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A Grammar of Motives

INTRODUCTION: THE FIVE KEY TERMS OF DRAMATISM

WHAT is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it? An answer to that question is the subject of this book. The book is concerned with the basic forms of thought which, in accordance with the nature of the world as all men necessarily experience it, are exemplified in the attributing of motives. These forms of thought can be embodied profoundly or trivially, truthfully or falsely. They are equally present in systematically elaborated metaphysical structures, in legal judgments, in poetry and fiction, in political and scientific works, in news and in bits of gossip offered at random.

We shall use five terms as generating principle of our investigation. They are: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose. In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*. Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose).

If you ask why, with a whole world of terms to choose from, we select these rather than some others as basic, our book itself is offered, as the answer. For, to explain our position, we shall show how it can be applied.

Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose. Although, over the centuries, men have shown great enterprise and inventiveness in pondering matters of human motivation, one can simplify the subject by this pentad of key terms, which are understandable almost at a glance. They need

never to be abandoned, since all statements that assign motives can be shown to arise out of them and to terminate in them. By examining them quizzically, we can range far; yet the terms are always there for us to reclaim, in their everyday simplicity, their almost miraculous easiness, thus enabling us constantly to begin afresh. When they might become difficult, when we can hardly see them, through having stared at them too intensely, we can of a sudden relax, to look at them as we always have, lightly, glancingly. And having reassured ourselves, we can start out again, once more daring to let them look strange and difficult for a time.

In an exhibit of photographic murals (*Road to Victory*) at the Museum of Modern Art, there was an aerial photograph of two launches, proceeding side by side on a tranquil sea. Their wakes crossed and recrossed each other in almost an infinity of lines. Yet despite the intricateness of this tracery, the picture gave an impression of great simplicity, because one could quickly perceive the generating principle of its design. Such, ideally, is the case with our pentad of terms, used as generating principle. It should provide us with a kind of simplicity that can be developed into considerable complexity, and yet can be discovered beneath its elaborations.

We want to inquire into the purely internal relationships which the five terms bear to one another, considering their possibilities of transformation, their range of permutations and combinations—and then to see how these various resources figure in actual statements about human motives. Strictly speaking, we mean by a Grammar of motives a concern with the terms alone, without reference to the ways in which their potentialities have been or can be utilized in actual statements about motives. Speaking broadly we could designate as “philosophies” any statements in which these grammatical resources are specifically utilized. Random or unsystematic statements about motives could be considered as fragments of a philosophy.

One could think of the Grammatical resources as *principles*, and of the various philosophies as *casuistries* which apply these principles to temporal situations. For instance, we may examine the term Scene simply as a blanket term for the concept of background or setting *in general*, a name for *any* situation in which acts or agents are placed. In our usage, this concern would be “grammatical.” And we move into matters of “philosophy” when we note that one thinker uses “God” as

his term for the ultimate ground or scene of human action, another uses “nature,” a third uses “environment,” or “history,” or “means of production,” etc. And whereas a statement about the grammatical principles of motivation might lay claim to a universal validity, or complete certainty, the choice of any one philosophic idiom embodying these principles is much more open to question. Even before we know what act is to be discussed, we can say with confidence that a rounded discussion of its motives must contain a reference to *some kind of* background. But since each philosophic idiom will characterize this background differently, there will remain the question as to which characterization is “right” or “more nearly right.”

It is even likely that, whereas one philosophic idiom offers the best calculus for one case, another case answers best to a totally different calculus. However, we should not think of “cases” in too restricted a sense. Although, from the standpoint of the grammatical principles inherent in the internal relationships prevailing among our five terms, any given philosophy is to be considered as a casuistry, even a cultural situation extending over centuries is a “case,” and would probably require a much different philosophic idiom as its temporizing calculus of motives than would be required in the case of other cultural situations.

In our original plans for this project, we had no notion of writing a “Grammar” at all. We began with a theory of comedy, applied to a treatise on human relations. Feeling that competitive ambition is a drastically over-developed motive in the modern world, we thought this motive might be transcended if men devoted themselves not so much to “excoriating” it as to “appreciating” it. Accordingly, we began taking notes on the foibles and antics of what we tended to think of as “the Human Barnyard.”

We sought to formulate the basic stratagems which people employ, in endless variations, and consciously or unconsciously, for the outwitting or cajoling of one another. Since all these devices had a “you and me” quality about them, being “addressed” to some person or to some advantage, we classed them broadly under the heading of a Rhetoric. There were other notes, concerned with modes of expression and appeal in the fine arts, and with purely psychological or psychoanalytic matters. These we classed under the heading of Symbolic.

We had made still further observations, which we at first strove uneasily to class under one or the other of these two heads, but which we

were eventually able to distinguish as the makings of a Grammar. For we found in the course of writing that our project needed a grounding in formal considerations logically prior to both the rhetorical and the psychological. And as we proceeded with this introductory groundwork, it kept extending its claims until it had spun itself from an intended few hundred words into nearly 200,000, of which the present book is revision and abridgement.

Theological, metaphysical, and juridical doctrines offer the best illustration of the concerns we place under the heading of Grammar; the forms and methods of art best illustrate the concerns of Symbolic; and the ideal material to reveal the nature of Rhetoric comprises observations on parliamentary and diplomatic devices, editorial bias, sales methods and incidents of social sparring. However, the three fields overlap considerably. And we shall note, in passing, how the Rhetoric and the Symbolic hover about the edges of our central theme, the Grammar.

A perfectionist might seek to evolve terms free of ambiguity and inconsistency (as with the terministic ideals of symbolic logic and logical positivism). But we have a different purpose in view, one that probably retains traces of its "comic" origin. We take it for granted that, insofar as men cannot themselves create the universe, there must remain something essentially enigmatic about the problem of motives, and that this underlying enigma will manifest itself in inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies among the terms for motives. Accordingly, what we want is *not terms that avoid ambiguity*, but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise*.

Occasionally, you will encounter a writer who seems to get great exaltation out of proving, with an air of much relentlessness, that some philosophic term or other has been used to cover a variety of meanings, and who would smash and abolish this idol. As a general rule, when a term is singled out for such harsh treatment, if you look closer you will find that it happens to be associated with some cultural or political trend from which the writer would dissociate himself; hence there is a certain notable ambiguity in this very charge of ambiguity, since he presumably feels purged and strengthened by bringing to bear upon this particular term a kind of attack that could, with as much justice, be brought to bear upon any other term (or "title") in philosophy, including of course the alternative term, or "title," that the writer would

swear by. Since no two things or acts or situations are exactly alike, you cannot apply the same term to both of them without thereby introducing a certain margin of ambiguity, an ambiguity as great as the difference between the two subjects that are given the identical title. And all the more may you expect to find ambiguity in terms so "titular" as to become the marks of a philosophic school, or even several philosophic schools. Hence, instead of considering it our task to "dispose of" any ambiguity by merely disclosing the fact that it is an ambiguity, we rather consider it our task to study and clarify the *resources* of ambiguity. For in the course of this work, we shall deal with many kinds of *transformation*—and it is in the areas of ambiguity that transformations take place; in fact, without such areas, transformation would be impossible. Distinctions, we might say, arise out of a great central moltenness, where all is merged. They have been thrown from a liquid center to the surface, where they have congealed. Let one of these crusted distinctions return to its source, and in this alchemic center it may be remade, again becoming molten liquid, and may enter into new combinations, whereat it may be again thrown forth as a new crust, a different distinction. So that A may become non-A. But not merely by a leap from one state to the other. Rather, we must take A back into the ground of its existence, the logical substance that is its causal ancestor, and on to a point where it is consubstantial with non-A; then we may return, this time emerging with non-A instead.

And so with our five terms: certain formal interrelationships prevail among these terms, by reason of their role as attributes of a common ground or substance. Their participation in a common ground makes for transformability. At every point where the field covered by any one of these terms overlaps upon the field covered by any other, there is an alchemic opportunity, whereby we can put one philosophy or doctrine of motivation into the alembic, make the appropriate passes, and take out another. From the central moltenness, where all the elements are fused into one togetherness, there are thrown forth, in separate crusts, such distinctions as those between freedom and necessity, activity and passiveness, coöperation and competition, cause and effect, mechanism and teleology.

Our term, "Agent," for instance, is a general heading that might, in a given case, require further subdivision, as an agent might have his act modified (hence partly motivated) by friends (co-agents) or enemies

(counter-agents). Again, under "Agent" one could place any personal properties that are assigned a motivational value, such as "ideas," "the will," "fear," "malice," "intuition," "the creative imagination." A portrait painter may treat the body as a property of the agent (an expression of personality), whereas materialistic medicine would treat it as "scenic," a purely "objective material"; and from another point of view it could be classed as an agency, a means by which one gets reports of the world at large. Machines are obviously instruments (that is, Agencies); yet in their vast accumulation they constitute the industrial scene, with its own peculiar set of motivational properties. War may be treated as an Agency, insofar as it is a means to an end; as a collective Act, subdivisible into many individual acts; as a Purpose, in schemes proclaiming a cult of war. For the man inducted into the army, war is a Scene, a situation that motivates the nature of his training; and in mythologies war is an Agent, or perhaps better a super-agent, in the figure of the war god. We may think of voting as an act, and of the voter as an agent; yet votes and voters both are hardly other than a politician's medium or agency; or from another point of view, they are a part of his scene. And insofar as a vote is cast without adequate knowledge of its consequences, one might even question whether it should be classed as an activity at all; one might rather call it passive, or perhaps sheer motion (what the behaviorists would call a Response to a Stimulus).

Or imagine that one were to manipulate the terms, for the imputing of motives, in such a case as this: The hero (agent) with the help of a friend (co-agent) outwits the villain (counter-agent) by using a file (agency) that enables him to break his bonds (act) in order to escape (purpose) from the room where he has been confined (scene). In selecting a casuistry here, we might locate the motive in the agent, as were we to credit his escape to some trait integral to his personality, such as "love of freedom." Or we might stress the motivational force of the scene, since nothing is surer to awaken thoughts of escape in a man than a condition of imprisonment. Or we might note the essential part played by the *co-agent*, in assisting our hero to escape—and, with such thoughts as our point of departure, we might conclude that the motivations of this act should be reduced to social origins.

Or if one were given to the brand of speculative enterprise exemplified by certain Christian heretics (for instance, those who worshipped

Judas as a saint, on the grounds that his betrayal of Christ, in leading to the Crucifixion, so brought about the opportunity for mankind's redemption) one might locate the necessary motivational origin of the act in the *counter-agent*. For the hero would not have been prodded to escape if there had been no villain to imprison him. Inasmuch as the escape could be called a "good" act, we might find in such motivational reduction to the counter-agent a compensatory transformation whereby a bitter fountain may give forth sweet waters. In his *Anti-Dühring* Engels gives us a secular variant which no one could reasonably call outlandish or excessive:

It was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a considerable scale, and along with this, the flower of the ancient world, Hellenism. Without slavery, no Greek state, no Greek art and science; without slavery, no Roman Empire. But without Hellenism and the Roman Empire as a basis, also no modern Europe.

We should never forget that our whole economic, political and intellectual development has as its presupposition a state of things in which slavery was as necessary as it was universally recognized. In this sense we are entitled to say: Without the slavery of antiquity, no modern socialism.

Pragmatists would probably have referred the motivation back to a source in *agency*. They would have noted that our hero escaped by using an *instrument*, the file by which he severed his bonds; then in this same line of thought, they would have observed that the hand holding the file was also an instrument; and by the same token the brain that guided the hand would be an instrument, and so likewise the educational system that taught the methods and shaped the values involved in the incident.

True, if you reduce the terms to any one of them, you will find them branching out again; for no one of them is enough. Thus, Mead called his pragmatism a philosophy of the *act*. And though Dewey stresses the value of "intelligence" as an instrument (agency, embodied in "scientific method"), the other key terms in his casuistry, "experience" and "nature," would be the equivalents of act and scene respectively. We must add, however, that Dewey is given to stressing the *overlap* of these two terms, rather than the respects in which they are distinct, as he proposes to "replace the traditional separation of nature

and experience with the idea of continuity." (The quotation is from *Intelligence and the Modern World*.)

As we shall see later, it is by reason of the pliancy among our terms that philosophic systems can pull one way and another. The margins of overlap provide opportunities whereby a thinker can go without a leap from any one of the terms to any of its fellows. (We have also likened the terms to the fingers, which in their extremities are distinct from one another, but merge in the palm of the hand. If you would go from one finger to another without a leap, you need but trace the tendon down into the palm of the hand, and then trace a new course along another tendon.) Hence, no great dialectical enterprise is necessary if you would merge the terms, reducing them even to as few as one; and then, treating this as the "essential" term, the "causal ancestor" of the lot, you can proceed in the reverse direction across the margins of overlap, "deducing" the other terms from it as its logical descendants.

This is the method, explicitly and in the grand style, of metaphysics which brings its doctrines to a head in some over-all title, a word for being in general, or action in general, or motion in general, or development in general, or experience in general, etc., with all its other terms distributed about this titular term in positions leading up to it and away from it. There is also an implicit kind of metaphysics, that often goes by the name of No Metaphysics, and aims at reduction not to an over-all title but to some presumably underlying atomic constituent. Its vulgar variant is to be found in techniques of "unmasking," which would make for progress and emancipation by applying materialistic terms to immaterial subjects (the pattern here being, "X is nothing but Y," where X designates a higher value and Y a lower one, the higher value being thereby reduced to the lower one).

The titular word for our own method is "dramatism," since it invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action. The method is synoptic, though not in the historical sense. A purely historical survey would require no less than a universal history of human culture; for every judgment, exhortation, or admonition, every view of natural or supernatural reality, every intention or expectation involves assumptions about motive, or cause. Our work must be synoptic in a different sense: in the sense that it offers a

system of placement, and should enable us, by the systematic manipulation of the terms, to "generate," or "anticipate" the various classes of motivational theory. And a treatment in these terms, we hope to show, reduces the subject synoptically while still permitting us to appreciate its scope and complexity.

It is not our purpose to import dialectical and metaphysical concerns into a subject that might otherwise be free of them. On the contrary, we hope to make clear the ways in which dialectical and metaphysical issues *necessarily* figure in the subject of motivation. Our speculations, as we interpret them, should show that the subject of motivation is a philosophic one, not ultimately to be solved in terms of empirical science.

Survey of Terms for Substance

Geometric substance. - An object placed in its setting, existing both in itself and as part of its background. Participation in a context. Embodied most completely in Spinoza's cult of "Euclidean" relations, logically ("necessarily") derivable from one another. These relations exist all at once, implicitly, though they may manifest themselves, or be made manifest, in various *sequences*. (As soon as certain antecedent steps are taken in the demonstration, certain consequent steps are "inevitable.") The plastic connotations can lead readily into strictly materialistic notions of determinism, as with the novelist, Theodore Dreiser, who professes to view all ultimate motives in terms of "chemism."

Familial substance. In its purity, this concept stresses common ancestry in the strictly biological sense, as literal descent from maternal or paternal sources. But the concept of family is usually "spiritualized," so that it includes merely social groups, comprising persons of the same nationality or beliefs. Most often, in such cases, there is the notion of some founder shared in common, or some covenant or constitution or historical act from which the consubstantiality of the group is derived. Doctrines of creation extend the concept of familial descent to cover

the relationship between the craftsman and his product ("the potter and the pot," as with the agent-act ratio).

This in turn moves us closer to purely logical derivations, of actualities from potentialities, of the explicit from the implicit, of conclusions from principles (that is, "firsts"). Plotinus' characterization of God as *to proton* would be a case in point, or Bonaventura's notion of the world's development from *rationes seminales*, an expression clearly combining the ideas of logical and biological descent. The stress upon the informative nature of beginnings can in turn lead us to treat christenings, inaugurations, and the like as aspects of familial substance. There is the girl of high spirits, for instance, who says of herself that she was born during a hurricane, as though the quality of her temper in later life were derived from the quality of the scene prevailing at her birth.

Biologists, in their concern with vital reproduction, necessarily give prominence to concepts of familial substance, in terms for genus and species, cellular structure, and the like. Often they study the responses of organisms at various levels of development, in the expectation that laws of behavior discovered at one level will apply to levels far higher in the scale of complexity. They expect differences, of course, but they also expect the processes at both the higher and lower levels to be "substantially" the same. Thus in an article of biological vulgarization published in one of the "cultural" magazines, a writer observed that, though we may lose confidence in the brotherhood of man, we can still be sure of our consubstantiality in a more inclusive concept of family: "protoplasm" (incidentally, another "first").

Since the taking of nourishment involves a *transubstantiation* of external elements into elements within, we might treat nutritive substance as a combination of the contextual and familial sufficiently notable to deserve a separate designation. Just as the organism dies when deprived of all food, so it will die in part when certain strategic ingredients are absent from its food. Thus, though one might not want to contend that a sufficiency of iodine will make men wise, we can say that a deficiency of iodine will greatly prod them to be stupid. And manganese has been called the chemical of "mother love" because, without manganese, hens won't set. (Similarly, the pituitary has been called the "mother love" gland, since a deficiency of the pituitary hormone in the female is accompanied by "lack of devotion to its offspring.") Modern

chemistry prompts us to stress the scenic aspect of the nutritional motive, as the chemist would seek to reduce the efficient principle in both manganese and the pituitary hormone to a common basis. Even a stock to which a scion has been grafted may be considered, from this point of view, as a part of the scion's environment, hence an environmental control upon food supply. For any motivational special factor which is theoretically assigned to the organism (in the sense that a horse and a tiger, a dandelion and a daisy, exemplify in their behavior and development different loci of motion), can be theoretically dissolved into the environmental. If you put a hungry horse and a hungry tiger in a cage together, for instance, you would thereby get not one environment but two, since the tiger would be so drastically momentous an aspect of the horse's environment, and the horse would be a nutrient aspect of the tiger's environment. And any change of nutritive elements such as accompanies glandular transplantations or the injection of hormones is analyzable as a "new physical situation." Dr. Andras Angyal observes in his *Foundations for a Science of Personality*, "A morphological distinction between organism and environment is impossible." He also reminds us, "The blood has been called 'internal environment' by Claude Bernard." Accordingly, he employs the concept of a "biosphere" in which "subject (organism)" and "object (environment)" are merged as a single process.

The title of Robert M. Coates's fantasy, *Eater of Darkness*, could be translated: "The agent whose substance is one with the substance of darkness" (though we should next have to make an inquiry into the author's use of "darkness" to discover the special attributes of the term in his particular thesaurus). Totemic rites and the sacrament of the Eucharist are instances where the nutritive emphasis becomes submerged in the notion of familial consubstantiality. "Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you what you are."

Directional substance. Doubtless biologically derived from the experience of free motion, since man is an organism that lives by locomotion. Frequently, with metaphors of "the way," the directional stresses the sense of motivation from within. Often strongly futuristic, purposive, its slogan might be: Not "Who are you?" or "Where are you from?" but "Where are you going?" Thought in terms of directional substance gained many fresh motives since the Renaissance, and the greater mobility that went with the development from status to con-

tract, alienation of property, the growth of the monetary rationale, and revolutionary innovations in the means of transportation and communication. The directional is also susceptible of conversion from "free" motion into the "determined." Thus, one may "freely" answer a call, yet the call may be so imperious that one could not ignore it without disaster. And statistical treatment of supposedly "free" choices may disclose a uniform response prevailing among the lot.

The directional has encouraged much sociological speculation in terms of "tendencies" or "trends." With such terms, the substantial paradox is not far in the offing. If a man did *not* make a certain decision, for instance, we might nonetheless choose to say that he had a "tendency towards" the decision. Indeed, any tendency *to* do something is, by the same token, a tendency *not* to do it.

The directional is embedded in the very word, "motivation." And we may note four related nuances, or perhaps puns, with corresponding philosophies. Doctrines that reduce mental states to materialistic terms treat *motion* as motive. When an individual's acts are referred to some larger curve, we get *movement* as motive. For instance, individual immigrants came to America as part of a general movement westward. "Movement" in such cases can be either purposive or necessitarian, since one's place in a "movement" is like one's enlistment in a "cause" (and Latin *causa* is defined as: *that by, on account of, or through which anything takes place or is done; a cause, reason, motive, inducement*). Terminologies that situate the driving force of human action in human passion treat *emotion* as motive. (In his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, I. A. Richards offers a good pun for reducing *emotion* in turn to *motion*, when he proposes that we speak not of the *emotions* aroused in us by art but of the *commotions*.) And one can mystically select the *moment* as motive. Such "moments" are directional in that, being led up to and away from, they summarize the foregoing and seminally contain the subsequent. But in themselves they "just are," being an "eternal present" that has wound up the past and has the future wound up.

All metaphors or generalizations, such as *homo homini lupus*, or "life a pilgrimage," or "the economic man," that treat one order of motivation in terms of a higher order or lower order, are examples of substantiation; and they reveal the paradox of substance in that the given subject both is and is not the same as the character with which and by which it is identified. Such statements about motivating essence, often

made in passing and sometimes serving as the midrib of a work, are the stock in trade of imaginative literature. As such, they can be most fully studied under the heading of Symbolic. And much that we have written in *Permanence and Change, Attitudes Toward History*, and *The Philosophy of Literary Form* could be read as an elaboration of this paragraph. The name of any well-developed character in a fiction is the term for a peculiar complexity of motives.

Dialectic Substance

From the standpoint of our present study, all the foregoing types could be considered as special cases of a more inclusive category: dialectic substance. Dialectically considered (that is, "dramatistically" considered) men are not only *in nature*. The cultural accretions made possible by the language motive become a "second nature" with them. Here again we confront the ambiguities of substance, since symbolic communication is not a merely external instrument, but also intrinsic to men as agents. Its motivational properties characterize both "the human situation" and what men are "in themselves."

Whereas there is an implicit irony in the other notions of substance, with the dialectic substance the irony is explicit. For it derives its character from the systematic contemplation of the antinomies attendant upon the fact that we necessarily define a thing in terms of something else. "Dialectic substance" would thus be the over-all category of dramatism, which treats of human motives in the terms of verbal action. By this statement we most decidedly do not mean that human motives are confined to the realm of verbal action. We mean rather that the dramatistic analysis of motives has its *point of departure* in the subject of verbal action (in thought, speech, and document).

A poem, by shifting the imagery of its metaphors, permits us to contemplate the subject from the standpoint of various objects. This effect is dialectical in the sense that we see something in terms of some other. In a more restricted sense, however, the dialectical considers things in terms not of *some* other, but of *the* other. The sharpest instance of this is an *agon* wherein the protagonist is motivated by the nature of the antagonist, as with the situating of socialist motives in resistance to capitalism, or the unifying effect of the Allied Nations' joint opposition to Hitler. There is a grim pleasantry that runs, "Of course we're

Christians—but what are we being Christians *against*?” In earlier days, when the devil enjoyed great personal prominence, he could perform this noteworthy role of agonistic unification which, in our era of humanistic progress, we generally assign exclusively to human vessels.

The ambiguity of external and internal motivation has recently plagued some enemies of Fascism who saw that an effective war against the Fascist nations would require many “Fascist” measures on the part of the Anti-Fascists. As the Irish poet, George Russell, once stated the form of their predicament: “We become the image of the thing we hate.” And the great dialectician, Coleridge, has observed that *rivales* are the opposite banks of the *same* stream. And it was dialectically, or dramatically, necessary that the *devil* should be an *angel*; for were he of any less noble substance, the Christian *agonia* would to that degree have fallen short of thoroughness in imagining a common ground on which the two great conflicting motives, good and evil, can join battle.

The most thoroughgoing dialectical opposition, however, centers in that key pair: Being and Not-Being. For the contextual approach to substance, by inducing men to postulate a ground or context in which everything that is, is placed, led thinkers “by dialectical necessity” to affirm that the only ground of “Being” is “Not-Being” (for “Being” is so comprehensive a category that its dialectical opposite, “Not-Being,” is the only term that would be left to designate its ground). The Neo-Platonist, Plotinus, carried such thinking to its ultimate limits, in the direction of that “negative theology” whereby the divine substance, as the ground of all that we experience in the material world, could be designated only by the absence of any attributes such as we in our material existence can conceive of. He would evolve a dialectical process that, beginning with material things, in the end had completely transcended its beginnings, thus arriving at a totally immaterial vision of God as an abstract Oneness. Accordingly, in his belief that material existence is estrangement from God, he is said to have been unwilling to name either his parents or his birthplace (the abstract concept of dialectical substance here leading him to proclaim his identity by a *negative* reference to the familial and the geometric).

The process of transcendence may, of course, be reversed. Then the ultimate abstract Oneness is taken as a source, a “first”; and the steps

leading up to it are interpreted as stages emanating from it. Or terms that are contextual to each other (such as Being and Not-Being, Action and Rest, Mechanism and Purpose, the One and the Many) can be treated as familiarly related (as were Being to be derived from Not-Being, Action from Rest, Mechanism from Purpose, the Many from the One). Or, in general, actualities may be derived from potentialities that are in a different realm than the actualities. The most obvious instance of such a derivation would be a naturalistic assertion that the “conscious” is derived from a “pre-Conscious,” or that the state of life is derived from a condition of “pre-life.” However, many less apparent variants are possible. The human person, for instance, may be derived from God as a “super-person.” Or human purpose may be derived from an All Purpose, or Cosmic Purpose, or Universal Purpose, or Absolute Purpose, or Pure Purpose, or Inner Purpose, etc. And instead of a “pre-conscious” as the source or latent form of consciousness, we may have a subconscious or unconscious or “collective unconscious,” etc.