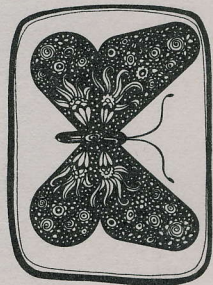


# CHRYSALIS

an interdisciplinary journal

Drew University  
Volume 3



CHRYSALIS  
An Interdisciplinary Journal

Volume 3  
1978-1979

Graduate Students' Association  
Drew University  
Madison, New Jersey

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## TOWARD A NEW FOUNDATION FOR PLURALISM IN RELIGION

Robert S. Corrington

### Introduction to the Problem: Pluralism and Transcendent Unity

When one examines the philosophical study of religion, one problem keeps emerging to perplex inquiry. This is the unresolved problem of pluralism in both its epistemological and ontological forms. By the phrase "religious pluralism" is meant the existence of a number of seemingly different conceptions of the nature of the world and the divine. Philosophy of Religion takes due note of this pluralism and puts forth any number of 'solutions' to the problem. Frequently, the philosopher seeks some "esoteric" unity hidden deep within each historical expression of the divine. This conceptual maneuver soon gives rise to a persistent dualism between the 'true essence' of a religion and its secondary 'manifestation.' It is assumed that the secondary manifestations are in some sense arbitrary and interchangeable. Their status is that of a cipher or symbol of something prior, both ontologically and epistemologically. This prior reality is to be found at the base of every religion and is found by a special act of seeing and of thinking. Hence the esotericist points out to the skeptics that their way of seeing is deficient or limited. With the right training the skeptics could, in principle, be taught to see in the proper way. When this perception is accomplished, the skeptics can join the small band of those who have overcome the illusions of the merely exoteric.

The esoteric dimension is seen as a unity beyond multiplicity. It is understood to be eternal and devoid of finite traits or discriminanda. All religions point toward this transcendent unity and find their source within it. Huston Smith, in describing the esoteric monism of Frithjof Schuon, states,

For Schuon existence is graded, and with it cognition as well. Metaphysically, in God at the apex, religions . . . converge; below they differ. The epistemological concomitant of this metaphysical fact is that religious discernment, too, unites at its apex while dividing below it. . . . What appears to it is Unity: absolute, categorical, undifferentiated Unity. Anthropologically this Unity precludes final distinction between human and divine, epistemologically between knower and known.<sup>1</sup>

In the esoteric domain all diremptions are sublated. Nothing is distinguished and nothing stands in opposition. The exoteric domain is reduced to a secondary status as that which points toward esoteric unity. A metaphor used by Schuon is that of colorless light,

for it goes without saying that the radiation of grace within esoterism extends, by reason of the latter's very universality, through all the domains of the traditional civilization and is not halted by any formal limit, just as light, colorless in itself, is not halted by the color of a transparent body.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the esoteric domain is 'colorless' and devoid of traits. Each tradition contains this domain deep within itself. When it is found, the various forms and shapes of religion cease to have primary importance. Religious dogma are relegated to the exoteric and contingent. Through this disclosure of the esoteric domain pluralism is overcome. Only unity remains.

What can be accomplished by learning of the esoteric realm? The initial result can be the lessening of the tensions between the various religious dogma. The claims, or more properly, truth claims, become relegated to the realm of the exoteric, yet they do not cease to be claims. Rather, they become claims in a different way. In their new role they are pointers and preservers of the prior realm of the esoteric. One can restate this point by saying that the claims now carry less ontological freight. And since they carry less freight, their collision has less inertial impact. What happens to the canons of formal logic is less clear. In this scheme logically incompatible claims can, it seems, exist side by side with little or no tension between them. Logical antinomies do not, then, pose a threat to each other. This situation presents a curious state of affairs. It becomes even more curious when the holder of this conception of religious unity urges the maintenance of the various conflicting claims. This realization impels a second result of the emergence of the esoteric realm in philosophy, namely, the relaxation of the strictures of formal logic. Thus we have a state of affairs in which truth claims are made but, at the same time, maintain their independence from the question of truth. Supposedly, to worry over their truth is to be deluded about their nature.

The problem rests with the attempt to get religious claims to be something they are not. What the claims attempt to do is to make specific assertions about the nature of the divine. They seem to convey generic breadth and have conceptual depth. Thus statements such as "God intervenes in the events of History" seem either true or false (leaving aside the important question of its cognitive status). As such the assertion comes into direct conflict with a statement such as "God does not, and has not, and will not, intervene in the events of history." To call these statements merely exoteric engenders confusion. For certainly they are foundational (i.e., primitive) claims. They achieve their foundational status by being non-derivative and generic. Thus the former claim can be stated, "Given any state of affairs that can be called a historical event, it is the case that God could interfere with that state of affairs in a way that would make a difference to that state of affairs." By translating the above statement into the more precise assertion we can see clearly that it is exhaustive in scope. This being the case, it becomes difficult even to imagine what its exoteric limitations would be. To call such a dogmatic assertion merely exoteric is to undermine seriously the cognitive force of language. But, even more damaging, it also undermines the ontological weight of the divine. This ironic conclusion is far from that intended by the believer in transcendent unity. Yet, this conclusion arises from the effort to limit the logical power of dogmatic claims. For if God is such a being that he does and does not enter into history, it becomes unclear just what prevalence he may have. On one side of the antinomy he is effective in history and on the other he is not evident. The believer in transcendent unity wants it both ways. Ostensibly, the divine collapses under the tension of the antinomy.

This conclusion can paralyze the Philosophy of Religion and lead to an impasse. There are two options. We can deny as valid the question of religious pluralism, or we can seek an alternative which preserves it in a new way. This essay attempts the latter. And while the above analysis is not conclusive, it does show the defects in the notion of a transcendent unity. What then is left to us?

We seem to be left with pluralism in religion. Yet this situation need not alarm. In fact, it frees us to raise even sharper approaches to this problem. And while we do not arrive at a 'solution,' we engage in fundamental reflections which should aid us in rethinking pluralism.

This essay consists of two main divisions. In the first an adequate conceptual model for the description of religious structures is exhibited. In the latter a recommendation as to how religions can be brought into fruitful interaction is described. In the second division, namely, "The Given: Beyond Empiricism," the esoteric/exoteric distinction is made from a phenomenological perspective. The third division, "The Pragmatic A Priori and Religious Experience," describes the cognitive in religion from the standpoint of the specific categorical claims of three religions. In the fourth division, "Interpretation and Sign: the Concrete Infinite," Royce's notion of interpretation as the link between the given and the pragmatic a priori is employed. Out of this consideration emerges the notion of the open-ended quality of interpretation as an infinity of concrete signs. In the fifth division, "The Community of Ironic Play and Passing Over," recommendations are made as to the type of communal structure that can emerge from the analysis of interpretation. It is hoped that John Dunne's program of "passing over" will find its fulfillment in the "community of ironic play." The sixth and final division, "Conclusion: Communicative Pluralism," exhibits the structure of open-ended plural community. Jasper's key notion of truth as communication illuminates this section. Just perhaps, the pluralistic understanding of religion can combine generic breadth with interpretive justice. If this hope is fulfilled, then the needed task of curative reconstruction can begin in the Philosophy of Religion.

#### The Given: Beyond Empiricism

The "given," as the title indicates, is not to be found within the pervue of orthodox empiricism. Unfortunately, many conceptual studies in the Philosophy of Religion depend upon an understanding of experience which antedates the advances made by both the idealists and the phenomenologists. By relying on a restricted (and abstract) analysis of experience and its objects, philosophy has preempted religious experience. This exclusion of the very thing that is sought is surely ironic. Our program can only advance if we rethink the foundations of our epistemology.

Orthodox empiricism (and here we think of Hume, Russell, and the Vienna Circle) maintains that experience has as its object discrete *sensa*. These *sensa* consist of bare particulars which find themselves related through external and logical laws of association. *Sensa* are ultimate perceptual simples in which generic predicates adhere. All combinations of sense particulars are merely external and contingent. By the power of associational habits these sense data bind together to generate the world structure. Only this constant operation of habitual conjunctions serves to hold the world of experience together. Were these habitual operations to fail, the world of experience would fall apart into a buzzing phenomenal chaos.

Any attempt to talk about something outside the sum total of sense data, in effect, constitutes a categorical leap. On the empiricist model, such a leap is held to be unwarranted. This leap is a leap into a conceptual void. Individuals undergoing religious experiences are said to be making what are here termed "assumptions" about that unknown "X" which is not itself a sense data particular. Their confusion lies in the belief that this "X" is as real as concrete sense particulars. For the empiricist anything not itself a sense data is by definition derivative and ontologically unsubstantial. The divine can never be a given.

Hidden within the empiricist epistemology is a constrictive paradigm which imposes a narrow frame on the rich fabric of experience. This frame functions imperialistically to lock out any emergent given which is not a bare sense particular. Empiricism assumes, in its quest for 'purity,' that the exclusion of all but sense data prevents the importation of pseudo-givens. By excluding all pseudo-givens, empiricism clears the field of the ontologically 'less real.' With the routing of the 'less real' emerges the stable frame of space/time particulars and their relations. In this way empiricism conquers all comers. Yet what does the 'conquest' mean? In what way are the various 'pseudo-givens' purged?

An answer to these questions lies in the rethinking of the nature of the given. We start with a definition: the given is that which gives itself. The given shows itself to experience. Concerning this Heidegger states:

Thus phainomenon means what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest... Thus the meaning of the expression "phenomenon" is established as what shows itself in itself, what is manifest. The phainomena, "phenomena," are thus the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light.<sup>3</sup>

By speaking of the given in this way, phenomenology avoids limiting phenomena to a specific type. Various givens can show themselves to consciousness. These givens can be space/time particulars, and they can be that which is not a space/time particular. In either case, the given emerges from the matrix of the hidden. This emergence is its coming-to-pass as an object of consciousness. Whatever the given may be in a stated instance, its act of coming into the light is what unites it with all other givens. Thus, while the divine will be given in a different way than the non-divine, its act of emerging unites it to other emergent givens. Where hiddenness was, now abides the given. And this given is not 'arrived at' by a categorical leap. It abides. The divine emerges in a way which suits its nature. To ask it to emerge as do space/time particulars is to impose closure on the fabric of experience. The empiricist attempt to reduce all givens to one type results in the closure of the divine. With the freeing of the given from the paradigm of discrete *sensa* comes the full, if often quiet, emergence of the epiphany of the holy. When the divine comes-to-pass for finite consciousness, the field of experience is recaptured from empiricist frames. With this recapturing comes the homecoming of the divine in historical space.

This approach to religious experience has the full warrant of those who maintain the esoteric/exoteric distinction. They claim that when the true given is reached we see its esoteric unity. Yet on the exoteric 'level' the given can emerge in numerous shapes and forms. These forms can be quite distinct, even incompatible. Yet showing itself through the exoterically given

is the unified esoteric. The correct application of phenomenological method in the Philosophy of Religion consists in finding this given amid the confusion of less important givens. Thus the esoteric rejects the limited empiricist model by maintaining the givenness of the divine. Yet the esoteric also maintains that the esoteric dimension is given in only one way. He can make this claim only by distinguishing between form and content. The content is that which remains the same throughout the various formal appearances. Thus content is given. But so too is form. They emerge together. Yet how, then, can they be distinguished? How do we know when we have gone 'beyond' the mere form? What is it that enables us to know when we no longer have form? And how can we even talk of formless content?

As Hegel has repeatedly shown, the distinction between form and content remains abstract and empty. The given, no matter what form it takes, still has "whatness" in some primary sense. This "whatness" (Quidditas) embraces both form and content. Pure form, whatever it could be, has no "whatness" just as pure content never emerges in a formless way. Hence, the distinction between form and content does no ontological work. Further, it fails to unveil the given as that which is formed content.

The esoteric is a class of experience that arrives at the formless given. Within the confines of this paradigm one class of experiences takes priority. This class is that of mystical experiences. In mystical experiences the forms of finitude are left behind. Hence the merely exoteric is transcended in the drive toward esoteric homecoming. The mystic becomes one with pure content. The exoteric kingdom is that of form, whereas, the esoteric is that of pure content, a content which is ontologically neutral. For the esoteric, all mystics find this neutral pure content beyond the play of exoteric forms. The religious traditions in which mystics find themselves serve merely as pointers toward the esoteric primary reality. Each tradition exists to sublimate itself into pure content. For the mystic the forms of the tradition are known to be culture specific. At this point philosophers not in agreement with the esoteric/exoteric model can still agree. Cultural specificity is in no sense a threat to religious experience. On the 'lower' (exoteric) levels there is a plurality of formal structures, while on the 'highest,' relativity is overcome. As Schuon states:

The exoteric viewpoint is, in fact, doomed to end by negating itself once it is no longer vivified by the presence within it of the esoterism of which it is both the outward radiation and the veil.<sup>4</sup>

This idea is largely correct, but only within the confines of the distinction. The so-called esoteric can light up the static forms of tradition. Jaspers writes similarly, in his analysis, on the role of the ciphers of transcendence--whether these ciphers be aesthetic objects, religious traditions, or formal metaphysical constructions. Trouble emerges when the claim is made that this esoteric given is given only as a unity, namely, as pure neutral content beyond formal variation. To see it as less than a unity, it is argued, is to fall prey to the exoteric. And though the divine is given in a different way than the non-divine, it is not clear that it is given in only one way. For even at the mystical 'level' the divine emerges in a plurality of modes. The

so-called unity among mystical experiences is contrived. Foundational level truth claims and mystical experiences can exhibit quite different givens. We, in fact, have a plurality of esoteric givens. Consider, for example, the contrast between Emerson and Schopenhauer. Both have worked toward generic notions/experiences of the esoteric dimension of existence. For Emerson this experience is of a benign Spirit which emerges within and through nature and man. This cosmic Spirit is the primary reality of the world. It is in no sense derivative--either causally or substantively--or non-generic. For Schopenhauer, on the other hand, the esoteric realm is chaotic Will. Will, for him, is the primary reality grounding the ordered world of phenomena, ordered via the ideal formal intuitions of space, time, and causality. This Will, unlike Emerson's Spirit, is hardly benign. It is a savage drive to further existence which disrupts peace and repose.

For both thinkers the esoteric/exoteric distinction carries weight, yet they differ on just what the esoteric realm is. Any attempt to argue that their generic notion/experience is derivative or merely exoteric can be rejected on the grounds that they had isolated the ultimate infrastructure of reality. For these thinkers, both Spirit and Will were "givens." All search for some 'higher' given beyond them is only vain. But how can this be? How is it that the given, even on the 'highest' level, emerges in such a plurality of ways? Is the world itself a plural? Perhaps the answer lies in the realization that the given is still not entirely understood. Apparently, the given is still something neutral, that is to say that the given is somehow purified of all categorical intrusions. Yet if even the mystics open-out a plurality of ultimates, we must seemingly deepen our search into the foundations of religious experience. Thus far we are at an impasse. But it is only apparent.

#### The Pragmatic A Priori and Religious Experience

The phrase "pragmatic a priori" comes from the American philosopher C.I. Lewis. Conceptually, it is heir to the Peircian tradition in epistemology. And, as is by now well known, Peirce derived much of his thinking on categories from Kant. The notion of the "pragmatic a priori" is a modern rethinking of the role of regulative constructs in experience. In the much neglected second half of Kant's first Critique, we have the analysis of the regulative ideas of pure Reason. The role of these ideas is dealing with things beyond the pale of orthodox empiricism. They are equivalent to the foundational categories of ontology. As such, they are indispensable. They do not order the world of sense intuitions, as do the categories of the Understanding (which are applied via the Schematism); rather, they ground world-pictures. Further, they are not testable in the way categories of limited scope are. With the emergence of regulative ideas, the "world" as a total structure emerges. They are the esoteric categories of thought. They grant both grounds and reasons for all that emerges within sense experience. For Kant these regulative ideas of pure Reason are static and non-transformable. With Hegel the genetic question fully emerges. Within Hegel's genetic/historical perspective we examine the transformation of the regulative foundational level constructs. They suffer the same fate as any time-dependent system. Each shape of self-consciousness has its own set of regulative categories. With the sublation, via determinate negation and identity with difference, of each

shape comes a quantum leap of conceptual frames. Thus, once again, we are confronted with the reality of pluralism, the "as-if" structure of knowledge (cf. Hans Vaihinger). It is "as-if" the world is structured in way X or way Y.

The power of this understanding of culture/time-dependent foundational categories appears when we confront given religious traditions. By our penetrating to the pragmatic a priori categories, the 'esoteric' structure emerges within each tradition. While this process belongs with the search for the given, it retains essential differences. As we shall see, the pragmatic a priori's belong in an as yet hidden way to the emergent givens. Before this can be established, we must examine three traditions. By doing so we can reveal their time/culture-dependent pragmatic a priori's. In this way we can gain a sense of the prefix "pragmatic" to the older term "a priori."

For our purposes we shall analyze an important passage from the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In it are to be found those doctrines which many hold to be central to Hinduism.

By meditation some perceive the Self in the self by the self; others by the path of knowledge and still others by the path of works.

Yet others, ignorant of this, hearing from others, worship; and they too cross beyond death by their devotion to what they have heard.

Whatever being is born, moving or unmoving, know thou, O Best of the Bharatas, that it is sprung through the union of the field and the knower of the field.

He who sees the Supreme Lord abiding equally in all beings, never perishing when they perish--he, verily, sees.

For, as he sees the Lord present, equally everywhere, he does not injure his true Self by the self and then he attains to the supreme goal. . . .

When he sees that the manifold state of beings is centered in the One and from which alone they spread out, then he attains Brahman. Because this Supreme Self, imperishable, is without beginning, without qualities, so, O son of Kunti, though It dwells in the body, It neither acts nor is tainted.<sup>5</sup>

Three generic notions appear in this text. In the first sentence is sounded the theme of the larger Self within the empirical self. This larger Self, namely, Atman, is perceived within the fluctuations of the finite self. As the individual pursues knowledge or works or worship, he or she comes to face the still infinite within. This larger Self prevails within the smaller self. Indeed, the smaller self is the larger Self. This notion/experience of Atman grounds the psychological/finite self in its source and goal. As such it lifts the finite self out of the sufferings of historical incarnation. This notion of the larger Self is an a priori notion. It is, for the Hindu, a necessary and universal element of the person. The element is necessary since the individual cannot be at all were it not for the Atman within, and it

is universal because there is no case in which Atman is absent. Hence, to be is to be the larger Self. In Kantian terms, Atman is that which makes the finite self possible, its enabling ground or fore-structure.

However, the notion of the larger Self is not merely a conceptual category (a priori). It is also, and perhaps more importantly, a transformative notion. By "transformative" is meant that this category dramatically alters the ongoing life-structure of the individual who exists under its sway. This category is not something that is passively entertained; rather, it consumes the individual and works a change. Thus we can say that it is fully pragmatic. By "pragmatic" is meant operative. A pragmatic category is one which enters into the evolving life-structure. Therefore, to maintain that the Hindu notion of the larger Self is a "pragmatic a priori" is to maintain that it enters into the individual life on a foundational level (generic and necessary) and that it works changes of an operative nature.

The second pragmatic a priori in our text is the notion of the identity of the "field" with the "knower of the field." This notion is, of course, the familiar idea expressed as, "Thou are that." It is an expansion of the notion of the larger Self. The larger Self is that mode of the person that is identical with what is. Through this larger Self the bond of identity comes to flower. The "knower", namely, the larger Self, realizes that he is the "field" (world) that is known. The subject-object diremption is overcome. This notion of identity is a necessary and universal element in the Hindu conceptual structure. It transforms, as operative, the life-structure of the individual in a fully pragmatic way.

The third pragmatic a priori in our text is the neutrality of Brahman. Brahman, namely, the ultimate reality, is free from both the causal nexus and finite traits. As neutral, It remains aloof from the churning and illusory world of appearance. It is the still center, located everywhere and nowhere, which allows beings to emerge into their Being (we must not think of Heidegger here). Like Atman, Brahman is both ground and goal. It is the ground in that It spawns the world. It is the goal in that the individual strives to return to Its still embrace. The notion/experience of Brahman consumes and remakes the individual. To paraphrase Peirce's notion of pragmatic concepts, the notion of Brahman can be seen as the effects stemming from the operation of the notion. These effects are religious in the fullest sense. The notion/experience of Brahman is one which makes a difference. his difference is the most important one of all, namely, the transformation of existence.

Yet in exhibiting these three pragmatic a priori's we have yet to feel the tension between alternative conceptual choices. This tension appears, however, in a second tradition. In the Bible of Taoism, the *Iao Te Ching*, a brief text establishes the fundamental categories of traditional Taoism. The work is divided into 81 'chapters' each of which is about a page in length.

There was a thing, a "gathering" chaos,  
Which existed prior to heaven and earth.  
Silent! Empty!  
Existing by itself, unchanging,  
Pervading everywhere, inexhaustible,  
It might be called the mother of the world.

Its name is unknown;  
I simply call it Tao.  
If I were to exert myself to define it,  
I might call it great.  
Great means extending to the limitless.  
Extending to the limitless means reaching the extreme distance.  
Reaching the extreme distance means returning to "nearness".  
Thus, Tao is great,  
Heaven is great, earth is great, and man is great, too.  
In the universe we have four greatneses, and man is but one.  
Man is in accordance with the earth.  
Earth is in accordance with heaven.  
Heaven is in accordance with Tao.  
Tao is in accordance with that which is.<sup>6</sup>

The "thing," this "Gathering Chaos," is the Tao. As chaos, Tao is the fecund seed-bed from which emerges the "ten-thousand things." As the "mother" it gives birth. From it emerges the worldling workshop, yet this chaos is a "gathering" chaos. As such it nurtures and maintains those beings which it dispenses into the venture of their thinging (here we think of Rilke and Heidegger). It holds the ten-thousand things into world. It is the Way that steers through all things. Like the Greek "Logos," it makes accord possible. It brings the essence of man, earth, and heaven into agreement. From this accord flowers harmony. Thus the Tao, as the fecund and protean ground, is also the source of world harmony.

The Tao is both like and unlike Brahman. Its differences are as basic as its similarities. For the esoteric to call the similarities more basic than the differences is to beg the issue. The meaning of the Tao is the nurturing void. This nurturing void is not the full and spiritual Brahman. Emptiness is not Radiant fullness. Tao is not over-ripe plenitude but quiet emptiness. It is chaos. As chaos, it dispenses beings into accord. It nurtures them after the dispensation. It is the gentle mother and not the bright and powerful father. It is dark and quiet. It does not set aflame but cools like water. Entering into the Way does not hand the individual over to a larger Self within. Rather, the self becomes radiant emptiness. This difference is a fundamental difference. To fail to see this proves both insensitivity to foundational nuances and conceptual imperialism. In both cases the Way remains closed. Pluralism allows the Tao and its flowering as the "gathering chaos."

But let us sharpen the options even further. The pragmatic a priori of "gathering chaos" points to the Theistic God of the New Testament. Our textual choice represents only one of many conceptions of the divine to be found within the Christian tradition. However, it is a prevalent conception.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. . . . But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. . . . But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.<sup>7</sup>

Three pragmatic a priori's can be isolated. The first is that of the "wrath of God." Paul's conception of the divine is a personal being capable of emotional reactions to historical states of affairs. The deity perceives the events of the world (unlike some versions of the "unmoved mover") and takes interest in what he perceives. His perceptions fill him with anger at what he perceives to be a broken trust between himself and his creatures. Of course, Paul's deity is capable of kindness whenever the individual or group turns toward him via the belief in Christ. Yet the deity's emotional options are limited. His reactions to man are quite different from those of both Brahman, which remains neutral and aloof, and the Tao, which nurtures the ventured-forth creatures. For Paul, God both has traits and enters into the causal nexus, i.e., is active in history. And while the Tao does relate to beings, it does so in a quiet and hidden way. Paul's God has a preference for larger order interventions. He has the trait of "power" which makes these interventions possible.

This notion of the "power" of the deity is the second pragmatic a priori in the text. Again, it is pragmatic in that this kind of category changes the life-structures of the believer in important ways. And it is a priori since it is a necessary trait of Paul's deity--necessary in the sense that without this trait Paul's God could not be at all. It is important to stress that this conception of the divine is Paul's ultimate conception. It cannot be absorbed into a 'higher' conception and still retain the traits that it has.

The third pragmatic a priori in the text is that of God's "righteousness" outside of the law. Paul posits a bifurcation between the laws of the community and the laws of the deity. For God to be at all, according to Paul, he must be righteous. The deity's concern is an ethical one. His ethical stance, however, is not limited by the finite human community of laws and regulations (cf. Romans 3:20). He manifests his righteousness "apart from the law," and at a certain point in history he will manifest it in a forceful way. During this final manifestation he will make an assumedly unappealable decision concerning which persons fall on which side of the ethical divide. Thus, history will be riven into two halves. The first half will be that time before the final judgment, and the second will be the timeless dimension after the manifestation of righteousness.

To live within the sway of these pragmatic a priori's is to be transformed. In each case described, this transformation takes on very different forms. What is more important in our criticism of esoteric monism is that the contents are also different. The foundational conceptions of these three traditions are irreducibly different. Any identity found between them is an imposed identity. And while this imposition of identity is often subtle, it remains an attempt to get generic categories to be something they cannot be.

#### Interpretation and Sign: the Concrete Infinite

The present purpose is to bring into correlation the notion of the "given" with that of the "pragmatic a priori". A concrete interpretation arises when a specific given is united with a specific pragmatic a priori. Out of this union emerges a concrete sign. The sign can be a simile, a metaphor, a symbol, or an abstract term which stands for some "X." An unbounded (i.e., infinite) number of concrete signs can emerge from the numerous interpretations of the world and the divine that are possible within historical space. These signs are linked serially and socially. Together they enrich reality.

The development of an interpretation is a dyadic process. The two terms of the dyad are, of course, the given and the pragmatic a priori. The given can also, in the context, be termed a percept. The pragmatic a priori can be termed a concept. Thus, a genuine interpretation involves the unification of a percept with a concept.

But the process is not so simple. It is not as if some free-floating given is somehow added to a free-floating concept. In point of fact this is Kant's position in the first Critique. In this Critique Kant engages in a separate analysis of both the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Deduction of the Categories. He works through the analysis as if they could be treated separately. However, as he points out, they are not so isolatable. They represent "moments" (Hegel) within the process of interpretation. Within experience the given and the category emerge together. The given always carries with it hidden conceptual components. Part of the task of Philosophy of Religion is to struggle with the given, to force it to reveal its co-equal category. A dyadic tension exists between the given's showing of itself and the category's generic power over and within the given. They both emerge within experience. Hence there is no pure given within experience which can be "seen" without categorial intrusion (here we differ sharply with the early and middle Husserl). The act of interpretation arises when the full weight of the category is felt within the emergent given. The resultant experience is not 'truth' but interpretation (which is always horizon-dependent; cf. Gadamer). Out of this dyadically generated interpretation is born the concrete sign. This sign is the concrete "bodying-forth" of the interpretation. As concrete it enters into the community of interpretation in a serially extensive manner.

The sign, which is concentered out of the interpretation, carries both conceptual content and rich givenness. An example of sign as revelatory is described in the Tao Te Ching:

That which is best is similar to water.  
Water profits ten thousand things and does not oppose them.  
It is always at rest in humble places that people dislike.  
Thus, it is close to Tao.<sup>8</sup>

In this case sign is simile. The Tao is like the water that nourishes the "ten-thousand things." Seeing the Tao as like water gives the experience a rich concreteness which is denied if the sign fails to emerge. In witnessing the various forms and activities of water we can come closer to sensing the ubiquitous presence of the nurturing void. Water shows itself as the carrier of ontological meaning. As such it achieves active sign-status. Here experience is evolving from sense data to signs. The world of experiences deepens with each leap from sense data to sign. The concrete sign serves to open out the world in ever larger ways.

Yet this "opening" power of the sign (as the product of interpretation) is constantly expanding serially. In its expansion it links up with other signs to generate a comprehensive yet open world picture. The logic of this process has been spelled out by both C.S. Peirce and Josiah Royce. A leading Royce scholar, F. Oppenheim S.J., lays bare the steps of this triadic process:

- (1) Let X = any sign to be interpreted  
Let Y = any interpreter  
Let Z = any interpretee  
Let I = any sign which is a resultant interpretation
- (2) Then  $R(X, Y, Z) \rightarrow I$  = the triadic relation uniting sign, interpreter and interpretee into a complex yielding I as interpretation of X.
- (3) But I is in turn a sign, requiring interpretation through the triadic relation  $R(I, Y^1, Z^1) \rightarrow I^1$ .
- (4) The process continues without end, and the form of the series is determinate in that each term is a triadic relation whose purpose it is to interpret that interpretation which was the resultant of the previous triadic relation.<sup>9</sup>

Each sign enters into the triadic movement of interpretation and further ramification. It becomes linked with other signs through the intervention of both the interpreter and interpretee. Once again the question of 'truth' does not arise in its traditional forms. The sign, as the triadic logic indicates, achieves its full meaning when it is interpreted or translated into a community product. Yet for this situation to happen the interpreter must feel the full weight (prevalence) of the sign. The sign becomes weighty when the interpreter realizes that his own categorial projections enabled it to emerge in the first place. The category which emerges with the given is a community projection which can be seen as projection through a reflexive turn on the part of the interpreter. This reflexive turn reveals the arbitrary nature of all categorial intrusions. The category takes on the feel of "ownness" (Hegel). Thus the interpretation, of which the category forms a moment, is the product of the tension between the categorial projection and givenness. Hence, the act of interpretation is an act of creation. Through this creative projection and self-recovery of the projection emerges the concrete sign.

Through the triadic expansion of signs the unbounded series of signs and interpretations is reached. This unbounded series is the concrete infinite. It is a concrete series in that it appears in numerous images, similes, shapes, and symbols. It is an infinite series in that it can be ramified indefinitely. What then is the bearing of this logic of interpretation on the problem of pluralism in religion? How can this conceptual model aid in overcoming both imperialism and sterile esoteric monism?

The model works its curative effect by seeing all religions as high order sign systems. A given religion is understood to body-forth specific signs of the world and the divine. This sign series consists of interpretations that have entered into the community of interpretation. As such the sign series is fluid and expanding. No religion is seen as 'true,' for such a claim ignores the role of interpretation in erecting the communal world. In specific terms, religions are those sign series concerned with opening out interpretations of the divine. Hence they serve a different role than other sign series, such as the scientific or aesthetic. All religions are alike in being concrete sign series. However, it does not follow that their foundational interpretations and signs are the same. Within the interpretation model our search is not for some elusive transcendent unity but for methods of translation and comparison.



Philosophy of Religion should take on the task of isolating and ramifying the foundational signs within each tradition. By doing so it allows each tradition of signs to enter into the triadic logic of sign expansion. From this expansion emerges the concrete infinite of community life.

What then is this community life to be? Is there a type of community that recommends itself to us?

#### The Community of Ironic Play and Passing Over

The community is the place where the intersection of signs takes place. Intersection is only possible when interpreters unite to ramify signs. From this ramification emerges the open community. Yet for the triadic logic of interpretation to function, it must remain free from specific signs. If a given sign is taken as the final opening out of the world and the divine, then the triadic movement of interpretation closes. This freezing of interpretation is the freezing of the community. What can intervene to prevent this freezing?

The power that saves the community of interpretation from the danger of frozenness is ironic play. Irony is the gentle power that holds the interpreter free from the sign. It frees the individual from the identity bond which crushes the community. It is the cool wedge that holds the heat of the sign from the weakness of finitude. Irony also belongs with play. Play is the ever-moving power of circling over and through the sign series. As such it is light and fluid. Ironic play is the freeing movement of distanced and quiet circling and hovering in and through signs. From this process emerges the curative community. Such a community is forever transforming itself and ramifying its concrete signs.

The religions of the community of ironic play are in a constant state of playful intersection. At this point the reality of what John Dunne calls "passing over" becomes evident. Only within a community of open interpretation held open by ironic play can we begin to learn of passing over. This concrete passing over is the opening out of compassion. The practice of passing over to other lives, says Dunne,

. . . has the effect of extricating a man from the hell of private suffering and allowing him to move about in the larger world of compassion. The sympathetic understanding into which he must enter in order to pass over to another man's life is itself compassion, for it involves a sharing of feelings and images as well as insight into the images and feelings. The broadening and deepening of his experience to which this leads makes possible a more penetrating answer to the question "What is suffering?"<sup>10</sup>

Through passing over, compassion expands. The community of ironic play is a compassionate community. This is made possible by the freeing power that rests within ironic play. The reality of each religious sign series is coaxed into hiddenness. Since irony frees the interpreter from identification with a given sign, he need not feel threatened by divergent sign possibilities. Play insures that the circling movement of interpretation never rests.

One should note that the notion of irony here discussed is not to be understood in its usual meaning. We speak neither of sarcasm nor of meanings opposite to those expected. Rather, irony is much as Thomas Mann saw it, namely, the hidden side of Eros. It is that side of Eros which emerges whenever there is a threat to the interpreter of total domination by a sign or sign series. This threat is overcome by the gentle distancing power of irony. The ironic interpreter turns a wry yet loving smile toward the signs that compete for his allegiance. Play enters to hold open as many sign possibilities as historical space allows. When ironic play enters the community of interpretation, the danger of closure is removed.

Passing over then becomes the active side of ironic play, the ceaseless struggle to enter into other signs and persons. Persons, as Royce points out, are seen as specific, yet unbounded, sign series. Each person is crossed over to in such a way that his signs (personal interpretations of himself) can become unhidden. This is the logic underlying compassion. The freeing of a person's sign series for the light of communal awareness is compassion. Here, to make manifest is to feel compassion, and in this way religion itself can be redeemed.

The redemption of religion is the task of the community of interpretation, yet this statement sounds strange. The usual understanding has it that redemptive power comes from religion. We turn to the great religions to find order for our world. This assertion is partially correct. We need signs. But there is more than one type of sign system. Each type is concerned with breaking open the world in its own way. The sign series of science, for example, must both (a) homogenize, i.e., make uniform, all events, and (b) quantify all relations and structures. Only by doing so is it science. The sign series of aesthetic objects brings world and thing into a radiant epiphany (cf. Heidegger). Religious sign series, on the other hand, are characterized by a pervasive power. They are so constructed as to fight against the distancing power of ironic play. For the theomaniac (whom we all should fear), the religious sign series is the "one thing needful," and any attempt to see it as less invites extreme censure. Irony is the failure of commitment. Scientific and aesthetic sign series do not call for such overt allegiance. Yet the theomaniac (as understood by Buber) is bent upon erecting a religious sign series beyond the curative reach of ironic play. Hence, the theomaniac insists that only the committed person is the religious person. Ironic play becomes the devil's work.

Yet we need not abandon commitment. Rather, we must see it in a different way. A higher ethic is that of loyalty to the community of interpretation. This loyalty concerns itself with keeping the various sign series open and expanding. It is not loyalty to this or that series but loyalty to serial ramification. It is curative rather than constrictive.

This point indicates why religious sign series need to be redeemed by the community. Their peculiar power needs to be undermined gently so that they no longer hold sway over the "one thing needful." By opening out the sign series of religions, we can keep each specific sign moving toward others, so that the triadic logic of interpretation saves religion from one of its own tendencies.

What is the result of this reconstruction of our understanding of religion? How does pluralism save itself from the dangers of solipsistic isolation?

### Conclusion: Communicative Pluralism

A conclusion usually functions to convince the reader that we have accomplished all that we set out to do. But in an essay of this type such a procedure may be premature. This case is especially true when we are working toward foundational level reconstruction. The 'testing' of a new program is an immensely complex affair, and we are not yet in a position to begin. Instead, we must forge ahead with yet one more recommendation toward rethinking the problem of religious pluralism. In Reason and Existenz Karl Jaspers states:

Truth therefore cannot be separated from communicability. It only appears in time as a reality-through-communication. Abstracted from communication, truth hardens into an unreality. The movement of communication is at one and the same time the preservation of, and the search for, the truth. In general then, it applies to my being, my authenticity, and my grasp of the truth that, not only factually am I not for myself alone, but I can not even become myself alone without emerging out of my being with others.<sup>11</sup>

Here two themes are emphasized: truth as communication, and the dependence of the individual upon the community. The problem of pluralism in religion is best dealt with in this context. As pointed out earlier, religion is a sign series. This sign series enters into the logic of interpretation and hence becomes communicated to the community. As such, religion becomes freed for open expansion and articulate ramification. The 'truth' of a sign becomes its communicability to the community of interpreters. If it is a genuine sign, it reaches out and touches upon other signs within the unbounded series of signs that go to make the world of the community. If it is not a genuine sign, it fades and ceases to have prevalence. Communication holds open the genuine signs. This communication is not the mere conveyance of "bits" of information, as in information theory, but is a play-infected expansion of meaning.

Through communication the individual interpreter remains free from the dominance of any given sign. He then insists on passing over to other signs and other religious meanings. And in the passing over, which is the active moment of ironic play, each religion comes to presence on its own terms. True pluralism grows as sign possibilities expand eternally.

The logical structure of this communicative community has been spelled out by Justus Buchler. In his book, Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment, he states:

A community is not simply a class but, specifically, a class of perceivers (necessary condition) for whom a given natural complex functions as a dominant concept (sufficient condition). Community issues in communication when the further conditions obtain, that at least two perceivers become concepts for one another, and that they jointly manipulate the same set of signs.<sup>12</sup>

Thus two perceivers (i.e., interpreters) work on the same sign material. Together they generate the communication which makes the plural community possible. This manipulation and assimilation of sign material is the foundation of community life. If the signs are religious in nature, then their manipulation constitutes the religious life. Religious life becomes and remains

plural whenever the manipulation of signs is non-restricted. As each sign emerges into the experience of the interpreter, it shows itself for what it is; that is to say, the sign is "allowed to speak." As different signs are "allowed to speak," different religious worlds emerge.

From this emergence comes the lived reality of pluralism. This pluralism is the life blood of the genuine community. When the community remains plural, it enhances the life of its members. To quote Buchler once again:

The wealth of the reflexive community depends on the wealth of the intersecting communities. Individuality is not to be identified with monotonous singleness or coherency. On the contrary, it is only when the many communities become standard and homogenous, or when they are rendered so by authority, that the individual solidifies his unity and loses his individuality.<sup>13</sup>

The reflexive community (the individual interpreter) becomes the place where many communities intersect. The interpreter is thus at the nexus of the communities of interpretation. Under the sway of this constant intersection, the sign series of the various religions can expand and work their cure upon the individual. This cure is that of opening. Thus, the plural community functions to keep the opening power of signs operative in historical space. Communicative pluralism is the 'how' of the communities of interpretation. Through this constant transfer of signs and through the interpretations at their core, the community remains free from the closure enforced by religion. By remaining free from premature closure, the community becomes the place where openness abides and radiates.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Frithjof Schuon, The Transcendent Unity of Religions (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. xii & xiii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>David F. Krell ed., The Basic Writings of Heidegger (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 74 & 75.

<sup>4</sup>The Transcendent Unity of Religions, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>S. Radhakrishnan & C. Moore, eds., Indian Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 147-48.

<sup>6</sup>Chang Chung-yuan, ed., Tao: A New Way of Thinking (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 71-72.

<sup>7</sup>Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952), pp. 885, 886, & 887.

<sup>8</sup>Tao: A New Way of Thinking, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup>Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., "A Roycean Road to Community", in International Philosophical Quarterly, vol. 10, 1970, p. 354.

<sup>10</sup>John S. Dunne, The Way of all the Earth (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 53-54.

<sup>11</sup>Karl Jaspers, Reason and Existenz (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), pp. 79-80.

<sup>12</sup>Justus Buchler, Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

## PROSPECTUS SUMMARIES

### Virtue and Obligation in Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant

Daniel Hok-Pin Ling

Most writers in the field of ethics have tended to present either an ethics of obligation that stresses on duties, external conduct, and "doing" or an ethics of virtue which puts its emphasis on dispositions, character, and "being." The purpose of this dissertation is to show the importance of trying to maintain 'a vital balance' between the two ethics. The writer hopes to do this by examining the notions of virtue and obligation in Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant.

This study is divided into four parts. Part One presents the views of Aquinas and Kant on virtue and obligation, with reference to their broader ethical theories and their intellectual backgrounds. Part Two compares the two notions developed in Part One, noting the similarities and differences. Part Three deals with the relation of virtue to obligation as seen in the light of the way Aquinas and Kant have dealt with it. Here, the writer attempts to show that the two notions can be considered as complementary aspects of the same morality. Part four considers the application of these two theories of ethics to personal and social morality.

The significance of this dissertation lies in the fact that it attempts to provide a previously unexplored comparison and contrast between Aquinas and Kant on the notions of virtue and obligation and on their relationship to each other.

### Morality and Social Ethics in the Thought of Charles Hodge

David Murchie

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify and explain Charles Hodge's concept of morality and to determine the extent to which this concept of morality influenced Hodge's social views. Though Hodge's theology reflected a firm commitment to a literal interpretation of an infallible Scripture, it is less certain that his social views were as strongly governed by that Scripture. Hodge did not specifically write a text on moral philosophy, as did so many other academicians of the mid nineteenth century (including Hodge's mentor, Archibald Alexander), but he did speak substantially to social issues in his Systematic Theology and in several articles in the Princeton Review, which he edited for more than forty years. Some of his concerns included civil laws regarding sabbatarian observances, relations between Church and State, the slavery/abolition controversy, and education. In general, this study attempts to determine 1) the extent to which Hodge does or does not fit into the 19-century "academic moralism" framework, 2) the philosophical and/or theological presuppositions underlying his concept of "morality", and 3) the degree to which Hodge's concept of morality is a controlling factor in his social ethics.