

## MEETING THE OTHERS IN THEIR DIFFERENCES: A PSYCHOSOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The present article is based on a book entitled *Meeting the Others in their Differences: Toward a Christian Approach to the Scientific Study of Religions*. The main purpose of this book is to describe and analyze the structure of religious discourses. It claims that it is possible to classify these discourses into four categories or what I called *modes of resolution*. The first mode is the *ritual mode of resolution* and it encompasses all the traditions whose purpose is to predict and control the forces of the world. The second mode, the *mystical mode of resolution*, comprises all mystical traditions aspiring to liberation from this world. The discourses of the third mode, the *relational mode of resolution*, are based on the idea that this world has been created by a transcendental Being who has directly revealed as His Will a code of laws regulating the relations between the members of a given community. The fourth mode is called the *mode of the cross*. It is specific to the Christian discourse. Although the model of the four modes of resolution has chiefly been used in the book to understand the structure of the religious discourses, it may be extended to explore other categories of discourses related to such areas of human activity as science and politics. The present article is an example of such an exploration. It considers various topics connected to interpersonal relations, self-perception in social context, and the perception of the other with some references to current social issues, in particular, the cancel culture and the woke movement.

**Keywords:** resolution; religion, discourse; instrumentalization; social structure; organization; social control; elitism; identity.

### Introduction

I recently published a book entitled *Meeting the Others in their Differences: Toward a Christian Approach to the Scientific Study of Religions*. Its main purpose is to describe and analyze the structure of religious discourses. The first part presents a brief survey of the two major types of approach to the study of religious phenomena. The first type comprises all models that locate the origin of religions in a psychological event. That event may be negative as it is the case with the Freudian explanation that reduces religious behavior to some kind of psychotic condition like neurosis. It could have a positive connotation if its source is what may be called a mystical experience, an experience of what cannot be named or objectified. In both cases, the event is viewed as universal in the sense that it is not specific to any religious traditions.

The second type presents the emergence of religions as a social phenomenon. It is thus intimately related to the fact that human beings are living in communities. As such, a

religion is like a language. If the latter allows people to communicate among themselves, the former, as a set of rituals usually sustained by a mythological discourse, is necessary for the regulation of people's behavior within a given community. In fact, language and religion are fused in the context of the dominating religious discourse of a community since any discussion, for example, on the Will of God, has a direct influence on how the relations will be shaped among the people who submit to that Will of God. The purpose of this brief survey is therefore to provide a historical context to my own approach to the study of the structure of religious discourses.

The second part of the book looks at how any objective discourse about religions may be misled by confusing the meaning of its symbols. To present my case, I used a method that I inherited from Dr. Charles Adams, one of my professors at McGill University. It consists in asking three fundamental questions: 1. What is the human problem or the human situation that calls the religious response? 2. By what means is the problem solved? 3. To what kind of situation does the solution of the problem lead? As a whole, these three questions are subsumed under the notion of problematics. When comparing the answers given by the various discourses—in the present case, I contrast Islam with Christianity—we notice that, even if they are using the same symbols, for example, *sin*, *prophets*, *Jesus*, their meaning is quite different. To illustrate that point, we could say that the degree of importance of Jesus (a person) in Christianity is equivalent to how the Muslim perceive the Koran (a book). Inversely, the Bible (a book) is secondary to Jesus in the Christian economy of salvation as Mohammed is to the Koran with regard to the Muslim problematics. This method also allows us, among other things, to understand why it is unacceptable for the Muslims to view Jesus as a person being both man and God, or why Christians have a hard time accepting that the Koran should not be subjected to the same degree of critical analysis as the Bible is, this being a common criticism leveled by Christians against Muslims.

Because this notion of problematics may be used as a justification for a relativistic view of religion, another model of explanation is presented. Its function is to identify the main presuppositions underlying the major religious discourses of the world. Here, it is shown, for example, that the relativistic nature of a religious discourse, whether real or perceived as such, is also relative to a particular type of aspiration or to the nature of the problematics one decides to implement. Four categories of problematics have been identified, each corresponding to a specific mode of resolving a distinct situation of crisis. The first mode of resolution is called the *ritual mode of resolution* and it encompasses all the discourses related to the problematics having at their core the practices of magic, divination, or sacrifices. The most important religious traditions of the ritual mode are Brahmanism in India, Shintoism in Japan and all forms of paganism. The discourses of science, including that of the modern study of religion, could be included in this first mode of resolution. The second mode, *the mystical mode of resolution*, comprises all mystical traditions aspiring to an experience of liberation from a world usually perceived as illusory or unredeemable. Buddhism and the various Hindu yoga are good examples of religious and spiritual traditions that are articulated by the presuppositions of this second mode of resolution. The discourses of the third mode, *the relational mode of resolution*, are based on the idea that this world has been created and is ruled by only one God who has revealed to a chosen nation a code of laws binding together all the members of that nation as well as the nation

itself with that God. Here, we predominantly find the Judaism of the *Torah* and the Islam of the *Sharia*. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the spiritual tradition of Sufism, although issued from Islam, is best categorized as an example of the mystical mode of resolution. This partly explains the reason why there has been an antagonism throughout Muslim history between the Sufis and their fellow believers who give priority to a submission to the Law. Finally, the fourth mode of resolution is called *the mode of the cross*. It is specific to the Christian discourse of reconciliation between mankind and God as brought about by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Although the model of the four modes of resolution has chiefly been used in my book to understand the structure of religious discourses, it may be extended to comprise scientific discourses as well. Indeed, starting from the pre-Socratic philosophers who, probably for the first time in human history, tried to attribute natural and rational causes to the observed phenomena—as opposed to being the results of divine intervention—to the advocates of quantum theory, we can identify distinct set of presuppositions regarding, for example, what constitutes the fundamental realities of our universe. What is most interesting is the fact that those sets of presuppositions correspond to the ones articulating the first three modes of resolution, while the fourth one, that is, the mode of the cross, underlies all the scientific discourses as it is the condition by which the evolution or the transformation of those discourses is made possible. This function assumed by the mode of the cross is true for all religious discourses as well and as such, it corresponds to a universal characteristic, namely, a characteristic that is intrinsic to all human experiences of transformation. Not to sound too apologetic, I have to add that the other modes of resolution also contain an element that may be viewed as universal with regard to human experiences. To explore those four universals, I would like to give another example of their application in the field of psychosociology, more precisely, with regard to topics related to interpersonal relations, self-perception in social context, and the perception of the other with some references to current social issues. What follows may be viewed, in part, as an original contribution.

### **The ritual mode of resolution**

What is universal about the ritual mode of resolution is the fact that we experience reality as something which is comprised of objects. However, what is considered universal does not necessarily mean that it is accepted as real by everyone. We all experience the objects of the world, but many mystics say that objects are projections of our desires. Whether we accept this proposition or not, the fact remains that in the context of the first mode of resolution, objects are intimately related to what we consciously or unconsciously want the world to give us. An object, whether it is something physical like food, or abstract like an idea, is always viewed as an instrument to fulfill a desire. That is why the founding event of the various problematics, which are articulated by the presuppositions of the ritual mode of resolution, is the discovery or creation of a new object. As such, an object becomes an instrument the moment we have made a connection between its essential characteristics and a purpose. The connection between the characteristics of an object and its purpose is what constitutes knowledge in the context of the present mode of resolution. It is that knowledge that regulates the actions transforming the object into an instrument. Thus, the

allusion to the notion of a ritual comes from the fact that regulated actions are repeated and memorized.

As far as we are dealing with heteronomous realities, that is, realities that can easily assume the purpose we impose on them, for example, a hammer or a computer, or semi-autonomous entities like a dog we train to be used as a shepherd, the relation between a desiring subject and what is perceived as an object is a stable one. In fact, if this relation is really stable, the object becomes, so to speak, transparent because it is now an extension of one's body and will. In this regard, Michael Polanyi uses the example of a blind person's stick that has become an extension of his sense of touch by "disappearing" as an object of perception (Polanyi & Prosch 1975: 36). However, the relation is unstable when it connects a desiring subject with a fully autonomous entity endowed with its own desires and will. In concrete terms, social problems start when a person perceives another person exclusively as an object and consequently, applies the same dynamic of actions as it would be with an instrument. Symptoms of psychological disturbances also occur when a subject looks at himself or herself, partially or wholly, as an object. Let's first look at the social disturbances resulting from the objectification of the other.

By definition, we can simply say that an autonomous structure cannot be reduced to a heteronomous status. Not only is it a semantic contradiction, but also an existential one on account of the fact that, in the case when a person is fully instrumentalized, we have a relation between a subject exercising his autonomy by depriving another subject of his autonomy. What does "fully instrumentalized" mean and what are the situations it is likely to occur? This concept is important to understand so that we may be able to distinguish between a situation where the efficiency of a social structure is optimized from one where internal tensions within such a structure are building up and, by the same token, a process of social implosion has been triggered. Being able to make that distinction also means that the fact that people are instrumentalized is ethically acceptable within specific contexts.

The instrumentalization of an autonomous person is acceptable in the context of a hierarchy of function, in which such a person, endowed with a specific skill or practical knowledge, is executing a task that contributes to the fulfillment of a given purpose. Whatever that purpose may be defined, its common denominator is its ability to generate autonomy. As long as this autonomy is shared, the instrumentalization of a person contributes to the stability or even the growth of a society. In this context, an individual autonomy is just one way of sharing or taking advantage of the collective autonomy generated. Some may wish to go into space, others would be contented by a nice stroll at a beach. While this individual autonomy is relative to each and every person, the shared autonomy is objective because it could be evaluated and even measured in the same way the output of a factory, a working environment, etc., can be estimated and determined.

However, the process of social implosion starts when one person does not partake in the autonomy that has been generated to the same degree as another person. An extreme example of this situation is when we have an elite enjoying a full autonomy while other people are fully excluded. Such is the case of a society relying on slaves, the *instrumentum genus vocale* (an instrument endowed with speech), for its survival and organization. A little bit above that status, but not much better in terms of autonomy, are the allegedly free

workers who have to toil to barely get the minimum means of their survival. In this case also, we are dealing with an instrumentalization of a person with very limited access to the generated autonomy. The logic of the ritual mode of resolution becomes even more apparent when such instrumentalized person becomes obsolete, useless, or even an obstacle to the amount of shared autonomy that is enjoyed by the others. For example, caring for a sick, old or dying instrumentalized person is a drain on the generated autonomy. History also tells us that there were societies which sacrificed people to their gods to maintain their structure or autonomy. In such a case, whether the sacrificed person can be productive or not, she is still instrumentalized to be part of a ritual fulfilling a social purpose.

At the psychological level, the instrumentalization of a person occurs when an individual becomes obsessed with his or her self-image, a condition known as narcissism. At this point, I do not want to describe all the aspects of this personality disorder—I am not qualified to do so—but highlight its implication with regard to the presuppositions of the ritual mode of resolution. I said that every object may be connected to a purpose and an action (even looking at something is an action). More specifically, an object is an instrument making possible or requiring a specific action so that a goal is accomplished. I also said that, in the process, the object becomes transparent because it is an extension of the body. From the point of view of the mind desiring to reach a goal, the body must also become transparent. If not, that is, if the attention is no longer on the goal, but on the means to achieve that goal, the action stalls. We thus create a situation of inhibition of the action. Just try to focus your attention to the process of walking when walking, you will either slow down, lose coordination or even stop. In other words, what is meant to be transparent is now opaque, what should not be an object of our awareness is now occupying the entire field of our consciousness. I would argue that it is this shift of attention, if it lasts or is dominant in the ways a person relates to herself and the others, that becomes, according to Henri Laborit who popularized the notion of inhibition of the action, pathological (Laborit, 1974).

The idea that an object becomes transparent when used efficiently to accomplish a goal can also highlight what is wrong with the transhumanist movement and its aspiration. In the present context, I understand transhumanism as the enhancement of the biological body by using technology. The problem is not the fact that we are connecting a natural body with an artificial device, but rather the situation, in which such a connection occurs. If we are dealing with an artificial limb to allow a handicapped person to lead a normal life or to have the benefit of a degree of autonomy enjoyed by people without any handicap, there is no problem. Here technology is raising a person to a normality that does not draw any attention. However, if the piece of technology allows a person to exceed that normality, it draws attention to itself to a point where such a person is defined in terms of the object being connected to her. Even if everyone would get such technological enhancement to make it a new normal, the problem remains because the natural body, the body we get at birth, always stays the base line. To fully understand the inherent flaw of the transhumanist aspiration, we have to move to the next mode of resolution as we are not just dealing with objects, but also with states of being.

### The mystical mode of resolution

The universal principle revealed by the mystical mode of resolution is the idea that the autonomous realities of the world are structured in terms of state of being or state of existence. The founding event of this mode is the emergence, within a world of expected states of existence, of a person with a state of being so extraordinary that it is viewed as something mysterious, beyond the normal grasp of one's cognitive ability. This is why that mysterious state of being is nameless and, consequently, cannot be objectified. The emergence of a new state of being also introduces a standard by which all other states are measured and judged. The desire to move from one state of existence to another, to transcend one's current state of being in order to realize or achieve a desired state is the common denominator of all the problematics articulated around the presuppositions of the mystical mode of resolution. It is thus in the context of such problematics that we find the notions of *karma* as actions whose results bring us closer or further to the desired state of being—actions aimed at satisfying desires by using objects yield negative *karma* and actions freeing us from such desires are positive *karma*—, degrees of perfection to mark the “distance” relative to the desired mystical state, and rebirth and reincarnation when the results of *karma* are spread out over many existences. Leaving religious discourses aside and in line with the purpose of the present article, I would like to investigate what happens, from a sociopsychological perspective, when a person is exclusively defined in terms of a state of being.

To continue the discussion on transhumanism, we can now understand the nature of the fundamental aspiration of this movement. The natural or biological body is viewed, following the logic of the mystical mode of resolution, as an inferior state of being while the technologically enhanced body as the aspired state of existence. In this regard, the transhumanist problematics rests on the same presuppositions as that of the gnostic sects like the Cathars and such other mystical traditions as Jainism that viewed suicide at the ultimate act of freeing oneself from the shackles of the body. It goes without saying that the body, not only it is inferior, but also impure. So is the material world from which it has been created. Freedom is usually a gradual process and, if in those mystical traditions what is to be liberated is called the soul, in secular movements it is usually the mind endowed with knowledge and reason. From the standpoint of knowledge and reason, ignorance and irrationality are going to be discredited—that is why religious traditions requiring faith in a revelation are invalidated—and from the elevated state of perfection resulting from knowledge and reason, the world is despised or looked upon in a contemptuous way. Very often, this negative attitude is transformed into an acute sense of shame toward the constituents of this world, especially those that are perceived as being entangled with the part of us which is aspiring to a higher level of being. The constituents are usually the family, society, the country one is born in, the culture that defines the identity of what is perceived as an inferior state of existence.

When transposing this attitude into a social and political context, we find an elite that believe to be entitled, on the basis of their perceived state of elevated existence, to certain privileges. They often view themselves as being above the laws because the laws apply to the lower states of being. It is not hypocritical of them not to follow the laws they enacted and impose of others. On the contrary, it is perfectly in line with the idea, like the Pharaoh



ruling over his subjects, that people of higher states of being dictate what is good for the people of lower states of being. It is as natural as saying that light rules over darkness, perfection regulates the imperfect, knowledge defeat ignorance, etc. If for the present elite knowledge and reason is no longer what justifies its elevated status and privileged position, they still nurture a dubious affiliation to globalist or universalist ideas so that they may shame the majority of people into submission by decrying their distinct culture, history, religion, and national or regional identity. It is as though the mechanism that has been used by the elite to generate their own status, has now been transformed into an instrument of power and suppression. It is so as long as this elite has enough useful idiots, that is, people who aspired to attain the status of the elite, but will never be able to because they have been instrumentalized to become the opposite side of those who have been shamed, to be part of the 'we versus them' divide. This is how the divide-to-rule principle works.

The shaming mechanism, to work efficiently, also needs the support of a discourse that is articulated by the presuppositions of the mystical mode of resolution. I previously mentioned that in the context of the problematics generated by this second mode, we have degrees or levels of perfection. We do not know what those levels consist of, but we are aware of their existence because they have been assigned a name. The name itself carries weight or has influence within a social environment. For example, in Buddhism, to be a *Buddha* (an awakened being) is the most respectable title a person can have. The same with the titles *master*, *guru*, etc. These titles are used to locate a person, fully identified with a particular state of being, within a hierarchy of states of beings. These titles are not to be confused with those we assign to a person in relation to a hierarchy of function like the titles *doctor*, *engineer*, *teacher*, etc. Thus, those who want to control other people can do so, following the categories and logic of the mystical mode of resolution, by assigning labels to other people. A label, like a mystical title, encapsulates the entirety of a person and forces her to a specific location within a social hierarchy, usually one that has very limited power or even one inviting others to exert their own power over her. We often say that labeling a person as a racist or something “phobe” is a way to exclude her from the public discourse, but this is only one example of a way to reduce the influence of a person in a social environment. When this strategy is used by someone who also controls a throng of useful idiots, it may result in having such a person fully excluded from society, to be canceled—as it is now said—if not socially destroyed. And if the label carries legal consequences, we are dealing with outright repression.

The use of labels to neutralize your opponents may be perceived as very effective, but when the practice stabilizes itself to become part of a culture, we end up with a society that is structured along the lines of a caste system similar to that which prevails for thousands of years in ancient India. A modern version of the caste system is certainly the social credit system where people are evaluated and ranked in a hierarchy on the basis of their choices. It is the perfect way to stifle the evolution of a society. If India had not had a parallel system promoting genuine spiritual emancipation, the entire Indian social structure would have collapsed or exploded on account of the tremendous amount of social discrimination and injustice the caste system generates. The comparison with the caste system brings me to shed light on other mechanisms that have been manifesting themselves lately, in particular, the *woke* movement.

If a cancel culture excludes people on account of their state of being, it does so because it assumes that such states of being are somewhat impure, that they carry some sort of negative stain or agent. For example, many hierarchies based on states of existence consider blood and death as polluting agents. That is why menstruating women, in many religions, for instance, Hinduism, Judaism and Shintoism, are excluded from the community and have to undergo special cleansing rituals before they could be readmitted. They are excluded because, in the context of the mystical mode, pollution or impurity that can corrupt one's state of being is transmitted by contact or direct association. In today's world, partly dominated by the mystical way of perceiving other people, not only a relation with an "undesirable" or "deplorable" person is sanctioned, but also any person who shares or is affiliated to certain ideas that have been earmarked as reprehensible by the cancel culture.

Conversely, a society dominated by mystical presuppositions has developed the notion of merits. A merit is something that may be gained by being associated with a person of higher state of being. Even if we have not done anything to elevate our own state of perfection, the mere contact with a higher state is sufficient to elevate us. This is how the system of merit work and why people in most religions flock to holy persons or saints, try to touch their garment or keep relics of their body. Even being at a place where such a saint has lived or did something meritorious is enough to receive some merits. In short, merits is a kind of spiritual money that can be exchanged in a fairly easy way. When transposed into a social system, merits can be accrued by associating with the elite or by affiliating—or rather submitting—ourselves to ideas, movements, etc. that have the potential to socially elevate ourselves. This is in essence the dynamic of the woke movement: elevation, not through one's efforts and dedication, but by submission. In a religious and spiritual environment, such a submission has its purpose, especially if it is part of a preparation to a deeper commitment to a mystical ideal. In a secular environment, like it is with a cancel culture, it leads to social stagnation. Such stagnation occurs on account of having a polarized society between givers, usually the elite who defines what the merits should be, and the passive receivers or consumers of those merits.

There is a last point I would like to discuss regarding a psychosociological perspective on the mystical mode of resolution. The elite, or those who control the means of social gratification, have been, historically speaking, quite antagonistic toward religious traditions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The reason is, in addition to the shaming mechanism of one's origin, that these religions set as the level of perfection something that is beyond human reach. This means that our status as a human is always to be perceived as inferior, imperfect, etc. In Islam and Judaism, for example, it is the fact that we are clueless about what has to be done or what is expected of us while in Christianity, it is the recognition that we are sinful, a state of being brought upon humanity on account of Adam's Fall. That state of being which is less than what could be accomplished is unbearable for the mystical elite for the simple reason that it directly undermines their authority. If they have some power or influence over the others, they can no longer claim it as their own. Like the many saints and prophets of the Abrahamic religions, it has been *freely*—I insist on that word—bestowed upon them. This means that they are not the source of their own merits. The attitude and the reaction of the elite is, to some extent, a reenactment of the encounter between the Pharaoh and Moses. The former is not supposed to move because he believes that he has



the privilege to move everyone else. The Pharaoh cannot, consequently, bear the fact that he is being forced to move by Moses, the son of a slave issued from a nation of shepherds, a profession that was, by the way, fully despised by the Egyptians. On the other hand, Moses seemed to have understood that the perfect way to destabilize a dictatorial regime, is to force it to openly act, more precisely, react. The parallel with the story of Moses brings us to the next mode of resolution.

### **The relational mode of resolution**

As just seen, what Moses reminds the Pharaoh, is that the latter is not the source of his own status, no matter how elevated it could be. The source of his authority and the means by which he is allowed to rule is an entity that transcends this world. This means comes in the form of a guidance that is codified in a system of laws. With Moses, it is the Torah and for the Muslims, the *Sharia*. However, contrary to the laws of a Pharaoh that take the form of personal edicts that have to be followed by everyone except himself, the laws of this transcendental entity revealed by an intermediary—a *prophet* in the context of Judaism and Islam—is a matrix by which laws are generated and to which everyone, including the prophet, has to submit. In a secular environment, such matrix could be a constitution or something like the Declaration of Human Rights. From this perspective, a law is understood as what defined or prescribed the boundaries of a relation between two autonomous persons. This is why the third mode of resolution has been designated as the relational mode of resolution.

I just mentioned the social role of labels and how they should be distinguished between those we use in the context of a hierarchy of function and that of states of being. In the present case, labels are what defines the two autonomous entities involved in a relation. We have, for example, the label “father” that automatically implies its counterpart, which could be “son,” “daughter,” “children,” “mother,” etc. These labels are relative to the relation they define as a father could also be a son. It is to be noted that a philosophical tradition like Confucianism has subsumed all possible relations to five categories, namely, 1. father-son; 2. elder brother-younger brother; 3. husband-wife; 4. ruler-subject; and 5. equal-equal, these relations being defined in terms of reciprocal duties and mutual accountability. Consequently, the relation between a mother and her daughter falls under the category of father-son and that of a boss and her employees, ruler-subject. Judaism and Islam—and to some extent in Christianity through its integration of the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament—,in addition to defining the social relations, also prescribe what the limits of the relation are with the transcendental entity. That is why God is a person in those three religions. Most mystical religions, if they recognize the existence of a transcendental reality, it is impersonal since we cannot be in relation with it. We can aspire to be like it, but this aspiration puts into place an entirely different problematic.

Because relations have now been recognized as another universal, we now have a third basis of power and authority. How does it work? Being a father is a state of being that not only has a social component, but also an existential one. The existential component is developed through actions—guided by a law or some principle, I need not remind—that occurs within a father-child relation. These actions can bring us closer to what it means to

be a father or away from it. One can see here that the relation is now the state of being of the mystical mode of resolution. In the relational mode, it is the relation that always poses a problem begging to be resolved, as opposed to a state that needs to be improved. Because of this shift of perspective, the social status of a person is always evaluated on account of her actions. Since we cannot know her state of being directly, it is her actions that reveal it to the outside world. This also means that there are good “fatherly” actions that can be rewarded and reinforced and bad actions—I would not call them “fatherly”—that ought to be censured. What has also shifted is the path toward sanctity. It does not occur by fleeing the world, by decrying it, especially the social structures like a family and a nation, but by reaffirming its salutary potential. The world, or more precisely, the relations we develop with it, is now a means of perfection. In a secular context, we can imagine how being a better professor, doctor or engineer—here defined as units of a relation, that is, professor-student, doctor-patient, engineer-material world—is improving the overall standard of a society or is increasing its shared autonomy.

From the point of view of the relational mode of resolution, there are basically two ways for a society to go wrong. The first one is when someone controls the process of defining of what it means to be, let’s say, a father or a wife, by imposing definite and, especially, objective ways of being a father or a wife. Such a move leads to social stagnation. It is as though the law of God has been brought down too close to the world and has, by the same token, considerably reduced the autonomy of the people to explore new ways of being what is expected of them. A community led by zealous and fanatic people with regard to the application of the laws are castrating the potential of a community to rejuvenate itself, to expand in complexity and autonomy. Why would a community be subjected to such a treatment? It varies from the desire of an elite to control, via an instrumentalisation of God and the revealed laws, the dynamic of a community to a survival mechanism against a perceived threat, be it interior or exterior. This is a very unstable and unsustainable situation as, in the first case, the elite has to be subjected to the same rules for the control to work—which is often not the case, especially when the motivation is to acquire additional material and social advantages—, and in the second case, its state, of what amounts to be a situation of social inhibition of action, puts it in a very vulnerable position like a hedgehog that cowers in the face of danger.

The second way for a society to go wrong is more pernicious. While the first way describes the mechanism by which certain religious communities fold in on themselves, the second way especially affects secular societies relying on the authenticity and validity of the relations that constitute them, that is, when a professor acts according to what is expected of a professor, a doctor, according to what is expected of a doctor, etc. The moment a professional derogates from what is expected of him, when he is acting to fulfill his own interest or to realize a specific problematic while claiming that he is acting as a professional, some confusion is being generated within the community in which that professional is active. When the discrepancy between his actions and his true intention becomes obvious, his credibility is in jeopardy and, probably, that of the body of professionals he represents. However, the satisfaction of exposing the hypocrisy of a professional never compensates for the loss in shared autonomy.

More confusion will be generated—worse than that, a process of implosion will be

triggered—when the constituents of a relation are being deconstructed. This is usually done by subverting the existential foundations of the meaning of words, for example, by saying that the experience of love is just an interplay of neurological reactions or that genders are just social constructs—as if the statement “genders are social constructs” is not a social construct itself—that is, by denying their biological components. When a traditionally accepted form of a relation is deconstructed—by invalidating the elements that constitute its specific designation or by reducing its meaning to a few defining elements—to allow new legitimate relations to be amalgamated, the former loses its distinctiveness while the latter are not allowed to construct their own distinctiveness. The process of deconstruction is also at work when words or concepts are overloaded with additional meaning, for instance, by saying that being a “white” American means being privileged and racist. This is, incidentally, what the mystics do best when they want to disentangle themselves from the various social networks they are part of. For example, to affirm, as Buddhism does, that there is no Self as a basis of our experiences, is a powerful way of severing all connections on which those experiences are predicated. In fact, it is a very violent means of disrupting and destabilizing a person since it directly aims at the node of her experiences of reality. A deconstructed Self, or a Selfless Person, is no longer capable of believing in the reality of any construction.

Thus, as the main means of establishing a relation between two autonomous beings is language, if the categories of realities are undermined by scrambling the meaning of the words that related to those categories, it becomes impossible to communicate. In this case, a person, although she recognizes the words being used, cannot figure out what another person is trying to tell her. Without communication it is also very difficult to act as actions rely on being able to make sense of what is being acted upon. Very early in history this stratagem was recognized as a means of bringing a society to a state of inhibition of action or a state of crisis that can be exploited by an elite to make people accept and do what they would not normally accept and do, were they living without the stress resulting from a corruption of their language. In ancient China, Confucius reminded us that: “When names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success; when affairs do not culminate in success, rites and music will not flourish; when rites and music do not flourish, punishment will not fit the crimes, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot (Chan 1973: 40). It was a situation that called for a Rectification of Names. Without it, a society is imploding on account of the process of atomization of its members, a situation that makes people highly vulnerable to external forces because they are no longer able to form intermediary structures like a family, an association, a community, or even a nation. A person that is integrated through a network of relations within such structures is not easily manipulated. That is why any political or economic system relying on the coordination of the actions of its members, needs to isolate the latter for a maximum of efficiency and results. People integrated in intermediary structures are more difficult to coordinate, that is, to be controlled, because those structures offer a space for a diversity of actions that are not aligned with the agenda of the encompassing system. Controlling a structure from the outside is a little bit like carrying a bucket full of water moving in all directions. We will see later that there is nevertheless a way to control such a structure.

It is interesting to note that Jesus, the peaceful rabbi from Nazareth, lost his temper twice,

at least this is what we gathered from the scriptures. The first time is when he overthrew the tables of the moneychangers. When money, as means of exchange and establishing relations, does not correspond to its intended or commonly agreed value, we have a situation that is comparable to words whose meaning is something different than what they were designed and adopted for. As counterfeit currency can wreck an entire economy, counterfeit words can jeopardize the stability of an entire network of relations. The second occasion was when he scolded some scribes and pharisees—I guess, the members of the religious elite—for being hypocrites on account of not doing what they were prescribing others to do. That corresponds to the first way a society goes wrong. Jesus reacted in such a way and clearly knew what was condemnable because he was operating under a different set of presuppositions as to how a society should be structured and organized. In other words, not only the scribes and pharisees were not living up to what they were, but also they were disrupting the flow of information necessary for the rejuvenation of a person and the society she is part of.

### **The mode of the Cross**

The fourth mode of resolution is called the *mode of the cross*, without the word ‘resolution’ simply because the cross, literally and symbolically understood as an event of a crisis, is the condition *sine qua non* for all experiences of resolution. For a scientist to conceive a new model of explanation—an object of the mind—, she will have to undergo a moment of extreme tension caused by the desire to integrate new observations within an ancient model of explanation or paradigm. Similarly, a mystic will be subjected to enormous mental stress in his endeavor to perfect or transform his ancient state of being, that is, to abandon the old self in order to welcome a new one. Finally, the person of relation, if she wants to deepen her relations with others, is constantly forced to rethink the ways she defines those relations. In the same fashion, a society articulated by a revelation guiding its members in the elaboration of laws defining their mutual relations, will also encounter situations of crisis when the ancient laws have to be adapted to the new social, historical, cultural circumstances it finds itself. This is why, in the Christian symbolic, the crucifixion is followed by the resurrection. It is to be noted that, in all three cases, by refusing to meet the situation of crisis head on, to resolve the problems as they present themselves, a process of implosion is triggered. It is so because such a refusal is tantamount to closing the door to the inflow of information coming from the environment in which a structure is always located. Such environment can be physical like a cell in an organ, social like an individual in a community, cognitive like Newton’s laws of movement in Einstein’s model of general relativity, or spiritual as it is believed to be so by those who say that God created the universe, since God must occupy another level of reality to create our reality, in a way similar to what we do when we transform the material world by our actions.

Thus, the mode of the cross becomes a mode of resolution, not by adopting a specific problematic, but by simply recognizing that the event of crisis, the situation of inhibition of action, or, in the symbolism of the Christian discourse, the experience of the cross, is what opens to the door to a new information by which we will be transformed or which leads to a resurrection. In other words, it is activated by just being aware of its structure or by an act

of faith in the Christian sense, that is, as Saint Paul puts it: 'Let us put on the armor of light!' (*Rom* 13:14). In terms of its psychosociological implications, this fourth mode of resolution allows us to identify the optimal conditions for the development of interpersonal relations as well as for the evolution of a society.

Starting with the dynamics of interpersonal relations, we have seen that the previous three modes of resolution are defining the person in three different ways, namely, as an object in the ritual mode, a state of being in the mystical mode, and a constituent of a relation in the relation mode of resolution. In the mode of the cross, the person remains undefined, that is, to be nothing, as an 'object' of our focal awareness, while she is allowed to be everything as an 'object' of our subsidiary awareness. To understand the meaning of this last affirmation, I refer to Michael Polanyi's notion of twofold awareness:

When I use a hammer to drive a nail, I attend to both, but in a different way. I watch the effects of my strokes on the nail as I wield the hammer. I do not feel that its handle has struck my palm but that its head has struck the nail. In another sense, of course, I am highly alert to the feelings in my palm and fingers holding the hammer. They guide my handling of it effectively, and the degree of attention that I give to the nail is given to these feelings to the same extent but in a different way. The difference may be stated by saying that these feelings are not watched in themselves but that I watch something else by keeping aware of them. I know the feelings in the palm of my hand *by relying on them for attending to the hammer hitting the nail*. I may say that I have a *subsidiary awareness* of the feelings in my hand which is merged into my *focal awareness* of my driving the nail. (Polanyi & Prosch 1975: 33).

To this, I add that the process of integration of the elements of the subsidiary awareness into a focal awareness is always a stressful one and, consequently, it is at that level that the experience of the cross occurs. This also means that, when transposed into an interpersonal relation, the elements that constitute the identity and diversity of a person are never objectified, and what is 'objectified' in the context of a relation, that is, the other person, always remains a mystery. 'The five colors make man's eyes blind; the five notes make his ears deaf; the five tastes injure his palate.' (Lao Tzu 1963: 32) In the context of today's cancel culture, this ancient maxim from Taoism becomes: 'If you do not see skin colors, you are a racist. If you see colors, you are blind.' Thus, it is because there is an absence of objectification at both levels of awareness that the persons that are part of a relation, and by the same token, the relation itself, are allowed to be what they are and to evolve.

To understand the dynamics of social transformation, I have to introduce the concept of *servomechanism*, also developed by Henri Laborit (Laborit 1974). Let's consider a bain-marie where the temperature of a body of water is regulated through a thermostat. If the thermostat is regulated by a system external to the body of water, it becomes a servomechanism. This is the way a structure can control another structure or affect its evolution. As such, a servomechanism is comprised of two natures: one that allows an external structure to communicate its will, and another that allows this will to be communicated to the body of water, in the present case, to influence the kinetic energy of the molecules of water. One would recognize that the simple model of a bain-marie can

illustrate the dynamics of the incarnation of God as understood in Christianity. Moreover, the experience of the cross is now located at the point of contact between the physical constituents of the servomechanism—the body of Christ—and its environment on account of the fact that those physical constituents are responding to a non-material reality—the Will of God—. Thus, Jesus, being the Son of God, that is, the one who has been sent to transmit the Will of the Father, is according to the Christians, the servomechanism par excellence or the source of all other intermediary servomechanisms that include the Eucharist, the Sacraments, the dogmas of the Church, and the Church itself with its representatives, the saints and all the persons who have been baptized.

For the servomechanisms to regulate society in an efficient way, to allow it to evolve—a servomechanism always circulates information from a more complex structure to a less complex one (grace moves from God to men)—, people who are being regulated by it have to have complete trust that the intent of the source of information is always benevolent and inclusive. The moment some doubt is cast on the real intention of those who are responsible for the distribution of the information and the control of the levers enacting the external will, the system starts a process of social disintegration. That doubt occurs when people sense that the external will is in fact the will of a group of individual trying to control the servomechanism for their own benefits. In this situation, the circulation of information is no longer from an external source to the people, but from the people to a substructure within the whole structure. In concrete terms, we have, in the religious context, people like the scribes and the pharisees who are using the law to consolidate their status within a system already instrumentalized by a larger system, namely, the Roman empire. In the secular context, it is a government that is acting, not in line with the will of the people, but to serve the interests of a foreign government, of a so-called global organization or even the vested interests of a corporation. To some extent, colonialism works precisely because it is structured around a universal principle which it is here the dynamics of the incarnation of God as defined in the context of the Christian discourse and, more precisely, the mode of the cross. All other means of control discussed earlier, namely, the instrumentalization of a person, the deconstruction of her identity, etc. are specific applications of that dynamics.

More examples of that dynamics may be explored, for example, how instruments like the Moody's credit rating can be used to control the economic development of sovereign countries. It could also be interesting to analyze the role of an elite, whether political or cultural, in the mechanism of social control and exploitation. But the purpose of the present article was only to show how fecund the model based on the notion of the modes of resolution, although primarily developed to understand the structure of religious discourses, may be used to explain psychosociological phenomena.



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