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JOHN MACMURRAY'S PERSONAL UNIVERSE*

Introduction

In his search for an integrating image of the human – and of the universe – to counter the dualisms and fragmentations that were the early 20th century's inheritance from modern philosophy, Scottish philosopher John Macmurray (1891-1976) found himself forced to rethink the whole of western philosophy. Macmurray undertook his project in the light of two defining features: (a) he articulated his thinking within the confines of philosophical method, while (b) implicitly taking his Christian faith as the gyroscope or *point de repère* for his sense of the truth he was seeking.[1]

Macmurray spoke of his work as a pioneering work, not a finished product.[2] He recognized that he was attempting to effect a radical conversion in both our way of thinking – about thinking and living – and our way of living. He frequently felt his own failure to be converted from the primacy put on thought and on the individual self that

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[1] Macmurray did not state this Christian ground for his work, in so many words. This is an interpretation on my part on the basis of reading his many books and following the line and tenor of his thought, especially the founding principles about being in his thought. His founding principles about the essential truth of life were shaped mainly by his Christianity – and by his appreciation of the Hebrew view of life as being 'intrinsically religious.'

[2] See SA, 1.

underpinned the post-Cartesian modern philosophy he was critiquing so profoundly. In that recognition, he was confirmed in his view that human beings are deeply conditioned but never fully determined by the social context in which they find themselves.

The 60-70 years that have passed since Macmurray undertook his philosophical project have revealed the credibility of his perception of his lifework: he was indeed a pioneer, especially in his intuition that the pivot for a genuine contemporary philosophy must be 'persons in relation' and all that is contained in and evoked by that reality. And he realized the concepts required to think coherently and consistently about the meaning of 'the personal' were not yet available in western thought – and indeed even less so since the revolutionary work of Marx and Freud had opened up such new discoveries. His contemporaries – but not colleagues – in this pioneering endeavour we now recognize to have been thinkers such as Maurice Blondel, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Mounier, Martin Buber and some few others – including Emmanuel Levinas and, to some degree, Michael Polanyi who did their most significant writings somewhat later than these others.

But not all of these thinkers explored the intuition of the primacy of the personal with the same methodological discipline that Macmurray imposed on himself. As Gabriel Marcel's great interpreter Roger Troisfontaines noted years ago, Marcel studiously avoided any systematized thinking on the 'mystery' of the personal for fear of being trapped into the rationalism and mechanism he was so vigorously trying to help philosophy – and human society – to escape. So, too, Martin Buber, after spending an afternoon in conversation with John Macmurray, is reported to have said: „I see no point on which we differ. It is simply that you are the metaphysician and I am the poet."[3]

In fact, Macmurray saw himself pursuing the articulation of a new philosophical form – the form of the personal. Although he saw this effort requiring systematic thinking, he refused to identify his efforts with offering „a new philosophical system."[4] As he put it, „a new philosophical form cannot be established by demonstration. It can only be exhibited and illustrated in use.[5] And that work of demonstration is not a system-building activity. Nevertheless, Macmurray appreciated that even tentative efforts at a new philosophy must embrace the full

[3] Reported to the author by Mr. Duncan Campbell, former professor of Education at the University of Edinburgh and nephew of John Macmurray.

[4] SA, 12.

[5] SA, 13.

scope of the philosophical vocation. As he put it, „the function of a philosophical form is to exhibit the unity of human experience as a whole."[6] And that 'whole' includes thinking through the meaning of the personal which included the unity of persons in themselves, with one another, and in the universe. Consequently, Macmurray's philosophy can be read as a philosophy of religion, one which includes a contemporary, post-modern opening onto the meaning of God. This perspective on his thought will dominate in this paper.

Because of practical urgencies he perceived in the post-World War I political realities of Europe, as well as the theoretical inadequacies of the modern tradition in philosophy, Macmurray did not shy away from this project. Having fought in the First World War, he chose to dedicate his life and his philosophical work to the pursuit of peace. Having lived through the Second World War and seen the opening of the Cold War between the U.S and the Soviet Union with the concomitant rise of nuclear weapons, he saw the concerns of his time move inexorably towards focusing on the place of persons not in nation states but in the world itself as one reality unified by threat and therefore, hopefully, able to be unified by promise. As he noted in his 1949 lectures at Queen's University in Kingston, 'the task before us is to lay down the foundations of a single tradition for the world as a whole".[7]

From that comprehensive perspective, this paper will inevitably appear as a 'once over lightly' incursion into Macmurray's thought. It attempts to present some of the major features of Macmurray's thought on the foundational – and ultimate – dimensions of human life and to point to how Macmurray identifies them and understands them from within the integrating perspective of what he calls 'the personal.' I believe Macmurray offers concepts and language to aid the dialogue in contemporary philosophy which has moved into a self-styled post-modern phase but has yet to find common principles, concepts or language by which its highly divergent representatives can unite in shared conversation.

I. The Anthropology of Personal Existence

Mutuality: In his last and most refined work on the nature of personal life, John Macmurray expressed the essential conviction underlying his philosophical analysis in the starkest of terms:

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[6] Ibidem.
[7] CF, 99.

It is only in relation to others that we exist as persons; we are invested with significance by others who have need of us; and borrow our reality from those who care for us. We live and move and have our being not in ourselves but in one another; and what rights or powers or freedom we possess are ours by the grace and favour of our fellows. Here is the basic fact of our human condition; which all of us can know if we stop pretending, and do know in moments when the veil of self-deception is stripped from us and we are forced to look upon our own nakedness.[8]

It would be difficult to find a more thoroughgoing rejection of the Enlightenment's image of the human person as essentially a thinking, self-actuating, autonomous individual, a being who enters into social relationships by organic contiguity and family rules at the outset and by contract and social custom in adulthood. But personal existence, as Macmurray insists, is not merely participation in species-humanity. It is radically different from the mere species-based social existence one finds in the organic world of the anthill, beehive, wolf pack or baboon colony. Conversely, it is not created – or most fully expressed – in the unity of a gentlemen's club, a business corporation or a political institution.

The objective reality called personal existence is neither a given nor merely a construct. A 'self', metaphysically speaking, is not first of all an 'individual' but a person in relation. Personhood, as Macmurray insists, not merely *implies* but is *constituted* by relationship. „Personality is mutual; in its very being. The self is one term in a relation between two selves. It cannot be prior to that relation and equally, of course, the relation cannot be prior to it. *'I'* exist only as one member of the *'you and I'*. The self only exists in the communion of selves.[9] Macmurray makes a major point of noting the difficulty in representing philosophically this reality. In fact it is impossible to do so within the epistemological terms of modern philosophy since, from that viewpoint, all knowledge is knowledge of an object; the other is reduced to the status of an object. But persons are constituted by a knowledge that is a knowledge *of*, not a knowledge *about*. „My own existence as a person is constituted by my knowledge of other persons, not by the mere fact of my relation to them. The main fact...is not that I am because you are, but that I am because I know you and that you are because you know me." Macmurray concludes that „I have my being in that mutual self-

[8] PR, 211.
[9] IU 137.

knowledge.[10] And this knowledge makes a person not only a conscious but a self-conscious being.

Further, he notes that this knowledge through mutual presence is rational and objective. In fact, he concludes that when it is a knowledge based on love and trust, that is, when it is formed in a *positive* personal relationship, it is the fullest form of rationality and objectivity of which human knowing is capable.[11] All other knowledge, whether by way of feeling (e.g., in art) or of thinking (e.g., in science) are identifiable as dimensions within full personal knowledge and find their own rationality and objectivity in relationship to it.[12]

Due to the central place Macmurray gives to personal knowledge and its ground in personal relationship, he is convinced that human beings do not have instincts in the organic sense of fixed and finished modes of activity that do not need to be learned. Nor do they have innate ideas to guide them. Human beings, Macmurray believes, are born with one essential impulse: the impulse to communion. This foundational desire for communion with all that is other than myself is, for Macmurray, the defining focus for human beings of what we are and what we are meant to become.[13] However, this human 'teleology' to communion does not evolve automatically; it can only be achieved by our free cooperation

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[10] IU, 137 ff.

[11] In his first chapter in RE, JM locates the meaning of 'reason' as the capacity to relate 'objectively' to the other, as the capacity to behave towards the other – any 'other' – according to its own nature and not according to our wishes, fears or biases. He concludes this reconstitution of the understanding of reason or rationality with the following statement: „The capacity to love objectively is the capacity which makes us persons. It is the ultimate source of our capacity to behave in terms of the object. It is the core of rationality." [p.15].

[12] Cf. RE; especially chapters 1, 3, 8 & 9

[13] It is important to note that Macmurray holds that within this impulse to communion there exists implicitly the impulse to other goods-including individuation or self-realization. The urge to 'self-differentiation,' for example, exists and functions dialectically within the urge to 'communion' in Macmurray's view (see especially FMW's last chapter on ethics and self-realization and PR, chapters 2-4), it is not reduced or eliminated by his rather dramatic and perhaps easily misinterpreted statement that the impulse to communion is the sole foundational impulse in human beings. So, too, the desire for other goods exists in dialectical relation to the desire for communion-they are not ignored. Paradoxically, the imperative Macmurray presents in PR that a person's true nature and vocation is to care for the other for the other's own sake and not at all for himself is a way of living that not only does not efface self-realization but is, he asserts, the only true way to ensure its achievement. The impulse to communion, then, although presented as the one essential impulse in the human being, is **clearly a complex rather than a one-dimensional reality.**

with God's purpose in the world. It is, as he says, at once a matter of our nature and a matter of choice or intention.

Freedom: Mutual relationship constitutes us as persons, and positive mutual relationship or friendship – that is, relationship based in trust and love – is the ground on which Macmurray locates his understanding of personal freedom. The reversal from traditional philosophy is clear: individual freedom is not a prior condition for creating friendship; friendship, a disposition to and an active relationship of love and trust, is the prior condition for the realization of freedom. Macmurray's ontology of mutuality concludes that „the fundamental condition for the solution of the problem of freedom is our knowledge of one another. But this knowledge...can be realized only through a mutual self-revelation; and this is possible only when we love one another.[14] In other words, we are indeed free and meant to grow in freedom, but we are free only in the context of our nature which is given, and that nature is described as an urge to communion which requires a trust that allows us to live with our attention and care on others rather than on ourselves. This mutual heterocentricity is at the heart of Macmurray's view of freedom. There are, therefore, clear conditions which must be met for freedom to flourish.

This view does not reduce freedom to a thinly-veiled social determinism. But it does affirm – against Idealism – that our concrete, lived freedom is not a pristine and unshakeable 'given.' Freedom is absolute as a defining feature of personal existence, but it is also relative-to our nature, first; but also to our social conditions. That is, although human persons are not mere functions of nature or one another's influences, „personal individuality is not an original given fact. It is achieved through the progressive differentiation of the original unity of the 'You and I.[15] This holds true for living freely as a concrete individual and social reality.

The problematic of freedom for Macmurray is therefore radically social and involves as conditions, at once, the most intimate aspects of our personal motives – and how they have developed through our early relationships and education – and the large, historical aspects of our economic, social and culture life-situation. On the one hand, persons

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[14] PR, 212. Much earlier, JM put this point in a similar way but with a greater emphasis on the radical heterocentricity which is the basis for genuine freedom: „to be ourselves is to live in communion with what is not ourselves...and we can only become free in so far as we think and feel and act in terms of what is not ourselves." [FMW, 140].

[15] PR, 91.

and communities of persons cannot flourish spontaneously and positively through coercion or by rules, even those rules to which people give assent. Rules do not create freedom. They limit it most directly, and indirectly can only help to provide conditions for its expression. We might try to choose security before freedom, but there is no security for us except in choosing our freedom and-as individually defining as personal choices are-the essential conditions of freedom are social[16] Their self-realization depends on mutual trust and love among persons, and where these conditions do not exist or are minimal, then freedom in sense of fully spontaneous action cannot take place. That is why Macmurray concludes that although we are truly born to live spontaneously, in actual fact in society we can live only as spontaneously as our fellow-persons, in their behaviours and attitudes, permit us.

Love and Fear: Why, then, do we not express this love and trust freely? Macmurray notes that the history of human relations reveals the interplay of two foundational or ontological human motives: love and fear. Contrary to Hobbes, Machiavelli and many other social thinkers, he claims that love, not fear, is the normative and truest form of personal spontaneity. He acknowledges the fact of fear and even the necessity of fear (in the form of caution, discretion, prudence, etc.) as a secondary personal motive. Fear, although always present to some degree in all our intentions and actions, is ideally subordinated to love in our relating to the Other – any Other.

Macmurray readily notes that fear is not only present and pervasive but clearly dominates in many personal and social relationships. Fear is, in fact, a clear source of human evil in many of its most and least forgivable forms. His analysis of the 'source' (understood ontologically, not historically) of this human condition derives from the central place he gives to reason, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the fact that human beings are also beings of nature.

In order to understand this ground of ultimate reality and meaning in this philosopher's thinking, it is necessary to step back for a moment and note the meaning Macmurray gives to the term 'reason.' He asserts: „We identify reason too easily with our capacity for knowledge. It is, in fact, more than this. It is that capacity which determines the distinctive form of all personal life. That this is bound up with our peculiar form

[16] CF, Chapter 1 on „The Relativity of Freedom". This statement is not a denial of individual, psychological wounds, fears, etc. which constitute significant concrete limitations on a person's freedom. It does suggest, however, that these individual conditions arise within personal relationships and can only be healed or helped through personal relationships.

of knowing ourselves and the world in which we live is true. But it is this form of knowledge integrated with our whole way of living, determined by it and determining it, which is the full expression of rationality.[17]

Returning now to the place of fear as a foundational human motive... The awakening of reason in human beings, Macmurray suggests, takes the form of awareness which features in emotional consciousness in the form of dual motives. The communion that I seek – with nature and with my fellows – is not guaranteed and is even potentially refused by them on two counts: others may hurt me; that is, they may choose to use their power to hurt me, or even kill me. Secondly, nature can hurt me or kill me; and Nature will, in an end I cannot avoid, take me in death. Fear, based on this knowledge, inevitably springs to life in consciousness. But personal fear, unlike animal fear, is based on a knowledge that carries not only one's past and present experience but also one's future in itself. We are not only going to die, we *know* we are going to die; and how we appropriate this knowledge significantly determines how we live and what meaning we invest in the world and in our living in it.[18]

Fear, in Macmurray's terminology, is a negative not a positive motive for action. It is not positive because it is not the feeling that *most* truly expresses our being. Because it undermines trust, fear makes the person less able to be free. And we are not truly ourselves until and unless we are able to act freely, even spontaneously. However, „the creative spontaneity of human life does not rest upon a pure spontaneity of motives," Macmurray observes, „but upon the triumph of the positive element of spontaneity over the negation which it contains within itself.[19] This fact sets up Macmurray's view that the solution of any problem of human freedom depends on the transformation of the relationship of persons from one based on fear and anxiety to one based mainly on love and trust.

Freedom requires other elements related to the overcoming of fear by love and trust. In practice, the exercise of freedom is the use of power to realize an intention. To limit the use of power is therefore to limit freedom.[20] Thus, if the first condition for freedom is the inherent

[17] CS, 36. JM develops this very holistic and relational notion of reason in various works. The simplest and most direct statement can be found in the opening chapters of RE.

[18] CS, 45ff.

[19] CS, 100.

[20] CF, 49ff.

sociality of human life, the second condition relates to both our power to realize our intentions (means) and the directing of our desires towards goals that are possible to be achieved (ends). The issue of a positive use of power and of choosing and pursuing appropriate ends is also at the heart of the problematic of creating a society in which persons can live in trust and in love – that is, in spontaneity – with one another.

For Macmurray, such a relationship is reflected only in genuine community; and community, as the free expression of trust and love in a society of persons, is the achievement not merely of sound economics or just political structures – although these are necessary and constitutive parts in its reality – but of religion, since religion is nothing less, from a human perspective, than the symbolizing, realizing and living out of the grounds of the life of community as an end in itself.[21] Religionis the ultimate form of living personally and is, therefore, the ultimate form of living rationally. It is from this perspective on religion, referring back to his analysis of the human condition and implicitly to the history that flows from the interplay of love and fear in human beings, that Macmurray concludes: „Reason has broken the community of Nature. Reason as religion must restore that community and reintegrate man with man, and mankind with Nature, at a higher level.[22]

II. Religion: Promoting and Celebrating Communion

Commenting in the 1930's on the immense influence of Marx and Communism in Europe and Russia, Macmurray observed that „modern communist theory may provide an adequate and complete account of the nature and process of social organization, but it gives no account at all of the essential nature of human community itself. For community is in the direct relations of persons in their personal character. And the field of direct relations, along with the love-motives which govern them and make them possible, is the field of religion.[23]

The context for this observation requires something of a diversion here in order to situate Macmurray's notion of religion as both a reflective and a practical enterprise. It arises from the need to locate an adequate theoretical and practical structure for representing the unity of human knowing and human action – which Macmurray was

[21] PR, 163-64.
[22] CS, 39-40.
[23] CC in CSR, 524.

convinced neither classical modern philosophy (based on a mechanical model of being) nor Marxism (based on an organic model of being) were able to achieve. Late in his career, Macmurray summarized his own representation of the relation of knowledge and action in the following manner: „All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship.[24]

Twenty years earlier, in various writings, he traced out his view of the unity of knowledge and the modes of human reflection by noting that personal knowledge as expressed in religion is the primary and most comprehensive and inclusive mode of human knowing. It arises, first of all through personal relationship made self-aware and translated into modes of representation and celebration. It was only in slowly learning to see the dimensions implicit in this knowledge that human beings were able to abstract first to the feeling element in action – the element that reveals and creates value – and only within this feeling relation to what we so blandly refer to as 'the bare facts' viewed apart from the feeling and action in which they are embedded in reality. On this reading, truth is most comprehensively contained and expressed in personal action which reveals within itself the truth of feeling (made self-aware in emotional reflection) and within that the truth of 'facts' (made conscious in immediate experience and observation and become intentionally accessible through intellectual reflection). In other words, Macmurray situates science as an intellectual exercise of human knowledge within the fuller scope of art [and ethics] both of which are essentially modes of emotional knowledge containing an intellectual dimension as a constitutive part. And they, in turn, find their base in the knowledge that arises in personal relationship made self-aware and expressed in religious reflection. All three are forms of being rational, but it is personal knowledge that serves as pivot, norm and context for science, for example, not vice versa as our current cultural premises propose.

Equivalently, in the practical order, Macmurray holds that technology and economics (material means generated to overcome hunger, scarcity, disease, etc.) are to be situated normatively in the fuller context of politics (social organization of means and ends for the sake of justice), and politics should be situated in the fullest human reality: culture and community (religion, personal life lived for its own sake). In Macmurray's terms, the impersonal and often indirect relations between persons in their economic and political relationships, are subordinate

[24] SA, 15.

and constitutive dimensions of their direct and personal relations in community. Just as he situated science and art within the context of religion in the order of knowledge and reflection, Macmurray situates economics and politics within religion (community & culture) in the order of practical living. From this perspective, all competition in whatever area of human action is for the sake of cooperation, and all cooperation is for the sake of community. And religion represents the primary and the ultimate form of both reflective and practical rationality.[25]

Returning to the question of religion as the basis for community, we can now see that Macmurray takes what he calls the 'personal' to be the most comprehensive category for describing not only the working of the individual person but of the whole of personal community. In the end, he will say religion is the fullest rational mode of apperception available to us for knowing the universe and living in it positively.

From this philosophical perspective, religion is not first of all a set of traditions, rituals or doctrines or even a specific way of spiritual life. It is „the whole field of common experience organized in relation to the central fact of personal relationship".[26] As a mode of reflection, its basic issues – as we noted earlier – are these two: how must we represent community and the relations between human persons? And, how must we represent the world and the relation between ourselves and the world?

Consequently, religion is burdened by an inexorable seriousness in the demands put upon it and in the claims it makes; it must be „the

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[25] PR, 167. It should be noted that this major point is presented here almost too cryptically. Religion designates not only the fullest genuine form of personal knowledge and action but secondarily also the most comprehensive form of meaning to which a society subscribes – regardless of its legitimacy or maturity of form and expression. For example, the material view of reality reflected in Hobbesian philosophy and canonized by Scientism is a 'religious' viewpoint because it is an ultimate view of reality. It is the reduction of the whole of reality to a mechanical mode of apperception. Just because it is false does not make it less 'ultimate' in the minds, hearts and actions of its proponents and even for those who live it without necessarily embracing it intentionally. This holds as well for the Romantic, organic mode of apperception that arose in the West in the late 18th and 19th century. It shaped science, politics, economics, literature, personal relationships and theories of spirituality, and formed nothing less than a comprehensive view of the universe as an evolving organism. In this sense, it was and is a 'religious' view of reality – even though, from Macmurray's perspective, an inadequate one, since mechanism cannot account for many of the realities or modes of knowing active in the organic model and, equivalently, the organic model of knowing and of the world cannot account for what is distinctively personal in the world. Macmurray hold that genuine religion must be at least 'personal.' [cf PR,171].

[26] SRE, 30.

expression of an adequate apperception of our relation to the world.[27] In practice, the primary demand of religion is for a personal integrity, that is, for a way of life that integrates the inner with the outer, and provides for a coincidence of motive with intention. It must also achieve community relationships formed by equality, freedom, mutuality and an openness to others, all others. In the light of our earlier analysis of freedom in relation to friendship and love and fear in human action, we noted Macmurray's conviction that only religion – not science or art or politics or economics – has the capacity „to create, maintain and deepen the community of persons and to extend it without limit, by the transformation of negative motives and eliminating the dominance of fear in human relations".[28]

Put philosophically, this kind of human action is the manifestation of genuine rationality in human relationships. Religion has its own empirical manifestations. It is clear that „in human experience our rationality appears not as a finished product, but as an inherent pressure to rise above irrationality, and thus progressively to achieve our own nature. Religion appears, therefore, as the drive to achieve rationality in our relations with our fellows. This drive is simply the primitive blind urge to realize our own nature.[29] It is the impulse to achieve equality and fellowship in the relations of persons and to extend this achievement to all men and women. Consequently, wherever those qualities flourish in human relationships rationality and genuine religion are functioning.

III. The Place of God in the Universe

So far, this essay has highlighted three major conversions in philosophy which John Macmurray proposed: first, in the area of knowledge, he put the primacy on action. Second, in the area of reflection, he situated reflection on personal and communal existence as the comprehensive form that included other forms of emotional and intellectual reflection, as constitutive dimensions of it. Third, he held that personal action – that is, the action characteristic of persons in relation with one another as persons – is the fullest form of action in relation to which other forms of action, such as economic and political activity are subordinate but constitutive aspects. From this point, Macmurray concluded that the only mode of true self-realization for

[27] PR, 218.
[28] PR, 163.
[29] RE, 120.

persons in community was to celebrate and consolidate the communion in justice and love already shared while striving to bring justice and love to birth and fruition in areas of personal relations where they are not yet dominant features of human life. In this context, he believed no one could be fully free, in the fullest concrete sense of the term, until and unless all are free to relate as equals and in full mutuality. He was convinced not only that this kind of shared living is our human destiny but that it is inevitably being intended through the course of history. How, philosophically, can he speak of this happening in the world and through the participation of human action? How, he asked, can we anticipate this fulfilment being achieved? How could the entire human family come to embrace such a vision and way of life – given the degree of fear and evil of which human beings are capable? To use his own term, we may ask: Is this a 'rational' hope?

It is in this context that the question of God surfaces explicitly in Macmurray's philosophy. Macmurray, as a philosopher, did not believe the existence of God could be rationally questioned. However, if the question were posed, he far preferred it be posed not in the form: 'Does God exist?' but rather: 'Is what exists 'personal'?'

In responding to this question Macmurray follows the form of his epistemological and metaphysical work of reconstruction. He asserts not only that action is primary but that the world, as an existent and changing reality, is One Action (that is, not a mix of mere physical events or organic processes).[30] Secondly he holds that this One Action is the Action of a Personal Other who loves the universe towards its fullest possible realization at the personal level. God, he says, is the personal, effervescent and vivacious Being in relation to whom our world receives its existence, its deepest meaning, purpose, destiny and fulfilment.[31]

In presenting his case, he claims that at the level simply of intellectual adequacy and coherence, the universe must be understood as a domain of action (not merely physical events or processes) and it must be personal, where personal includes the organic and the mechanical as subordinate, necessary and constitutive dimensions of itself. If the world were subject to a merely mechanical or organic understanding, everything that is distinctively personal would be without explanation or support. The innate human desire for love and communion in freedom and knowledge, for a universal community based on trust and

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[30] SA, chap 10.

[31] See SA, Chapter 10 and PR, Chapter 10 for his development, in turn, of the World as One Action and God as Personal Other.

love, would be futile even to our imagination, let alone our action. A full communion with all of being, a genuine ground for peace in the face of organic death, a reason to act freely and take responsibility for our actions, a knowledge which by its nature is creative and exceeds a mechanical or organic explanation – all of these would be simply irrational excrescences, eccentric flukes on the periphery of the main fact, namely that the universe is merely an amalgam of haphazard physical events or a tissue of unconscious and undirected organic processes. There would be nothing to sustain or explain the Personal. And persons would be the most irrational of beings.

Macmurray contends that God is nothing less than the infinite ground of every finite phenomenon, not some withdrawn, Deist source of the world as simply unfolding physical activity or organic processes. God is implicitly present in every mechanical event, every organic process, every personal action, with love, intelligence and direction. Only a personal, all-powerful and all-loving being who grounds, cares for, guides and impels the universe could be the ground for a perfect love, a love which casts out all fear and cares for the lowliest person and the least of beings. More pointedly from the human perspective, only a personal God could intend and, through a power that is mysteriously expressed always in freedom, vulnerability and love, effect without fail a unified community of humanity. God must be personal and nothing less – even though, as Macmurray notes, God, as personal, is so much more than we can understand by 'personal' from our own small human experience.[32]

In his efforts to express this almost fierce conviction about the destined unity of the world in personal love, Macmurray was attempting to counter the dualisms and the idealism inherent in so much of western Christianity. He proposes, in that context, a notion of God free of all 'supernaturalism.' As he observed, writing in dialogue with other Christians and with atheist Marxists in the 1930's, „God is no more supernatural than Matter. Both are infinites, and lie beyond their finite manifestations. God is infinite personality; and personality dissociated from matter in idea is purely ideal – that is to say, non-existent. God is real; and therefore he is the ultimate synthesis of matter and spirit, of Nature and Man.[33]

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[32] SRR, 45.

[33] CC in CSR, 526. About 20 years later his position has not changed. In PR, he continues to do battle with dualisms in being that dominate in modern philosophy, and he writes bluntly: „There is no place at all for spirit in a material universe; nor for matter in a spiritual universe. This can only mean that both matter and spirit are misconceptions." [p.213].

It is important to note that this view does not result in monism or pantheism for Macmurray. He holds firmly to the transcendence of God. God, as Personal Other, is transcendent by being Totally Other. Yet God is the personal Other in relation to whom the universe is and can be personal. This means God is also immanent in the world. Macmurray is impatient with the dualism implicit in the traditional use of the terms 'transcendent' and 'immanent.[34] He asserts that, in a truly relational and unified view of the world, all immanence bespeaks a proportionate transcendence as its necessary correlative. Nevertheless, God's immanence, like his 'personal' existence, is radically different than that of any creature's. God is immanent to me – and to each and every being – with an intimacy, as St. Augustine noted, that is more intimate to me than I am to myself. But this expresses an immanence of presence, of free love in perfect knowledge, not an immanence of simple identity. God remains inscrutably Other.

God's form of being is, therefore, *at once* a mode of infinite immanence and transcendence. God, as loving ground and presence to all beings, including the least endowed and the most victimized, is precisely the ground for the possibility of casting out fear and the resulting domination of persons by other persons. God as personal knows us and loves us; consequently, every physical, organic or spiritual weakness in us, even our impending death, is situated by a love that supports and enhances life beyond the passage of organic death and in the midst of our own actions of evil. God, as presented by Macmurray, upholds all of being with a love that is a power unto life which embraces all physical events, organic processes and human actions.

This view has not simply psychological but historical significance. God is intimately and lovingly present in the universe in each of its events, processes and personal actions (including all of nature as well as every human mode of action such as science, technology, art, economics, sports, politics, religion) drawing and guiding them to the fullness of his intentions for the world. This paradox does not destroy the human freedom to act creatively but situates it. We are free to act as we choose, but our actions cannot fulfil us nor can they ultimately enhance the world or human community in the direction of the maximum flourishing of individuals, communities and nature apart from choosing to be united with God's love and God's intention in and for the world.

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[34] PR, 223.

Since this is a philosophical claim, the question must arise: How can this claim be verified? Or, again in Macmurray's own language: how can it be accepted as a rational and reasonable claim? For Macmurray, any verification of reasonableness must consider the implications of the alternative to the claim that the world is personal; that is, the world is constituted by merely impersonal forces. The resolution of the question is not to be found exclusively on the reflective level, in a search for coherence, even though efforts in that area are clearly crucial. The essential determination of reasonableness must come from the fact that the impersonal and the personal views of the universe God each give rise to a 'way of life'.[35] Macmurray notes „the verification of the belief in God must lie in their difference; and in particular in the difference between the realization of freedom in the one and in the other.[36]

In other words, the verification of the world as One Action and God as Personal Other is achieved not essentially by philosophical arguments pleading for a fuller version of intellectual coherence but by religion put into action – and secondarily into reflection. At the reflective level, in human practice across cultures and societies and civilizations, it arises cumulatively in the community through the narratives, across time and generations and cultures, of our testimonies of our experience of God and the construals we put on our experience. These are subject over the long course of history and experience to multiple modes of testing in reflection and living, the most telling of which is the satisfactoriness or unsatisfactoriness of the life (of the individual and the community) that arises from the way of life and its construal. In practice, when God is not only construed but embraced as an ever-present personal source of vivacious love, the effect this has on the release and expression of personal spontaneity can be expected to be different than when a view of the universe as an overwhelming mechanical entity or essentially a complex of biological processes holds the imagination, intentions and actions of a community.

In other words, when human action is based on the acceptance of a personal and caring God, it tends to foster in persons intentions and actions that are transformed in the direction of loving others for their own sake and thereby contributing to the realization of a community

[35] The historical implications of a mechanical view are seen in both the theory of Hobbes and in the way of life that results from Hobessian premises. An organic view of life gives rise to many theories and modes of living, but they all tend to a collectivism that is reflected in Marx and in the states that, in various ways, based their policies on his positions. [see PR, 127 ff].

[36] PR, 215.

based on equality, freedom, love and trust, not on inequalities, coercion, fear and anxiety. For those who are convinced the universe, even with its brokenness and evil, is the domain of loving action by a caring, personal God, our fullest freedom and self-realization is to move individually and communally in the direction of seeing as God sees, feeling as God feels and acting as God acts. In the end, Macmurray readily acknowledges that „religious doctrines can be verified only by persons who are prepared to commit themselves intentionally to the way of life they prescribe".[37] The verification of the world-view, then, comes from the way of life that arises when the world-view is lived out in thought, feeling and action. There is no other way.[38]

It should go without saying that a positive view of the universe is not necessarily a pollyanna view. The affirmation and acceptance of a loving God does not deny the evils that mark so palpably the lives of the majority of the people in the world, or the horrors, adventitious or intentionally caused, that have visited so many. The world is indeed filled with evil – in almost infinite forms. But this fact need not be a contradiction or a final stumbling-block for one whose religion is real. „Real religion, as Macmurray notes, „will save us from fear but not from the things we are afraid of.[39] In other words, if religion does not make us inexorably and irremediably more open to reality at every level, then it is not a true view of reality or a genuine way of living in the world.

In conclusion, it could be said that, within the constraints of philosophical method, Macmurray's understanding of religion has responded to the five meanings of the word 'catholic' ('universal') that Rowan Williams discovered were noted by the fourth century bishop, Cyril of Jerusalem in referring to the early Christian Church: It is found *everywhere*: it isn't the religion of one race or group. It teaches the *whole* truth, all that people need to know for their salvation. It makes holiness possible for *all* kinds of people, rich and poor, clever and

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[37] PR, 223.

[38] This statement could appear to contradict Macmurray's view that action (made up of knowledge and movement) is both fuller than and prior to reflection. In this context, he denies a prior dependency on theory. „What is verified in action is necessarily a *conception* of God, which presupposes a practical belief in His reality." [PR, 223]. The philosophy (idea) is dependent on a conviction (feeling) which arises from living (action). The premise behind the position is this: Truth is what can be acted upon and when one does the result is more life. As Macmurray put it in *The Clue to History*, „In doing well we come to know truly; in knowing the truth we are set free." [CH, 85]. This should not be confused with Pragmatism's criterion of truth: Truth is what works. For Macmurray, 'satisfactoriness of life' does not *constitute* the truth of the conception, it *confirms* or *verifies* the truth of it.

[39] FMW 64.

simple. It faces and deals with *all* the sicknesses and ills of human beings. And it displays the fullest possible *variety* of human excellence and every kind of spiritual gift.

One could wonder if these same criteria might not be applied with good effect to all claimants to the status of an ultimate view of meaning or to a way of life that reveals implicitly such a claim. It might prove compelling if the searchlight were to include in its sweep the claims of neo-liberal economics, the many new spiritualities that currently receive attention in western societies and, of course, to the mainline religions in their teaching and practice in society.

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