

MONISM, PLURALISM AND THE LOGIC OF CRITICISM

1. Adventurism as Cultural Metaphysic¹

The history of culture is the history of the ways of life people have chosen for themselves. It is in the differences in these ways that we may read the record of the great ideas that have presided over each culture and have provided people with some measure for their humanity. Presiding over and guiding the conduct of life for many people in western culture is a "philosophy of life" whose guiding themes may be described as follows.

The only realities are those presented to the senses. These realities are invariably singular in nature. To attempt to interpret these presentations in terms of concepts or other abstractions is held to be illegitimate, for abstractions and (immediate) realities are held to be mutually exclusive. If we are to know the real, we must divest ourselves of all intellectual tools and plunge headlong into the flux of becoming. The universe, so it is held, is in one continual flux. This flux is filled with a multiplicity of unpredictable events and stimuli. What is real is not the actual, but the actual-for-me? As we find it, reality is irreducibly singular, fresh, spontaneous, unhabitual, immediate. Our lives are but temporary and arbitrary unities which endure only for a while and then are here no more. Hence the perpetual vanishing of experiences, and the always imminent vanishing of the self is the core issue of life. Life is transient and experienced realities are constantly dissolving before our eyes. Wisdom, if there be any, is understandable only as authenticity; as making the most of the array of temporary realities which comes our way. Before life is snatched away from us, we should seek to enjoy as many realities as we can. There is no permanent or enduring reality. All that *is* is relative and transitory. The end of life cannot be beyond the present moment: it *is* the present moment and its enjoyment.

Paradigms of meaningfulness are thus impulse and spontaneity. When one knows that life is eternal or non-transitory, one is not concerned to crowd as many sensations as possible into one's years. For the Adventurist, on the contrary, each individual

is a wanderer : ' You go your way, and I'll go mine,' is the summit of wisdom. If there is no repetition, no continuity, then the value of *this* moment increases—and since there is no ultimate retribution in life, one may live as one wants. And if life is unique, then we should value fleeting things for they can never be again. Life is beyond good and evil, beyond form and judgment. One is thus relieved of traditional duties and obligations. Life is drifting with the stream—unanchored. And this need cause no fear, for since the "way" is everywhere, one cannot get lost. Beyond the now, there is no end in life. Purposelessness is the only purpose.

The mood, the stance, the posture toward the world articulated above is what I mean by Adventurism here. It is a "philosophy" not so much clearly articulated as deeply felt. For it is brought into being not so much as the result of reflective thought as the result of the failure of reflective thought to provide any consistent guides for the conduct of life which can be held with trust and applied with honesty. As for Nietzsche, so for many people today : where the absolutes have gone, there only may relativism come in to fill the gap. It is a philosophy held to by people of all kinds of moods, positions, and needs. Some affirm it with joy, others with sadness; some are pleased by it others are sad and forlorn; to some it gives courage, while to others it gives only grounds for despair. But whatever the feeling that accompanies its adoption, there is a certain lifelessness and incredulity that underlies the philosophy for while it may be clear that absolutism is false, it is not clear that Adventurism is true, and nagging doubts about this seem to be present wherever the stance is adopted. And that, after all, is all to the good for the most important thing about any person is the attitude he takes toward the world, the face he presents to life. We must therefore take this philosophic posture seriously, but along with those who see no alternative to it, we need also to ask if it is true.

Even though life is rarely if even simple, many people seem to prefer to have their fundamental options cast in terms of dichotomies : adventurism or absolutism, pluralism or monism, realism or idealism. As a result, those who adopt an adventurist stance see the only alternative as absolutism, and if absolutism just will

not do, then our only alternative is—Adventurism. Part of the purpose of this article is to challenge the dichotomising tendency and to consider some additional alternatives. In particular, the position of Adventurism will be developed as coherently as possible, and will then be subjected to a critique which avoids such dichotomies. Because of its persistent hold on so many people in our culture, Adventurism deserves to be taken seriously, and deserves to be criticized in terms other than those which result when it is simply opposed to its contrary, monism or absolutism.

The position outlined as Adventurism above seems to entail three basic beliefs which guide the conduct of the lives that accept it : subjectivism, scepticism, and hedonism.

By subjectivism I mean the view according to which the only meaningful utterances are *about* a subject and its feelings, preceptions, thoughts and so on. We all learn the basic distinction between subject and object early in life. In our own culture, this distinction has played the role of a fundamental classificatory matrix. Through its use, we have come to identify objectivists as realists, naturalists, and believers in trans-personal truth. Subjectivists, on the other hand, are idealists, perhaps mystics, certainly illusionists, and are those who believe that there are no truths which hold beyond the boundaries of the individual self. Faced with this dichotomy, Adventurists adopt subjectivism and deny any truth whatsoever to objectivism. Not only is it the case that all utterances have a subject as a necessary ingredient, but also all utterances tell us nothing about "the world" but only something about a subject and his own unique world. Language, we may respond, is based on and presupposes trans-personal and intersubjective unities of meaning (concepts) : if, then, Adventurism can be asserted, it can only be asserted through the use of concepts which by definition are extra-subjective. Rather than close the door to Adventurism, this argument merely leads its adherent to say, with Cratylus or Bergson, that reality, the really real, cannot be asserted at all, and if one should attempt to articulate it conceptually one is attempting to do what is ultimately impossible. Adventurists speak because it is convenient to do so, and when an Adventurist speaks *he* knows that he is making verbal reference only to his own experience, and "means" only what he experiences. Language may thus bridge the gap between one individual and another; it cannot transcend the individual.

This can be further clarified by considering the epistemological scepticism of the Adventurist. Consciousness is regarded as primarily sensational, factual, physical: the body is both its condition and its source. This being so, we attribute meaning to life by the way we use, the way we are, our bodies. What is here-and-now is real; what is merely remembered or abstracted from the here-and-now cannot be real. It follows that spontaneity is more basic than order, and judgments of value reducible to opinion. In interpersonal relations, charisma wins always over argument, and the powers of the body, including the emotions, win out over any intellectual judgment. Severally, these imply that ideals or aims which transcend the present moment are regarded as illusions, abstractions. Rather than hold that life consists in a continuous or ordered series of steps leading to fulfillment and meaning. Adventurists hold that life is merely one damned thing after another leading to one final thing (death) after which there is no other. Consequently, the positing of goals, and the sustained pursuit of ideals are rejected as worthless. Adventurists thus erect the sovereign individual into the sole cognitive bearer, and reject out of hand any and all extra-subjective claims to knowledge.

Adventurists are also Hedonists. If there is no knowable object of value, then each individual is free to assign value to whatever object or set of objects encountered in his experience. The quality of value is thus not endurance or universality, but vitality, intensity, and pleasure. As a consequence, a life-style founded on this view of value involves a multitude of activities crowding one's day and exhausting one's night. And since there is no necessity, one needs to be faithful only to one's own life.

II Toward a Critique of Adventurism

As we all know only too well, trying to argue an Adventurist out of his position is just about impossible. Many people might just feel that it's better just to walk away from any encounter with an Adventurist, sadly shaking one's head and hoping perhaps that "time" will lead him to see the light and change his ways. Argument, after all, presupposes minimal agreements holding between two people; where these agreements are lacking, there is no use to argument. For the sake of clarity, let us call the

Adventurist an irrationalist², and his opponent a rationalist. Now, one of the things one finds out when talking to an Adventurist is that he despises the rules of argument that the rationalist places on him-and as a result rejects argument completely. Rather than either walk away from an argument with an Adventurist, or make the rules too hard for him to accept, I'm going to attempt to consider some of the strategies of argument that may be used, and to reject most of them as unreliable.

It is usual to oppose the position articulated as Adventurism by arguing that it implies disorder and solipsism both of which are inimical to the development of true humanity which comes only where there is order and association. That is, the one, unity, order, continuity, are opposed to the many, disunity, disorder, discontinuity. For those who are fond of thinking in dichotomies, this is the usual strategy of argument. The rationalist will uphold order and accuse the Adventurist of disorder, while conversely, the Adventurist who prizes disorder, will oppose the order of the rationalist. Among other problems that may obtain in such a strategy, the most telling one is that the affirmation or negation of one side of a dichotomy has rarely solved anything-ever. Every so-called "perennial problem" of philosophy and of intellectual life generally takes the form of a dichotomy. One-many, freedom-determinism, idealism-realism; and further, there has never been a single instance of a sound and cogent argument supporting one side or the other of one of these dichotomies. Furthermore, the argument between the Adventurist and the rationalist is really not an argument between mutually exclusive camps, but is rather one of a family quarrel. Adventurists are pluralists in the sense that they affirm that each individual is the judge of what is real, but the real is of one kind only-sensational. The Adventurist is thus a pluralistic monist. The rationalist, on the other hand, opposes this pluralistic monism by advancing a non-pluralistic monism; that which is real is enduring, permanent, and is true for all people. A further aspect of this strategy is that it is just too simple. It operates on the basis of a dyadic or two-pronged thought-tool, assuming uncritically that the world can easily be divided into two items opposed to each other, and it also assumes with contemporary logic that there are two and only two truth-values; if one side is false, the other may be true; or, to put it more strongly, if one side is true, the other must be false. And

since neither defender of the two sides of the dispute is likely to hold that his side may be false, this logic of criticism leads to little more than self-congratulation combined with arbitrary negative passion.

A different strategy of criticism is the one adopted by thinkers such as Hegel or Peirce. This is a logic of synthesis. Enlarging on the logic of two truth values, it holds that where two views are contrary to each other, *both* are likely to be false when taken singly. The only way to solve the problem is to reconcile the two opposing positions by arranging them within a larger and more inclusive context and thus being able to show that they are continuous rather than discontinuous from each other. While we may all agree that the peacemakers are blessed, this strategy is still more on the side of the rationalist than the Adventurist, for while it grants the Adventurist a place in a wider scheme of things, the rule whereby the reconciliation is achieved is a rationalist one (i. e. order, continuity) through and through. So while an Adventurist might feel an initial attraction to someone using this kind of strategy, he soon realizes that the logic of synthesis is worse for his case than a dyadic logic-for a logic of synthesis is like a stacked deck of cards; rather than being opposed by a single alternative, the Adventurist here is opposed not only by the negation of manyness, to use Hegel's schema, which is the rationalist order, but he is also opposed by the "concrete universal" which is a rationalistic sleight of hand.

A logic of inclusive disjunction with two basic axioms seems to me to be a better strategy: (1) the one, order, continuity, may be as much a fundamental trait of reality as is the many, discontinuity, manyness, and both "concepts" of these two fundamental traits are disjunctive unities within the set of traits that reality may have, and (2) any synthesis of the one and the many is itself not a "higher reality" but merely another disjunctive unity among other disjunctive unities. Given the first axiom, it follows that there are many "fundamental" traits of reality, none more fundamental than any other.³ Thus, for instance, there may be some traits of reality which just simply are best characterized in terms of an Adventurist ontology. Thus Adventurism which erects the here-and-now to paradigmatic status among the traits of reality is not negated or opposed, or synthesised, but rather *complemented* by other philosophies

which in their turn take some other trait as fundamental to reality as a whole. On the other hand, the second axiom assures us that there is a unity of the plurality of possible disjuncts.

Let us consider this logic of inclusive disjunction as applied to Adventurism. Contrary to Adventurists who assert that it is alone the genuine pluralism, upholder of manyness, it is necessary to note that there are several kinds of pluralism. There is, first, the pluralism of a single kind, and second, the pluralism either of no kinds or of all kinds. Opposed to these two forms of pluralism may be the monism of identical and not multiple exemplifications (i. e. absolute monism), as well as the monism of multiple but not identical exemplifications (i. e. personalism). It is clear that both monism and pluralism, and in this case, Adventurism and its contrary, are pluralistic and monistic in one way or another; that pluralism does not exclude monism, nor monism pluralism. Hence neither pluralism nor monism can be reduced to the one or the many.

Contrary to those Adventurists who assert the pluralism of a single kind (e. g. atomism) and who might want to reject any ontology which claims that reality is not simply the here and the now, there does not seem to be anything in Adventurist principles which excludes there being immediacies or selves which transcend the sensual present. If this is denied, then either the pluralistic or the monistic side of Adventurism will have to be given up. If on the other hand, the Adventurist accepts the claim that there may be immediacies which transcend the present moment, then it is legitimate for the Adventurist to admit realities beyond the here and now, and modes of cognition other than localized and particularized ones.

If we can agree that life is becoming without denying either that what becomes may be not only immediate but permanent, or that the nature of becoming itself may not be characterizable in terms much like those in which opponents of Adventurism would argue, then perhaps we can also agree on a series of steps which an Adventurist needs to be able to go through in order to accept the legitimacy of the two axioms of the logic of criticism used to criticize it here, namely, (1) the first step is the felt Adventurist one that the real is singular; (2) second, that the singularity of the real may not be of the

same kind or nature in all cases; (3) third, that these different kinds of singularities may form a unity; and (4) fourth, that each kind of singularity has a place within an adequate view of reality. The motives which incline one to this series of steps are two. First, if Adventurism is a genuine pluralism, then it must accept the existence of different orders of reality, or of realities which are not singular in nature, or if singular, are not sensuous singularities only. And second, if Adventurism is not to degenerate to a monism of multiple exemplifications, it must accept the notion that the realities which *are share* location in an order, have a place or position in a wider view of reality—wider than the Adventurist's initial claim that the real is and only is what is here and now. By considering the notion of *position* and its categories, these claims can be substantiated.

We can distinguish eight basic categories necessary to make sense of the notion of *position*: relation, power, method, economy, order, duration, limitation, and satisfaction.⁴

(1) Relation. To place an object, be it physical, mental, or otherwise, we must first of all understand its relations to other things, and there must exist other things of different kinds. We must assume that the thing to be placed has certain essential or defining characteristics which make it that thing and none other, and we must recognize the fact that part of the nature of that thing may in fact be the series of possible or actual relations it has to other things.

The characteristics of relation as a category of place are several. Relations exhibit strength; that is, if there is no difference between the things related, to the things placed in relation to other things, then none of the two or more things exhibit any strength, any individuality of being. Placing requires the strong relations of difference rather than the weak relations of identity or sameness. Relation also requires joining; for if there is no joining, no fit of one thing to another, there is no placing but merely haphazard conjunction. That is, relations of place must exhibit pattern, togetherness and repetition. For if a relation of place is not repeatable, then the objects cannot be placed but simply assigned to a place in an empty logical series.

(2) Power. The basic character of power is definitivity. A

thing placed can so be placed only because it exhibits definite powers or capacities. If all things had the same power, the same definitivity, then nothing could be placed for all things would exhibit the same repetitive characteristics, the same nature. To say that things to be placed must exhibit definitive powers is to say that things exhibit their own sense of specificity, their own sense of restraint, their own uniform or deliberate posture. And this is to suggest that things placed are subject to growth and decay of powers, may precede or proceed from other things, and endure even amidst change.

(3) Methodic. To be able to place a thing we must be able to count on the methodic or procedural aspects both of the thing to be placed as well as of the act of placing. This implies that placing presupposes context; that without a multiplicity of methods which work with things according to their own integrity, of things and contexts, an abundance of things of different characters. It presupposes, in other words, plenitude of being.

(4) Economy. Things are economical. That is, they exhibit balance, modesty. When things are placed that does not mean that they may not suffer a diminuation or accentuation of their powers at different times. A wooden chair piled amongst other chairs in a basement suffers diminuation, while a chair which is for a while desk, chair, stool, ladder, perhaps even firewood, suffers accentuation, except in the last case when it suffers extinction also. A thing out of place, without use, is not allowed to exhibit its powers, is not related, has no powers, and thus has no economy—it is a superfluity of being.

(5) Order. To place is to order. Order is not relation; where relation presupposes integrity and pattern, order presupposes prior relation. Order presupposes and conditions the harmony of the whole, induces tolerance amongst things, and opens up the receptivity of things to each other.

(6) Duration. Whether the nature of a thing is to be transient or of greater temporal spread, whether its nature is spontaneous, fresh, solitary, momentary, or steady, habitual, social and lasting, all things exhibit duration—they last. They exhibit their definitive temporality. Things endure for their given times.

(7) Limitation. To a thing is assigned or given its nature

which constitutes an apportionment of properties. Things must be limited qua things, specifiable, else they are not, and cannot be or participate with other things.

(8) Satisfaction. Things have their own identity. When things are placed, they exhibit the satisfaction which comes both from their recognition of the propriety of their place, and from their humility at being placed appropriately.

With these categories in mind, we can now consider the Adventurist position.

An Adventurist seems to want to claim that all things in the world are *one* kind, belong to one order, one system: all things are transient and particular; to be is to be a transient particular. The real is without relation, without continuity, bearing no repetitiveness. If we consider such claims in light of the categories of place, we can further elaborate this view as saying that: (1) either all things exhibit the same strength or that each thing exhibits its own strength; (2) either that all things exhibit the same posture, the same definitivity, or that all things have their own individual definitivity; (3) either all things may be treated alike or that things are different one from another; (4) either that all things exhibit the same character or that the characters of things differ; (5) either that all things are ordered in the same way, or that each thing is ordered according to what it is; (6) either that all things exhibit the same temporal duration—sensitized immediacies—or that things exhibit the temporality of their own individual natures; (7) either that all things share the same properties, or that they are different; (8) either that all things share the same satisfaction, or that they depend for their satisfactions on what they are in and of themselves.

Let us assume an Adventurist would uphold one side of each disjunct over the other; all things exhibit the same strength, the same posture, the same manner of being, the same character, the same order, the same duration, the same satisfaction; or the contrary.

The logic of Adventurism faces a severe contradiction at this point. For if it is the case that relations are "unreal", then it is impossible to assert the sameness of things in any respect. Furthermore, to uphold singularity over universality, is to uphold

difference over sameness, and this attempt to uphold difference cannot involve holding that all things are alike.

If, on the other hand, an Adventurist holds that all things are different; that all things exhibit their own peculiar strength, posture, character, temporality, and so on, we come closer to the essence of the position. But if the assertion of difference is not to be a universal and thus illegitimate-statement, it must be empirical, it must involve experiential discovery of the non-sameness of things. And in this case, some recognition of the fact that, to negate the first side of each disjunct, not all things exhibit the same strength, posture, temporality, and so on. And this sort of recognition is already to move beyond a strict Adventurism. For once it is admitted that not all (real) singular things exhibit the same posture, etc. it must also be admitted that not all things are of the same kind. And once it is admitted that things may differ in their essential properties, then we have already admitted that being has different senses, that to be is not to be an immediate particular, *only*.

To be an immediate particular is thus to be one kind of being amongst others. To be cannot be defined in terms of the here and now only. Thus Adventurism is a philosophy based on one mode of being, but is not a complete philosophy or a complete ontology. Just as immediate particulars are to be seen as one kind of being amongst others, so Adventurism is to be seen as one kind of philosophy amongst others. If we use a dyadic logic, we would be want to claim that either Adventurism or its negation may be true and one false. A Triadic logic would claim that both may be true. A logic of exclusive disjunction holds that while the doctrine of Adventurism as well as that of its negation, as well as that of their synthesis may be all true of being, these are but three aspects or modes among others: Adventurism is as 'true' of its mode of being as others are of theirs. All philosophies thus share a place in a wider order than they would be able, by their own principles, to grant.

NOTES

1. Adventurism is a name I have given to a philosophical type which *may* be exemplified by Nietzsche and others. See my "Reason and Political Authority," *Journal of Value Inquiry*, VII, 4, Winter, 1973, 43-56.
2. The term "rationalist" is used only at this point to identify an opponent of the Adventurist. Both the terms rationalist and irrationalist are no longer adequate for describing positions; for one thing, the term rationalist is more eulogistic than either descriptive or normative. Elsewhere I have argued that there are many ways in which we may reason about the world, that the Adventurist has his own legitimate view of the role and function (and nature) of reason, and thus that the term rationalist is merely a term of agreement for that view of reason that the person in question prefers. See article in note 1, and "Varieties of Philosophical Reason," *Philosophical Studies* (Ireland), 1976.
3. For a defense of this claim, see Justus Buchler, *The Main of Light*, New York: Oxford, 1974, Ch. 6.
4. For a development of the categories in terms of which these eight categories of position are legitimated, see "Varieties of Philosophical Reason," note 2 *supra*. See also "Arithmos," in *Philosophic Research and Analysis*, Spring, 1976.