Eros and The Psychology of World Views

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I would like in this essay to use the theme of "Eros" to explore some of the ways psychology and philosophy can illuminate the sources of our world views.(1) In view of the fact that Eros has been a major theme of philosophy as well as psychology and that attitudes toward it seem often to be both deeply rooted in world views and also generative of world views, it seems especially suited to an inquiry into the ways philosophical thinking, psychology, and world view might be linked. The linkage among these was first sketched by Karl Jaspers early in the twentieth century in his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919), but few have ventured to explore it further in a systematic way—a point that seems underscored by the fact that this is one of the few books of Jaspers that has still never been translated into English.

In the Foreword to the 4th edition of that work, Jaspers said that the idea for it came to him when he noticed that intellectual disputes were not always determined simply by empirical or logical considerations:

> Im Kampf der wissenschaftlichen Anschauungen und der lebendigen Persönlichkeiten spielte nicht einfach das empirisch und logisch für jedermann gleichermassen richtige eine Rolle. Dies zwingend Gültige herauszuarbeiten zeigte sich vielmehr als die schwierige Aufgabe. In der Diskussion war fast immer auch etwas anderes fühlbar. Nicht etwa unser Geltungsbedürfnis, unser Rechthabenwollen war dabei interessant, sondern irgendein Etwas, das nicht fassbar war, obgleich es Schranken zwischen den Menschen aufzurichten schien. (P. ix)

> (In the struggle of scientific views and living personalities, the empirical and logical do not always play for everyone an exactly similar role. To meet their demands in a cogently valid manner, on the contrary, turns out to be a difficult exercise. Something else can almost always be felt to be at work in the discussion. Not just our concern with personal prestige or correctness is in play, but also something else that cannot be pinned down, even as it sets up barriers between people.)

He mentions Sigmund Freud and Alfred Erich Hoche as examples of figures who represented heterogeneous rival powers in psychology in this manner. Perhaps today we

would be more likely to speak of Freud and Jung in such a context, and I will turn to a comparison of their ways of thinking about psychology shortly.

First, however, it will be appropriate to try to see the issues involved in a broader philosophical framework, as Jaspers himself would certainly have urged us to do. Jaspers said in the same Foreword that his own purpose in writing that book, which grew out of the transition he was then making from psychiatry, his field of academic training, to philosophy, was essentially philosophical. This was in part because in accord with Aristotle's dictum in *De Anima*, 431b20, that "the soul is in a way all things," he interpreted psychology broadly enough to include virtually the whole realm of thought. But it was also because his purpose was not simply to present a gallery of world views, like pictures at an exhibition, but to illuminate the space in which existential decisions are made (p. xi). His real theme, that is, was the way to authentic human existence, and his real interest was not merely a psychological one about the reality (Realität) of world views but a philosophical one about their truth (Wahrheitscharakter) (p. xii). Jaspers' book itself will probably seem rather dated today, since so much has happened since in the development of the field of psychology, especially in its scientific, experimentally controlled aspects, but philosophy is a more perennial field of inquiry, and much of what Jaspers has to say regarding it still includes valuable leads that can also be seen worked out in some recent schools of psychological thought.

As a first philosophical predecessor in the study of the psychology of world views, Jaspers cites Hegel, whose *Phänomenologie des Geistes* was the only major attempt at such a psychology before his, but he says Hegel's effort was itself more an *expression* of world view than an analysis, so that it was less properly a model for his own effort than a potential object for it (p. 12). Max Weber's sociology of religion and his political studies, says Jaspers, also contained a psychology of world views combining concrete historical study with systematic analysis (p. 14). He found a more powerful inspiration, however, in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Both these thinkers, he says, lived the problem of existence in the most original way and must be recognized as the greatest psychologists of world view, having not only considered and realized but tested every position in infinite self-reflection.

> In grenzloser Selbstreflexion prüfen sie jede Stellung, die sie in ihrem Innern erringen, erfassen die Problematik des Ich, die Dialektik alles subjektiven Daseins. (P. 13)
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> (In infinite self-reflection they try to put to the test every position that they can inwardly attain, to grasp the problem of the ego and the dialectic of every subjective existence.)

Since our own topic is specifically Eros, however, and not existential or psychological philosophy in general, it may be more helpful for the present purpose, before considering Jaspers' own specifically psychological suggestions further, to turn from these thinkers he cites to some who I think have been especially important in laying the philosophical

groundwork for all modern thought about desire. The ones I have in mind are three major seventeenth century thinkers: René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and Benedict Spinoza. Representing respectively spirit-body dualism, reductionistic materialism, and a monism that treats spirit and matter as aspects of a single reality, these three sketched out for the early modern world the range of ways human being and the place of desire in relation to it have been conceived ever since. The radical differences between them also illustrate rather nicely, I think, the applicability of Jaspers' idea that underlying differences of philosophical position there may be other factors than the simply logical and empirical. Each presents a radically heterogeneous world view that must have been founded on something in each thinker's own mentality and experience but which can be neither proven nor finally disproved—although the science of neurobiology does offer some telling criticisms of Cartesian dualism.(2)

Let us begin with Descartes. For him the body and the soul, the famous *res cogitans* or "thinking thing," are separate realities, only tenuously linked, so that the only way we can know there is any corporeal world at all corresponding to the sensations in our minds is by logical deduction from the idea of God's truthfulness. In any radical dualism, desire tends to be associated with the body, while one's true self tends to be identified with the incorporeal soul. Desire, therefore, is seen as a distraction from our true life. Where dualism regarding desire comes into Descartes' thought is with reference to its power as a source of cognitive error. The true life of a "thinking thing" is to think, and to do that well is to do it accurately and without distraction. Descartes' ideal is a mind completely liberated from prejudice and passion so that it can operate with perfect rational clarity and thereby attain certain knowledge.

2

Another seventeenth-century thinker who shared many of Descartes' assumptions about reasoning—especially the idea of a philosophy as precise as geometry, as was reflected in the very form of his major work, the *Ethics*—was Benedict Spinoza. But Spinoza differed fundamentally from Descartes in his rejection of dualism and in his positive view of desire. In Part III of his *Ethics*, he tells us that "the mind and the body are one and the same thing, conceived at one time under the attribute of thought, and at another under the attribute of extension."(3) In keeping with this holistic anthropology, Spinoza defines "affect" in a way that includes not only feelings that might be passively experienced but also the energy of striving or desire: "By affect I understand the affections of the body, by which the power of acting of the body itself is increased, diminished, helped, or hindered, together with the ideas of these affections."(4) Human beings are essentially embodiments of energy moving toward a goal. Spinoza's word for this is *conatus*, which is usually translated as "desire" but which might also be rendered as Eros. "Desire," he says, "is the essence itself of man in so far as it is determined to any action by any one of his affections."(5)

The central human problem, therefore, is what should one desire, what is the true goal of our Eros? "By the word 'desire'. . ." he says, "I mean all the efforts, impulses, appetites and volitions of a man, which vary according to his changing disposition, and not infrequently are so opposed to one another that he is drawn hither and thither, and knows not whither he ought to turn."(6)

What is the solution to this perplexity and conflict in desire? Spinoza is quite explicit: desire itself contains the solution, because as he states it in Part IV, Proposition 7, "An affect cannot be restrained nor removed unless by an opposed and stronger affect," and in Proposition 18, "The desire which springs from joy, other things being equal, is stronger than that which springs from sorrow."

The essential problem is that human beings, through lack of clarity, fall into bondage, by which he means subjection to false desires. For Spinoza, bondage is due not to desire as such but to lack of clarity in desiring. Freedom, or autonomy, comes through clarification of desire, not its rejection.

In Spinoza's framework of thought, when bondage is understood as a relation to the objects of desire, it amounts to idolatry, a term that has special significance in his context, because Spinoza's monism extends to identifying the notion of God with the unified substance, simultaneously conscious and extended, of all reality. Spinoza's God, one might say, is perfectly realized luminosity of existence, the ultimate act of luminous self-presence, which is the goal of all striving and the one satisfaction of all appetite. False desire is more than a merely cognitive mistake in this context; it is a kind of idolatrous fetishism.

Because there is no separation or essential difference for Spinoza between knowing and conation, misunderstanding of our desire necessarily takes the form of a misdirected striving, a pursuit of subjection. This is what constitutes "passion" as Spinoza uses that word; passion is the replacement of active life by passivity. In this light we find bondage understood not as a relation to an object but as a feature of the subjective life of the one who undergoes it. The operative word here is "undergoes." Passion is a state of subjection, of undergoing. True life is active, and the goal of true desire is the activity of true understanding—which in turn is a participation in, cognitive-affective union with, the life of God.

To desire truly, therefore is to live consciously in God and to will with the divine will. As Spinoza puts it in Part II, Proposition 49, wisdom teaches us ". . . that we do everything by the will of God alone, and that we are partakers of the divine nature in proportion as our actions become more and more perfect and we more and more understand God." To know this wisdom and live in accord with it is to be free, because God "acts from the laws of His own nature only, and is compelled of no one" (Bk. I, Prop. 17.), which is the very definition of freedom. The human subject, too, has a law of his being, which is to do precisely this, but

when he mistakenly pursues subjection and passivity, he violates it and places himself in bondage. This can only happen because of lack of clarity, since it is never possible to strive for anything or any condition unless it is mistakenly apprehended as offering some potential satisfaction.

The solution, therefore, lies in the elucidation and education of desire. This will have the effect that true desire will emerge into clarity and displace false desire. Why? Because, as was mentioned above, desire which springs from joy is stronger than that which springs from sorrow. What does this mean? Joy, as Spinoza uses the word, is the affect that accompanies and gives expression in consciousness to our awareness of our life as expanding, becoming enhanced. Sorrow is our awareness of our life as contracting, becoming diminished. And what is our life? Along with our bodily thriving, it is the actuality of consciousness, the exercise of active understanding. Joy, in other words, is our conscious experience of true life, of freedom, and in so far as we pursue true life, the life of active understanding, we will experience joy, which we will experience as a stronger *conatus* than that of false desire, or passion, so that the latter, with its experience of sorrow, will be "restrained" and "removed," as was said in III, 18 as quoted above "by an opposed and stronger affect."

This problem and Spinoza's solution will be worth bearing in mind in connection with what follows, both because it will find echoes in some of the psychological thinkers we will be examining and because it suggests at least the possibility of an experience of joy founded on the discovery of true desire, a possibility that Spinoza may reasonably be thought to have believed in not merely because he worked it out as a logical theory but also because he confirmed it in his own serene philosophical existence.

Still another modern alternative to dualism is reductionistic materialism of the sort expounded by Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was a thorough materialist, with a conception of man as essentially matter in motion. Sense "is motion in the organs and interior parts of man's body, caused by the action of the things we see, hear, etc."[7] Outward movement stimulated by sensations he calls "appetite" or "desire" if it approaches the object and "aversion" if it retreats from it. He defines good and evil in a similarly behavioristic manner: ". . . whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth *good*; and the object of his hate and aversion, *evil*." There was no true good discernible by the higher faculties of mind, as had been the case for Plato and Aristotle; there were only the appetitive objects that might randomly stimulate us to movement.

For Hobbes the central philosophical problem, given these assumptions, was political: how to bring the desires of the multitude under strict control for the common good. Desire was not inherently evil for Hobbes, but it was unruly, and if it was to find any possibility of satisfaction, it could do so only within a political order in which it was strictly controlled through the power of a sovereign to whom each subject yielded his or her freedom for the

sake of the satisfactions that might then remain. This left, of course, the problem of possible tyranny if the monarch became overly severe, but Hobbes thought subjection to a tyrant was a risk worth running in order to avoid the war of each against all that would make life once again, as it had been in the state of nature, "nasty, brutish, and short."

Among the great figures of modern psychological thought, the one who comes principally to mind as sharing Hobbes's basic world view is Sigmund Freud. Like Hobbes, Freud espoused a thoroughgoing biological materialism, and also like him, Freud considered Eros a potentially unruly element in human life that demanded careful control both in order that it might attain moderate satisfactions and that it be prevented from bringing about conditions that would make for even greater suffering than the inevitable frustration of having to settle for less than the infinity of satisfaction that the Id, left to itself, would insist on.

3

Like the society theorized by Hobbes, the mind as conceived by Freud was in danger of falling under a tyranny, that of a blind and rigid Superego. But Freud offered a solution: "Wo Es war, soll Ich werden" ("Where 'it' was, there should be 'I'").(8) The "I," one's capacity for conscious, rational self-government, should gradually be developed to replace the tyranny of merely reflexive, unconscious impulse.

Freud's basic world view remained essentially tragic, however, due to his belief that all desire was inherently retrogressive and impossible of fulfillment—that is, he believed that what all of us really want most deeply is to recover the blissful equilibrium we once experienced in the womb, before we were cast out into a world of hunger, thirst, and inevitable frustration. As he put it in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1929), "Somit sind unsere Glücksmöglichkeiten schon durch unsere Konstitution beschränkt. Weit weniger Schwierigkeiten hat es, Unglück zu erfahren. Von drei Seiten droht das Leiden, vom eigenen Körper her, der, zu Verfall und Auflösung bestimmt, sogar Schmerz und Angst als Warnungssignale nicht entbehren kann, von der Aussenwelt, die mit übermächtigen, unerbittlichen, zerstörenden Kräften gegen uns wüten kann, und endlich aus den Beziehungen zu anderen Menschen."(9) ("Our possibilities of happiness are . . . limited from the start by our very constitution. It is much less difficult to be unhappy. Suffering comes from three quarters: from our own body, which is destined to decay and dissolution, and cannot even dispense with anxiety and pain as danger-signals; from the outer world, which can rage against us with the most powerful and pitiless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations with other human beings.")

If Freud's thought tended to parallel the pattern represented by the philosophy of Hobbes, Jung's is more similar to that of Spinoza. (Cartesian dualism, on the other hand, seems to have lost all appeal at the end of the twentieth century, perhaps in part because the psychology of the unconscious associated with Freud and Jung has so permeated our culture

and effectively undermined the Cartesian identification of the self with rational consciousness.) Where Freud identified Eros in the adult primarily with sexual desire, Jung took a more comprehensive view of it as a general appetite for life and especially for psychological differentiation and integration. He saw this as proceeding by way of an initial, disturbing realization that consciousness is only one component of a larger, and largely unconscious, self. This tended to be symbolized in the dreams and fantasies of his patients, he found, by the imagery of a shadow-self that haunted and pursued one. This very image suggests the dynamism characteristic of the Jungian world view, since it represents a force of truth that actively seeks, by hounding us, to come into consciousness (as compared with the Freudian idea of the unconscious as setting up obstacles to consciousness). Eventually Jung came to speak of this as an "archetype" of what he called the collective unconscious—by which he meant it was a special pattern of dynamism characteristic of a particular stage of development universal to the human species. Jung's archetype of the shadow represented everything we did not know about ourselves and did not want to know. At a later point of development, as one came to find the unconscious no longer frightening but attractive, this psychic force transformed, he said, into a new archetype, the anima—a symbolic figure representing the positive appeal of further self-knowledge and growth. There were also later archetypal transformations as well, representing wisdom and the psychic balance that can grow out of the integration of previously unconscious life into consciousness. The parallel to the Spinozist vision lies in the underlying conception of a unity of life that is gradually realized through the unfolding of the implications of a fundamental vital Eros that expresses itself as simultaneously corporeal and spiritual.

Where Freud's world view was tragic, Jung's is clearly comic, in the same sense that Dante's *Commedia* is: human life is an expression of a cosmic Eros, a love of life and a force of development that presses toward conscious realization and that torments us only to drive us onward in order that in the end it may welcome us with open arms.

Freud's psychology and Jung's were both psychologies of the unconscious. In Freud's case the unconscious was something like a garbage dump, a place where repressed memories, too unpleasant or painful to be allowed into consciousness, were thrust to get rid of them. But they never simply disappeared; in fact Freud thought they continued intact in the unconscious and from there exerted persistent pressure to return to consciousness, either as actual memories recovered through psychoanalysis or in disguise as neurotic symptoms. As Freud put it, "Seitdem wir den Irrtum überwunden haben, daß das uns geläufige Vergessen eine Zerstörung der Gedächtnisspur, also eine Vernichtung bedeutet, neigen wir zu der entgegengesetzten Annahme, daß im Seelenleben nichts, was einmal gebildet wurde, untergehen kann, daß alles irgendwie erhalten bleibt und unter geeigneten Umständen, z.B. durch eine so weit reichende Regression wieder zum Vorschein gebracht werden kann"(10) ("Since the time when we recognized the error of supposing that ordinary forgetting signified destruction or annihilation of the memory-trace, we have been inclined to the opposite view that nothing once formed in the mind could ever perish, that everything

survives in some way or other, and is capable under certain conditions of being brought to light again, as, for instance, when regression extends back far enough")—a statement that also indicates the basically retrospective character of Freud's style of analysis. In Jung's case, the unconscious consisted in part of such repressed memories, which Jung referred to as the "personal unconscious," but as "collective unconscious" it consisted primarily of psychic energy seeking some form of fulfillment.

Both psychologies of the unconscious have been strongly criticized in subsequent years as speculations that cannot be experimentally verified. Memory theorists have shown that memory behaves in very different ways from that which Freud hypothesized, and both Freud's and Jung's theories about collective memory are heavily dependent on the discredited Lamarckian evolutionary theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. This has not, however, prevented the development of further psychologies of the unconscious which seem less susceptible to such criticisms and may even be supported by experimental evidence. One is the theory of Ernest Becker that along with Eros the other deepest human motive is the fear of death. The other principal example of an alternative psychology of the unconscious is René Girard's specifically anti-Freudian theory of mimetic desire. I will turn first to Ernest Becker.

Becker modeled much of his thinking on Freud's theory of repression and "the return of the repressed" in the form of symptoms, and also on Freud's later thinking about the balance between two great biological drives, Eros and Thanatos. The latter was Freud's hypothesis about an instinctive appetite for death, which he conceived as an alternate way that we seek unconsciously to satisfy our nostalgia for the perfect equilibrium and stasis we experienced in the womb. Despite his explicit admiration for Freud, Becker cannot be considered a Freudian. In fact his characterization of Eros as much more than sexual libido links him with the broader, philosophical heritage of the image of Eros that Jaspers and Jung also drew on. And his treatment of the death theme is actually quite the opposite of that of Freud, whose concept of Thanatos Becker saw as an attempt to mask our real anxiety about death by interpreting death as a positive motive parallel to the sex drive rather than as an object of aversion. Freud's Thanatos was a counterforce opposing Eros; Becker's death-anxiety is simply the reverse face of Eros itself: the same force that makes us reach toward fullness of life also makes us fear any threat to life.

Ultimately Becker found more inspiration in Otto Rank and Søren Kierkegaard than in Freud. From Rank in particular he took the idea of repression as "character armor," a necessary "vital lie" used to keep terror at bay, and the idea of society as a hero system in which one seeks through symbolic projects to triumph over death. Becker's central assumption in all his work was that our hero projects enable us to feel immortal. In order to endure the terror of living in the ever-present face of death, we need world views that tell us life is more powerful than death and that we have a permanent place in the drama of its triumph.

In *The Denial of Death* (1973) Becker emphasized the need for cultural hero projects that could offer us this satisfaction. But at the beginning of his last book, the posthumous *Escape From Evil* (1975), he said that his previous works "did not take sufficient account of truly vicious human behavior" and that in this one he would "attempt to show that man's natural and inevitable urge to deny mortality and achieve a heroic self-image are the root causes of human evil" (p. xvii).

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If Freud's vision was tragic and Jung's comic, Becker's might best be described as ironic: the Eros of life that leads us to flee from death drives us to hero projects that threaten the very life we seek to protect. The capstone of what Becker calls in *Escape From Evil* his "general theory of human evil" is that its root is "man's hunger for righteous self-expansion and perpetuation" (p. 135), which produces the paradox that "evil comes from man's urge to heroic victory over evil" (p. 136). It is their desire to overcome evil that leads human beings to project their sense of guilt, inadequacy, and vulnerability onto scapegoats and then destroy them: they cannot endure these in themselves, and they hope, unconsciously and stupidly, that they can exterminate them with their victims. "From the head-hunting and charm-hunting of the primitives to the holocausts of Hitler, the dynamic is the same: the heroic victory over evil by a traffic in pure power. And the aim is the same: purity, goodness, righteousness—immunity" (p. 150).

What then can we do, or dare we try to do, if our evil is the result of our very effort to be good?

Actually Becker thinks we can do quite a lot. He urges us to recognize "how men defeat themselves by trying to bring absolute purity and goodness into the world" and, as an antidote to this, he urges us to acknowledge "the non-absoluteness of the many different hero systems in the family of nations" (p. 168). Most importantly, Becker urges that, in light of his analysis of the role of unconscious motives in driving us to turn our best impulses to evil, we must learn to act consciously and carefully rather than unconsciously and stupidly. This requires an effort of demystification of socially constructed myths and hero systems, "the revelation of the lie," as he puts it (p. 125). But it also requires a new formulation of religious sainthood, one that will join with psychoanalysis in seeking to uncover what is repressed and counter our tendency artificially to shrink our intake of experience:

Both religion and psychoanalysis show man his basic creatureliness and attempt to pull the scales of his sublimations from his eyes. Both religion and psychoanalysis have discovered the same source of illusion: the fear of death which cripples life. Also religion has the same difficult mission as Freud: to overcome the fear of self-knowledge. . . . The ideal of religious sainthood, like that of psychoanalysis, is thus the opening up of perception: this is where religion and science meet.Becker placed great weight on the claim that his approach brings

religion and science together. One might wonder, however, precisely what sort of scientific grounding Becker thought psychoanalysis could offer—or even itself legitimately claim. Freudian theory has been extensively applied in clinical settings, but it is now widely recognized that the results have been ambiguous when compared with other forms of psychotherapy—and most importantly, with placebo therapies in which someone simply listens sympathetically to patients while offering no particular treatment—and experimental psychologists have remained quite skeptical toward it.

Becker's ideas have, on the other hand, been taken up by some experimental psychologists, principally Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski, who have developed numerous experiments to test for what they call "mortality salience" (the unconscious fear of death) and its effects on world views and on behavior. I will not take time to describe them here, but these psychologists have done more than forty experiments demonstrating that the fear of death operates as a genuine unconscious motive that, significantly, is most powerful when it is most unconscious. Its principal effect according to these studies is the polarizing of world views by the division of the cosmos and the social world into forces of good and evil, an "us" and a "them." Raising the fear of death into consciousness, on the other hand, diminishes this tendency along with the death-anxiety that generates it.(11)

The other important new psychology of the unconscious is that of the Girardian school—although these thinkers prefer to avoid the term "unconscious" because of its associations with Freudianism.(12)Rather, as Jean-Michel Oughourlian puts it on the basis of René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, "the unconscious is the Other" (". . . l'inconscient, c'est l'Autre").(13)

What does it mean to say this? What it means from the point of view of Girardian mimetic theory is that our deepest psychological motive—which we are deeply averse to recognizing—is the tendency to imitate the desires and attitudes of others. This implication is that Eros, at least as we commonly conceive it, is an illusion. Our common conception of desire is that of a relation between ourselves as subjects and a desired object. Either we conceive of our desires as arising spontaneously within us or as elicited by the attractiveness of the object. The Girardian conception of desire is that it is mimetic, that is, modeled on the desires we see, or think we see, in others.

This was a theme Girard developed initially in a critical study of the novel from Cervantes to Dostoyevsky and Proust, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1961), "romantic lying and novelistic truth." The "romantic lie" the title refers to is the naive belief that our desires originate spontaneously within our selves; the "novelistic truth" that great novels reveal is that we look to others to give us clues to what is desirable. In particular we look to prestigious others for this, figures who seem to possess a vitality or psychological strength beyond our own, and we imitate their desires in order to model ourselves on them and thus acquire their qualities. Girard termed this pattern of mimesis "metaphysical desire" because

its real goal is the supposed "being" of the other. Behind all of our conscious desires for particular objects, lies our real but largely unconscious desire for the sufficiency of being the other embodies and exemplifies for us. "Le désir selon l'*Autre*," says Girard, "est toujours le désir d'être un *Autre*. Il n'y a qu'un seul désir métaphysique mais les désirs particuliers qui concrétisent ce désir primordial varient à l'infini."[(14)](#) ("Desire according to the Other is always the desire to be the Other. There is always only one metaphysical desire, but the particular desires that make that primordial desire concrete are infinitely various.")

Metaphysical desire as Girard describes it stems from the fear we each harbor that we are deficient in "being"—which means to us "power." Each of us comes into the world utterly helpless, surrounded by powerful, godlike others, and we long to possess the ontological plenitude we see in them. Noticing that they desire various objects, we assume that they must want them in order to gain a still greater sufficiency of being than that which they already have, and so we reach for the same objects in the illusory hope of gaining it too.

The reason we are addicted to lying about this, to repressing it, is that we are afraid to admit to ourselves the vulnerability we feel and the extent to which we feel dependent on our models of being. To acknowledge this would be to admit into consciousness that which we most flee from: the fear of our own nothingness. This is a point at which Girard and Becker coincide. Both see the fear of being nothing and nobody as our deepest repression, and both interpret it as driving us unconsciously to projects of becoming *somebody*, to hero projects as Becker phrased it.

This fear and our tendency to imitate the desires of others in order to gain relief from it became the nucleus in Girard's thought of an intricate psychological and anthropological system. Nothing ever really satisfies our deep hunger for being (that is to say, power), and no victory over any rival ever provides effective assurance of our own power, since the very fact that we have defeated the rival tells us he was not as powerful as we had thought. The natural trajectory of desire, therefore, according to this system, is to "escalate" as one proceeds in search of unattainable being. As Girard put it in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), as long as the desirer never realizes the insidious dynamics of the process he is caught up in, he will proceed endlessly "to an even greater violence and seek out an obstacle that promises to be truly insurmountable" (p. 148). "Desire," he says, "clings to violence and stalks it like a shadow because violence is the signifier of the cherished being, the signifier of divinity" (p. 151).

5

The result of this universal human drive toward ever-increasing levels of violent conflict would have led long ago, says Girard, to the extinction of our species if our ancestors had not accidentally stumbled on the device that delivers us from the self-destruction we hurtle toward. This device is the victimizing or scapegoat mechanism. We were saved from the

relentless cycle of violence by the same mimetic tendency that got us into it: just as our mimesis of each other's desires produces general rivalry, so the mimesis of each other's hostility—"la mimésis de l'antagoniste"—leads to the focusing of our violence on a common victim.(15) Chance could be expected to lead at some point to two or more fighting a single opponent, which would attract the mimesis of others, so that eventually our ancestors would form a group, unified by their opposition to the individual (or the other smaller group) they ganged up on.

This is what Girard thinks actually happened at the dawn of human history. Collectively, our ancestors found themselves delivered by this scapegoating from mutual random violence and united in solidarity with fellow enemies of the one whom the victimizing mechanism led them to see as embodying all threats. Thus the anarchic violence that might have destroyed them all became transformed for them into a creative struggle against evil. Standing over the body of their victim, they felt blessed and at peace with one another through this polarization of violence onto a single victim. The enemy who was first hated as the source of the evil among them thus became in their eyes the source of their peace and brotherhood .

Girard sees this as the moment in which religion, the sense of the sacred, sacrifice, and society are all born—and they go hand in hand. The ambiguous power of the scapegoat to generate both violence and peace, hatred and love, is the reason, according to Girard, for the ambiguity of the sacred as analyzed by phenomenologists of religion such as Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade: as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, something beyond intellectual comprehension and simultaneously terrifying and powerfully attractive. Religion is born as the effort to preserve the effect of this life-giving death by its commemoration through rites of sacrifice and by the prohibition of further violence among those it has united.

But religion remains a mask worn by violence, and the scapegoat remains a victim. Christianity, on the other hand, says Girard, is in essence—and despite its historical accretion of a great deal of ordinary religiousness—the polar opposite of this natural development. Girard considers the Christian revelation, properly understood, to be completely *super*natural because its real meaning is inconceivable from the point of view of human desire, violence, and fascination with power. This revelation entered the world in the person of Jesus as the one who with full consciousness saw through the scapegoat mechanism and unmasked it once and for all. This was the secret "hidden since the foundation of the world" referred to in Matt. 13:35 and Luke 11:50-51 (and alluded to, of course, in the title of *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*).

For Girard this, then, is the heart of the Gospel: the revelation of the role that violence and the victimizing mechanism have played in all human affairs and the announcement that there is another way, a way of non-violence and the end of victimization. Girard thinks this exposure of the truth offers both hope and genuine danger. Just as in Freud's and Becker's theories of release from symptoms through the uncovering of repressed unconscious

contents, the Girardian hope is that when the mechanisms of mimesis and victimization are effectively unmasked they will also be disarmed: the realization that desire is mimetic breaks its enchantment, and the realization that one is scapegoating makes it difficult to continue doing so.

In their highlighting of the problem of scapegoating, we can see that despite their basic differences of approach, Becker and Girard converge on a single problem: the tendency of world views to become polarized, dividing the world up into a "their" side and an "our" side, a side of demonic evil and a side of the angels. For both, the fear of becoming nothing and nobody is a fundamental psychological motive, and both think the half-conscious efforts we make to deal with that fear can lead toward victimization. For Becker, the victim is the object onto whom we project everything about ourselves that reminds us of our potential death; for Girard the victim is the chance point of convergence of vectors of hostility growing out of a competition of mimetic desires. Both also hope that knowledge of how these unconscious processes operate will help people to avoid letting their thinking and action be unconsciously controlled by them.

Becker's hypotheses have been tested experimentally, with results that offer strong support to the idea of an unconscious fear of death that leads us to become defensive about our own world view and aggressive toward those who represent competing ones. No group of experimentalists has directly taken up Girard's hypotheses for testing, and his theory of society (and language, religion, and even human consciousness as such) as founded on victimization is so highly speculative that it is hard to imagine how all of it could be tested—although the past century has offered plenty of evidence that scapegoating does take place on a massive social scale and at least circumstantial evidence that it can play an important role in generating class, party, or national solidarity.

Girard's hypothesis about mimesis as a fundamental human motive, on the other hand, has received some indirect experimental support in the work of people studying imitative behavior among children. Again I will not try to summarize this research here, but it is extensive. The reader is referred to the work of William Hurlbutt, Andrew N. Meltzoff and M. Keith Moore, Mabel Rice and Linda Woodsmall, Richard Davidson and Nathan Fox, and Leslie Brothers listed in the bibliography below. In addition, the last decade or so has seen the important neurobiological discovery of "mirror neurons" in monkeys in 1996 by a team of researchers led by Giacomo Rizzolatti, a neuroscientist at the University of Parma, and the subsequent discovery that humans have an elaborate network of systems of mirror neurons located in several areas of the brain, including the premotor cortex, the posterior parietal lobe, the superior temporal sulcus and the insula. Extensive research since then has shown that these systems of mirror neurons play an essential role in enabling humans through inward neurological imitation to understand and empathize with the actions of others, their intentions, and the social meaning of their behavior and their emotions.[16]

I spoke earlier of the developmental thrust of the psychology of Carl Jung. Developmentalism is a pattern of thinking that has also had a subsequent history involving considerable experimental research, especially in the work of the other distinguished Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget and of subsequent thinkers in his tradition, such as the Americans, Lawrence Kohlberg and Robert Kegan.

Psychological development, of course, requires a motivating force of its own if it is to take place. There is good evidence that there is a force of development at least as strong as those of death-anxiety, mimesis, and the sort of biological need-drives that Freud focused on. Karl Jaspers spoke of *Enthusiasmus*, which he likened to the Eros of Plato's *Symposium*, an enthusiasm for life itself, transcending all particular drives.(17) Jaspers considered the principal types of development in the psychology of world views to be differentiation of consciousness and the individuation this makes possible. Both of these he saw as involving a change in the relations between the subjective and objective poles of consciousness—between the powers and tendencies of the subject "behind" us and the realm of objectivity, including particular world pictures (*Weltbilder*), "before" us.

But how do those relations change and why? Jaspers did not himself go into detail about this. It remained for developmental psychology to study the particulars of these changing relations. Jean Piaget studied the way operative capacities developed in children and the effects these then had on their subjective mental organization or what he called "psychological structures" and on what these in turn enabled them to do in the way of interpreting or "constructing" the worlds of their experience.

6

This supposes an appetite to develop operative powers and actually to perform the operations that constitute a more developed subjectivity, and this appetite for thought can also be called an Eros. As Tilo Schabert said in an Eranos lecture published in 1994, "Denken is ein Fest. Es ist Geselligkeit. Es ist die Choreographie von Vorstellung. Es ist ein Tanz der Worte. Es ist das Werk von Eros, dem begehrenden Gott, der auf es sinnt und der es inszeniert."(18) ("Thinking is a festival. It is fellowship. It is the choreography of representation. It is a verbal dance. It is the work of Eros, the yearning God, who senses it and performs it.")

I will use the term "existential Eros" for this inward dynamism of operations. Commonly when one hears the word Eros, one thinks of it as an appetite to "have" or possess something, and in Christian religious thought in particular it has been common to treat Eros (conceived as an egoistic, possessive motive) and Agape (as a self-transcending, generous one) as opposites and even as conflicting. But it is helpful to distinguish between an Eros that reaches for objects (whether external objects or internal ones, such as a pleasant sensation, an item of knowledge, or an image of egoistic triumph) and an Eros that is an

appetite to perform the operations of actively experiencing, interpreting, weighing and considering, judging, or deciding, that constitute the subjective actuality of fully developed conscious life. Something known is an object of knowledge, but the process of knowing is not an object but an activity. It is by such activity that we may be said to exist subjectively. In our bodily existence we are real objects in the world even when subjectively we may not be there at all, as when one is in a coma—but as subjects we are actual only to the extent that we perform the operations that constitute our subjective life.

This conception of what it means to exist as subject and of the passion to do so has been a theme of existential philosophy since Kierkegaard, and many other thinkers subsequently have also discussed the idea of an appetite or Eros for subjective existence. Paul Ricoeur, for example, drawing on both Jaspers (the subject of his first book) and the imagery of Plato's "Between," spoke of human existence as rooted in an experience of "tendency and tension"[(19)] and described it explicitly as an "Eros" in tension between and participating in Pascal's two infinities of God and nothing—symbols which Ricoeur explicated in terms of the difference between consciously intentional and involuntary human acts. These are poles of human possibility, and we live always between them, with neither ever so fully actualized that a human being becomes either a mere neurological mechanism (that is, simply objective) or a completely conscious agent (fully subjective). To become the latter may be a point of aim, but we never experience it as our full actuality. "Thus the Self," says Ricoeur, "the Self as a person, is given first in an intention . . . the person is primarily the ideal of the person . . ." (p. 110). A fully actual person is something we are always either on the way to becoming or in retreat from.

Eric Voegelin, who once studied with Jaspers and said that he was deeply influenced by his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, similarly drew on Plato's image of human existence as lived in the divine-human "Between," and he spoke of human beings as moved by a fundamental experience of existential tension which, if allowed to fulfill its inherent directional dynamism, will lead to "differentiation of consciousness" and the development of capacities for noetic operation.[(20)] Voegelin's masterwork, the five volume *Order and History*, traced the historical unfolding of the noetic differentiation from the Presocratics through Plato and Aristotle, but for its systematic exposition and further historical development he sometimes referred inquirers to the work of Bernard Lonergan.

In his Aquinas lecture of 1968, "The Subject," Bernard Lonergan analyzed a range of possibilities of subjective existence, corresponding both to the levels of operation that come into play in the subject's life and to the ways in which one can relate to those in terms of recognizing and affirming them or ignoring or denying them. With regard to our levels of operation, Lonergan said that "we are subjects, as it were, by degrees":

At a lowest level, when unconscious in dreamless sleep or in a coma, we are merely potentially subjects. Next, we have a minimal degree of consciousness and subjectivity when

we are the helpless subjects of our dreams. Thirdly, we become experiential subjects when we awake, when we become the subjects of lucid perception, imaginative projects, emotional and conative impulses, and bodily action. Fourthly, the intelligent subject sublates the experiential, i.e., it retains, preserves, goes beyond, completes it, when we inquire about our experience, investigate, grow in understanding, express our intentions and discoveries. Fifthly the rational subject sublates the intelligent and experiential subject, when we question our own understanding, check our formulations and expressions, ask whether we have got things right, marshal the evidence *pro* and *con*, judge this to be so and that not to be so. Sixthly, finally, rational consciousness is sublated by rational self-consciousness, when we deliberate, evaluate, decide, act. Then there emerges human consciousness at its fullest. Then the existential subject exists and his character, his personal essence, is at stake.[(21)]The metaphor of "levels of consciousness," Lonergan says, refers to this cumulative sublation of operations, which means that the lower operations are "retained, preserved, yet transcended and completed by a higher" (*ibid*.).

What characterizes the "existential subject" as existential is that at the highest level of development not only are all the operations of cognition and decision active and integrated, but the subject is also aware, at least implicitly, that their exercise constitutes a choice of how to be, of the quality of existence: "Though concerned with results, he or she more basically is concerned with himself or herself as becoming good or evil and so is to be named, not a practical subject, but an existential subject" (p. 84).

This choice is only possible, however, when the subject is aware of itself as such, that is, when it is aware not only of the objects it senses, understands, or knows but also of performing the operations by which it does so. The "neglected subject" does not know itself because although it performs the operations that constitute it, it is not aware of doing so. The "truncated subject" not only is unaware of performing these operations but resists recognizing them (p. 73). The "alienated subject" carries this self-ignorance to the point of refusal. The movement from alienation toward consciousness is an existential decision, the choice of a mode and quality of existence: "The transition from the neglected and truncated subject . . . is not just a matter of finding out and assenting to a number of true propositions. More basically, it is a matter of conversion, of a personal philosophical experience, of moving out of a world of sense and of arriving, dazed and disorientated for a while, into a universe of being" (p. 79).

When Lonergan discussed the dynamism of the operations that constitute subjectivity, he spoke of them as moved by "active potencies . . . revealed in questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, questions for deliberation."[(22)] These can be best understood, I think, as dynamic anticipations of what it would be like actually to perform the operations of understanding, critically reflective judgment, and ethical decision and in that performance to attain their objects. They are, that is, expressions of existential Eros. Lonergan used the term "transcendental notions" for these appetites for operation. "The transcendental

notions," he said, "are the dynamism of conscious intentionality. They promote the subject from lower to higher levels of consciousness, from the experiential to the intellectual, from the intellectual to the rational, from the rational to the existential" (*Method in Theology*, pp. 34-5).

To discuss these operations in terms of cognitional theory and philosophy of existence is to focus on an upper level of development presupposing processes that emerge only very gradually in human life and build on developments taking place in early childhood. This is what makes the research of Jean Piaget so valuable; he mapped out systematically the formative stages of the course of development that can culminate, at its highest levels, in the philosophical processes analyzed by Lonergan.

7

Piaget was himself trained not only as a biologist but also as a philosopher, and his work as a psychologist developed as a conscious effort to unite these two areas of inquiry. He sometimes referred to his psychology as "genetic epistemology," and he conceived it as the study of the way cognitive operations develop and lead to changes both in one's subjective mental organization and in one's picture of the world. "The fundamental hypothesis of genetic epistemology," he said in the lectures he gave at Columbia University under that title in 1968, "is that there is a parallelism between the progress made in the logical and rational organization of knowledge and the corresponding formative psychological processes" (*Genetic Epistemology*, p. 13). Another way to put this would be to say that according to Piaget there are both subjective and objective structures which develop in parallel and correlate with each other—the same principle that Lonergan spoke of as "the isomorphism thatobtains between the structure of knowing and the structure of the known" (*Insight*, p. 399).

A "structure" in psychological terminology is an enduring organization, pattern, or aggregate of elements. It contrasts with a "function," which is transitory. As Piaget conceived them, operative capacities are structures in this sense; they are self-regulating, dynamic systems. Subjective structures develop as a repertoire of abilities to perform inward and outward actions. Each develops through differentiations and moves toward an integration that has both subjective and objective aspects. As Piaget put it, "since operations do not exist in isolation they are connected in the form of *structured wholes*. Thus, the construction of a class implies a classificatory system . . ."[(23)](#).

In his last book, *Psychogenesis and The History of Science* (1983), in collaboration with the physicist, Rolando Garcia, Piaget tried to correlate the development of science with his theory of the way consciousness develops in individuals. Both science and individual psychology start with an undifferentiated field of experience, then each develops by differentiating both subjective and objective aspects of that field, by integrating and

grouping these, and by reflecting on them and forming groups of groups. For example, an infant learns to move legs, feet, hands, and fingers independently, then combines these capacities into the integrated activities of walking or grasping and moving some object. Eventually it becomes able to form a conception of movement as such. This grouping of groups produces abstract categories that can themselves be operated on. The child learns to crawl back and forth, discovering that there are various ways of arriving at the same place, and thereby constructs a notion of space. It rotates objects and looks at their various surfaces, which can become the foundation for developing a science of geometry. It may discover that numerical quantities can be grouped into abstract categories and then develop an algebra (a science of the general relations of mathematical operations). Finally the child or adult may even realize that in doing all this it is performing mental operations and may thus become able to reflect on them as such and on the fact that all knowledge of the world is constructed by them.

Piaget found four main stages in our psychological development. First is the sensori-motor stage, which begins in infancy and lasts about two years. At the beginning of this period objects are not thought of as permanent, because in the absence of a notion of space, there is literally no place for them to reside in when they are not perceived. A notion of space is developed by way of sensori-motor actions (moving, returning, change of direction, and so on) until it attains an equilibrium by becoming organized as a group of such displacements. The permanent object is an invariant whose notion is constructed by means of such a group.

The second stage, which lasts from about two to seven years of age, is that of preoperational thought. This is prepared by a crucial development between approximately ages eighteen months and two years, in which the child develops a capacity for deferred imitation "and that kind of internalized imitation which gives rise to mental imagery."[(24)](#)

Piaget calls this "the symbolic function," which makes possible "the internalization of actions into thoughts" (p. 11). The child's thinking at this point is "figurative," as he terms it. Thinking as such can have two aspects: the figurative and the operative. "The figurative aspect," he says, "is an imitation of states taken as momentary and static. In the cognitive area the figurative functions are, above all, perception, imitation, and mental imagery, which is actually interiorized imitation" (*Genetic Epistemology*, p. 14). During the first two stages of development the figurative is the only type of thinking that has yet developed, and it always remains an aspect of the thinking of even the most developed mind.

The operative aspect of thought, on the other hand, "deals not with states but with transformations from one state to another. For instance, it includes actions themselves, which transform objects or states, and it also includes the intellectual operations, which are essentially systems of transformation," capable of being carried out interiorly through mental representation (*ibid*.).

This accords well, by the way, with Girardian mimetic theory and the research of experimentalists and neurobiologists regarding an innate tendency to imitation. What both lines of analysis suggest is that as consciousness develops, it begins with activities, such as mimesis, in which subjectivity is so immersed that there is little or no capacity for regulation of the activity. That is, the infant, though conscious *in* the activity, is not conscious *of* it. And since development is gradual and may remain only partial, there is plenty of room in ordinary human life for the psychological patterns analyzed by mimetic psychologists and other versions of psychology of the unconscious, Freudian, Jungian, Beckerian, and so on. But in proportion as operations become differentiated and the subject becomes conscious of them, pre-conscious psychological processes can be expected to become less dominant. We may become gradually less, to use the mimetic theorist Jean-Michel Oughourlian's image, the "puppets of desire" and more our own masters. We may become, by degrees, agents whose thought and action are more to be understood by a psychology of consciousness, such as Piaget's, Lawrence Kohlberg's, or Robert Kegan's, than by psychologies of the unconscious.

In an actual adult case, a given individual may be anywhere on a continuum of differentiation of consciousness, but to the extent that he or she is more conscious and capable of intentional self-regulation rather than automatism, it is because the initial movements in that direction took place in childhood in the form of capacities for conscious operation. According to Piaget's observations, the first psychological operations in the proper sense appear at around 7-8 years of age, and verbal or propositional operations at ages 11-12. What he means by "operations" is "actions which are internalizable, reversible, and coordinated into systems characterized by laws which apply to the system as a whole" (*Logic and Psychology*, p. 8). This is why he can say that they do not appear in children younger than seven. A younger child "manipulates" objects, but has no notion of "transforming" them systematically or of reversing such transformations.

The period from 7-11 years of age Piaget calls the stage of "concrete operations," by which he means that operations are carried out only on the objects themselves. There may already be the beginning of an interest in classes and relations, but the operations involved in determining them are not yet dissociated from the data to which they apply, or to put it another way, form has not yet been abstracted from subject-matter. Each field of experience (those of shape and size, weight, and so on) is "given a structure by the group of concrete operations, and gives rise in its turn to the construction of invariants (or concepts of conservation). But these operations and invariants cannot be generalized . . ." (*Logic and Psychology*, p. 17).

8

The fourth stage, which usually begins sometime between 11-12 and 14-15 years of age, is that of "formal" or "hypothetical deductive operations." The transition to this stage is

marked by the ability to construct abstract propositional representations of alternative possibilities and deduce their implications. With this, the realm of the possible becomes not just particular practicable extensions of concrete situations, as it was for thinking at the prior stage, but the full range of alternative realities that constitute the framework of general structural limits within which the actual must necessarily occur.

This brings the ability to reason by hypothesis. The child's logic is now concerned with propositions as well as objects, which makes it possible to construct operations about implication, disjunction, and incompatibility. Along with this comes the ability to construct "operational schemata" not directly related to the logic of propositions, such as proportions. Proportional operations do not appear in the adolescent's thought as unrelated discrete operations; in accordance with the principle stated earlier, they form a system or "structured whole," "a set of virtual transformations, consisting of all the operations which it would be possible to carry out starting from a few actually performed operations" (p. 41).

In the process of thinking, says Piaget, the subject is affected by such structures without being conscious of them; he finds himself carrying out operations determined by the laws of the whole operational field. Here one's world expands to something much greater than one can consciously grasp; one might spend all one's life gradually working out and realizing the implications of the implicit systematic order of the structural wholes formed by the operative capacities one develops—as Euclid did with his geometric intelligence and Mozart with his musical intelligence.

Lawrence Kohlberg, whose thought developed directly out of his study of Piaget, offered a helpful analysis of the characteristics and implications of Piaget's stages that I will briefly summarize:(25)

Stages imply qualitative differences in children's modes of thinking or of solving the same problem.These different modes of thought form an invariant sequence, order, or succession in individual development. While cultural factors may speed up, slow down, or stop development, they do not change its sequence.

Each of these different and sequential modes of thought forms a "structural whole." A given stage response on a task does not just represent a specific response determined by knowledge and familiarity with that task or tasks similar to it; rather, it represents an underlying thought organization.

Cognitive stages are hierarchical integrations. Stages form an order of increasingly differentiated and integrated *structures* to fulfill a common function.

Of course these observations do not apply only to children. In Kohlberg's investigations of moral development he found himself obliged by his observations to push some of his own stages further and further into adulthood, and Robert Kegan, who once worked with

Kohlberg, began by studying child development, but has turned in his more recent work increasingly to the analysis of stages (or as he now terms them "orders of consciousness") that develop only in adulthood, if circumstances call for them and meet with a response.

Since this discussion has already become rather long I will pass over the work of Kohlberg and proceed directly to that of Robert Kegan, whose neo-Piagetian "subject-object" theory currently represents, I think, the most insightful and philosophically sophisticated articulation of developmental thinking.

Kegan draws on Piaget and Kohlberg, as well as on neo-Freudian object relations theory and existential and phenomenological psychology, and tries to synthesize them with reference to a theme he thinks was strongly implied in those thinkers but not fully developed: the changing relation between the subjective and objective poles of consciousness at the different stages of psychological development. There is nothing to indicate that Kegan has read Jaspers on this subject, but it is no accident he should have found this theme implicit in Piaget, since Piaget and Jaspers were both working out some of the implications of the Kantian "Copernican revolution," to which the discovery of the constructive role of subjectivity in cognition was central.

Kegan considers the principle of the dynamic reciprocal relation between the subjective and objective poles of consciousness to be the key to understanding in its full dimensions the movement from one level of development to another. He suggests that "the underlying motion of evolution, setting terms on what the organism constitutes as self and other, may both give rise to the stage-like regularities in the domains they explore and describe the process of movement from one stage to the next."(26)

This is certainly a cognitive process, as Piaget had analyzed it, but Kegan thinks it is also much more than that: "I suggest that human development involves a succession of renegotiated balances, or 'biologics,' which come to organize the experience of the individual in qualitatively different ways. In this sense, evolutionary activity is intrinsically cognitive, but it is no less affective; we *are* this activity and we experience it" (p. 81). It is this intrinsic phenomenological duality that leads Kegan also to try to integrate the cognitive-developmental psychology of Piaget and Kohlberg with existential psychology. Piaget, he says, tended to look at meaning-making descriptively, "from the outside," as a "naturally epistemological" process of constructing logical, systematically predictive theories to balance and rebalance subject and object, self and other (p. 12). Existential psychology, he says, looks at meaning-making "from the inside" as an ontologically constitutive process in which "what is at stake in preserving any given balance is the ultimate question of whether the 'self' shall continue to *be*" (*ibid*., emphasis in original).

The emergence of a Piagetian cognitive operation constitutes a new structure in the subjective pole of consciousness that naturally generates ("constructs") a new structure in

the objective pole. Looked at from the existential or phenomenological point of view, what happens in this process is a reconfiguration of "self" in relation to "other." When the change is radical—and movement from one stage to another can be experienced as quite radical—it can even feel like a death; the self one had been dissolves and a new self begins to form—or at least one hopes a renewal is taking place to balance what is being lost. But while one is going through the change, this may feel quite uncertain. It can be experienced, that is, as not only a cognitive but also an existential crisis.

Kegan's is a neo-Piagetian existential psychology of "meaning-making": "Thus it is not that a person makes meaning," he says, "as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making" (p. 11). Meaning-making is an activity, in the first instance, of interpretation of experience: it assimilates experiential data and combines and recombines them in an effort to construct an objective view that will adequately accommodate them. But at certain points the process can also involve a restructuring of subjectivity itself and a movement from "what Piaget calls 'decentration,' the loss of an old center, and what we might call 'recentration,' the recovery of a new center" (p. 31). It is this latter process that constitutes psychological growth, the basic element in which is a movement of differentiation within consciousness: "Growth always involves a process of differentiation, of emergence from embeddedness . . . thus creating out of the former subject a new object to be taken by the new subjectivity" (p. 31).

9

What does this mean concretely? Kegan offers an example in a story of two brothers looking down from the Empire State building: "As their father reported it to me, both took one look down at the sidewalk and exclaimed simultaneously: 'Look at the people. They're tiny ants' (the younger boy); 'Look at the people. They look like tiny ants' (the older boy)" (p. 29). The younger boy was still at the preoperational stage, at which one looks at the world *through* one's perceptions but cannot reflect *on* them, so that if there is a change in what one sees, it can only seem a change in the object: "For the 'preoperational' child, it is never just one's perceptions that change; rather, the world itself, as a consequence, changes" (*ibid*.). The older boy's "They look like tiny ants," says Kegan, "is as much about him looking at his perception as it is about the people."

If we consider this example more closely, we can see the implications for a theory of what I referred to earlier as "existential Eros." I spoke of existential Eros as an inward dynamism of operations that constitutes a powerful force of development which impels us through a process of differentiation of consciousness. This is a process in which we become more intensively subjects as we develop and perform the operations by which we come to know our objects. Such a process is clearly visible in the story of the older and younger brothers and the way they relate to their perceptions. The preoperational younger brother (who was perhaps around four years of age) was "embedded" in his perceptions. Prior to this, as a

newborn he was embedded in something still more basic: his reflexes, or what Piaget called the "sensori-moteur." At this early stage a child has at most a very hazy sense of a world that could be called objective, and much of its cognitive activity is occupied with sorting out where he or she ends and the rest of the world begins. "The events of the first eighteen months," says Kegan, "culminate with the creation of the object and make evolutionary activity henceforth an activity of equilibration, of preserving or renegotiating the balance between what is taken as subject or self and what is taken as object or other" (p. 81). Typically, by around age two "the sensorimotoric has 'moved over' from subject to object, and the new subject, the 'perceptions,' has come into being. This is how our four-year-old got to be who he is—a meaning-maker embedded in his perceptions" (p. 32). The same process of evolving, at the same age, also creates " 'the impulse,' the construction of feelings arising in *me*, which are mine as distinct from the world's" (*ibid*.); the child at this age is thus embedded in perception with regard to cognition and in impulse with regard to action.

The existential dimension is easy to see when development is formulated in terms of embedding and differentiation. What we are "embedded" in is irreducibly subjective to us, so that we experience it as simply what we *are*. The child embedded in perception and impulse can experience the thwarting of its impulses as though this were a threat to its very being. To move from this state to one that can reflect on perceptions and impulses, not only means that something has "moved over" from the subjective pole to the objective; it also means that a new experience of selfhood, of what it means to *be* has taken shape. This can be wrenching. Kegan even suggests that the experience of this is the source of our emotions, which are constituted by "the phenomenological experience of evolving—of defending, surrendering, and reconstituting a center" (pp. 81-2).

Embedding and differentiation is also the point of connection with object relations theory, which focuses on the affective aspect of the same process of changing relations between subject and object that Piaget analyzed primarily in its cognitive aspects. There are some important differences, however, between the Freudian psychoanalytic approach to object relations and the neo-Piagetian approach that Kegan favors. One difference is that psychoanalysis emphasizes early childhood as determinative of the affective patterns of one's entire life and interprets it as fundamentally narcissistic, while Piaget considered each stage to have its own evolutionary dynamism in the present and said that Freud's "primary narcissism . . . is really a narcissism without Narcissus"—since at that point there is no more sense of self than there is of an "other."(27)

Another difference is that, as was mentioned earlier, psychoanalysis has always interpreted the fundamental psychological motive of the child as a wish to restore the condition of complete satisfaction it enjoyed in its mother's womb; it looks backward even as it reaches out to form object relations. These are therefore essentially a detour for it, a roundabout route toward the uterine home that is always the goal of its true longing. For Piaget, on the

other hand, object relations are created for their own intrinsic value; the child's goal is equilibration in the present, not a return to the past, and the equilibration it seeks is adequacy of its cognitions to the new complexity of the objective world it is discovering. Both Freud and Piaget thought it was dissatisfaction that prompted the infant's development, but Piaget believed, like Aristotle, that the exercise of our capacities is itself pleasurable, and he also believed, like Lonergan (who himself was deeply influenced by Piaget), that we therefore have an inherent dynamism toward the operations of interpreting, judging, and evaluating.

In *The Evolving Self* (1982) Kegan discussed this dynamism as evolving through six stages or "selves": the incorporative, the impulsive, the imperial, the interpersonal, the institutional, and the interindividual. I will not go into detail about these, but the important point about their sequence is that the involve a successive differentiation between the subjective and objective poles of experience. What he calls the incorporative self lacks all differentiation because everything in its phenomenological "world" is incorporated into its subjectivity. This is the condition described above as that of the newborn until about eighteen months—embedded in reflexes, sensing, and moving. When these have moved over to the side of the object, a new self, the impulsive self, takes shape in which the subjective principle is the child's perceptions and impulses; it is "embedded" in these. This is Piaget's "preoperational" child, and the reason for this embeddedness is that the child has not yet developed its capacity for the operations that would differentiate objects from its subjectivity.

Movement to the next stage takes place through differentiation of the impulse as something that can be reflected on and controlled for the sake of longer term goals defined by the enduring dispositions that now come to constitute its subjective principle. Kegan terms these "needs," perhaps because a child embedded in its appetites can only experience them as that; the idea of a "desire" would require further differentiation. The "self" of this stage Kegan calls "imperial," because the child embedded in its "needs," organizes its forces for their fulfillment and pursues them with a determination that subordinates everything else. The imperial self thinks of others as either useful or the opposite. It does not feel guilt, but only anxiety over how others will react. Guilt would require something not yet possible at this stage, "the internalization of the other's voice in one's very construction of self" (p. 91).

It is worth noting the link at this point to Girard's mimetic psychological theory discussed earlier. In Kegan's next stage, the interpersonal, inner mimesis of the feelings and attitudes of others becomes central. As Kegan puts it, "in the interpersonal balance the feelings the self gives rise to are, a priori, shared; somebody is in there from the beginning. The self becomes conversational. To say that the self is located in the interpersonal matrix is to say that it embodies a plurality of voices" (pp. 95-96). No longer does the child have to anticipate anxiously how others might react, since it is "able to bring into itself the other half of a conversation stage 2 [the imperial] had always to be listening for in the external

world" (p. 97).

Stepping back from its "needs," it is able to feel pulled by the simultaneous force of different desires, and so it becomes aware of the need assess their relative importance and deliberate about possible courses of action. One might say that what makes the difference between what I experience as a "need" and what I experience as a "desire" is precisely the differentiation that takes place when the "need" I was embedded in becomes something I can think about. I may still feel the same appetite, but when it becomes something I can notice and recognize as a desire, then I am able to place it imaginatively alongside other ones I may have and ask myself which is more important to me.

10

I will not continue with the details of Kegan's analysis, since the point regarding the differentiation of consciousness through development of the capacity for reflective operations should be sufficiently clear. What is important from the point of view of the present essay is that in *The Evolving Self* and in his next book, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994) , Kegan shows how the psychic energy I have been speaking of as "existential Eros" can gradually unfold through an inward dynamism of appetites and operations that produce succesive differentiations between subjective and objective poles of experience and thereby constitute relational personhood.

Before leaving Kegan, however, there is one last topic in *The Evolving Self* that is worth mentioning because it has a special bearing on the theme of "Cultures of Eros." It is an idea Kegan adapted from the object relations theorist D. W. Winnicott: "D. W. Winnicott was fond of saying that there is never 'just an infant.' He meant that intrinsic to the picture of infancy is a caretaker who, from the point of view of the infant, is something more than an 'other person' who relates to and assists the growth of the infant. She provides the very context in which development takes place, and from the point of view of the newborn she is a part of the self" (p. 115). Winnicott called this the "holding environment," and Kegan calls it the "culture of embeddedness." For Winnicott it was a developmental factor that applied only to infancy, but Kegan generalizes it to all the stages of life: "In my view it is an idea intrinsic to *evolution*. There is not one holding environment early in life, but a succession of holding environments, a life history of cultures of embeddedness. They are the psychosocial environments which hold us (with which we are fused) and which let go of us (from which we differentiate)" (p. 116).

Each of us, at any point in development, is a combination of both differentiation and embeddedness. We are never simply individuals; the individual is only that side of a person that has become differentiated. But there is always that in which the person is also embedded, and this too is a component of the total personality. The importance of the culture of embeddedness is that, at least under the best circumstances, it (1) nurtures the

developing person to the point that further development becomes possible, (2) encourages transition to the next stage, and (3) encourages reintegration, in an appropriate new form, of what has been transcended.

If we can speak, as I have suggested, of an existential Eros, that, too, needs a culture to nurture it, to encourage the differentiations by which it develops from an Eros of mere impulse or desire to an Agapic Eros that seeks fullness of life as actualized, relational personhood, both in oneself and universally.

Perhaps at this point it may be clear why I think the psychology of world views is so important. Every culture embraces and fosters a world view and is in turn shaped by it, and these world views themselves are both the products and the producers of the mentality of those who live in the society the culture animates. To try to survey and appraise the world's cultures in this light, or to examine the full scope of even one would be unmanageable in this already long essay. But perhaps we might draw on Kegan's scheme of developmental stages to understand one important problem that has troubled our own Western culture for centuries: the question of how to understand the place and the value of Eros in human life.

I spoke at the beginning about three philosophical world views, those of Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza, and the different ways they appraised Eros—more negatively in the cases of Descartes and Hobbes, more positively in the case of Spinoza. I also spoke of the deeply rooted tendency in our culture to associate Eros as such with egoistic grasping and to contrast that with the Agape of God. This is a contrast one did not find in Plato or Aristotle, the giants of Hellenic culture. Both of them took a positive view of Eros, and Spinoza's thought was essentially in their tradition—as I think Dante's was also, to mention a Christian writer who drew deeply on the tradition of Plato and Aristotle. The strongly negative view of desire that expresses itself in the belief that human nature is fundamentally depraved is not at all essential to the Christian religion, even though in certain times and places that religion has played such an important role in promoting it. Rather it grows to a very large extent out of the experience and the special psychology of a particular Christian individual who, for good or ill, has had enormous influence in western thought.

I refer, as you might easily guess to St. Augustine of Hippo, who formulated the doctrine of Original Sin that subsequently came to have such great influence, particularly at the time of the Reformation. How might one understand Augustine's thought on this subject in the light of the patterns of development sketched by Kegan?

As is well known from his account in the *Confessions*, at a particular point in his life Augustine underwent a conversion from pagan, and then Manichean-dualistic, licentiousness to Christian self-control and concern with moral responsibility. Augustine described this as the effect of divine grace. I do not mean to depreciate the value of that type of explanation, but since Augustine remained, before and after his conversion and

presumably during it as well, a human being with a particular psychological makeup, it is not necessarily reductionistic to suppose that what happened within him may also be partially intelligible in developmental terms. And if it is, then perhaps developmental psychology may also help us to understand why his theological thought about desire and human depravity took the particular character it did. After all, Augustine's doctrine was not there at the beginning of Christianity. As Elaine Pagels said in *Adam, Eve, and The Serpent*, "Where earlier generations of Jews and Christians had once found in Genesis 1-3 the affirmation of human freedom to choose good or evil, Augustine, living after the age of Constantine, found in the same text a story of human bondage."(28)

What developmental process might seem to have been involved in Augustine's turning from sensual indulgence to a radically negative view of corporeal pleasure? In terms of Kegan's stage theory, one element would certainly seem to have been a leap in developmental stage—a "rebirth" in the traditional language of religion—in which Augustine no longer identified with the sensual desires in which his subjectivity had previously been embedded. Not everyone who makes the transition from the impulsive self or the imperial self to the interpersonal or the institutional, of course, turns so strongly against the earlier self that has been transcended. In Augustine's case, several factors may have contributed to this. One is probably strictly personal: from his self-description he seems always to have experienced very powerful sexual appetites, even after his conversion and decision to control them. The fact that he continued to find it difficult to do so probably helped steer him toward the idea that there was something radically unruly about the flesh as such.

Some other factors that were probably equally important, however, were not strictly personal but cultural. One may have been the lack of an adequate "holding environment" or "culture of embeddedness" in the Christianity of his place and time that could have helped him to reintegrate the sensuality he had transcended. Another was certainly that he had been influenced in his previous thought by the sharply dualistic thinking of the tradition of Plotinus and other neo-Platonists even before he took up Manicheanism. Still another was that as he developed and identified with his institutional role as a bishop in the Church, he had responsibility for directing the spiritual life of an unruly flock in a recently Christianized Roman empire where there were many "new Christians," many of whom probably converted for reasons that were less spiritual than his own. Still another factor may have been that Augustine had to carry out these responsibilities and define the Christian life for himself and others in what was at that time a comparatively less civilized region of the empire than was the world of the eastern Mediterranean where Christianity had originated and where its major doctrines had been formulated among Greek-speaking thinkers of whose discourse he said himself he was largely ignorant.(29) (Originating in the West and in Latin at a time when Western and Eastern Christianity were already drifting apart, Augustine's doctrine of human depravity has never played any role in Eastern Orthodox theology.(30)) Strongly identifying with his institutional role as bishop and distrusting the impulses that threatened from within himself and within his flock the order he believed himself obliged to uphold, it is

not surprising he should feel himself besieged on all sides by forces of chaos that seemed endemic in the human condition.

11

Whenever a person develops a world view about which he or she feels real conviction, it is reasonable to suppose that it has found some ground in his or her concrete experience of life, and one element of that life consists of the developmental transitions he or she makes. Another is the socially effective beliefs that are prominent in his or her culture—as spirit-flesh dualism was in Augustine's. But it is possible even for a world view that fits one's experience at a given point to become a constricting force that prevents one from further growth, and it is also possible in the case of a powerful mind and personality like Augustine's that one person's experience and his interpretation of it may find echoes in the experience of others and become paradigmatic for a culture.

If we look back over some of the ideas in philosophy and psychology sketched in the course of the present essay, I think one can see the influence of a culture of distrust of Eros on many of the thinkers mentioned. Ernest Becker, for example, may have believed in a positive Eros as another fundamental psychological motive in addition to the terror of death, but the emphasis of his writings was certainly on the latter and on its evil effects in both individuals and society. And René Girard's idea of the Gospel as totally alien to human culture seems a clear echo of Augustine's despair over sinful humanity in a crumbling empire.

The problem this represents for a consideration of "Cultures of Eros" is that a culture that condemns human desire as inherently egoistic and disorderly is likely to overlook or deny the possibility of what I have called existential Eros. Fortunately, as I hope I have shown, the latter also has some persuasive advocates. Although I deeply appreciate the powerful insights that Becker and Girard, like Freud and Hobbes before them, offer into the dark side of our humanity, I nevertheless believe that the patterns of thought represented by such thinkers as Karl Jaspers, Carl Jung, Eric Voegelin, Bernard Lonergan, Jean Piaget, and Robert Kegan offer us the best hope we have of raising that darkness into light—by which I mean not just bringing our more sinister impulses under control but transforming them through the elucidation and education of desire.

12

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13

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14

Notes

1. The ideas in this essay were first developed for an Eranos conference on "Cultures of Eros" and an earlier version was published in German in a volume with that title as "Eros

und die Psychologie der Weltanschauungen"in Detlev Clemens and Tilo Schabert, eds., *Kulturen des Eros* (Eranos Jahrbuch, neue folge, vol. 8: 179-229). Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001. (back)

2. See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Brain*. (back)

3. III, Proposition 2, scholium. (back)

4. III, Definition 3. (back)

5. III, Prop. 59, The Affects, Def. 1. (back)

6. Ibid., Explanation. (back)

7. Leviathan, I, 6. (back)

8. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, 15:86. (back)

9. Gesammelte Werke, 14:434. (back)

10. Das Unbehagen in der Kultur, Gesammelte Werke, 14:426. (back)

11. These studies and their results are reviewed in Greenberg, Jeff, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski. "Terror Management Theory of Self Esteem and Cultural World Views: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements." In M. P. Zanna, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 29, 1997. See also the special issue of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 33, no. 1 (March 1998)) devoted to terror management theory and including an essay by Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski with critical responses by the present author and others. (back)

12. See Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire*, pp. 151-52. (back)

13. Ibid., p. 241. (back)

14. P. 101, emphasis in original. (back)

15. Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde (1978), p. 41. (back)

16. See the articles in the bibliography by Marco Iacoboni et al., Mirella Dapretto et al., and John P. Murray et al. An article by Sandra Blakeslee, "Cells That Read Minds," summarizing this research appeared in the New York *Times*, January 10, 2006. (back)

17. "Wie in allen Einstellungen der Enthusiasmus das eigentlich Lebendige ist, ebenso gilt allgemein, dass Leben Liebe ist. Was jene Liebe, z.B., den Eros Platons charakterisiert, is

zugleich Charakteristik der enthusiastichen Einstellungen" (Ibid., p. 123). (back)

18. "Chaos und Eros: Uber die Strukturierung menschlicher Existenz im Denken," in *Strukturen des Chaos*. (back)

19. Fallible Man, p. 13. (back)

20. See Voegelin, "Reason: The Classic Experience" (1974), in *Published Essays: 1966-1985*. (back)

21. Second Collection, p. 80. (back)

22. Method in Theology (1972), p. 120. (back)

23. Logic and Psychology, p. 8, Piaget's emphasis) (back)

24. Logic and Psychology, p. 10. (back)

25. Essays on Moral Development, 1:57-58. (back)

26. The Evolving Self, p. 74. (back)

27. Quoted in Kegan, *Evolving Self*, p. 79. (back)

28. New York: Random House, 1988, p. 97. (back)

29. See his statement in the preface to Book 3 of his *De Trinitate:* : ". . . the writings which we have read on these subjects [i.e., the recently formulated doctrine of the Trinity, from the Council of Constantinople in 381] have not been sufficiently explained in the Latin tongue, or they are not available, or at least it was difficult for us to find them; nor are we so familiar with Greek, as to be in any way capable of reading and understanding such books on these subjects in that language, although from the few excerpts that have been translated for us, I have no doubt that they contain everything that we can profitably seek." (back)

30. See my essay, "Augustine's New Trinity: The Anxious Circle of Metaphor." (back)