Self and World

Stephen Theron

> Before we as individuals are even conscious of our existence we have been profoundly influenced for a considerable time (since before birth) by our relationship to other individuals who have complicated histories, and are members of societies which have an infinitely more complicated and longer history than they do (and are members of it at a particular time and place in that history); and by the time we are able to make conscious choices we are already making use of categories in a language which has reached a particular degree of development through the lives of countless generations of human beings before us. Popper does not say, though he might have done, that our very existence itself is the direct result of a social act performed by two other people whom we are powerless to choose or prevent, and whose genetic legacy is built into our body and personality. We are social creatures to the inmost centre of our being.[1]

Yes, my existence is the result of that social act. This prompts one to ask, to the extent that one knows one is free – am I my existence? We say, after all, "I exist", with all appearance of predication. I, like God in some systems, might be then beyond being.

The soul proceeding from God, this has been one way of shoring up this conscious freedom against parental despotism or "traducianism". Others find that consciousness itself gives the necessary independence. "The principle of personality is universality", said Hegel, making no reference to a soul. Putting such a subsistent form against an otherwise "material" world gratuitously devalues the latter We might say: dogs produce dogs; free beings produce free beings. The social act in question is no more "material" than the writing of a poem.

Life, however, is the project of imitation of reality, of the whole surrounding one, viewed as infinite or absolute. So life indicates the ubiquity of a full infinity transcending space and time, as we find it in Cusanus, Leibniz, Hegel and others. *Anima est quodammodo omnia*.

With life mind (Anaxagoras), being (Parmenides), applies itself at a given point, making itself more present there, the point or part in consequence asking itself or studying how to maintain itself as a system in imitation of the infinite's permanence. This is "cunningly"

[1] Bryan Magee, *Popper*, Fontana Modern Masters, London 1973, 1977, p.69.

© The author 2006. Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK, and 350 Main Street, Malden MA 02148, USA

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

concealed, all happening as if by chance or, at higher levels, at the wish of the living being.[2]

The latter thus emerges as a kind of world over against its containing world, which in fact is rather contained in consciousness and which it seeks to devour. Finally, as term of this process, by the principle of incarnation the rational creature arises from whom all creation, as indeed all logic, has come forth. It is as if the *ergo* in *cogito ergo sum* were to be taken causally. This is in fact the concealed thrust of the axiom. We have the saying, "I will put my spirit into them."

To maintain itself the would-be organism must replenish its forces from what surrounds it, perpetually, for it is in this interchange that it takes over, replaces indeed the environing world, by an *identity in difference*. It tries various solutions, analogous to the theories we produce when trying to understand, Popper points out, developing mouths or other organs, which it, or the *phylum* to which it belongs (or some "selfish" individual gene), retains as long as they serve, along with organs or processes for expelling used material and so on. It also begins to modify the environment with external structures, webs, dams, nests, houses and whole cities, fuelled by a correspondingly developed intentional language. These last resemble theories or knowledge more closely still as being *conscious* solutions to problems. Knowledge though has always been accorded an ontic structure, thinking or knowing being a "having the form of the other as other" (i.e. not just one's own form making one to be what and who one is). Any problem-solving, anyhow, is a pursuit of happiness, an elimination of its contrary, whether in action or thought, contemplation being merely "the highest praxis" (Aristotle).

Consciousness is thus summoned in its very essence to become absolute, not merely a collective universality (social being) but absolute and so free. *Nihil humanum me alienum puto*; the ancient poet understood this, while everything is human as object for the rational creature.

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird.

This then is not pathetic or poetic fallacy, uttered in vain, but the insight that this nightingale, like our household pets, finds its true self in us as we spirits find ourselves in one another and all find themselves in the One or in the bond of love, the whole with which the parts identify, and which alone is, the Idea. "And this we call God", some say, by linguistic decision seeming already to make "God" secondary to "this", a first cause, *forma formarum* or whatever it might be. They thus transcend the option for or against religious language while retaining the substance, as we find so strongly in

[2] This cunning of reason is a Hegelian notion (*Encycl. Logic* 209). But cp. Popper, *Unended Quest*, Fontana, Collins, London 1976, p. 179.

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

McTaggart's formally atheist philosophy. All roads lead to Rome, some say. So in uttering this sentence Aquinas declared an end to religious slavery, though he was by no means the first. "I and the Father are one", said another. We are fathers of our world.

In seeing that life is a project of duplicating the whole we confirm the philosophies of coincident monads, of coincidence of opposites, of identity in difference. Any consciousness is the whole as self-knowing, to the extent that it *is* consciousness. A finite consciousness is *ipso facto* a false consciousness ("How can the gods see us face to face until we have faces?") and *atman*, the true self, is simply Self.

I think it was Susan Sontag who wrote of Hegel's intellectual failure, though where he failed she failed to say. It is rather that his thought has laid bare the failure of intellect at the level of (absolute) intellect itself. This is an achievement, not a failure. Dialectical thinking opens the way to that universal affirmation which is love, and to a reality beyond the prejudice of existence, as in sistology. All forms of objective representation are provisional, in flux, like the evolutionary process itself. This, and not some other thing, is the true unity of philosophical experience.

It is a strange anomaly that we simultaneously postulate the emergence of life from non-life at some past time and reprobate theories of spontaneous generation from "matter" as obscurantist. Life, we say, is always a re-production, the laying of eggs, the splitting of cells. Yet once, at least, it was not, as follows from the reality, as science now affirms, of a linear natural history. This is so, irrespective of whether we prefer the view, championed by one of the discoverers of DNA, of an extraterrestrial origin to life (in view of the improbability of evolutionary timescales otherwise entailed) or incline to explanations of a self-cancelling opening to the development of life from non-life through atmospheric change induced by the first organisms (algae) themselves as presented in, say, D. Attenborough's *Life on Earth*.

Viewed philosophically, however, and more specifically from an absolute idealist standpoint, neither the anomaly nor its solution signify unless aesthetically merely. If the explanation of life shall involve more than the earth and one star, the sun, this is as such more fitting for the view that life is the *universe*, the whole, become conscious of itself in the part, so that the part then *is* the whole. In any case though science requires that the process be explained holistically.

Also thus viewed, final understanding must transpose the evolutionary development to a dialectical process of thought corresponding to a non-temporal series, even a necessity, imposed by freedom, in infinite intelligence, with which the true self, of each and all, eternally corresponds. It is an explanation according to our modes of perception, within which we dig up the fossils, journey in space and so on, with more or less virtuality, of what I am.

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Finally, thought itself is transposed from thought's purely intentional and thus, at face-value at least, partial mode to a form of reality overcoming all limitation of parts over against a supra-organic whole, at once infinitely simple and infinitely complex (union of opposites), which is best called love, thus far, it might seem, ultimately vindicating the Franciscan vision over the Dominican. Love thus includes mind in a higher mode, as we said earlier that the divine ideas are not intentional.

* * * *

By idealism Popper understands one or more versions of sense-data or other theories of representative perception. He finds it unscientific; it is almost as if he feels that a scientist has to be a naive realist like Winston Churchill. For Churchill's argument he cites does not go to the ground of things at all.

Absolute idealism leaves science and everything else just as it is. It draws the consequences of a real infinity, inadequately approached in the analogy-of-being theory of some theologians. Popper is quite right that Hegel's background is theological. So what? What it says is that all these things, all the investigations of science, are thought by the absolute spirit, pure act, unchanged necessity. Mind, to be true, has to think absolutely, the only way to transcend contradiction.

This is not determinism. Augustine and Aquinas had already grounded created freedom in divine omniscience. The free act is the one known and caused by Spirit itself without other causal intermediary. Thus quantum mechanics, the supposed randomness, confirms the Leibnizian vision. That the particles move randomly, if they do, means they are free, divinely moved without intermediary, being thus microcosms of the rational creature. Rationality is freedom, poised in judgment between alternatives, not confined to any behaviour or corresponding environment.

Absolute idealism would add, however, that these particles are in the mode of our perception of things, like all things studied or broached in science, since this is true of matter as such. There can be no matter and all finite forms fall short of truth in themselves. The infinite *is*, beyond and without matter. Matter is our mode of perceiving finitude, a negativity. Popper's remark about idealism betraying people in poverty is a total *non sequitur,* only comparable to his saying that theology seems to him as such a lack of faith, as if Plato and Aristotle have no theology, or Aquinas and Augustine – write nonsense.

* * * *

One of the great cleavages in experience is that between thought and being. We need not say it is the greatest. There are also those between life and death, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, truth and falsity, male and female, finite and infinite. . . . .

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

So we say, you only thought you did that, we call thoughts *entia rationis* merely, and so on. Yet Aristotle described the first principle as Mind and as the thought which thinks itself, i.e. not a brain or a substance in being or being as such, producing thoughts as accidents. Each or any thought (*idea divina*), for Augustine or Aquinas later, is identical with the *essentia divina* or what absolute Mind is. Yet why should such a being have an essence, apart from a prior assumption of essentialism? Aquinas affirms, with Aristotle, that God is *actus purus*; this act is what God is. Why though speak of God as having an essence, under which this act, *actus essendi*, act of being, is brought, thus demanding the identification of essence and existence which one might say retains essentialist language while abandoning essentialism? He who IS here takes the step to him who will be what he will be, an alternative reading of the *Exodus* text.

It might seem safer to say God both is and is not (Neoplatonism, Nicholas of Cusa *et al*.) than to treat being as a quasi-essence. There is no essence or common nature of the things which are, said Aristotle, i.e. being, existing is a separate principle as the insight that it is an act merely emphasises. This move though makes it less inevitable to go on to say, with Aquinas, that being is God's proper effect, whereby he is a creator, properly if not essentially. An inner necessity to create, as proper to him, is yet irresistibly suggested, the view for which Hegel is often reproached, though Hegel brings out that such a necessity does not negate or restrict freedom.

If though thought is primal then being and death are overcome at one stroke. Being is a divine thought like any other. Indeed God himself, the actually infinite, is his own thought. Such thought is not intentional of some being outside of it and the formal and the actual are here the same. This in fact is the true reading of the identity of essence and existence. So there is nothing "proper" about being and we ourselves are primarily divine thoughts and, as such, one with the divine "essence", though in dispensing with Thomistic language we do not need to say that. We are one with the first, only and all-embracing thought in its sovereign liberty. It thinks us as we think it. We know as we are known, since this knowledge is in fact making us what we will be though in an eternal perspective beyond all future.

This gives us a certain necessity and security, besides demanding a revision of logic such as Hegel undertook. It gives us a certain formality, as fore-shadowed in Aquinas's comparison of the angelic hierarchy with the number series. It would be in this sense that the Fregean postulate of "the thought", in a third kingdom beyond empirical being and our subjective impressions and thinkings, finds application. Our very being is thus given a formal or timeless character reminiscent of the passage from death to life in religion.

Account can be taken, too, of the differentiation of spirit, as tackled by McTaggart, into will and even emotion, recalling us to ideas seen

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

as conscious contents. One can stress that the ancient tradition did not see thinking as an empirical process, taking this as the only alternative to a crass psychologism. But we should rather see that timeless ideas can be personal beings like ourselves. Thus angels were then reckoned to be highly personal though without history. Indeed if time is not real then all our history is a cipher for something else.

The question of salvation hinges very much upon the dichotomy of thought and being. How shall I be or become what I am thought of, absolutely, as being, what I should or ought to be in other words? But we are what we are and each one of us *is* his idea, as prison is the proper place for the criminal (Hegel's example). Of course, like God, we will be what we will be. That is to say, the picture is not final, not finally *revealed*, either in time or within whatever series time represents. This is our freedom, again not to be viewed as exclusively linked to time, as if the eternal were not free. Thus as a man sows so shall he reap indeed, but we are reaping already, timelessly; the sowing is the reaping and thus to them that have shall be given since they have it already, and the same with the negation.

Similarly, the opposition between theory and praxis disappears as one approaches the ground of things. There is an enormous relief in this realisation, corresponding to the saying, "Whether we live or die we are the Lord's". Nor of course should such truths, like the veneration accorded to the contemplative life in medieval times, undermine the normal processes of education, of activating youngsters to virtuous or even purgative (such was the stress) praxis. Still, in the temple of the mind one must learn to see that all is well and as it should be, this being the only way to *mean* that God is God. Any "process theology" must therefore begin *after* this. If though there was ever a need for mysticism then philosophy thus does away with it since it was what mysticism, cramped by social and dogmatic pressures, was beginning to be, as the example of Plato and other thinkers showed in advance. The transposition of thought mentioned above is relevant here. But thus it is that even Aquinas's system can seem to have a certain "impurity" as a philosophy, corresponding to an epoch where an authoritarian theology and not metaphysics (equated by Aristotle with theology), was judged "queen of the sciences". This, though a necessary stage to our own position (we depend in part upon what was worked out then), was not then seen as a stage.

People say, when they wake up in the morning, it is good to be alive, as if there were some other negative state with which they are comparing it. But a state, a standing, *status*, just is a being in life, though it can be something more too, such as a conscious knowing and finally the Idea in which all is comprehended and *ipso facto* identical, as nothing temporal or extended or finite can be. The oppressiveness of the dream-state from which we maybe wake cannot be extrapolated to a conception of an inferior, alternative shadow-life,

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

as mankind has often imagined, because it is essentially that from which one awakes since one is not one's own shadow merely and so can never become it. He is, we say, a shadow of his former self, as Edmund Blunden's poor soldier screams "I am blown to bits". But his companions exhort . . . . think of your father, of home, and so his experience is to take its place with the rest. He is alive or he is not he, and this alternative holds ceaselessly, even where in the eyes of many he may seem to have died.

That is why life is a form of thinking (cp. "This is eternal life, to know etc."), for which being, its sheen, is just one of the ideas, taking its place in a larger whole (cf. the discipline called sistology). To this corresponds the saying, "in the midst of life we are in death" (*media vitae in morte sumus*), sung by the monks at their Lenten compline, not however as evoking gloomy resignation (though their monody might suggest this) but as the most liberating of all thoughts, *spes unica* as they used to say.

* * * *

Marxism and Catholicism both are committed to realism, the public experienced world. Popper here follows the Marxist line he otherwise deprecates. One betrays the poor, he says, if one espouses idealism. It is a "treason of the learned".

Hegel on the other hand argues that idealism is *the* philosophical attitude. It is the attitude of both Aristotle and Plato. One can find it in Aquinas but somehow obscured, the so-called moderate realism, but also an emphasis on created reality as a separate, analogous being.

The example of Marxism leads one to look back on Catholic realism as also having a practical aim, i.e. an aim not subsumable under philosophy (thus rendering such realism impure *qua* philosophy). The aim might be that of managing populations mentally, turning them away (as under Pope Nicholas I according to Rudolph Steiner) from mystical religion, where one unites with the absolute reason.

* * * *

In regard to the question of ultimate reality, what it might be, we try to identify something about which no further question can be asked, something, that is, which explains itself. The self-explanatory is at times takes simply as a name for, even as the kind of core-description of, God. In a similar way St. Thomas Aquinas rounds off his five proofs in each case with the phrase, "and this we call God", though here the self-explanatory takes the form of first cause, of what changes all else without itself changing, of what is necessary in itself, of superlative being causing all other being or, fifthly, of intelligence setting all else in order.

People sometimes ask, what caused God, as if apologists had missed this loophole in the arguments. These though are structured precisely to show that there is something to which this question, or

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

a corresponding why-question, is not applicable, since it is the background theatre first causing the possibility of such questioning or, equally, bringing out what a question is. One can perhaps ask what causes one to think causally, Kant's question though Hegel, for one, saw that this was already contradictory. To ask though what causes there to be a cause of causality simply brings the contradiction out into full light. If though all that is meant is to ask if there is a cause to causality then we can ask where or how the speaker rejects the above arguments and the discussion can continue from there.

We can indeed ask why God is self-explanatory, even if we have stipulated God as this, since the concept is more general than that of God. The answer is that God is self-explanatory as postulated, since he is postulated as originator and sustainer of all else. So there is no independent reality in terms of which questions as to his cause or explanation might be answered. This is why he is self-explanatory or (a weaker thesis) not open to explanation.

It follows that the exclusion of the why-question applies not only to God but also to anything postulated as ultimate reality. It applies to the universe should this but be treated as the whole of reality. Yet even if we could not ask the why-question about the universe (the weaker thesis) it does not thereby have the aspect of being self-explanatory, such as God might be claimed to be on some understandings of necessary being. As changing and extended the universe is marked by finitude and so we are pointed ever beyond it. When we ask a perpetual why-question here, corresponding to the number-series, we are judging that the universe is not all, that it is limited. Those who refuse this question commonly do not so judge. A kind of idealism arises, perhaps in connection with relativity-theory.

Much indeed depends upon whether we can sustain the objective or independent reality of space and time. They would then be absolute, i.e. infinite in extension and duration but not infinite absolutely or from all points of view, as we understand God to be. Hence the problems, for example, about his power ever seeming to be limited, e.g. by human freedom or by an unknown future. A partial infinity does not so much explain itself as beg a question, rather (such as that about being in relation to time).

Hence God is postulated, as he whose thoughts we are. In the Trinitarian relations, their theology, we have the schema for God's self-explanation. Each one of us, it will follow, as rational beings, are then identified with that and in that with one another. All are in God, should God be indeed God, as his ideas or whatever analogously corresponds to ideas, since outside of him there is nothing. Such ideas then will not be intentional as ours are, since God, Aquinas points out, can have no relation to some outside being. Yet the outside being Aquinas takes for granted has a real relation to God! Yet to say that God is in all things as their cause is only a weaker alternative if one

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

has lapsed into a self-contradictory deism. What one means rather is their total cause, explanation and sustainer at all times and in all parts. So Aquinas ought to have been and perhaps was an absolute idealist. He had already made the move from the "dust thou art" stance of *Genesis,* funerals and papal elections, seeing the creation as *penitus nihil,* like the Psalmist's veil perhaps.[3]

As in God's thought, though, all things form a unity and identity with one another. If this is not what we see then we see falsely. It is as perfect a whole as the Trinity itself.

This whole, in fact, is put by some in the place of God. We can either say of this "and this we call God" or we can say that here God is denied. Similarly, Hegel either first presents the doctrine of creation without incoherence or he transcends and denies it.

God is love, Christians say, and it is often urged that this does not licence saying that love is God, or absolutely first. But why exactly, unless it is felt that God must be being, as he/she/it is not in Plotinian or even Renaissance Christian mysticism? As union of opposites he is beyond being. For McTaggart the state of love in heaven transcends both knowledge and will in overcoming opposition of subject and object. "I in them and they in me." It is also very Pauline. "Then shall I know even as I am known." For how is that? "Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Love is the bond of the blessed spirits which are all that exist. It is the whole they form, supreme reality as genus transcending though maybe "containing" existence as species (of reality).

Again though, of this whole one cannot ask why. *Ipso facto* then it is not contingent, nor are its parts, ourselves. We are not liable to vanish away since for us too, even now, being is just one of our ideas. In us space and time, the finite, is transcended, while in passing over to heavenly love we take up our essential infinity, as one in idea with the divine essence, as Aquinas puts it. This is the sense in which faith can move mountains, where "I and my father are one". Not that "faith" is the issue here, but the seeing that each idea is one with the divine essence.

Corresponding to the Leibnizian-Hegelian perfect whole, where the opposition of part and whole is overcome in identity, we have the old *processio ad intra*, as of *verbum* and of the spirit. *Verbum*, however, as interior word, is used, by Aquinas, to explain divine generation precisely as, or on the analogy of, mental conception of ideas by us. So if creation is actual divine thinking, a determinate knowing within God, then this is not separable from that *processio ad intra*.

[3] AV Psalm 104, Vulgate 103.

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the Word, itself not separate from the speaking of it as eternally proceeding (i.e. eternally "begotten" or, rather, being begotten), all things are spoken or thought.

The union, the identity, is so close that each spirit *is* that whole. Hence its true consciousness and self is divine or infinite (which is why our present consciousness is often called false). Hence the being or existing of one or all of us is itself one of the ideas and so in each and all is identical with the self-explanatory and so not contingent. Hence any other or lesser things, giraffes, fossils, the starry heavens, class struggle, are thought as in us and as thoughts of ours. That is to say, we spirits with our characteristic modes of perception are reality, the sole and wholly integrated reality, beyond simplicity and composition as conceived by "the understanding" (as opposed to the reason).

We do not then come to the idea of God (our own idea) as from outside. This gives cause to some to urge that we no longer speak of God, who both is and is not.

Aquinas's Trinitarian theology is thus compatible with the Aristotelian-Hegelian idea of *nous*, absolute reason, as thought thinking itself. Where then he speaks of the identity of divine essence and existence he actually concurs in the overcoming of the opposition between thought and being. The indestructibility of spirit, necessary being, means just this and hence Aquinas's inclusion of matter (*materia*) among necessary beings is effectively a denial of matter, of a "material" world, as commonly conceived of as being in opposition to the spiritual, as body and soul are then irreconcilably opposed in man. In religion, the absolute religion, this is overcome, negated and denied by the literal resurrection of Christ, which is not literal if there is literally no earth, no tomb, in absolute terms, from which to rise up.

In the identity of divine nature and history with our own true substance and destiny as faces of love all is reconciled. This may or may not entail reincarnations, where time is unreal and we are now, eternally, identical with and in one another, each in all and all in each. In the time series consciousness and insight wax and wane, while intermittently (as seen from that series) we pass over to where all is accomplished, as from before the foundations of the world at time's end. In my beginning is my end, it was said, alpha and omega.

* * * *

We thus see how in the modern period the mystical stream rejoins the rational, as it was in Plato. Mysticism, as outgrowth upon a socially entrenched orthodoxy, was philosophy in exile. The contemporary dogmatic theology, therefore, largely a product of the understanding merely and not of reason, was also largely "rationalist", in another terminology, as was the Scholastic derivation of an associated philosophy from a few surviving or from newly discovered

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Greek texts. Attempts to determine or delimit that of which we may or may not speak continue this unphilosophical exclusion of the "mystical", an attitude traced by Rudolph Steiner to the reign and policy of Pope Nicholas the First in the ninth century. But the mystics, in fact, were always articulate and the two greatest dogmatic thinkers, Augustine and Aquinas, are both acknowledged as mystical, also *in* what they wrote. It is merely that Hegelian contradiction is disguised as paradox, as saying what one cannot say, this however being itself a contradiction demanding to be overcome like any other. Thus the concept of paradox specifically means that it *is* overcome in its very apprehension as a judgment, transcending the formulated parts. Thus religious authority and worship, while and in reconciling oppositions, pointed the way to the further perfection and enrichment of philosophy.

* * * *

St. John's Gospel might represent a difference in style and content of Jesus's utterances as being a later *development* in his thinking (if he is represented as growing from child to man then one can hardly deny him development in manhood also).

John, as the only evangelist who was one of the three closest intimates (whatever one says of Peter *vis à vis* Mark) could have caught more of what was said on their last night together, the other disciples keeping more of a respectful distance. They later, that is Matthew, record more of what was said to them as a group (than these more intimate and ultimate discourses) while John admittedly would project back some of the later wisdom into earlier occasions. This is just because he himself would not have this later (developed) notion of development at his disposal so as to thematize it in his depiction of Jesus's life.

It is the greatest men who develop most.

* * * *

The old doctrine of the infusion of the (human) soul effectively separated man from nature, leaving us with a dualism only "saved" by a doctrine of creation. How though would pure infinite spirit create matter as generally understood, something which is nothing more than our understanding of reality before we begin to be spiritual? In fact the upholding of spirit has to be denial of matter thus understood. Matter is a misperception. We are spirits, the soul that is infused. The soul is the man.[4]

But since with matter time too falls away the spirits do not begin to be. In this way the latest constructions of biology or, still more, physics can be seen as last-ditch defences against philosophi-

[4] This was F. Inciarte's final interpretation of Aristotle as against Aquinas.

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

cal idealism, i.e. where they are put forward as an alternative, as they should not be.

Evolutionists would explain how the world becomes conscious of itself. In fact consciousness simply emerges, as it seems to us, and is then conscious of itself, not of "the world", which is then taken up as an earlier or prior approximation to a now more perfect relation of whole and parts, including all else. This is a kind of macro-example of how the knower changes what he knows.

Viewed dialectically then the world is needed merely as counterpart, as the cumulative series recapitulatable in this self-consciousness which is spirit, for, given the infinite reason we call God, all is spirit (McTaggart finds love prior to, more final than, knowledge).

In physics we move to ultimate particles or charges which in their random behaviour, subject only to statistical tabulation, mirror the freedom of spirit and of human action. They are the nearest we get to the infinite idea and it is mere arbitrary choice to go on specifying them as "material". Physics, just as much as logic, becomes an unrestricted ontology.

Our historical emergence from nature, this belief absolutely taken, clashes in an especially acute way with the idealist denial of absolute time. For McTaggart both the A-series (from past to present to future) and the B-series (from earlier to late) are fulfilled in the timeless inclusions of the C-series[5], progressively grasped or let go in the perceptions constituting a D-series. The self is timeless, hence both pre- and post-natal, as with Plato. Selves are all that exist, the universe being their aggregate.

To this, on a realist model, only the infused soul can answer. But we have already expatiated on the difficulties of this, even could we overcome (as Aquinas does many of them) the Hegelian objections to "the common conceptions of God, the Soul, the World"[6], either viewing the soul as a thing duplicating the body or as an abstract simplicity on which immortality "is supposed to depend" but which "as little corresponds to the nature of the soul as that of compositeness".

There was always in fact an oddity about how thought was supposed to account for its own emergence in this way. Truth has no proportion to this deterministic finitude (as Augustine saw long ago, or Aristotle in saying that *nous* "comes from outside"). Only the infinite is true; rather, the infinite is all truth, truth being one. If thought is no more than a product of preferred neural "pathways" and habits then evolution is just the preferred model. But neither is this relativism absolute; the regress is infinite and hence no support is given for this basic Popperian realism either. To speak with Teilhard de Chardin of the universe becoming conscious of itself

[5] J.E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence,* II, 724.
[6] G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia, Logic* 31.

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

begs this particular question, forcing reversion to the soul-infusion thesis with its inherent difficulties, such as the difficulty of the corresponding concept of matter as a receptacle for this infusion. This is in fact a falling away from the grasp of matter as pure potentiality at the extreme of a monistic scale of graded actuality, implicit in Aristotle, which leaves it open to see matter as purely finitude and, despite Hegelian qualifications, ultimately as untruth and misperception (because simple parts and infinite division are both impossible, runs McTaggart's argument). Hence in physics the more ultimate the particle the more it loses materiality in the "common" sense, while Popper and others already complain that physics has gone over to idealism.

It is part of the Hegelian claim that idealism is the proper stance of philosophy as such, just as it is the characteristically defining stance of religious mysticism. The mystic comes to see that created reality is *penitus nihil* (Aquinas), under metaphors such as that of dust and ashes, actually very material, as every housewife knows. This opens a way to a dialectical understanding of philosophy's history, Cartesian and post-Cartesian in particular. When we come to grips with the idea of infinity we will find it undercuts the orthodox notion of creation as in "ontological discontinuity" (with the creator). Even if we insist on saying that God makes things outside himself this making outside itself then becomes something inside, in virtue of the infinity. Nothing, but nothing, is discontinuous with infinity, with God. We must therefore overcome the finite limitation inherent in our own notion of infinity when we thus oppose or limit (!) it with the finite, with any finite truth. But the only way of freeing infinity from being limited to the role of a dialectical opposite to the world, as in much religious thought, is to deny the truth of the finite flux.

For this reason the fight has to be extended into the whole area of language as predication, which is an attribution of categories, be they Kantian, Aristotelian or other. Applying a category or predicate to *nous*, thought, is "suggesting another canon than the nature of thought", saying that God is such as *against* its opposite. Here we have the deeper meaning of Quine's "to be is the value of a variable". The propositional form is just not suited (and here Hegel synthesises Nicholas of Cusa with Kant) to the truths that all philosophers have wished to express within their categorial limits. But what had ultimately to be done was to let thought expound ("freely and spontaneously") itself, free of ready-made categories. This is the dialectic, which Hegel tried to chart, feeling, paradoxically, that here he rejoined the most primitive Greek thinkers where thought was free and "at home with itself", in a grand reintegration after the intervening theological differentiation. For this being at home with itself is specific to thought alone, hence to God, the infinite, never needing to

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

go outside itself, necessarily not doing so indeed. Here all is in each part. By contrast, "every judgment is by its form one-sided and, to that extent, false."[7]

Evolutionary theory, as it becomes more open, progresses ineluctably to saying things *had to be* like that, i.e. there is no other way to think them. Similarly, in physics, there have to be simples, ultimates, as in Leibniz. Thought imposes itself as prior willy-nilly, since philosophy, of which idealism is the proper form, is not some esoteric pursuit but the distillation of our most central preoccupations.

Stephen Theron
Calle Santiago Guillén Moreno 35
San Fernando de Maspalomas
E35100 Las Palmas
Spain
Email: pindarth@yahoo.se

[7] *Ibid.* 32.

© The author 2006.
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2006.00115.x Published online by Cambridge University Press