

## THE ETERNAL WORD

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.  
Day pours out the word to day,  
and night to night imparts knowledge.  
Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard;  
Through all the earth their voice resounds,  
and to the ends of the world, their message.  
-Psalm 19:1-4

The notion of an omnipotent and transcendent Deity has suffered continual assault since the advent of the modern age. Catholic doctrine maintains that the existence of God may be known by the natural light of human reason,<sup>1</sup> and rightly so since the Scriptures themselves clearly teach this.<sup>2</sup> The skeptics of our day, however, remain unconvinced, as their position is often based on the assumption that only propositions which are demonstrable in a scientific manner are admissible as truth. Crucial to this world view is the premise that the investigator has control over the object of inquiry sufficient to draw information based on experiment. God, however, clearly does not fall under the category of objects or things which can be manipulated at will, for He is rather a subject. A subject differs from an object in that what is knowable about him can only be obtained through revelation, which occurs when the subject freely discloses himself. The most serious shortcoming of the cosmological argument for the existence of God is precisely its lack of reference to the ground of being as subject, so that the skeptic is given no compelling reason against finding the "first cause uncaused" within the realm of objects. It is no wonder then that the scriptural prescription adopts a wholly different line of reasoning in its appeal to the analogy of creation (that is, the argument by design).

The best approach for arriving at a rational conviction of God's existence is to show how indeed the scriptural argument, which is intuitively grasped by the average person, is capable of analytical exposition. This has the advantage not only of scriptural foundation, but also of making evident the justice of holding each person accountable for acknowledging or failing to acknowledge God as the Sovereign Creator.

It is perhaps best to begin by referring to the terminology of Martin Buber,<sup>3</sup> who proposed that our relationship to ultimate reality is one of I-Thou, rather than I-It. It is taken for granted that the "I" of either relation is real, since our self-perception is one of the grounds of our discourse. The "Thou" referred to in the premise is of course the Divine Subject, God. The "It," on the other hand, is the totality of all objects- i.e., entities which are accessible to us in principle without the need for revelation. One immediate consequence of this definition is that the physical universe as understood by the skeptic, being itself identical to "It," is inadmissible as a possible divine entity- that is unless we consider the conscious observer within the universe to be God, and the world a mere

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<sup>1</sup> First Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*.

<sup>2</sup> *Romans 1:19-21, Wisdom 13:1-9*.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

extension of his being. Thus pantheism reduces to solipsism, so that he who deifies the universe only deifies himself.

Before we consider any evidence for our position, it is necessary to establish the standard by which we may ascertain the truth or falsity of our claims. Since no syllogistic system can be verified from within without a priori acceptance of its premises, human reason must transcend mere logical inference if it is to avoid the prison of self-reference. The only yardsticks by which we may measure the fitness of a philosophical system, other than self-consistency, are its multiplicity of correspondence to perceived reality and its capacity to propagate rational discourse. For instance, the idea that the world is but the subjective dream of a single indivisible conscious being (solipsism) is at least conceivable and trivially self-consistent, however no more information may be derived from it, nor can any conversation about such an idea be justified without logical inconsistency. A viable philosophy is one that reveals an inter-connectedness in the universe which is compelling to the human mind bent on discovering order, and which, additionally, does not hinge on private experience. To posit pure meaninglessness is to beg oneself to be silent!

If the foundation of meaning is that which maximizes correspondence and discourse, then these two criteria must somehow be intrinsic to the structure of reality, assuming of course that reality is itself meaningful. How then might we infer whether or not our dealings with ultimate reality involve a relationship with a Subject? The answer lies in the presence or absence of communication.

We may illustrate the central role of communication in establishing the nature of a subject by imagining that a newborn baby has been put in a large incubator without light of any kind after having its memory erased. Let us further assume that the baby has been paralyzed so as to be completely inert and suspended in air without any contact with material objects. Under such conditions, the baby will develop no more than the most primitive self-consciousness, hardly surpassing that of a mere vegetable except perhaps for a subliminal awareness of its own internal functions. If, on the other hand, it were allowed to come in contact with objects in a random manner (so that no information might be conveyed other than what the objects afforded in themselves), its self-awareness would then be elevated somewhat by the external stimuli, but certainly not to the point of displaying active intelligence.

Now consider a similar baby allowed to sense and explore his surroundings and to come in contact with a small animal, such as a kitten. The interaction that would take place between the two would in this instance raise the fledgling human's self-knowledge to a level significantly higher than in the previous cases, yet it would likely not surpass that of the animal. Ultimately, it is only in sustained communication with another human being that our newly-conscious babe can begin to recognize itself as belonging to its own species.<sup>4</sup> The essential point we are demonstrating here is that a subject's self-understanding is determined by its level of communication with entities apart from itself and the extent to which such entities mirror its own nature. This is the crux of the argument by analogy, as analogy is the logical basis for subjective communication as opposed to the language of objectification.

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<sup>4</sup> The presumed results of this thought experiment are supported in many respects by the well-documented case of the Wild Boy of Aveyron. See Roger Shattuck, *The Forbidden Experiment* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1980) for a review of this and other cases of isolation and deprivation.

When a man looks at his surroundings, he does not find any subjects among the members of the animal kingdom who match his capacity for intelligence, most especially his gift for language and symbolism. Even if man did evolve from the apes, some subjective communication outside of his own species must have shaped his consciousness from the void out of whence it came. It is in the order and harmony of creation, the rhythms of which are constantly responding to his every movement, bathing and sustaining him like one vast cybernetic system, that he finds the evidence for a superior intelligence capable of having molded his own.

The skeptic's retort to our stated argument is usually to reduce ultimate reality to natural laws and to leave out any reference to mind or personality (reductionism). There is at least one problem with this approach, and that is that principles do not by themselves imply material events since there are infinitely many realizations of history, human or otherwise, that are consistent with the laws of physics.<sup>5</sup> Other than to posit the trivial statement that the universe is the way it is, there is no "proof" that the world is determined to be the one in which we live.<sup>6</sup> Let us refer to all laws, principles, or ideas which represent, order, or govern reality as Logos<sup>7</sup>, and to all concrete realization as Being. The problem referred to concerning the reductionist's position is that in his scheme there is no necessary connection between Being and Logos, other than that the latter refers to but does not completely reflect or correspond to the former.

Another fault of reductionism is the failure to consider that meaning, if it is worth speaking of, must be able to assign significance on various levels of reality. For a reductionist to say, for instance, that Rodney is a collection of atoms and molecules is to speak on a very different level of meaning than the holist who perceives in the organization and interdependence of Rodney's constituent parts a personality every bit as real as his atoms and molecules. The very nature of meaning is to relate and unify on a higher level what is apparently unrelated and separate on a lower level of perception. Induction or analogy, not deduction, are required to make this leap, so that for instance the existence of dogs cannot be deduced from the laws of quantum field theory, as the latter describe only events on a lower level of meaning. What is most amazing and also most essential about higher life forms is not that they are determined by events on a lower plane of reality, but that they are able to exert control of this lower level by appealing to their organization on the higher plane, as in the phenomenon of human or animal volition.<sup>8</sup>

Nowhere is level interaction more crucial, in fact, than in the very physical laws that apparently govern our universe. For instance the laws of quantum mechanics describe "quantum" (i.e., microscopic) objects which are defined in terms of

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<sup>5</sup> See Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 6-8.

<sup>6</sup> This view is contested by those espousing the Many-Worlds Interpretation of quantum mechanics, who hold that all logically possible universes exist (see Barrow and Tipler, *op. cit.*, pp. 472-496). However, since there is no communication possible between such universes, neither can there be any ultimate proof of such an assertion.

<sup>7</sup> Our choice of terminology is deliberately connected with the idea of the Logos in the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John, together with its connotations in Greek philosophy.

<sup>8</sup> The role of "tangled hierarchies" in the phenomenon of conscious intelligence is explored in D. R. Hofstadter, *Goedel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

measurements involving "classical" (i.e., macroscopic) objects. Furthermore, these laws cannot be stated except by making reference to the observer and his act of observation, both of which are inseparable from and intimately connected with the objects observed. Moreover the relative nature of physical law presumes the existence of two or more observers whose measurements can be compared. Even in physics no object can be postulated without reference to a subject and his act of communication, even if it is limited to a discussion of physical measurements! Physics from this perspective becomes a grammar of discourse between subjects.<sup>9</sup>

If the apparent laws of the physical universe are considered to be real (that is insofar as our models of the world approximate the truth), and if such laws not only require the presence of subject but grant at least equal status to subject and object, how then is it possible to regard matter as having primacy over subject? These laws must themselves point to an ultimate Subject apart from whom they possess no reality. Such a one would then be worthy of the name God, for He would by necessity have to transcend the natural laws that owe their existence to Him. The reasoning behind this is as follows. Logos cannot stand by itself, since by its very nature it is reflective and must therefore refer to something in the order of Being. Since Logos transcends the universe, the Being it refers to must likewise be transcendent. God is therefore both the ultimate level of meaning and the ultimate level of being. In Him there is no antagonism between His self-possession or consciousness and His self-reflection since He encompasses both within Himself.

The precise relationship between ourselves and Deity can be illustrated if we first define consciousness as the capacity of a subject to identify with and be present in a self-representation. A self-representation or image can either be material, as in the case of the human body, or non-material, as in a name. This establishes the mind or consciousness of a subject as a non-temporal entity whose self-extensive presence in an image may be referred to as its spirit. Communication then occurs when two subjects share a common self-representation, that is when one subject sees in another a reflection of his own nature or experience. Thus communication is none other than spiritual communion, which in the material world involves what may be legitimately called a sacramental presence. In God, there is a one-to-one correspondence between His subjective self and His self-image, whereas in man the correspondence is non-exhaustive, since the Logos in which he shares with God a self-representation, far transcends his finite being. Man is therefore but a creature who exists within the Divine Self-Image.

Christian revelation has afforded us additional insight into the nature of the Divine Subject. The mysterious doctrine of the Trinity not only guarantees that God is wholly independent of His creation, since He possesses within Himself a self-sufficient dynamism; it also reveals that communication is the ultimate basis for the Divine, and therefore for any derived form of life. The Father, who is the ground of all being and self-consciousness, in His inherent action of comprehending Himself begets the Son, the Logos, who is the personification of God's self-understanding He is the "Thou" to the Father's "I." From God's self-conversation, which is the result of the love between the Father and the Son, proceeds the Spirit, who in turn is the personification of the union of the divine I-Thou. He is the very breath of God, the animating force underlying the divine

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<sup>9</sup> These aspects of modern physics and others are discussed more fully as they relate to the problem of God's existence in Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

activity, and the divine presence inhabiting all that lives. The union of the three Persons of the godhead is effected by their perfect agreement as manifested in the Divine Will, which orders creation according to a purpose not inherent in the universe itself. Thus God is seen to be a compound unity embracing the notion of subject in His very nature Whereas from this perspective the universe is seen to be a particular by-product emanating from the eternal conversation among the Divine Persons, the pantheist god is by contrast a solipsistic entity eternally gazing at his navel in order to comprehend himself. Nirvana is then a static heaven bereft of all dynamism and distinction, both of which have been obliterated by the consummation of the evolutionary process. This "god" is as good as dead as the very realization of his existence is at once his own annihilation. Thus the cardinal principle of reality may well be that solipsism and self-reference breed death, whereas communication, which is self-giving and therefore love, begets life.

Because God is the ultimate subject, man exercises no control over Him, and consequently must rely exclusively on revelation (both natural and supernatural) in order to discover who He is. Man is totally dependent on God, Who is absolutely free and under no obligation to reveal Himself. Yet, despite God's lack of indebtedness to His creatures, there must always be an underlying trust which is the basis of all faith, above all in God's desire to communicate Himself. Such a fundamental trust not only predisposes man to receive revelation, but also gives him the assurance of a basic order present in all reality which is necessary to decipher its meaning. The most elementary form of revelation is precisely the created world, which is also the initial Word in God's conversation with men. In order to decipher this Word, man must not remain on the level of I-It, for the moment he adopts the posture of sovereignty and control, He remains deaf, dumb, and blind to his Creator. Rather, he must inductively recognize the level interaction that forms the basis for divine dialogue, acknowledging that spirit (i.e., that which binds I to Thou), being the highest form of life, is the ultimate ordering principle of all reality, including both mind and matter. Objects then may be seen as but idealizations (words divorced from the mouth of the speaker, so to speak), as they are predicated on a divine dialogue which transcends all "things," as such. From this perspective, a flower becomes more than a flower, and a tree more than a tree. Indeed all of nature is a veritable symphony of praise to the Father encompassed by the Logos and, in turn, a revelation to man of the invisible qualities of the Deity. Man literally walks in a world full of divine speech.

It is not sufficient for man to be content with the material Universe as proof of God's communication to him, for to stop here is to be inattentive to God the Subject and hence to treat Him as no better than an object which he may turn on and off at will. Thus there can be no static proof of God's existence that does not by its very nature overlook what it aims to establish. The initial recognition of God's self-revelation is but an invitation and prelude to eternal dialogue, a dialogue that was brought to fruition in the history of the human race in that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."<sup>10</sup> This ongoing conversation is the true and ultimate confirmation of that which is first perceived through the dim light of the heavens.

**--Eduardo P. Olaguer**

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<sup>10</sup> *John 1:14*

*CORRESPONDANCES*

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,  
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,  
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,  
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,  
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

— Charles Baudelaire