



Pathei-Mathos - A Path To Humility

Contents

- Prefatory Note and Definition
 - Toward Humility - A Brief Personal View
 - Numinous Expiation
 - Humility, Abstractions, and Belief
 - Soli Deo Gloria
 - Appendix - A Few Terms Explained
-

Prefatory Note and Definition

This small compilation is of four essays of mine about or which substantially refer to humility. Two of the essays were written in 2012, one in 2010, and the other in 2011. Since humility and hubris form an important part of the philosophy of pathei-mathos - what I previously (pre-Spring-2012) called the numinous way - this compilation may therefore be useful and of some interest to those interested in or studying that philosophy, a philosophy I endeavoured to outline in my text *Recuyle Of The Philosophy Of Pathei-Mathos*.

Humility is used here, in a spiritual context, to refer to that gentleness, that modest demeanour, that understanding, which derives from an appreciation of the numinous and also from one's own admitted uncertainty of knowing and one's acknowledgement of past mistakes. An uncertainty of knowing, an acknowledgement of mistakes, that often derive from *πάθει μάθος*.

Humility is thus the natural human balance that offsets the unbalance of hubris (ὕβρις) - the balance that offsets the unbalance of pride and arrogance, and the balance that offsets the unbalance of that certainty of knowing which is one basis for extremism, for extremist beliefs, for fanaticism and intolerance. That is, humility is a manifestation of the natural balance of Life; a restoration of *ἀρμονίη*, of *δίκη*, of *σωφρονεῖν* - of those qualities and virtues - that hubris and extremism, that *ἔρις* and *πόλεμος*, undermine, distance us from, and replace.

David Myatt
October 2012

Part One

Toward Humility - A Brief Personal View

The more I reflect on religion - and on my experience of various religions and those who believe in them - the more I incline toward the view that most if not all of what have sometimes been referred to as 'the major religions' - Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism - manifest (each in their own particular way) and enhance (or can enhance) our humanity, and thus enshrine a means for us to be compassionate and tolerant and receptive to humility. For it seems to me there is, to paraphrase an expression of George Fox used by The Religious Society of Friends, 'that of the numinous' in every person, and that answering to 'that of the numinous' can take and has taken various manifestations over millennia with all such manifestations deserving of respect since there is an underlying unity, a similar spiritual essence - a similar discovery and knowing and appreciation of the numinous, a similar understanding of the error of hubris - beyond those different outer manifestations and the different terms and expressions and allegories used to elucidate 'that of the numinous'.

Thus it would be improper and erroneous of me to conclude that a particular religion has influenced more people in a good way - is 'better' - than another religion or all other religions. Especially as - and again in my admittedly fallible view - the bad done, the suffering caused, by those 'in the name of' some religion or by adherents of some religion, most probably are caused by or are a consequence of our errors, our faults, our propensity as human beings to be hubriatic, to sometimes or often do or sanction what is dishonourable, inhuman, or just plain selfish.

As for Buddhism, I tend to view it - like Taoism - as a Way of Life rather than as a religion^[1] and even if considered a religion then most probably it is a noble exception

considering how, unlike many religions, it has seldom if ever been associated with people and tyrants who followed it doing dishonourable, inhuman, extremist, deeds in its name. Certainly Buddhism - and Taoism and many others Ways - have not (so far as I know) been used by fallible hubriatic humans to try to justify wars, invasions, persecution, killing, intolerance, and the mistreatment of those deemed to be heretics and apostates.

The discovery and knowing and thus the appreciation of the numinous by individuals, in a life-changing and thus often reformatory way, is frequently the result of pathei-mathos, and which pathei-mathos can incline individuals toward their own uncertainty of knowing and thus toward a certain personal humility. A personal humility which I personally believe manifests - which is - the essence of the numinous and thus the essence of our humanity, of our nature as human beings capable of reason, compassion, love, honour, and gentleness; human beings who have the ability to choose not to commit the error of hubris; the ability not to do what is harsh, dishonourable, hateful, violent; the ability to refrain from inflicting suffering on other humans and other living beings; the ability to be empathic and thus appreciate the connexion we are to all Life, to *ψυχή*.

In my own case, as I mentioned in *Just My Fallible Views, Again*:

"Being with - living with - Muslims (both Sunni and Shia) taught me humility^[2], the ignorance of my past political beliefs, and how the Muslim way of life can be and certainly has been (on balance) an influence for good, just as Christianity (on balance) is and has been, and just as Judaism is and has been [...]

Hence I find myself in the curious position of now possibly understanding and appreciating the wordless *raison d'etat* of Catholic monasticism, manifest as this is in a personal humility; a humility that during my time as a monk my then still hubriatic self could not endure for long. Which recent understanding and appreciation led me for a short while at least, and only a few years ago, to wistfully if unrealistically yearn to return to that particular secluded way of life. And unrealistic because for all that understanding, appreciation, and yearning, I no longer had the type of faith that was required, the type of Christian faith I did have when I had lived that monastic way of life. A lack of faith I really discovered and felt when I went, during that not-too-long-ago period of yearning, to stay once again and for a while in a monastery [...]

Also, although I no longer consider myself a Muslim, I retain a great respect for that particular Way of Life, as I do for several other Ways I have personal experience of, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism. And a respect for two basic reasons. First, because I feel that those (and many other Ways and religions, for example Judaism and Hinduism) have been and are a means to remind us of the numinous, of the error of hubris, of the need for a certain personal humility. For they all, diverse as they appear to be, can enable us to

glimpse or feel or know that supra-personal perspective which inclines us or can incline us toward living a more moral life, expressed as such a life often is in personal virtues such as compassion, self-restraint, honesty, modesty. Second, because I am acutely aware of how fallible I am, that I could be wrong, that I have been wrong in the past, and that my answers to certain philosophical, theological, and moral questions (as evident for example in my philosophy of pathei-mathos) are only my own often tentative and certainly fallible answers."

For me personally, humility is also an acknowledgement of a particular and important intuition regarding the self, regarding our perception of ourselves. Of how - when as individuals via pathei-mathos or otherwise we experience and then appreciate the numinous - we are not (as we often like to believe) in control of our lives, but instead are subject to supra-personal forces that have often, in the past as now, been variously termed or described as God, the gods, Fate, karma, Allah, wyrd, the cosmic perspective, the acausal, destiny, *Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες*, and so on. Of how such a belief of personally being in control, or of being capable of so being in control, of our lives, is mere egoism at best and, at worst, hubris; an egoism and a hubris that, whether we know or not - and mostly we with our egoism and our hubris do not know - are both the genesis of suffering and the raison d'etat behind our perpetuation of suffering.

DWM
September 2012

Notes

[1] My experience of various religions - and of other elucidations of 'that of the numinous' - has led me to conclude that it is possible to make a distinction between a religion and a Way of Life. One of the differences being that a religion requires and manifests a codified ritual and doctrine and a certain expectation of conformity in terms of doctrine and ritual, as well as a certain organization beyond the local community level resulting in particular individuals assuming or being appointed to positions of authority in matters relating to that religion. In contrast, Ways are more diverse and more an expression of a spiritual ethos, of a customary, and often localized, way of doing certain spiritual things, with there generally being little or no organization beyond the community level and no individuals assuming - or being appointed by some organization - to positions of authority in matters relating to that ethos.

Religions thus tend to develop an organized regulatory and supra-local hierarchy which oversees and appoints those, such as priests or religious teachers, regarded as proficient in spiritual matters and in matters of doctrine and ritual, whereas adherents of Ways tend to locally and informally and communally, and out of respect and a personal knowing, accept certain individuals as having a detailed knowledge and an

understanding of the ethos and the practices of that Way.

[2] In terms of my own pathei-mathos, the culture of Islam - manifest in Adab, in Namaz, and in a reliance on only Allah, and a culture lived, experienced, by me over a period of some nine years - was not only a new revelation of the numinous but also a grounding in practical humility. The very performance of Namaz requires and cultivates an attitude of personal humility, most obvious in Sajdah, the prostration to and in the presence of Allah, Ar-Rahman, Ar-Raheem; a personal humility encouraged by Adab, and shared in Jumma Namaz in a Masjid and during Ramadan.

Part Two

Numinous Expiation

One of the many problems regarding both The Numinous Way and my own past which troubles me - and has troubled me for a while - is how can a person make reparation for suffering caused, inflicted, and/or dishonourable deeds done. For, in the person of empathy, of compassion, of honour, a knowledge and understanding of dishonour done, of the suffering one has caused - perhaps before one became such a person of compassion, honour, and empathy - is almost invariably the genesis of strong personal feelings such as remorse, grief, and sorrow. The type of strong feelings that Christopher Marlowe has Iarbus, King of Gaetulia, voice at the end of the play *The Tragedie of Dido Queene of Carthage*, written c.1587:

Cursed Iarbas, die to expiate
The grief that tires upon thine inward soul.

One of the many benefits of an organized theistic religion, such as Christianity or Islam or Judaism, is that mechanisms of personal expiation exist whereby such feelings can be placed in context and expiated by appeals to the supreme deity. In Judaism, there is Teshuvah culminating in Yom Kippur, the day of expiation/reconciliation. In Catholicism, there is the sacrament of confession and penance. In Islam, there is personal dua to, and reliance on, Allah Ar-Rahman, Ar-Raheem, As-Salaam.

Even pagan religions and ways had mechanisms of personal expiation for wrong deeds done, often in the form of propitiation; the offering of a sacrifice, perhaps, or compensation by the giving or the leaving of a valuable gift or votive offering at some numinous - some sacred and venerated - place or site.

One motivation, in the case of pagan religions and ways, for a person to seek expiation is fear of *wrake*; fear of the retribution or of the misfortune, that - from the gods - might befall them or their descendants in this life. Similarly, for those acceptive of an

all-knowing, all-seeing supreme deity - or even of the Buddhist mechanism of karma - there is also fear of wrake; fear of the punishment, the retribution, the misfortune, that might await them in the next life; or, in the case of Buddhism, the type of life that might result when next they are reborn.

As the Owl explains in the mediæval English religious allegory *The Owl and the Nightingale*,

ich wat þar schal beo niþ & wrake

I can see when there shall be strife and retribution [1]

All such religious mechanisms of expiation, whatever the theology and regardless of the motivation of the individual in seeking such expiation, are or can be cathartic; restorative, healing. But if there is no personal belief in either a supreme deity or in deities, how then to numinously make reparation, propitiation, and thus to not only expiate such feelings as remorse, grief, and sorrow but also and importantly offset the damage one's wrong actions have caused, since by their very nature such suffering-causing actions are *ὑβρις* and not only result in harm, in people suffering, but also upset the natural balance.

In truth, I do not know the answer to the question how to so numinously make reparation, propitiation. I can only conject, surmise. One of my conjectures is enantiodromia; of the process, mentioned by Diogenes Laërtius and attributed to Heraclitus, of a wholeness arising both before and after discord and division [2]. This wholeness is the healthy, the numinous, interior, inward, and personal balance beyond the separation of beings - beyond *πόλεμος* and *ὑβρις* and thus beyond *ἔρις*; beyond the separation and thence the strife, the discord, which abstractions, ideations, encourage and indeed which they manufacture, bring-into-being. As Heraclitus intimated, according to another quotation attributed to him -

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριιν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριιν καὶ χρεώμενα [χρεών]

One should be aware that Polemos pervades, with discord *δίκη*, and that beings are naturally born by discord. [3]

But what, then, in practical personal terms are this wholeness and this process termed enantiodromia? To me, this wholeness is a knowing and an acceptance of both the importance of the numinous principle of *Δίκη* [4] and the necessity of wu-wei [5] - and a knowing which empathy can provide - and thence a desire to live life in a non-interfering manner consistent with empathy, compassion, reason, honour, and humility. And it is this very knowing, this very desire to live in such a manner, which is enantiodromia; which is cathartic, restorative, healing; with a natural humility and the cultivation and practice of reason - *σωφρονεῖν*, a fair and balanced judgement - being

the essence of this personal process, the essence of enantiodromia.

For the human virtue of humility is essential in us for us not to repeat our errors of ὑβρις, a humility which our πάθει μάθος makes us aware of, makes us feel, know, in a very personal sense. For we are aware of, we should remember, our fallibility, our mortality, our mistakes, our errors, our wrong deeds, the suffering we have caused, the harm we have done and inflicted; how much we personally have contributed to discord, strife, sorrow.

In addition,

" ...by and through humility, we do what we do not because we expect some reward, or some forgiveness, given by some supra-personal supreme Being, or have some idealized duty to such a Being or to some abstraction (such as some nation, some State) but because it is in our very nature to do an act of compassion, a deed of honour: to do something which is noble and selfless.

That is, we act, not out of duty, not out of a desire for Heaven or Jannah, or enlightenment or some other "thing" we have posited - not from any emotion, desire or motive, not because some scripture or some revelation or some Buddha says we should - but because we have lost the illusion of our self-contained, personal, identity, lost our Earth-centric, human-centric, perspective, lost even the causal desire to be strive to something different, and instead just *are*: that is, we are just one microcosmic living mortal connexion between all life, on Earth, and in the Cosmos. For our very nature, as human beings, is a Cosmic nature - a natural part of the unfolding, of the naturally and numinously changing, Cosmos." [6]

Thus a personal humility is the natural balance living within us; that is, we being or becoming or returning to the balance that does not give rise to ἔρις. Or, expressed simply, humility disposes us toward gentleness, toward kindness, toward love, toward peace; toward the virtues that are balance, that express our humanity.

This personal humility inclines us toward σωφρονεῖν; toward being fair, toward rational deliberation, toward a lack of haste. Toward a balanced judgement and thence toward a balanced life of humility, wu-wei, and a knowing of the wisdom of Δίκη.

There is nothing especially religious here, nor any given or necessary praxis. No techniques; no supplication to some-thing or to some posited Being. No expectation of reward, in this life or some posited next life. Only an interior personal change, an attempt to live in a certain gentle, quiet, way so as not to intentionally cause suffering, so as not to upset the natural balance of Life.

DWM
February 2012

Notes

[1] v.1194. The text is that of the Cotton Caligula MS in the British Library as transcribed by JWH Atkins in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, Cambridge University Press, 1922.

[2] The quotation from Diogenes Laërtius is: πάντα δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐναντιοδρομίας ἡρμόσθαι τὰ ὄντα (ix. 7)

My translation is: *All by genesis is appropriately apportioned [separated into portions] with beings bound together again by enantiodromia.*

As I mentioned in my essay *The Abstraction of Change as Opposites and Dialectic*:

I have used a transliteration of the compound Greek word - ἐναντιοδρομίας - rather than given a particular translation, since the term enantiodromia in my view suggests the uniqueness of expression of the original, and which original in my view is not adequately, and most certainly not accurately, described by a usual translation such as 'conflict of opposites'. Rather, what is suggested is 'confrontational contest' - that is, by facing up to the expected/planned/inevitable contest.

Interestingly, Carl Jung - who was familiar with the sayings of Heraclitus - used the term enantiodromia to describe the emergence of a trait (of character) to offset another trait and so restore a certain psychological balance within the individual.

[3] Fragment 80 - qv. *Some Notes on Πόλεμος and Δίκη in Heraclitus B80* and also *The Balance of Physis - Notes on λόγος and ἀληθέα in Heraclitus*.

As I noted in *The Abstraction of Change as Opposites and Dialectic*, it is interesting that:

"in the recounted tales of Greek mythology attributed to Aesop, and in circulation at the time of Heraclitus, a personified πόλεμος (as the δαίμων of kindred strife) married a personified ὕβρις (as the δαίμων of arrogant pride) [8] and that it was a common folk belief that πόλεμος accompanied ὕβρις - that is, that Polemos followed Hubris around rather than vice versa, causing or bringing ἔρις."

[4] As mentioned elsewhere, Δίκη is that noble, respectful, balance understood, for example, by Sophocles (among many others) - for instance, Antigone respects the natural balance, the customs and traditions of her own numinous culture, given by the gods, whereas Creon verges towards and finally commits, like Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the error of ὕβρις and is thus "taught a lesson" (just like Oedipus) by the gods because, as Aeschylus wrote -

Δίκη δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν
μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει

In respect of Δίκη, I write and spell it thus - in this modern way and with a capital Δ - to intimate a new, a particular and numinous, philosophical principle, and differentiate it from the more general δίκη. As a numinous principle, or axiom, Δίκη suggests what lies beyond and what was the genesis of δίκη personified as the goddess, Judgement - the goddess of natural balance, of the ancestral way and ancestral customs.

Thus, Δίκη implies the balance, the reasoned judgement, the thoughtful reasoning - σωφρονεῖν - that πάθει μάθος brings and restores, and which accumulated πάθει μάθος of a particular folk or πόλις forms the basis for their ancestral customs. δίκη is therefore, as the numinous principle Δίκη, what may be said to be a particular and a necessary balance between ἀρετή and ὕβρις - between the ὕβρις that often results when the personal, the natural, quest for ἀρετή becomes unbalanced and excessive.

[5] Wu-wei is a Taoist term used in my philosophy of The Numinous Way "to refer to a personal 'letting-be' deriving from a feeling, a knowing, that an essential part of wisdom is cultivation of an interior personal balance and which cultivation requires acceptance that one must work with, or employ, things according to their nature, for to do otherwise is incorrect, and inclines us toward, or is, being excessive - that is, is ὕβρις. In practice, this is the cultivation of a certain (an acausal, numinous) perspective - that life, things/beings, change, flow, exist, in certain natural ways which we human beings cannot change however hard we might try; that such a hardness of human trying, a belief in such hardness, is unwise, un-natural, upsets the natural balance and can cause misfortune/suffering for us and/or for others, now or in the future. Thus success lies in discovering the inner nature of things/beings/ourselves and gently, naturally, slowly, working with this inner nature, not striving against it."

I first became acquainted with the concept of wu-wei when, as a youth living in the Far East, I studied Taoism and a learnt a martial art based on Taoism. Thus it might be fair to assume that Taoism may well have influenced, to some degree, the development of my weltanschauung.

[6] The quote is from my essay *Humility, Abstractions, and Belief*.

Part Three

Humility, Abstractions, and Belief

πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κούδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει
(Soph. Antig. 334)

There is much that is strange, but nothing has more strangeness than we human beings

One of the many questions that occupied me for some months this year [2010] was the question of humility: can there, for instance, be true humility without a belief in a supreme Being, be that supreme Being God, as understood for instance, by Christianity, or Allah, as understood by Islam.

For I have certainly come, through and because of my own peregrinations and my *πάθει μάθος*, to recognize, to understand, the need for humility – the need for us, as individual human beings, to place ourselves in such a supra-personal context, such a perspective, that we become aware of our own fallibility, our own mortality, our own humanity, our own weakness, so that there is within us, or develops within us, a natural empathy with other Life, with Nature, and especially with other human beings.

From humility, it seems to me, derives two most important human virtues, dignity, and awareness of the numinous, the sacred. From humility derives the necessary desire to forgo or at least restrain what seems to be, at least so far, our human need for arrogance, for personal pride, for ὕβρις (hubris); for pursuing some ideal, such as a disruptive, often suffering-causing un-numinous change, where we are intensely and personally dissatisfied with ourselves, our situation, our circumstances, and often with what we regard as “society”.

Manifestations of Humility

One of the great advantages – a manifestation of humanity – of a Way such as Islam and Christianity and Buddhism is that they provide, or can provide, us with the supra-personal perspective, and thus the humility, we human beings require to prevent us veering into and becoming subsumed with the error of hubris.

As it says in the Rule of Saint Benedict:

“The peak of our endeavour is to achieve profound humility...” Chapter 7,
The Value of Humility

As it says in the Quran:

“The *‘Ibaad* of Ar-Rahman [Allah] are those who walk on earth in humility.”
25:63

As it says in the Dhammapada:

“Yo bâlo maññati bâlyae paúóitovâpi tena so bâlo ca paúóitamânî sa ve bâloti vuccati.”

” Accepting of themselves, the simple person in their simplicity is wise, although if they pride themselves they are wise, they are simply full of pride.

“

Furthermore, such Ways provide such a supra-personal perspective in a manner which is living – that is, these Ways are presented to us as something which has a historical genesis and which lives among us, in our own times, in and through those devoted to them in that dignified manner which makes such people living examples of those tenets, of those Ways. That is, the dignified people who follow such Ways – who are inspired by those Ways to practice humility in their own lives – thus manifest the numinous, the sacred, among us, and so can provide us with practical, and personal, guidance, and a sense of belonging.

Thus, in such Ways we, as individuals, can find a welcome, a type of identity beyond our own personal one, and certainly a place where we can often, in time, find a home: a place to dwell awhile between the problems and the passions and the foibles of our lives, and place where can feel, and come to know, the numinous.

Yet such conventional Ways also require a certain belief, a certain faith: an acceptance of their own abstractions, and often their own dogma. For example, Islam requires, among other things, an acceptance that the Quran is the literal word of Allah. Christianity requires, among other things, that one accepts Scripture – the Old and New Testaments – as authoritative guides, to be quoted, admired, and followed; as Christianity also requires a belief in Jesus as the resurrected Son of God. Buddhism requires, among other things, an acceptance of Siddhattha Gotama as *the* enlightened one, who left guidelines and means to be followed; Buddhism also requires that one accept such things – such abstractions – as nirvana, and re-birth.

But, is humility possible without recourse to such Ways? Does humility of necessity require a certain inclusion – of one becoming part of a living tradition or of some conventional Way with a multitude of adherents and members? Does humility, therefore, of necessity, depend on one accepting certain abstractions and having faith in certain dogma?

The Cosmic Perspective

In essence, the truth of our human nature is that we are simply one type of life which exists on one planet orbiting one star in a Galaxy composed of billions of stars in a Cosmos containing billions upon billions of other Galaxies.

That is, in Cosmic terms, we do not seem to be anything special, and are most probably – if not almost certainly – not unique. We only assume or like to believe that we are unique – an assumption, and a belief, an arrogance, that most conventional Ways (termed religions) accept as a fundamental premise. Thus, Christianity and Islam both speak of a supreme creator-Being providing us with revelation, by means of Prophets, and which revelation is a guide to how we might attain what is regarded as the aim of our mortal existence, which is an eternal after-life in Heaven or Jannah.

There is, thus, the notion of this supreme Being guiding us, interfering in our affairs, and having a direct concern for we human beings on this planet we have called Earth – hence, for example, the concept of prayer to this Being; forgiveness from this Being;

hence the notion of Jesus being crucified for us; hence the notion, in Christianity, of redemption and Heaven through Jesus; hence the notion of, in Islam, Shariah and Adab as a means, a path, to Allah and thus as guides to attaining the after-life in Jannah promised to us by Allah.

Even in Buddhism there is the belief in enlightenment, which Siddhattha Gotama and his teachings can guide us to, even if this takes several re-births in this mortal world, on Earth. There is also the notions of nirvana, re-birth, and of the Sangha as an enlightened way to enlightenment.

In all of these Ways there is *us*: we human beings, on this planet, striving for a different non-mortal, non-causal, existence. There are human beings thus concentrating on their own salvation, their own enlightenment, as there is some supreme Being, or some Enlightened One, concerned with us, or guiding us.

Which leads us to certain important questions, if we suspend the human-centric presumption - for example, does the probable existence of sentient life elsewhere in the Cosmos mean that:

(1) the God of Christianity, the supreme Being, the creator and giver of life, has to provide revelation through Prophets on every planet containing sentient life; and for there to be another crucifixion of another Jesus or even the same Jesus? And, if not, why not - for does not all sentient life, being the creation of the supreme creator, require redemption and the chance of Heaven?

(2) the Allah of Islam, the supreme Being, the creator and giver of life, has to reveal another Quran on every planet containing sentient life through other Messengers akin to Muhammad?

(3) a sentient being such as Siddhattha Gotama has to become enlightened to guide other sentient beings on every planet bearing sentient life?

Further questions arise, such as, if Heaven and Jannah exist will they become the abode of all the other non-human sentient life from other worlds who have been judged fitting to be there - or will other non-human sentient life have their realms, their own after-lives, and if so why if there is only one supreme God, one Allah, for the whole of the Cosmos as the ontology and theology of Christianity and Islam require? Would God, or Allah, operate a kind of apartheid policy to keep humans and non-humans separate in their after-lives?

Would there be an alien, a non-human, equivalent of the Catholic Pope on some other, extra-terrestrial worlds, somewhere in our Galaxy or in other Galaxies? Would there be a type of Shia or Sunni divide on another world, or on other worlds? And so on.

The easy answer to such questions is to continue with the human-centric perspective; with the assumption, the belief, that we human beings are, if not unique in the Cosmos in being sentient beings, then are somehow in some manner special, or favoured, by God, by Allah, or even by the nature of what Siddhattha Gotama taught was the impermanence of existence.

But if one asks such questions about the Cosmic nature of life, then it is easy to see that a non-revealed Way (or philosophies) such as Buddhism, and Taoism, can be adapted or expanded to answer most of them, whereas revealed Ways such as Christianity and Islam have quite major problems, in terms of ontology, ethics, theology, eschatology, and so on.

Which then leads us to the simple question as to why there is no mention of the Cosmic perspective - of non-human sentient beings on other worlds in the Cosmos, requiring enlightenment, redemption, and so on - (1) if Siddhattha Gotama was the enlightened one, who perceived the true nature of existence, which existence is as vast as the Cosmos; (2) if the supreme Being of Islam and Christianity, as posited is the all-knower, the creator of all life, everywhere.

Of course, conventional Ways have easy - if ultimately unsatisfying - answers to such questions, which are *either* the canard that we humans are indeed special, chosen, and have some "sacred duty" to take our Earth-given revelations, the enlightenment of Siddhattha Gotama, out to other sentient life in the Cosmos, *or* that Siddhattha Gotama, God, Allah, were concerned with guiding us, we human beings, and deemed such questions about the Cosmos and other life would or might "only confuse us..." and what was important was our salvation, our enlightenment. Thus, we are treated like children, who cannot be told, or trusted with, the whole truth.

Such answers are unsatisfying because they require either a continuation of our arrogance, or an act of faith; they require that we limit our curiosity, limit our expectations; and accept that God, Allah, Siddhattha Gotama know or knew what is best for us, and it is right that they regard us as and treat us as children.

Such answers are unsatisfying because, to the rational, the doubting, human being it seems as if the revelations from God, from Allah, are somehow in some way deficient, as it seems as if Siddhattha Gotama may not been as fully enlightened as Buddhists seem to accept or to believe.

In truth, our human appreciation of the vastness of the Cosmos, of the probability of other sentient life existing elsewhere, our faculty of reason, should move us toward the conclusion that most if not all conventional Ways are incomplete at best, or at worst are just other examples of our human-centric perspective, of our lack of empathy with all life, with all existence, in the Cosmos.

Humility and Empathy

The Cosmic perspective points us toward a possible answer in respect of the initial question asked regarding humility, for it seems that the essence of genuine humility lies in this Cosmic perspective and in the empathy which enables us to appreciate other life in the Cosmos.

That is, what we call humility - with its human-making quality, its distillation of an essential part of our humanity - does not necessarily depend on God, or Allah, or one some revelation, or on some enlightened human being such as Siddhattha Gotama. Rather, it has become or it can become inherent in us by virtue of our slow human

process of *πάθει μάθος*, of us learning from our experiences, and thus growing in consciousness and empathy, which consciousness and which empathy provide us with both a knowledge, an understanding, of suffering and its causes, and with a means of ceasing to cause or to contribute such suffering.

Thus, humility is, like personal honour, an essential practical manifestation of empathy itself and of us acquiring a Cosmic perspective - because humility disposes us toward acting in such a manner that we try and avoid causing suffering to other beings, and removes from us that arrogance, that pride, which arises when we are subsumed with ourselves, our desires, and a human-centric perspective. For, by and through humility, we do what we do not because we expect some reward, or some forgiveness, given by some supra-personal supreme Being, or have some idealized duty to such a Being or to some abstraction (such as some nation, some State) but because it is in our very nature to do an act of compassion, a deed of honour: to do something which is noble and selfless.

That is, we act, not out of duty, not out of a desire for Heaven or Jannah, or enlightenment or some other "thing" we have posited - not from any emotion, desire or motive, not because some scripture or some revelation or some Buddha says we should - but because we have lost the illusion of our self-contained, personal, identity, lost our Earth-centric, human-centric, perspective, lost even the causal desire to be strive to something different, and instead just *are*: that is, we are just one microcosmic living mortal connexion between all life, on Earth, and in the Cosmos. For our very nature, as human beings, is a Cosmic nature - a natural part of the unfolding, of the naturally and numinously changing, Cosmos.

Evolution and Change

One objection to our human *πάθει μάθος* - to our evolution toward sentience and cosmic empathy and thus humility - might be that such evolution is itself an abstraction, a theory, or some ideal.

However, by such evolution is meant only change, only a natural unfolding - φύσις; only that slow interior iteration whereby we are changed through experience, through learning, through culture, through art, through those many and varied presencings of the numinous which contain and which express, and which have expressed for several millennia, the quintessence of our human *πάθει μάθος*.

Such a change is numinous, and distinct from that change - that disruptive, un-numinous, profane, change - which abstractions cause or which are the genesis of suffering.

For the change that is our numinous φύσις is essentially and at first an interior, a personal, one, imbued with the very acausality of the numen; whereas the vapid change of abstractions is the change of the causal, of cause-and-effect, arising from the pursuit of, or the desire for, outer change, of attempting to mould life, especially human life and Nature, to some abstraction or some ideal, which we believe in, assume, or hold onto.

Furthermore, empathy with life, with the Cosmos, disposes toward an understanding, a knowing, of the Cosmos itself as a natural unfolding, a natural, and numinous, changing, just as Nature is such, here on Earth: one particular, one finite, presencing of the very living of the Cosmos.

Conclusion

Hence, we arrive at the simple conclusion that for us human beings, humility seems to be a natural and necessary and numinous development; an expression of our humanity, of the potential that we possess to evolve, to change, ourselves in a numinous manner consistent with the Cosmic nature of our own being, and consistent with the nature of the Cosmos itself.

DWM
2010

Part Four

Soli Deo Gloria

Being extracts from a letter written in reply
to someone enquiring about the philosophy of The Numinous Way.

Since you enquire about the veracity of my Numinous Way, I should perhaps emphasize - as I have mentioned several times over the past few years - that this Way represents only my own fallible answers born from my own pathei-mathos, and that I am acutely aware that the answers of many other Ways, such as Buddhism and the answers of conventional religions such as Catholicism, also in their own particular harmonious manner express something of the numinous and may thus for many people provide a guide to living in a more numinous way.

As I wrote many years ago:

The Numinous Way is but one answer to the questions about existence, [and] does not have some monopoly on truth, nor does it claim any prominence, accepting that all the diverse manifestations of the Numen, all the diverse answers, of the various numinous Ways and religions, have or may have their place, and all perhaps may serve the same ultimate purpose - that of bringing us closer to the ineffable beauty, the ineffable goodness, of life; that of transforming us, reminding us; that of giving us as individuals the chance to cease to cause suffering, to presence the good, to be part of the Numen itself. For what distinguishes a valuable, a good, a numinous Way or religion, is firstly this commitment, however expressed, to the cessation of suffering through means which do not cause more suffering; secondly, having some practical means whereby individuals can transform themselves for the better, and thirdly, possessing some way of presenting, manifesting,

presencing what is sacred, what is numinous, thus reconnecting the individual to the source of their being, to their humanity.

In my fallible view, any Way or religion which manifests, which expresses, which guides individuals toward, the numinous humility we human beings need is good, and should not be stridently condemned.

For such personal humility - that which prevents us from committing hubris, whatever the *raison d'être*, the theology, the philosophy - is a presencing of the numinous. Indeed, one might write and say that it is a personal humility - whatever the source - that expresses our true developed (that is, rational and empathic) human nature and which nature such Ways or religions or mythological allegories remind us of. Hence the formulae, the expression, *Soli Deo Gloria* being one Western cultural manifestation of a necessary truth, manifesting as it does one particular numinous allegory among many such historical and cultural and mythological allegories. Just as, for example, the sight of King Louis IX walking barefoot to Sainte Chapelle was a symbol of the humility which the Christian faith, correctly understood, sought to cultivate in individuals.

As I mentioned in my essay *Humility, Abstractions, and Belief*,

One of the great advantages - a manifestation of humanity - of a Way such as Islam and Christianity and Buddhism is that they provide, or can provide, us with the supra-personal perspective, and thus the humility, we human beings require to prevent us veering into and becoming subsumed with the error of hubris.

As it says in the Rule of Saint Benedict:

“ The peak of our endeavour is to achieve profound humility...”
Chapter 7, *The Value of Humility*

As it says in the Quran:

“ The *Ibaad* of Ar-Rahman [Allah] are those who walk on earth in humility.” 25:63

As it says in the Dhammapada:

“ Yo bâlo maññati bâlyae paúóitovâpi tena so bâlo ca paúóitamânî sa ve bâloti vuccati.”

“ Accepting of themselves, the simple person in their simplicity is wise, although if they pride themselves they are wise, they are simply full of pride. “

Furthermore, such Ways provide such a supra-personal perspective in a manner which is living - that is, these Ways are presented to us as something which has a historical genesis and which lives among us, in our own times, in and through those devoted to them in that dignified manner

which makes such people living examples of those tenets, of those Ways. That is, the dignified people who follow such Ways - who are inspired by those Ways to practice humility in their own lives - thus manifest the numinous, the sacred, among us, and so can provide us with practical, and personal, guidance, and a sense of belonging.

Thus, I now have, partly from practical experience, come to apprehend a certain unity, a certain common insight, behind many outwardly differing Ways and religious forms, to the extent that I personally have been considered by some people to be some kind of Buddhist-Taoist-Muslim-Sufi-Catholic-NuminousWay-pagan-mystic hybrid. But in truth, I am merely someone who as a result of pathei-mathos knows their limitations, their fallibility, and thus who empathically resonates with past and present emanations of the numinous, often because of struggling to answer certain questions about our human nature, about our mortal existence, and about the nature of Reality which many others over millennia have also sought to answer.

Since you especially ask about Catholicism in relation to the Numinous Way, all I can say in my experience - having been raised a Catholic and having spent some time as a Catholic monk - is that Catholicism did manifest, and to an extent still does manifest, aspects of the numinous and therefore this particular guide to human living is one which I understand and appreciate as one style of earthly-harmony.

As I wrote a year or so ago:

" The Latin Tridentine Mass of the Catholic Church [...] evolved over a certain period of causal time, and became, for many Catholics, the main ritual, or rite, which imbued their ordinary lives with a certain numinosity - a certain awareness of the sacred, with attendance at this rite involving certain customs, such as modest and clean dress, and women covering their heads with a veil. This rite was, in essence, a *Mysterium* - that is, it embodied not only something holy and somewhat mysterious (such as the Consecration and Communion) but also was wordlessly un-mundane and so re-presented to most of those attending the rite, almost another world, with this re-presentation aided by such things as the use of incense, the ringing of the Sanctus bell, and the genuflexions. In addition, and importantly, the language of this rite was not that of everyday speech, and was not even, any longer, a living changing language, but rather had in many ways become the sacred language of that particular Way.

The Catholic rite endured for centuries and, indeed, to attend this particular rite marked, affirmed and re-affirmed one as a Catholic, as a particular follower of a particular Way, and a Way quite distinct from the schism that became Protestantism [1], a fact which explained, for instance, the decision, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First of England, to punish by fine or imprisonment those who attended this rite, and to persecute, accuse of treason, and often execute, those who performed this rite.

However, the reforms imposed by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican replaced this numinous rite, this *Mysterium*, with rites and practices

redolent of un-numinous Protestantism. Why? Most probably because those involved in such planning and producing and implementing such reforms were swayed by the causal abstractions of “progress” and “relevancy” – desiring as they did and do to be in accord with the causal, material, Zeitgeist of the modern West where numbers of adherents, and conformity to trendy ideas and theories, are regarded as more important than presencing The Numen in a numinous manner. When, that is, some profane causal abstractions come to be regarded as more relevant than experiencing and manifesting the sacred as the sacred.

Yet this does not mean that Catholicism, before the reforms imposed by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, was or remained a Way, *per se*. Only that, of all the variants of what are now termed Christianity, it retained a certain numinosity expressed by the original Way; that, through its Mysteriums such as the Tridentine Mass, it still presenced something of The Numen; and that it managed to avoid the worst excesses of the religious attitude, maintaining as it did a monasticism which by its own particular way of life encouraged the cultivation of a genuine, non-dogmatic, humility.”

Source - Concerning The Nature of Religion and The Nature of The Numinous Way

As this quote – and the associated footnote – make clear, it is my personal opinion that traditional Catholicism, with its Tridentine Mass and its particular conservative traditions, was a somewhat better, more harmonious, expression of the numinous (a necessary and relevant expression of the numinous), than both Protestantism and the reforms introduced by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, and which reforms served only to undermine the numinous, to untwist the threads that held together its “hidden soul of harmony”.

However, what really matters in my view in respect of considering how we judge and evaluate other Ways and other styles of earthly-harmony (that is, what are often regarded as religious expressions of the numinous), is not so much their veracity as perceived and/or assumed by us during one span or certain spans of causal Time, but rather how those Ways, those expressions, affect people and predispose them toward or guide them toward living in a more numinous manner. That is, by criteria such as humility, avoidance of hubris, compassion, fairness toward others: by those things which express, which manifest, the numinous in us, in terms of our character, our behaviour. Not, that is, by some abstract criteria which we posit and which we with arrogance use to condemn or malign, often based on some vainglorious assumption or need that our own beliefs, our own answers, are the correct ones.

There is thus a tolerance, a respect; a desire not to stridently condemn; an awareness of our own fallibility deriving from our own pathei-mathos and from the numinous perspective, the silent wordless clarity, that such a personal learning from the suffering of experience brings.

All I have tried to do in respect of The Numinous Way is present what I hope is an

alternative style of earthly-harmony, and sought to clarify how this alternative differs from others. For instance, in the matter of empathy, of honour, and of seeking to avoid the dogma arising from some causal abstraction or other. As to the veracity of my personal answers, I admit I do not know.

DWM
June 2011

Notes

[1] Catholicism (before the reforms imposed by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican) represented, in my view, the original Way known as Christianity, and was - at least before those reforms - quite distinct from those schisms which are now known as Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity. Indeed, distinct enough - until those reforms - to be considered a different Way of Life, a Way evident, for example, in Catholic rites (such as the Tridentine Mass), in monasticism, in Papal authority, in the use of Latin, and in the reverence accorded The Blessed Virgin Mary.

Furthermore, it is my admittedly fallible view that the schism now termed Protestantism was a classic example of the religious attitude predominating over numinosity - and thus that it is and was redolent of attempts to reduce The Numen to linear causal abstractions. Thus, Mysteries such as the Tridentine Mass became replaced with recitation of Scripture in the vernacular and with attempts to rationally explain - according to some abstract causal theory - the mystery of the consecration.

Appendix

A Few Terms Explained

ἀρμονία

ἀρμονία (harmony) is or can be manifest/discovered by an individual cultivating wu-wei and *σωφρονεῖν* (a fair and balanced personal, individual, judgement).

Cosmic Perspective

The Cosmic Perspective refers to our place in the Cosmos, to the fact that we human beings are simply one fragile fallible mortal biological life-form on one planet orbiting one star in one galaxy in a Cosmos of billions of galaxies. Thus in terms of this perspective all our theories, our ideas, our beliefs, our abstractions are merely the

opinionated product of our limited fallible Earth-bound so-called 'intelligence', an 'intelligence', an understanding, we foolishly, arrogantly, pridefully have a tendency to believe in and exalt as if we are somehow 'the centre of the Universe' and cosmically important.

The Cosmic Perspective inclines us - or can incline us - toward wu-wei, toward avoiding the error of hubris, toward humility, and thus toward an appreciation of the numinous.

δίκη

Depending on context, *δίκη* could be the judgement of an individual (or Judgement personified), or the natural and the necessary balance, or the correct/customary /ancestral way, or what is expected due to custom, or what is considered correct and natural, and so on.

A personified Judgement - the *Δίκη* of Hesiod - is the goddess of the natural balance, evident in the ancestral customs, the ways, the way of life, the ethos, of a community, whose judgement, *δίκη*, is "in accord with", has the nature or the character of, what tends to restore such balance after some deed or deeds by an individual or individuals have upset or disrupted that balance. This sense of *δίκη* as one's ancestral customs is evident, for example, in Homer (Odyssey, III, 244).

The modern numinous principle of *Δίκαια* suggests what lies beyond and what may have been the genesis of *δίκη* personified as the goddess, Judgement.

ἔρις

Strife; discord; disruption; a quarrel between friends or kin. As in the Odyssey:

ἦ τ' ἔριν Ἀτρεΐδῃσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔθηκε.

Who placed strife between those two sons of Atreus

Odyssey, 3, 136

According to the recounted tales of Greek mythology attributed to Aesop, *ἔρις* was caused by, or was a consequence of, the marriage between a personified *πόλεμος* (as the *δαίμων* of kindred strife) and a personified *ὑβρις* (as the *δαίμων* of arrogant pride) with Polemos rather forlornly following Hubris around rather than vice versa. Eris is thus the child of Polemos and Hubris.

Extremism

By *extreme* I mean *to be harsh*, so that my understanding of an *extremist* is a person who tends toward harshness, or who is harsh, or who supports/incites harshness, in pursuit of some objective, usually of a political or a religious nature. Here, *harsh* is:

rough, severe, a tendency to be unfeeling, unempathic.

Hence *extremism* is considered to be: (a) the result of such harshness, and (b) the principles, the causes, the characteristics, that promote, incite, or describe the harsh action of extremists. In addition, a fanatic is considered to be someone with a surfeit of zeal or whose enthusiasm for some objective, or for some cause, is intemperate.

In the philosophical terms of the way of pathei-mathos, an extremist is someone who commits the error of hubris; and error which enantiodromia - following from *πάθει μάθος* - can sometimes correct or forestall.

πάθει μάθος

The Greek term *πάθει μάθος* - pathei mathos - derives from The Agamemnon of Aeschylus (written c. 458 BCE), and can be interpreted, or translated, as meaning *learning from adversary*, or *wisdom arises from (personal) suffering*; or *personal experience is the genesis of true learning*.

However, this expression should be understood in context, for what Aeschylus writes is that the Immortal, Zeus, guiding mortals to reason, has provided we mortals with a new law, which law replaces previous ones, and which new law - this new guidance laid down for mortals - is pathei-mathos.

Thus, for we human beings, pathei-mathos possesses a numinous, a living, authority - that is, the wisdom, the understanding, that arises from one's own personal experience, from formative experiences that involve some hardship, some grief, some personal suffering, is often or could be more valuable to us (more alive, more meaningful) than any doctrine, than any religious faith, than any words one might hear from someone else or read in some book.

Πόλεμος

Heraclitus fragment 80

Πόλεμος is not some abstract 'war' or strife or kampf, but rather that which is or becomes the genesis of beings from Being (the separation of beings from Being), and thus not only that which manifests as *δίκη* but also accompanies *ἔρις* because it is the nature of *Πόλεμος* that beings, born because of and by *ἔρις*, can be returned to Being, become bound together - be whole - again by *enantiodromia*.

According to the recounted tales of Greek mythology attributed to Aesop, *ἔρις* was caused by, or was a consequence of, the marriage between a personified *πόλεμος* (as the *δαίμων* of kindred strife) and a personified *ὑβρις* (as the *δαίμων* of arrogant pride) with Polemos rather forlornly following Hubris around rather than vice versa. Thus Eris is the child of Polemos and Hubris.

Furthermore, Polemos was originally the *δαίμων* (not the god) of kindred strife, whether familial, of friends, or of one's *πόλις* (one's clan and their places of dwelling).

Thus, to describe Polemos, as is sometimes done, as the god of war, is doubly incorrect.

Numinous

The numinous is what manifests or can manifest or remind us of the natural balance of Life; of what is harmonious, or what reminds us of what is harmonious and beautiful. In a practical way, it is what we regard or come to appreciate as 'sacred' and dignified; what expresses our humanity.

We are reminded of this natural balance, of what is numinous - we can come to know, to experience, the numinous - by pathei-mathos. That is, by the process of learning from personal adversity/personal suffering/personal grief.

An aspect of this learning is an appreciation, an awareness, of The Cosmic Perspective: of ourselves as one fallible, mortal, fragile biological, microcosmic, nexion on one planet in one Galaxy in a Cosmos of billions of galaxies; one connexion to, one emanation of, all other Life. In essence, pathei-mathos teaches us humility and the value of personal love

ὑβρις

ὑβρις (hubris) is the error of personal insolence, of going beyond the proper limits set by: (a) reasoned (balanced) judgement - *σωφρονεῖν* - and by (b) an awareness, a personal knowing, of the numinous, and which knowing of the numinous can arise from empathy and *πάθει μάθος*.

Hubris upsets the natural balance - is contrary to *ἀρμονίη* - and often results from a person or persons striving for or clinging to some causal abstraction.

According to The Way of Pathei-Mathos, ὑβρις disrupts - and conceals - our appreciation of what is numinous and thus of what/whom we should respect, classically understood as *ψυχή* and *θεοί* and *Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες* and *δαιμόνων* and those sacred places guarded or watched over by *δαιμόνων*.

Wu-wei

Wu-wei is a Taoist term used in The Way of Pathei-Mathos to refer to a personal 'letting-be' deriving from a feeling, a knowing, that an essential part of wisdom is cultivation of an interior personal balance and which cultivation requires acceptance that one must work with, or employ, things according to their nature, their *φύσις*, for to do otherwise is incorrect, and inclines us toward, or is, being excessive - that is, toward the error, the unbalance, that is hubris, an error often manifest in personal arrogance, excessive personal pride, and insolence - that is, a disrespect for the numinous.

In practice, the knowledge, the understanding, the intuition, the insight that is wu-wei is a knowledge, an understanding, that can be acquired from empathy, *πάθει μάθος*,

and by a knowing of and an appreciation of the numinous. This knowledge and understanding is of wholeness, and that life, things/beings, change, flow, exist, in certain natural ways which we human beings cannot change however hard we might try; that such a hardness of human trying, a belief in such hardness, is unwise, un-natural, upsets the natural balance and can cause misfortune/suffering for us and/or for others, now or in the future. Thus success lies in discovering the inner nature (the physis) of things/beings/ourselves and gently, naturally, slowly, working with this inner nature, not striving against it.

ψυχή

Life *qua* being. Our being as a living existent is considered an emanation of ψυχή. Thus ψυχή is what 'animates' us and what gives us our nature, φύσις, as human beings. Our nature is that of a mortal fallible being veering between σωφρονεῖν (thoughtful reasoning, and thus fairness) and ὕβρις.

cc David Myatt 2012

This item is covered by the Creative Commons (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0) License and can be freely copied and distributed under the liberal terms of that license.

Image credit: Botticelli - Madonna del Magnificat
