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EPILOGUE

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Our intention thus far has been to consider and explicate some of the cardinal issues of Rabindranath's philosophical position. We have tried to show that he has rethought the whole foundation of our lives and finds its meaning and purpose in human terms alone. This Philosophical anthropology is based on a non-naturalistic theory of man. Summarily, the theory of man can be stated in the following manner.

Rabindranath believes that man has a *nature*, and this nature is man's truth. Human truth is *regulative* rather than constitutive of the human mode of being. There is in man a tension between the opening elements of life, ideas, aspirations and actual facts, freedom and necessity, surplus and utility, finitude and infinity, separateness of the ego and the harmony of human relationships. Man finds himself in a crisis, and his *humanity* consists in the conscious criticism of the crisis. He starts as an ego, but it cannot be the centre of his personality forever, he needs and seeks for a wider life, unity and relationship.

Rabindranath's concept of man has moral and aesthetic overtones. With him the evidence of the aesthetic and the ethical carry greater weight than the logical, Philosophy, for Rabindranath begins by taking into account the spirit of alienation, the obscurations of man in the human world. By 'freedom' he understands the perfection of human relationship. Man finds himself in alienation, yet he refuses to be what he is.

He searches for his identity. The search may be inconclusive, yet it is a human prerogative, forced upon him by his self-consciousness. Man's refusal to be what he is cannot be a matter of theoretical awareness alone, it entails assent to an imperative concerning the 'real' or 'true' nature of man. Theory of man suggests a course of action. Rabindranath's philosophical writings exhibit such elements as a theory of the nature of man, a diagnosis of what is wrong in man, and a prescription for putting it right.

We have endeavoured to formulate the so-called Indian way of thinking in connection with showing the role of the individual *vis-à-vis* the universal in Rabindranath's philosophical thought. Various influences have been at work in forming his views. He inherits and incorporates a great deal of the Indian way of thinking. This only shows the relation of a philosophy to the culture in which it has grown up. But to say that in Rabindranath's thoughts there is a genuine manifestation of Indian spirit would be an unqualified assertion. One can hardly say that without eliminating from his philosophical outlook a substantial western content. Conscious formulation of theories of man has never been in vogue in the philosophical tradition in India. The so-called Indian theories of man have only been incidental. With Rabindranath it is a primary concern, and should be considered, in part at least, as an inheritance from the positivistic influence of the west. In spite of his own statements about the *vedic* ancestry of his ideas, his human philosophy is essential European in spirit. This is a fascinating

story of our cultural renaissance.

I should like to make a brief mention of some specific conceptual issues with a view to clarifying finally Rabindranath's philosophical position.

When we consider such statements about man's true or real nature as "Man is an angel of surplus" etc. we must decide what sort of statement is being made. These statements may turn out to be value judgments saying what ought to be the case, rather than statements of fact, about what is the case. If what is being asserted is evaluative and not factual, then it becomes impervious to evidence. Statements about human nature are especially subject to a kind of ambiguity. When Rabindranath says that man is an artist or a creative spirit, does he mean that all or most human beings are actually so, or that we should all be so, or what? In this distinguishing value judgments from statements of fact I am not implying that Rabindranath's statements are merely expressions of individual taste, that they cannot be given objectively valid reasons, whether for or against. I am just pointing out that the above kind of clarifying question is often essential when discussing theories of human nature. Rabindranath's statements have often been taken to be ontologically descriptive. But this makes him committed in the wrong direction. He defines his terms persuasively, i.e., he changes the descriptive meaning of his favourite *upanisadic* terms without altering their emotive meaning. Even theological notions undergo a process of secularization at his hands. *Homo homini*

deus; for Rabindranath there cannot be any reference point beyond man. This Protagorean element in his thought has most often been profaned.

What reason can we give for accepting Rabindranath's statements about man's nature? Many of them are concealed definitions, and may be held to be impregnable to contrary evidence. They reveal a part of what he means by the word 'man'. Not all matters of definition are trivial, however. Sometimes Rabindranath introduces new terms (e.g. 'angel of surplus') in new ways. It is then indeed necessary for definitions to be given, and for it to be made clear they are not claims about any sort of fact. Definitions are not the sort of statements which can be proved or disproved merely by investigation of the evidence as empirical statements can be. Now, if a statement does not fall into any of the three categories, viz. Evaluative, analytic or empirical, then we have really a difficult case. Some of Rabindranath's assertions about human truth try to say something about what in a sense is the case, and in another sense, what ought to be the case. They assert some fundamental truth about man's nature, and hence are not matters of definition. It is clear, at least, that these assertions are not genuinely empirical.

Rabindranath would not like to win too easily by explaining away all possible evidence against his statements. They are too mixed a bag, and many deserve individual attention. It is of no use suggesting testability by observation, for it is a

conceptual connection between human freedom and imagination. Man's consciousness, if not unhappy, is creative. Man is an artist who freely fashions his possible image and tries to actualize it. Herein lies man's authenticity. Human reality need not necessarily be what it is but must be able to be what it is not. Rabindranath's basic point is that to be conscious at all is to be free.

Rabindranath gives the impression that the reality value of the ideals of man's further development are ontologically prior to man. This is partly owing to his ambivalent use of language and should be inconsistent with his intention expressed in such assertions as "Reality is human". Man's ideal being must be different from his actual mode of existence since the ideal can be *real* for man alone; hence no ontological priority could be ascribed to it. We do find him in moods such as saying that which is "eternal is realising itself in history", but such expressions are misleading. The so-called 'eternal' is no other than "man's own infinity", otherwise, Rabindranath says, it would have no justification to exist. To be precise, to exist is to be creative, and accordingly, human existence encompasses the ideal. In a similar fashion his favourite term 'infinite' is a regulative notion, beckoning man's self-transcendence. It is hardly constitutive of human destiny. The term 'infinite' connotes more than it denotes; it is a short hand expression for man's intentional consciousness, his value-positing freedom. There seems to be no reason for supposing that man's self-discovery should culminate in some final event marking

the consummation of a hitherto creative process. what Rabindranath means by man's infinity is that no set of predicates, however adequate, can descriptively exhaust what the notion 'man' implies. 'Man' is an open-ended term. His remarkable phrase '*mānavika bhūmā*' brings out the positivistic presuppositions of his humanism.

Rabindranath does not allow the concept of man to be subsumed under the category of God. In point of fact 'God' is a term he rarely uses and even when he uses it, it is rhetorical in effect. Man, he says, aspires for rising in the dignity of being, and religion is only one of the ways in which human aspiration finds itself expressed. In 'religion of man' the idea of God presupposes the idea of man. Had there not been in man a search for his own supreme value, had he not asked the question, 'what is it to be man-like?', the idea of God as a vision of a being would not have arisen at all. And having arisen, the idea is no definitive answer to the question. Man is greater than his own creations. The concept of man for Rabindranath is a necessary pre-condition of the idea of God.

We have considered Rabindranath's idea of nature and found that nature, unrelated to the human mind, does not exist in his philosophical discourse. Some remarks concerning the unity of man and nature may now be made. Rabindranath's Berkeleyan-Kantian conception of nature is farthest from Locke and has striking similarities with that of Aristotle. Nature, according to him, occasions our self discovery. "As we know the truth of the stars

we know the great comprehensive mind of man" (*Religion of Man*, p.15). Nature is a human achievement; it is what is revealed to *man* as nature : "It is included in himself and therefore there is a commingling of his mind with it, and in that he finds his own being" (*Religion of Man*, p.72). The unity of man and nature is then possible because unity is a human principle.

Rabindranath assimilates society to nature in respect of man. Society, or for that matter, culture and civilization are human creations. They are organs of man's self-realization. Man creates his society, building his culture and civilization by an inner necessity whereby he can embody his values. Rabindranath uses the same methodological device for explaining the unity of man and society as he does for that of man and nature. Society, conceived along the premises of Rabindranath's concept of man, cannot be a system of windowless monads interacting by a pre-established harmony. The generative principle for harmony should lie within the social individuals. Thus envisaged, Rabindranath's society is as distant from Rousseau's as it is from that of Hobbes. It cannot be modelled on the bee-hive (*Religion of Man*, p.22) either. Short of freedom or harmony, a society becomes closed, and its members alienated.

How can the truth of general propositions about man be ascertained ? Aeschelus, in speaking of the office of intuition, says that when the mind sleeps it is bright with eyes. With Rabindranath the relationship between intellect and intuition is not one of war with the knife. Man is a unity of intellect,

by disengaging the mind from its imprisonment in the web of customary associations and routine ideas. An aesthetic view of life not only rescues morality from stagnation but also is presupposed by it. Man's self-expression in art is its own object and helps him to leap free of the filters that obscure his real nature. Man *qua* man is an artist, a citizen of the kingdom of freedom. What practical reason is for Kant, art is for Rabindranath. It implies a non-solipsistic human world and transcendence of alienation. The word 'love' sums up all these.

"Goodness is the freedom of our self in the world of man, as is love" (*Religion of Man*, p.121). It may be debated whether 'love' is an aesthetic or ethical notion. For Rabindranath it is both. Love illuminates our consciousness and beauty bears its everlasting meaning. The notions of beauty, goodness and love are revelatory of the human message of our experience. 'Freedom', 'harmony', and 'surplus', are interchangeable terms, are key-notions in Rabindranath's Philosophical anthropology. Whatever term is predictable of man must be either derivable from or definable in terms of these. This is a point of methodological significance. Working through the imagination, the surplus in man renders possible a plethora of man's adventure of ideas and actions. It "finds its manifestation in science, philosophy, and the arts, in social ethics, in all things that carry their ultimate value in themselves" (*Religion of Man*, pp. 36-7). Against the claims of every abstract ideas Rabindranath has pleaded the cause of the complete man. This continues to be a desideratum of any theory

of man. "The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship" (*Religion of Man*, p. 116).