

III. ETERNITY AND FREEDOM

D. R. Khashaba

The conceptual intellect is the glory and the doom of humankind. It is in virtue of our conceptual thought that we have our special character, distinguishing us from all other animals, and it is in all probability, as it now seems, by this same intellect and our vaunted reason that the human species will be led to its final annihilation. So conceptual intellection is the peculiar property of human beings but it is not what is best or what is most valuable in them. There is in us a deeper, purer, intelligence — in our body, in the tranquility of serene solitude, in moments when we are struck with awe and wonder, in the gasp we eject at the sight of beauty, in the gush of love when soul opens to soul, in the flow of tenderness towards a helpless creature, in the happy giggle of a baby, in the exuberance of poetic creativity — in all of that there is a deeper, purer intelligence, a state of pure internal joyful illumination, and I find that deep, pure, intelligence in the warbling of the bird and in the dance of the butterfly. When Shelley addresses the Skylark saying, “Teach me half the gladness / That thy brain must know”, he is addressing the fount of Life at the heart of all Being.

From the beginning of human existence the best individuals at their best moments — when one all by oneself is one with the whole of Nature — yearned for communion with the intelligence in the All and aspired for union with the All. The sages, the mystics, the inspired poets, found that communion with the All within themselves, in their inmost reality. “I searched myself”, says Heraclitus. The best philosophy seeks to rouse our awareness of that fount of intelligence in us and in the whole of reality. Thus the profoundest thinkers found all things in the One and found the One in all things.

Heraclitus found one Logos in all things and found all reality and all understanding in the hidden depths of the unfathomable soul.

Socrates sought the good and found the good in understanding; yet that understanding is understanding of no other thing than the good; and in the end the good is found to be no other than the wholesomeness of the soul, the integrity of that inner reality of ours that is fostered by doing what is right and is harmed by doing what is wrong.

Some twenty-two centuries later we find Spinoza saying: “We know nothing to be certainly good ... save what is truly conducive to understanding ...” (*Ethics*, IV. XXVII). Spinoza goes on to say: “The greatest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the greatest virtue of the mind is to know God” (IV. XXVIII). And we should note that for Spinoza God is the one Substance, the one all-embracing Reality, “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself” (First Part, Definitions, III). Kant sums it all up in saying that nothing is absolutely good except a good will.

For Plato only what is wholly real is wholly intelligible (*Republic* 477a) and only one who sees things as a whole is a philosopher (*Republic* 537c). And the wholly real and wholly intelligible is represented by Plato as the Form of the Good, which is yet beyond being and beyond understanding. — How all these seemingly various views coalesce will, I hope, be clear from what follows.

When we probe deep enough we find that the questions: ‘What is real?’, ‘What is ultimate reality?’, ‘What is the good?’, ‘How do we know reality?’, are not so many questions but are aspects of one question, variations of the one mystery that haunts all reflective minds. Multitudinous wayward answers have been and are being offered, every one good in its way but, as determinate theories or supposedly definitive answers, they all crumble under the weight of their own intrinsic contradictoriness. In the end the mind can only find rest in that insight shared by poets and mystics and expressed by the Hindu wisdom in the words of the Upanishads: “Thou Art That”. For in the end we find that the restless, irking, questioning Intelligence is itself all the reality, all the understanding, all the good we know or can ever know.

That inner intelligence, that inner reality of ours, is not a substance; it is nowhere; it is simply our inwardness, our subjectivity. It is what Kant referred to as the transcendental unity of apperception and laboured in vain to give an account of.

We may call it the principle of our unity, of our wholeness, of our creativity. It cannot be located, cannot be ‘observed’, because it is not in the nature of inwardness to be objectified; it can only be beheld in the immediacy of living intelligent spontaneity. It is pure creativity, an instance of the creativity that is the ungrounded ground of all that is. I harp on this because the notion of the real that does not exist and cannot exist because it is real — this notion is novel and is not easy to grasp since it flies in the face of common thought and common language.

Thus the one reality that is our own inner reality cannot be placed or found anywhere in space or time because, being the Unconditioned *par excellence*, it cannot be a thing conditioned by space or time or constrained in a determinate formulation of thought or language.

At our best, when we are happiest and most blessed, when we are truly our true selves, we are givers and creators. In spontaneous good deeds, in poetic and artistic creation, we are outflowing intelligence, outflowing virtue, outflowing love. Only then do we have true being transcending the ephemerality of our bodied being: only in the spontaneity of love and in poetic and artistic creativity do we have true being and intelligence and goodness. Only then are we true to the intelligence that is our inner reality and is part of the intelligent creativity of the All — that Power “Which wields the world with never-wearied love, / Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above” (Shelley, *Adonais*).

What most strikes a reflective mind contemplating the natural world is its mutability and fugitiveness. Not only do all living things die and come to dust but in the long view the massive mountains have no more permanence or stability than the rainbow; the stars and galaxies in the height of their splendour are dying, constantly burning themselves out. All that is in this world of change is and is not, for to exist, to be a particular this, a particular what, is to be grounded in non-being. It is a mockery to call it real. Thus the Hindu sages saw the world as *maya*. To exist is to be constrained by Where and When, to be There and Then, to be determined by and dependent on all that the particular existent is not. Thus Existence is grounded in imperfection; its law is transience. (If I remember correctly, this is the gist of the first Part of Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality*.) Hence the universal flux. Nothing that exists lasts, to exist is to be evanescent.

“Fire lives the death of earth and *aêr* lives the death of fire, water lives the death of *aêr*, earth that of water.” (Heraclitus, tr. Richard D. McKirahan and Patricia Curd.) Existence is the original sin that brings death in its wake. Plato never wearied of emphasizing the unreality of all things in the world.

By contrast what is real has been conceived as permanent, constant, and unchanging, such as the One of Parmenides. Even Plato, for a time, in theory, voiced this error, until he saw its incompatibility with his profounder insight into Reality as creative, as procreation in beauty (*Symposium*). In the *Republic* the Form of the Good, while beyond being and beyond understanding, brings forth all being, all life, all understanding. In the *Sophist*, first we have the crucial statement that things that are, are no other thing than activity, *ta onta hôs estin ouk allo ti plên dunamis* (247e), and then, arguing against the ‘Friends of the Forms’ who took his poetic flights about the immutability of the Forms too literally and narrowly, he says: “But tell me, in heaven’s name: are we really to be so easily convinced that change, life, soul, understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real — that it has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence?” (248e-249a, tr. Cornford.) In the *Timaeus* Plato says that the maker of the universe made it because, being good, he wished all things to share in his goodness (29d-e). All of this does not signify any reversal or change in Plato’s fundamental outlook. I maintain that the creativity of all that is real is of the essence of Plato’s thought, but this is not the place to argue that out.

All perfection, all goodness, all understanding, is creative and the ultimately real is pure creativity. Ultimate Reality is not an entity, not a This, not a What, for all determinate actuality is necessarily transient since it is grounded in non-being. Reality is the negation of thingness as it is the negation of existence. What is fully real does not exist but outflows in transient existents. If we name Reality God, it is blasphemy to say that God exists. Ultimate Reality is pure Act, pure Creativity: it is not an agent that is active, not a god that is creative, but sheer creativity. I ordinarily say that ultimate Reality is creative intelligence but find fault with that expression; it is rather intelligent creativity. The perfection of Being is creativity *sans* a creator and the perfection of Goodness is the same creativity *sans* a creator. I name it Creative Eternity.

Eternity is not extended time or limitless time; it is the negation of temporality as it is the negation of all actuality. Eternity is Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva all in one: it is the eternal Act, it is Love, it is the Form of the Good that, being beyond all being and beyond all understanding, brings forth all evanescent being and goodness and beauty and intelligence.

Thus, in attempting to comprehend the mysteries of Being, of Life, of Goodness, of Understanding, we end up with the mystery of mysteries that we yet come face to face with in the mystery of our own inner reality that is pure intelligent creativity.

We end where we began, our Omega is proclaimed in our Alpha, and I can say with Parmenides “For me, it is indifferent from where I am to begin: for that is where I will arrive back again.”

D. R. Khashaba

Email: dkhashaba@yahoo.com

Blog: <http://khashaba.blogspot.com>

Site: <http://philosophia937.wordpress.com>