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# THE CRISIS OF THE PERSONAL: MACMURRAY, POSTMODERNISM, AND THE CHALLENGE OF PHILOSOPHY TODAY

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## **Abstract**

Since Descartes, philosophy has given priority to the Subject as Thinker, and made sense of things first according to the Logic of substance (cause and effect) and then of organism (function in a living system.) These logical forms are no longer adequate: philosophical reflection must now address the crisis our culture is facing, which requires action. By taking the Self as agent Macmurray challenges us to come up with a new 'logical form', i.e., for the 'Personal', since only persons can act (do this, not that, and succeed or fail.) The personal involves a necessary unity of positive and negative: thinking and knowing are negative, constituting and sustaining the positive, action, without which they are meaningless. Merleau-Ponty's application of Husserl's invention/discovery of the phenomenological reduction makes room for this problematic feature by uncovering the immediate experience of the Other in action. The 'natural attitude' which takes the (impersonal) scientific perspective as objective and rational exemplifies the risk inherent in the personal, and is a kind of 'bad faith' (as explored by the existentialists.) Being in relationship with other persons is constitutive of the possibility of rationality. By linking these insights with some more recent Continental philosophy (Luce Irigaray, Derrida's deconstruction) we get a new model for epistemology (meaning and truth) as contingent on trust, such that we could envisage the World-as-one-action.

## **Key Words**

John Macmurray; Subject; Self as Agent; logical form of the personal; the negative; phenomenological reduction; Merleau-Ponty; 'natural attitude'; 'bad faith'; solipsism; Irigaray; Derrida; deconstruction; epistemology; friendship.

## ***1. Introductory: Macmurray and 'modern' philosophy***

For Macmurray the task of philosophy is to reflect on experience as a whole. Philosophy, unlike science (which is more properly understood as a number of 'specialized sciences') is concerned to express and interpret the universe<sup>2</sup> not as a totality, as in say field theory, but such that we come closer to understanding ourselves as part of the world, of the whole of what is - as, in immediate experience, we know ourselves to be. He sees himself as following in the footsteps of a tradition which stretches back to

the Greeks, but in particular includes the 'moderns': Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, etc., and unlike some other twentieth century philosophers<sup>3</sup> he understands the history of philosophy as absolutely necessary to philosophy's conception of itself. The work of an individual philosopher is not only a response to and an expression of the time in which that philosopher lives, it can also, as a result of reflecting on it, contribute to, indeed help mould, the attitudes and assumptions which come to prevail in the surrounding society, during and after that time. Thus philosophy has a cultural role which may affect all our lives: that is, history in the making. Perhaps this was more obvious in the past before philosophy became an academic discipline, but Macmurray is convinced that philosophy today is perhaps even more crucial as our western civilization, and with it the earth itself, faces a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. In this essay, then, I will outline how Macmurray's philosophical discoveries make for a particular reading of the history of philosophy, which may in turn open up a sense of where philosophy needs to go now, as we enter the third millennium. For this my strategy will be to develop some of his ideas in conjunction with insights from Continental philosophy, in particular phenomenology, a style of philosophizing initiated by Edmund Husserl, interpreted and in some ways radicalized by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In conclusion I will be suggesting connections with the work of two contemporary post-modern thinkers, Luce Irigaray and Jacques Derrida.

Philosophy then, is a reflective activity and it is called for, as all reflection is, when life presents problems which make it difficult or impossible to go on as we were. According to Macmurray, action is primary and thought secondary, its role being to guide and correct action. When we are doing something, we are thinking as we act, and often the two aspects are effectively indissoluble. But there may come a point when we hit a snag, so to speak, when our action is interrupted and we have to stop and think. We have to withdraw from our engagement with the world and reflect about the situation, imagine different ways of addressing our problem, and consider the consequences of choosing one of them. If our reflection is successful we may be able to go back to the real world with a sense of knowing how to handle ourselves and what to do

next. But if putting the conclusion of our reflection into practice does not help, and we continue to be frustrated, then we must perhaps recast the terms in which we understood our problem. Take, for example the collapse of the Mediaeval world view<sup>4</sup> and the development of science. Traditional patterns of thinking no longer made sense, and there was need for radical changes in the way people construed their existence and the world they lived in. Modern philosophy arose at this time, as Descartes and others tried to give form to a conception of reality which would be adequate to the new situation. While no-one today would argue for Cartesianism as such, there are a number of elements of Seventeenth Century metaphysics still around, albeit sometimes 'unexpressed and half conscious, implicit in [our] ways of behaviour...'<sup>5</sup> They have become taken for granted habits of thought. But in spite of, or perhaps because of, the overwhelming success of the scientific method in so many fields, we are getting to the point where the limitations of that metaphysics are becoming apparent to more and more thinkers. Macmurray sees us, as a species, at a crisis point in history, in the face of which we need philosophy to make it possible for us to reflect anew on what we are and what we are doing. He calls for a new way of thinking, a break-through analogous to Descartes', to enable us to articulate what is at stake and then we may find a way to understand and deal with this more and more confusing reality. Thus, as I shall try to show, his effort becomes part of what has come to be called 'post-modernism'. Macmurray gave his Gifford Lectures (delivered 1953 and 1954, first published 1957 and 1961<sup>6</sup>) the general title 'The Form of the Personal', and in them he addresses what he identifies as the 'crisis of the personal.' He describes the various new approaches to philosophy which were current in his time (phenomenology, existentialism, logical analysis) as struggling, each in its own way, with the inadequacies of traditional patterns of thinking. I believe that it is his analysis of these patterns that is one of Macmurray's major contributions to philosophy, and it is worth spending a little time seeing how they work. To keep our reflection relevant and consistent we must make use of symbols to represent what we are thinking about (*I.U.* ch II) and combine these symbols in a systematic and consistent fashion so that our conclusions will help us resolve the real world issues that made withdrawal from action necessary in the first place. He identified this feature of reflection as the 'unity pattern' (*I.U.*) and later more generally as the 'logical form' (*S.A.*) and his diagnosis of the philosophical problem of our time as the need for a new one to address today's reality which is even

harder to deal with than that faced by Descartes and his contemporaries. We must find and learn to think according to a 'logical form' that would enable us to reflect on our experience as persons (*S.A.*, p 29). Descartes succeeded in articulating the 'logical form of substance', which made sense as philosophy's response to the development of physics, and it provided continuity with the traditional privilege accorded mathematics which as Macmurray says 'proved adequate for the scientific determination of the material world.' (p 33). But the problem it eventually raises is that what is not so determinable becomes, as he puts it, unknowable. If the one who reflects on the material world is 'immaterial' (Descartes' 'mental substance'), the activity of thinking obviously cannot be understood in material terms.<sup>7</sup> If we do try to make sense of the self according to a physical (mechanistic) conception, we must end in scepticism, as became clear to Hume. The development of the biological sciences led to the emergence of a new logical form first sought by Rousseau and Kant and eventually recognizable in the dialectic developed by Hegel, which would be adequate to organic life. <sup>8</sup> But even as the Cartesian (mathematical/mechanical) unity pattern had to make room for one which could account for the logic of birth, growth, and decay, in due course it seems we were bound to need a way to reflect on human reality, to try to come to terms with *our* existence as persons. Physically certainly we are 'matter', and biologically alive, but we are more than machines or organisms, (cf. *S.R.E.*, pp. 101, and 119) and to the extent that we fail to realize this, our lack of self knowledge may – indeed perhaps already does – spell disaster. Hence, the crisis of the personal.

Macmurray does not offer us a full blown system developed in accordance with the required unity-pattern. Rather, he sees himself more as diagnosing the crisis and indicating some features of what may be needed to meet it. I actually think that such a system may not be possible or desirable, and to the extent he hankers after one, he may be more caught up in old habits of thought than he realizes.<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, his insights into the workings and short-comings of the earlier (modernist) logical forms, and his sense of what is essential about the personal are important and revealing, and they do, it seems to me, converge in significant ways with the continuing trajectory of what has come to be known as Continental Philosophy. Central to his perspective, and already at odds with much of traditional philosophy is his insistence on the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. 'Primary knowledge,' he says, is 'knowledge as a dimension of action,' which he contrasts with 'reflective activity which

intends the improvement of knowledge' (*P.R.*, p 77.) Thus, as mentioned already, we stop and think when for some reason what we are doing is not going well, and it was going to take a while before there seemed a need to reflect philosophically about ourselves. But by the Nineteenth Century the sources of a philosophical impulse 'in the stresses and strains of personal life' (*S.A.*, p 29) were making themselves felt in such thinkers as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard,<sup>10</sup> philosophers who are now recognized as forerunners of twentieth century existentialism. Macmurray's approach has been called existentialist,<sup>11</sup> partly because of his insistence on agency, and there are other affinities between his work and that movement; I will be referring to some of them later. Meanwhile I want to go a little further with Macmurray's account of the sources of this crisis and indicate his approach to addressing it.

## **2. The emergence of logical form: knowledge and the role of the negative.**

Philosophy's traditional concern has been with an epistemology which privileges theory over practice (thinking over action or experience), an ordering which Macmurray insists on reversing. He writes

*All thought presupposes knowledge. It is not possible to think about something that you do not already know' (I.U., p 6, italics his)*

This is primary knowledge which

is first and foremost that immediate experience of things which is prior to all expression and understanding (p. 7)

And the paradigm case, as one might call it, is not knowing a fact (that such and such is the case) but knowing another person. Not only does this fit with the common-sense insight that knowledge, if it is knowledge, cannot be mistaken, it is also an effective illustration of the difference between knowing someone, and knowing about her, which would be reflective knowledge. If I do know her, then it must be the case that she knows me: this (personal) knowledge is inherently relational. So, again as in common sense, knowledge refers beyond oneself, or as Macmurray often puts it, to the Other. But reflective knowledge, not being immediate, cannot attain the certainty of immediate knowledge, that is knowledge of the Other in action. (*S.A.*, p 168) We are born into personal relationships: our existence is social from the very beginning; and the baby's response to its mother marks its dawning ability to distinguish between Self and Other. In fact I become aware of (my) Self at the moment I become aware of an Other (not-self) responding to me: *I* am in communication with *you* ('I-thou' precedes 'I-it.'<sup>12</sup>)

This first encounter with the negative, the not-I that lets me be I, is the matrix of the personal, and at the same time 'the germ of rationality' (*P.R.*, p 61.<sup>13</sup>) Gradually I will begin to distinguish separate Others who are not the generic 'you', and then, by further discrimination or abstraction, the elements of my world which do not respond to me, which are not persons. Some of these are things which apparently take no account of me, but I become interested in them to the extent that I can manipulate, act on or use them. And often unless I affect such a thing in some way it does not change, it continues to be how it was, where it was, etc. (Macmurray's term for this is 'the continuant,' *S.A.*, ch. 7.) This is of course relative to me, to what I expect or want from it, and so we may come to see, in Macmurray's phrase, 'the World-as-means'. Conscious attention to things in this way is a mode of reflection which when developed and carried out systematically becomes science. (*P.R.*, p 198.) That it is not the only mode of reflection, nor even the most important one, is intrinsic to Macmurray's thought: scientific knowledge *is* knowledge, but not the whole of knowledge. It made sense, though, that it would be the first mode of reflection to be fully worked out. It is obviously very useful - and easier to cope with than the more problematic modes which develop out of emotional or personal life. This seems to be the case with the child's development<sup>14</sup> as well as the history of our society's ability to reflect on itself.

Philosophically, then, regarding what we experience as matter, as stuff to be worked on, led to the notion of substance, and its logic is such that positive and negative exclude each other (*S.A.*, p. 96.) It cannot be the case that A and not-A, *viz.* ~ (A. ~A). This kind of logic, which has been developed to allow for inference from premises to conclusion, functions like mathematics (pp. 93 f); Macmurray has no more quarrel with it than he has with mathematics as an abstract discipline. It is valuable and reliable within its limits. But what he is concerned with is what he calls the logic of representation, 'a logical form for the representation of the actual unity of the object to which our thought refers' (p. 95); and if the mathematical unity pattern is regarded as the most adequate for the representation of Reality, it would be taken as adequate to represent the Self. As we have noted this is in fact what Descartes supposes: he describes himself as a 'thinking substance', and so is born what Macmurray called 'the vicious dualism between mind and matter' (*I.U.*, p. 57.) It seems as if the exciting new discoveries due to scientific method, especially when interpreted from the theoretical stand point of traditional philosophy, made this metaphysical assumption irresistible - and with

Descartes' 'I think therefore I am', the Subject of modern philosophy is born. Setting aside for the moment Macmurray's challenge to the priority of the theoretical (replacing 'I think' with 'I do'), this thinking substance has to be the negative of the world it thinks about. While Descartes' body, as extended substance, appears to take up space, change in time, be subject to cause and effect, he himself, as Mind, is immaterial, outside space and time, and can have no intelligible relationship with that body or with anything else.<sup>15</sup> (In Gilbert Ryle's telling phrase, he is the 'ghost in the machine'.) It is possible that his body doesn't even exist, and he would never know. These paradoxes are addressed by Spinoza and Leibniz, who are more consistent than Descartes, but as this thinking substance is treated mathematically and logically, it becomes more and more remote from any experience. Although change may seem to take place in this 'substance', it will happen according to a plan which has nothing in common with the material world, on which it cannot act at all. There is no future, everything that will be is already completely accounted for, and our sense of freedom is a matter of our ignorance. While it may seem that empiricism was the rebuttal of rationalism, Locke, Berkeley and Hume did not in fact directly question the form of representation. They did lose interest in the logico-mathematical issues, but they also applied the same logic of substance to their experience of the material world. In a kind of see-saw movement, the Object was given precedence over the Subject, which then began to disappear. Science became the study of a series of events which have no meaning in themselves while the activity, indeed the existence, of the scientist as agent (or thinker) became less and less comprehensible, and as we have seen Hume finally came to the conclusion that this line of thought must end in scepticism. However, the metaphysics of substance has persisted past what has been touted as the death of metaphysics, and mind-matter dualism, with priority given to matter, is endemic in much of what passes for 'objective' thought today.

Macmurray saw Kant as a bridge-figure not, as is sometimes said, because he reconciled rationalism and empiricism, but rather because he opens up a way to envisage the organic unity pattern. Macmurray lays considerable stress on Kant's relation to the Romantic movement, and regards the Third Critique as a counterweight if not a revision of the First.<sup>16</sup> The Romantic movement was a reaction against the dominant mechanistic logic; it was an expression above all of feeling, a celebration of life. From the perspective of the logic of substance it was subjective and irrational - but it demonstrated part of

what was missing from that logic. While the logical form of substance enables us to reflect on how things work, and so extend our knowledge of the World-as-means, the logical form of the organic enables us to reflect on how it feels, and to refine our contemplative appreciation.<sup>17</sup> Thus Kant's *Critique of Judgment* gives an account of our experience of the sublime and the beautiful in terms of the experience of disinterested satisfaction ('purposiveness without purpose') according to patterns of thought which transcend (or escape) the rigidity of the categories of the *Critique of Pure Reason* - a substance ontology *par excellence*. The organic model is perhaps most fully developed by Hegel, who gave us a new version of human reality, in terms of an over-riding 'super-personal' destiny.<sup>18</sup> The images that predominate are those of struggle as in the fight between master and slave (the central motif of the dialectic), and eating and digesting, as well as growth and development (the bud becomes the flower, which becomes the seed.) According to this pattern, positive and negative engage each other, they affect each other, and each is transformed and absorbed into something new which could not have come into being without the contribution of both. (A.~A) ? H. Thus living things grow and change in accordance with a teleology which will make sense of their development over time. As we come to understand things according to this unity pattern, we would, says Macmurray, be acquiring knowledge of the World-as-end (S.A., p. 194.), and it will give us insight into *motive*, while knowledge of the World-as-means gives us a handle on *cause*. ('I feel', while an improvement on 'I think' is not yet 'I do.')

This mode of reflection is still inadequate to our reality as persons: the world view it generates is impersonal (which was Kierkegaard's main criticism of Hegel.) For teleology, the impetus towards a whole greater than the sum of its parts, although not mechanical, still lacks the personal contribution, namely intention and choice which make it radically different from the *telos* of the organism because they account for the ways an agent responds to changing situations. (Macmurray saw the influence of the organic unity pattern in the rise of totalitarianism in the Twentieth century and its refutation in the misery of those caught up in it.<sup>19</sup>) Sartre, I believe, was struggling to find his way out of this logical form (cf. n. 11), but he conceived human reality (*Dasein*) as the (unfulfillable)

project to metamorphose its own For-itself [consciousness] into an In-it-self-For-itself and a project of the appropriation of the world as a totality of being-in-itself (B.N., p. 784.)

Eleanor M. Godway: *The Crisis of the Personal: Macmurray, Postmodernism, and the Challenge of Philosophy Today* i.e., to absorb what negates us, as an organism takes in its food.

Macmurray's new take on epistemology is succinctly stated in his thesis:

All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship. (S.A., p. 15)

The logical form which will make sense of this will allow us to represent the way the negative works in personal life: 'a necessary unity of positive and negative' (p. 98), which we all experience but find it very hard to reflect on. I think part of the appeal of the other two modes of reflection is that they *are* impersonal, they do not implicate us personally. They address themselves to matters of fact, as if all had already happened, whereas the field of the personal is the arena of choice (doing this, not that): it is concerned with matters of intention, and is therefore problematic. Neither the logic of substance nor the logic of organism can make room for *action*, which for Macmurray is what constitutes personal existence. And what we do affects the future, indeed, inaugurates *this* future instead of any alternative, and this will be a future we all have to share. The mode of reflection that is called for must envisage 'the World as one action' (as opposed to 'the World as means' or 'the World as end' of the other two modes), and make clear the need for the (positive) intention of friendship. We are all at risk if we make the wrong choice: and the possibility of making the wrong choice is constitutive of action as such. We could not succeed unless we could fail. We could not act rightly unless we could act wrongly. Thus the positive is constituted and sustained by the negative (see n.13.)

To return to the theme with which this section opened, our (first) primary knowledge is the immediate experience of relationship with another person. Relationships with other people are matters of intention (as opposed to matters of fact), and thus inherently problematic. When we care about someone we are vulnerable: the positive (love) includes and is constituted by the negative (fear.) (P.R., pp. 62 and 66.) Action (rather than reaction) is possible when we succeed in subordinating the negative to the positive - we know what we are doing when we are able to take account of the risks. We need others, to be ourselves; we have to be able to trust, both ourselves and each other, in face of the unpredictable.

### **3. A philosophy of immediate experience: introducing phenomenology**

What Macmurray calls for then is a philosophical practice which reflects his discovery that action is the positive which includes and is sustained by

thinking as its negative, and the point of action (what gives it meaning) is the possibility of friendship. Let us return to Macmurray's understanding of the task of philosophy: to reflect on the universe as a whole.

By the universe as a whole, one means the universe in that quality of completeness and wholeness which is given in immediate experience, the absence of limits and clear cut boundaries, the *qualitative infinity* which characterizes it in all its parts. It is this very wholeness and completeness which belongs to immediate experience always, and which is always absent from reflective experience that philosophy reflects upon and seeks to explain. *I.U.*, p. 12 (his italics.)

Would any contemporary philosopher subscribe to this account of what they are trying to do? Probably it would apply to the aspirations of the great systematic thinkers of the past, but no one now believes their hopes were realized in a way that works for us today. If the reasons for this impasse are those put forward by Macmurray, then perhaps there really is an important role for philosophy in our time. And was Macmurray truly alone in claiming this? He certainly thought so.<sup>20</sup> But meanwhile in Continental Europe there was a movement afoot which was developing in such a way as to converge with some of the insights Macmurray was exploring. Edmund Husserl's phenomenology seemed at first to be a kind of neo-Cartesianism, focusing as it did on the contents on consciousness. Three major works were titled *Ideas*, and another important text was *Cartesian Meditations*.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, what may have seemed like a version of idealism, concerned with the Subject as opposed to its Objects, turned out to lead somewhere quite different. Husserl's invention/discovery of the *epoche* (or phenomenological reduction) eventually offered a new way to reflect on immediate experience, such that we are able to recover what Macmurray called its 'qualitative infinity'.

There is no need to try to follow the tortuous path of Husserl's phenomenology, or consider the various ways his approach has been interpreted or applied. I only want to draw attention to a few themes which may help put Macmurray's ideas into another context. In the late text, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*,<sup>22</sup> Husserl gives an account of the

'crisis' which developed very early in modern philosophy and science and which extends with increasing intensity to our own day. (p. 16)

It would be stretching it to say that Husserl's 'crisis' is the same as Macmurray's 'crisis of the personal' but their accounts of its origin and effects are pretty close. Husserl explains how 'the mathematization of

Nature' which he saw as starting with Galileo, led directly to Descartes' dualism (Part II, §§ 8-12.) This dualism embodies a fundamental contradiction, namely the impossibility of acknowledging the relation of the scientist to the reality he is part of. Mathematical science is a 'method' which hides 'true being' behind a 'garb of ideas' (p. 51) such that the life-world where we really live, the ground (*Boden*) which supports all our activities is covered over and forgotten. The very success of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) has contributed to the crisis for European humanity, as he puts it, because it is not matched by the wisdom of knowing what we are doing with them that we might have hoped for from insight into ourselves, from *Geisteswissenschaften*. Such 'psychology' as seemed available, if modeled on physics, suffers from the same contradiction. As Husserl saw it, this contradiction at the heart of twentieth century European culture was already spelling disaster in the 1930's, and if anything we are in worse shape today. Like Macmurray Husserl believes that we must address these issues with a new take on philosophy – and this is no light matter. If we are 'serious philosophers', he says and philosophizing is not to be confined to

merely private or otherwise limited cultural goals [...] in *our* philosophizing [...] we are *functionaries of mankind*. The quite personal responsibility of our own true being as philosophers, our inner personal vocation, bears within itself at the same time responsibility for the true being of mankind. (p. 17, italics his)

Thus Husserl has made a commitment like Macmurray's to call a halt to philosophy's business as usual, and try to reflect in a new way, and this for the sake of the future of us all, as we face a crisis of wholly new dimensions.

When I referred to phenomenology as a movement, I meant to distinguish it from a theory: it is a matter of experience, of a shift of focus, which we have to accomplish somehow for ourselves. As Husserl defends it in *C.E.S.* 'the *practical* possibility of [this] new philosophy will prove itself [...] through its execution' (p. 18, his italics.) He does not offer us yet another 'garb of ideas' but a way to try to set such garbs aside. His own discovery originally arose from concerns about 'psychologism' as applied to mathematics. He was arguing against a theory that mathematical thinking can be explained as the result of causal mechanisms (e.g. neural pathways) as opposed to conscious understanding. When the result of a mathematical calculation is 'recognized as true' (whether or not is it 'objectively' so), there is an identifiable experience the *Aha! Erlebnis* ('Aha! I

get it!') which he called the 'subjective correlate'. It is this 'subjective correlate' of the experience of evidence that becomes the domain of phenomenology. Access to it depends on learning to 'bracket' the 'objective' context in which it arises, so we can recognize and set aside the 'natural attitude' according to which we usually function in the world – the mode of thinking that Macmurray describes as making sense of the World-as-means.<sup>23</sup> By learning to recognize how we 'naturally' respond to the world we can overcome what Husserl called the naïveté of this attitude and start reflecting on what is actually given in our (immediate) experience without jumping at once to conclusions about the status or value of what it is an experience of. As I have implied already, this *epoché* or 'phenomenological reduction' is not, does not work as, a philosophical argument: 'getting it' is itself an '*Aha! Erlebnis*', a new kind of awareness, an awareness of just that 'qualitative infinity' Macmurray indicates. That is why I said 'start reflecting' because once we set about the task of noticing what is given it never does end. Husserl continually revised and reworked his texts as he came to recognize he was embarked on an 'infinite task'. This task is taken up by his successors, in particular, for our purposes, by Merleau-Ponty who focuses on the later works which have more emphasis on the life-world and embodiment than the conceptual issues of the first phenomenological accounts such as the eidetic reduction of *Ideas I*, which was to bring to light invariant 'essences' as they emerged from the phenomena.

For Merleau-Ponty

phenomenology is neither a materialism nor a philosophy of mind. Its proper work is to unveil the pre-theoretical layer (*couche*) in which both of these idealizations find their relative justification and are gone beyond (*dépassées*.)<sup>24</sup>

And this 'layer' is our active participation in the world, that immediate experience (what Heidegger called Being-in-the World), to which Macmurray calls our attention. If early Husserl had a tendency to think of it as passive, in Merleau-Ponty as in Macmurray, it is active. Merleau-Ponty refers to *Ideen II* which

brings to light a network of implications beneath the 'objective material thing' in which we no longer sense the pulsation of a constituting consciousness. The rapport between my body's movements and the thing's properties which they bright to light [not a thinking 'consciousness' but] the 'I can' which is able to elicit these marvels. p. 166 (translation amended.) (cf. also *C.E.S.*, p. 106.)

This 'I can', like Macmurray's 'I do' is engaged with the world, forward-looking, vulnerable, open to

*Eleanor M. Godway: The Crisis of the Personal: Macmurray, Postmodernism, and the Challenge of Philosophy Today*

disappointment or worse as well as the wonder of discovery. For both Merleau-Ponty and Macmurray touch is prior to (more real than) vision. ‘tactual perception is necessarily perception in action’ (S.A., p. 107) because it is at its core the experience of resistance – that is the ‘Other’, of what is not me, which makes clear where I end and the Other begins. Without resistance no action is possible. (p. 108.) Knowledge of the Other in action is certain, as Macmurray says, not of course in the sense that we have a guarantee that we can never be mistaken, but that what we go by is the experience of evidence, the coming up against the Other in a way that affects us.<sup>25</sup> Sceptics, and to a large extent analytic philosophers (especially epistemologists) who say, ‘and since that’s all we have to go by, admit it, we can never really know,’ have a model of knowledge as that of an isolated subject, not an agent, and because it has no relation to the Other, it is irremediably incorrigible (and solipsistic.<sup>26</sup>) They are still held captive by the ‘substance’ ontology, which allows one no way of being constructively affected by the negative. But how can one break free of this mind-set, how does one ‘get’ phenomenology? In my experience it is, as Husserl said, this philosophy ‘proves itself through execution’ – that is only by doing it. Macmurray gives a vivid account of his skating lesson when he finally ‘got the feel’ of doing the Dutch roll backwards (*I.U.*, p. 5). He had to give in, you might say, and let himself be affected by the Other. Similarly, the phenomenological reduction is not exactly something you do, but rather something you undergo. So, when I introduce phenomenology to students I begin not with a definition but with an invitation to experience something they don’t expect. I get them to participate in a practical experiment.<sup>27</sup> I stage a particular kind of encounter with (tangible) objects of perception which will allow for an experience of the reduction, a practice case as it were, to familiarize them with the mental muscles needed and then they will be able to recognize and implement the dynamic involved. The point is to pay attention to the ‘phenomena’ I offer, to try to focus on what is presented as unfiltered experience, and immediately make a record of what that experience was like. I put assorted objects into paper bags: they are handled without being seen, they are supposed to be unrecognizable, and the bags are passed around the group. The idea is to learn to put aside could be ‘known’ about the object being encountered and concentrate on the experience, as if you had no idea what was being experienced. This way the ‘objective’ world, is ‘bracketed’ and you deal with only what is on the hither side of awareness (Husserl’s ‘subjective correlative’.) If you knew already what was in the paper bag that ‘objective’ knowledge takes you all too quickly into the world of common-sense categories, its use, what caused it to be that way, how it could be expected to behave under certain conditions, i.e. the World-as-means. This usual approach, the ‘natural attitude’, is what the *epoche* interrupts, renders problematic, to see what the reduction can reveal. I will say more about the natural attitude in the next section. Meanwhile a couple of things this exercise can bring to our attention.

Macmurray describes thinking as the negative moment: we think (reflectively) because we have to stop when what we are doing runs up against an obstacle, when our way forward is blocked, and we have to take stock, reorient ourselves. In this context, the point is purposely to introduce an experience of disorientation, to set aside the ‘taken-for-granted’ objectives of the natural attitude, to drop the selectivity of seeing the World-as-means or the World-as-end and try to open us to the World as that with which we are always already in relationship. The bracketing of the ‘objective’ world neither makes our experience ‘merely subjective’, nor does it take us out of the real world. Rather, it reminds us what that objective world rests on – Merleau-Ponty’s *couche*. The effect of this disorientation is a loss of focus which effectively removes any criterion as to what is relevant: indeed the idea is to pay careful attention to as much as possible of what is given (the phenomena) – especially what we ordinarily exclude without noticing. The experience is invariably richer than is afforded by our usual approach to what we perceive, because we try to tune nothing out. For some participants this gives a sense of freedom, of the adventure of discovery, of letting in something new and unexpected. But often there are others who resist; it makes them uncomfortable, even angry. People trained to value an impersonal objectivity and carefully structured observational processes are exasperated by the apparent ‘pointlessness’ which the exercise not only implies, but in effect requires. (This same exasperation seems to come up in response to some of Derrida’s ‘deconstructive’ writing, which I touch on in Section V.) It can be hard to forego the comfort of the familiar, the take-for-granted ‘business as usual’ of the natural attitude, knowing what to expect. Yet this is after all a venture into the realm of the personal, not without risk. And there can be a personal gain from insight into one’s own reaction, even before one compares notes with others on what was experienced.

At this point another dimension is introduced. If your experience is different from mine it can be that we thought we had access to the same bag but did not – and that gets clarified by further examination

of what was given (always without looking!). Or you really did have a different experience of what turned out to be the same 'original'. What then? In the atmosphere I try to foster, there is no constraint as to what you should have experienced. And, as each one gives his or her account, no-one's experience as honestly reported is to be discredited, though there may be wide variations. The relevance of hearing other people's versions of phenomena we thought we all perceived is that they enable us to go back again and check if our own experience of 'X' is enriched by trying to respond to it in another way. We become aware of the subjective correlate when our point of view is put in question, and it is then, of course, that we can learn something new. Perhaps it is not only persons that have a point of view, but it is as persons that we are able both to acknowledge our point of view and simultaneously allow it to be questioned - and this is a moment at which we become aware of ourselves *as* persons. And even if we now 'correct' our first impression, our first impression is still evidence as that, a first impression. The more points of view possible, the better; there *is* no one right view, and everyone's experience is to be valued. Remember this is an exercise in reflection, focused on immediate experience, and which is why there is always that sense of qualitative infinity.<sup>28</sup> The hope for 'one right view' is for the incorrigibility mentioned above - and no scientist would claim that his current version of the data he is working with cannot be revised: theory is always hypothetical.

I referred to the atmosphere that I want to create for this exercise...and this is related to discomfort or fear that may be occasioned by what I invite folks to do. What is needed for a successful experience is trust; trust in me, that I haven't put something horrible or dangerous in that paper bag; trust in oneself, that one can risk new ways of experiencing (and for some this takes more courage than for others); and trust in others, both that they will listen respectfully when one shares what one has put down as one's description of one's experience, and not be poised to judge or devalue it, and also that they too will offer their findings in a spirit of good will and open enquiry, without an ulterior motive, such as pleasing someone else, or competing with the others, but will honestly examine what they discover *is* their experience, and witness to it without reserve. The situation is inherently problematic, but if we are granted a shared 'aha!' experience we participate in what the phenomenologist call intersubjectivity<sup>29</sup> in action. 'The primary expression of reason,' Macmurray tells us (*P.R.*, p. 61) 'is the reference to the other *person*' (his italics.) In a kind of corollary

to his thesis which I quoted in the last section, in the experience of phenomenology that I have been describing, it is possible to rediscover the need for friendship in our search for truth. Relations with others *are* problematic, and here the willingness to be open to the point of vulnerability is a large part of what makes the experience real and thus not an isolated withdrawal into reflection such as Macmurray describes. We have been able to reflect together, and we can return to the world of everyday life more in tune with it and with each other.

#### **4. The natural attitude: solipsism and 'bad faith.'**

The 'natural attitude' is the name Husserl gave to the traditional (common sense) assumption that world is the way it looks to us. This naïve view has been refined during the course of the history of philosophy so as to be replaced by the notion of the ideal spectator whose perspective transcends the limitations of point-of-view, the one that is, to whom the world looks the way it 'really' is. It is this refined version which has long been taken for granted in our culture as the paradigm of Enlightenment (modernist) thought. In fact I suspect that to the extent we think we know (facts), we still tend to identify with that disembodied Subject, the knower disconnected from what is known. Merleau-Ponty put it this way:

It is natural to believe ourselves in the presence of a world and a time over which our thought soars, capable of considering each part at will without modifying the part's objective nature.<sup>30</sup>

This high attitude thinking (*pensée de survol*) is what was aspired to as 'objectivity', and both Husserl and Macmurray recognized that when we are conscious of what it assumes, it becomes untenable. But its hold on us is hard to break: the phenomenological attitude is 'unnatural,' and the shift needed to effect the *epoché* requires an effort against the grain, so to speak, and then vigilance to avoid slipping back. What is at stake is the sense of the problematic which puts our point of view on the line. Indeed the early Husserl seemed unaware how much of the natural attitude was involved in his assumption that the transcendental reduction was the route to the Transcendental Ego in which all differences of perspective would be resolved (see n. 29.) Macmurray's account as I have tried to explicate it in conjunction with the practice of phenomenology seems in some ways more consistent, but I actually think that if Macmurray had had access to the phenomenological method, and the concomitant experience of divesting himself of the natural attitude, he would have had something of an antidote to the tendency he recognized in himself of still thinking in the old way (see n. 9.) My proposal is that we think of Macmurray's work as concerned

Eleanor M. Godway: *The Crisis of the Personal: Macmurray, Postmodernism, and the Challenge of Philosophy Today* with the problem of the natural attitude under another name.

Macmurray's account of the Self as a personal unity includes 'its capacity for self negation [...] the Self is constituted by a practical contradiction between its elements' (S.A., p. 98.) This is what allows for the integration of thought and action as we have seen, but it is also what makes possible a divergence between these, not in the sense of acting without thinking (which would not be acting - see S.A., p. 87) but in the way in which thinking 'theoretically' separated itself from action, as philosophy developed. For, although the natural attitude has what might be called a 'natural' etiology, it leads to paradoxes which may already be having disastrous effects in the real world. If this seems exaggerated Macmurray did not think so: his non-philosophical writings and activities were about the desperate need for realistic reflection which will enable us to act, to address the world's problems before it is too late to stop our self-destruction, (and I have already mentioned Husserl's concern expressed in *C.E.S.*) As long as the natural attitude allows us to give priority to the theorizing subject, the knower can seem detached from what is known, and in particular there is a temptation for scientists to feel they should regard their work as 'objective,' and not let themselves be affected 'personally' by what they discover or what they enable us to invent. Laws of nature, which scientists formulate and work at confirming by experiment, are, Macmurray says, descriptive of the Other (what is *not* them) as continuant, that is to say as process without agency, as for example movement in a straight line. This abstraction from the whole experience/relationship obscures the existence (actions, choices etc.) of all agents, both of the scientist observing, and of other human agents who might interfere or be affected. But we cannot go on treating the world as means, as if the ends were not our business. We are already making choices, even if we do not think we are. Indeed, as we contemplate what has happened to the world (what has been accomplished by our species) since Husserl's time, his alarm at the apparent unstoppable of the career of the the natural sciences, and at the lack of insight into humanity available from the *Geisteswissenschaften*, has been more than justified. We seem to be in the dire situation of the sorcerer's apprentice as we continue to unleash forces we cannot control - and I would attribute this to the logic of the natural attitude. Most scientists, even philosophers of science, do not think of themselves as working within an out-dated metaphysics: many are unaware of the effects of Cartesianism on the history of science. But at the back of this amazing socio-cultural construct which

is western scientific thought and procedure is an unacknowledged idealism. That is to say what the scientist knows (can explain) is taken as true in a way that experience (e.g. of the patient with unusual symptoms) is not. The mental construction takes precedence over the intrusive negation from the real world, that is until a new model is developed which can take account of the discrepancies. And these would be discrepancies in the continuant. (In Buber's terms, there would only be a change in the It-world, no breakthrough of the I-Thou. But Macmurray's articulation of the problem seems to give us more to work with than does Buber's poetic account.) 'The rationality of any mode of reflection lies in its reference to the Other' (*P.R.*, p. 181) and as is the tenor of both Macmurray and this piece of writing, ignoring the Other is not without very serious consequences. Scientific thought which forgets this may be guilty of what J. L. Austin referred to as:

Perhaps the original sin by which the philosopher casts himself out of the garden of the world we live in.<sup>31</sup>

And if, in embracing objectivity, scientists don't think of themselves as personally involved it is not surprising they are not aware of their own contribution to what is happening in the world. Oddly enough, Husserlian phenomenology has been castigated as solipsistic, because of its emphasis on taking (subjective) experience seriously (and perhaps because of the convoluted account of our perception of others in *Cartesian Meditations*.<sup>32</sup>) My interpretation, on the contrary, is that through his diagnosis of the natural attitude he enables us to identify the cancer of solipsism at the heart of western thought. For Macmurray the thinker, knower or Subject is a negative moment in personal experience, an abstraction from the Self. If it is taken as the Self as such, as in our theoretical tradition, it must be conceived as totally isolated, not part of the world at all, locked into Descartes' *Cogito*. And if, which is impossible, my existence were that of

an isolated self, the existence of any Other would have to be proved, and it could not be proved. (S.A., p. 17)

One of the paradoxes of solipsism, of course, is that it is illogical to articulate it since that implies language and a community to argue with, so in a sense it can never be seriously intended as a theory. But that doesn't mean it has no meaning - indeed my point is that what it means underlies a great deal of what passes for knowledge. Merleau-Ponty says of solipsism, that if it were a true solipsism, it would not know that it is isolated, would be unaware that it is alone, would presuppose the absolute inexistence of

others.<sup>33</sup> And so of course it could not be challenged, not that is by the Other as a Self. (Strictly speaking, the Subject is not a Self, and that is why there is a problem in the first place.)

The capacity for self-negation, due to the 'practical contradiction' between the elements of the self, means that the integrity of the self can be compromised. Not in a clinical sense (although cf. n.15), but as Heidegger or Sartre would put it, in an ontological sense. The effect of this, for Macmurray, is seen in the example of self-deception, or in existential terms, 'bad faith.' In the natural attitude as I have been describing it, we are in bad faith to the extent that we regard changes in the world due to technology or economics as part of the continuant; we tune out what we are doing, our responsibility for our actions. From an objective ('scientific') point of view there are no actions, only events; no intentions, only causes. To think of ourselves as not responsible when clearly it is people who are doing stuff is a classic example of Sartre's notion of bad faith: treating oneself as In-itself, an object whose behavior is caused, rather than acknowledging the responsibility of being For-itself, with the openness to the future this entails. For Sartre the contradiction within the Self is fraught with anxiety<sup>34</sup> (as also for Kierkegaard and the Heidegger of *Being and Time*) which we are continually tempted to avoid in bad faith. But in Macmurray's terms, it would be the possibility of bad faith that sustains and constitutes good faith which is not, then, the rare and precious exception implied by Sartre. It is not essential to an existentialist position to be caught in the old dualism. Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty both appreciate the phenomenological descriptions in *Being and Nothingness*, but they regard them as documenting only the phenomenon of bad faith, and therefore not to be taken as a complete account of human existence. This brings me to a reflection on my earlier discussion of the practice of phenomenology. I have been implying that at least in some circumstances one who adopts the natural attitude is in bad faith. As a Subject that regards itself as detached from its objects, one would be abstracting from one's personal existence. What the phenomenological reduction calls for is an effort to undo that abstraction and in restoring the integrity of the person involved (as a participant in the phenomenological exercise I described, for example), reunite thinking and agency so as to be brought back into genuine interaction with the real world and other persons. By setting aside our presuppositions, we can open ourselves up to the richness of what there is to be experienced - which had previously been

edited to fit the limited 'objective' perspective. Doing phenomenology together generates an atmosphere of trust, because only when we are willing to let down our guard can all our discoveries be shared in good faith. But this is not a transformation of character such that everyone who participates suddenly becomes (existentially) authentic, and is responsive in an I-Thou moment. It is however the immediate effect of the bracketing of the assumption of causality, which was the framework through which (*pace* Kant) we thought we had to interpret everything. It is the acknowledgement of the personal. By simply getting people to pay attention to everything they experience without deciding what it is, what caused it, they are at once conscious of the way existence precedes essence - not in Sartre's somewhat heavy moral sense (Sartre, *Ex*) - but in the way Merleau-Ponty describes in *The Phenomenology of Perception*.<sup>35</sup> All of this was always going on but we have been encouraged to discount this level of existence and overlook it as irrelevant. Whereas in fact, it is, and has had to be the background from which the Subject/continuant perspective has been abstracted. All that is needed is for that abstraction to be recognized as such, and what I named as the bad faith of the impersonal ('natural') attitude could be addressed. I do not want to be taken as arguing that scientists as a group and the society which pays them to do their work are guilty of lying to themselves, as such. I am thinking more along the lines of what Lewis Gordon has called 'institutional bad faith'. In his *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* <sup>36</sup> Gordon explains how 'weak bad faith' is allowed to become the norm in a society, resulting for example in what is called 'unaware racism'. He also gives an illuminating account of the bad faith inherent in believing one is in good faith (pp. 50-63) - in Macmurray's terminology, somehow evading the contradiction endemic in the personal (the self existing through self-negation: 'I am not what I am and I am what I am not.')

It may be important to connect this discussion of good and bad faith with another context to which faith is relevant, namely Macmurray's discussion of religion. He thinks one of the main problems of our time is not the work of scientists themselves but rather the unthinking attitude of non-scientists (and of scientists while not engaged in scientific pursuits) who accord such authority to 'Science' that it has in effect become a substitute religion. When Merleau-Ponty refers to the same phenomenon, he calls it 'scientism.' (Interesting in this context is Husserl's comment that the phenomenological reduction can be experienced as a kind of religious

Eleanor M. Godway: *The Crisis of the Personal: Macmurray, Postmodernism, and the Challenge of Philosophy Today* conversion C.E.S., p. 112.) What is of interest here is not so much Macmurray's own religious position but rather the role of faith in the possibility of understanding the world according to the logic of the personal. As opposed to the World-as-means and the World-as-end, Macmurray envisages us as participating in the World-as-one-action and he identifies this attitude as religious.<sup>37</sup> Because, as personal, this is a matter of intention and not a matter of fact it is inherently problematic. While he himself is not a mystic (as evidenced in his *Search for Reality in Religion*), he believes rational religion will entail commitment to a conception of God which would express the highest aspirations of personal life, and God would be the Agent to whom we can attribute the intention we are to accomplish. I do not think this is bound to be the case; Macmurray's vision is, anyway, of a community of persons positively related to one another - and perhaps what matters is recognizing the World-as-one-action, and accepting it as *ours*.<sup>38</sup> But the link between the logic of the personal, phenomenology and faith surely has a spiritual dimension.<sup>39</sup>

##### **5. A new epistemology: the contingency of meaning and truth**

The natural attitude is not simply self deception – but both owe their possibility to the problematic character of the personal: as its logical form must represent a necessary unity of positive and negative (S.A. p. 98), there is always that practical contradiction between the elements of the Self. The integrity of the Self is inherently at risk - it exists through self-negation. This may have an ominous sound, and as I suggested in my references to Heidegger and Sartre it could be taken that way. Then 'the crisis of the personal' would mean that the personal would always (and only) be experienced as crisis, as well as what I think Macmurray intended, namely, that we as persons are facing a crisis which we need to come to terms with, and for which we need to be able to develop the means for reflecting on what to do about what we are up against. But while there are dangers inherent in this precarious unity of the Self, as we have seen in the example of the natural attitude and its relation to solipsism, it is the relation, the tension, between positive and negative which makes it possible to become conscious, human and rational, at all; to become, a person, a Self. It was important for me to spell out the approach of phenomenology and introduce the concept of the reduction because by its means we can go back, as it were, and explore not only the constitution of the personal, but also its roots in the pre-personal and thus what goes into what we are, so that we may handle our current crises with some

insight into what we bring with us. The point of the reduction, as discussed above, is to enable us to set aside the natural attitude and to take account of our actual experience with as few taken for granted assumptions as possible. But though the change of attitude from the natural to the phenomenological can be recognized and its effects taken into account, what one learns from the reduction is not a once-for-all accomplishment. The works of the later Husserl and the career of phenomenology at the hands of his interpreters (and the existential 'dissidents') led Merleau-Ponty to conclude that 'the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction.' (P.P., p xiv.) In Macmurray's terms, the positive is always and only possible (accessible) when it is limited and sustained by the negative. And so whatever insight we gain into ourselves will always be both limited and sustained by what we do not know. In other words, something like the reduction needs to happen again and again, so that the Other, what 'negates' us, is not routinely made familiar and assimilated into a habitual, taken for granted, aspect of the Self. Whereas Macmurray saw how habit becomes the negative, an unconscious background that sustains the positive of conscious action, Merleau-Ponty is especially interested in the way new meaning emerges as a disruption, a dislocation of what has become routine, as a new form emerges against a background of what itself was once new meaning. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he traces this pattern in movement, perception, emotion, speech, culture and art, morality, social life, politics and history. Meaning as positive, comes into existence against a background of what now no longer has meaning. At a pre-verbal level it may be a question of motives rather than intentions, and intentions themselves can become habits which form a background needed for new directions of activity, expressions of meaning. The phenomenological reduction can allow us to undo layers of what has been accomplished this way, and enable further horizons of experience, meaning and non-meaning, to come into focus.

Relations with other people are particularly important for Macmurray and Merleau-Ponty because, as both realize, human existence is inherently social. We become aware of ourselves by recognizing that we are not someone else, and that is why the pre-personal is important. Both Merleau-Ponty and Macmurray (P.R. p. 60) insist that there is pre-linguistic communication, and Merleau-Ponty describes what he calls *la vie à plusieurs*, ('undifferentiated group life' - or 'life lived by several',<sup>40</sup> that is, the infant's participation in social life before it has any sense of its own identity

or point of view. It discovers who it is by negation, as Macmurray would say. Husserl also, towards the end of his career, noted that the I-you, (first-person – second-person) relationship is the primordial beginning of human awareness (*E.J.*, p.14). All these explorations depend on the phenomenological commitment to follow the logic of the experience from within the relationship, to respond to the person-to-be and not assume either a causal (empiricist) or an intellectualist perspective (which would imply that the meaning/self/intention is already present in the child). The emergence of the next level of meaning is in a way ‘autochthonous’, it comes to be out of the tension in the situation, the vital energy between positive and negative elements which brings forth something that could not have been foreseen. The viability of each new birth of meaning is not guaranteed, there is no built-in promise of success though there is what one might call the direction of hope, towards the positive which takes shape against the negative, integration over disintegration. Merleau-Ponty says of the emergence of meaning, which he calls expression, that it is like a step taken in the fog, no one can tell if it will lead anywhere (*S.N.S.* p. 3). Neither is there any guarantee that a universal agreement will ever be reached: there is no over-arching logos to assure us that there will be a resolution of our difficulties. As the rationality of any mode of reflection lies in its reference to the Other, we are at the mercy of the Other, so to speak, in our effort *be* rational. As we must keep rediscovering, we are in the domain of the problematic.

I mentioned Luce Irigaray at the beginning of the paper because I have learned to do phenomenology differently because of her. She has helped me to handle being Other to men, to philosophy, and encouraged me to move beyond the taken-for-granted definition of woman as opposed to man. The part she plays in this tradition has opened up the possibility, indeed revealed the likelihood, that the experience of women may (for whatever reason) be different from that of men. She says that sexual difference may be *the* issue of our age,<sup>41</sup> the one issue we must all think through, if we are to make it. I believe that she is bringing up the problematic of the personal in a way that Macmurray would endorse. In two essays,<sup>42</sup> ‘The Personal Life’ and ‘The Virtue of Chastity’ he struggles with his awareness that women have not been seen as persons, and in his religious quest (*S.R.R.*) it is the ‘sex question’ that for him was one of the most important problems for the Church. And if we get to the point at which there can be a personal (mutually respectful) friendship without a power imbalance, I

believe both men and women will be able to rethink their relationship with each other and the world.<sup>43</sup> It is possible to understand our culture’s sexism as a reflection of mind/body dualism: men are ‘mind’ and women are ‘body,’ thus distorting the capacity of both men and women to come to terms with themselves and each other as persons. And both points of view are needed, so that, as in binocular vision, another dimension of truth may come into focus. There are analogous points to be made about racism and other forms of oppression. The perspectives of all must be taken into account for us to know where we are going. De Beauvoir<sup>44</sup> and Sartre (*Ex*) say that I cannot be free as long as any other human being is not: I cannot will my own freedom without willing freedom for all. I think that this insight can be integrated with Macmurray’s thought: to aspire to be fully human, a person, to be rational in Macmurray’s sense, is to commit to the human community, and then there can be concrete meaning in the idea of the World-as-one-action - the action of all of us together.

Finally something about Derrida and deconstruction. One thing about Derrida that has sometimes been misunderstood, I think by critics and fans alike, is how much he identifies with the phenomenological project. I have already suggested that his work can cause people to experience a sense of disorientation, such as happens in my exercise in phenomenology. Actually almost all his writing was intended to be understood within the *epoche*. (In fact I heard him say bemusedly, if people read him without knowing that, he doesn’t see how they could make sense of his work - it must seem nonsensical!<sup>45</sup>) The point of the *epoche* was to develop a perspective from which to take account of ourselves and what we are doing. As we practice the *epoche* and keep undergoing the reduction we become more and more aware of how the contingencies of our situation have contributed to how we think of our Selves (as well as how we make sense of everything else.) Phenomenology does not remove us from the world, it makes clearer the ways in which we and the world are co-constituted. Post-modernism’s lack of faith in the Subject, is I think an inevitable result of our having had to realize how fragile our rationality is, and how irrational it is to rely on it. Deconstruction is a special kind of withdrawal, a process which lets us open the door to all the ways in which what we say and do has meanings we did not realize. Like the phenomenological reduction, it is not so much something you do as something that happens to you. You can resist it, but you can also allow it to affect you and both what you mean (consciously), what is

Eleanor M. Godway: *The Crisis of the Personal: Macmurray, Postmodernism, and the Challenge of Philosophy Today* meant through you (by the structures you are part of) and how you 'read' the meaning around you. You are implicated in all of these. And as all meaning contains meaning-less-ness as a constituent element, the security of Subject as detached knower is gone forever. Thus Derrida often writes in such a way that his writing deconstructs itself as we try to pull out of it a univocal meaning. He is struck by what Macmurray noticed, that we cannot tell the truth unless we can also lie; similarly words cannot be understood unless they can be misunderstood, and there is no final correct reading of any text or any situation. Remember Macmurray's point that the paradigm case of knowledge is knowing another person. In this context truth is not an issue of facts or even exactly honesty, but a true friendship is one which is open so both can grow, which can handle the problematic, deal with 'the undecidable in the face of which decision must be risked.'<sup>46</sup> And Derrida's phrase for the possibility of intending the world community, in which we are all positively motivated towards one another is the 'messianic structure'<sup>47</sup>

One of my favorite interpreters of Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes deconstruction as 'a radical acceptance of vulnerability.'<sup>48</sup> This vulnerability is not weakness, or something to be regretted. It is the price of openness, the reference to the Other which is what makes it possible for us to learn anything at all. Acceptance of it means we respond to each moment profoundly aware that our response is never adequate, our words and values are all infected by what she calls catachresis.<sup>49</sup> The crisis of the personal is not one that can be overcome, so that we can resolve it and get on with the task of philosophy. It is the problematic situation that being a person *is*. Spivak has harsh words to say of those who practice 'crisis management', who seek to mask or evade the vulnerability we are heir to. (*P.C.C.*, pp. 95-112.) Postmodernism, then, is not comparable, and superior, to modernism, on some kind of linear scale, better able to take account of things overlooked by earlier efforts ('managing' the 'problems' of dualism, sexism, ethnocentrism, even logocentrism and onto-theology.) It doesn't replace modernism so much as enable us to see through it,<sup>50</sup> so that the negative constituent is not covered over, the risk is not denied, in all that we undertake to say and do, in this 'modern' world into which we have been thrust.

My reference to the challenge of philosophy, in the subtitle of this essay, like the phrase, crisis of the personal, exhibits (one might almost say catachrestically) an ambiguity in the meaning of 'of.' For Macmurray, philosophy herself faces a challenge, namely to find and articulate a logical

form adequate to the personal (as opposed to the logic of substance or the organic.) But also and at the same time, philosophy, as it begins to witness to the dilemmas of the post modern era, challenges us to acknowledge that we are persons, selves (not subjects), agents, and as such are ourselves the locus of the crisis, the turning point, the knife edge, where things could go either way. Derrida, *pace* many critics, believes he is on the side of reason, he too wants to save the Enlightenment: he is singularly aware of how gravely it is at risk. But it can never be saved once and for all. Such as we can salvage depends on acknowledging as much as we can of what we do not know that underlies our tentative grasp of what we think we know. Because Macmurray understands that awareness of darkness is due to recognition of light (as the negative constitutes and sustains the positive), there is a way out of the despair, the sense of anomie in some postmodern thought<sup>51</sup>. Although truth *is* problematic, should be written '~~truth~~', in friendship and in philosophy, it is that for the sake of which we take the next step.

### Notes

1. I am grateful to Harry Carson for the encouragement to write this essay, and for extensive comments on earlier drafts.
2. *Interpreting the Universe*, first published 1933, reprinted by Humanities Press 1996, p. 11 f. Hereafter cited as I.U. (References to this and other texts are to later editions.)
3. Practitioners of what Macmurray called 'logical empiricism', who were developing what has come to be known as analytic philosophy. This school of thought has become dominant in many Anglo-American universities. See below p.17f, and n.26.
4. *The Boundaries of Science: a Study in the Philosophy of Psychology*. London: Faber 1939, p. 40 ff.
5. *The Structure of Religious Experience*, London: Faber 1936, p. 9. Hereafter cited as *S.R.E.*
6. Vol. I, *The Self as Agent* (henceforth cited as *S.A.*) and Vol. II, *Persons in Relation (P.R.)*, both republished by Humanities Books, 1991.
7. Such that a brilliant philosopher like Donald Davidson ties himself in knots with his 'anomalous monism'. See especially his *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford University Press, 1980
8. See *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. W. Wallace, Oxford University Press, 1959. He did not intend to offer an alternative to mathematical logic, which is based on the law of contradiction (or the excluded middle), but rather develop a way to identify an underlying structure of meaning, to make sense of life.
9. But cf. his caveat: 'The influence of the old assumptions is pervasive and unformulated. [...] It is

- only to be expected, therefore, that I have carried over much from the old order that should have been left behind and that my tentative theorizing will be found liable, at many points, to the objection that it still presupposes what it purports to reject.' (S.A., p. 14.)
10. Macmurray felt a close affinity with Kierkegaard, particularly as regards religion. Cf. *Search for Reality in Religion*, first published, London, Allen and Unwin, 1965; reissued London, Quaker Home Service, 1995; p. 24; hereafter cited as *S.R.R.*
  11. See John MacQuarrie's *Existentialism*, London: Penguin Books, 1972, esp. pp. 93 ff. Macmurray's evaluation was that although existentialism makes it a point to confront and express the crisis, it lacked the analysis and rigor needed 'to discover or construct the intellectual form of the personal, [because] the organic concept of the Self has not been overcome' (S.A. p. 145 n.), existentialism can come across to a large extent as a version of romanticism, emphasizing the plight of the isolated individual whose projects are 'doomed to frustration and...meaninglessness' (p. 222.) To the extent that he is right, existentialism can only be a reflection on reaction rather than on action; in which case, it would make sense for its general mood to be despair. As Sartre put it, 'Man is a useless passion' (*Being and Nothingness*, Washington Square Press, 1969, p. 784; hereafter cited as B.N.) As long as the crisis is seen as 'merely personal' in a narrow sense, it is not possible to see beyond it, to envisage a logical form adequate to the task set by the personal, for persons - for us, as 'persons in relation.' See p. 11 below.
  12. Macmurray is quite conscious of how close his ideas are to those of Martin Buber (*S.R.R.*, p. 24). See Buber's *I and Thou*, trans. W. Kaufmann, Scribner's, 1970, and *Between Man and Man*, trans. R. G. Smith, Macmillan, 1965. Also *John Macmurray, a Biography* by John E. Costello, Floris Books, 2002, p. 322. Hereafter cited as *J.M.B.*
  13. Macmurray expresses this 'logic' somewhat cryptically as the positive constituted and sustained by the negative, and refers to Kierkegaard's account of 'a dialectic without a synthesis'. See *S.A.*, p. 98 ff. We will come back to the place of emotion (motive) in this first and all subsequent experiences of knowledge at the end of this section. For an account of the mother-child relationship see *P.R.*, Chapter II.
  14. See for example *Thought and Language*, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, trans. E. Haufman and G. Vakov, Cambridge, M. I. T., 1962, and *Learning How to Mean*, M. A. K. Halliday, London: Edward Arnold, 1975. Both these investigators document the development of the young child's instrumental thinking and speaking as at first separate from the already established way of communicating with others by expression of feelings, etc.
  15. Of course, people who really believe this and act on it are in serious trouble, and may be diagnosed as schizophrenic. (See R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, Pelican Books, 1965, p. 65 ff and *passim*; Laing also makes reference to Macmurray on p. 23.) Macmurray's comment is 'I think, therefore I am not'! (*Cogito ergo non-sum*, S.A., p. 81.)
  16. The first, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.Kemp Smith, Macmillan, 1965; the third, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard, Hafner, 1968. But Macmurray cites the second, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T. K. Abbot. London: Longmans, 1909, as giving priority to agency, even if he cannot make it consistent with his overall system. (See *S.A.*, ch II)
  17. 'The reflective element in contemplation is an emotional activity' *P.R.*, p. 35.
  18. In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie, Harper and Row, 1967.
  19. Communism did seem to hold out hope, and Macmurray appreciated Marx for replacing the theoretical perspective with the practical call for change in the real world, but sees him still as caught in the logic of the organic (*S.A.* p. 97.) He put much effort into supporting Christian Socialism (see *J.M.B.*, almost *passim*, but especially ch.13).
  20. See *John Macmurray in a Nutshell* by David A. S. Ferguson, Handsell Press, 1992, p. 21 (and n. 68 p. 26).
  21. *Ideen I, II, and III*, originally written circa 1912, and extensively revised over nearly two decades. (*Ideen I*, English version, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten, Martinus Nijhoff, 1983, hereafter cited as *I I*.) *Cartesian Meditations* trans. D. Cairns, Kluwer, 1988.
  22. Written 1934-37. Trans. D. Carr, Northwestern University Press 1970. Hereafter cited as *C.E.S.*
  23. Cf. *I.U.*, p. 57, where Macmurray refers approvingly to Bergson on 'the function of the intellect [which] is to deal with matter.' He is most likely thinking of *The Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T. E. Hulme, Macmillan 1955.
  24. *Signs*, trans. R.C. McCleary, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 165. Hereafter cited as *S. Merleau-Ponty's*. debt to Husserl is discussed at length in the essay from which I have just quoted - 'The Philosopher and his Shadow', pp. 159 - 181 where he reflects on the 'unthought-of' element in Husserl's work, what one might call the qualitative infinity of the horizons that participating in phenomenology opens up.
  25. This is why Dr. Johnson kicking the stone in refutation of Berkeley's idealism, though it doesn't touch Berkeley's argument which still rankles in the history of philosophy.
  26. So there is no way to resolve the paradox of the 'brain in the vat', and according to Macmurray, this is a dead end, philosophically speaking, since 'the rationality of any mode of reflection lies in its reference to the Other' (*P.R.*, p. 181.) As long as epistemology seeks a 'foundation' for knowledge, it is stuck in a substance-ontology. Macmurray (like phenomenology) allows us to recognize (as the experimental scientist knows in practice) that factual knowledge is always open to revision.
  27. I developed this practice from an exercise used by Herbert Spiegelberg in the Phenomenology Workshop

- which I attended in St. Louis, MO. July 1971. See Spiegelberg's *The Phenomenological Movement*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, Vol II, ch. XVI, and Don Ihde, *Experimental Phenomenology*, State University of New York Press, 1986, for more background.
28. I regard this as a hands-on version of what Husserl describes as the method of 'free imaginative variation.' See I.I., sec.4, and sect.70.) Spiegelberg described as a 'baroque' philosophy, which brings forth more and more details and refinements – in other words, the opposite of reductionism, which leaves so much out. And as Macmurray explains, immediate experience is continually changing (I.U., p. 8).
  29. The route Husserl himself took (via various attempts at reduction) brought him to the recognition that what he originally called the 'Transcendental Ego' is better understood as 'transcendental intersubjectivity' (C.E.S.) The way the reduction can put us in touch with pre-predicative, pre-personal experience comes up in section IV.
  30. *Sense and Non-Sense*, H.L. and P.A. Drefuss, trans., Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 93. (Hereafter cited as *S.N.S.*)
  31. *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford, 1979, p. 90. There are other links one might make between Austin and Macmurray, such as respect for ordinary language, and the general approach to clarifying what one is doing when one speaks. Cf. the whole gamut of 'performatives.'
  32. As more of his manuscripts are being transcribed and published, the emphasis on embodiment and the lived world becomes greater, beginning with *Experience and Judgment*, trans. J.S. Churchill and K. Ameviks, Northwestern University Press 1973. Hereafter cited as *E.J.*
  33. *Texts and Dialogues*, eds, H. J. Silverman and J. Barry Jr., Humanities Press, 1992, p. 165.
  34. *Existentialism*, trans. B. Frechtman, New York Philosophical Library, 1947. Hereafter cited as *Ex.*
  35. Trans. C. Smith, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962. Hereafter cited as *P.P.*
  36. Humanities Press, 1995, pp. 45-48.
  37. Macmurray was not a theologian, though there has been much attention given to his ideas by theologians. His account of 'religion' is focused on the kind of social bond which can enhance personal life by addressing the negative (fear), rather than a concern with defining God. See *P.R.*, Ch 7 and 10.
  38. See my forthcoming article 'The World as One Action', in *International Studies in Philosophy*, 40, 1, (Spring 2010.)
  39. Cf. my article 'Faith and Knowledge in Crisis...' in *Listening: a Journal of Religion and Culture* (a special issue on the topic 'Crisis of Faith in the Western World') Spring, 1992.
  40. 'The Child's relation with Others', in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. J. M. Edie, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 119.
  41. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. C. Burke and G. C. Gill, Cornell University Press, 1993, p 5.
  42. Originally talks given on the B.B.C. in the 1930s, and reprinted in *Reason and Emotion*, Humanities Books, 1962.
  43. See my article, 'Phenomenology and the Frontiers of Experience: Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray', in *Historical Reflections*, Vol. 19, no. 1, Winter, 1993.
  44. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. B. Frechtman, Citadel Press, 1996.
  45. At the Spindel Conference on Derrida and Husserl, Memphis TE, Sept. 1992.
  46. A condensation of Derrida's moves in a number of writings but especially in 'The Almost Nothing of the Unpresentable' in *Points...Interviews 1974-94*, ed., Elisabeth Weber, Stanford University Press, 1995.
  47. *In Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, 1994, Derrida, discusses 'messianism' (without a messiah) pp. 21, 28, 167ff - a matter of intention, not fact.
  48. *The Post-Colonial Critic*, Routledge, 1990; hereafter cited as *P.C.C.*, p.18.
  49. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Routledge, 1993, p 127. In the context cited, Spivak is applying it to 'woman', but as she discusses it there, it is apparent that it illustrates a theme which is almost ubiquitous in deconstruction. Let me here give you an earlier attempt by me and my colleague to come to terms with it: 'Catachresis means that there is no literal referent for a particular word; that its definition comes apart as soon as we begin to articulate it. This deconstructive awareness of the play of signification does not empty our language [and lives] of meaning, but rather precipitates us into a crisis of value which calls for an increased circumspection about values, and responsibility for what is done and said in their name.' *Who is this 'We'?* by Eleanor M. Godway and Geraldine Finn (Black Rose Books, 1994), p 2. One way this is conveyed by Derrida, following Heidegger, is to write the word crossed out, namely, ~~Truth~~, and refer to it as 'under erasure'.
  50. 'See through it' in at least two senses, namely, that we recognize its distortions, and that we accept it as part of what makes us what we are, appreciating that it is what has allowed us to see at all.
  51. Cairns Craig in *Intending Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), chapter IV, 'Beyond Reason: Hume, Seth, Macmurray and Scotland's Postmodernity' situates Macmurray's thought in relation to such postmodernists. Central to his account is the influential text *The Postmodern Condition* (Jean-Francois Lyotard, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi: Manchester University Press, 1984.) While his essay is concerned with the history of ideas and literary analysis, Craig's insights are quite relevant here. If for Lyotard postmodernity is a 'condition', and, as Craig puts it, the authors in question have gone back to Kant's 'Sublime', it would seem they are caught in Macmurray's Organic (see p.10 above). (Perhaps some like MacIntyre are struggling towards the Personal (p. 177n.) but it is still in terms of an organic model.)