify it, and to understand it *more* adequately) is that it does not take us far enough. We must explain further.

The ordinary devotional consciousness, we earlier agreed, is a mode of self-awareness which inevitably arises in the struggle through which rational beings must go towards the completion of their self-conscious experience. This ritualistic consciousness however, employs a symbolism and sensuous imagery which can be misleading, since it suggests that religious truth consists of contingent facts about the world. Metaphysical thinking can help us to rectify this mistake by pointing out that the true meaning of religion consists, not in a contingent set of facts about the world, but in its being the expression of a drive towards the completion of self-conscious experience, a drive which is the essential outcome of the very possibility of any form of consciousness. But although metaphysics can grasp this much, and can tell us why religion cannot be a total expression of the ultimately complete self-conscious experience, it in no way follows from this (as Hegel seems to think) that the philosophical thought which serves as a corrective to self-understood religion, itself expresses the totally adequate self-conscious experience. Metaphysics may get further towards this completeness than the faith of the simple believer, but it would be rash indeed to hold that philosophical thought, as engaged in by finite human beings and as expressed in human language, can adequately express the nature of the Absolute. The ultimate meaning of religion, and indeed of other forms of consciousness, philosophical thought can hint at, and certainly it can tell us what must be excluded from the

fully adequate self-conscious experience; but in the very course of this hinting, it quickly becomes clear that what is being hinted at, metaphysics could never grasp in its fullness. To find the ultimate meaning of religion, even as characterized by philosophical thought, it is necessary to look *beyond* philosophical thought. And in doing so, we begin to see how the insights of the mystics are confirmed.

Mysticism and the Complete Self-Conscious Experience

The ultimate meaning of religion, metaphysics can tell us, lies in the complete self-conscious experience or mode of being which as we have said, cannot adequately be captured by philosophy. However, from the hints which philosophical thought can give us about the nature of such an experience, (or mode of being), it is possible to build up a description of an experience which strongly agrees with the descriptions of union with God presented to us by the mystics. And if this is so, then it seems fairly clear that we can reply in the affirmative to our question raised at the beginning of this chapter, the question whether religion as it is practised by ordinary believers can, when properly understood, provide us with any reason to hold that the views of the mystics are corroborated.

If the meaning of religion is located ultimately in the complete self-conscious experience, it is clear, firstly, that such an experience would involve a total transcendence of all finite states. Such an experience would involve the total transformation of the finite subject into a pure expression of a Being whose nature is utterly universal; one which is totally unlimited by finite perspectives. That is, in the complete self-conscious experience, the finite subject would be transformed, so as to share in the divine nature. This, of course, is

strongly reminiscent of what the mystics have told us about their experience of union with God.

Also, because the complete self-conscious experience must involve a total transcendence of finitude, the subject of such an experience must be absolutely free.⁴⁸ This too, corresponds closely to the sense of freedom which mystics have spoken of, when they have claimed to have been absorbed into God.

A third feature of a complete self-conscious experience is that all tendency to evil must be overcome, since to tend towards evil is to assert one's particular will over against purely universal purposes. And we have already discussed at some length the way in which mystics have claimed that in their encounter with God, the gap between duty and inclination closes so that the subject's moral consciousness knows only love.

Many more similarities between mystical experience and the complete self-conscious experience hinted at by metaphysics, could doubtless be listed, but we shall mention only one more. That is to do with the quality of ineffability. We have already mentioned that any adequate metaphysical account of the complete self-conscious experience must contain within itself an acceptance of the fact that such an experience cannot be adequately expressed in human thought and language. And this is precisely what the mystics have claimed when they have said that their experiences cannot properly be described. Human language, being something finite, is totally inadequate to express the complete self-conscious experience hinted at by metaphysics or the union with God of the mystics.

What has been said so far is sufficient to show how the phenomenon of religion, understood as an incomplete awareness of the self-conscious experience, serves strongly to confirm the mystical world-view. Indeed

48. Free, that is, in the non-arbitrary sense which we have discussed previously.

it is beginning to look as though the complete self-conscious experience which is inadequately described in metaphysics, is in the end identical with mystical experience. However, we shall conclude this chapter by suggesting otherwise.

What we shall suggest, rather, is that the mystic, like the metaphysician, has a vision of the complete self-conscious experience, but that, although the mystic's vision is more adequate than that of the metaphysician (who is confined to finite thought and language throughout the whole of his work), it is nonetheless a vision which falls short of such completeness.

One thing alone is sufficient to make this clear; that is, that in the experiences of mystics and those who have brought news of special encounters with God, such persons have always had their experiences bounded on either side by time. It may well be true that such people have, for a little while, been totally absorbed in the nature of God and to a very large degree transcended their finitude. But a totally adequate and complete self-conscious experience cannot last ten minutes, ten days, or even the length of a human lifetime. It must be genuinely complete, in the sense of being free from all temporal limitation.

This means that for a human being to experience absolute rational self-conscious awareness, he would have to cease to be human. His nature would have to be permanently transformed. Only a permanently unlimited Being, such as theists have called God and philosophers have called the Absolute, is capable of such awareness.

CHAPTER NINE

MORAL EXPERIENCE AS EVIDENCE

FOR THE MYSTICAL ABSOLUTE

CHAPTER NINEMORAL EXPERIENCE AS EVIDENCE FOR THE MYSTICAL ABSOLUTE

In the previous chapters of this thesis, we have considered various ways in which the claims of individuals to have encountered a Divine Being might possibly be verified. We have seen, in the course of our enquiry, that metaphysical arguments can be adduced, which not only are not impossible a priori, but also carry considerable justificatory force. However, the one metaphysical argument which we have not yet considered, the argument for a Divine Being on the basis of moral experience, is perhaps the most important of all. Kant certainly thought so; his argument for the view that our moral experience provides not only a basis but the only possible basis for a (justified) belief in a Divine Being is well known. We shall, in what follows, take a different line of argument from that of Kant, though the importance he attached to moral considerations shall be fully endorsed here. We shall contend, with Kant, that the fact and nature of human moral experience is relevant evidence for a Divine Reality (though this Divine Reality, we shall see, will be more than a "postulate of practical reason") but against Kant we shall not hold it to be the only relevant evidence. For, as we shall argue, the finite moral consciousness is only one of the ways in which (what we have called) the Absolute Subject makes itself manifest through the lives of self-conscious beings.

If morality can only be adequately understood as a manifestation of the Absolute Subject, it is obviously the strongest possible evidence for the existence of such a subject. And, bearing in mind what

was said at the end of Chapter Seven about the Absolute Subject of metaphysics and the Divine Object of religious experience, it seems reasonable to conclude that if moral experience is a manifestation of the Absolute Subject, it provides the strongest corroboration for the claim of the mystics.

But why must human morality be understood as a manifestation of the Absolute Subject? To answer this question we must begin by saying something about the essential nature of morality.

What is the Essential Nature of Morality?

In response to our question about the essential nature of morality, we may take as our starting point our previous conclusion that the self-conscious subject is so important in any epistemology or ontology that the notion that there is an objective world of the non-ego does not make sense without it. We came to this conclusion without in any way slipping into a thorough-going subjective idealism in which there is a one-sided dependence of the objective upon the subjective, and in which the objective loses its substantiality by being dissolved into subjective consciousness. In our view, the substantiality of the objective was retained, despite the fundamental role of the subject in "constructing" the realm of human knowledge, because that creative process of "construction" was in no way arbitrary or dependent upon the whims of *particular* subjects. It was rather governed by a principle which could be regarded as the principle of subjectivity as such, a principle to which particular subjects must conform if they would free themselves from ignorance. Because the subject plays its part in the "construction" of the real, though not in a particular and arbitrary way, it makes as little sense, we said, to fix the locus of the reality of any existent thing on one side of the subject/object cleavage as on the other.

If the role of the subject is fundamental in the epistemological sphere, because it "constructs" or is internally related to the world it knows and does not merely apprehend it as a "given", then clearly any world of moral value will also be a construction. If we cannot regard the objects of knowledge as external entities most truly apprehended with maximum passivity and detachment, then, a fortiori, moral concepts - which are much more obviously produced by human societies - cannot refer to the sort of objective qualities which are quite independent of self-conscious life.

However, the fact that our view of knowledge carries the implication that moral concepts cannot be concerned with qualities somehow external to the agent and that moral rules and concepts are *some sort* of social construction, does not put us in a position to conclude anything about the type of social construction which morality is. We cannot merely assume that moral rules and concepts are produced as in the case of knowledge by a "principle of subjectivity" (which, we have said previously, can be identified with the Concrete Universal) for much work is done in the world by the arbitrary and particular will. (Indeed, some moral systems in the world must be placed in this category, since in a world of competing and conflicting empirically existing moralities not all can be [even primarily] the expression of the Concrete Universal.) However, neither can we assume that all moral systems are merely subjective constructions without rational justification.

Many recent philosophers have sought to produce a value-free moral philosophy which is neutral as to the content of any particular morality, because they have regarded all moralities as necessarily the work of the particular and arbitrary will, and reducible in principle to sets of prescriptions or emotional reactions. However, if there is any rational basis for the criticism of existing moral practices then there is more to

morality than would be discovered by an empirical sociological enquiry into the practices themselves. It would then be clear that morality, although necessarily the work of self-consciousness, would not be in principle its arbitrary work and would not in principle defy attempts at rational justification. Indeed, it would be precisely by examining the basis of rational criticism of existing moral rules and concepts that we could uncover the *essential* nature of morality, by explaining how morality is in essence (which would be its most rationally based form) an expression of the principle of subjectivity.

It will be our task in the rest of this Chapter to establish that moral concepts and rules are amenable to rational criticism, and that it is both meaningful and useful to speak in terms of the justification of such rules, concepts or systems, though ultimately this justification will be seen to rest on intuition.¹ Thus, we shall produce a view of morality which outlines its essential structure, but at the same time shall not be neutral as regards content.

Recognition of the Role of the Active Subject in both the
Cognitive and Moral Spheres makes evident the Impossibility
of Value-Free Theories

The breakdown of the is/ought dichotomy begins with the understanding that the world we think about and act in does not consist of a mere object "out there", but bears an essential relation to subjectivity. The world of our experience is the product of a dynamic and dialectical interpenetration of subject and object, to a point where both are transmuted into something which is utterly different from what they appear

1. We shall see that the introduction of intuition into the enterprise of moral justification does not make morality unamenable to rational criticism. Intuition, in the sense in which we shall outline it, is rather the pinnacle of human rationality.

to be when taken in abstract isolation. Thus, the world of enquiry does not reveal itself to us more truly when we pare away from it the part which the subjective plays in constructing it and transforming it, and regard it as an object to be contemplated in cold detachment.

Thomas Kuhn, writing in Structure of Scientific Revolutions, argues that there can be no scientific theory which merely describes how the world is and which contains no element of evaluation. We shall see that what Kuhn says about scientific theories can also be applied to moral theories, and from this we shall infer that there is no moral theory which is in no way normative. That some philosophers purport to have such theories makes no difference to their impossibility, it means only that those philosophers have not thought through all the implications of their own theories.

According to Kuhn, the image of science which is derived from the study of finished scientific achievements is seriously misleading as regards what goes on in scientific practice. That image is that science develops by an accumulation of discoveries, all of which have been produced by the application of a more or less external scientific method, which has to do with getting a close fit between ideas and nature. Kuhn accepts that any viable theory must be able to account for the facts, but points out that this criterion leaves the door wide open for different scientists to uphold rival theories. What differentiated the different schools of thought in, for example, Galileo's time, says Kuhn, was "their incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practising science in it."² Kuhn adds that these ways of seeing the world are not just a matter of observation and experience. Observation and experience

2. T.S. Kuhn: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions p.4
(International Encyclopaedia of Unified Science , Vol.II, No.2).

must restrict the range of possible belief, otherwise science would be impossible. But they cannot by themselves determine a particular body of such belief, there is always an additional element. Kuhn refers to this as the arbitrary element, an element which depends upon historical and personal accident. The degree to which Kuhn is justified in calling this subjective element arbitrary we shall see later, after we have followed through his argument for the existence of a subjective evaluative element.

Kuhn tells us that *normal science*, (by which he means normal scientific practice in a particular historical period), is conducted on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like. The scientific community will be ready to defend that assumption, if necessary at some cost. That is to say, the community will try to suppress novelties which fail to fit in with basic commitments. (This will be done by trying to bend old theories to account for new phenomena - even when the 'fit' is somewhat clumsy). It is not possible, however, to suppress novelties forever. Eventually an anomaly can become so great that "normal science" has to be revised to accommodate it. When this happens - and the point at which it happens very much depends on subjective evaluation as does the choice of the new theory - it is not a matter of one more scientific discovery added to the pile. It is rather that a whole scientific way of looking at the world shifts. In such a case there is a scientific revolution.

Kuhn emphatically points out that scientific theories are not rejected because of one falsifying instance. Somebody who accepts a new paradigm has to act to a large extent on the basis of faith (or intuition, or subjective evaluation) because although the old paradigm has failed to deal with a few new problems, the new paradigm has to deal not only with the new problems, but also with the whole field of knowledge

which the old paradigm satisfactorily accounted for. Kuhn, in recognizing the subjective element in paradigm choice, concludes that in the end "there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community."³

Kuhn has clearly perceived how it is that in any serious attempt to explain the world, it is also necessary to *evaluate* the world. Or to put this another way, to discover the element of value which is in the world already, because the world already is, in a certain sense, a subjective construction, and thereby infused with value. Underlying Kuhn's philosophy of science is an idea which has been emerging and recurring throughout the whole of this thesis:- that knowledge in the deepest sense of the word is a discovery which is also a creation.

Where Kuhn goes wrong, however, is in his equation of the subjective element in science with the arbitrary element, and in particular in his failure to distinguish between subjective evaluations which are genuinely arbitrary (or elements in subjective evaluations which are genuinely arbitrary) and subjective evaluations as such, which are not necessarily arbitrary. Kuhn merely assumes that there is no principle of subjectivity, and that any contribution to knowledge which gives scope for subjective freedom necessarily involves only the freedom of the particular and arbitrary will. Kuhn is no doubt influenced by the large part that contingent circumstances have always played in scientific development, circumstances which have to do with the accidental factors bearing upon the subject, (e.g. being in a certain room at a certain time may suggest something to a scientist which would never have occurred to him in other circumstances, it could even lead to the development of

3. Quoted from T. Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions in Modern Sociology (Editor Peter Worsley) p.33 (Penguin 1970).

a theory which greatly advances science). However, this does not mean that the evaluations contributed by the thinking subject are wholly arbitrary in that they are all "on a par" or that there is no rational basis for preferring one to the other. Indeed, the fact that evaluative judgments, be they choosing a scientific perspective or following a moral code, often follow a long and arduous struggle, together with the fact that it is not utterly meaningless to criticize somebody else's evaluative judgments, is enough to strongly suggest that the values (which can as meaningfully be said to inhere in the objective as in the will of the subject) are not expressions of the arbitrary and particular will, but are rooted in the essential rational nature of a free self-conscious subject in dynamic interaction with the world.

We have now established that the impossibility of freedom from all value-judgments in scientific knowledge is connected with the fact that all such knowledge is and must be a product of active subjectivity. And we have seen that this does not imply that theories containing such evaluations are necessarily and fundamentally arbitrary constructions. Thus, the relevance of Kuhn's view of science to moral philosophy is now apparent, and could be summed up in this way. If value-judgments are necessary for all human knowledge as well as human action, and if these can be established to be non-arbitrary, then in the arguments which establish this we have the basis for a moral philosophy which is at once descriptive and prescriptive. It is to the arguments which purport to establish this that we must now turn.

Hegel's View of Morality

Accounts of morality which purport to be value-free are rooted within the empiricist tradition in philosophy, whereas accounts which

are openly prescriptive are rooted in the rationalist and idealist traditions. We have criticised the former tradition throughout this thesis on the ground that it attenuates the nature of the rational subject, by underestimating his creative role in the theoretical and practical realm. The latter two traditions (which are found together at various points in the history of philosophy) emphasize the place of the thinking self-conscious subject in the 'construction' of the world we know, and thus have an inbuilt critical prescriptive element. From the philosophy of Plato onwards these traditions have held that the very ideas needed to make sense of empirical reality must have a rational base, and just because they have a rational base they transcend empirical reality and are also (potential) tools for the criticism of it. In moral philosophy a description of the structure of morality reveals concepts which can be used to criticize empirically existing moralities, and thereby says something about the adequacy of the *content* of any particular morality, as well as providing a description of its form.

There is a striking example of this critical approach in the philosophy of Hegel. Hegel elucidates the relation between morality and reason through the concept of the free will. Through reason, I overcome the limitations imposed upon me by way of my initial finite and limiting particular perspective. To fully realize my potential for freedom, I must not be subject to the tyranny of whim and feeling which affect me in my capacity as a particular. Thus freedom is not a matter of arbitrary expression of the will, but rather of transcending my particularity to a point where I express the universal. The restrictions which must be imposed upon my arbitrary will in order for me to become truly free are for Hegel the basis of morality. Thus Hegel asserts:

"The man in the street thinks he is free if it is open to him to act as he pleases, but his very arbitrariness implies that he is not free. When I will what is rational, then I am not acting as a particular individual but in accordance with the concept of ethics in general. In an ethical action, what I vindicate is not myself but the thing. But in doing a perverse action, it is my singularity which I bring to the stage. The rational is the high road where everyone travels, where no-one is conspicuous." 4

For the young Hegel, morality is only really possible when complete freedom has been attained, such that there is no longer any conflict between duty and inclination. In his Early Theological Writings, in the course of discussing Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Hegel writes that:

"the moral disposition, etc., ceases to be particular, opposed to the law, and therefore the correspondence of law and inclination is life, and, as the relation of differentials to one another, love, i.e., it is an 'is'." 5

For the mature Hegel, however, self-conscious rational freedom could be found to be embodied in imposed morality and law, even before the gap between duty and inclination had been entirely closed. Hegel thought that it was necessary for freedom to express itself in these inadequate forms in order for there to be a basis for the subsequent development of more adequate forms of expression. (Indeed, even when the mature Hegel is describing what he sees as the ideal society he speaks in terms of individuals continuing to require the coercive power of the state, if they are to refrain from expressing particular whims and aims at the expense of the universal).

The moral rules and laws of certain societies, Hegel admits, may

4. Additions to paragraph 15, Philosophy of Right.

5. Early Theological Writings, p.215.

fall a long way short of embodying the principle of freedom in adequate form; however they do at least teach man that he must stand above his own particular impulses and express (some sort of) universal. It is the moral philosophy of the mature Hegel which we shall be considering in this chapter.

Questions which must be raised about how far we can follow Hegel

Hegel's moral philosophy, we have now seen, is grounded in the principle that the particular has to be transcended and transmuted if ever it is to come to express its essential nature. When it finally does come to express its essential nature, it will have overcome that temptation to follow its *particular* interests (as opposed to its more genuine *universal* interests) which are the basis of immoral behaviour, and which inhibit the expression of the free will.

However, we have still to decide what exactly follows from the concept of the totally free will. We said earlier that a moral philosophy based on the Hegelian principle of the sublation of finitude by infinite freedom would imply something as regards the content of morality. Hegel certainly claimed that morality was only possible within a specific social context - thus, he 'prescribed' and described the type of social set-up he thought necessary for human ethical relations to reach their highest pitch. According to Hegel, some very specific, seemingly empirical features of society are implicit within the concept of the free will, and are necessary preconditions for the realisation of the highest human moral potential. Thus, in attempting to decide what is really implicit within the concept of the free will which is relevant to morality, we shall also be considering ways in which Hegel's views need to be modified, and the reasons why he goes wrong at various points.

The Concept of the Free Will

Hegel explains his view that freedom involves following a necessary course - as opposed to an arbitrary one - in the opening sections of the Philosophy of Right, by way of a discussion in which he discusses the three moments of the will. The third moment must contain within itself the 'truth' of the first two moments; it must also constitute their reconciliation. (The first two moments are, it must be remembered, opposites, when considered in abstract isolation.) Only in the third moment does the will find concrete freedom, but its composition is dictated by the necessity which the need for reconciliation imposes. However, it is necessary to elucidate further.

The first moment of the will consists in the capacity which the will has to detach itself from particular purposes and choices and to leave everything as possibility. Because, at this level of the abstract will, everything is still a possibility and the will has not yet limited itself by making determinate choices, to common sense it seems that in this most abstract and empty freedom we have the greatest possible freedom. This view is often reflected in the assumption that those who try (though they never totally succeed - since this abstract freedom of mere possibility is never found in its purity) to suspend judgment on all things are somehow freer than those who have thought out their ideas and have actually come to conclusions, or in the view that to get married is to lose your freedom, since prior to marriage you *could* marry anyone - and thus you still have before you an infinite range of possibilities, even though - (and at this level this is not consciously realised) - the possibilities represent only an infinite range of ways in which you can sacrifice your freedom.

What we learn from the first moment of the will is that there is a real sense in which rational beings have an infinite range of possibilities open to them. But while these possibilities *remain* possibilities the very feature that renders possibilities of value - i.e. the possibility that they may become *actualities* - is missing. This feature is put forward by Hegel as the second moment of the will.

The second moment of the will consists of the capacity of the will to choose a determinate content. Thus the second moment provides a corrective for the abstract one-sidedness of the first moment. But taken by itself, the second moment is also one-sided, for if determinateness is cut off from its source in creative freedom and is seen only as the content it immediately appears as, the accent falls heavily on limitation. The will now has a particular content, and this particularity brings it into the realm of finitude. It is no longer in a position where it could do anything, it has transformed infinite possibility into determinate and particular content.

The third moment of the will is that which unites the abstract freedom of infinite possibility with the overcoming of abstract emptiness as it is represented by the second moment. The moments of universality and particularity are thus brought together as self-consciousness grasps that only by finding expression in the particular finite world can it express its (potentially) infinite freedom. The finite world thus appears not merely as the world of limitation, but the world where possibilities can become actualities by means of self-conscious freedom.

For determinateness to be an expression of freedom all arbitrary elements in the will must be eliminated. For the third moment of the will to be realized, the will must express itself in the one way whereby it can both make a determinate choice and overcome the finitude which inheres in the determinate and particular, when taken in abstract isolation.

This therefore already says something about the content of a morality rooted in freedom. It says that a life based on the pursuit of particular pleasures and inclinations leads to a state of bondage. For human relations to be truly ethical, the one particular must not put himself above another particular, since in such a mode of relating, one may gain power in a certain sense over the other particular but lose all power over oneself. ("What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his own soul?")

We may accept Hegel's view that freedom can only be realised through necessity, and that this necessity is so relevant to how we relate to others that it is indeed at the basis of morality. We must also accept the Hegelian view that only under specific social conditions can the third (reconciling) moment of the will manifest itself in its fullness. Social conditions must be compatible with the will's determinate choices being the expression of freedom, if determinate choices are not to produce a content, the accent of which is likely to fall upon limitation.⁶ A society which for example, does not concern itself with a person's motivations but only with the consequences of his actions (be they the *intended* consequences or not) is not giving the true moral consciousness, in which subjective intentions *are* important, an opportunity to develop. An individual living in such a society would never really learn to think of his actions as the product of his freedom, for that society would define as part of his actions consequences which became his only by virtue of fortuitous circumstances. From this alone it is clear that morality does not inhere only in the isolated individual, since it is very much influenced by social conditions.

6. As we shall see later, moral conduct is not impossible under imperfect social conditions. But the more adequate the social conditions are, the easier does moral vision become.

Hegel says far more than that there must be specific social conditions for human ethical life to develop and sustain itself. He says a great deal about what those conditions must be. His philosophy is prescriptive, not only for the individual moral agent but for society as a whole. (That is why political philosophy and ethics are inseparable in Hegel). Hegel, as we have said, is not wrong to be prescriptive. But this does not mean that we shall accept Hegel's views when we come to consider precisely what it is that he prescribes.

Hegel's Critical Method

Hegel's task is to discover the social conditions under which the free will can be most truly and deeply expressed, and under which human ethical relations can arrive at the highest degree of perfection. To do this, Hegel employs the method of describing societies whose social morality embodies the principle of the free will in totally inadequate form, and thereby exposing the contradiction of recognizing the existence of any sort of moral code - which presupposes the free will - on the one hand, and effectively denying the principle of the free will, on the other. Thus, Hegel's descriptions are inevitably critical, but it is precisely by discovering the point of inadequacy - of contradiction, in any one society's social morality - that we can be in a position to postulate a further type of society with a new social morality which can overcome the contradictions and inadequacies which inhere in the old. Once the contradictions of the previous society have satisfactorily been resolved, the social morality of the new society is such that the moral agent can more fully express his essential freedom, by making determinate choices within that society.

We need not quarrel with Hegel about this method of proceeding,

since it is in essence the same critical method which we have argued for and advocated all along. What we must try to decide is whether Hegel applies it adequately and consistently, so that he at last ends up with a set of social conditions wholly commensurate with the adequate expression of the free will.

The Society in which Abstract Right Predominates

Hegel, in his attempt to find the adequate social morality, begins by considering forms of society in which the social morality is not adequate. The first type of society he considers is one which has not gone beyond seeing morality in terms of Abstract Right. Although this view of morality contains an aspect of the truth about an adequate morality (i.e. that morality is not merely a matter of what seems to be right to a particular individual) it contains that truth in a most inadequate and one-sided form. To see why, we must outline the Hegelian argument further. The mentality which sees morality in terms of Abstract Right is the most primitive form of moral consciousness. When a self-conscious being first learns to differentiate itself from the world and from others, it will notice that it has an individual will which stands over against other individual wills. Thus, what leaps to attention in this primitive stage of self-consciousness is individuality, since individuality is a new discovery. Being impressed with this new discovery, self-consciousness will see itself in terms which stress its isolation from and its opposition to the other self-consciousnesses rather than in terms of its interaction with them, and the fulfilment that derives from such interactions. The world is seen as a heap of atomized differentiated wills, which are primarily threatening and hostile to each other.

This most primitive stage on the road to adequate self-awareness contains a stress on the importance of the isolated individual which leads to a characteristic view of human ethical relations. That view arises because the individual who has just discovered his individuality will seek fundamentally to protect and preserve it. He is afraid that the world may invade him without him being able to offer any resistance. But he does not only want to protect his individuality out of fear. He wants to protect, and indeed also assert it, because he sees it as something of value, something worth preserving. The isolated individual's desire to preserve himself and have himself recognized as an individual leads to a moral outlook in which the moral world is seen in terms of individual rights, rights which one has by way of being a significant individual unit, but which accrue to the self as an essentially isolated and private self, and which are therefore essentially rights *against* other selves. In other words, the moral world is seen in terms of rights which prevent others from invading an individual's private world, for such a morality has no place for any assumption that mutual satisfaction might be the result of relations between selves.

To effectively assert my individuality, it is necessary to impose my form upon the world. This is so even at the highest levels of self-conscious life, for a great work of art is a transformation of the world and a negation of "the given" in accordance with the free expression of a subjective will. However, at these high levels, the subjective will embodies less particularity, and more of the Concrete Universal, than it embodies in the more primitive attempts at self-assertion. The most primitive attempts to "impose my form on the world" are attempts to impose my form, as a *particular individual*, on the world. And just because these attempts to transform the world are in accordance with my nature as a particular, the degree of creativity involved in this type of

transformation is slight. The natural expression of my search for recognition as a mere particular is to take possession of part of the world and call it *mine*. At the level of Abstract Right, I am therefore chiefly concerned with rights as they relate to property.

"A person must translate his freedom into an external sphere, in order to exist as idea. Personality is the first, still wholly abstract, determination of the absolute and infinite will, and therefore this sphere distinct from the person, the sphere capable of embodying his freedom, is likewise determined as what is immediately different and separable from him." 7

"The rationale of property is to be found not in the satisfaction of needs but in the supersession of the pure subjectivity of the personality. In his property a person exists for the first time as reason. Even if my freedom is here realized in an external thing and so falsely realized, nevertheless abstract personality can have no other embodiment save one characterized by immediacy." 8

For Hegel, the most primitive ways in which an individual takes - and retains - possession of a thing are "(a) by directly grasping it physically, (b) by forming it and (c) by merely marking it as ours."⁹

Hegel acknowledges that even at this level of Abstract Right, the network of essentially individual rights must find a means to secure recognition by the community as a whole. Hegel therefore introduces the concept of Contract as an essential feature of Abstract Right. Hegel asserts:

"Existence as a determinate being is in essence being for another. One aspect of property is

7. Paragraph 41 of Philosophy of Right.

8. Addition to paragraph 41 of Philosophy of Right.

9. Paragraph 55 of Philosophy of Right.

that it is existent as an external thing, and in this respect property exists for other external things and is connected with their necessity and contingency. But it is also existent as an embodiment of the will, and from this point of view the 'other' for which it exists can only be the will of another person. This relation of will to will is the true and proper ground in which freedom is existent. The sphere of contract is made up of this mediation whereby I hold property not merely by means of a thing and my subjective will, but by means of another person's will as well and so hold it in virtue of my participation in a common will." 10

The contradiction which inheres in Abstract Right, thereby revealing that Abstract Right is utterly inadequate as a basis for human relationships, is exposed when we reflect upon the notion of Contract. For on the one hand, Contract shows how even Abstract Right presupposes that ethical relations with others are a matter of expressing the Universal and overcoming (mere) particularity, since it is requisite that the individual property rights are recognized by the common will. But on the other hand, a universally recognized contract can have almost any content, for it is a matter merely of what a plurality of particular and not necessarily rational individuals agree upon. The type of universality expressed through the institution of Contract is wholly inadequate, since the only thing which matters is that both sides "keep the bargain", and it is only by chance that particular individuals would will the rational content. In Contract, there is a contradiction between the essential need to express Universality which is its presupposition, and the actual way in which that Universality is expressed.

"The principle of rightness, the universal will, receives its essential determinate character through the particular will, and so is in relation with something which is inessential." 11

10. Paragraph 71 of Philosophy of Right.

11. Paragraph 82 Philosophy of Right.

The contradiction which inheres in Contract sets up a malaise in the individual or community whose code of conduct is fundamentally seen in terms of contractual obligations. For in Contract, one finds absolute obligations to pursue courses of action which have as their content the morally inessential. When the malaise becomes too great, as it almost inevitably must, the outcome is a violation of the principles of Abstract Right, which Hegel calls *Wrong*. An analysis of Wrong leads us to see that the accentuation of particularity which is a precondition of the existence of Abstract Right is also what leads to its breakdown.

"In contract we had the relation of two wills as a common will. But this identical will is only relatively universal, posited as Universal, and so is still opposed to the particular will. In contract, to be sure, making a covenant entails the right to require its performance. But this performance is dependent again on the particular will which qua particular may act in contravention of the principle of rightness. At this point then the negation is just what wrong is. In general terms, the course of events is that the will is freed from its immediacy and there is thus evoked out of the common will the particularity which then comes on the scene as opposed to the common will. In contract the parties still retain their particular wills; contract therefore is not yet beyond the stage of arbitrariness with the result that it remains at the mercy of wrong." 12

Hegel divides Wrong into non-malicious Wrong (in which, for example, a man genuinely thinks he owns something and treats it as his, even though in reality it belongs to another), Fraud, where right "is made a show of" ("the universal is set aside by the particular will and reduced to something only showing in the situation") and Crime, in which the principle of right openly ceases to be respected.

At the level of Abstract Right, the particular is inclined to run

12. Addition to paragraph 81, Philosophy of Right.

wild in the various forms of Wrong, because Abstract Right does not offer scope for a more adequate development of particularity. Paradoxically then, the particular runs wild, not because it has been granted too much scope, but because it has been too confined. There is no real scope for the development of subjectivity. One important feature which is indicative of this is that at the level of Abstract Right a system of strict liability operates, one is held responsible for violating these rights irrespective of intention or motivation.

This strict liability view of morality is obviously inadequate, for it ignores some of the most fundamental features of human moral life. However, despite its limitations, it does also contain an important insight, the truth of which must be preserved at the higher levels. That insight is that the particular individual with his arbitrary will is not the final judge in ethical matters. The fact that an action is carried out conscientiously is not enough to justify it morally, unless that conscience has some form of objective backing. Abstract Right contains this principle in a very distorted form, since the content of the obligation is the morally inessential, and because strict liability leaves no room for subjective conscience.

The violation of the principle of Abstract Right leads on to the need to negate this violation. But Wrong cannot be annulled simply by retreating to an abstract universal and *imposing* this, as an external force, upon the offender. It was because the universal was too abstract - and appeared as too external to the agent - that Wrong arose in the first place. The corrective measures taken when Abstract Right is violated must not proceed by trying merely to crush the particular individual. Rather, the individual's claims for self-expression must be accepted but an individual must also learn that truest self expression is really found in the expression of his nature as universal. T.M. Knox

puts it as follows:

"... the contradiction of right by the criminal cannot be annulled by a mere regression to bare universality. Mere denial of the corruptive invader will not root it out - tamen usque recurret. The only solution is to reorganize the claims of the particular by allowing that the universally right *must* be mediated by the conscientious convictions of the subject. We go beyond the criminal's defiance only by substituting for the more abstract conception of personality the more concrete conception of subjectivity. A 'subject' is the universal will embodied, no longer in universal rights, but in a particular will; hence from the point of view of the subject, the law which the criminal breaks is *his own* law; i.e. his crime is not a contradiction of a right outside him but a self-contradiction, a defiance of right embodied in him."

However,

"As soon as the rational agent realizes this he rises above the contradiction simply by keeping the law, the law which is the law of his own conviction, i.e. he has transcended the sphere of right altogether and become a moral agent." 13

The World as it is Seen from the Standpoint of Individual Moral
Consciousness

It is through the mediation of punishment, according to Hegel, that the transition from Abstract Right to Morality is effected in real life. A man who violates another's rights renders himself liable to be punished. But the phenomenon of punishment hardly makes sense without the idea that there are universal moral laws which each individual can have knowledge of. If we are expected to obey a just law, then

13. Both quotations from T.M. Knox's Translator's Notes to paragraph 104 Philosophy of Right.

obedient behaviour is more rational if we can see for ourselves the obligatory force of that law. The standpoint of individual moral consciousness is thus concerned, not just with rights against others, but with *rules* for behaviour, and rules which are the sort of rules which unite us with others, and which subjective consciousness can see to be justified. In the Philosophy of Right Hegel asserts:

"The right of the subjective will is that whatever it is to recognize as valid shall be seen by it as good, and that an action, as its aim entering upon external objectivity, shall be imputed to it as right or wrong, good or evil, legal or illegal, in accordance with its knowledge of the worth which the action has in this objectivity." 14

In Abstract Right objective value is upheld yet this objectivity is sundered from its basis in subjective freedom. The standpoint of individual moral consciousness knows of objective value, but takes seriously the demand to see for itself what is of such value.

Because of the emphasis on subjectivity, intention and motivation now become extremely important:

"So far as right in the strict sense was concerned it was of no importance what my intention or my principle was. This question about the self determination and motive of the will now enters at this point in connexion with his own self-determined choices, he is free in this relation to himself whatever the external situation may impose upon him. No-one can break in upon this inner conviction of mankind no violence can be done to it, and the moral will, therefore, is inaccessible. Man's worth is estimated by reference to his inward action and hence the standpoint of morality is freedom aware of itself." 15

14. Paragraph 132 Philosophy of Right.

15. Addition to paragraph 106, Philosophy of Right.

The individual who follows a moral code and who is aware of himself as so doing refuses to accept the ascription of total responsibility to him for actions which are not produced intentionally and whose full nature he is not in a position to grasp. This is utterly different from how it was with Abstract Right, where, "it was of no importance what my intention or principle was." Hegel points out how this standpoint of Abstract Right is reflected in Greek tragedy, for the heroes in Greek tragedy accept responsibility for the full compass of their act, irrespective of whether circumstances prevented them from knowing the true nature of what they did (e.g. the Oedipus story). This mentality is utterly rejected at the level of individual moral consciousness.

"The right of intention is that the universal quality of the action shall not merely be implicit but shall be known for the agent, and so shall have lain from the start in his subjective will." 16

Under the general heading of (individual) morality, Hegel deals with various types of moral codes, all of which turn out to be ultimately inadequate - despite the fact that all are more adequate than the view of the moral world based on Abstract Right. Hegel does this because he realises that morality does not only involve the attribution of responsibility to individuals for consequences of actions which were intended, (or which ought to have been foreseen, even were they not consciously intended), but also a judgment of approval or disapproval based on the determinate content of the action. In particular, morality concerns itself with how human actions bear upon human Welfare. In connection with Welfare Hegel disusses the specific moral outlooks of Utilitarianism and Egoism. It would seem odd to many philosophers that

16. Paragraph 120 Philosophy of Right.

Hegel should treat these two together, but once we understand what Welfare involves for Hegel, the reason becomes clear.

Welfare, as Hegel conceives it, is not the content of the natural will, for we have now arrived at the level of thinking.

"The subjective element of the will, with its particular content - welfare, is reflected into itself and so stands related to the universal element, to the principle of the will." 17

However, although Welfare is not the content of the natural will, it is nonetheless a mode of benefit which can accrue only to isolated particular individuals. Hegel accepts that it is a right of subjectivity to have its welfare catered for; however, it is a mere accident if the welfare of particular isolated individuals qua isolated particular individuals corresponds to their deepest welfare, which would involve their fulfilment by satisfying the universal side of their natures. It is because both Utilitarianism and Egoism are concerned with the well-being of particulars qua particulars that Hegel treats them together.

"This moment of universality, posited first of all within this particular content itself, is the welfare of others also, or as specified completely though quite emptily, the welfare of all. The welfare of many other unspecified particulars is thus also an essential end and right of subjectivity. But since the absolutely universal, in distinction from such a particular content, has not so far been further determined than as 'the right' it follows that these ends of particularity, differing as they do from the universal, may be in conformity with it, and may be not". 18

17. Paragraph 125 Philosophy of Right.

18. Paragraph 125 Philosophy of Right.

The Problem of Subjective Conscience

The truth of the matter, for Hegel, is that the particular has a right both to its own self-realisation as an expression of the universal and to the knowledge that such a self-realisation is its own deepest essence. The particular thus has an absolute right to do what it *knows* to be good and right, which is something which would involve self transcendence. But there is a problem here which Hegel clearly perceives and does not attempt to hedge. If we accept that an individual has an absolute right to do only that which he perceives to be good, we make his conscience the sole moral judge. But then what happens if he is wrong? Suppose he claims (and really sincerely believes) that his actions express the universal, whereas in fact they express gross particularity? If we fall back on authority and say that the individual should conform to the morals of his society, we would then deny the sanctity of subjective conscience, and in the end destroy the sphere of conscience entirely, for we would end by allowing it scope only at times when it happens to coincide with a behavioural code determined by quite extraneous factors. But if we do not allow outside influences to curb subjective conscience, then we do nothing to safeguard ourselves against those whom Hegel describes as "bad men with well-meaning hearts."

We have before us the dilemma that we seem to need a criterion for moral virtue outside subjective conscience (for even if we accept that the determining characteristics of morality lie somewhere within the domain of subjective conscience how do we know whose subjective conscience to follow when claims conflict?) yet cannot introduce one without resorting to the arbitrary and non-rational one of positive authority, a procedure which is seemingly incompatible with the doctrine that individuals should be able to see for themselves the rightness of their actions, and which cannot be defended on independent grounds, for

it would give bad men every bit as much scope as does allowing the total sovereignty of subjective conscience.

The way out of this dilemma has for Hegel much to do with the concept of rationality. It shall have for us too, though we shall not accept Hegel's detailed working out and application of this concept. Rationality transcends the individual yet stems from subjectivity. It curbs subjectivity as particularity in the name of subjectivity as an expression of the Universal. However we must face the problem that people can be mistaken as regards being wholly rational. Since it is possible to be mistaken, how can any individual at any time be sure he is not mistaken? The problem of conscience seems to recure in the sphere of rationality. For Hegel "What is right and obligatory is the absolutely rational element in the will's volition, and therefore it is not in essence the particular property of an individual."¹⁹ But this leaves unanswered the question - how does an individual know when he possesses that which is in essence the universal property? How can he differentiate this from cases where he thinks he knows? And if he can't, why should society at large be in any better position to know itself to have a rationally based moral code, which it can justify imposing upon deviants?

The whole problem is perhaps best formulated as the dialectical contradiction that any society which did not allow for the claims of conscience could hardly be called a moral community at all, yet to allow the claims of conscience opens the way to the destruction of such a community.

19. Remark to paragraph 137 Philosophy of Right.

Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Conscience

We have so far followed Hegel in his view that the concept of individual morality, with the importance it attaches to conscience, provides a corrective for the inadequacy in any notion which sees moral obligation as having nothing to do with subjective intention, and we have also followed Hegel in his view that there is a dialectical contradiction involved in the concept of individualistic morality. How then do we resolve the contradiction? How can we reconcile the right of the subject to see for himself that what he is obligated to do is good, with the demand that there are obligations, transcending the particular or transcending those obligations which are actually acknowledged by particular individuals? In the perfectly rational society, there would be no confusing of the particular will with the demands of the Concrete Universal, but then in an irrational society, part of that irrationality could mean that it might see itself as wholly rational, and its members would mistake their assertions of particularity for perfectly rational expressions of the Concrete Universal. And if such a mistake is possible, how can we ever be absolutely sure that our will expresses the Concrete Universal, even on those occasions when perhaps it does?

Hegel tells us that this problem can be solved through the integration of the individual into the communal life of his society. The details of his arguments we shall elucidate further below.

It is at the point when Hegel attempts to answer this difficult question about conscience that we must begin to diverge from his moral philosophy. Indeed, both Hegel and Bradley were unable to satisfactorily come to terms with this problem, and their case for Absolute Idealism

is considerably weakened because of it. Both Hegel and Bradley, in the absence of any criterion of correct conscience which is truly compatible with the right of subjectivity, fall back on the idea that the proper criteria of conscience are the moral standards of one's own society. The right of subjectivity is retained in a grossly attenuated form, through the idea that subjective freedom can be salvaged by freely accepting one's own society's standards!

In F.H. Bradley's My Station and its Duties we find that the problem of conscience is solved through a thorough-going retreat into positive authority, in which the standards of the status quo become the absolute measure of private conscience. In the end conscience is deprived of any real role at all, since if actions are to be mediated by conscience only when conscience coincides with accepted moral values, the mediation is in reality utterly redundant. In the end we are no further than the sphere of Abstract Right, where subjective motives and intentions are irrelevant, and where obedience is enjoined "because it is commanded".

Hegel does not retreat into the same degree of conservatism as Bradley, for he (Hegel) at least gives a non-positivistic reason for accepting prevailing standards of a particular individual's society. He does not, therefore, like Bradley, merely assume that prevailing social norms are morally superior to those of private conscience, he rather argues for it. However, his arguments for this are extremely dubious, for they turn on the idea that some one particular society is the most developed expression of the Concrete Universal in the world so far - and on the assumption that the social whole will (almost) always embody the rationality of the Concrete Universal more adequately than will any individual member of it.

Hegel thus accepts in principle the sovereignty of the negating and rationally critical consciousness over the uncritical acceptance of

the positive and given, and would claim that an individual who defers to his society's values does not lose his right of subjectivity. The most rational side of him goes along with it, and it is through expressing his most rational side that the individual is most truly a free subject. Hegel would no doubt warn against confusing the right of the subject with the self-assertion of the isolated particular.

There is still however a strong retreat here into positive authority, and at two levels. Firstly, there is the weakness of Hegel's arguments for the view that any particular society is the most rational, so far. At no point does Hegel succeed in proving that the further one advances into the future, the more rational do societies become, and indeed Hegel even suggests himself that there may sometimes be retrogression. To believe that the latest society is also the most adequate form of society (in relation to its capacity to express the Concrete Universal) or even that it is very likely to be requires an act of faith whose precondition is deference to the momentary given.

In any case, if Hegel were able to demonstrate the truth of the proposition that "the most recent society is very likely to embody the Concrete Universal most adequately" this could be established only through the application of criteria which are themselves demonstrably rational, and this would make a comparison of conscience with one's society's dictates redundant, since one could use the demonstrably rational criteria directly. Hegel's failure to advise this betrays the fact that in spite of his plea for rationality, Hegel wants subjectivity to take its criteria for the rational from a source which is positive authority.

We have thus seen that Hegel falls into an appeal to positive authority when he is discussing how conscience can be reconciled with objective moral standards in actual societies which have historically

existed. But we now must add a second level at which Hegel appeals to positive authority. This level is concerned with the fact that Hegel sacrifices the "right of subjectivity" to see for itself the rightness of its obligations, not only in the inadequate and imperfect societies, but also in the perfect society, the State which he describes. We might accept that the element of reliance on the positive in the less perfect societies is an inevitable - though not in itself good - consequence of being so imperfect. In such a society, the rational could not be seen clearly, and that this was so could be considered an unavoidable mark of the tragedy of the finite. But in the perfectly rational State, where subjective conscience and the objective rational moral law are finally reconciled, the individual should not be called upon to accept anything on authority. Yet Hegel builds into his perfect State a strong necessity for positive authority. Thus the reconciliation which Hegel seeks is totally impossible. Precisely how and why Hegel does this, we must now elucidate further.

The Failure of the Hegelian State to Reconcile Subjective
Moral Conscience with Objective Moral Standards

According to Hegel, the one-sidedness embodied in both abstract right and subjective individual morality is overcome and finds its reconciliation with its (apparent) opposite in an Ethical Life which is itself subsumed within the State. Ethical Life is meant to emerge as the synthesis of the conflict between Abstract Right and Morality, and the State emerges to heal the inadequacies which inhere in an Ethical Life, considered in abstract isolation from a more ultimate unifying force. Ethical Life consists of two moments, the Family and Civil Society. It is not necessary to follow Hegel's argument very far

before we discover that the ultimate reconciliation between subjective and objective will never be realised in the way he proposes. For Hegel, we shall see, picks on quite contingent social institutions and then tells us that they are logically necessary stages on the way and contributors towards performing a task of reconciling subjective with objective which is quite beyond their capacity. It is necessary however to consider Hegel's reasons for thinking that the institutions of Ethical Life could bring us nearer to a reconciliation with objective moral laws, a reconciliation which could find its completion in the State.

According to Hegel, the institutions of the Family and Civil Society bring us closer to the Concrete Universal and overcome (at least in part) the one-sidedness which arises in Abstract Right and subjective conscience because in these institutions the individual has his subjectivity integrated into something which transcends him, but he does not thereby lose his subjectivity. Thus, for Hegel, the whole problem of the clash between subjective conscience and objective moral standards is less likely to arise. Because the individual can be integrated into a social whole without thereby losing his individuality then that integration is a stage on the way to overcoming the subject/object dualism.

Hegel's Family and Civil Society provide for this integration, and therefore bring the social whole and the individual closer to expressing the Concrete Universal. It is through this integration that, for Hegel, the onesided emphasis on objectivity in Abstract Right and onesided emphasis on the individual in subjective morality are overcome.

There are two questions which must now be asked if we are to assess the argument which Hegel presents for the ultimate reconciliation.

(1) Are the Family and Civil Society, later subsumed in the State,

necessarily the only vehicles through which the subjective/objective reconciliation can occur?

(2) Is it even possible that these social institutions can perform the reconciling task which Hegel intends them to? Can they really achieve the sort of social integration which would make it possible to say that the subjective individual conscience has genuinely been reconciled with objective moral rules?

In reply to (1) we may say that all that is required by the need to grant subjective conscience its right yet still retain an objective rational moral structure is a social form in which rational thinking is unimpeded by ideology or by sectarian interests which such ideology normally serves to render legitimate. There is no reason to suppose that the family as Hegel describes it is the first necessary step towards such a social form, nor must we suppose that the Hegelian Family or Civil Society have a necessary or even special place in effecting the subject/object reconciliation. The Family does not necessarily emerge out of the conflict between Abstract Right and subjective conscience, nor does Civil Society arise out of the Hegelian nuclear family.

Hegel regards the Family as the first step towards reconciling subjective morality with objective standards since it is within this small group that the individual learns, at the most basic level, to express his universal nature. Thus, the individual fulfils his particular sexual wants through the universal institution of marriage.

Two points may be made in criticism of Hegel here. The first is that the nuclear western style family is not the only way, nor the most obvious or fundamental way, in which the principle of expressing particular aims through universal institutions could be learned and implemented. And secondly, Hegel shifts at this point from his concept of the universal as having to do with rationality, to a universality

which has to do merely with what everybody in fact does. Thus, at no point does Hegel attempt to demonstrate the universality of marriage by showing it to embody rationality, it is rather universal simply because it's a generally accepted custom, and one is nearer the Concrete Universal by engaging in it because in so doing you subject your particularity to the discipline of what is generally done. The question of whether this curbing of particularity is done on behalf of a content which is in itself rational is one which Hegel leaves unanswered.

We may criticize the place which Hegel gives to Civil Society on the same grounds on which we have criticized the Hegelian view of the Family. Civil Society may well teach people to curb their particularity, but to what end? It is the content of the end which will determine whether this curbing is in reality a greater fulfilment for subjectivity or merely its denial, and Hegel does not adequately consider this second possibility. He rather has a strong tendency to assume that all integration is good, and that so long as there is no de facto clash between subjective moral opinion and the morality of a society then a genuine reconciliation of subjective morality with objective moral standards has taken place.

Hegel thus does not consider what sort of whole the parts are being integrated into. And precisely because many authoritarian structures have a strong power to integrate people to the point where their beliefs completely coincide with social morality, Hegel is led to totally overlook positivistic elements in his moral philosophy which are in reality utterly incompatible with the type of subjective fulfilment and freedom required by the Concrete Universal.

Further Inadequacies of the Hegelian State

From what we have said so far, it is clear that Ethical Life, in the Hegelian sense, cannot provide a solution to the possible antagonism between subjective moral conscience and objective obligation. The social institutions associated with Ethical Life do not necessarily emerge from the conflict, nor do they help with reconciliation. But can Ethical Life, subsumed by the Hegelian State, provide for this reconciliation?

At first, the State, as the mediating and unifying force between the competing, conflicting atoms of Civil Society, may seem a plausible vehicle for the ultimate subject/object reconciliation. The (Hegelian) State, (so it seems), after all does not seek to express the Concrete Universal simply by way of individuals agreeing to "all do the same thing", it seems rather that the State must have a content, beyond the contingent will of individuals, which has by virtue of its very nature the power to unify. This is just how the State is distinguished from Civil Society. But what is this content, which enables individuals to be truly integrated into the common life, without simply integrating them by getting them to think and do the same things?

Hegel does not elaborate much upon this. He rather concentrates on the sheer power of the State to thoroughly integrate, without acknowledging that individuals can be very well integrated into social wholes which are perfectly evil. He comes close to the assumption that subjective freedom is a product of the mere fact of total social integration, an assumption which is in no way warranted.

However, insofar as Hegel succeeds in giving a content to his ideal State, beyond its power to unite individuals, this content is far removed from any which has to do with rationality and freedom. It is a

de facto unity, and has all the contingency and particularity of an extreme nationalism, as is well exemplified in the remarks which Hegel makes about war. Here the citizens of one State are urged to identify with their State and to fight against another particular State. What the war is being fought about Hegel regards as essentially irrelevant, since war in itself is a feature which is necessary to rejuvenate the health and vigour of the nation. It does this by reminding the individuals who are called upon to die that there is something greater than they, for which they can justifiably be asked to sacrifice themselves as particulars. Thus:

"It is necessary that the finite - property and life - should be definitely established as accidental, because accidentality is the concept of the finite." 20

And

"War is the state of affairs which deals in earnest with the vanity of temporal goods and concerns ... " 21

Hegel overlooks the fact that when two nations are at war, then in at least one of them, and most probably in both of them, particular finite lives are being sacrificed not in order to express and fulfil the Concrete Universal, but merely because they have clashed with the totally finite aims and interests of an opposing nation.

From Hegel's remarks on war, we can conclude that the unifying power of his State rests not on reason and the fulfilment of the subjective, but on a contingent and finite nationalism in which the subjective is frequently negated rather than fulfilled. Particular is

20. Remark to paragraph 324, Philosophy of Right.

21. Remark to paragraph 324, Philosophy of Right.

sacrificed to particular, not fulfilled through the whole. In Hegel's State, therefore, there is not an inevitable coincidence between subjective fulfilment and objective obligation. In the army of the Hegelian State, soldiers would fight not because they could find subjective fulfilment through a subjectively-correctly-perceived-objective-obligation to do so, but merely because they had been told to.

From what has been said so far, it is quite clear that the Hegelian State does not provide a way of subsuming Ethical Life such that the positivistic elements are removed and the clash between subjective conscience and objective morality is overcome. The positivistic element is still very much present, and the "right of subjective conscience" so see for itself the rightness of what it does, is a principle which is not realised. This becomes even more clear, however, when we consider the relation of the Hegelian State to Civil Society.

In the Hegelian State, at one level of social life, a very important level, the isolated individual continues to exist, and often has to be "kept down" by the State. The rational society has been actualized, but Hegel admits that many will still be unable to see or will not even be interested in seeing the rightness of what the State decrees for themselves. For such people, the State's dictates can only be accepted on the basis of positive authority. Thus for Hegel, even at the most rational level of social life which he can envisage, the right of subjective conscience remains unfulfilled, and the clash between subjectively perceived moral goodness and objective moral obligation remains a viable possibility.

What the Hegelian Failure to Solve the Problem of Conscience

Teaches us

Earlier in this chapter, we argued for the view that the only

adequate morality is one which is constructed by subjectivity, but by a subjectivity which constructs, not according to the arbitrary whim of its nature as a mere particular, but according to the necessity which is the deepest expression of its own nature. Hegel grasped this principle, he realized that the only objective backing which can be demanded by and presented to the subjective conscience is the disciplined necessity which flows from the nature of subjective consciousness itself.

Unfortunately Hegel, realizing that conscience might express more of the particular than the universal, constructed a moral edifice which was meant to be the true expression of subjectivity, but which ended up as an objective moral structure in which the moral law did not issue from any subjectivity, however that subjectivity expressed itself. That is, the moral law which was meant only to transcend particularity, ends up by transcending subjectivity too.

In the very failure of Hegel, however, to specify the conditions under which subjective conscience will be in line and know itself to be in line with objective moral standards, (objective in that they transcend particular moral feelings but not objective in the sense of standing over against subjectivity), can be seen the importance of the task of discovering such conditions. For only under such conditions can there exist the sort of self-conscious moral conduct which alone is morality in the deepest sense, a morality which is a subjective construction yet not an arbitrary one, and, which knows for itself the law of its own necessity. Under such conditions, subjective conscience could be granted its "sacred right", and before such conditions obtain, morality in the deepest sense is impossible.

Hegel's State can never provide the conditions under which subjective conscience can be granted this right. But his arguments did point the way to an awareness of the type of conditions which are necessary in

order for the clash between subjective conscience and objective obligation to begin to be removed. He does this by telling us the reason for the clash in the first place.

The clash occurs because it is possible for the individual subjective mind to be, as it were, blinkered to its own (potential) nature and to the (potential) nature of its own activity. It fixes itself upon finite aims and interests, either its own, but perhaps more often when it mistakes such finite aims for moral ones, those of others, which it has, through ideological means, been taught to regard as the moral law. Subjective conscience goes wrong when it mistakes the interests and aims of particular individuals and groups for an objectively binding moral law.

Removing the Blinkers

The first step towards removing the moral blinkers is the existence of a community in which the actions which facilitate the interests of particular groups and individuals are not (falsely) elevated to the status of the moral law. In such a society, it would not be inevitable that people would have clear moral vision, but it would be very much more likely, since the main features which normally block such vision would be removed. Whether such a society will ever actually come into being is something which cannot be predicted in advance, for a society which allowed an unfettered moral law would itself be a product of the free will.

No social structure however, can provide a guarantee that moral vision will be clear, nor is it impossible to attain such vision without a social edifice. Moral vision is merely easier and more likely, if it is not impeded by an ideological "moral law" which is based, not on expressing the Concrete Universal, but on the attempt to render legitimate

the furtherance of particular private interests. But, in fact, as well as in principle, the Concrete Universal can be expressed by those who have discerned it in any society.

What we have said so far brings us to answer the question - how can we be sure that we are, in our moral actions, expressing such a Concrete Universal, and that we are not unwittingly merely the vehicle of particular interests? For we can see now that it is quite possible, and we may suspect fairly common, for private interests to masquerade in the clothes of genuine morality. The recognition that this is so, is the first and perhaps most crucial step towards clear moral vision. We shall be more able to identify genuine expressions of the Concrete Universal once we realize that there may be counterfeit ones.

However, the way is still open for mistakes to be made, since moral ignorance is not exclusively the result of social codes of practice which render legitimate certain private interests that pose as the moral law. Moral ignorance and error might result from the individual mistaking his finite aims, interests or ideals for the Concrete Universal. While this is so, we cannot grant to subjective conscience its "sacred right" absolutely unconditionally. Under what conditions then could we be certain that our moral actions were genuine, and that we have not been misled, to the point where we may grant to subjective conscience its sacred right to see for itself the rightness of its obligations?

We must not underestimate the difficulty involved in this problem. A moral judgment is, as we said earlier, a subjective construction which nonetheless is not arbitrary; it is a creation which is also a discovery. It is not arrived at by ratiocination, nor is it arrived at by empirical testing. It is rather an intuitive judgment, in the deepest sense of the term, the depth of which consists precisely in its encapsulation of the faculty of the mind to synthesize. But just because making moral

judgments is a matter of intuition depending on a process of synthesis it is extremely difficult to find any obvious guarantee that the judgment is correct. How then is it possible to identify a valid moral intuition?

This question may be answered at two levels. At the first level, we need only to point out that we do not need criteria by which we may infallibly identify correct moral intuitions as against false ones in order to accept that there is such a thing as intuitive moral knowledge in the world. Perhaps nobody can be absolutely *certain* that he is right, but that doesn't imply that he can't have knowledge of his rightness. If two people have conflicting intuitions, and one happens to be right while the other is wrong, the fact that the person who is wrong is as committed to his view as the one who is right doesn't stop the person who is actually right from having genuine knowledge, and rightfully claiming that he has.

The sacred right of subjective conscience can thus be said to accrue to the person who has a correct moral intuition. The fact that we cannot always be certain as to the correctness of a moral intuition does not abnegate the possibility of genuine intuitions, which are known to be genuine, or at any rate does not do so entirely. The assumption that we cannot have knowledge because we cannot have absolute and infallible certainty is just as unwarranted in moral matters as (more obviously) it is in scientific matters. As A.C. Ewing puts it:

"... there will be an end to all talk about most topics of interest, and certainly about philosophy, if we refrain from making any assertions that other people will dispute." 22

At the first level therefore, the answer to our question about how to identify correct intuitions is simply that we don't need known decisive public criteria for doing so, before we can accept that the correctness of an intuition may be seen, as it were, from the inside. That such an individual would be naive to claim absolute certainty does not mean that he would be wrong to claim knowledge.

At the second level, our question may be answered by adding that lack of certainty about moral intuitions (and other things) is a feature of a world, such as ours, in which subjective and objective are sundered from, each other and stand over against each other. In such a world, the subjective consciousness can never be certain it knows its object, or even its own potential to inform the objective, because it stands at a distance from the objective realm.

Morality is an attempt to close the subject/object gap, by informing the subjective with the mark of actions which are the product of Universal Reason. Were morality to be wholly successful, the gap between subjective and objective would close, all alienation would vanish, and in such a world there would be, as well as knowledge, certainty. One would then have wholly transcended the limiting tyranny of the finite.

In the world as it is, there cannot be absolute certainty. But this does not mean that (genuine) conscience cannot claim its 'sacred right'. It merely means that people can be wrong about their intuitions. And this is not the objection to the whole notion of subjective demands in morality that it at first looked, since there can still be moral knowledge.

Within the finite world, it is perfectly true to say, there can be no criterion, internal to the moral intuition or its content, for (absolutely) proving or demonstrating that it is a correct moral intuition. But this does not mean that it is nonsensical to speak of

correct moral intuitions, and in any case, even in the absence of such an absolute criterion, it seems to make good sense to posit a kind of "external" criterion. This type of criterion could only be applied after having acted upon a moral intuition, for in retrospect, it might well be seen that the consequences of adopting the "correct" moral intuition and acting in accordance with it will be different from, and better than, the consequences of adopting an "incorrect" one. By reflecting upon the consequences of the various intuitions, we would be led to a deeper understanding of the moral nature of those intuitions. We would, of course, have to rely on further intuitions to determine whether the consequences of adopting a particular intuition were good or bad, and it might be argued that because of this we are, in advocating an external criterion, really doing no more than begging the question.

However it becomes clear that we are not merely begging the question when we consider that the further intuitions by which the moral value of the original intuitions consequences are judged, might be much less in doubt than the initial intuition itself and therefore serve to shed light on the nature of the original intuition. Our external criterion will not of course be infallible, for the further intuitions by which we evaluate the consequences of acting upon the original moral intuition, might be just as much in doubt as the original intuition itself. But this only means that our external criterion is fallible, not that it is useless.

We live in a world which is engulfed by alienation and a multitude of uncertainties, and moral uncertainties are only one species of the latter. Yet if moral knowledge is possible, even in this setting, then its application will tend to close the subject/object gap, and thus make something more like certainty possible for the future. The more the gap has been closed the easier will clear moral vision, and therefore

moral knowledge, become.

Thus, the problem of subjective conscience conflicting with objective obligations to the point where it could be certain that its moral intuitions were correct could only occur in a world in which objectivity was totally informed by and unalienated from subjective self-conscious life, which had become transmuted into a vehicle for Universal Reason. Or, as it would be expressed in the Christian tradition, the subjective individual would have become transformed into an instrument of the Holy Spirit.

In such a world, the blindness brought on by our natures as limited particulars would simply not be present. In a world such as this, and only in a world such as this, could we rely completely on the validity of all our moral intuitions.

In this world, it is part of our finitude that we cannot have this kind of certainty. It is part of the tragedy of finite life that that life must consist - at least in part - of a sort of semi-blind groping. Yet it is one of the wonders of finite life that from this partial blindness can come greater vision, and that it contains within itself the potential for its transformation, a transformation which could provide it with the clear vision of Universal Reason. Thus, contained within a world of uncertainties and insecurity is a (potential) world of certainties and security, indeed, the former does not make sense except as an unrealised expression of the latter.

Human moral experience, when taken by itself, reveals itself to be a contradictory form of experience. It is, on the one hand, a form of experience in which a force of obligation seems overpowering, or even absolute. But on the other hand the ultimate criteria of justification for these feelings of obligation seems constantly to elude us. One reaction to this contradictoriness might be despair; an experience of

obligation which is so strong yet so difficult to justify on rational grounds could well be thought indicative of how little we can rely on our experience.

But scepticism leading to despair is not the only possible reaction. An alternative reaction would be to replace scepticism and despair with what Bosanquet calls "a wider outlook".

A wider outlook, of the kind which would be relevant here, would see in the contradictoriness of the human moral consciousness considered in isolation (as a wholly autonomous unit) a reason why human morality should not be considered in total isolation. The contradictoriness of morality would, on this view, point to an overall context in which the finite moral consciousness could be seen to make sense, not as a self-sufficient phenomenon, but as a partial manifestation of the whole.

On this "wider outlook", it would become apparent why moral intuitions cannot be absolutely justified despite their extreme power; any experience which is a partial manifestation of an overall context could never have its deliverances justified, at any point prior to the total apprehension and understanding of the whole and ex hypothesi the finite moral consciousness cannot fully grasp such a transcendent content. The power of the moral consciousness would be explained, on this view, precisely by its being a product of this transcendent content.

Thus we can see how, on our "wider outlook", the apparent contradictoriness which inheres within human moral experience can be both resolved and explained. And that we should adopt this wider outlook, rather than scepticism and despair, becomes clear when we consider the implications of the characterisation of morality which has already been set out in this chapter.

Human morality, it was earlier said, is an attempt by finite beings to overcome, through their actions, the various forms of alienation which

circumscribe their existence. It is an attempt, in particular to reconcile finite subjects with each other, which in turn demands as its precondition reconciliation between subject and object. As long as moral agents remain finite, they never wholly achieve these reconciliations, but insofar as they do succeed, they express (in part) a non-arbitrary rational, liberating principle of subjectivity. If finite beings ever managed to totally overcome their alienation, and achieve a complete reconciliation with the entire realm of the not-self, they would then become absolute subjects, or rather (since they would also be fully reconciled with each other) they would become the Absolute Subject.

However, even while finite subjects remain merely finite, their moral actions must be understood as expressing in part the nature of the Absolute Subject. For these actions are aimed at, and partially succeed in, overcoming the alienation that only an Absolute Subject could overcome completely. The overall context within which a partial reconciliation between subject and object makes sense can only be total reconciliation, as well as the power to produce that reconciliation.

The Intelligibility of Human Morality and the Claims of
Religious Experience

It emerges therefore that the overall context within which human morality is alone rendered intelligible is that of absolute subjectivity. The inherent contradictoriness of human morality, when considered in isolation, leads us to posit an Absolute Subject from which finite moral action and consciousness issues, and of which it is merely an incomplete manifestation. The Absolute Subject is thus the "completion" of human morality, just as it is the "completion" of religion as it practised, of relations between finite individuals, and of relations between finite

individuals, and of relations between finite individuals and the external world. That the Absolute Subject which completes human morality is identified with the Absolute Subject which completes those other phenomena we have mentioned becomes immediately apparent when we remember that the Absolute Subject's completion is always a matter of reconciling (finite) subjectivity with objectivity.

We have already argued for the identity of the Absolute Subject with the object of religious experience in contexts other than the ethical. And since the Absolute subject which emerges as the completion of the ethical is identical with the Absolute Subject which emerged in these other contexts, these previous arguments apply equally here.

However, when we consider the Absolute Subject as the ultimate completion of human morality, as well as of the other phenomena mentioned (i.e. religion as it is practised etc.) it becomes clearer than ever before that the mystics' Divine Object and the Absolute Subject are one. For in mystical and other forms of religious experience, the overwhelming intuition is one of the supreme goodness of the creative force which reconciles finite spirits with their own, and the world's essence. Thus, in religious experience we have an experiential intuition of the supreme value of the reconciliation of subject with object, a reconciliation which corresponds precisely to the labour of the Absolute Subject.

Furthermore, according to the deliverances of religious experience as we have described it, the source of all freedom, reason, and creative endeavour is found in the subjective attempt to overcome alienation. The value-elements of the reconciling power are in a sense experienced as primary, for it is in the goodness of the reconciliation that we find the *telos* of freedom, reason, and creativity. It is rather as with Plato's "Form of the Good" through which alone the other Forms are imbued

with existence and intelligibility.

The Absolute Subject which arises, as it does, as the completion of human morality, must also be understood to transcend such morality, when the latter is conceived in the terms of its own self-understanding. For the Absolute Subject stands as the completion, not only of moral but of all other finite endeavours (e.g. the various intellectual and artistic pursuits) which are not normally thought of as specifically moral activities. However, reflection reveals that ultimately all these various endeavours are actually in a strong sense value-infused, since all of them represent partial manifestations of the Absolute Subject's task of surmounting alienation between subject and object. The Absolute Subject therefore, which emerges as the transcendent context of human moral endeavour may, no less than the object or religious experience, be described as primarily the source of all value. For it is in moral value that we find the essential *raison d'être* for its various manifestations. It is the Absolute Subject, conceived of as the supreme source of all value, which makes possible rational, creative self-conscious life as we already know it. And it also makes possible life as we have yet to discover it.

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