

Glissando: Life, Gift and the Between

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William Desmond is one of the greatest living thinkers. His work is characterised by a noble simplicity and expansiveness. Unlike most philosophers today, he does not shirk the fundamental and ‘obvious’ questions, but always tackles them head on. At the same time, he produces a kind of ‘Irish’ challenge (at once neoplatonic, Augustinian, Thomistic and post-Hegelian) to Heidegger’s attempt to meld philosophy with poetry. A lengthy disquisition on fundamental modes of being will pass seamlessly into a meditation on the flight of a seabird across a Gaelic seashore. And its path is never, for the reader, a diversion.....

Since I agree with nearly everything that Desmond has to say, apart from some minor divergencies or hesitancies that are scarcely worth discussing in print, there seems little point in offering a critique of his philosophy. Instead, I prefer to celebrate it by temeritously offering the following essay as an intended application to the topic of ‘life’ of his ‘metaxological’ metaphysics of the ‘between’, which is also, as many passages in his *oeuvre* reveal, a metaphysics of ‘gift’. In what I hope is an act of tributary *mimesis*, my reflections will veer between natural science, ontology, literature, music and theology.

1. Evolution and Design

Ever since Darwin, at a popular level, the terms ‘creation’ and ‘evolution’ have been set against each other. In this lies little rationale, but we must ask for the rationale behind the constantly re-staged debate. It is indeed as if one has a kind of lobster-like double articulation, with superficial hostility between the two pincers, of a single episteme. On the one hand there is the legacy of post-Newtonian Christian natural theology; on the other hand there is the explanation of the phenomena of life in terms of the operation of the law of natural selection.¹

In the first case one has to do with ‘creation’ only in a bastardised sense. Newton no longer conceived of God as Being as such, and as the source of finite being produced from nothing but sharing by various degrees in his infinite simple *esse*. His God was rather a supremely powerful entity who had shaped alongside himself other entities with whom he communicated through a shared dimension dubbed his ‘sensorium’, manifest to us as an inferred absolute space and absolute time. According to the, as it were, old covenant of the laws of motion, celestial as well as terrestrial bodies travelled in infinite straight lines unless otherwise interrupted, a movement that is perfectly reversible. But according to the, as it were, new covenant of gravity, celestial bodies were regularly bent back from this course to move cyclically in

¹ Even as sophisticated an academic as John Dupré gets this whole area hopelessly wrong, simply because he has no knowledge of the history of theology and the real nature of its interaction with science. Hence he assumes that ‘the argument from design’ is the strongest traditional argument for the existence of God, whereas in the most authentic Christian theological tradition (Augustine, Maximus, Aquinas, Cusanus, Pascal etc) it simply did not figure at all. See John Dupré, ‘Human Origins and the Decline of Theism’ in *Darwin’s Legacy: What Evolution Means Today* (Oxford: OUP 2003)

relation to each other. In the case of both ‘covenants’ one has, on the one hand, an absolutely regularly operating and universal law. On the other hand, one has also the direct presence of God, however precisely conceived, whether in the one case as the absoluteness of space and time, or in the other case as the attractive and repelling force of gravitation. In the latter case, Newton the hermeticist was always in self-conflict with Newton the voluntarist theologian: the latter would have liked to reduce gravitation to mechanism, the former toyed with the notion that God had introduced into reality certain inscrutable and quasi-vital ‘active principles’.²

This ‘designing’ God is not the God of classical Catholic theology because his causality operates on the same plane as finite causes even though it is all powerful. One can trace the beginnings of such a way of conceiving of divine causality as far back as Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, but it displaced an older and essentially neoplatonic way of looking at things, still holding good for Aquinas, in which the divine cause was a higher ‘influence’ which ‘flowed into’ finite levels of causation, entirely shaping them from within, but not ‘influencing’ them or conditioning them on the same plane of univocal being, as a less metaphorically-rooted meaning of ‘influence’ tends to imply. Put briefly, the ontological versus ontic difference between primary and secondary causality was lost sight of.³

It is still this post-Scotist and Newtonian God who is invoked by advocates of ‘creative design’ all the way from Paley through to recent evangelical biologists. Just as motion and the planetary system appeared to be organised like clockwork in the Newtonian universe, so likewise Paley saw in organisms far more complex mechanisms whose instance could only be explained by the notion of direct and continuous divine causal influence. Similarly today, biologists like Michael Behe argue that even the most primitive component of a light-sensitive nerve that permits ‘seeing’ to arise, is already so complex that only an extrinsic divine designer will explain its existence.⁴ The scandal of ‘creationist science’ is indeed the idea that God could become an empirical hypothesis, experimentally verifiable, but the scandal is still more theological than it is scientific and in fact, all the way at least from Newton to Faraday, the main current of natural science was centrally shaped by such scandalous confusion.

In the second case, one has the Darwinian tradition itself. It is, of course, not at all the case that Darwin displaced the ancient monotheistic doctrine of creation with the thesis of evolution by natural selection. To suppose that it is, would be to remain within the terms of the bastardised theological assumptions of Paley and the divine design tradition. Yet within the terms of this tradition, it is possible also to argue that Darwin was in one respect modifying received theology rather than simply standing it

² See Simon Oliver, ‘Motion according to Aquinas and Newton’ in *Modern Theology* 17 no 2 (2001) 163-199 and *Divine Motion: Physics and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2005)

³ See Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP 1986) 23-117; Jacob Schmutz, ‘La doctrine médiévale des causes et la théologie de la nature pure (XIII^e – XVII^e siècles) in *Revue Thomiste* No I-II Jan-June 2001, 217-264

⁴ Michael J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996)

on its head. His project shares an important feature in common with the Christian apologetic *Bridgewater Treatises* (particularly the section by William Whewell) which he indeed cites positively in *The Origin of Species*. For both works, the Paleyite perspective on life is insufficient in terms of its Newtonian analogue. For in the latter case, while absolute space and time and the force of gravity represent the direct divine presence, this is still manifest in a totally regular fashion expressible by comprehensible laws. There appeared to be no biological equivalent to this regular divine governance. So both treatises are interested in compensating for this lack in terms of discovering more regular immanent processes at work in features exhibiting apparent organic design. This included processes leading to the constant creation of new species, such that *both* treatises exhibit a break with the Aristotelian focus upon fixity of species and the search for explanation of variation within species only, in favour of the attempt to account genetically for the variation of species itself. The difference is that in the case of *The Bridgewater Treatises* divine design ultimately explains the mutual adaptation of species and environment; while in the case of *The Origin of Species* the immanent law of one-way selective adaptation of species to environment becomes a sufficient *explanans* unto itself.⁵

Nevertheless Darwin, if no doubt for largely expedient reasons, still left open the possibility that he had discovered a ‘law of creation’. More decisively, the phrases in which he does so at the end of the *Origin* manifestly echo the design tradition in terms of its conviction that the pain and struggle of natural selection is justified by the beneficial ‘good’ of later outcomes.⁶ A crucial aspect of the latter was theodicy: local and temporary ills were explained as necessary for the emergence of long-term or higher goods – indeed in Paley’s case the divine ethics are wholly utilitarian. And for Paley already, long-term or higher goods are conceived in highly ascetic and stoic terms: ‘a family containing a dying child is the best school of filial piety’ as he joyfully informs us.⁷ This same emphasis is consummated by the work of Malthus: the latter is quite misread if we suppose that he thought his gloomy demographic conclusion posed a problem for theology which he then had to solve. To the contrary, it is more as if the dire conclusion is uncritically embraced by a natural theology which thinks of virtue as emerging from a cosmic training in hardship.⁸

Darwin’s central move was to extend Malthusian political economy to the economy of life as such. In doing so, he at last completed the Newtonian ambitions of the English design tradition – which one might describe as a bizarre fusion of a rather tame picture of nature on the one hand with the idea of a nature as a ‘hard school’ of training in order and excellence on the other. On the one

⁵ See John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1991), 192-226; Anthony Baker, ‘Theology and the Crisis in Darwinism’ in *Modern Theology* 18 (April 2002) 183-215

⁶ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* ed J.W. Burrow (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1979) 458-460

⁷ Cited by Baker, op cit

⁸ See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 42-5; Baker, op cit and Michael Hanby, ‘Creation Without Creationism: Toward a Theological Critique of Darwinism’ in *Communio* 30 (Winter 2003) 654-694

hand.....watercolours; on the other hand cross-country runs..... For now one had the equivalent of Newtonian motion in a straight line in the form of the *glissando* of constant variation of species. And one also had the equivalent of Newton's law of gravity in terms of the law of the survival of the fittest, as Darwin expressed it after Spencer. This is certainly, nevertheless, an oversimplification: for Darwin variation is still by and large a physically imposed alteration of a lingering (Aristotelian) biological, and sexual selection plus inheritance of acquired characteristics play some minor role in mutation. Nevertheless, the twin general model is overwhelmingly the norm: the ceaseless *glissando* along an absolute vital continuum; the emergence of relatively stable biological types interrupting this continuum by virtue of the law of struggle.

To what extent can one say that not just Darwin, but the entire Darwinian tradition remains informed by this Newtonian-Malthusian amalgam? In the case of the latter component, the law of struggle in the face of scarcity, it is not difficult to produce quotations from Richard Dawkins which show that he is essentially a Malthusian: every genetic or phenotypic success will eventually engender a further increased general scarcity to ensure the continuity of refinement produced through competition. Without some continuous dimension of radical shortage rendering terrestrial reality less than infinitely shareable, natural selection could not be the basic process at work.
9

In the case of the former component, ceaseless chance variation of species, the situation is more complex. Quickly after Darwin came the thermodynamic and probabilistic revolutions in 19thC physics. This could be seen as problematic for Darwinism in so far as it began to move away from the dominant Newtonian paradigm of clearly defined mechanical causation exhibiting a perfectly regular function, towards a looser sense of statistically verified constant conjuncture that might indicate an entire gamut of co-conspiring causal forces at work.¹⁰ On the other hand, critics like Darwin's friend William Herschel had already pointed out that Darwin's selective mechanism could not, like Newtonian law, be deployed to make clear advance predictions, nor be experimentally manipulated – for this reason he described the Darwinian natural norm as 'the law of higgledy-piggledy'.¹¹ Thus it appeared to many that Darwinianism could be more naturally correlated with the new probabilistic scientific paradigm. However, this immediately suggested that 'natural selection' was something more diverse than originally intended and perhaps not exclusively focused upon the law of struggle. This has then bequeathed a huge and often suppressed ambiguity to modern biology: in so far as Darwinism remains pure, it belongs to old-fashioned, possibly outmoded Newtonian science; in so far as it can be correlated with modern physics, it ceases to remain, exactly, Darwinism. (And arguably, the further physics later drifted away from the Newtonian model, the worse this ambiguity has become.)

⁹ See Baker op cit and Hanby op cit

¹⁰ For all the following discussion on the probabilistic/thermodynamic revolution and its impact upon biology, see David J. Depew and Bruce H. Weber, *Darwinism Evolving: Systems Dynamics and the Genealogy of Natural Selection* (Cambridge Mass: MIT 1997), 167-329

¹¹ See Hanby op cit

The new physics in its aspect as thermodynamic also encouraged the idea in biology that the *glissando* of organic variation is not Newtonian mechanical inertia plus Newtonian mechanical rupture, but rather a series tending to *crescendo* or *diminuendo*, to concentration or dispersal. Indeed the new perspectives in physics offered a greater chance of integration with biology: organisms could be seen as instances of declining energy seeking a temporary refuge in relative equilibrium on the way to final entropy. And when these new perspectives were combined with the newly discovered science of genetics, then Darwin's organic variation could be understood in terms of genetic drift, as random bundles of genes exhibiting collectively certain tendencies measured in terms of statistical probability.

Lack of any understanding of heredity had clearly been a weakness in Darwin's theory. The hypothesis of genes can be seen as shoring it up by providing a precise physical location for organic variation. However, this only helps to confirm the first 'Newtonian' element of *glissando*, it does not necessarily confirm the second 'Newtonian' element, which is the law of survival.

It only unambiguously does so if, as with Richard Dawkins, one seeks to show natural selection at work fundamentally on the genetic level. Yet is in fact far more likely that natural selection works at every level – genotypic, phenotypic, species-wide -- and indeed, contrary to what Dawkins would have the British population believe, the general tendency of genetic theory from its origins until now has actually been to modify orthodox Darwinism. And it is for just this reason that one *can*, I think, claim that mainline Darwinism is Newtonian-Malthusian and therefore is in a strange collusion with its Christian fundamentalist enemies. For genetic theory suggests, first of all, that the *glissando* of continuous variation is essentially vital rather than mechanically physical; secondly it suggests that this can result in genetic mutations that are not expressed at the phenotypic level and therefore never subject to the tests of natural selection, while further on down the generational line they will of themselves issue in phenotypic alterations. At the macro level of the scale, attention to the properties inherent only in populations, as with the great inter-war Russian-American biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky (incidentally -- or not -- a devout Russian Orthodox), has long encouraged attention to auto-poetic and internal shifts in animal constitution that are more to do with adaptation to an environment than with struggle for scarce terrain. Indeed, such a perspective has brought to the fore how species actively modify their own environment and can sometimes modify it in harmony with other species with whom they form a yet larger quasi-grouping. Perception of natural agonism is not of course wrong, but it can be overstressed by too exclusive a preoccupation with the biological individual, rather than the smaller and the greater drifts within which it is swept up. 12

What is more, one can go beyond Dobzhansky's nominalism which defined a species in terms of a local inter-breeding population. For after all, do we not first of all only *recognise* such a self-generating group because of an inescapable shared likeness?13

¹² Depew and Weber, 161-497

¹³ See Hanby op cit and Marjorie Grene, 'Introduction' to *Dimensions of Darwinism: Themes and Counter-Themes in Twentieth-Century Evolutionary Theory* ed Marjorie Grene (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1983), 1-15

Yet perhaps such recognition only records an ‘accidental’ not essential resemblance between members of a single biological lineage. This would suggest that the basic unit of the processes of evolution and natural selection is the individual. But then the question arises: what makes this individual *biological* in nature? The answer must have to do both with the inner inertial drive to organic self-development, and the drive to reproduce within certain regular parameters. Yet in that case, if one is to evade the most nakedly teleological construal of the biological individual (granting it a kind of ‘quasi-intention’), then an entire gene population and sequence, or else an entire population group or sequence becomes the more likely subject of the evolutionary plot. But if the group assumes priority in this way, then resemblance between individuals reverts from accident to essence, and biological existence must still be construed in metaphysically realist terms.

Accordingly, one must still think of the living individual as in some sense instantiating a formal essence. But this is further to imply that, as for Aristotle, specific form itself (however mysteriously) ‘explains’ in an ultimate and unsurpassable fashion. Moreover, since the nature of living form is to grow and to reproduce within certain regular and yet not entirely theoretically delimitable parameters (as gardeners and parents know) then this form is inherently ‘teleological’ in the sense that its collective nature as internally moving and self-replicating across time (which is ‘its own point’ – a goal beyond goal) is participated in by individual living organisms, who in this non-intentional sense ‘aim towards’ their pre-defined fulfilment and flourishing. For this sort of reason, Etienne Gilson argued that Darwin himself had not really escaped the teleological perspective which defines biology as such.¹⁴ Even Darwinism cannot escape the question of why the ‘drive to survival’ -- which sounds just as anthropomorphic as the drive to appear or to appear as beautiful -- and so forth. One might say, that, of course, nothing is seeking to survive, it is just that certain random mutations turn out, within given equally accidental conditions to be able to persist. But this still leaves begging the question of the ontological character of the living unit. Why does a ‘single’ gene or pool of genes remain single such as to ‘underlie’ (‘substantively’) a process of mutation? Still more, why do genes and animals self-replicate over time in an organic way that produces constantly new individual instances of a recognisably ‘same’ species? These questions mean that one cannot really stop asking exactly what is it that in some sense seeks to survive and to increase, or simply to sustain an inertia beneath variety? Why should there be any tendency in nature consistently to remain rather than endlessly to disintegrate, disseminate and re-form only momentarily? In other words, why is not the *glissando* of continuous variation *far more* absolute than it appears to be? Why are there any consistent living things at all? For if variation were more absolute, if no continuities in growth and reproduction were readily discernible, then there would be no reason whatsoever to speak of ‘life’ in any sense whatsoever.

But once one has admitted that the drive to survive is teleological, then there is no reason not to suggest that there is equally a biological drive to expand self-manifestation in terms of growth and engendering – an extension of a drive to

¹⁴ Etienne Gilson, *From Darwin to Aristotle and Back Again: a Journey in Final Causality, Species and Evolution* (Notre Dame Ind: Notre dame UP 1982)

manifestation which may indeed characterise the individuation of all of physical reality as such.¹⁵

If, to the contrary, one really seeks to rid biology of all teleology, then, as with Dawkins, one must imply that all of life is epiphenomenal, a mere apparent cover for fully determined chemical and physical processes. Yet no-one has discovered exactly what these processes are that issue in such an upshot, still less exactly how such processes throw up this sort of an illusion. And arguably it is transcendently impossible for the latter discovery ever to be made, since the phenomenological experience of a supposed illusion -- like that of colour in Locke's philosophy -- always occurs in a 'language' that is incommensurable with the language of explanation of what is 'really' going on: nothing within mere mechanical interactions in any way anticipates or could give rise to, the appearance of a tree anticipating Spring, despite the fact that, at least to begin with, one cannot perceive a tree in any other way. Moreover, physics itself has abandoned the notion of all-pervading mechanism and all-pervasive efficient causality by recognising, at the most fundamental of all levels, spontaneities, elective affinities, and obscure tendencies of matter to persist in certain regular patterns. It becomes more plausible to read biological life in terms of an intense manifestation on the surface of a transcendental 'life' that undergirds all of finite reality and is even coterminous with being as such.

Strict Darwinism therefore remains a dubious, unphilosophical and unscientific ideology. It is still ultimately undergirded by exploded Newtonian physics and questionably pessimistic Malthusian demographics and political economy. In both respects it is secretly a first cousin of its necessary enemy, the divine design hypothesis.

But what does this mean in practice? In either case one has a biological underwriting of the capitalist market system. In the Darwinian case it is true, certainly, that the refusal or minimalisation of the inheritance of acquired characteristics does not lend itself as easily to 'social Darwinism' as do vitalist Lamarckian principles.¹⁶ Nor does the inhumanly long timescale in which variation can issue in mutation. Nevertheless, Darwinism underwrites the picture of the struggling individual as the main social unit, of human groups struggling against each other, of eugenic manipulation as improving along a measurable scale of value -- namely survivability -- something -- namely humanity -- which is but an accidental upshot of accidental processes. Left-Darwinians like Dawkins seem to have to project a possible human self-invention without any ontological basis in their scientific conclusions: quite coherently then, everyone knows about Dawkins' selfish gene, but few about his recommended socially- altruistic human being.¹⁷

¹⁵ See Jacob von Uexküll, *Theoretical Biology* trans D.L. Mackinnon (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Teubner and co, 1926)

¹⁶ See Depew and Weber, 193-217; Peter J Bowler, *Darwinism* (New York: Twayne, 1993)

¹⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Deign* (New York: WW Norton, 1996). For important critiques of Dawkins and Darwinism, see David Berlinsky, 'The Deniable Darwin', in *Commentary* 101 No 6 (1996), 27-28 and Alister McGrath *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005)

It is striking that most, though not all, Christian evangelical opponents of evolution are enthusiastic supporters of the capitalist market. One can suggest that one latent reason for their horror at Darwin is that, in perhaps a very Anglo-Saxon way, it encourages tragic resignation in the face of market competition and not an unambiguous celebration of it as a glorious providential instrument for the training of freedom and independence. 18

And both Darwinism and divine design envisage a political economy of nature and for this reason further share in common a reduction of the vital to the mechanical: Dawkins still has a watchmaker, it is just that he is now blind, like the secularised hidden hand of the marketplace. 19 In essence they view animals as complex mechanisms and organic struggles as processes of mechanical action and reaction. Beneath even genetic appearances for Dawkins, as I have already suggested, there presumably lurk chemical and then atomic and sub-atomic ones. Life itself then must be an epiphenomenon: we are all always already dead, along with our cats, dogs and geraniums.

But does not the spectacle of the fight between the two fundamentalisms, biological and religious – a fight between first cousins – occlude from view an alternative vitalist way of understanding evolution? Darwin's mechanical reductionism was actually quite politically respectable and, as we have seen, it could readily be given back a theological gloss. In the 17th C it is often observable that a vitalist or 'hylozoist' atheism was seen as yet more threatening than the mechanical variety. A machine is implausibly self-constructed and self-operating, unless it is a vitally inspired automaton: but an underlying vital force truly can displace God or at least immanentise him. And this story was repeated in the 19thC. Many have argued that Darwin's bias towards design and mechanism was in fact a mode of distancing himself from the evolutionism of political radicals in France like Geoffroi St-Hilaire, for whom there was a kind of forceful (but not strictly 'teleological' he supposed) bias in matter itself towards greater and greater organisation and self-awareness favourable to collective organisation.

2. Vitalism and Transcendence

One can then suggest that the modern story of evolution concerns not just the fate of a Newtonian God and the meaning of a biosphere without God, but also a vitalist and sometimes even semi-mystical conception of the biosphere which has taken many forms. The question of what happens now to a more traditional Catholic notion of God I shall advert to at the end of this paper.

Quite simply and briefly, the vitalist view makes more sense than does the Darwinian one. To reduce consciousness and life to epiphenomena is not science, but mystification. An adequate ontology has to be able to accommodate the arrival of

¹⁸ See Jim Wallis, *God's Politics* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005) for a discussion of the Christian new right by a left-wing evangelical.

¹⁹ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*

these emerging realities. A living thing, as Leibniz realised, has parts which in so far as they are living, reflect to infinity the organisation of the whole organism and its infinite relations to all the rest of physical reality – this precisely distinguishes nature (the divine art) from human art, for which the parts of a machine are not in themselves machines as reflecting the organisation of the whole. (He also argued that every physical substance, or ‘monad’ is organic and so infinitely organised.) This infinite referral is the result of a self-sustaining action, an auto-poesis. Life endlessly engenders life and does not *as* life die – for if death cannot generate life, then the priority of life over death renders it immortal; there is no life without resurrection, as Russian philosophy has often argued.²⁰ Nor is it born, since it is not caused. More and more, most significant biologists recognise that a vital genetic drift and even the feedback of random phenotypic alteration are the major factors in the evolutionary process, with natural selection confined to an ever yet more minor role. ²¹

Nor does current biology any longer need to choose between pure chance on the one hand, or divine intervention on the other, in order to explain microcosmically complex phenomena like the eye. Instead, it can appeal to mathematics and to musical theory for the insight that chaos is a phantom mirage: processes can only exist as organised series and patterns, since every ‘random’ instance already contains patterns discernible for a selective gaze or a repeatable action – and these are the only possible modes of response, even if they are impersonal. What is it that causes selection and why are certain patterns favoured – not just at the organic level but at the sub-organic also? It is very hard to know, but it is at least impossible now not to conceive of ceaseless organic variation as truly a *glissando* and moreover as one constantly interrupted by mysterious preferential selections which seem to have the force of ‘revelations’ -- as they do for the human composer of music when he selects from an infinite myriad of possible combinations.

These sorts of considerations have rightly tended to give a new currency to the thought of Henri Bergson.²² One could read him as offering a double criticism both of orthodox scientism and of orthodox theology (or rather as he supposed it to be), which pinpoints their hidden collusion. For Bergson, to suppose that reality is measurable and predictable like Cartesian space is to deny to it any auto-originate dimension and to encourage the deistic hypothesis of an ultimate originator and sustainer. (One can add here that if capitalism is the mechanisation and spatialisation of social reality -- its reduction to statistical outcomes and maximum possible abstract repeatability – that we should not be surprised if a certain sort of deistic or volutaristic God will always be re-invoked in every neo-liberal historical moment.....)

As against this, Bergson reasonably suggested that life and consciousness, since they are upshots in excess of the merely physical, themselves offer a re-manifestation on

²⁰ See G.W. Leibniz, *Monadology* 64. *Principles of Nature and Grace, Founded on Reason* 4. For the Russian perspective, see Sergius Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: the World as Household* trans Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven: Yale UP 2000)

²¹ See Depew and Weber, 479-497

²² See especially, Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* trans Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998)

the surface of the world, of processes at work in its deepest depths. When we gather up our forces to will and to create, we obscurely fuse past, present and future and directly intuit something that, in striving to bring about, we already see. In this fashion we directly experience in temporal *durée* the fundamental work of the *élan vitale*. Human art and action is not then an epiphenomenal illusion, but neither is it a sudden alien intrusion upon reality. The consequence of this view – drawn by many of the greatest modernist artists, and perhaps supremely by the Catholic composer Olivier Messiaen and his pupils Iannis Xenakis and Pierre Boulez – is that the artist realises in the free creation also the most revealing experimental work of science.²³

The priority of the vital over the physical can then be seen as essential to the securing of immanentism – even if this will tend to mean that the *élan vitale*, however named, becomes an immanent deity, or even a quasi-transcendent one.

Peter Hallward, in a truly penetrating summary, has shown how most modern French philosophers are in this respect the heirs of Bergson.²⁴ They tend to identify the absolute as a creative force which consists in a *glissando* of constant variation (or absolute heterogeneity or internal self-differentiation) which is a perpetually non-identical repetition. While, in the case of Gilles Deleuze, this is an immanent absolute that is named variously ‘a life’ or ‘pure composition’ or ‘the plane of immanence’ or ‘the abstract machine’, the virtuality rather than actuality of this absolute is paralleled in philosophers like Michel Henry or Christian Jambet by the henological or ‘beyond being’ character of their notion of transcendence. But in either case, one has a resulting dualism in terms of the contrast between a ‘good’ transcendental creative factor on the one hand and a ‘bad’ static and representable created element on the other. This dualism is virulent precisely because the virtual creative factor is only actualised or self-realised in terms of the static element which inevitably obfuscates (both in terms of being and of knowing awareness) the very forces which sustain it and always exceed it.²⁵

And already, in Bergson himself, the vital impulse does not truly exist apart from its tendency constantly to run into reverse, to look backwards, laying out time as memory and thereby engendering the spatial field that is studied by physics.²⁶ Picking up on

²³ For ideas on Messiaen and the entire question of musical ontology on which the current paper is drawing, see Catherine Pickstock, ‘Quasi una Sonata: Postmodernism, Religion and Music, in *Theology and Music* ed Jeremy Begbie (Cambridge: CUP forthcoming 2006). See also Ian Darbyshire, ‘Messiaen and the Representation of the Theological Illusion of Time’ and Roberto Fabbi, ‘Theological Implications of Restrictions in Messiaen’s Compositional Processes’ in *Messiaen’s Language of Mystical Love* ed Siglind Bruhn (New York: Garland, 1998) 33-55 and 55-84, respectively.

²⁴ Peter Hallward, ‘The One or the Other: French Philosophy Today’ in *Angelaki* Vol 8 No 2 August 2003, 1-33

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: a Life* trans Anne Boyman (New York: Zone, 2001), 25-35. See esp 31: ‘Events or singularities give to the plane all their virtuality, just as the plane of immanence gives virtual events their full reality.....A wound [an instance of the Stoic ‘incorporeal’] is incarnated or actualised in a state of things or of life; but it is itself a pure virtuality on the plane of immanence that leads us into a life’.

²⁶ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, Chapter III, 186-272

post-thermodynamic notions of evolution, Bergson saw organic life as reverse entropy, temporarily recuperating its diminishing series, although also as that which constantly recuperated the self-renewing ultimate source of being (transcendental 'life') beyond the grasp of physical science as such.

In a similar fashion, Deleuze and Guattari see life as decoding the formally organised circular flows of physical *milieux* and thereby as establishing 'territories'. In their reading of the latter process in the case of animals, they are radically non-Darwinian and learn from both Bergson and the composer Messiaen. A bird singing his song is not primarily defending a territory, according to the chapter 'On the Refrain' in *A Thousand Plateaus*, but is rather continuously establishing it, for territorial animals make more explicit a decoding that removes a haecceity from the organised flux in order to restore and release energy that is endemic to life as such. A territory is for Deleuze and Guattari literally a sacred space established by animal art before it is an assurance of sufficient food and security, since animality *need not* seek these things through a process of individuation – it simply happens to do so, or even in some fashion *chooses* to do so.

Again in keeping with Bergson, the territory is for Deleuze and Guattari already a reaching beyond itself, a deterritorialisation precisely because its drawing of a circle in order to contain energy has conjured the power of absolute heterogeneity whose virtual capacity exceeds the circle that it draws on in the very process of drawing it. The refrain that the bird sings is equivalently a folding back upon itself of the uninterrupted *glissando* of life in order to establish a theme, a cry that represents animal identity and wards off the threat of destruction. Yet the territorial refrain can already be expanded into a song of courtship and even into pure variations that have lost sight of all function, as Olivier Messiaen had already concluded.

For Deleuze and Guattari, this same process is simply taken further in human beings: our highest effort is to conjugate forces which send milieus and territories spinning into free-play but without disappearing altogether into chaos or invoking the heterogeneous as a new sort of closure. One could say that, for them, this is a new sort of post-human and ecological sociality. It is intended to resist both narrowly defended terrains on the one hand and entirely abstract universal modes of capture like that of capitalism on the other. It concerns the 'betweens' of reality and the 'diagonals' that exit from the vertical spatial and horizontal temporal coordinates within which they are inscribed. This is their 'path of flight' -- not really one of straightforward escape, but rather of escape both from stifling enclosure and the vacuous loneliness of mere escapism -- escape for the sake of escape. In so far as it aims somehow magically to capture the forces of the cosmos itself it is apparently unlike Derrida's appeal to an 'impossible' donative *differance* which is merely regulative and cannot be in any sense realised. It is also somewhat unlike the usual Marxist injunctions merely to negate the given or await its immanent collapse. It is rather a Spinozistic injunction to individuals already and always to create a positive joyful conjugation of forces.

In this manner (Bergsonian or Deleuzian) vitalism seems to combine a sophisticated reading of modern science with a continuing role for metaphysics and an ontological ground for the human pursuit of hopeful social projects.

But is this entirely the case? We saw that the 18th and 19th C Anglo-Saxon God of intelligent design is a half-immanent God interacting on the same plane with what he influences. From this there results a fundamental dualism of the creative and designing on the one hand and the inert and the designed on the other. This dualism is *not* the result of having a transcendent principle, a transcendent *esse-intellegere* – *volere* from which finite being is entirely derived in all degrees of its existence, including secondary causality and creaturely freedom. It is rather the result of dividing up the finite world into spheres of influence between a quasi-transcendent principle on the one hand, and sheerly finite causal process on the other.

But this means that vitalism, by switching to the apparent monism of pure vitalist immanentism, one does not get rid of this dualism, but rather augments it by rendering it aporetically virulent. In a hypostasised double negation the fixed and apparent is merely the phenomenal guise for the virtual and dynamic which nevertheless only ‘is’ at all through its phenomenal self-occlusion. It is all rather like Thomas Carlyle’s deconstructed account of German idealism and romanticism: the phenomenal world is only the ‘clothing’ of the real ideal world; and yet the examination of human culture reveals that all the entire realm of thought is itself but a matter of ‘fashionable clothing’ or temporarily preferred image and metaphor. Hence by implied analogy the cosmic clothing conceals a null energy which is merely the power to clothe and so to disguise itself.²⁷

Any immanentism whatsoever tends to succumb to this model of double disguise – of the real by appearance, but more fundamentally of appearance by the supposed real. In constantly ‘uncovering’ the illusion of uncovering itself, postmodernism does little more than expound the grammar of such immanentism that it never calls into question. For, to repeat, in any immanentism there is the whole or the director of the whole which is the truly real – for Bergson it is the *élan vitale* that is absolutely self-differentiating – with an absoluteness not without *some* kinship with the absolute time of Isaac Newton. But this ‘absolute’ – as with Spinoza’s substance, Heidegger’s Being, Deleuze’s ‘a life’, Derrida’s *differance* etc – is only ‘actual’ in another subordinate realm that it ceaselessly erects and dismantles.²⁸ In Bergson’s case this is the realm of space which is all that ordinary cognition ever represents.

Since subordination is involved here, even if the subordinating requires the subordinate in order to be at all (but whenever does it not, one might ask?) then this *schema* involves always not only dualism, but also hierarchy between a higher conditioning power and a lower conditioned reality. One can try, like Francois Laruelle, to be more avant-garde than all the avant-garde in thinking a purer immanence by constructing and invoking an absolute that exists purely as self-presupposition that is immediately a self-positing without any conditioning of an ‘outside’.²⁹ Yet Laruelle is still led to say that this process itself, in order to attain a

²⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: the Life and Times of Herr Teufelsdröckh*, introduced by Alasdair Gray, illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987)

²⁸ See Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 2002)

²⁹ Francois Laruelle, ‘What can non-philosophy do?’ In *Angelaki*, Vol 8 No 2 August 2003, 169-191

thinkable actuality, throws up the spheres of conditioning/conditioned that are conventionally constructed and theorised by both practical life and philosophy, even if these are not supposed to feed back into the ultimate unthinkable nullity that is also everything. Dualism and hierarchy are therefore the secret heart of all immanentisms.

Why should this matter, politically? It matters because immanentist vitalism cannot really think an advance to a better world. Deleuze's intentions were in many ways admirable, but his notion of composition is inherently unstable and contradictory – pulled in two opposite directions at once. To the degree that the path of flight deterritorialises, it also tends to a void nullity or chaos that will either swallow it up or be recruited as an abstract basis for totalising rule. Inversely, to the degree that, to use the musical example deployed by Deleuze and Guattari, atonality remains rooted in the tonality of territory, it will still affirm local prejudices. That there *needs* to be, ethically and politically, a mean between the concretely local and the merely void and abstract universal is correct, as Deleuze to his credit recognises. And yet his Bergsonian outlook cannot really think this medium.

Why? Because a univocal process of pure self-differentiation is only realised through the very realities that it must also constantly negate: milieus, aggregates and territories. The 'mechanosphere' includes both these things and to pursue a line of flight is in the end to be resigned to evil as well as good, enclosure as well as freedom – so this it is only personal and stoic liberation after all.³⁰

Crucial here is a point made by Peter Hallward which supplies a second reason for concern. Absolute heterogeneity is self-generating difference and therefore it is the many in so far as it one, and the one is so far as it is many, but not in any sense a mediation between the two. It contains no *relation* – and this is not a plea for Hegelianism. Rather, it is a demonstration that even Deleuze's differential metaphysics reduces to an oscillation that is also a coincidence between the one and the many (or the subject and the other) that is actually still the dialectical *failure* to think mediation or 'the between' -- as William Desmond has argued with respect to Hegel.³¹ By contrast, in the spatialised or territorialized level of Deleuze's 'chaosmos' there are apparent relations and representations, but these relations are not originally constitutive since each spatial reality is ultimately directly engendered by absolute heterogeneity – the acausal deterritorialising force which establishes the real primarily as difference in excess of any preceding continuities of essence. Their harmony is not, indeed, exactly pre-established, but it is constantly re-established by continuous occasional intervention, even if the spatial things do not really occupy any ground independent of such intervention, and even if the intervention is only 'there' in the intervening. Hence Deleuze declares that, while his differential monads are no longer discrete, they remain, in their (Whiteheadian) 'prehending' of each other (non-rationally) 'windowless'.³²

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* trans Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1987), 501-517

³¹ William Desmond, *Hegel's God: a Counterfeit Double?* (London: Ashgate 2003)

³² Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* trans Tom Conley (London: Athlone, 1993) 81: 'Prehension is naturally open, open onto the world, without having to pass through a window'. See also 121-137

But without real relations, human beings and all other organisms are reduced to the subservience of a vital flow: their only possibility of salvific self-escape must consist in self-abolition through identification with this vital flux. And if relations themselves cannot mutually constitute something that discloses ultimate reality, then there is no real hope for a social and ecological transformation that acknowledges both individuals and their vital bonds to others without which they could not live nor express any values.

The question here is, if the *glissando* of the vital process is actualised only through ‘notes’, ‘scales’ and ‘metres’, then do we necessarily need to see the latter as *in any sense at all* interrupting or completing the *glissando* rather than as serially constituting it? This is the same as to ask, *does* the vital process exist in a pure heterogeneity that always expresses the same univocal One, or does it rather consist, as William Desmond has suggested (in a bold attempt to ‘dynamise’ and temporalise Thomistic analogy) in endless analogical relations that express simultaneously identity and difference? In the first case, as with Hegel, one has only an apparent coincidence of opposites whose constantly renewed *aporia* in point of fact still respects formal logic. In the second case, one has a more radical and irreducible coincidence of opposites precisely because there is as much persisting pleasurable tension as there is reconciliation – a tension that sustains, as Desmond puts it, the agapeic distance of the other (in its relatively ‘univocal’ singularity) within and yet beyond the erotic moment of fusion (which, unlike the philosophers of difference, he does not moralistically deny). This coincidence of the genuine *metaxu can* truly only be ‘heard’ rather than thought, as Desmond suggests, in poetry or music.³³ And perhaps it can be heard in the most maximally strained and so verifying degree in the most extreme of modern or post-modern musics, where ‘harmony’ remains in some extended sense despite all the disharmony and complexity. Certainly in Messiaen, if not in Xenakis, the continuous perpetual variation of unpredictable rhythm is not superior to, but is rather something constantly arriving with, the invocation of a spatial colouration invoked through sound. This ‘synaesthesia’ renders his always programmatic music ‘poetic’, if one takes poetry to be the instance of the blending of the various sensory mediums – a blending which, as ‘common sense’, one can see as giving rise to language as such and so thought as such. (Here also one has an ineffable ‘between’, without which, nonetheless, thought would not really operate).

By contrast with this synaesthetic and metaxological blending of ‘organising’ time and organised space, it is arguable that the continuing downgrading of space and visibility in modern French thought is still very Cartesian in character. Bergson had not really felt the force of the new physics – which, in effect, from the mid-19th C onwards, precisely restored the hermeticism and neoplatonism that Newton (who was precisely *not* the last of the magicians) had tried to keep at bay: the primacy of light; the role of descending series; action at a distance; apparently unmediated harmonisation; the coincidence of opposites; the irreversibility of a time that is not absolute; the multiplicity of finite infinities. (There are anticipations of most of these things in Robert Grosseteste, Giordano Bruno etc as recent research shows, and it is

³³ William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (New York: SUNY, 1995)

also the case that early 20thC physics was imbued with the spirit of the second wave of romanticism that mutated into modernism)³⁴. By contrast, Bergson still saw physics as concerned with the precisely measurable and did not explore the *aporias*, given ecstasies and mysterious relationality of space in the same way that he explored the paradoxes of time. (Perhaps for this reason he not only read, perhaps validly, Einstein's space–relative time as only spatialised time and not true *durée*, but he also failed to read *durée* as itself relative to eminent extension)³⁵

This meant that he did not consider the possibility that the irreducible relational interfolding of past, present and future is not simply the work of a temporal self-differentiation, but might equally be the work of a spatial 'laying out' of such moments in a display, such that 'relation' lies not simply 'inside' a thing (G.E. Moore's 'internal relation') – else it would be that thing, or the totality of all things, negating event and contingency -- nor simply 'outside' that thing (Moore's 'external relation') in which case it would merely belong to another thing or again to all things (as with Hume, a hero of Deleuze) with the same upshot.³⁶ For there to be events in time, there must be a spatial 'laying out' of temporal moments, but their mutual ecstasy is not thereby simply abolished, but instead is expressed in a different way in the mystery of the 'between' that is real relationality -- neither internal nor external. Temporal ecstasy is the 'erotic' inwardness and savour of mutuality; but spatial mutuality is the 'agapeic' externality and reaching endlessly out towards the ecstatic goal. And each is relative to the other.

The third criticism concerns the question of series and gift – two names for the same thing in the writings of the pagan neoplatonist Proclus.³⁷ If complexity always falls out as an ordered series, then it is always a rising or a falling, always has a greater or lesser focus or foci. For this reason the usual 'radical' objection to hierarchy as such is the worst naivety – for ontologically-speaking there is always hierarchy and equality can only be achieved by the subtle blending of asymmetrical ascendancies. (Most of our current political thought fails to see precisely this.) It is notable that 'hierarchy' was only the name given by Dionysius the Areopagite to the 'series' of the pagan neoplatonists, which always had a mathematical dimension.³⁸ So I do not altogether complain of Deleuze's immanentist hierarchy – only of its stasis and absolute non-reversibility. Whereas the neoplatonic series was always psychically ascendable, one can only climb Deleuze's stoic staircase to the end of subjective annihilation. This

³⁴ See Iain M. Mackenzie, *The 'Obscurism' of Light* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1996); Hilary Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science* (Ithaca: Cornell UP 1999); James T. Cushing, *Philosophical Concepts in Physics the Historical Relation Between Philosophy and Scientific Theories* (Cambridge: CUP 1998); Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004)

³⁵ See Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe* trans Robin Durie (Manchester: Clinamen, 1999)

³⁶ See Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, 35-53

³⁷ See, for example, Proclus, *Elements of Theology* trans E.R. Dodds (Oxford: OUP 1963) Propositions 18, 20, 42

³⁸ Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Complete Works* trans Colm Luibheid (London: SPCK 1987)

means, in consequence, that if Deleuze's vital series 'gives', like Plotinus's One, what it does not have (since it is beyond being, which is nonetheless derived from it), namely all the various ontological actualities which he isolates (milieus, territories and so forth), it also takes away what it gives, does not allow any return gift of gratitude to the absolute and finally calls one beyond any generous reciprocity.³⁹ In this way the human creative act might, as with Bergson, invoke the absolute, but it cannot as gift invoke an absolute giving and sharing. Yet art is perhaps distinguished from science as gift.....as Iannis Xenakis declared in his thesis defence, *Arts/Sciences: Alloys*, to select is to receive a revelation as if 'by grace'. And to offer a work of art is to offer delight and so a gift 'meritoriously', not just the usefulness of instruction.⁴⁰

The political advantage of vitalism is that the creative human effort is here in tune with, even disclosive of, the ultimate. But the hope for positive social construction demands more than this heroic individualism – it demands that our mutual love, relating and surprising in order to forge new bonds, be also in tune with the ultimate.

But supposing that we were to hear the music of Messiaen, whose thoughts about territory and the refrain are invoked at the most pivotal point of *A Thousand Plateaus*, otherwise than he was heard by Deleuze? In his own voluminous but fragmentary writings, the composer constantly tries to fuse the thought of Bergson on time with the thoughts of Aquinas on the relation of time and the cosmos to eternity.⁴¹ He certainly embraces the notion that music is primarily non-identical repetition, continuous variation and so manifests *durée*, yet he denies that the latter is 'immediately given' to consciousness – instead it is only experienced through all our corporeal and spatial interactions that alone produce continuous rhythm. And even though the latter is the temporal essence of music, sound has a synaesthetic aspect which conjures up for us colours, specific spatial sites and objects of visual contemplation. Hence for all the abstractness of Messiaen's rhythmic lines and for all his invoking of the non-narrative dimensions of intensity, timbre, polyrhythm, polydynamics, polyharmony, heteroharmony and so forth (and arguably he neglects too much the narrative dimension, writing *no* liturgical music!) his music remains situated and representational. In keeping with this, the step-ways forward movements always simultaneously spread out into a vast and varied simultaneous sonority. As his pupil Pierre Boulez put it, what one should hear through all this is the strange 'diagonal' where harmony and colour blend with rhythm and melody.⁴²

³⁹ For a critique of Plotinus in relation to the gift, see Claude Bruaire, *L'être et l'esprit* (Paris: PUF 1983) 95-107

⁴⁰ Iannis Xenakis, *Arts/Sciences Alloys: the thesis defence of Iannis Xenakis before Olivier Messiaen et al* trans Sharon Kanach (New York: Pendragon press, 1985) 27-47, 61-79 (dialogues with Olivier Messiaen and Michel Serres, respectively).

⁴¹ Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur et d'Ornithologie*, Tome I (Paris: Leduc, 1994) esp 7-52

⁴² Pierre Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship* trans R. Weinstock (New York: Knopf, 1968), 231-232, 295-301, 382-383

But in that case the diagonal is the mediation of the seemingly heterogeneous. It is, in fact, another name for the *metaxu*. And for Deleuze it is this diagonal that is the line of flight. But can this be the true diagonal, the true between, if it veers hopelessly between vertical arboreality and a never fully attained quality of the sheerly rhizomatic? This Deleuzian diagonal is not, indeed, a relation, since it seeks to escape from both traps – but really it can never escape from either and is stuck in a shuttle. Just because, in order to be a free pure relationality without relation between points it must escape the vertical and the horizontal, its relationality is fully captured all the time by either pole. Moreover, its diagonality does not *express*, participate in the absolute, since this is the sheer horizontality of the purely virtual.....

In this way immanentism, in refusing a transcendent God, always winds up by deifying an impersonal process and ontologically subordinating those concrete situations within which alone human beings can truly dwell as human.

So Deleuze finally failed to hear Messiaen's diagonal as ultimate – or as on the way to an infinite diagonal. Messiaen's diagonal remains truly a pure relation just because it does not seek to escape its two co-ordinates and yet is still the 'surplus' to them which alone links them in order to render them elements of a complex, perhaps cosmic music.

Hence Deleuze mis-reads the line of flight. It goes just as much upwards with the trees as it burrows along with the roots of the prairie. If it is to escape and yet remain, it must continue to relate and never abandon one pole of this relating for the other. This means that its flight *denies* the ultimacy of any immanent process or any partially immanent Godhead, because this will always consecrate a duality that renders relationality subordinate. To say that the givenness of spatial laws traps us in impersonal fixity and cold terroristic rule is truebut the idea of a one-way impersonal temporal gift that gives only itself to itself traps us just as surely.

Instead, we need to think the vital as relational or metaxological. But in that case there is no controlling power within the finite world and there is nothing that inscribes a boundary round this world. There is only the sequence and pattern of inter-tangling diagonals in interaction with pattern-forming processes (horizontally) and open-ended always developing essences (vertically). Properly to re-constitute this world diagonally is indeed to move along a horizontal path, as when one is ascending an inclined staircase, but it is also to climb upwards, to reach beyond this world altogether. Progress forwards through time is possible because it is simultaneously a reaching to transcendence, not a re-invocation of a primordial impersonal process. We can therefore only reach towards better social relations insofar as we come to understand ourselves as participating in a higher source of relationality that constantly gives itself.

For if relations are to be ultimate within this world, they can only be grounded in relationality. But if this is something finite, then *either* it is a given set of spatial relations which reduces to a totality and is not relation, *or* it is a giving temporal relationality which reduces to the monism of time and again, is not a relation.

No, if relationality or 'the between' is to be ultimate within the world, then the world itself must be purely relation, purely a medium – down to its ground something received, such that it is at bottom a relation to itself as other, a reception of itself as gift which it must then give to itself -----this allows that the inner reality of the cosmos is vital, even psychic in Bergson's sense.⁴³ But it also ensures that the autopoietic is from the outset also relational, also social, also a response, also involved in giving and receiving. This alone ensures that hierarchic series are gifts and reversible – even the hierarchy of Creator and creation, since by perfect reception and response the human creature and the cosmos through him can be deified.

Within this conception, it does, indeed, remain true as for Carlyle and as recognised by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, that finite reality itself is a flimsy garment, a theatre, a dream. But it also ceases to be the case that this dream apparently conceals a 'real' spiritual dreamer, whose supposition in turn conceals the reality *only* of 'concealment', of dreaming. This 'postmodern' scenario was already mooted by the greatest Baroque dramatists, namely Shakespeare and Calderon, but they both also envisaged how it is outplayed within a Catholic dramaturgy.

For what matters in *The Tempest* within the magical artifice of Prospero's disclosure through fiction (allegorical masques) of the historical truth, and his conjuration of justice, is that both truth and justice must in the end subserve the higher and more voluntary magic of mercy and reconciliation. In this way, even though the cosmos remains a theatrical dream, Prospero can in the end abandon his 'rough magic' because he sees now this dream as upheld by divine mercy and grace. In other words, the 'dream' is real to a finite degree just because it allows some exercise of a non-compromising goodness which seeks a true 'between', or analogical co-dwelling of creatures, human and bestial. So whereas the 'dream' of appearance within immanence is constantly cancelled only to constantly reappear in a shuttle without meaning, the dream that creatively emanates from a transcendent source is granted a certain reality of its own, just to the measure that it is given, and gratefully returns, a certain share of the good. Here then, a being without the good is 'mere dream' or illusion, but a being with the good is also a good that is (somewhat) actual (rather than merely being merely intended, or primarily an imperative, as for Kant, or a pre-ontological subjectively constitutive imperative, as for Levinas.)⁴⁴

It is the same dramatic argument in Calderón's *La Vida es Sueno*.⁴⁵ Here the protagonist Segismund, Prince of Poland, has been imprisoned without any human contact in order to forestall a prophecy that he will rule as a tyrant. His father Basil

⁴³ This is argued by Bruaire, *L'être et l'esprit*, 51-87 and *passim*.

⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a Levinasian thesis of the priority of good over being could be seen as partially confirmed here. See William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* ed. Anne Barton (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1996) Act IV Scene I, 148-156: 'These our actors/as I foretold you, were all spirits, and [note]/are melted into air, into thin air:/ And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,/ The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,/The solemn temples, the great globe itself,/Yea, all which it inherit, shall all dissolve,/ And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,/Leave not a wrack behind'. See also, Act V Scene I, 40-47 and 10-20.

⁴⁵ Calderón de la Barca, 'Life is a Dream', trans Roy Campbell, in *The Classic Theatre Vol III: Six Spanish Plays* ed Eric Bentley (New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp407-480, esp p.456, p.466, p.477

feels that, in justice, this prophecy should be tested and has Segismund released, but on the merciful condition that if he should indeed prove tyrannous he will later be told that he has only dreamt that he was for a day a ruler. The prophecy is indeed fulfilled, and Segismund proves in one horrendous day of misgovernment to be both unruly and violent. However, he then himself concludes that whether or not he was dreaming during this interlude is irrelevant: for each of us only dreams what happens to us or what we are, insofar as we are always performing a role (as for Carlyle) and the entire Creation is itself a divine artifice in which we play our allotted parts. This means that, for Calderón, beneath the idea of disguise, lies the reality that, if there is *only* disguise then, whatever role we are performing, we are after all only performing ourselves as some mask or another. Thus in this instance, Segismund only dreams that he is a ruler, but ironically he truly is, by destiny, just this ruler, (so that he is, in fact dreaming who he really is), but then again such a role is purely an artifice, a seeming.

However, Segismund finally repents and is released to become a worthy ruler. It is realised that human beings are not bound to tragic fate and that the attempt to evade the prophecy itself ensured that Segismund became the inhuman monster that the prophecy foretold. Segismund declares that all that matters, awake or dreaming, is the doing of justice and the granting of mercy, for in this way finitude is granted its true measure of significance, and so of reality, in accordance with the divine intention: 'To act with virtue/Is what matters, since if this proves true./That truth's sufficient reason in itself;/If not, we win us friends against the time/When we at last awake.'⁴⁶ This is expressed in terms of absence of any true human life if it is 'without honour' and honour in turn is seen as a preparedness to receive gifts and, still more, liberally to grant them. Thus within the perspective of transcendence, appearances and temporary states are 'saved' because they are seen as instances of gift which can only be recognised if this founding generosity is taken up and perpetuated.

It follows that, if one allows the seemingly greater dualism of Creator and created, there ensues, paradoxically, no unbridgeable dualism, and no psychically unclimbable stairway. Within immanence one has to choose between the less real appearance of the vertical on the one hand and the less actual but more finally real truth of the horizontal on the other. But if the *metaxu* of diagonal relation is truly ultimate, then there is no duality in this world between appearance and reality or actuality and virtuality, for *all* is now, *more radically than for postmodernism*, ephemeral shadowy image, and yet the shadow can still in itself bear the trace of goodness, and therefore can fully participate in and not occlude the real, just in so far as the theatre of shadows becomes also the scene of an enactment of cosmic justice and mercy. (Towards all creatures, not just human ones.)

As for the duality between God and the world.....it does not exist in any simple fashion. For in leaving this world for God along the diagonal of Jacob's ladder one only receives back this world with more intensity and more advance towards its eschaton. As Maximus the Confessor put it: if the visible things refer always to the invisible, the invisible things refer always back to the visible.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Calderón, 'Life is a Dream' Act III, p.462

⁴⁷ Maximus the Confessor, 'The Church's Mystagogy' in *Selected Writings* trans George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), Chapter Two, p. 189

But is not relation abolished in God as the ultimate source? Not according to Catholic understanding. To the contrary it argues – and I am thinking especially of John Scotus Eriugena here -- that if God is the one who creates and receives back from the creation its tribute of praise, then he *is* this, as himself outside himself, but also he *is* this, as not merely himself within himself. We are given to ourselves vertically always in the mode of a simultaneous cosmic and social ecstasy towards finite others, because God is in himself both vertical interchange of gift and horizontal absolute continuity. God is at last *entirely* the diagonal medium because the Father is only ‘above’ the Son in generating the Son, and the process of engenderment is nothing but the Son in his vertical iconicity itself. (For this reason an ‘entire’ diagonal medium is, in an extraordinary sense, ‘univocally analogical’, because the Son is a ‘perfect’ likeness to the Father and univocally at one with him in infinite being, as Eckhart taught.)⁴⁸ This diagonal line is infinitely and entirely expressed in the Father-Son absolute substantive relation, but as infinite expression it is also infinitely unexhausted and like a fractal line winds on, as it were, from two to three and then presumably infinite dimensions in the Holy Spirit, whose substantive relation to Father and Son forms a ‘square’ on the base of their mutual love.

In the New Testament, the name of the receptive and exchanging Holy Spirit as the ultimate transcendental ‘between’ is therefore ‘gift’, but it is also therefore ‘life’. For if God is the infinitely sustained exchange of gift, then he is also supremely life, as that which is self-sustaining, self-increasing and self-engendering. And if God supremely gives to the Creation the gift of being, then he must also give to it life since, also in finitude, to be without remainder gift is to be likewise without remainder, yet here by grace of another, perpetually self-renewing.⁴⁹

Therefore the only perfected metaphysics of vitalism must be a Catholic one, a philosophy that is equally a true exegesis of the Gospel.

⁴⁸ See Burkhard Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity and Unity* trans Orrin F. Summerell (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: B.R. Grüner, 2001)

⁴⁹ Michel Henry has explored this in an indispensable way, despite the fact that his dualism of ‘inner’ life versus external embodiment (alluded to earlier in this article) and his concomitant claim that ‘auto-affection is transcendently prior to mediation by external sensation (a conclusion that is importantly disputed by Chrétien) gives a certain quasi-Manichean cast to his exegesis and theological reflections. See Michel Henry, *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* (Stanford Cal: Stanford UP 2003) and ‘Phenomenology of Life’ (a useful short summary of his entire philosophy) in *Angelaki* Vol 8 NO 2 2003, 97-111

