

Radhakrishnan's and Brunner's Anthropologies: a Comparison

K. C. MATHEW

I

INTRODUCTION

Radhakrishnan posits the Absolute as the ground of the universe. The qualityless Absolute is paradoxically conceived as having an infinite number of possibilities.¹ The cosmic process is the actualization of one of these possibilities by God who is the Absolute in relation to this particular possibility. The goal of the cosmic process is the consummation of this actualization, or the mastery of the Self over the not-self into which this particular possibility differentiated itself as the beginning of the universe. The cosmic process is evolutionary in character. The Self is drawing, as it were, the not-self as an 'Unmoved Mover'² through the various stages of life, consciousness and self-consciousness. Man, who is self-conscious, is the latest product of this emergent evolution. The whole process can be called the evolution of the spirit because not-self or matter represents the lowest depth to which the spirit has descended. It is only a form of the spirit.³

The existing individual is a microcosm of the macrocosm, a synthesis of Self and not-self, spirit and matter. The not-self which has evolved to the self-conscious level is the empirical self of man. The Inner Self is the *Atman* which is consubstantial with the Absolute.⁴ The Self is still drawing the not-self towards it. But as the not-self is self-conscious in man, it has to co-operate consciously in the evolution of the spirit. The malady of man is that the empirical self due to *avidyā* or ignorance loves itself rather than the true self.⁵ This malady

¹ Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, pp. 342-345.

² This is the present author's interpretation of Radhakrishnan's view. He thinks that if Radhakrishnan's view is pushed to its logical conclusion, it could not mean otherwise.

³ Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads*, pp. 86-87; 'Fragments of a Confession' (in *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, pp. 30-31).

⁴ *The Idealist View of Life*, pp. 109, 111, 271.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

results in the tragedy of his fall into fragmentariness. But when the empirical self turns to the Inner Self through discipline and contemplation, it gains an intuitive awareness of its oneness with the true Self. This is a momentary merging of the empirical self into the *Ātman* after which it returns to its normal self-consciousness as an integrated self. This experience of momentary metaphysical identity brings about an integration of the individual self because the intuitive awareness of identity with the true Self involves the activity of the whole man.¹ Those who have reached this stage are the God-men. The goal of the cosmic process is to make all men God-men.

In contrast to the above view Brunner posits as the ground of the world the personal God who created it *ex nihilo*. The created order, including man, is ontologically distinct from the Creator who sustains it by His presence and activity. This ontological discontinuity is absolute.² Man is different from the rest of the creation in that he is created in the image of God, which is not substantial identity but relational existence. Man is created in such a way that he can hear the call of God and answer it by his own decision. To be in the image of God is to be in this 'call and answer' relation.³ Thus it is a dependent and responsible existence. But man by loving his own self more than God has fallen from this right relationship with God. Each man is a 'fallen Adam' in his actual existence. He is no longer in right relation to God. The goal of his life is the restoration and perfection of the image of God.

Thus, it is obvious that the absolute metaphysical discontinuity is central in Brunner's world view, whereas continuity is the essence of all spiritual wisdom in Radhakrishnan's philosophy. This basic difference determines their views regarding the knowledge of the ultimate reality, the nature and destiny of man, evil, freedom, history and society.

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

When Radhakrishnan speaks about the knowledge of highest reality, he refers to the empirical self as the knowing subject and the Inner Self as the 'Object' to be known. But the Inner Self is always Subject and never Object.⁴ So the problem of knowledge is how can the empirical self know the Inner Self, which is always Subject. The answer is 'knowledge

¹ *The Idealist View of Life*, pp. 211-213; *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 15; *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 24.

² Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, pp. 19-20, 30.

³ Brunner, *The Scandal of Christianity*, p. 59; *Christianity and Civilization*, Vol. I, p. 78; *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, p. 59.

⁴ Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, pp. 270-271.

by being'.¹ The empirical self can know the Inner Self by becoming one with it. It is an experience in which the empirical self loses itself in the Inner Self and finds its true nature as one with it.² This experience is a momentary foretaste of the next stage of human evolution. This is what Radhakrishnan means by intuitive awareness.

The empirical self lapses back from this state of pure awareness of identity into ordinary consciousness of subject-object distinction. But it returns refreshed and illumined with a 'never-to-be-forgotten' memory of the experience of pure Selfhood. Henceforth it possesses an unshakable conviction that its true nature is identical with that of *Ātman* or Inner Self.³

Brunner also is faced with a similar problem of knowledge because the 'Object' to be known (God) is always Subject and never an Object. Moreover, the metaphysical discontinuity between the knowing subject and the 'Object' to be known (God) is absolute. God is, therefore, wholly inaccessible to man's natural faculties for research and discovery.⁴ This discontinuity allows no room for 'knowledge by being' in his system. Brunner's answer to the problem is that the Eternal should break into the temporal; the Infinite into the finite and the Divine into the human.⁵ This is precisely what has happened in the 'Jesus-event'. The Eternal as 'event', as revelation, has no historical extension. Revelation is not the extended fact in history which we call the historical personality of Jesus. The historical personality of Jesus is an *incognito* which veils completely the complete revelation of God which can be seen only by the eye of faith.⁶

The revelation in Jesus Christ becomes revelation for me only when I recognize Jesus as Christ. In other words revelation, as self-disclosure of Subject to subject, has two aspects: an 'historically objective' one—the incarnation of the Son—and an 'inwardly subjective' one—the testimony of the Son through the Spirit to my heart.⁷ The subjective aspect of revelation is a face to face encounter between Divine 'Thou' and human 'I' made possible by the testimony of the Spirit which enables one to hear the Word of God in the mere word of man. The response to this self-disclosure of God is faith which brings about the transformation of the human 'I'. This encounter of man with God through faith, according to Brunner, is the primary source of the knowledge of God.

¹ Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, p. 138.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

⁴ Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 23.

⁵ *Christianity and Civilization*, Vol. I, p. 59.

⁶ *The Mediator*, pp. 333-334.

⁷ *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 29.

Radhakrishnan would reply to Brunner that the identification of the spiritual reality of the universe with a historic figure Jesus Christ is a confusion of the universal Self in us with a catastrophic revelation from without. He would add that it is not necessarily an objective truth but an interpretation—a personal confession.¹ It is difficult to see how Brunner would answer this charge of subjectivism—a weapon which he himself uses masterfully against the mystics and the fundamentalists.

Intuition, according to Radhakrishnan, is of a self-certifying character and carries its own authority. It is beyond the bounds of proof and comes with a conviction that brooks no denial.² Brunner has no better claim for the authority of revelation. Revelation knows no proof except its own proof.³ One believes something because God says so in the crisis of faith. Thus, in the last analysis, authority for both Radhakrishnan and Brunner is subjective.

Intuition is the realization of *Tat tvam asi*. It is the awareness that there is only one universal Self and that there is no such Self as mine in any exclusive sense. But revelation, according to Brunner, is a divine-human encounter—a meeting of two persons. It does not obliterate the I-Thou distinction as in the identity experience of intuition. The goal of revelation is community, whereas the goal of intuition is identity.

Intuition, according to Radhakrishnan, is the clue to reality. It is intuition that assures us of the meaning and significance of human life. For Brunner revelation is the clue to reality. It is the 'Jesus-event' that assures us of the meaning of the universe. Take this 'event' away, then the temporal events lose all final significance.

Radhakrishnan's understanding of intuition is Bergsonian in that it is not opposed to intellect.⁴ The former is the completion of the latter. He says that the results of intellection 'will be dull and empty, unfinished and fragmentary, without the help of intuition, while intuitional insights will be blind and dumb, dark and strange, without intellectual confirmation'.⁵ His presentation of these two modes of knowing as not opposed to each other but as complementary is his greatest contribution to Indian epistemology.

Radhakrishnan's solution of the problem of intellect and intuition is similar to Brunner's solution of the problem of reason and revelation. Brunner seeks to relate reason and revelation in a positive way. In spite of his strictures against the autonomous reason, he concedes that there can be no revelation

¹ Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, p. 99.

² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³ Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, p. 30.

⁴ H. Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 7.

⁵ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 179.

apart from reason. He goes further and asserts that reason is the organ of revelation.¹

Brunner admits that it is not possible to define the limits of reason where the spheres of reason and revelation overlap. However, he attempts to explain it by an illustration of concentric circles around a given centre. The centre is the dimension of the personal and the circles are the dimension of the non-personal. The closer reason advances to the personal centre the less competent does it become. The innermost circle represents the knowledge of God, the absolute Subject. Radhakrishnan might say that the innermost circle represents the knowledge of pure selfhood (universal Self) which is the ultimate reality at the heart of all existence. But this knowledge is a self-awareness in which reason participates by merging with *Ātman*. Brunner, on the other hand, holds that reason, the organ of revelation, participates only in the encounter of the human subject with the divine subject. Here it is not identity, but God's self-disclosure in terms of an 'I-Thou' relation.

Brunner's chief criticism of 'knowledge by being' might be that it knows no self-disclosing God. Radhakrishnan might reply to this that the Divine reveals itself to men within the framework of their 'intimate prejudices'. Something is directly experienced, but it is unconsciously interpreted in terms of the tradition in which the recipient is trained. Therefore Brunner interprets revelation as an encounter with a personal God because of his Judaeo-Christian background. But this argument works both ways. Is not Radhakrishnan's interpretation in terms of identity due to his 'intimate prejudice' towards the Upanisadic dictum, *Tat tvam asi*?

Radhakrishnan does not deny the subject-object distinction in intellectual knowing. This distinction is transcended only in intuition. However, common sense tells one that knowing a thing and being a thing are different. It is easy to see the need for subject-object relation in knowing. But it is not an ontological identity. What is needed is relatedness or kinship between the subject and the object so that the knower can enter sympathetically into the known and commune with it. Why this is not true in religious knowledge is hard to see from the standpoint of pluralistic metaphysics. For Brunner the relatedness or kinship needed for religious knowledge is supplied by *Imago Dei*. His doctrine of *Imago Dei* does not destroy the distinction between the self to apprehend and the object to be apprehended. Radhakrishnan would say that this type of religious knowledge is not false. But he would add that knowledge by being is a higher type of knowledge which gives a foretaste of the evolutionary goal of mankind.²

¹ Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 418.

² Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, pp. 209-210, 305.

Radhakrishnan's answer raises a problem which he seems to gloss over. If what he is saying is that for a moment the empirical self reaches the next stage of evolution, it is hard to see how it can slip back into the lower level after the experience. It is as improbable as the thought that an animal can return to the plant level. How can he maintain such a view without contradicting the basic principle of evolution as an upward movement? If the experience were not of the next level of evolution, he then would have to admit that it is a mental delusion, or he would have to reject the evolutionary goal of mankind.

Brunner also is faced with a problem of no less magnitude. For him there is an absolute qualitative difference between the temporal and the eternal. How can he maintain in terms of this time and eternity dialectic that the eternal has broken into the temporal? He has not solved the problem by reducing such events to One, or by reducing the extent of this One event to a 'moment'. Nor does it help to call it a paradox.

THE NATURE OF MAN

Radhakrishnan looks upon man as a self-conscious being whose individuality is temporary and not eternal. Individuality is not anything evil in itself; it is a normal stage in the evolution of the Spirit. But it becomes evil when it is regarded as an end in itself. The goal or destiny of man is to secure 'release' from the sense of individuality by merging the empirical self with the Inner Self. This is not a destruction of the empirical self but its fulfilment—the raising of the whole empirical self to a higher level of God-consciousness.¹

Imago Dei, understood as relation, distinguishes Brunner's man from Radhakrishnan's man. The former stands clearly on the opposite side of the abyss that separates the Creator from the creation. But there is no room for such an abyss in Radhakrishnan's thought. This determines the goal of man in each case. Radhakrishnan conceives of the goal of man as identity with God, because God is the inmost essence of our being and to become one with Him is to realize ourselves.² It is not the destruction of individuality but its fulfilment. Brunner, on the other hand, conceives of the goal of man as the restoration and perfection of the image of God, which is a state of communion with God and not identity.

It is important to note that the actual man, according to Radhakrishnan, is the empirical self. The Inner Self, which is universal, is the immanent aspect of God. Therefore, there is no organic relationship between the Inner Self and the empirical self. He is using the traditional Hindu expression 'Inner Self'

¹ Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, pp. 111, 305-306.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

to accent the immanence of God. God is so immanent in each man as to be regarded as his true self. This Inner Self is, as it were, a reminder of the original state from which man had descended and to which he is ascending.

Brunner might argue that in terms of his own perspective Radhakrishnan's emphasis on the Inner Self brings with it a dualistic conception of man, and that his relational interpretation of the image of God avoids dualism. It is the psycho-physical whole, the person, whom God has created in His own image.¹ Thus the whole man stands in relation to God. Radhakrishnan would reply that the dualism of his man is there to be vanquished: The dualism between the possible Self (Essential Self) and the actual self (empirical self) disappears by the latter growing into the former. This brings about a 'teleological unity' in the empirical self. In the last analysis, Radhakrishnan's empirical self lacks nothing that Brunner's relational man possesses in himself. While God is completely transcendent in Brunner's relational view, Radhakrishnan's God is both immanent and transcendent and what he calls the Essential Self is nothing other than the immanent aspect of God.

Another claim of Brunner is that only the relational man can be truly responsible. He may say that Radhakrishnan's man knows no authority which makes him responsible, because, in the last analysis, he is responsible only to his own Inner Self. This criticism is not fair as the Inner Self of Radhakrishnan's man is also transcendent.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In Radhakrishnan's philosophy evil is subordinate to his fundamental monism. In other words, there is no place for evil in the beginning and in the end of the world. But as long as it exists the problem of evil is a real one. Evil is a necessary condition of the world-process. A world without it would be one in which the finite is eclipsed by the Infinite.² Evil is real; it gives reality to the cosmic strife. But it is unreal in the sense that it will be changed into good in the end.³ Being the condition of progress, it disappears when the end is attained.

Radhakrishnan's explanation of the problem of evil is defective in that it minimizes the tragic nature of evil in spite of his attempt to emphasize the reality of evil. It is hard to see how polio germs, earthquakes, cobra poison and a host of other things constitute the condition for progress. Perhaps, Radhakrishnan glosses over this difficulty because of the 'reign of Monism' in his philosophy. Brunner, on the other hand, adopts a dualistic outlook. In order to explain evil he posits an active

¹ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 218.

² Radhakrishnan, *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*, p. 450.

³ *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 242.

and positive power which transcends the negative status ascribed to evil by Radhakrishnan. He affirms that Christian faith is bound to admit the existence of a sinful supernatural power.¹

Another defect of Radhakrishnan's answer to the problem of evil is that it is conceived as a metaphysical rather than a moral problem. Evil is the privation of Being rather than an act.² Brunner, on the other hand, looks upon evil as an act—a positive negation.³

Sin, according to Radhakrishnan, is a particular evil connected with man. Man emerges from the animal level as self-conscious, and this self-consciousness breaks up his primal unity with nature. The goal of the human individual is to realize a higher union through the harmony of his empirical self with the Divine in him. By this higher union, he regains his unity with the world because the same Spirit operates at all levels of being. But by *avidyā* or ignorance man reveres the empirical self to the exclusion of the Divine. This is the greatest sin. It results in inner division. The tragedy is that man is not aware of his *avidyā* which produces selfish egoism. The more ill, the less conscious does one become.⁴

Radhakrishnan, however, is not a pessimist. He has no doctrine of original sin. No man is utterly evil because of the immanence of the Divine in him. He is certain that even the worst sinner will finally turn to the unceasing wooing of the Divine in him and consciously direct his evolution to the next level.⁵

Radhakrishnan uses the term 'Fall' in a misleading way in that it means a leap forward in evolution from the animal stage to the human level characterized by intellectual knowledge. This is very similar to Hegel's view of the 'Fall'.⁶ For Brunner, 'Fall' is a downward movement. The 'Fall' presupposes the creation of man in the image of God. Fall implies the loss of this image of God—the right relation to God. The fallen man stands in opposition to his origin and destiny. He stands in a perverted relation to God.⁷

¹ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, p. 140.

² Augustine in his *Confessions* says that evil is a 'privation of good' and that 'in the end it ceases altogether to be' (*Ibid.*, p. 46); 'non-being, understood negatively, does not require a subject, as the philosopher says, and such a non-being is an evil' (Pegis, *The Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 129).

³ Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 129.

⁴ Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 44.

⁵ 'The Ancient Asian View of Man' (in *Man's Right to Knowledge*, p. 12).

⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, p. 33. Hegel in his dialectical philosophy represents the 'Fall' as fall upward, 'the very transition by which he (man) becomes man. Persistence in this standpoint is, however, evil'. He adds, 'The Fall . . . is no causal (accidental) conception, but the eternal history of Spirit.'

⁷ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, p. 92.

Sin is this perverted relation to God—a deliberate act of rebellion against God. Radhakrishnan also may say that sin is a negative relation to God. But this negative relation is a state to which he has evolved and not the result of his free act. He continues to be a sinner largely due to *avidyā* which produces selfish desires. Thus sin is causal rather than existential. Therefore this view fails to make man solely responsible for his sin.

Man in his empirical nature, according to Brunner, is in contradiction to God's will and to his own destiny and being.¹ This is the essence of the doctrine of sin. Sin is spiritual in origin. It is man's attempt to be his own God. It is not in ignorance that the origin of evil lies, but in man's will to negate the God-given destiny and frame of his life. This attempt to emancipate himself from God entangles him in a desperate, incurable contradiction of his being.

The problem of evil, according to Brunner, is this contradiction between man's true nature and his actual empirical nature.² A true understanding of evil, according to Brunner, should take into account two facts, the fatal cleavage in man's nature and his responsibility for it.

Radhakrishnan accounts for the contradiction in man in terms of evolution. But from the Brunnerian standpoint Radhakrishnan's view minimizes the fatal character of the cleavage in human nature. For Radhakrishnan the cleavage is between man and nature which, after all, is a necessary step forward in evolution. But the cleavage in the nature of Brunner's man is something which cuts straight through his relation to God. It is this relation to God that makes man man.

Brunner shows a deeper understanding of the radical nature of moral evil than Radhakrishnan. He employs expressions like the fall, rebellion against God, apostasy, perversion of the original relation to God, contradiction and inner division to accent the fatal nature of sin. The damage done by sin is something which man can never undo. The only answer for his desperate situation is divine intervention. This is precisely what happened in the 'Jesus-event'.

Sin is not such a formidable obstacle for Radhakrishnan as to need divine intervention to save man. Salvation for him is 'self-realization'. Moreover, if anything like selfishness or ignorance stands in the way of man's self-realization, God is more responsible for it than man. God is responsible for constituting human nature in such a way as to need evil for its development. Sin and evil are nothing more than the birth-pangs of a new life. Therefore, in the last analysis, evil has no 'evilness'. Without it the emergence of spiritual and moral values are impossible.

Even the doctrine of *Karma* loses its tragic feature at the hands of Radhakrishnan. He removes the popular notion of

¹ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, p. 124.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 180-185.

fatalism connected with this doctrine by identifying it with the will of God. He does not seem to recognize the need for relating it with the Grace of God. Actually, Radhakrishnan's man does not need Grace to disentangle himself from *Karma*. Just as he is responsible for what he is, so also he can make himself what he ought to be. What he needs is not Grace but enough opportunities. The doctrine of *Samsāra* governed by the law of *Karma* guarantees these opportunities one needs for self-realization.¹

Here Radhakrishnan and Brunner are poles apart in their views. The difference lies in their understanding of the nature of evil (sin). Brunner holds that sin creates a formidable barrier that separates man from God and that man is completely incapable of removing this obstacle. Left to himself Brunner's man is doomed for ever, whereas Radhakrishnan's man is not. The only hope of the former is in the Grace of God because he cannot get rid of the guilt that stands between him and God.²

We have indicated that by positing ignorance as antecedent to any sinful human action, Radhakrishnan fails to make his man fully responsible for his sin. It remains to examine whether or not Brunner is successful where Radhakrishnan has failed. Brunner posits 'evil force' as antecedent to any sinful human action. But as pure force of temptation, it is outside man. It suggests evil, but man allows himself to be led astray by his free choice and is thus responsible for his action. But the force of evil which is antecedent to one's own sin gains entrance through sin and shares in the dominion of sin over him. The more one sins the more one falls under the combined dominion of sin and the demonic forces.

To one who has understood man's situation as bondage to the power of sin, any talk of salvation through 'self-realization' is nonsense. It is hard to find one who would be more opposed to the idea of 'self-realization' than Brunner. For him the only way of deliverance from the bondage of sin is through the act of Jesus Christ, understood in faith.

Brunner, however, by positing 'evil force' does not solve the problem of responsibility. Perhaps, it raises more problems than it solves. For example, why did God create men in such a way that the 'evil force' could have easy access to him and tempt him? Is not God responsible for all that resulted from the fall of man who was created in this fashion? We doubt if Brunner has succeeded in placing the sole responsibility for sin on man. The only thing he can rightly claim is that his view places more responsibility on man than Radhakrishnan's view.

(To be concluded)

¹ Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 73.

² Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, p. 107.