

THE CONFLATION OF THE EXISTENTIAL AND THE ONTOLOGICAL

The Error Western Thought Has Made, and the Perpendicular Resolution on
Which the System Rests

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Abstract

This treatise states the single error on which the entire perpendicular ontology of the Catharturgy Corpus is a correction, and which the rest of the system presupposes. Throughout Western thought, two fundamentally different relationships have been confused: the ontological, which is vertical, hierarchical, and asymmetric — the relationship of degree of being, of fullness and its privation, of the source and what is modelled after it; and the existential, which is lateral, polar, and symmetric — the relationship of co-equal complementary poles whose interplay is the life of the moving world. The error takes two forms, which are one error. Sometimes the two are conflated, the one treated as though it were the other; sometimes they are set in antithesis, treated as rivals one of which must defeat the other. Both forms fail to see the true relation, which is perpendicular: the two axes are neither identical nor opposed but distinct and intersecting, meeting at right angles, each preserved in its own dimension. Perpendicular ontology is the resolution of this confusion, and it is at once the metaphysical principle and its physical manifestation — for reality is in fact structured perpendicularly, the registers of being intersecting at right angles, so that the resolved relationship is not merely asserted but instantiated in the very structure of things. The treatise sets out the error, the resolution, the Trinity as the exemplary pattern after which the ontological registers are modelled in the manner of Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure, and the gravest single instance of the confusion: the dualist miscasting of evil, which is ontological privation, as a co-equal existential pole.

Keywords: The Existential and the Ontological · Perpendicularity · Conflation and Antithesis · Symmetry and Asymmetry · The Trinity as Exemplary Pattern · Pseudo-Dionysius · Bonaventure · The Reductio · Dualism · Privation · Catharturgy

I. The Two Relationships and the Single Error

There are two fundamentally different relationships at work in any account of reality, and the failure to distinguish them is, this treatise argues, the deepest and most consequential error in the history of Western thought. The first is the ontological relationship. It is vertical: a relationship of degree of being, of the fuller and the less full, of the source and what is derived from it, of the rarefied and the dense. It is hierarchical and asymmetric — the terms are not equals; one is prior, fuller, the pattern, and the other is posterior, diminished, the image. The descent of the worlds, the procession of being from its source, the gradation from the subtle to the gross: all are ontological, vertical, asymmetric. The second is the existential relationship. It is lateral: a relationship of polarity, of complementary opposites whose interplay constitutes the life of the moving world — light and dark, expansion and contraction, the active and the receptive, Yang and Yin. It is symmetric: the poles are co-equal, co-real, mutually necessary, neither a diminution of the other. The turning of the seasons, the alternation of the poles, the complementarity of the moving cosmos: all are existential, lateral, symmetric.

The error of Western thought has been to confuse these two relationships, and it has done so in two opposite ways that are at bottom one error. Sometimes the two are conflated — the one treated as though it were the other, an asymmetric ontological gradation read as a symmetric existential polarity, or a lateral complementarity mistaken for a vertical descent. Sometimes, and this is the same error inverted, they are set in antithesis — treated as rivals, as opposed principles one of which must overcome or absorb the other, as though the existential and the ontological were enemies contending on a single field. Conflation collapses the two into one; antithesis pits the two against each other; and both fail in the same way, by refusing to grant that the two relationships are distinct dimensions rather than competitors or twins. The history of the error is the history of this refusal — of metaphysics run as though there were a single axis along which everything, being and motion, fullness and polarity, good and its opposite, must be located together.

Two relationships, persistently confused. The ontological: vertical, hierarchical, asymmetric — fullness and its diminution, source and image. The existential: lateral, polar, symmetric — co-equal complementary poles. The error takes two forms that are one: conflation (treating the one as the other) and antithesis (treating them as rivals). Both refuse to see that they are distinct dimensions.

II. Perpendicularity as the Resolution

The resolution is perpendicularity, and it is precisely the relation that is neither conflation nor antithesis. Two lines that are conflated are made one line; two lines set in antithesis are made to oppose along one line, head to head; but two lines that meet perpendicularly are neither merged nor opposed — they are distinct, each running in its own dimension, and yet genuinely related, meeting at their intersection. Perpendicularity is the relation of the distinct-and-intersecting: not identity, for the lines are not the same; not opposition, for they do not contend along a shared

axis; but intersection, the meeting of two dimensions that remain themselves. To say that the existential and the ontological are perpendicular is to say that they are neither the same relationship nor rival relationships, but two distinct dimensions of reality that meet without merging and relate without contending. This is the resolution of the confusion: the two axes drawn apart and set at right angles, each granted its own dimension, meeting at the intersections where being and motion in fact cross.

And here is the feature that makes perpendicular ontology more than a conceptual tidying: it is at once the metaphysical principle and its physical manifestation. The perpendicularity is not only the right way to think the relation of the existential and the ontological; it is the actual structure of reality. The registers of being do in fact intersect at right angles — the soul meets the body perpendicularly, the dimensions of creation cross perpendicularly, the whole structure of things is built on the perpendicular intersection of substantially distinct registers. So the resolution of the ancient confusion is not merely asserted; it is instantiated. Reality is structured as the resolved relationship looks — the principle and its manifestation are the same. When one points to the perpendicular meeting of body and soul, or to the dimensional intersection of the registers, one is not illustrating the resolution by analogy; one is pointing at the resolution existing, the confusion undone in the very fabric of what is. Perpendicular ontology is therefore both the physical explanation of how reality is built and the manifestation of the metaphysical point resolved — the structure of the world is the answer to the error of thought, made real.

Perpendicularity is the relation that is neither conflation nor antithesis: not one line, not two lines opposed, but two dimensions meeting at right angles, distinct and intersecting. And it is both principle and manifestation — for reality is in fact built perpendicularly, the registers intersecting at right angles. The resolution is not asserted but instantiated: the structure of the world is the confusion undone, made real.

III. The Trinity as the Exemplary Pattern

If the ontological axis is the vertical descent of being from its source, the question arises what the source is, and after what pattern the descending registers are modelled. The answer is the Trinity. The triune Godhead is the exemplary pattern — the highest register, the supernal triad — and each descending ontological register is modelled after it, an image of the triune source at a lower degree of being. This is the exemplarism of the great tradition. In Pseudo-Dionysius, all things proceed from the superabundant Godhead and are ordered in descending hierarchies that image and participate in the divine, each rank reflecting the source according to its measure; the registers of being are a hierarchy of images, descending from and led back toward the God who is their origin and end. In Bonaventure, creation is a system of vestigia and imagines — traces and images of the Trinity — and the whole is ordered by the *reductio*, the leading-back of the manifold to God as its exemplary cause; every creature is a more or less adequate image of the Trinitarian exemplar, and the soul above all is *imago Trinitatis*.

This is why the ontological axis is asymmetric and hierarchical, and why the triadic pattern recurs down the registers. It is asymmetric because it is exemplarist: the Trinity is the pattern, the

registers are the images, and a pattern and its image are not co-equal — the image is derived from, dependent on, and a diminution of the pattern. And the triadic structure recurs at every register precisely because each register is modelled after the triune exemplar; the pattern reappears at every level, as Bonaventure's traces and images reflect the Trinitarian exemplar throughout creation. The ontological axis is thus a Dionysian and Bonaventurian exemplarist descent: the Trinity at its summit as the pattern, each lower register an image of the triune source, the whole an ordered hierarchy of participation and likeness, asymmetric throughout because an image is never the equal of its exemplar. These figures are the tradition's right understanding of the ontological axis — hierarchical, exemplarist, Trinity-patterned, with the lesser always a diminution of the greater and never its co-equal.

IV. The Gravest Instance: The Miscasting of Evil

The single most consequential instance of the confusion is the dualist account of evil, and the two-axes distinction diagnoses it exactly. Evil, in the system's settled definition, is privation — a diminution of being, the contraction of a function onto finite fixation, a lack. As privation, evil belongs to the ontological axis, and it belongs there in the asymmetric way that everything on that axis is asymmetric: a privation is parasitic upon the fullness it lacks, dependent on the good as an image is dependent on its exemplar, and so it has no co-equal standing whatever. Evil is less being, not other being; it is the shadow of the good's diminution, not a second principle beside it. This is the ontological axis correctly understood, in the line of Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure, for whom evil is precisely privation and never a substance or a rival power.

The dualist makes the axis-confusion in its purest and gravest form. Perceiving correctly that there is a duality involved in good and evil, the dualist miscasts it: he takes what is in truth an ontological relationship — the asymmetric relation of the good and its privation — and reads it as an existential polarity, a symmetric relation of two co-equal, co-real, mutually necessary poles, as Yang and Yin are co-equal poles. So evil becomes a second principle, co-eternal with the good, a dark god contending with a god of light on a single field. This is the structure of Manichaeism, and of the Zoroastrian opposition of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, and it appears again, in a softened modern form, in the symmetric polarity of the Luciferic and the Ahrimanic flanking a balancing centre. In every case the error is the same: an asymmetric ontological privation has been miscast as a symmetric existential pole. Dualism is not, at bottom, a distinct theory of evil; it is the confusion of the two axes applied to the moral question — a vertical asymmetry mistaken for a lateral symmetry, privation promoted to a principle by being moved to the wrong axis.

Dualism is the axis-confusion in its gravest form. Evil is ontological privation — asymmetric, parasitic on the good, with no co-equal standing. The dualist miscasts it as an existential pole — symmetric, co-equal, a second principle, a dark god beside the light. Manichaeism, Zoroastrian dualism, the symmetric Luciferic and Ahrimanic: in each, an asymmetric privation is mistaken for a symmetric pole. Privation is promoted to a principle by being moved to the wrong axis.

This is why the privation theory of evil and the perpendicular distinction of the axes are one teaching. To hold that evil is privation is to hold that evil belongs to the asymmetric ontological

axis, where it is a diminution and not a co-equal; and to keep the axes distinct is to refuse the dualist's move of relocating evil to the symmetric existential axis, where it would become a pole and a principle. The same vigilance protects the existential polarity in the other direction: because Yin and the dark and the receptive are existential poles and not ontological privations, they must never themselves be miscast as evil — the symmetric pole is good, and only the confusion that drags it onto the vertical axis makes the dark seem a privation. One distinction does both works at once: it keeps evil from being promoted to a co-equal principle, and it keeps the good dark pole from being demoted to an evil. The perpendicular ontology, holding the axes apart, is what makes both errors impossible.

V. The Point on Which the System Rests

This is the point on which the perpendicular ontology rests, and with it the system it grounds. The error — the conflation of the existential and the ontological, or their setting in antithesis — has run through Western thought wherever a single axis has been made to carry both being and motion, both fullness and polarity, both the good and its opposite. The resolution — that the two are perpendicular, distinct and intersecting, neither merged nor opposed — is the principle from which the rest of the Corpus unfolds, and it is a principle that reality itself instantiates, for the registers of being do in fact intersect at right angles. From this resolution descend the rest: the kenotic cosmogony, in which the outpouring constitutes perpendicular registers; the chromatic and elemental orderings, each with its ontological and its existential form; the definition of evil as ontological privation rather than existential pole; the whole structure of the Tree as the perpendicular intersection of the vertical descent of being and the lateral polarity of the moving world.

The tradition possessed the materials and felt the distinction without naming it — it built exemplarist hierarchies and it built dualisms, it ordered colors and elements by being and by motion, it spoke of fullness and of polarity — but lacking the perpendicular distinction it ran the two relationships together, now conflating them, now opposing them, and so generated the confusions that have attended Western metaphysics from its beginnings. The Corpus names the distinction and grants it its proper structure: the existential and the ontological are perpendicular, the resolution is both thought and thing, and the Trinity is the pattern at the summit of the ontological descent after which all the registers are modelled. Everything the system treats is the working-out of this single resolution — the undoing, in thought and in the structure of reality alike, of the oldest confusion of the West.

References and Related Papers

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Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* and *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam* (creation as vestigia and images of the Trinity, the reductio to God as exemplary cause, the soul as imago Trinitatis).

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