

THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGIONS AND CULTURES

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Abstract

This paper will survey how Western philosophy turned almost from its beginning to the objective dimension, which it developed ever more intensively through much of its history; and second, to watch more closely the restoration of the dimension of subjectivity and the way in which this in turn has most recently given new access to the cultures of people. Thirdly it will look at the way in which the history of religious awareness both undergirds this history of philosophy, and manifests a parallel dynamic. In this light it will be possible finally to analyze how the relation between religions and cultures can be a key to an harmonious progress of peoples at a global level and in South East Asia.

OBJECTIVITY AND THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE

That the religious dimension of life be taken as an absolute point of reference has been foundational for all cultures as far back as we can track. Thus in its earliest totemic form, human understanding in terms of the external senses and the corresponding social organization, was structured in relation to some *one* reality - whether animate or inanimate. This one was not itself subject to being used, as were all other things, but rather was treated with the greatest reverence as the key to the meaning of the whole of reality and each of its parts. To dishonor or abuse this *one* in any way - to break a taboo - was the ultimate crime and unless corrected was considered to be destructive, not only for the individual but also for the welfare of the whole society.¹

With the progress of human consciousness in the development of the imagination as an internal sense, these codes of honor and taboos evolved into *mythic forms*. These unfolded the inherent sense of the one totem as a key to all reality, into a pattern of gods identified either as nature, or as the parts of nature. Their hierarchy culminated in a highest god, or in a community of gods, who consciously directed and judged all of life.²

It was against this background that the history of philosophy in the West began with the development of the ability to think not only in terms of what can be sensed by the external senses (totem) or imaged by the internal sense (myth), but what could be directly or formally known in its own term according to the intellect. This is particularly indicative for our issue of religion and culture, for just as totemic thought was centered in an absolute one, and mythic thought structured in terms of a family of gods, now philosophy proper as opened by Thales, and the metaphysics as initiated by Parmenides in his *Poem*, was built on a similar insight. It argued rigorously that being would not differ from nonbeing unless it were ultimately one without beginning or change, intelligent and intelligible.³

Thus human thought at the totemic mythic and philosophical levels was founded in the one absolute reality. All of life is shaped and inspired according to these norms. This was so much the case that when any vision arose which seemed to threaten this key to social life - as with Socrates in Greece or Christianity later in Rome - it was effectively proposed that they needed to be eliminated for the welfare of the community as a whole.

Indeed it is first here that Western thought took a decisive turn. Seeing its own need for norms and orientation it proceeded to make the virtues which Socrates sought into stable things - like stars in the firmament - according to which people could guide their lives. Thus Plato gave them the ontological status of things, ideas existing at another level or in another world beyond the reach of humans. They were unable to be shaped by human history, and able only to provide stable guidance as norms of the human good.

In the great monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam people were then challenged to live in tune with this principle of unity, truth and goodness. It came indeed to be understood as creator and saviour in intimate interaction with a humankind created in its image, serving as its

vice regent, and even in Christianity sharing in human and divine nature through the Incarnation.

SUBJECTIVITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF CULTURE

There remained, however, something inconvenient for human pride, as man was increasingly subject to the objectively higher One, which could never be exhaustively understood or manipulated. Hence, in the Reformation and Renaissance which initiated the modern period, an effort was made to reduce the field of vision and focus on objects which could be grasped clearly and distinctly; all else was removed from consideration. Not God and infinite truth, but only human reason would be the measure of all. Our world became not what man could do with the infinite truth and love of the creator - the world of nature inhabited by man - but what he could construct in terms which to him would have the clarity and certainty of science. This would be not the living world of nature and human beings, but the artificial world of robots and mechanics, the economic structures of profit and exploitation, and the political world of power and hegemonic suppression.

Intentionality

To read this history negatively, as in the last paragraph, is, however, only part of the truth. It depicts a simple and total collapse of technical reason acting alone and as self sufficient. But is there more to human consciousness and hence to philosophy? If so, to use the analogy of the replacement of a tooth in childhood, it is not so much the old tooth that is falling out which is important, but the strength of the new tooth that is replacing it. A few philosophers did point to this other dimension of human awareness. Shortly after Descartes, Pascal's assertion "Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas" (the heart has its reasons which reason does not know) remains a significant insight even if it was unheeded at the time. The same was true of Vico's prediction that the new reason would give birth to a generation of brutes - intellectual brutes, but

brutes nonetheless. Later, Kierkegaard would follow Hegel with a similar warning. None of these voices would have strong impact during an era where the human race was intent on "conquering" the world by a supposed omni-sufficient objective scientific reason. But as human problems mounted the adequacy of reason to handle the deepest problems of human dignity and transcendent purpose came under sustained questioning; greater attention was given to additional, in particular subjective, dimensions of human capabilities.

One might well ask which came first, the public sense of human challenge or the corresponding philosophical reflection and insight; or were they in fact one -- the philosophical insight being the reflective dimension of the human concern? In any case, one finds a striking parallel between social experience and philosophy in this century. From the extreme totalitarian and exploitative repression of the person by fascism and communism in the 1930s there followed the progressive liberation of the person from fascism in World War II, from colonial exploitation in the 1950s and 60s, from social marginalization as minorities in the 1970s, and from Marxism in the 1980s. Like a new tooth the emergence of the person has been consistent and persistent.

This has had a strikingly parallel development in philosophy. At the beginning of this century it appeared that the rationalist project of stating all in clear and distinct objective terms was close to completion. This was to be achieved in either the empirical terms of the positivist tradition of sense knowledge or in the formal and essentialist terms of the Kantian intellectual tradition. Whitehead wrote that at the turn of the century, when with Bertrand Russell he went to the First World Congress of Philosophy in Paris, it seemed that, except for some details of application, the work of physics had been essentially completed. To the contrary, however, the very attempt to finalize scientific knowledge with its most evolved concepts made manifest the radical insufficiency of the objectivist approach and led to renewed appreciation of the important role of subjectivity in knowledge.

To be more precise, Wittgenstein began by writing his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*⁴ on the Lockean supposition that significant knowledge consisted in constructing a mental map corresponding point to point to the external world as perceived by sense experience. In such a project

the spiritual element of understanding - the grasp of the relations between the points on this mental map and the external world - was relegated to the margin as simply "unutterable". Later experience in teaching children, however, led Wittgenstein to the conclusion that this empirical mental mapping was simply not what was going on in human knowledge. In his *Blue and Brown Books*⁵ and his subsequent *Philosophical Investigations*⁶ Wittgenstein shifted human consciousness or intentionality, which previously had been relegated to the periphery, to the very center of concern. The focus of his philosophy was no longer the positivist, supposedly objective, replication of the external world, but the human construction of language and of worlds of meaning.

A similar process was underway on the Continent of Europe. There Edmund Husserl's attempt to bracket all elements, in order to isolate pure essences for scientific knowledge, forced attention to human intentionality and to the limitations of a pure essentialism. This opened the way for his understudy, Martin Heidegger, to rediscover the existential and historical dimensions of reality in his *Being and Time*.⁷ The religious implications of this new sensitivity would be articulated by Karl Rahner in his work, *Spirit in the World*,⁸ and by the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution, *The Church in the World*.⁹

For Heidegger the meaning of being and of life was unveiled and emerged - the two processes were identical - in conscious human life (*dasein*), lived through time and therefore through history. Thus human consciousness became the new focus of attention. The uncovering or bringing into light (the etymology of the term "phenomenology") of the unfolding patterns and interrelations of subjectivity would open a new era of human awareness. Epistemology and metaphysics would develop - and merge - in the very work of tracking the nature and direction of this process.

Thus, for Heidegger's successor, Hans-Georg Gadamer,¹⁰ the task becomes uncovering how human persons, emerging as family, neighborhood and people, by exercising their creative freedom weave their cultural tradition. This is not history as a mere compilation of whatever humankind does or makes, but culture as the fabric of the human consciousness and symbols by which a human group unveils being in its time.

The result is a dramatic inversion. Before all began from above

and flowed downward - whether in structures of political power or of abstract reasoning. Progressing into the new millennium, attention now focuses rather upon developing the exercise of the interior creative freedom of the intentionality of a people in and as civil society as a new and responsible partner with government and business in the continuing effort toward the realization of the common good.¹¹ This is manifest in the shift in the agenda of the United Nations from the cold war debates between economic systems and their political powers to the great people's conferences of Rio on the environment, in Cairo on family, in Beijing on women. The agenda is no longer reality as objectively quantifiable and conflicting, but the more difficult and meaningful one of human life as lived consciously with its issues of human dignity, values and cultural interchange.

What does this mean for philosophy? *The Philosopher's Index for 1970* had only 32 books or articles on culture. In 1980 the *Philosopher's Index* carried 120 listing on the subject. By 1998, however, there were 300 listing on culture and an additional 100 on values, with almost the same number on hermeneutics. Soon on Gadamer alone there were well over 1000 entries. If Marx spoke famously of standing Hegel on his head, in our lifetime the same has happened quite literally for the entire field of philosophy; the theme of the 2008 World Congress of Philosophy: "Rethinking Philosophy in a Global Age."

The more integral human horizon now situates the objective issues of power and profit in a context of human intentionality or subjectivity. This calls most urgently upon philosophy to develop new ways of thinking and interpreting which can enable people to engage more consciously and freely, more responsibly and broadly, these new dimensions of life emergent as the interchange of cultures and civilizations of a global age. Done well this can be an historic step ahead for humanity; done poorly it can produce a new round of human conflict and misery.

With this new interior insight into the working of human consciousness it is as if a whole new world opens before us as we become self aware of the free inclinations and decisions by which we open our own horizons and the preferences and commitments by which we shape the terrain of our life and mobilize its forces in its relations and engagements.

Values

The drama of free self-determination, and hence the development of persons and of civil society, is most fundamentally a matter of being as *affirmation* or a definitive *stance against non-being* as seen above in the work of Parmenides, the first Greek metaphysician. This is identically the relation to the good in search of which we live, survive and thrive. The good is manifest in experience as the object of desire, namely, as that which is sought when absent.¹² Basically, it is what completes life; it is the "per-fect", understood in its etymological sense as that which is completed or realized through and through. Hence, once achieved, it is no longer desired or sought, but enjoyed.

This is reflected progressively in the manner in which each level of reality, even a stone, retains the being or reality it has, and resists reduction to non-being or nothing. The most that we can do is to change or transform a thing into something else; we cannot annihilate it. Similarly, a plant or tree, given the right conditions, grows to full stature and fruition. Finally, an animal protects its life -- fiercely, if necessary -- and seeks out the food needed for its strength. This, in turn, as capable of contributing to an animal's sustenance and perfection, is for the animal an auxiliary good or means.

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

The moral good is a more narrow field, for it concerns only one's free and responsible actions. This has the objective reality of the ontological good noted above, for it concerns real actions which stand in distinctive relation to one's own perfection and to that of others - and, indeed, to the physical universe and to God as well. Hence, many possible patterns

of actions could be objectively right because they promote the good of those involved, while others, precisely as inconsistent with the real good of persons or things, are objectively disordered or mis-ordered. This constitutes the objective basis for what is ethically good or bad.

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

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

The term 'value' here is of special note. It was derived from the economic sphere where it meant the amount of a commodity sufficient to attain a certain worth. This is reflected also in the term 'axiology' whose root means "weighing as much" or "worth as much." It requires an objective content -- the good must truly "weigh in" and make a real difference; but the term 'value' expresses this good especially as related to wills which actually acknowledge it as a good and as desirable.¹³ Thus, different individuals or groups of persons and at different periods have distinct sets of values. A people or community is sensitive to, and prizes, a distinct set of goods or, more likely, it establishes a distinctive ranking in the degree to which it prizes various goods. By so doing, it delineates among limitless objective goods a certain pattern of values which in a more stable fashion mirrors the corporate free choices of that people.

This constitutes the basic topology of a culture; as repeatedly reaffirmed through time, it builds a tradition or heritage about which we shall speak below. It constitutes, as well, the prime pattern and gradation of goods or values which persons experience from their earliest years and in terms of which they interpret their developing relations. Young persons peer out at the world through lenses formed, as it were, by their family and

culture and configured according to the pattern of choices made by that community throughout its history - often in its most trying circumstances. Like a pair of glasses, values do not create the object; but focus attention upon certain goods rather than upon others. This becomes the basic orienting factor for the affective and emotional life described by the Scotts, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, as the heart of civil society. In time, it encourages and reinforces certain patterns of action which, in turn, reinforce the pattern of values.

Through this process a group constitutes its concerns in terms of which it struggles to advance, or at least to endure, mourn its failures, and celebrate its successes. This is a person's or people's world of hopes and fears in terms of which, as Plato wrote in the *Laches*, their lives have moral meaning.¹⁴ It varies according to the many concerns and the groups which coalesce around them. As these are interlocking and interdependent, a pattern of social goals and concerns develop which guides action. In turn, corresponding capacities for action or virtues are developed.

Indeed, Aristotle takes this up at the very beginning of his ethics. In order to make sense of the practical dimension of our life it is necessary to identify the good or value toward which one directs one's life or which one finds satisfying. This he terms happiness and then proceeds systematically to see which goal can be truly satisfying. His test is not passed by physical goods or honors, but by that which corresponds to, and fulfills, our highest capacity, that is, contemplation of the highest being or divine life.¹⁵

Virtues

Martin Heidegger describes a process by which the self emerges as a person in the field of moral action. It consists in transcending oneself or breaking beyond mere self-concern and projecting outward as a being whose very nature is to share with others for whom one cares and about whom one is concerned. In this process, one identifies new purposes or goals for the sake of which action is to be undertaken. In relation to these goals, certain combinations of possibilities, with their natures and norms, take on particular importance and begin thereby to enter into the makeup of one's world of meaning.¹⁶ Freedom then becomes more than mere

spontaneity, more than choice, and more even than self-determination in the sense of determining oneself to act as described above. It shapes -- the phenomenologist would say even that it constitutes -- one's world as the ambit of human decisions and dynamic action. This is the making of the complex social ordering of social groups which constitutes civil society.

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

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

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

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

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

Cultural Tradition

Together, these values and virtues of a people set the pattern of social life through which freedom is developed and exercised. This is called a "culture". On the one hand, the term is derived from the Latin word for tilling or cultivating the land. Cicero and other Latin authors used it for the cultivation of the soul or mind (*cultura animi*), for just as good land, when left without cultivation, will produce only disordered vegetation of little value, so the human spirit will not achieve its proper results unless trained or educated.¹⁷ This sense of culture corresponds most closely to the Greek term for education (*paideia*) as the development of character, taste and judgment, and to the German term "formation" (*Bildung*).¹⁸

Here, the focus is upon the creative capacity of the spirit of a people and their ability to work as artists, not only in the restricted sense of producing purely aesthetic objects, but in the more involved sense of shaping all dimensions of life, material and spiritual, economic and political toward fulfillment. The result is a whole life, characterized by unity and

truth, goodness and beauty, and, thereby, sharing deeply in meaning and value. The capacity for this cannot be taught, although it may be enhanced by education; more recent phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiries suggest that, at its base, culture is a renewal, a reliving of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation.¹⁹ This leads us beyond self and other, beyond identity and diversity, in order to comprehend both.

On the other hand, "culture" can be traced to the term *civis* (citizen, civil society and civilization).²⁰ This reflects the need for a person to belong to a social group or community in order for the human spirit to produce its proper results. By bringing to the person the resources of the tradition, the *tradita* or past wisdom produced by the human spirit, the community facilitates comprehension. By enriching the mind with examples of values which have been identified in the past, it teaches and inspires one to produce something analogous. For G.F. Klemm, this more objective sense of culture is composite in character.²¹ E.B. Tyler defined this classically for the social sciences as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits required by man as a member of society."²²

In contrast, Clifford Geertz focused on the meaning of all this for a people and on how a people's intentional action went about shaping its world. Thus to an experimental science in search of laws he contrasts the analysis of culture as an interpretative science in search of meaning.²³ What is sought is the import of artifacts and actions, that is, whether "it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said."²⁴ This requires attention to "the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs."²⁵ In this light, Geertz defines culture rather as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of intended conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."²⁶

Each particular complex whole or culture is specific to a particular people; a person who shares in this is a *civis* or citizen and belongs to a civilization. For the more restricted Greek world in which this term was developed, others (aliens) were those who did not speak the Greek tongue; they were "barbaroi", for their speech sounded like mere babel. Though at first this meant simply non-Greek, its negative manner of expression

easily lent itself to, perhaps reflected, and certainly favored, a negative axiological connotation, which soon became the primary meaning of the word 'barbarian'. By reverse implication, it attached to the term 'civilization' an exclusivist connotation, such that the cultural identity of peoples began to imply not only the pattern of gracious symbols by which one encounters and engages in shared life projects with other persons and peoples, but cultural alienation between peoples. Today, as communication increases and more widely differentiated peoples enter into ever greater interaction and mutual dependence, we reap a bitter harvest of this negative connotation. The development of a less exclusivist sense of culture and civilization must be a priority task.

The development of values and virtues and their integration as a culture of any depth or richness takes time, and hence depends upon the experience and creativity of many generations. The culture which is handed on, or *tradita*, comes to be called a cultural tradition; as such it reflects the cumulative achievement of a people in discovering, mirroring and transmitting the deepest meanings of life. This is tradition in its synchronic sense as a body of wisdom.

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

The Genesis of Tradition in Community

Because tradition has sometimes been interpreted as a threat to the personal and social freedom essential to a democracy, it is important to note that a cultural tradition is generated by the free and responsible life of the members of a concerned community or civil society and enables succeeding generations to realize their life with freedom and creativity.

Autogenesis is no more characteristic of the birth of knowledge than it is of persons. One's consciousness emerges, not with self, but in relation to others. In the womb, the first awareness is that of the heart beat of one's mother. Upon birth, one enters a family in whose familiar relations one is at peace and able to grow. It is from one's family and in one's earliest weeks and months that one does or does not develop the basic attitudes of trust and confidence which undergird or undermine one's capacities for subsequent social relations. There one encounters care and concern for others independently of what they do for us and acquires the language and symbol system in terms of which to conceptualize, communicate and understand.²⁷ Just as a person is born into a family on which he or she depends absolutely for life, sustenance, protection and promotion, so one's understanding develops in community. As persons we emerge by birth into a family and neighborhood from which we learn and in harmony with which we thrive.

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

If it were merely a matter of community, however, all might be limited to the present, with no place for tradition as that which is "passed on" from one generation to the next. In fact, the process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition in relation to a people's evolving sense of human dignity and purpose, constitutes a type of learning and testing laboratory for successive generations. In this laboratory of history, the strengths of various insights and behavior patterns can be identified and reinforced, while deficiencies are progressively corrected or eliminated. Horizontally, we learn from experience what promotes and what destroys life and, accordingly, make pragmatic adjustments.

But even this language remains too abstract, too limited to method or technique, too uni-dimensional. While tradition can be described in

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

This points us beyond the horizontal plane of the various ages of history and directs our attention vertically to its ground, and hence, to the bases of the values which humankind in its varied circumstances seeks to realize. It is here that one searches for the absolute ground of meaning and value of which Iqbal wrote. Without that all is ultimately relative to only an interlocking network of consumption, then of dissatisfaction and finally of anomie and ennui.²⁸

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

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

and cultivated.

Hence, it is not because of personal inertia on our part, or arbitrary will on the part of our forbears, that our culture provides a model and exemplar. On the contrary, the importance of tradition derives from both the cooperative character of the learning whereby wisdom is drawn from experience, and the cumulative free acts of commitment which have cultivated our culture and civil society.²⁹

Ultimately, tradition bridges from ancient Greek philosophy to civil society today. It bears the divine gifts of life, meaning and love, uncovered in the process of facing the challenges of civil life through the ages. It provides both the way back to their origin in the arch? as the personal, free and responsible exercise of existence and even of its divine source, and the way forward to their divine goal, the way, that is, to their *Alpha* and their *Omega*.

RELIGION

In one sense we have been speaking in horizons that are increasingly restricted to the human: from objective dimensions which in modern terms come to be restricted to sciences totally constructed by, and at the disposition of, humankind, to subjective dimensions which could become reduplicatively self referential in terms of human whims and desires.

Yet another path is also opened by human subjectivity and it is precisely one which leads to the other term of our search, namely, religion. Mohamed Iqbal points to this in his *Reconstruction of the Sciences of Religion* when he distinguishes between religion and the philosophy of his day when awareness of subjectivity was only beginning to emerge. He saw philosophy as more objective, abstract and coldly rational, whereas religion located in the realm of human subjectivity is alive and relational.

The aspiration of religion soars higher than that of philosophy. Philosophy is an intellectual view of things; and as such, does not care to go beyond a concept which can reduce all the rich variety of experience to a system. It sees reality from a distance as it were. Religion seeks a closer contact with Reality. The one is theory; the other is living experience, association, intimacy. In order to achieve this intimacy thought must rise

higher than itself, and find its fulfillment in an attitude of mind which religion describes as prayer - one of the last words on the lips of the Prophet of Islam.³⁰

Metaphysics is displaced by psychology, and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the ultimate reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.³¹

This does not remove it from rationality, but enables rationality to expand to al-Ghazali's savoring of being and truth.

Similarly Parmenides' highly rational exercise of abstract reasoning identified the basis of being as one, eternal and unchanging. For Aristotle at the culmination of his metaphysics this was life divine, contemplation on contemplation itself (*noesis noesios*). Yet from so exalted a position it was unable to know our world of multiple beings with their tragedies and triumphs.

All this is reversed when we review these issues with the new sensibility to subjectivity and in ways that bring us directly to culture. For if as we have seen cultures are most radically the values and virtues of a people then we must ask what is the basis of the valuing by a people what is not only their interests or concern but what is their ultimate concern in terms of which all has meaning.

This appears in the thought of Paul Tillich in both the thesis and the antithesis of his dialectic. In the former he speaks of God not only as absolute being but phenomenologically as "ultimate concern". He notes that we are never indifferent to things, merely recording the situation. Rather, we judge the situation and react accordingly as it reflects or deviates from what it should be. This fact makes manifest essence or logos in its normative sense. It is the way things should be, the norm of their perfection. Our response to essence is the heart of our efforts to protect and promote life; it is in this that we are basically and passionately engaged. Hence, by looking into our heart and identifying basic interests and concerns - our ultimate concern - we discover the most basic reality at this stage of the dialectic.

In these terms, Tillich expresses the positive side of the dialectical relationship of the essences of finite beings to the divine. He shows how these essences can contain, without exhausting, the power of being, for God remains this power. As exclusively affirmative or positive, these might be said to express only the first elements of creation. They remain, as it were, in a state of dreaming innocence within the divine life from which they must awaken to actualize and realize themselves.³² Creation is fulfilled in the self-realization by which limited beings leave the ground of being to "stand upon" it. Whatever is to be said of the negative or antithetic phase of the dialectic about this moment of separation, the element of essence is never completely lost, for "if it were lost, mind as well as reality would have been destroyed in the very moment of their coming into existence."³³ It is the retention of this positive element of essence that provides the radical foundation for participation by limited beings in the divine and their capacity for pointing to the infinite power of being and depth of reason. As mentioned above, such participation in the divine being and some awareness thereof is an absolute prerequisite for any religion.

After the tragic stage of the antithesis, Tillich returns to the ultimate concern as experienced in true ecstasy. One receives ultimate power by the presence of the ultimate which breaks through the contradictions of existence where and when it will. It is God who determines the circumstances and the degree in which he will be participated. The effect of this work and its sign is love, for, when the contradictions between beings in the state of existence are overcome so that they are no longer the ultimate horizon, then reunion and social healing, cooperation and creativity become possible.

The Hindu thought of the *Bhagavad Gita* goes deeper than the conflicting egos or selves to appreciate a unity, an absolute Self, at the root of all and of which each is a reflection. Paul Tillich calls the cognitive aspect of ecstasy - *inspiration*. In what concerns the divine, he replaces the word knowledge by awareness, (for it is not concerned with new objects, which would invade reason with a strange body of knowledge that could not be assimilated, and, hence, would destroy its rational structure). Rather, that which is opened to man is a new dimension of being, participated in by all, while still retaining its interior transcendence.

It matters little that the contemporary situation of skepticism and meaninglessness has removed all possibility of content for this act. What is important is that we have been grasped by that which answers the ultimate question of our very being, our unconditional and ultimate concern. This indeed, is Tillich's phenomenological description of God. "Only certain is the ultimacy as ultimacy."³⁴ The ultimate concern provides the place at which the faith by which there is belief (*fides qua creditur*) and the faith that is believed (*fides quae creditur*) are identified.

It is here that the difference between subject and object disappears. The source of our faith is present as both subject and object in a way that is beyond both of them. The absence of this dichotomy is the reason why Tillich refuses to speak of knowledge and uses the term 'awareness'. He compares it to the mystic's notion of the knowledge God has of Himself, the truth itself of St. Augustine.³⁵ It is absolutely certain, but the identity of subject and object means that it is also absolutely personal. Consequently, this experience of the ultimate cannot be directly received from others;³⁶ revelation is something which we ourselves must live.

Ultimate Concern

In this experience, it is necessary to distinguish the point of immediate awareness from its breadth of content. The point of awareness is expressed in what Tillich refers to as the ontological principle: "Man is immediately aware of something unconditional which is the prius of the interaction and separation of both subject and object, both theoretically and practically."³⁷ He has no doubt about the certainty of this point, although non-symbolically he can say only that this is being itself. However, in revelation he has experienced not only its reality but its relation to him.³⁸ He expresses the combination of these in the metaphorical terms of ground and abyss of being, of the power of being, and of ultimate and unconditional concern.

Generally, this point is experienced in a special situation and in a special form; the ultimate concern is made concrete in some one thing. It may, for instance, be the nation, a god or the God of the Bible. This concrete content of our act of belief differs from ultimacy, which as ultimacy is not immediately evident. Since this concrete content remains within

the subject-object dichotomy, its acceptance as ultimate requires an act of courage and venturing faith. The certainty we have about the breadth of concrete content is then only conditional.³⁹ Should time reveal this content to be finite, our faith will still have been an authentic contact with the unconditional itself, only the concrete expression will have been deficient.⁴⁰ Here it is important to keep in mind Buber's caution with regard to the thought of Max Scheler. Is it enough to change the object of intention; is indeed the act of intention the same even if the object is different? Or is this intention essentially relational; an I-thou rather than an I-it relationship, whose quality is not effected by its object?

Tillich sees two correlated elements in one's act of faith. One is that of certainty concerning one's own being as related to something ultimate and unconditional. The other is that of risk, of surrendering to a concern which is not really ultimate and may be destructive if taken as if it were. The risk arises necessarily in the state of existence where both reason and objects are not only finite, but separated from their ground. This places an element of doubt in faith which is neither of the methodological variety found in the scientist, nor of the transitory type often had by the skeptic. Rather, the doubt of faith is existential, an awareness of the lasting element of insecurity. Nevertheless, this doubt can be accepted and overcome in spite of itself by an act of courage which affirms the reality of God. Faith remains the one state of ultimate concern, but, as such, it subsumes certainty concerning both the unconditional and existential doubt.⁴¹

Can a system with such uncertainty concerning concrete realities still be called a realism? Tillich believes that it can, but only if it is specified as a belief-full or self-transcending realism. In this, the really real - the ground and power of everything real - is grasped in and through a concrete historical situation. Hence, the value of the present moment which has become transparent for its ground is, paradoxically, both all and nothing. In itself, it is not infinite and "the more it is seen in the light of the ultimate power, the more it appears as questionable and void of lasting significance."⁴³ The appearance of self-subsistence gradually melts away. But, by this very fact, the ground and power of the present reality becomes evident. The concrete situation becomes *theonomous* and the infinite depth and eternal significance of the present is revealed in an *ecstatic* experience.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of this as something other-worldly, strange or uncomfortable. It is *ec-static* in the sense of going beyond the usual surface observations and calculations of our initial impressions and scientific calculations, but what it reveals is the profundity of our unity with colleagues, neighbors and, indeed, with all humankind. Rather, then, than generating a sense of estrangement, its sign is the way in which it enables one to see others as friends and to live comfortably with them. In these global times as ethnic and cultural differences emerge, along with the freedom of each people to be themselves, this work of the Spirit which is characteristic of Tillich's dialectic comes to be seen in its radical importance for social life.

CONCLUSION: DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGION AND CULTURE

We have now come to the point of relationship between religion and culture and precisely in ecstasy or the point of Ghazali and Iqbal which was omitted by James. Religion then is not another realm of human experience alongside others, but rather the source from which we come, the foundation on which we have, and the goal which we seek through all our values and virtues.

Some would want to distinguish between beliefs which they would see as related to earlier levels of experience and expressed in the various theologies, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, faith which is the deeper level of experience the ultimate concern which is literally inexpressible or unutterable. It is the former which specifies and distinguishes the multiple cultures and the latter in which all human life - indeed all reality whatsoever - grounded.

Such a distinction is not without merit in that it takes account of the diversity and multiplicity of cultures and religions. Unfortunately, what we distinguish we too often separate and then proceed to conceive one without the other. As a result the concrete or specific beliefs of a people lose their depth of meaning and become only cultural artifacts similar to their dances or songs. In this case they lose their religious significance. These are "religious" as seen by the sociologist or anthropologist.

Hence, if we can distinguish beliefs from faith we must not separate the two, but understand rather that beliefs are the ways in which faith is lived in time and place. In this relationship it is faith which holds the primary and gives to beliefs their sacred and salvific character.

In this light then the term dogma must be rethought. In the modern rationalist context anything based on a faith that went beyond reason was rejected as beyond the realm of assured truth, and hence as blind, arbitrary and willful. In post modern terms with their implicit critique of rationalism it is rather rationalism itself which has come to be seen as willful, blind and arbitrary.

What then is the proper relation between the one faith and the multiple "belief systems." Properly controlled insight can be garnered from the extensive work done on the system of analogy in the last Part of his work *Participation et Causalité* which Cornelio Fabro rightly termed the language of participation. This was developed by Plato to express the way in which the many reflected (he used the term "mimesis" or "imaged") the one, that is, the way the many good realities shared in and expressed the absolute idea of the good. Each in itself as well as each of its beliefs is sacred and salvific.

As elaborated over time the first thing to be said here is that this differs from univocity which is obtained by abstracting from or omitting that which is distinctive, leaving only an identical sameness in nature. Abstraction is realized only in and by the mind, but it misses the quintessentially unique character of cultures as products of freedom and hence as intensively unique.

Analogy of proportionality differs from this in that each is a realization of being according to its own nature or essence:

the existence of A	::	the existence of B
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the essence of A		the essence of B

In the early 1930s Penido, studying this in the context of the emerging totalitarianism, was concerned with the defense of the uniqueness of the individual before the all powerful state. For him analogy cannot be a compromise, a halfway mark between univocity and equivocity and an

attenuation of both. Rather it is necessary to appreciate that analogy is itself a form of equivocity for there is nothing at all in one being which is also in the other, neither its existence nor its essence. Any two beings are each fully unique and hence different or equivocous. But in an analogy of proper proportionality they are differentiated from within, and in this very differentiation lies a certain degree of similarity.

This is even more true of the relation between two cultures. As works of creative human freedom they are unique. As ongoing processes of a cultural tradition, being continually adapted and passed on through time, they are in a continually process of differentiation from within. Yet there is a certain similarity which consists in each culture being a realization of its own nature from within. The similarity lies in the freedom by which a person, people or culture shapes its identity, passes this on, and lives this at each point in time.

Precisely then as a matter of creative freedom we come to the paradoxical conclusion that the similarity between cultures lie in the very reality by which they constitute themselves as differentiated and unique. This similarity consists not in their abandoning any part of themselves in negotiation with others, or in the attenuation of the devotion with which their identity is pursued, but rather in their unique committed pursuit in their own terms of the goodness of being. This is the very reality of their identity or culture.

For our purposes I would like to suggest that this means not only that the many cultures religions and beliefs receive a truly sacred character from the faith that inspires them, but that each expresses their faith in the absolute or the absolute itself in a unique and wonderful manner. If this be so then the insight of Nicholas of Cusa takes on new importance for our global times. For in meeting other cultures founded in their religions I encounter not only something holy, like my own religion, but a manifestation of the divine that my own religion (shaped as it has been by its own distinctive beliefs) has not been able to express. Religions are sisters which complement each other. Each needs, and is needed by, the others as all tend toward the one absolute and absolutely loving source and goal of all.

ENDNOTES

¹ G.F. McLean, *Ways to God* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1999), ch. II, pp. 75-105.

² *Ibid.*, ch. III, pp. 107-132.

³ G.F. McLean and P. Aspell, *Readings in Ancient Western Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hal, 1971), pp. 39-44; G.F. McLean, *Ways to God* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1999), pp. 171-175.

⁴ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by C.K. Ogden (London: Methuen, 1981), completed in 1918, published in 1921.

⁵ *Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) dictated in 1934-1935.

⁶ *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), begun in 1936, published in 1953.

⁷ *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

⁸ Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. by W. Dych (Montreal: Palm, 1968).

⁹ "The Church in the Modern World" (Gaudium et spes) in the Documents of Vatican II. ed. W. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), pp. 199-309.

¹⁰ H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2000). (Original German: *Warheit und methode*. Tubingen: Mohr, 1960.)

¹¹ G.F. McLean, "Philosophy and Civil Society: Its Nature, Its Past and Its Future," in *Civil Society and Social Reconstruction*, ed. G.F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001), pp. 7-85.

¹² Aquinas, *On Truth*, q.1.

¹³ Ivor Leclerc, "The Metaphysics of the Good," *Review of Metaphysics*, 35 (1981), 3-5.

¹⁴ *Laches*, 198-201.

¹⁵ *Metaphysics XII*, 7. Gerald F. Stanley, "Contemplation as Fulfillment of the Human Person," in *Personalist Ethics and Human Subjectivity*, vol. II of *Ethics at the Crossroads*, George F. McLean, ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1996), pp. 365-420.

¹⁶ J.L. Mehta, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), pp. 90-91.

¹⁷ V. Mathieu, "Cultura" in *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), II, 207-210; and Raymond Williams, "Culture and Civilization," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), II, 273-276, and *Culture and Society* (London: 1958).

¹⁸ Tonnelat, "Kultur" in *Civilisation, le mot et l'idée* (Paris: Centre International de Synthèse), II.

¹⁹ V. Mathieu, "Cultura" in *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), II, 207-210; and Raymond Williams, "Culture and Civilization", *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), II, 273-276, and *Culture and Society* (London, 1958).

²⁰ V. Mathieu, "Civiltà," *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, I, 1437-1439.

²¹ G.F. Klemm, *Allgemein Culturgeschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig, 1843-1852).

²² E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London, 1871), VII, p. 7.

²³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁷ John Caputo, "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," in George F. McLean, Frederick Ellrod, eds., *Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), pp. 199-222.

²⁸ Gadamer, pp. 277-285.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Gadamer emphasized knowledge as the basis of tradition in contrast to those who would see it pejoratively as the result of arbitrary will. It is important to add to knowledge the free acts which, e.g., give birth to a nation and shape the attitudes and values of successive generations. As an example one might cite the continuing impact had by the Magna Carta through the Declaration of Independence upon life in North America, or of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in the national life of so many countries.

³⁰ Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religions*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy and Institute of Islamic Culture, 1984), p. 143.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

³² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 238, 255.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 83; Cf. "A Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of Incarnation," *Church Quarterly Review*, CXLVII (1949), 141.

³⁴ *Dynamics of Faith*, Vol. X of *World Perspectives*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

³⁶ "The Problem of Theological Method," *Journal of Religion*, XXVII (1947), 22-23.

³⁷ "The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, I (1946), 10.

³⁸ *Systematic Theology*, I, p. 109.

³⁹ "The Problem of the Theological Method," *loc. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁰ *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 18.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *The Protestant Era*, trans. J.L. Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 18.

⁴³ *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain, Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961).