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https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_canadian-journal.php

The Natural Theology of John Macmurray

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I

FOR SEVERAL DECADES Professor John Macmurray has attempted to employ a philosophic apologetic for the religious dimension of life, and yet his work has been largely neglected. This lack of interest is strange, especially since he has pursued several lines of investigation that are currently receiving much attention, and also since his work is appreciatively referred to by Bishop John A. T. Robinson in his book, *Honest to God*.¹ Macmurray's concern with the scientific culture of our time, his interest in the role of the individual, and his effort to combine existential motifs with empirical methodology are some of the aspects of his philosophical writing that should be of importance in present discussion. It is the object of this article to present the main themes of his approach and to appraise critically the position indicated.

Professor Macmurray, though occupying a chair in philosophy, has a long-standing interest in the question of religion. In 1928 he contributed two essays to B. H. Streeter's volume, *Adventure*; later, in an essay published in 1936, he declared his concern with directness: "My lecture is a defense of science . . . and an attack upon the spurious religion of our so-called Christian culture. It is a demand for a religion that modern science need not be ashamed to serve."² The possibility of performing such a service himself was provided by the Terry Lectures, which were published in 1936 as *The Structure of Religious Experience*, and the Gifford Lectures delivered in 1954 and published in two volumes: *The Self as Agent* (1957), and *Persons in Relation* (1960).

Macmurray sets his course by claiming that modern philosophy has been misdirected through its assumption of the primacy of the theoretical reason and by the egocentric implications of this position.³ The alternative proposed is to follow the Kant of the practical reason rigorously, to assert the primacy of the self as agent over the self as epistemological subject. What this means is that philosophy must begin from the standpoint of action; while we are necessarily creatures of reflection, the task that Macmurray undertakes is that of indicating how reflection is a derivative of action.

To put the initial premise more precisely, the argument is that thinking is only one mode of activity, an indispensable mode to be sure, but as one

1. London: S.C.M. Press, 1963, pp. 51, 61, 119.

2. John Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1936), p. 194.

3. John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1957), p. 38.

facet of a whole it points inevitably to a more fundamental ground, namely, the free engagement of the individual person with other persons. Throughout the discussion there is employed an essentially pragmatic theory of meaning and of verification, especially akin to the thought of William James, for Macmurray works with a pluralistic ontology and indicates an experimental ground for verifying values as well as scientific hypotheses.

His book, *The Self as Agent*, opens with what Macmurray takes to be the dilemma of contemporary philosophy: both logical empiricism and existentialism rest upon the decision that "the traditional method of philosophy is incapable of solving its traditional problems. . . . Whereas the logical empiricists discard the problems in order to maintain the method, the existentialists relinquish the method in wrestling with the problems."⁴ The desideratum is to find a viable way of establishing a rapport once again between the problems and the method. Macmurray is convinced that the only hope of doing this is to begin the philosophical investigation with a new attitude, with a new mode of reflection.

Such a reconstruction, it is contended, must begin with practical reason; but unlike Kant, whom Macmurray finds to be inconsistent because he does not insist upon the primacy of the practical intelligence throughout the critical philosophy,⁵ he intends in the analysis of the self-as-agent to make the practical unequivocally basic. The effort to build a philosophical method upon existential involvement, or the primacy of man-in-activity, is predicated upon the conviction that the empirical evidence is more adequately explained in this perspective.

The religious bent of this position is evidenced by Macmurray's following of Kant also in the attempt to "deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." The objection to "knowledge" is that in modern philosophy *noesis* is identified with technical or "pure" reason and is taken to be discoverable apart from any activity or involvement of the self-as-agent. The general attachment of philosophers to the assumption that "I think" is the basic fact of self-awareness is roundly attacked, and the alternative of the "I do" of human self-agency is proposed. Consistently the claim is made that activity gives rise to genuine knowledge and that knowledge is always in the service of activity.

The ramifications of the switch from "I think" to "I do" are thoroughgoing. The egocentric implication of the isolated thinker who has made theoretical reason primary renders thought inherently private, and the thinker is thereby committed to logical individualism. Religion, in contrast, is found precisely in the relation between persons. A philosophy that is egocentric cannot even form the religious question, much less hope to deal effectively with it. The most that a theoretical starting point can provide is a knowledge of God conceived as the supreme object of thought, but this is not the God of religious worship and certainly not the God found

4. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

5. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 63.

in human fellowship. The fundamental problem, then, of religion, in terms of modern philosophy, is that knowledge is taken to be essentially private and persons in relation cannot be adequately accounted for. In contrast to this position Macmurray intends to show that existence is action, and then to indicate how the theoretical or intellectual aspect of experience is included within man's activity as an agent.⁶

It must be made clear that the agent here described is a unitary personality; the man who acts is the man who reflects. While acting and thinking may be separated for discussion, in the perspective of the primacy of the practical reason, thinking is always a part of the action, and therefore must be included in the agency of the self.⁷ To put this in another way, theoretical reason may exclude activity, but action can never exclude reflection; the more inclusive fact is thus the self-in-action. To speak of the self as an actor is to refer to man who is involved as a complete person with his environment. Knowledge, feeling, and action all mesh together in a rather tacit manner to invest this engagement with a wholeness—so that the total person is acting in relation to his total context.

One other distinction needs to be made. To speak of the self as agent is to speak of acts and not of events. This distinction Macmurray insists upon. To speak of an act is to speak of the agent as the source of the activity. One cannot give explanation for this activity otherwise than in terms of the agent's free decision. The fact of the self's agency is not to be proved from a theoretical base; it is a "practical" fact to be experienced, it is the very constituting actuality of human life. In contrast to an act, there is juxtaposed an "event," which may be defined as any happening whose source can be attributed to a "non-agent," or whose cause is non-volitional. To put it tersely, for every event there is an external cause; for every act there is a free decision.⁸

Macmurray's position may be summarized in the following propositions: (1) The self is agent and exists only as agent. (2) The self is subject (or thinker) but cannot exist only as subject. The self can be subject only because it is agent. (3) The self is subject in and for the self as agent. (4) Finally, however, the self can be agent only by expressing its nature also as that of thinking subject.⁹

The philosopher, then, while recognizing the primacy of action, must give an adequate account of the reflective character of human activity. "I do" is by itself incomplete; in actual experience it must take the form of "I am doing this or that concrete thing." Now the question may be raised: "What am I doing when I am thinking, or reflecting? What are the modes of reflection?" Macmurray indicates that there are three basic "attitudes,"

6. It should be made clear that Macmurray finds no answer in the organismic theories of man. This approach is, for him, another expression of the theoretical reason, in which man is understood through biological categories; it therefore misses the distinctively human.

7. Cf. Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, p. 87.

8. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 148f.

9. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 100-2.

as he calls them in his early work, or "modes of reflection," as he denominates them in his later work.

Macmurray illustrates these different attitudes through reference to the polarity of scientific investigation and aesthetic contemplation. He writes: "The scientific attitude selects as central those facts of experience which are most clearly and accurately observable, that is to say, what can be measured and counted."¹⁰ The intellectualistic or analytic approach to data is chosen because it is appropriate to the utility that the control of the natural world intends. However, he maintains, this approach, while valid for its specific purpose, is inept and indeed misleading at the most crucial juncture, namely, in its understanding of the intrinsic distinctiveness of the person *qua* person and his unique place within nature. In contrast to this attitude is that of aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic awareness is also empirical, but it is not concerned with manipulation or control. Rather, aesthetics is the search for the intrinsic value of the given data or datum, and the quality of mind expressed by aesthetic perception is described as contemplative and emotional. What is appropriated in aesthetic vision is not a piecemeal analysis of the experienced world, but its harmony, organic unity, and wholeness. This attitude is different from scientific apprehension by virtue of its ability to recognize uniqueness, but it also remains fragmentary, and this precisely because the concentration upon intrinsic value leaves out of account the extrinsic values of the natural phenomena. Thus, while each of these "modes of reflection" explores valid dimensions of the sensed phenomena, each provides only a fragmentary description of reality as experienced.

In spite of this limitation, these two types of description have often been taken to exhaust the functions of conscious *rapprochement* of the self with the phenomena provided by the senses; but to halt the investigation at this juncture leaves out the most decisive factor, namely, the person in whom these two attitudes inhere. It is not permissible to forget, as modern philosophy has persistently tended to do, that we ourselves are a part of the field of experience. The scientific and artistic attitudes, though antithetical to one another, are common to every person; there must, therefore, be an attitude of mind or a mode of reflection that provides a ground for the symbiosis of these two opposing modes of reflection. Macmurray argues that there is such a perspective, and he designates it as the personal realm or the religious dimension. (If a judgment may be made in passing, Macmurray is impressive in his claim that the "person" is *the* problem of contemporary philosophy, whether it is recognized to be or not.)

To put this another way, it is not only necessary to ask what we will make of the word, but it must also be asked: What will the world make of us?¹¹ That is to say, we must take personhood itself as a datum; the

10. John Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), p. 8. Cf. *The Self as Agent*, pp. 187-8.

11. Cf. Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experience*, p. 17.

self who acts and knows is a part of the world and demands an adequate account of his agency as the *sine qua non* of all utilizing and contemplating activity. The claim may now be made that the religious attitude actually enlarges the field of study, for the self is added to the complex which must be understood. Action and thought are the functions of persons, and have their importance precisely because they serve the personal dimension of existence. The thesis of Macmurray's entire work may be succinctly stated: "All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship."¹²

To pursue this theme, it is contended that the self does not first of all become aware of its own existence and then, by some deductive means, become aware of the other—a procedure that is characteristic of technical or pure reason. On the contrary, "In practical experience Self and Other are correlatives discriminated together by their opposition; and this opposition constitutes the unity of the experience. . . . The distinction of Self and Other is the awareness of both; and the *existence* of both is the fact that their opposition is a practical, and not a theoretical opposition."¹³ That is to say, the resistance of the other to the self constitutes the context in which the agency of the self is expressed, and, indeed, this also means that the other must himself be an agent. Action, as contrasted with motion or event, requires a self in relation to other selves; and to be a self is to be in relation to another or other selves, thereby creating the context within which we come to know ourselves and our world. Now the definition of "person" should be clear: to be a person is to be a self who can intentionally act and whose action takes place within an arena with other persons. The facts of freedom and relationship are the constituting realities of human existence.

In the second volume of his Gifford Lectures, Macmurray re-emphasizes and elaborates the cruciality of the interinvolvement of agents. He writes: "The thesis we have to expound and sustain is that the self is constituted by its relation to the Other; that it has its being in its relationship; and that this relationship is necessarily personal."¹⁴ Perhaps the most significant value of this volume is the careful analysis of the dynamics of personal relationships that is provided; here Macmurray reveals sensitivity and insight to an uncommon degree.

But what does it mean to be a person? *Persons in Relation* begins by urging that one agent can know another agent only by entering into direct encounter with him. This is not to claim that the other does not remain in some way an object (an it or thing) for us, but it is to claim that to know another genuinely we must know his intentions, his feelings, and his communicated thoughts. In this field we cannot act through intermediaries; no one can enter into fellowship with another except by immediate encounter. To put this in another way, it is urged that a relation is personal

12. Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, p. 15.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

14. John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 17.

when it is intentionally personal, i.e., when it expresses a personal attitude towards the other and thereby recognizes the other's self-agency (the other as a centre of integrity or a thou).¹⁵

To support his thesis of the radical interinvolvement of personal life, Macmurray points to the total dependence of the human baby upon other persons. The child is born to be cared for; he is born into an inherently personal relationship upon which his survival and maturation depend. The environment of the baby is a home, that is, a context which is a human creation. Therefore, the child can live only through other people and in dynamic relation with them.¹⁶ Here again it may be noted that the personal includes both the scientific and the aesthetic attitudes, for both utilitarian and intrinsic values are expressed in this intentional, interpersonal relation.

Since human action is intentional, and hence utilizes motives, it is important to look at the basic motives. Macmurray contends that there are polar motives that give rise to action: love (positive motivation) and fear (negative motivation); and to these is added a third motive, which arises from the frustration of love, namely, hate. These motives are original, which is to say, that they underlie all intentional relation with others.¹⁷ But the motive does not determine action, for action is intentional; i.e., the actor freely chooses or decides upon a motive. This distinction between motives will be a matter for comment later.

Once more the thesis may be stated: If we did not know other persons, we could not know anything. To be a person is to be in communication with others, and only by such communication can we know ourselves to exist. To know we are in relation is not an implication or a conclusion from other knowledge; as our author puts it unequivocally: "The knowledge of the Other is the absolute presupposition of all knowledge, and as such is *necessarily indemonstrable*."¹⁸ What is meant by this is that it is only in personal relationship that selfhood evolves, and it is only as the individual comes to maturity as a self that he is enabled to know his world. But this selfhood is not to be proved by abstract reflection; it is the very condition of life itself, and therefore the precondition of reflection.

In the light of this analysis of the self-as-agent and of persons in relation, we must repeat that the actualization of this dimension of life constitutes for Macmurray the area of religion. Religion may now be defined more precisely as the manifestation of genuine community among persons, and its purpose is "to create, maintain and deepen the community of persons and to extend it without limit, by the transformation of negative motives."¹⁹ To say that the religious mode of reflection is more basic than the scientific or aesthetic is to say that the self in its agency and in its relation to others is the *prius* out of which the modes of reflection arise. But now more can

15. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 40; *The Structure of Religious Experience*, pp. 26f.

16. Cf. Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, pp. 48-51.

17. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 64f.; *The Self as Agent*, pp. 194f.

18. Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 77; my italics.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 163

be added. It must be made clear that Macmurray intends by "religion" the relationship between men in their common unity or community. Since his early essays he has insisted that "God," or the Personal Other, is known through relation with persons. Thus he quotes Blake with approval: "God only exists and is in existing beings or men."²⁰ What he seems to understand by this assertion is that there is in the community of men a fullness, an *esprit de corps*, a more inclusive dimension of experience, which can only be described as "Other." God, consequently, is defined always in terms of the completeness of human relationships.

Macmurray states his conclusion in these terms: The self-as-agent exists as a part of the world and is dependent upon the world for support and resistance. "The thought of the world as a unity is a postulate of action."²¹ This unity must, from the standpoint of self-agency, be thought of as unity of action or the encounter of agents. The verification of the view of life as constituted by agents is to be found in the effect of this belief upon our relations with persons, for to believe that one is acting within a context of agents involves a different way of life from one founded on the belief that the world is a process of events. This argument is obviously circular, and yet it does point again to the thoroughness with which the practical reason has been affirmed.

We should note further that this view postulates an experiential argument for the reality of God. Macmurray is convinced that *prima facie* it is not possible to describe or, more fundamentally, to be engaged in the world, without positing a supreme Agent whose act the world is. The self-as-agent-in-a-personal-context is taken to be the key to the understanding of the character of the universe in which man lives. Consequently, "if the object of reflection is the relation of the self to another self, the universal which is revealed must be a universal personality."²² Philosophy since the time of Descartes has driven towards an atheistic conclusion, but when it begins with practical reason this tendency is reversed. At the same time, for Macmurray, to speak of God does not represent a desire to establish some world beyond this world, for such a dualism, though often attempted, basically falsifies the actual world and the self's place in this world.

It remains now to draw Macmurray's conclusion. If this universe of existence is to be conceived through the form of the personal, then it must be referred to as a personal universe.²³ From the standpoint of the self-agency and personal interrelatedness of human life, the question of whether or not the world is personal is a question of whether or not God exists. In fact, however, it is illegitimate to ask the question, "Does God exist?" as though this were only an interrogation of theoretical reason in which the idea of God could be postulated quite independently of the experience of the self-

20. Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, p. 210.

21. Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, p. 220.

22. Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experience*, p. 51; cf. *The Self as Agent*, p. 222.

23. Cf. Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 214.

as-agent. God is not to be found in thought, but in the immediate experience of being a self in a personal world. For "thought presupposes knowledge and knowledge presupposes action and exists only in action."²⁴ Existence and the knowledge of existence are given together from the start. The result of the argument can be put tersely: "There is then no question of proving existence, but only of determining its character."²⁵

The proper theological question may now be stated: "Is what exists personal?"²⁶ This is not an abstract, metaphysical question; it is pre-eminently and exhaustively a question of action. What we are asking is this: Does the world have a personal character? In practical terms, this is to ask: Does my action as a self demand that I interpret my world in personal terms and does such an interpretation give the greatest possibility for the actualization of my freedom? Macmurray answers these questions affirmatively. To deny this way of apperceiving the world would be to refuse to account for the fact that the world can produce persons who are capable of activity such as that of agents. It is a false empiricism, and therefore a false conception of the world, to have no place for persons or to be unable to account for them. On the other hand, if the world is conceived personally, the impersonal aspects of existence do not have to be denied; rather they can be accounted for and adequately recognized.

It is the *practical* or experiential belief in the reality of God that is verified by this personal-apperceptive approach. The self and the other are determined reciprocally; therefore, whatever formal character is ascribed to the other must be ascribed to the agent, and *vice versa*. At the most basic level, this means that the world must also be described as the activity of an Agent who acts intentionally in relation to men. The world is the result of intentional action and "to conceive the world thus is to conceive it as the act of God, the Creator of the world."²⁷

II

So much for description; we must now turn our attention to an assessment of Macmurray's position. There are at least three different perspectives in which such an attempt at the construction of a natural theology may be evaluated. The first is that of a strictly philosophical analysis; that is, the questions of assumptions and methodology could be dealt with. A second approach might be called a phenomenological evaluation; that is, the questions of the comprehensive coverage, valid syntheses, and correct understanding of religious practices could be dealt with. A third possible approach is that of a theological evaluation; that is, an assessment of the possible agreement or complementarity between the natural theology and a given theological system could be attempted. The natural theologian as such is not under any compulsion to support a single theological tradition; but, from the perspective of any theological system, it must be asked of a

24. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

natural theology: Does it provide an opportunity for contact with my particular tradition? We shall utilize all three approaches.

Macmurray is to be commended for his serious intention to make the person fundamental in his philosophy. (In this he makes common cause with others, such as H. Richard Niebuhr, who also argued for the primacy of practical reason and man's internal historical evaluation.) For too long, philosophers have overlooked the obvious primacy of the person, who is the matrix of all acting and thinking. To begin once again with man is a recovery that portends significant discussion. The very difficulty of the task may help to account for the fact that Macmurray has received little critical attention. Nevertheless, there are basic questions to be asked. First, one must carefully evaluate the utilization of a pragmatic criterion of meaning and validation. If Macmurray is to resuscitate a pragmatic theory of meaning or a pragmatic theory of verification, then he must deal with the numerous objections that have been made since the time of James and Dewey. The fact that he does not directly face the philosophical questions which have been raised about such constructions as his leaves his statement on unsure ground.

One way of stating the problem is to be found in Macmurray's subordination of thinking to action. It cannot be denied that much of man's mental energy is expended for the sake of action, but to make action an exhaustive category is to do less than justice to the range of mental activity that has no "practical" consequences. At the very least it reduces the contemplative activity of the mind to a position where, if it has no utilitarian value, then it is perverse. Or, to put the problem in a different way, the self-as-agent may be acknowledged as a part of the field of investigation without the decision to make the agency of selfhood the all-comprehensive category. With the existentialists, Macmurray has sought to vindicate the role of the person, but to see the person primarily as agent is to undermine the very principle that he hopes to enhance—the total uniqueness of the personal dimension in existence.

Macmurray is clear as to the ontological implications of his position; he lays bare the assumptions and the conclusions of his thought; and on the basis of his theory of immediate engagement in the world he makes the norm of his thought clear. The criterion of validity is that which enhances the agency (freedom) and community (participation) of man. This forthrightness is commendable. And perhaps its significance can be seen when it is compared with the attempt of some writers to combine existentialist insights with linguistic analysis, while at the same time they still fail to escape the problem of the isolated thinker within the egocentric predicament. (I think, for instance, of Ian Ramsey and William Poteat, who have pointed out the special logical status of language which deals with the privileged access one has to his own person.²⁸)

28. Cf. Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1957), pp. 63ff. and William H. Poteat, "God and the 'Private-I'" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 20 (1960), pp. 409-16.

And yet difficulties still remain. The primary problem, as has been mentioned, has to do with the primacy of activity over thought. Does not Macmurray, in the last analysis, carry on his argument on a theoretical level, and does he not attempt to validate the primacy of activity and the norm of activity by theoretical demonstration? That is, even if the agency of the self is temporally antecedent, is not the mental activity still valuationally prior? Even if thought is in order to action, does not the rational evaluation of action provide the criteria for the guidance of action? What is free activity if it is not rationally decided activity? If it is that, is Macmurray's insistence on the primacy of action really consistent with his own developed argument?

Macmurray's desire is to reinstate the person as an essential element in the experience with which epistemology must deal, but he has painted his philosophy on too restrictive a canvas. A more radical approach is called for, an approach that investigates the personal dimension in all knowing (even scientific) as well as in action. Macmurray separates the realm of the personal from scientific and aesthetic reflection, as though these activities themselves did not basically reflect personal decision and existence; or, at least, he does not adequately indicate the personal dimension in theoretical judgment. He should emphasize more clearly that the thinker and actor as *man* is the *prius* out of which all knowing and doing arise. Such a programme, though genuinely radical, is possible, and may be found carried out in the work of Professor Michael Polanyi. It might well achieve Macmurray's ends more effectively than his own approach.

As for the question of phenomenological adequacy, Macmurray's definition of religion seems dubious. To put the issue sharply, Macmurray's use of "religion" to refer to the relationships of persons is most questionable, because of its limitations. The basic definition of religion that he proposes is that religion is an attitude that takes the self-as-agent-in-relation as the primary category. Thus, in a manner again reminiscent of American pragmatism, he uses the adjective "religious" to describe that dimension of experience which integrates and enriches man's selfhood. But what of the multiple other ways in which religion has been understood and practised? The least that may be said is that Macmurray is not interested in the traditional forms of religious expression and interpretation, the phenomena of religious ritual, rite, and explication that centre in worship and speak of man's relation to that which is qualitatively wholly other than man. His adoption of a more limited definition is, of course, deliberate, for he intends to find a religion that is adequate for the modern scientific mind; but is he talking about what has traditionally been described as religion? The answer must be negative. To say that a negative answer is requisite is not to deny that religion often includes the dimension of interpersonal relations, but it is to claim that the reduction of religion to this one area is to redefine its character inadequately.

Finally, it may be asked, what is the possibility that the Christian theo-

gian will find here the rudiments of his type of theism? On the whole, Macmurray's approach is most suggestive at a point which he does not emphasize in his later writings, namely, the role or function of Jesus.²⁹ The emphasis on the interaction of agents provides the ground for making crucial the person of Jesus. In a sense, it could be claimed that the theme of a man-for-other-men could function as a creative centre in his thought, and that the "humanity of God" could thus provide a central theological category. This side of his position still remains open for further exploration.

In terms of the doctrine of God, Macmurray does make common cause with theologians who insist that the God of Christian faith is not the result of a rational, theoretical demonstration, but rather that God is known as one who is encountered in personal relationship. But does he meet other points that theologians will be concerned to make? Where is there any room in this account for worship? Is there any room for the category of the holy? While a type of transcendence is attributed to God, the same transcendence of activity is found in man's capacity for self-reflection; thus the distinguishing quality of God's transcendence, which is an apotheosis of the capacity for reflection, is not at all clear.³⁰ The problem is that the analogy between man as agent and God as Agent is so tightly drawn that the distinctiveness of the divine is not adequately indicated. Is the integrity of the other person to be identified with the holiness of God? Is there any qualitative distinction between the Agent who is God and the agent who is man? Such questions remain. Consequently, while the argument may point to a theistic conclusion, it does not point towards a worshipping conclusion.

Another aspect of the same problem may be put in this way: How is man related to the supreme Agent? All human relations, Macmurray insists, are intramundane, immediate, and unmediated. Man is engaged by other agents, not merely with the results of their activity. How then can man be related to the totality of an agent's actions? This problem strikes deeply into Macmurray's argument for man's experience of God as Agent.

The doctrine of creation, which Macmurray makes central in his description of the agency of God, is also unclear. Can the argument that the self as an agent necessarily implies a personal world lead to a belief in an Agent who created the world by his act? God's agency is described as being similar to man's, but what is there that resists God and thereby calls his agency into being? If personal activity necessarily implies a personal world or context, even God's activity is not exempt from this condition. The only way to break out of this circularity is to attribute a decisive creative act to one personal Agent (*creatio ex nihilo*)—an attribution that Macmurray's position does not allow. To put the problem pointedly, not only does man-as-agent require God in this argument, but also God-as-Agent requires man or a personal context. Are God and man therefore co-eternal, or does the name "God" only refer to a quality of human relationships?

29. This was evident in his earlier writing. See *Reason and Emotion*, pp. 193, 240-8, and *The Structure of Religious Experience*, pp. 28-30, 45f.

30. J. A. T. Robinson also expresses this criticism in *Honest to God*, pp. 51f.

One last issue, that of the nature of human relationships, must be commented upon. Throughout Macmurray's description, the highest form of relation is that of mutuality or *philia*. While this is a type of community having value in itself, it is still some distance away from the Christian vision of community, which is based on *agape*. But even if one were willing to stop with the seeking of *philia*, the question must be asked: What is there to make man move from fear or hate to love? What motive power leads man to extend the range of community? This problem is acknowledged in an early writing: "The paradox of the situation is that the state of consciousness which needs reconciliation makes the reconciliation impossible."³¹ The question is this: Is the freedom of the self-as-agent such as to change the response to the basic motives? Macmurray is content to say that this does happen. In his Gifford Lectures he sounds very Kantian when he writes: ". . . Negative dispositions, however persistent they may be, are never unalterable. For they are not innate characters, but habits which have been learned. In principle, what has been learned can be unlearned; and empirical experience offers us many examples of the transformation of character."³²

The only question to be raised at this point is whether Macmurray has taken seriously enough the strong hold that our past decisions as well as our context have upon us, or, in other words, whether his concept of freedom is not too independent of the themes of character and destiny, not to mention the firm grip of sin. Perhaps a late word of William Temple is relevant; Temple too is discussing human relations, but he finds restrictions on the full realization inherent in man's natural situation, and he therefore turns to a Christological ground: "He is the source of fellowship, and all true fellowship comes from him. But in order to fashion true fellowship in such a world as this, and out of such men and women as we are, He must first break up those fellowships with which we have been deluding ourselves."³³

Perhaps it is too much to ask that a natural theologian should respond fully to the requirements of any given theological tradition. But when the system is founded on the nature of the person, then an uncongenial anthropology does raise serious problems and makes its utility questionable.

To raise these questions about Macmurray's work is not to indicate that his contribution is unimportant. Quite the reverse is true; it is because he is dealing with the crucial issues of the nature of the person, of existential engagement, and of philosophical and theological method, that he rewards careful study and invites critical appraisal.

31. Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experience*, p. 46.

32. Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 105.

33. Quoted in A. M. Ramsey, *An Era in Anglican Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1960), p. 161.