

ELEUTHERIA

Published by the Institute of Speculative Philosophy

Volume III Number 2

FALL 1991

Ottawa, Canada

Message from the President

Francis Peddle

I

This issue contains pieces by Ian Lambert and James Lowry. Mr. Lambert, who is currently an attorney in the Cayman Islands with Maples and Calder, writes on the relationship between free will and causation as conceptualized by Henry George and Ludwig Von Mises. Traditionally, free will and causation have been looked upon as mutually exclusive; causation thus negating and eliminating free will; free will disrupting and rendering unintelligible cause and effect relationships. George and Von Mises demonstrate that it is conceptually incoherent to think of free will apart from cause and effect relations. It is only insofar as the will creates cause and effect relations that those relations become intelligible to us. Equally, a sequence of causes and effects only have meaning insofar as we relate them to our will acting independently and causally upon the external world. Understanding free will and causation as aspects of the same concept is to think speculatively about their complementarity and interrelation.

Lowry's article *Psyche and Cosmos* will be serialized over the next three instalments of *ELEUTHERIA*. This monograph is a systematic examination of the circular and linear referents buried in the paradox of causation and the desire to return to origins. Dr. Lowry shows how in the very life of thought uncertainty demands certainty, ambiguity determinateness and subjectivity objectivity.

This article speculatively interrelates a broad range of dichotomies that, in modern philosophy, are generally looked upon as delimiters to conceptual liberation. Dr. Lowry's work is therefore as much an answer to the problematics of modern philosophy as it is a going beyond that philosophy in its explicit characterization of philosophy as such.

* * *

In May of this year the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada decided that "private scholars" would no longer be eligible to apply for research grants. This decision discriminates against a significant and viable sector of the Canadian research community. The arguments stated in the Council's letter, dated June 20, 1991, to the Presidents of Learned Societies to support revoking the eligibility of private scholars for research grants are seriously flawed.

The Council makes a comparison with the policies of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Medical Research Council which is inappropriate. The research programs of the other federal granting councils require a much stronger institutional context, both with respect to the procurement of equipment and to the teamwork necessary to carry out scientific empirical research. By contrast, a significant proportion of the research in the human and social sciences takes place outside of the university. This is evidenced by the fact that university-based researchers generally leave the university setting when they go on sabbatical or obtain research time stipends and research

grants.

The Council states that the university environment is the only one which "provides opportunities to combine research with teaching and training opportunities". This is parochial in the modern context where many scholars work and flourish in non-university based institutes and research centres. It is private scholars and non-university based inquiry which add diversity, imagination and vitality to many of the disciplines which the Council supports.

The decision of the Council was taken without any prior consultations with either private scholars or the academic community in general. Many scholars thought that the days of "executive federalism" and decision-making in a void had passed.

The Council is in effect discriminating against perfectly qualified scholars and researchers, who do not want university positions because it is not

the most favourable environment for the pursuit of their research, or who for reasons usually beyond their control cannot get university positions. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council was created by Parliament to "promote and assist research and scholarship in the social sciences and humanities". The Council best fulfils this mandate by concentrating on excellence in scholarship irrespective of the academic or social status of the author. This mandate is severely weakened by Council's move to drop support for all research conducted solely by non-university based scholars.

The Council should review and revoke this decision. It diminishes support for the Council's efforts amongst its very own clientele. This support is not something that can be overlooked with impunity, especially in a fiscal and constitutional climate where there is discussion of possibly disbanding the three federal granting councils or devolving their mandate to the provinces.

HENRY GEORGE, LUDWIG VON MISES AND THE PROBLEM OF FREE WILL

Ian Lambert

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of free will is as old as philosophy itself. Throughout history, there have been few philosophers who have not grappled with it at some stage in their thinking. The problem has been of particular importance in Western philosophy during the last four centuries, because of the threat it poses to science, and to social science in particular, although it has often been lost sight of in the twentieth century amid the euphoria that has accompanied modern scientific achievement.

The problem can be formulated purely in the form of a question. Does man have free will? However, such a question is misleading. It is fundamentally different, for example, from the question: Are there flightless birds in China? There is no doubt as to the meaning of that question or that it should admit of a yes or no answer. It is also clear how, in practice, one would set about ascertaining the answer by empirical inquiry. The problem of free will is not so clear in its meaning; nor is it really clear how one would go about ascertaining an answer.

Yet, it is not merely the difficulty in pursuing an answer that distinguishes the problem of free will. The ancient mathematical problem of "squaring the circle" was one which no-one knew how to solve, until centuries later it was finally proved that the problem was impossible to solve. (This problem can be formulated in the form of the question: Is it possible, using compasses and a straight edge only, to construct a square of the same area as a given circle? To which, we now know that the answer is No, the number pi being "transcendental").

Nor would the term paradox be entirely appropriate either, perhaps because that term is usually confined to the realm of theoretical inquiry, as in the example of "Russell's Paradox" in mathematics. A paradox consists of two mutually contradictory statements both of which appear to be true within a formal system. The result is that either the foundations, or axioms, of the system are flawed, or the process by which the two statements are derived is flawed. What is certain is that the real (material) world is not self-contradictory and it is for this reason that such paradoxes arise only in theoretical inquiry. Indeed, the deduction of mutually contradictory propositions within a formal system is one of the standard methods by which hypothetical models of reality are shown to be incorrect.

The "problem" of free will is that there is something essentially problematical about our experience of free will. The apparent existence of free will creates doubt in our mind about whether or not determinism is true; the apparent truth of determinism (as demonstrated by the success of modern science) creates doubt in our mind about whether or not we have free will.

One solution to the problem, particularly in the period since Descartes, has been to say that determinism applies to the whole of the material world, including man's physical body, but does not apply to that part of man which is not body (spirit, mind, soul, whatever it might be), which alone has free will. However, this solution - which is rather like kicking the table over to prevent yourself from losing at chess - only creates further

problems, not least that concerning the interaction of mind and matter.

HENRY GEORGE

In *The Science of Political Economy* (hereafter, *SPE*), in a chapter devoted to the character of the laws of nature, Henry George combines the problem of free will with the problem of causation; and in finding a solution to the latter he stumbles across a solution to the former. In a style reminiscent of Hume, Heidegger or the later Wittgenstein, he asks the reader to consider the mundane everyday experiences from which our idea of causation arises:

... To say that one thing is a sequence of another is to say that the one has to the other a relation of succession or coming after. To say that one thing is a consequence of another, is to say that the one has to the other a relation not merely of succession, but of necessary succession, the relation namely of effect to cause ...

... When, proceeding from what we apprehend as effect or consequence, we begin to seek cause, it in most cases happens that the first cause we find, as accounting for the phenomena, we soon come to see to be in itself an effect or consequence of an antecedent which to it is cause. Thus our search for cause begins again, leading us from one link to another link in the chain of causation, until we come to a cause which we can apprehend as capable of setting in motion the series of which the particular result is the effect or consequence.

... The simplest causal relation we perceive is that which we find in our own consciousness. I scratch my head, I slap my leg, and feel the effects. I drink, and my thirst is quenched. Here we have perhaps the closest connection between consequence and cause. The feeling of head or leg or stomach, which here is consequence,

transmitted through sense to the consciousness, finds in the direct perceptions of the same consciousness, the cause - an exertion of the will. Or, reversely, the conscious exertion of the will to do these things produces through the senses a consciousness of result...

... Passing beyond the point where both cause and effect are known by consciousness, we carry the certainty thus derived to the explanation of phenomena as to which cause and effect, one or both, lie beyond consciousness. I throw a stone at a bird and it falls. This result, the fall of the bird, is made known to me indirectly through my sense of sight, and later when I pick it up, by my sense of touch. The bird falls because the stone hit it. The stone hit it because put in motion by the movement of my hand and arm. And the movement of my hand and arm was because of my exertion of will, known to me directly by consciousness.

What we apprehend as the beginning cause in any series, whether we call it primary cause or final cause, is always to us *the* cause or sufficient reason of the particular result. And this point in causation at which we rest satisfied is that which implies the element of spirit, the exertion of will. For it is of the nature of human reason never to rest content until it can come to something that may be conceived of as acting in itself, and not merely as a consequence of something else as antecedent, and thus be taken as the cause of the result or consequence from which the backward search began... (*SPE*, 45-49).

George's reasoning can be summarised as follows: My concept of causation is derived from *my* experience of *my* ability to cause things to happen. My ability to cause things to happen arises from my ability to will that such things will happen. That act of will I experience, generally, as something free, in the sense of something within my control, an uncaused cause. If I did not experience my own free will I could not have

any concept of causation. Thus, the ideas of free will and of causation are not contradictory or exclusive; rather, they are opposite sides of the same coin.

This certainly accords with our everyday experience. We all have a will and we all, generally, experience our own will as free. If we seriously doubted the freedom of our own will, how could we ever make a decision? We all also experience sequential events in a causal relationship to each other. None of us seriously doubts that there is such a thing as causation in the universe. The problem of free will arises from our ability to reason from effect to cause, which in turn makes us wonder, at times, whether our act of will is itself only an effect with an antecedent cause; and it is the rare occasions when we genuinely feel that our act of will has been forced upon us - when we say "I don't know what came over me" - that make us take the problem of free will really seriously (and not just as some sort of idle philosophical puzzle).

Of course, it might seriously be questioned how I could ever be fully conscious of any external cause which my will might have. This finally turns the problem into one of human understanding. It may be that I will never know the answer to the problem because I am, in a sense, too close to it - just as the one object which I cannot grasp in my right hand but which anyone else can grasp in his right hand is *my* right elbow; the failure is not so much an anatomical one peculiar to me as due to *my* situation. Against this it may be argued that, although I may never know the causes of my own will, I should be able to ascertain other people's, by scientific inquiry. This would certainly account for the fact that we often find other people's behaviour predictable while at the same time finding ourselves mysterious, and that often other people seem to know us better than we know ourselves. (Oscar Wilde once said that only the shallow really know themselves.) One objection to this, however, is that if our concept of causation arises from reasoning by analogy from our experiences, there is no direct experience of causation of our own will - those rare exceptions apart - from

which we can reason.

George's treatment of the problem of free will is characteristic of the man and his work. First, he acknowledges (as should any serious social scientist) the importance of the problem. He knows it cannot be ignored. He knows that it is a riddle put to any political economist which not to answer is to be destroyed. Secondly, he translates it into something personal; the problem of free will really only has meaning if it means something to *me*, if it affects *my* world. Thirdly, he takes his reader back to the simple everyday experiences from which the problem arises and has meaning. In doing this, he brings the individual into the centre stage; the spectator and the spectacle are brought together. He amply demonstrates, just as Einstein and Heisenberg did in physics, that the scientist is part of his experiment and not something external to it.

(This whole approach contrasts starkly with that of a thinker like Marx, who typifies the man who produces a social theory which explains everything except the thinker and the theory itself. Marx laid down the law to everyone, while making himself an exception to every rule; he dismissed other's theories as bourgeois propaganda while refusing to recognise his own bourgeois origins and it is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that communist and socialist governments have acted in the same way, exempting themselves from their own rules. Such is the legacy of Cartesianism, which allows people to consider that they are exempt from and independent of events in the world they occupy, that they are the ones who have magically ascended to the heights of Sinai from which they can look down upon the world below. Such is most emphatically not the approach of George, who seeks no exemptions for himself but rather to include himself at every turn.)

The serious treatment of the problem of free will by an economist is a rare occurrence. However, George is not unique in this. There have been others who have recognised that the problem of free will poses a serious threat to economists, because it questions whether and if so how a true

science of economics is possible, even in theory. One such thinker was Ludwig Von Mises.

LUDWIG VON MISES

In his treatise *Human Action* (hereafter *HA*), Von Mises starts by considering the very same issues as George in *SPE*:

Man is in a position to act because he has the ability to discover causal relations which determine change and becoming in the universe. Acting requires and presupposes the category of causality. Only a man who sees the world in the light of causality is fitted to act. In this sense we may say that causality is a category of action. The category means and ends presupposes the category cause and effect. In a world without causality and regularity of phenomena there would be no field for human reasoning and human action...

Where man does not see any causal relation, he cannot act. This statement is not reversible. Even when he knows the causal relation involved, man cannot act if he is not in a position to influence the cause.

The archetype of causality research was: where and how must I interfere in order to divert the cause of events from the way it would go in the absence of my interference in a direction which better suits my wishes? In this sense man raises the question: Who or what is at the bottom of things? He searches for the regularity and the "law", because he wants to interfere. Only later was this search more extensively interpreted by metaphysics as a search after the ultimate cause of being and existence. Centuries were needed to bring these exaggerated and extravagant ideas back again to the more modest question of where one must interfere or should one be able to interfere in order to attain this or that end.

The treatment accorded to the problem of causality in the last decades has been, due

to a confusion brought about by some eminent physicists, rather unsatisfactory. We may hope that this unpleasant chapter in the history of philosophy will be a warning to future philosophers (*HA*, 22).

GEORGE AND VON MISES

This brings us back to the point where we began. Man, says Von Mises, only acts, i.e. only exerts his will, where he seeks to cause things to happen. It is our knowledge of causation that enables us to act effectively. Nothing better illustrates that free will and causation are opposite sides of the same coin, for it is George who points out that it is only our experience of free will that enables us to have any concept, and therefore knowledge, of causation.

George seems to assert the primacy of the will, Von Mises the primacy of causation; but in reality neither is prior to the other. Child psychologists tell us, and keen observation of infants confirms, that the newly born baby experiences the world without "ego boundaries" and that he slowly discovers that he has a thing called a will. It is typically at the "terrible" age of two that he exerts his will most intensively and at the same time begins to learn the limitations on the effectiveness of his will. It is precisely at this stage, when he learns precisely what he can will and how, that he likewise begins truly to understand cause and effect. Free will and causation are therefore intrinsically inseparable experiences.

George and Von Mises are thus able not so much to solve the problem of free will as to dissolve it by drawing the elements together into a more unified whole, while at the same time acknowledging its vital importance to the economist:

We must simply establish the fact that in order to act, man must know the causal relationship between events, processes or states of affairs. And only as far as he knows this relationship, can his action attain the ends sought. We are fully aware that in asserting this we are moving in a circle. For

the evidence that we have correctly perceived a causal relation is provided only by the fact that action guided by this knowledge results in the expected outcome. But we cannot avoid this vicious circular evidence precisely because causality is a category of action. And because it is such a category, praxeology cannot help bestowing some attention on this fundamental problem of philosophy (*HA*, 23).

The consequences of this for the activities carried on by modern economists are very serious.

MODERN ECONOMICS

Both George and Von Mises would have attacked economic modelling as a barren activity doomed to fail because it must subscribe wholesale to determinism and dismiss free will as something wholly illusory:

... the sciences of human action differ radically from the natural sciences. All authors eager to construct an epistemological system of the sciences of human action according to the pattern of the natural sciences err lamentably...

Here we are faced with one of the main differences between physics and chemistry on the one hand and the sciences of human action on the other. In the realm of physical and chemical events there exist (or, at least, it is generally assumed that there exist) constant relations between magnitudes, and man is capable of discovering these constants with a reasonable degree of precision by means of laboratory experiments. No such constant relations exist in the field of human action outside of physical and chemical technology and therapeutics... Those economists who want to substitute "quantitative economics" are utterly mistaken... if a statistician determines that a rise of 10 percent in the supply of potatoes in Atlantis at a definite time was followed by a fall of 8 percent in the price, he does not establish anything about what has

happened or may happen with a change in the supply of potatoes in another country or at another time (*HA*, 39-55).

Exactly the same criticisms can be made of econocyclists, who seek to predict the future on the basis of what they perceive as regular patterns or cycles of economic behaviour in the past. This too is a denial of free will; but at the same time the econocyclist asserts that we can alter the course of future events based on our knowledge of such cycles.

Similarly, Von Mises dismisses mathematical economics as a misconceived enterprise, as did George, notwithstanding the fact that Von Mises and George's work and approach has much in common with that of the pure mathematician or logician:

The mathematical economists disregard dealing with the actions which, under the imaginary and unrealisable assumption that no further new data will emerge, are supposed to bring about the evenly rotating economy. They do not notice the individual speculator who aims not at the establishment of the evenly rotating economy but at profiting from an action which adjusts the conduct of affairs better to the attainment of the ends sought by acting, the best possible removal of uneasiness. They stress the imaginary state of equilibrium which the whole complex of all such actions would attain in the absence of any further change in the data. They describe this imaginary equilibrium by sets of simultaneous differential equations. They fail to recognise that the state of affairs they are dealing with is a state in which there is no longer any action but only a succession of events provoked by a mystical prime mover. They devote all their efforts to describing, in mathematical symbols, various "equilib-events anything else than kaleidoscopic change and chaotic muddle...

... We must bethink ourselves and reflect upon the structure of human action. Like

ria", that is, states of rest and the absence of action. They deal with equilibrium as if it were a real entity and not a limiting notion, a mere mental tool. What they are doing is vain playing with mathematical symbols, a pastime not suited to convey any knowledge (*HA*, 250).

These three areas of inquiry; economic modelling, econocycology and mathematical economics have been notoriously unsuccessful at predicting the future state of the economy, with most of their advocates praying free will in aid as a reason why their predictions did not come true, the government or a war or some other event interfering with the natural and ordinary course of events. It is not without some justification that an economist has been defined as "a man who tells you today why what he predicted yesterday would happen tomorrow has not".

TRUE NATURE OF ECONOMICS

Disconcerting though all this may be to the modern economist, even more unnerving if George's and Von Mises' assertion that the science of political economy or economics is neither an empirical science nor a theoretical construct based on ideal types, but is essentially *a priori*:

Praxeology is a theoretical and systematic, not a historical, science... Its statements and propositions are not derived from experience. They are, like those of logic and mathematics, *a priori*. They are not subject to verification or falsification on the ground of experience and facts. They are both logically and temporally antecedent to any comprehension of historical facts. They are a necessary requirement of any intellectual grasp of historical events. Without them we should not be able to see in the course of logic and mathematics, praxeological knowledge is in us; it does not come from without (*HA*, 32-64).

The place I would take is not that of a

teacher, who states what is to be believed, but rather that of a guide, who points out by looking what is to be seen. So far from asking the reader blindly to follow me, I would urge him to accept no statement that he himself can doubt, and to adopt no conclusion untested by his own reason (*SPE*, xxxvii).

In the face of all this frenzied agitation it is expedient to establish the fact that the starting point of all praxeological and economic reasoning, the category of human action, is proof against any criticisms and objections... From the unshakable

foundation of the category of human action praxeology and economics proceed step by step means of discursive reasoning...

And let us emphasise it even at this early point of our investigations - action necessarily always aims at future and therefore uncertain conditions and thus is always speculation (*HA*, 67-68).

Both George and Von Mises can thus be seen as truly speculative philosophers and the science of political economy a part of philosophy in its broadest sense.
sent.

PSYCHE AND COSMOS

THE PERENNIAL PARADOX OF CAUSATION THEORY AND THE PERENNIAL DESIRE TO RETURN

James Lowry

I

To gaze upon the mighty salmon as they fight their way upstream, throwing their whole being in and out of the water to once again be born is a sight which can but cause us wonder. These headstrong creatures, powerful and vibrant in the prime of life, will to be where they began so they may breed, and dying, go forth again through their progeny into the wide white-crested sea until, by the age old call, they are beckoned once more to return. The desire and impulse, the drive, to return to the beginning, to the womb, to the source of one's being, is a phenomenon without parallel. So deep, so ubiquitous is it that we forget its hold and power over and within us. While we may wonder at the salmon we quite forget that in our science, religion, and philosophy, in the

inmost depths of our unconscious being, the very same perennial forces are at play. We may distance ourselves in the sands of time from the wonder of our birth, but death washes us upon the shoals of space until, finally, we turn away, abandoning our daily ablutions, and wonder ever yet again upon our being, upon the womb of our existence. We too, like the salmon, have buried deep within us that instinct to return and to survive. We want to live, to be forever, and, in this willing to return, is imbedded deep below our surface the desire to know, to cradle in the tiny hands of time the first child that ever was.

Human history has been replete with the phenomena of return. It is so now, and so it will ever be. We humans, like the myriad life and death around us of which we are a part,

are obsessed with our origins. The obsession is not unique with us - far from it. Entropy, given enough time, does its work; dust returns to dust, composition decomposes. Neither atoms, nor molecules, nor cells, nor plants, nor other animals can escape - but the dimension of our obsession to return, of its hold upon us and its thrust within us, is of a variety and quality unlike that of any other earthly being.

In philosophy we talk not of origins or drives, but of causes. For Aristotle wonder, the fundamental natural impulse to knowledge,¹ was, in the end, only directed to and satisfied by knowledge of cause. Νοῦς² (nous) was, finally, the final cause towards which everything, like the salmon to their rivers, was drawn, impelled by the power of an inborn erotic impulse.³ This Νοῦς was for Aristotle a divine animal,⁴ a singular god which, while neither creative nor motive, was, nevertheless, alive and the focal point of a cosmic return. Commentators often forget that the Aristotelian νοῦς is both a ζῶον and the object of a cosmic love.⁵ To explain how everything turned toward νοῦς how the best in us strained for the state of νοῦς⁶ was the final result of Aristotle's own path home. But for Aristotle's successors his νοῦς could not be final. For the Platonists who finally completed the Greek speculative journey νοῦς is a kind of undeveloped δημιουργός, or divine craftsman, a fixed point in a truncated cosmos. After centuries of meditation and generations of comment upon the major texts of antiquity the Aristotelian νοῦς was incorporated into a cosmic format which represents the last flowering of Greek philosophy.⁷ This speculative exegesis, which has come to be known as Neoplatonism, was not content either with Aristotle's semi-platonism or with Plato's hints at a mathematized⁸ cosmos full of ideas participating in a single One or Good. Plotinus developed and Proclus completed with help from Iamblichus a speculative cosmos in which the point of return was also that of origin.⁹ The One was beyond Thought as beyond Being and Life, but it was also the source of what it was beyond and to which in some manner all

desired, as to the Aristotelian final cause, to return. To be *one* with the One was to be truly blessed. To enjoy, to recollect once again, that state of bliss was, we may say, the *be all* and *end all* of life. Νοῦς, the One, Anaximander's Infinite (ἄπειρον),¹⁰ Parmenides' Being (εἶον)¹¹ - whatever - to find the source, the very font of Being and of Life, was the original philosophical impulse - the original philosopher's dream. And, as we shall see, this original autochthonous ground has remained and will remain at the very heart of philosophy, at the leading edge of philosophical desire.

II

It is a commonplace that Greek philosophy arose from and out of Greek religion. What came to be known as *metaphysics*¹² among the Greeks was thought by Aristotle to be "first philosophy" (πρώτη φιλοσοφία)¹³ or *theology* (θεολογία).¹⁴ This latter term, our own term for theology, shows that philosophy had from the beginning the same subject matter as religion. Philosophy, as the λόγος or word, reason, ratio, gathering, logic - what we may call the *rationality* - of God was the discovery, to their everlasting credit, of the Greeks, as religion was not. The impulse to God or gods is found everywhere and the common thread, the very same thread we find most tightly woven in Neoplatonism, is our unquenchable impulse to relate ourselves to our origins. When the discovery of reason by the Greeks freed them from religion it did not free them from the obsession to return in some way to divinely original being - not at all. No sooner did reason, self-discovered, posit reason's end as the *One* or *Good* with Plato and then as *God itself* as νοῦς with Aristotle, then it turned with the advent of Christianity on its own secularity and became not the conqueror, but the servant of religion. What in India, Persia, Egypt, and later in Islam never became separated could not among the Greeks stay so. The desire for God, for being close to God, to fully return, to

unite with God, overcame any separation of philosophy from religion. Neoplatonic secularism, transformed, became the useful thought world of Christian theology. Greek concepts seemed to be able to make the Nicene formula arguable. Many centuries later at the Council of Trent St. Thomas' Neoplatonic cosmos, buttressed with Aristotelian arguments, became, in the guise of Christian revelation, anachronistically, the imaginative norm of return.¹⁵ Beatrice awaits Dante¹⁶ as the Virgin Mother awaits Faust¹⁷ on their Odyssey through the departures of worldly discovery to the recovery of self in the womb of origin and end. Like our salmon they leave the small pools of their streams and swim into the vast ocean of experience only to return exhausted, exhilarated, dying, and dead to the salvation of their initial being.

In religion that initial Aristotelian insight into the ubiquity of cause is not lost but camouflaged in God. God is the source, the origin. From God, as Scotus Erigena following Pseudo-Dionysius, who followed Proclus, tells us, everything - the Word - proceeds; and to God the Word returns.¹⁸ The orthodox Christian faith is a faith of love in a triune God, in the love of a Father for his only-begotten Son, who through the Holy Spirit of love, returns from whence he came. The prodigal is a son for all time - an image in the mind of Jesus prefiguring his own return home to his Father as Christ. The triune God is the cause of all. He creates as the great Jehovah out of Nothing and like Allah is finally only the majesty of Nothing's source. The love of God is that of the divine Persons, who constitute the divine procession and return, which in turn is imitated into eternity by the nothing thereby created.

The effects of the Christian God, as with the One of Neoplatonism, never exceed their cause, and the proof of this is that they are ever yet again taken back up into their cause in a bliss of loving union. For the hard-nosed, this-worldly thinkers of today religion in any form is just mysticism or, better, mystification. And,

to be fair, the best heads of Christendom have always gloried in the divine "mysteries".¹⁹ Thinkers of today are, like the Greek philosophers of classical antiquity, secularists. Unlike them they have not taken up metaphysics. They have eschewed religion for science or at least for rational disbelief. Mystery is merely for them a form of ignorance to be overcome, not a paradox to be believed. But a paradox in our contemporaries' view persists nevertheless. For our contemporary denizens of the modern cosmos are, like their religious brethren of old, as obsessed as ever with cause and effect, with their own origin and with knowledge.

Modern cosmology is no longer dominated by God or by the earth or sun, but it is, as it always was before, dominated by the *idea* of cause. Any explanation of the present assumes itself to be the effect of a past event or events. At present the Big Bang theory still seems to hold sway. This theory sees the present physical universe as the result of an incalculable explosion of an incalculably dense matter. Time, space, motion, gravity, as we know them, came into being. We could indeed argue that relativity came to be. The paradox of this theory is that our entire outlook, including our understanding of calculation and of natural laws, depends on the original explosion having *already* occurred. Our whole nexus of explanation is based on the physics of the universe thereby occurring. To really understand the state of being before the explosion would be to understand what does not come within the framework of explanation, of effects. Our ability to transcend beyond the effects, to return to the original cause, is, by definition of causal explanation based upon effects, impossible. We can speculate, but empirical verification or falsification - the theoretical basis of our scientific method and the ground of scientific truth - is impossible. This impossibility might lead one to prefer on speculative grounds the idea of a steady-state image of the universe in which construction and destruction of effects is always equivalent. But this theory too has a paradox: namely, that in order for it to be true, the principle of entropy, according

to which the physical universe should eventually become a kind of thin material gruel, must be suspended. Cause and effect must constantly change places in what is logically a vicious circle. The steady-state theory is appealing because it absolutizes the universe as we know it, and thus seems to be free of the need to explain a time when the laws of the physical universe were non-existent. Unfortunately, unlike the Big Bang theory, it does not seem to be borne out by the empirical evidence of what so far appears to be endless universal expansion. A third possible way to explain the nature of the cosmos is to posit that the universe expands from an original point, as in the Big Bang theory, only to finally contract again into an original state. Here we have not only a speculative return as in the Big Bang theory but an actual return. As in the case of the steady-state theory this pulsation theory so far lacks the physical evidence of such a contraction. At the same time a pulsating universe of this kind would, theoretically, entail the difficulties of both the previous theories: first, the problem of explaining an origin not subject to the laws which can only come to be in the effects; and, second, the problem of cause and effect changing places and creating a vicious circle in which explanation becomes impossible. All three theories are explanations which work with the two variables of cause and effect and *together* exhaust the theoretical possibility of cosmic explanation. They are not accidental variations or mere speculations in the sense that there are logically no other structures within which to account for effects and causes. Each is hampered by an inherent theoretical impasse which seems to preclude the possibility of explanation.

Given the problems inherent in explaining the cosmos, why do we want to explain it at all. Why not just let the cosmos *be*? What is our impulse to offer scientific explanations for cosmic being? Why do we feel it necessary? For the same reasons that men have always felt so. Our scientific impulse is the very *same* impulse that we see in religion and then in philosophy. It is an impulse imbedded in our feeling and

demanded by our reason. It is, finally, the impulse of *reason*, for the very reason that the cosmos does not, as such, appear self-fulfilling. It is not simply a question of our understanding but of the cosmic appearance itself. The problematic of appearance is simply this: effects cannot be their own explanation. The "why", the "what", the "how" are questions which arise because the nature of an effect is to be incomplete or dependent and contingent. To lead back to a cause is really the effort to complete the incompleteness of effect by returning to cause. Knowledge and cause and explanation are intimately entwined. The desire to return to cause is also the desire to know. In this regard Aristotle was right to see cause and knowledge as one. His νοῦς is, in fact, his best example, as it not only is that upon which the universe depends²⁰ but also is in itself νόησις νοήσεως νόησις (thinking thinking on thinking).²¹ In other words it is its own cause or the effect of itself, or, in Aristotle's words, the νοῦς necessarily is,²² and compels our wonder²³ because it has the best life.²⁴ Actually there is not a long distance between the efforts of modern astronomers and physicists to achieve an explanation of the universe and the efforts of ancient philosophers. The problems that are endemic to their theories are wondrously similar. Aristotle's νοῦς although it is a principle sufficiently self-involved not to need anything, is also a being within what we would call a steady-state universe. For Aristotle as for the Greeks generally the cosmos, what we call the universe, is always existing and, in general, subject to very little change. Finite beings may come to be and pass away but the types of being, like Plato's εἶδη or ideas, what we would call species, simply are. The major problem with this view is that, since only the νοῦς necessarily is and everything else does not have to be, there is no way that one can return to the νοῦς by way of unnecessary or contingent beings. Since contingent being is just that - contingent - to use it to prove the necessary involves the fallacy of making the contingent necessary or of making necessary being contingent upon contingent being. The reasoning is not only circular but, in the final

analysis, *ineffective*. This difficulty could be overcome if we could start with necessary being and actually see that it is the cause of contingent being. The Neoplatonists do precisely this when they make the One the source of everything. For them Being proceeds (πρόοδος) from the one and returns (ἐπιστροφή) to it.²⁵ In Neoplatonism the cosmos is a definite hierarchy in which the One produces the various intelligences (νόες), souls (ψυχαί), and bodies (σώματα) right down to the merest almost nothing or matter (ύλη).²⁶ At the same time this almost nothing is, as farthest extension, closest to the One. As such, it originates immediately from the One.²⁷ This characterization of matter as being immediately produced by the One points up the central paradox of Neoplatonism; namely, that of how the One can be the origin of the not-One or Many. Although in Neoplatonism the Aristotelian

difficulty of a retroactive relation between necessary and contingent being is overcome by assuming a productive starting point, the unical principle of production is, by definition, the very opposite of what it produces. The return is, because of this paradox, subject to the same logical problem as we found in Aristotle and as we, in fact, find in the speculative difficulties of the modern Big Bang theory. How can that which is the origin of the laws of the effects be known by those effects? It could not be, unless it was equally subject to those laws. But then what is the difference between the cause and the effects? To try the variation of the Big Bang theory which simply calls for a pulsating universe only underlines the paradox of a dualism in which the cause becomes the effects, which effects in turn become the cause of the cause. The steady-state theory is only a seemingly more sophisticated form of this paradox.

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A. 980a1; and Book A (I) generally.
2. Νοῦς (nous) is very difficult to translate as its implications in Greek, particularly in the linguistic usage of Aristotle, are both tied to the nuances of every day discourse and to the technical meanings of a most subtle and erudite philosophical system. English meanings include the terms Mind, Spirit, Reason but do not convey the active sense of a Divine Thinker never not thinking and hence never not alive and never able not to be.
3. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A. 1072b3. Aristotle explicitly says that the νοῦς moves as "being loved" (ἐρώμενον). The verb form here is from ἐράω the Greek word for erotic, physical love. Aristotle does not use the verb φιλέω which in Greek is associated with friendship and non-physical attraction. The kind of passion Aristotle thinks of here is that of the most powerful instinctual attraction associated most often for the Greeks with Aphrodite. In the *De Anima* (B. 415a24-415b7) Aristotle remarks that in the nutritive soul (θρεπτική ψυχή) is lodged the most primitive and widespread power (δύναμις) of the soul, which is manifested in the act of generation (ἔργα γεννησσαι) and the use of food. He goes on to point out that in the act of generation, or reproduction, animals and plants, as far as they are naturally able, partake of the divine and eternal. He uses here the Platonic verb form for participation (τοῦ ἀεὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχσιν) and links it with the idea (which we see fully expounded in the *Metaphysics*) that "everything desires such participation" (πάντα γὰρ ἐκείνου ορέγεται). For Aristotle the final power of the final cause is shown in the inborn instinctual desire of φύσις (nature) for νοῦς. For a fuller discussion of Aristotle's idea of causation and its importance in his philosophy see my article: "Aristotle and Modern Historical Criticism", *Laval théologique et philosophique*, Feb. 1980, 17-27.
4. Aristotle uses the term ζῶον: *Metaphysics*, A. 1072b29.

5. By using the term ζῶον in reference to the νοῦς Aristotle is indicating most clearly, and in a way consonant with any Greek world-view, that the νοῦς is an ensouled being. In other words the νοῦς has a soul, a ψυχή. At the same time this divine νοῦς is the object of erotic love as pointed out in note 2 above. Aristotle in the *De Anima* tries to distinguish between the nutritive, sensitive, and intellective powers of the soul. The problem arises for him of how the νοῦς can be most complete and yet without nutrition and sensation. Aristotle's answer is that it is self-sufficient and without external desire: that is, its desire is for itself alone and is, therefore, presumably complete. The problem which Aristotle is left with is twofold: (1) how can the intellective soul be more complete than a soul that is also nutritive and sensitive; and (2) how can an intellective "life" be simple (ἀπλῶς - *Metaphysics*, Δ. 1072a32) if it is both subject and object, and, if subject and object are the same (ταῦτόν - *Metaphysics*, Δ. 1072b21) by contact (θιγγάνων - *Metaphysics*, Δ. 1072b21), how can they be distinguished? We can see the effort to overcome this set of paradoxes in the Neoplatonic synthesis of Plato and Aristotle, wherein the νοῦς is set within an hierarchy of beings. For a full account of this see my book: *The Logical Principles of Proclus' Στοιχείωσις Θεολογική as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos*, Amsterdam, 1980.

6. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (X. 1177b) Aristotle asserts without reservation that the noetic life is the best possible and that it is the only path to immortality in so far as such a state may be possible; "If then the divine in man is reason (νοῦς), even this life is divine compared to human life. And it is not necessary to mind (φρονεῖν) those counselling that men and human things are mortal. Rather we must, as far as is possible, be immortal by doing (ποιεῖν) everything in life according to the best that is in us." (*Nic. Eth.*, X.7. 1177b30-34) (All translations in this essay are by the author unless stated otherwise.)

7. The Neoplatonists could never accept Aristotle's idea that the nous was the highest and first principle. For them νοῦς is still infected with plurality. Plotinus states this very clearly in his sixth *Ennead* (VI,7,41,II.8-17): "What does the νοῦς itself need in order to think? Surely it does not sense (αἰσθανέται) itself - for it need not - nor is it two. Rather there is the manifold of the νοῦς itself, the act of thinking - for the νοῦς and νόησις are not the same - and the third, even the object of thinking. Suppose then the thinker (νοῦς), the act of thinking (νόησις), and the object of thinking (νοητόν) are the same, becoming one by hiding in each other; yet, once distinguished, something will not again be undistinguished. Any otherness must be given up as the best nature does not need any help at all. For what might you add, when the addition is a lessening of what needs nothing." The νοῦς is for Plotinus, as the second hypostasis, an intermediary principle between the One and Soul. As such it produces soul in the Platonic way of participation. In Proclus we see the completed form of Neoplatonic synthesis. Here the νοῦς is fully incorporated into the hierarchy of Being in a cosmos consisting of the One and Being. Proclus follows Plotinus in thinking of the νοῦς, as subject and self-object, as numerically one but yet not logically one. That is to say, for the Neoplatonists, the logical distinction is a *real* distinction which renders the νοῦς, as a being, below the One. Proclus develops this idea more fully than did Plotinus by introducing the henads (ἐνάδες) between the One and Νοῦς. Each henad is a unit in which there are no distinctions; unlike the "hidden" triadic nature of νοῦς as also νόησις and νοητόν. At the same time, however, each henad is also a "participant" in unity and, therefore, according to Proclus, cannot be pure unity (*Elements of Theology*, Prop. 2); in addition, there is a multiplicity of henads, while there is only one One. Thus the henads are logically more akin to the One than νοῦς, while, like the νοῦς, they are numerically one. Yet they are not **the** One. That Proclus fully understands Aristotle's claims for νοῦς can be seen by a close reading of his *Elements of Theology*, particularly Propositions 165-184 (especially Prop. 168). At the same time these propositions show how Proclus integrated Aristotle's first principle into an hierarchy in which it is an intermediate principle. The Neoplatonic rejection of Aristotle's νοῦς as the first principle is not

based on a misunderstanding of Aristotle's position, but on understanding it as needing to be integrated into a Greek cosmos which can account for production as well as return, even as it assumes that Being as φύσις and νοῦς always is. Aristotle had evidently thought of the νοῦς as analogous to Plato's idea of the δημιουργός while at the same time thinking of the νοῦς as unmoving and, therefore, without the defect of motion, which Plato had attributed to the best soul as first cause and νοῦς (*Laws*, x, 873b-899d; see especially 897c for the conjunction of νοῦς with the best soul (ἀρίστη ψυχή)). Aristotle's νοῦς as a ζῶον and a δημιουργός can be a kind of combination of the Θεός in *Timaeus* as δημιουργός (see *Timaeus*, 29a3 and 30a2 for the Platonic transition from δημιουργός to ὁ θεός) with the providential character of the Platonic self-moving soul as principle of life. The Platonic παραδινγμάτα (exemplars) (*Timaeus*, 28e6) are incorporated by Aristotle into the νοῦς when he refers to it as the "form of forms" (*De Anima*, 432a1 - καὶ ὁ νοῦς εἶδος εἰδῶν) and to the intellectual soul (ψυχή νοητική) as the "place of forms" (*De Anima*, 429a27 - τόπος εἰδῶν). While Aristotle can be seen to have tried to bring together the various grades of being into the νοῦς, he can also be said to have tried to purify from νοῦς the very same variety. This is the chief dilemma and paradox of the Aristotelian philosophy. The reduction of φύσις to the principle requires that the principle be its completion (ἐντελέχεια). At the same time this completion as unmoving (ἀκίνητος) and without matter (ἄλη) or potentiality (δύναμις) is an ἐντελέχεια as ἐνέργεια that is simple (ἀπλῶς) and self-contained. In short Aristotle would have to equivocate any term he uses to describe the νοῦς in order to use it both of nature (φύσις) and of νοῦς. The later Neoplatonists, particularly Iamblichus and Proclus, tried to get around this difficulty in two ways: (a) ontologically, by following Plotinus' criticism of the νοῦς as having plurality while at the same time clarifying Plotinus' distinctions between ἐν, νοῦς, and ψυχή; and (b) logically, by developing the *via negativa* in relation to the idea of participation. (For an exposition of the Neoplatonic hierarchy and the relation between Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus, and the idea of negation in Proclus see my book: *The Logical Principles of Proclus' Στοιχείωσις Θεολογική as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos*, *op.cit.*, especially the Introduction, pp. 1-27, and the Appendix: the latter is a consideration of the relation between Proclus' *Elements of Theology* and *Platonic Theology*.) Commentators have tried to get around the difficulty of synthesizing Aristotle's idea of the relation of νοῦς to φύσις by distinguishing his use of νοῦς in *Metaphysics* from that in *De Anima*. The notorious controversies over whether the noetic soul in Aristotle is immortal, which go back to pre-Neoplatonic times, continued in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and still flourish in some circles today, are an indication of the depth of the problem. The perennial nature of the dilemma is due, however, as is argued in the body of this essay, not so much to discrepancies or disunities in the actual statements of Aristotle as to the nature of the Greek cosmos itself as a cosmos, but rather to the nature of the Greek cosmos itself as a cosmos in which being as hierarchy is assumed.

8. For an interesting and informative account of these Platonic "hints" see J.N. Findlay's *Plato: the Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, New York, 1974.

9. For an account of the speculative cosmos see my book: *The Logical Principles of Proclus' Στοιχείωσις Θεολογική as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos*, Amsterdam, 1980.

10. See Anaximander's fragments, particularly Fragment 1, in: *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels and W. Kranz, vol. 1, 6th ed. Dublin/Zürich, 1951-1952.

11. See Parmenides' fragments, particularly Fragment 6, in: *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels and W. Kranz, vol. 1, 6th ed. Dublin/Zürich 1951-1952.

12. For a short discussion of the origin of the term "metaphysics" (τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά) see: Giovanni Reale, *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, tr. J.R. Catan (Albany,

1980), 484-485, where he paraphrases the conclusions of Hans Reiner's article: "die Entstehung und ursprüngliche Bedeutung des Namens Metaphysik," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 8 (1954): 210-237.

13. Aristotle: *Metaphysics*, E. 1. 1026a24, K. 4, 1061b19; *Physics*, B. 2, 194b14; *De Caelo*, A. 8. 277b10.

14. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, E. 1. 1026a19 and K. 7, 1064b3.

15. For an indication of the importance which Thomism played in the formulations of the Council of Trent see: *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings, vol. XII, "Thomism", section 7, p. 322.

16. Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto 1. ll. 46ff.

17. Goethe, *Faust*, Part Two, Act V, ll. 12094 to the end.

18. Scotus Erigena, *De Divisione Naturae*. *De Divisione Naturae* has this idea of the procession and return of the Word as its ground theme. For a typical passage see: 449b ff. and 528c23 - 529b20 ff. in *Periphyseon*, Latin text and English trans. by I.P. Sheldon-Williams, Dublin, 1968.

19. In the Christian liturgy the Eucharist is commonly referred to as a "participation in your (i.e. God's) sacred mysteries" (μετέχειν τῶν ἁγίων σου Μυστηρίων). See, for example, *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, The Faith Press, London, 1969, 24.

20. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ. 7. 1072b 13-14.

21. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ. 9. 1074b34.

22. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ. 7. 1072b10.

23. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ. 1072b 24-26.

24. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ. 7. 1072b 26-30.

25. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 11 and Prop. 31.

26. See Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. For a scheme of the Neoplatonic universe see my book: *The Logical Principles of Proclus' Στοιχείωσις Θεολογική as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos*, Amsterdam, 1980, 102-103.

27. The best statement of this view is that of Proclus in his *Elements of Theology*, Cor. Prop. 72, where he says that matter is produced directly from the One: ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ὑποστᾶσα.

ELEUTHERIA ISSN 0843-8064. Published semi-annually in the Spring and Fall by the **INSTITUTE OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY**: P.O. Box 913, Station B, Ottawa, CANADA K1P 5P9 Tel: (613) 594-5881. Fax: (613) 594-3952. E-mail: isp@raynon.com Charitable Reg. No. 07799841-20. Available to all members. Subscription rates and the availability of back issues and of volumes in the **INSTITUTE'S MONOGRAPH SERIES** will be supplied upon request.