

Beyond Postmodernism? Toward A Philosophy Of Play. Robert Miller.

Postmodernism has been in vogue now for some thirty years or so. It has influenced many disciplines. With regard to philosophy, some key themes are as follows.

Lyotard, in his seminal text, *The Postmodern Condition*, offers the short definition that postmodernism means a new incredulity towards metanarratives. Metanarratives are the grand metaphysical stories we tell ourselves about the nature of reality. These are also referred to as language games. These language games purport to represent reality truthfully in words, or represent the truth about reality. Accordingly, such language games are specific versions of the more general language game called the representational language game of truth. Theory purports to provide truth, a true representation of reality as it is. So the new incredulity could also be called: the non-credibility of the representational language game of truth, or, the lack of credibility of theory in general.

Language games are said to be heterogeneous, ie, they have different cultural and historical origins and consequently differ radically from one another in certain key respects. Because of this, they are also said to be incommensurable, ie, they can't be compared and measured against one another to decide which one is more true. This can't be done because the games contain within themselves different criteria for deciding truth. For example, one game decides truth according to an empiricist criterion, while other games do not. Therefore, there is no independent position from which you can judge between the games. In other words, there is no criterion for deciding the true criterion of the truth.

Radical relativism logically follows, ie, all values, standards, forms of evidence, methods of testing for or determining truth - and so all methods of arriving at a theory purporting to truly represent reality - are relative to the language game being played. What is called antifoundationalism also follows, ie, a correct foundation for knowledge, truth, or theory, can't be identified, because to identify a correct foundation presupposes we've already identified the correct foundation for identifying the correct foundation. This results in a circular logic or a logical regress. For example, if one identifies the correct foundation for theory as 'empirical verification', on what foundation has one identified this as the correct foundation? If it is on the basis of empirical verification, then the foundation merely assumes its own validity in a circular logic. But if it is based on some other foundation, then we may ask for the foundation of that foundation, and so on endlessly.

Antifoundationalism leads us into the whirlpool of logical reflexivity, ie, the process by which an argument reflects back on itself and undermines its own validity. For example, if it is asserted as a truth of theory that there are no foundations upon which to assert any truth of theory or establish its validity, then this assertion, which purports after all to be a truth of theory, itself has no foundation upon which to establish its validity. In short, antifoundationalism is itself without foundation. While it undermines every other truth of theory, it undermines its own truth too. Radical scepticism, also called nihilism, would appear to follow, ie, the claim that we have no knowledge, that theory is ineffectual, that truth is dead. However, it's not so simple. For the claim that the truth is dead is likewise without foundation. We can't claim it is

true that the truth is dead if the truth is dead. Similarly, we can't claim to know there is no knowledge if there is no knowledge. We seem, then, to be in a quandary: whatever we say can be reflected on and questioned in an endless circuit of reflection and questioning.

So theory has arrived, for internal logical reasons, at a road to nowhere. The new incredulity toward metanarratives we started with soon evolves into a new incredulity toward all theorising as such, or the growing awareness that there is something irrational about rational theory itself. At this point, theory begins to deconstruct itself in an endless way, or, as Baudrillard puts it, theory is found to autodestruct in our hands. It simply falls apart. He also puts it that the secret of theory is that there is no truth in theory. We might reply, however, that it's no longer a secret. Moreover, if the secret of theory is that there is no truth in theory then there is no truth in saying that there is no truth in theory.

It might be thought that these considerations are rather abstruse, and that none of this is relevant to the ordinary person in the street who gets along without theorising at all and simply relies on good old common sense. But no. For what is called good old common sense is itself simply a form of theory, ie, a network of thoughts which purport to truly represent reality as it is. Moreover, good old common sense is probably not that old: it reflects a worldview which has become common in one's neck of the woods only in relatively recent times. After all, common sense varies from one culture to another and one historical period to another. Therefore, so-called ordinary people are just as much caught up in the representational language game of truth as any postmodern intellectual, even if they've never reflected on it in these terms. If theory autodestructs, common sense autodestructs along with it. We are all left, then, wondering how we are supposed to think now about this or that or everything and what to do about it.

This, then, might be a better short definition of the postmodern condition: a state of quandary wherein we lose our grip on reality, ie, on whatever has been represented hitherto as being reality by this or that theory. If theory slips, reality slips. And if reality slips, self-identity slips. For what we are to ourselves is determined by how we think about ourselves and our place in the world. It is determined by our theory of reality, ie, by the representational language game we have been playing. But as we've seen, our theories lack foundation and definite truth content: they autodestruct in our hands. If so, we autodestruct in our hands. Reality begins to unravel....

Of course, there are many critics who bemoan the advent of postmodernism and fight a rearguard action against it. There are, for example, the many custodians of religious truth. The religions claim to mirror the truth of reality, the truth that's out there, in a valid and adequate language or network of thoughts. We might have to make a leap of faith to believe in it, but what we'll be believing in is that we have the right representational theory of reality. Since postmodernism undermines representation in general, questioning whether it can even have any clear or stable meaning, it undermines religion. While modern humanists may applaud this, they don't like postmodernism one bit either. For along with undermining the supposed truths of religion, it also undermines the supposed truths of modern humanism, including materialism, atheism, and the scientific enterprise. Indeed, all previous theories of

reality - those of pre-modernity and those of modernity - appear to sink into the whirlpool of logical reflexivity and come apart in our hands.

Worse still, it appears there's no way out of the maze of perplexity into which theory has entered. For Derrida, among others, insists that we are unavoidably caught up in theory even it does lead nowhere. As Hilary Lawson puts it in his book, *Reflexivity*, page 121: "Derrida's abandonment of decidability would at first sight appear to imply the end of the search for knowledge and truth. Instead of trying to peer through the veil to see the truth beyond, we are to destroy the veil altogether. But such a description must reflexively carry within it that which it seeks to excise. For the metaphor of the veil appears to be the provision of a new truth." And he quotes from Derrida, "When it is a matter of the veil, is that not once again tantamount to unveiling?... This question, inasmuch as it is a question, remains - interminably." And Lawson sums up with, "No theory is safe from the Derridean onslaught, but equally no theory is proclaimed. Yet theories of one form or another cannot be avoided."

So what this is saying is that, as soon as we start to theorise at all, and set up this or that statement as a truth, certain critical or deconstructive reflections on that statement - such as asking for its ultimate foundations - immediately result in the undermining of its truth. Moreover, the questioning of the truths of theory turns back on itself, reflexively, so we then reflect on the questioning itself in a questioning way, for example, asking after its foundations. These theoretical turns would spiral to infinity. Or to use a different metaphor: if we claim that theory veils the truth, that itself claims to be a truth, and so an unveiling, thus implying that theory does not veil the truth after all, but reveals it. It seems, then, that we can't rest with the initial assumption that theory reveals this or that truth of reality; nor yet with the second assumption that theory veils the truth of reality; nor yet with a third assumption: that we can destroy the veil to get at the truth. Theory appears to be caught in a glitch, an endless feedback loop. If we can't escape theory, we can't escape the loop.

So this would appear to be the postmodern view: we must theorise although the theorising lacks legitimacy and can get nowhere. We are caught up, then, in the endless play of the logos, ie, the endless play of thoughts running through our minds, rather like a rat on a treadmill. The rat is our rationality. It's going around in circles of undecidability, ie, where a final truth can't be decided or final word given. It would seem, then - despite Derrida's frequent claims that his philosophy does have ethical and political relevance - that the result of postmodernism is simply endless undecidability, which, after all, is just a fancier way of saying: indecision, a new incapacity to decide what to think or how to act. Postmodernism generates a sense of being stuck: a condition of thought snookering itself. And in case you haven't quite grasped the endless intricacies of this, we might mention that even Derrida's theory of undecidability can't be decided, for to decide on undecidability, is to abandon it, and thus contradict the undecidability. It seems we have here the philosophical equivalent of that joke where one says, "I used to be indecisive, but now I'm not so sure."

Ludicrous as this position may be, it does follow logically from engaging in the process of pursuing the truth of reality and the nature of theory. So we can't dismiss the postmodern as being ludicrous without also dismissing theory, the pursuit of truth,

as being ludicrous. Worse, we can't conclude that it's true that theory is ludicrous, since this claim, which is a theory about theory, would itself be ludicrous. Worse still, according to Derrida, we can't avoid this giddiness of theory, and of theory turning on itself endlessly, as in a room full of mirrors. It seems, then, that we must reflect on and on to no end. It seems we are bogged down in the postmodern condition, and that there is no 'beyond postmodernism'.

But is this so? The key claim is that we can't avoid theory. We can't get out of it and so we are stuck in interminable theoretical reflections. However, surely there are two things we might do to escape theory. First, we could be silent. Second, we could use thought in a different way. Instead of engaging with thought as theory purporting to represent the truth about reality - playing in the representational language game - we could use thought in an aesthetic way. This differs from theory. After all, an aesthetic fiction may create a world of its own for itself and it need not purport to represent the truth about reality.

So let's consider these two possibilities, beginning with silence.

The turn to silence brings us to Zen. From a Zen angle postmodernism looks rather like an enormous koan, ie, a paradoxical question or case or conundrum in which thinking has been thoroughly snookered. It only gets more and more snookered the more you try and solve the koan by using thought, intellect, and more theory. Eventually the futility of the approach is realised. It seems too ludicrous to continue. Then what happens? Something changes. Something gives. You make a radically different move. Instead of keeping on thinking and theorising, you take an inward step back from the thinking and theorising to simply watch it. This inward step back is a detaching from the thought process. In this detached observation, or passive contemplation, one is no longer simply thinking or theorising. Rather, one is rooted outside the thought process, outside the self-discourse or the text of reality with which you usually engage. One has become Zen meditator rather than thinker or theorist.

Derrida has famously said, "there is nothing outside the text". He did not mean there is literally nothing outside the text. That would imply linguistic idealism, ie, that only thought or language is real. What was meant is that whatever is outside the text would have to come inside the text to be thought at all and, hence, mediated, named, spoken, and used for theory. There is a sort of something outside the text, but it is a sort of something which is a sort of nothing, ie, non-thing, nothing nameable or speakable: the unspeakable, the indeterminate, the nameless, the undecidable, etc. A further implication is that, as there is nothing outside the text and we are caught up in the text, in the endless play of logos or thought, it is this which lets us be something. For it is thought, theory, self-reflection, which generates the story of who or what we are and so provides self-identity. However, the Zen move is the move to step back inwardly outside the text to observe it. Therefore, in this stepping back one becomes the nothing which is outside the text, ie, no particular thing or entity or anything nameable - as distinct from being this or that self or self-entity. One is a silent nothing outside the text relating to the text.

It might be objected to silence that we can't be silent all the time. We have to think, theorise, judge, communicate, and act in the world. So at best silence could only be a

very brief respite from this. However, this objection is based on a misunderstanding. The essence of Zen is simply to be rooted outside the text, in a detachment from the text, in the nothing outside the text. To be so rooted is to be rooted in inward silence. And this remains so even when the text is active, ie, even where thought, speech, communication, is happening. One is essentially contemplative rather than intellectual. One doesn't buy into the text or the theory, even the text or theory one is currently employing. Hence, it's common to find this description in Zen literature: that the Zen person speaks but does not say anything, thinks but does not think anything, acts but does not do anything, etc. The Zen person is essentially nobody going nowhere while being somebody going somewhere, ie, inwardly one is nobody going nowhere while outwardly one thinks, speaks, communicates, acts, and appears to be somebody going somewhere. To borrow a poetic line, the Zen person occupies the Zen point, an inward point of silent nothing: that "still point round which the world turns".

Zen is not a solution to the dilemmas of theory in the sense of solving them on a theoretical level. For they can't be solved on that level. Postmodernism highlights how reason itself is irrational. Rational theory can't found itself or justify its operations by its own lights. Attempting to do so with yet more theory is just going round and round in logical circles. We can't find a theoretical solution to theory's dilemmas, but we can transcend them. For they exist only for representational thinking. The Zen move liberates us from representational thinking in a state of aesthetic contemplation. Then it relates us back to thought in a new way: an aesthetic way. The aim of representational thinking was to think the truth about reality, while the aim of aesthetic thinking is to generate certain aesthetic effects, such as: beauty, re-enchantment, stimulation, interest, charm, allure, humour, provocation, love, etc. Hence, the aesthetic game is heterogeneous to, and incommensurable with, the representational game. The two language games sustain two different forms of life: theoretic life and aesthetic life. The former is truth-centred while the latter is effect-centred. The former is troubled or perplexed about reality and concerned to find out what it really is. It assumes that this is possible. The latter is not troubled or perplexed about reality and is not concerned to find out what it really is. Nor does it assume that this is possible. The former tries to reflect on and reflect reality. The latter plays contemplatively and creatively with reflections to generate an aesthetic world of its own.

This Zen play differs from postmodern play. Derrida speaks of the play of language, the play of the logos, and he seeks to keep theory itself in play. He plays in that game and the name of the game is to keep everything, including ourselves, within the play of mediation so that nothing becomes decidable or settled in a final or fixed truth. As for Baudrillard, he plays equivocally in the theory game, ie, he doesn't come clean on whether he is playing in the game or not, and vacillates between playing in it and not playing in it. This is shown by the way he often refers to himself a moralist and metaphysician, ie, a theorist playing in a representational language game of truth, and often as a pataphysician, ie, someone playing with purely 'imaginary solutions' in a kind of parody of metaphysics. The latter is not a representational language game, but an aesthetic game, a fiction even. Indeed, the ongoing equivocation in Baudrillard is summed up in the term he uses for his text, viz, 'theory fiction'. This is a contradiction

in terms. For fiction doesn't purport to be a true representation of reality, while theory does. Baudrillard wants both together. But this is incoherent.

Suppose we play with language in an aesthetic way and create an aesthetic world of thoughts for ourselves to inhabit. Such a world can only be identified by theory as a fiction if theory has the competence to correctly identify truth from falsehood with regard to reality. In other words, one has to know what reality is first to be able to identify a worldview as merely a fiction, ie, as the not-real. However, as we've seen, it can no longer be claimed that theory has this competence. It is too busy sinking in the whirlpool of infinite reflexivity, undermining itself at every turn, caught up in its own long goodbye. Consequently, there is no clear way of distinguishing a metaphysical fiction of reality from a metaphysical truth of reality. The terms lose their old meanings. Even the term, theory fiction, is no longer relevant. There is simply the generation of aesthetic worlds with no way to determine that they are fictions rather than valid realities.

The consequence of this is quite revolutionary. What it means is that metaphysics - once thought to be outmoded never to return - can make a new come back, like Lazarus rising from the dead. It can't be metaphysics in the old sense, however, that is, where one sought to establish a metaphysics by representational thinking. What comes in now is aesthetic metaphysics, metaphysics as a function of aesthetic thinking, ie, we create a metaphysical world for ourselves on the basis of aesthetic criteria rather than the old criteria of representational legitimacy, such as: knowledge, truth, intuition, revelation, authority, Scripture, tradition, evidence, verificationism, falsificationism, correspondence, coherence, etc. For every one those terms has been rendered suspect by postmodernism. This allows aesthetic metaphysics to reign supreme. Its truth or falsity can no longer be decided, so it is no longer the issue. The sole issue or criterion that remains is the aesthetic one, ie, whether a metaphysics is aesthetically pleasing or strategic: for example, re-enchanting.

In Zen play, languages are conventions of communication, more or less skilful means for the purposes of helping someone make a Zen move and re-enchant existence. So, for example, the language game called postmodernism might be considered more or less useful in the way a koan is useful, viz, for the purpose of bringing a thinking mind to a crisis, an impasse, so it may be provoked thereby to do something entirely different to escape the futility, viz, transcend representational thinking altogether. Thus Zen is beyond postmodernism though it may use postmodernism for its own purposes. Zen is not in postmodernism or in the play of language, but plays with postmodernism and the play of language.

The same can be said of Zen's relationship to Buddhism. We should not confuse or conflate the two, as most commentators do. Zen is not the text of Buddhism. Literally, the word Zen means meditation. As such, it is not a theory. It's an act, a move: the inward act of stepping outside theory, outside the scriptures, outside the text. Buddhism, on the other hand, is a representational language game, a theory of reality, a text. Zen finds it more or less useful to play with Buddhism the way it may play with postmodernism, as a kind of koan, a vehicle or teaching device for communication and for provoking the mind into a crisis, an impasse, and a self-transcendence. As a text, Buddhism lends itself to this Zen move because there are

certain features within the text which set up unresolvable paradoxes and dilemmas. Buddhism is rather like postmodernism in this respect. So either can be used as a means to provoke a Zen move of self-transcendence above thought and theory.

Some writers, notably Ray Grigg in his book, *The Tao Of Zen*, realise Zen is not Buddhism. He argues against equating them. However, he argues instead that Zen is more essentially Taoism. But this is a similar mistake. Zen is not Taoism either, in so far as Taoism is a theory, a text, a discourse about reality. What has been happening is that people tend to equate Zen with the vehicle it associates with, eg, Buddhism, Taoism, the Martial Arts, etc. - and now we might add: postmodernism. The thing is, Zen itself is not a theory or a language, but it needs to use a language in order to communicate, teach, recommend, encourage, or otherwise provoke a Zen move. It would be best, then, not to speak of Zen religion or Zen philosophy at all, but just speak of the Zen move. Perhaps in this way we might better appreciate the lovely title of that book by Alan Keightley called *Into Every Life A Little Zen Must Fall*.

Keightley often uses Wittgenstein as his vehicle. Are there any other vehicles? Yes. Here's one from a completely different cultural setting. The 14th century Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, wrote a key sermon, which may be translated as *On Detachment, On Disinterest, or On Abandonment*. The sermon conforms to his well-known general theme of 'gelassenheit', translated as 'letting go and letting be'. In such sermons Eckhart presents his view that the highest practice for the Christian is to stand contemplatively outside the text, the process of thought, even Christian thoughts about God. How does he arrive at this? Because his form of theism contains the idea that God, as creator, transcends the creation and everything within it. Thoughts and texts, including concepts of God, are created things in the world of time and space. They are theories. Therefore, they are not God nor are they adequate to God. To come close to God we must stand outside all our ideas and theories about God and be rooted in that nothing outside the text, that inward silence which is a detached watching in freedom from the text. Moreover, we can be rooted in this silent nothing all the time. To explain this, Eckhart provides a wonderful analogy: that of the door opening and shutting on its hinge. The hinge does not move even while the door is moving. Thus, inwardly, the meditator does not move while the mind or body is moving, and does not speak while outwardly speaking, etc. This is what he means by spiritual detachment. It is, in effect, Zen. Thus, one can find the essence of Zen in Eckhart, though one should not confuse it with the Christian vehicle, which is Eckhart's text.

Here are a few more vehicles. Zen in Krishnamurti: Krishnamurti's critique of cultural bias, division, belief and conflict, is used as a provocation to stand outside every cultural text. Zen Egoism: Max Stirner's text on radical egoism is used to undermine every other theory and then itself, leaving us in a state of creative nothing, playfully related to everything, including every text. Zen Kantianism: Kant's text on beauty in *The Critique Of Judgment*, where the experience of free beauty is said to arise from a contemplative disengagement of the faculties required for theoretical knowledge, is used as a provocation to practice this disengagement. Zen Existentialism: the existentialist critique of our flight from nothingness is used as a provocation to encounter nothingness and be rooted there. (I have used all of these vehicles at one time or another.)

One question remains. Given that Zen is not itself a language but it must associate with a language, as a vehicle, in order to communicate, what would be the best vehicle for it to associate with? This will largely depend on the context. In a Taoist culture, Taoism presents itself as a good choice. In a Buddhist culture, Buddhism will be useful. In the West, postmodernism currently appears useful. In a certain sense, it doesn't matter. Zen is very flexible and it may be associated strategically with this or that, whatever might work. However, I now want to introduce a new thought, or strategy, which I call: the double strategy.

Meister Eckhart's theology employed two terms: the *via negativa*, or negative way, and the *via positiva*, or positive way. Let's appropriate them for our own use. The latter links to our notion of the vehicle, the former to the turn to silent nothing. In Zen play the two work together, ie, we use a positive way, ie, a positive language of reality, in order to think, speak, teach, communicate, and generally occasion the Zen move. Since we are not playing in the representational language game here, we need not abide by its rules. Consequently, we can choose our positive way, our metaphysics, our vehicle, as we please, ie, according to personal aesthetic criteria rather than representational criteria. In other words, postmodernism has cleared the way for a new form of metaphysical faith - not the old style faith which was tied to external authority and representational criteria, but a new style of faith: aesthetic faith. This kind of faith is free and playful: free in that it is not fettered by representational rules, and playful in that it sets its own agenda for itself, ie, according one's own aesthetic criteria. In other words, we can choose whatever metaphysics we want for our purpose, no matter how bizarre the metaphysics may otherwise look. For remember that critical theory has shown itself incompetent to identify anything as metaphysical fiction as distinct from metaphysical truth. It's no longer a question, then, of the truths of theory versus the fictions of metaphysics. The sole issue is: What is your aesthetic preference? What seems pleasing or re-enchanting to you? What would be for you an optimal metaphysical faith?

We now find we are at liberty to choose such a faith, and sustain it, because self-reflexively self-critical twists in theory - ie, the aporias or impasses of truth-centred thinking such as occur in postmodernism and in Buddhism - nullify theoretical criticism from the side of critical theory itself. It is this factor which both provokes and permits the double aesthetic turn, ie, the *via negativa* of the Zen move into a silence outside the text together with the *via positiva* of the free and playful adoption of an optimistic metaphysics. We should note, then, that a new age of metaphysical faith becomes possible beyond postmodernism - not despite it, but rather in light of it. For something like postmodernism is required first so that thought may come to the impasse which blocks representational thinking and provokes a turn to the *via negativa* and *positiva* of aesthetic thinking.

To sum up. What comes first in time is theory, ie, we begin philosophy, the philosophical journey, by passionately pursuing the representational truth about reality. We are seekers of truth and our passion propels thought along. However, what happens is that theoretical thinking eventually turns back in on itself bringing itself to a self-reflexive impasse or aporia. This realisation occasions the inward step back from any further involvement in the pursuit of truth through representational thinking.

We decide instead to contemplate our texts from a standpoint outside of the texts, ie, from the standpoint of the uncontextualised, the silent nothing. This is the first aesthetic turn. The second aesthetic turn is to return to our texts, our ongoing thoughts, in order to play freely with them for our aesthetic purpose. We adopt an optimal metaphysical faith and change our everyday thoughts accordingly. The basic principle of this metaphysical faith is: Always assume the best until the worse is proven! But, as we've seen, the worse is always impossible to prove. For theory can no longer prove anything, stuck as it is in its own impasse.

This, then, is our double turn, our double strategy. Mind you, it could just as soon be called a single strategy with two aspects: the single strategy being to play positively with our thinking from a position outside it.

People who sit and contemplate in silence the ongoing flow of life soon find that this kind of practice tends to generate certain beneficial aesthetic effects, such as: an increasing sense of inner peace, happiness, harmony, affinity, sympathy, goodwill, receptivity to beauty, and even a tendency toward generalised love. This soon seems more rewarding than being caught up in the increasingly ludicrous pursuit of truth by way of endless words and thinking. However, as we are also creatures of thought and communication, we begin to relate ludically (playfully) to the ludicrous. This seems appropriate. Hence, we begin to play with thought for our aesthetic purposes, adopting this or that strategy of communication, not because of its intrinsic truth-value, but because it is provisionally pleasing or useful in a context. We eventually realise we are at liberty to adopt maximally positive strategies of self-enjoyment and re-enchantment, ie, optimistic faith. Filling our mind with positive thoughts about reality in this way we generate a re-enchanted aesthetic world for ourselves to inhabit. This *via positiva* then greatly augments the aesthetic effects generated by the *via negativa*, and the two tactics work hand-in-hand together to promote higher degrees of eudemonia, ie, being in philosophical good spirits. It begins to seem the obvious thing to do, the obvious choice in the circumstances.

Beyond postmodernism, ie, the impasse of theory, ethics can also come back in, namely, as aesthetic morality. This makes morality a function of personal spiritual development rather than an abstract theory of moral laws or list of duties and obligations. The personal development has three aspects. First, there is the initial context: genetic predispositions, upbringing, socialisation, education, philosophical influences, etc. The first step for morality is an upbringing conducive to it. Second, there is the transformational effect of meditation practice, ie, of being in the world in a Zen way. This practice tends to undermine prejudices generated by cultural thinking and enhances feelings of generalised benevolence and sympathy. Thirdly, there is the element of metaphysical faith. This evolves as an option out of the complex of psychological factors generated by upbringing and meditation. Metaphysical faith can be used to further enhance morality by generating a universe in which morality has an abiding significance: for example, by asserting the eternal centrality of love and the supreme worth of every person. A metaphysics of universal love, after all, recommends itself as an excellent candidate for a *via positiva*.

In other words, a key step in fostering *caritas* (spiritual love or charity) is to first take the maximally charitable view of reality, ie, of everything and everyone. Charitable

action is inspired by taking the maximally charitable view. For then we will see reality through the eyes of faith, ie, we will see it as a metaphysically perfect reality, and everyone in it as a metaphysically perfect being, a being of supreme worth, hence, a being supremely worthy of our compassion and attention. Everything and everyone will be sacred, re-enchanted. As the artists of our own lives, it is up to us, if we wish, to conceive and perceive reality in such a way. We may do so freely and playfully once we have escaped from the prison of our representational convictions, ie, from that conditioned thinking which keeps us bound down in a relatively disenchanting and dispiriting universe mistaken for a truth. If we can break through that we can break through to a more joyful and moral vision.

In this way moral action enters into our aesthetic strategy, ie, as a function of our experiments in re-enchantment. For example: try generating a supremely loving universe, then enacting love every day, and see what aesthetic effects result.

What I'm suggesting here starts to look like a confluence of two recent movements, one which usually impresses intellectuals, namely postmodernism, and one which they usually scorn, namely so-called New Age spirituality. The trajectory of the latter is toward an increasingly personalised and customised spiritual metaphysics, while the trajectory of the former is toward the impasse of theory and the transcendence of representational thinking. A confluence of the two would generate the kind of non-representational aesthetic faith I've been describing.

Alternatively, those of you who like to think of history in the Hegelian manner, ie, according to a thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic, might appreciate it put this way: if the pre-modern age of representational faith is the thesis, and the modern and postmodern age of rational and critical theory is its antithesis, then the new age of free and playful faith is the higher synthesis which appropriates and goes beyond both the old terms and their outmoded opposition.

Perhaps something like this would be timely. For in postmodernity it's remarkable how many people seem lost and depressed. I frequently come across people who are taking drugs - prescription drugs or otherwise - to cope with life. The postmodern lot is not a happy one it seems. Baudrillard speaks of the disenchantment and melancholy which haunts the current systems. Well, it's surely not so surprising to find that depression is rampant when dominant philosophies, such as materialism, capitalism, Marxism, existentialism, and postmodernism, are themselves depressive. That this general state of affairs does not exclude those so-called ordinary people in the street we mentioned before completely explodes the myth that philosophy is irrelevant to them. The effects of a 'zeitgeist' are felt far and wide. I would suggest, then, that what most of us have been suffering from is a philosophical malaise rather than a purely biological one. We have been depressed because we have been living in a depressing universe. Depression is realistic in such a circumstance. After all, one would be deranged not to be depressed in a depressing universe or fearful in a hostile one.

Our world lacked purpose and spiritual depth and, consequently, we lacked optimism and hope. Consider: in various cultures of faith life has been far harsher for people than it is now in the West, yet they seem to have been better able to cope. Faith can provide a strong psychological foundation and sense of meaning even in the midst of

suffering. Or as Nietzsche put it: He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how. Viktor Frankl famously found it so even in Nazi concentration camps. Not to put too fine a point on it, what we've been lacking is that ancient triad: faith, hope and love. We've all but forgotten what it would be like to live in a universe rich in positive meanings and abundant in love. Imagine for a moment how different it would be if we could have that kind of supremely positive and optimistic outlook once again. Well, if we don't wish to go back to an age of old-style faith tied to tradition, authority, pseudo-evidence, and pseudo-rational arguments, we can still go forward to a new age of aesthetic faith. That's the positive message I'd like to get across today.

Finally. What is the status of my text? Is it perchance a theory? Surely not. Logically, it must itself be an example of aesthetic thinking rather than representational thinking, ie, it does not purport to represent reality, but is written only because it seems to re-enchant me. It is entertaining to me to entertain these thoughts. I merely invite you to consider if they might re-enchant you. Who knows? - they might even be true!
