

The Metaphysics of Mysticism: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transcendence

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Being, Becoming, and Eternity

As a final note, something further must be said about the permutations of being as they touch upon our attempt to arrive at some kind of epistemological synthesis. In the writings of St. John of the Cross, any attempt to seize upon a coherent notion of being immediately brings us to the ineluctable realization that for St. John the ontological is deeply radicated in the eschatological. Being in its utter immediacy is possessed of identity, and therefore history. The historical nature of being, embracing, as it does, all the antecedents that culminate in present being, being not merely verging upon, but enacted within the telos of becoming, is, within the mystical context, without terminus; it is eternally enacted because God is eternal. Ultimately, beyond the eschatological chrysalis, being is epiphanous, a perpetual epiphany in perpetually becoming. What I mean by this is that God's autonomous perpetuity is in Being. Man's heteronymous perpetuity is in becoming. Let us take another approach..

Becoming, I at least suggest, is the created articulation of the uncreated eternal. There is no terminus to becoming vis-à-vis the Absolute, the Infinite, the Eternal, and in this sense it is perpetually parallel to it and only in virtue of it. Even while we may speculate that at any given point of becoming, the soul (in eternity) subsumes as present all the permutations of its being, in all that has been and to this extent incorporates being even in the indesinence of becoming; that is to say, if we presume that the soul incorporates as present all that has been up to any given point in the continuum of becoming, we still have not arrived at the soul as being – only as a being-such-that-is-perpetually-a-becoming-of. From this perspective, the soul is indeed the imago Dei inasmuch as it embraces as eternally present all that it has been . . . up to this point in its becoming; however, what lies before it is not yet present, nor can the soul incorporate what it is not yet, into what it has been, into what it is, has enacted, up to this point of its becoming. The soul may in fact be understood to exist in a quasi-eternal present – but it is a present that has not yet, and never will, culminate in a terminus of its becoming such that it is a being whose being has been totally and completely enacted and can become no more than it is. But to attain to nothing more, to culminate in nothing more, to become no more than what the soul is, is to understand the soul not simply as having attained to being, but

having become indistinguishable from it. It would be a being whose essence has culminated in being. But only God's Being is His essence, and only God's Essence is His Being. Rather than having understood the soul as having spuriously assumed unqualified being, we see the soul as the speculum of this Esse Ipsum, this Being Itself, as the finite image of what is absolute – understanding at the same time that the Infinite and Absolute as imaged eternally exceed the boundaries of the finite image. However clear and authentic the image, it is only an image in part, an incomplete instantiation, not only of the Absolute, but of its very own being which is perpetually becoming, and is not yet what it will be, and when it is what it will be, it will still not yet be what it will be, for it remains to be more, to become more than it is, to perpetually verge on the Infinite and the Absolute but never embrace it in its totality. Since human nature can never attain to the ontological status of Being Itself inasmuch as it can never assume the divine nature (even while participating in it), the perpetuity of its becoming-that-always-verges-on-being remains an inviolable aspect of its created nature (or its nature qua created) – and therefore remains unchanged even in eternity. And that is the splendor and the happiness, the felicity enjoyed by the soul in conspectu Dei, that is to say, in the beatific vision. Becoming is inexhaustible – because Being Itself is inexhaustible in God; becoming, as such, it is a tangent to, because it is enacted in, eternity.

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