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Part : IV

HARMONY

&

FREEDOM

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## PART - IV : Harmony and Freedom

### I

We may now propose to make some comparative remarks about Rabindranath and the like-minded western philosophers.

Rabindranath has many things in common with Hegel, since they are both idealists of somewhat similar temperament. I have in mind the striking fact that, as with Rabindranath, so with Hegel, love is the highest kind of knowledge, and "Spirit is Artist" (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, 708). Love is a key notion in Hegel's early thought. In love, says Hegel, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self. Love annuls and transcends reflection, and discovers life itself without any further defect. In love, the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate. Life senses life. Here love is used by Hegel as a clue to the nature of things; it is a satisfactory clue to the nature of thought as well. The concepts of reflective understanding fail to do justice to what we know to be true of living experience. In love, as Hegel puts it, life is present as a duplicate of itself or a sort of analogue of reason. The similarity of expression is close enough to tempt one to mistake a similarity of thought. But the temptation must be guarded against, because Rabindranath would not here speak of love as "the analogue of reason".

In his *The Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel devotes a whole chapter to the thesis of "Spirit of Self-estrangement", in

which he identifies alienation with objectivity. The loss of "essential being" is a precondition of objectivity, and without objectifying itself, without "self-estrangement", "spiritual self-realization" is not possible. Actuality is "the direct perversion of the essential self". Hegel explains the formative process of culture on similar lines. Culture and civilization are characterized by estrangement. "Determinate individual moulds itself by culture to what it inherently is, and only by so doing is it then something *per se* and possessed of concrete existence". Alienation in this phenomenological sense which Hegel gives it would be acceptable to Rabindranath, but he would prefer to say that the spirit *expresses* itself through culture and civilization. For example, Hegel sees in language an instance of alienation, while Rabindranath would assign to language a *transcending* role rather than an alienating role leading to actuality. *Alienation*, for Rabindranath, in this context, is used in a *pejorative* sense, which it is not so with Hegel. For Hegel, there is an ontological difference between the self-estrangement and self-realization of the spirit, corresponding to a logical movement from one domain to the other. Rabindranath does not look upon alienation as a logical prerequisite for the self-realisation of the spirit. With him, alienation is not *essential* to the nature of reality, at best, he would say that it operates as *tila*.

For the same reasons, Rabindranath would not agree with Hegel in holding the view that in creating works of art,

religion, philosophies, science and the state man loses his own soul. It is not possible for him to say that man's own creations become members of new realms of the objective or of the absolute mind, because over and above the individual minds Rabindranath does not commit himself to the ontology of an absolute mind. Neither is nature, for Rabindranath, as it is indeed for Hegel, "the self-estranged spirit". On the contrary, Nature is the deathless poetry of God. Moreover, Nature, for him, is the paradigm of harmony, hence it cannot be "the self-estranged spirit". Hegel makes creation equivalent to alienation, whereas, for Rabindranath, it is the model of the act of transcending it.

## II

It is natural for Rabindranath not to entertain any such notion of *creative alienation* as Hegel does. Rabindranath takes art as *concretion*, to borrow the phrase from Whitehead, whereas alienation is abstraction. To the alienated individual he says, the world is "nebulous", i.e., "a mist of abstractions" and "in their dense amorphousness man is hidden and truth is blurred". He mentions that "Everywhere in man's world the Supreme person is suffering from the *killing of human reality* by the imposition of the abstract". Art restores the human reality and thereby makes "the whole world our own", which otherwise, in alienation, is "the lightless world of facts". Rabindranath's phenomenology of art consists of the set of following statements:

- (a) In art man reveals his creative soul;
- (b) By his creative activities man makes Nature instinct with

- his own life and love, the artist builds "man's true world";
- (c) "Art is concerned with existence";
  - (d) The principle of unity;
  - (e) Man is free only as a creator;
  - (f) Aesthetic consciousness is not the consciousness of a class of things, but of the individual;
  - (g) "The Real is Joy".

The statements listed above, together constitute an aesthetic manifesto of dealienation. For aesthetic experience and dealienation co-imply each other. The aesthetic self is the total self of man, since its domain is the largest, i.e., the whole human reality. Rabindranath takes *art* in a much wider sense than Hegel does. It is not a phenomenon but reality itself. Human reality is aesthetic, since existence for Rabindranath, is creativity.

Rabindranath is perhaps the only philosopher who endeavours to solve the metaphysical problem of alienation by an aesthetic theory. It is also significant that the identification which man finds, for himself, in his aesthetic experience is never the identification of his ego, but of his human essence. It is not the case that one's essential humanity is identified with its accidental characteristics, which is the other name of alienation. It is the essentials of one that come to be united with the essentials of all. Art is man's lien on the universal, which is none other than his own truth, both in him and "in the heart of existence". Man has, for his "playmate", in art, the Reality.

### III

The question of alienation is significant only in a non-solipsistic universe. Rabindranath looks for a kind of epistemology or ontology in order to explain that we are incapable of doubting the existence of others. We have already seen that his concept of personality has, in the Kantian sense, a *transcendental* employment. Solipsistic knowledge, or absolute alienated consciousness, for him, is impossible if unity is at work, or else even the self-hood would not have become possible. The consciousness of personality is the consciousness of unity as a *person* and of union with other *persons*. It is aesthetic inasmuch as it becomes actively expressive and reveals the "truth of existence", i.e., the relatedness of things. "All proofs of truth are credentials of relationship" (*Creative Unity*, p.32). It delights us when we experience "personality acting upon personalities" (*Ibid.* p.35). Rabindranath clarifies the non-solipsistic nature of our epistemic awareness : he says, "Knowledge is one of the channels of our relation with the things outside us; it is making them our own, and thus widening the limits of our self". "At every step we have to take into account others than ourselves" (*Ibid.*, p.72) Again, he says, "It is our ignorance which makes us think that our self, as self, is real; that it has its complete meaning in itself" (*Sādhanā*, p.60). His basic epistemological conviction has a wider significance. Solipsism, he holds, is alienation, "our soul when detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self loses its significance. For its very essence is unity. It can find its

truth by unifying itself with others (*Ibid*, p.23). Thus, for Rabindranath, to be intensely aware of others is to be aware of ourselves and experience delight. Self-knowledge is blissful, since it coincides with self-expansion into the domain of others. If we leave out the fact of delight, Rabindranath is in line with Kant and Sartre in maintaining that solipsism is too simple to account for the fact that through consciousness we apprehend an objective world of persons and things. For him, as it is for Kant and Sartre, it is never the question that anybody has ever really doubted the existence of others. For all of them, and especially for Sartre, it is a "fundamental presupposition" that the other exists: "others are the Others, that is self which is not myself" (*Being and Nothingness*, p.230).

#### IV

But still some doubts remain. The upshot of the Kantian argument, non-solipsism granted, is that it is impossible for the self to know itself as it is in itself. It only views itself as an object or representation. As in the case of pure reason, so also in practical reason, though the self is disclosed as a subject for *reason* has its employment in a non-solipsistic sphere, since the moral law is a universalizable maxim, yet we are threatened by a self-alienation exemplified in the original division of the will within itself. The will is divided within itself and against itself. Rabindranath would admit this moral self-alienation of heteronomy of the will prior to moral action, and as a necessary condition of it. Kant thought that the self-alienation of the will in a moral situation can be resolved within and only within the

will itself. For Kant, there is no possibility that the problem can be overcome through action or that action might result in a further accentuation of split within the will. Again, action poses a problem, for the will must translate itself into an act, and the action may not express the intention. The self can achieve its freedom only through action, yet in making the self determinate the action is the negation of freedom. Prior to the action the self is simply a possibility. Through action it makes itself into an actuality, an objective reality. But in the process of acting it finds itself in a new mode of self-alienation as both subject and object to itself. The problem is so difficult for Kant because for him the moral law is devoid of any content and his ethical system does not admit any moral ideal or ethical model, lest it be heteronomous.

But, for Rabindranath, the difficulty is surmountable, the moral alienation of the self from the soul is not hard to transcend, since he employs an ethical model, which belongs to the Universal Man. His ethical model, e.g., the Buddha's *maitri* is an example of the case that "To live the life of goodness is to live the life of all" (*Sādhanā*, p.47). The moral nature of man consists in man's having "an extended vision of his true self", in realizing that man is much more than he seems to be. In growing aware of that which he is yet to be, man's perspective of life changes. Rabindranath takes the good will to be "the supreme wish of the larger life", and "good is that which is desirable for our greater self". Again, "the sense of goodness comes out of a truer view of our life, which is the connected view of the wholeness of

the field of life" (*Ibid*, p.45). Man, for him, is "provident", "more in truth than he is in fact". "It is a truth that man is not a detached being, that he has a universal aspect" (*Ibid*, p. 46). The statement is both synthetic and analytic in explicating the use of *man* in the context of Rabindranath's philosophy. But a tautology would have kept the problem where it was. The problem of alienation would ever threaten an ethical system which construed moral autonomy as emptied of all content, making evaluative statements barely tautological. It does not mean that Rabindranath falls away from moral autonomy and lapses into determinism or heteronomy of the will. He upholds moral autonomy as well. But owing to his conception of the self as having a universal aspect, the moral domain, for him, is non-empty and the imperatives flow from man's surplus. Thus Rabindranath's moral theory transcends alienation, and its autonomy consists in acting in accordance with man's essence, i.e., the ideal of the Universal Man.

A possible misunderstanding would be to think that in referring to the Buddha's *maitri* Rabindranath is exhorting us to imitate the Buddha. But, in fact, what he means is that in morality in order to justify a decision completely, we have to give a complete specification of the way of life of which it is a part. And, the nearest attempts are those given by the great religions, especially those which can point to historical persons who carried out the way of life into practice. The Buddha, for Rabindranath, stands for a specification of a dealienated way of life. It should not be thought that his ethical view is complacently construed. On the contrary, he frankly admits that

“Man’s freedom is never in being saved troubles; it is the freedom to take trouble for his own good” (*Sādhanā*, p.53). Again, in his opinion, it is in the “region of will that anarchy is permitted; only in man’s self that the discord of untruth and unrighteousness holds its reign” (*Ibid*, p.35). Creative living is not a pleasure trip, it is a battle, and it can be won. Dealienation becomes possible, since it is guaranteed by the “truth of man”. For Rabindranath, moral life cannot be reduced to a merely formal imperative, which is logically inescapable. What Aristotle called the “weakness of the will” is a disposition of human individuals. Moral living is a human drama, moral alienation is a fact of rebel ego to the Universal Man. This transcendence does not imply *cancellation* of the ego, rather, here, again, the means of aesthetic. Moral freedom is a creation, and creation, in art and morals alike, is a reorganisation of matter according to its own immutable laws. Freedom lies in the novelty of the reorganisation.

Hence Rabindranath does not maintain any sharply distinguished spheres of necessity and freedom as Kant’s *phenomenal* and *noumenal* worlds. We are not required to think ourselves free, as in Kant, in order for morality to be possible. He would say morality *is* possible, because we *are* free. It is required to be realised only in our actively expressive consciousness. Morality is not merely a question concerning the autonomy of the good will, rather it concerns our existence, for Rabindranath thinks : “good is the positive element in man’s nature”. Human existence is moral. It is a value-centred ontology - a harmony of knowledge, love and action. Rabindranath does not

think that necessity and freedom are mutually exclusive. *Necessity* is expressed in law. By laws we ourselves adjust to the world. The moral laws are our own laws, expressive of the *nature* of man, and this knowledge liberates us by giving us the power of truth over facts. The law hurts us where we are alienated from "the all". It is in being in harmony with the Universal will that we are free. And the Universal will is our *own* will. Hence, for Rabindranath, action does not determine our freedom. It is freedom *in* action that unites us with "the all".

Moral freedom yields delight, and testifies to reality. We have quoted him earlier as saying that delight is the criterion of reality. Rabindranath holds that knowledge makes us glad no less than art. It evidently follows that the alienation of the cognitive and the moral selves can be transcended in the aesthetic self, which is superior to both, since it incorporates the truth of the two selves with a greater extension of consciousness. The cognitive self delights in knowledge for in the knowing state we become aware of *ourselves* as the knower, so cognitive self-awareness is delighting. But delight, or the aesthetic factor in knowledge is often obscure because cognitive awareness reduces reality to object-hood, and often fails to touch the realm of personality. It is the aesthetic *nisus* which dealienates and yields inter-subjectivity, otherwise in most cases knowledge is a hand-maid of utility. In morality, goodness is love, and love, for Rabindranath, is an aesthetic category, which is mostly left out in cases of moral formalism. In love, the unloving formalism of

moral alienation is transcended, and we realize ourselves in others and it is this realization which yields delight. Thus, love is the testimony of the "complete" and "final" truth of man, which is relatedness or harmony. Or, in other words, *harmony* is the basic concept of human reality, which is aesthetic *per excellence*.

## V

The individual cannot be *human by himself*. The moral world is essentially non-solipsistic. Existentialist premises conceive the *problem* of human relationship in the following way. There are two values in human relationships which the human condition permits. According to the existentialists, they are *intensity* and *dignity*. Since human relationships involve a reciprocity between human agents, there is an uneliminable element of threat and danger, and the awareness of danger is the source of all intense states of consciousness. Again, since there is a necessary reciprocity in human relationships, one's freedom can always be pitted against the freedom of the other. According to some existentialists, the human condition permits *personal love*. Love is an intense relationship between persons, i.e., two free human agents. And the mutual recognition of one's own and another's freedom is not only its necessary but also its sufficient condition. Two people who mutually recognize the irreducible human reality of the other cannot love one another. This is the paradox inherent in the nature of the love relationship. To want to be loved is to attempt the assimilation of another's freedom by subjecting it to one's own. Thus love is doomed to failure, and solipsism of a certain sort is inevitable. Sartre takes love as an

instance of alienation.

For Sartre, love is the wish to be loved, that is, I, an *object* want to take hold of the very liberty of the other by becoming myself, i.e., my object-self – the source of his values. Love is the attempt of the self-seen-as-object to absorb another's freedom by making itself the highest reality. When such absorption fails, the lover tries to bring about his end by making himself a "fascinating object". This is a basic type of language in the primitive sense of expressiveness in general. Such expressiveness is still doomed to failure by the very logic of the situation. The lover wants the beloved to love him. He wants an object to "make worth living" the life of the beloved as free subject. If he succeeds, then the beloved loves the lover, i.e., the beloved himself turns into object in relation to the lover as subject. So the original character of the relationship is contradicted by its own fulfillment. Love by its very nature carries with it its own frustration.

Rabindranath would say that Sartre's analysis does not consider the total self of the lover, it is focussed on his ego, which is not freedom, but is in alienation. The wish to be loved is not true *mumukshatva*, it operates on the wrong plane. The Sartrean lover seeks to take hold of the very liberty of the other. It is a self-refuting move, and consequently reduces himself to the state of an object. The Sartrean lovers do not face each other as living human beings, but as facsimiles of humanity. Their encounter is an anonymous togetherness. For

this Sartre's concept of man is responsible. He conceives man to be a useless passion. Rabindranath holds, with Jaspers and Buber, that the authentic person is a "related" person. True communication between authentic existence, and for which *love* is a name, is an integral part of their constant recreation. The relation of love is possible for those human beings, who do not impair the freedom of those communicating. But Sartre allows for no *true person-to-person* encounter. For him, "hell is other people", and at the root of all human relations is conflict. On the contrary, Rabindranath thinks harmony in the base of authentic existence, and, for him, the lover is a partner of the dialogue between the *I* and the *Thou*. Moreover, the sense of wanting the completion of one's self in an other's is genuine in human consciousness. For an account of the need of human beings for one another the myth of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* seems to be still valid. Again, Diotima's account of immortality of the myth of the *Phaedrus* is affirmed in a novel manner by Rabindranath. The lover craves not simply the love of the beloved but the growth of his soul's wings, which only the beauty of the beloved, by recalling beauty itself, can give him. And in this process the soul of the beloved as well as that of the lover is nourished and ennobled. So regarded, love is not so much the desire to be loved as it is the sense of one's completion in another through shared insights and aspirations.

In existential terms, the transcendence of the lover neither transcends nor is transcended by another but becomes aware of itself, through the participation of the very freedom of

another in his freedom. The other's transcendence expands and ripens in its way through similar participation. Were there no much mutuality, the dilemma of Sartrean lover might indeed obtain, though it is too logical to match reality. But if the major premise is false, so is the conclusion.

Sartre emphasizes the contradictions and the failures of human relations without ever mentioning the slightest positive value. He is obsessed by the idea that the *look* of the other diminishes the the For-itself. He finds that the other's freedom, which can neither be abolished nor appropriated, may well appear intolerable. Human behaviours, implying joy and pain, generally moves in both zones. Sartre sees only one aspect. He emphasizes anti-thesis and forgets the synthesis. And as for the *look*, it is a metaphor and does not necessarily prove anything. It diminishes, but may *fulfill* as well. It may be doubted whether Sartre's "*the look*" is an ontological fact from which all conflict is derived and in terms of which conflict must be defined. We do not enter into conflict with one another because we look at one another. It is because we conflict with one another that we look. We rarely *look* at passing strangers on the street. *The look* is not even a wholly apt metaphor for conflict. There is nothing particularly upsetting or alienation-generating in the look of an adoring mother, for example, not to speak of lovers. This is a highly artificial example on which to base an analysis of personal relations.