

## ***Religious Foundations for Human Rights and Responsibilities***

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The contributions of Greek philosophy to human understanding are broadly known and deeply appreciated. Perhaps less appreciated are its contribution to the religious understanding of Christianity and Islam. These need to be known and celebrated. At the same time, however, it is important to be aware of the limitations of the ancient Greek mind in order to shed light on the later contributions of the great monotheistic religions to the appreciation of the dignity of all human beings as persons in the image of God. This, in turn, provides the realist metaphysical foundation for the rights of persons and peoples. That is Part I of this study.

Part II will examine, in contrast, the secularizing character of the modern humanistic and rationalistic paradigm. This results in the paradox that the very dynamism whereby human rights are strongly affirmed eats away at their foundations. Part III will then search for ways of restoring the religious foundations of human rights for our global age.

### **THE REALITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN ANCIENT THOUGHT**

#### **The Human Person in Greek Thought**

Upon reflection it becomes apparent that the human mind has always been theistic. In the earliest prehistoric times this had the form of totemism in which all was understood in terms of the one totally unique totem. In time this was succeeded by a mythic stage, i.e., by thinking imaginatively in terms of families of gods. Hierarchically related, these expressed a foundational unity. It was natural then that with the initiation of philosophical reflection Parmenides' first conclusion was that being was one, infinite and unchanging. What was most clear and most necessary was the One; its recognition came first; what was problematic was not the one God, but the multiplicity of persons and thing.

From that point onward the task of philosophy was to find a way to understand how there could be multiple, limited and diverse realities. To state them separately from the One was to undermine their reality. Thus Plato explained them as images (*mimesis*) of the one in order adequately to assure their reality. Aristotle would begin rather from recognition of the material or physical universe as what is most apparent and first experienced.

In this the Greeks simply supposed matter as given and looked only for an explanation of its forms and their changes. But this had its own difficulties. The purpose of material entities such as plants and animals could be only to multiply and replicate, i.e., the continuation of their species. Human beings manifested activities which clearly transcended those of matter, yet as their forms were forms of matter they could not explain as well the spiritual life of consciousness and will proper to humankind. They related these to higher forms or souls separated from the human synolon of form and matter and hence related no more to one human than to many. Freedom was not truly personal, nor was the individual human self-aware, free and therefore responsible. All this was the work of the lowest separated soul(s), not particularly related to any one human being.

The implications of this become more evident with time in the work of Averroes. Called "The Commentator" due to holding most strictly to the ancient text of Aristotle, he interpreted the human in terms of Aristotle's notion of form bound to the material or physical order, and hence as dependent on separated souls for intellection and other spiritual activities. This reduced the role of the human being to that of preparing by its external and internal senses the phantasms for the acts of the separated spiritual soul. Acts of intellection and responsible acts of freedom were then proper not to human beings, but to the lowest of the separated souls. For Beatrice Zelder<sup>1</sup> this indeed was not at all a human being, but a mere homunculum, without soul or intellect, freedom or responsibility. Later we shall see John Locke and David Hume as natural heirs of this restricted view of the human, and hence in need of a better foundation for human rights. Where could this be found?

### **Christian and Islamic Thought as a Religious Basis for Human Rights**

In order to understand the proper contribution of the great monotheistic traditions to these issues it is important to appreciate how they freed themselves for restriction to the Greek focus on forms and achieved deeper insight regarding being itself and that of human persons

in particular. Greek thought had simply presupposed the fact of matter; its questions regarded the ideas or forms, either as spiritual and therefore separate from matter, or as forms of material beings and therefore bound to space and time. In the Greek view the two were essentially different and necessarily separate. The resulting dramatic fissure in the Greek mind was depicted in Raphael's classical mural of Plato and Aristotle in the Agora, the former pointing upward while the latter pointed downward. Indeed Aristotle sternly criticized Plato, his teacher of 20 years, precisely in this regard. While understanding remained in the Greek terms of forms in relation to a given matter, and thus as simply an issue of differentiated types or kinds this contrast was irreducible and irresoluble. The proper meaning and dignity of humankind as physical was depressed and unappreciated, while the exalted character of its spiritual nature was attributed rather to separated souls. No proper sense of human dignity and rights could be developed in these terms.

It was then of decisive moment when this sense of being was deepened so that matter and spirit could be brought together in the human person. On this basis it could be appreciated, that one's physical reality had the dignity of the spirit and conversely that the human would be the point at which the spirit acquired the physical or material dimensions of space and time. This could not be done simply by adding one to the other; instead the understanding of being itself needed to be deepened in order to appreciate the radical unity of the one human person. How was this deepened awareness of being achieved, and what was the proper role of religious therein?

### **From Form to Esse**

Development in the understanding of being required transcending this Greek horizon wherein matter was supposed and being had meant simply to be of a certain differentiated type, form or kind. This was done through the achievement of an explicit awareness of the act of existence (*esse*). This awareness came with the recognition that the multiple realities were the effects of the act of divine creation which made them to be or to exist as expressions of the divine power, truth and goodness. The precise history of this development in the awareness of being from form to existence is difficult to identify in a conclusive manner, but some things are known.

Because the Greeks had considered matter (*hyle* – or the “stuff” of which things were made) to be eternal, no direct questions arose concerning the existence or non-existence of things. As there always had been matter, the only real questions for the Greeks concerned the shapes or forms under which it existed. It was the conclusion of the Greek and

the beginning of the medieval period when Plotinus (205-270 A.D.), rather than simply presupposing matter, attempt the first philosophical explanation of its origin. It was, he explained, the light from the One which, having been progressively attenuated as it emanated ever further from its source, had finally turned into darkness.<sup>2</sup> This answer obviously is not very satisfactory, but whence came this new sensitivity to reality which enabled him even to raise such a question?

It is known that shortly prior to Plotinus the Christian Church Fathers had such an awareness. They explicitly opposed the Greeks' simple supposition of matter; instead they affirmed that, like form, matter too needed to be explained and they traced the origin of both form and matter to the Pantocrator.<sup>3</sup> In so doing they extended to matter the general principle of *Genesis* that all was dependent upon the One who created heaven and earth, the Spirit who breathed upon the waters. In doing this two insights appear to have been significant.

*A Deepening Awareness of Being as Esse.* In the early centuries of Christian thought a theme that had been stated in the Hebrew scriptures was further deepened, namely, that of the dominion of God over all reality. Progressively this came to mean not only divine control but the divine origination, or creation of all completely or *ex nihilo*, i.e., without any preexisting matter or stuff. In this context the Greek issue of the kind or form of things was deepened to that of their very existence or *esse*.<sup>4</sup>

By the same stroke, human self-awareness and will were deepened dramatically. They no longer were restricted to focusing upon choices between various external objects and life styles. That would be the common but superficial contemporary meaning of what Mortimer J. Adler terms a circumstantial freedom of self-realization. Nor was it even Kant's 'choosing as one ought,' after the manner of an acquired freedom of self-perfection. Both of these remain within the context of being as nature or essence. The freedom opened by the conscious assumption and affirmation of one's own existence was rather a natural freedom of self-determination with responsibility for one's very being.<sup>5</sup>

In phenomenological terms Paul Tillich follows the progression of this deepening awareness of being by reflecting upon the experience of being totally absorbed in the particularities of one's job, business, farm or studies—the prices, the colors, the chemicals—and then encountering an imminent danger of death, the loss of a loved one or the birth of a child. At the moment of death, as at the moment of birth, the entire atmosphere and range of preoccupations in a hospital room shifts dramatically. Suddenly they are transformed from tactical adjustments for limited objectives to confronting existence, whether in sorrow or in joy, in terms

that plunge one to the center of the entire range of meaning. Such was the effect upon philosophy when human awareness expanded and deepened from concern merely with this or that *kind* of reality, to the act of existence in contrast to non-existence; and hence to human life in all its dimensions, and, indeed, to God Himself.

*The Philosophical Impact of Redemption: Radical Freedom.* Cornelio Fabro goes further. He suggests that this deepened metaphysical sense of being in the early Christian ages not only opened the possibility for a deeper sense of freedom, but itself was catalyzed by the new sense of freedom proclaimed in that religious message.

I say “catalyzed,” not “deduced,” which would be the way of science rather than of culture. Where science looks for principles from which conclusions are deduced of necessity, a culture is a work of creative freedom. A religious message inspires and invites; it provides a new vantage point from which all can be reinspected and rethought; its effects are pervasive and enduring. This was the case with the Christian *kerygma*.

The message of redemption focused not upon Plato’s imagery of the sun at the mouth of the cave from which external enlightenment might be derived, but upon the eternal Word or *Logos*, the Son, who entered the cave unto death so that all might rise to new existence. This is the prologue of the gospel of St. John:

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

...

That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.<sup>6</sup>

This was more than light to the mind. Christ’s resurrection was also a freeing of the soul from sin and death. Cornelio Fabro suggests reflection upon one’s free response to the divine redemptive invitation was key in the development of the awareness of being as existence. The radically total and unconditioned character of this invitation and response goes beyond any limited facet of one’s reality, and/or of any particular consideration according to time, occupation or the like. It is rather the direct self-affirmation of one’s total actuality. Hence, its sacramental symbol in baptism is not one of change, transformation or improvement; it is not merely a matter of reformation. Instead, it is resurrection from the

waters of death to radically new life. This directs the mind beyond any generic, specific or even individual form to the unique reality that I am as a self and for whom to live is freely to exercise or dispose of my very act of existence. This opened a new awareness of being as that existence by which beings stand outside of nothing ("ex-sto")—and this not merely to some minimum extent, but to the full extent of their actuality. Fabro calls this an intensive notion of being.

This power of being bursting into time through Creator, Prophet and Redeemer:

- directs the mind beyond the ideological poles of species and individual interests, and beyond issues of place or time as limited categories or sequences;

- centers, instead, upon the unique reality of the person as a participant in the creative power of God—a being bursting into existence, which is and cannot be denied;

- rejects being considered in any sense as nonbeing, or being treated as anything less than its full reality;

- is a self, affirming its own unique actuality and irreducible to any specific group identity; and

- is an image of God for whom life is sacred and sanctifying, a child of God for whom to be is freely to dispose of the power of new life in brotherhood with all humankind.

This is the ample, deep and inconclusive basis for human dignity and hence of human rights.

It took a long time for the implications of this new appreciation of existence and its meaning to germinate and to find its proper philosophic articulation. Over a period of many centuries the term 'form' was used to express both kind or nature and the new sense of being as existence. As the distinction between the two was gradually clarified, however, proper terminology arose in which that by which a being is of this or that kind came to be expressed by the term 'essence,' while the act of existence by which a being simply is was expressed by 'existence' (*esse*).<sup>7</sup> The relation between the two was under intensive, genial discussion by the Islamic philosophers when their Greek tradition in philosophy was abrogated at the time of al-Ghazali.<sup>8</sup>

The question was resolved a century later in the work of Thomas Aquinas through a "real distinction" between existence and essence as principles of being. In turn this rendered most intimate the relation of these two principles, related as act and potency respectively. Essence is that by which the being is what it is, while *esse* is that by which the essence simply is or exists. This supported a new and thoroughly active sense of being.

This is not to say that al-Ghazali was wrong a century earlier to

oppose Averroes and Greek metaphysics or that Islam was wrong in choosing the side of al-Ghazali in that dispute. Aquinas, too, had to overcome the Latin Averroists in the course of his intellectual battles in Paris. But Iqbal's<sup>9</sup> relatively recent intuition of the need to proceed in terms of being as active suggests the importance of this medieval juncture in the history of thought. With Thomas' renewed sense of being as existence, rather than as merely form, the Christian metaphysical tradition went on to develop a systematic philosophy with the technical tools needed for understanding the deep religious character of the origin and exercise of human life in this world. This accompanied, reflected, deepened and enabled the dramatically new dimension of human life which the monotheisms added to antiquity, thereby providing a firm foundation for the notion of the human person, its dignity and hence for human rights. Moreover, it did so in a way that did not fraction humanity into single isolates but united them in origin and goal, rendering them thereby properly social.

### **THE PARADOX OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN MODERN THOUGHT**

Thusfar we have seen both the limitations of Greek thought in its understanding of the human person solely in terms of essence or of being as form. We saw as well the crucial contribution to the establishment of the dignity of the person on basis of the monotheistic awareness of God as creator, which deepened the sense of being from form and essence to esse or existence. Yet at the very end of the section on Greek thought it was suggested that "the Commentator," Averroes, laid the basis for a reductionist return to the Greek perspective by the Latin Averroists in Paris and the subsequent development of modernity. A parallel but distinct path was that of such British Empiricists such as Locke and Hume who reduced human knowledge to that of the senses so that reality was seen in terms of mere reconfigurations of sense data in the mind.

As a result, on the one hand, the individual human was strongly affirmed politically in contrast to any hierarchical authority whether of the king by the British "Magna Carta" or the French "Rights of Man," the American "Bill of Rights," or the UN "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". This became the basic affirmation of human rights. Yet paradoxically, on the other hand, the real basis for these rights in the reality of the human being was being seriously eroded.

In order to bring our search for adequate foundations for human rights up to the present it is then important to see the ways in which human rights were not only affirmed by modern humanism, but also

undermined by its exclusion of awareness of their divine foundations and the reductivist humanism which limits all to the merely human. In that light it will be possible to identify more specifically the contribution now needed of religion for supporting and strengthening the force of human rights in our day and their proper recognition in the many cultures and civilizations of our global world. What then are some of the limitations of the modern paradigm with regard to human rights.

### **The Means without Goals; Power without Purpose**

Turning to the Enlightenment, especially its earlier roots in the 17th century in such thinkers as Hobbes, Locke and Descartes, it is striking that this group immediately divides when one attends to their fields of interest. Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Leibnitz and Newton wrote on physics, but did little on moral or political philosophy. In contrast, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau focused upon political philosophy and did not argue to moral or political issues on the basis of scientific discoveries.

What appears common and fundamental to both sets of Enlightenment thinkers is their abandonment of teleology or final causality in nature, including human nature. For Machiavelli this was a license for reducing the project of Plato from that of the perfection of the soul to cynical manipulation: the same choice made by Creon as supposedly more realistic than that of Antigone. This rejection of finality is highly praised by John Dewey, for whom the key to human emancipation is the reduction of all to the status of indifferent material in human hands under the arbitrary disposition of human ingenuity.<sup>10</sup> The identity and meaning of things depend entirely on how they are engaged in the human project, whose end is set by human choice. If there is a guiding ideal it is "progress," but in Dewey this is self-defined in a circular manner as the constitution of those conditions which in turn favor progress. But as progress for its own sake leads nowhere and is for nothing, life becomes ever more frenetic and unfulfilling.

Further if there is no goal there is no good open to human reason. In this case, reason no longer rules the will, its passions and desires. Instead, by supreme irony, reason, no matter how highly it be exalted, becomes in the end the tool or instrument of blind and insatiable passions. But if passion rules reason, on what then are our passions based? They are unguided by any supreme good and subject to the riotous panoply of contrasting attractions; inexorably they confront death as their nemesis or supreme evil.

Many readings of the Enlightenment, such as Dewey's contrast of the Ancient and modern, root the difference in the change from the



Ptolemaic to the Copernican system of the universe.<sup>11</sup> Though the importance of this should not be underestimated, it suggests only a reordering of relationships. The deeper revolution is religious rather secularizing. The world is no longer a realm of peace, the court of a loving God, in which people's freedom is ruled by their self-determined search for fulfilment in the good. Instead it becomes a mad flight from evil, as nonviolence is replaced by Hobbesian violence, and friendship by envy and enmity. One would not chose to live there; indeed, life there is no life at all.

In this light nature is perceived as a hostile aggressor upon man; threatening one's basic right to life. Consequently, all action, natural and human, must be shaped toward dominating a hostile environment, both physical and social: man becomes wolf to man: competition descends into open conflict. It is not by accident that Pentagon planners at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century find their philosophy in Leo Strauss<sup>12</sup> who echoes Moses Maimonides that there must be two philosophies. The false one is exoteric and for the masses; it proceeds with Socrates in terms of justice and the good. The true philosophy is esoteric; it proceeds in terms of suppression, violence and fear as the only way to control the masses. This must be kept hidden so that rule is by deception and instilling fear, as said Thrasymachus and Creon of old.

In sum then, as there can be no talk of ends, attention is focused exclusively and insatiably upon means, which basically is power acquired in violent competition with others. As a quantitative notion this has no standard within itself, but calls continually for increment—today reflected in what is called “consumerism”. In this competition for means there can then be no peace; social, commercial and political life all become fields of war “by another name.”

### **Method without Metaphysics**

The history of the Enlightenment has been long and differentiated, replete with adjustments and adaptations. To a deductive system such adjustments would appear to be compromises, but in the enlightenment model they are a natural part of the learning process. A major step in this was the development of an epistemology by John Locke. This too was not a conclusion from scientific discovery, though Locke knew the new scientists at Oxford and took part in their discussions. What was more decisive for him, however, was his work for the Earl of Shaftsbury in the political milieu of London. The discussions he organized there seemed always to come to the same impasse: how can one be sure of the position one advances? The issue was not merely speculative. Society as a whole was moving from the

period in which all decisions were made by the monarch, to one in which the people in their multiple groupings were beginning to assume responsibility for state decision-making. Their concerns, interpretations and proposals needed to be able to be examined by all concerned. Thus the problem in Locke's seminar mirrored that of the country as a whole: A democratic parliamentary system requires the ability to communicate what is in one's mind and heart; in public affairs this must be restricted to what can be open to, and evaluated by, others. This was the nominalist parallel to Descartes restriction of all to what was clear and distinct; it would appear later in John Rawls' relegation of all cosmic and religious vision behind a veil of ignorance and to Habermas' communication ethics.

In this context Locke developed what he referred to as a "short paper," which over the years evolved into his two volume *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,<sup>13</sup> where the original short paper seems to have survived as the first pages of book II, "Of Ideas in General, and Their Original". There he proposed his "historical plain method" which seems amazingly simple and clear. The first step was to remove all prior ideas—a ground-clearing process in the grand Enlightenment manner. Now one examines the way in which ideas come to be inscribed, as it were, upon the mind as on a blank tablet. Only two classes of ideas are recognized. The first is ideas coming from the senses, the experiences of which supposedly can be repeated by all others persons. The second is the process of reflection in which these, and only these, ideas are variously combined and interrelated.

Here the supposition is that if this history of ideas can be made clear, then the value of each idea can be ascertained. Thus, one must hold rigorously and exclusively to the ideas originated through the senses, as these experiences can be replicated by others. Further, the process of manipulating ideas must add no new content. Hence, all thought will be open for inspection by all. The subsequent development of Lockes' text elaborated the ways ideas could be variously combined and set the whole in the context of language. On this basis the final part of his *Essay* delineates the extent and nature of knowledge.

His exchange with Bishop Stillingfleet, who objected to the loss of any realist knowledge of substance in such a pattern, suggest that Locke was not fully aware of the drastic limitations this placed upon the mind. Indeed, it took some steps, first by Berkeley and then Hume, before the notion of substance, and hence of being and metaphysics as a whole, would be rejected entirely. The radical implications of this for the present have been articulated in a consistent manner by Carnap in the "Vienna Manifesto".<sup>14</sup> Only that which is available to the senses or able to be traced back to perception thereby is to be considered

valid scientific knowledge.

Thus the political requirements of collaboration between scholars become the characteristics of the scientific endeavor. The unified science which Descartes sought to elaborate is no longer his rationally elaborate unity of natures, but the process itself of collaboration between scientists. The method of the endeavor supplants its content in importance. For human rights it is their affirmation rather than their content or foundation that is important. And in this lies the paradox of human rights in the modern paradigm: the more strongly they are affirmed the more their reality is eviscerated.

Today there is a growing consensus that modernity, as founded in the 17th century, realized in the revolutions of the 18th century, and proclaimed in more recent liberalism, is not sufficient to promote or even allow for the human person. Max Scheler's<sup>15</sup> critique of liberalism provides a list of particulars, namely, its rationalist formalism, individualism, and absence of purpose. An examination of these should help in diagnosing the contemporary pathology which must be addressed by attempts to develop a more adequate vision for human rights.

### **Reason without Life: Rationalism**

Among the most salient—and presently the most critical—aspects of the Enlightenment is its reduction of all to reason and its dependence thereupon. In this its goal is control of reality through control of ideas. However, the more it succeeds in this goal the more it isolates itself from the highly integrated and complex character of life as physical and spiritual, from truth as goal of intellect and from the good as goal of the will, and from understanding and affectivity, both individual and social.

In its rigorous Kantian form rationalism would eschew the concrete facts as too chaotic, the psychological aspects of utility as too unstable, and traditional ethical principles as too heteronomous to be worthy of human autonomy. Instead, it looks to reason itself for formal rules of action and political cooperation common to all persons. This mitigates the radical individualism of those proceeding on the basis of empirical knowledge; indeed, the test and proof of the validity of the norm and the corresponding political practice would be precisely their degree of universality.

But there is the rub: universality at the cost of separating reason from concrete actuality is idealized out of time and space. It is forgotten that reason is part of man and undergoes change in the dynamic developmental human process of interaction with other persons and things. Further, while will depends on knowledge, we

have a perception of values which precedes clear concepts and deductions, takes us out of indifference and situates our reasoning processes within an ongoing process of taking interest, evaluating and, at its highest point, love.

### **Person without Personality: Formalism**

The formalism inherent in liberalism derives from its conception of the social order as a set of external *quid pro quo* contracts between its members. In the positivist tradition this consists in a certain calculus of desires in which what counts is not persons and their values but the method of calculation, or “due process” in the legal order. Where individualism is strong, this becomes a tool used by atomic individuals in pursuit of their discrete ends at the expense of society and its welfare. Where the social is strong the balance shifts so that the formal pattern becomes supreme; persons, their freedom and creativity in the social order are ignored or even crushed so that the social goals can be more freely pursued.

Classically, Kant attempted to protect the person in this context by his formulas for treating the other as oneself and all persons as ends in themselves. But the very universality which assures that such formal factors apply equally and identically to all bespeaks their essential limitation. The “X” which is to be treated as an end in itself is applicable identically to all humankind; its meaning is identical in each case. But this means that what is particular about each—their proper identity and history, their hopes and concerns, their freedom and creativity—are not taken into account. The concrete person, along with his or her free and hence unique affirmation of meaning and importance is lost. There can be an affirmation of universal rights, and certainly no one would want less; but in this context, the culture created by a particular people through generations and even millennia of shared suffering and generous commitment comes to be looked upon as a remnant from the past to be at best tolerated, but progressively disparaged and discouraged as an impediment to the emergence of a new and supposedly more purely formal democratic order. Formalism becomes the enemy of the concrete existential freedom and the proper rights of persons and peoples.

### **Progress without Purpose**

Liberalism fails further to adequately explain its key notion of ‘progress’ upon which it centers when it appeals to either need or utility. Need can be seen as a stimulus to actions undertaken to escape

or lessen present evil, e.g., death for Hobbes or anarchy for Spinoza. Life is looked upon rather pessimistically and action is a process of ameliorating its deficiencies. But logically, because these needs develop in history they could not at the same time be principles for its explanation. As concrete needs arise spontaneously and randomly, the responses thereto are aimless and accidental; they could not explain positive progress over time. Rather, positive advance requires a surplus of time, of means and of vision free from the constraints of needs and necessities.

The other liberal approach to motivation is utility. But as individuals are particular, their separate utility does not take account of the commonweal. Hence it is unable to provide the motivation needed for effective recognition of human rights, social cohesion and true progress.

### **Person without Society: Individualism**

The new stress on the individual emerges in contrast to the prior state of affairs where interpersonal relations were duties and reflected one's place in society. In contrast, for liberalism rights pertain to a person independently of society and prior to one's participation therein. Relations to others are secondary and society is reduced to a fabric of individual interests woven according to patterns of similarity and dissimilarity, convergence and contrast, in the form of mutable explicit contracts rather than of traditional usage.

Scheler would recognize levels of sociality as parallel developmental stages in the growth of the person, as well as stages in historical social development. This begins in the tribe in which the individual is completely integrated in the community. In liberalism the situation is quite reversed. Society and other persons become objects and means for the individual and his or her ends. The bitter fruit of this is that conversely the individual becomes but an object in the eyes of others. Both authentic personhood and true sociality are lacking.

Hence, liberalism harbors three main errors regarding the individual. First, the individual is seen as prior to society, whereas in fact the person emerges from society. Second, by so stressing the action of simply parallel autonomous individuals as constituting the community all subjectivity is denied to others and to the community, and in the end to the individual him- or herself. Finally, individualism itself becomes unworkable for it is in the community that one discovers oneself. To consider oneself isolated is in the end to lose real individuality and personhood and to be reduced to an abstraction; it is a self-imposed dehumanizing solitary confinement – the very antithesis of human rights.

## Man without God

Going higher to the principles from which the human self-understanding flows and in which it is embedded, Huntington notes in his *Clash of Civilizations* that each civilization is based on a great religion and conversely that each great religion founds a distinct civilization (with the exception of Buddhism, which he takes pains to explain). Particularly, the cultural traditions and the religions in which they are grounded and consecrated are needed in such unsettled and changing times as those upon which we enter in these newly global times.

These cultural traditions constitute the very purchase that peoples have on a properly human life, that is, one that is lived with dignity and self respect for themselves and their children. This sense of personal and social identity receives more, not less, attention at points of great change. When attacked it will be defended at all costs. In this it matches the contrasting liberal terror at any suggestion of compromise of the separation of Church and State, the path to which had been opened in the Peace of Westphalia at the end of the Thirty Years of Religious War in 1648.

We find ourselves then in a clash of two civilizations which are as massive, all-inclusive and inexorable as the shifting of tectonic plates. On the one hand, there is the liberal Western tradition which sees the removal of all cosmic, metaphysical and religious vision from the public square as the sole strategy for enabling peoples to live together in peace. On the other hand, there is the broad sense among the rest of the world's civilizations that such a mental lobotomy would be the destruction of human meaning and dignity. This is the mega threat, for nothing could be more threatening to each civilization, more contradictory between East and West, or more strenuously resisted by all.

In this light the present transition beyond modernity finds itself at the intersection of two fundamentalisms: on the one hand, a secular fundamentalism that is a forgetfulness of God, which Rawls formulates into a principle of liberalism, and on the other hand, a reactive religious fundamentalism marked by a relative forgetfulness of man. Huntington's analysis of the latter's reaction to the global assertion of secular liberal democracy is precisely his sense of an impending clash of civilizations. He sees this as an attack on Western liberalism. But what even he seems not to have envisaged—though it may be a consequence of his analysis—is the aggressive character of Western liberal free-market democracy inspired by its own fundamentalism. Rather than a defensive military posture with aggressive diplomacy, it has reversed the order to bypass free intercivilizational interchange and move to a preemptive military strategy to force the conversion of the

world to its own secular ideology.

In sum, we have diagnosed the modern Enlightenment program in order to see what it has not provided in order to go in search of what is needed to shore up human rights in the new global era.

We found:

means without goals  
power without purpose  
method without metaphysics  
reason without life  
person without personality  
people without society  
man without God.

The task before us points directly to our key issue, namely, the need reinvigorate human rights to heal this exasperated sense of the human person and of human life by restoring its proper meaning and dignity, and thereby the human rights built thereupon.

## **THE RELIGIOUS RESTORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

Our reflection on the paradoxical character of modernity found that it affirms human rights more assertively to the very degree in which it undermines their foundation. As we enter now into a truly global context which enables comparisons and contrasts between Western and other civilizations it becomes increasingly clear that the notion of human rights has been developed in terms of the individual over against society and that rights stands for the claims for the self rather than for duties toward others. Hence, rights take on an adversarial character corresponding to an economy built upon competition for profit and to a politics consisting in a struggle for power based upon self-interest. In this perspective human rights descend from their original purpose of protecting the people against torture and other forms of oppression and become entitlements to socially and individually destructive action. Thus, for example, the right to freedom of speech becomes the right to tear down and destroy; the rights of self defense become the right to torture others; constitutional protections are put aside. Like the prophet of old we cry out "what will deliver us from this body of death? ... Take away, O Lord, this heart of stone and restore our heart of flesh and blood." How can this be done?

As seen above, whereas the modern paradigm has been essentially individualistic and atomistic, the newly global situation imposes the need, and hence the possibility, of thinking in terms not only of the individual -- whether person or nation -- but of the whole of which

these are parts. This is true physically as we become conscious that all efforts at development must take account of their impact on the environment of neighborhood and nation, continent and world. This is no less true financially, politically and in terms of civilizations, which Huntington terms the largest “we”. In this light rights begin to take on also the character of responsibilities, the “common good” regains its meaning and importance, and teleology or purpose, which four centuries ago had been fatally excluded as anthropomorphic, becomes again a matter of concern central to human meaning and purpose.

We come then to the dawn of a new paradigm, built namely in terms not of diversity but of unity, not of parts but of whole. Heidegger provides a theory by which this shift can be understood. He points out that at each crisis in human history a choice needs to be made between alternate horizons or concerns. The one chosen is intensively developed, whereas the alternative is left undeveloped. At the time of Plato the choice to guide the polis was that of objectivity, rather than of subjectivity; at the beginning of the modern era it was focused yet more narrowly on the individual, rather than on the whole. Much -- very much -- has resulted from the long concentration upon this path of investigation. However, the very fact that it has been a choice of one against the other means that it is inadequate. Gradually this has become manifest and upon entering a global age it turns disastrous.

What Heidegger points out is that at this point the way forward is not to pursue the same path which promises only modest, arithmetic advance, but to return to the original point of choice in order to pursue the alternate path which was not previously chosen. For our global age this would be not the path of the individual and multiple, but that of unity and the whole as was pointed out then by Nicholas of Cusa. Taking this path in our days promises not arithmetic but geometric progress, for it suggests comity rather than conflict and cooperation rather than competition.

We might cite three particular implications of thinking in terms of the whole. Above we examined ancient philosophy in terms especially of the deepening of the understanding of being from form to *esse*. In modern terms Cusa would suggest understanding the various beings within the global reality as specific degrees of contractions of the whole. To this, however, he would add the efficient and final causality by which the ordered universe of reality takes on a dynamic and even developmental character. This has a number of implications: directedness, dynamism, cohesion, complementarity and harmony.<sup>16</sup> Thus Cusa's global vision is of a uniquely active universe of beings. It has:

1. *Direction to the Perfection of the Global Whole*: As contractions of the whole, finite beings are not merely products



ejected by, and from, the universe of being, but rather are limited expressions of the whole. Their entire reality is a limited image of the whole from which they derive their being, without which they cannot exist, and in which they find their true end or purpose. As changing, developing, living and moving they are integral to the universe in which they find their perfection or realization and to the perfection to which they contribute by the full actuality and activity of their reality.

This cannot be simply random or chaotic, oriented equally to being and its destruction, for then nothing would survive. Rather there is in being a directedness to its realization and perfection, rather than to its contrary. A rock resists annihilation; a plant will grow if given water and nutrition; an animal will seek these out and defend itself vigorously when necessary. Human beings bring to this their free creativity. All this when brought into cooperative causal interaction has a direction, namely, to the perfection of the whole.

2. *A Dynamic Unfolding of the Global Whole*: As an unfolding (*explicatio*) of the whole, the diverse beings are opposed neither to the whole nor to the absolute One. Rather, after the Platonic insight, all unfolds from the One and returns thereto.

To this Cusa makes an important addition. In his global vision this is not merely a matter of individual forms; beings are directed to the One precisely as a whole (*complicatio*), that is, by interacting with others. Further, this is not a matter only of external interaction between aliens. Seen in the light of reality as a whole, each being is a unique and indispensable contraction of the whole. Hence finite realities interact not merely as a multiplicity, but as an internally related and constituted community with shared and interdependent goals and powers.

3. *A Cohesion, Complementarity and Harmony in the Global Unity*: Every being is then related to every other in this grand community, almost as parts of one body. Each depends upon the other in order to survive and by each the whole realizes its goal. But a global vision, such as that of Cusa, takes a step further; for if each part is a contraction of the whole, then, as with the DNA for the individual cell, "in order for anything to be what it is it must also be in a certain sense everything which exists."<sup>17</sup> The other is not alien, but part of my own definition.

From this it follows that the realization of each is required for the realization of the whole, just as each team member must perform well for the success of the whole. But in Cusa's global view the reverse is also true, namely, it is by acting with others and indeed in the service of others or for their good that one reaches one's full realization. This again is not far from the experience of the family, but tends to be

overlooked in other human and commercial relations. It is by interacting with and for others that one activates one's creative possibilities and most approximates the full realization of being. Thus, "the goal of each is to become harmoniously integrated into the whole of being and thereby to achieve the fullest development of its own unique nature."<sup>18</sup>

Some would think of the global whole as no more than a mega machine built of many disparate parts, which assemblage, if overtaxed, can be thrown into disorder. Others note a deeper unity more organic in character such that the well-being of the various parts depends on the health or proper interaction of the whole. This can enable one to conceive not only the rights of others but the need for mutual care and concern of the many individuals as separate parts. But it does not explain how these can be interrelated and on what basis.

It is here that a deeper sense of retrieve is required. For as modernity was marked by the search for knowledge that was not only clear, but clear enough to be able to distinguish one from the other, its focus has been on the essences or kinds of things as they differed among themselves. To appreciate their unity one with another from the individual to the global level it is necessary to redevelop attention to the existence by which each is and how its very exercise is a process of close cooperative interaction one with all others. In this light what appears is being as analogous or somewhat similar and related to one another.

But this takes one further as one asks for the creative source of these existences and traces this back to being which, as Parmenides pointed out, must ultimately be one, unchanging, infinite and eternal. The monotheist would recognize this as the one God, creator of all.

There is much to be learned here for life in a global age. The Hindu would point out that this one, named Brahma, must be of the character of existence or actuality and actuation, of *cit* or consciousness which is the actuality and actuation of truth, and of *ananda* or bliss which is the actuality or enjoyment of goodness or love. Moreover, as perfect in itself, its act of sharing its being in the form of creating the universe can be only a generous act of love.

On the part of humankind this provides a matrix of how to live in the exercise of one's being, i.e., in unity with others by living in truth which is justice and in goodness which is love. It is this which "ties us back" to our divine origin -- the etymology of the term "religion".

This, however, points to another basis for human rights which was eroded by "Enlightenment" rationalism. By reducing knowledge to issues of space and time the empiricists and Kant removed access of the intellect to the meaning of human life; by removing teleology as

anthropomorphic it lost touch with the purpose of life as well. But life with neither meaning nor purpose is a poor candidate for human rights. The response to this is precisely what we have seen above to be the religious appreciation of human persons with the meaning and purpose of beings who are free and responsible.

But in all this probably we have still understated the meaning of religion for human rights. For religion is more than only an intellectual understanding of reality. Mohammad Iqbal states this well.

The aspiration of religion soars higher than that of philosophy. Philosophy is an intellectual view of things; and as such, does not care to go beyond a concept which can reduce all the rich variety of experience to a system. It sees reality from a distance as it were. Religion seeks a closer contact with Reality. The one is theory; the other is living experience, association, intimacy. In order to achieve this intimacy thought must rise higher than itself, and find its fulfillment in an attitude of mind which religion describes as prayer – one of the last words on the lips of the Prophet of Islam.<sup>19</sup>

Metaphysics is displaced by psychology, and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the ultimate reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

For human rights this has the most dramatic implication. For a right that is merely acknowledged but not acted upon remains a hollow entitlement. For their actuation it is necessary to move the heart as well as the mind, and not only to recognize but to act upon that recognition. Here religion by moving to action on the basis of understanding the unity with all persons and with physical nature as well provides the basis in human meaning for human rights.

It is not incidental then that in these global times we find a renewal of deep religious vision in order to appreciate how we are all interrelated as fellow creatures of the one divine source. This means that at the existential center of our reality – in terms of source and goal, of meaning and purpose – we are most deeply interrelated not only with our own countrymen but with peoples of all civilizations, and thus how cooperating one with another is both possible and indeed the only way forward. Religion then provides the needed basis not only formally to declare, but truly to live human rights.

## Notes

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1. Beatrice Zedler, "Averroes on the Possible Intellect," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 25 (1950), 164-178.
2. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II 5(25), ch. v.
3. Maurizio Flick and Zoltan Alszegehy, *Il Creatore, l'inizio della salvezza* (Firenze: Lib. Ed. Fiorentina, 1961), pp. 32-49.
4. In order to understand Christ to be God Incarnate it was necessary to understand Him to be Son sharing fully in the divine nature. This required that in the life of the Trinity his procession from the Father be understood to be in a unity of nature: the Son, like the Father, must be fully of one and same divine nature. This made it possible to clarify, by contrast, the formal effect of God's act in creating limited and differentiated beings. This could not be in a unity of nature for it resulted, not in a coequal divine Person, but in creatures radically dependent for their being. But to push the question beyond simply the nature or kind of being is to open directly the issue of the reality of beings, and hence the issue not only of their form, but of their very existence as well. This is to ask not only the Greek question of how things are of this or that kind, but how they exist at all, rather than not exist. This constituted an evolution in the awareness of being, of what it means to be real. This came to be seen not simply as the compossibility of two forms, which by Aristotle had taken as a sufficient response to the scientific question "whether it existed". Instead, to be real means to exist or to stand in some relation thereto.
5. Mortimer Alder, *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conception of Freedom* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), I, 609.
6. John I:1-5, 8.
7. Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Torino: Societa Ed. Internazionale, 1950), pp. 75-122.
8. Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error and Mystical Union with the Almighty: al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* trans. M. Abulaylah, ed. G.F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001).
9. M. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy and Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989)
10. *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon, 1957). See also William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Washington Square, 1963).
11. Dewey, *ibid.*
12. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press of Glencoe, 1959), ch. 9, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing"; "Persecution and the Art of Writing," *Ethics* (1959).
13. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Dover, 1959), Book II, ch. I, vol. I, 121-124.
14. Rudolf Carnap, *Vienna Manifesto* (with trans. Hahn and Otto Newrath, *Wissenschaftlicher Weltanfassung: Der Wiener Kreis [Vienna Manifesto]*), trans. Albert E. Blumberg in *Perspectives on Reality*, e.g., J. Mann and G. Kregche New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), pp. 483-493.
15. Max Sheler, *Problems of Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. M. Frings (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).
16. De Leonardis, pp. 233-236.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
19. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religions*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy and Institute of Islamic Culture, 1984), p. 143.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.