

## Love, Law and Language: Continuing to think with Daya-ji

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In one of the last essays that he brought to completion, *Eros, Nomos, and Logos*, Daya-ji revisits many of the themes that animate his long philosophical career, drawing them together in a stunning philosophical farewell. He focuses on what he calls time and again “the prison house of I-centricity,” and the need for escape; on the tension between apparent human freedom and the determinism we imbibe with the scientific image; on the nature of creativity, and on our essentially social nature, but also on the consequences of human embodiment and the role of the *puruṣārthas* in human life.

I often find myself returning to this beautiful essay, in part because it draws so many of these themes together, but also because it reflects both Daya-ji’s greatest insights and some of the obstacles to bringing those insights to complete fruition in his philosophical project. As always when I read Daya-ji, I imagine his voice behind the words, and then the argument that would ensue over drinks, and the joy in philosophical discourse. Today, I would like to respond to this essay, engaging in just that dialogue with the Daya I remember and imagine before me.

### 1. The problematic of *Eros, Nomos and Logos*

*Eros, Nomos and Logos* addresses four linked problems: the relation between freedom and causality; the place for *Logos*—understood as reason and normativity—in the natural world; the relationship between the *puruṣārthas* and normativity, and the relationship between egocentricity and freedom. These problems are linked in part because solutions to any one suggest routes to solutions to the others, but also because together they constitute the larger question, “what is it to be human?” or better, “what makes life worth living?” Through all of this, *Eros*,

or our biological nature, constitutes both the heart of the problem and the heart of the solution, as Daya-ji sees it.

Here is how Daya puts the first problem—that about causality and freedom:

...[A]ctivity is itself paradoxical, as it simultaneously involves, or presupposes, both freedom and causality, which are united, as Kant saw, in the teleological judgment, which is unintelligible and hence unacceptable to reason or *Logos*, as the Greeks named it, and thus renders man unintelligible to himself...

The notion of freedom... involves not only the notion of causality... but also the idea of rule or restriction, as without it nothing can be built or brought into being. Kant saw this in his notions of constitutive and regulative rules, without which one cannot delimit or demarcate or get going... (310)

Daya is pointing here to a conundrum that must be faced by any account of human action. For something to count as an *action*, as opposed to an event in which we are *passive*, we must in some sense do it freely; if we are merely caused to behave in a particular way that does not count as *acting*. Nonetheless, action presupposes determinism: after all, if our intentions could not cause behavior, we could not act freely; and if our intentions were not caused by our beliefs and desires, we could not think freely; so, without determinism, we could not be free. Freedom and determinism, therefore, seem both to be opposed to one another and to be mutually entailing. This is why action appears to be paradoxical and unintelligible. But to be human is to act, and so to be human would appear to be both paradoxical and unintelligible.

Daya immediately ties this problem to another paradox: freedom requires constraint by rules. To be free appears to prereflective thought to be capable of doing whatever one desires. But freedom cannot be randomness. To be free—as Kant argued—is to be able to follow rules, to act for reasons, as opposed to behaving in causally determined ways. But rules are prescriptive; so, to be free is to place oneself under the constraint of rules, and so not to be able to do whatever we want.

Once again, to be human is to be free, and so is to be caught in a web of paradox. This is the first puzzle Daya sets out to solve in this essay.

The second problem—very closely connected to the puzzle about rules and freedom—concerns the role of *Logos* in the natural world. Just as there is a tension between liberty and constraint in the conception of freedom, there is a tension between the normative force of rules, including rules of reason, and the fact that these rules are instituted by animals like us in a physical world. For natural phenomena just *are*: they do not command; they are not rationally assessable; and they have no obviously normative force. Nonetheless, we do find ourselves constrained by rules, including rules of reasoning, moral rules, laws and the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic rules that make it possible to communicate and to articulate further rules. Even so, we know that we are nothing more than animals, beings subject to the deterministic laws that govern the universe. Once again, being rule-governed is essential to our humanity, despite the fact that as natural organisms in a scientifically describable world, we are merely determined; once again, our own essence seems to be both paradoxical and incomprehensible. Daya puts it this way:

*Logos... brings in the notion of law: a law that governs whatever happens... This is the revolutionary suspicion that occurs to the self-consciousness of man, and he tries to know the Logos, that he may understand all that is as well as why it is what it is. ...*

Once it has come into being,... *Logos* acquires a reality of its own, independent of the person or persons who brought it into being. It becomes, so to speak, a part of the natural world order, even though it would have come into being without the human being or beings who occasioned it. This, however, results in its being seen as an object among other objects in the world, demanding to be understood both in terms of what it is and what it can do to others. It begins, thus, to have both a structure and a causality like everything else, except for the radical difference that its origin lies in human choice and thus has to be understood in terms of something that has an inbuilt essential indeterminacy and plurality. (*Ibid.*)

These two problems taken together threaten the very possibility of our life being either comprehensible or meaningful. On the one hand, seeing ourselves as natural

objects among other natural objects deprives us of the freedom and responsiveness to reason that makes us human; on the other, taking ourselves to be free and responsive to reasons is incomprehensible given what we know of our natural existence. And unfortunately, we are not given a choice between these two perspectives: we must, in intellectual honesty, take both, and so find our lives *both* meaningless and incomprehensible. Here is Daya:

But the necessity of what *is* also entails the necessity of what *will be* and thus renders all human effort and action meaningless, just as the retrospective necessity of all that *was* makes all history meaningless, rendering all the seers, saints, prophets, geniuses, that is those of whom we feel justly proud, as having been the victims of an illusion and, in the process, making us also succumb to it. (313)

Now, Daya points out (*Ibid.*) that classical Indian thought—in particular Advaita Vedānta—attempted to resolve just this dilemma through the doctrine of *sadasadvilakṣana*—the idea that reality has two aspects, one entirely deceptive (that is *māyā*) and one that is absolutely true (*tattva*). By drawing this distinction, one can have freedom and normativity at the level of reality, while being determined by pure causality at the level of *māyā*. Understanding the source of normativity in this way is attractive, precisely because it offers a route to naturalizing normativity and to grounding our responsiveness to reasons and freedom in our biological and social nature. But, Daya, correctly points out, this simply shifts the problem from one spot to another. We now need to understand how we can constitute any sense of normativity within the world of our own experience.

This is because we ordinarily—especially in the Indian context—think of immanent normativity as constituted by the *puruṣārthas*, the natural human goals that emerge from our embodied, social nature and from the desires—mundane and spiritual—which, in turn, arise from our embodied, social and reflective nature. It is therefore unclear how such purely descriptive facts about us can constitute the requisite freedom and norm-governed life they are meant to explain. Moreover, we still would have to explain how this kind of freedom is possible at the phenomenal level if we are really entirely determined at the ultimate level of reality. I will return to this

point later, but for now notice that this puzzle is redolent of the critique of Śāṅkarācārya's *māyāvāda* launched by Aurobindo—that it reinstates the very duality against which it is poised. So, as Daya points out, the *sadasadvilakṣana* approach in fact undermines, rather than supports, this approach. For once we draw the distinction between *māyā* and *tattva*, and place the free and the rational at the transcendent level, there is no explanation of how the *pruṣārthas*, which are grounded in *māyā*, have any normative force at all. They become, once again, facts among facts, with perhaps a causal, but never a normative grip, on us. This is the third puzzle.

And this takes us directly to the final of the four interlocked puzzles to which Daya is concerned to draw our attention, that regarding egocentricity. Daya, as I noted above, was preoccupied in a number of his late essays with what he repeatedly characterized as the “prison-house of I-centricity.” In brief, that prison-house emerges from the following predicament of practical reason: if I take myself to be an autonomous subject of experience and agent, then I immediately posit a special intimate relationship to myself, which gives me a *prima facie* reason to take my own interests as paramount, and to take my own experience as foundational. But to the extent that I do so, nothing can constitute an adequate or compelling reason to abandon that perspective. For any reasons require me to take others seriously, and that will always be irrational given their fundamental difference from *me*. And given how central our moral and epistemic practices—which involve taking others seriously—are to our human life, our very lives as persons appear to be irrational.

This is just a generalization of the “Why be good?” problem that emerges for any ethical theory that treats egoism as even *prima facie* rational. If one does so, than no appeal to the interests of others can surmount the rationality of serving mu own interests, an intuition at the heart of much of modern economic theory, which treats self-interest and rationality as synonymous, with tragic but predictable results. It is also connected to the private language problem and to the problem of other minds. In each case, we find that if we start by taking the egocentric perspective—that meaning is constituted by the relation of words to my own ideas, or that I know

other minds on the analogy of my immediate knowledge of my own—we can never escape solipsism. And again, if we cannot escape solipsism, we can't make sense of our lives as human lives at all.

Daya correctly saw that this general egocentric predicament is also bound up with the problem of freedom. We might think that taking ourselves to be autonomous, self-contained agents and subjects is to take ourselves as free from the heteronomy of determination of our experience, action, values, and from the influence of others. Our status as independent egos hence, it would appear, is our guarantor of human freedom. On the other hand, though freedom is possible, as we saw already, only in the context of normativity and sensitivity to reasons, and normativity and reason are collectively, not individually constituted (and here the thought of KC Bhattacharyya regarding the relationship between subjectivity, freedom, and our embodied and socially embedded nature is relevant—but beyond the scope of the present discussion). So, freedom seems to require not complete subject autonomy, but rather responsiveness to others and to our roles in norm-constituting communities. How to understand ourselves as both autonomous and as responsive to these norm-governed and norm-constituting practices and communities is the key to the escape from the prison of egocentricity, and understanding that route is the central task of this late essay.

## **2. The Focus on Kant and Hegel**

Daya-ji's initial strategy in this essay is to leverage ideas from Kant and Hegel to resolve this complex conundrum. He properly focuses neither on the second *Critique* nor on the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* for his analysis of the relation between transcendental freedom and empirical determinism. The analysis in those texts is patently individualist, and would immediately fall prey to the problems already scouted. Instead, Daya turns to Kant's *Science of Right*, and to Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* that builds on it. Kant, and later Hegel, emphasize in these texts that the right emerges not simply from an individual human being recognizing the transcendental grounds of her own freedom an agency, but rather from participation in a community bound by ties of reciprocal obligation. This would appear to be a first step out of the

egocentric predicament, as well as towards the naturalization of normativity Daya seeks as a condition of the intelligibility of human life.

Nonetheless, as Daya concedes, this strategy is not ultimately successful. The reason is straightforward: Kant and Hegel, in their respective analyses of the right, focus entirely on legal norms, and not on moral or cognitive norms. While, as I will argue a bit later, this is a good template for an argument, by itself it will not do the trick. For arguing that legal norms are socially constituted—while this is obviously the case—leaves open the question of the source of the normativity in question. That is, if we are antecedently convinced that there is a problem with merely natural phenomena having normative force, or a puzzle about the source of the normativity of natural conventions or practices, pointing out that artificially constructed legal systems have normative force in virtue of the structures of the communities that institute them will beg the question. We still have to explain how it is that these communities come to be able to confer normative status on their legal structures. The ultimate source of normativity, and hence its consistency with the deterministic structure of nature, has yet to be addressed.

### 3. The use of Eros as the pivot

It is here that Daya-ji introduces *Eros* as the key to resolving these conundra. He writes:

The human world... is in-between [*Nomos* and *Logos*], and it is here that *Logos* and *Nomos* reign supreme as it is built on their basis, though it is rooted in *Eros*, whose nature no one knows, though it is there all the time and is the prime mover or the force that does not let anyone rest ever. (319)

Daya's idea is that the source of the unity of *Logos* and *Nomos* is their common root in *Eros*. He is never quite as clear as one would hope regarding how *Eros* is meant to reconcile these two forces, but we can reconstruct the central intuition that animates this strategy. I suspect that it derives not from Kant or from Hegel, but from Hegel's great rival for the post-Kantian mantle, Schopenhauer. Daya reads *Eros* as a kind of blind but ubiquitous life force or drive that underlies all activity, not unlike Schopenhauer's *Wille*. If we take the lead from Schopenhauer, we might

see what Daya has in mind. Just as *Wille* is the force that underlies not only causation, but also conation and reasoning—including logical deduction and transcendental argument—*Eros* is seen by Daya as underlying both the natural world and the human world of norms and social practices. It is the drive for growth and development, the drive for association, the drive for progress, the drive to create.

*Eros* is hence a natural bridge between the biological and the social; reflecting the fact that as human beings, we are biologically determined to be social; the same nature that leads us to eat and to reproduce leads us to constitute families, communities, nations, languages, legal frameworks, and the myriad institutions that make human life possible. As Mandeville would have noted, in this respect, we are no different from the bees, whose biological constitution leads inevitably to the complexity of the hive. Daya puts it this way:

The continuous questioning of both *Logos* and *Nomos*... in each succeeding generation, results in that ever-continuing attempt to find a more satisfactory solution and has given rise to... civilizations that define the distinctive being of man.... Behind and beneath the ... construction of civilizations lies the dissatisfaction and frustration that man feels in respect of whatever is, as ... it would always be thought of or imagined as different from what it is, thus challenging him to change... in the hope that it would be better for oneself and others, and that the world he lives in would be better place in which to live.

*Eros* is the name for this, and has to be understood in this way.... It is not *kāma*, or ... pleasure seeking... as Freud saw it, or even the *vāsana* or *tr̥ṣṇa* as the *śrāmānya* or the “world-denying” traditions of India called it, but *pravṛtti* or the ever-outward oriented, positive, valuational consciousness of man... (319-320)

#### **4. The secularization of the transcendental and the recognition of the transcendental character of the mundane**

Daya-ji's project comes into sharper focus only when we reach the end of the essay. His concern in this essay and in so much of his late work, as we have noted, is with the problem of egocentricity. He is concerned only to show both that and why it is

rational to be non-egocentric in our outlook. But his is after more than that: Daya also aims to draw our attention to the possibility of the re-enchantment of the commonplace and to the easy availability of a transcendental sensibility.

A good deal of this outlook, I suspect, derives from his reading of Advaita Vedānta through the lens of Aurobindo in *Life Divine*. Daya was very impressed with *Life Divine*, and referred to it in conversation as one of the great masterpieces of 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian philosophy. And central to Aurobindo's project in that sprawling study is the demonstration that the manifest universe is not illusory—not *māyā*—but rather the real manifestation of the supramundane in space and time—*līlā*. On this view, conventional reality emerges in a kind of dialectical interplay of consciousness and the absolute—a plunging of consciousness into concreteness—and can be apprehended as the manifestation of the absolute in a reversal of that dialectical project—an ascent to full consciousness.

This understanding of the nonduality between manifest reality and *Brahman* simultaneously reveals the world of everyday experience to have an inextricable transcendent dimension and the world of *Brahman* to be available to ordinary consciousness. Daya interprets this insight from Aurobindo in terms of the relationship between values and the empirical world, following Kant in identifying valuation with a transcendental perspective and empirical consciousness with the everyday:

The secularization of the transcendental and the transformation of the sensuously given into that miraculous something becomes nonsensuous without losing its sensuousness. This complex character of the given misleads the unwary observer into thinking that it is sensuous still. The secularization of the transcendental is accomplished through an infusion of values. This infusion renders it a symbol of something else. It also constitutes a halting step in a forward movement beyond itself, halting because of the imperfection and incompleteness both of that which was sought to be mirrored and of that which was sought to be realized. (321)

It is this “infusion of values,” Daya insists, that fuses the secular and the transcendent, and it does so by rendering it symbolic, or meaningful. (There is a nice

kinship here to the thought of the Native American philosopher *Lame Deer*.) Our everyday life, which can seem insignificant—in both senses of that term—is rendered meaningful—in both senses of that term—when we see that life as connected to what we value, and to that to which we aspire. Our actions and our words are capable of representing greater things, of bringing into reality a future we desire for the sake of those who will follow us, and of inspiring others in similar directions; the world we experience, while bounded in space and time, can carry our thought forward to the abstract, to the merely possible, and to the infinite.

The immanent thereby partakes in the transcendent; the transcendent finds its concrete embodiment in the immanent. In the end, the world we experience and the actions we contribute to it become the manifestation of the values we cherish. Daya concludes this final essay with these thoughts:

A little self-reflection and an effort at imaginative identification with the underlying *Eros* of its own reality, in the sense in which we have used it, might help in mitigating or lessening the stranglehold of I-centricity that seem to be inevitable result of self-consciousness in man. It might also, hopefully, make man more aware of these indebtedness to the past generations who had built what he has inherited and responsible towards the future generations for whom he would leave the world just as others did before him, when he came into being. (321)

So, this is the final point. So long as we remain trapped in the immanent, egocentricity is hard to avoid. This is simply because, on Daya's view, the world as it is merely empirically is bereft of value: value enables and requires connection to the transcendent. And without value, desire is all that can drive us. When *Eros* is understood as mere individual desire, it serves *Nomos* in its causal sense. But when *Eros* is taken as care for others, it serves *Logos*, and motivates a life of gratitude and beneficence.

All of this sounds very hopeful, and it is testimony to the greatness of Daya-ji's spirit that he was so hopeful regarding humanity at the close of his life, in what were indeed dark years geopolitically, as Daya himself notes towards the close of this essay. But while I share with Daya the view that a meaningful life and moral

progress require a liberation from egocentricity, as well as the view that the demands of *Nomos* and *Logos* must be simultaneously met in any coherent understanding of human life, I have to regard this approach to those goals as a noble failure.

And I think that the failure was built in from the start, that is, from the use of resources drawn from Kant and Hegel in Europe, and from Śāṅkara and Aurobindo in India; that is, from sources that begin analytically with the individual subject and then try to work out from there. My own suspicion is that Daya's prison-house of I-centricity is in fact inescapable. The only way not to become imprisoned therein is never to enter in the first place. I would therefore like to help Daya to work his way towards these same goals by starting elsewhere, in the matrix of interdependence and collective life, drawing inspiration from Hume in the West and from Buddhists such as Candrakīrti and Śāntideva in India. The relation between *Eros*, *Nomos*, and *Logos* may look different from there.

##### **5. Other ways out: Hume instead of Kant; Buddhism instead of Vedānta**

Let us first think further about the relationship between freedom and *Nomos*. Daya-ji, although ambivalent on this point, sets up his problematic by taking causality to be antithetical to freedom, and indeed causality and freedom are often so understood. But, as Hume and Schopenhauer, each in his own way, correctly emphasized, this is a simple conceptual error. Freedom is not only not antithetical to causal determinism, but it presupposes it. This is because to be free in action is for one's desires and intentions to cause one's acts; to be free in thought is for one's occurrent desires and intentions to be caused by one's standing beliefs and values, in tandem with the environment and its demands at the moment of action. If our actions were not so caused, we would be unfree—either constrained by heteronomous causes, random in our behavior, or simply insane. Augustinian agent causation of the kind that Daya considers central to freedom in this essay is not merely unattainable—it is incoherent. (Garfield 2014)

When we take this fact seriously, we see that we need to understand human freedom in a way different from that adopted by Augustine, Kant, and even Daya. Hume saw this. Freedom, like identity, is a *narrative*, or a *forensic* notion. We act freely when we behave in ways that cohere with the narrative arc of our lives, an arc we describe not as solo narrators, but as co-authors, collaborating always with those around us, who help us to define the ends we pursue, the reasons for which we can act, and the sortals through which our actions and their grounds can be comprehended. Whether an action is free or caused is not a *metaphysical* fact to be determined by an examination of forces, but an *interpretative determination* of what narrative best makes sense of that action. Our identity is, therefore, essentially hermeneutical, and for that reason, essentially collectively constituted.

This hermeneutical dimension of our social and moral lives—our *Logos*—is not, as Daya-ji worries, in tension with the fact that as natural organisms, we are governed by *Nomos*—by natural law. For, as Hume also saw, Human beings are natural artificers. As social animals, we are biologically determined to be artificers. We have evolved to construct languages, social groups, dams and harbours, currencies, banks, governments and alliances. We have hence also evolved to construct norms—ethical, epistemic and linguistic norms among them. This is not accidental; it is part and parcel of our biological nature—it is, in other words, *nomologically necessary* for us to do so; that is, it is nomologically necessary for us to create our *Logos*. The most impressive of the artifacts we are designed to construct are ourselves: beings who are determined understand themselves as free, rational agents. The union of *Nomos* and *Logos* is hence built into our very nature.

I have urged that our self-understanding is narrative, or hermeneutical. But what are the horizons against which we self-interpret? As we answer this question, we enter more deeply into a conversation with Daya-ji. As social animals, we live and understand ourselves at the intersection of the psychobiological and the psychosocial. It is an oversimplification to see these as independent axes of understanding, given that we have evolved biologically in a social matrix and to be inextricable from

that matrix. For these axes are, in complex ways, mutually dependent. But the simplification will do no harm for now.

To understand our own behavior—and to attain the kind of responsiveness to reason that allows us freedom in the sense of that term I have been adumbrating—we must understand both the biological and determinants of our psychology—that includes our individual needs, drives, habits, motives, values and thoughts, as well as their social determinants. The latter include the social rules of the societies we inhabit; the particular social niche within those societies we occupy; our family roles and professional responsibilities; the ideologies and economic circumstances of our times, and so much besides. The narratives in terms of which we make sense of ourselves advert to both of these dimensions in providing reasons for anticipated actions and explanations for those we have executed. Responsibility or exculpation could depend upon reference to phenomena located in a logical and axiological plane defined by these two axes. .

One way to put this point as we return to Daya's concerns is that *Eros* indeed ties *Nomos* and *Logos* together in the unity of our lives. But it may not do so as simply as Daya thinks. When we examine the *puruṣārthas* that structure our lives, each has both an individual and a social dimension. If we are attentive to these dimensions, we see *Eros* at work in each *puruṣārtha*, and in each case, both at the individual and the social level.

*Kāma* may appear to be a purely biological aim. But it is not. As both Aristotle and Hume noticed, human pleasures are not purely physical; they are social. We cannot understand the pleasure we experience when listening to music or viewing art, or in the contemplation of another's achievements, without adverting to the culture that creates these values and without noting our innate resonance with our conspecifics. *Kāma* thus unites the individual and the social.

*Ārtha*, too, has individual and social dimensions. While we might think of the demand to accumulate enough property for comfort to be a purely self-directed motive, grounded in egoism, it is not. *Ārtha* is a *puruṣārtha* precisely because others

depends upon us, and because the indigent impose burdens on all of us. Moreover, we can only discharge our social duties if we ourselves are not indigent. Once again, the individual and the social are joined. *Eros* aims us in both directions.

*Dharma* is the *puruṣārtha* most obviously social in nature. But we should not forget that it has individual dimensions as well. It is not simply in the interests of others that we observe our duties; it is also so that we will be better, happier individuals. *Dharma*, when properly conceived, is both in the interest of self and other. And of course the same can be said of *mokṣa*. While the quest for liberation is in its most immediate dimension an individual goal, the means by which we can pursue that goal, as the *Gītā* emphasizes, are irreducibly social, tied to our roles and our situations.

Daya-ji is correct to identify *Eros* with a drive to fulfill our desires, and he is wise to see those desires in a normative, not a purely descriptive way, tying them to the *puruṣārthas*. And it is a very great insight of this paper to see that it is *Eros* that must enable the reconciliation of *Nomos* and *Logos*. But Daya gets lost when he attempts to understand all of this at the purely individual level. The key to the resolution of this apparent dichotomy, I have been urging, is the very key to the prison-house of egocentricity from which Daya seeks escape: it is the recognition that there is no irreducibly individual standpoint from which *Eros* can be understood in the first place; no *Nomos* that is not in some sense social, and so *Logos* is infused with the nomic and the erotic from the outset.

Another way to put this point is to see that freedom of any kind, and hence the possibility of participation in *Logos* and human life, involves not liberation from, but guidance by rules. Speaking and thinking are rule-governed; rational action is rule-governed, and so forth. But rules only emerge from customs—from social conventions that establish regularities, which regularities induce expectations, which expectations give rise to mechanisms of ensuring conformity, which in turn come to have normative force, allowing us to distinguish correct from incorrect

thought, speech or behavior. Freedom—or at least *human* freedom—therefore, is only possible in community.

But it is not only *Logos* that is essentially collective: *Eros* and *Nomos* are as well. For the desires that motivate us are not simply biological, although that is one of their roots. Since we are biologically social, we are wired by our evolutionary history and then shaped by our social environments to have desires that are essentially social. These include the bonds of affection that bind family, friends and associations, but also political desires, hopes for the future and religious commitments. And inasmuch as our behavior is governed not only by physical, biological or individual psychological laws, but also by social regularities, the *Nomos* that explains our life is also socially constituted.

This is why *Eros*, *Nomos* and *Logos* are so inseparably bound, and why *Eros* can mediate between *Nomos* and *Logos*. In this we can agree. But they are tied not, as Daya-ji would have it, at the level of the individual, but at the collective level. For this reason, we can see that Daya sets off on the right journey, but gets off on the wrong foot. If we begin by taking a communitarian view of human life, as for instance Hume does in the *Treatise*, or Candrakīrti does when he characterizes ordinary life as constituted by *lokavyāvahāra*, we do not face the problem of escaping the prison-house of egocentricity; we never enter it in the first place. Now, this is not to say that Daya is wrong to worry about egocentricity. It is, after all, a pervasive moral and social problem, and one to which philosophy is called to give a solution. But he may be wrong in his imagination of the structure of the problem.

The problem of egocentricity not, as is it is often painted—both in the West and in India—as the problem of the need for reasons to be moral given the *prima facie* rationality of egoism. If that were the problem, it would be insoluble, and no talk of the value of *Eros* would help us, for *Eros* itself would be individual. Instead, as Śāntideva argues in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, and as Hume argues in Book III of the *Treatise*, egoism is not even *prima facie* rational, given our essentially social nature and the absence of any intrinsic individual identity. The problem of

egocentricity arises from the irrational tendency to ignore this fact and to take our identity to be intrinsic, and our interests to be egoistic. It is therefore metaphysical re-education that is demanded, not moral re-education, if we are to cultivate a caring attitude in our culture. For this reason, Hume in the West, and the Buddhist tradition in Asia would have been better starting points for Daya in this essay than Kant and Saṅkara.

#### **6. The two truths, the secular transcendent and the transcendent mundane**

We can take this idea one step further before closing this dialogue with Daya-ji. At the end of this final essay of his illustrious career, he calls on us to recognize the secular nature of the transcendent and the transcendent nature of the mundane. As I noted above, this is undoubtedly an illusion to the *līlāvāda* of Sri Aurobindo that Daya so admired. But if we continue the line of thought I sketched above, we can see an alternative route to the same conclusion, one perhaps more conducive to Daya's own aims. That would be to continue to take the Buddhist route instead of the Vedānta route to *mokṣa*.

There are good reasons to take this alternative: the Vedānta route, attractive as it may be in virtue of its nondualistic union of the sacred and the mundane, particularly in its *līlāvāda* manifestation, still involves a commitment to a static absolute, and gives liberation a very transcendentalist, and somewhat non-secular spin, involved as it is with the notion of a *Brahman*. The Madhyamaka alternative is to see the transcendence of the mundane and the secularity of the transcendent in terms of the doctrine of the two truths as adumbrated by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.

On this view, we can distinguish between two truths—the conventional and the ultimate. But the ultimate is simply the emptiness of all phenomena of intrinsic nature; the fact that they are all interdependent; and so the fact that their only mode of existence is conventional. The ultimate reality of anything on this view is its merely conventional status. The two truths are, therefore, as Nāgārjuna argues in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, both distinct and identical: they are

intensionally distinct, inasmuch as to apprehend things as conventionally real and to apprehend them as empty are two different cognitive attitudes; but they are extensionally equivalent inasmuch as emptiness and conventional reality are each nothing but thoroughgoing interdependence.

This, as Śāntideva argues in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> chapters of *Bodhicāryāvātāra*, is the metaphysical foundation of an attitude of *mahākaruṇā*, which is the attitude towards which Daya-ji gestures as the close of the essay. And it rests on seeing that we, others and the world we live in are both empty of any intrinsic identity and conventionally real; that these are the same; that the transcendent nature of our existence is its merely conventional reality; and that this makes our lives both too ordinary to take ourselves too seriously and too infused with transcendent meaning to dismiss the significance of our own lives or those of others. This is the vision to which Daya-ji calls us. I join him in that call, but hope to have convinced you that there is a better route to it than the one he sketched.

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