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**A study of the boundaries of existence**

Davis, William Pike, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1994

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A STUDY OF THE  
BOUNDARIES OF EXISTENCE

by

William P. Davis

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate  
School at the University of North Carolina  
at Greensboro in Partial Fulfillment  
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Approved by

  
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This paper reflects the author's intense disquietude with the conventional attitudes concerning the vicissitudes of existence and wo/mankind's conduct in its facticity.

Surveying the historical centrality of myths and relaying the creation myths from various cultures, the author muses over the power of myth and its archetypical importance to modern wo/man as the wellspring of existence.

The problematic nature of wo/mankinds incessant need to know, to dominate and to control is explicated by a review of thoughts and writings of major philosophers and authors. This epistemic hunger manifested chiefly in the form of curiosity is examined historically and existentially and its contribution to the progress of wo/mankind critically questioned.

The present dilemma of human existence revealing itself in meaninglessness and purposelessness and resulting in wo/mans inhumanity to wo/man, extreme patriarchy, oppression, domination, subordination, competition and greed is lamented. The historical and present realization of absurdity and despair is presented through the thoughts and writings of existential philosophers.

The nature and power of aesthetics is evoked, not only as a refuge from the vicissitudes of existence, but also as a means of approaching transcendence to meaning and purpose.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## D I S S E R T A T I O N     I N T R O D U C T I O N

This paper concerns the ultimate significance to me of thinking and writing about my existence and the choices implied by my existence. I am equally attentive to present and historical considerations of important issues of Justice, Freedom, Beauty and Truth; however, my concern for these topics stems from an underlying anxiety for My-Meaning-Making-In-This-World - My Existence. I like to think of my preoccupation with this issue as distinctly foundational, even as "the foundations of my foundations".

Wo/Mankind has made numerous attempts to answer the question: **Why/Existence**, or why is there something rather than nothing? Thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas not only asked but legitimated the question: "If it is the office of the philosopher to ask first questions, he cannot but ask [this question].... Indeed, he must ask them"..(Anderson, 1952, p iii) Even the pragmatic philosopher, Will James, commented on the Why/Existence question at some length. "We cannot answer why there is any being at all and not rather nothing". (Wilshire, 1971, P. xxvi).

That is, elemental human life is really mysterious; a greater understanding of man may lead to an understanding of God. Hence James speaks of "the mystery of fact" (Mysticism, P. 241) which is mysterious on several levels: not only is the

existence of the world as a whole a mystery, but also details. (Wilshire, 1971, P. xxxvi)

One need only shut oneself in a closet and begin to think of the fact of one's being there, of one's queer bodily shape in the darkness (a thing to make children scream at, as Stevenson says), of one's fantastic character and all, to have the wonder steal over the detail as much as over the general fact of being, and to see that it is only familiarity that blunts it. Not only that anything should be, but that this very thing should be, is mysterious. (James, 1890, P 6).

Difficulties with most treatment of the Why/Existence question include the silencing effect of assertive answers provided, precluding further discourse, the conversation is over and the matter settled; and that the differing answers propounded by assorted groups are often enforced with the power of the sword! If not the sword, then with eternal damnation, pain and suffering...I would prefer the sword! I really prefer the discourse.

I choose to ask the why/question tangentially and to focus on the rather obvious fact (to me) that I/We and other objects DO exist. I want to explore the wonder and mystery of existence as I have come to feel it, through my exposure to the theorizing and teachings of others who view this mystery in its diverse dimensions. I prefer, initially, to explore with those who stand back and revel in the origin and meaning of the mystery in itself! During this inquiry I will necessarily encounter others who take a "point of view", or even a robust stance, perhaps even a dogmatic posture. I hope to use these poses to further the mystery - to advance and

deepen the profound nature of existence and my radical amazement.

It only seems natural to me that some humility is owed to the overwhelming reality of this existence in its various presentations ranging from the simple to the complex, from the infinitesimal to the infinite and from the good to the evil. It only seems genuine to me to be impressed with the variety and proliferation of forms, with the fecundity of life, with the processes of birth, maturation and death and to wonder about suffering, pain and pleasure, purpose and meaning, destiny and freedom and the tyranny of choice. It is instinctive for me to wonder. For, in reality, I am astonished; I am in a position of radical amazement! This paper will demonstrate my (and other's) astonishment and awe that there is something rather than nothing, the absurd aspects of existence, and attempt to impute meaning from such a radical mystery.

Somehow centering on the mythic and historical significance of circles, this paper will follow a somewhat deliberate circuitous train of thought that can be characterized as Beginnings - Endings and "The (all important) In-Between". Taking the hermeneutic circle as a metaphor for the boundaries of existence, I will ground this study by exploring Beginnings as illuminated in diverse creation myths. Bonhoffer comments on the importance of beginnings:

The Bible begins in a place where our thinking is at its most passionate....That the Bible should speak of the beginning provokes the world and irritates us. For we cannot speak of the beginning; where the beginning begins our thinking stops, it comes to an end. And yet the fact that we ask about the beginning is the innermost impulse of our thinking; for in the last resort it is this that gives validity to every true question we ask. We know that we must not cease to ask about the beginning though we know that we can never ask about it. (1959, P. 13)

This exploration of beginnings will include the retelling of ancient myths as they attempt to divinize or rationalize purpose and meaning from our escape from chaos. The authentication of myths as reality will be explored as a substratum of existence.

Mythos is also an organ of philosophy, but neither as reflexive consciousness, nor as a second-class organ somehow subordinate to the logos. Mythos is not ancillary to logos. The mythical dimension does not mean that I think the unthought - for then it would obviously cease to be unthought. It is an important task of philosophy to admit mythos as an organ *sui stante*, a contact with reality. (Panikkar, 1979, P 345)

This paper will explore with Merlin Donald (1991) the idea that ancient myths, beginning with creation myths, somehow "define" a people archetypically; that the recent neuroscience and neuropsychological research findings possibly confirm that myth may in fact be a determining factor in cognitive activity, memes formation and participate in the formation of human culture.

Having explored various interpretations of creation, I will move toward the examination of the dis-equilibrate power of curiosity as a force driving humankind forward into history. I will exhibit my awe, and that of others, at the driving compulsion of the epistemic hunger as it propels wo/mankind forward to some ultimate destiny, be it Nirvana, Heaven, Hell or a return to Chaos. I will wonder over the mythological core of humankind and her/his place in the maturation of the cosmos.

Given the actuality of creation and the potency of history: what ought I do now? What of accountability, burden, culpability, freedom and/or liberty. Where can I find my charge, my obligation or my unknowing pledge? What is required of me to exist in any meaningful manner? I will consult with existential philosophers on the distinction and angst of reflexive existence In-This-World-With-Others-At-This-Time in the face of apparent absurdity!

Equally important, and an underlying fundamental in this paper are the notions of temporality and the necessity of choosing. The looming date with non-existence presses me forward to the ultimate significance of choosing my existence In-This-World-At-This-Time. I will wonder with others if an unspoken purpose of our conception of finality is to "awaken" one to the import of reflexion on existence and tne authentic life. I will wonder at the relationship between Beginnings

and Endings; between Endings and Beginnings and the significance of the In-Between.

The matters addressed in this paper are certainly philosophical; perhaps psychological and religious as well. Definitive or assertive language does not seem appropriate to me. It is my intention to not only explore my thinking on these matters but also to expose my deep feelings, emotions and passions; and, to invoke similar sensitivity within the bosom of the reader. We would, then, be more prepared to seriously address the profound questions of Justice and Freedom, Beauty and Truth, Good and Evil!



CHAPTER I  
B E G I N N I N G S

Introduction

How does one know about beginnings? I can observe myself beginning this paper, or watch someone beginning to read it. I can further visualize beginning anything, and then beginning something else. We seem to always be beginning, and beginning to begin again. Beginnings must be something of the stuff of life, the creative aspect of existence, or the way we-exist-in-this-world-in-time. We seem to always be beginning.

It seems as though beginnings must be recorded in our memory to be known. We can tell one another of our activities, our beginnings, or it can be recorded in writing as a means of someone else knowing of our beginning. Without either memory and language or writing, would human existence have duration, history, or meaning? This chapter will burrow into the core of the value of the history of beginnings, will recall the histories of mankind, all in an attempt to peer into the duration, history and meaning of existence.

I will look first into stories and myths, as a potent immanent human methodology for understanding reality, of making sense of the world and of making meaning of our experiences in this world. Once the relevance of myths to our everyday life has been explored, I will inquire into the utility of myths that portray the beginnings and creation of

our cosmos, our existence and our existential *raison d'être*. By presenting a survey of creation myths from cultures around the world, I will bring forth similarities and differences that the ancients welded into a meaning-making existence.

Can such an exploration of the wellspring of existence have significance to me in my attempt to impute meaning into existence? Can studying other's attempt to explain their existence help me to establish myself in-this-world? What can I learn from them? Is it possible that this effort will help me understand the Why/Existence question?

#### The Potency of Myth as Reality

A moment's reflection convinces me that I, and most of humanity are indeed those creatures in Plato's cave, observing the shadows on the wall and explaining reality to each other with stories.

And if there had been honors and commendations among them which they bestowed on one another and prizes for the man who quickest to make out the shadows as they pass and best able to remember their customary precedence, sequences, and coexistences, and so most successful in guessing at what was to come ....(Republic, Book VII, 516)

Certainly, the literature is crowded with examples of the social construction of reality. Is not the social construction of reality a metaphor for stories and myths? Is this not how we go about interpreting our existence, do we not make-meaning by "fitting" ourselves into stories and myths?

The material of myth is the material of our life, the material of our body, and the material of our environment, and a living, vital mythology deals with these in terms that are appropriate to the nature of knowledge of the time. (Campbell, 1990, P. 1).

Pannikar (1979) states that "The tolerance you have is directly proportional to the myth you live and inversely proportional to the ideology you follow" (P. 20). Pannikar further connects myths with human actions, rationality and ideology ... from mythos to logos:

The ideology you follow is the demythicized part of the view you have of the world; it is the result of the passage from mythos to logos in life and personal reflexion; it is the more or less coherent ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness, i.e., the doctrinal system that enables you to locate yourself rationally - ideologically - in the world at a particular time, in a particular place. (P. 21)

Further, Michael Novak (1970) maintains that:

....men seldom, if ever, act according to principles and rules stated in words and logically arranged. They act, rather, according to models, metaphors, stories, and myths. Their action is imitative rather than rule-abiding....The story a man is acting out determines his actions more than the verbally stated rule he is following. (P. 23).

Novak further posits that the beginning of the authentic movement is the dis-abusing oneself of myth, of recognizing the hegemonic and insidious power of myths purveyed upon us by others. Novak wishes us to return to "nothingness", and begin

our stories all over again in a more authentic manner (in Chapter Three).

Rollo May (1969 P. 34) discussed the significance of myths. May states that

they [myths] are man's way of expressing the quintessence of his experience - his way of seeing his life, his self-image, and his relations to the world of his fellow men and of nature ....they carry the vital meaning of this experience. (P. 34)

...In a word, myths are in some not very clearly understood way the bearers of psychic power, life, and energy. They function regressively when they elicit the repressed, unconscious, archaic urges, longings, dreads and other psychic content.....symbols and myths enable the person to experience greater reality in the outside world. (P. 45)

Who generates these myths and stories that so control our interpretation of existence? Is it not from our culture, from society, our parents, schools, churches, governments, institutions? One could ask..who benefits? Who does benefit from our acceptance of these stories, these myths? Do these stories portray the Truth? How many of us have had their chains released, turned around and stared at the actors behind the parapet as they parade around in front of the fire with figures on their heads? Just knowing that they are there, and that they are doing the parading helps me to recognize the awesome power of myths and stories in my life.

Mirica Eliade (1963) convinces me further of the place of myth in furthering the understanding of existence.

Myth, in itself, is not a guarantee of "goodness" or morality. Its function is to reveal models and, in so doing, to give a meaning to the World and to human life. This is why its role in the constitution of man is immense. It is through myth, as we said before, that the ideas of reality, value, transcendence slowly dawn. Through myth, the World can be apprehended as a perfectly articulated, intelligible, and significant Cosmos. In telling how things were made, myth reveals by whom and why they were made and under what circumstances. All these "revelations" involve man more or less directly, for they make up a Sacred History. (P. 144).

Merlin Donald (1991) speculations on the origins of the modern mind concern the importance of myth as well. Donald finds myth to be an essential component in our making sense of the world as we find it today.

Their [!Kung people] mythical thought, in our terms, might be regarded as a unified, collectively held system of explanatory and regulatory metaphors. The mind has expanded its reach beyond the episodic perception of events, beyond the mimetic reconstruction of episodes, to a comprehensive modeling of the entire human universe. Causal explanation, prediction, control - myth constitutes an attempt at all three, and every aspect of life is permeated by myth. (Donald, 1991. (P. 214)

If, in fact, stories and myths are the basis for our interpretation of existence today, and we rely so heavily on them for our "everydayness", how can we then turn to the stories and myths of the ancients with any less assurance of their reality? Are these ancient civilizations, when they speak of their existence, not entitled to the same degree of reality that we maintain for ourselves?

Now, one fact strikes us immediately: in such [ancient] societies the myth is thought to express the absolute truth, because it narrates a sacred history; that is, a transhuman revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time, in the holy time of the beginnings (*in illo tempore*). (Eliade, 1957, P. 23)

Not only do these myths express absolute truth, but primitive humankind also believed that the knowledge of myths gave great power. If one knew the origin of the matter (mankind, agriculture, animals, etc), and its genealogy up to the present time, then one had command or control over the matter. Most ceremonies and rites were in fact the re-citation of the creation myth and/or a re-creation of the events contained in the myth. These myths would be performed or re-enacted as a means of gaining power over, or favor with, the elements affecting their lives. (Eliade, 1963. P.14).  
What is so strange about this?

The social consequences of mythic integration were evident at the cultural level: narratives gave events contextual meaning for individuals. In Paleolithic cultures, and in aboriginal cultures in general, the entire scenario of human life gains its perceived importance from myth; decisions are influenced by myth; and the place of every object, animal, plant, and social custom is set in myth. Myth governs the collective mind. This remains essentially true today, even in modern postindustrial cultures, at least in the realm of social values. (Donald, 1991. P. 268)

Do we not take our myths, our shadows on our wall, as valid truth; do we not pattern our entire existence, our lives and fortunes, our relations with the world, on our particular

myths that we accept at this time? Do we not value knowledge, of history, of physics, of medicine, etc. - all these myths - as a means of furthering our co-existence with existence?

Novak (and others) will [in Chapter Three] attempt to convince us to recognize that actors are parading about behind us with figures on their heads. But that puts us ahead of our story!

#### Prior to the Beginning

At first blush, I would have maintained that creation marks the beginning of our stories, that there is no-thing prior to the creation. This type thinking leads to the powerful paradox connected with boundaries...such as the boundaries of time and space ... what is before and beyond them? What are they bounding in and out? Erich Neumann (1954) sets the table for us as follows:

The question of the beginning is also the question "Whence?" It is the original and fateful question to which cosmology and the creation myths have ever tried to give new and different answers. This original question about the origin of the world is at the same time the question about the origin of man, the origin of consciousness and of the ego; it is the fateful question "Where did I come from?" that faces every human being as soon as he arrives upon the threshold of self-consciousness. The mythological answers to these questions are symbolical ...(P. 7)

The creation myths that we will explore below all contain a description of the pre-existing forces, or spirits, that

maintained some type of existence prior to the creation. This pre-creation existence is referred to as the Urgrund (Berdyev, 1954 and Eliade, 1957 P. 179), as the Dynamic Ground (Washburn, 1988), the uroboros (Neumann, 1954), Nothingness (Novak, 1970), by Christian and Judaic myths as Chaos or the void, and by Hindu and Indian myths as the great sea, and by primitive Americans as being living in the center of the earth (symbolism to the womb unmistakable). Erich Neumann (1954) gives us one of the best elaborations on the significance of this cosmic pre-existence by relating it to the pre-existence of an individual.

Although the ego experiences - and must experience - the uroboros as the terrible dark power of the unconscious, mankind does not by any means associate this stage of its preconscious existence only with feelings of dread and drowsiness. Even if, for the conscious ego, light and consciousness cleave together, like darkness and unconsciousness, man still has inklings of another and so he thinks, a deeper "extrawordly" knowledge. ... This knowledge is postconscious, outside and not of this world, a knowing and being in the perfection that comes after death, but it is also preconscious, preworldly, and prenatal. This is what the Jewish midrash means when it ascribes knowledge to the unborn babe in the womb, saying that over its head there burns a light in which it sees all the ends of the world. (P. 23)

Finally, Mirica Eliade comments on the primordial situation as in a state of urgrund from which hierogamic myth has developed into a world-wide concept.

And we now know that all creation implies a wholeness that precedes it, an Urgrund. Hierogamy is only one of the forms of explanation of Creation



from a primordial *Urgrund*; there are other cosmogonic myths besides the hierogamic; but they all presuppose the prior existence of an undifferentiated unity. (1957 P. 179)

Even in modern day chaos theory (Briggs & Peat, 1989) (Is this not myth as well?), scientists refer to mythic ideas of the chaos and order. Christian Biblical texts are reinterpreted in light of chaos theory:

Psalm 74:13-14 relates that God (who is order) is compelled to 'break the heads of the dragons on the waters' and 'crush the heads of Leviathan'. One commentator points out that this is the vestige 'of a notion of creation which emphasizes the struggle of the deity against the powers of chaos.' The Biblical universe starts 'without form, and void' until God creates, or orders, it. (Briggs & Peat, 1989, P. 20)

Other modern day scientists approach the concept of creation from viewpoints that can either support notions of creation, or refute them, depending on the science involved.

One could account for what was observed equally well on the theory that the universe had existed forever or on the theory that it was set in motion at some finite time in such a manner as to look as though it had existed forever. (Hawkins, 1988. P. 8)

Stephen Hawkins, The Nobel cosmologist, points out that when Edwin Hubble, in 1929, made the "landmark observation that wherever you look, distant galaxies are moving rapidly away from us" (P. 8), the assumption can be drawn that at some point in linear time (ten or twenty thousand million years ago), all matter was at the same place in space, and

consequently the "big bang", or creation. However, Hawkins also points out and personally maintains a unified theory that questions the need for creation:

The idea that space and time may form a closed surface without boundary also has profound implications for the role of God in the affairs of the universe. ... So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator? (1988. P. 140)

This establishment of a pre-existent situation is a necessary condition for creation myths. The necessity for a "prime-mover" has been understood for centuries. In the creation myths to follow, we will find that they all emanate from this pre-existent power of completeness and wholeness, or chaos and mystery.

It might be instructive to us at this point to remember Aristotle's insight, referred to by Brigs & Peat (P. 76) and found in the Nicomachean Ethics, "For a well-schooled man is one who searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits." (1094:23).

### Creation?

Before we ponder specific creation myths, I want to loosen the dialogue, to widen the view and to raise the mystery. How I dearly love the heroic and beautiful writing

of Anne Dillard (1974) as she poetically and playfully questions, vilifies and glorifies the significance of our created world.

That it's rough out there and chancy is no surprise. Every live thing is a survivor on a kind of extended emergency bivouac. But at the same time we are also created. In the Koran, Allah asks, "The heaven and the earth and all in between, thinkest thou I made them in jest?" It's a good question. What do we think of the created universe, spanning an unthinkable void with an unthinkable profusion of forms? Or what do we think of nothingness, those sickening reaches of time in either direction? If the giant water bug [who sucked the liquified viscera from the frog] was not made in jest, was it then made in earnest? Pascal used a nice term to describe the notion of the creator's once having called forth the universe, turning his back to it: *Deus Absconditus*. Is this what we think happened? Was the sense of it there, and God absconded with it, ate it, like a wolf who disappears round the edge of the house with the Thanksgiving turkey? ...It could be that God has not absconded but spread, as our vision and understanding of the universe have spread, to a fabric of spirit and sense so grand and subtle, so powerful in a new way, that we can only feel blindly of its hem. (P. 7)

Anne is in good company. No less than Henri Bergson (1911) also calls into question not only the nature of creation, but also the reasons for creation. Bergson postulates the creative aspects of the evolution of the cosmos, but he is distinctly puzzled with the underlying fundamentals. The "Why is there anything rather than Nothing" question surfaces again and again.

I have no sooner commenced to philosophize than I ask myself why I exist; and when I take account of the intimate connection in which I stand to the rest of the universe, the difficulty is only pushed

back, for I want to know why the universe exists; and if I refer the universe to a Principle immanent or transcendent that supports it or creates it, my thought rests on this principle only a few moments, for the same problem recurs, this time in its full breadth and generality: Whence comes it, and how can it be understood, that anything exists? ...Existence appears to me like a conquest over nought. I say to myself that there might be, that indeed there ought to be, nothing, and I then wonder that there is something. (Bergson, 1911. P. 275)

In the Introduction to this paper, I referred to St. Thomas Aquinas' recognition of the mystery of existence. From Thomas' questions of the middle ages, down to Will James of this century, the question continues to be asked and answered, over and over again:

We cannot answer why there is any being at all and not rather nothing (Wilshire quoting James, 1971, P. xxvi).

Why the mystery had to be taken out, the wonder rationalized, and the dogmatism injected is a marvel to me. Why do the actions of the ineffable have to be rationalized? What is it about mystery that demands explanation for the human specie? Obviously from the range and variety of myths presented below, wo/mankind demanded an explanation, wanted to know, and the response is myth.

#### Christian Stories of Creation.

In the beginning God created the heavens  
and the earth.  
And the earth was without form and void,  
and darkness was upon the face of the

deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

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And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26)

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These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. (2:4)

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And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (2:7)

This is a powerful rendition of the poetic beginning of the world as contained in Genesis. It is a peaceful, gentle, loving and caring story of the beginnings and of mankind's existence on this earth. This story also contains the "seeds" of patriarchy and hierarchy that we find in the Church today. From this poetic Genesis story, immersed in mystery and awe, we move (downward?) into interpretation, rationalist logic and dogmaticism.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1959) qualifies the Christian conception of creation of the world by emphatically maintaining that "The new is the real end of the old; Christ is the new;" (P. 11) that the creation of the world can only be viewed by peering backwards from the appearance of Christ, the true creation. The old world can only be viewed in light of the new! Is this not how we view all of history; from our "now" perspective?

Bonhoeffer also places the beginning in a circle and comments on the impossibility and the certainty of beginnings:

Thinking cannot answer its own last "why," because an answer would again produce a "why." The "why" is much more the expression for the beginning-less thinking, *par excellence*. Our thinking, that is, the thinking of those who must go to Christ to know of God, the thinking of fallen man, has no beginning because it is a circle. We think in a circle. We feel and will in a circle. We exist in a circle. We might then say that in that case there is beginning everywhere. We could equally well say that there is no beginning at all (P. 14)

Bonhoeffer considers the beginning, the creation of the cosmos, to be "totally ineffable, unutterably dark beyond of our blind existence." (P. 15).

Returning to the Genesis accounts, St Augustine (O'Toole, 1944) has no such problem. Augustine proceeds from a very firm and fixed position that explains not only existence, but also the possibility of evil. Of greatest importance for Augustine, God created the cosmos not out of his own essence, but *ex nihilo*, out of nothingness.

The reason for the mutability of created things lies precisely in their being drawn from nothingness. God, the unchangeable good produces good things which are changeable. These are good because they are from the supreme good; they are changeable because they are produced *ex nihilo*. Creatures are good but they are not supreme good because God has not generated them from His own substance but made them from nothing: ...*quia non eam genuit de se ipso, sed fecit ex nihilo.* (P. 6)

Thus the injection of rationalistic logic imposed on mystery and awe. Donald (1991) discusses the narrative skill and myth utilized by primitive society, and how the introduction of logical-scientific skill that supports paradigmatic thought develops in literate societies after systematic education.

In modern culture, the narrative mode still predominates in the arts, while the paradigmatic predominates in the sciences. There is little doubt that narrative thought developed earlier in human history than scientific and logical thought. ... Aboriginal hunter-gather cultures, in their possession of elaborate mythical accounts of reality and in their daily uses of language, show a predominantly narrative mode of thinking. (Donald, 1991. P. 257)

The significance of the development of a highly rationalistic Christian position cannot be overestimated in the western canon. Is this not the reification of the hierarchical concept of wo/man's relations with the deity; leading to having dominion over rather than custody of the creatures in this world; to the patriarchal domination and subordination of women; to the dogmatism inherent in the Organized Church in particular and Christianity in general?

Must the Divinity be rational? Augustine uses this argument to avoid "profound metaphysical and moral difficulties." (O'Toole, 1944 P. 8) Augustine had to "explain". For Augustine, evil is a defect or privation of good (made possible by the concept of *ex nihilo*), and not a Manicheism substance. Augustine has the Why/Existence question worked out as well.

To the question why has God created the heaven and earth, Plotinus will reply that an inexorable law of the divine nature demands such a creation. Augustine answers: *Quia voluit*. The will of God is the cause of heaven and earth. And if one asks further: "Why did God will to create heaven and earth, he seeks something which is greater than the will of God and this cannot be found." (P. 12)

It was important to Augustine to interpret Genesis as a popular and not scientific interpretation. When God made heaven and earth, as reported in Genesis 1,

the heaven and earth here mentioned are not those which are perceptible to the senses. They refer, rather to matter without form, which was made first of all, and from which all things distinct and formed arise. This matter is called by the Greeks chaos: *Primo ergo materia facta est confusa et informis, unde omnia fierent quae distincta atque formata sunt, quod credo a Graecis chaos appellari.* (P. 17).

This formless matter bears resemblance to the aristotelian concept of matter as pure potency (P. 31). Again, this distinction of form and matter seems to indicate a strong influence, not only of Aristotle, but also of Plato and Plotinus.



In an involved series of interpretations, Augustine concludes that the Genesis words, *Let there be Light*, involved the creation of the angels; although he becomes somewhat unsure. He wonders, with Aristotle, if time can exist without motion (which implies moveable bodies). In the end, Augustine concludes that two beings are timeless, but not eternal:

One of these creatures is utterly formless and therefore does not have the stability needed to be subject to time. This is formless matter. The other creature is so excellently formed that it rises above intervals of change. It is not eternal, by nature, unchangeable, but because of the perfection its contemplation of the Word of God .....This creature is, of course, the angelic nature. (P. 41).

There is very little of the mystery or wonder or awe in Augustine's conception of creation. From a poetic beginning, it is now matter of dogma, yet not Biblical inspired dogma, but that of religious scholars in the church. This [non-inspired] dogma represents a fundamental underpinning of the Organized Church today. This is the beginning of a rational, dogmatic and hierarchical representation and not to be in accord with any orientation of mystery, wonder and awe.

To underscore Augustine's dogmatic positions, O'Toole summarizes as follows:

There are three questions we may ask ourselves about the world: who made it, by what means, for what reason? (*Quis, per quid, quare*). God, of course is the author of the world, as He is of all creatures. How did God make it? Through the power of His fiat. For what purpose? Because it was good. (P. 50)

In fairness to St. Augustine, the Roman Church and the scholars and devouts of the last fifteen hundred years, In their searchings for understanding, their choice of rationality may be understandable. They stood on the shoulders of the Greeks, the birthplace of rationality. With the surging evangelical charge that they felt, perhaps it was easier to "convert the heathen" if the story "made-sense" and did not depend on mystery. The pagans had their stories; their stories explained matters for them, so why not have reasonable, rational explanations available to convert these pagans to Christianity? It seems unfortunate that the stories developed had to be hierarchical, patriarchal, oppressive, power-laden, positivistic and void of wonder, mystery and awe. From Mythos to Logos! Athens won out over Jerusalem!

Bonhoeffer holds that the creation of the cosmos is "totally ineffable, unutterably dark and beyond of our blind existence." (P 15). I prefer not to count the number of angels on a pin! Too bad that that would not sell!

St. Thomas Aquinas re-emphasizes Augustine's conception of creation *ex nihilo*. James Anderson (1952) gives all of Thomas' arguments in favor of *ex nihilo* and dispels all arguments to the contrary. Passing over these rationalistic and positivistic arguments, Anderson summarizes the Thomistic arguments for creation as follows:

Since existence is absolutely primary and absolutely universal, its proper and adequate cause can be none other than an agent absolutely primary and absolutely universal, and, consequently, uncaused. (P. 24)

Anderson further explains the Thomistic conception of the universe as:

The universe is a community of beings analogically bound to one another through their proportionate sharing in the act of existence. Now, God occupies the absolute center of this community, for He and He alone is the cause of that act. (P. 114)

The influence of Aristotle on Thomas is unmistakable. His conceptions of "the good" as that which all things aim or desire is to him a metaphysical fact. The actualization of potency is a necessary desire and good. Anderson further posits that Thomas' metaphysics of love is "the first presupposition, the primary ground, of every appetitive act." (P. 154).

Langdon Gilkey (1959) wrote his doctoral dissertation on the subject of *creatio ex nihilo*, and studied under both Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. His understanding of the Protestant Christian doctrine of Creation has been helpful to me in my attempt to, first understand, and second, to attempt to find meaning in this doctrine. Gilkey takes even the most difficult issues head-on, including the existence of evil and the intellectual dilemma this presence has caused for Christianity.

The question of evil, then, is no subsidiary issue for Christian faith. The reality of evil in our world is at one the greatest intellectual threat to the convincing power of Christian theology, and the single characteristic of our human existence which gives to Christian faith its continual meaning and creative power in men's lives. (P. 214).

Gilkey maintains the Christian position that God did not create evil as such, that evil is a distortion of the good that was created. "For Christian thought, therefore, evil arose only from freedom." (P. 218). Freedom gave mankind the capability to turn from God and sin. This concept of relating Freedom with evil also caused Nicholas Berdyaev (1960) to postulate freely and widely on the relation with some "original-thoughts":

The traditional doctrines of theology do not solve the painful problem of evil. The ordinary theological conception of the creation of the world and the fall turns it all into a divine comedy ...Evil is generally said to be due to the abuse of freedom with which God endowed His creatures. But this explanation is purely superficial. The freedom through which the creature succumbs to evil has been given to it by God, i.e. in the last resort is determined by God. (P. 23)

The theogonic process (a divine mystery-play going on in the eternal hidden life of the Deity) and the presence of tragedy in God presuppose the existence of primeval freedom rooted in nothing, in non-being. On the secondary plan, where there is the Creator and the creature, God and man, the uncreated freedom may be thought of as outside God. We may not think of being as outside God, but we may thus think of non-being. This is the only way to understand evil without making God responsible for it. ...The element of freedom does not come from God the Father, for it is prior to being. The tragedy in God is connected with freedom: God the Creator has absolute power over being, but not over freedom. (P. 29)

These concepts of evil are not satisfactory to me. How can it explain 40,000 deaths per day of children from starvation, dis-ease and di-stress and other absurdities of this existence? This concept [of freedom being responsible for evil] again immerses me in rationality, cause and effect, power-relations, leading to sternness, strictness, oppression, domination; and supporting the patriarchal hierarchy of the church fathers over the believers. This is no small matter! I am speaking here of centuries and centuries of doctrinaire subjugation of millions and millions of people. This refers to the real lives, hopes, desires, fears, suffering and eventual death [fearful of going to hell] of a substantial part of humanity for hundreds of years. Was the Grand Inquisitor right? Do we really want bread? Do we really want it that badly?

Gilkey enumerates all of the existential questions concerning the meaning of existence, "who" put me here, his verbiage for "thrownness", of freedom and destiny, etc. (pp 19, 21). His Christian answers are summarized as follows:

These affirmations are: 1) That the world has come to be from the transcendent holiness and power of God, who because He is the ultimate origin is the ultimate Ruler of all created things. 2) That because of God's creative and ruling power our finite life and the events in which we live have, despite their bewildering mystery and their frequently tragic character, a meaning, a purpose, and a destiny beyond any immediate and apparent futility. 3) That man's life, and therefore my life, is not my own to "do with" merely as I please, but is claimed for - because it is upheld

and guided by - a power and a will beyond my will.  
(P. 25).

In other words, Faith! The Christian creation stories and existential dilemmas posed do not shirk from the problem, do not tread down the road of rational thinking and provide "answers", even if some [finally] admit that some answers are ultimately mystical and "beyond my will"! Mythos to Logos and back to Mythos!

Concluding this section on Christian concepts of creation, I return to Nicholas Berdyaev (1954) for a few remarks concerning the mystery of creation and our understanding of the Christian story.

The very conception of the creation of the world by God stands in need of revision and deepening. As is well known, the idea of creation has always been difficult to rational philosophical thought. ... The widespread explanation that God created the world either for his own pleasure (this is a deplorable notion) or in order to reveal his love to some other than himself, is very naive. (P. 61)

The events which take place in the existential sphere lie outside any causal sequence. It is only in the sphere of objectification that the causal link exists. It cannot, therefore, be said, for example that God is the cause of the world. There can be no causal relations between God and man. There is nothing which God determines. God is not a power "outside" and "above". (P. 13)

I am reminded again of Aristotle's admonition to search for only that degree of precision that the subject matter will allow!

### Judaic Stories of Creation

For this interpretation of creation, reference is made to Levenson (1969) for his views and his critique of Yehezkel Kaufmann's (1889-1963) accounts. Levenson's narrative and interpretations of Genesis 1 varies markedly from the Christian accounts discussed above. First, and foremost, the Jewish interpretation rejects the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* and labels such a concept as distinctly "post-biblical". The Jewish interpretation emanates from the concept that when, in Genesis 1, "God created the Heavens and Earth", such creation was not completed in one day (as maintained in the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*)... but in three days, and such creation was accomplished from a pre-existent formless mass (such as water) that could be called chaos.

The rest of the chapter [Genesis 1] indicates that the heaven was created on the second day to restrain the celestial water, and the earth on the third day. (Levenson, 1988. P. 5)

Additionally, Levenson points out that nowhere in Jewish doctrine or myth does the God of Israel have a myth of origin. "Not a trace of a theogony can be found in the Hebrew Bible." (P. 5). It does appear that there may be other Gods/gods involved in the creation story (Elohim being plural..El as singular!). "When were these other divine beings created? They too seem to have been primordial." (P. 5).

Levenson points out that the Jewish creation stories bear strong resemblance to the Babylon stories (discussed below).

Regardless of their possible origin or connection to Babylon, they are now distinctly and forever Jewish. Both accounts indicate that creation may have been the result of conflict between and amongst the gods, with (in the Jewish version) YHWH being victorious! "Psalm 82 relates the drama of YHWH's ascent to cosmic mastery that predominates in Hebrew Bible." (P. 7). Psalm 74:12-17 presents an even more convincing story of conflict and tenuousness.

There is some ambiguity on this point however, and Levenson and Kaufmann disagree on the nature and significance of this supposed conflict, probably representing the conflict between Psalm 74 (violence, dragons, Leviathian) and Genesis 1 (poetic). Whereas Kaufmann supposes "that in Israel we are dealing not with creation but with a rebellion against YHWH by some of his own creatures," (P. 8); Levenson is not so sure. He interprets the texts to represent creation (provided we do not fall into the postbiblical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*). These conflicting stories get all intermingled with the rather straightforward Babylon myth which does involve conflict, mastery, order and dominion. Nevertheless,

Two and a half millennia of Western theology have made it easy to forget that throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, including Israel, the point of creation is not the production of matter out of nothing, but rather the emergence of a stable community in a benevolent and life-sustaining order. The defeat by YHWH of the forces that have interrupted that order is intrinsically an act of creation. The fact that order is being restored rather than instituted was not a difference of



great consequence in ancient Hebrew culture. (P. 12)

Nor is it of great importance to modern Jewish writers - There is not a single reference to creation or creation stories in the considerable literature of Abraham J. Heschel. Martin Buber (1965) makes only passing reference to creation, and grounds creation in mystery and the ineffable. Heschel would certainly agree with the mystery, wonder and awe of it all.

Particularly impressive is the concept that the Jews look to their God for assistance in the "emergence of a stable community in a benevolent and life-sustaining order." (Levenson, P. 12). This humanistic hunger, with overtones for the affirmation of humanity, and requests for help with everyday vicissitudes of existence seems more real, more pastoral, with more texture, more passion and harmony. These longings by the early Judaic people could be resulting from long periods of capture and servitude in Egypt and Babylonia. Is this not what one really wants from their deity; assistance in living a meaningful, purposeful life of compassion, love, joy and gratitude? One must appreciate the lack of violence, hierarchy, power, domination, and subjugation in these views. This view seems to recognize that if I truly want "bread", then I will work for it, and please make it possible for me to attain it for myself, my family, my community!

Nevertheless, one very important result of this creation story is its tenuousness, its susceptibility and vulnerability to the return of chaos! Regardless of the creation story taken, on the one hand God has only promised not to let chaos return in his covenant to Noah, and on the other hand:

In the case of creation through combat, the survival of the possibility of the return to chaos is more unqualified. The Sea is not always described as destroyed, hacked to pieces, never to rise again. On the contrary, often the waters of chaos are presented as surviving, only within the bounds that define creation. (P. 14)

Levenson wants to emphasize that the YHWH of Israel has not defeated forever the Leviathan, or the Behemoth, or the chaotic Seas; and that the conflict may re-emerge in an eschatological context as a return to chaos. Not only the prophecies in the Bible, but also the readily availability of nuclear weapons in the hands of human beings today support the contention of "a return to chaos". Chaos theory (a current scientific myth) itself represents periods of stability punctuated with periods of chaos with imbedded periods of stability. Why should there be order; why not chaos? Maybe we are experiencing chaos now, with order being a reuniting with the creator!

#### Creation Legends of Babylon and Egypt

In the beginning, neither sky nor earth existed. Everything was a watery waste, a chaos of freshwater and salt water. The two great currents flowed together and mingled, but without forming

lakes or rivers. Two Divinities contended for dominion over the vast primordial ocean; Apsu [male, father], who ruled over the fresh waters, and Tiamat [female, mother], who ruled over the salt water deeps.

The waters contained the seeds of life; but centuries passed before life arose at last, in pairs, the gods began to emerge from the liquid universe. First there appears Lanmu and Lanamu, personifications of the sand bars and silt deposits which form where salt water and fresh water meet. Lanmu and Lanamu in turn produced another divine pair, Anshar (horizon of the sky) and Kishar (horizon of the earth) who in turn became the parents of Ea, the earth and water god. (Father Lawrence, OSB, unpublished classroom notes, 1993)

The myth continues into a series of conflicts, extreme violence and wars among their progeny until Marduk, one of the offspring gods finally defeats and kills Tiamat, the mother of salt water chaos, and establishes order:

Placing his foot on the corpse of his enemy, Marduk bursts into an exultant victory chant, the forces of chaos fled when they saw that Tiamat had been killed, Marduk had won and it was useless to fight against him. The victorious champion lifted the inert corpse of his enemy and, flinging Tiamat's body to the waves, Marduk shouted, "Now order will prevail in the universe!"

At Marduk's command, the world was created and mankind made to populate it, thus it was that Marduk imposes order on the world and the universe and receives homage from both gods and human beings. (Lawrence, 1993)

Here we find the earliest account of pre-creation activity of gods of chaos, of conflict among the gods, of the defeat of chaos (and a watery chaos at that) and the establishment of order leading to creation of the universe.

It is significant that these stories come from what is portrayed as the "cradle of civilization", the Tigrus and Euphrates valley, the land of the Sumerians and Babylonians. The "earliest civilizations" produce the stories of the earliest times.

From the tone of these myths, it must have been a violent period, this antiquity, with much warfare, suffering and death. These early people seem not to have been "pastoral", but warlike, vicious and with little regard for life. Mythos is not synonymous with the good, the peaceful or with the affirmation of humanity! Sometimes, perhaps, more logos in the affairs of mankind would be of benefit. I wonder to what extent the people of these areas [Iraq, Iran, etc.] are still under the influence of these types of myths, or if the advent of modern religions [Muslim, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism] can possibly meliorate archetypical and unconscious views of creation?

No doubt, the Christian and Judaic creation stories derive from these accounts which date back to the third millennium B.C.E. (King, 1918). In his Schweich Lectures (1908, P. 23), Canon Driver "showed how the literature of Assyria and Babylon had thrown light upon Hebrew traditions concerning the origin and early history of the world." (King, 1918. P. 2 [also delivered as Schweich Lectures, 1916])

Most of the evidence of Babylonian and Sumerian Creation myths and stories of the Deluge emanate from what is called

Nippur documents uncovered (in present day Iraq) by the Pennsylvania Museum and published in 1914. (King, P. 21) and from the "Seven Tablets of Creation" (of Sumerian origin).

In the reason here given for man's creation, or for his rescue from the Flood, we have an interesting parallel to the Sixth Tablet of the Semitic-Babylonian Creation Series. At the opening of that tablet Marduk, in response to 'the word of the gods', is urged by his heart to devise a cunning plan which he imparts to Ea, namely the creation of man from his own divine blood and from bone which he will fashion. And the reason he gives for his proposal is precisely that which, as we have seen, prompted the Sumerian deity to create or preserve the human race. For Marduk continues:

I will create man who shall inhabit  
[...],

That the service of the gods may be  
established and that their shrines may be  
built. (Seven Tablets, Vol I, pp 86 ff)

...It will suffice here to note that, in both, the reason given for man's existence is the same, namely, that the gods themselves may have worshippers. (King, P. 55)

For the Egyptian version of the creation, I return again to the unpublished work papers of Father Lawrence, OSB. His interpretations of the Egyptian myths are the result of many years of study and student interaction. His version is as follows:

In the Beginning, Nun, the watery chaos, filled all space. In the watery depth, however, life was already beginning to take form. Eventually, there emerges the creator-god Atum [by some accounts, he was a serpent or a watery dragon], whose name means "The Completed One."

Lacking a place on which to stand, Atum creates a mound or low hill which rose above the waters. Then, standing on the primeval mound, he brought forth two more divinities by spitting them out of

his mouth: Shu, the god of air and wind, and Tefnut, the goddess of air and moisture. [note the male Shu and the female Tefnut]

Identifying himself as the supreme creator-god by whose power all things would exist, Atum held council with his offspring. The younger divinities readily acknowledged their father's supremacy. "Speak! tell us now what our task will be!" exclaims Tefnut.

Atum faced his children and said, "Shu, you are the air, from which life will emerge; and you, lovely Tefnut will bring order out of chaos and help to separate the earth from the heavens."

Then Shu and Tefnut, the first couple produced another diving pair: Geb, the earth-god, and Nut, the sky-goddess. Atum commented proudly, "see the earth and the sky are born ! Soon an orderly universe will replace chaos." Thus were born Geb, the god of the earth and Nut, goddess of the sky.

Shu and Tefnut lifted the sky above the earth and thus helped to form a well-ordered universe out of the primeval chaos. Nut became the vault of the sky, while Geb became the earth, with its mountains and deserts and rivers. Atum, in his capacity as creator-god, imposed order on the world and made men and animals and plants to populate the earth. (Lawrence, 1993)

This recount is known as the system of Heliopolis and is most widely observed (King, 1916, P. 107). There are other accounts ranging from a cosmic goose that lays a cosmic egg to a Mother Goddess described as a cow arching across the sky to a version of the gods making man out of clay on a potters wheel. (King, 1916, P. 106)

These accounts from Babylon and Egypt are more "earthy", more of the "stuff of life", more poetic, with overtones of greed, jealousy, passion, power, conflict, suffering and death. There does not seem to be such an emphasis on rationality,

positivism or logic. These are stories of the heroic, of the poetic, violent and creative powers of gods and man!

### Greek Creation Myths

I am returning again to Father Lawrence, OSB, and his work papers for the clearest and most straightforward account of the Greek myths of creation. Father Lawrence's account continues on to account for the appearance of all of the Greek gods; however, I quote only the portion that relates to the creation of the first gods, mankind and animals:

FIRST of all there was chaos, the dark, empty void.

Before the sea, the land, or the sky existed, the universe was only a formless mass over which Chaos presided. Chaos was the one divinity whom the Greeks never represented in bodily form, for since there was no light, Chaos was never seen.

Then there appeared Gaea, the Earth, Terrestrial matter.

Next appeared Eros (desire), the most beautiful of the immortal gods. No heart can resist his influence.

These were the three primordial elements or forces: Chaos, Gaea and Eros. Out of Chaos came Erebus and night, or the lower darkness and the upper darkness. From the union of Erebus and night were born two radiant offspring: Ether, light and air; and Hemera, day. Ether and Hemera, united by ties of love and beauty, called on Eros to help them. Their combined efforts brought about the separation of the waters, the air, and the solid matter [Earth].

Earth first bore Uranus, the starry sky, equal in size to herself, to cover her on all sides. (Later, the sky was to be the home of the immortal gods.) Next, Gaea bore the lofty mountains. Then

Eros aimed an arrow at the Earth and commanded her to bring forth life, living creatures.

AND SO IT WAS that plant and animal life appeared on the earth. Birds filled the air with their songs. Where there had been silence, now there was life and movement. The wild animals and birds lived side by side in peace and harmony. (Lawrence, 1993)

Other versions of this creation myth concur with the chaotic stage in the beginning, but create Gaea, Mother Earth, and Uranus, Father Sky. The marriage of Gaea and Uranus produced the other gods, cyclops and monsters. (Society for Visual Education, Inc).

Robert Graves (1955) gives the Pelasgian version of creation. In this story, Eurynome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, created the North Wind and the great serpent Ophion [note that in this version the creator is a creatrix!]. The couple lived on Mount Olympus. They coupled and formed the lesser gods, planets and finally Pelasgus, the first man. (P. 27). Interestingly, this myth and religion was matrilineal, "with women being the dominant sex and man her frightened victim." (Graves, P. 28). This myth relates later to the Babylonia myths of Marduk in that Marduk "symbolically sliced her [Eurynome] in two at the Babylonian Spring Festival, when he inaugurated the new world order. (Graves. P. 28).

Other popular Greek versions include the Homeric and Orphic myth with the original gods, Oceanus and Tethys; the



Olympian Creation Myth with its gods, Mother Earth and Chaos and their son Uranus.

From Hesiod's Theogony comes a philosophical myth with Darkness and Chaos giving rise to Night, Day, Erebus, and the Air (Graves, P. 33).

From Ovid's Metamorphoses comes Nature out of Chaos who created the earth and man from clay and water, "and that his soul was supplied by certain wandering divine elements, which had survived from the First Creation (?) (Graves, P. 34).

The second myth, found only in Ovid, was borrowed by the later Greeks from the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, the introduction to which records the goddess Aruru's particular creation of the first man, Eabani, from a piece of clay; but although Zeus had been the Universal Lord for many centuries, the mythographers were forced to admit that the Creator of all things might possibly have been a Creatrix.

The Jews, as inheritors of the 'Pelasgian', or Canaanitish, creation myth, had felt the same embarrassment: in the Genesis account, a female 'Spirit of the Lord' broods on the face of the waters, though she does not lay the world egg; and Eve, 'the Mother of All Living' ...(Graves, P. 35)

Obviously, the Babylon and Judaic myths affected the Greek stories as they are not only later in time, but also intertwined in action and gods. It is equally obvious that the rationality imbued in later Christian accounts are missing as well. It seems that these poetic, heroic, passionate, almost playful myths of sometimes violent, sometimes playful gods are the catalyst that brought early pre-Socratic philosophers to begin their rationalistic plunge into the

eventual scientific endeavor to "explain the world". Athens - vs- Jerusalem! Mystery -vs- rationality. Mythos and Logos! The questions that wo/mankind have asked since the Greeks.

### Norse and Germanic Creation myths

A historiography of the Norse and Germanic mythology would reveal a substantial persuasion being exerted on ancient (pagan) stories by the Christian influence beginning about 1000 CE. Most, if not all, of the early stories, especially those concerning creation, would be entirely lost if it were not for The Prose Edda written by Snorri Sturluson around 1200 CE. Through his poetry, and his alone, we can peer through medieval and neolithic eyes into the myths, legends and stories of this region.

Even Sturluson, in The Prose Edda, paid homage to the Christian authority by including a prologue to his work quoting the exact genesis story of creation, Adam and Eve, the flood, etc. (P. 8). Couched as a text on poetics, really a recalling of ancient creation myths, Sturluson protected himself from the Church by the prologue and with these words:

Christians, however, must not believe in pagan gods or that these tales are true in any other way than is indicated at the beginning of this book [the prologue]. (P 11, Introduction by Sigurdur Nordal, D.Litt, Oxon, Research Professor of Icelandic Literature in the University of Reykjavik).

Turning now to the unpublished work papers, classroom notes and writings of Father Lawrence, OSB with his interpretation of the Edda creation stories, we begin the saga of the giants!

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WERE FROST AND FIRE.

Long ago, before time began, there was no earth, nor sky, nor ocean; only the region of fire and the region of mist and between them, the abyss.

In the heart of the region of fire dwelt the fire-giant Surt, or Surtur, who sat waiting for that dread final day on which he would destroy the world and the universe. On that day, Surt's flaming sword would destroy the lives of both gods and men.

The cold from the region of the mist and the heat from the region of fire formed a thick, poisonous fog. The fog drifted down, down into ginnungagap, the yawning gulf.

In the center of Niflheim there surged and boiled up the mighty fount of all waters, a well called nvergelmir, the roaring cauldron. One of the streams issuing from nvergelmir was the river evivagar or icy waves, through which ran a poisonous scum like the slag which flows out of a furnace. The scum hardened into ice, which little by little filled the northern portion of ginnungagap.

From the interplay of frost and fire, a figure in human shape took form amid the fog and mist. This was the frost-giant Ymir, sometimes known also as Aurgelmir, or "mud seether." Ymir is the ancestor of the giants. After Ymir was formed, another being emerged from the mists and frost: the cow Audhumbla, "The Nourisher." Ymir remained at the side of Audhumbla, the primordial cow, and fed himself with her milk.

After a series of further giants and gods emerged from the frost and mist, and after a series of violent conflicts, jealousies, rivalries, fierce personal battles between gods

and giants, finally the Giant Odin, the maker and protector of humankind was formed. The giant Odin finally succeeds in slaying the frost-giant Ymir and

Out of Ymir's flesh, the gods formed the earth; from the giant's blood, the rivers and seas, from his bones they made the mountains, and his teeth became rocks and gravel.

From the giant's body there emerged a new race, that of the elves and dwarfs. "Go now" Odin commanded them, "and live in the caves and in the most remote corners of the woods."

Then Odin lifted Ymir's skull and announced, "this will serve to cover the worlds." And so Ymir's huge skull became the sky. Sparks which had escaped from the realm of fire were given a place in the sky where they became stars.

.  
. .

The human race had not yet been made, Odin now prepares to create mankind. ....From the trunks of the trees, an ash and an elm, Odin carved the first man, ask (ash) and first woman, embla (elm). [He] gave them power to think and to speak, made them able to see and hear. And so it was that the first human couple came into existence. Ask and Embla thanked the gods for giving them being and life, and promised not only to populate the earth, but also to worship the gods faithfully.

After mankind populated the earth, they became "lovers of gold" and corrupt. Some of the giants "have made men evil and depraved; someday we shall have to fight the giants again!"

Odin continued to watch over the world, for he knew that sooner or later a tremendous battle must occur, a battle in which the world and the gods would go down to destruction together. (Lawrence, OSB, 1993)

Other myths concerning the conflict between the gods and giants are contained in stories of Balder, Freyr, Frigg, Thor, Wotan, Loki; however the legends of Odin as the leader of the Norse gods dominate. These gods and myths are also present in Germanic versions with slight changes (Tuisto rather than Ymir, for instance). The early Germanic creation myths also contained the same belief in the ultimate destruction of the world.

What an elaborate set of stories, heroic, "larger-than-life" creatures vying for power, control and mastery of the world. The stories are full of passion, violence and drama on a giant scale. Harken back to an early paragraph...Surt, with his flaming sword, is waiting to destroy the world! Odin knows, that the final battle between the giants and gods must occur, and with it, the end of the world!

The sun will go  
black  
earth sink in the sea,  
heaven be stripped  
of its bright stars;  
smoke rage  
and fire,  
leaping the flame  
lick heaven itself. (Prose Edda, P. 90)

However, in the final few sentences, the myth goes on to recount the repopulation of the world by gods and wo/man. Thus ends the portion of the Edda that recounts the activities of gods and giants in the creation (and destruction and re-creation) of the world.

### Native American Creation Myths

In order to provide a representative sample of the type of myths that prevailed in primitive American culture, I have selected the creation myths of the Maya, the Hopi and the Pueblo (Tewa). These myths are differing in many respects, each has its own particular charm. Turning to Father Lawrence, OSB, for his interpretation of the Maya, the story is as follows:

This is the account of how it all began. This is the first account, the first narrative. There was neither man, nor animal, birds, fishes, crabs, trees, stones, caves, ravines, grasses, nor forests. There was nothing brought together, nothing which could make a noise, nor anything which might move or tremble.

In the beginning all was calm, silent, motionless. The surface of the earth had not yet appeared; only the sea and the vast, empty sky existed. There was only immobility and silence in the darkness, in the night.

In the deepest part of the night dwelt Huracan, also know as "Heart of Heaven." Then he spoke his word of command, in the presence of the lords Tepeu and Gucumati: "Let us make this and that; let us make everything!"

Again Huracan spoke his words of command: "Let the waters withdraw so that the land can appear! Let there be living creatures on the earth, to pay us homage! Let light appear, let there be daybreak in the sky and on the earth!"

Animals appeared, trees, mountains and birds. The gods were initially pleased, but became dissatisfied when the creatures could not talk and praise them. The gods then created wo/mankind out of clay, but it was unsatisfactory as

the clay would crumble. The gods then created wo/mankind out of wood. These wooden people also displeased the gods and were destroyed. Finally, a more satisfactory version of humankind was created out of corn and cornmeal. These humans were god-like and wise; could see to the horizons and threatened the gods.

Then Huracan, Heart of Heaven, sent a mist over the eyes of the men. "My vision is growing cloudy!", one of them exclaimed. "I can see only what is near."

Another cries out, "our wisdom, our knowledge, is diminishing! It will be thus forever!"

While men slept, women were created and "standing before them the women were indeed very beautiful and the hearts of the men rejoiced." These were the first human couples from whom all human beings descended. (Lawrence, OSB, 1993)

This concept, of creation, destruction, re-creation is found in most, if not all, of the myths of primitive Americans. In differing mythological accounts, the world seems to be created over and over again, in cyclic, sometimes with rhythmic regularity.

the famous [mayan] calendars marked not only days, months and years, but in the Maya calendar a great cyclic pattern of roughly three million years, with subdivisions of 158,000, 8,000, 400 and 20 years. ...At the close of each great cycle creation reached its fulfilment and a new creation began. (Lawrence, 1993)

It is pointed out in these classroom notes and workpapers provided by Father Lawrence, that the Maya believed that we were living in the era of the Fifth Sun. "Creatures on earth suffer continual testing by the gods, and if any species fails it perishes with the Sun to which it belongs." We cannot assume that this era will last forever either, for "only if mankind climbs the ladder of redemption" can it become immortal. In each of the creations and destructions, at least one human couple manages to survive to re-populate the next world.

During one of these ages, the supreme god sent for the human pair, Tata and Nena, and told them to make a hole in a great tree and to hide in it. When the flood came they would be saved, they were told, but only if they were not greedy and did not eat more than a single maize cob each. The man and woman remained safely in their hole until the waters receded. When at last they emerged, they saw a fish, and they made a fire on which to roast it. The gods saw the smoke rise into the air and were very angry. As a punishment Tata and Nena were amputated of a portion of their heads and transformed into dogs. Because they had disobeyed the gods, they forfeited that part of the brain which distinguishes man from animals. (Lawrence papers, 1993)

In another version of creation from Central America, the God Quetzalcoatl undergoes a series of heroic acts of contest, contention, battles and wars with other gods, finally descends into the underworld, and retrieves a bone fragment of the giants who were in a previous era. By grinding these bone fragments into dust, and after waiting for three days:



The gods waited patiently, and on the fourth day the mixture seemed to boil. Soon a baby boy appears. The midwife goddess lifted him up and announces, "Humanity has been born! See the first man!"

Then a baby girl emerged. "Here is the first woman!" the goddess exclaimed. "The human race will descend from these two, the first couple."

At last the sun began to move, and the human race held it in honor above every other divinity. "Hail Sun! We have build that pyramid in your honor, and there we will worship you." (Lawrence work papers, 1993)

Moving into the Hopi culture, Laura Thompson (1950) explains their creation myths. Long ago, the Hopi lived in the Lowerworld and were very happy. "There was much rain and the crops grew well." (Thompson, 1950 P. 121). After their society seemed to break down, with arguments and ill-feelings, the Hopi decided to ask if they could move into this present world.

After sending out messengers who were favorably received by the Deity of the Upperworld, the chiefs and the people climbed out through an aperture called the Sipapu (Place of Emergence). From there they started to group, ... and took possession of the land. When the other main Hopi clans arrived by various routes, each of their leaders gave one or more ceremonies to the mythical Bear Clan Chief in exchange for land, and thus the ancient pueblo groups settled in Hopiland. (Thompson, P. 122)

Alfonso Ortiz, PhD (1969) is of Pueblo origin and presents a detailed exposition of the Tewa creation (or origin) myth. Similar to the Hopi myth above, Ortiz relates that

The Tewa were living in Sipofene beneath Sandy Place Lake far to the north. The world under the lake was like this one, but it was dark. Supernaturals, men and animals lived together at this time, and death was unknown. (P. 13)

Among these people living under the ground was the "Blue Corn Woman, near to summer," and the "White Corn Maiden, near to ice." These mothers asked the men to go to the upperworld and explore. When they emerged, and "stepped on the earth it was still soft and he sank to his ankles in the mud". After a long and involved attempt to emerge into the upperworld, finally the Tewa people came to settle the southwest. (Ortiz, 1959).

Joseph Campbell (1990) confirms these stories of the Pueblo people as being a myth that is "universal in this part of the world". "It is of the first people having come up from the womb of the earth through a series of four stages.." (P. 32). After repeated rising and falling from one stage to another, they finally emerge into the world as we know it now. "This is really an out-of-the-earth birth" (P. 32), and has some relevance to the Native American reverence for the Earth in all of their ceremonies.

In all of these accounts, the gods seem to be present before the creation of the world and wo/man. The gods seem to have struggled to create a satisfactory version of wo/mankind, with several creations, destructions and re-creations necessary to effect present wo/mankind. Yet, even this is

deemed tenuous, as the great cycle must forever destroy and recreate.

In the Maya and Aztec versions, there is human sacrificing to the gods, much blood demanded by the gods, and abundant punishment for any lack of respect.

### Conclusions

Obviously, wo/mankind has gone to great lengths to explain and justify their existence. Some story must exist, for obviously we exist and must have come from some logical or illogical beginnings. Unfortunately, these myths convey a heritage of violence, warfare, destruction, wanton killing and suffering, greed, power - or - probably equal in destructive power, a heritage of rationality, dogmaticism, domination and suppression. Some versions depict an absolute dependence on and vulnerability to the gods (fate), some of human aspirations and search for freedom (choice), and some for earthly interpretations that result in the desire for bread over freedom. These myths represent to me the origins and problematic nature of various interpretations of present day existence, including destiny, fate, freedom, choice, domination and subordination - the vicissitudes of existence. Our present-day human problematique did not begin with the industrial revolution, the rise of science, or even with the incessant search for knowledge -vs - mystery; but is archtypically ingrained in our psyche from the earliest times

of creation through myths. These myths represent the wellspring of existence. They are important to me in my attempt to place the human dilemma in perspective and my attempt to form a coherent view of existence.

## Chapter II

## T H E E P I S T E M I C H U N G E R

Epistemic Hunger and its Problematics

Now that some basis has been established in Chapter One for my existence in-this-world through the recognition of the [archetypical] importance of a variety of present and ancient myths, it is now my task to "bring myself" to the present. What has happened since creation to account for the existence of the variety and profusion of humanity? I want to know if there are some divine or other "forces" that have propelled wo/mankind from the naked Adam and Eve of Genesis to the modern intellectual, dominating and powerful specie that we have become? Do we have a Faustian need to be as God? And has that need or force been good?

Perhaps the beginning of this epistemic hunger is explicated in the Genesis account, when Adam and Eve partook of the "forbidden fruit" from the tree of life!

[Serpent says] For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig

leaves together and made themselves aprons.  
(Genesis 3:5-7)

"To make one wise", "And the eyes of them both were opened"; the epistemic hunger beginning to be manifested in wo/mankind! Now whether this hunger is ungodly or not, I shall not delve too deeply. However, I do not want to dismiss entirely the possibility that this curiosity, this epistemic hunger has not been, and is not, necessarily leading wo/mankind to higher and higher levels of humanity. There is much in the literature (in the Canon) that deprecates the epistemic hunger and clearly indicates that it may lead humanity to ruin. Jermy Rifkin (1988) clearly maintains this position. (Curiosity killed the Cat). Martin Heidegger (1971) in a conversation with a Japanese philosopher made the statement:

Thirst for knowledge and greed for explanations never lead to a thinking inquiry. Curiosity is always the concealed arrogance of a self-consciousness that banks on a self-invented ratio and its rationality. The will to know does not will to abide in hope before what is worth of thought. (P. 13)

The problematics of the present (and historical) debate over "intellectualism" and "anti-intellectualism" is perplexing. Even though Socrates has been quoted as saying that "Knowledge is Virtue", Nietzsche claims (1966) that

In the end, however, privately and secretly, he laughed at himself, too; in himself he found,

before his subtle conscience and self-examination  
the same difficulty and incapacity (P. 191)

Oswald Spengler (1926) agrees: "In place of the Socratic formula 'Knowledge is Virtue' we have, even in Bacon, the formula 'Knowledge is Power'." (Vol 1, P. 362). Later, Spengler comments that "the episode of the 'burning of the Books,' decreed by the Chinese Augustus in 212, begins to be intelligible ..." (Vol II, P. 433). Erich Fromm (1947) commenting (and laminating) on modern man's orientation to 'marketing', and with reference to the incessant need to know (as opposed to thinking) stated that

Knowledge itself becomes a commodity. Here, too, man is alienated from his own power; thinking and knowing are experienced as a tool to produce results. Knowledge of man himself, psychology, which in the great tradition of Western thought was held to be the condition for virtue, for right living, for happiness, has degenerated into an instrument to be used for better manipulation of others and oneself ... (P. 76).

Knowledge, and wo/mankind's incessant straight-lined Faustian curiosity for knowledge as represented by scientific advances is made problematic by recent thinkers and writers as well. Svi Shapiro (1983) in a study in the sociology of knowledge observed that

There is, more probably, a widening cognizance of the growing tension between the human benefits that are the results of technology and scientific forms of understanding, and the dehumanizing and imperilling consequences of scientific 'progress'. Certainly there is an increasing evidence of a growing skepticism toward the monolithic use of

scientific criteria, values, and epistemology as the sole means by which one may develop understanding or make judgements (P. 137)

The problematic nature of epistemic hunger resulting in the profusion of technic shows itself in the discovery of gunpowder, the genetic double-helix, nuclear weapons, ingenious methods of human torture, psychological conditioning, mass extermination camps, continuation of conditions of domination and subordination by the powerful (more knowledgeable) and the wholesale destruction of the environment in the name of "progress". Yet who can deny that this epistemic hunger, in the form of curiosity exists? We have not destroyed the world yet, although we now have the capacity to do so easily. Where does this hunger lead us?

In this chapter, I will be documenting wo/man's incessant drive to know, yet I will also be constantly questioning the "value" of this knowledge, and will concur finally with Abraham Heschel as he places (Faustian) knowledge on an inferior level to (Apollonian) wisdom (See R. May, 1991, P. 218 for an excellent distinction between the two).

I want to agree with Novak that this drive to constantly question, to seek, to find out can be maddening and it "makes us aware of its total range and depth, a feeling of formlessness, or nausea, or lassitude arises." (1971, P 15).

When I perceive the drive to question in its purity, apart from the products to which it leads me, I perceive the ambiguity of my own conscious life. I recognize the formlessness, the



aimlessness, and the disunity implicit in my own insignificance, my mortality, my ultimate dissolution. I peer into madness, chaos, and death. (P. 15).

Are we, in reality, and finally, peering into madness, chaos, and death? Is this where the epistemic hunger will take us? Novak maintains that "The unique character of our drive to question, however, is its ability to double back upon itself." (P. 47). He states that there is nothing that I cannot question and that

Every form that the drive to question assumes is subject to questioning. Every operation of the drive to question is subject to review and revision. It is, as it were, in facing itself - in emptying itself - that the drive to question faces the void. (P. 47)

Walter Davis (1989), in a chapter entitled "A Farewell to Epistemology", explicates G. W. F. Hegel's concepts of subjectivity. Davis explains that

The world is not what it is but what consciousness makes it. Yet consciousness is not simply shaping activity but critically reflection upon that activity. And reflection is not a contemplative end to thought but the goal to further questioning. Hegel thus, stands the traditional notion of knowledge as correspondence on its head. (P. 23)

If any correspondence is involved, Davis maintains that the "only correspondence which can satisfy consciousness is correspondence with itself..." (P. 23). Davis maintains that "the Absolute and the System have been dead for a long time"...Yet Hegel lives on. Most of the recent philosophers

(Dewey, Lukacs, Sartre, Lacan, Derrida) develop their thought by "developing a quarrel with Hegel." (P. 23)

Before we plunge into the epistemic hunger as evidenced by wo/mankind's history of discovery, questioning and wondering, it might be instructive to recall Abraham Heschel's instructive words concerning the purpose of knowledge (in the first place)!

What is the purpose of knowledge? We are conditioned to believe that the purpose of knowledge is to utilize the world. We forget that the purpose of knowledge is also to celebrate God. God is both present and absent. To celebrate is to invoke His presence concealed in His absence. The mind is in search of rational coherence, the soul in quest of celebration. Knowledge is celebration. Truth is more than equation of thing and thought. Truth transcends and unites both think and thought. Truth is transcendence, its comprehension is loyalty. (1965. P. 117)

In line with Abraham Heschel's thoughts, Walter Davis (1989) also reflects on the process of asking questions and posits that we should not really be after answers, but to deepen the questions.

We have been trained to ask questions as if they were merely the transition points to answers that remove all doubt, leaving us with full positivity. From Aristotle through Wittgenstein the general assumption has been that if there is no answer it isn't a question. Existentialism argues, in contrast, that the "correct" relationship to the fundamental questions is to keep them alive and deepen our relationship to them as questions. A question is a great hole in being, a rupture with positivity, and experience of nothing as prior to and more profound than something. (P. 138)

Epistemic Hunger and the Need/Want to Know

Daniel Dennett (1991) discusses the development of curiosity, or the epistemic hunger, as a milestone in the development of human consciousness. (P 181). According to Dennett, [early] wo/mankind began to acquire information "for its own sake, just in case it might prove valuable someday."

This marked a rather fundamental shift in the economy of the organisms that made this leap: the birth of curiosity, or epistemic hunger. Instead of gathering information only on a pay-as-you-go, use-it-immediately basis, they began to become what the psychologist George Miller has called *informavores*: organisms hungry for further information about the world they inhabited. (P. 181)

This gathering of information "that might prove valuable someday" must have proved its value to early wo/man, for it seemed to spur wo/mankind forward into exploration, discoveries and an incessant desire to know more and more! Plato's Allegory of the Cave is the classic demonstration of the Greek concept of knowledge, appearances, reality and of wo/mankind's striving [upward] for knowledge and the ultimate goal of achieving final knowledge of "goodness".

In his popular book, The Discoverers (1983), Daniel Boorstin states that his "focus remains on [wo/]mankind's need to know - to know what is out there." (P. xvi). Boorstin also quotes Francis Bacon's The Advancement of Learning (1605) as follows:

Nay, the same Solomon the king, although he excelled in the glory of treasure and magnificent buildings, of shipping and navigation, of service and attendance, of fame and renown, and the like, yet he maketh no claim to any of those glories, but only to the glory of **inquisition of truth**; for so he saith expressly, "The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out" (preface)

There does seem to be something to the concept that wo/mankind just wants to find out - to explore. Jacob Bronowski (1973) thought that "The most powerful drive in the ascent of man is his pleasure in his own skill. He loves to do what he does well and, having done it well, he loves to do it better." (Dennett, 1991, P. 209). Dennett (1991) agrees that our ancestors "took pleasure in various modes of relatively undirected self-exploration". Dennett further posits that the plasticity of the human brain, combined with innate restlessness and curiosity caused wo/mankind to explore, progress, develop and "that these discoveries became part of the culture - memes - that were then made available to all. (P. 209). Dennett further posits that the development of memes (cultural equivalents of biological genes) was the fundamental underpinning of the development of modern wo/man.

Nicholas Berdyaev (1960) comments that knowledge - "is not something, but is about something." (P. 3) It is reasonable to believe that the need to plant and harvest, to recognize the seasons and to fix the date and time of religious ceremonies was an early need of humankind. This need led to the beginning of science and technology resulting

in the development of various calendars and the science of astronomy. Carl Sagan (1974) quotes Friedrich Von Schiller (Xenien, 1796) as saying "To one, science is an exalted goddess; to another it is a cow which provides him with butter." (P. 38). Carl Sagan, the most prominent spokesperson for science this century, can also focus upon science as a form of epistemic hunger.

Civilizations can be characterized by how they approach such questions [ultimate questions of the origin, nature and fate of life, worlds and the universe as a whole], how they nourish the mind as well as the body. The modern scientific pursuit of these questions represents an attempt to acquire a generally accepted view of our place in the cosmos; it requires open-minded creativity, tough-minded skepticism and a fresh sense of wonder. (1974, P. 46).

Loren Eiseley (1969) had the main theme of mankind as a Quest, a seeker "after adventure, knowledge, power, meaning and righteousness." However, Eiseley posits that the quest is not of his own choosing, "often, in weariness, he wishes he had never set out on it - but is enjoined upon him by his nature as a human being." (Eiseley, 1978, P. 18) Eiseley interprets the Odyssey of Homer as a metaphor of the Epistemic Hunger:

Odysseus' passage through the haunted waters of the eastern Mediterranean symbolizes, at the start of the Western intellectual tradition, the sufferings that the universe and his own nature impose upon homeward-yearning man. In the restless atmosphere of today all the psychological elements of the Odyssey are present to excess: the driving will toward achievement, the technological cleverness

crudely manifest in the blinding of Cyclops, the fierce rejection of the sleepy Lotus Isles, the violence between man and man. (1978, P. 19)

It seems that the Epistemic Hunger, the need or want to know is a recurring theme. If Eiseley's ruminations are correct, even Homer had as a theme the drive of wo/mankind toward some intrinsic need that resolved itself in quest, curiosity and the incessant "need to know".

Ross Mooney (1967) comments on wo/man's existential need to know. To Mooney, knowing is at the center of human existence.

What we want, in our emergent knowing, is the chance to be in tune at center with ourselves (as persons), nature (as life) and universe (as God). (P. 275)

Mooney also discusses the routes to knowing as follows:

One great route is from an inner reaching; another is through outer. In the former, one knows himself to be a participant-creator in what is moving through him; in the latter, one knows himself to be seeing creation moving through another being. The former is, at times, called 'mystic,' though the knowing, then, is very real, natural, and compelling. The latter is, at times, called 'scientific.' (P 275)

John Dewey (1929) had another but similar view of the need for knowing in wo/mankind's emerging culture. According to his view, humankind has two choices of co-existence with the powers of the world. One choice involved

"supplication, sacrifice, ceremonial rite and magical cult"

(P. 3) and the other course was to:

invent arts and by their means turn the powers of nature to account; man constructs a fortress out of the very conditions and forces which threaten him. He builds shelters, weaves garments, makes flame his friend instead of his enemy, and grows into the complicated arts of associated living. This is the method of changing the world through action, as the other is the method of changing the self in emotion and idea. (P. 3)

In addition to action, as a form of acquiring new knowledge, Dewey also comments on the intellectual Quest for Certainty (1929). This is a need "for a peace which is assured, an object which is unqualified by risk and the shadow of fear..." (P. 8). This quest can only be realized by pure knowing, in the philosophic tradition. Dewey proceeds to posit that the intellectual search for certainty is an attempt to transcend belief (myths); that knowledge was a closer approximation of truth than beliefs. (P. 26). Finally, Dewey reflects on the history of knowledge, explaining that in the beginning wo/mankind sought knowledge in order to live; but that further intellectual striving were for the purpose of gaining greater security; that the intellectual and the practical are closely linked. (P. 38). Dewey re-tells the story of the Oriental potentate who would not go to the horse races because he [intellectually] knew one horse was faster. It did not [intellectually] arouse the potentate's curiosity. The intellectual and the practical were not linked! (P. 38).

Maxine Greene (1988), in her John Dewey Lectures commented on Thomas Jefferson's views on the need to know .. on knowledge in general (P. 28). Jefferson was of the opinion that a great evil of tyranny was possible if only a few "knew" and the masses were ignorant. Therefore, and primarily, Jefferson advocated the necessity for a "general diffusion of knowledge" for the "illumination of the minds of the people at large" in order to lessen the tyrannical exercise of power by the educated elite. A "need" to know to prevent or diminish exploitation.

The concept of a need for knowledge as a liberatory or emancipatory force is historical as well. Paulo Frere (1970) being the well known proponent of liberatory education for the oppressed as a distinct humanization endeavor for both the oppressor and the oppressed. Even Horace Mann, the "Father" of the Public Schooling in the United States, saw as one value of education the melioration of poverty and servility as well as the furthering of democracy.

It [education] does better than to disarm the poor of the hostility to the rich; it prevents being poor ...The spread of education, by enlarging the cultivated class or caste, will open a wider area over which the social feelings will expand...(Greene on Mann, 1988, P. 33)

From a psychological perspective, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs bears directly on "the need to know" (Hamden-Turner, 1981, P. 118). The need for food, drink, exercise; or physiological needs; imply a hunger for knowledge



in order to survive. Knowledge is vital for II) safety and security, III) social needs, IV) esteem needs and V) finally self-actualization. Other psychological theories (Kohlberg, Piaget, Freud, Jung) cite varying immanent needs of human beings which further imply needs for differing types of knowledge. Michael Washburn (1988) transpersonal psychological views contain a desire to return to a feeling of "well-being", or "expanding waves of bliss that were experienced in neonatal times. (P. 45). Human conduct, in his view, is directly affected by this desire.

The well-being experienced during original embedment is never entirely forgotten, and the ever-so-faint memory of it lives on to haunt us in later life. Our nostalgia for paradise reflects a longing for this original state. (P. 45).

Ken Wilbur (1983) confirms and refutes Washburn's transpersonal views with alternate transpersonal psychological views differing somewhat from those of Washburn. Wilbur's main thesis is that mankind is striving - not to return to some pre-egonic state, but - forward to a trans-egonic state. Wilbur corrects not only Washburn, but Freud, Jung, Bergson, Nietzsche, Levy-Bruhl and Auguste Comte by placing all of them in what he terms the Pre/Trans Fallacy. All of the above, in his view, do not view the forward progress of humanity as a trip from "pre" to egonic to "trans"; rather as some type of fall and redemption, or desire to return to some previous blissful (pre) state. Interestingly, thought, Wilbur does

embrace the concept of involution - or a mammoth fall - from a state of oneness to a preconscious state, and that our present journey is to "back-forward" toward this original state -which is not the pre-egonic state. (1983, P. 201)

These psychological views of a transpersonal nature do represent an unconscious need or want on the part of humanity, and could represent the concealed underpinnings of the Epistemic Hunger! Certainly the [more conventional] views of Kohlberg, Piaget, Maslow, Baldwin and Erickson, with the emphasis on stage development, speak to some unseen need, or drive, to progress forward into time.

Epistemic Hunger, Freedom and Spirit - Destiny

Is there some dialectic between Freedom and Destiny? Is Freedom a manifestation of Destiny, or is it a "facilitator" of Destiny; does Freedom come from Destiny? G. W. F. Hegel thought and wrote about the "Idea of History and its Realization" as a progression of the spirit toward Freedom. Hegel considered World History as "the description of the spirit as it works out the knowledge of that which it is in itself". (Friedrich, editor, P. 12).

Hence, what constitutes the reason of the spirit in its determination (that is, its destination), ...what constitutes the final end of the world we claim to be the spirit's consciousness of its freedom and thus the actualization of its freedom. (P. 12)

Hegel continues to maintain that change in nature is cyclical; but that change in the spirit is "a progression to the better, the more perfect." (P 21). Further,

The principle of development contains further the notion that an inner destiny or determination, some kind of presupposition is at the base of it and is brought into existence. This formal determination is essential. The spirit which has world history as its stage, its property and its field of actualization is not such as would move aimlessly about in a game of external accidents, but is instead the absolutely determining factor. (P. 22)

Ken Wilbur (1983) also comments on Hegel and Aurobindo's view that wo/mankind is striving forward toward some type of supermind. Following some of the ideas and verbiage of Teilhard de Chardin, Wilbur explains that Teilhard's conception of

the omega point and with Aurobindo's evolutionary drive toward the supermind, but the same concept was held in the West by such philosophers as Aristotle and Hegel. (P. 203)

Oswald Spengler (Vol I, 1926) picks up on the theme of the forward progression of humankind into Freedom and Destiny as well. Commenting on Goethe (P. 25), Spengler agrees that history is a record of things becoming; of the world-as-organism; of intellectual flair, as being "the secrets of the phenomenal world in motion." Spengler, himself, (P 117) likens the forward progression [of humankind], the becoming, as a sure destiny of the soul or spirit [as organic logic].

Anyone who understands at all what is meant by saying that the soul is the idea of an existence, will also divine a near relationship between it and the sure sense of a destiny and must regard Life itself as directed, irrevocable in every line, fate-laden. Primitive man feels this dimly and anxiously, while for the man of a higher Culture it is definite enough to become his vision of the world. (P 127).

Spengler continues to pursue the destiny-idea that reveals a soul and its "world-longing"; "to rise into the light, to accomplish and actualize its vocation." (P 118). When this concept, this lost vision, comes to one, it will shatter the illusion of causality. Further in Vol I, (P. 365), Spengler reinforces this view, as the "Faustian" view and the "Faustian man sees in history a tense unfolding towards an aim; its "ancient-medieval-modern" sequence is a dynamic image. (P. 365).

All grand events of history are carried by beings of the cosmic order, by peoples, parties, armies, and classes, while the history of the intellect runs its course (Vol II, P. 19)

Nicholas Berdyaev (Richardson, 1968) sees history as destiny which cannot be abstracted from wo/mankind. Rather than being an "external phenomena", history "brings with it the revelation of essential being, of the inner spiritual nature of the world and of the inner essence of man." (P. 7). Berdyaev sees the historical as "deeply ontological". He further posits that "celestial history to be a

predetermination, in God, of historical destinies in which human freedom is allowed to operate." (P. 30).

I am particularly impressed with Father Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, attempts (1955, 1956, 1960) to place wo/mankind in this world in a cosmic sense. Sir Julian Huxley (in the 1955 Introduction) places Teilhard de Chardin's work as a synthesis ...

of the material and physical world with the world of mind and spirit; of the past with the future; and of variety with unity, the many with the one. (1955, P. 11)

Certainly Father Teilhard's approach is scientific, overly scientific in my view, yet he seems to reach to a depth, to a unifying depth not approached by most philosophers of mankind. This depth includes, as a necessary but not sufficient measure, placing mankind as a distinct phenomenon in a cosmos in the process of becoming; a genesis, an evolution of mind - in his words a noogenesis, with inherent possibilities; and the necessity of treating this phenomenon scientifically. (P. 12). In his words, two basic assumptions go hand-in-hand:

The first is the primacy accorded to the psychic and to thought in the stuff of the universe, and the second is the 'biological' value attributed to the social fact around us. (P. 30)

Rather than speak of cosmology, Father Teilhard prefers to put the cosmos in the process of becoming ... a

cosmogogenesis. Is this an Epistemic Hunger, this psychic and biological becoming? I believe that we can begin to frame it so. Father Teilhard's metaphor for this Epistemic Hunger is convergent integration, or self-complexification, of humankind (and life in general).

He thus envisages the world-stuff as being 'rolled up' or 'folded in' upon itself, both locally and in its entirety, and adds that the process is accompanied by an increase of energetic 'tension' in the resultant 'corpuscular' organisations, or individualised constructions of increased organisational complexity. (P. 15).

This self-complexification, a difficult concept by itself, is co-extensive with a visionary (and heavily documented) concept of energy. Not only the energy measured by the physicists, but 'psychic energy' - which will be followed by his conception of the 'inner' and the 'outer' of existence. (P. 16). These concepts, working together will "guide the human species up the path of progress to higher levels of hominisation." (P. 17). This inner and outer tension, this energy, drives mankind forward to what Father Teilhard calls the 'point Omega', or in another reference the Christogenesis, or The Divine Milieu (1956).

Let us establish ourselves in the divine milieu. There we shall find ourselves where the soul is most deep and where matter is most dense. There we shall discover, where all its beauties flow together, the ultra-vital, the ultra-sensitive, the ultra-active point of the universe. And, at the same time, we shall feel the plenitude of our powers of action and adoration effortlessly ordered within our deepest selves. (1956, P. 115)

Seemingly anticipating recent discoveries in quantum physics, Father Teilhard maintained that there was an 'inner' and an 'outer' of things. The upholders of the outer, the materialists, and the upholders of the inner, the spiritual interpretation, need to be reconciled.

I am convinced that the two points of view require to be brought into union, and that they soon will unite in a kind of phenomenology or generalised physic in which the internal aspect of things as well as the external aspect of the world will be taken into account. Otherwise, so it seems to me, it is impossible to cover the totality of the cosmic phenomenon by one coherent explanation such as science must try to construct. (1955, P. 53)

For Father Teilhard, mankind is on an inexorable journey to "penetrate, intellectually unify, and harness the energies which surround it" (P. 280). For him, science should be the study of man; to "decipher man is essentially to try to find out how the world was made and how it ought to go on making itself." (P. 280). This is Epistemic Hunger!

I am reminded of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, of wo/mankind coming into the light. Yet in Plato's story, the seeking individual was "dragged" upwards out of the cave into daylight! Why is it necessary that he be dragged...and who or what is doing the dragging? The mystery of the Epistemic Hunger continues!

#### Epistemic Hunger and Consciousness

It seems as though the forward movement of wo/mankind into history has a strong connection with the "evolution" of

consciousness. What is it that distinguishes wo/man from the animal kingdom? Rational thought? Reflexive thought? The development of consciousness from "lower" to "higher" levels? Or are we really looking at the right level when we concentrate on the human organism? Where is consciousness located, and what is it? Richard Dawkins (1976) startled the world with the concept that the human organisms are "machines created by our genes;" that we are essentially life support systems for a ruthless selfish genetic pool resulting in ruthless selfish individuals! Being an extreme Darwinist, Dawkins makes no bones concerning evolution; "Much as we might wish to believe otherwise, universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts that simply do not make evolutionary sense." (P. 2). Dawkins states that the purpose of his book and revelations concerning genes are to help us realize that we can expect no help from our biology:

Let us understand what our own selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have the chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to. (P. 3)

Recent discoveries in genetic theory resulting from the Human Genome project to map the human genetic makeup are revealing how pervasive and influential individual genes are in the DNA makeup. It does appear from the recent announcements that genetic pre-dispositions, at a minimum, play an overriding role in our behaviour, consciousness, health, development and manner of death. The randomness,



chance gifts and deficiencies, indifference and lack of recourse does seem to support a theory of ruthless selfishness; a theory of genetic diversity assuring survival; and a more frightening possibility of genetic engineering of life - a return to eugenics thinking and possibilities of yesteryear!

Others have posited that our consciousness is not located in the brain or mind, but located in every single gene. If consciousness is located in the genes, and if the genes are as selfish as Dawkins maintains, then "something" needs to be done. We need to either transcend this level of consciousness, move consciousness to the mind, or join with the Marxist and dismiss the importance of individual consciousness altogether!

Dennett (1991) believes that "Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery." (P. 21). Dennett is assuming here that the origin of the universe, the mystery of life, time, space, gravity - the cosmological questions - are being solved, or at least that "we do know how to think about them." (P. 22). I am not so sure about that at all; however, for Dennett, the questions of consciousness have not even been sufficiently clarified. Dennett feels that our conceptions of consciousness, even the evolution of our thinking of consciousness, is seriously flawed. The act of Phenomenology, as a mode of consciousness, by bracketing, is to Dennett not a valid method of inquiry. For Dennett, Phenomenology should

not be capitalized, but should be phenomenology - a method of looking at the apparent world. I think that I agree with him (and Kubie, below), for I am certain that what we perceive in our awake state of consciousness is not reality. For Dennett,

It turns out that the things that swim by in the stream of consciousness - you know: the pains and aromas and daydreams and mental images and flashes of anger and lust, the standard denizens of the phenom - those things are not what we once thought they were. They are really so different, in fact, that we have to find some new words for them." (P. 45)

So, as it turns out, the forward motions of the development of consciousness may have more than one dimension! Not only might consciousness be developing; but, our conception and expressions of consciousness must be developing as well. Lawrence Kubie (1967) sheds an enormous amount of light on the matter for me in a manner that seems only too clear and correct and with which I agree:

Conscious processes are important not for thinking but for sampling, checking and correcting, and as tools for communication. The intake of factual data about the world around us is overwhelmingly preconscious, i.e., subliminal. This preconscious input consists of an incessant subliminal bombardment, which goes on both when we are awake and when we are asleep. ... the bits of information which are furnished to us this way, whether subliminal or conscious, are then processed ... on a subliminal level. ...It is clear that what remains cannot be a true representation of the external world, or of what we are trying to learn, or what is processed internally in the learning process, or of what we "create" by recombining units into new patters. I once put it that unwillingly we distort what we perceive, and then learn what we have distorted. (P. 76)

How, then, does this view of consciousness relate to the Epistemic Hunger of the human experience? If we must disabuse ourselves of much of what we take as "real" - the opening up of a vast area for questions arises!

Even standard "scientific texts" such as the celebrated work by Thomas Kuhn (1962) supports the thesis that we cannot be sure that we know what we think we are knowing and perceiving. Kuhn states that orthodox science only attacks problems that scientists believe (are certain) can be solved and avoid those [metaphysical or anomalous] (uncertain) observations that cannot be approached in a scientific manner and a solution eventually achieved. Yet, Kuhn in an honest and straightforward manner, comments on the uncertainties that science does work with, even though they "ignore" this type of uncertainty (Kuhn seems to be certain of their uncertainty ... or uncertain of the certainty?)

But is sensory experience [and instrumental data] fixed and neutral? Are theories simply man-made interpretations of given data? The epistemological viewpoint that has most often guided Western philosophy for three centuries dictates an immediate and unequivocal, Yes! In the absence of a developed alternative, I find it impossible to relinquish entirely that viewpoint. Yet it no longer functions effectively, and the attempts to make it do so through the introduction of a neutral language of observations now seems to me hopeless. (Kuhn, 1962, P. 126)

Even though I realize that I am being selective in quoting Thomas Kuhn, it is important to this thesis that he

fully recognizes, admits and firmly postulates that shared scientific viewpoints depend on cultural issues, shared education, language, experience. Kuhn is very straightforward in his view that epistemology, even scientific epistemology is relative:

If two people stand at the same place and gaze in the same direction, we must, under pain of solipsism, conclude that they receive closely similar stimuli. ... But people do not see stimuli; our knowledge of them is highly theoretical and abstract. Instead they have sensations, and we are under no compulsion to suppose that the sensations of our two viewers are the same. .. On the contrary, much neural processing takes place between the receipt of a stimulus and the awareness of a sensation. Among the few things that we can know about it with assurance are: that very different stimuli can produce the same sensations; that the same stimulus can produce very different sensations; and, finally, that the route from stimulus to sensation is in part conditioned by education. (P. 193).

So much for the Truth of Science! In fact, Kuhn, near the end of his essay admitted as much: "It is now time to notice that until the last very few pages the term 'truth' had entered this essay only in a quotation from Francis Bacon." (P. 170)

Michael Novak (1970) comments extensively on this need to question, this need to move forward in our understanding (consciousness) of this world and our existence. Novak would like us to completely disabuse ourselves (on a personal level) of all preconceived ideas and truths and begin to question all over again from a position of "nothingness". How can we argue

with Novak, when he states that these questions would result in the ultimate existential question of:

Granted that I must die, how shall I live? That is the fundamental human question, which fundamental myths aim to answer. The drive to question allows the human animal to lift his eyes from the sequence of daily routines to perceive the law of his own death, and to struggle for ways of life that assuage death's bitterness. Thus, from the earliest moments of life until death extinguishes it, the drive to question is the principle of human development. (P. 48)

This drive to question can lead wo/man to a unique position, one that apparently no other animals ever arrive, and that position is one of anxiety. "The components of this anxiety are feelings of helplessness and loneliness, its terminus is the perception of one's own death." (Novak P. 48). As a wo/man continues to question, continues to follow the epistemic hunger in his soul or psyche, s/he may, for Novak, finally "perceive that all the supports offered by his culture, his social position, and his achievements do not remove the fundamental law of consciousness: he stands alone in a darkness and he must die." (P. 48). Novak feels that this drive to question is a "fundamental tendency and vital force" of wo/man. It is not only in the thinking, consciousness, psyche, soul of wo/mankind, but "it is in the limbs, in the genitals, in the heart, in the passions, in the darkest and most sensitive recesses of instinct and sensibility." It is a "hungering attitude toward experience." (P. 47). This epistemic hunger is

a sort of open-mouthed hunger of attending, noticing, doubting. It is not only a superficial curiosity; it is a hunger to become-one-with. An ancient name for it is intentionality; it is a sort of focusing of consciousness, a tending toward ...able to change perspective, angle, direction, depth, intensity; able, too, to double back upon its own operations and to alter its own performance. (P. 45)

This drive to raise question shatters dominant myths; cultural experiences cause altered consciousness of beauty, truth and meaning. Questions arise, answers are sought, and ultimately the epistemic hunger results in Novak's concept of nothingness. For Novak, from this nothingness, authentic wonder, authentic being, authentic living can arise from the development of human striving for honesty, courage, freedom and community. These four positions of consciousness are for Novak the only human aspirations that can be achieved, and must be achieved only, from a position of nothingness.

C. G. Jung (1933) comments on the achievement of a "modern man" (sic) as the result of progression through ancient and modern time. This modern man is no average man, but one who has progressed to a state of being conscious of the present, "fully conscious of one's existence as a man, it requires the most intensive and extensive consciousness, with a minimum of unconsciousness." (P. 197). This modern man is solitary, "every step forward means an act of tearing himself loose from that all-embracing pristine unconsciousness which claims the bulk of mankind ..(P. 197).

Indeed, he is completely modern only when he has come to the very edge of the world, leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown, and acknowledging that he stands before a void out of which all things may grow. (P. 197)

Jung states that the achievement of this modern man status is both a blessing and a curse. This man not only represents the "culmination of the history of mankind, the fulfillment and the end-product of countless centuries", but also, and equally important, "we are also the disappointment of the hopes and expectations of the ages," (P. 199) as we plunge and re-plunge wo/mankind into world wars "among Christian nations and its barbed-wire and poison-gas. What a catastrophe in heaven and on earth!" (P. 199).

Jung laments the fact that medieval man was certain of right and wrong, of good and evil, of the devil and God; but that the modern man has "lost all the metaphysical certainties of his medieval brother" (P. 204), and has replaced these certainties with tenuous material security that "terrorizes the imagination" (of poison gas, etc). Jung quotes a "Red Indian Friend" who was the governor of a pueblo:

We don't understand the whites; they are always wanting something - always restless - always looking for something. What is it? We don't know. We can't understand them. (P. 213)

What has been the result of this incessant Faustian epistemic hunger, this curiosity, on the part of wo/mankind? Have we reached a stage of consciousness that is hopeless,

that is evil to our fellow humans, the earth and the cosmos? Does this epistemic hunger need to be redirected away from technic, away from ideological hegemony, power, "civilization", and into some more wholesome (for humanity) direction? Has the appearance of alienation, hopelessness, domination, subordination, hierarchy, vicious patriarchy, uncaring exploitation, etal., finally begun to "run its course" and a higher level of consciousness begun to emerge? Certainly many psychological theories of stage development culminate in some type of transcendental consciousness of peace, wholeness, unity and oneness with the cosmos. Ken Wilbur (1983), Michael Washhburn (1943), Erich Neumann (1954), and others all posit that humankind is moving "forward" into history by the evolution of some type of super-consciousness, or transformation and transcending the ego consciousness so prevalent in modern society.

If this movement is taking place, I believe that it is taking place by a redefinition of popular ontological, axiological and epistemological concepts. The movement into "meaning" will be taken up in the next section. It embraces not only new concepts of wonder, awe and amazement, but also new axiological concepts of justice, beauty, freedom; new concepts of epistemology as passion and bodily knowledge as well as mental and psychic knowledge!



### Epistemic Hunger and Meaning

In a philosophical mode, Spengler (1926) questions the value of knowledge [with Nietzsche] and juxtaposes knowledge against belief. Not that the questions are not present; but how are they answered?

Whence comes it, then, that secrets must be unravelled and questions answered? Is it not from that fear which looks out of even a child's eyes, that terrible dowry of human waking-consciousness which compels the understanding ... Can a desperate faith in knowledge free us from the nightmare of the grand questions?

"Shuddering awe is mankind's noblest part." He to whom that gift has been denied by fate must seek to discover secrets, to attack, dissect, and destroy the awe-inspiring, and to extract a booty of knowledge therefrom. (Vol ii, P. 12).

Are we back to Mythos and Logos again? Are Hegel and Spengler, along with Nietzsche, once again, questioning the forward-progress, the destiny, of humankind as a dialectic of mythos and logos or of Faustian and Apollonian epistemology? Is the Epistemic Hunger a matter of logos alone, does it include the mythos as well? Nicholas Berdyaev (1954) states that truth "is not intellectual and purely cognitive, that it must be grasped integrally by the whole personality; it [I am the way, the truth and the life] means that truth is existential." (P. 22). Berdyaev elaborates that "Imagination and passion may be a source of the knowledge of truth." (P. 26).

When Jerusalem is set in sharp contrast with Athens we find ourselves in an awkward position. The

possibility of spiritual clarified knowledge is denied, and the possibility of merely rational cognition is recognized. (Berdyaeu, 1954, P. 65)

Berdyaeu agrees that the good is life and that the final end is the fullness of life; further Berdyaeu agrees with Professor Mengert (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994) that "All Epistemology is grounded in Ontology (and perhaps all Ontology is grounded in Axiology)" and that:

In order to have value and be a blessing life just must have meaning ...it must lie in that which is beyond and above life ...ascending towards something higher than self (P. 22)

Abraham Heschel (1965) addresses this question in a similar manner by raising the issue of "requiredness" (P. 106) For Heschel, "Human living as being-challenged-in-the-world can be understood only in terms of requiredness, demand, and expectation." Heschel would rather concentrate on the "qualities that constitute personhood, such as love, the passion for meaning, the capacity to praise, etc. (distinctly Apollonian);" rather than what he considers the subsidiary matter of logos and mythos. Heschel considers this approach as differing from the Greek mind (logos) and of being a more accurate formulation of Biblical (mythos).

Heschel places in perspective the "problems" addressed by wo/mankind (in his epistemic hunger). One must contemplate the "necessity of confronting and being pre-occupied with it [the problem]. (1965, P. 1). This perspective would in my

mind include the need to confront, the struggle for survival as discussed above in section 1, as opposed to the "hunger to confront". While addressing the question of the purpose of knowledge, Heschel points out that in addition to utilizing the world, the purpose of knowledge is "also to celebrate God ... To celebrate is to invoke His presence concealed in His absence." (P. 117). For Heschel, human bewilderment, our inability to express is of primary concern. When analysis "sinks" to the level of logos and mythos, Heschel contends that: "Is it not conceivable that our entire civilization is built upon a misinterpretation of man?" (P. 5). Heschel is interested in self-knowledge, of epistemic hunger for "what it means to be a human being - of being human. Rather than contemplate the historical nature of wo/mankind, his accomplishment, inventions, culture, etc., Heschel would rather contemplate what it means to be human. In fact,

The more refined and accessible the avenues to the study of behavioral facts become, the greater the scarcity of intellectual audacity in probing what is imponderable about human being. (1965, P. 10)

Heschel holds that the philosophy of history, philosophy itself, the nature of will, rationality, are all impediments to understanding what it means to be human! As Heschel sees it, "the chief problem of man is not his nature, but what he does with his nature." (P. 10). This is the existential dilemma, the grand question, that I will address in Chapter Three - How do I reconcile my existence with absurdity ...What

do I do now ...how do I "ascertain [my] ends and directions"?  
(P. 11).

This is the thought that comes to all men, to everyman in the form of question: What am I here for? What is at stake in my existence? This question is not derived from premises. It is given with existence. Man, a problem to himself, does not take his existence for granted. (P. 13)

This inward epistemic hunger is in one sense as old as philosophy itself ..."Know Thyself" over the door at the Temple of Delphi. In another sense, this inward turning is a reaction to Epistemic Hunger being construed only as Logos or Mythos. Heschel points out that:

Philosophy cannot be the same after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Certain assumptions about humanity have proved to be specious, have been smashed. What has long been regarded as commonplace has proved to be utopianism. (P. 13)

This Epistemic Hunger of The Logos, currently manifesting itself as technology, has not proven to be the utopian search as Logos or Mythos would have it. If it is true that 100 millions of humans have been slaughtered in wars during the last two centuries, and that 90 percent of this slaughter was in this century ...then the message of turning the Epistemic Hunger away from technic and myth ... or as a minimum, confining this technic in a web surrounded by an ethical and moral base ... and placing proper emphasis on the process of discovering "what it means to be human" is an imperative of the first order!

This is an age in which it is impossible to think about the human situation without shame, anguish, and disgust, in which it is impossible to experience enjoyment without grief and unending heartache, to observe personal triumphs without pangs of embarrassment. (Heschel, 1965, P. 14)

In this Chapter, I have presented not only the incessant, immanent human drive toward knowledge, but also the problematic nature of this drive and the veracity of the knowledge itself. In Chapters Three and Four, I must lean upon the problematic nature of knowledge in a struggle to structure meaning and purpose in my encounter with absurdity.

If I am to be supported in primal ground; if my life is to have meaning and purpose; I must begin to prepare myself intellectually to reach out and grasp at some tangible basis for knowing Truth, Beauty Freedom and Justice. Coming from a position of absurdity, personal angst, intermixed with a strong Epistemic Hunger of my own, I must relax my grip on the search for "THE meaning of life" to concentrate on "the meaning of MY life".

## CHAPTER III

## O N T O L O G I C A L     A N G S T / D E S P A I R

## I ASKED A THIEF

I asked a thief to steal me a peach:  
 He turned up his eyes.  
 I ask'd a lithe lady to lie her down:  
 Holy & meek she cries --

As soon as I went  
 An angel came.  
 He wink'd at the thief  
 And smil'd at the dame.

And without one word said  
 Had a peach from the tree  
 And still as a maid  
 Enjoy'd the lady.

W Blake  
 Lambeth 1796

Introduction

We have thus far examined some of the human spiritual and mythic explanations for existence-in-this-world-at-this-time. These mythic interpretations allowed early wo/mankind to live in this world with some pretense; to construe some meaning and presumed purpose from their existence. We have, likewise looked at the many-sided interpretations of impetuses moving humankind forward into his destiny and history. We have found explanation upon explanation and rationale after rationale to account for the present existence of humankind in some

rational (or irrational) manner. We have found that philosophers of history, of mankind and of existence struggle to account for the phenomena of mankind, the purpose of life, the logic of existence and meaning-making. We have found no consistent, over-all, generally agreed upon, documented and "without-question" proven answers. The question of existence remains.

After a review of the main ideas of contemporary philosophers, Albert Camus (1955) concludes (with me) that "these men vie with one another in proclaiming that nothing is clear, all is chaos ..." (P. 27). Camus says (and I agree) that all would be saved, if for just once, someone could say "This is clear." Therefore, "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world." (P. 28).

For many years, and with especial emphasis during my studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, I have wondered, and become convinced, about the absurdity of this existence. It is my intention in this chapter to outline in detail what I find so absurd, why I find it absurd, and to wonder "in extreme angst" concerning this absurdity. Many an astute observer has maintained that it is absolutely necessary to "work through" and explicate absurdity in order to emerge into a more healthy, satisfying conviction as to the value of one's own existence. Sartre had Oreste claim that "Human life begins on the far side of despair." In no way do I intend to

merely deprecate your or my existence, to impetuously fly in the face of God, or to brazenly structure the utopian existence. I do intend to provide serious criticism and wonder at some of the outstanding absurdities as I find them in the thinking and writing of the most serious philosophers from Soren Kierkegaard, through especially Franz Kafka and Nicholas Berdyaev, Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jeremy Rifkin, Morris Berman, Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox and others.

I do intend to point out the extreme condition that I find wo/mankind facing, the suffering, illogical, uncaring and hopeless existences that I find everywhere about me in the human environment. When adequate attention has been heaped on this subject, and I feel that my message concerning absurdity, the seemingly hopelessness of existence, the folly of wo/mankind and the corresponding extreme angst of humankind has been adequately expressed, I will (in Chapter Four) outline my aesthetic of choice for an attempt to develop a worth-while and meaningful existence. I do want to re-emphasize that even though this chapter is full of Angst; I hope it to be a fully honest appraisal of the world, overflowing with uncaring suffering, cruelty, stupidity, hopelessness, uncaring misery and cruel and pointless death; I do find an outlet, a rationale, a methodology and an aesthetic of choice possible as outlined in Chapter Four. This Chapter cannot and must not stand alone; it is integral



and important in connection within the total context of its surrounding chapters.

I will never forget Dr. Svi Shapiro's remarks at the beginning of a course that was intended to criticize the "dominate culture". He stated that he "was a happy person, enjoyed life, lived a normal existence and was generally content with his life...but...that was not what this course was about!" He proceeded to wreak havoc on contemporary culture and civilization, upon the dominant culture and upon wo/mankind's indifference, uncaring and unresponsiveness to the vicissitudes of the poor, suffering and forgotten! This chapter is in the same spirit! This chapter is dedicated to absurdity, nihilism, despair and our (civilization's and cultural) historical recognition and response to what has been termed "the human problematique!"

#### The Absurdity of Life and Death

Life is a struggle; from the prenatal oceanic bliss giving way to the unannounced, apparently unwelcome and immanent extreme shock of birth and the first breath of earthly air, humankind, as well as other life forms, are presented with a hostile or at best ambivalent, cruel struggle for a what seems as a pointless existence resulting in ultimate death, decay, non-existence and apparent non-significance!

The first movement of Gorecki's Symphony No. 3 re-lives this movement from non-being to being - to existential struggle, anguish, despair, uncaring and un-merciful and meaningless death and the necessity to continue onwards in the fulfillment of some destiny. Listen to the first movement ... listen to the soul-cleansing anguish dominated by a setting of the 15th century Polish prayer "Holy Cross Lament". As the Mother anguishes over the death of her small baby son ..

My son, my chosen and beloved  
 Share your wounds with your mother  
 And because, dear son, I have always  
 carried you in my heart,  
 And always served you faithfully  
 Speak to your mother, to make her happy  
 Although you are already leaving me, my  
 cherished hope. (from the "Lysagora  
 Songs" collection)

The centrality of a mother's love for her son (sic), and the heartache encompassed in the death of this love, is the epitome symbol of the dilemma faced by humankind in this existence. Adrienne Rich is quoted as saying

The mother's battle for her child - with sickness, with poverty, with war, with all the forces of exploitation and callousness that cheapen human life - needs to become a common human battle, waged in love and in the passion for survival. (quoted in Fox, 1988. P. 12)

Alice Miller speaks of children "as messengers from a world we once deeply knew, but we have long since forgotten." (Fox, 1988. P. 22). Even the seed of the lowest plant undertakes a less than even chance of germination, growth and

the seemingly pointless struggle for existence and reproduction of it all over again. Should these life forms - human, animal or plant - be "fortunate" to survive the hostile environments of their early existence, struggle and grow, mature and reproduce- all at the expense of other life forms; the pointlessness of an inevitable individual death and decay awaits them all. C. S. Calian (1965) in his notes on the philosophical thinking of Nicholas Berdyeav states that

Berdyeav described this early outlook on the first page of his autobiography: 'I cannot remember my first cry on encountering the world, but I know for certain that from the very beginning I was aware of having fallen into an alien realm (P. 3), and

I am aware of myself as a point of intersection of two worlds; while this world, the world of my actual living, is known as unauthentic, untrue, devoid alike of primacy and ultimacy, there is 'another world', more authentic and more true....(P. 3)

"Life" only is maintained - only at the expense of the pointless suffering and death of other life! What about my life, my individual existence - why do I care or want to maintain "Life" in general - especially if it involves the suppression, domination and oppression of others? Why is my existence important? Must I struggle against all other forms of life to maintain my own? If I must endure the vicissitudes - and there are many - of birth, maturation, observation and participation in uncaring struggles for the continuation of life, and the final absurdity of non-existence, loss of all that was gained, a return to chaos and anonymity, relegation

to the dust-heap of non-history; if I must endure all of this...if you and all other forms of "life" must endure all of this...for nought....the absurdity of the cycle, the absurdity of the struggle, the absurdity of existence is the ultimate, paramount and foremost philosophical, psychological and religious conundrum in our existence! Ivan Karamazov [of The Brothers Karamazov] stated that he accepted God, but did not accept his world and adopted a non-acceptance of the world. It could not have been expressed more forcefully and poetically than that expressed by Soren Kierkegaard as

One sticks one's finger into the soil to tell by the smell in what land one is: I stick my finger into existence -- it smells of nothing. Where am I? Who am I? How came I here? What is this thing called the world? What does this world mean? Who is it that has lured me into this thing and now leaves me there? ... How did I come into the world? Why was I not consulted ... but was thrust into the ranks as though I had been bought of a kidnapper, a dealer in souls? How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? Why should I have an interest in it? Is it not a voluntary concern? And if I am compelled to take part in it, where is the director? ... Whither shall I turn with my complaint? (Schumacher, 1973 quoting Kierkegaard, P. 85)

Some have claimed that this existence is "the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms" and that "...only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built".(Schumacher quoting Bertram Russell, P. 86). Schumacher continues to quote Sir Fred Hoyle, the astronomer, concerning "the truly dreadful situation in which we find ourselves. Here we are in this

wholly fantastic universe with scarcely a clue as to whether our existence has real significance." (P. 86). Schumacher continues

Estrangement breeds loneliness and despair, the 'encounter with nothingness,' cynicism, empty gestures of defiance, as we can see in the greater part of existentialist philosophy and general literature today. Or it suddenly turns - as I have mentioned before - into the ardent adoption of a fanatical teaching which, by a monstrous simplification of reality, pretends to answer all questions. (P. 86)

Schumacher concludes that "Man's highest cultural achievements are nothing but disguised economic greed or the outflow of sexual frustration." (P. 90). Even intellectual achievements provide no relief, nay, may even foster the feeling of hopelessness and despair. Lord Byron stated it thusly:

Sorrow is knowledge; they who know the  
most  
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal  
truth,  
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of  
Life.

What are we doing in our everydayness? What are we doing to the human specie, to the planet, to life itself? Are we proceeding in some straight or crooked path toward some agreed-upon goal? Are we, you and I, in this America today, somehow conducting our affairs in a manner that makes sense to us or to the rest of humanity? What are we doing when

Today in Rio de Janeiro children are starving. While in San Francisco children lie on laundered sheets, in Vietnam others lie in pools of blood. The Earth is rich enough so that no one has to starve, and men are not obliged to murder one another. Exactly in proportion as we are free men, we are responsible for the social, economic, and political practices of our nation that terminate in uncounted deaths. Occasionally we lift our eyes from our daily routine and glimpse briefly at the worldwide consequences of the American way of life. The structure of rationalization collapses. We went to bed imagining ourselves decent and good; we awake to find blood on our hands. (Novak, 1970. P. 16)

Does it matter that children are starving, lying in pools of blood or on laundered sheets? Does it matter that the competitive pressures of existence force us to oppress, crowd-out, inflict pain and suffering and uncaring misery and death on The Other? Is there some divine prohibition or retribution against vicious and wanton destruction of the environment, of the frustration of human aspirations for peace and harmony and of life itself? If so, where is it? All around me, I see the competitive fight for "the bitch-goddess success" , for one, deprecating, devaluing and destroying all in its path. No force can be found that has effectively put an end to "unnecessary human [or other] suffering"! Wo/Man's incessant drive for the "something" in life, or the idiocy of it, continues to rape, kill, slash and burn all that stands in its path. Where does it all come from and where does it lead?

#### When the Stage Collapses

Albert Camus (1955) states that one day in the life of an individual, all of a sudden, "It happens that the stage set

collapse." One day, in the life of the thinking, inquiring, wondering soul, the stage collapses!

Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday accord to the same rhythm - this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. ...inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. ...everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it. ...Mere "anxiety," as Heidegger says, is at the source of everything. (P. 12)

Camus continues that once the stage collapses, all begins anew in a frightened new direction.

At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of the trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them ...The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia. (P. 14)

Life according to Camus can be likened to watching a man talking on the telephone in a telephone booth behind a glass partition ..."you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive." (P. 15). To Camus, this is the development of "nausea", or a recognition of the absurd. After a brief recognition of the history of the absurd in the search for truths and absolutes, from Socrates through Kierkegaard, Kant and Hegel, Jaspers and Chestov, Scheler and Husserl and Heidegger, Camus synthesizes the absurd:

How can one fail to feel the basic relationship of these minds! How can one fail to see that they take their stand around a privileged and bitter moment in which hope has no further place? I want everything to be explained to me or nothing. And the reason is impotent when it hears this cry from the heart. The mind aroused by this insistence seeks and finds nothing but contradictions and nonsense....If one could only say just once: "this is clear," all would be saved. But these men vie with one another in proclaiming that nothing is clear, all is chaos, all that man has is his lucidity and his definite knowledge of the walls surrounding him. (P. 27)

How can I agree more with Albert Camus concerning the collapse of the stage, with the confusion paramount in the history of philosophical thought concerning truth, knowledge, ethics and the vicissitudes of life. One day...one day...THE STAGE COLLAPSES...and we stare absurdity in the face. For Camus, and for me, the "absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world." (P. 28).

The absurd is particularly poignant when one contemplates the existence of evil in this world. C. S. Calian (1965) quotes Nicholas Berdyeav's reaction to the absurdity of the existence of evil in the world and our necessary response ..

The existence of evil is the greatest mystery in the life of the world and causes the greatest embarrassment to official theological doctrine and to all monistic philosophy ... The denial of the existence of evil in the world, as he [Berdyeav] saw it, is nothing else than a mockery of the measureless suffering of man and of all created things ...All those who uphold the traditional doctrine of Providence are obliged to maintain an attitude of unconcern in the face of the injustice and wrong of the world ...(Calian, 1965, P. 119)



No one who thinks is immune from the despair and hopelessness of existence. William James despaired to the point of suicide when he reflected upon the tenuousness of his existence and how it could be otherwise in any moment. His testimony reflects "his pessimism and general depression of spirits" ...

I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse gray undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them inclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. THAT SHAPE AM I, I FELT, POTENTIALLY. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate. (Novak, 1970. P. 59 quoting William James)

James stated that he "awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before." Who would care... perhaps a few friends, acquaintances or family members. Does it make any difference in the long sweep of history whether William James was a genius or an idiot? What difference would it make if he profited or suffered? Who would care if you or I profited by existence or suffered a

horrible life and death? Would either be significant enough to "report it to the Royal Society?" [as Thoreau said!].

What do we make of Existence?

Given the obvious fact that, for better or worse, existence has been forced upon us, and that we had no say or opportunity to structure our fate, what has been the response of the human community to this atrocious fact of existence? Has mankind banded together to resist, to complain, or even to meliorate the vicissitudes? Has a general revolution against the founder and creator- against our "throwness" - been attempted or anticipated? What progress has wo/mankind made in coping with this human condition?

One might think that a period which, in a space of fifty years, uproots, enslaves, or kills seventy million human beings should be condemned out of hand. But its culpability must still be understood. In more ingenuous times, when the tyrant razed cities for his own greater glory, when the slave chained to the conqueror's chariot was dragged through the rejoicing streets, when the enemies were thrown to the wild beasts in front of the assembled people, the mind did not reel before such unabashed crimes, and judgment remained unclouded. (Camus, 1956. P. 3)

If this is the way it is now....what is the significance of an espoused nihilism ...where there are no values, not even the values of the victorious, of the masters over the slaves, or the strong over the weak?

If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance. There is no pro or con: the murderer

is neither right nor wrong. We are free to stoke the crematory fires or to devote ourselves to the care of lepers. Evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice. (P. 5).

Where is the limit, the boundary of what is allowed? Where can we find in this existence some proof of the value of existence, or of an existence whether it be of happiness or sadness, of fulfillment and meaning or of suffering and hopelessness? What can I point to in the affairs of gods and wo/men that affirms the value of life? Where in the long dark history of wo/mankind can I find some hope, some favorable omen of meaning or value? William Blake, in "The Song of Los" lamented the plight of mankind:

Thus the terrible race of Los & Enitharmon gave  
Laws & Religions to the sons of Har, binding them  
more  
And more to Earth, closing and restraining,  
Till a Philosophy of Five Senses was complete.  
Urizen wept & gave it into the hands of Newton &  
Locke.  
(Plate 4, lines 13-17)

Michael Novak (1970) summarized the dilemma presented to modern wo/mankind as the destruction of historical myths. The myth of tradition has taught us that wise men throughout history knew best, that social organizations and institutions are true. This myth can be dispelled when the long bloody and cruel history of wo/mankind is examined. The rationalistic myth teaches us that there is some foundation in ethics...again dispelled. The humanistic myth teaches us that each human self is unique and valuable...yet see as

commonplace the wanton destruction of humankind. As Novak states it:

When honesty leads us to see through the inadequacies of such myths as these, it often leaves us yearning just the same. We are disappointed with our fathers, insecure without certainty, depressed by our loss of identity and value. (P. 53)

David Purpel (1989) put forth "several propositions" that seem to summarize the dilemma that surrounds the human problematique even in this advanced stage of civilization. We are at the apex of culture, civilization, technology, education, intellectualism, sciencism, communications, awareness, etc., yet...

1. We live in a moment of utmost precariousness, a time unlike other times, when particular cultures, nations, and groups are at risk, but when the entire civilization and planet confront the possibility of extinction.

2. We live in a time of massive injustice, ranging in severity from serious and devastating to unimaginable horrible. We confront staggering conditions of starvation, unemployment, poverty, misery, exploitation, and oppression.

3. We live in a time of estrangement and apartheid, ranging from moral and spiritual alienation, narcissism and personalism, to the legitimized structures of racial, economic and social separation. ....

4. We live in a time of particularly dangerous self-deception and arrogance derived from our reluctance to accept the extent of our ignorance. ...

5. We live in a time of increasing despair, a time when more and more people perceive themselves as victims and as powerless even in the face of the

realization that 'powerlessness corrupts and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely.' More and more we have edged into a paranoid state when the 'system,' however irrational and unwise, becomes even stronger, more remote, and less responsive. ...

[6. We also live in a time of hope....] (Purpel, 1989. P. 111)

Purpel also points out Abraham Heschel's precept that "it is an act of evil to accept the state of evil as either inevitable or final." (P. 113). Be that as it may, humankind has had some 5,000 years of recorded civilization and culture to "not accept" the evil, yet it remains in the most potent form possible all around us in our everydayness. Acceptance or non-acceptance - does it seem to matter?

Charles Hampden-Turner (1981) discusses existentialism (in map 12) as a movement that recognizes the problematique of present day existence as

Man [on the right of the map] finds himself immersed in nature, guaranteed by her laws, filled with miraculous machinery and crowded around by people chattering cheerfully about forms, patterns and discoveries. Yet he is also poised on the edge of the abyss, doomed irrevocably to death, to aloneness and to 'fear and trembling' at this prospect ... although each scientific cause can be calculated, the ultimate purpose of it all eludes comprehension. The dread in one half of his being supports the shut-away dogmatics in the other half. (P. 52)

Wo/mankind must endure this existence, and has endured existence in various forms and manners throughout history. Some of these forms of persistence have produced wonderful

works or art, poetry, music and dance. Most have produced disillusionment, disappointment, hardships, despair, stress and distress, anxiety, existential angst, pain, suffering and uncaring deaths. Camus' notebook contains this observation:

Melville's note on the margins of Shelley's Essays: 'Milton's Satan is morally very superior to his God, as whoever perseveres despite adversity and torture is superior to whoever, in the cold assurance of an unquestioned triumph, takes the most horrible revenge on his enemies. (P. 232)

and Camus' observation on Pascal..

Pascal: 'I spent a great part of my life in the belief that there was a justice; and in this I was not wrong; for there is one insofar as God has been willing to reveal it to us. But this is not as I thought of it and this is where I was wrong; for I believed that justice was basically just and that I was capable of knowing and judging it. (P. 260)

Franz Kafka captured the essence of Pascal's observation on the fleeting face of justice in the novel, The Castle, when an explanation of Klamm's appearance is being explained to K. as

For he's reported as having one appearance when he comes into the village and another on leaving it, after having his beer he looks different from what he does before it, when he's awake he's different from when he's asleep, when he's alone he's different from when he's talking to people, and -- what is comprehensible after all that -- he's almost another person up in the castle. (P. 231)

Kafka was heartbroken, disillusioned and articulate concerning the elusive nature of justice, of God and of

wo/mankind's hopes and aspirations, and his response to the ultimate absurdity of existence. Kafka concentrated on the transparent nature of reality, and reality's responses to wo/mankind's vicissitudes, when in a masterly manner, Kafka likened the Castle to "heaven". Wilhelm Emrich's review of The Castle comments on Kafka's recurring themes.

We have touched four times on the same motif, which constitutes one of The Castle's principal themes. Seen from afar, the Castle is limpid, bright, weightless, ascendant; whereas seen from close by, it proves to be a degraded edifice, grim, without grace or upward thrust. The distant hum of childlike voices, heard over the phone, that chant of a single voice that tries to reach our heart, is nothing but a mechanical effect. Barnabas's white tunic with its silken reflection covers a coarse dirty gray shirt: Hermes is a messenger no one appointed. The heavenly scent of the cognac which resembles the breath of a beloved person who gives us praise and kind words is only a disgusting coachman's brew. (P. 251)

Kafka expresses perfectly what I can find in my everydayness of existence. Seen from afar and by the masses (not reflecting on it at all), existence is "bright, weightless, ascendant", but upon my closer examination, it is "degraded, grim, without grace or upward thrust". Our everyday existence and relations with the Other can appear "childlike, the chant of a single voice that tries to reach our heart,"...but upon my closer examination of the history of relations between wo/man and wo/man, I find only "a mechanical effect" of callousness and uncaring striving for privilege driven by perhaps territorial claims, power, domination,

reproduction "fever" (or fervor), "survival of the fittest"...etc...resulting in massive death, destruction and "unnecessary human suffering". The beauty of the natural world, the fragrance of flowers, color of the oceans, mountains, sky are all tainted, upon closer examination, with competitive pressures for survival, terror, pain, suffering and eventual uncaring death..."a disgusting coachman's brew!" Upon closer examination, I can find abundant absurdity in the human existence!

Compounding Absurdity!

ROS: What is your line?

PLAYER: Tragedy, sir. Deaths and disclosures, universal and particular, denouements both unexpected and inexorable, transvestite melodrama on all levels including the suggestive. We transport you into a world of intrigue and illusion ... clowns, if you like, murders -- we can do you ghosts and battles, on the skirmish level, heroes, villains, tormented lovers -- set pieces in the poetic vein; we can do you rapiers or rape or both, by all means, faithless wives and ravished virgins - flagrante delicto at a price, but that comes under realism for which there are special terms. Getting warm, am I?

ROS: (doubtfully): Well, I don't know . . .

PLAYER: It costs little to watch, and little more if you happen to get caught up in the action, if that's your taste and times being what they are.

(A Play by Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead, P. 23)



I want to move from the philosophical and historical recognition of the absurdity of existence to comment upon the more current follies of humankind as I find them in the more recent past and in today's "dominant culture". I want to document wo/mankind's relations with the Other...including other persons, animals, plants, the earth, space and cosmos. Wo/mankind can and does compound his situation:

#### THE GARDEN OF LOVE

I went to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,  
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love  
That so many seed flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;  
And Priests in black gowns were walking their  
rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

William Blake

I want to engage my despair concerning the present activities of wo/mankind and that, in my outlook, these efforts cannot continue without some dire consequences; that must be rectified, must be stopped, changed or modified in some manner. I find the present brilliance of technology, of psychology, neuroscience, genetics, new forms of agriculture...I find all these ingenious new methodologies (also) leading wo/mankind into an impossible void..or into a

possible geometrical progression of domination, repression, infliction of suffering and death and extinction on a scale never contemplated by the "mass of men" - even in their "quiet desperation"! I am not alone in this polemic!

Jeremy Rifkin (1985) has emerged as an eloquent spokesperson explicating the problematique that humankind faces, its mythic origin and its ultimate consequences. Rifkin explains that the mythic Adam and Eve, eating from the tree of knowledge, whilst in the midst of security and good fortune, is the archetypal source of our present dire circumstances. Their quest for knowledge doomed them and mankind to a life of struggle, vicissitudes and despair.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed, God meted out the supreme punishment. He made Adam and Eve mortal and banished them from Paradise. Because they were now conscious, having eaten from the tree of knowledge, they would be forever conscious of their own mortality. From that time on, they and their heirs would live in constant fear of their own impending death. (P. 13)

Rifkin claims that our entire (psychic or unconscious) effort from that time has been to return to the bliss of the garden; and that we have attempted to achieve this goal through obtaining knowledge, technic, control, domination and the attempt to predict. The rise of science, of technology resulting from this effort imperils the very existence of wo/mankind in this world today. We, like Adam and Eve are "frightened semi-naked creatures huddled outside the gates, left to ponder their [our] own demise." (P. 14). Rifkin

instructs me that the discovery of the "double-helix" (genetics) and of the nuclear secret places us in extreme danger of the absolute apocalypse. The acquisition of more and more knowledge has placed us in a more and more tenuous position. Rifkin's attempts to place limits on scientific inquiry are, of course, futile. Wo/Mankind seems determined to outwit the gods, to live without appeal and to brute-force themselves into heaven. I am afraid that this will not be the case!

Morris Berman, in the introduction to his recent study (1984) of the human problematique summed our present dilemma as follows:

For more than 99 percent of human history, the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche. It has very nearly wrecked the planet as well. (P. 10)

Particularly scary is the fact that our present efforts to "live-in-this-world" is based on our understandings of historical perspectives. When these historical perspectives are perverted, as I have pointed out above, the present and future become particularly frightening. As Thomas Berry (1988) points out, this human story "is their [our] primary source of intelligibility and value," and

The deepest crises experienced by any society are those moments of change when the story becomes

inadequate for meeting the survival demands of a present situation. (P. xi)

Father Berry believes that this is exactly our present situation. From the visions of Francis Bacon (and many others), we have instituted a program of "scientific control over the functioning of the natural world." ... that "more than any other single cause has brought about the disintegration that is taking place throughout the entire planet" (Berry, 1988. P. xii). For Berry

The time has now come, however, when we will listen or we will die. The time has come to lower our voices, to cease imposing our mechanistic patterns on the biological processes of the earth, to resist the impulse to control, to command, to force, to oppress, ... (P. xiv)

With our tremendous explosion of knowledge, of technic and technique, we humans have become almost complete masters of our natural world and all that is in it. Certainly we have the capacity to reduce "everything" to ashes ... and possibly we will! Our tremendous technological prowess, combined with the increased tensions of increased populations, increased standards of living, conspicuous consumptions, increased tensions for higher and higher "standards of living" by more and more people...is scary! Father Berry explicates on this power...I quote extensively and passionately - immediately and loudly ...

In our times, however, human cunning has mastered the deep mysteries of the earth at a level far

beyond the capacities of earlier peoples. We can break the mountains apart; we can drain the rivers and flood the valleys. We can turn the most luxuriant forests into throwaway paper products. We can tear apart the great grass cover of the western plains and pour toxic chemicals into the soil and pesticides onto the fields until the soil is dead and blows away in the wind. We can pollute the air with acids, the river with sewage, the seas with oil - all this in a kind of intoxication with our power for devastation at an order of magnitude beyond all reckoning. We can invent computers capable of processing ten million calculations per second. Any why? To increase the volume and speed with which we move natural resources through the consumer economy to the junk pile or the waste heap ... we are, supposedly, creating a technological wonderworld. (P. 7)

If Father Berry is correct, and I believe that any serious examination of the current situation points out the accuracy of his observations, than what are we doing? It seems that we are taking the absurdity of our "throwness", of our very existence, and proceeding down a deliberate path of compounding absurdity with more and more absurdity! The magnitude of our actions can only be measured on gigantic scales...scales that compare a few years to millions of years of geologic time..

The change that is taking place on the earth and in our minds is one of the greatest changes ever to take place in human affairs, perhaps the greatest, since what we are talking about is not simply another historical change or cultural modification, but a change of geological and biological as well as psychological order of magnitude. We are changing the earth on a scale comparable only to the changes in the structure of the earth and of life that took place during some hundreds of millions of years .....such an order of magnitude can produce a paralysis of thought and action...[to say the least!!!] (P.11)

Matthew Fox (1988) "cut to the quick" of the matter in what I interpret as an acknowledgement of the Nietzschean proclamation that "God is Dead". Matthew Fox deems our present orientation as a lack of a cosmology - a deficiency in our understanding...

When a civilization is without a cosmology it is not only cosmically violent, but cosmically lonely and depressed. It is possible that the real cause of the drug, alcohol, and entertainment addictions haunting our society is not so much the "drug lords" of other societies but the cosmic loneliness haunting our own. (P. 2).

In the book of Joel, written in the fifth century B.C., it is written:

Stand dismayed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, for the wheat, for the barley; the harvest of the field has been ruined. The vine has withered, the fig tree wilts away; pomegranate, and palm, and apple, every tree in the field is drooping. Yes, gladness has faded among the sons and daughters of the human race. (Joel 1:11-12)

This is the direction in which I find mankind proceeding - and proceeding as rapidly as technology and greed and invention will allow. Where is the cosmology of the dominant culture, the elite controllers of the industrialized communities leading us? Stand dismayed...as Joel shouts...stand dismayed...

...Agricultural practices in North America today destroy topsoil at the rate of six billion tons per year....It takes God and nature ten thousand years to produce one inch of topsoil...It has been estimated that the state of Iowa, as rich a state

in healthy topsoil as any in the United States, will be a desert by the year 2020.....in fifteen years the planet's fertile land will be reduced by one-third....one-third of the planet's total [forests] will be destroyed in the next fifteen years....in order to satiate First World appetites for beef and other luxury items such as sugar, coffee, tea, and cocoa (Fox, 1988. P. 14)

### Hope/Despair

Combine the prophecy of Joel, with the lack of cosmology explicated by Fox...and we have an unreconcilable dilemma of cosmic proportions. Original absurdity through throwness with concocted absurdity of greed, domination, oppression, power and ignorance piled on top!! This must not continue! Where are the creative solutions to this unreconciled absurdity? Where do we hear any creative voices of hope, of promise, of survival?

Carl Jung said that creativity emerges 'from the realms of the Mothers.' ...But how fruitful is it of late? How many abortions of imagination and imaginative individuals are performed daily and weekly in our educational, familial, and religious institutions? (Fox P. 19)

William Blake said that when "imagination denied, war ruled the nations." War is what has been ruling our nation and the world, war and fear of war, domination and fear of domination, freedom and the fear of freedom...war!

...nations like our own can spend trillions of dollars on weaponry and war preparations while its young fall into despair spawned by unnourished imaginations: apathy, dropping out, drugs, alcohol dependence, punk behavior, suicide. ... This

feeling of powerlessness is overtaking our times. From it, as Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy points out, comes despair, and despair conceals apathy. (Fox. P. 20)

Wo/mankind's folly in the on-going and continuous oppression and subordination of fellow mankind, when it could be otherwise, reminds me of William Blake's little poem about a Clod and a Pebble:

The CLOD & the PEBBLE

"Love seeketh not Itself to please,  
 "Nor for itself hath any care,  
 "But for another gives its ease,  
 "And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair."

So sang a little Clod of Clay  
 Trodden with the cattle's feet,  
 But a Pebble of the brook  
 Warbled out these metres meet:

"Love seeketh only Self to please,  
 "To bind another to Its delight,  
 "Joy in another's loss of ease,  
 "And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite."

William Blake

It seems that we cannot win. Man's inhumanity to man (and especially perhaps to women, the disempowered, the very young and old and the "deviate") continues unabated in the modern world. Escape to Heaven or heavenly-sent bliss seems not to be a possibility in the everyday world. Franz Kafka (Friedman, 1964) claimed that both heaven and earth claim mankind; yet do not allow admittance. Both heaven and earth have a chain around mankind so that



if he heads, say, for the earth, his heavenly collar throttles him, and if he heads for heaven, his earthly one does the same. (P. 299).

We seem not to be able to live on this earth or appeal to heaven. I, like Kafka, must somehow make friends with my ignorance. Nothing is clear. I find myself, like Kafka, "in extreme danger", on that dizzying crest of the abyss,

in the subtle instant that precedes the leap. Being able to remain on that dizzying crest - that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge (P. 50)

On that dizzying crest, with the necessity, the extreme angst, of choice facing my existence. Leap!, leap where, why, when and how? Remain on the crest in the "integrity" of ignorance? The existential angst of Choice!

## CHAPTER IV

## A E S T H E T I C S   O F   C H O I C E

I recognize the necessity and the terror of choice. I recognize the aesthetic dimension involved in choosing how to conduct my life; how to pursue Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom! I look back at my intellectual, ethical and aesthetic development; at the influences exerted on me by thinkers, writers and philosophers. I struggle with them over issues of Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom. It is my decision, and mine alone to make; yet, I lean heavily on these sages and I thank them for speaking to me so poignantly; so eloquently, and with such conviction. How have they influenced and shaped my aesthetic of choice?

Leap of Faith

Soren Kierkegaard wants me to leap! Kierkegaard wants me to "close my eyes" and leap into Faith. He wants me to shuck my rationality and make an irrational plunge into The Church. My rationality is ordering the world and does not represent the true world-order. Kierkegaard wants me to join with Abraham, throw my sense of right-and-wrong to the wind, and follow the dictates of blind faith wherever and however it may lead! I must note that Kierkegaard, himself, was not able to make the leap; but, oh how he extols Abraham for doing so!

The ethical life is not good enough; the aesthetic life is sub-standard; only the life of unmitigated faith will satisfy Mr. Kierkegaard. The Knight of Faith is the true hero; the tragic hero is not! Perhaps he is right. Individual transcendence from the vicissitudes of existence can possibly be achieved through blind faith; despair mitigated, anxiety flushed into the arms of God, and life made at least bearable if not particularly existentially meaningful or purposeful! Millions of humans have attempted this mode of living throughout the ages.

This is the first of a series of recommendations to me that involve Individual Transcendence - where does that leave the presence of evil in the world for the Other? What does that do for the enormous amount of unnecessary human (and other) suffering existing in the world? Are the "real" ills of the world, as I recognize them, addressed by Mr. Kierkegaard's leap? Soren Kierkegaard urges me toward an individualism at the expense of community and my fellow wo/man! Can I do that? Can I leave the Other behind in an individual attempt at transcendence? And what would I be leaping into?

Wait a minute! Either a casual or serious reading of Mark Twain's Letters from the Earth (1938/1962), or of H.L. Mencken's Treatise on Right and Wrong (1977) would give one pause. Twain points out his interpretations of the absurdities contained in the history of those who profess

Kierkegaard's leap; its astounding history of oppressive, inhuman, detrimental and deceptive aspects. Writing back to heaven concerning his visit to earth, the Archangel Satan reports:

This [Earth] is a strange place, an extraordinary place, and interesting. There is nothing resembling it at home [heaven]. The people are all insane, the other animals are all insane, the earth is insane, Nature itself is insane. Man is a marvelous curiosity. When he is at his very very best he is a sort of low grade nickel-plated angel; at his worst he is unspeakable, unimaginable; and first and last and all the time he is a sarcasm. Yet he blandly and in all sincerity calls himself the 'noblest work of God.' This is the truth I am telling you. And this is not a new idea with him, he has talked it through all the ages, and believed it. Believed it, and found nobody among all his race to laugh at it. (P. 7)

From this point, Mark Twain's polemic becomes even more poignant. When I read Twain's account, I cannot but agree that Kierkegaard's request must be placed in question and/or clarified immensely!

H. L. Mencken makes an even more lucid historical case for placing Mr. Kierkegaard and his request in suspension. Mencken fills his volume with the historical misdeeds of those who profess to follow Mr. Kierkegaard's recommendations. And misdeeds of cosmic proportions at that! Centuries of oppression, domination, subjugation, hierarchy, patriarchy, warfare, torture, greed, power-seeking and unnecessary human (and other) suffering have resulted from Mr. Kierkegaard's professed adherents. My aesthetics of choice will not allow

me (or Kierkegaard, himself) to leap into this historical quagmire of conventional religiosity at this time. My (perhaps twisted) sense of justice, of fairness and of aesthetics will not allow me to countenance his recommendations.

Yet, I can sense an affinity of Mr. Kierkegaard's approach with a higher reality explicated only in aesthetics. A more careful reading of Kierkegaard's work would show that he agrees with me on the unfortunate results from conventional religiosity and wrote and railed consistently against the conventional Church. Yet, his aesthetic is obtuse (at least for me); Mr. Kierkegaard demeans aesthetics and explicates a reality that he can comprehend, but that I (and historical man) have not been able to fathom. I can only proceed on what I know and on what I doubt; I know (and he knew) the reported results of those who propret to follow his counsel, of man's inhumanity to man, and I doubt my ability to achieve or sustain the required degree of ambiguity in the face of its reported record. Aesthetic wo/man leaves no such trail of tears!

#### Out of Nothingness

Michael Novak (1970) wants me to recognize the mythic nature of my constructed reality; to disabuse myself of its falseness and to embrace a new mythic ethic of honesty, courage, freedom and community! From a position of

"nothingness", the complete abandonment of all cherished myths of existence, Novak asks me to rebuild an ethic of honesty, courage, freedom and community. Novak makes a noble case:

The impulse to exercise both the drive to question and conscious choice meets resistance. In the depths of the experience of nothingness, a person often wishes to cry out in despair: 'Why bother? Why do anything at all?' And thus at the root of honesty and freedom is an act of sheer creative will, an act of courage. Without courage, freedom is impossible; one lacks the heart to create. ... For no good reason, from the depths of his own emptiness and abandonment, a man must freely create his own values, his own identity - or fail to do so. Cultural supports, intellectual supports, and emotional supports have been taken away from him; he will be who he will be. In the night the terror of freedom passes through him. He decides for himself whether to seize hold and, if so, which way to bend his life. He reaches into the depths, fingers his bootstraps, and utters 'Yes' or 'No' out of his own anguish and abandonment. (P. 58/59)

The urge toward an ethic of community mitigates the individualistic tendency inherent in nothingness and individual transcendence. Ethical values are always social! Novak urges me to consider myself not an "atomic particle but a worldself, a thou, whose development is interdependent with the development of other human beings [other worldselfs - other thous]" (P. 88). Michael Novak has made an impression on my consciousness. Michael Novak has urged me into a position of hope, of meaning, of direction and purpose. The vicissitudes of existence for me and for the Other are not erased. The overwhelming volume of unnecessary human (and other) suffering is not eradicated or meliorated; yet, I can

adopt Michael Novak's ethic of honesty, courage, freedom and community as one guiding light in my intellectual, aesthetic and ethical development and search for Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom! At the very least his exposition can help me cope; help me to "make it through" this existence in some meaningful manner.

### Eco-Feminism

Thomas Berry (1988) asks me to love this earth; to cherish the earth as a sacred place! He asks me to place myself in a saintly relationship with the earth, with nature and with the physical and spiritual cosmos. A tall order! Berry asks me to repudiate the technological wonderment of this modern industrial society - face the consequences of this "development" and its destructive and deleterious rape of the earth. "The time has now come, however, when we [I] will listen [to him] or we will die." (P. xiv). Berry feels that we have

lost our sense of courtesy toward the earth and its inhabitants, our sense of gratitude, our willingness to recognize the sacred character of habitat, our capacity for the awesome, for the numinous quality of every earthly reality. (P. 2)

We have even lost our "primordial capacity for language at the elementary level of song and dance." Instead we have exercised dominion-over rather than custody-of our sacred Mother earth and its creatures. With great genius we are propelling ourselves directly into the abyss of death,

destruction, dispoilation and desacralization. Berry asks us to stop and recognize that:

In our times, however, human cunning has mastered the deep mysteries of the earth at a level far beyond the capacities of earlier peoples. We can break the mountains apart; we can drain the rivers and flood the valleys. We can turn the most luxuriant forests into throwaway paper products. We can tear apart the great grass cover of the western plains and pour toxic chemicals into the soil and pesticides onto the fields until the soil is dead and blows away in the wind. We can pollute the air with acids, the rivers with sewage, the seas with oil - all this in a kind of intoxication with our power for devastation at an order of magnitude beyond all reckoning. We can invent computers capable of processing ten million calculations per second. And why? To increase the volume and the speed with which we move natural resources through the consumer economy to the junk pile or the waste heap. ... We are, supposedly, creating a technological wonderworld. (P. 7)

In sympathetic understanding and reconciliation with the Native people of the Americas, Berry wants me to appreciate the divine reality of the world and the world of nature. Go beyond the "pragmatic use, academic understanding, or aesthetic appreciation!" Recognize the truly human intimacy with the earth and with the entire natural world. Recognize the inherent wisdom of the Omaha Indians when they introduce a new-born into the cosmos - addressing "the sun, the moon, the stars and every being that moves in the heavens, declaring:

Into your midst has come a new life. Consent ye, we implore! Make its path smooth, that it may reach the brow of the first hill. Then to the atmospheric world, to the winds, clouds, rain,



mist, and all that moves in the air. Then to the hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, trees and grasses. Finally. 'Ye birds, great and small, that fly through the air. Ye animals, great and small that dwell in the forest. Ye insects that creep among the grasses and burrow in the ground, I bid ye all to hear me. Consent ye all, we implore! Make its path smooth. Then shall it travel beyond the four hills. (P. 13/14)

Considering the conduct of modern civilized man, I doubt that such consent would be forthcoming!! I recognize a Beauty, a Truth, a Justice and a Freedom in Thomas Berry's urging. I see a logic and an aesthetic in his teaching. I am in sympathetic alignment with Thomas Berry. Yet, I have a disquietude, a feeling of incompleteness and un-ease. Where is the melioration of the vicissitudes for the creatures of this divine cosmos? I see an ethic of "eat or be eaten", of tearing apart of the flesh, of harsh competitive pressures to survive at the expense of the Other! I have never accepted the dictum that "It is only nature's way" - that the vicious, impersonal, indifferent, sometimes hostile and seemingly always uncaring natural world is somehow sacred. That it is mysterious and awesome I will readily agree...but that it is benign, or loving, or caring, or sacred...I wonder! Yet, I do not want to despoil, to slash and burn or to be unkind to our cosmos. Possible extinction of the human specie is important, I suppose - to some it is an idle consideration (!); but an even deeper ethic or aesthetic tells me that we are dealing with a cosmic system beyond our comprehension, and that we

should be, at the very least, respectful! I am a follower of Thomas Berry, but I keep a watchful eye out over my shoulder.

### Mysticism

What can I say of the great mystics of past? Lao Tzu (1955 Blakney trans) can be an example. This striving for "oneness", or for the recognition of truth and reality of oneness - makes me wonder why, if it be true, we have devolved into non-oneness, into duality - and continue to deprecate or support duality as we experience it in our everydayness. Mystic-scientist Annie Dillard expands the discourse when she explains that

If we analyze a molecule of chlorophyll we see 136 atoms of hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen arranged in an exact and complex relationship around a central ring. At the center of the ring is a single atom of magnesium. Amazingly, human blood is identical to this chlorophyll, except that at its center is a single atom of iron. (Fox 1983 quoting Dillard).

Yet every time I get into the "oneness" mode, into the unreality of this perceived world of duality, I get "jerked-back" by a jet airplane winging its way at 600 miles per hour and at 40,000 feet to some remote destination!! Yet,

The remarkable unanimity of the great mystics of China, India, Persia, the Holy Lands and Europe, is one of the truly impressive facts of the spiritual history of the human race. (P. 28)

There must be something that I am missing. I am confused! I can understand that "the stuff of the cosmos" is basically the same - a oneness - yet it seems to manifest itself to me in a dialectical manner as opposite poles of a continuum. I am instructed by Lao Tzu that The Way is ineffable - a path toward ultimate reality - and that "Reality is disclosed only to those who meet its conditions and the conditions are primarily moral." (P. 30). "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8). One of these moral conditions must be to have a private station rather than a public one, and to strive for the right!

According to Socrates:

...no man ... honestly striving against the main lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; he who would fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one. (Apology 32)

I am further confused by the lack of concern for the Other by the mystics of this world. Certainly, Jesus and others expressed an agape for the Other; yet melioration of the vicissitudes of existence encountered by the Other seemed to be not either available or desired. It seems that the more one strives for this melioration the further one becomes from its realization. Lao Tzu instructs us:

The student learns by daily increment.  
The Way is gained by daily loss,  
Loss upon loss until  
At last comes rest.

By letting go, it all gets done;  
 The world is won by those who let it go!  
 But when you try and try,  
 The world is then beyond the winning.(48)

Yet Matthew Fox (1988) tells us, in his defense of the mystic in all of us (everyone is a mystic [P. 48]), that "The test for authentic mysticism is justice making and compassion, as Jesus taught." (P. 44). Fox relays an instance in which Martin Luther King, Jr. (as I write this, today is his 65th birthday!) received death threats..."we're going to blow your brains out, and blow up you house...."(P. 49); King turned to the mystical power for strength:

....I never will forget it....I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night....'I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak.' ...And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, 'Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world.' He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. (Fox, 1988 P. 49 quoting King).

Compassion gets universal accolades as an underpinning of mysticism. In fact, Thomas Merton observed (two hours before his death) that compassion is the "keen awareness of the interdependence of all living things which are all part of one another and involved in one another." (Fox, 1988 P. 50). William James (1958) seems to draw "the bottom line" on mystical states for me by explicating its truth and its

warrant for the truth. His conclusions concerning the truth of mystical states is broken down into three parts:

1. Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolute authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.
2. No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.
3. They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith. (P. 323/324)

Compassion for, and action on behalf of, the Other seems to be another sometimes fundamental of mysticism that I can embrace. Yet, it is not universal that action on behalf of the Other is a necessary requisite for mysticism. I just have no direct knowledge or experience in one-ness, dissolving the world of appearances or union with God. I can embrace compassion ...I can embrace action on behalf of the Other! And I can honor and accept the validity of mysticism for others.

Charles Hartshorne, in the introduction to Richardson's book on Berdyaev (1968) made the comment that both Berdyaev and Whitehead believed that

The ethical imperative is to create beauty, harmonious experience, in oneself, in and for others, ultimately in and for God." (P. xi).

This idea of creating beauty and harmony appeals to me. It is an aesthetic approach to life that seems to not only provide a refuge from the vicissitudes of existence, but also to provide a direction of meaning and purpose that implies an ethical context of intra- and inter-subjectivity. Whereas I have accepted and admitted much of the above into my philosophical, ethical and aesthetic search for Truth, Beauty, Justice and Freedom ... I can appreciate the appeal of creating beauty and harmonious experiences on a personal, social and cosmic scale. This concept seems to embrace or encompass many of the teachings of Kierkegaard, Novak, Berry, Lao Tzu, and King.

I want to explore further the aesthetics of Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Abraham Heschel and Martin Buber. I want to consult with their lived experience as I further my aesthetic of choice. How can they help me choose an aesthetic approach to existence that will satisfy my search for Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom?

#### Aesthetics of Struggle

Franz Kafka talked to me in story - whether it be the story of man/insect (The Metamorphosis), a dog (Investigations of a Dog), an underground rodent (The Burrow), a land-surveyor (The Castle) or Josephine the singer. Kafka consistently brought to me the struggle for meaningful existence balanced with persistence. Kafka brought an aesthetic dimension to me,

not only through his writings, but through his ideas, thoughts, meditations and themes. Anyone familiar with his life struggle recognizes the import of persistence in his life. (Pawel, 1984). Kafka is the paragon of persistence with an aesthetic dimension!

Kafka's little dog in Investigations of a Dog questioned the world and all that he observed. His most poignant moments were aesthetic moments when he observed a pack of dogs dancing and conjuring up music, not by singing, but silently by

the lifting and setting down of their feet, certain turns of the head, their running and their standing still, the positions they took up in relations to one another, the symmetrical patterns which they produced by one dog setting his front paws on the back of another and the rest following suit until the first bore the weight of the other six, or by all lying flat on the ground and going through complicated concerted evolutions; and none made a false move, not even the last dog, though he was a little unsure .. sometimes hesitated..(Kafka, 1936 Muir trans P. 206)

This aesthetic overpowered Kafka's little dog and brought him to his knees, completely rendered incapacitated by the movements and music of the pack of dogs. What was this artistry - this "syncopated relations amongst one and the other?" Also what is this about a singing hunter hound? Here is a large dog that sings magnificently; yet, does not know that he is singing; yet, seems to be singing solely for the sake of Kafka's little dog.

...the [hunter] hound was already singing without knowing it, nay, more, that the melody, separated

from him, was floating on the air in accordance with its own laws, and, though he had no part in it, was moving towards me, towards me alone. (P. 252)

What is Kafka telling me concerning inter-subjectivity? How can I find this "syncopated relations amongst one and the other?" Kafka's dog found Beauty and Truth in the actions of the Other, in their artistry and in their (perhaps unknowing) caring!

Sure there is music even in the beauty, and the silent note which Cupid strikes, far sweeter than the sound of an instrument. For there is music wherever there is a harmony, order, or proportion: and thus far we may maintain the music of the spheres.

Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682)  
Religio Medici, II.9

Kafka's dog merely had to search, to persist to question and to stand amazed at the harmony, order, or proportion. Questioning and persistence represented to Kafka the existential approach to meaning and purpose. Kafka's little dog instructs me to search for harmony, order, or proportion, to see, and to perhaps be "rendered incapacitated" by the music of life.

Franz Kafka struggled to ...D'etre dans le vrai ...one of his favorite quotations (Kafka, 1930, p xi - Homage by Thomas Mann). To live in the true Kafka chose the aesthetic life of Literature as Art. Writing justified his life, and writing aesthetically about aesthetics is what he did best! In the



homage quoted above, Thomas Mann (quite an artist himself) observed:

Art as the functioning of faculties bestowed by God, as work faithfully done - that is an interpretation not only in an intellectual but in a moral sense: as it heightens the actual into the true, it lends meaning and justification to life, not only subjectively but also humanly; thus the work became humanly conservative, as a means of living "in the right" - or at least coming close to it - and art thus becomes adaptable to life. (P. xii)

Art "heightens the actual into the true!" If I profess a search for Truth and Beauty ... and Art heightens the actual into the true ...perhaps attempting to become more aesthetically aware is a lesson from Kafka and Mann to me. They are not alone. Mann also quotes Goethe:

Man can find no better retreat from the world than art, and man can find no stronger link with the world than art. (P. xiii)

Retreat from or Engage the world with aesthetics? Kafka engaged, Mann engaged, and Goethe engaged the world through aesthetics and urged an aesthetic outlook on the world. Robin Maconie, in The Concept of Music (1990) supports Kafka's dancing dogs and singing hounds as they render incapacitated our little dog:

It [music] is an information process working simultaneously on many different levels, generating a complex of responses from the most basic and physical to the most elusive and abstract .  
...Music also transcends language ... it is also

manifestly a code, and inherently a rationale, of instructions as to actions, emphasis, and timing (P. 3).

Maconie likens the human body to a musical instrument driven by animal intuition but for a higher purpose of "harmonizing the diving intentions" (P. 89); and playing out a divine melody in harmony with a divine orchestra. Yes, I do believe that aesthetics can render one incapacitated and can heighten the actual into the true.

Harmony, order and proportion - how can we dispute its transcendental nature recognized by wo/mankind from the pre-Socratics down to our scientists and physicists of today? I need to remember that ...harmony, order and proportion - syncopated relations between one and the Other...I need to remember that!

It does not stop here. This is only the beginning of the power of aesthetic endeavors and the rendering incapacitated power of music as realized by Kafka's little dog. Claudio Naranjo (1989) tells of Beethoven's reaction to the power of music!

When I open my eyes I must sigh, for what I see is contrary to my religion, and I must despise the world which does not know that music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy ... Music, verily, is the mediator between intellectual and sensuous life.

Katherine Hanley (1987) comments on Gabriel Marcel's deep commitment to music and its power of interiority and depth.

Marcel considered music to be the deepest center of three concentric circles. It was also the central role of his life. Marcel considered music to be the transcendent dimension of life.

Music, like many realities we experience bodily and spiritually, is present to us in our individual subjectivity by way of inwardness and depth. Music is a reality that can be present to many individuals and to each one by way of interiority and depth. Finally, music, by its presence, effects a certain assurance of the message it conveys. (P. 4).

No wonder Kafka's little dog was rendered incapacitated by the music of the dancing dogs and the hunter hound! When Kafka's dog commented on the "syncopated movements", it reminds me of Ellen Winner's (1982) comments that with music "what we perceive are not the individual elements of a stimulus but rather the relations among the elements (P. 206) Thomas Mann (1985) recites F. Nietzsche's deep appreciation for art, especially music.

The young Nietzsche, Yeat's chosen philosopher, believed, and believed it ever more energetically as time went on, that from the 'desolation of reality' there was only one escape: art and its mythopoeic power ...

'Only as an aesthetic phenomenon are world and existence forever justified.' Thus Nietzsche sets up, fortified by his early experience of Wagner's art the only truth surviving the desolation of a reality deserted by God and gods. (Mann, 1985. P. 19)

Franz Kafka ... you are leading me into the world of aesthetics! You are interweaving my search for Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom into the world of aesthetics. The little investigations of a dog ... finds an important dimension for meaningful existence.

### Aesthetics of Persistence and Rebellion

Albert Camus talks to me through novels, stories and his personal experiences and philosophical thoughts. One of his core philosophical positions, that particularly resonates with me, is of the nobility of persistence in the face of the complexity and uncertainty of this world. Whether it be Dr. Rieux, Meursault, or Sisyphus, they all found that persistence was the overriding reality of their existence. And it was this persistence that formed the core of their particular nobility, meaning and purpose in life.

The important thing, as Abbe Galiani said to Mme d'Epinay, is not to be cured, but to live with one's ailments. (Camus, 1955, P. 38)

and ... "Let us insist again on the method: it is a matter of persisting." (P. 52). Camus saw a great nobility in mankind manifesting itself in the action of persistence. Camus was completely over-awed by the nobility of Sisyphus, as he trudged down the slope to engage his rock again.

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself. I see a man going back

down with a heavy, yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. THERE IS NO FATE THAT CANNOT BE SURMOUNTED BY SCORN. (1955. P 121)

It does not seem to matter whether this persistence results in some productive or particular result! It does not seem to be of importance as to the outcome of the persistence. The central core is the persistence itself ... not even expecting, hoping-for, predicting, or perhaps even desiring some particular result. The nobility is in the persistence itself. This position of Scorn leads me into another of Camus' primary underpinnings. The power of scorn gives one the strength to rebel, to resist and to revolt. Camus urges me to revolt - to action!

In our daily trials rebellion plays the same role as does the 'cogito' in the realm of thought: it is the first piece of evidence. But this evidence lures the individual from his solitude. It finds its first value on the whole human race. I rebel - therefore we exist. (1956. P. 22)

Camus instructs me that rebellion verifies the value of human existence. "Why rebel if there is nothing permanent in oneself worth preserving?" (P. 16). This rebel refuses to

approve of the condition in which he finds himself. The rebellion may equally be on a personal level against injustice, racism, domination and oppression; or on a metaphysical level against the vicissitudes of existence. In all cases, non-acceptance is crucial; and is the twin of persistence.

I accept Camus aesthetics of persistence and rebellion as essential to a search for Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom. I accept his requirements for nobility and authenticity. I continue to strive to recognize the fundamental importance of aesthetics, of art, in the exposition of this rebellion. For Camus, Art was the ultimate expression of rebellion. "No artist tolerates reality' says Nietzsche." (1956 P. 253).

Rebellion can be observed here [in art] in its pure state and in its original complexities. Thus art should give us a final perspective on the content of rebellion. (P. 253).

At the same time, and paradoxically, historical revolutionaries have rejected and persecuted art. Yet Camus makes a strong case for art as a reconstruction of unity that is not found in the existential world. Music, for example,

gives form to sounds that by themselves have none, and where, finally, a particular arrangement of notes extracts from natural disorder a unity that is satisfying to the mind and the heart. (P. 256)

Art tries to give us back the "the elusive value which the future perpetually promises" (P. 258), but cannot be found

in present day existence. Art can snatch form from the grasp of history! In this context, music and painting have a strong ethic of rebellion; yet, for Camus, the novel was the ultimate tool of the rebel. Certainly, Camus' novels reveal a strong ethic and aesthetic of persistence, rebellion and completed form which cannot be found in the hurly-burly of modern day existence. This ethic and aesthetic can be found in Camus' novels.

What, in fact, is a novel but a universe in which action is endowed with form, where final words are pronounced, where people possess one another completely, and where life assumes the aspect of destiny. The world of the novel is only a rectification of the world we live in, in pursuance of man's deepest wishes. For the world is undoubtedly the same one we know .... It is here that we can no longer keep pace with them [the heroes], for they complete things that we can never consummate. (P. 262/263)

Again, I find art to be of central importance in the aesthetic of choice and in the search for unity, wholeness, completeness in life. Camus teaches me that art is central to the aesthetic of Beauty, Truth, Freedom and Justice!

#### Aesthetics of being more fully Human

It could be that the views of Abraham Heschel are out of place in this context. Yet, I find his insights to be especially significant in that they relate to differing levels of reality with similarities to the worlds of art and aesthetics of Kafka and Camus.

Citizens of two realms, we all must sustain a dual allegiance: we sense the ineffable in one realm, we name and exploit reality in another. Between the two we set up a system of references, but we can never fill the gap. (Heschel 1983/1992 P. 1)

Heschel's profound outlook on the problems of wo/man is centered on the ineffable. He approaches this level of reality in wonder, awe and radical amazement; not with intellectual knowledge or dogmatics. Wo/Mankind's correct place in the Cosmos is of especial interest to Heschel. He develops the understanding that perhaps we are concentrating on the wrong aspects of wo/mankind; emphasizing the trivial and ignoring the urgent. "Is it not conceivable that our entire civilization is built upon a misinterpretation of man?" (1965 P. 5). Heschel concentrates his insights into the question of what it means to be a human being AND what it means to more fully human! (1965). This is an existential question of great currency and importance to modern wo/man

This is an age in which it is impossible to think about the human situation without shame, anguish, and disgust, in which it is impossible to experience enjoyment without grief and unending heartache, to observe personal triumphs without pangs of embarrassment. (P. 14)

By recognizing more fully the "ontological connection between human being and being human" (P. 16), it is possible to develop a basic insight into a more meaningful and satisfying existence. A world that consists primarily of de-humanization standards of domination, oppression, subjugation, uncaring and



unmoved motives is a dangerous world. This is the historical world of time and space that we must contend with in some manner. By grasping a firmer understanding of what it means to be fully human, we begin to provide guideposts for approaching authentic living dans le vrai. We develop unique understandings of Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom! And Community!!

Human solidarity is not the product of being human; being human is the product of human solidarity. Indeed, even the most personal concern, the search for meaning, is utterly meaningless as a pursuit of personal salvation. Its integrity discloses compassion, a hope or intuition of meaning in which all men may share. (P. 45)

Man "achieves fullness of being in fellowship, in care for others." (P. 47). Heschel tells me that wo/man cannot be fully human as long as he is a solitary individual searching for the transcendent. Wo/Man's progress in being human "stands in direct proportion to the degree in which we care for others." (P. 47). I understand this to be the underlying essential for Heschel's first realm of reality - being human and becoming more fully human.

It is a most significant fact that man is not sufficient to himself, that life is not meaningful to him unless it is serving an end beyond itself, unless it is of value to someone else. (P. 57)

Yet, this is just the first realm of reality, and not by any means to be the fulfillment of existence. Man has more to give! "Human existence cannot derive its ultimate meaning

from society." (P. 59). Heschel asks me to "climb to the level of mystery," (P. 72); to shuck rationality, logical and verifiable thinking and to climb upward to the level of mystery! A substantial move to another realm! Heschel is explicating the imperative of awe; the awareness of the sense of the ineffable. Finite meaning yields to analytical reason; infinite meaning is realized in awe.

The sense of wonder [and awe] is not the mist in our eyes or the fog in our words. Wonder, or radical amazement, is a way of going beyond what is given in thing and thought, refusing to take anything for granted, to regard anything as final. It is our honest response to the grandeur and mystery of reality, our confrontation with that which transcends the given. (P. 78)

This is an important new insight, or rather perhaps another perspective on the insights of Kafka and Camus regarding art and the aesthetic milieu. Heschel's wonder, awe and radical amazement is particularly focused on the ineffable or perhaps the spiritual transformation and transcendence of wo/mankind. Yet it is directly relevant to the imperative of becoming more fully human. Becoming more fully human implies, no demands, that one approach the ineffable in a posture of wonder, awe and radical amazement. Kafka and Camus would term this approach as aesthetic. These postures are for Heschel

to live in defiance of absurdity, notwithstanding futility and defeat; to attain faith in God even in spite of God (P. 80)

Finally, in response to the Heideggerian concept of "thrownness", Heschel turns the concept on its head through the command of obedience. Whether it be against your will that you are born, or live (or suffer and die?) in a certain matter, or that you must give account against your will for your being - whether all this is a variety of "thrownness" is beside the point for Heschel. "The transcendence of being is commandment, being here and now is obedience." (P. 97). Significant living "is an attempt to adjust to what is expected and required of a human being [and of being more fully human]" (P. 106)

I have learnt much from Abraham Heschel. He has much to teach wo/mankind concerning the significance of our existence. Heschel can bring light into dark places, viz

The teaching of our society is that more knowledge means more power, more civilization - more comfort. We should have insisted in the spirit of the prophetic vision that more knowledge should also mean more reverence, that more civilization should also mean less violence. (P. 100)

For Heschel, the search for truth is obvious. "The truth of being human is gratitude; its secret is appreciation." (P. 114)

#### Aesthetics of Relation

Martin Buber brings it all down to my level; or upward to the ultimate level. Martin Buber places existence directly in relation with the Other. Abraham Heschel hinted at the

requiredness of dealing with the Other for a meaning and purposeful life. Martin Buber makes it explicit! And Martin Buber connects Franz Kafka's and Albert Camus' aesthetics as well. Relations, creativity, ultimate significance, meaning, purpose, existence - Martin Buber addresses all.

That man is legitimately creative who experiences so strongly and formatively that his experiences unite into an image that demands to be set forth, and who then works at his task with full consciousness of his art. But he who interferes with the spontaneity of perceiving, who does not allow the inner selection and formation to prevail, but instead inserts an aim from the beginning has forfeited the meaning of this perception, the meaning that lies above all aims. (1957 P. 9)

This spontaneity of perceiving, this inner formation is essential to Martin Buber. The world of I-It inserts aims; is the world of time and space, is the absurd world-view of the existentialists. The ordered and detached world is there "next to your skin" and,

You take it to be the 'truth,' and it lets itself be taken; but it does not give itself to you. ... You cannot hold on to life without it, its reliability sustains you; but should you die in it, your grave would be in nothingness. (1958 P. 31)

Buber does not deny the absurdity of the world of I-It. In fact he seems to agree that it is "nothingness". This is the absurd world of Albert Camus and Franz Kafka in the previous chapter. Buber wants to sharply differentiate the world of I-It from the world of relations..the world of I-Thou. And when we recognize and appreciate this difference,

everything changes, and we see reality as distinctly different from that described in the world of It. The world of It is an inferior reality, distinctly and forever inferior, or a "nothingness".

It is important to Martin Buber that this world of I-Thou is apriori! This primary world of relation is demonstrated in the relations between the prenatal child in its oceanic bliss and the newborn with the mother's breast. Never can a relation, on human terms, be more real than that of the child and the mother.

In the beginning is relation - as category of being, readiness, grasping form, mould for the soul; it is the a priori of relation, the inborn Thou. ...The inborn Thou is realised in the lived relations with that which meets it. The fact that this Thou can be known as what is over against the child, can be taken in exclusiveness, and finally can be addressed with the primary word, is based on the a priori of relation. (1958 P. 27)

This fundamental unity, that of relation in the I-Thou is habituated out of us as we grasp this reality of the I-It by objectifying the world. The absurdity, complexity and incomprehensibility of the I-It world is a lesser reality we have learned, that we have constructed ourselves. This twofold nature of reality is central to Buber's teachings.

Each thing and being has a twofold nature: the passive, absorbable, usable, dissectible, comparable, combinable, rationalizable, and the other, the active, non-absorbable, unusable, undissectible, incomparable, noncombinable, nonrationalizable. This is the confronting, the shaping, the bestowing in things. He who truly

experiences a thing so that it springs up to meet him and embraces him of itself has in that thing known the world. (P. 27)

This is a fundamentally different reality from that of the absurd. This is an underlying different way of knowing the world, of seeking Beauty, Truth, Justice and Freedom. Yet, Martin Buber has not sought to dismiss the world of the I-It. He sought to heighten the reality of the I-It by knowing the world in its heightened reality of the I-Thou. This ability to heighten reality is realized by Martin Buber in Art!

And how can I give this reality to my world except by seeing the seen with all the strength of my life, hearing the heard with all the strength of my life, tasting the tasted with all the strength of my life" (1957, P. 28)

Believe in the simple magic of life, in service in the universe, and the meaning of that waiting, that alertness, that 'craning of the neck' in creatures will dawn upon you. Every word would falsify; but look! round about you beings live their life, and to whatever point you turn you come upon being. (1958, P. 15)

And this "coming upon being" with "all the strength of my life" is realized in relation and dialogue. This becoming aware, moving beyond being merely an onlooker can be realized in relation and dialogue through art - for "art is essentially of the nature of dialogue." Music, architecture, sculpture all say, "to him who receives them, something that can be said only in this one language." (1965, P. 25). To move beyond the "world filter" of our senses is dialogue and art.

But there is something that goes beyond that, that begins at any given time where the function of the filter is at an end, a bodily element that sends itself out, as it were - in order to partake of a ground that otherwise would not be grasped - in enormous variety of manners and persons, nonetheless producing a unity of unities and with each new work renewing it. I mean the existence of the artist; I mean art. (1965, P. 150)

Art does not bring out the mystery or the spirit of things. That is not the function of the artist (more probably the function of the scientist). "Art ... is the work and witness of the relation between the substantia humana and the substantia rerum, it is the realm of 'the between' which has become a form." (P. 155). The artist is not trying to penetrate behind the world of the senses but to perfect the form to the completed image.

This importance of the aesthetic in life keeps coming through to me. This importance of being liberated from the rational, from the logical and intellectual is a recurring theme of all my advisors in this chapter. How does one do this? How does one become more aesthetic?

Buber explains that this feeling of art is a polar feeling. Out of our familiarity with the world and recognizing its strangeness, of our "total enjoyment and total renunciation, comes the pathos of the genuine feeling of art." (1957, P. 67). To become an artist, for Buber, or to appreciate art, one must delve deeply into the pain of the world; must touch the poles of existence ... "total enjoyment, and total renunciation." Then one, like Kafka's little dog,

can be rendered incapacitated by the "dancing dogs" and their syncopated movements.

I am now beginning to savor that art is not merely a refuge from the vicissitudes of existence; but, a fundamentally different reality; a different and higher reality, and one that can be experienced aesthetically, personally and in community, in conjunction with everyday life. This dimension of reality will not be breached intellectually or rationally. The realm of the Other is vital in the higher reality - for Art is an inter-subjectivity of form - an arena of dialogue or of relation. I can search for, and perhaps find, Truth, Beauty, Justice, and Freedom in aesthetics, I will certainly not find it in the I-It world; I will only find absurdity in that realm! The world of the absurd is the world of despair; the world of aesthetics contains the stairsteps to the gods! The I-Thou world is the higher world, the transcendent world where, if they exist anywhere at all, one would find Plato's eternal forms! The absurd world of angst and despair contain no such eternal!

Wise men tell us that heaven and earth and the gods and men are held together by partnership and love, and by propriety, moderation and justice. (Plato in Gorgias)

Some of these wise men are Kafka, Camus, Heschel and Buber!



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