

SPIRIT AND BODY

**AKA, SL = where I try to put the main point of something in simple / basic terms*

“When man thus eventually steps forth and becomes a question to himself, however, he takes himself along, together with all his constant attributes. For he is spirit and body, man and woman, individual and community. These constants are part of his nature, his essence, which does not mean that they solve his riddle; in fact, they render it more profound and more pressing. In all three dimensions, man seems to be built according to a polarity, obliged to engage in reciprocity, always seeking complementarity and peace in the other pole. And for that very reason he is pointed beyond his whole polar structure. He is always found crossing the boundary, and thus he is defined most exactly by that boundary with which death brutally confronts him, in all three areas, without taking account of his threefold transcendence” (p. 355).

Point 1: Tension between two poles: “man as the ultimate blossom of nature, the epitome of the world” and “an as profoundly alien to the time-space world of nature and as striving to regain the lost original world” (p. 358).

“The tension between body and spirit is manifested in the contrary pull of the two poles. Initially each seems to embrace the other only in a unity.” [AKA, SL: think about how you relate to the world/nature around you and as part of you vs. how you think of yourself as somehow beyond that, as somehow only finding your true self in God, beyond the world of nature].

1.1 Pole 1: “man as the ultimate blossom of nature; the epitome of the world” (p. 356). “Man is spirit only as the crown of a series of forms that ascend from the energies of matter; he recapitulates these forms in himself.” [Cf. Augustine: “It is quite certain that one who understands both exists and is alive,” *On the Free Will*, II, 3, 7. Also: “In the modern evolutionist world model, the human form represents the end product of a process whereby life forms diverge and differentiate as a result of mysterious leaps and mutations that are never really explained” (p. 356).]

1.2. Pole 2: “Despite his bodily being, man remains profoundly alien to the time-space world of nature and strives to regain the lost original world.” “On the other side, the faculty of reflection ... implies such a distance from the realm of the vital and immediate that it fundamentally modifies the infrastructure necessary for its operations ...; indeed, it reduces it to the level of a tool” (p. 356).

1.3. Poles 1 & 2 in tension: “What (*ascending from below*) seems to be the goal (*telos*) of the development is seen, from the vantage point of the attained end, to be its meaning” (p. 356). ... “Thus man can be ultimate blossom of nature, the epitome of the world, while at the same time, despite his bodily being, he remains profoundly alien to the time-space world of nature and strives to regain the lost original world.”

Point 2: “anthropology must accept the idea that there is an ambiguity to be taken into account here: what seems like a natural polarity is also an unnatural dichotomy” (p. 358). There is a “torn-ness” in us. How do we understand it?

1.1. **Initially solution, but doesn’t work. INITIAL SOLUTION:** Initially, we may see this dualism in us as a mark of our dignity. On the one hand, the second creation account where man is both formed out of existing clay by hand of God *and* directly endowed with the breath of divinity shows both of these poles in such a way as to emphasize man’s grandeur (p. 358-9). [AKA, IN SIMPLE LANGUAGE, THIS SOLUTION MEANS: THE DICHOTOMY IS OKAY AS IT IS. IT’S PART OF BEING HUMAN.] **PROBLEM:** But this doesn’t realistically work because this “greatness cannot deny its inner torn-ness, where “spirit” and “flesh” are “at war” with one another, resulting in man being made “captive” (Rom 7:23) (p. 359). St. Maximus the Confessor wrestled deeply with the paradox that the *pathe* (the “passions”), which are in themselves “natural,” cannot ultimately be brought into harmony with the spirit.”

1.2. **So, how are we to understand this tension in us? Balthasar recounts two aspects and approaches to this tension:**

The paradox is expressed in the age-old description of man as a “boundary,” a “boundary phenomenon”: *methorion*. Positively, this says that he is the mediator between the lower and the upper world; he participates in both and can cause spirit to permeate nature and lift nature up into the realm of spirit. Seen ‘statically,’ he can be said to be a ‘mixture’ of the two ‘inimical’ worlds; ‘dynamically,’ he can mediate between them, ascending and descending.” According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, man “stands on the boundary between the divine, nonphysical nature and irrational, animal life” (*De hom. Op.* 16).

1.2.1. “natural synthesis”: In this first case, man can be (and can seek to create) a kind of natural synthesis of these worlds (p. 360). In this view, “it is possible to link both worlds (i.e., spirit and matter) mediated by man by means of a series of crossing points” (p. 361). [Discuss and draw on board]

1.2.2. “open, undefined freedom”: “in this second case, the most he can do, after making a free choice, is to relate to one of them.” “The borderline on which man is placed compels him to make a free decision between ‘up’ and ‘down,’ and the no-man’s-land he occupies is his open, undefined freedom.” (p. 361). Thus, St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: “The soul is the boundary between two realities: the one is intelligible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and the other is physical, material and irrational. Once it has purified itself of its attachments to the present material life, it turns, through the practice of virtue, to the Divine to which it is related” (*In Cant.* II; quoted on p. 362). KEY: the perspective has changed here: it is no longer primarily a question of the spirit/body dimension but, more profoundly, of the freedom to embrace good or evil—a freedom which is attained at the boundary, at the point of indifference” (p. 362). [Note: indifference here means openness to good or evil, prior to choosing one or the other]. Thus, in this case, we are faced with a *decision*: either God is preferred to the world or the world to God. [*Discuss and draw on board*]

So, looking at the two aspects, we are left with a big question!

Point 3: “Is it possible for human existence to be a single whole and to have an ultimate meaning?” (p. 363) [YES, ONLY IN CHRIST]

The question here is: “How can man, by means of his freedom, become a responsible spiritual-physical being?” (p 363)

3.1. INITIAL SOLUTION: “It is precisely the radical nature of his decision in favor of the Absolute that forbids him to absolutize either of these poles; he is redirected to the Aristotelian “middle,” the *meson*. That is:

3.1.1. Against pure spiritualization (e.g., Neoplatonism): this must appear as hubris, as wanting to be God. And yet, the fundamental demand *must* be for an upward movement, involving control of the physical and emotional, the natural and mediate”

3.1.2. Against purely sensory and sensual claiming the primacy is problematic.

3.2. BUT THAT SOLUTION IS NOT ENOUGH. CHRIST IS THE ONLY SOLUTION.

- “If man is not to resign himself to a narrow Aristotelian “middle”—in view of the destructiveness of extreme spiritualization and extreme sensualization—he must be given *Lebensraum* [= “living space,” the “space to grow and develop”] in the form of a concrete blueprint that will liberate him from the straightening “middle.”
- This would require a perfectly fleshly being, who goes beyond the realm of “the world” so as to bring both world and flesh with it, in its transcendence up to God, “transfiguring” it, not “spiritualizing” it in some incorporeal manner.
- Must overcome last barrier: death.
- **CONCLUSION:** “Man is an open question that has no answer but that of Christ.”