

PHILOSOPHICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Archie J. Bahm

Too many contradictions in the Christian fundamentalist doctrines taught to me as a freshman at Taylor University, Upland, Indiana (1925-26), caused me to abandon my pre-ministerial plans to pursue my quest as a truth-seeker, first at Albion College (1926-29), where I majored in philosophy, and then at the University of Michigan (1929-34), where my MA and PhD work were influenced by Roy Wood Sellars, who was a critical realist, evolutionary naturalist, and humanist. My own philosophy, "Organicism," was influenced by the emergent evolution of Sellars (and of C. Lloyd Morgan), the concept of organic unity in aesthetics of DeWitt H. Parker, and the concept of organic freedom of Charles Horton Cooley in his *Introductory Sociology*. Also important were studies in biology and gestalt psychology.

Teaching philosophy and sociology at Texas Technological College (1936-46), I used at first Sellars' *Principles and Problems of Philosophy*. Following Sellars' example, I gradually developed my own textbook, *Philosophy: An Introduction* (Wiley, 1953). In my textbook, I surveyed several theories of knowledge and of metaphysics originating in the modern period, and I arranged the problems of philosophy into three groups: knowledge, reality, and values. My own theory of knowledge, "Tentative Realism," resulted from regarding Sellars' critical realism as insufficiently critical. Because it was too long, complicated, and personal for introductory purposes, a publisher's reader objected to its inclusion in the textbook, and so it was omitted. This left the pragmatism of James and Dewey as my final statement at that time.

My theory of existence was developed by adding to Sellars' selections of materialism, spiritualism, dualism, and emergentism. I added the neutral monism of Spinoza, the emanationism of Plotinus, and the creationism of John E. Boodin. These fell into a systematic pattern of pairs of opposing theories. Although first formulated as a theory defined in

terms of the constructive features of each of these theories, it was eventually modified by adding nondualistic (Advaita) Vedantism, which resulted from my studies—while the book was in press—in Indian philosophy and which was needed to oppose Cartesian dualism. Time did not permit inclusion of a chapter on Vedanta, but a publisher's reader demanded a chapter on A. N. Whitehead's "Philosophy of Organism," which was duly prepared and included.

Sketched throughout chapters on axiology, aesthetics, ethics, philosophy of religion, social philosophy, economic philosophy, political philosophy, and philosophy of education, my theory of values was limited to exemplifying how pairs of opposing theories can be united in organic unity. Examples are: values as intrinsic and instrumental, beauty as subjective or real, ethics as individual or social, religion as theistic or atheistic, society as individualistic or totalitarian, government as democratic or dictatorial, economics as capitalistic or socialistic, and education as progressivistic or essentialistic.

My course in ethics included three parts. The section comparing thirteen well-known theories eliminated Kant's deontic theory as inconsistent with sounder teleological theories and was published in 1959 as *What Makes Acts Right?* Next was a section on codes, which were abandoned in favor of principles. Finally was a systematic study of principles of individual ethics, social ethics, and final ethics that were all interpreted as contributing to an organicist theory. These were not published until 1980 in India in *Why be Moral? An Introduction to Ethics* (Manoharlal Publishers). The book had been written earlier under contract with the American Book Company, which had ceased publishing college textbooks and had refused to honor its contract.

Written at the request of a Colorado professor to support his program, my *Ethics as a Behavioral Science* (Thomas, 1974) emphasized ways in which all ethical situations are alike. My battle with the scientific community, represented by the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, of which I became a member in 1936, led to publishing in 1980 *Axiology: The Science of*

Values and Ethics: The Science of Oughtness, two books that were bound together (World Books). The two books were intended for surveying views of members of the AAAS believed to be open to reconsidering the false logical-positivist claims that science is, or ought to be, completely value-free. Lack of funds aborted the study. Even though I was permitted at an AAAS annual meeting to chair a session on "Is Ethics a Science?" in which four competent professors of ethics concluded that ethics is not a science if conceived in one way but is a science if conceived in another way, an official letter from the Board of Directors of the National Academy of Sciences asserted that "Ethics is not a science." These two books were republished in abbreviated form in 1984 (World Books).

For several years I taught philosophies of religion. After two years at the University of Denver (1946-48), I moved to the University of New Mexico as a full professor (1948-73), where I began teaching Asian philosophies and later comparative philosophy. A Fulbright Research Scholarship in Buddhist Philosophy at the University of Rangoon (1955-56) resulted both in studies in Theravada Buddhism and a research report, *Philosophy of the Buddha* (Harper and Brothers, 1958), demonstrating that Gotama's enlightenment replaced traditional Hindu ideals of complete elimination of desire with ideals eliminating only desires that will be frustrated.

A second Fulbright Research Scholarship, in the history of Indian philosophy at Banaras Hindu University (1962-63), resulted in a translation, *Bhagavad Gita: The Wisdom of Krishna* (Bombay: Somiya, 1970). My discovery was that *niskama yoga* (disinterested interest) is a common requirement of all other yogic doctrines when developed to their mature forms.

Teaching a television course in world religions required condensation of lectures for student and popular attention, and prepared the way for publishing *The World's Living Religions* (Dell, 1964; republished as a tape by Recording for the Blind, 1970; republished in New Delhi by Arnold-Heinemann, 1977; and translated into Japanese, 1977). My interpretations of the *Tao Teh King by Lao Tzu* (Ungar, 1957; Crossroad/Ungar/Continuum, 1958) and *The Heart of Confucius* (Chung Yung and

Ta Hsueh) (Walker, 1960; Harper and Row, 1971) were finished during trips to Burma and India, when I received approving consultations with Taiwanese philosophy professors C. C. C. Chang and Thomé Fang.

At this time, I was also accumulating evidences of fundamentally differing emphases in some Western, Indian, and Chinese preconceptions. Then I discovered that F. S. C. Northrup's *The Meeting of East and West* grossly misunderstood Asian philosophies by lumping Indian and Chinese views into one "undifferentiated aesthetic continuum." These concerns led to publishing *Comparative Philosophy: Western, Indian, and Chinese Philosophies Compared* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1977). My tentative conclusions summarizing these emphases, respectively, are as follows: regarding desire, idealizing willfulness, will-lessness, and willingness; and, regarding logic, "X is either *a* or *not-a* but *not both*," "X is neither *a*, nor *not-a*, nor both *a* and *not-a*, nor neither *a* nor *not-a*," and "X is both *a* and *not-a*."

My favoring a both-and (yin-yang) organic logic led to *Metaphysics: An Introduction* (Barnes and Noble, 1974), which sketched alternative theories about polar pairs of categories of existence and explained their inherent interdependence (sameness-difference, permanence-change, substance-function, whole-parts, events-duration, container-relational space, internal-external relations, universal-particular, action-passion, cause-effect, and so on). An earlier companion work, *Polarity, Dialectic, and Organicity* (Thomas, 1970), defined Organicism in terms of twelve other theories of polarity arranged in a diagram of types, developed a new theory of dialectic in sixteen chapters (ten on "Structural Aspects" and six on "Dynamic Aspects"), synthesized many theories of negation (opposition) and its omnipresence, and summarized ideas about organicity. *The Philosophers World Model* (Greenwood, 1979) was prompted by a series of world model books, sponsored by the Club of Rome, which needed criticism for neglecting ethical, religious, and philosophical factors affecting the future and fate of humanity.

Having adopted a both-and (yin-yang) logic inherent in

my conception of organic unity, I had hoped that my ideas about polarity, dialectic, and organicity might serve as natural extensions of Taoist metaphysics. But my hopes were dashed recently during the last week in September 1988 on my second visit with professors at the Shanghai Academy of Social Science's Institute of Philosophy. When exploring with Xu LiDa possibilities for adapting Taoistic ideas for use in general systems theory, I inferred that ideas of causation and whole-parts interaction were implied. But when I sought confirmation of these inferences from Ji Shu-Li and colleagues, I learned that Taoistic self-activity is understood as a continuing process in which distinctions between cause and effect are inappropriate. Since just as day follows night without being caused by night and just as a plant grows to three inches tall without its second inch causing its third, so the concept of causation is irrelevant. Also, I learned that a self-active tao is thought of, not as a whole of parts, where a whole is not its parts and the parts are not the whole, thus involving opposition between them, but as a whole embodying its functioning in a wholesome manner. My conception of the interdependence of a whole and its parts, which involves some independence as well as dependence, should be replaced by comprehending them as mutually immanent. When opposites are complementary, they embody some of each other's being. Even dialectic, which involves two different beings recurrently reembodying existing influences from each other, requires too much antitheticalness to reveal the mutual immanence of complementary opposites.

So the question bothering me now at this writing is: To what extent does the concept of mutual immanence better explain the organic nature of existence than does my concepts of interdependence, interaction, interexistence, and dialectical growth? Is my Organicism still too Western in conceptual presupposition to be grafted onto Taoistic ideals? Now I am troubled almost as much as when I surrendered my Christian fundamentalist convictions in 1925. I continue to seek help from Chinese sources.