

Epistemology and Metaphysics: Two Sides of One Coin

Understanding Dialectical Incarnation

Martin J. Schade

With the celebration of UNESCO's World Philosophy Day, November 19, 2009, being hosted in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia, it is important to stress the unity in those aspects of philosophy which Western mentality has too often separated. Now that global unity is of major concern for our future, in all avenues of social, environmental and philosophical issues, and with the broad theme of epistemology at the heart of this Conference, this paper is aimed at indicating the unity between epistemology and metaphysics. In recent philosophies there has been a strong separation of these two fundamental philosophical concerns in the same way that the Western Philosophy has frequently separated other philosophical elements such as matter from idea/spirit, transcendence from immanence, subject from object. This paper will examine Anselm's Ontological Argument for the existence of God as an indication of how epistemology and metaphysics are necessarily united. We will then indicate how the philosophy of Dialectical Incarnation unites what seems to be opposing bi-polar entities into one, demonstrating that although concepts may be distinct they are never separated.

The most obvious separation of epistemology and metaphysics is found in the analytic movement and specifically Logical Positivism. These philosophical persuasions, as valid and informative as they are, reject a philosophy, such as Dialectical Incarnation, which unites seeming opposing poles. Logical Positivism, rejects statements about metaphysics, theology and ethics as being unverifiable. These academic disciplines are not a part of serious cognitive thinking or epistemology. To have meaning, a given statement has to be connected to either empirical data or analytic truth. Logical Positivism aims at connecting philosophy more closely to empirical epistemology and to science. The ultimate basis of knowledge rests upon public experimental verification rather than upon personal experience. It sees metaphysical statements and theological doctrines not as false but meaningless. The great unanswerable questions about substance, causality, freedom, and God are unanswerable because they are not genuine questions at all. Logical Positivism holds the position that all genuine philosophy is a critique of language; and its result is to show the unity of science. All genuine knowledge about nature can be expressed in a single language common to all the sciences.

If science is the centre of attention for Logical Positivism, a methodology of science finds it difficult to reconcile itself with metaphysical statements or theological speculations because these concepts are usually encapsulated, closed and dogmatic and it would be a waste of time to foster any form of valid argumentation. Metaphysical statements and theological doctrines are neither verifiable nor confirmable, hence they are rejected. This could be true if metaphysics is viewed as merely transcendental and abstract assertions, like "The Absolute is beyond time," or if theology was strictly confined to formally established dogmatic principles, like "God is Triune." Dialectical Incarnation indicates that neither is the case. The metaphysics of this paper is very much interwoven with

science, especially physics, and its theology is open to the “infinite horizon” of the totality of reality. Neither is encapsulated nor dogmatic and to confine all philosophy and theology to only that which is scientifically verifiable is limiting both.

Before we move to the dialectical union of epistemology and metaphysics I wish to indicate how some philosophers think that it is absurd to reason in such a dialectical, contradictory manner. I refer to the attitude of Karl Popper who repeatedly attacks the dialectic. In 1937 he wrote and delivered a paper entitled “What Is Dialectic?” in which he attacked the dialectical method for its willingness “to put up with contradictions.” Popper concluded the essay with these words:

The whole development of dialectic should be a warning against the dangers inherent in philosophical system-building. It should remind us that philosophy should not be made a basis for any sort of scientific system and that philosophers should be much more modest in their claims. One task which they can fulfil quite usefully is the study of the critical methods of science (Popper 316).

The new philosophy of Dialectical Incarnation seeks to demonstrate that seeming opposing elements, such as matter and spirit, human and divine, epistemology and metaphysics, “creation” and evolution are actually dialectically one. Humanity sees the world and God as external objects which need to be analysed and described. Epistemology, therefore, inevitably involves metaphysics. When one seeks to know something, that something is an objective reality. That objective reality is then explained through an understanding of metaphysics. Epistemology is one side of any philosophical inquiry. Metaphysics is needed so as to describe the world and Nature as immanent and the being of God and as transcendent. The necessary relationship between epistemology and metaphysics is demonstrated through the history of Western philosophy.

The question of the Ionian Cosmologists, “What is the one stuff of the Universe?” is both epistemological and metaphysical. Plato’s Divided Line is an obvious demonstration of a dualism yet he cannot separate the “real” world” from the material and “unreal” world. The constant interaction of epistemology and metaphysics continues in history through obvious examples: Plotinus’ emanation and the physical world, the ontological as well as the cosmological arguments for the existence of God, and the statement of Descartes, “*Cogito ergo sum.*” In the seeming endless search to know the world and to know God one always has to describe being. The dichotomy between the two are worthy ways of philosophizing reality, but it is crucial to realize that epistemology and metaphysics are only concepts in knowing, describing and experiencing the oneness of all in the totality of reality. Dialectical Incarnation, with its new understanding of the Self, intends to break down the dualism fortified by Descartes and understand the unity between previously separated philosophical entities.

With a dialectical understanding of the totality of reality, Anselm’s Ontological Argument for the existence of God serves as an example of how epistemology and metaphysics are simply two sides of the same coin in which one can grasp how the completeness of God and the completeness of Nature are united as one. The Argument

goes as such. God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” Everyone has an idea of this concept regardless of one’s belief in God. Something can be in our intellect before we know that it really exists. Two possible concepts emerge. A greatest conceivable being can exist either in one’s mind or in reality. The greater of the two possibilities is that God exists in reality, i.e. real existence is greater than imaginary existence. Therefore, by this “ontological argument” God, who is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” must exist to be “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.”

Dialectical Incarnation takes this argument even further. God, to be “that than which nothing greater can be conceived,” is not merely spirit, nor merely transcendent. God must also be material and immanent to be “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” God cannot be simply an idea and God cannot be simply pure Form, or pure Act, or pure transcendence, in the manner in which Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy have stated. God and Nature are not separated but dialectically one, as are the knowledge of God and Nature, through epistemology, and the object of God and Nature, through metaphysics. To reject metaphysics is to deny the totality of reality its complete nature

Logical Positivists would reject Dialectical Incarnation because it is not verifiable from a scientific observational analysis and because of incarnation’s infinite horizon in understanding and explaining God and the world.

In response, an advocate of Dialectical Incarnation would indicate that science has evolved and continues to evolve. The science of the new physics is able to verify certain things which are not observable. Quantum mechanics has demonstrated that atomic physics cannot predict what will happen when it delves into the subatomic world. Science, as it was understood before quantum mechanics, would say that it can predict certain things happening, e.g., the apple is always going to fall from the tree. As such, Newtonian physics would say, “If such and such is the case now, then such and such is going to happen next.” Quantum mechanics says, “If such and such is the case now, then the *probability* that such and such is going to happen next is ... (what ever it is calculated to be).” Scientists of the new physics can never know with certainty what will happen to the particle that they are “observing.” All that they can know is the probabilities for it to behave in certain ways (Zukav 27).

Gary Zukav explains it well.

Contrary to Newtonian physics, quantum mechanics tells us that our knowledge of what governs events on the subatomic level is not nearly what we assumed it would be. It tells us that we cannot predict subatomic phenomena with any certainty. We only can predict their probabilities (28).

If Logical Positivists contend that metaphysics, theology or religion is meaningless because it is unverifiable, I again turn to what Gary Zukav says.

Acceptance without proof is the fundamental characteristic of western religion. Rejection without proof is the fundamental characteristic of western science. In other words, religion has become a matter of the heart and science has become a matter of the mind. This regrettable state of affairs does not reflect the fact that, physiologically, one cannot exist without the other. Everyone needs both. Mind and heart are different aspects of *us*.

The Wu Li Masters know that “science” and “religion” are only dances, and that those who follow them are dancers. The dancers may claim to follow “truth” or claim to seek “reality,” but the Wu Li Masters know better. They know that the true love of all dancers is dancing (88).

The advocate of Dialectical Incarnation would say to the Logical Positivist: your logic is correct, your means of observing and measuring is correct, your verifying is correct, to the extent that you can verify the things you do, but you fail to *see* beyond the mere empirical world. Reality is dialectical and empirical observation is not the sole manner in which one can offer a proper philosophy of that reality. Reality is supernatural even though one can empirically observe only the natural.

A Need for a Synthesis

The need for a synthesis lies in the nature of the dialectical method itself. The dialectical idealism of Hegel, as a thesis, evokes the antithesis of Marx dialectical materialism. Though both Hegel and Marx have an end to their system, the Absolute Idea in the former, the classless society of communism in the latter, both call out for a synthesis. This synthesis then becomes a thesis in itself, and thus the dialectical process continues. The objective of Dialectical Incarnation is to identify and define the synthesis as incarnate love in its infinite expressions. The constant synthesis of Dialectical Incarnation is primarily through the human person, who is the resolution of the mind/body problem in its very Self. The synthesis of incarnate love is an ongoing dynamic and will continually be expressed and discovered in its own evolutionary manner. Like Hegel’s end and Marx’s end, this synthesis is a process that manifests itself in each particular expression. The goal is to recognise that one cannot separate the transcendent from the immanent, spirit from matter, the one from the many, but to allow the ongoing synthesis to actualise itself in its perfection.

Another reason for a synthesis is the simple fact that matter and spirit have, for too long, been separated. Can one “see” dialectically and paradoxically so as to no longer separate the two? In theory we refer to the distinction between matter and spirit, but in reality we need not separate the two. Instead of saying that one is the “reflection,” the “expression,” the “disclosure” of the other, the manner in which Hegel and Marx do, can one simply understand that matter and spirit are the “conditions of the possibility” for incarnation and recognize that they are not separate? All of reality is incarnate; all of reality is ongoing incarnation. In Dialectical Incarnation, matter or spirit are equal and neither is favoured, one from the other.

What contribution does Dialectical Incarnation make toward philosophy and the epistemological endeavour itself? The contribution is for humanity to have greater vision and fuller being as Teilhard de Chardin passionately proclaims.¹

Seeing. We might say that the whole of life lies in that verb—if not ultimately, at least essentially. Fuller being is closer union...union increases only through an increase in consciousness, that is to say vision... *To see or to perish* is the very condition laid upon everything that makes up the universe...vision is fuller being (Teilhard 1975 31, 33).

Teilhard's challenge is to "teach how to see God everywhere, to see [God] in all that is most hidden, most solid, and most ultimate in the world" (Teilhard 1968 46). From the onset of his mission he breaks down the barriers that divide God and the world, for he says, "that our lives, and...the whole world are full of God" (Teilhard 1968 47), and therefore "by virtue of the Creation and, still more, of the Incarnation, *nothing* here below is *profane* for those who know how to see" (Teilhard 1968 66). In breaking down the barrier between God and the world, Teilhard also razes the wall between spirit and matter. For him, matter and spirit are not two separate substances, set side by side, differing in nature; they are two aspects of "one single cosmic stuff and there is between them no conflict to baffle our intelligence" (Teilhard 1968 22).

For Teilhard, creation, incarnation and redemption are seen as simultaneous acts of the one act of love. Therefore, we can understand his central position with regard to the Incarnation in this way: "God-Love reaching self-fulfilment only in love...is nothing more nor less than a 'phylum of love' within nature" (Teilhard 1968 5). According to Teilhard de Chardin, "to create, to fulfill and to purify the world is, for God, to unify it by uniting it organically with [God]self" (Teilhard 1975 293-94).

Although Dialectical Incarnation has its conception in early Western and Eastern philosophy, it continues to manifest itself in different contemporary philosophies. A significant example is process philosophy. Yet the incompleteness of process thought is that it is a philosophy of mere experience, emerging from the roots of British empiricism. Process philosophy, as described by Alfred North Whitehead, is not a holistic philosophy which includes the entirety of matter and spirit, mind and body, human experience and concrete historical events.

Returning to Anselm

If God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived," then God must be both transcendent and immanent, both spirit and matter. Traditional philosophy, through the ontological argument of Anselm, states that "God's essence is God existence." For

¹ I have quoted Teilhard in an earlier CHIPS Conference. "[The Aum, the Tao and the One Love, it's ALL ONE: Introducing Dialectical Incarnation](#)". UWI, Cave Hill Philosophy Symposium, Conversations II: Western and Non-western Philosophies, March 2006.

Dialectical Incarnation all infinite particulars of the totality of reality have as their essence their own existence Dialectical Incarnation is an equally balanced synthesis of an essentialist's condition of the possibility as it is an existentialist's condition of the possibility. "My essence is my existence," as is "your essence is your existence," as is a particular neutron's essence is its existence. Every human and every particular being of the world can say "I am, who am."² Dialectical Incarnation is equally an epistemology of the totality of reality as it is a metaphysics of the totality of reality.

Throughout history we humans have been afraid of humanity's divinity. Humanity has condemned itself to an intrinsic evil condition of which humanity never actually had. It is time that we humans recognize the divine that we are, and it is time for us to allow God, the divine, to be the human and the Nature, that God, the divine, is.

The Philosophy of Dialectical Incarnation: Breaking down the dualism of Western Philosophy

The Dialectic of Dialectical Incarnation is the triadic, methodological understanding that all of reality is comprised of the process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. All of reality is comprised of the conditions of the possibility of being idea, spirit and transcendence. All of reality is comprised of the conditions of the possibility of being body, matter and immanence. All of reality is incarnation. All of reality is the condition of the possibility to be both idea and body united completely. All of reality is the condition of the possibility of being both spirit and matter united totality. All of reality is both transcendent and immanent united equally.

The human person is the centre of this dialectical process, because it is the human person who can recognise it, "see" it, feel it, and self-reflect upon it.³ The human person, with a human heart and mind, are united as one incarnation, one incarnate Self, the "centre of the circumference," the centre of the universe and all of reality. One's *telos* is arrived at by discovering and co-creating one's Self, which is the material-super-natural existential of the totality of reality, moving towards perfection.

Dialectical Incarnation is Hegel's idealism united with Marx's materialism and synthesized equally in incarnation. Dialectical Incarnation is neither a monism nor a dualism but can be dialectically understood as both. Dialectical Incarnation involves both mentally "knowing" and bodily "feeling" one and/or the other. One can reason on the spiritual side equally as on the material side, the transcendent side as well as the immanent side. Dialectical Incarnation is aimed at clarifying how seemingly opposing concepts are distinct "conditions of the possibility" but are never separate in actual reality. All of reality is a single dialectical entity, and this single dialectical entity is incarnation. When one says that epistemology and metaphysics, divinity and humanity, spirit and matter, are distinct but not separate one means that one can intellectually grasp the condition, the "concept," of each, but in actual reality one can never separate the two. The reality in which opposing entities can be "distinct but not separate" is similar to what

² These are the words God says to Moses when Moses asked "Who are you?" Exodus 3: 14.

³ Note: "It" is the philosophy of Dialectical Incarnation, the dialectic of the world.

Aristotle had in mind when he stated that one cannot separate matter from form and form from matter. Incarnation is parallel to Aristotelian substance which, as he explains, is both form and matter, distinct as conditions, as “concepts,” but never separate in reality. Dialectical Incarnation is equally an epistemology of the totality of reality as it is a metaphysics of the totality of reality. Epistemology inevitably involves metaphysics because one must know something and that something, i.e. reality, is understood through metaphysics.

Dialectical Incarnation is a new metaphysics in understanding all of being. It offers a new epistemology in how humans know this reality of all being, in knowing the condition of the possibility of the incarnation. Dialectical Incarnation is a new anthropology, by identifying the human person as an incarnational being, a material-supernatural existential. It is a new philosophy of the human person because humans can critically reflect upon themselves as incarnational beings and wonder how it is that they can “know” and “feel” themselves as the centre of the totality of reality. It is a new theology because it is a new anthropology, which is now an anthropological theology. Dialectical Incarnation is a new cosmology because creation is evolution and all is sacred. It is a new ethics because the agent in ethics understands himself or herself in a new incarnational perspective and within a new incarnational context of doing ethics. Dialectical Incarnation is a new psychology of the Self, because mental processes are no longer mere “mental” processes, and observing those mental processes are no longer being passively observed. Dialectical Incarnation is a new philosophy of religion, because it recognises the harmony found in the infinite expressions of the divine experienced by the culturally conditioned incarnational human beings in the world. It is a new sociology, because the individual in society is an incarnational being of culture within the common good. Dialectical Incarnation requires the coming out of Plato’s cave and seeing “The Good” in its fullness; something Plato himself could not have done, as an idealist.

In the philosophy of Dialectical Incarnation, incarnation is the “one stuff” of the universe. Incarnation is incarnate love and therefore dialectical in its own being. Love requires a lover and a beloved. The lover, as *subject*, as individual, must be material, i.e. incarnational, so as to be particular. The beloved, as *object* must be material, and therefore incarnational, so as to be particular and individual. Love is human, divine and the totality of reality.

Dialectical Incarnation understands that reality has a triadic nature and each particular incarnation, from the smallest sub-atomic particle and/or wave, to the entirety of the cosmos, is a synthesis of incarnation. With each particular synthesis (these are the infinite particular incarnations of the world), the particular synthesis becomes a new thesis. For example, I as Self, is a particular incarnation, both “idea-like” and “matter-like”. I am now a subject, and a thesis. The antithesis is that which is object, i.e. the external world. Descartes had to separate these conditions of the world. Dialectical Incarnation re-unites them. I as subject, as a new thesis, is united with the novel, objective, socio-cultural, physical environment of my incarnational existence. This union brings forth a synthesis. I, as subject and object totally united as one, am synthesising and recreating. As a new thesis, the incarnational Self serves as the subject while the antithesis serves as the object

which is the totally external environment, or “situation,” in which the Self finds its being. The synthesis is the new creation, with itself as a new other “Self” in a new objective world, constantly creating and evolving. Dialectical Incarnation is a process philosophy in its completeness.

The Self within Dialectical Incarnation

I look into the night sky and see the face of God. God is awake and aware, in us, as us...when I think about the struggles I've had searching for a glimpse of Ultimate Reality...[w]hen I'd ask the question, 'God who are you?' there seemed to be an answer from the great Silence. 'Who are YOU?' Know yourself (Lintner).

Any philosophy, any theology, and any epistemology of God and Nature must first begin with anthropology, for it is the human person who is the philosopher, the theologian, the believer, the searcher. Within an anthropology, the starting point is the subject, the Self, of that human person, the agent in the search, the active condition in which the world and God is known.

All understanding of the world and God is filtered through the Self. There is no other way of observing the world and God except through the Self. The world and “divinity” have no “meaning” outside the Self. In order to understand this thesis it is paramount to have an understanding of Self. The Self becomes aware of Nature which is the actual and only means in which the Self may have a glimpse of the mystery of God and the world.

The Self is the centre of the circumference of the totality of reality. The Self is the nexus of divinity and humanity, spirit and matter, soul and body. Let us awaken from our slumber and see that we humans are the centre of the dialectical One Love, One Heart found in the totality of reality. In so doing humanity is bringing epistemology and metaphysics into all of reality, bringing about a more complete unity where “What I know is who I am” and “Who I am is what I know”. With a new imperative to enter the entirety of the globe, let us end in the words of Albert Einstein.

A human being is part of the whole called by us ‘universe.’ We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest...a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive (Memorable Albert Einstein).

References

Lintner, David. "Know Thyself," found in Life Skills Institute. Originally appeared in the on-line journal *The Messenger: A Guide for Life's Adventure*. Web

"Memorable Albert Einstein Quotes":_Mathematical Circles Adieu 1977. Web. June 27, 2009.

Popper, Karl. *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books, 1962.

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, S.J. *The Divine Milieu*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968.

---. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975.

Zukav, Gary. *The Dancing Wu Li Masters an Overview of the New Physics*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1979.