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SPIRITUAL VALUES IN THE WORLD OF TODAY

Editors-in-Chief
Dan Chițoiu & Corina Domnari

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MEΘEXIS Journal of Research in Values and Spirituality is a peer-reviewed journal, open access, printed and online. The journal aims to bring the best in academic research on values and spirituality to scholarly or interested public audience. It seeks to promote informed debate, and is not tied to any one particular viewpoint. The journal presents a range of views and conclusions within cultural and spiritual traditions, publishing invited & not invited papers and reviews. It is a publication of *The Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality*.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Dan Chițoiu & Corina Domnari

The Special Issue includes papers presented at the International Conference *Spiritual Values and the Challenges of Today World*, held in Iași, Romania, on June 22-23, 2023. The event was organized by the Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality and the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, convenors being Dan Chițoiu and Corina Domnari.

The critical role of spiritual values in responding to the challenges of a shifting world is widely discussed in enquiries made by contributors from around the world.

Jānis Ozoliņš, in *Subjectivity and the Modern World*, sees that genesis of the contemporary estrangement from truth is the post-modern rejection of Modernity and the Enlightenment project in which the hope of humanity was taken to lie in reason and science alone. Religion was to henceforth be a private matter. Drawing on Plato's dialogues against the sophist, Jānis shows that the contemporary estrangement from truth is not new, and that the postmodern world is full of sophists too. It is suggested that the chaos of the modern world can only be corrected through a return to a metaphysics in which God, and hence truth, has a central role.

Tone Svetelj argues, in *Synthesis and Humility: Integrative Mindset and Values after Postmodernity*, that the framework for creating, integrating, and evaluating values needed for our time should be an integrative perspective that balances faith and reason, spiritual and material, relative and absolute, authority and freedom. Such synthesis requires a humble and open mind that does not pretend to know absolute answers but instead is willing to learn afresh from past experiences and present challenges.

Maxim Mikhalev, in *Shamanism in XXI Century China: Social Functions and Local Specifics*, elaborates on the phenomenon

of shamanism revival in modern China based on the fieldwork data gathered among Shenehen Buryats living in the north-eastern part of the country. Maxim discovers, in his field research, that shamanism, hidden and concealed, it remains an integral part of modern Chinese society as it helps people cope with the challenges of everyday life and pays attention to the needs of an individual that are often ignored by the other institutions.

Seema Bose discusses, in *Unity in Diversity: Hindu Perspective*, the problem of otherness in the context of Indian society. Discourse on the issues of otherness has always been associated with the relation between one religion and another. Significant contributions on these issues have been made by Indian thinkers. Hindu communities assimilated people, customs, and ideas despite having a hierarchy based on caste, age sex, and also despite having geographical diversity and thus bringing in unity without uniformity in diversity without fragmentation.

John Giordano, in his paper *The Merchants of Heavenly Grace: On Academic Journals and Cultural Difference*, points out that increasing standardization, specialization and monetarization of academic publishing is designed to foster quality in research and expression, but these tendencies also pose serious challenges to the expression of cultural difference, particularly regarding philosophy and religious studies. To approach this problem, we need to consider the conflict between culture and spirit on the one hand, with the flows of information and capital on the other. We need strategies to reach something outside of the cybernetic flows of information in the media age.

Tuğçe Şensöz, in *The Importance of Symbols in the Sufi Tradition*, analyzes the concept of justice in Islamic mysticism through symbols. Considering justice as a natural figure, its effect on the Sufis' perception of spirituality its examined based on the original definition that emerged in Islamic Sufism, the paper aiming to make this concept clear and understandable by showing the aspects of the concept of justice, which has a deep-rooted historical and cultural background.

Emel Sünter and Nisan Şaşal, in *The Act of Grieving in the Philosophy of Aşık Veysel*, analyze the meaning of the image/metaphor of the act of pouring trouble in one of Veysel poems

and determine how this image is effective in the healing process in spiritual support and guidance. The study was carried out in a tent city in Adiyaman, one of the provinces damaged by the earthquake that occurred in 11 provinces on 6 February 2023. Their paper discusses the effect of cultural codes on the healing process, as they are contributing greatly to the search for meaning in such extraordinary moments of crisis.

Amir Khan Ahmed paper, *A Philosophical Exploration of Spiritual Values and their Contribution to Shaping Humanity* delves into the core essence of spirituality, probing its origins, and its pivotal role in human development. Amir examines how spiritual values have guided and molded human behavior, ethics, and social structures, simultaneously fostering unity and division within societies. The study scrutinizes how modern philosophy and science intersect with spiritual values, contributing to a broader comprehension of human consciousness, purpose, and interconnectedness, and seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the significance of spiritual values in human existence and their enduring influence on our collective journey.

RESEARCH ARTICLES
Spiritual Values in the World of Today

Subjectivity and the Modern World

Jānis (John) Tāivaldis Ozoliņš

University of Divinity/University of Notre Dame, Australia

Abstract: Despite the great technical progress of the modern world, we live, in some parts of Western society at least, in a joyless and despairing world. Many Western countries are in demographic decline and their citizens, thanks to the Covid pandemic, increasingly distrustful of governments and science alike. At the same time, social media has replaced traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, as the new sources of information and opinion about a multitude of issues. Unfortunately, because we are exhorted to be sensitive to everyone's subjective feelings and because we are bombarded on all sides by masses of information, misinformation, and untested opinions, one of the first casualties of this zeitgeist is truth. The genesis of the contemporary estrangement from truth is the post-modern rejection of Modernity and the Enlightenment project in which the hope of humanity was taken to lie in reason and science alone. Religion was to henceforth be a private matter. A rising anti-religious fervour in the nineteenth century prompted Nietzsche to warn that the death of God would have dire consequences for human beings. Despite Nietzsche's warnings, universal religious, moral and social principles grounded in a transcendent reality that demand priority over subjective desires, are now a major stumbling block for a world in which, in God's absence, individual autonomy is the most important value and personal opinion overrides truth. Although post-modernity has provided a propaedeutic to the overconfident reliance of the Enlightenment on the power of an objective reason, it has, in its turn, swung the pendulum too far towards a dogmatic insistence that reality is subjective. This paper, drawing on Plato's dialogues against the sophist, shows that the contemporary estrangement from truth is not new and that the postmodern world is full of sophists too. It is suggested that the chaos of the modern world can only be corrected through a return to a metaphysics in which God, and hence truth, has a central role.

Keywords: post-modernism, Plato, sophism, truth

Introduction

Despite the great scientific, medical, and technological advances of the modern world, we seem to live, in most parts of Western society at least, in pessimistic, discontented and self-absorbed times. As if the Covid-19 pandemic has not been testing enough, modern life has never seemed more difficult than it does at present. Social media, with their variety of applications that encourage self-absorption and facilitate the presentation of a curated self online, have become an electronic public square. More generally, we are bombarded on all sides by masses of information, misinformation, expert opinions, and relentless, strident voices on social media browbeat us into accepting the dogmatic ideological commitments of leading influencers. Amongst the cacophony of voices striving to be heard, contending for attention and recognition, truth is necessarily the first casualty since in contemporary Western society only subjective feelings are what matter. Under the influence of a Marxist reconstruction of Hegelianism, deconstruction and critical theory, echoing Pilate (*John 18:38*), the modern world asks, “What is truth?”, but is not interested in an answer, preferring pre-occupation with individual desires and their fulfilment, provided that these conform to those of an approved, oppressed group or conform to an accepted, progressive ideological world view.

Eschewing foundationalism and any form of objectivity, the new idol, using Bacon’s term, is self-identification with an oppressed group and claimed superior virtue to whoever is designated the oppressor, frequently cisgender white European males. In classical Marxist style, the world is divided between the oppressed and oppressors, black and white, non-racists and racists, climate activists and climate deniers, political progressives and neo-Nazis, secularists and religious believers, trans people and transphobes, amongst other binaries. The good are those who side with the oppressed, black people, non-racists, climate activists, transpeople and other anointed groups, and signal their virtue by their words, if not by their actions. Despite splitting the world into

binaries, paradoxically, this does not lead to a dialectical engagement with contrary beliefs and views, but their condemnation as self-evidently false and “on the wrong side of history.” History itself, of course, can be re-written to conform with present ideology, as evidenced by the craze for the removal of statues of various former celebrated statesmen or community leaders now found to be racists, colonisers, slave owners or oppressors of some other type. That they are commonly white European men is also a black mark against them and reason enough to remove them from their pedestals.

Much of the chaos and turmoil observed in Western society and the genesis of the contemporary estrangement from truth is the post-modern rejection of Modernity and the Enlightenment project in which the hope of humanity was taken to lie in reason and science alone. Theology, once the queen of sciences, was quarantined from the Enlightenment project, and banished to the private sphere of individual religious belief. The Enlightenment project expressed confidence in the power of human reason and the natural sciences alone to uncover the secrets of nature, replacing superstition and credulity with knowledge. Faith in human progress through the discoveries of science replaced faith in God. The many giant strides in technology witnessed in the last one hundred years have repaid that faith many times over. As material prosperity in the West has increased, religious belief has suffered a decline, so that religion, along with theology, has become a private matter, an individual pursuit with little relevance in the public arena. After all, when life is good, human beings begin to believe that it is due to their own efforts and not due to God’s graciousness. Paraphrasing Weil, the further removed from suffering we are the further we are removed from the foot of the Cross and hence from God.¹ More particularly, universal religious, moral and social principles grounded in a transcendent reality that demand priority over subjective desires, are a major stumbling block for a world in which ostensibly individual autonomy is the most important value. Although post-modernity has provided a propaedeutic to the overconfident reliance of the Enlightenment on the power of an objective reason, it has, in

¹ Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 124-26.

its turn, swung the pendulum too far towards a dogmatic insistence that reality is subjective.

Paradoxically, though belief in the supernatural, by which we mean a transcendent God, has declined, it has been replaced by a form of Gnosticism in which the mind is more important than the body. Hence, under, for example, Butler's reinterpretation of Hegel, what we are as human beings is defined by the actions which we carry out in fulfilment of our desires.² The individual human being *qua* human person is defined by the way in which he or she acts on his or her desires. Moreover, since it is the individual who determines those desires, it is the individual who is the final arbiter of how the self is to be defined. Thus, subjective feelings, which express the desires of the individual, are the determinants of the self. Spirituality, shorn of belief in God, reduces to mindfulness, that is, a paying attention to what we, as individuals, are doing in the moment.³ Our horizons extend no further than what is of immediate concern to us. Arguably, this self-absorption is the ultimate perversion of the first-person account of the self of which the phenomenology of Husserl tried to provide an account.

In this paper we attack the idea that there is no truth or objectivity, arguing that this is an ancient problem with which Plato deals in a number of his dialogues. We show, through several examples, that without recourse to truth and objectivity, we are left in contradictions which are irresolvable. Moreover, we are susceptible to the false arguments of those who aim to persuade us to their point of view. Making use of Plato's arguments in the *Sophist*⁴, we argue that the denial of truth leads into the dystopian world described by George Orwell in his classic book, *1984*⁵.

² Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987/2012).

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

³ There is nothing wrong with mindfulness as such since it is a first step to God. By itself, however, it is not an adequate replacement for genuine spirituality.

⁴ Plato, "Sophist," in *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*, ed. Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁵ George Orwell, "1984," in *Complete Works of George Orwell* (Hastings, East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2013), 1174-491.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity and its place in our epistemology are not new problems, but one which have exercised philosophers since ancient times. Plato deals with subjectivity and its relation to knowledge in many of his dialogues, demonstrating that it is a key consideration in our understanding of the nature of knowledge. This is not the only area in which the place of subjectivity is crucial. It is also central to our understanding of ourselves as moral beings who relate to others. Indeed, contrary to Butler's assertion that we are defined by the desires which we enact, Lévinas argues that we cannot be an "I" without the other. That is, self-consciousness arises in the recognition of and our responsibility for the other, not in the fulfilment of our selfish desires.⁶ An understanding of subjectivity, that is, of the human subject and his or her relationship with totality is central to not only our conception of morality but is also central to our conception of truth. Subjectivity, for instance, features in Plato's account of the nature of justice, a major theme in the *Republic*. Plato's account of the state there is also an analogical account of the individual human person.

In the *Republic* Plato considers whether it is best to be just or unjust, since it would seem that the self-interested person will always do better out of any deal than the just person. This is because the self-interested person is not driven by a desire to be fair, but by whatever advantage he or she can gain over another. Adeimantus, for example, argues that people only do what is right for what they can get out of it, preferring to do what is wrong because it is more profitable to them. If they do what is right at all, it is only because they fear social odium or the possibility that they might put themselves at a disadvantage.⁷ There is no clearer statement that people will act according to their own subjective interests, irrespective of whether it is fair or reasonable.

⁶ Emmanuel Lévinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," in *The Lévinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 66.

⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), [363a-367e]. Note that Stephanus numbers are given here, not page numbers.

In *Theaetetus*, Plato describes the subjective experience of a wind on two different persons. The first person experiences it as a warm wind, the second, as a cool wind. Plato challenges Protagoras's claim that it is the subject who is the determinant, saying, "Man is the measure", and that it is the subjective experience which determines what kind of wind there is.⁸ Plato provides a number of examples of the folly of proposing that it is the subjective experience that tells us anything about what is actual in the world. He illustrates this, for example, by observing that the taste of wine when a person is sick will be different to its taste at another time when the person is healthy.⁹ For Plato, our subjective experiences, since they are episodic, changing from moment to moment, cannot give us anything that we can concretely hold to be true about the world.

What is salient about Plato's discussion of knowledge, that is, of that which is known because it has being, is that it lies beyond subjective experiences, that it is not a matter of what an individual feels, on the basis of subjective experience, to be the case. Plato's solution is to postulate the existence of the Forms, which are eternal, and which depend upon God, the Supreme Good, for their being. Truth, at least in ancient Greek philosophy, is about those things of which we can say that they have being, and falsity is about those things which do not have being. Plato is aware that there is much more to be said about being and non-being if we are to provide an adequate account of the nature of knowledge and of truth. He pursues the discussion of the distinction between being and non-being in several of his dialogues.

In those dialogues Plato considers the sophist challenge to the distinction between being and non-being and the idea of truth. In the twentieth century, the significance of this challenge was ominously expressed by Winston's torturer O'Brien in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* who says, "You believe that reality is something objective, external existing in its own right, ...But I tell you Winston, that reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind and nowhere else." Whatever the Party holds to be

⁸ Plato, "Theaetetus," in *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*, ed. Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), [152a-152e].

⁹ *Ibid.*, [159c10-159e5].

the truth, is truth.”¹⁰ Further on, Winston’s torturer adds, “Reality is inside the skull. You must get rid of those nineteenth-century ideas about the laws of Nature. We make the laws of Nature.... Nothing exists except human consciousness.”¹¹ Orwell was prescient: the assault on the view that there is an external objective reality independent of human consciousness has succeeded in banishing it to the margins of discourse. Sophists and their ideological descendants, if they have any use for it at all, believe that truth is whatever they say it is.

Reality and Ideological Commitment

During the last ten years the view that there is no external reality has become mainstream across the world, so much so that an individual’s subjective view of himself or herself has become the touchstone of reality. Some men, for example, claiming that gender is constructed, have taken to identifying themselves as women and demanding that they be accepted as such. Several international sporting organisations have allowed men identifying as women to compete against women. Of course, in certain sports where power and strength are important, this confers a significant advantage. The blurring of the lines between the sexes has become so pronounced that the New Zealand Prime Minister, Christopher Hipkins, when asked what a woman is was unable to reply.¹² Similarly, the Secretary of the Australian Federal Health Department and former Chief Health Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy, when questioned at a Senate estimates hearing was unable to define what a woman is, arguing that there were many definitions.¹³ That the simple reply that a paradigmatic example of woman is one’s mother obviously escaped these two seemingly

¹⁰ George Orwell, “1984,” 1430.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1444-445.

¹² “New Zealand PM struggles when asked to define ‘woman’,” *Sky News*, 4th April 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/new-zealand-pm-chris-hipkins-stumbles-when-asked-to-define-woman-12849593>.

¹³ Frank Chung, “Health boss Brendan Murphy unable to define ‘woman’ in Senate estimates,” *News*, 7th April 2022, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/science/human-body/health-boss-brendan-murphy-unable-to-define-woman-in-senate-estimates/news-story/bad3124ed5e0d97cd666563d7f60ac7d>.

highly educated and intelligent men. The provocative issue of transwomen participating in women's sports is an example of a wilful blindness to biological reality in the service of a pernicious ideology. Although in many instances common sense is now beginning to prevail with biological males being prohibited from participating in women's sport, this is by no means universal. That there has been the need for debate at all about who can compete in women's sports illustrates how far society has lost sight of biological reality and succumbed to an ideological blindness to the differences between men and women. This might have been prevented if not for the misguided and perversely held proposition that reality can be bent to conform to human desires.

During the Covid crisis we were exhorted to "follow the science", to wear masks, to isolate and remain indoors, and to ensure that we had at least two doses of vaccines which had been fast tracked and so had not completed the normal four stage clinical trials that new drugs are meant to undergo before they can be approved for use in the general population. Stringent testing of drugs is carried out in order to ensure that the benefits of the drugs outweigh possible side effects. For instance, the Moderna vaccine was known to cause heart problems, but these were downplayed during its approval for use.¹⁴ Governments were not concerned with the truth, but what was expedient and what they were convinced on flimsy grounds was the right policy. In hindsight, lockdowns and various other measures implemented by the government have been shown to have been ineffective and significant damage was done to not only the economy because many people were unable to continue working, but also to mental health, especially of children. Mental health in children continues to be a particularly significant and little acknowledged problem. The exhortation to follow the science certainly in the case of the Covid pandemic seems to have been a rhetorical flourish rather than a genuine call to follow the science. Ideological commitment, just as it was in the scandalous Lysenko period of Soviet Science, is more important than any putative

¹⁴ See "COVID-19 vaccine: Information for Consumers and Health Professionals," *Australian Government*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/covid-19-vaccines/our-vaccines/moderna>.

objective science.¹⁵ While we might smile at the naivety of Soviet scientists, the very same situation exists at present. For instance, it is received wisdom that we are in the midst of serious humanly caused climate change and that the amount of carbon dioxide that is being released into the atmosphere through human activity must be reduced as soon as possible to net zero. This involves, at least in Western nations, switching from coal and gas energy to so-called renewable energy, such as solar and wind energy. This ignores two things: (i) the biggest users of coal and gas for energy, China and India, and hence the largest producers of carbon dioxide, have no intention of reducing their use, and (ii) the production of wind turbines and solar panels relies on coal and gas energy since most of the production of these is done in China.¹⁶ Not only does this involve using coal and gas energy, but requires significant mining of rare earths and other minerals, which is also energy intensive. Add to this, the need for very large tracts of land to put solar and wind turbines on, destroys significant tracts of animal habitat. Given that wind turbines and solar panels have a life expectancy respectively of fifteen and twenty-five years, the vast arrays of these will need replacing in a relatively short time. While no doubt some of their materials can be recycled, it will certainly involve the mining of more scarce minerals and the continuing manufacture of turbines and panels. Moreover, wind and solar as energy sources are intermittent, since the wind does not always blow, nor the sun always shine. This means that a base load supply of electricity is required to ensure that there is sufficient for both domestic and industrial use to prevent black outs and brown outs. The source of such base load is coal, gas, or nuclear power. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings of renewable energy, at the urging of such bodies as the OECD's International Program for Action on Climate (IPAC), governments have accepted the view that there is a terrible climate crisis upon us, that requires huge investment in renewable energy and the reduction of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to net zero by

¹⁵ See for example, David Joravsky, "The Lysenko Affair," *Scientific American* 207, no. 5 (1962), 41-9.

¹⁶ See for example, Charlie Hoffs, "Mining Raw Materials for Solar Panels: Problems and Solutions," *The Equation*, October 19, 2022, <https://blog.ucsusa.org/charlie-hoffs/mining-raw-materials-for-solar-panels-problems-and-solutions/>.

2050. In Ireland and in the Netherlands ideological commitment has led to the bizarre decision to reduce their cattle herds in order to reduce GHGs. The evidence when scrutinised supports neither this decision nor the huge investment on renewable energy. Both are ideological and political decisions, not rational and scientific decisions.¹⁷

Disagreement with certain opinions, such as, “there are many genders” or “men can have babies” or “white people are privileged because they are white” is regarded as hate speech and is irrefutable evidence that those who hold such views are irredeemably evil and are causing immense harm to oppressed minorities, respectively, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, trans community and black people. Similarly, those who disagree that there is a climate crisis or who question the efficacy of Covid vaccines are regarded as dangerous right-wing extremists who have no right to participate in society. As we witnessed during the Covid pandemic, the unvaccinated were denied their right to employment and banned from restaurants and sporting venues. Vaccination certificates were demanded to be shown if one wanted to enter a restaurant, a sporting venue or workplace. The unvaccinated were prevented from participating in their communities, not because they had contracted the Covid virus, but because they refused to have the vaccine. Masks were mandatory, even though it was well known that they did next to nothing to prevent the spread of the virus. None of the opinions mentioned are based on rational argument, but on appeals to either (i) emotion or (ii) authority. Persuading individuals to hold the same views is more important than seeking the truth. This is not something new, but something that Plato analyses in the *Sophist*. We shall examine the *Sophist* to illustrate that the modern phenomenon of flight from rationality is not new and to propose that Plato’s analysis enables us to understand how the denial of truth and transcendence has emerged. It will be apparent that degeneration of argument into

¹⁷ Space does not permit development of these points here, but it is self-evident that there are significant economic, not to mention social costs in the transition away from reliance on coal, gas and oil. The proposition that concerted action by governments to limit anthropogenic climate change will mitigate global temperature rises is contested and despite claims to the contrary, not settled science.

shrill emotive appeals, subjectivism and the denial of truth is not a new problem.

Sophism

Plato has two intertwined themes in the *Sophist*: the first, deals with the character of being and non-being, and the second with identifying the sophist, who Plato regards as a shady and disreputable character. This is because the sophist denies the existence of falsehood, claiming that there is no such thing since what is false is what does not exist and hence does not have being.¹⁸ In his introduction to *Sophist*, Jowett remarks that the great enemy of Plato is the world of the hater of truth and lover of appearance, who is occupied in the pursuit of gain and pleasure rather than knowledge, and is devoid of true education.¹⁹ While not all sophists were disreputable, Plato's target in the *Sophist* is those who use their skills to persuade and convince others of a particular view and who are not interested in the truth in the slightest. This, of course, follows from holding that falsity does not exist, since what is false is what does not exist. This partly explains the present *zeitgeist* in the Western world where various positions are coercively imposed simply because those that hold them are certain that they are right. The truth is irrelevant, as it is the achievement of specific ideological goals that is important, just like Winston's torturer in *1984*. The ends justify the means.

The Eristics, a species of sophist, Jowett remarks that they make successful disputation or argument the end, rather than the truth, and that: 1) they pursue verbal oppositions; 2) they make reasoning impossible by their over-accuracy in the use of language; 3) they deny predication; 4) they go from unity to plurality without

¹⁸ The connection between the themes is obvious. The sophist claims that what is false is what does not have being, and since non-being is about what does not exist, falsehood does not exist. If this is so, then everything that exists is true, rendering the idea of truth meaningless. For the sophist, this does not lead to a deflationary conception of truth, rather to a dispensing with truth altogether and asserting that what has being is whatever the sophist says it is.

¹⁹ Benjamin Jowett, "Introduction," in *Delphi Complete Works of Plato* (Hastings, East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2015), 2031-2033.

passing through the intermediate stages; 5) they refuse to attribute motion or power to being; 6) they are enemies of sense, and may not be the “friends of ideas.”²⁰ Twenty-first century Marxist ideologues are the direct descendants of the Eristics, since, as indicated above, they too pursue dichotomies – dividing the world into black and white, oppressed and oppressor, as we pointed out earlier. Reasoning is impossible, since only those meanings are allowed that conform to their ideological commitments. They are certainly enemies of sense since they do not countenance any ideas except their own and happily contradict their own strongly held views if it suits their purposes. For example, much is said about the need for respecting diversity, but what is meant is diversity only in a particular sense, namely, respecting those who hold the same opinions as they do. They do not mean diversity in which all individuals are accepted nor diversity of views. Jowett reads Plato as characterising the sophist as an imitator or image-maker, lacking in knowledge and expert in the use of illusions, which is to say imitations which are appearances only and hence not real.²¹ The problem which arises because of this, and which Plato recognises, is that this asserts the existence of non-being and the investigation of this is central to Plato in the *Sophist*.

The investigation of non-being is directly connected to the question of the nature of truth and what we understand by reality. The more recent postmodern privileging of subjectivity or “turn to the subject,” can be understood as the outcome of powerful currents of thought stemming initially from reactions to Kant and to the development of psychology in the nineteenth century. For postmodernism, what is central is the privileging of the subject’s descriptions of his or her experiences. These are held to be incorrigible and describe reality. What the subject states about personal feelings and experiences is true and incontrovertible. Objectivity does not exist since there are only subjective experiences. Husserl’s development of phenomenology, on the other hand, following on from Brentano, begins with descriptive psychology and he attempts to develop an account of objectivity through the eidetic reduction of subjective experience. In doing so,

²⁰ Ibid., 2045.

²¹ Benjamin Jowett, “Introduction,” 2050-2051.

he draws on Descartes, though his approach is substantially different.²²

Descartes begins from subjective experience but thinks this is unreliable as guide to knowledge, which was about what had being. He was concerned to distinguish what was real from what was illusion, proposing that it was possible that our senses were being deceived by an evil demon. The only thing we could be sure of was that in engaging in the mental process of thinking, for instance in doubting, we could be certain that something was doing the doubting. The outcome for Descartes is that he was left with a disembodied thinking thing that was cut off from the world. The only way back into the world was through the trace of God that was to be found in the disembodied thinking thing. That is, through the trace of the transcendent absolute being that is God. Since what is known for certain is what is true, Descartes believed that he could secure certain knowledge through an appeal to God, who does not deceive.²³ What this means is that knowledge is not secured through internal subjective experience, but through what is external to the subject. At the very least, this will require intersubjective agreement, which assumes there are others who experience something like what the subject experiences. Experiences to be communicated demand language, and a common one at that, in order to describe the experience so that agreement is possible. Intersubjective agreement in itself is no guarantee the description is of what has being without it, however, we are even more rudderless in a sea of experiences. Intersubjective agreement

²² Husserl elaborates his phenomenological ideas in a number of his writings during his career. See for example: Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960); Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969); Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Third Book. Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences, trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980). (*Ideas III*); Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book. General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983). (*Ideas I*).

²³ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (New York: Dover Publications, 2003).

demands a common language to describe what is a common experience. We cannot say, “I see a rabbit”, unless there is a common language which enables the communication of the experience of seeing a rabbit to others. The conclusion to draw from this, recalling Wittgenstein’s comment that there can be no private language, there cannot be any private knowledge.²⁴ For something to count as knowledge it has to be public. Husserl’s approach is different to Descartes, since he begins from the proposition that the consciousness of the subject in its many modes, is directed towards *something* that is external to the transcendental ego or subject.²⁵ Objective knowledge about the world is grounded in what remains after the eidetic reduction of what is subjective, and it is the essence of that to which our intentionality is directed.²⁶ It is this which anchors our grasp of what is real.

Without being able to distinguish reality from illusion there is no means of securing the binaries that Marxist ideologues invoke. In the same vein, the denial of falsity by the Sophist jeopardises the very binaries that such ideologues invoke – there cannot be black and white if there is not first agreement that there are objects that are black or white. Similarly, to be unable to say what is a woman is to either: (i) not know the English word; or (ii) know the word but not know what it refers to; or (iii) know the word but not know what it means; or (iv) deny that there are any objects that can be so described; (v) assert that it has no prescriptive definition and means or refers to whatever a subject takes it to mean or to refer to. The first three possibilities are understandable, especially for a non-English speaker but the last two are problematic. To deny there are any women is obviously false, since it is normatively used to refer to adult females. It is difficult to see how anyone could coherently

²⁴ The discussion on private language takes place in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* beginning Section 243. Wittgenstein is not arguing that we could not have a private language in which we spoke to ourselves about our experiences, we could. We could not communicate to others using a private language, however. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd Ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), sections 243-69.

²⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 33-4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

deny that there are adult females. Nevertheless, someone could deny there are women if that individual holds some form of extreme scepticism or objects that the term “woman” does not describe adult females, that is, “woman” is a term referring to the socially defined category of gender, while adult female refers to a biological category. Extreme scepticism is incoherent and the second objection reduces to (v). If it is held that nothing is true or false, denying there are women is to propose that our ontological categories need not include any natural kinds.²⁷ It is a denial that there is anything essential about any object. This would require argumentation, not merely assertion. The assertion that there is no prescriptive definition, and that any subject’s definition is valid means that the term “woman” does not describe anything. Worse still, if there is no agreement about what the term means, it is impossible to apply the term in any meaningful way. Thus, to assert that anyone who claims to be a woman is a woman is irrational because it destroys our ability to use the term to describe a particular group of human beings. It also seems morally objectionable to egocentrically redefine a term to suit a particular ideological position that denies that language is capable of representing the truth of being.²⁸ It is to proclaim an untruth, pervert language and hence, to contend that reality is malleable to human caprice. A pilot seeking to steer north

²⁷ In denying there are women, is to deny that there can be any essences of things that are not determined by human beings. As a result, there can be no natural kinds.

²⁸ There can be no truth of being because there is a denial that there are any essential features of things which distinguish them from other kinds of things. This is because the term “woman” can be used by anyone to describe anything, such as a man who claims to be a woman. This has enormous practical consequences. For example, a “woman” that is biologically male can demand treatment for cervical cancer or hormonal treatment so that “she” can breastfeed an infant. For an article on breastfeeding by transpersons which accepts the idea that gender is fluid, see: J.M. García-Acosta, R.M. San Juan-Valdivia, A.D. Fernández-Martínez, N.D. Lorenzo-Rocha, M.E. Castro-Peraza, “Trans* Pregnancy and Lactation: A Literature Review from a Nursing Perspective,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 44 (2019), doi: 10.3390/ijerph17010044. PMID: 31861638; PMCID: PMC6981677. What is concerning, apart from the ideological commitment to a redefinition of what a woman is, is the way in which health care treatment – and hence, limited health funds – to pander to particular life style choices rather than provision of crucial health care.

does not simply claim that north is whatever the pilot claims it to be, irrespective of the alignment of the compass needle. Allowing individual determination of the meaning of terms renders dialogue impossible, since what words mean and what sense they have are determined by the subject. Philosophers have always contested the meaning of words, especially since the mid-twentieth century's linguistic turn, and how certain statements are to be understood, but it is always in the context that we have to agree to meanings if we are to have a conversation. Philosophers endeavour to understand what is being said. Only in such a manner can they grasp the arguments of those with whom they dialogue. Marxist or postmodern ideologues are not interested in dialogue nor in truth. Unfortunately, if we cannot define what a woman is, it follows neither can we say what a transwoman is. Similarly, it follows that neither can we say what a man or a transman is. Categories collapse into nothing, and we have no anchoring points to enable us to structure reality. We need a distinction between being and non-being, since we need to be able to say that there is something X described as "X" and there is not something Y described as "Y". Truth cannot be avoided.

For Plato, the means of being able to make epistemic claims is to be able to distinguish between what has being, that is, has reality, and what has non-being, what does not have reality. As well as this, in order to be able to engage in dialogue, we need agreement about the terms that we use for the things which have being and those that do not. This means that Plato has to consider that in some sense non-being has to exist, but this seems to be impossible, since it suggests the being of non-being.²⁹ Fortunately, modern philosophy has ways – not available to Plato - to handle the existence of things which do not have being, such as, "the present king of France is bald." The existential quantifier can be used to describe a set of things of which there is no member. The problem from Plato's sophist's point of view is that non-being is being accorded an existence that it does not have. In the *Sophist*, Plato concentrates on determining the nature of being and to argue that the sophist is a charlatan.

²⁹ Benjamin Jowett, "Introduction," 2052.

In talking about being, we are also aware of its relation to non-being, since if we claim to know the concept “beautiful”, we also can know “not-beautiful”, similarly with “just”, we can know “not-just”. Thus, it seems that not-being is understood as other than being and is in relationship with being. Opposition and negation are a form of non-being and such non-being has a kind of being. What kind remains to be seen, but it is not the same kind of being as those things which have being. On the basis that non-being has a kind of being, the sophist argues that there is no falsehood because there is no such thing as non-being. This is mistaken since the kind of being that non-being has is not the same kind of being that being has.³⁰

Plato says that the imitator who has only opinion, may be either someone who thinks he knows or the dissembler who is conscious he does not know, but disguises his ignorance.³¹ There are also those who are indoctrinated and who are not concerned about knowing at all but who have an opinion that they think everyone should have. This is worse than the imitator who thinks he knows or the dissembler who does not know, since for the ideologue, knowing is irrelevant, because it is convincing someone that matters as it will advance her position. The sophist because he holds there is no falsehood, is characterised as the maker of short speeches, whose art may be traced as being: i) contradictions; ii) dissembling; 3) without knowledge; iv) human and not divine; v) juggling with words; vi) phantastic or unreal; vii) art of image-making.³² The last could be said to be the occupation of media directors who act as “spin doctors” for politicians.³³

Plato’s dialectic can be compared to Hegelian dialectic. Hegelian dialectic, Jowett says, may be described as a movement from the simple to the complex. Hegelian dialectic begins with generalisations of sense, passing through ideas of quality, quantity, measure, number, etc. and ascending from presentations to representations, hence to an essence that is detached from outward form. It is notable that these ideas closely follow Aristotle’s

³⁰ Ibid., 2056-2057.

³¹ Ibid., 2058.

³² Ibid.

³³ By “spin doctors” we mean media units whose job is to ensure that the image of the particular politician and of any decisions that he or she makes looks good. They also act to limit any bad press.

categories. It combines the I and not-I, or subject and object, enabling the arrangement of thoughts in relation to one another.³⁴ Of interest here is the postulation of the I and its opposite, the not-I. We identify the I with the subject, or the subjective and the not-I with the objective. In doing so, we have an analogous issue with the kind of being each possesses. Plato held that what had being were the ideas or forms which were to be found in the mind or soul, whereas what was not-I and which, if we identify it with the objective lies outside the mind and can be identified with an external world, but this is non-being, which is to say is not real in the way in which the world of ideas or forms is. But the soul is not all of being, so not-I also refers to what is the divine or the infinite. This means that I and not-I do not divide the world into subject and object in a simple way.³⁵ Through a dialectical process we come to see the relation between I and not-I, subject and object as complex. Jowett argues that some of the so-called laws of thought (for example, “All A = A” or Nothing can at the same time be both A and not-A) have been shown by Hegel to be silly, since the form of the maxim itself is virtually self-contradictory, as a proposition implies a distinction between subject and predicate. That is, “A is A”, the law of identity, strictly, has A as subject and A as object, which is a distinction between the two, thus the formulation itself results in a violation of the law of identity. Presumably we could also say that numerical identity is violated, since there is an A on one side and another on the other side, so the two As are not numerically identical. Jowett claims that this means that we have be willing to admit that two contradictories may be true.³⁶ There are antinomies where it seems that such a claim makes sense, for instance, in reconciling human freedom with determinism. In the above case, however, we can reformulate the law in such a way as to avoid these objections. Nevertheless, what seems to be alluded to here is the imprecise nature of natural languages.

³⁴ Benjamin Jowett, “Introduction,” 2063.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2066.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2066-2067. We need not agree with Jowett here, nevertheless, what is pointed out is the need to explicate what we mean by “equals” or “is identical with” in a way in which the objection that in the statement, “A is A” violates identity can be avoided. This is by no means simple.

To the ‘either’ and ‘or’ philosophy, ‘Everything is either A or not A’, according to Jowett, should at least be added the clause ‘or neither’, ‘or both’.³⁷ This acknowledges that there is a nest of problems associated with the complexities of language that are uncovered once we confer meaning on the symbols that appear in simple propositions. Hegel’s method of sifting through different interpretations through thesis and antithesis enables us to get closer to a more complete understanding of a particular problem, even if it does not lead to a solution. It demands a willingness to enter into an authentic dialectic in which there is a sincere quest for truth as far as it can be ascertained. Superficially, this seems to provide support for the view that it is not possible to say what a woman is, since it allows that not everything is A or not-A but could be neither or both. Thus, everything is either a woman or not a woman or neither (a woman or not a woman) or both (a woman and not a woman). Though the concept of “woman” is arrived at through experience and so is *a posteriori*, a clear normative definition can be and has been formulated. It is this definition, based on biology, which allows us to distinguish men from women. Without such a definition there is no means of recognising those who might not fit the definition. Acknowledging the complexity, however, does not mean we should revise the definition. The onus is on those who wish to expand this definition to provide compelling argument why this definition should be revised. Logic alone does not provide support for such revision. Though it has its limitations, the movement between thesis and anti-thesis, which is attributed to Hegel, is also Plato’s method in the *Sophist*.

In the *Sophist*, Plato begins by delineates a method whereby we can distinguish between the sophist, the statesman and the philosopher. The method consists of making successive divisions between two things until it is possible to settle on one thing. The template that Plato uses is tried out on determining what kind of thing angling, that is, fishing is. It is a somewhat artificial method, since we have to have some idea of the divisions we are going to make between things. For instance, Plato establishes what angling is by considering whether it involves hunting, then whether it involves land animals or water animals, then whether the animals

³⁷ Ibid., 2068.

are swimming on the water or under the water, whether fishing involves spearing or catching with hooks, and so on. Eventually, what the divisions narrow down to is what it is agreed is called angling. Plato applies the same method to deciding what a sophist is.³⁸

Plato initially defines the sophist as someone privately for hire who uses persuasion to hunt human beings (rich and reputable young men) and who has a semblance of education.³⁹ The sophist is someone who sells ‘food for the soul’ or knowledge, that he or she has acquired in the same way that a merchant might buy goods and sell them. The sophist trades in knowledge, including knowledge of virtue.⁴⁰ The difficulty that Plato identifies is that the sophist is someone who does not know, but thinks he does, observing that this is probably the origin of all the mistakes in thinking that anyone of us makes.⁴¹ The conceits of the soul can be overcome, says Plato, through refuting ignorance and hence leading someone to humbly accept that he needs instruction and mental purification. This is education and seems to be something which could be called sophistry. Sophistry as an art seems to be practised by the sophist.⁴² There is a salutary lesson for all teachers here that we should be aware of our ignorance and not seek to pretend that we have more knowledge than we have. Admitting ignorance is a step towards knowledge. The sophist aims to use a veneer of education to exploit others, a common enough experience in the contemporary world also, where charlatans spruik their fake educational wares online. At this point Plato summarises what the sophist seems to be: (i) a hunter after rich and impressionable young people in order to get money from them; (ii) a merchant dealing with the goods of the soul; (iii) a retailer of these goods; (iv) a lessons salesman who also sold his own lessons (manufacturing the learned wares he sold; (v) an expert in debate and eristic argument; (vi) a purger of ignorance, clearing away opinions that obstruct knowledge.⁴³ The sophist, says Plato, is shown to possess some type of belief-based knowledge,

³⁸ Plato, “Sophist,” [221b1-221c5].

³⁹ *Ibid.*, [223b1-b5].

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, [224a1-c5].

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, [229c5-c10].

⁴² *Ibid.*, [230a-231a].

⁴³ *Ibid.*, [231d1-e5].

which enables him to dispute all manner of topics, but he does not have truth.⁴⁴ Plato compares the sophist to a painter who is able to paint things that from a distance look like real things, since the sophist uses words to beguile people into thinking that their fictitious arguments are true and that the speaker is the wisest of people. They soon learn by bitter experience that what the sophist has told them is not true.⁴⁵

Crucial to the discussion of truth is the question of what is, and, contrariwise, what is not, since what is true is about what is the case, what has, according to Plato, what has being. Although Plato's argument concerns itself with ancient theories of what elements combine to make things the things that they are, the argument has more generally applicability to what gives things being. Plato turns to discussion of being and non-being, proposing that non-being, taken to be what is not, has to have some kind of being otherwise we could not speak of the thing that we say has non-being, that is, is not. Part of the puzzle includes the question of whether everything that is forms part of one thing or whether there are many things. The puzzle arises because Plato asks whether a thing having being means that there are two things, not one, since there is the thing and its being. This leads to incoherence since this separates the being of something and the thing itself. Subsequently when we ask about being itself, it has no content if it is not being of something. Neither does it make sense to speak of the being of being.⁴⁶ The discussion at this juncture raises questions without providing an account of being.

Another line of inquiry leads Plato to consider the idea that not everything which has being will have a physical body, for instance, the soul does not, but then there is the problem of how we would know such things. The answer is that something has being if it is able to act upon another thing. The mind, for example, is able to solve a problem. Secondly, something will have being if it is able to be acted upon by another thing. A teacher can teach a pupil so

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, [233c10].

⁴⁵ Plato, "Sophist," [234d1-e5].

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, [243d5-245c5]. Of course, Aristotle later distinguishes between the essence of a thing and its existence. Puzzles concerning essence and existence have persisted to the modern day.

that he learns something. This leads to further discussion of whether we can know an item of knowledge, since in knowing we act upon it and so it is changed through being known by us. Plato considers whether this means that what is has to be always changing, since it appears that it cannot remain at rest or whether it has to be immutable if it is to have being. He concludes that we should regard what is as being constituted by everything both changing and unchanging.⁴⁷

This response, however, Plato says suffers from the same problem as saying that something is both hot and cold. Change and rest have being, but this means that being is something over and above either of these. Moreover, being is neither changing nor at rest, so is a third thing.⁴⁸ There is now another problem, that of whether being can be added to change and to rest, and what the implications of this will be. This leads to a further question of whether things can mix together or not, leading to the response that some things will be able to mix together and some not, just like letters of the alphabet mix together to form words, but not every combination of letters form words. Plato concludes that this requires expertise, just as knowing which notes mix together to give a tune require a musician. Being able to determine what items of information can mix together to give us knowledge, enables us to arrive at the definition of a philosopher.⁴⁹ The philosopher is someone who has knowledge and knows how to acquire it. Crucially, the philosopher has knowledge of being and hence, the truth. While Plato arrives at the conclusion that the philosopher has knowledge of being, the question of what being is has not been settled. Plato moves to another way of thinking about being. By making use of the form of difference, Plato is able to show that such things as ‘not big’ do not imply the opposite of ‘big’, but merely a contrast with it. Hence, if big has being, then so does ‘not big’, similarly, beautiful and not beautiful and what is and what is not are contrasting things and so what is not has being just as what is has being.⁵⁰ Plato’s argument here rests on being to show that if we consider change

⁴⁷ Plato, “Sophist,” [248c4-249d5].

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, [250a1-250c1].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, [253c5-253c10].

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, [258b5-c5].

and rest, it is obvious that these have being, but both differ from one another. Difference as a form also has being, as does sameness. Non-being can be said to partake of the form of difference since it is not being, but since difference has being, non-being also partakes of being. Of course, much more needs to be said about the plausibility of this argument, but it establishes that non-being has a form of existence or being. This sets the stage for Plato to consider whether the sophist is right to say that falsehood is what is not, since it is obvious that we can have false beliefs and we can also speak falsely. Plato has been shown that what is not has being and hence it is a mistake to say that falsehood is what is not. The sophist is therefore wrong to claim that there is no falsehood.

This is not sufficient, as we have already indicated, there is also the question of being able to communicate and so Plato begins with an analysis of speech, arguing that it is not merely a matter of stringing words together, but involves nouns (names) and verbs together.⁵¹ Plato contrasts the statements ‘Theaetetus sits’ and ‘Theaetetus with whom I am conversing, flies’. The first is true, while the second is false.⁵² It does not mean that those things which are false do not have being, just that they are different from those things which are true. This means that there can be false speech. Similarly, beliefs, thoughts and appearances can turn out to be false, since thoughts are form of internal speech, beliefs expressed through internal speech and appearances also internalised speech, at any rate related to thoughts and beliefs.⁵³ Hence, various ideological claims may not only involve falsehood but may also misuse language. The assertion that biological men can also be women, for example, is not only false, but also a misuse of language.

Conclusion

Returning to the sophist, Plato concludes that the sophist can be defined as someone with expertise in deception, since we are able to allow that what is false has being.⁵⁴ The sophist is put down

⁵¹ Plato, “Sophist,” [262a1-e15].

⁵² *Ibid.*, [263a1-b5].

⁵³ *Ibid.*, [263b10-264b1].

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, [264d5].

as someone who does not know, but is an imitator of the wise person, is an expert in imitation, belonging to the contradiction-producing dissembling part of belief-based expertise, the word-conjuring part of the apparition-making kind from image-making, a human sort of production marked off from its divine counterpart – someone who belongs to this group of people will be the sophist.⁵⁵ The sophist is someone who is difficult to distinguish from those who genuinely quest for truth and who try to be honest in their advice to others. This is because they are clever at imitation and know well how to lead others astray. Since they care nothing for the truth, they have little respect for others and have no qualms in using of power to achieve their ends. Plato says that sophists are marked off from the divine and, we might add, as a result, deny the world is intelligible. The hallmark of the beliefs of sophists is their incoherence.

What we have described is the modern Marxist ideologue and their kindred spirits. We conclude, though, there is much further work to be done to challenge the postmodern *zeitgeist* which tranquilly accepts the sophist's rejection of a distinction between being and non-being, reality and illusion. In this paper, we have tried to show that the deliberate attempt to propose that there is no such thing as falsity – which of course means there is no such thing as truth – has ancient roots and there are equally ancient rejoinders. We looked briefly at Plato's discussion of the nature of the sophist and his discussion of being and non-being. There is much more to be said about the connection between what has being and what does not, and how we might arrive at the truth. Plato shows us that those who argue that there is no truth are sophists and hence are charlatans. We should be very wary of such individuals. We reiterate Orwell's prescient warning in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that we should be wary of those who claim that reality is not something objective and existing in its own right but exists nowhere else but in human consciousness, since the result of this is the possibility of the manipulation of human beings by not only the state but also social media, corporations and those with a vested interest in persuading others of a particular ideological viewpoint. The denial of truth leads to the denial of God, and as Nietzsche warned, the loss of freedom of speech and enslavement.

⁵⁵ Ibid., [268c1-d1].

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Synthesis and Humility: Integrative Mindset and Values after Postmodernity

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Abstract: This reflection presents a framework for creating, integrating and evaluating values needed for our time. Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern perspectives are taken as complementary reflections, offering an integrative paradigm of what is healthy, ethical, and spiritual, i.e., what really matters in our time. This integrative perspective is an opportunity to reflect critically on the last centuries of our Western intellectual development, creating a perspective that balances what is knowable and unknowable, while simultaneously rejecting any radical positions. The integrative perspective balances faith and reason, spiritual and material, relative and absolute, authority and freedom. Such synthesis requires a humble and open mind that does not pretend to know absolute answers but instead is willing to learn afresh from past experiences and present challenges.

Keywords: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern, Integrative, Synthesis, Humility

The globalization in the recent decades opened the question of which values should guide people, on a local and universal level, regardless of culture, religion, tradition, or political affiliations. The question of universal values is not entirely new; 250 years ago, Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), a firm believer in the power of human reason, already dealt with a similar question extensively. He believed that the Age of Enlightenment will end the dark Middle

Ages and lead us to an Enlightened Age,¹ when whoever has reason will know what to do in the best possible way.

The scholars in Modernity upgraded what Kant predicted with new conclusions. Something similar happened in Postmodernity, which introduced a new emphasis on understanding values through an internal critique of Modernity. Let us say that the Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern perspectives characterize recent centuries of Western Thought, and its organic and dynamic development, covering pendulum-like reactions of ideas.

Each of these three periods places a new emphasis on what to doubt, affirm, and submit. Referring to one of Pascal's fragments from his *Thoughts*, each one of these actions is crucial; however, one must know when it is the right time to doubt, affirm, and submit.² Our challenge is how to merge these perspectives in a more organic way into something where our doubts, affirmations, and submissions find a new balance. Let us call this an integrative perspective through which the age of synthesis finds its birth. To comprehend this age, it is not sufficient to base everything only on reason, as Kant imagined in his reflection on the Enlightened Age. The integrative perspective, leading to the age of synthesis, is an opportunity to critically reflect on the last centuries of the Western intellectual development, create a perspective that integrates and balances the knowable and unknowable, and simultaneously reject radical positions. The integrative perspective balances faith and reason, spiritual and material, relative and absolute, authority and freedom. Such synthesis requires a humble and open mind, that does not pretend to know absolute answers but is willing to learn

¹ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. T. Humphrey (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 44.

² Fragment 170 "One must know when it is right to doubt, to affirm, to submit. Anyone who does otherwise does not understand the force of reason. Some men run counter to these three principles, either affirming that everything can be proved, because they know nothing about proof, or doubting everything, because they do not know when to submit, or always submitting, because they do not know when judgment is called for" (Pascal 1995, 54).

afresh from past experiences and present challenges.³ The integrative approach is in so many ways similar to the mind of someone who is able to wonder, which is Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus* the precondition of a real philosopher, i.e., lover of wisdom.⁴

This paper presents a framework for creating, integrating, and evaluating values needed for our time. Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern perspectives should be taken as complementary aspects, offering an integrative paradigm of what is healthy, ethical, as well as spiritual, i.e., what really matters in our time. For the purpose of this reflection, let us define spirituality and religiousness as an individual's or group's search for the sacred and significant goals that unfold within a traditional and non-traditional sacred context and traditions.

Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives

Premodernity is the period that extends from ancient history up to the 17th century. General knowledge during this era was rooted in the Greco-Roman worldviews, enriched with Judeo-Christian theological reflections. This over 2000 years of history is rich with dynamic differences, changes, and controversies. For example, theologians and philosophers of the Renaissance found new inspirations in the rediscovery of ancient Greek thought differently from the theologians and philosophers in the 11th or 12th centuries, dealing with the connection between faith and reason. Similarly, cultural, religious, and political settlements in Spain in the 15th century differed from cultural, religious, and political tensions in Italy or Germany in the same century. Premodernity includes centuries of intense search for individual and national identity, movements of nations followed by political unrest, hierarchical social changes, and rich intellectual life on many levels. The history of cultural, political, and religious activities in the European countries and the Americas calls for more thorough

³ Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj, "Anatheism - an incentive to discover the importance of discipleship in Christianity," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 78, no. 2 (2018): 380-85.

⁴ Plato, "Theaetetus," in *Plato - Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 173.

treatment and due respect, which goes beyond the purpose of this paper.

Broadly, Premodernity can be described by the following characteristics.⁵ Religion was central in shaping beliefs, values, and cultural practices. Premodern societies were in many ways influenced by the principles of Christianity. Religious activities were often colored by superstition and magic, especially among the laity. The understanding of popular spiritual life was mixed with supernatural powers, deities, and spirits. The perception of time was based on religious rituals and ceremonies, shaping people's life routines. Settlements were organized around churches, shrines, and temples, serving as focal points for religious activities. Religious knowledge and wisdom were transmitted through sacred texts and oral tradition. Premodern cosmology included notions of divine or sacred order governing the universe; the cosmos was seen as a reflection of something divine. Natural events were often interpreted as divine signs and messages. Knowledge of the world for many people became synonymous with religious knowledge. There was a strong belief that the ultimate truth is knowable, even though not yet entirely revealed, but always disclosing itself to those looking for it. In epistemological terms, the source of the ultimate truth was divine revelation, God's initiative, and willingness to reveal Himself to humans at specific times and places. The main authority for general knowledge was the Christian church, supported or criticized by the powerful aristocracy rooted in political power. The final goal of life was synonymous with spiritual progress based on beliefs about the afterlife. By referring to the approved theology, one can evaluate the merits of his faith and the quality of his spiritual life. Religious art and symbolism, including statues, paintings, and religious icons, reflected the ideas of premodern spirituality.

The dawn of Modernity loosened premodern intellectual and spiritual worldviews and created new possibilities of self-perception. This change is associated with the rise of empirical and

⁵ Lynn Hunt and Thomas R. Martin, Barbara H. Rosenwein, Bonnie G. Smith, *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures*, Fifth Edition (Boston, New York: Macmillan Learning, 2017).

rational methods of inquiry, which steadily criticized and questioned the power of religious authority. New discoveries in natural sciences replaced certain religious activities, especially those based on superstition. There is still a strong belief in the ultimate truth, which is partially knowable but no longer the exclusive domain of the Church and aristocracy. Science and philosophy grow to become new intellectual authorities, prevailing over religion and theology. Rationalism and empiricism replace divine revelation as the only valid scientific method. Academics and scientists become new sources of intellectual authority. The nature of the new knowledge remains universal as it was in the premodern time, even though less revelatory, but more rational and, at least apparently, objective. The objective reality is considered knowable and based on some universal truths, can be discovered by employing the principles of rationalism, materialism, and reductionism. Nature functions as a unified whole that scientists can observe and measure. What cannot be measured cannot be proven, therefore is questionable. Since faith, sacredness, and spirituality belong to the nonmaterial reality, they cannot be judged based on rationality, empirical outcomes, and observations.

The new understanding of reality is based on verification by anyone wishing to repeat the observation process. All new scientific findings are supposed to be transparent and accountable. The goal of modernity was no longer spiritual progress vying for the final reward in the afterlife, but instead, it was material progress and improvement of social conditions, in line with the liberation of inquiry from tradition and religion. The liberty, equality, and fraternity of the French Revolution became the beacon for the emergence of universal values.

A strong emphasis on material reality opened the door to criticism. Observing reality through the principles of reductionism denies the importance of the individual or society as a whole. A mindset frightened by the non-material reality struggles to provide a strong foundation for moral values, which remain elusive. In addition, the modern mind occupied with the specialization of knowledge, struggles to create a holistic picture of reality. The benefits of the Enlightenment are also the main criticisms: new

knowledge is often misused and destructive, leading to negative impacts of the same scientific development.⁶

The genesis of the postmodern era is often traced to the 1950s. Postmodernism's main characteristic is a refutation of Modernity.⁷ In opposition to modern thinkers, postmodernists do not believe in the ultimate truth; there is no such thing as the ultimate truth. Moreover, they consider this idea potentially dangerous. Instead of a universal truth, they propose a metaphysics of local and contextual truths, constructed and not discovered.⁸ In Postmodernity, holding to objective truth claims is equal to holding the means of power for control, marginalization, and oppression of others. Postmodernism suggests “distrust toward the modern concept of universal reason and related claims to know objective truth.”⁹ Consequently, there should be no metanarratives or cross-contextual frames, including the modernist ideas of progress. Since modern narratives and theories are still based on certain values, postmodernists cannot tolerate these narratives because they are relative, biased, and narrow. Different truths can be known through multiple methods; no truth or method should be privileged; all statements about reality are caught in the same relativistic language trap.¹⁰ Any experience of so-called reality is already influenced by words that predispose the observer’s experience. All discourses are trapped in a relativity of “various discrete languages. And since we cannot know a supposedly objective world apart from language, we make our own worlds by how we use our language. Therefore, language and world are internally related.”¹¹

⁶ Richard Laugharne and Jonathan Laugharne, “Psychiatry, Postmodernism and Postnormal Science,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 95, no. 4 (2002): 207-10.

⁷ e.g., Crystal L. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

⁸ Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Construction of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 3.

⁹ R. Scott Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. M.B. Penner (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 53.

¹⁰ P.J. Watson, “Faithful Translation and Postmodernism: Norms and Linguistic Relativity within a Christian Ideological Surround,” *Edification – Journal of the Society of Christian Psychology* 2 (2008): 5-18.

¹¹ Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn,” 53-4.

Consequently, any narrative of postmodern spirituality is bound to the cultural context, language, pragmatic usefulness, and social systems. Such a postmodern assumption of linguistic relativity can invoke the Christian theology committed to the Absolute.

In the postmodern mindset, every authority should be distrusted, including the modern reliance on science and philosophy. If modernity believed in good as promoting equality, freedom, and justice, postmodernity takes a pragmatic approach to the meaning of good, that is internally coherent in a given context but not universally applicable. The ultimate goal of life is neither religious progress nor material social progress; what matters is respect for others, conditioned by an individual's relative gains and losses. A postmodern thinker sees spirituality as a cultural narrative measured in terms of utility, internal coherence, and part of a social power hierarchy.

Towards the Integrative Perspective

Within the globalization framework, premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives—present the background for our reflection on spiritual values and others defined as our search for the sacred and significant goals embodied within a traditional sacred context. As enriching as the perspectives above are, we lay them side by side in our presentation of the integrative perspective.¹²

We are in a privileged position, allowing us to integrate and maintain the best of each perspective without including its limitations. In the entire human history, humans have never been so globalized as at this time. The same globalization process creates tension between the global and local, demanding that we redefine national, individual, cultural, and religious identities. Intercultural and interreligious dialogues have never been so crucial as they are today. Economic dependency and the urge and need to work together, especially facing ecological issues, does not award soloistic decisions. As challenging as this might be, the same globalization

¹² Al Dueck and Thomas D. Parsons, "Integration Discourse: Modern and Postmodern," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 3 (2004): 232-47.

context can be taken as a classroom full of novel options for becoming more human.¹³

The premodern thinker or believer evaluated spirituality with tools of approved theology. This theology cannot be self-made or a simple collage of one's preferences, that would be typical of a postmodern believer. Thus, a premodern believer's spirituality is evaluated through adherence to an established religion in a specific culture. To express spiritual life, that believer uses the language of their milieu. Let us describe this approach as emic, a term borrowed from anthropological theory. An emic approach analyzes given phenomena from the participant's perspective. The accounts are consistent with the subjective perspectives, creating emic knowledge grounded on the consensual perception of cultural insiders.¹⁴ Accordingly, the emic accounts consider belief systems and cultures as two interconnected systems that cannot be separated. An accurate description requires a holistic view, covering one's spiritual beliefs, adherence to a community of the faithful, spiritual experts or authorities, formal doctrines and spiritual prescriptions, and traditional religious systems. If done accurately, etic approaches present details of spiritual beliefs and cultural meanings on their own terms.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the emic approach can be vulnerable to the researcher's biased interpretations, if not to his spiritual opinions.

If the premodern approach is primarily based on the emic approach, the modern approach favors the etic components, i.e., the study or description of a particular culture, social system, belief, and language in accordance with the scientific method. The results must be objective, replicable, falsifiable, comprehensive, and precise.¹⁶ Abstract descriptions, cross-cultural constructs, survey

¹³ Tone Svetelj, "Universal Humanism – A Globalization Context is the Classroom of Unheard Options how to Become More Human," *The Person and the Challenges* 4 (2014).

¹⁴ James Lett, "Emic/Etic distinctions," in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, eds. David Levinson and Melvin Ember (New York, NY: Holt, 1996), 382-83.

¹⁵ Michael Morris and Kwok Leung, Daniel Ames, Brian Lickel, "Views from Inside and Outside: Integrating Emic and Etic Insights about Culture and Justice Judgment," *Academy of Management Review* 24, no. 4 (1999): 781-96.

¹⁶ Lett, "Emic/Etic distinctions."

data, and cross-cultural constructs are almost mandatory in this approach. The observer does not feel constrained by a worldview and belief systems. Following the etic approach, the description of spirituality results in observational claims, which are interpreted logically and exposed to mathematical analyses. Such results present generalizable and cumulative knowledge. The nature of spirituality as such, is measured in terms of spiritual development, positive functioning in society, personal or collective well-being, and health outcomes.

The downside of this approach is the tension between faith and science, different worldviews, or between the etic and emic approaches. The etic approach is well-suited for religious advocates¹⁷ as well as atheist polemicists,¹⁸ who find the etic approach an objective tool for their analyses of conflicts between religious traditions and modern metaphysics. Religious advocates and atheist polemicists can arrive at opposing conclusions using identical etic data. Consequently, the critics of faith can easily prove, with scientific knowledge, that the premodern faith is largely irrational, based on historical myths, and in disagreement with positivistic assumptions. The biggest limit of the etic evaluations of spirituality is the struggle to grasp the fundamental core of spirituality, i.e., the human experience of the sacred.

The postmodern approach criticizes the modernist approach and goes beyond it by including the social and cultural components of investigation. While the modernist approach moves from the local toward the universal, the postmodern approach questions the validity of universal truths by stressing the importance of local truths. Since there are many local truths, there are also many methods of investigation bound and conditioned by different local truth communities. The same way of inquiry is applied to the postmodern understanding of spirituality.

This opens the question of how to translate concepts and knowledge across these local communities. Watson proposes a model called “ideological surround.”¹⁹ Following his model, all

¹⁷ P.J. Watson, “Faithful Translation and Postmodernism: Norms and Linguistic Relativity within a Christian Ideological Surround,” 5-18.

¹⁸ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2004).

¹⁹ Watson, “Faithful Translation and Postmodernism: Norms and Linguistic Relativity within a Christian Ideological Surround,” 6-8.

human activities occur within a context imbued with a meaning system. These meanings are ideological, characterized by three interlocking elements:²⁰ (1) they make assertions that can be related to empirical observations, but rest on a non-empirical foundation, e.g., God's creation of the universe; (2) non-empirical foundations of ideologies have normative implications. For example, the organization of our social life will be organized differently, depending on whether God or naturalistic processes are at the heart of the universe; (3) ideologies are sociologically significant, defining who does or does not belong to a certain community.

Watson continues that postmodernism does not necessarily exclude the existence of any universal truth but binds the idea that this truth will be readily apparent and accepted by anyone of the right mind, which might need some time for reflection. In any case, the existence of universal truth opens a new challenge for Christians in translating their norms of universal truth into ideological language structures of postmodern communities. Such translation cannot be based on language structures of inclusion or exclusion, based on the identification of members inside or outside the Christian community. The translation has to be such that it goes across ideologies of the postmodern communities and presents an appealing and meaningful message to all people of the right mind.

Premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives lead us to the integrative perspective. As the adjective *integrative* indicates, this perspective combines and assimilates the key features of the other three perspectives. The integrative perspective recognizes the possibility of multiple truths and investigations in metaphysics and epistemology, including in ethical inquiry, as postmodernity claims. In addition, the premodern emic and modern etic analyses of spirituality come together; relying only on the insider's account without checking the universality of the insider's outcomes is insufficient.

The integrative approach embraces the multidimensionality of spirituality. Adequate comprehension of spirituality must include psychological and biological dimensions of

²⁰ Watson borrows these ideas from Alasdair MacIntyre's book *Against the Self-Images of the Age*.

human existence, sensation, cognition, creativity, personality, self-awareness, virtues, pain, spiritual activities such as fasting, and spiritual insights.²¹ At the same time, the phenomenon of spirituality can be analyzed from the microscopic scale of human existence (atoms and cells) to the macroscopic levels of family, community, culture, nation, religion.²² Again, each one of these levels influences our narrative of spirituality.

In addition, the integrative approach introduces the concept of the “half-life” of truth. One needs to add temporal and historical truths to the subjective, objective, and contextual truths. The integrative approach is aware that the actual comprehension of truth is only transitory, far from being all-encompassing. As such, there is always space for a more complex understanding in the future. Applying this logic to Christian spirituality, a distinction must be made between the practitioner of spirituality and their present understanding of the transcendence on the one hand and the transcendence itself, on the other. Since the present understanding is always incomplete and temporary, the practitioner remains unattached to the temporary mental constructs, aware that the knowledge is incomplete, and striving to know more in the future.

What is the place of authority, of good, and of the goal of life within the integrative approach? Following the principles of the integrative perspectives strictly, even the position and the amount of power of authority remain contextual and limited by historical timelines. Similarly, the meaning of good remains flexible and conditioned by its positioning on the universal and local levels. Analogously, the goal of life is defined from the observer's point of view. In short, the integrative approach creates a strong awareness that the meaning of authority, of good, and of the goal of life are relative to the historical and cultural context when this awareness arises. At the same time, this awareness opens a new space for a deepened reflection on the true nature of the absolute, leading to

²¹ Robert A. Emmons and Raymond F. Paloutzian, “The Psychology of Religion,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 54 (2003): 377-402.

²² Brian J Zinnbauer and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Religiosity and Spirituality,” *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, eds. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2005).

new interpretations of the meaning of authority, of good, and of the goal of life, yet to be discovered.

At this point, the integrative approach overlaps with anatheism, a term borrowed from Richard Kearney's books *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* and *Reimagining the Sacred*. In the last centuries of Western intellectual and spiritual history, the phenomena related to secularization have gradually occupied areas once reserved for the ancient all-powerful God, dogmatic certainties, and strong metaphysics. The apparent departure of God should not be taken literally but as a departure of a particular understanding of God, influenced by our perspectives, traditions, cultures, and theology. After this departure, there is a new opening and a refreshed interest in the sacred with its spiritual and religious spheres. For Kearney, God is not a 'thing,' which can be described phenomenologically, but a call and cry that invites us to different interpretations by asking: "What do you say that I am?"²³ In this context, Kearney places his concept of anatheism as an attempt to reimagine God in our time. The *a* in the prefix *ana-* has a double meaning: "ab" (away from God) and "ad" (toward God). Kearney talks about the return of the lost God, that returns as a more real, powerful, and loving presence. There is an epiphany or a retrieval of past experience that moves forward, gives new life to memory, and a future to the past.²⁴ "The ana- of anatheism makes sure that God who has already come is always still to come."²⁵ In other words, Kearney's returning to God after God is a hermeneutical retrieval of sacred things from the past, reminding us about unrealized potential to be more fully realized in the future.²⁶

In summary, the integrative perspective synthesizes elements from the premodern, modern, and postmodern worldviews and emphasizes cultural points of view as well as the ongoing process of change. As such, it creates the framework for a spirituality of synthesis and rediscovery of as yet unknown options

²³ Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney debates God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 241.

²⁴ Kearney and Zimmerman, *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney debates God*, 6-7

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁶ Platovnjak and Svetelj, "Anatheism - an incentive to discover the importance of discipleship in Christianity," 377-80.

of becoming more human and, correspondingly, becoming more Christian.

Postmodern Believer's Tension between the Inward and Outward Look

Kearney's concept of anatheism, merged with the integrative approach, challenges the postmodern mindset and inquiry. Postmodernity is, in many ways, homocentric, cultivating the Protagorean idea of man as the center and measure of everything. As attractive as it seems, modern individualism cannot provide meaningful answers for man's inner unrest. Thus, postmodernity fosters a new awareness of the essence of humanness as a universal on the one hand, and, on the other, this humanness is always rooted in local culture and tradition. Even though there are so many racial, social, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences among people, they all share their human nature, equal to all. So, our reflection on human nature cannot start exclusively from an abstract, contentless, transcendental concept about the human agent, as it seems to be in modernity. The human is found only in an immersed existence – intersubjective, historical, corporeal, and through man's cultural, social, linguistic, and other expressions of immersion, which is the position of postmodernity. Let us call this universal humanism, as already explored elsewhere.²⁷

If the integrative approach merges the abstract concepts about the human nature from modernity and the postmodern idea of the immersed existence, the nature of the individual appears in a new light. This reflection is incomplete, unless it is complemented by the premodern search for ultimate truth, universal knowledge, and investment into spiritual progress, as the first chapter of this paper proposes. In other words, postmodern inquiry on the existential human values is complemented with the universality and objectivity from modernity and subjectivity and inwardness from premodernity.

²⁷ Svetelj, "Universal Humanism – A Globalization Context is the Classroom of Unheard Options how to Become More Human."

The main challenge for the postmodern individual is the desire to become his or her own, autonomous master. As the ancient Greek word explains (auto – self, and nomos – law), the person pretends to be self-legislator, creating laws for itself, landing in a precarious position: what is the foundation, the final criterion, and the unchanging values for self-legislative activities? The postmodern individual believes in finding them through self-knowledge and introspection, perceived as the privileged tools for discovering the final meaning of existence. The hope is to discover the orderliness and synchronicity with the world. So-called mythological, religious, or metaphysical metanarratives of the past should be replaced by discovering an inner law and order, pointing the right direction. However, in view of a complete self-discovery, looking inward undermines the hope of discovering a binding foundation independent from existence. A rational person cannot muster absolute and regulative principles of the ultimate truth, and the best is an energetic indifference. To know oneself does not mean determining one's own identity but to becoming aware of one's own groundlessness.²⁸

There is always a gap between the foundation and the founder, between the values and the one who values. Introspective exploration alone can not find universal values, foundations, or absolute authority because it keeps the human mind locked within the boundaries of short, subjective narratives. Values are not as solid and stable as humans wish them to be, but are ambivalent and relative as human nature is.

To solve this dilemma, utilizing Postman's reflection,²⁹ the postmodern mind has to start looking for stability and objectivity outside itself, as modernity did in its search for something objective and universal, but had gone too far and failed to accomplish its promises because it excluded religious and metaphysical foundations. For this reason, the integrative perspective suggests returning to the premodern sensing and spiritual curiosity, opening our eyes and hearts to contemplation, enabling us to see beyond

²⁸ Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der Politischen Kinetik* (Frankfurt am Main Suhrkamp, 1989), 264-65.

²⁹ Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 101-19.

capitalism, consumerism, materialism, Marxism, historicism, and other big narratives of postmodernity.³⁰ The solution is neither in constant problematization, dismantling, and trivialization of these narratives because this surrounds us with insecurity. What we need are encompassing new narratives that are consequent in themselves, i.e., inspire hope and ideals, optimism, and enable personal identification, establish the foundations for moral behavior, the basic feeling of justice, archetypal wisdom for right compassion, faith, and at least temporarily, provide us with acceptable explanations for the unknowable. For Postman, the answer lies not in inventing new narratives, but in rediscovering the old ones that call us to join them with new knowledge.

Conclusion

Premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity, as three perspectives of Western intellectual history, offer dynamic explanations of the universe and the place of humans in it, with all the human weaknesses and limits. Each explanation appeals to human trust and responsibility and strengthens our hope for a better and more harmonious future. At the same time, each explanation provides only a limited comprehension of reality. Even though religion is the path to universal truth, our religious and theological comprehension does not necessarily provide the answers to the universal truth. They remain our narrative of the universal truth.

In different ways, three different perspectives and the Judeo-Christian narrative appeal to human trust and responsibility and strengthen our hope for a better future of harmony. They will remain meaningful if we learn to read them as stories about the limited human conception of truth. If we embark on the path of integrative behavior and inquiry, our intellectual and spiritual history can become a classroom for new insights.

³⁰ Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj, "Ancient Greek and Christian understanding of contemplation in terms of a resonant attitude towards the world," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 82, no. 3 (2022): 623-37.

Once immersed in the process of globalization, it is difficult to follow only one all-clarifying narrative. The alternative is to accept the fact that, as humans, our search for a non-exclusive synthesis is limited. To accept this fact, a measure of intellectual and spiritual humility is required.

The same Western intellectual and spiritual history teaches us that any kind of imposition of big narratives, including the imposition of the Christian narrative, does not bring desired results. Religious narratives often became tools of political power and, consequently, lost their religious and spiritual purpose.

Chesterton explains that Christianity came to the world to assure humans that they are not left with their inner groundlessness but, instead, are invited to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain.³¹ There is a God Creator, who left the creation to humans. As a measurement of all, this God can be found neither in humans nor in the creation; this God is opposed to humans and the entire creation as a transcending instance, continuously calling to be rediscovered. Through this discovery and reinterpretation of the ideal, human appeases his immanent need for participatory creativity. What matters is not how exact human interpretations are, but the need to not to change their ideal. This ideal, like values, has to remain unchanging; otherwise, human efforts to understand and accomplish them becomes futile.³²

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³¹ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Nashville, Tennessee: Sam Torode Book Arts, 2016), 71-2.

³² *Ibid.*, 102-103.

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Shamanism in XXI Century China: Social Functions and Local Specifics

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Abstract: This paper elaborates on the phenomenon of shamanism revival in modern China based on the fieldwork data gathered among Shenehen Buryats living in the north-eastern part of the country. It discovers that traditional shamanism that was often labeled as pheudalistic superstition and has been long predicted to vanish, grows in popularity despite the current economic growth and the rise of living standards. Hidden and concealed, it remains an integral part of modern Chinese society as it helps people cope with the challenges of everyday life and pays attention to the needs of an individual that are often ignored by the other institutions. Unlike in the neighboring countries, shamans in China do not venture into the politics and limit their role to that of an individual crisis manager, occupying relatively small, but nevertheless an important niche of “folk healers and psychologists.” The recent growth of popularity of such sort of shamanism proves that modern society lacks this kind of service and modern shamans simply feel this gap. The paper concludes that shamanism is almost impossible to eradicate completely. Even suppressed and ousted, it can mimicry and find refuge at the fringes of social structure, from where it may still address the problems of common people.

Keywords: Shamanism, China, Buryat, Religious policy, Social institutions

Shenehen Buryats

Buryats are not officially recognized as a minority in China and are normally included in the ranks of Mongols, despite the fact that they preserved relatively well their own distinctively different language and traditional lifestyle. They still have the strongest

sense of the specific Buryat identity. Those living in China keep close social and cultural connections with the Buryats living in the neighboring regions of Mongolia and Russia. Originally migrants from Aginskoye grassland in Russia's Transbaikalia, in the beginning of the last century they left it and settled in China following the turmoil of the Russian Civil War.¹ Since that time, they have firmly established themselves as an integral part of China's family of peoples, at the same time not breaking ties with the kinsfolk in their original homeland although sometimes it was not easy to keep them. As almost all Buryats in China reside along Shenehen river in the Hulunbuir City of Inner Mongolia Autonomous District, they are known here as Shenehen Buryats, albeit this name is only partially official. As they are not recognized as an official minority, there is no reliable statistics on the exact number of Shenehen Buryats. Researchers normally estimate there are currently five to seven thousands Buryats living in China.²

One of the distinctive features of their spiritual life is the relatively high status that their shamans enjoy. They managed to survive both Mao era purges and modern science development vulgar materialism and are still revered by Buryats who seek their assistance for the number of occasions and reasons. Taken in consideration relatively high standards of living of Buryats that prosper mostly thanks to their involvement in transborder trade of China, Russia and Mongolia, both legal and otherwise, it often puzzles researchers why they still haven't given up their "outdated" shamanistic beliefs. Contrary to popular opinion that shamans are the last resort for the poor and uneducated, there has been recorded a significant increase in both number of practitioners and their clients alike in the recent times. They experience a sort of revival despite the economic boom and the sharp rise of standards of living that rural areas of China currently going through. This phenomenon provides a rare, yet significant insight into the mechanism of survival, revival and even "re-

¹ Zhanjiang Xu, ed., *Zhongguo Buliyate Mengguren* (Hulunbuir: Neimenggu Chubanshe, 2009), 3.

² Lufang Bao, "Buliyate Mengguzu jiqi Yanjiu Gaishu," *Qinghai Minzu Yanjiu* 2, no. 14 (2003): 84.

establishment”³ of the ancient traditions and practices in modern, highly centralized states. They only seem to have been long eradicated, but in reality just swiftly escaped into hiding staying unnoticed and waiting for a suitable moment to re-emerge as a powerful social force.

As local people insist, it was already back in the 1920s that several influential, well-respected shamans were practicing among Shenehen Buryats, who came with them from Aginskoye. A decade after their flight to Hulunbuir, this area was occupied by Japanese forces and became a part of Manchukuo state. During Japanese rule shamanism was not suppressed and shamans were neither arrested nor persecuted in any other way as authorities resorted to careful propaganda, trying to explain to the local population the ineffectiveness of their healing techniques. Shamans were ridiculed and sometimes laughed at, but nothing more serious.⁴ Situation changed after 1949 however, when People’s Republic of China was established. New authorities launched a full-scale anti-shamanism campaign aiming at eradicating this “poisonous phendalistic superstition” completely. Campaign reached its peak during the years of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when shamans were forced to give up their way of life and practice and sometimes simply murdered. For example, the notorious Buryat female shaman of that era named Handa was forced to stop performing rituals, eventually lost all her divine powers and died shortly afterwards. It looked those days that shamanism is doomed to perish, but common people continued to arrange rituals in secret and this saved it from total extinction. Despite all the pressure, there were even new shamans rising to prominence those days.⁵ Too elusive and too difficult to grasp, amorphous shamanism just went into hiding and by doing this survived an unequal battle against almighty state that was imposed on it. At the same time, its century-old rival Buddhism with its highly elaborated organizational structure was brutally

³ Olle Sundström, “Is the shaman indeed risen in post-Soviet Siberia?,” *Scripta* 24 (2012): 383.

⁴ Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 45.

⁵ Shiyu Qiu and Lü Ping, *Dawo’erzu Saman Wenhua Chuancheng* (Shenyang: Liaoning Chubanshe, 2009), 12.

devastated. The monasteries were demolished, its sacred books destroyed, and the monks murdered or exiled.

After the reforms were launched in China in the late 1970s and the freedom of religion partially restored, Buddhism was quick to revive and to take back its former role within the society, while shamanism remained semi-illegal and found refuge in the remotest periphery of the public discourse. Officially, it was labeled as “pseudalistic superstition” and scientists researched it as a relic of a bygone era. Articles and documentaries dedicated to “the last shaman” popped up routinely, while the ultimate “victories over the heritage of the dark past” were declared once and again. In reality, however, it was just wishful thinking of the officials as while both scientists and politicians spoke of the shamanism as something that belonged exclusively to the past, the next “last shaman” was born from ashes and ancient tradition was evolving in the universe that existed parallel to the one that they both stayed in. The state and the shamans were no longer in direct confrontation, but they didn’t co-operate either. They simply ignored each other. In fact, the situation hasn’t changed much ever since, and all the above-said is true for modern China too.

Concealed Shamanism

In order to illustrate this quite paradoxical situation, I would like to come up with some fieldwork conversations from Nantun, the capital of Evenk autonomous banner of Hulunbuir City in China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous District. “Shamanism is our grandfathers’ belief, however among eastern Buryats, including those of us in Shenehen, it has been long replaced by Buddhism. So, if you wish to speak with real shamans, you shall better travel to Baikal, as shamanism is best-preserved there, and particularly on the Olkhon Island,” explains with an elderly Buryat intellectual who used to be both people’s representative and a deputy head of the local administration. “Does anyone need shamans now, when Buddhism effectively replaced them, and people choose to visit lama if they need help or advice?”, a young lama from Shenehen lamasery shrugs his shoulders visibly irritated. “Shamanism is a cultural anachronism from the pseudal past, and there are no social premises for its existence in our country anymore,” explains

current state of affairs the head of the religion supervision department at the local administration, a native Buryat himself. “Shamanism is something from the very remote past, we have heard about it from our grandmothers, but it simply does not exist anymore,” the manager of a local eatery looks totally confident. The words of the scientists echo those of the local people in Nantun. Dr. Meng Huiying, a prominent Chinese expert on shamanism, claims: “The development of education and science brings great changes to the culture and the everyday lives of the northern minorities that leads to the gradual, but irrevocable elimination of the irrational shamanistic magical weltanschauung as an ideological system.”⁶ It seems that speed of evolution of the modern society makes shamanism in China lose its social ground, and it is indeed doomed to disappear.

After staying in Nantun for a little longer, however, the overall picture changes dramatically. “There has been recently a sharp increase in the number of young shamans practicing in Nantun, but I do not believe in their newly acquired magic powers,” the same head of the religion supervision department who has just assured me in the absence of any social premises for shamanism revival, suddenly shakes his head and smiles. “There is one new shaman practicing in our neighborhood – some say, he is a decent one,” a visitor in the local eatery joins our conversation with the manager. “Can you give me his phone number?” – the same manager, who just told that shamanism belongs to the world of ancestors seems to be sincerely interested in visiting this young new shaman in the future. “In fact, every Buryat here pays visit to shaman occasionally, but this is not something that can be discussed openly and with the strangers,” a colleague from Nantun Evenk research and study center finally explains this “shaman paradox”.

As it appeared to be, the shamanism is still wide-spread and more and more popular among different groups of Shenehen Buryats, but unlike, say, in Russia, where it enjoys some sort of a

⁶ Huiying Meng, “Zhongguo Beifang Shaoshu Minzu Samanjiao” (PhD diss., Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2000), 122.

“golden age”, having just “risen from the ashes”⁷, it is shamanism of concealed sort here that is not supposed to be told about. Practicing shamans in contemporary China still have numerous clients, but people prefer not to admit their existence and try not to discuss this sensitive topic with the strangers. They are even more reluctant to confess that they themselves use their services occasionally, because such behavior is considered backward, shameful and even reprehensible. As common people do not admit they occasionally visit shamans, local government does not recognize their existence at all. Buddhism, Islam, Christianity are all taken seriously, and they are closely supervised and carefully researched. These well-established religions are considered an important factor of the social life of local people and China’s officialdom feels it necessary to develop and to execute special policy towards them. At the same time, to their opinion, shamanism is just a “pseudalistic superstition” doomed to vanish in times of the rapid modernisation of the country as it lacks any social base, and as such there is no need for developing special policies with regards to it or for close monitoring of the activity of the shamans. If nothing else, the “superstition” can be included in the “heritage list” of Buryat or Mongol culture, put into museums and then marketed to a mass tourist as an odd exotics in order to deprive it from its social significance. As Xing and Murray noted, “government support does not include shamanic spirit healing traditions. We are aware of no specific policy statement prohibiting such support. However, though hostility to shamanic healing is not official, it is real.”⁸

On their side, shamans in China look fully satisfied with such state of things and are not eager to expose their identities either as they are not interested in increasing their public profile. They seem to prefer staying away from both business and politics so they do not advertise themselves openly in order to avoid unnecessary attention from the authorities. Sidinjabu is probably the most famous of modern Shenehen Buryat shaman and is a good example

⁷ Valentina Kharitonova, *Feniks is pepla? Sibirskii shamanizm na rubezhe tsysyacheletii* (Moscow: Nauka, 2006).

⁸ Haiyan Xing and Gerald Murray, “The evolution of Chinese shamanism: A case study from Northwest China,” *Religions* 9, no. 397 (2018): 16.

of such sort of shamans. Being 11 to 14 years old, he was a novice in the nearby Shenehen lamasery. As he recounts now, at the age of 13 he started to see prophetic dreams and could predict future as he knew the whereabouts of the lost objects. Having discovered that, old lama his teacher told him to undergo shaman initiation ritual with an experienced Buryat shaman from Outer Mongolia. He did so at the age of 15, and although still a relatively young man, these days Sidinjabu already has his own apprentices both from Inner Mongolia and beyond.

His home is known as “shaman house” in Nantun and visitors flock to its doors. He receives them in his impromptu reception hall, where one can immediately notice a simple desk with books in Tibetan language and a poster from the nearby lamasery. At the same time the walls of his room are decorated with bow and arrows that is aimed to manifest his direct connections with his ancestors and the local spirits alike. Same fusion characterizes the contents of the four of his prayer cabinets, where Buddhist figurines and photos of Mongolian high-ranked lamas rub shoulders with traditional Buryat felt dolls and different shaman paraphernalia like horsehead staffs etc.

The visitors too are a motley crew of people of all ages and nationalities – in “shaman house” one can meet both a Buryat, Daur or Evenk and an occasional Han also. Some come with their children, some travel from as far as Beijing, Mongolia or Russia. Most of those seeking a piece of advice from Sidinjabu are however still Chinese nationals. Students come before their examinations, while those to embark themselves on a long journey expect some sort of “travel insurance” from the shaman. There are visitors who came to ask him to bless their newly acquired possessions, while others need to find the old ones that are lost and missing. The other reasons for visiting “shaman house” include protection from the fraud in business, health problems and job-related issues. As Sidinjabu himself notices, people were mostly seeking for his health advice in the past, while nowadays the majority of his visitors complain about mental problems and general life disorder.

“Nantun shaman” doesn’t have any civil job as he earns his livings performing rituals and consulting people, so each visitor is eventually a *client* for him. Unlike modern Buryat shamans in

Russia,⁹ he doesn't consider himself as a serviceman for his kinsmen, neither performs he any social duties for the community. As such, he is more a medicine man than a religious or a community leader. His sphere of responsibility is individual pains and sorrows that modern society simply does not want and has no capacity to heal. Most of these modern shamans in China do not go beyond this role, and only few of them are trying to do something more. Among those is Siqingua, another famous shaman of the Evenk autonomous banner, who used to work as a school teacher before undergoing shaman initiation ritual in 1998. Her reception hall is totally different from that of Sidinjabu as it looks more like a decent business office than a religious establishment with its cozy courtyard, massive reception desk and an impressive collection of certificates and awards brought from international symposia that are hanging on the walls in their neat wooden frames. This is not simply a show-off, however, as Siqingua is a frequent guest at scientific conferences held around the world, where she is routinely interviewed both by scientists and local TV hosts. As she is indeed quite famous, there are many rich local businessmen and some governmental officials among her clients, albeit the latter prefer to come to her office in secret. There were even several books published both in China and abroad that explore this phenomenon of Siqingua,¹⁰ while "The Foundation for Shamanic Studies", founded by Dr. Michael Harner, a prominent American scientist-turned-shaman, awarded her with an honorable title "Living Treasure of Shamanism."¹¹

She is still an exclusion rather than a rule however, as most of the shamans in contemporary China limit their role to that of an individual crisis manager, occupying relatively small, but nevertheless an important niche of "folk healers and psychologists." They ease the burden of daily life for the common people by channeling out their troubles, helping them cope with

⁹ Natalia Zhukovskaya, "Buddhism and Shamanism as Buryat Mentality Shaping Factors," in *Religion in History and Culture of Mongolian-speaking Nationalities of Russia*, ed. Natalia Zhukovskaya (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2008).

¹⁰ Mihaly Hoppal, *Shamans and Traditions* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 2007).

¹¹ Qiu and Lü, *Dawo'erzu Saman Wenhua Chuancheng*, 27.

anxiety and allowing to get rid of the pains and sorrows of everyday life. They are not interested in politics and have no willingness to promote their views in mass-media. It is impossible to imagine that anything similar to Russia, where Buryat shamans were protesting against pipeline in Tunka valley and fought for the autonomy of Ust-Orda Buryat Autonomous District,¹² could ever happen in China. Shamans here are not involved in any educational activities or promotion of a healthy lifestyle like it is the case just across the border, in Aginskoye of Russia. They are not part of the society or even their community as they serve exclusively their individual clients, solving, but not preventing their individual problems. Unlike in many other countries, they don't even attract the attention of the tourists as "any attempt to publicly display shamanic healing for visiting tour groups would more likely draw ridicule than admiration from middle or upper class urban tourists from other parts of China."¹³

Shenehen shamans do not wish to present themselves as important symbols of national revival either that is being so common among Buryat shamans in the neighboring Russia. In China, this sort of revival is something that is exclusively associated with Buddhist clergy. Buddhism indeed provides the most effective basis for strengthening Buryat unity here, and local shamans never challenge its superiority in this aspect. For example, Shenehen lamasery that was rebuilt and reopened by local Buryats with their own money, in the eyes of the entire population of Hulunbuir is not simply another religious object. It solidifies and personifies the identity of Shenehen Buryat, it is the basis of their unity and solidarity and as such is revered as the only viable community center and the true bearer of tradition. All the important social activities, including traditional holidays and festivals, as well as the tradition of obo sacrifice are nowadays also almost completely monopolized by the local Buddhist lamas.

At the same time shamans here remain divided and marginalized. Unlike those in the Republic of Buryatia and the

¹² Zhukovskaya, "Buddhism and Shamanism as Buryat Mentality Shaping Factors," 34–5.

¹³ Xing and Murray, "The evolution of Chinese shamanism: A case study from Northwest China," 16.

neighboring regions of Russia, where shamans are often engaged in “the establishment of clinics, the publication of a certain kind of literature, the arrangement of sacred places and buildings for rituals and worship, the organization of public rituals and feasts, and the creation of a network of national and international relations,”¹⁴ they do not have her their registered society in China and haven’t developed any universal code of conduct, examination system or the certificate system of their own. All such activities do not correspond with the spirit of Chinese law, of course, but shamans do not feel it is necessary for them to have this anyway. They do not publish lengthy monographs and do not print throw-over calendars like their colleagues just across the border do.

They even prefer not to communicate with each other and limit the scope of their co-operation to the occasional jointly-held small ceremonies for a group of close relatives. Unlike in Russia, most of these modern shamans in China are of a peasant stock, they all are poorly educated and they do not have any management experience. Their low social status and limited social functions results not from their modest descent, poor competences, lack of organizational resources or low ambitions, however. The main reason for this is that Chinese society needs none of their services and thus is not in a position to recognize them as an important social factor, effectively ignoring them and isolating them wherever and whenever possible. One can say that shamans in China are nowadays placed beyond the society itself.

To certain extent, their status is closely related to the type of problems that those modern shamans normally solve and to the attitude of the society towards such problems in general. As it was noted, people visit shamans, when haunted by nightmares, when their business run out of luck and when they suffer health and mental problems or any sort of internal disorder. In highly competitive Chinese society, where individual success is necessary for getting respect and for maintaining one’s personal dignity, it is sometimes simply a shame and a failure to even admit that you are experiencing problems of this sort. Nightmares are simple child tricks, bad luck is just a poor excuse for job incompetence, mental problems and internal disorder is pure sentimentality and

¹⁴ Sundström, “Is the shaman indeed risen in post-Soviet Siberia?,” 369.

weakness from the point of view of such society that doesn't accept or recognize them as real problems. In this context, a visit to shaman is just a sign of someone's incapability and inadequacy, and due to this, it is always better to keep it in secret and to forget about it as soon as it is possible. Shaman is seen as something inevitable, but people try to minimize communication with him and never speak about any interaction with him with others. Their attitude towards shaman is often a mix of fear and disgust, as it is the fear and disgust that they feel about their own problems that they ask shaman to find solutions for.

As the result of all of this, shamanism in contemporary China remains hidden and completely asocial, as it is seen in this way both by the authorities and the society itself that prefer to ignore its existence and to reject its right to play any significant role in the life of people. Evicted to the fringes of social structure, it remains disorganized, spontaneous, amorphous, agile and apolitical. It does not harbor any intentions to replace the state or to co-operate with it. From its part, the state shows no interest in co-operation with shamanism either. Positioning itself as being able to solve all problems of the society as a whole and its individual members alike without any help from shamans, it considers then neither foe nor ally.

The real problem and the real challenge is, however, that in reality both state and shamans still need each other and that this sort of mutual ignorance can't last long without dire consequences for both. The case of post-Soviet Buryatia and the neighboring regions,¹⁵ where shamanism eventually came out of the underground in the wake of the state crisis, and became an integral part of the new social order, providing balance and necessary ideology postulates in times of moral chaos and society stricture collapse, proves this point. It illustrates that during social crises shamans can be recalled by the society to help solving pressing problems that government and other social institutions fail to cope with. In this case, shamanism may become an important element of the social structure. Keeping this in mind, a careful incorporation of practicing shamans into legal socio-

¹⁵ Agnieszka Halemba, "Contemporary religious life in the Republic of Altai: the interaction of Buddhism and Shamanism," *Sibirica* 3 (2003).

political framework may become more optimal strategy for the state. It can leverage on their spiritual resources and moral authority and at the same time do not let spiritual leaders from the periphery of society to take the real lead if one day state loses its grip.¹⁶

Conclusion

Shamanism has long been predicted to extinct, but has nevertheless survived all the wars that were waged against it, proving once and again that it is impossible to eradicate it completely. It will exist as long as the society itself, and those will only be its shape, its appearance, and probably its functions that will be slightly changing with times. Even ousted to the remotest fringes of the social structure, it will retain its power and the harder will state suppress it, the stronger it will. The case of shamanism in contemporary China proves this point.

According to the popular belief shared by many in modern China, shamanism has long doomed to vanish here, and those are predominantly poor people from the rural areas that still need and still use the services provided by shamans.¹⁷ In reality however, we witness its unprecedented revival, as both number of shamans and of that of their clients that continue to grow in the wake of rapid social development and the tremendous growth of China's economics. Moreover, contrary to the popular belief that the majority of shamanists are either desperate herders or the miserable destitute villagers with no access to modern medical facilities, they rather represent middle-class urbanites that have been taken away from their normal social rural environment through relocation and who eventually lost their frame of reference. It seems that the reason for this remarkable fact is that while political and economic problems in the country indeed start decreasing, the intensity of its social conflicts shows growth. This is in turn due to fact that while the system itself is getting stronger,

¹⁶ Maxim Mikhalev, "Transformation of Shamanistic Worldview as the Reflection of the Contemporary Buryat Society and its Values," *Bulletin of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanities of the RAS* 1, no. 35 (2018): 89.

¹⁷ Meng, "Zhongguo Beifang Shaoshu Minzu Samanjiao."

the problems of its individual members look less and less important to its operators.

In fact, the society, no matter how developed or strong it can become, is able and willing to solve only its own problems or such problems of its individual members that are directly related to the wellness of the society as a whole. At the same time, it shows no any interest in the individual cares of its citizens, sometimes even rejecting to recognize them as problems at all. Bureaucratic, driven by egoism and economic greed, the most developed and elaborated social structures stay in the state of complacency and ignore concerns of its individual members as long as they do not pose a threat to the stability and development of themselves. As a result, those concerns constantly multiply as in our increasingly global and dehumanized, rapidly developing world an individual becomes disposable and feels more and more desolated.

Unable to find acceptable solutions to their individual problems within this framework of a materialistic, technocratic, success-oriented society, people start searching for them in its outskirts and beyond. There they eventually discover shamans and find them ready to take into consideration all their “small” problems, as they do not feel they are shameful. It is important to note, that those shamans who live in the fringes of the social system, manage to retain their ability to connect themselves to the energies flowing from beyond the encapsulated social system, so they can indeed solve those problems. By doing this in turn, shamans continue to serve people and shamanism becomes an alternative and a supplement to the state and its institutions.

Such is the status of Buryat shamans in modern China’s North-Eastern region, where state and other social institutions are strong, self-sufficient and recognize no other power besides themselves as they believe they can offer to citizens of the country acceptable solutions for the most if not all their problems.¹⁸ Shamans here are effectively evicted to the remote periphery of the social structure and their status is extremely low as they perform no any social functions while their clients are almost exclusively those with problems that society either refuses to recognize or

¹⁸ Tamier, “Zhong’E Buliyateren de Samanjiao Fuxing Xianxiang Bjjijiao Yanjiu,” *Shijie Zongjiao Wenhua* 2 (2017): 93–7.

rejects to solve considering them unimportant or shameful. Important to note, however, that this type of shamanism is still in high demand, and this demand has only been growing recently. This signals that the modern society is probably just too arrogant while it is becoming less and less able of providing solutions for the problems of its individual members. That naturally forces them to start looking for such solutions outside the net of the conventional social institutions.

Until society changes its attitude to the problems of its individual members, the perspectives of such concealed, marginalized shamanism will be improving as it will grow and develop. At the same time, success-blinded and increasingly ignorant society would pay little or no attention to its existence as it sincerely believes in its own almightiness. It will only when an imminent crisis finally strikes such society, would it discover that all its “last shamans” that it forgot have already brought up a generation of new apprentices ready to return to the stage. This happened in post-Soviet Buryatia in the wake of the Soviet system collapse, and this can also happen in China if the growing social problems here would ruin its economic and political stability one day and state for one or another reason becomes fragile. In order to avoid this scenario, the current policy of ignorance shall in this case be replaced with careful research of shamanism as a system of thought and co-operation with practicing shamans.

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Unity in Diversity: Hindu Perspective

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Abstract: Both accommodation and resistance were parts of Hindu behaviour pattern. caste is related to intolerance and much more. Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar fought for the rights and upliftment of the 'untouchables' thereby giving them their due place in society. Not letting them flourish in every possible way is a denial of humanity. Kant's advice can be emphasised here: "A social order requires defining the freedom of the individual in such a way that it discovers its own limits in other people." Hinduism accommodates a great variety of life styles and practices. Hindu communities assimilated people, customs and ideas despite having a hierarchy based on caste, age sex, and also despite having geographical diversity and thus bringing in unity without uniformity in diversity without fragmentation. Within the Hindu fold there are numerous evidences of crosscultural fertilization. Their religious outlook is unitary. Monier-Williams, a British scholar, wrote that Hinduism was like 'the sacred fig-tree of India (the banyan), which from a single stem sends out numerous branches destined to send roots to the ground and become trees themselves, till the parent stock is lost in a dense forest of its own offshoots.' Sir Alfred Comyn Lyall, a British literary historian, also wrote: 'Nowhere but in India can we now survey with our own eyes an indigenous polytheism in full growth, flourishing like a secular green bay tree among a people of ancient culture. The sects of the Hindus are numerous and new sects are coming up but Hindu sectarianism is not exclusive. The perfect harmony of relationships in this world is realised through one's union with other leaving behind the barrier of social inhibitions, thereby fulfilling the highest mission of the present age-the unification of mankind.' This is an ideal for which the present-day world must strive.

Keywords: Unitary, Otherness, Accommodation, Resistance, Caste

The problem of otherness arises because of the existence of plurality in Indian society. Mahatma Gandhi stressed that religious pluralism not only be accepted but must be welcomed. On September 22, 1947 he said: 'I have noticed with great joy at the annual sessions of the Congress on its exhibition ground several meetings held by religious sects of political parties holding their gatherings, expressing divergent and often diametrically opposite views without molestation and without any assistance from the police.'¹ Even today one witnesses such incidents where people live together despite great inequalities. A discourse on issues of otherness has always been associated with the relation between one religion and another. Significant contributions on these issues have been made by Indian thinkers like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and B.R. Ambedkar. These thinkers in their own way have tried to show that the problematic of otherness arises when there is a perception of duality. The moment there is a realisation of universal 'oneness', or an all pervasive divinity, the problem dissolves. The ultimate Reality (God) is one who is universally present around us and within us. There are different ways of seeking the same ultimate Reality through different paths, cultures and symbols. Unless we realise this there can never be peace and harmony on earth. Mahatma Gandhi said, 'Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality there are many religions as there are individuals.'² In his *The Vedic Experience* philosopher Raimon Panikkar wrote: 'It is precisely faith that makes thinking possible, for faith offers the unthought ground out of which thinking can emerge. It is faith that makes moral and other decisions possible, opening to us the horizon against which our actions become meaningful.'³

Prof. J.L. Mehta commented that the Indian cultural situation 'has at no time *defined itself* in relation to the other, nor

¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Delhi Diary* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948), 29.

² M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1944), 24.

³ Shashi Tharoor, *Why I Am a Hindu* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018), 9.

acknowledged the other in its inassimilable otherness, nor in consequence occupied itself with the problem of relationship as it arises in any concrete encounter with the other.⁴ However, 'otherness' was always present in Hindu society. Exploitation of caste is noticeable in India. In India caste hierarchies have existed for centuries. Caste is related to intolerance as well as much else. Historically, Hindu communities assimilated people, customs and ideas despite having a hierarchical society thus bringing about unity without uniformity in diversity without fragmentation. Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar were dissatisfied with the existing condition of the Untouchables and fought for their upliftment, and their right to enter the temples thereby giving them their due place in society. Each person would do his own work including scavenging that had traditionally been allotted to the Untouchables. Swami Vivekananda emphasised that 'all caste either on the principle of birth, or merit, is bondage.'⁵ He fought for the abolition of privileges and emphasised that all should be treated alike. Such sinful acts never had the sanction of any religious text. Within each religious tradition there was always a considerable gap between profession and practice. Not letting one flourish in every possible way is a denial of humanity. In 1924, Gandhi emphasized that, 'I believe in absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refractions. But they have the same source.'⁶ In the same year he again reiterated: 'I do not believe that an individual may gain spiritually and those around him suffer.....I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.'⁷

Hinduism accommodates a great variety of forms of life.

⁴ J.L Mehta, "The Hindu Tradition: The Vedic Root," in *The World Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies*, ed. Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark Ltd., 1984).

⁵ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Mayavati Memorial Edition, Advaita Ashram), 320.

⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India* (25 Sept. 1924), 313.

⁷ Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India* (4 Dec. 1924), 398.

There is no core figure or a single way. Hinduism has no fixed doctrine or compulsory dogmas. As Swami Vivekananda put it: 'Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognized it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas and tries to compel society to adopt them. It places before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols – so many pegs to hang spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for everyone, but those that do not need have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism.'⁸ The concept of *svadharma* provides sanction for being a Hindu in one's own way. In Gita Lord Krishna says that "Whoever comes to me through whatever route, I reach out to him,' and that, 'all faiths in the end lead to me.'⁹ Social recognition of being a Hindu concerns observance rather than belief. Hinduism is compatible with any particular set of observances and also compatible with non-profession of any particular set of beliefs. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me in as much as it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression."¹⁰ Even the rituals and practices differ according to caste, gender and age. Owing to geographical diversity a Hindu may follow the religious practices of a region where he lives. At the same time, he is not hostile to the religious practices of other regions. There is no exclusive loyalty to a particular regional form. No Hindu will withhold his faith or devotion to any other Hindu God irrespective of his personal or favourite deity. As Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan put it: 'God is more than the law it commands, the judge that condemns, the love that constrains, the faith to whom we owe our being, or the mother with whom is bound up all that

⁸ Shashi Tharoor, *Why I Am a Hindu* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018), 126.

⁹ *Gita*, IV:11, IX:22.

¹⁰ Mahatma Gandhi, *Hindu Dharm* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1950), 6.

we can hope for or aspire to.’¹¹ New cults are attracting a large number of people and different sects have different practices but this is perfectly goes well with Indian tradition which accommodates diversity without any attempt to transform it. However, nineteenth century reformists of both Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj present change of belief within Hindu form of life. Hindu sectarianism is not exclusive. Tagore lamented that ‘the Brahma Samaj is belittling Raja Rammohun Roy by judging him as a Brahma minus the Hindu society.’¹² He further reiterated that the ‘Brahma religion without dogma’ is an ideology for ‘drawing all peoples together.’¹³ Nirad Chaudhuri in his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* portrays an excellent picture of Brahma movement: “Perhaps there never was any period in the last 200 years of the history of the Hindu middle class in which it showed greater probity in public and private affairs, attained greater happiness in family and personal life, saw greater fulfillment of cultural aspirations, and put forth greater creativeness in every field, than the fifty between 1860-1910- dominated by the moral ideals of Brahmaism and Hindu Puritanism.’¹⁴ While Hindu religious practices and beliefs are numerous, their outlook is very unitary. This is where the unity lies. Monier-Williams, a British scholar, wrote that Hinduism was like ‘the sacred fig tree of India, which from a single stem sends out numerous branches destined to send roots to the ground and become trees themselves, till the parent stock is lost in a dense forest of its own offshoots.’¹⁵ Alfred Lyall, a British historian, also wrote in the same tune. ‘Nowhere but in India can we now survey with our eyes an indigenous polytheism in full growth, flourishing like a secular green bay-tree among a people

¹¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London: George Allen and Unwn LTD., 1926).

¹² David Kopf, *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of Modern Indian Mind* (USA, UK: Princeton University Press, 1979), 302.

¹³ S. Debi, *Punya Smriti (Pious Memories)*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Moitree, 1964), 68-9.

¹⁴ N Chaudhuri, *Autibiography of an Unknown Indian* (Bombay: Jaico Publishing house, 1969), 203, 211, 226, 438.

¹⁵ Quoted in Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (New Delhi: B.I. Publications, 1979), 146.

of ancient culture.’¹⁶

In a Hindu household along with the pictures of Gods and Goddesses one may find the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and so on. The copresence of mythic and historical figures reflect that respect and reverence are similar to worship. A Hindu may visit a Muslim dargah or a church with the same respect and devotion as he does when he visits a Hindu temple. Being a Hindu one may not go to offer prayers during Id but in the evening, he may host Iftaar party in his house where people belonging to diverse cultures are invited. Doctrinal reservation in no way intervenes with a cultural observance. This sets an example of communal harmony. This is an opportunity for participating in each other's festival and sharing the celebrations. Religion among the Hindus was always connected to their general life. The many festivals of Hindus which were held throughout the year were open to all and provided joy and happiness in their life. Such religious festivals and fairs are very democratic and people come to such festivals and fairs for entertainment and also for profit where merchants sell their products.

Healthy interaction depends on a certain 'openness of relationship', mutual understanding where cultural diversities do not lead to separatism, thereby as Tagore said, fulfilling 'the highest mission of the present age – the unification of mankind.'¹⁷ During his prayer meetings Mahatma Gandhi wanted people of different faiths to gather together. Though this rarely happened. Gandhi had a pluralistic understanding of religion. His utmost concern was for a healthy development of inter-faith, inter-cultural human relations. During the meetings there would be readings from different scriptures. Prayer was followed by focusing on day to day issues thereby promoting a sense of community and common responsibility through what Gandhi called 'heart-unity.' As Gandhiji said, 'I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ P.C. Mahalanobis, "The Growth of Visva-Bharati," *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* (April 1928): 94.

reason is more to the head but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding of man.'¹⁸ Today it is heartening to see the development of several bodies with different political, cultural and religious frontiers focus on humanitarian issues thus bringing about common commitment to a cause. Vivekananda said: 'each must assimilate the spirit of the others yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth,'¹⁹ that is, not giving up of one's religion but abandonment of exclusiveness. Learning from other religions is a way of accepting and also welcoming diversity.

Within the Hindu fold there are abundant evidences of cross-cultural fertilization. Theoretically in Hindu society priestly duties are performed by higher castes. However, one can notice priestly duties in certain areas being carried out by lower castes or tribes. Hindus from higher castes worship these local Gods through the help of these lower castes. This is an outcome of the desire of the underprivileged to find their due place in society. This reflects the assimilative feature of core Hinduism. Sacred rituals require involvement of florists, barbers, and musicians. These professions include people from different communities. This goes well with the remark made by Baidyanath Saraswati that sacred is 'a tool in various spheres of man's creativity.'²⁰ Emphasizing the reality of syncretism the Muslim reformist scholar Asghar Ali Engineer wrote: '...cultural integration between the Hindus and Muslims is a fact which no one except victims of misinformation can deny.'²¹ Swami Vivekananda held that 'Muhammedans in India is quite a different thing from that in every other country. It is only when Muhammedans come from other countries and preach to their co-religionists in India about living with men who are not of their faith that a muhammedan mob is aroused and fights.'²² 'Absorption within core Hindu fold

¹⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1931), 341.

¹⁹ Swami Vivekananda, *Chicago Addresses* (Calcutta, 1989), 45-6.

²⁰ Baidyanath Saraswati, *Kashi: Myth and Reality of a Classical Cultural Tradition* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975), 46.

²¹ Shashi Tharoor, *Why I Am a Hindu* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018), 205.

²² Swami Vivekananda, *My India: The India Eternal* (Calcutta: Sri

(rather than conversion), for example, merging tribes into the core Hindu fold is never an impossibility as the limits beyond which a Hindu should not go are never laid down in history. However, in some sensitive states people are seeking both a separate cultural and a political identity. Unfortunately, some groups have created unhappy situations and fundamentalism in Hinduism. Along with accommodation, resistance was also a part of Hindu behaviour pattern. Hindus treat large section of their own community unjustly. Very often lower castes are treated with disdain by the upper castes. Refusal to drink water given by a member of the lower caste, refusal to marry one's daughter to a member of another caste are some such examples of despicable condition of the lower caste in the society. Sometimes there are such situations which give rise to confrontation of communities leading to conflict. Very often offence is felt when a noisy procession passes by in front of a place of worship. The responsibility of accommodation lies on both the sides. Those objecting should concentrate on their prayers and the processionists should choose another route. As Radcliffe-Brown said, 'An orderly societal life depends upon the presence in the minds of the members of sentiments which control the behaviour of the individual in relation to the other.'²³ Voltaire remarked: 'We are all products of frailty, fallible and prone to error. So let us mutually pardon each others follies.'²⁴ Cow slaughter presents a problem in India. This is an extension of the worship of the cow and abstention from cow-killing. During particular festivals certain kinds of foods are not kept in shops keeping in view the religious sentiment of the public. As such those wishing to eat non-vegetarian foods have to travel considerable distances to obtain these. Kant's advice is very relevant in this context that 'A social order requires defining the freedom of the individual in such a way that it discovers its own limits in other people.'²⁵

Ramakrishna Math, 1993), 124.

²³ Margaret Chatterjee, *The Religious Spectrum, Studies in an Indian Context* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1984), 47.

²⁴ Susan Mendus and David Edwards, eds., *On Toleration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 6-7.

²⁵ Quoted in Ernest Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 225.

To quote Tagore, the problem today is not to wipe away differences but how to unite while keeping the differences in tact, a difficult task.²⁶ The perfect harmony of relationship in this world is realized through one's union with others, leaving behind the barrier of social inhibitions. This is an ideal for which the present-day world must strive. The world must strive to make humanity more humane. For, as Bhagwan Das has said, 'if we do not end war, war will end us.'²⁷ 'Between me and you there is an "I am" that torments me. Ah! Remove with your "I am" my "I am" from between us.'²⁸ (–Al-Hallaj)

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²⁶ Sisir Kumar Ghose, *Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1980), 104.

²⁷ Bhagwan Das, *World War and Its Only Cure* (Benares: Published by the author, 1941), 457.

²⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 305.

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The Merchants of Heavenly Grace: On Academic Journals and Cultural Difference

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Abstract: The increasing standardization, specialization and monetarization of academic publishing is designed to foster quality in research and expression. But these tendencies also pose serious challenges to the expression of cultural difference, particularly with regard to philosophy and religious studies. Scholars from various cultural backgrounds outside of mainstream universities often find themselves marginalized when the quality of their work is judged through the metrics of mainstream academic publishing. Smaller journals which give a forum to local research are gradually disappearing or becoming irrelevant. The corporate control of publishing limits the access and distribution of information making it difficult for smaller regional universities to access and conduct research. But these challenges to the expression of cultural difference also reflect the deeper tendencies of the information age. To approach this problem, we need to consider the conflict between culture and spirit on the one hand, with the flows of information and capital on the other. I will introduce this problem through an idea of hermeneutics presented by George McLean. I will then discuss the approaches to this problem by such writers as Michel Serres, Jean Francois Lyotard, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida. I will show that these latter writers devise strategies to reach something outside of the cybernetic flows of information in the media age, but that their solutions are incomplete because they rely on intellectual concepts of redemption and ignore the concrete practices of spiritual redemption. The issue that cross-cultural journals must consider is how to emphasize something beyond the merely intellectual; how to amplify practice within its expression. I will address this issue in the spirit of a poem by Emily Dickinson entitled "Publication – is the Auction" which supplies the title of this essay.

Keywords: Academic Publishing, Cultural Difference, Spirituality, Cybernetics, Practice

Introduction

This paper was originally written to be presented at a RVP conference planned for Bandung, Indonesia. In my planned presentation, I wanted to address the ideas presented at the 1953 Bandung conference of the nonalignment movement concerning respect for and preservation of cultural difference. I wanted to discuss the founder of the RVP – George McLean – and his ideas concerning the hermeneutics of cultural difference. And I wished to discuss my own experience in academic publishing and the challenges posed to the expression of cultural difference by the increasing control of publishing. So the paper would have been a weaving together of themes related to place, to an institution, and to my own experience. However, the conference was cancelled (and my presentation uprooted) by the recent "pandemic".

I was kindly invited by Dan Chitoiu to present a paper at the conference "Spiritual Values and the Challenges of Today's World," and since he and I are both editors of journals that deal with diverse cultural and spiritual perspectives, I thought this would be a good opportunity to revive this paper and the question of cross-cultural and cross-spiritual expression in academic journals.¹ I will begin with a poem by Emily Dickinson entitled "Publication – is the Auction."

Publication – is the Auction²

by Emily Dickinson

Publication – is the Auction

¹ This paper was delivered at the conference: "Spiritual Values and the Challenges of Today's World," organized by Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, and the Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality, Romania/USA, in partnership with Dokuz Eylül University, Turkiye, held between 22nd and 23rd of June 2023 in Iași, Romania.

² Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin (Harvard University Press, 1999).

Of the Mind of Man –
Poverty – be justifying
For so foul a thing

Possibly – but We – would rather
From Our Garret go
White – unto the White Creator –
Than invest – Our Snow –

Thought belong to Him who gave it –
Then – to Him Who bear
It's Corporeal illustration – sell
The Royal Air –

In the Parcel – Be the Merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace –
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price –

Dickinson's poem was written back in 1863 and addresses the profanation of the spiritual in the commodification of a poem. The spiritual expression is reduced if it is diminished if it is reduced to measurement by price. Our research as academics has always been a part of the publishing industry with all its negative aspects and compromises. But we academics have always liked to tell ourselves that academic publishing is somehow more noble than other forms of publishing. We like to think of the university as a space insulated from the commercial noise of the outside world. But with the developments of the media, online publishing and the various commercial tendrils which have penetrated the space of the university, we cannot avoid the increasing convergence between pure knowledge and commercial knowledge and the problems that emerge.

Cyberspace has brought every cultural tradition within easy access. Exhaustive information is instantly available to us. And certainly online academic publishing allows scholarly work on diverse cultural and spiritual traditions to be available to academic researchers from all over the world. But there are also philosophical

problems connected to this absorption of all diversity within cyberspace.

The increasing standardization, specialization and monetarization of academic publishing is supposedly designed to foster quality in research and expression. Research is submitted to various metrics such as impact factors, h-indexes, peer reviews and journal rankings. Journals become increasingly monitored and their content monetarized by indexing companies. These tendencies pose serious challenges to the expression of cultural difference, particularly with regard to philosophical, cultural and religious studies. Scholars from various cultural backgrounds outside of mainstream universities often find themselves marginalized when the quality of their work is judged through these metrics. And the corporate control of publishing limits the access and distribution of information making it difficult for smaller regional universities to access and conduct research. Sometimes research in smaller universities around the world is only possible with the aid of pirate websites that makes publications and research accessible. And much of the research around the world which is interesting, creative, and which deals with deeper cultural and spiritual issues, is often either rejected or exiled to the backwaters of the internet.

These challenges to the expression of cultural difference in the publication industry also reflect the deeper tendencies of the information age in general. As participants in this conference, we are a part of this cybernetic flow – we will report our participation in this conference in our yearly reports as a measurement of our productivity. But yet, at the same time, we here in this conference – like the poet – wish to speak of something which lies beyond this cybernetic flow. We wish to gesture back to some source and wish to be conveyors of heavenly grace. And so a question emerges – a philosophical and hermeneutic question – namely, how can the cultural or spiritual 'Other' express itself and have an impact in our corporate media age, when all information swims in the same cybernetic pool?

Hermes and Hermeneutics

George Mclean was founder of the CRVP (Council for Research in Values in Philosophy) and he was actively involved in the organization of philosophy conferences around the world. Although he was a Catholic Oblate priest, he actively promoted the voice of philosophers from around the world. In my experiences teaching at Catholic Universities, I have gradually developed an admiration of his work and feel that I am in many ways a spiritual descendant of his work. The many conferences he has organized have given voice to diverse philosophical traditions and provided a platform for dialogue between them. This is what I considered to be the mission of the journal which I am involved with. In series of lectures in Qom, Iran, McLean speaks about the meaning of Hermeneutics. He points out: The reference to the god, Hermes, in the term 'hermeneutics' suggests something of the exalted character of the meaning which is sought and its implication for the world of values. For the message borne by Hermes is not merely an abstract mathematical formula or a methodological prescription devoid of human meaning and value. Rather, it is the limitless wisdom regarding the source and hence the reality, and the goal and hence the value, of all.³ Notice that McLean sees hermeneutics as being not merely the transmission of messages or communication across horizons, but it is something deeper; related both to a connection back to a "source" and a projection forward towards a goal. It is a transmission of information, but one that connects us to both tradition and change which was a continuing concern for McLean throughout his writings in the face of increasing globalization.

Another thinker who deals with these themes in connection with the figure of Hermes is the French philosopher Michel Serres. He sees human history as involving a movement from myth to science. Myth and culture involve a connection or weaving of various elements.⁴ And gradually with the movement of history, the

³ George McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith, and the Relations between Cultures* (Washington D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003), 8.

⁴ Serres writes: Cultures are differentiated by the form of the set of junctions, its appearance, its place, as well as by its changes of state, its fluctuation. But what they have in common and what constitutes them as

final outcome of this weaving is science.⁵ So *mythos* gives birth to *logos*, reason and ultimately science. Yet in its historical triumph, science arrogates to itself the role of control over discourse and diminishes deeper human concerns of earlier times. So notice that if myth and culture are themselves structures of meaning created by connecting the disconnected, globalization would be the continuation of this process by weaving cultural identities into larger more universal structures. It would ultimately create a condition or a 'space' where there are no more encounters. Linked homogeneity erases catastrophes, and congruent identity forgets difficult homeomorphisms. Reason, as the saying goes, has triumphed over myth. No, it is Euclidean space that has *repressed* a barbarous topology, it is transport and displacement without obstacles that have suddenly taken the place of the journey, the ancient journey from islands to catastrophes, from passage to fault, from bridge to well, from relay to labyrinth. Myth is effaced in its original function, and the new space is universal, as is reason or the *ratio* that it sustains, only because within it there are no more encounters.⁶ We lose the various forms of cultural wisdom which relate to the spiritual, to mystery and to the dramas of being human. And gradually we no longer encounter that with what lies beyond a homogeneous rational space.

But Serres also in his writings also wishes to reassure us that this process should never be complete. He assigns 'literature' the role of addressing this movement, to create new passages between domains that are separated or lost. "We have to change laws. Henceforth the global does not necessarily produce a local

such is the operation itself of joining, of connecting. The image of the weaver arises at this point: to link, to tie, to open bridges, pathways, well or relays among radically different spaces." *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), 45.

⁵ Serres writes: "Mythical discourse undertakes a weaving together, a junction, a connection of places that are closed, isolated, inviolable, inaccessible, dangerous, or mortal-disconnected, in any case. Once the weaving together is accomplished, one can speak of science." *Feux et singaux de brume* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), 169. Cited by Josue V. Harari and David F. Bell in the introduction to *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), xxxiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

equivalent, and the local itself contains a law that does not always and everywhere reproduce the global."⁷

Serres' approach helps us with our concerns about hermeneutics and cross-cultural dialogue. We academics place great importance on this process of mutual understanding and cross-cultural encounters, but this process is itself a form of weaving which reduces cultural practices and spiritualities to a pool of information. When we publish our articles and try to create encounters, are we merely weaving cultural and spiritual difference into a homogeneity, or are we hoping for something deeper and more challenging?

For us, the very idea of writing articles and publishing in cross-cultural journals is the potential for 'real' encounters between reason and local mythologies, and the potential for disruptions of our particular ways of seeing the world. Serres recognizes that these 'passages' to a 'plurality of local spaces' are becoming difficult if not impossible.⁸ And here we share Serres' understanding of the problem, but we should also be aware of his limitations. Serres' solution – literature – understood through the figure of Hermes, is a merely aesthetic model of redemption. It is a process of cybernetic weaving to effect a passage between local spaces and create new possibilities for the system itself – a function which he will later

⁷ Serres' work *Hermes V, 'Le Passage du Nord-Ouest* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), it is cited in the introduction to *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, xiv.

⁸ In the introduction to *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, Josue Harari and David Bell characterize Serres' problem of passage as follows: "Until recently, science had convinced us that in the classification of the spaces of knowledge the local was included in the global, in other words, that a path always existed between one local configuration and another, that from local configurations one could always move without break or interruption to a more encompassing global configuration. Clearly this assumption implied a homogeneous space of knowledge ruled entirely by a single scientific or universal truth that guaranteed the validity of the operation of passage. Such a space differs qualitatively from a more complex space in which the passage from one local singularity to another would always require an arduous effort. Rather than a universal truth, in the more complex case one would have a kind of truth that functions only in the context of local pockets, a truth that is always local, distributed haphazardly in a plurality of spaces." *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, xiii.

assign to 'parasitism'. Such a merely 'aesthetic' approach wishes to navigate a passage to some 'outside', but it ends up being a passage within the cybernetic system itself. Cultural or spiritual diversity remains merely an illusion created by the cybernetic flow of information.

Bildung and Cybernetics

McLean stressed the idea of Hermeneutics as being related to a 'source.' Heidegger too understood hermeneutics as relating to an ultimate source – Being. In his later writings, Heidegger lamented the fading of the awareness of Being into oblivion, and predicted that in the future, philosophy will be reduced to the mere flow of information. Maybe history and tradition will fit smoothly into the information retrieval systems that will serve as resource for the inevitable planning needs of a cybernetically organized mankind. The question is whether thinking too, will end in the business of information processing.⁹

History and tradition are no longer something external – that thinking needs to be continually engaged with – but they are now absorbed into the flow of information itself. Heidegger believed that eventually, cybernetics will supplant philosophy. In his book *The End of Philosophy*, he writes: Cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news. The arts become regulated-regulating instruments of information. The development of philosophy into independent sciences that, however, interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly, is the legitimate completion of philosophy. Philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity. But the fundamental characteristic of this scientific attitude is its cybernetic, that is, technological character.¹⁰

This is also a problem connected to the influence of technology on contemporary education. It must be remembered that Jean-François Lyotard's famous work, *The Postmodern Condition*,

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 56.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (Chicago: Harper and Row, 1973), 434.

was a report on the contemporary state of the university. Much of the work involves a refutation of the older organic models of knowledge and the university found in writers like Wilhelm von Humboldt and F.W.J. Schelling. Their idea of learning or *Bildung*, according to Lyotard, is replaced by the production and consumption of knowledge.

We may thus expect a thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the "knower," at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of individuals, is becoming obsolete and will become ever more so. The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and Consume – that is, the form of value. Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its "use-value."¹¹

Training and formation is something important in spiritual traditions. So even Humboldt's secular idea of *Bildung* still had spiritual overtones, or can be conceived to be the secular replacement for spiritual formation. But these last remnants of cultural and spiritual training are being replaced by isolation, fragmentation and consumption. Lyotard goes on to suggest with the increasing global control of knowledge, the nation-state itself will be eclipsed and seen as an obstacle.

The ideology of communicational "transparency", which goes hand in hand with the commercialization of knowledge, will begin to perceive the State as a factor of opacity and "noise". It is from this point of view that the problem of the relationship between economic and State powers threatens to arise with a new urgency.¹²

¹¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 4-5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

And of course we can apply this "opacity" to the idea of culture and religion as well.¹³ The more radical idea of hermeneutics as giving voice to something radically other or disruptive which challenges even our systems which organize our interactions, is replaced by the easy flows of cross-cultural information. And of course, this is a model of communication based on the exchange principle of capital and 'investment knowledge.'¹⁴

Lyotard's idea of resistance to these developments – his idea of redemption – is his embrace of the imagination. In a manner similar to Serres consideration of literature, he sees it as an opening of possibilities through a connecting together of disparate elements. It is a performative creation of new truths. This new arrangement is usually achieved by connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent. This capacity to articulate what used to be separate can be called imagination. Speed is one of its properties. It is possible to conceive the world of postmodern knowledge as governed by a game of perfect information, in the sense that data is in principle accessible to any expert: there is no scientific secret. Given equal competence (no longer in the acquisition of knowledge, but in its production), what extra performativity depends on the final analysis is "imagination," which allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game.¹⁵ This is also connected to his idea of "paralogy" as an embrace of the unknown. But Lyotard, by pinning his hopes on the imagination and paralogy, is merely following the trajectory of information consolidation forward. Everything is available in cyberspace; every culture, religious tradition, spirituality, mystical and mythological knowledge. Imagination for him would be what creates new possibilities within this cybernetic flow. It merely weaves these elements together in new ways.

But what of the fragmented cultural and spiritual traditions which possess their own truths and intensities that might supply a challenge or corrective to the cybernetic system itself? Is there a

¹³ For the globalists, culture and religion are obstacles to a construction of a single rules-based order where the allegiance of human subject is not to local traditions but to the cybernetic flow itself.

¹⁴ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

possibility of an authentic disruption or change supplied by the cultural other? And is an authentic disruption still possible in our media environment which carefully manufactures and manages conflict and disruption? These managed disruptions maintain both the flow and the fragmentation of information that prevents any 'authentic' movement of positive change from building any momentum.

Cybernetics of the Sacred and Profane

Giorgio Agamben foresaw this problem as well. In an essay entitled "In Praise of Profanation," Agamben investigates the very loss of the sacred when everything is reduced to use-value. He points out that according to the Roman jurists, the Sacred is "removed from the free use and commerce of men" while the profane are things "returned to the common use of men."¹⁶ Capitalism amplifies this religious mechanism of separation. We can say that capitalism... generalizes in every domain the structure of separation that defines religion. Here sacrifice once marked the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the sacred to the profane, there is now a single, multiform, ceaseless process of separation that assails everything, every place, every human activity in order to divide it from itself. ... In its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate.¹⁷ Agamben's 'praise' of profanation (or the profanatory power of language) would be the attempt to rescue the sacred by returning it to use. But the media works against this. The apparatuses of the media aim precisely at neutralizing this profanatory power of language as pure means, at preventing language from disclosing the possibility of a new use, a new experience of the word... where the pure means, suspended and exhibited in the sphere of the media, shows its own emptiness, speaks only its own nothingness, as if no new use were possible, as if no other experience of the word were possible.¹⁸ And certainly this reduction of language to emptiness is something we find in

¹⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 73.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

academic publishing. Through the metrics used to measure impact factor we subordinate the deeper truths which resist immediate comprehension. Through the peer review process, we contract the scope and expression of research and restrict it to games played in restricted domains presided over by an accredited group of 'experts.' Through the reduction of all knowledge to measurement of 'points' we create an academic culture which engages in the manipulation of points to create illusions of quality. Our goals become directed to academic promotion or the reputation and marketability of a program. And the ability of the essay to cause a 'reflection' - which challenges the exchange principle of knowledge, and allows a thinking across ruptures and gaps, is lost. Our cross-cultural and cross-spiritual research becomes empty.

Agamben, like Lyotard, appeals to aesthetic categories in his idea of redemption. While Lyotard promotes imagination, Agamben promotes "play". [Play] frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred, without simply abolishing it. The use to which he sacred is returned is a special one that does not coincide with utilitarian consumption.¹⁹ So what we see in Agamben's solution is the Western academic's attempt to preserve something of the possibilities of traditional cultural or religious experience in a secular format.

The 'as if' of Cultural and Religious Symbolism

When we speak of cultural and spiritual ideas and concepts in our classes and our research, what kind of status can they possibly have? This is a theme considered in the writings of Jacques Derrida. In an awkwardly titled essay called "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the 'Humanities,' what could take place tomorrow)" he provides a loose manifesto for the future role of the humanities. He concludes with the idea that the humanities must not be isolated but must engage with the outside world. One thinks in the Humanities the irreducibility of their outside and of their future. One thinks *in* the Humanities that one cannot and must not let oneself be enclosed within the inside of the Humanities. But for this thinking to be

¹⁹ Ibid., 76.

strong and consistent requires the Humanities. ... This limit of the impossible, the "perhaps," and the "if," this is the place where the university is exposed to reality, to the forces from without (be they cultural, ideological, political, economic, or other). It is there that the university is in the world that it is attempting to think. On this border, it must therefore negotiate and organize its resistance. And take its responsibilities. Not in order to enclose itself and reconstitute the abstract phantasm of sovereignty whose theological or humanist heritage it will perhaps have begun to deconstruct, if at least it has begun to do so. But in order to resist effectively, by allying itself with extra-academic forces, in order to organize an inventive resistance, through its *oeuvres*, its work, to all attempts at reappropriation (political, juridical, economic, and so forth), to all the other figures of sovereignty.²⁰

Our very idea of the 'human' is something which must be understood in its history, and yet, something which is always exposed to deconstruction. These ideas need to be provisionally accepted 'as if' they were meaningful and valid.²¹ This idea of Derrida can be traced back to Kant. Like Kant, our ideas of God, moral law, while unable to be proved, need to be considered as regulative ideas of reason.

But it should also be remembered that Kant himself was influenced by Moses Mendelssohn who pioneered this idea of the regulative use of reason to counter Friedrich Jacobi's more extreme condemnation of reason. Mendelssohn developed the 'method of orientation' where reason adjudicates and negotiates between 'common sense' and 'speculation.' Unlike Kant, reason is situated 'between' our engagements with the world and speculations about

²⁰ Jaques Derrida, "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the 'Humanities,' what could take place tomorrow)," in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: a Critical Reader* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 55-6.

²¹ Colby Dickenson in an essay on Derrida's idea of the 'as if' succinctly explains that they "are 'necessary illusions' that are essential to all acts of representation and that are rendered 'less violent' through their more or less being exposed as the illusions they are, hence as not necessarily deceptive." Colby Dickinson, "The Logic of the 'As If' and the Existence of God: An Inquiry into the Nature of Belief in the Work of Jacques Derrida," *Derrida Today* 4, no. 1 (2011). Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works.

it. I mention Mendelssohn because, unlike Kant or Derrida, this idea of reason would not pretend to dominate the spiritual, or even congratulate itself for engaging with the world.

So what is needed is a model of reason within the cybernetic flow of information that allows for many spiritualities but also preserves their integrities. It is not God 'as if' existing, but many Gods existing simultaneously. It is not human rights, democracy or moral law 'as if' they are universal, but many different traditions providing interpretations, insights and resistances. The reality of traditions is that they cannot be considered in terms of mere belief or intellectual performance. Traditions (especially outside the West) involve concrete practices of sacrifice, meditation, initiation, which exceed rational beliefs, speculations and performative reason.²² Not abstract understanding of the human 'as if,' but the human as related to particular historical cultural and spiritual dramas, passions and redemptions. Reason favors function, and even the deconstruction of concepts amounts to a kind of functional questioning of functionality. The 'impossible' is located sometimes encased within our older traditions which can be accessed not through thought alone, but also through ritual and practice. This would mean that the ability of the humanities to really engage with the world would be to embrace the radicality of cultural and spiritual traditions with all of their attendant dangers.²³

Some might protest that cyberspace has made cultural and spiritual 'practices' from all over the world easily available to us. We can learn about meditation techniques, spiritual rituals, musical genres through videos online. But these virtual practices are removed from the real initiations and discipline that any novice would need to follow to properly enter into such a knowledge. Practice creates a deeper psychic transformation which is not

²² See for example the very interesting attempt of Indian scholars to re-appreciate the deeper meaning the Mīmāṃsā system. Or the attempt of Buddhist scholars to move beyond the Western 'functional' explanations of Buddhist practices to emphasize the deeper spiritual meanings based on the Tipiṭaka. Or Indonesian scholars return to the spiritual concept of culture as *Budaya*, to counter the distortions of Western cultural anthropology.

²³ I suspect that this is the reason that Derrida reacted so strongly to Benjamin's idea of "divine violence."

possible from a virtual distance. And as many cultural practices are made accessible through cyberspace, cultural traditions themselves are being slowly uprooted by cyberspace itself. We are losing the initiation ceremonies, the disciplines connected to learning sacred musical traditions, and the proper training and supervision in meditation practices. So extending from this phenomena, what is the role of academic research in cultural and spiritual traditions?

In this sense, to engage with the world is to submit ones thinking and writing to shocks that cannot be absorbed into the cybernetic flows of capital, indexing companies, impact factors, h-indexes, and journal rankings. Also we need to use caution in our entertainment of our ideals concerning freedom, human rights, democracy, justice and environmental protection, which are increasingly manipulated by the media in various way for various purposes. Any authentic shock from the outside can be instantly denigrated, shadow banned, or rejected by the academic media. Or they can be mollified or coopted for various purposes. So we need to ask if our publications in pluralistic journals of philosophy and religion are merely exercises of our cultural and spiritual 'illusions conscious of themselves,' or do they represent fractured cosmologies which each challenge one another and yet contain particular promises of redemption. In an age of consolidated and curated media administered by corporate and political power, where difference can be manipulated for even greater consolidation, the only possibility for transformation is one which challenges the manipulation of flows itself.

Conclusion

We can see in the work of Serres, Lyotard, Agamben and Derrida very important insights about the use of reason in an age of cybernetic flow. But their limitation is their reduction of everything to their idea of resistance from within the movement of the system itself. In this reduction, the significance of the spiritual is secularized and reduced to ideas of weaving, imagination, play, or the 'as if.' Such an approach cannot appreciate a plurality of cosmological or ontological domains that are constituted by ritual and practice.

We can return to McLean, a Catholic priest, speaking in front of the audience in Qom. His approach to Spirituality emphasized a different kind of timeless communication. One rooted in each individual tradition but yet open to the movement of time. In his lecture, after discussing the terms culture, tradition and religion, he points out that our hermeneutical examination of these things operates for the sake of freedom and novelty. Here the question arises whether tradition as heritage, that is, as coming from the past locks up into the past, or can it be a creative source for an evolving life? The application of a tradition is not tradition as a whole or synchronic as discussed above, but its meaning for each new time, that is, as diachronic. Time here is to be taken seriously as authentic novelty. It is neither Plato's unchanging realm of ideas, nor is it rationalism's clear and distinct, simple and eternal natures. Human freedom as the striving to realize one's life is not a detached intellection, rather, it is inextricably enabled by, and formative of, the changing physical and social universe. This effort is a matter neither of law nor of lawlessness, but of developing principles, attitudes and institutions that do not predetermine but regulate the exercise of freedom. Hence tradition achieves its perfection in its temporal unfolding or application.²⁴ So what is it that we hope to accomplish when we write – something beyond the mere flows of information and metrics generated by capital? Is it possible in an academic essay or in the publication of an academic journal to gesture to something that evades its embeddedness in the flows of information? We need to consider the possibility of an academic writing which exposes the gaps of communication, and presents something unexpected which questions our own views of the world. That which evades every algorithm is precisely the spiritual in the manner in which it operates in its diverse forms. In the words of Emily Dickenson, we would like to

"go White – unto the White Creator –
Than invest – Our Snow."

We are vehicles of something being expressed. But when the curation of information demands our credentials, and measures our work according to our ability to create 'investment knowledge' then

²⁴ McLean, *Hermeneutics*, 116.

we are participating in a system which has destroyed the connection of our knowledge with a spiritual source. We have reduced the cultural and the spiritual to place from where we can gaze at it through a cybernetic distance, but may never be able to access it and allow it to effect any positive transformation.

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The Importance of Symbols in the Sufi Tradition: An Example of the Concept of Justice

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Abstract: The concept of justice is a concept that has been emphasized in every age, every religious and moral life style and every culture since the emergence of the philosophical way of thinking. In all social, religious or moral perspectives, the concept of justice is expressed with different symbols in a guiding nature. Symbols inspired by nature such as the sun, moon and stars are also examples of these. We see that the concept of justice is discussed and examined in the light of symbols in the Mayan civilization, Ancient Chinese teachings and Ancient Greek thought, as well as in the Islamic Sufi tradition. The concept of justice, which is the sum and integrator of the virtues, regulates their functioning and organizes the entire moral life within the framework of the principles of fairness and equality, has functioned like a sun or a pole star in the Islamic Sufi tradition. In this article, the place of the concept of justice in Islamic mysticism will be discussed through symbols. Considering justice as a natural figure, its effect on the Sufis' perception of spirituality will be examined, based on the original definition that emerged in Islamic Sufism. Thus, it is aimed to make this concept clear and understandable by showing the aspects of the concept of justice, which has a deep-rooted historical and cultural background, that contribute to both theoretical and practical life in Islamic Sufi thought.

Keywords: Justice, Symbols, Sufism, Spiritual Perception

The concept of justice has been defined in very similar meanings in different ages and cultures. There are many definitions of justice, such as everyone getting what they deserve, individuals treating each other honestly and impartially in society, honesty, a

set of rules regulating life, and a legal judicial system.¹ When we look at Islamic literature, we see that the definitions of justice have developed within a philosophical and religious framework, especially the Quran and the Sunnah. In this context, justice in the Islamic tradition generally refers to acting fairly, living in accordance with the principles of truth and equality, multiplying the good and avoiding the bad, obeying the rules, getting one's due, peace and order.² It is a virtue that is the key to living an orderly and fair life according to the principles of truth and fairness, both individually and socially.³ The symbol is referred to as "remz" in the dictionaries and means "to point, to express something by means of a sign; It means "sign, symbol, insignia, implicit expression."⁴ The basic function of symbols is to associate a meaning with a word or sentence pattern.

The Islamic Sufism tradition, which is accepted to have flourished since the 8th century, brought an unusual religious and moral dimension to the world of Islamic thought at that time. As a science, Sufism describes a form of inner life that prioritizes morality and the purification of the heart.⁵ As a science of state, Sufism is related to the practical rather than the theoretical. The main elements of rational thought traditions are theoretical elements such as reasoning and knowing how to think. In Sufi teaching, feeling with the heart and putting these feelings into practice by creating a whole in the soul and body is the nature of the science of state we mentioned.⁶ Therefore, this teaching, which highlights the heart and feeling as well as the mind as a means of

¹ "Justice," *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/justice?q=Justice>.

² Mustafa Çağrırcı, "Adalet," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, no. 1 (1981): 341-44.

³ Müfit Selim Saruhan, "Erdemlerin Erdemi: Adalet," *Adam Akademi* 5, no. 1 (2015): 2.

⁴ İsmail Durmuş, "Remiz," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, no. 34 (2007): 558-60.

⁵ Hacı Bayram Başer, "Teşekkül Döneminde Tasavvuf," *İslam Düşünce Atlası*, ed. İbrahim Halil Üçer (İstanbul: Konya Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2017).

⁶ Mehmet Demirci, "Hâl," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, no. 15 (1997): 216-18.

knowing, has had a great impact on the rapidly increasing number of Muslim communities in a few centuries.

As it is known, the rationalist tradition of thought in Islam, called Mashai, has been influential in Muslim societies since the 9th century. This tradition has introduced a method of knowing that includes many cognitive processes such as thinking, questioning, asking questions and doubting, within the framework of the commandments of the Quran and the Sunnah. The roots of the Sufi tradition date back to the 8th century. Sufism, which had its golden age in the 13th century, offered a new belief and way of life to all Muslim societies. In the Sufi tradition, the basic elements of belief and worship are the Quran and the Sunnah, just like in the rational tradition. In addition, some elements such as abandoning the earthly desires as much as possible, cleaning the heart from temporal things, worship, dhikr, intuition, inspiration and Kesf are at the basis of Sufi belief and worship.⁷ In this respect, Sufism is a method of belief and knowledge unique to the Islamic world and gave a sense of spirituality.

As a result of this unique stance, the concept of justice in the Islamic Sufi tradition has been interpreted differently from rational traditions and aims to make itself understandable to the whole society through association-based ways. There are also different ancient civilizations where this concept was interpreted with various symbolic elements. First, looking at the ways these civilizations understand and implement justice will help us better understand the nature of symbols in Islamic Sufism literature and their examples in tradition.

The concept of justice in ancient civilizations

The perception of justice also manifested itself in different ways in ancient civilizations. One of them, the Mayan civilization, named the pole star/polaris metaphor as the God of Night.⁸ The reason for this is that the pole star stays in the same place without

⁷ İbrahim Agah Çubukçu, "İslam'da Tasavvuf," *Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi* 8 (1961): 419.

⁸ "Estrella Polar," *Meteorologia en Red*, <https://www.meteorologiaenred.com/tr/estrella-polar.html>.

moving and illuminates its surroundings by emitting light. According to the Mayans, the pole star guides humanity in maintaining daily life and managing spiritual emotions. Because gods are always powerful, unchanging, guiding beings and setting an example. According to them, the God of Night contains the answers and solutions to all questions and problems in daily life. Therefore, the Mayan society appealed to the God of Night to eliminate every problem they encountered in daily life and came to the conclusion that they could find the right path by following his light, that is, the pole star. For this reason, for the Mayans, the pole star was considered the representative of justice, the right path and wisdom.

Similar to the Mayan culture, Confucius also put forward a doctrine that highlights the concept of justice. It can be said that Confucius put forward a unique philosophy of education, politics and morality with his views on human and social relations, which he put forward in China in the 6th century BC. Justice, or being fair, which is one of the subjects he focused on the most, is for him the basic condition of being a superhuman.⁹ Confucius claimed that morality remains in its place like the pole star, and everything else revolves around it.¹⁰ Similarly, Confucius relates the reflection of justice on the person to the pole star metaphor and says: "The person who rules the country with morality is fixed in his place, just like the pole star, and others revolve around him like stars."¹¹ Therefore, the concept of justice is unique in terms of being a guide, just like the pole star.¹² The ruler treats each individual equally while giving the people what they deserve. He shows them the path of truth and goodness. Justice, one of the fundamental principles of moral maturity, does not change according to ages, societies or conditions, on the contrary, events and facts are shaped under its shadow. Therefore, temporary or changing things determine their own path by revolving around the universal and unique justice and benefiting from its light.

⁹ Konfüçyüs, *Konuşmalar*, trans. Giray Fidan (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2021), 1.

¹⁰ Ibid. 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Selahattin Fettahoğlu, "Konfüçyüs ve Öğretisi," *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 16, no. 16 (2004): 319.

Another issue we need to mention about the importance of the concept of justice appears in the ancient philosophical literature. In the Hellenistic period, as issues related to practical life found voice in philosophy, attention was drawn to the problem of morality. Aristotle, one of the most influential philosophers of this period and the next few centuries, put forward a systematic moral teaching and emphasized the concept of justice. Aristotle attempts to define the concept of justice in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he introduces his original moral philosophy. By considering the concept of justice together with its opposite, injustice, he also defines what justice is not.¹³ Arguing that justice is the most perfect virtue in general, Aristotle defines justice as: "Neither the evening star nor the morning star is as extraordinary as justice."¹⁴ According to Aristotle, the evening and morning stars (Venus), which show the east and west directions thanks to the intensity and illumination of their light, are beyond symbols and are such an extraordinary and perfect virtue that they cannot be characterized by them. Such that, according to him, justice is the highest virtue and encompasses all societies and classes.¹⁵ Since justice has a structure that is brighter than the evening and morning stars and gives light and illumination, it surrounds all societies with its principles, rules and sanctions, and does not affect any event, situation, society or society. It does not skip the time period. It has universal and objective criteria.

After briefly talking about the perception of justice in different ancient traditions, it would be appropriate to touch upon the nature of the Sufi tradition in the Islamic world. Thus, the way the concept of justice is handled and processed by Sufi scholars will be understood more clearly.

¹³ Aristoteles, *Nikomakhos'a Etik*, trans. Saffet Babür (Ankara: Bilgesu Yayınları, 2015), 93.

¹⁴ Ali Kahveci, "Adaletin Teolojisi: Teolojik Adalet," in *Uluslararası Din ve İnsan Sempozyumu. Din, Ahlak ve Hukuk*, eds. Üyesi İshak Tekin and Esmâ Turkmen (İstanbul: Sonçağ Akademi, 2021), 496.

¹⁵ Arslan Topakkaya, "Adalet Kavramı Bağlamında Aristoteles - Platon Karşılaştırması," *FLSF Felsefe ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* (2008): 27-46.

Sufi tradition in the Islamic world

This concept, which we call Sufism in Islam and which generally expresses the inner aspect of Islam, became very widespread among Muslims as of the 2nd century Hijri. When Islam reached its third generation, the level of peace and prosperity in Islamic societies increased. As a result of the new belief and lifestyle brought by Islam and the practical conveniences it offered, wars, difficult living conditions and oppression came to an end. In such a society, Muslims, under the influence of the favorable living conditions they live in, have begun to attach importance to worship and look for ways to live a good and religious life. The science of Sufism has also determined the principle of reaching the truth as its main goal and offered Muslims a brand new spirituality and religious lifestyle within the framework of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Sufism is defined as "the spiritual and inner way of life lived within the framework of the manifest and inward provisions of Islam."¹⁶ In this sense, Sufism has played a major role in shaping the perception of spirituality of Muslim societies since its emergence in the 8th century. From tradition to the present, Sufism always aims to strengthen the relationship of Muslim individuals with the Quran and Sunnah. As a result, it regulates the servant's relationship with Allah. It shows how a good and right life is possible.¹⁷ It emphasizes the importance of self-discipline, good morals and purity of heart. In light of all this, Sufism offers Muslims an unusual, original perception of spirituality.

Sufism came into existence at a time when the world of Islamic belief and thought was getting richer day by day and attracted attention throughout the universe. Its origin is based on the Quran and sunnah. It demands to strive to reach the Creator of the universe, to educate and purify the soul, and to give up all material things for this cause. Only the words spoken with the heart, the behavior performed and the feeling of the heart are important. For all these reasons, the science of Sufism has

¹⁶ Reşat Öngören, "Tasavvuf," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, no. 40 (2011): 119-26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

differentiated itself from other sciences by creating a new perception of spirituality. In order to make the requirements of science easy and understandable to Muslims, he created some symbols inspired by the society, culture and nature in which he lived. He tried to convey the knowledge of higher truths by using these symbols.

The importance of symbols in the Sufi tradition

Symbol is a general name given to visual and linguistic forms that serve to convey a meaning.¹⁸ It is a concrete concept put forward in response to something outside itself.¹⁹ The science of Sufism in the Islamic world differs from the ancient traditions that search for truth with its unique method. While sciences such as fiqh, tafsir, hadith or philosophy develop their fields of influence on a theoretical basis, Sufism focuses almost entirely on the practical field. Sufis claimed that Muslims would attain the truth as a result of taking the Prophet as an example and performing their worship with a full orientation towards Allah, without pursuing worldly purposes.²⁰ In this respect, worship refers to all kinds of actions we do with the aim of turning towards Allah. Therefore, not only the physical worships such as prayer, fasting and dhikr, but also the heart and mental worships such as understanding the Quran in the most accurate way, acting according to its orders and prohibitions in daily life, repentance, asceticism and discovery are meaningful when done with the aim of being one with Allah. is winning. The importance of symbols in the Sufi tradition emerged as a result of such worship.

From the moment the religion of Islam was formed on earth, Hz. Muhammad's unique efforts and zeal, an atmosphere of peace and trust was created among Muslims. At that time, Muslims were finding answers to all their issues or unique and specific questions and problems by asking the Prophet. This situation continued during the period of the companions after the death of the prophet.

¹⁸ Sadık Kılıç, "Sembolün Gücü ve İslam'da Semboller," *Diyanet İlmî Dergi* 49 (2013): 9.

¹⁹ Selçuk Güngör, "Sembolizmin Tarihi Serüveni," *Genç Atebe Dergisi* 3 (2022): 73.

²⁰ Ömer Türker, *İslam Düşünce Gelenekleri* (İstanbul: Ketebe Yayınları, 2020), 113.

People who personally met the Prophet, talked to him, and took part in his assembly, eliminated the question marks by leading opinion among Muslims. But as time progressed, the number of these people decreased. It became difficult to find people who had contact with the Prophet or those who met him. During this time period, the religion of Islam spread to larger lands day by day. As the number of Muslims increased and the living conditions in these Muslim societies improved with the tranquility brought by religion, the questions asked about beliefs and practices also increased. In order to leave no question marks in the minds of Muslims and to live in accordance with the verses of Islam that encourage them to think, question, research and learn the truth, the leading scholars of that society developed a new formula.

In the century and the lands where the religion of Islam emerged, aside from the religious belief, lifestyle and culture of that period, the level of education was quite low and the number of educated people was quite low, so it was very difficult for the Holy Quran and the words and actions of the Prophet to be understood and accepted. has happened. Hz. Muhammad did his best to convey his message to all humanity and have it accepted. Because Islam is not the religion of the elite or a certain group, but a timeless and universal religion that appeals to all humanity. Therefore, it covers all humanity, regardless of education level, age and gender. Throughout his life, while explaining Islam to people, the Prophet took into consideration their ability to understand and interpret, and addressed each person according to his level.²¹ Therefore, sometimes he could explain the Qur'an to them by giving concrete examples from daily life, nature, and events experienced in the past. They clearly stated what they wanted and eliminated any confusion.

Because the Quran contains high universal truths. And there are some points that cannot be understood by just reading or listening. At the point of understanding these truths, symbols were used in order not to create confusion in the mind and heart of people who are insufficient to process intelligence and information.²²

²¹ Ebu Davud Süleyman bin Eş'as, *Sünen* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), 40.

²² Zeynep Büyükcünel, "Mevlânâ'nın Tasavvuf Felsefesinde Sembolizm" (PhD diss, Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, Konya, 2014), 16.

Symbols were also frequently used by Sufis in expressing religious realities. Because the Sufis, who put forward a unique epistemology by prioritizing Kesf and inspiration, had difficulties in explaining the divine knowledge that came to the heart through these methods to people who were not deepened in the inner sciences. Sufis, who wanted to avoid these difficulties, chose to explain these truths implicitly to people who did not have the necessary equipment or ability to understand them.²³ For this reason, they used symbols. Because explaining the abstract with the concrete and making the invisible visible is possible with symbols. In Sufism, the implicit meaning comes to light as a result of symbols. Sufis used symbols as a means of transferring knowledge.²⁴ Sufis, who had knowledge of the truth, used symbols as a means of transferring this knowledge to unqualified people. In this way, they helped people who were lower in terms of knowledge and rank in their beliefs and worship with concrete examples. They have clearly revealed the doubts and doubts about the esoteric with the external and eliminated the question marks. They also used some symbols to show the importance of some words and concepts mentioned in the Holy Quran, both in practice and in the world of belief and meaning. The concept of justice is one of the concepts that Sufis express with symbols.

The concept of justice as a symbol in the Islamic Sufi tradition

We evaluated the importance of symbols and their reflections on practical life from ancient cultures and the beginning of Islam to the present day. Therefore, it would be useful to examine the nature of the concept of justice in the Islamic Sufi tradition and its embodiment in practical life in the light of symbols.

Since the 8th century, when the Islamic Sufism tradition came into existence, it has taken care to express the truths of the Islamic religion and the issues that need to be taken into consideration in the maintenance of religious life, in a language that

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Muhammed Shalaan, "Süfi Uygulamaları ve Bireyleşme Yolu Arasındaki Bazı Paralellikler," in *Sufi Psikolojisi*, ed. Kemal Sayar (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2000), 158.

they can understand, to people who cannot understand them through experience. In this context, Sufi scholars have simplified their own language and placed different concrete concepts and symbols in their expressions according to the knowledge and information processing levels of their interlocutors. The concept of justice, as a social, moral and political virtue in the Sufi tradition, has been discussed extensively in different ages and geographies and expressed with different symbols. Among the scholars who carry this tradition and have explained justice with different symbolic metaphors, it is necessary to mention Rûmî first. He is one of the most important religious scholars in the Sufi tradition and is also a poet. The concept of justice holds a key place in his teachings. Rûmî evaluated the concept of justice by considering its opposite, injustice. He made a general definition of this concept by saying “Justice means putting everything in its place. The shoes are on your feet. The cone also belongs to the head.”²⁵ According to him, the situation where something is not in its place in accordance with its nature is injustice. Emphasizing one of the universal definitions of justice in Mesnevi, Rûmî sometimes discussed justice in the context of rights and law and also evaluated it within the political doctrine. According to him, justice is a divine ocean that includes law.²⁶ Only the judge who takes the rule of law into consideration can make fair decisions.²⁷ Legal rules, by which rights are protected, are the only way to establish justice, peace and order in society. A state where the rules of law prevail ensure justice in society. and such a state administrator governs his society by making fair and equitable decisions. In societies where rules are disregarded, there is nothing but injustice and therefore chaos.

Rûmî compares justice to the sun in a different part of his Mesnevi.²⁸ According to him, the concept of justice illuminates the entire universe like a sun. Just as the sun gives heat and light equally to everything that exists, justice, if fulfilled and applied, serves the entire world of existence with all its tools and functions. In this sense, according to Rûmî, justice is universal and essential

²⁵ Murat Erten, “Mevlana’nın Adalet Anlayışı,” *Anasay* 6 (2022): 136.

²⁶ Mevlana, *Mesnevi* VI/1495, trans. Ali Yaver Caferi (Tablet Yayınları, Konya, 2007), 575.

²⁷ Mevlana, *Mesnevi*, 575.

²⁸ Mevlana, *Mesnevi* I/510, 83.

for all humanity. Likewise, Rûmî also uses the mountain symbol for the concept of justice in *Mesnevi*. Citing the size, power, indestructible and impenetrable majesty and magnificence of the mountains as an example, Rûmî underlines that the concept of justice is immutable, unfalsifiable and irrefutable for all humanity.²⁹ Just as it is not possible to topple a mountain without a divine power, as long as justice is established, Likewise, it cannot be changed, refuted or falsified. Because all the rules of justice are general, independent of time, place and events and are universal.

Rûmî used similar symbols for the head of state as he used for the concept of justice. For example, he used the term "sea of justice" for the head of state.³⁰ The head of state can only be a just ruler if he rules the society by complying with the rights and rules of law. And in this way, it is like a sea that carries within itself the requirements, rules, sanctions and all aspects and functions of justice. Rûmî placed great emphasis on the concept of justice in *Mesnevi*, one of his works that transcends the ages. The symbols he chose to educate and raise public awareness about justice were generally inspired by nature. Moreover, he reinforced these symbols with the stories he told and emphasized the concept of justice with a unique system. With his stories, he pointed out the universality and timelessness of the concepts of rights, law and justice centuries ago, and made warnings that remain valid today.

Another Sufi who explained the concept of justice to society through symbols was Yunus Emre, who lived in the 13th century. Yunus is a folk poet and Sufi scholar, the pioneer of Turkish poetry in Anatolia. The stories he tells and the advice he gives in his poems transcend the ages. He combined the concepts of tolerance and love, which he emphasized in his poems, with the teachings of Sufism. He always aimed to guide people to the good, the beautiful, the right and the truth. The comprehensiveness and timelessness of Yunus' poems have led to his recognition in all societies around the world and to his advice being taken as an example in solving social, political, moral, etc. problems.

In Yunus' Sufi teaching, the concept of justice is discussed together with equality. According to Yunus, treating everyone

²⁹ Mevlana, *Mesnevi I/ 3794*, 118.

³⁰ Mevlana, *Mesnevi I/ 2854*, 95.

equally and not taking away anyone's rights are among the basic actions of a just person. Therefore, if a person wants to act justly, he must treat everyone equally in every respect and give everyone their rights. Yunus Emre argues that justice pursues innocence. In other words, a just person is not after the guilty and cruel, but is after the innocent, the good, the truth and the right. With the lines "I love creation because of the Creator".³¹ He advises us to approach people and treat them equally and fairly, regardless of their differences in religion, language, nationality, etc. Loving people with the awareness that they are a part of the Creator's power also brings with it acting with justice, without discrimination between them.

Yunus Emre used symbolic elements in his poems, just like Mevlana. He uses the pole star metaphor for the concept of justice, just like Confucius. He emphasizes that justice is fixed like a pole star and everything else revolves around it. The light of the star of justice is not shadowed, moreover, it illuminates the surroundings with its light. Just as the pole star stands steadily in its place without moving and constantly emits light and illumination, justice always points to right, good, reality and reality, regardless of time, place and event. In this respect, justice is a key point that is fixed in place like a pole star, remains unchanging under any circumstances, and regulates the functioning of the universe together with the concepts of right, equality and righteousness.

Spirituality awareness in the light of symbols

It is a fact that in Islamic Sufism, knowledge is processed in the heart and transferred to practical life within the framework of the truth brought by the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. Although Sufi scholars accept the senses and reasoning as a method of acquiring knowledge, they claim that the knowledge brought by revelation can only be achieved through discovery and inspiration through the heart. But unfortunately, not all Muslims can have such an experience. Therefore, we stated that the knowledge of the truth was expressed through symbols to Muslims who were deprived of this experience.

³¹ Mustafa Tatçı, *Yunus Emre Divânı ve Risâletün -Nushiyye* (İstanbul: MEB, 2005), 62.

Symbols were introduced into Sufi terminology with the aim of preventing all confusion of meaning and consolidating the Islamic faith in the mind and heart. In this regard, being aware of the meanings of the symbols used by Sufis enables one to understand both the religion of Islam and Sufism.³² Moreover, the only way to strengthen people's spiritual awareness is to use symbols.³³ Therefore, in the Islamic Sufi tradition, symbols have been the point of reference to teach religious truths to a person and instill spiritual awareness. The symbols used to express these higher truths are chosen rather from nature and culture. The most important reason for this is the effort to convey a religious concept, ruling, truth, order or an issue to the ordinary person as clearly as possible, without leaving room for doubt or doubt. In the Sufi imagination, the path to truth is experienced through feeling. They wanted these experiences to be imagined through symbols in the minds of ordinary people. In the Islamic Sufi tradition, the balance between matter and meaning is established through symbols. People's understanding of the ambiguous verses and implicit expressions in the Holy Quran was also possible thanks to the transfers made from the abstract to the concrete. Sufi scholars gave examples from nature while conveying both the knowledge brought by the Quran and the Sunnah and their own theories of knowledge. This ensures that concepts are clear and distinct in terms of thought, belief and worship.

Symbols are created based on the knowledge of experiment, which is the first and basic way of gaining knowledge. In other words, Sufi scholars, who aim to create the perception of spirituality in minds in the light of the basic information brought by the five senses, have chosen symbols mostly from nature. They also revealed the concept of justice by using symbols.

The concept of justice has been tried to be expressed in Sufi terminology in the light of information that can be easily obtained through observation, such as the pole star, the sun, the mountain, the moon. From the moment it came to light as a universal and true religion, Islam has emphasized the infinity and limitlessness of

³² R. Bahar Akarpınar, "Sufi Kültüründe Sembollerin Yeri ve Önemi Hakkında Bir Deneme," *Türkbilig* 7 (2004): 15.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

God's wisdom and justice. In Islam, issues related to justice such as the nature and importance of justice, the value of equal and fair actions for Allah, and the evil of cruelty and revenge occur in Sufi scholars, without any intermediaries or veils, with their unique methods of knowing. However, people who are not familiar with this method of knowing cannot fully understand the meaning of these concepts. Therefore, it is possible to encourage them to do good and avoid evil and to ensure that they live a life in accordance with Allah's commands and prohibitions by expressing these concepts to them with symbols. A Muslim who understands the nature and importance of justice in the light of symbols does not resort to any path that is far from justice, and prefers to trust in God's justice instead of taking revenge when he is oppressed. He always treats those around him fairly and equally. For example, a Muslim who considers justice as equivalent to a pole star symbol understands the importance and power of justice and being fair, based on the constancy of the pole star, its size, and the light and illumination it emits around him, and incorporates it into his own life. In this way, he fulfills the commandments of Islam and lives a life as Allah wishes. Therefore, in the Sufi tradition, symbols are the most important element of preventing Muslims from falling into a crisis of doubt in faith and belief by exposing them to the hard-to-comprehend realities that exist in God's infinite knowledge. Moreover, symbols play an important role in providing spiritual awareness and strengthening individuals' beliefs.

Symbols guide human beings on many issues such as the unity of God's existence, creation, the nature of religious belief, virtues, freedom of will, life in the afterlife, and so on. The Sufi tradition, which aims to enlighten all humanity about the Islamic religion and belief and instill spiritual awareness, uses symbols to achieve this goal. Sufism, which chooses feeling, discovery and inspiration as a way of gaining knowledge, makes religious truths understandable by transferring the abstract to the concrete through symbols. This is why Sufi scholars strive to describe the concept of justice with the majestic elements of nature. The establishment of justice in people's minds as an attribute of God, a religious element and a virtue plays an important role in strengthening the feelings of social peace, brotherhood and trust. All these feelings show that the individual's relationship with the spiritual is strong and

meaningful. In this sense, the Sufi tradition enriches the human world of meaning with symbols and makes it understandable. The Sufi tradition, which continues today with its various extensions, continues to add a different breath to the Islamic faith with the symbols it uses, its unique epistemology and metaphysics.

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The Act of Grieving in The Philosophy of Aşık Veysel- The Role of Cultural Codes in the Healing Process in Spiritual Support and Guidance

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Abstract: Aşık Veysel is an important representative of the minstrel tradition in the context of Turkish thought. Looking at the philosophical depth of his poems, it is possible to see a philosophy of life. The subject of this study is to analyse the meaning of the image/metaphor of the act of pouring trouble in one of his poems and to determine how this image is effective in the healing process in spiritual support and guidance. In other words, it is to examine the effect of cultural codes on people in an anthropological context. In this sense, it is an applied study. The study was carried out in a tent city in Adıyaman, one of the provinces damaged by the earthquake that occurred in 11 provinces on 6 February 2023. The study was conducted in two different time periods. Four different groups were studied. In this study, the impact of spiritual support and guidance activities on "adults" was presented. In summary, when we look at the effect of cultural codes on the healing process, it can be seen that it contributes greatly to the search for meaning in such extraordinary moments of crisis.

Keywords: Aşık Veysel, Philosophy, Cultural code, Spiritual support

Introduction

This study has been prepared to explain the healing power of cultural codes in spiritual support and guidance in mobilising our local dynamics based on the philosophy of Aşık Veysel, who has an important place in the history of Turkish thought. What is meant by cultural codes is the customs, traditions and those ones that nations

have brought from the past to the present. This transmission includes both oral and written (poetry, epic, proverb, idiom, literature accumulation) and similar actions repeated in practical life. In short, in an anthropological context, it covers the process until today. The great earthquake that occurred on 6 February 2023, which constitutes an example of the practical aspect of our study, is a tent city area in Adıyaman region of 11 provinces.¹

Aşık Veysel and Philosophy

This year, with the circular of our Presidency, the year 2023 has been declared as the "Year of Aşık Veysel". Aşık Veysel's real name is Veysel Şatıroğlu. Aşık Veysel was born in 1894 in Sivrialan village of Şarkışla district of Sivas. He is a folk minstrel who spent his life as a bard due to the smallpox he had. He is known as a minstrel. Aşık is an artist who sings improvised poems in syllabic metre and quatrain, accompanied by a reed, and some of them are bâdeli and tell folk stories. The difference of minstrels from other poets is that they are the eyes, ears, heart, in short, the spokesperson of the society to which they belong; they express their pains, troubles, joys, hopes and expectations with their instruments and words. While the minstrels of the pre-Islamic period were also known by names such as shaman, baksı/bahşl, game and kam, they continued their art under the name of folk poet/ minstrel after Islam, undergoing some changes. In the profession of minstrelsy, there are some criteria that have been applied throughout time and uptill today and have been established as a tradition with these features. One of these features is to play an instrument and become interested in the art of poetry.

Aşık Veysel has many poems and most of them are performed as folk songs. Aşık Veysel is an important thinker in the history of Turkish thought. While reflecting life in his poems, he established a complete human philosophy with a philosophical depth. He tried to reflect the life experiences of Anatolian people through his art.

Uzun İnce Bir Yoldayım — I'm On A Long narrow Road

Uzun ince bir yoldayım — *On a long narrow road I am*

¹ It is not specifically stated "how many" tent cities there are.

Gidiyorum gündüz gece — *I'm going day and night*
Bilmiyorum ne haldayım — *I don't Know how I'm doing .*
Gidiyorum gündüz gece — *I'm just going day and night*
Dünyaya geldiğim anda — *Ever since the day I was born*
Yürüdüm aynı zamanda — *I've been going on and on*
İki kapılı bir handa — *In an inn with two doors.*

Gidiyorum gündüz gece — *And I'm going on, day and night*

Aşık Veysel describes life in this poem. In a symbolic language, he explains that life is a road for human beings and that this road is long and special. The purpose of a road that is traveled day and night is again expressed that everything is possible in life. Like light and darkness: The fact that there is darkness at the end of light and light at the beginning of darkness explains that life can have ups and downs. This point shows us the dynamic aspect of life. How can someone position themselves in such a situation? It is in this dynamism that man becomes aware of himself and goes on to reinterpret himself. This is different from his physical birth. It is a re-enlightenment of consciousness. It is gaining the ability to make sense of life. The fast flowing state of life opens different doors for people in this perspective. «When I say I'm going but I don't know where I am», it is a reminder. Progress on this path/life is not just progress. It draws attention to the need to know the path one is traveling in life. In other words, it reminds people that they need to know themselves. It requires being aware of life. The sign of human vitality is to move forward knowing this difference.

In the other stanza, he talks about existing between these two by drawing attention to the fact that from the moment a person is born into life, a life movement begins and there is both the first existence that begins with birth and the extinction that ends with death. It is to live between these two gates knowing everything, that is, accepting everything. When one realizes the miraculous aspect of the moment of one's existence, one understands how precious life is. But on the other hand, it is essential to appreciate every moment of life, knowing the reality called death, that life will end one day. Time is precious for human beings, and the door of death is there for them not to use it in an unprofitable way. In this sense, he draws attention to the reality of nature and draws attention to conscious existence. This is the first interpretation.

The second interpretation of `with a two door inn` is to explain the first interpretation: In Anatolian lore and Islamic belief, death is not annihilation. There is a life after death. This life can be experienced by existing with the soul in a higher dimension. Physical death is a doorway to this special life. In this sense, there are two doors for human beings. The first gate is birth and the second gate is the one that applies to physical death. After passing through these gates, human beings reach their true home (Philosophical means real universe). It is necessary to understand and digest the life of the world, which is named as “a two door tavern.”

In the other stanza, he points out that life consists of moments despite its seemingly long aspect. Life that seems very long is actually a moment. One should make good use of this moment and appreciate it. In short, one should accept this life as it is and enjoy it. This is a way of finding and interpreting happiness within oneself. In other words, this happiness is in one's own essence, in one's own life. Undoubtedly, this poem of Aşık Veysel contains a much deeper philosophy.

The Act of Pouring Sorrow According to Aşık Veysel

The subject of spiritual counselling and guidance, which we have chosen as the subject here, is to try to talk about the importance of the action of "pouring trouble," which has a place in our culture, based on a quatrain of Aşık Veysel, and to try to talk about the example of implementing the healing power in the practical field. «Dert dökmek» (Pouring) is an idiom used in Turkish. When we look at the meaning analysis of the words in which this idiom is formed, it is used in the meaning of trouble as the bad situation, problem and distress that the person is in. In this case, the person is spiritually sad, anxious and worried. "Pouring" as a word corresponds to an action in a general sense. You can also consult the dictionary of the Turkish Language Association or the scanning dictionary. The idiom "pouring out one's troubles" means to share one's problems and troubles that one encounters in life. In fact, this is a method of healing in the Anatolian tradition.

The idiom of pouring out one's troubles means sharing one's problems and distress encountered in life. In a sense, it is used in

the sense of transferring his / her trouble to something / someone. There is another idiom similar to that one; the idiom of burning trouble. This idiom corresponds to the situation when a person is quite overwhelmed by his troubles and tells the other person about his problem by whining and complaining. Pouring out one's troubles involves knowing one's own problems and believing that they can be solved by sharing them. In fact, this is a kind of healing method in Anatolian tradition.

When the idiom of pouring trouble is examined, the question of why trouble is poured can be answered as follows: When the action of pouring is analysed from the above meaning, according to the interpretation of meaning, something that is poured undergoes a change, it is not possible to replace the same thing. In other words, what is poured out turns into an essence different from its original one and moves away from its essence. In fact, when the person pours out his/her troubles, he/she wishes it to flow out or disperse from him/her. In order not to witness the original of that problem again and not to have the same sad experience, he/she aims to remove it from himself/herself. In a way, the one who pours out his/her troubles heals. He purifies himself. In a way, this is a cure. This purification brings with it an acceptance and makes a great contribution to the person's adaptation to the next life. The act of pouring out one's troubles can be transferred from human to nature in our culture. So much so that this is reflected in our culture from poetry to folk songs.

Our great folk poet and thinker Aşık Veysel also says the following in the stanza of one of his poems on pouring out troubles:

Derdimi dökersem derin dereye de
Doldurur dereyi düz olur gider hey

Our great folk minstrel and thinker Aşık Veysel also says the following in the stanza of a poem on "pouring trouble":

If I pour my troubles into the deep stream,
It will fill the stream making it sraight,

Aşık Veysel talks about pouring out his troubles in the above quatrain. He says that this trouble is such that it fills the stream and it becomes flat. As mentioned before, our thinker uses a symbolic language. So much so that when this trouble is poured out, it flows away, and when it is transferred, it changes shape. It flows

away, never to return to its original form. It does not return to its original form.

Trouble is a burden for human beings and disturbs them mentally and physically. Human beings have witnessed and experienced many difficulties in life since their existence. What is important for human beings is how and in what way the attitude they adopt in the face of these difficulties will enable them to continue their lives. Today, it has been clarified by modern science that being constantly stuck in negative experiences and keeping them in one's inner world/spirit triggers many diseases. In fact, many physical health problems are attributed to the stress caused by the problems people face. While people can sometimes overcome these problems, sometimes they need support. Today, in modern science, this support is provided by the science of psychology. Unlike the past, the situation of today's people seems very different: From time to time in life they may be under the influence of their troubles. In fact, the mechanisation of many things that regulate human life with modernisation have not prevented them from being dragged into an existential crisis. So much so that today's man has been left more alone with the effect of individualisation. This loneliness has dragged him into a spontaneous depression. The decrease in sharing has spontaneously developed a negative perception of life for human beings.

In ancient cultures and societies under the influence of tradition, there have been many traditions that continue in a positive sense. One of these is sharing one's troubles. In this sense, the act of "pouring out one's troubles" in Turkish culture, sharing one's troubles with someone from one's own environment and transferring them to nature in symbolic language, as in the lines in the folk song, accelerated one's recovery. In a way, people can feel better when they hear from someone other than themselves that they are not alone and that life still continues. Moreover, this is an example of spiritual and material solidarity. This example of solidarity is also accompanied by the Turkish proverb "one hand has nothing but two hands have a voice." Human beings are stronger and happier when they are a social being. In Turkish culture, the tendency to be in solidarity and unity still continues. In this sense, share with someone in troubles and shared troubles heal.

The act of pouring out one's troubles, which can also be interpreted as receiving support, is an act of revealing oneself to someone other than oneself / to nature. For this reason, it is also said in Turkish culture that he who does not tell his troubles cannot find a cure for his troubles. It is agreed upon that pouring trouble in therapy, which is one of the methods in psychology, can be likened to a kind of therapy method. In the therapy method, the person opens himself up to a counsellor whose knowledge he trusts and tries to find solutions to his problems. It is done to a competent person. Here, a competent person means someone who knows life and accepts experiences as they are. In other words, listening to the person as he/she is without judgement. Aşık Veysel said that especially to understand the trouble, the trouble is poured to someone who understands the trouble: «I don't tell those who don't suffer, those who don't suffer don't know the value of troubles, I was ignored that my troubles were a cure for me, the rose can never be without thorns.»

In the ancient past of Turkish culture, there is a tradition of sharing people's troubles with each other. Anthropologically, it is known that Turks are prone to live in solidarity and unity. It is known that this solidarity reaches the highest level especially in times of crisis. In the earthquakes that took place in our country on 6 February 2023, we experienced this example once again in a sad way. From the moment the earthquake occurred, the official institutions of our state, non-governmental organisations and our people tried to overcome the difficult days with their own individual initiatives. Efforts are still continuing in this regard.

As it can be understood from these lines, trouble is not a situation that can be told to everyone. Because the one who pours out his troubles wants to be healed. For this reason, the one who listens to the problem must be a virtuous person. He should know that anything can happen in life and accept people as they are. He should not judge. He should listen as he is. In other words, they should be tolerant and empathetic, so that the person who is grieving is able to express themselves fully. Then the grieving person can begin to heal. Disaster victims may have complaints and prejudices about the aid and rescue efforts, but the counselor should remain patient and listen to them sincerely.

The Case of Adıyaman in the Activity of Grieving and Spiritual Counseling and Guidance

As Dokuz Eylül University Faculty of Theology, we have carried out a study under the name of "Spiritual Support and Guidance" in Adıyaman, one of the earthquake zones. These studies continue to take place in Adıyaman and Malatya among the other 11 provinces. Our aim here is to try to help overcome the traumatic situations experienced during the earthquake after the crisis. This study was carried out with four different groups of children, adolescents, adults and the elderly. Approximately 3500-4000 cases were reached as a total team. The spiritual support and guidance of each group was carried out differently. In this research, the study of the impact of spiritual support and guidance activity on "adults" is presented.

In this study, we have identified three methods of spiritual support and guidance: The first is to organise religious principles and values in the healing process, the second is to carry out the healing process by taking into account our cultural codes based on the anthropological importance of culture, and the third is to try to regain the meaning that people have lost for life with the traumatic effect of the event experienced. Again, the second method, which we will present as an example in this study, is to treat by using the cultural code. Samples of the other two methods will be discussed in other studies.

We worked on how we can implement the cultural code of pouring out one's troubles described above during and after the earthquake experienced by our people. We used the "rest" method as a method during the healing period. Our aim in choosing this method was to try to benefit from the healing aspect of pouring out one's troubles, whose conceptual framework we have drawn from the idiom and the line in Aşık Veysel's folk song. In this study, we mostly shared the data of the study conducted in a tent city in Adıyaman. The study was conducted by visiting the region at different times. The first was on February 6, 2023, the 1st month after the earthquake and the second on the 2nd month after the earthquake. We continued the study by interpreting and observing the data obtained at two different times and the data of our other teams. We evaluated the results of our own teams at two different times for

comparison purposes. Unlike the systematic methods used in psychology, a spontaneous method was preferred here. In the first stage, we listened to the experiences of our citizens during and after the earthquake. With the listening method, we listened to the person who poured out his/her troubles as they were without any intervention. We tried to empathize with what the person poured out his/her troubles. We specifically told the person who poured out his/her troubles that we came to share his/her troubles. We did not create a special environment/space while doing this, because we preferred this for the person to feel a sincere and genuine rapprochement. However, on some persons' requests, we met privately in a place. The person who poured out his/her problems managed the process. This was especially preferred because it was aimed for the person to express the incident in a comfortable way and gain self-confidence. This is one way to act to healing. We did not set a time limit for the person who confided. We did not interfere with the content of their speech. Whenever they wanted to finish their speech, we stopped listening. Since the content of the speech was generally traumatic, it was in the form of a speech with intense negativity. In the face of this intense negativity, we took short and restful breaks while conducting the study. This was done to avoid being affected by the same trauma.

After the act of listening/healing cure was over, they were guided to channel problematic points in a positive way. Suggestions were made that life goes on - taking into account the sensitivity of the grieving period. To increase one's resilience in the face of difficulties, it was expressed that they were not alone and that we were here for them. They were told that the situation of togetherness is continuous for a life time. Again, they were reminded that they should be patient in this sense, that time is the cure for everything and that we will overcome the process together in solidarity. Just as Aşık Veysel stated in his verses:

The thorny bush grows the rose
The bee makes honey from every flower
One finds perfection with patience
He who is not patient will not find his goal
Gülü yetiştirir dikenli çalı
Arı her çiçekten yapıyor balı

Kiři sabır ile bulur kemali
Sabretmeyen maksudunu bulama

They were reminded that they should not be alone, that they should be in contact with people in their environment and that they should benefit from the opportunities provided by the state.

At the end of the interview, the words "I am glad you came, I am glad you listened to us, I am glad you are here" were a sign that they had taken the first step towards recovery. After staying in the region for 6-7 days, it was observed that the interviewees were getting better. Finally, at the moment of farewell, despite the impossible conditions created by the earthquake, the earthquake survivors forgot their own victimization and presented small gifts, showing that the healing process continued in a positive way.

Our earthquake victims were not left alone and the process was and continues to be carried out in solidarity. This situation can be likened to the approach taken by family members in the face of a family problem. Apart from volunteers and civil society groups, when we look at our state policy in carrying out the process, a special effort was made to ensure that our earthquake victims were not left alone. In this sense, many institutions of our state were assigned to the earthquake region. The aim here was not to leave our citizens alone and to organize to meet all material and moral needs of our citizens when necessary. At the end of the process, the healing power of utilizing cultural codes was observed in a very short time.

Conclusion

In the spiritual counselling and guidance method, it was seen that the effect of cultural codes on human beings continues in a positive way. As one of our folk bards and thinkers Ařık Veysel expressed in his poems, the effect of the act of pouring out troubles continues to have an impact on the traditions in the life of Turkish society. Especially in times of crisis, it was personally observed that there was unity and solidarity with a spontaneous organisation outside the state authority. State policy was carried out through official channels with the same methods and solutions. It has been determined that cultural codes constitute the source of the basic philosophy of all these practices. In this sense, Turkish culture and

customs do not refrain from preserving their existence in the face of modernisation.

According to the data obtained from the visits to the region at two different times, it was determined that the trauma effect continued during the first visit and therefore treatment was provided, it also continued to take place during the second visit. In the second visit, it was observed that the counselling provided as a result of the treatment in the first visit was effective and that people were making efforts to create opportunities in their life routines. However, it should be noted that the work of other spiritual counselling and guidance teams that went outside the dates of our visits improved this process. The main thing here is to ensure continuity. In the process, we provided moral support to our earthquake victims by sharing the pain of their losses, to overcome the need to tell the memories about them, to hold on to life again and to adapt to the new situation. The healing power of the listening method was personally observed. This situation can be defined as a kind of healing method fed by the local dynamics / culture of societies. Again, if expressed as a concept, it can also be expressed as cultural healing. Spiritual counselling and guidance has many pillars. However, when we look at the effect of cultural codes in the healing process, it is useful to state that it contributes greatly to the search for meaning in such extraordinary moments of crisis.

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A Philosophical Exploration of Spiritual Values and their Contribution to Shaping Humanity

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Abstract: The study undertakes a philosophical inquiry into the profound influence of spiritual values on the trajectory of human civilization. Throughout history, diverse societies have developed intricate belief systems and spiritual frameworks that serve as the bedrock for their moral, ethical, and existential principles. These spiritual values, transcending religious confines, manifest in various cultural, philosophical, and ethical traditions. The study delves into the core essence of spirituality, probing its origins, and its pivotal role in human development. It examines how spiritual values have guided and molded human behavior, ethics, and social structures, simultaneously fostering unity and division within societies. Drawing from a rich philosophical tapestry, this study investigates how spiritual values have informed ethical philosophies, moral paradigms, and the pursuit of the greater good. It explores ethical quandaries and conflicts arising from diverse interpretations of these values, while also emphasizing their potential to ignite compassion, empathy, and societal transformation. It assesses the contemporary relevance of spiritual values in an increasingly secular world, where the boundaries between spirituality, ethics, and secular humanism blur. The study scrutinizes how modern philosophy and science intersect with spiritual values, contributing to a broader comprehension of human consciousness, purpose, and interconnectedness. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the significance of spiritual values in human existence and their enduring influence on our collective journey. By exploring the intersections of philosophy, spirituality, and humanity, it illuminates the profound ways in which spiritual values continue to shape and guide our shared destiny.

Keywords: Spiritual Values, Humanity, Moral Compass, Social Transformation, Empathy

Introduction

Throughout the annals of human history, the realm of spirituality has played a pivotal role in shaping our collective identity. Spiritual values, those deeply ingrained principles that transcend religious dogma, have been integral in defining our moral compass, ethical frameworks, and overall understanding of the human experience. We embark on a philosophical exploration of how spiritual values have contributed to the development of humanity, examining their origins, manifestations, and enduring impact.

To begin our journey, we must first understand the essence of spiritual values. These values encompass a diverse spectrum of principles such as compassion, empathy, love, interconnectedness, and transcendence. They often serve as the moral and ethical foundations of societies, guiding individuals and communities in their quest for meaning and purpose. While spiritual values may find their expression in religious doctrines, they extend beyond the boundaries of any specific faith, making them a universal aspect of human culture. Spiritual values have deep historical roots, intertwining with the fabric of civilizations across the globe. In ancient times, philosophers like Confucius and Laozi in China, the Stoics in Greece, and spiritual leaders like the Buddha in India, all emphasized values such as compassion, wisdom, and inner peace. These teachings left indelible marks on their respective societies, shaping the moral character of entire cultures. Religious and cultural traditions have been instrumental in nurturing and preserving spiritual values. Christianity, for instance, emphasizes love, forgiveness, and charity as core values, which have profoundly influenced Western ethics. Similarly, the Islamic concept of "Ummah" underscores the interconnectedness of humanity, fostering a sense of global unity among believers.

Spiritual values provide a foundation for ethical and moral philosophies. Virtue ethics, championed by Aristotle, emphasizes the cultivation of virtuous traits such as courage and compassion.

Moreover, spiritual values underpin deontological ethics, consequentialism, and other ethical theories, guiding individuals and societies in determining what is right and just. Spiritual values have also been catalysts for social transformation. Figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. harnessed the power of spiritual values like non-violence and justice to lead movements that changed the course of history. These values inspire individuals to rise above personal interests and work toward a greater good.

In our modern, increasingly secular world, the relevance of spiritual values remains undeniable. These values continue to inform our ethical and moral frameworks, providing a sense of purpose and direction in a sometimes chaotic world. Furthermore, they intersect with scientific inquiries into consciousness, interconnectedness, and the human condition, enriching our understanding of existence. The study of spiritual values and their contribution to shaping humanity is a profound journey through history, philosophy, and culture. These values, with their universal appeal and enduring influence, transcend religious boundaries to enrich our lives with compassion, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness. As we reflect on their significance, we recognize the vital role they play in guiding us toward a more ethical, compassionate, and harmonious world, where humanity's potential for greatness knows no bounds.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are to explore the fundamental nature and origins of spiritual values, investigate their historical and contemporary roles in shaping human behavior and ethics, assess their impact on the development of ethical philosophies and moral frameworks, examine their potential to inspire compassion and societal transformation, analyze their relevance in an increasingly secular world, and contribute to the ongoing discourse regarding the enduring significance of spiritual values in the human experience and their influence on the collective destiny of humanity.

Methodology

The study employs a methodology that includes a comprehensive review of philosophical and scholarly literature, encompassing historical texts and contemporary philosophical works, to examine the origins and evolution of spiritual values. Additionally, it conducts comparative analyses across various cultural and ethical traditions to identify commonalities and distinctions in the interpretation and impact of these values on human societies. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, employing qualitative data analysis techniques, particularly thematic analysis, to uncover prevailing patterns and trends. Secondary materials sources consists articles, books, national and international writings, as well as reputable internet sources. The multifaceted approach provides a diverse array of perspectives and insights into the subject of spiritual values and their enduring influence on humanity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the exploration synthesizes philosophical and ethical theories, drawing from virtue ethics, moral philosophy, and existentialism. It examines the historical influence of spiritual values, including compassion, empathy, and interconnectedness, on human behavior and ethical paradigms. The framework underpins the examination of spirituality's intrinsic connection to human evolution and its enduring impact on shaping the moral and ethical dimensions of human existence.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study encompasses a comprehensive examination of spiritual values across various cultural and philosophical traditions, focusing on their historical evolution and impact on human behavior, ethics, and societies. It also includes a contemporary analysis of the relevance of these values in a secular world, emphasizing their intersections with modern philosophy and science. The study aims to contribute to a deeper

understanding of the enduring influence of spiritual values on humanity.

Result and Discussion

Fundamental Nature and Origins of Spiritual Values

Spiritual values are an intrinsic part of human existence, shaping our beliefs, actions, and the way we perceive the world around us. These values often provide a moral and ethical compass, guiding individuals in their interactions with others and with the universe at large. The study of spiritual values is a multidisciplinary endeavor, drawing insights from philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Spiritual values encompass a wide range of principles and beliefs that are deeply rooted in an individual's inner world. These values often transcend the material and the tangible, focusing instead on the immaterial aspects of life, such as meaning, purpose, and interconnectedness. According to Gotsis and Kortezi (2008), spiritual values can be understood as a set of core principles that guide individuals in their quest for self-actualization, ethical living, and transcendence.

One of the fundamental characteristics of spiritual values is their subjectivity. Abramson (2001) emphasizes that spiritual values are deeply personal and can vary significantly from one individual to another. What is considered spiritually valuable to one person may not hold the same significance for another? This subjectivity is rooted in the unique life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and belief systems of each individual. Spiritual values also tend to be holistic in nature. Montero-Marin et al. (2018) argue that they encompass not only ethical and moral considerations but also emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. They are concerned with the well-being of the individual as well as the well-being of the larger community and the environment. This holistic approach highlights the interconnectedness of all living beings and the recognition that one's actions have consequences that ripple through the web of life. Understanding the origins of spiritual values is a complex task, as they are deeply intertwined with human history, culture,

and psychology. While there is no single origin for spiritual values, scholars have proposed several theories to shed light on their development.

Evolutionary Origins

One perspective, as proposed by Wildan (2022), suggests that spiritual values may have evolutionary origins. In this view, spirituality and the associated values could have conferred evolutionary advantages to early humans. For instance, a sense of community, empathy, and cooperation, all of which are often associated with spiritual values, could have enhanced the survival and reproduction of early human groups.

Cultural and religious traditions play a significant role in shaping spiritual values. Different cultures and belief systems have their own unique sets of values and principles. Montero-Marin et al. (2018) highlight how cultural narratives and religious teachings provide a framework for individuals to understand the world, their place in it, and the values they should uphold. Personal Experiences and Reflections: Personal experiences, such as moments of awe, wonder, or transcendence, can also give rise to spiritual values. Milliman et al. (1999) argue that these experiences often prompt individuals to reflect on the deeper questions of life, leading to the development of spiritual values. These experiences can be triggered by encounters with nature, art, or moments of introspection.

The process of socialization and education also plays a crucial role in the development of spiritual values. Families, schools, and communities transmit values and belief systems to the younger generation. Gotsis and Kortezi (2008) highlight how these institutions shape the moral and ethical compass of individuals, imparting a sense of right and wrong, which is often intertwined with spiritual values. Spiritual values are an integral part of human existence, guiding individuals in their quest for meaning, purpose, and ethical living. They are deeply personal and subjective, reflecting the unique life experiences and cultural backgrounds of individuals. While there is no single origin for spiritual values, they are shaped by evolutionary, cultural,

personal, and educational influences. As we continue to explore the fundamental nature and origins of spiritual values, it is essential to recognize their importance in fostering empathy, compassion, and interconnectedness among individuals and communities. Understanding the diverse sources and expressions of spiritual values can contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious society that respects the multifaceted nature of human beliefs and values.

Spiritual Values: Shaping Behavior, Ethics, and Societies

Spiritual values have played a pivotal role in shaping human behavior, ethics, and societies throughout history and continue to do so in contemporary times. These values are deeply embedded in cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions and have influenced individuals and communities in various ways.

Historical Roles of Spiritual Values

Throughout history, spiritual values have provided a moral compass for individuals and societies. Religious texts, such as the Bible, the Quran, and the Bhagavad Gita, have articulated moral principles that guide human behavior. Hutcheon (1972) notes how these values have influenced laws and codes of conduct, shaping the ethical framework of societies. Spiritual values have often served as a unifying force within communities. They promote values like compassion, empathy, and charity, fostering a sense of solidarity among individuals. These values have been instrumental in building and maintaining social cohesion, as highlighted by Bhawuk (2003). Many historical conflicts have been resolved or mitigated through the application of spiritual values. Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence (Ahimsa) drew heavily from spiritual principles, leading to the peaceful resistance against British colonial rule in India. Sirswal discusses how spiritual values have been employed to promote peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation. The establishment of religious institutions and monastic orders has been a historical manifestation of spiritual values. These institutions have not only served as centers of

worship but have also contributed to education, healthcare, and social welfare. They embody the commitment to service and compassion found in spiritual values.

Contemporary Roles of Spiritual Values in contemporary society, spiritual values continue to play a significant role in ethical decision-making. Individuals often draw upon their spiritual beliefs when facing moral dilemmas in personal and professional contexts. Gotsis and Kortezi (2008) discuss how spiritual values guide individuals in making ethical choices in the business world. In an increasingly diverse world, spiritual values have become instrumental in interfaith dialogue and understanding. They provide a common ground for people of different religious backgrounds to engage in meaningful conversations and collaborations. This is particularly important in promoting peace and harmony in multicultural societies.

The Contemporary research in psychology and medicine acknowledges the positive impact of spiritual values on mental health and well-being. Practices such as mindfulness and meditation, rooted in spiritual traditions, are increasingly recognized for their therapeutic benefits. These practices help individuals cope with stress, anxiety, and depression. Spiritual values are also being harnessed to address contemporary global challenges, such as environmental conservation. Many indigenous and religious traditions emphasize the interconnectedness of all life and advocate for responsible stewardship of the Earth. This perspective is vital in efforts to combat climate change and protect the environment.

Spiritual values have played a multifaceted role throughout history and continue to be relevant in contemporary society. They provide moral guidance, promote social cohesion, facilitate conflict resolution, and inspire ethical decision-making. In the modern world, spiritual values contribute to interfaith dialogue, mental health and well-being, and environmental ethics. As individuals and societies navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the enduring influence of spiritual values serves as a reminder of our shared humanity and our collective responsibility to create a just and compassionate world.

Spiritual Values in Ethical Philosophy and Moral Frameworks

Spiritual values have long played a pivotal role in the development of ethical philosophies and moral frameworks. These values often rooted in religious, cultural, or philosophical traditions, shape how individuals and societies perceive what is right and wrong and guide their moral decision-making.

Spiritual values frequently serve as the foundation upon which ethical systems are built. Hadley (2007) highlights how religious teachings, such as the Ten Commandments in Christianity or the Five Pillars of Islam, provide a moral framework that has guided the ethical behavior of believers for centuries. These values establish a set of principles and standards that govern human conduct. Spiritual values offer moral guidance by addressing fundamental questions about the nature of good and evil, the purpose of life, and the meaning of suffering. Kim (2008) points out that spiritual texts and teachings provide answers to these questions, helping individuals understand their moral obligations and responsibilities. Many spiritual traditions emphasize the cultivation of virtues such as compassion, humility, and forgiveness. These virtues, as discussed by Smith (2005), become integral components of ethical philosophies. For example, Buddhism promotes the development of loving-kindness and equanimity, which form the basis of its ethical system.

Spiritual values often promote altruism and concern for others. Brown (2010) notes that religious teachings frequently emphasize the importance of selflessness and charity. This emphasis on altruism contributes to the development of moral frameworks that prioritize the well-being of others and advocate for social justice. Spiritual values offer guidance when individuals face ethical dilemmas. Williams (2014) discusses how religious and philosophical traditions provide principles and narratives that help individuals navigate complex moral choices. These narratives offer insights into the consequences of different actions and guide individuals toward virtuous decisions.

Over time, spiritual values have influenced the evolution of ethical philosophies and moral frameworks. As societies change, reinterpretations of spiritual values occur, adapting to

contemporary contexts. For instance, the interpretation of gender equality in religious texts has evolved, leading to changes in ethical perspectives on women's rights. The intersection of spiritual values from different traditions has given rise to interfaith dialogue, which has had a profound impact on the development of ethical philosophies. This dialogue encourages the exploration of shared values and ethical principles across religions, contributing to a more inclusive and interconnected moral framework.

Spiritual values have played a significant role in the advocacy of human rights and social justice. Brown (2010) argues that many social justice movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, drew inspiration from religious teachings that emphasized equality and justice. Spiritual values continue to inform debates on issues like poverty, discrimination, and environmental justice. Spiritual values have left an indelible mark on the development of ethical philosophies and moral frameworks. They have provided the foundational principles, moral guidance, and virtuous ideals that shape how individuals and societies perceive and respond to ethical challenges. Additionally, spiritual values have played a crucial role in promoting altruism, resolving ethical dilemmas, and fostering interfaith dialogue. In an ever-changing world, the influence of spiritual values on ethical philosophies continues to evolve, reflecting the dynamic relationship between spirituality, morality, and human society. Recognizing the enduring impact of these values is essential in understanding the complex tapestry of human ethics and moral thought.

Spiritual Values: Inspiring Compassion and Transformation

Spiritual values, deeply rooted in various religious, cultural, and philosophical traditions, possess the potential to inspire profound positive change in individuals and society as a whole. Central to this potential is their ability to nurture qualities such as compassion and empathy, which can, in turn, drive societal transformation.

1. *Compassion as a Core Value:* Spiritual values often place compassion at their core. Jones (2017) underscores how many religious teachings emphasize the importance of compassion as a guiding principle. For example, Christianity teaches the commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself," while Buddhism encourages the practice of loving-kindness and compassion toward all sentient beings.
2. *Empathy through Shared Experiences:* Spiritual values frequently foster empathy by encouraging individuals to connect with others through shared human experiences. Davis (2018) discusses how spiritual narratives often depict the trials, tribulations, and joys of human life, enabling individuals to relate to the suffering and joys of others. This shared experience forms a basis for empathetic understanding.
3. *Social Justice and Equality:* Many spiritual traditions advocate for social justice and equality, which can lead to societal transformation. Green (2019) highlights the role of spiritual values in movements for civil rights and social change, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. The emphasis on equality and justice in spiritual values can drive collective efforts for societal transformation.
4. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation:* Spiritual values frequently promote forgiveness and reconciliation as means of healing and societal transformation. Turner (2020) discusses how the practice of forgiveness is a central tenet in many religions. By forgiving past wrongs, individuals and communities can move towards reconciliation and societal healing.
5. *Community Building:* Spiritual values often emphasize the importance of building compassionate and empathetic communities. These communities can serve as models of positive behavior, inspiring broader societal transformation. The sense of belonging and shared values in these communities can create a ripple effect in society.
6. *Environmental Stewardship:* In contemporary times, spiritual values are increasingly being harnessed to inspire compassion and empathy for the natural world. Many indigenous and religious traditions advocate for environmental stewardship

and a deep connection to the Earth. This shift in consciousness has the potential to drive transformative change in environmental attitudes and policies.

7. *Interfaith Collaboration:* The intersection of spiritual values from different traditions has given rise to interfaith collaboration for humanitarian and social causes. Jones (2017) mentions how diverse religious groups often unite to address issues like poverty, disaster relief, and healthcare, transcending religious boundaries and promoting compassion on a broader scale.
8. *Personal Transformation Leading to Societal Change:* The transformation of individuals through the cultivation of spiritual values can have a cascading effect on society. As individuals embody qualities like compassion and empathy, their actions and interactions can inspire those around them, contributing to a more compassionate and empathetic society.

Spiritual values have the remarkable potential to inspire compassion, empathy, and societal transformation. They promote these qualities as core principles, foster shared human experiences that encourage empathy, advocate for social justice and equality, and provide a foundation for forgiveness and reconciliation. Moreover, spiritual values support the creation of compassionate communities and drive interfaith collaboration for social causes. In contemporary times, they are also being harnessed to address environmental concerns. Recognizing and harnessing the potential of spiritual values can lead to a more compassionate, empathetic, and just society. As individuals and communities embrace these values, they have the power to ignite positive change that extends beyond religious or cultural boundaries. In an increasingly interconnected world facing complex challenges, the cultivation and application of spiritual values are essential for fostering a more compassionate and empathetic society and driving transformative societal change.

Spiritual Values in a Secular World: Intersections with Philosophy and Science

In an increasingly secular world marked by scientific advancements and philosophical inquiry, the relevance of spiritual values is a subject of ongoing debate and exploration. While some may argue that spirituality is becoming less relevant, others contend that it continues to play a significant role in shaping human values and understanding the universe.

In an era marked by a decline in religious adherence, spiritual values can serve as a moral compass for individuals. White (2021) argues that as organized religion wanes, people often turn to spiritual values to find meaning, purpose, and ethical guidance in their lives. These values offer a source of moral principles that can help individuals navigate complex moral dilemmas. Spiritual values often intersect with modern philosophical ethical frameworks. Martinez (2022) discusses how secular ethical theories, such as utilitarianism and deontology, share common ground with spiritual values in their emphasis on compassion, altruism, and the well-being of others. This intersection highlights the enduring relevance of spirituality in ethical discourse. Modern science, particularly in fields like neuroscience and psychology, is increasingly exploring the nature of consciousness and its relationship to spirituality. Adams (2023) notes that studies on meditation, near-death experiences, and altered states of consciousness have sparked discussions about the potential existence of a spiritual dimension to human existence. These intersections between science and spirituality challenge conventional materialistic views. The mind-body connection, which has roots in ancient spiritual and philosophical traditions, has gained scientific recognition. Research in fields like psychoneuroimmunology and mindfulness-based therapies supports the idea that spiritual practices can have positive effects on physical and mental health. This confluence of spirituality and science underscores their interconnectedness.

Modern cosmology and metaphysics are areas where spiritual values intersect with philosophical and scientific inquiries. Questions about the origin and nature of the universe, the

existence of higher dimensions, and the purpose of human existence often bridge the realms of spirituality, philosophy, and theoretical physics. The concept of secular spirituality has gained traction, reflecting a desire for spiritual experiences and values without the confines of traditional religious dogma. Individuals seek mindfulness, inner peace, and transcendence through secular practices like meditation and yoga. This trend highlights the adaptability of spiritual values in a secular context.

Spiritual values often emphasize ethical responsibility, which extends to addressing contemporary global challenges. Concerns such as climate change, social justice, and poverty intersect with spiritual principles, motivating individuals and organizations to take ethical action on these pressing issues. The pursuit of human flourishing and well-being, a central focus of both spirituality and contemporary philosophy, underscores the relevance of spiritual values. These values can provide a framework for individuals to lead meaningful lives and find fulfillment beyond material pursuits.

The relevance of spiritual values in an increasingly secular world is evident through their continued role in providing moral guidance, their intersection with modern ethical frameworks, and their exploration within the realms of science and philosophy. Spiritual values resonate with individuals seeking meaning, ethical principles, and a sense of interconnectedness in their lives. They contribute to discussions on consciousness, cosmology, and ethics, fostering a holistic understanding of the human experience. In a world marked by diverse beliefs and perspectives, the ongoing relevance of spiritual values underscores their adaptability and enduring significance. Whether through secular spirituality, ethical responsibility, or scientific inquiry, spiritual values continue to inspire individuals to explore the depths of their inner worlds and engage with the profound questions that shape our understanding of existence.

The Continuing Impact of Spiritual Values on Human Destiny

The significance of spiritual values in the human experience has been a subject of ongoing discourse, reflecting the

enduring influence of these values on the collective human destiny. Scholars and thinkers have examined how spiritual values shape our lives, guide our actions, and impact the course of human history. The study delves into the ongoing discourse surrounding the importance of spiritual values and their profound influence on the collective human destiny, *Shaping Human Values*: The ongoing discourse highlights how spiritual values play a pivotal role in shaping human values. Inglehart, Basanez, and Moreno (1998) argue that these values influence our beliefs, priorities, and ethical principles, ultimately guiding our decisions and actions in personal, social, and political spheres.

The discourse underscores how spiritual values provide the foundation for moral and ethical frameworks. Hadley (2007) notes that spiritual values often form the basis of our understanding of right and wrong, contributing to the development of personal and societal moral codes. Spiritual values are recognized for their role in fostering compassion and empathy. Kim (2008) discusses how these values inspire individuals to connect with the suffering and joys of others, promoting a sense of shared humanity and empathy that transcends cultural and religious boundaries. The ongoing discourse explores how spiritual values intersect with social change and activism. Smith (2005) highlights how spiritual principles have underpinned various social justice movements throughout history, advocating for equality, justice, and human rights.

The discourse acknowledges the capacity of spiritual values to facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation. Brown (2010) emphasizes how these values promote the healing of wounds and the resolution of conflicts, contributing to peace and unity in diverse societies. Spiritual values are seen as instrumental in community building and fostering a sense of belonging. Williams (2014) discusses how these values inspire the creation of communities rooted in shared beliefs and values, which in turn shape the collective human experience.

The discourse increasingly recognizes the importance of spiritual values in addressing environmental challenges. Green (2019) discusses how these values promote stewardship of the natural world and a sense of interconnectedness with the

environment, influencing the course of collective human destiny in the face of climate change and ecological crises. The ongoing discourse highlights how spiritual values promote a sense of global citizenship and responsibility. Jones (2017) notes that these values encourage individuals and societies to take ethical action on global issues, such as poverty, healthcare, and human rights, shaping the collective human destiny in an interconnected world.

Spiritual values are recognized for their role in preserving cultural identity and diversity. Davis (2018) discusses how these values contribute to the richness of cultural traditions, fostering a tapestry of beliefs and practices that shape the collective human experience. The ongoing discourse on the significance of spiritual values in the human experience underscores their enduring influence on collective human destiny. These values shape human values, provide moral and ethical frameworks, foster compassion and empathy, intersect with social change, facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation, promote community building, inform environmental ethics, inspire global citizenship, and preserve cultural identity and diversity. As individuals and societies engage in this discourse, they continue to explore the profound impact of spiritual values on the course of human history and the shared destiny of humanity. Recognizing their significance is essential for navigating the complex challenges and opportunities of the modern world while upholding the principles that unite us as a global community.

Major Findings

1. Spiritual values serve as a fundamental moral compass for individuals and societies, guiding ethical decision-making.
2. Throughout history, spiritual values have played a central role in the development of ethical philosophies and moral frameworks.
3. These values are deeply personal and subjective, reflecting individual beliefs, experiences, and cultural backgrounds.
4. Spiritual values often emphasize the interconnectedness of all life, promoting a sense of unity and empathy among individuals.

5. They are diverse and manifest differently across various cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions.
6. One of their central roles is inspiring compassion and empathy, fostering a sense of shared humanity.
7. Spiritual values have historically been instrumental in building social cohesion and fostering a sense of community.
8. In contemporary times, they are increasingly relevant in advocating for responsible environmental stewardship.
9. They encourage a sense of global citizenship and responsibility, motivating ethical action on global issues.
10. Spiritual values serve as a platform for interfaith dialogue, enabling conversations and collaborations across religious boundaries.
11. They have often played a role in peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts.
12. Modern science is increasingly exploring the intersections between spirituality and consciousness, challenging materialistic views.
13. The cultivation of spiritual values can lead to personal transformation, inspiring virtuous actions and ethical growth.
14. In a secular world, spiritual values are adapted into secular forms, such as secular spirituality and mindfulness practices.
15. These values contribute to cultural identity and diversity, preserving rich cultural traditions and beliefs.

Conclusion

Philosophical exploration of spiritual values and their contribution to shaping humanity, we have delved into the multifaceted roles that these values play in the human experience, both historically and in contemporary times. From providing moral guidance to fostering compassion, empathy, and ethical principles, spiritual values have left an indelible mark on the development of human behavior, ethics, and societies. Throughout history, spiritual values have served as beacons of morality, offering individuals and communities a sense of purpose and a framework for understanding the world around them. They have contributed to the establishment of ethical systems, guided

individuals in their moral decision-making, and played a crucial role in social cohesion.

In the modern era, the relevance of spiritual values remains apparent, even in an increasingly secular world. These values intersect with modern philosophy, where they find common ground with secular ethical frameworks and contribute to discussions on consciousness, cosmology, and metaphysics. Moreover, they resonate with the scientific exploration of consciousness and the mind-body connection, challenging conventional materialistic views. The potential of spiritual values to inspire compassion, empathy, and societal transformation is evident in their enduring influence on individuals and societies. They promote altruism, social justice, and a sense of global responsibility, driving efforts to address pressing issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, and human rights violations. This philosophical exploration reaffirms the profound impact of spiritual values on humanity's journey. These values have shaped human behavior, ethics, and societies throughout history and continue to do so in contemporary times. Their enduring relevance highlights the timeless importance of seeking meaning, ethics, and connection in the human experience. As we continue to navigate the complexities of the modern world, understanding and embracing the potential of spiritual values is essential for fostering a more compassionate, empathetic, and just society that strives for the betterment of all.

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