

Sketch of a Future Metaphysics

by Germain G. Grisez

I.

LIKE EVERYTHING else in our experience, the history of philosophy displays a cyclic pattern, or at least a partial repetition of pattern in its successive ages. If we reflect upon the first stage of western philosophy—from Thales to Socrates—we are struck by the rich diversity of topics, problems, interests, and styles of expression which appear. Many individuals begin their reflection independently, concerning themselves with diverse facets of experience. Within the contexts of separate inquiries into unrelated problems, diverse sources of evidence are used and many modes of argumentation are introduced. In pre-Platonic thought we discern no common purpose; the motivations which bring various men to commit themselves to what later will be regarded as the common philosophic enterprise are, so far as we can see, quite varied. The resources of ordinary and literary language are exploited in a variety of ways and developed in wholly new directions as novel modes of discourse are invented. Finally, we observe among the leading figures an evident lack of real communication, even when they happen to be aware of one another.

Textbooks and histories of philosophy reduce this stock of materials to intelligible order only by a liberal use of scissors and paste, and they achieve a plausible interpretation only by following some especially permissive canons. Imagine the plight of a student held to close textual study without the aid of any imported interpretative framework, and even without the assistance of a knowledge of subsequent philosophy.

Such was the place from which Plato had to begin. Neverthe-

less, he successfully comprehended this incoherent mass of material in the liberal unity of his thought and work. He introduced philosophy by bringing the relative order of dialogue out of a chaos of fragmentary reflections and episodic works. His genius produced a memorial, not only to his own spirit but also to that of his predecessors, incomparably richer and more structured than anything they had achieved. He invented many articulative devices, special means of distinguishing and uniting. Though we would not speak of a "Platonic system," considering the connotations the expression carries for us, we can hardly deny Plato the palm for being the first great synthetic mind in the history of philosophy, a history which we really can see as beginning before him only by virtue of his work.

The immediate subsequent history of philosophy consists largely of reactions to Plato, the different forms of which are important to notice.

Aristotle, fundamentally a follower of Plato, perhaps his equal in genius, accepted as his own the project on which Plato had embarked. Yet he diverged from Plato in important respects: he was more interested in nature, he invented new devices of logic, and the product of his synthetic thought had more definite articulation.

Other members of the Academy remained disciples of Plato, and his philosophy continued to draw new followers for centuries. The results of this discipleship after a few generations were several abstracted and simplified versions of certain striking aspects of Plato's work—the first systematic tradition. Plato himself probably would have disowned all the degenerate Platonisms of his loyal followers as betrayals of philosophy; we know that he did in fact disown the first such product of discipleship.

Still other thinkers arose outside the Academy as they found some facet of experience, some limited realm of reflection, which they felt even Plato had failed to treat adequately, and

they proceeded to develop, independently and yet against the Platonic scene, a new fragment of thought. Most notably, the Fathers of the Christian Church reacted in this way, for they believed that they were confronted with a reality and entrusted with a gospel the ignorance of which rendered philosophy, epitomized by Plato, obsolete.

There was a like variety of reactions to Aristotle, and to Plato and Aristotle together. However, in Aristotle's case no one arose who could accept the synthetic project as his own and make a successful attempt to stand to Aristotle as Aristotle stands to Plato. Although many, including Boethius, sought to mediate the issues between Plato and Aristotle in order to achieve an ultimate synthesis, I think it fair to say that the verdict of history is that the results of such efforts were in every case less valuable than either of their contributing sources by itself.

It seems to me a plausible construction of the history of philosophy to say that a like pattern of development, synthesis, and reaction has been repeated in each age. In the course of the reaction there comes a time when the spirit of the old systems is lost, so that one can no longer learn from them what philosophy is. The traditions dry up, the schools close or become enclosed in fruitless scholastic repetition. Isolated efforts at reflection independent of the frameworks of the old systems begin to appear; they gain more from their fresh immediacy than they lose from their narrowness of scope. At length the comprehensive thinkers appear: Aquinas and Scotus in medieval philosophy, Kant and Hegel in classical modern philosophy. And each of them projects his great new synthesis.

Only later history will be able to say where we are at present. We no longer consider ourselves modern; too many new beginnings have been made, and thought has moved so swiftly that the conception of philosophy common to Kant and Hegel is no longer adequate for us. Perhaps the first of a pair of great

syntheses already has appeared. If so, the pattern allows for another which should be less creative, less flexible, but more systematic and more formal in its methodology.

Increasingly in recent works, the notion of order has been used to mark fundamental continuities and discontinuities in reality. The order of language is contrasted with the order of objects; the order of nature is contrasted with the order of human existence; the social order is contrasted with the order of material culture. In the sketch which follows, I propose a way in which these whisperings might become an articulated discourse capable of expressing a new metaphysics. Of course, there is a vast difference between a sketch and the finished work it projects.

II.

Suppose we attend a lecture by a philosopher who discusses a problem of some interest. What is it that we *really* hear at the lecture?

Asked this question afterwards, we might reply in several different ways. If we happen to be interested in physics, we might comment on the sound which we heard, and evaluate the man's voice, its amplification, the acoustics of the hall. If we attended to the line of argument, we might talk over the problem itself, the evidence and arguments which were offered, the clarification gained, and evaluate the competence of the piece of philosophic workmanship we had heard. If we were impressed by the speaker himself, we might express our appreciation of the man's character and commitment to philosophy, and we might exclaim that we now know how the Athenians felt after listening to Socrates. Finally, if we were concerned about the difficulties of expression and communication, we might remark upon the words and phrases, the subtle and accurate use of language we had noticed. In short, if a problem is presented for our consideration, we may *really* hear one or more of the following: the sounds, the problem, the person, and the language.

Let us look more carefully at the order of reality in which each of these is located.

First of all, if we really hear sounds, it is because we are organisms with a certain specialized organ for sound perception and that organ is functioning in a certain way under certain conditions. Of course not all organisms are capable of perceiving sounds. Biology, physiology, and psychology are relevant here. They distinguish sound perception from other sensations, they distinguish sensation from the tropisms of plants, they distinguish human hearing from that of other animals. Moreover, a consideration of the characteristics of various elements and compounds and also of subatomic particles is likely to be relevant to this view, for not only do these have to be taken into account for the sake of biology, but for a physical treatise on sound, and for the engineer's work on sound conveyance and reproduction.

Thus, if sounds really are heard they are enmeshed in the order of reality that we call "the world of nature." This world contains organisms of various kinds, and it also contains inorganic substances, some of which are compounds, some elements, some free subatomic particles. The things in the world of nature are numerable and measurable, but counting and measuring them often becomes difficult, because they are not neatly isolated and delimited one against another, but mutually condition and interpenetrate each other. Each thing in nature goes to make up part of the environment of each other one, and there is a constant process of interchange among them all. Still, nature is not a homogeneous mass but a dynamic system, and natural entities are to some extent distinguished from one another with their own shapes and dispositions, their own abilities, and receptivities, and resistances. And so it happens that definite events occur, events which involve and affect distinct natural entities—events, for example, such as sounding and hearing a sound.

Consequently, we find the reality of natural entities, organic and inorganic, and there is a sense in which we say that for something really to exist it must be among the things there are in the world of nature, and "to exist" means to have an environment and at the same time to be a part of the environment of the others which make up an entity's own environment. Quantities, relations, qualities, and events also are natural, and they may be said to exist in nature in a secondary way, inasmuch as natural things are conditioned by them. Of themselves, these are not natural things, but a thing in nature has quantity, relations, and dispositions, and it takes part in natural events.

And so if we attend a lecture and if we hear, we assuredly hear some sounds, and they are real sounds, a series of natural events.

Now let us consider the second possibility, that we really hear the problem which is being proposed. In that case, after the lecture is over we may or may not be inclined to agree with it, but we know what the philosopher was talking about. To know what he was talking about, we could not go off in a reverie about the better things we might have been doing. Rather, we had to follow the meaning of what he was saying, and we had to grasp what propositions were asserted and what ones were denied. We had to comprehend the problem, by following the inquiry it introduced, and knowing the thrust of the course of thought the philosopher was projecting. Logic is relevant here, to analyze the argument presented, to isolate the key meanings and find the elementary propositions on which the whole argument rests. The point of such an analysis would be to help more perfectly in following out the treatment of the problem, so that we would really know what was the tendency of the thought—in short, what the lecturer himself was thinking of.

Thus, if a problem really is heard, it is introduced into an order of reality that we call "the intentional." The intentional consists in a structure of meanings and propositions relevant

to definite problems about some subject matter or other. Meanings, of course, may have instances, and they mark off classes. Propositions may have facts which verify or falsify, confirm or disconfirm, justify or condemn them. Thus, at least sometimes, an analysis of what inquiry turns up will enable us to resolve a problem by linking it to evidence, so that we can reach a definite conclusion.

Hence we have the reality of intentional entities, problems reducible to meanings and propositions, and there is a sense in which we say that for something really to be it must be a thought content that can be dealt with somehow on the basis of some kind of evidence—in other words, to be is to be a known truth. Instances and classes, facts and conclusions also are intentional, and they exist in inquiry in a secondary way, inasmuch as they enter into the resolution of a problem through which thought is fixed upon a subject matter. Of themselves, these are not intentional entities, but an intentional entity may have instances or be classified, it may refer to a fact or lead to a conclusion, if one is able to arrive at something that the thinking is about.

And so if we attend a lecture in which a competent philosopher discusses a problem, and if we hear and follow it, then we really hear a problem, and it is a real problem, not merely a pseudo-problem, a problem susceptible of conclusion in some new knowledge about the subject matter under consideration.

Now let us consider the third possibility, that we really hear the person. We not only speak of giving someone a hearing and hearing someone out, but we also speak of being a good listener. A good listener is not susceptible to the attack which adolescents so often make on their parents—"You never really hear what I'm saying to you." *Cor ad cor loquitur*, and there is a community of feeling and a communication of personality to be gained or lost, intensified or diminished.

To recognize another and to respond to him as a person is

to form an appreciation of the unique orientation and self-commitment through which he acts, to interpret and evaluate what he does as an individual or as a member of a community in so far as what he does is not mere behavior but is intelligently guided action in accordance with his chosen purposes. To form an appreciation of his orientation is more than to analyze it and perhaps is not at all to analyze it. To appreciate another is to communicate with him in purpose, to take up cause with him, even if it is to reject his intent. To quarrel takes some common ground, and if one cannot even quarrel with another the only possibility is to treat him as an unfree thing, as a non-person. That is one reason why lovers quarrel more than casual acquaintances do.

Thus, if a person really is heard he is allowed to stand out in an order of reality that we call "society" or, more concretely, "human life." This sphere integrates free agents in their personal relationships, and it is divided and harmonized in various modes and levels of communion in human action. Virtues and vices, customs and laws, agreements and conflicts, institutions and unique moments of fulfillment and tragedy—all these arise in human life through the unfolding of the self-determined orientations of persons in human action having moral significance.

Thus we have the reality of persons, and there is a sense in which we say that to exist is to be a person or a personal entity—that is, a moral person, a society. And in this sense "to exist" means to act intelligently according to an orientation based upon a fundamental, free self-commitment. Virtues and vices, customs and laws, and the rest also are human, moral-social, or, if one prefers, existential, inasmuch as human life gives rise to them. Of themselves, these entities are not human, but human existence is shaped by them and carried on through them, and so all of these derivative moral-social entities have a subsidiary reality by virtue of their significance for our lives.

And so if we listen to a great philosopher, if we really cooperate with him, if we really share his concern, then we assuredly really hear a real person trying to communicate his interest and to engage our concern for what concerns him.

Now let us consider the fourth possibility, that at a lecture we really hear talk, a linguistic exercise. Actual language is something more than mere sounds, since obviously one who does not speak English could hear the sounds as well as or better than a native and yet not hear the language. But the language also is something other than the problem with its intentional reality, as the possibility of translation, even though it is imperfect, makes clear.

Now I do not mean to take a stand at the moment on the complex problems concerning the relationships between thought and expression. Behavioristically considered, the process of thinking and the process of forming signs certainly are continuous, perhaps inseparable. But language is a matter of use, for it depends upon the use of sounds or marks to accomplish certain tasks. Language, to be sure, sometimes is closely related to meaning, but sometimes it also is closely related to natural events and to existential encounters. Clearly, not all the tasks of language constitute the linguistic item a sign, for some of them are mere expressions, as for example are many exclamations which differ in different languages. Sometimes the linguistic item has an existential function, it plays a role in human intercourse, although it neither signifies nor expresses anything. "Goodbye," for example, need not express any feeling or convey any meaning, but it does help to bring a meeting to a close and to initiate departure; it is purely a performatory utterance.

In its various roles, the use which constitutes language blends off into other uses which ordinarily are not considered to be instances of language. If, for example, an exclamation such as "ouch" is clearly an instance of language, a groan might be thought of as linguistic too. But there are other modes of

expression, such as painting and music. These are uses of materials for expression, at least sometimes in part for this, and while they would not be called language by most people, they are much closer to certain instances of the uses which constitute language than all of those uses are to one another. Again, if the words in a mathematics or science book are language, how are we to consider geometrical constructions or laboratory demonstrations? Moreover, if we are to consider "goodbye" language, why not consider a wink to be language? And the wink leads us to the language of love, which includes everything from kisses to blows, from glances to gifts. Evidently, by reflecting upon the words a lecturer utters, as the real objects of our hearing, we have stumbled into a large domain, that of objective culture. Much of this domain can be encompassed by the word "symbol," if we use that word very broadly, but the symbolic also merges into the technical. Human use not only constitutes language and fine art, but also equipment and machines, products and refuse.

Thus, if words really are heard, they are picked out of an order of reality that we can call "objective culture" or "the symbolic and the artificial," including in the artificial all the things we make. The symbolic and artificial consists in uses, and every use establishes a three-term relation involving a person, a natural entity, and an intention. Some of the consequences of uses are fairly stable—for example, written language, a painting, a monument, or a machine. Other consequences of use are ephemeral, coming and going in the operation itself—for example, a drink of water, an uttered sentence, or a kiss. The relatively stable work is considered to be symbolic or artificial, but we must observe that its permanence as an object can be reduced to its person, and its natural material, and its intention. The existence of the symbolic and artificial as such belongs to it from the operation of use alone.

Hence we have the reality of objective culture, symbols and

art works, including in the latter all performances and products, and there is a sense in which we say that for something really to be it must be a use, or at least be a term of the use-relation. The terms of the use-relation of themselves are not symbolic or artificial, but they connect with the symbolic or artificial in the reality of the act of use.

And so if we listen to a lecturer, and if we know how to carry out the system of uses which constitute the language spoken, then we really hear a real use of sound to communicate to us concerning a problem.

To sum up this entire section—what we *really* hear can be considered four times over, and each of these four distinguishable objects of hearing can be located in its own order of reality: sounds can be located in nature in which they are enmeshed, the problem can be located in the intentional into whose elements it is reduced, the speaker can be found in the moral-social order of human existence in which life is lived, and language can be located in objective culture as part of the set of things which follow upon operations of use.

III.

Let me try to emphasize and clarify this conclusion to make it as sharp as possible. The word “hear” has not one meaning, but at least four meanings, and these diverse meanings appear when we consider what it is that can be said “to be heard.” I am not especially concerned with hearing for its own sake, but I have begun from it because the word “hearing” has appropriate meanings for each of the four orders. My argument is that it is not the case that what is “heard” in one of the four senses really is heard, while what is “heard” in the other senses is only said to be heard by some strange distortion of the word’s true meaning. Nor is it the case that one of these four objects of hearing is real, while the others are merely subjective (i. e., not natural), or apparent (i. e., not reducible to the elements of

the intentional), or inauthentic (i. e., not rooted in the center of a moral personality), or imitation (i. e., not of full use).

Whatever it is that is heard, whether sounds or meanings or persons or linguistic uses, what the order-ambiguous word "heard" refers to is neither real nor unreal in isolation from everything else. But in its connection with hearing, what is heard is discovered by our reflection to lie at a juncture in a complex network which enmeshes that object and our hearing together. So enmeshed, the object has a certain reality; it is real in a sense appropriate to the network or order in which we find it.

The word "order" is itself order-ambiguous. In one sense order presupposes change, and it implies a pattern in the process that both delimits and joins factors which become involved with one another in events; such an order extends to the entire set of factors that constitutes the only absolutely closed system—the universe. In another sense, order presupposes wonder and it implies that if we begin using consistently any integrated method for satisfying wonder by finding and following connections, we shall eventually come upon everything, since a method adequate to answer all questions must be adequate to all things. In a third sense, order presupposes the authoritativeness of value, and implies the possibility of a creative response which relates oneself to anything else according to what is due to it, since a person not only must select a scheme of things in which he has a certain role or assign himself a role in the scheme of things but also must fulfill the role he takes upon himself. In a fourth and final sense, order presupposes a limited sphere, and implies a position outside from which to operate upon what is within in such a way that it comes to be for something which it is not in itself, as a symbol *stands for* the symbolized and a product *is for* the function which renders it a product of use.

All well and good, a critic might remark, but why multiply

distinctions without necessity? It may be considered that what I am proposing is a rather strange distortion, but if the critic were willing to follow me a way for the sake of argument, he might concede that true reality—that is, real reality—abides in what approximates to one of the four so-called “orders of reality” which I have indicated, and that the other three can be situated in it suitably enough, once it is restored to its pristine condition by having the other three rejoined to it, as they really are joined.

Someone might wish to argue, in the first place, that if man is part of nature, an only moderately sophisticated human psychology can locate the intentional, the moral-social, and the symbolic-artificial in man, considering man in his complete being and operation within his full environment. Surely knowledge, interpersonal behavior, and use are natural processes, unless we arbitrarily restrict the notion of nature to the subject matters of physics, chemistry, and biology, and set man as a subject over against the objective development of the universe of which man is only one part.

But someone else might wish to argue, in the second place, that reality and objective existence are not independent of meanings and of facts. The intentional, of course, is a house with many mansions, and so it has room for nature, society, and art. Yet reality depends on a discrimination among ideas, and the objective is a correlate of the subjective. Hence, if we avoid naive realism and if we do not confuse biological extroversion with intuition, it is evident that the reality of everything is a function of its place in the structure of meanings and facts, and it is equally evident that it is a mistake to expand distinctions between modes of intentionality into a diversity of orders of being.

Moreover, someone else might wish to argue, in the third place, that all of these distinctions depend upon and find a place within one's personal or social orientation. The variety of

cultures is a fact, and while it is true that necessary preconditions for the conduct of life are everywhere classed as nature, and perfect fulfillments of purpose as ideal, and possessions and expressive vehicles of the self are counted as symbolic or artificial, still these distinctions shift from one culture to another. And not only does the distinction between the natural and the artificial shift dramatically—for example, we consider to be poetic fiction what many a primitive considers fundamental natural reality—but the distinctions even shift a good bit from one philosopher to another, since every philosopher has his belief and each basic commitment has its own all-pervasive consequences. Thus I may be granted the right to make these distinctions as I please, but my view may be considered unspeakably dogmatic and intolerant if I suppose that everyone ought to make them in the same way that I do.

Finally, someone else may wish to argue that what I am saying, while interesting enough, does not at all have the status with which I am attempting to endow it. It may very well be economical or even indispensable to distinguish the meanings of the word “real” as I am suggesting, or it may in any case be true that the word is used with some such variety of senses, but to go from such a distinction to an assertion of many orders of reality is a rather obvious blunder. For of all meaningless questions, no doubt the most meaningless are those which arise from the failure to stop at that point beyond which a legitimate analysis ought not to proceed.

Now, I cannot attempt to respond adequately to these arguments in this sketch. However, I do wish to suggest some points which I think might be developed in an adequate response.

If we compare any one of the orders of reality that I have distinguished with the other three, asking ourselves how it might be distributed among them rather than how it might dispose of them within its own domain, we note that its relationships to

the others need not be viewed simply as the reciprocals of their relationships to it.

Beginning with nature as an order of reality, but supposing at the same time that the other orders also are real and irreducible to nature, we observe that things enmeshed in the world of nature can also become ingredients of the intentional by entering experience, they can become ingredients of the moral-social by being taken as goals or obstacles or even as scenery for life, and they can become ingredients in the artificial by being assumed as materials for use.

Again, beginning with the intentional as an order of reality, but assuming at the same time that the other orders also are real and irreducible to ideas, we observe that elements in the structure of the intentional can also become ingredients in the world of nature by being treated as appearances—phenomena—they can become ingredients of the moral-social by being admitted into deliberation, or justification, or ideology, and they can become ingredients of the artificial by serving as plans, programs, or interpretations.

Moreover, beginning with the moral-social as an order of reality, but believing at the same time that the other orders also are real and irreducible to human existence, we observe that moments in the life of a person can become ingredients of nature by spreading through human acts into natural processes, they can become ingredients of the intentional by fixation in judgments, prejudices, contentions, and points of view, they can become ingredients of the artificial by being the agency of a person performing a use which constitutes a symbol or a product.

Finally, beginning with objective culture as an order of reality, but at the same time treating the other orders as real and as irreducible to the symbolic and artificial, we observe that the latter can become ingredients of nature by being means of adaptation and satisfaction of needs, they can become ingredi-

ents of the intentional as methods of inquiry and instruments of its prosecution, they can become ingredients of the moral-social as embodiments of human values.

In complexity there is a certain richness, and what I am suggesting now is that a necessary part of the response to arguments which would attempt to reduce the diversity of orders to one for the sake of simplicity is that the maintenance of the distinctions has the advantage of allowing us to make sense of a number of items which philosophers cannot avoid dealing with sooner or later. Some of our worst philosophic difficulties revolve about these items—items such as reason within freedom and commitment within knowledge, nature bursting in upon thought and subjective conditions of our thought obscuring nature, technology disrupting human community and prejudice interfering with communication and efficiency.

Moreover, if the mutual exclusions of various reductionistic positions are not sufficient response to one another, the one fact which every reductionistic view must face is that there are opposing positions which are quite as capable of disposing of it as it is of disposing of them. A scheme which maintains multiple diverse and irreducible orders of reality, and which refuses to consider any of these primary in relation to the others except in a limited mode of primacy appropriate to itself, promises a more plausible treatment of the problems of pluralism and unity in philosophy itself.

However, an astute critic would proceed to object that in making my claims I must myself be standing in one or the other order of reality and appraising the rest from that point of view. This objection amounts to one more attempt to subject the multiple view to reduction. It might be expressed in any one of the ways available—for example, by saying that the distinctions I am suggesting are merely of entities, or of modes of knowing, or of interests, or of languages. Obviously, my only means of defense is to claim that if the focus of the objection is

made precise, I shall be found there not in one but in four diverse positions of response simultaneously. On the other hand, I might ask the critic how he can defend his position without implicitly denying his own claims? For example, if thought is nothing but nature, how can it be that there is a thinkable alternative which makes it occur to the naturalistic reductionist to say that there is no real alternative?

A still more serious objection to the position I am proposing may be constructed on the pattern I have just now suggested against reductionistic views. How can I think and express the diversity and irreducibility of the orders of reality if they are indeed diverse and irreducible? Even to say that much is to think of the four at once and to refer to them under a common rubric.

To this objection a twofold response is necessary. In the first place, the four orders thought of at once, even as diverse, do constitute somehow a unified object of thought. In the second place, the possibility of my being found in a fourfold position of response indicates that there is somehow a unity in me, a unity in which my body, my thought, my interest, and my use of language converge, the unity of an *I* which is the principle of me and my and mine in every order.

Let us consider first the implied unity of object. Here it is important to notice first that all of the pivotal expressions I have been using—for example, “order,” “reality,” and “irreducible”—are ambiguous to the four orders. Still, this ambiguity is not that of expressions which are used with varying meanings merely by an accident of language; it is a translatable ambiguity which can be found in many and perhaps in all languages, and this fact shows that the unity involved here is more than merely verbal. This more than verbal unity, however, is not presented in the distinctions of the orders of entity, for although the four can be unified from within one order, they can be unified in alternative ways from within the other orders.

Multiple diverse and irreducible orders of entity foreshadow a further unity which they do not enclose nor positively represent; stripped to bare essentials, the position I am defending can be expressed in precise formulation as a merely negative one: "Reality cannot be limited by the scope of its reductions."

The indicated unity in me, the unity of the self, presents a more difficult problem and one which will require the most careful development in an articulated metaphysics. Several temptations must be set aside.

First, there is the temptation to identify the self with the natural body I can point to as me, the center to which all of nature converges so far as I am concerned. To make this tempting identification is to yield to the reduction of all orders of reality to nature through the medium of the self, a reduction easy to fall into because it is not a straightforward and naive move, but a sophisticated gambit which leaves intact a provisional distinction of orders within an ultimate naturalism.

But, second, similar temptations to identify the unity of the self with the thinking of the intentional order, the choosing of the existential order, or the operating of the artificial and symbolic order also must be rejected. Each of these identifications also would lead to a sophisticated reduction, and one all the more plausible inasmuch as it avoids the inadequacies of naturalism and all the more appealing inasmuch as it seems to provide an ultimate justification for our human conviction that man—or, at least, this man, I—must be the center of reality.

In the third place, we may be tempted to deny that there is any residual *I* after the distribution of me and my and mine to the various places in each order of reality where they occur, and we may yield to this temptation because knowledge limited to any single order of reality can include whatever is there as me or my or mine without reference to a self. But this ground for the rejection of the residual *I* is not sufficient, for we are not led to the self by inquiry into one of the orders of reality, but

by reflection upon our inquiry into their irreducible distinction, a reflection which implies a unity in reflecting.

In the fourth place, we may be tempted to treat the residual *I* as a relation among the diverse and irreducible modes of entity. Now there are in fact relationships among them, precisely those which are indicated by saying that each is in its own way an ingredient in the others, but these relations, as I have said before, can be accounted for within the orders involved, and each order accounts for its relationships with the others in its own way. The ultimate irreducibility of the orders is not an additional relation, but only a denial of further relation, and this denial is merely an intention among the other intentions which constitute the inquiry called "metaphysics." Thus the self as relation is objectively empty, and a theory of the self which yields to this temptation inevitably provides content for the relational self by drawing upon the resources of one of the orders of reality—the self becomes thinking or freedom or action, and we have again a plausible and appealing reduction of reality to man.

After setting aside all of these temptations which are presented by the problem of the residual *I*, what remains that we can say of the mystery of the self? Two characteristics can be attributed to it, I think, without leading to reduction.

First, it is reflexive. This characteristic is what raises the problem of the self in the first place. But for reflexivity I would not be troubled by finding myself at once in four postures of response to reductionistic attacks upon the diversity of orders of entity which I am defending. And but for reflexivity the criticisms I have suggested of reductionistic views would not be effective; in fact, as I shall propose shortly, the peculiar method of metaphysics especially requires argument which appeals to reflexivity.

A second characteristic of the residual *I* is that in diverse ways it assumes the various orders of entity to itself, and strews

me, my, and mine about in them. For although these are not signs of self within the orders of entity, and we always can dispense with self in considering any order of entity in and by itself, they are signs of the entry of entity of every order into the self. The birth of a certain organism in the middle of nature initiates my life; the consciousness of thinking and content thought is my knowledge; the making up of my mind to an action makes it my responsibility; self-originated operation produces a work which is original and in the full sense mine.

In sum, I believe it will be necessary to grant the reality, apart from any of the diverse and irreducible orders of entity, of a residual *I*, a principle which of itself is empty reflexivity, and which for that very reason is not an ingredient in any of the orders, but which is capable of assuming all of them as ingredients in itself, finding content for the self by making its empty reflexivity a rich and endless reflection. If the word "man" is used to refer to the residual *I*, the self which is a limiting principle of me and my and mine, it does not foreshadow in a negative way some absolute reality transcending the diversity of orders of reality; rather it indicates in a positive way what could only be a negative principle except for its reflexivity, which becomes reflection thanks to the contributions of each order of reality.

IV.

What I have been proposing so far is not a problem, but rather a schematic outline of a metaphysics which I envisage as the outcome of inquiry concerning the metaphysical problem: What on the whole and in the end is real, and why is it so? The answer I have been suggesting is that everything is real in one way or another, in fact in several ways, but that entities of each order of reality are not, as such, entities real in virtue of their inclusion in other orders of reality, so that no single order of reality completely encloses everything.

However, I by no means suppose that the schematism I have

been outlining can by itself be called a metaphysics. For a complete metaphysics, something more than a grand design is necessary. One must have a method which controls the working out of problems to reach the design, and this method must take into account the problem of verification in metaphysics. Otherwise, metaphysics becomes a kind of poetry or a set of dogmatic formulae to which one can adhere only by irrational commitment.

Now I do not think that the method of metaphysics is simply direct observation and generalization, nor is it simply free speculation, nor is it simply unreasoned choice, nor is it simply the analysis of meanings. The method of metaphysics has some room for observation, for free speculation, for choice, and for meaning analysis, but each of these must be controlled by the others.

The analysis of meanings does reveal some general conditions of meaning which cannot be denied, as Aristotle showed, since an attempt to deny them becomes either meaningless or simultaneously an affirmation of them. These general conditions of meaning are not of great interest in themselves, and one can inquire into their own presuppositions not in general but only in particular cases by beginning with various examples of discourse. And here choice enters, since it is possible to begin with one example as well as with any other—indeed, it is possible not to begin at all. At the same time, there are certain facts: for example, the fact of change in nature, the fact of doubt and questioning, the fact of interest, the fact of effectiveness in operation. The metaphysician thus begins with a threefold supply of data: common conditions of meaning, examples of discourse, and some obvious facts. His problem is to determine what is necessarily presupposed by his data. He may not fashion a hypothesis which could account for his data without really being so, since whatever he offers must be derived from the data with necessity, and the sort of data he confronts do not

allow alternatives. Still, there is room in the metaphysician's procedure for free speculation, since any objection or counterposition which can be formulated and posed must be answered; nothing is ruled out a priori as irrelevant.

If we were to begin with examples of discourse from the natural sciences, from logic, from moral and political argument, and from criticism, and if we were to attend to the minimum requirements for meaning in each case, I think we would discover quite diverse modes of definition underlying each mode of discourse. Further, if we were to note how one discoursing in each mode attempts to establish a position and to eliminate its alternatives, I think we should discover implicit appeals to diverse facts in the diverse modes of discourse. Moreover, in each mode of discourse it is possible to determine meaning without establishing a position—that is, without verifying—and the effort to establish fundamental positions in any mode of discourse eventually leads to one of the other modes of discourse and to some attempt to reflect upon the relationships of the two to one another. Carrying on such reflection with continuous free speculation against the results leads to alternative reductions and to repeated efforts at synthesis by distinguishing factors within a complex unity.

I would claim that the pluralistic synthesis I am proposing is a necessary implication of the irreducibility of modes of defining and the intersection of efforts at verifying. That is to say, the situation with respect to definition and verification presupposes many diverse orders of reality, no one of which exhausts what it is to be real. Though each order of reality is, the fact that something *is* is not identical with its being of a certain order. I do not mean to suggest that what holds for knowledge holds for its objects—i. e., that the modes of human knowing are necessary conditions for being as such. I only mean to suggest that what is incompatible with the knowability of an object which we do know is necessarily not a condition for being

as such—i. e., that what cannot hold true of reality, *supposing that it is known as in fact it is known*, cannot possibly hold true of reality, and hence necessarily does not hold true of it.

Moreover, I am not claiming that the metaphysics sketched here would be complete. Further efforts might add to it, or might indicate other metaphysical conclusions which were simply irrelevant to it. Further, even in its own terms it would have to be completed by descending to an examination of the meanings of “order” and “reality” for each order, and taking up piecemeal the problems which arise as each order is ingredient in the others. Only in this descent does metaphysics attain any positive knowledge; reality as such is not positively known.

Furthermore (although it is not actually a separate question), we must not only consider method but also verification procedure in metaphysics, just as in any other knowledge. I say it is not a separate question, since metaphysics does not in its method first formulate its conclusions and only afterwards verify them. Rather, the initial access to the subject matter, which is a negative proposition, is also a verified conclusion of metaphysics. If metaphysics is possible at all, its statements are not open to falsification, although they are not merely formal truths, for they are denials of the reduction of reality as such to any one order of it.

Let us look briefly at the methodological problems which the metaphysician faces from the point of view of the truth of his conclusions.

First of all, he cannot merely claim to have an ineffable knowledge. He must communicate in a rational discourse. He has to start his discourse somewhere, and he has to use words with some meanings. Recently we have discovered that meeting this requirement is not so easy as might have been supposed in times past. Not that linguistic analysis shows all metaphysical statements to be meaningless, but it does show that there are serious difficulties in formulating such statements and that it is

easy to fall into nonsense unawares. Also, the close examination to which the meaning of metaphysical statements should be subjected will reveal the modest limits of defensible claims, so that assertions which seem startling at first may turn out to be innocuous commonplaces, or at least much less impressive, after analysis.

In the second place, as I have mentioned already, a metaphysician must contend with some facts, and these include the fact that there are other philosophies and that his own philosophy probably will not be the last effort of its kind. About this point we need not be naive. Facts, along with everything else, are defined within a metaphysics, and so the metaphysician who seeks absolutely independent facts to verify his position is begging the question. However, if the metaphysician must define the facts, still there is something he must define, and so he has some limits which are not purely formal ones.

But in the third place, the metaphysician faces the problem of consistency. Of course, he can define consistency in various ways, but then he must be true to himself after his own fashion, and that is easier said than done. If he excludes nothing at all, then he also says nothing at all; if he excludes something, he may be brusquely reminded that he has excluded his own position according to his own requirements for consistency.

As a matter of fact, there are certain types of argument that are universally recognized as effective by metaphysics. These are arguments which depend directly or indirectly upon self-reference or which exclude a certain kind of infinite regress. Let me exemplify with the most formal kind of example, although the arguments are employed constantly in metaphysical investigations. Suppose someone says, "All statements are false." He has denied the statement itself, unless he makes an exception of it. Suppose he says, "All statements are true." We have merely to disagree, and then he must concede error unless he makes an exception of our disagreeing statement.

Suppose he attempts to avoid the initial difficulties by making the exceptions. Then, if he wishes to say anything to defend them, he shall find himself in the same difficulty as long as he attempts to maintain his original position, or he will have to make the same exception again *ad infinitum*. But such an infinite regress is unacceptable, for he shall never come to a point at which he can make a stand in defense of what he meant to be a position; hence, he shall never be able to take a position. If wisdom is the end, the inability in principle ever to take a position is excluded. But at the same time, if metaphysics concerns all things, it cannot avoid self-reference.

Let me get at this point in another way, not by considering the form in which effective metaphysical arguments are conducted, but rather the kind of premises which they employ. First principles cannot be established by demonstration, but that does not mean that they can be assumed as evident with no questions asked. It is the business of metaphysics to question them. How then are they to be defended? In Aristotle's terms, the defense will be dialectical. But does not a dialectical argument always proceed from something which is simply granted as true, conceded by an opponent? Yes. How then can a philosopher arrive at conclusions which will hold true beyond the special context of an argument with a particular opponent? Only by appealing to what no opponent can deny if he wishes to remain a metaphysician at all. Metaphysics, being a finite occupation, not being identical with reality itself, does have some limiting conditions, and so if a metaphysician can find arguments which appeal to these limiting conditions, he can establish a position which no other metaphysician can deny. That is what Aristotle did when he defended the principle of contradiction.

So far as the problem of verification is concerned, I am only saying that the position I am sketching would be difficult to attack by such refutation, since it seeks to exclude only those

positions which exclude from reality what somehow is thought to belong to it. More simply, if less accurately, my view is that reality is at least as complicated as anyone or all of us together think it is, and the residue of unanswered questions gives us reason to think it is even more complicated than that; hence, each effort to say what reality as such is not, or what it is in particular for something to be real, can be correct so far as it is self-consistent within the limits of its meaning, which is relative to facts that are not completely determined by it.

V.

These reflections on metaphysical method, abstruse as they necessarily are, may perhaps become clearer if we turn to another factor which must be considered if a metaphysical sketch is to be developed into a full-fledged metaphysics. Philosophy does not begin at the beginning of knowledge; rather, it begins with problems and the philosopher must deal with at least some of the positions on a question which make it a problem. Philosophy is reflective, and so, as I have mentioned before, it must consider the results or accomplishments of some prior awareness, and it takes its departure as a discourse by reference to some other discourse. The philosopher in any age begins from science or law or myth or poem, and in our age, with a great deal of philosophy already done, he begins from other philosophy. Otherwise, metaphysics would be a soliloquy; perhaps a satisfaction to the philosopher himself but unintelligible and irrelevant to everyone else. Thus the metaphysician finds himself compelled to be a historian of ideas to some extent, and a sketch of a metaphysical system such as I am giving here should include some suggestion as to how the available materials would be used.

Working with rather loose labels, I can suggest the range of materials which would be employed in the development of the metaphysics for which I have presented the outline. Recent

philosophic movements, trends fundamentally diverse from one another—logical positivism, phenomenological idealism, naturalism, existentialism, pragmatism, instrumentalism, dialectical materialism, plain language analysis—all of these unite in the rejection of Hegelian absolutism.

Now, I could not agree more willingly that the absolute idea infringed upon the reality of everything else. I can read books and journal articles of the initial wave of reaction to absolute idealism, and can read about the developments which I do not know first hand, with a feeling of deep satisfaction, for it is delightful to find the rich plurality, the variety and concreteness, the adventitiousness and irrationality, the uniqueness and irreducibility of so many phases of reality taking revenge on the implausible presumption of the absolute idea, which had threatened to swallow them all up, and pretended to reduce them all to mere moments in its own development.

Yet though there was such a reaction against absolutism, and though we can rejoice in it as a redress, we nevertheless cannot be altogether complacent about its consequences.

Naturalistic philosophers began absolutizing some natural principle, whether that was the atom or the evolutionary process. Now I begrudge nothing to nature, but the effect of elevating any natural principle to the status of an absolute was to place obstacles in the way of the full realization of knowledge, of life, and of the artificial and symbolic. We need only recall the exuberant excesses of mechanistic materialism, of behaviorism in psychology, of evolutionary theory in economic and social thought, and there are many other examples. But then too, some who began with intentions, with logical form or with ideas detached or bracketed, while doing well in getting rid of psychologism and unfounded assumptions which reduced logic to natural reality, proceeded to establish their own set of absolutes upon whose foundation everything else became relative. There have been various forms of logical reduction, of which logical

atomism was only one example. Another was the emphasis idealistic phenomenology placed on detached essences, which was an infringement on the rich reality of life as it is concretely lived—the personal reality of engaged existence. And again, existentialism has pointed to the irreducibility of existence and the centrality of commitment, but in doing so has made of it another absolute, and this tack has even led to the enthronement of pure arbitrariness over all else. Finally, rejecting or ignoring all of these, various forms of operationalism have arisen, positions which elevate use itself to the status of an absolute. The natural is what registers in a certain measure; the intentional is identified with language use; or the moral-social is reduced to economic and political manipulations.

Moreover, it has been characteristic of many of the reductions that have been carried out in reaction to Hegel that they have not proceeded in the direct and relatively naive manner which was common in the previous history of philosophy. For among the moves which Hegel made was the identification at the limit of his absolute with the human self. One can view this dialectical step either as elevation of the self or as abasement of the absolute. Perhaps Hegel meant it to be the former, but the elevation he proposed seemed to many who succeeded him too costly in its destruction of the peculiar uniqueness of the *I* underlying the familiar me, my, and mine. Hence these reactions moved on the sophisticated plane I mentioned above while discussing the residual *I*. One of the orders of entity was absolutized, not directly, but by making absolute the signs of the self in it, and then using the medium of the self to reduce everything to that order. The problems, the patterns of argument, and the results of reduction characteristic of most contemporary philosophies can be understood, I believe, with the assistance of this model.

For my own part, I do not wish to deny, in fact I precisely wish to assert, that there is a certain absoluteness in nature, in

the intentional, in the existential, and in the artificial-symbolic. Evolutionary process, pure meanings, commitments, and problematic situations—each of these candidates for the role played in Hegel's thought by the absolute idea—have a certain absoluteness, a "relative absoluteness" we might call it, for each marks a certain point beyond which reduction in one order of reality cannot proceed, a point beyond which it is senseless to seek a further point of reference. But no one of these starting points is so absolute that, standing alone as the total origin of reality, it can eliminate the others. None of the relatively absolute principles is absolutely absolute. The reality each of them has is insufficient to establish fully the position even of itself as it becomes an ingredient in other orders of reality. However, this concession, which must be made on behalf of every order of reality, does not deprive it of its own mode of reality; rather, that reality is protected by the mutuality of concessions.

However, what is to become of Hegel's absolute idea, the absolutely absolute? The direct attacks upon it in the developments of recent philosophy have succeeded only in substituting even stranger gods for it. And the reason, I think, is not far to seek. If nothing we know of is sufficient to establish fully the reality of any particular order of reality, and if reduction of each order to the others is to be resisted, then there must be a reference-point for reality which is not within the natural, nor within the intentional, nor within the existential, nor within the artificial-symbolic.

Such a reference-point might be said to be absolutely absolute, but in separating it from every order of reality, a guarded assertion of it can avoid claiming any positive knowledge of it as it is in itself. Thus Hegel's *definition* of the absolute can be avoided, and thereby we shall avoid casting all the limited absolutes, all the relative absolutes, into the abyss of absolute relativity. This development of the schematic metaphysics I am outlining amounts to the positing of an unknown God, which is

the one sure defense against all known gods. Methodologically, such a reference-point is unavoidable, since there must be that which makes possible the unified thought of reality in its diversity.

As I have argued previously, the self is not adapted to play this role, and attempts to make it do so only result in more sophisticated forms of reduction, in which a limited principle within one order of reality becomes absolute while the rest of reality is reduced to a condition of miserable relativity to it. The human self is a portent of a reality which of itself it can never be, for the emptiness of reflexivity points to the fullness of being, as doubt points to truth, dissatisfaction to value, and effort to the unity of completion. The human self by itself does not point to itself; even though in itself the residual *I* is reflexivity, it does not point at all until its assumption of the orders of reality permits it to become reflection. The human self, therefore, can never be identified with the absolutely absolute.

On the other hand, if the diversity of reality in its various orders really is irreducible, the reference-point which metaphysical methodology requires must be wholly other than every order of reality, and all orders of reality must be wholly other than it. Hence it will be absolute, but not relatively so, and in this way, and only in this way, we can say that it is absolutely absolute.

I have, so far, discussed the question of the absolutely absolute only in terms of reality, but a similar consideration can be made in terms of knowledge, of free adherence to value, of creative use.

If inquiry is to be kept open indefinitely, nothing which in principle already is known will keep it so. Attempts to delimit the sphere of knowledge succeed only in subverting one pretender to perfect knowledge by advancing the claims of another usurper. A guarded assertion of an absolutely absolute truth is

much less dogmatic than such limiting strategies, provided that we recognize that this assertion does not convey absolute truth but merely refers to what it can characterize only as unknown.

Again, if our freedom is not to be captivated by submission to some particular value in which we happen to be interested, then our very first commitment must be toward that which is not exclusive of any value. However, we can make such a commitment only if we do not expect the absolutely absolute to be a good biased in our favor. We know by experience how much love narrows; it confines us to what we love, and in life as it is lived sets us at enmity with all else. But until we have tried it, we have no ground for denying that loving what is in no way good *for* us is not a captivation but a liberation.

And use, too, can have its full initiative only if even use itself can be used creatively. If that is impossible within the confines of our ingenuity and projects, wherein every use involves some destruction or at least restriction of utility, it nevertheless may be possible within a multiply-ordered reality which is a creation of a principle beyond all use. A metaphysics of such a reality can be constructed to stand as a symbol for such a principle.

This, then, is the sketch of a future metaphysics. If someone should ask why we are concerned about such a thing, we can only answer that the alternative to metaphysics seems to be other and worse metaphysics. Worse metaphysics is the sort that results in counting much of reality as if it were absolutely relative. And what is the absolutely relative? To this question there can be four answers: the total emptiness which we imagine would separate perfectly closed systems; the contradiction to which inconsistent thought necessarily comes; the captivity into which one's free commitment to unconditioned freedom delivers oneself; the universal rubbish which is the only prospective product of use turned upon itself in such a way as to destroy both itself and mankind.

*Georgetown University,
Washington, D. C.*