

CENTER FOR REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LAW  
8420 Camellia Drive, Raleigh, North Carolina 27612  
(919) 847-5819

Affiliated with  
The Riverdale Center for Religious Research  
5801 Palisade Avenue, Bronx, New York 10471

James Berry  
Advisory Board  
American Teilhard Assoc.

September 17, 1981

Circular No.19

We had a meeting of the Second Law Study Group on 25 August where the subject was evolution and evolution did take up some of the time, but so did a lot of other subjects, and what I am going to do is try to recapture a phrase or a sentence here and there that might get the wheels to churning. It was a good session.

Theodosius Dobzhansky wrote a book for the series Perspectives in Humanism, edited by Ruth Nada Anshen and published by Meridian Books. Dobzhansky's piece is called The Biology of Ultimate Concern, the ultimate concern being death or "what's it all about?"

Well, Dobzhansky is a Teilhardian and if you choose to read only the last chapter in his book you will be richly rewarded. But if you have a discussion with Dr. Leslie Real who led our session, you will have to reread it a couple of times and read some other people too before you are comfortable about any of it.

The emphasis in Teilhard and Dobzhansky goes to genesis, becoming, the transitional function, and the evolutionary role of the human, of nature, and of the universe. Les Real questions the specialness of the human in Dobzhansky and Teilhard and many others. He seems not to be convinced that the human is the central reality or the most complex of all phenomena or that mind deserves the emphasis it gets as the proof of the extraordinary value of humanness; or that the sun and the moon and the earth were created for the convenience of the human. He does not subscribe to the belief that the process of evolution along a "privileged" axis can be supported by science. Teilhard's vision of a sort of inevitable progress must be supported by means other than biological study.

Les Real likes the way French philosopher Gabriel Marcel goes at the difficulty we have in understanding what's going on. The following is a condensed paraphrase.

Marcel, in an essay accompanying a play he wrote, speaks of problems and mysteries. A problem is something you can define and measure and have a go at solving. A mystery is a problem which encroaches on itself, which in some way is mixed in with the solution. Love is a mystery. If John loves Mary, he needs to be near her and to do things for her, but when he steps back to think about love, and to admire it, he ceases to be loving and becomes an objectifier of love. That's the first level of reflection, and when he steps back from there to objectify his self-awareness, he has reached the second level of reflection which can be endlessly compounded. He can reflect on himself reflecting on himself, etc. This dichotomizing of subject and object is avoided in the third level where one no longer divides the world up, but becomes a poet or maybe a Buddhist. Teilhard and Dobzhansky are objective and Marcel is subjective. The difference lies in how one looks at the present and the future; whether one finds his meaning in potential, in his participation in the becoming process, in evolving toward Omega, or whether he finds his meaning in here and now experiencing the dimensions of humanity which are love and caring, faith, hope, fidelity."

I hope I have done Les Real justice in paraphrasing him above. I have no trouble with his criticisms of Teilhard's science and his preference for Marcel, but I want to find that Teilhard, in providing his vision of the future, does not distort present meaning by his placement of the human in the natural order and his concentration on the human's participation in evolution, neglecting temporal existence. When Thomas Berry conducts his session on Riverdale Papers in December, I hope to see a synthesis reached or at least approached. My brother is not less a Buddhist, not less concerned with the present, but I think that the present cannot be comprehended unless one has found a place in it defined by past and future alike. When the principles of Subjectivity, Differentiation, and Communion are included, maybe it will come clear(er?).

I guess there is no way a meeting such as the one we had could have happened without considerable talk on Zen Buddhism. I copied a quote Les read from Meister Eckhart which is said to capture the spirit of Zen and of Merton also.

Then how shall I love Him  
Love Him as He is  
Not God—Not spirit  
Not person and not image  
As sheer pure limpid One  
Alien from all duality  
And in this One let us sink  
Down eternally from nothingness to nothingness

← read dichotomy

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There was a Trappist monk with us, Jim Gorman, who weaves for a living somewhere up around Oxford. Jim has a good deal of experience with Buddhism and was a lively participant in the conversation:

My exposure to Zen Buddhism was very revolutionary. It fits into this discussion from the point of view of the phrase you just used 'the true self'. When I read The Ultimate Concern, I was very stimulated. I'm not anxious to check out of this program. I'd like to live to be 400. That ultimate concern is a real concern of mine. I'm self-aware. I have a keen sense of loss in the idea of dying. None of the great traditions satisfactorily deal with it on a conceptual level, but Zen experience, the experience of enlightenment in Buddhism is really an experience in reality, a direct intuition of reality. It gives a whole different perspective on life and what the problems are and what ultimate reality is. I can't tell you because I haven't experienced it, but somehow it's in the Christian gospel story of 'Unless you lose your life you cannot gain it'. So when you express your ultimate concern, you are holding on to your life, and until you give it up you won't gain it. When you gain it, you will know what it is—and some people will be able to explain it.

Les broke in with, "That puts a whole new perspective on the statement 'One cannot see God and live'."

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- September 22nd - Jim Hunt (no relation) will talk about Mohandas Gandhi. I  
5:30 p.m. have copies of the recommended reading. (Please note that this  
is a changed date from September 29th)
- October 27th - Lynn White, Jr. on the Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.