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The Mystery of Dialogue

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Abstract: What does it mean to exist? This fundamental question can only be understood properly if one takes "to exist" in the infinitude of its verbal resonance: that existence is essentially an event, a happening, which means that existence cannot be understood as a presently available entity which can be categorically grasped as object of our cognition. This releasing of our existence from our conceptual-categorical mastery, this redemption from the violence of cognition, has something essentially dialogic about it which cannot be reduced to the dialectical logic of position and of opposition (op-position). This ethical dimension of existence, in its essentially dialogical depth and fecundity, is the very mystery of being, that is: to be, to exist, is to confront the mystery that makes our life open to the arrival of the other which cannot be anticipated by any calculable, instrumental reason.

Keywords: dialogue; communication; language; nexus; event

For Harjeet Singh Gill

Ecstasy

"What does it mean to exist?" It is this question that interests us here.

To exist: one cannot here miss the infinitude ("to") of its verbal resonance ("exist"). To exist is irreducible to being an entity that has already been in its "what it is," to that which has come to a point of arrest, and which, as such, can now be grasped (the German verb for grasping—*greifen*—is telling) in the concept (*Begriff*—from the verb *greifen*) categorically, the concept that would subsume the phenomenon under its universality with its "maximizing thrust" (Schürmann 2003) of predicative language. The cognitive violence in its "maximizing thrust" lies in its denial of the *eventive* trait of the phenomenon in question, of its *happening* and its *perhaps*, of its *arrival* and its *ecstasy*. This is why Martin Heidegger understands *existence* ecstatically: that existence is essentially—and this is the "essence" of existence—ecstatic; and he distinguishes this ecstasy of existence from the entities *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*, entities that are presently available and ready to be used.

This brings him very close to the later Schelling; and Heidegger never fails to mention his indebtedness to Schelling (Heidegger 1985), though he basically engages with the early Schelling: that existence—reason itself—"is" (rather, "goes") ecstatic when it confronts the un-pre-thinkable (*Die Unvordenkliche*) and exuberant event of that which goes even beyond Being (*Überseynde*). This ecstasy of existence is *manifestative* and *revelatory* (*Die Offenbarung)*; and its *singular* and *eventive* trait is irreducible to the categorical grasp of the entities "the already-having-been." For the concept only represents only the "not-not" (Schelling 1994) of essence—that is, the infinite ability-to-be of being; what the concept grasps is only the immanent content of being in its infinite ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*)—the potentiality which has its own ability to unfold itself immanently—while the *actuality*, which really is *existence* in its "essence," is that which ecstatically steps beyond and outside, because it is free for its existence. This freedom is not opposed but is at one with its necessity (see Schelling 2020). When Schelling goes on to understand God Himself in this light—*who* is *deo nil potentiale* (and hence is irreducible to any "what" and the "why") and hence is the living God—this God is free to the extent that it may even freely dispose His own being (Schelling 2020, 137). That is to say: He may, out of his own freedom and de-cision *kenotically* (following Philippians 2:6–9) *empty* Himself (following Luther's *theologia crucis* of *Entäusserung*). God is He *who* (*who* is not irreducible to "what")—and He is the actually existing and living God—freely, out of the incomprehensible de-cision (*Ent-Scheidung*), lets the extra-divine Logos be, lets the world be, lets His own "outside" be. This God is essentially *dialogic* God: He addresses the other as "thou"; He lets Himself be addressed as "thou"—in a love, even though this fiery love assumes sometimes, out of this abyss of love itself, the fury of wrath. That His fire of wrath is basically grounded in His even more originary and immemorial Love—what Schelling would call groundless (*Abgrund*)—which *groundlessly* precedes all negation and position (see Schelling 1992): this all-consuming and all purifying fiery Love which gives us life—this sourcive fire—is the very *freedom* that lets the other come into being, with whom then a *dialogue* happens, whom He *addresses* as "thou" and who *responds* to Him with a "thou," for dialogue is basically a *call* and *response* which do not necessarily have to be contemporary and coterminous with each other.

It is not necessary that dialogue has to be grounded on the synchrony of self-presence. Genuine dialogue is irreducible to the pathos of fusion which would neutralise or even nullify the singularity of the other in advance. If dialogue is genuinely to happen in freedom, then the fusion cannot but be an obstacle to dialogue: dialogue soon turns into the coercive and oppressive language of the law where every speech is transformed into "position" or an "opposition" (which is the counter-position). True dialogue interrupts the mythic return of the dialectical law of position and opposition. Dialectic is not more than dialogue. The surplus of dialogue over the logic of position: this is the unthought which remains the task of thinking.

Eventality

In fact, between the divine call and the human response—this *dia-legein* (not only in the sense of just two speeches or voices, but in the sense where two voices go *dia* without coming to a *sync*)—there is a non-contemporeinty and diachrony: the *diachrony* of freedom, the *freedom* for diachrony, is the very *Abgrund* of a divine Love, preceding all ground, which ecstatically lives outside the mythic-blind necessity. Only God who is ecstatic is the dialogic God. Only a dialogic God is the God of revelation and is Love Himself, is Truth Himself, is Life Himself (John 14:6). That the response to the question concerning truth and of life is transferred from a "what" ("*What* is truth?" "*What* is life?") to *who* ("I am the Truth," "I am the Life," "I am the Way"): this remarkable transformation or *metamorphosis* lays at rest all cognitive-conceptual attempts to grasp God in terms of immanent categories of the infinite-ability-to-be. Jesus, speaking here in the first person singular ("I"), addressing "thou," is this dialogic God. He is the God who—in order to speak to us humans amongst whom He lives as one of us—in order to enter into dialogue with us, freely and without necessity, vicariously and out of His abyss of Love, *empties* Himself even unto the cross (Philippians 2:6–9). He is the *speaking* God—the God who *speaks*, whose essential "being" is that of *speaking* to us, often in parables—who, for the sake of an infinite dialogue which transforms us even unto glory, through the humiliation on the cross, vicariously assumes the burden of the cross in order to make it light for us. To speak is to pass through the cross. God himself has to pass through the cross in order to speak: but this necessity is grounded in His freedom. The infinite speech of God passes through the measure of finitude, because He is essentially free for this finitude: this paradox of the divine language itself a cross—for understanding, for human, all-too-human reason.

This speaking and dialoguing God—who refuses Himself to be enclosed into the monologue of the mute being—is, as such, essentially God who becomes history and historical: He enters into history—the suspending and interrupting Word that He is—in order to interrupt and suspend the mythic law of necessity, in order to transform and transfigure it from the logic of all " already-having-been" into that which has not *yet* been, that which has never been at all, the world which is "to come" in essential sense. Speech transforms the ones whom the Word speaks—us, whom the Word addresses. Dialogue transfigures the one who responds to the call of Love. The Word of God is such that it interrupts the immanence of all words that are being spoken and transforms all words into their very futurity, into their very *adventitiousness*, into their very *eventality*. In speaking in human language, the Word of God *frees* all words of humans *from* their enclosures into the laws of the world *to* the open space of freedom—where a radically new world, radically different from the form of the world as it exists, would come to pass. What is *to* come would never simply pass by. The world is redeemed by the Word of the dialogic God—redeemed from the iron law of "already-having-been," from the potentiality of its mere ability-to-be—and this God places the world in the open *spacing* of freedom. This is the meaning of

redemption that issues from the dialogic Word of Him who takes His own being at risk. To speak is the essential risk which He assumes; and He is free to assume that risk to the point of the Cross, which is abominable to the *sagacity* of the world and scandalous to the *law* of the world. The Cross thus manifests this fundamental risk at its extreme moment—a *scandal* and a *folly*. This is God's *eventality* enters into history in order to bring it to the point of its passing of its existing form. God's eventality is the moment of letting go and emptying Himself on the cross, and opening up of the world to the Kingdom of which humans know neither a date nor its place. It cannot be predicted and predicated, because it is not an already-has- been, and its analogy is nowhere to be found in the world of already having-been. It is only a matter of hope which exceeds all prediction and predication: this is why Saint Paul calls this hope as the "hope against hope" (Romans 4:18), which is actually true hope, and is thus hope against all hopelessness. Only such hope saves the world which is irresistibly moving towards its own annihilation. God has to become a fool in order to confound the wisdom of the world; the Word of God has to become a scandal in order to undo the law of the world: but this is God's free necessity; it is the necessity of His freedom.

The Word of God comes out of the abyss of Love and enters into history, tears apart that history to the hope against all hope, and to which He calls us to be faithful, testing this faith against the measure of the world's intelligibility. The human intelligibility that takes its measure from the horizon of the world does not change that world: such is the world that remains unredeemed and unredeemable. Only that faith which takes its light—both lighter than the light of the world and darker than the darkness of the world—from a source beyond the horizon of the world's intelligibility, only such faith is faithful to the *eventality* of the *world to come*. The infinitude of the verbal—"to come"—is the very infinity that the speech of God, by addressing us as "thou," to whom we may call as "thou," opens us from the very heart of the world, extending and expanding that heart, deepening that heart, through which the sorrows of the world get transformed into joy, "in the little while, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). "In the little while, in the twinkling of an eye," (I Cronthians 15:51-52) " God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4): this *metamorphosis* of the world is the very *gift* of a dialogue, is the *dialogic* gift par excellence, for without dialogue there is no metamorphosis, no transformation of us and of the world. It is the *evental* gift of the God who speaks to us and who lets Himself be spoken to us. He gives us the gift of speech so that we may speak to Him. The language of this speech is essentially vocative—it is prayer. It is in prayer that we find the highest vocation and innermost essence of language fulfilled. In the folding of the hands in prayer the violence of grasping and seizing of our hands is renounced and abandoned. The mournfulness of this renunciation is its very bliss—language in its fulfilment. Dialogue is essentially oriented towards to this beatitude. Dialogue is fulfilled in being thus beatified.

Dialogue

Dialogue is, then, an event of language. Dialogue *happens*. It cannot be part of a calculable program oriented towards a predetermined *telos.* The event of dialogue is the event which happens in language, but it does not wholly belong to language: that is why there is something like the *ineffable* to which language exposes us, from which language erupts as an event. This ineffability is not just an accident, a consequence, a result of speech: it is the originary and immemorial opening of speech. It is the *ecstasy* of language which, beyond all predicative and predictive structure of denomination and positing, exposes us to the *manifestative* dimension of existence by *indicating* us towards it.

The Word of God addressing us is *the event of language* par excellence: its *happening* interrupts the totality of signification that constitutes the horizon of the world's intelligibility. But this fundamental *interruption* does not annihilate the world in a divine fury of utter destruction; rather, this interruption saves and salvages the world *to* its "to come," for *redemption*. There is thus no true dialogue without at once interrupting the totality of the already accomplished signification, and there is no true interruption without fundamentally salvaging the fundamentally *manifestative* trait of our existence. Dialogue interrupts and tears apart—in the redemptive violence of love—the closure of the monologue in which the world tends to enclose itself in the mythic law of necessity. God, whenever He speaks, interrupts the myth of the world. The narcissism of the world, blind to love, deaf to the call of love, dumb to receive the risk of love, tends to close itself into the "already-having-been" of being; the speech of love, demanding from us a response, ineluctably always late, wakes us up by shattering the foundation of this narcissistic world. Dialogue is thus not an apologetic use of language that exhausts itself in the sweet harmony of signification; rather, dialogue shatters the foundation of what has already been and of what has congealed itself into the sterile attributes of the law's immobility. As against the stagnancy of the world's law, love affirms itself in an un-re-thinkable and exuberant overflowing renewal—in a speech that is the surplus of signification, in the manifestative indication which exceeds all attribution. Dialogue is, then, the fundamental speech act of God and the speech act between humans. *It is love's act.* Even though this love appears fragile, its fragility exceeds all the powers of the world and all potentiality of an infinite ability-to-be. This is why Schelling, contra the dominant ontological understanding of being, understands actuality to be more than potentiality: God is He—He is the speaking God—whose actuality is such an exuberant fire that all potentiality of the world is consummated in its purifying flame of redemption.

The gift of language, which is never an aboriginal to the supposedly autarchic human, is the very gift of addressing and being addressed as "thou"; it is the very gift of addressing the "thou" as "I." This is why both Meister Eckhart and Schelling understand existence itself as "gift" or even as "loan" (Schelling 1992), freely given, gratuitously arrived. Language discloses, manifests, reveals me to myself as the "I" who essentially responds: henceforth all the address that issues from me as *call* issues from this originary *response* to the divine call of love. My

responsibility lies in this *response*—in this response to the call which comes to me from Love, which comes to me from Him who is Love. Without this fundamental *listening* there is no dialogue. I cannot enter into dialogue with the "thou" without listening. To listen is to learn to wait. In waiting time flourishes and blossoms wherein the human being perdures and endures. To listen, even to be able to speak, is to cease myself speaking for the time being. This interaction between listening and speaking is the very mystery of dialogue. It is the mystery because in listening all to which I listen is not exhausted in my conceptual-cognitive ability to comprehend. There remains something which I cannot exhaustively comprehend. There remains the ineffability that lends language its *eventiveness*, its *dis-enclosure*, its *manifestative* and its *indicative* dimension which refuses to close itself up within a totality of signification. Since we—the human beings ourselves—are speaking and dialoguing beings, the ground of our very existence remains an indecipherable mystery to us—without which there is no language. Dialogue thus marks the finitude of each one of us, and manifests, at the same time—without exhausting in signification—that which truly is the infinitude that keeps the heart of the world, our very world, open to the *coming* of *redemption*. Dialogue is, then, the heart not just of language but of the world. The world in its eventiveness—and not in its signification is essentially dialogic: it palpitates, trembles, shudders in the coming of the Other whose name is beyond all names.

Nexus

God speaks, the world comes to being. God speaks, the speaking being comes to being. There is something like a trace of divinity in human language. Now this human language not only responds to the call of the Other and calls others like him/her; s/he also calls—by that very gift of language—nature who comes to receive her names. Language, which is essentially dialogical, constitutes the very ontological nexus of beings: from God to nature, a language passes though the human whose essential being is to speak. The human is the vowel between consonants, as Schelling (1992) says. He is created in the *eikon* of God—*imago Dei*. The event of the fall marks the decisive rupture of this nexus. Now humans, and the whole of nature too, "groan" for their redemption (Romans 8:18–25)—that is, they groan for the restoration of the originary ontological nexus. Now the dialogical language is overwhelmed with the lust for mastery and domination—language is transformed into an instrument, a means to an end; the "dominion" which is the originary gift from God to humans is transformed into domination. The transmutation of the ontological nexus of beings is the very transmutation of language, due to the fall of the humans. The dialogic language suffers the violence and becomes an infinite groaning. We have been, along with nature, groaning all along. Only in the restoration of language to its originary dialogic nature lies our redemption; and it is in redemption alone, from the violence of domination, that the ethical task of all dialogic thinking and being lies.

When at the inception of the self-legitimizing epoch of modernity the human being is determined as an autarchic and self-sufficient Subject of

rationality, the doctrine of the originary nexus of being is obfuscated and has undergone oblivion. The human language came to be determined in its task as that of clarifying of what has-already-been: a certain concept of "truth" is born which consists of testing this clarifying act of human rationality in terms of its propositional structure, where the dialogic-evental-ecstatic-manifestative trait of language is set aside in order to legitimize the ontic sciences. The drafting of human existence—and the whole of nature too—into this totalizing project of the kingdom of man, demands drafting of human language too within this totalizing project: the vocative nature of language is reduced to the juridical language of means to an end, because the juridical language of means and end—with its "maximizing thrust"(Schürmann 2003) —can assimilate and appropriate the multiple singularities of phenomena under the gaze of the one. The verbality of the infinitive—in its radical openness to the futurity—gets transfixed into the "small stations" and "crabbed times" (Rosenzweig 2005, 354) of the substantives, closed up into the stagnant waters of the asphyxiating law.

At the closure of this epochal condition it constitutes the highest vocation of human existence to be itself vocative; and it is language, which is in its essence vocative—that is, in its mystery of the dialogic nature—which can unfold humanity to its essential truth: that the human being is an essentially open being, to the divine and to nature amidst which s/he exists ecstatically, as the being whose task consists in that s/he manifests himself/herself to the other as the one who essentially responds to the call of responsibility.

The mystery of dialogue is, then, less of an objective fact among facts in the world but the name of an essential task that the human being—because s/he is made in the image of God—may hope to assume in order to participate in the redeeming and salvaging act of restitution of the originary ontological nexus of beings. It cannot be a calculable program which can be carried out, with a pre-determined *telos*, by the ratiocinative actions of the human being. Only in thoughtful listening to the call of the infinity—who Himself is Word—may this essential task fructify and flourish in us.

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