

WHAT HAPPENED TO HUMAN LONGINGS? A Reading of the History of Western Epistemology

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Whatever object a person thinks of at the time of death, having been absorbed in its thought all through, he attains to that and that object alone. (*The Bhgavat Gita*, 8/6)

The Second Prelude is to ask God our Lord for what I want and desire. (*Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius)

These two statements, taken from two vastly different religious and cultural traditions – separated in time by something like twelve centuries – point to a common theme: that we become or are given what we earnestly long for. This is obvious enough in the first quotation. Regarding the second, anyone who knows the *Spiritual Exercises* knows that “asking what I want and desire” is the most frequently used phrase in that book. The whole purpose of the Exercises is to discover what I want. Going beyond these examples, the importance of human desires and longings — where ‘longing’ is understood as a persistent and intense desire to meet a felt need — have always been recognized in one form or another in religious practice. At the popular level it found expression in such myths as the wish-fulfilling tree (and cow); among the more learned it found expression in their spiritual classics such as the above texts. These texts assume, of course, a theological frame: it is God/Krishna who ensured the fulfillment of our heart’s longing. But beyond particular theological frames, there was also the more fundamental assumption: reality is structured in a manner that responded to human desires and longings.

These were much before discussion on Freudian projections and sociological constructions became the order of the day. Today the situation seems completely changed. When our contemporaries talk about human longing, it is used not so much within a theological framework as to undermine it. God is not one who ensures the fulfillment of our longing, but a projection of good human qualities out there, a sign of alienation; rather than fulfill human longings, God is a rival to humans and a hindrance (the “greatest danger”, said

Nietzsche) to their well being. Even the more basic assumption about the relation between the structure of reality and human longing has become a taboo.

The nearly unanimous view today is that the structure of reality is totally independent of, and indifferent to, human longing. In the words of Albert Einstein,

For the scientist there is only 'being' but no wishing, no valuing. No good, no evil — in short, no goal... There is something like a Puritan's restraint in the scientist who seeks truth: he keeps away from anything voluntaristic or emotional.¹

The very term "wish-fulfillment" has the negative connotation of self-delusion. And this taboo extends also to theologians. According to Don Caputo "the cosmos is under no obligation to answer our complaints. Put another way, the ability of an idea to answer our complaints... is little guarantee of its truth."² In other words, the cosmic and the human, the macrocosm and the microcosm are at variance from one another. As far as our human situation is concerned, this is indeed a fall: from an understanding of reality as something that responded to our desires and longings to something that is totally indifferent to our cry. How has this come about? This paper is an attempt to retrace some of the important milestones on epistemological route that has brought us here.

The main part of the paper, therefore, is a historical narrative. Its purpose is to show that Western philosophy has been attempting to preserve a certain view of knowledge and reality that can be traced to a pre-philosophical stage. Although the dissonance between the microcosm and macrocosm has become pronounced only after the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, I hope to show that its seeds have already been sown earlier in the specific route taken by Greek philosophy. This is done in the first two sections of the paper. The first section presents a *pre-philosophical* common sense view of the world, what has been called naïve realism. The second section is an attempt to show how the subsequent developments in the direction of *philosophical* realism constitute a progressive impoverishment of the rich world of naïve realism. I have called it a fall not only because it constitutes a compromise on the fullness that was present in the early stage of pre-philosophical naïve realism, but also because it results in our having a cosmos that is indifferent to our cry. The third section examines some of the implications of this fall. Although the implications include the "death of God" in Western culture, I shall talk about God only to the minimum required so as to keep the focus on

1 Cited in Midgley (1995), 75.

2 Caputo (1990), 170.

human longings and the making of an indifferent world. In the fourth and concluding section, I broadly hint at the possibility of a philosophical recovery of the richness of our pre-philosophical world.

Before moving into the historical narration, let me add some cautionary notes. First, from what has been said, it might seem I am using the Biblical imageries of Eden (innocence), Fall and Redemption. And that is right. However, it will be clear as we proceed that these images are not being used in their theological sense. Second, and more important caution is about the word "realism". Since this word is used extensively in the paper (one might even take the paper as a critique of realism), it is to be kept in mind that this is not a word that has any one precise meaning. In other words, one must not begin with one's own preferred definition of realism, such as knower-independent existence of reality. Beyond that general notion there are more specific doctrines involved and their development will be traced step by step from its origins in the pre-philosophical stage through its pre-modern metaphysical version, up to the modern epistemological version. Third, since our focus is not realism but the fall, I shall say nothing about scientific realism since it is not needed for our purpose. Finally, the historical sketch presented here, is necessarily sketchy. But I believe the basic elements required for our purpose are there.

I. *The Age of Innocence*

This is the stage of a pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude to life that has not yet been formulated into a philosophical theory. We humans have a natural propensity to believe that we live in a world that exists "out there," independently of us, that it is extended in space and time. Such a belief comes so naturally to us that Husserl called it the natural attitude. Here is Husserl's "most decisive statement"³ of the natural attitude:

I find continually present and standing against me the one spatio-temporal fact-world to which I myself belong, as do all other men found in it and related in the same way to it. This 'fact world,' as the word already tells us, I find to *be out there*, and also *take it as it gives itself to me as something that exists out there*.⁴

This does not mean that there is any explicit affirmation or denial of a fact-world. We must clearly distinguish a pre-theoretical human practice

³ Natanson (1973), 26.

⁴ Husserl (1931), 106.

from a theoretical reflection on the assumptions of that practice as done here. The world of natural attitude is primarily a world of practice and not of theory. However, when we reflect on this practice we find that this pre-philosophical world of everyday life carries with it a philosophy of naïve realism.⁵ We might even call it a pre-philosophical philosophy of the world. It is realism to the extent that it accepts the world as it appears to common sense as real; and it is naïve to the extent that it is unreflectively accepted. Let us consider these in more detail.

The statement that naïve realism uncritically accepts the world as it appears to common sense as real does not mean that it makes no room for the distinction between appearance and reality. That would be impossible, given that one's experience of surroundings is not always on the right track. The point, rather, is that:

All doubting and rejecting of the data of the natural world leaves standing the *general thesis of the natural standpoint*. "The" world is as fact-world always there; at the most it is at odd points "other" than I supposed, this or that under such names as "illusion," "hallucination," and the like, must be struck *out of it*, so to speak; but the "it" remains ever, in the sense of the general thesis, a world that has its being out there.⁶

It is to characterize both these aspects of naïve realism (i. e., the natural standpoint and the distinction it makes between appearance and reality) that Bernard Lonergan coined the descriptive phrase "already out there now real". "Already" referring to that orientation of consciousness which does not make its environment, but finds it already there, offering opportunities and issuing challenges. "Out" refers to the extroverted consciousness that is aware of objects distinct from itself; and "real" to the second aspect of naïve realism, i. e., its ability to distinguish appearance and reality within the "already out there"⁷

We should not be misled by the quotation from Husserl into thinking that the pre-philosophical philosophy of the world is only a "general thesis" about the existence of a world and not about the existence of any concrete, specifiable entities. It is a world made up of specifiable entities like trees and grass, birds and bees, sun and moon, other embodied selves like me and so on. We could say that we live in a pre-fabricated, ready-made world of objects that exist independently of any knower. Moreover, this a pre-fabricated world of naïve realism is populated by a rich array of entities. It contains not only the physical reality of trees, stones etc., but also ghosts and gods, angels and spir-

5 Natanson (1973), 47.

6 E. Husserl (1931), 106

7 Lonergan (1992), 276-7.

its. This we shall consider later. For the moment, what is important is to understand the nature of this world. It is primarily a world of practice and not of theory. Therefore, although it is rich world, it is devoid of theoretical entities such as electrons, neutrons, or Platonic forms and the like. Basically it remains our perceptual world of everyday life.

This belief in a pre-fabricated, ready-made world of objects or entities that exist independently of any knower could be considered the most fundamental thesis common to different versions of realism. There are others that hang around this basic conviction about the reality of a ready made world, all of which, so to say, are meant to ensure that there is a perfect fit between knowing, knower and the known (the world). The most prominent — at least the most discussed — aspect of this fit is the one between knowledge and the world and it has come to be known as the correspondence theory of truth. Something is true to the extent that it corresponds to the way things are in the pre-fabricated world. This, in fact, is a direct consequence of accepting a readymade world. This view of the world makes the concept of truth so obvious as to require any theory of truth at all. Little wonder that Aristotle devoted the whole of one sentence to its discussion! "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true".⁸ To talk of Aristotle at this point is, however, to jump ahead. Let us remain with the pre-philosophical stage.

A less discussed, but equally important, aspect of the three way fit is the one between the human knower and the world. Not only do we live in a rich world, but also in a world that is responsive to our needs and desires. Even apart from the religious dimension of it (which will be seen later), what is meant by the responsiveness of the world to the human is, in the first place, that we are in a world in which our physical needs such as hunger and thirst are met. This world is also rich enough to meet our psychological needs such as security, companionship, and the like. Note, however, that in satisfying one's needs one must already have certain knowledge of objects. This would eventually develop as the thesis of the priority of knowledge over action. These three thesis — reality of a ready made world, correspondence theory of truth and the priority of knowledge over action — can be considered as the three pillars of realism. Needless to say that all the three have their origins in our common sense view of the pre-theoretical stage.

Now we can move on to the characteristic mark of the pre-philosophical stage. We noted that the world of naïve realism is populated by a rich array of entities: the physical objects and persons we perceive, objects and persons whom I do not perceive here and now, gods, spirits, and so on. All these dif-

8 *Metaphysics* IV, 7 (1011b25-26)

ferent entities that make up the rich world of everyday life cannot obviously be dealt with in the same manner. An intimate friend who is far away or dead could be more real to me than the neighbour next door with whom I have no dealings; a ghost may be as real as a member of my family; a phantom limb is as real as a physical limb. However, seen from a logical point of view, these would seem to be incompatible. And the fact is that being primarily a world of practice and not of theory, logical compatibility or incompatibility is not one of its concerns. What is real in one context and state of consciousness may lose its reality status in another context and state of consciousness. Those items of this diverse world that can be dealt with in the same manner without leading to logical contradictions is called a "finite province of meaning" by Alfred Schutz. According to him, there are several such finite provinces within our everyday world. And he is emphatic about their mutual incompatibility:

Harmony and compatibility... are... restricted to a given province of meaning. In no case is that which is compatible within the finite province of meaning P is also compatible within the finite province of meaning Q. On the contrary, seen from the P that has been established as real, Q appears, together with the particular experiences belonging to Q as purely fictive, inconsistent, and inverted.⁹

This lack of concern with theoretical consistency is the main reason for considering this pre-theoretical, pre-philosophical realism of everyday life-world as belonging to the age of innocence and naïvete.

Given the human penchant for reflection, it is not surprising that the stage of naive realism could not last. One can, then, either hold on to the realist convictions or reject them. Whether accepted or rejected one can no longer be naive about one's position, but needs to articulate those convictions in as clear and consistent a manner as possible. Both acceptance and rejection would now be distinct philosophical positions articulated with varying degrees of sophistication.

II. *The Fall from Innocence*

In the process of developing a philosophical theory by bringing logical coherence to the pre-theoretical practice, important changes take place. We shall trace this development in this section, first in its metaphysical from and then in the epistemological.

9 Schutz & Luckmann (1974), 24.

i) Metaphysical or Pre-Modern Realism

The characteristic mark of pre-modern philosophy is its metaphysical approach and orientation. It may be characterized as that style of thinking which is concerned with the unchanging essence of things or the first principles. Modern thinking, in contrast, is epistemological: it is primarily concerned with problems of knowledge and skepticism. Unlike epistemological thinking, metaphysical thinking takes for granted that we have knowledge. Then it asks the question, What must we and the world be like if it is to be the case that we know something?¹⁰ This very manner of raising the question, it may be noted, calls for a description of the knower and the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that Plato defines *episteme* as "true belief with an account"¹¹ where giving an account is a much broader notion than that of giving justification (characteristic of modern philosophy). An account involves a description and an explanation in terms of the described elements.¹² It is this descriptive dimension that gives metaphysical approach to knowledge a touch of naturalistic epistemology.¹³

As far as Plato's descriptive psychology goes, there is not much that is at odds with a pre-philosophical view. What is really new is the introduction of a new realm of entities: the Forms or Ideas. Concerned as he was with ethical and political issues, he must have hit upon these Forms as the really real entities as a way of keeping values like justice beyond the whims and fancies of individuals. Seen in terms of realism, Plato remains a realist to the extent that he maintains the isomorphism between knowledge and reality. But he is realist of a special sort since his reals are in another world. Knowledge is attained by recollection (anamnesis) or detached contemplation of Ideas. Wo/man is the measure of all truth because their lies imbedded in him/her the ability to recollect these forms.¹⁴ And this ability is human reason.

Plato's philosophy also marks the beginning of the fall from the richness and the innocence of naive realism since it involves a bifurcation of reason and experience, concept and content. Experience is all content and no form; reason is all form and no content. This bifurcation is accompanied by an overvaluation — if not divinization — of reason and an undervaluation — if not a contempt — of experience. Plato, was assisted in this matter by his predecessors, Parmenides and Heraclitus. Prior to them, a sharp and unbridgeable gap was believed to exist between human and divine knowledge. But with

10 White, in Dancy & Sosa (1992), 345.

11 *Theaetetus*, 201c

12 See, Everson (1990), 4.

13 Everson(1990), 6

14 Thilly, F. (1993), 62.

them, "the intelligent human being is already a god or godlike being. The knowledge revealed by reason is 'divine knowledge': there is nothing better of the kind."¹⁵ Now with Plato, appearance and change come to be laid at the doorsteps of experience; reality and truth anointed in the temple of reason because it is the contemplation of eternal, unchanging forms unsullied by matter.

The Platonic type of realism that questions the reality of the objects of everyday experience is so much at variance with our natural standpoint that Aristotle, his disciple, found it necessary to re-instate experience. He brought down the forms from heaven to earth: they are not apart from things, but in them. Therefore, experience is important as a starting point of knowledge. Real knowledge, however, must go beyond experience to the universal forms or the essences arrived at through abstraction.¹⁶ Accordingly, genuine knowledge must pass beyond experience to their reasons and causes (the two are not distinguished), i. e., to the unchanging ideas.¹⁷ Thus, Aristotle managed to integrate his respect for experience with the Platonic tradition of disembodied, exalted reason. Thomas Aquinas faithfully followed him,¹⁸ with some variations to accommodate knowledge received in revelation. This idea of 'real' and 'reason' would have such sway over subsequent developments that much of Western philosophy would remain unintelligible without them. The protracted struggle to maintain the reality of universals in the middle ages, for example, would make no sense without knowing the Platonic view of the real and reason. If the universals were not real, then there is no reality for reason to pass on to, and God's existence cannot be known through reason!¹⁹ In fact, even when the Platonic view of the real was overturned in modern philosophy, his view of reason remained entrenched in the form of 'pure reason'. It is not until the arrival of the existentialists and the post-moderns that this view would face any serious challenge.

Further, though Aristotle reinstated the importance of experience for knowledge, we should be under no illusion as to the sort of experience that

15 Hussey, E. (1990), 37.

16 See, for example, *De Anima* II. 12. 424a17. The same reasoning is at work when he says that plants do not perceive because they lack 'a principle suitable for receiving the form.' 424b

17 A similar distinction is to be found in Lonergan when he draws the distinction between experiential conjugates and explanatory conjugates. For the distinction, see, (1992), 102-5. But unlike in Aristotle, his explanations need not be unchanging. See, 273, 316, etc.

18 "Reason or intellect, St. Thomas taught, following Plato and Aristotle, is essentially different from the senses. Intellect or reason is concerned with the essence and being of things, while the senses are concerned with their appearances". See, Benignus F. S. C. (1947), 443. The Bruce Publishing Company.

19 See, Thilly (1993), 168.

he reinstated; it was ordinary perceptual experience, often qualified as “sense-experience.”²⁰ In other words, the bifurcation reason and experience done by Plato is now augmented by an unwritten restriction on the notion of experience. Although it is difficult to say when this trend began in Greek thought, this identification of experience with perception is clearly seen in the philosophy of Plato and by the time of Aristotle there is no question of experiencing the divine. Compared to the pre-philosophical view, this constitutes a further fall. Divinity was as much part of the earlier world as were the other more ordinary objects: it was, indeed, an enchanted universe. Moreover, these spirits and gods were not objects of speculative reason; they maintain a solid link to the experiential world. As Richard Wentz observes: “When traditional people speak of ‘spirits’ that are abroad, they tend to refer to a *presence* such as the wind, or the creative force of a word. A god or spirit is not containable, only *known* to these people.”²¹ To the wind and the word mentioned by Wentz, one could add the sun and the moon, rivers, trees stones and the like. While none of these objects are identified with the divine, the presence of the divine is experienced in them. The Judeo-Christian tradition is no exception to this: storms and clouds, thunder and lightening, smoke and fire signify God’s presence.²² The heaven is his throne, indeed, and the earth his footstool.²³ There also must have been more pronounced mystical experiences which knows “neither birthday nor native land”, to use a famous phrase of William James.²⁴ But reading Western epistemology one would not even suspect that such experiences existed. So much so that even the recognition of a truism — that mystical states are a state of consciousness different from the ordinary perceptual consciousness — comes only as a conclusion to an elaborate study by William James! This would remain inexplicable unless it is realized that the only sort of experience that Aristotle re-instated in epistemology is perceptual experience. Religious experiences must remain in exile. Reason became the sole means by which humans can have some knowledge of the divine.

Besides the strong possibility that Aristotle had no familiarity with religious experiences, he had good logical reasons for excluding religious experience from his epistemology. We saw that if the pre-philosophical realism had a role for religious experience, it was at the expense of logical consistency.

20 I have argued elsewhere that this identification is arbitrary and untenable. See, Karuvelil (1994).

21 Wentz (2000), 26. italics original.

22 There are numerous passages the Bible that attest to this. Here are a few: Ps. 18: 7–15; 19: 1; 97: 6; Ex. 3: 2; 16: 10; 19: 6, 9, 18.

23 Is. 66: 1; Mt. 5: 35.

24 James (1936), 410.

One moment they could regard an entity, say a tree or a mountain, as a perceptual object and at another as divine or a manifestation of the divine. But Aristotle, who single handedly established the discipline of logic, could not allow such a "confusion" of identity without undermining the fundamental laws of thought, especially the law of the excluded middle. We might call it the "logicization of reality" since it is a clear case of logical considerations being extrapolated from the realm of thinking to the realm of reality. Logic and the laws of thought are not just laws of human thinking or limitations on what can be thought coherently, but are also the laws of reality. The "genera and the species in terms of which we order phenomena follow the ideal order of things themselves."²⁵ Alternatively, we could also call this doctrine the complete intelligibility of reality within a single logical system. It was only with Kurt Godel proving his incompleteness theorem that the error of the doctrine of complete intelligibility got exposed.²⁶

It is worth noting that philosophies that take mystical experiences seriously, as the Indian systems, tend to take the logical law of excluded middle lightly. They consider it a limitation of human thought and not a law to which reality must conform. Therefore, rather than identify cognitive experience with ordinary perception, Indian philosophy makes a distinction between ordinary and extra-ordinary perception. Aristotle's logicization of reality became possible in Western philosophy because his predecessors had already elevated human reason to the divine level. So also, a correspondence theory of truth — that natural consequence of the assuming a ready made world— is at work here and to which Aristotle gave its first explicit articulation. What is remarkable about Aristotle is that he, for the first time, brings all of these different elements together into a coherent and comprehensive system. It was not for nothing that he was referred to as "the philosopher" for centuries!

If reason was given primacy over experience in the realm of knowing, knowing was given primacy over action in the larger realm of living. Action was undertaken for the fulfillment of emotions and desires and these had to be guided by reason (knowledge).²⁷ Knowledge gave the correct picture of reality, the cosmic order, which, in turn, was to guide human actions.²⁸ Ac-

25 Habermas (1992), 30.

26 Godel (1931). Translated by B. Meltzer (1962). For an accessible interpretation of the incompleteness theorem, see, Arbib & Hesse, (1986), 31-32.

27 Plato made a distinction between higher or the spirited part of the soul and the lower part. Emotions like anger, ambition etc. belong to the higher and appetites like hunger and thirst belong to the lower. See, Thilly (1993), 68.

28 Habermas (1987), 301-2. There is hardly any difference in this matter between Plato and Aristotle, except that Aristotle's cosmic order was immanent in the cosmos whereas Plato's was not.

tion, therefore, can only follow knowledge. This view of the relationship between knowledge and action, between knowing and willing can be traced to the pre-theoretic world of everyday life. Aristotle's philosophy carries forward this view: perception activates the soul's desire to attain the perceived object and then the perceiver acts.²⁹ But there is an important difference between the pre-theoretic world and the metaphysical one: the latter includes normative entities related to values. And these are known by the use of (divinized) reason. This manner of conceiving the relationship between will and intellect will have important implications for the Thomistic understanding of reason and faith, which we shall see in the next section.

The advantage of the metaphysical approach is that it continues the pre-philosophical tradition of a perfect fit between a theory of knowing, knower and the known, between the content of cognition and the way things are. Its typical style of argument is: If we have such cognition or idea, with the occasional exceptions already mentioned, there must exist realities corresponding to that cognition or idea. Or, "if the objects of our ideas were not real, our knowledge would not be knowledge; hence they must be real."³⁰ On this approach, thought and being coincide; if there is cognition, it must be true unless there is reason to think otherwise. It can be seen that in this respect, metaphysical realism is very much a continuation of pre-philosophical realism of the perceptual world. And in as much as pre-philosophical realism is our natural standpoint, not only did it not make any sense to talk about independent justification of cognition, there was absolutely no need for it either. All that was required was a coherent explanation; and this was provided by Aristotle's metaphysics, which was custom-made, so to say, to fit the perceptual world. Everything that needed to be explained within the perceptual world was explained in his system. Moreover, this seemed to be the only feasible philosophy that maintained the pre-theoretic intuitions of naïve realism. Then there was the genius of Thomas Aquinas that fitted the doctrines of Christian faith into this marvellous Aristotelian scheme. The Aristotelian-Thomistic system remained without parallel and seemed invincible until the advent of modern science.

ii) Epistemological Realism

The first half of the seventeenth century — the age of Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes and others — saw drastic changes in our

29 See, J. L. Ackrill (1981), 63, 67.

30 This observation made by Thilly is about Plato (See, Thilly, 62), but similar considerations apply to Aristotle (See, Thilly, 81).

31 Bhava (1999), 529–541.

understanding of the world.³¹ We noted earlier that even when individual items in our perception were considered as illusion or hallucination, the reality and reliability of the (perceptual) world was never in doubt. "The *prima facie* experience of nature, full with color, fragrance, sound, warmth, and beauty, was authentic and indubitable. There was no need to go behind it."³² It is this indubitability and authenticity of the experienced world (read, perceptual world) that becomes problematic with the advent of modern science.

The immediate experience of nature with its colours, fragrance, sound, and warmth was a subterfuge which hid the real working of nature. One had to go behind it and discover the mathematical formulae that governed the process of nature.³³

Along with indubitability of the world also goes the central place occupied by humans in the world. Earlier, human beings were pictured as being "central to the scheme of things. His immediate surrounding, the nature, was open to his direct scrutiny and ready to serve his ends.... His farther surrounding was the finite cosmos, which revolved round the earth, man's abode, with its stars and planets."³⁴ But now,

Nature was immediate yet apart and did not serve man. His farther surrounding was an infinite universe without any centre. Man occupied an insignificant planet which orbited round a minor star called the Sun...³⁵

And here lies the twin sources of the Cartesian anxiety³⁶: a realization of the unreliability of his experienced world and the insignificance of the human in the newly emerging picture of the world. A metaphysical approach to knowledge that was suitable primarily for a systematic understanding of the perceptual world would no longer do because the unreliability or unreality of that world was exposed by the new scientific developments. In other words, the descriptions on which the metaphysical account was based became problematic. Another approach to knowledge had to be found.

The genius of Descartes was in finding a solution that abandoned altogether the metaphysical approach to knowledge. Rather than contend that if we are to have knowledge the world must be such and such, he retreats into the inner world of cognition to discover the indubitability of the *cogito*. From

32 Bhave (1999), 529.

33 Bhave (1999), 530.

34 Bhave (1999), 529.

35 Bhave (1999), 530.

36 This term is from Bernstein (1983), 16.

that firm foundation he proceeds to establish the reality of God, who in turn, ensures objectivity of his knowledge of the external world. Irrespective of the validity (or otherwise) of his deductions, he had inaugurated a new era, a new approach. From now on epistemology would not depend on metaphysics for its grounding, but rather it is epistemology that would ground one's theory of what there is and its principles. Thus is born an era of epistemological realism.

The significance of the Cartesian move can be seen by asking a question: Is human knowledge more like mirror image or like a depression? A mirror image is caused by the object, but not a depression. To see the correctness of an image, one will have to go beyond the image and look at the object whose image it is. (Hence, the importance of descriptions). But in the case of depression, there is no question of going outside to find what caused the depression. All that can be done, and needs to be done, is to go deeper and deeper within and examine the depression closely. The Cartesian cogito is the end result of an examination of this sort. Thus there opens up a chasm between cognition and justification. Lest anyone is tempted to blame Descartes for this chasm, it must be emphasized that he was merely responding to a situation that already existed where the descriptions of the perceptual world along with its metaphysical explanations had already become problematic as a result of developments in science.

With the Cartesian mode of justification, Western philosophy took a further step away from the fullness of our pre-theoretical world. Within the earlier metaphysical approach, it would make no sense to talk about a thinking thing apart from the world that is experienced and thought about.³⁷ But with Descartes we come to have a subjective, worldless mind on the one hand and an objective, mindless (non-teleological) world on the other. The result is a dichotomization of the subjective and objective realms, the microcosm and the macrocosm. Such was not the case till now. In the Aristotelian-Thomistic realism, there was a double link between microcosm and macrocosm: of cognitive isomorphism and human action as an application of knowledge. Both these links come to be imperiled in the Enlightenment realism, which had to find other ways of ensuring the link between microcosm and macrocosm. Let us see each of them more closely. However, since the second one is intimately linked to our theme of human longing, I shall deal with it separately in the next section.

First, how Enlightenment realism ensured cognitive isomorphism. Descartes is able to secure the link between his innate ideas and the outside world and bridge the chasm between the two by bringing in a non-deceiving God.

37 Consider, for example, the contrast between the Thomistic and Kantian understanding of direct judgement: the former puts one in touch with the world, whereas the latter is an intra-mental fact. See, Desbruslais (1977), 18.

But the empiricists, by giving up the divine guarantee and yet maintaining the Cartesian mode of justification, landed themselves in serious trouble. They maintain the Cartesian method of looking in, but find no innate ideas — neither of God nor of any other. Rather, they only find sense impressions caused by physical objects. In keeping with the spirit of the age that saw Aristotle's teleological explanations give way to mechanical or causal explanations, objectivity of knowledge is now ensured by making knowledge a passive causal process. If knowing is a passive process, then knowledge must be caused solely by how things are. And this would ensure the objectivity of knowledge. Thus, is added another important doctrine to philosophical realism: perceiving as a passive causal process, as opposed to a constitutive one.³⁸ One author put it graphically when he said:

Perceiving is assumed to begin with the stimulation of a sensory surface and to end with the formation of a 'percept', given in consciousness... [In this model], the whole train of events is inflicted on a passive perceiver, who takes what is given and must be grateful for it.³⁹

Although this is most clear in Locke's *tabula rasa* model of mind, this doctrine is already present in a germinal form in Aristotle's imagery of the wax receiving the ring's seal-engraving.⁴⁰ What is missing in the empiricists is Aristotle's teleology. The computational or information processing model of cognition that makes consciousness a passive partner in cognition — a popular model in cognitive psychology— is a continuation this approach.

A little reflection, however, would show that a passive causal theory of knowing alone will not ensure the objectivity of knowledge, where objectivity is understood as the isomorphism between cognition and reality: What if the world has more than one structure, each of which is causally efficacious? Metaphysical realism ensured objectivity by insisting on the unchanging substantial forms, together with the logicization of reality. Epistemological realism has no special use for the former, but the latter becomes very handy. That doctrine is now modified as reality having one unique structure. Note that this doctrine is far from the pre-philosophical belief in the reality of a pre-fabricated world; it involves an additional thesis to the effect that there is only one way in which that world is fabricated. Hilary Putnam is right, therefore,

38 The contrast between the causal and the constitutive is taken from Hooker (1987), 257.

39 Neisser (1978), 90. Although this statement is about the present day approach to cognition, this is also quite an accurate statement of the empiricist view.

40 'As for sense perception in general, it must be understood that the faculty of perception is the capacity to receive perceptible forms without matter, as wax receives the ring's seal-engraving without its iron or gold.' *De Anima* II. 12. 424a17. Taken from Ackrill's translation, as found in Ackrill (1981), 65.

in characterizing realism in terms of having "one true and complete description of the way the world is".⁴¹ That this is not Putnam's caricature of realism can be seen from Clifford Hooker, himself a realist. According to him, the "goal of realism is nothing less than the construction of the true model of reality, a unified account of the world. ."⁴² Apparently, it is one thing for Godel to show the erroneous nature of a doctrine and quite another to undo the thinking pattern of two and half millennia!

There was a further difficulty. In trying to safeguard the objectivity of knowledge by relying on a causal theory of cognition, it was seen that not all impressions seemed equally objective; colour, sound, taste and the like proved problematic. This problem was sought to be solved by bringing about a further mutation to our pre-theoretic concept of experience. Husserl calls it "Galileo's mathematization of nature"⁴³ and Lonergan calls the "geometrization of the world."⁴⁴ Thus, there comes about the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, the former of which alone really represent the world and not the latter. Prior to that, even with the devaluation of experience and its restriction to domain of the perceptual realm, there was no tampering with the richness of the perceptual realm itself. The color, the sound, the smell and the like were experienced as belonging to the objects.⁴⁵ But the mathematization of nature changes all that. The rich world of sense-experience is now replaced by its measurable aspects. The unmeasurable, non-quantitative dimensions of the perceptual world are now relegated to the subjective realm. The quantitative feedback driven sciences become the paradigm for any knowledge worth the name.

Even with these maneuvers, the chasm between cognition and justification would not go away; nor would realism be ever again as secure as it was until the advent of modern science. It was left to Hume to bring out the skep-

41 Putnam (1981), 49. Italics added.

42 Putnam (1981), 49.

43 Husserl (1970), 23-60.

44 This is how Lonergan describes the process: 'For Galileo the object of science was the geometrization of the world. In proposing this he had to meet the objection that is obvious to everybody that the real world is far more than what is treated in geometry. To meet that objection he drew the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are inherent in things themselves. The things themselves have length and breadth; they move; they have weight and mass. These are all measurable qualities in the things themselves. But there are also secondary qualities: color, sound, odor, taste, the feeling of hot, cold, wet, dry, rough, smooth, heavy, light. The characteristic of all these is that they are not in the thing but in the subject.. They are secondary qualities. They result from an interaction between the real thing, which is just geometrical, and the animal. Lonergan (1993) 180-81; see also, Lonergan (1992), 107, 153; Husserl (1970) 30 n.

45 Husserl (1970), 30.

tical implications of the Cartesian mode of justification. If the objectivity of knowledge is ensured by causation, what about our knowledge of causation itself? Hume argued that in order for there to be any real knowledge of causation we must have an experience of the necessary connection between one event and another (the supposed cause and effect), and this cannot be had; all we can have are constant conjunction and regular succession. Necessity is only in the mind; it is not based on experience. In other words, when Hume took the Cartesian mode of justification seriously and looked inside he could not find any causal necessity. Thus Hume carried the Cartesian mode of justification to its logical end. This, in brief, is the development of the epistemological realism of the modern Enlightenment era.

III. *Some Implications*

Each step in what I have called "the fall" has important implications for the fulfillment of human longings. Let us begin with the restriction on the concept of experience. Having identified experience with perceptual experience, there was no longer any place for religious experience in its scheme of things. We have seen that a consciously adopted realism, in its search for logical consistency, cannot but exclude religious experience.

St. Thomas and his followers carried this exclusion of the experiential knowledge of the divine into Christianity via Aristotle.⁴⁶ Having made religious experience impossible, the only link to the divine that remained in the Thomistic tradition is reason, besides revelation. And there is very little that reason unaided by revelation can know.⁴⁷ Though little, it can know something, i. e., the existence of God: we can pass from the experienced world to its cause. Establishing the existence of God enables one to be attentive to revelation through which is known the nature of God, i. e., such matters of faith as the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation etc. Thus, reason and revelation fitted one another neatly. Faith was understood as an assent to the truths revealed by God. It differed from knowledge only in as much as the assent given is not on the strength of evidence but by an act of the will, an act made in

46 This explains — partly at least — the reason why the Franciscans with their Augustinian leanings — and mystics in general — were not very enamoured of the Thomistic wedding of Aristotle and Christianity.

47 See, Benignus (1947), 444–45: "The difficulty is still greater in regard to other spiritual beings [than knowing one's own soul], for example, God. Man can reason to a certain knowledge of God's existence, but he cannot reason to anything like an adequate knowledge of God's nature."

48 Benignus (1947), 446.

spite of lack of evidence.⁴⁸ Knowledge, in contrast, did not involve the will. In knowledge will follows the intellect whereas in faith intellect follows the will. But this act of will itself is the most reasonable thing to do, since belief in the existence of a God who reveals is already established as reasonable beforehand.

Crucial to the "proofs" for God's existence in this scheme is the principle of causality: the move from the experienced world to its cause. But Hume's foray into the Cartesian mode made it impossible to make this pass from experience to anything outside it. And he made it a point to make mince — meat of the arguments for the existence of God. Thus was severed our only remaining link with God, other than revelation. The Humean challenge on causality became a blessing in disguise to the extent that it woke up Kant from his slumber leading to his re-joining together of experience and reason, after centuries of their separation.⁴⁹ But this re-joining of experience and reason was of no help to epistemology of religion because Kant — like his predecessors — continues to identify experience with perceptual/empirical experience. Therefore, the sort of necessity that Kant established for causality is applicable to empirical experience alone, and God, by definition, is beyond the empirical!

As far as the Enlightenment mutation of experience is concerned, it has important implications for the concept of God: of how it is transformed from the one who fulfills human longings into a rival to the humans. However, I shall restrict myself here to its implications for knowing and willing. The Enlightenment mutation of experience enabled Newtonian science and its philosophers to anaesthetize knowledge not only from secondary qualities such as color and odor but also from the whole realm of unquantifiables including human longing, which are consigned to an irredeemably subjective realm. This is a major change. In the world of naive realism emotions such as anger, love etc. are objective facts which are as much a matter of perception as are quantifiables like shape and weight; even a child recognizes an angry face; and who can look at the beloved's face and not see the love? But after the mathematization of nature, these are legislated out of the objective world and consigned into the subjective realm. Little wonder that existence of other minds became one of the most intractable problems since then. The place of

49 It may be argued that Aristotle did not separate them, but merely distinguished between knowing, desiring and willing. This can be supported with texts such as this: 'Desire — active desire — is the same as pursuit [action], and the faculties of desire and of pursuit are not different from one another or from the faculty of perception.' Cited in Ackrill (1981), 63. Italics added. But the fact remains that the sort of 'faculty psychology' adopted by metaphysical realism ends up with the separation of the faculties, and not merely their distinction. See, Flanagan (1997), 195–6.

human longings and aspirations, values and meanings is also along these, for obvious reasons. This manner of ensuring the objectivity of knowledge constitutes one of the most crucial steps in the fall brought about by philosophical realism.

If the place of human desires and longings is in the subjective realm, it has implications for how we conceive of the relationship between knowledge and action. Knowledge is the result of detached Platonic contemplation by the intellect; willing, valuing and doing belong to the practical realm which calls for engagement in one's surroundings. This can also be said of the metaphysical age. But there is an important difference. In Aristotle's teleological view, perception arouses desire in the animal, and desire would be "pointless if the animal could not go after what it desired."⁵⁰ The same held for the humans. Human knowledge — that included knowing the cosmic order through reason — not only produced the desire to reproduce that order within, but was also normative for conduct. Human fulfillment consisted in living according to the eternal cosmic order through right conduct (and/or by means of rituals). Thus, the human microcosm was intimately linked to the macrocosm.

Enlightenment realism marks the severing of this link. To the extent that scientific, objective knowledge is a replica of the singular structure of reality, and that structure is independent of and indifferent to human actions, desires and longings, knowledge becomes value free too. W. K. Clifford's teaching on "The Ethics of Belief"⁵¹ can be considered as a strong warning against mixing up the two realms. Since values are in the subjective realm, acting according to values can now on be only a matter of subjective, personal choice and significance; the structure of reality is indifferent to it. Fulfillment that comes from acting in that manner is a matter of following a personal dream; it can have no cosmic significance. How could it be otherwise once we join together the pre-theoretic view of a readymade world with the Enlightenment view that strips away all values from its structure?

The fall is now complete. From the rich world of pre-theoretic experience, the enchanting and the mysterious presence was first banished. Even then by virtue of the fact that sense-perception aroused in the soul the remembrance of ideas (Plato), there was something to be said in favour of the sage who developed such a facility for remembrance, though it was not quite quantifiable. But now we are left with a world that is quantitative and measurable but has no place for the qualitative, the valuable. Now we have reached the world of Don Caputo to which I referred in the beginning, a world that is under no obligation to answer our complaints, a world that is indifferent to human longing and its fulfillment.

50 Ackrill (1981), 63.

51 Clifford (1901).

IV. *A Possible Alternative*

Each theses of philosophical realism — the three original ones plus the ones added later on — has proved problematic, if not untenable. But there is hardly any doubt that realism is still the ruling philosophy today. So strong is the pull of the natural attitude. This is not surprising because not only has an alternative view to content with the cultural history of two and a half millennia, but also the fact that what Lonergan called “biological extroversion” has been so deeply ingrained in us in the process of evolution. However, presently we are witnessing a ferment and unrest amounting to an epistemological crisis. This may be considered as the wanderings following the fall. It would be impossible for me to critique the various wanderings here. Let me, instead, conclude by hinting at an alternative that might lead to the promised land. Whatever the specifics of the alternative, if my analysis of the fall is correct, then that alternative epistemology will have to re-instate religious experiences as an integral part of life. It will also have to recognize the contribution of the knower to the process of knowing. Let us restrict the present discussion to the latter. If we are to go beyond Kant regarding the contribution of the knower to the knowing process and are to relate knowledge to human desires and longings, then, it is also clear that the traditional picture of the relation between knowledge and action will have to be reversed, or at least made reciprocal. The challenge is how these can be combined into a coherent theory that accounts for our perceptual, scientific and religious knowledge without either the reductionism of modern philosophy or the epistemological free-for-all of post-modernism.

We can make a beginning by adopting a Kantian line and acknowledging our contribution to knowledge. Knowledge in this scheme is not a mirroring of a pre-fabricated world; rather, “the mind and the world jointly make up the mind the world,” as Hilary Putnam says.⁵² Further, “Objects’ do not exist independently of our conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another possible scheme of description.”⁵³ Although this position may be called ‘constructivism’ (I have done so myself), it is not an adequate expression, except for the contrast it offers with realism. ‘A relational theory of knowledge’ seems to express the idea better. Human knowledge, upon this view, is neither like a mirror image nor like a depression; it is more like love (a mutual relationship), or even better, like the family brought forth through that relationship.⁵⁴ Putnam’s idea of a joint making

52 Putnam (1981), xi.

53 Putnam (1981), p. 52.

54 For an analysis of love as a mutual relationship in contrast with other types of relationships, see, Bruemmer (1993).

conveys this notion of knowledge being produced by a mutual relationship. Obviously, we do not begin with the assumption of any pre-existing 'fact world'. And it is this starting point that is the most difficult to make sense of. Besides the fact that it goes contrary to our ingrained natural attitude, it also invites the objection that if knowledge is a relationship, the relata must first exist. So how can we not start with a fact world?

A proper understanding of this matter is very crucial if we are not to end up in the sort of contradictions Kant is said to make: On the one hand, there exists a mind independent thing-in-itself which is unknowable; on the other hand we know our experience to be caused by that thing-in-itself. In order to avoid such contradictions, we must recognize that just as there is no family prior to a certain relationship, there is no world (cosmos, ordered universe) prior to the relationship between a knowing mind and its surroundings. Notice that there is no 'thing-in-itself' here. That is a totally misleading expression because it makes us think of objects like oranges and apples, animals and persons as objects we know to be existing (i. e, a pre-fabricated world), but none of these objects can be really known; all that can be known are their appearances. Such talk is obviously non-sense. The relational theory says, rather, that anything that may be considered an object are those which we can call by names such as 'apple' and 'orange' and it is the product of a relationship; such objects have no existence prior to that. All that can be said about the relata that exists prior to the relationship is a knowing mind and its surroundings (the enviroing world, as the phenomenologists would say). Nothing can be said of the shapes and contours of this enviroing world except that it is there and that we are constantly interacting with it, like explorers in an unknown strange land. It is in the course of explorations that the enviroing world becomes a fact world. And only about a fact world can we say that it is made up of different objects arranged in a certain way.

Once we have reached this Kantian understanding, we are ready to move on. If we cut up the world into objects according to our conceptual schemes, where do these schemes come from? It is here that evolutionary epistemology comes into the picture and answers the question in terms of our phylogenetic experience or the explorations done by our evolutionary ancestors.⁵⁵ The relationship between action and knowledge is reversed in this scheme of things. Heidegger and the pragmatic philosophers also make important contributions in this direction. R. W. Newell succinctly puts this view when he says,

There is another way of looking at knowledge because there is another way of looking at persons. We may see them as agents acting in the world and guided by their beliefs, motives, desires and needs; and thus seen,

55 Wuketits (1984).

explain epistemological ideas by focussing on human activities and practices.⁵⁶

Human needs, desires and longings come, then, at the very centre of our conceptual schemes and accordingly, of our world-making.

Now we come to the most crucial step. If our world results from a relationship, then the nature of that world would depend on the nature of the relationship. In other words, depending on our manner of relating to our surrounding world, the objects of our cognition would vary. Objects of scientific, religious, and perceptual worlds would seem to be results of such different ways of relating to our surrounding world.⁵⁷

Once this is done we would have a comprehensive theory of cognition. There has been sufficient recognition in recent times about the man-made character of religious worlds. Some thinkers have also begun to recognize this in the case of science. Besides recognizing these trends, a theory like this would simultaneously be an explanation as to why we are not aware of the activity involved in the making of our perceptual world. It is because those practices have become spontaneous to us (automatized) due to our evolutionary history. But such is not the case with science or religion; knowing the objects of either of these require a special effort on the part of the knower. This is very much recognized in religious practice. We are less aware of it in science because scientific findings, for various reasons, have been projected by our technology driven culture as the only truth. To acknowledge the legitimacy of these different worlds, is also restore the richness of our pre-theoretical world. It would bring together the two diverging trends of the Enlightenment legacy: the decentring of the cosmos or dethroning the human from the centre of the cosmos and, a centring of epistemology in human subjectivity inaugurated by Descartes. This joining of the two will be done without making that subjectivity into a subjective matter — as the moderns did — because the desires and longings that go into the making of these different worlds are not the fancies of individuals but universal needs and longings of the human heart.

No post-Cartesian epistemology, however, can rest with a theory of cognition, no matter how rich and comprehensive that theory. It will have to be complemented by a theory of truth and epistemic justification. But once we recognize the true nature of our cognition, there is at least the possibility that we can take faltering steps towards an adequate theory of justification. But today we are far from even recognizing the true nature of cognition. All that has been proposed in this section are merely some hints that enable us to

⁵⁶ Newell, R. W. (1986), 7.

⁵⁷ For a little more detailed treatment of this matter, see, Karuvelil, (2000).

recognize our different ways of cognizing the world, ways where human needs and longings play an important role. These hints need to be cashed in if we are to have a comprehensive theory of cognition. And such a theory, in turn, will help us to find an adequate theory of justification.

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