

# BEINGNESS AND NON-BEING

[by Hugh M. Lewis](#)

We look out upon the world and we are a part of it and yet we are also separate from it. The side of us that finds itself in the world is our sense of being in the world, or our beingness. The side that remains separate is our sense of non-being in the world. The former seeks identity in the world, the latter finds the difference of identity in the world.

It is our beingness and our non-being in relation to the world that creates the dialectical tension in ourselves, a struggle between sides as to which shall at any one moment have control over our sense of identity. The state of being in the world is the creation of a fusion of differences such that though differences exist in the world they are transcended by common identity--they are rendered unimportant. Non-being in the world leads to a differentiation of identity from the world, such that differences become the basis of relationship and prevent their fusion, and self identity also becomes sundered between what remains in the world and what becomes alien from it.

We frequently switch between states of being and non-being in our world, depending upon circumstances. Insecurity or uncertain situations cause separation in order to protect our sense of identity from possible harm. In order to maintain this sense of separation we erect certain kinds of barriers, or 'ego defense mechanisms' which block or intermedate the flow of information or communication, between our inner selves and our outer world. It is behind such bulwarks that we can foster a sense of 'ego identity' that is supported by such defenses and which is essentially separate from the experience of the world and yet remains surrounded by and situated within the world.

Supplanted within the self, constructed of symbolisms and rationalizations by which we mediate experience of the world, we come to depend on our sense of ego as separate from the world and we invest energy into the maintaining of props and supports which

will help to preserve and promote it. Though spurious to our sense of being in the world, our ego's become important to us as if they were a genuine part of our own self identity--as something necessary and un-expendable in our lives.

And our sense of ego identity becomes like transparent bubble or a pair of tinted sun glasses which always distort our perception of the world and always bends the light of our vision. We grow accustomed to this sense of ego distortion, so accustomed we no longer notice the difference and come to think and act as if our mediated experiences were genuine and unadulterated instead of filtered and distorted. Our whole sense of perspective of reality, as it is mediated through our ego identity becomes different from the actual dimensions of experience, but we soon can no longer tell the difference, and we response to our distortions and representations of the world rather than to the world itself.

Our sense of ego identity becomes invisible to ourselves--we behave as if it were natural and true. But if it is so transparent and invisible to anyone else in the world--our ego identity become our see through clothes without which we would feel naked and probably quite ugly in the world. We wear them as if they were the outer layers of our skin, which cannot be shed except under the most personal of circumstances.

Other people who are wearing similar raiment over their identity fail to find genuine relationship with one another, but in their common alienation from natural experience they find a sense of communitas in which their different distortions of reality cancel one another out in interesting and sometimes complementary ways, and they find mutual satisfaction in the sharing of common fears, insecurities and defense.

To these people, those who walk with naked egos in the world are threatening, foolish, embarrassing and shaming of their own imputed morals. They become objects of derision, fear displacement and secret fascination. To those who walk nakedly or with very thin skins of ego adornment, those who wear the clothes of kings, sun glasses and live in little bubbles seem empty, hollow, false, ingenu, spurious, afraid and fundamentally distorted or slanted. Though those inside of bubbles seem translucent from

without, their clothes are neither invisible nor distorted--directing perhaps but never distorted.

The differences between beingness in the world and non-being in the world are the basis of a fundamental schism of human reality and between people in the world--it is a schism of mentality, experience, world views and ways of relating in the world. It is not a difference between introversion or extroversion, or between hyper-suggestible and hyper-resistant, between aggressive and regressive, or between projective and introjective, though all of these may be a component part of a common polythetic complex of basic differences.

\*\*\*\*\*

People who do not live in bubbles or who only walk in thin skins experience their worlds with only slight distortion and are not insulated from the harsh light of the sun or the cold of the night. They learn to live with direct, unmediated experience, without the need for props and supports to sustain their sense of identity in the world. Their identity is experience and experience is their identity, and there is little need for inflated ego in an essentially ego-less world.

The state of being in the world is one in which identity gained through relationship with the world, through unmediated experience of the world. Identity is essentially un-Academic, to the extent that acquired, formal knowledge structures experience in the way that ego identity structures it. The sense of self remains strong,, because it survives the vicissitudes if the world unprotected and un-insulated from its harsher, more threatening realities. It can be called the 'school of hard knocks' but it is more of a natural attitude of openness to the environment that becomes augmented by acquired skills in dealing with and adapting to changes in the environment. Knowledge, however abstract or concrete, can either help or hinder this adaptive functioning, but is in itself neutral in regard to how it is deployed by and individual.

While it might be said that the sense of being in the world is one of adapting to and negotiating with the environment, its resources, limitations and alterations, non-being in the world is primarily

involved with coping with and controlling the environment or of maintaining sense of ego in relation to the environment.

Beingness in the world and non-being entail two different strategies of adaptation to the environment, strategies which have different sets of consequences for both individual character and the social environment in which the individual is situated.

Non-being in the world works within environments according to pre-arranged designs or paradigms--attempting to superimpose structure upon the environment and to alter and render the environment conformable to this design. The design itself usually comes from the pre-conditioning of some previous environment in which the self became well adapted. It is the individuals attempt to maintain a consistency of environmental relations from this previous adaptive orientation in the ever emerging present. There is a dependency of the individual upon an internalized fixedness of pattern which is projected upon the environment in orderly ways. The sense of non-being, and the insecurity which underlies it, results from the degree of 'misfit' between the projection of the internalized sense of design and the actual order or environmental patterning encountered. This misfit results in 'cognitive dissonance' which forces upon the individual a decision of either to amend the internalized sense of order or else to attempt to amend or rearrange the environment. Attempts to do the latter lead to a need to establish 'control' or power in the environment and results in greater frustration and greater cognitive dissonance.

Another way of understanding this is to see that peoples prearranged plans and preconditioned paradigms set up in the individual certain standards of normality of expectation in relation to the environment--it is when changes which happen lead to a sense of 'relative deprivation' either actual or anticipated, that an acute sense of environmentally situated stress occurs which requires resolution through remedial action. The frustration producing attempt to maintain one's pre-designs at all costs leads to the formation of ego defense mechanisms and coping mechanisms which allows one to channel and deal with the stress that inevitably, continuously results. The ego perseverates in a high

state of tension which comes to infuse all experience with supernormal significance and larger than life importance.

Non-being is brought in to the present as an unchanging sense of past, of past sense of order and paradigm in the world which is uncompromising and 'absolute' in its existential coordinates.

Non-being can in a sense be referred to as a regressive state of being in the world--one which falls backwards into a nonexistent sense of the past by failing to move forward with an ongoing sense of the present.

Non-being leads to a 'set piece' planning strategy which renders responses to the environment typical and therefore predictable. The range of possible moves or alternative patterns of adaptation are laid out well in advance, as a set of rules, guidelines, instructions the form of which exists representationally in the environment. This kind of strategy attempts to account for and manage all possible kinds of change in the environment, frequently by attempting through control mechanisms to reduce the range of these possibilities.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beingness encounters the environment in a more flexible ad hoc and spontaneous manner which relies upon intuition and ad lib extemporaneous responses to meet and cope with environmental challenges and changes. The success of such an 'encounter' strategy depends upon the organismic and functional flexibility of the individual. It entails a foregoing of previous designs, sets of expectations and standards of normality. It entails an 'unlearning' of past patterns of adaptation such that their experiential elements remain, but without a necessary fixed pre-pattern or pre-arrangement which needs to be preserved. The ego identity is able to manage disorder even to thrive on chaos, at a minimum threshold of stress.

Such an orientation entails an open-mindedness to the ongoing, ever present environment. Experience is taken at face value, fully and as a matter of fact. Sense of identity depends upon maintaining a sense of environmental relation, of being able to change

appropriately and in a timely manner with fluctuations in the environment. Control over the environment is not sought so much as control over the self in changing environments. The locus of control is introjected into the self rather than projected out of the self. Loss of control results not from failure to maintain ones internalized sense of pattern in the external environment, but in the feelings of things getting out of control in failing to adapt to the environment.

\*\*\*\*\*

There may be extreme types but no 'true' types of only non-being or beingness, but there are many mixed types of people who are more or less one way and the other.

Non-being can be said to correlate with patterns of authoritarianism, while beingness corresponds with creativity. These types of complement one another and can be thought of as negatively correlated such that where there is a predominance of non-being and authoritarianism there will be a corresponding lack of beingness and creativity, and vice versa.

\*\*\*\*\*

The two types can be said to elicit two different varieties of experience of the world. For non-being the experience of the world is 'fear mediated' and one's responses are 'fear motivated'. Environmental changes are experienced as threatening to the established sense of order. There is a regressive sense of always lagging behind and of needing to keep up. There is a sense of deficiency which is rooted in the environment, the lack or need to make the environment better or perfect, more complete and finished. Stability of the environment, continuity of perceptual pattern from past to present, the congruence of experiences with previous expectations, are valued and are preferentially perceived. Deviations, anomalies, discontinuities are devalued and selectively filtered from experience or simply ignored. There is in the experience of non-being a pervasive feeling of basic, inexorable uncertainty and anxiety which is construed in the environment of the world, feelings which require secondary compensation.

For non-being, the world is experienced in a basically vicarious way, as something distant, indirect, alien, full of illusion and as separate from the self. The world is constituted by difference in a non-relative way such that any and all differences make the difference.

For beingness, the experience of environments is fundamentally challenging and stimulating. Change and difference are not repressed or devalued but are prized as 'interesting' and exciting or at least diverting. Identity is gained by experiential involvement with environments rather than through a fundamental sense of separation. Sense of self is experienced as incomplete in relation to the environment, demanding self fulfillment, actualization and expression. There is a feeling of being supported or uplifted by the environment. Diversity, anomaly and difference are values as the source of intrigue and expectation while continuity, similarity and sameness are seen as uninteresting and unchallenging.

For beingness in the world, the experience of environments is always immediate, direct, irreversible and different. Many differences exist but none make the difference.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is possible that non-being in the world is related to the psychological phenomena of field dependency--of depending upon fixed frames of reference by which to orient ones perspective of reality and experiences of the environment.

\*\*\*\*\*

Non-being is an inherently simplifying approach to human reality. It favors over diversity, conformity over deviance, simplicity to complexity. It is an approach which always seeks to interpret the world in simplified and simplifying paradigms.

Beingness is always complicating human reality--preferring diversity, difference and deviation over the opposed values. Complexity--in both the environments of the world and in the experience of these environments is preferred.

\*\*\*\*\*

Non-being is a specializing and focusing approach to human reality. It seeks a single set of repertoires and of patterns on which to model the world. It is a matter of become finely tuned to certain specific environments, of becoming exceptionally well adapted in narrow frames of reference and in environments with relative overall stability.

Beingness is a generalizing approach to many different environments. It is a jack of all trades but master of none. It is a broad based behavioral flexibility which readily transfers and moderates skills and experience from one environmental context to others. Beingness tends to approach the world in a generalizing and generalistic way.

Non-being is relatively restricted yet highly elaborated to many variables upon a single common theme. Beingness is relatively unrestricted yet unelaborated to a few variations upon many different themes.

\*\*\*\*\*

Part of the paradox of beingness and non-being is that both ways of experiencing reality lead to two different sets of long term consequences for adaptation and depending upon environments, one kind of adaptation is more suitable for some circumstances while the other is more suitable to other contraposed circumstances.

Non-being in the world fits best when the world has overall stability and is highly compartmentalized into many different niches. Specialization in narrow niches congers on non-being adaptive success over the generalization of beingness. It facilitates long term fixed focus and the exclusion of peripheral distractions.

Beingness works best in rapidly changing environments which are destructive of daily routines and 'sense of structure'--it fosters general but non-specific adaptation to a wide range of environmental niches and works best under the stress of change.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beingness and non-being are centrally tied to the psycho-geography of human experience and relationship with environments. People seek to maintain an experiential 'identity' of perceptions in the flow of events from one environmental context to the next. Rapid changes, death and separation tend to overload and break down the individual's capacity for dealing with change, leading to maladaptive relations between self identity and its environmental context. In psycho-geography, there is clearly no separating the external, environmental identity of the self and the internal psychological identity of the environmental context. Unconscious becomes rooted in context, and context becomes rooted in the unconscious.

\*\*\*\*\*

The principle kinds of environments in which beingness and non-being find reinforcement are in social environments of interpersonal and self-other or individual-group or group-group relations, and natural environments of the world.

Social environments which are characterized as 'in group' oriented and 'intensive' are reinforcing of non-being. Rank Order Hierarchy and Status Role identity are nomothetic social contexts which foster and are fostered by non-being--the self as compared to significant reference others, or as constituted by the psychologically internalized relations of the social environment. Such environments foster a sense of security and social stability based upon a traditional conservatism and conformism to a given, narrow range of values or a focused group orientation.

Long term existence in relatively slow changing natural environments also fosters a sense of non-being of identity. Cultures which are fixed, sui generis and relatively secluded and immobile also lead to a cultural orientation based upon the elaboration of non-being--superstition, prohibition, animism, ritualization of sacred and secular life.

Social environments which are 'out group' oriented and 'extensive' as 'outside of any center of power' are reinforcing of beingness as a

strategy of adaptation to randomly fluctuating social environments. Sojourners crossing cultural boundaries and regularly having to 'make the strange familiar' must cultivate a sense of being in the world in order to avoid the otherwise inexorable and debilitating culture shock. Strangers and marginal types are also more generalistically unfocused and are characterized by their beingness in the world.

The poet, the artist, the sleuth--whoever sharpens our perception, tends to be anti-social; rarely well adjusted, he cannot go along with currents and trends. A strange bond often exists among anti-social types in their power to see environments as they really are. This need to interface, to confront environments with a certain anti-social power, is manifest in the famous story, "The Emperor's New Clothes". 'Well adjusted courtiers, having vested interests saw the Emperor as beautifully appointed. The anti-social brat, unaccustomed to the old environment clearly saw that the Emperor 'ain't got nothing on'. The new environment was clearly visible to him. (Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*, 1967)

It follows that beingness comes from the confrontation of diverse ranges of natural environments or regions of great environmental diversity, and that displaced cultures or diffused cultural orientations that have witnessed or suffered a great deal of mobility and transition should be more promotive of beingness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Certain aspects of beingness of the new generation are in conflict with the sense of non-being of the older generation--nonconformity to certain traditional values, creation of new cultural environments and orientations, general lack of social responsibility that goes unlearned except by negative reinforcement and punishment. It also follows that certain aspects of the non-being of the new generation are in conflict with the beingness of the older generation--roller coasters versus strolls in the parks, daydreams versus disillusionment, self centered pride versus hard won humility.

As we grow older, we tend to trade off our sense of being and non-being in the world for another sense of non-being and being in the

world, and this becomes the basis of the perennial conflict between the generations.

\*\*\*\*\*

There is a fundamental difference between the professional specialist who is well adapted to a fixed environmental context, highly elaborated set of behavioral repertoires and the 'amateur generalist' who is never afraid of trying out new lines and is usually pretty good but rarely superlative. Amateurs often offer a sense of freshness which stuffy, tried and true professionals usually lack. Amateurs sometimes invent or discover things too obvious but quite apparent to professionals.

Professionals come to know and exhaust the many different profiles of a single occupational or adaptive horizon--their inventory of experiences focus upon the complete range of variations of a common line or theme of activity or involvement. The amateur shotguns experience over many profiles of several different horizons and the experiences gained in each add to a general repertory which may be applied to still others.

\*\*\*\*\*

There is another paradox between beingness and non-being in adaptation to environments. The structure of ego identity of non-being seems strong and impervious to change, yet it is founded upon spurious foundations which can suffer sudden, complete breakdowns or go through its own 'conversion' experiences when its mediating function finally becomes undone by environmental changes. The high level of environmental stresses confers upon non-being a kind of hyper-suggestibility and susceptibility to environmental or social influences which seems counter intuitive to its show of changeless imperviousness. The stolid character of ego identity can appear quite hypocritically strong and enduring like a rock and yet be actually quite manipulable by subtle influences which are threatening and fear inducing. Unmasked, the essential selflessness of such egos become the hapless and helpless bodies of mass oriented, mindless crowd behavior. They become the soulless entranced spectators of tragic accidents. As much as these people attempt to control their environments, they are also

controlled by their environments. Their relationship with the environment is characterized by psychological interdependency such that the relative status of the ego, its sense of expectation or deprivation, is critically influenced by changes in the environment.

It is this paradox which confers upon these people a kind of 'change of wardrobe' chameleonness which allows them to change ego identities when environmental constraints makes it convenient for them to do so. They exchange their fixedness of being and purpose for a 'fitness' of new internalized environments.

Beingness on the other hand, seems to have on the surface an apparent flexibility, a capacity for its skin to change colors with the changing seasons of its environment,, but underneath its chameleonness it remains the same chameleon. It fosters an integrity of being which continues through adaptation and fitting into new environments--this integrity of self identity crosses many boundaries of environmental variation and change without breakdown or undergoing a metamorphosis of being. This is a basic paradox of being, for it is ever changing and yet always the same basic identity.

\*\*\*\*\*

The importance of understanding the distinction between Beingness and non-being extends beyond the characteriological and experiential differences and have are of greater consequences in accounting for fundamental social differences and general phenomena of humankind's adaptation to their world. It has come to influence our sciences and our modern world views.

Culture history can be said to be in part of study of human beingness and relative non-being as it becomes manifest in the world. As such culture history opens us up to qualitative and substantial varieties of human experience and general phenomena which are mostly unavailable to more scientific approaches to the study of human reality. It allows us to frame answers for certain kinds of questions and problems of human reality which are otherwise unanswerable or difficult to contextualize.

One critical difference is between the study of the human being as 'an object of knowledge' and the learning about human experiential realities as a 'subject of understanding'. The former, statistical approach defines human being as non-being, in terms of countable objects or components, in terms of numbers and things. This approach reifies human beingness and transforms human identity into 'thingness' that is 'objectified' by becoming 'de-subjectified'. The second approach deals with human beingness in subject terms of phenomenological experience and resists the reification and numerical transmutation of the irreducibly qualitative and holistic in its original state. The second approach transforms human beingness into 'metaphor' for which to understand a human's interrelations with the environment. Being transformed into a name or a 'word' has other consequences for human identity, whether it is nominal or verbal, or literary or oral, but the looseness of interpretation and connotation preserves a sense of the generality and contextuality which inheres naturally in human experience.

\*\*\*\*\*

Erich Fromm makes a distinction between authoritarian conscience, which he describes as the 'superego' of the internalized law of the father, and later, of society and the 'humanistic conscience' which is not internalized authority but an inner 'voice that calls us back to ourselves'--'the human core common to all men, that is, certain basic characteristics which cannot be violated or negated without serious consequences'. This humanistic conscience is rooted in the traditions of religious philosophy. He goes on to assert that the central moral problematic of modern humankind is the reification of human identity. 'Man is not a thing, and if you try to transform him into a thing, you damage him.' Power reifies human beingness into non-being, turning a human being into a corpse.

...A corpse is a thing. Man is not. Ultimate power--the power to destroy--is exactly the ultimate power of transforming life into a thing. Man cannot be taken apart and put together again; a thing can be. A thing is predictable; Man is not. A thing cannot create, Man can. A thing has no self. Man has. Man has the capacity to

say the most peculiar and difficult word in our language, the world 'I'...

...to understand our neighbor and ourselves--is to understand a human being who is not a thing. And the process of this understanding cannot be accomplished by the same method in which knowledge in the natural sciences can be accomplished. The knowledge of man is possible only in the process of relating ourselves to him...Ultimate knowledge cannot be expressed in thought or words...And you can never exhaust the description of a personality, of a human being, in his full individuality; but you can know him in an act of empathy, in an act of full experience, in an act of love...

What, then, are the ethical demands of our day? First of all to overcome this 'thingness'...to overcome our indifference, or alienation from others, from nature and from ourselves. Second, to arrive again at a new sense of 'I-ness', of self, of an experience 'I am' rather than succumb to the automaton feeling in which we have the illusion that 'I think that I think' when actually I do not think at all but am rather like someone who puts on a record and thinks he plays the music of the record.

'Medicine and the Ethical Problems of Modern Man' Erich Fromm, The Dogma of Christ--and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture.

This difference of beingness and non-being is related to the fundamental schism between the 'two cultures' of Academia, the Sciences and the Humanities and the critique of the 'anal obsessive' Weltaangshaung of science as being unable to deal impersonally with the personal and its comparison with more humanizing traditions rooted in religious philosophy, has been noted by such people as Abraham Maslow who makes a distinction between the nomothetic, deficiency motivated knowledge of science based upon the control of uncertainty in the environment and idiographic, love inspired knowledge which seeks involvement with the environment.

\*\*\*\*\*

Subject-object relations in the world are directly related to differences in self- other relations in our social worlds. Consideration of 'self-other' relations in the world involves Martin Buber's critical distinction between 'I-thou relation' and 'I-it relation'. In the life of dialogue we can choose to either meet face to face what challenges us in our environments and refer to it as 'you' or else we can stand apart from 'it' and view it as an object. Each of these different attitudes involves a different sense of self, or I, one being characterized by beingness and 'I-it' being characterized by non-being. The self of beingness is involved in an exclusive and unique relationship, unlike any other. The self of non-being is one that 'experiences, assesses, compares, sums up, analyzes and learns'. No preconceptions, anticipations, desires or purposes interfere between I and you--such a relationship is only possible when such pre-dispositions have been vanquished. 'I-thou' always involves reciprocity. From relation it sometimes leads to 'encounter'--'the high peak of relational life, the lightening flash which suddenly illuminates the way'.

As for what is precisely meant by encounter: whereas relation is the unilateral recognition of a vis-à-vis as you on the part of an I, encounter is what happens when two I's step into relation simultaneously. Encounter is the coming together into existential communion of two I's and two you's. encounter is a privilege that I receive. I enter into your-relation of my own accord and thereby fulfill the 'act of my being, my being's act' but encounter is not done by me. 'You encounter me by grace; it is not found by seeking... You encounters me. But I enter into immediate relation with it...'

You-relation ...is the very 'cradle of real life'. And what is 'real life?' All real life is encounter. Is life unreal then? ...History shows that it is out of I-you and I-you encounter that the truly creative, redemptive and revelatory acts draw their being. It is both from the mighty encounters and from the little encounters between I and you that new creations, new redemptions and new revelations spring...(Martin Buber by Pamela Vermes)

This understanding of the difference between beingness and non-being in self-other relations recognizes the primary importance of

'encounter' as a state of 'reflexiveness' or 'reflexivity' in relationship that comes from the doubling of mirrors dissolving boundaries in reality, opening out onto endless possibility and becoming 'identity with a difference'. Furthermore, the connection between the reflexivity of encounter in self-other relationships and creativity is recognized. The possibility of encounter of the self with the world is the wellspring of human creation.

\*\*\*\*\*

The inherent reflexiveness of self-other relations entails that we find ourselves in others, as reflections or representations of the self, and that we find others in ourselves, as their reflection and representation. This leads to consideration of the inherently interpersonal horizon of the self identity and other identity--a self-other meta-relation--such that neither self component nor other component is complete when separate or alone from the meta-relation.

The interpersonal horizon of the self and the other is composed of 'bundles of things'--traits, experiences, memories, skills, feelings, etc. Both self and other identity is defined polythetically rather than monothetically. I or thou are not just a single organismic entity, a name with a complete personality attached. Both of us are a composite of many different things. Furthermore, the things within us are integrated by sets of interrelations between these things. We are composites of a range of variation of different images, but are found in reflection and representation in reflexive 'inter-identity' between self and other

When self and other enter into interrelationship, there is an 'unpacking' of things and their interrelations and things are shared, compared and contrasted between self and other. Common things and their relations are the common ground for mutual identity--differences between things become the basis for the irrelation of non-being--the separation of difference--defining the self other meta-relation in terms of differences--reifying the other into an object of differences to be 'studied'. Everyone has something in common with everyone else, but the more in common with identity, the stronger is the meta-relation between people--the greater and more intense the 'encounter' between self and other.

But defining meta-relations exclusively in terms of shared sameness or difference leads to reification in both directions.

This sense of exclusive reification is the basis of spurious self-other identification and meta-relation. Meta-relation takes a life of its own--it is the 'life of dialogue'. This life has a direction ultimately beyond the control of either self or other and will become interpreted different by both self and other on the basis of their different 'personality matrices' of bundles of traits and their interrelations. Sharing a meta-relation leads to a generalization and 'fusion' of differences--to encounter--over time such that the personality matrices of self and other are brought into closer alignment over time. Encounter in meta-relation opens up new possibilities for growth and inter-identification between self and other. People learn how to react to, reject, accommodate, tolerate or assimilate the differences they find between one another and vice versa.

In asymmetrical meta-relations the reciprocity and interchange is more one directional--self or other attempt to control the direction of the life of the meta-relation. Reflexivity is impossible under such circumstances and such a relationship is the basis of an externalized form of power in the world.

Symmetrical relationships based upon evenness of 'inter-change' or reciprocity is based upon shared similarities and mutual identification between self and other. Relationships which are asymmetrical are based primarily upon differences between people--there is no 'fusion of difference' but only 'separation of horizons.' Similarities tend to be denied or rejected, withdrawn and these result in spurious 'irrelation'.

In spurious irrelation, self and other are separate and one is transformed into a thing, an instrument, or object of power of the other.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the reflexiveness of self-other meta-relation, there is a process of internalization or identification of the 'ego' of the values of the meta-relation--the other is incorporated within the sense of self.

Often the internalization of this meta-relation, which begins in past or remote primary social relationships between parent and child or between siblings results in the intrinsic incorporation of difference and 'contradiction' such that self identity of the resulting ego is compartmentalized on the basis of inimical differences. This leads to front and back regions of the personality of the ego, to 'top dog' and 'under dog' intra-physic conflicts between the ego and the self.

When our inter-relational mechanisms which serve to preserve the integrity of or sense of being breakdown under the stress of conflict, there occurs a disintegration of personality--the bundles of things no longer cohere into a general pattern of the self--they do not fit together anymore.

In or self-other meta-relations, we come to 'work out' or project these differences of ego identity upon the relationship, which entails a 'reification' of the other of the meta-relation as a thing. Such a projection is the recognition or imputation of the 'over emphasis' of difference in inter-human relationships--differences which are actually repressed within the self. In such cases, we are largely unable to have a genuine encounter experiences with people--they are narcissistic objects of our own projections, they are objects of reflection, but not reflexiveness. Our meta-relations and our 'inter-identity' in our social world becomes one predominantly of 'non-being'--spurious, separate and alienating.

It is through learning how to engage in genuine self-other meta-relations, to unlearn difference within ourselves and between ourselves and the world, and to 'encounter' our world that we can resolve our intra-physic conflicts rooted to an unreal past and which keep our sense of self always imprisoned in a world of dependent, asymmetrical object relations. We actually gain self control over our own identities by releasing our projective need to control or be controlled by our worlds.

\*\*\*\*\*

It must be understood that interpersonal differences and similarities are not so much real or actual as much as they are ascribed, imputed on the basis of metaphorical connection, symbolic identification or analogical evaluation. We are looking

symbolically, hence reflexively, for ourselves in others, and for others in ourselves. And it is from this search and this 'inter-identification' that our sense of ego and sense of self ultimately depend. It is the analogical nature of these differences and similarities in meta-relation which is the basis of psychic meaning and being in the world.

The other becomes the reference of significance for the self--what is called the significant reference other. If focusing upon similarities, the other becomes an object of empathetic emulation--subordinating self to authority of the other. To focus upon or emphasize differences exclusively in meta-relation is to concomitantly ignore similarities and to disallow similarities. It is to assert one sense of ego identity, or its authority, over the other. The other becomes negative 'counter-reference' significant other. In either case, the exclusive emphasis of either similarities or differences leads to a nomothetic pigeon holing of the identity of the other into the personality matrix of the self. Non-being of the meta-relation is the result, as in neither case is encounter with the full humanness or identity of the other as self recognized reflexively.

Focusing exclusively upon either differences or similarities is a social distancing mechanism necessary for the protection of ego identity. It is necessary for maintaining a reference relationship in which the other is a reflective object of the self and not a real person, or separate sense of self. The other person is merely a symbol, but not one which stands for itself. Masks, personas, assertion of authority, control and power, enforced anonymity or alienation are all social distancing mechanisms employed in defense of the ego. On the other hand, focusing upon similarities and differences in terms of sympathetic and empathetic resonances within the self leads to idiographic 'understanding' of the subjective other such that differences in time are worked out, fused, or tolerated. Difference remains, but becomes unimportant in terms of real difference and similarity.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is to be seen by extension that if a majority or the predominant part of social interrelationships in the world are based on non-

being and are therefore spurious irrelation, then the social reality which is produced by the networks of these spurious relations will also be spurious. Such a social atmosphere will be characterized by its impersonalness and alienation, by the cultivation of front regions which mask the hidden networks of back regions and will foster asymmetrical irrelations between people. Such societies will in turn foster and promote 'spurious' social relationships and socialize personalities which internalize 'difference'.

There are no 'purely' spurious or genuine cultures or relations or people--there are many mixed types of more or less spurious or genuine.

Sapir's dualism consists of a single continuum defined on the basis of how well a given culture provides a suitably adaptive environment for the individual. Genuine culture begins with the concerns of the individual needs while functioning as an integral and meaningful whole--'a richly varied and yet somehow unified and consistent attitude toward life in which no part of the general functioning brings with it a sense of frustration or misdirected or unsympathetic effort. (1924, page 410) Spurious culture is extraneous to the individual, cultivating an attitude of non-participation and alienation. While the genuine culture serves to nurture the creative potential of human beings, the spurious culture is inherently frustrating, fragmentary and wasting of human endeavor and sentiment.' (Grindal, 1979, page 13) (Lewis, unpublished manuscript, 1989)

\*\*\*\*\*

It follows from this that cultural orientation which promote beingness in identity lead to a creative fluorescence of 'civilization' in which the individual potentialities of the human being become promoted and 'nurtured' through genuine meta-relation and is allowed to express itself in the world in terms of the realization of greater creative possibility. It also follows that in civilizations in which spurious irrelation prevails, such personal realization through meta-relation becomes systematically frustrated and stemmed from further development through interpersonal irrelation. There is a net loss of creative productivity of people, and

a net increase of authoritarianism and its social effects in social relations.

Alfred Kroeber associated the growth and high points of development with culture historical developments of characteristic 'style type patterns' as well as with the frequency of culture historical personalities or of 'genius' of a reflective of the particular style of civilization. The determining factor of the appearance of bursts or clusters of genius in the course of a civilization culture historical development is due largely to the social context which either fosters or allows this rise of genius, or which systematically frustrate or prevent its occurrence. Culture historical contexts which become spurious tend to prevent the growth and development of stylistic genius of civilization, while genuine meta-relations within such contexts encourage and protect such development.

\*\*\*\*\*

We have now an important linkage between individual experience of reality, between beingness and non-being, and the growth, development and demise in culture historical process of human civilization. Which comes first, the individual or the context of the individual's development, is largely a hen and egg question. They come together in a dialectic of human identity. What is important is to recognize how the statistical frequency and relative structural predominance of certain kinds of 'encounters' or face to face meta-relations, work consistently through extended networks and 'social movements' to turn the wheels of culture history and to describe the processual patterning of the rise and fall of human civilizations.

We have in this a culture historical account of our own civilization--the promotion of the rugged individualist style of civilization through many genius who invented a whole new world and now the rise of a pervasive and predominant sense of non-being in social relationships which tends to frustrate and prevent the rise of the very kind of genius upon which its greatness was founded.

\*\*\*\*\*

The dialectic of mind and world view are collective representations of the individual human being's experience of beingness and non-being in the world. Such experience is primarily subjective and phenomenological in the sense that it is derived from the recognition of one's self in the world, of the sentient possibilities of other's beingness, and of the dilemmas of death and separation and inexorable facts of life. It is subjective in the sense that it is a non-absolute and relative, yet non-arbitrary condition of human existence--recognition and understanding of the sense of identity and difference of beingness and non-being is relative, contextual dimensionality which has no external or a-priori standards of frames or references. It casts human existence, individually and collectively, in a shadow of indeterminacy such that there are few fixed, unchanging points of reference by which to anchor experience, understand change or about which to configure meaning in the world.

Beingness and non-being are a contrapuntal dialectic which informs human existence with meaningfulness and a meaning--they are the essential counterpoint of or mythologies and our enacted social dramas. Being and non-being stand in unending opposition to one another and it is the dialectical tension of this contradiction which creates the antinomial and paradoxical ground of meaning in the world and which allows for transcendence of the dialectics through symbolic synthesis.

But beingness and non-being have a very different connotations for meaning in the world--following one way or the other has very interesting and problematic implications for how individuals and collectivities come to organize experience, mediate environments and structure their world view, and both lead down different pathways to changing which has very different consequences for humankind and the world.

Individuals may lead a life of beingness while the collective of which that person is a part may lead a different way of non-being, and vice versa. Though interconnected the dialectics of being for the individual is different than the dialectics of being for the collective--the way of life of the collective may lead to the

individual's life ways, but the individuals way of life may also lead the life ways of the collective.

\*\*\*\*\*

The dialectics of Mind, of being and non-being, and of Mindness and world view are founded upon the basic principles of identity and difference--principles of relation between the term and the thing, subject and object, self and other the signified and the signifier and the metaphor and the thing for which it stands. The dialectic of identity and difference informs all other dialectics as being between 'collectivizing/relativizing'--contrapuntal directions and tendencies of understanding. Identity and difference are inseparable, as identity must be defined by anti-thetical contraposition to relative difference, and vice versa. The principles of identity/difference are articulated quite simply and logically by the Theory of Sets. The principle of identity is expressed in terms of being; difference expresses non-being. Identity comes through the recognition of similarities and differences, and their fusion upon a common horizon of meta-relation. Differences comes through the separation of similarities from differences and the exclusive emphasis of each to the neglect of the other.

### DIALECTIC OF SELF AND OTHER

Individuality is the 'idea' of Mind and is the synthesis of a dialectic between 'self centered identity' and 'other de-centered difference'--or the self defined idiographically in conjunction with the sense of personality development--biographically and longitudinally organized as a sense of inner directed continuity through time and across space and the 'otherness' of the self defined nomothetically as a bindle of relationships to other things and ultimately with other people, or other 'selves' in the world.

Self in the world is defined diachronically as motion through time. Other of the world is defined synchronically as distance across space. The dialectic between self and other is a dialectic between time and space as well. Translation of self into other and of other into self is concomitantly the inter-translation between space and time. The dialectic between self and other is the spatio-temporal manifestation of Mind.

Sense of self is the expression of the holothetic principle of Mind--'idea' expressed in terms of other 'ideas' which remain extrinsically defined in terms of other ideas of the world. The paradox of the dialectic is to synthetically transcend the dialectic while remain extrinsically defined in terms of other ideas of the world. The paradox of the dialectic is to synthetically transcend the dialectic while remaining within its circle. The function of a meta-language is to allow this transcendence.

In this regard it is vitally important to note that the social sciences are largely, almost exclusively, the science of 'other identity' and so cannot transcend the dialectic of individuality. To 'de-center' the importance of the 'sense of self' in a systematic way is to attempt to subjugate the self to the dictates of the social order, and to define Mind in exclusive terms of social organization. It places the momentousness of Mind to the service of the momentum of culture history and reduces the importance of the self as the manifestation of Mind. In essence it constitutes a systematic denial of Mind as an ordering principle of human reality. Put another way, it constitutes a denial of beingness in the world by the affirmation of non-being of the world in terms of 'becoming' in a Perfect State of Mind.

It is not an accident that social sciences legitimate themselves in constructs and languages which are mostly spatial and synchronic in reference--the aim is a Logos of Perfect Space/Time in which disorder, randomness and uncertainty become minimized.

This emphasis upon other-identity has important implications for the role of the social sciences within a culture historical framework. The recovery of Mind depends upon the recovery of the sense of self from the anti-thetical principle of otherness.

## BEINGNESS AS A NATURAL STATE OF MIND

Beingness gains its identity in a dialectic with 'non-being'. Beingness identifies the reflexive identity of self and mind as an idea and a 'meta-relation' with the world.

Logos as 'natural systems theory' states that 'mind' as the natural logos of the human being has occurred as an order of reality which is guided by its own reasons--reasons which are basically 'meta-

physical'. Yet meta-physicality of mind, of the 'beingness' of humankind, must have had its evolutionary origins in humankind's natural adaptation to selective forces in past environments. And as an adaptive mechanism, mind came into being long before humankind invented civilization in the historical sense--it came into being in the heads of individual's as they struggled for survival in hostile environments. It came into being among people whose only sense of social solidarity must have been 'natural' and 'mechanical'--who acted or had to learn to act, as individual 'culture bearers' rather than as 'organic specialists' whose adaptive success and survival came to depend more upon the success and survival of their 'social system' than upon their own individual state of being.

Neither were these primeval human beings very interested in the notions of progress or of 'becoming' or of perfection--being in its dialectic with possible non-being was an earnest, everyday problem of survival. The mind of human being developed to its full ecological and evolutionary significance long before the development of the civilized contexts for understanding 'ecology' and 'evolution'.

Humankind has long existed in a 'primitive' state of beingness for a much longer span of time than we now know how to imagine. Perhaps mind as a culture historical phenomena had been in a long slumber before finally 'awakening' to its own self consciousness. We will never know.

Beingness as natural state of mind exists in the fear of death, in the daily confrontation with disorder and disintegration. As such there was no significant sense of 'becoming' except perhaps in the most mystical and magical of meanings.

## REASONS FOR BEING

Many different reasons for being have been given--some better than others. Many are just lies, other sophisticated rationalizations 'in service of the ego'--others reasons are more pragmatic or more philosophical and others have been mandated by socio-economic survival or political struggle and confrontation. Systems always seem to have their own reasons, and if not, eventually will. Reason

for being is not any or all the reasons we may give for our being--being in and of the world has its own reasons separable from the ones we may bring to it. Reason for being does not wait for our understanding of it, nor do our substitute reasons ever replace it. Reason (and unreason) for being is not necessarily 'rational' or 'logical'--reasons for being happens around our own ideas and in the absence of our intentions and plans.

But reason for being is not a divine spirit or a guiding force. It is not fate, nor destiny, nor the will of God or Allah, or even the action of logos or the science of truth. It is not an essence reducible by scientific or philosophic explanation--no psychoanalyst can mine its treasures or discover its depths in the individual psyche.

Difficult to put into words, it is more like willpower, but not unconscious or conscious motivation. It is collective in being shared, but it is not an internalized superego, a phenomena of mass movements or social hysteria. It is the function of mind, and the human expression of logos. It is not the deep, generative structure of structuralism. It is similar to the Dao that cannot be put into words or the way that isn't the way. It is not the same for all people, it varies with individual differences. It is an integrity of being that makes its own sense. It is a synergism and an encompassing totality arising from the fact of being itself rather than preceding or following it. It predetermines nothing except itself, and is predetermined by nothing but itself.

We cannot know it completely, objectively or however remotely, because we cannot separate ourselves from it, nor isolate others from it. It is the forest and we are the trees of the forest. It expresses itself through us but not because of us. We are its vehicles, its vessels, carrying its essence and substance into our future.

Though reason for being is not our reasons, it ultimately informs them with reason. Though we cannot control it, or comprehend it in any sense, we can come to know of it and understand some of it and describe what of it we know and understand. And whether it may be scientific or not is irrelevant. It is because we are and we are because it is, and just that is enough. Knowing and understanding it is enough in itself--its relevance is self evident.

We will know it when we find it, because it will know us and have fond us.

Reason for being is the principle of mind. The study of culture history is the attempt to generalistically excoriate the principle of mind and our reason for being from the phenomena of everyday experience in the world.

## NONBEING AND THE RATIONALITY OF BECOMING

The rationality of becoming is the scientific substitute for being. But no matter how progressive our rationality for becoming may be, however fulfilled or fulfilling in our lives, it never reveals our reason for being. It covers over the dialectic between being and non-being by incorporating the principle of change and the control of change, into its unfolding dialectic and thus makes non-being the basis of human identity. The rationality of becoming fails to transcend the dialectics of being and non-being but reverses its counterpoint.

The evolution of mind arose as the result of the logos of change. The rationality of becoming can be constrained as the principle of non-being of change which is directed or controlled--a sense of superimposing a pattern of structure of a non-existent future upon the sense of the present. Reason for being transcends the dialectic of being and non-being by an acceptance of the inevitability of change.

The rationality of becoming leads to a denial of the reason for being--an attempted escape from its inevitability, a desperate effort to purposefully forget it or to 'unlive it'. It attempts to substitute for reason for being in its own rationality of becoming something other than what one is. Its vicariousness searches for its own reason for being in the non-being of the possibilities of change itself.

Rationality of becoming lives in the world but is not of the world in the way that reason for being is. It serves a purpose of change. The principle of change becomes the principle of progressive evolution--change with a purpose.

## CHANGE AND NONBEING

Part of our reason for being is the maintenance of a sense of continuity of consciousness through time, an identity of perception, a sense of constant, stable self. Though we watch ourselves gradually change, we like to think that there remains something fundamental which does not alter with circumstances or change with the seasons. It is vital to our being even though we cannot explain exactly what it is.

If there is a universal principle or a logos, then it must be the principle of universal change--everything changes, constantly, gradually, rapidly, alternating, growing, expanding, moving, eroding, even our mind. Changes pervades our every and very experiences of the cosmos. Whether change in the universe is evolutionary or not remains to be discovered--it only seems so ordered in our locale. Universal change guarantees us that nothing remains the same forever, that all things are indeed temporary and ephemeral.

The observation of change, the ability to notice and to know change, both creates sense of being as somewhat resistant or defying change, and simultaneously challenges this sense by the possibility and the inevitability of non-being. Being and non-being rise in the world together as part of the dialectical mediation of change.

Perhaps it is our name, or our social and natural history which produces us a sense of continuity through time, inspite of changes. We recognize our reason for being in our offspring, and see the challenges to its survival in the death of friends and family. We may call it love, or nature, but we do not seek to analyze it or explain it. We act and make decisions on its behalf because we are a part of it and it is a part of us. But always we measure it by comparison with non-being in the world--that changes that go around us and through us which suggests our own impermanence and our own ephemerality.

## NONBEING AND VICARIOUSNESS

Recognition of the possibility of non-beingness and the denial of beingness leads also to the capacity for vicariousness--the substitution of possible states of non-beingness for beingness. Vicariousness is a qualified form of non-beingness as it covers over the sense of separation of death by the false sense of belonging derived from the imagined experience of another person's beingness. Vicariousness comes from our social identity, our knowledge of the beingness of the other as an experience of our possible non-beingness.

The importance of the pathology of vicariousness in the constitution of the modern mind should not be underestimated--as modern beingness has become defined by the vicariousness of other identity to the point of loss of beingness in self identity. Part of this social vicariousness of non-beingness becomes expressed as a 'cult of individuality'--of the over emphasis upon the distinctiveness and importance of the self vis-à-vis other identity. The media promotes this pathology of vicariousness as a mechanism of the 'system' in the de-personalization of the beingness for the sake of its perpetuation.

The principle of becoming is a special form of vicariousness. Becoming is also a form of non-beingness which becomes a substitute for beingness. Becoming substitutes the vicariousness of the other with the non-beingness of the self as the embodiment or progressive realization of a rational ideal--the substitution of the idea of natural mind by the ideal of perfect mind.

It follows that a modern world built upon the principle of progress incorporating the principle of becoming and the modern mind of this principle of becoming, is a pathological world founded upon the vicariousness of non-being and the denial of beingness.

## DEATH AND NONBEINGNESS

Non-beingness is expressed symbolically as death and separation. Because death is the inevitable and ultimate consequence of life, the entire process of living can be looked upon as a gradual process of dying--every minor parting or permanent transition in life has a sense of separation and becomes a resonance of death. Death is a

natural end state of life, and separation is a natural process of living.

Death and separation are the expressions of the principle of inexorable change in life--everything changes in time, and these changes over the long run are irreversible and permanent.

Death is the final, most irreversible change of living. It represents a great unknown. It is the only absolute horizon of our understanding and knowledge beyond which our consciousness cannot carry us.

Because it represents symbolically the unknown, death is the universal source of fear and the cause of anxiety over change and separation. Such fear and anxiety pervade our life, and are normal conditions of existence.

Pathology comes from the inability to deal with these fears and feelings of anxiety as natural states of living--leading to their denial or to the 'fear of fear' and to the anxiousness about anxiety. Denial of death as a pathological way of dealing with it leads to its covert sublimation in other ways--an unconscious symbolic preoccupation and fascination with dying and separation. Fear of fear and anxiousness about anxiety are part of this unconscious denial--obsessive expressions of this fear and anxiety which become inordinately powerful and suggestive in the daily rituals of living.

The possibility of the denial of death comes from the recognition and possibility of denial of beingness--as a consequence of mind it comes from the self recognition of the dialectic between beingness and non-beingness. It is concomitant to the reflexive identity of self and mind. Like Versus and Falsus, the ability to apprehend the identity of truth, (or the truth of identity) always also opens up the possibility of untruth and non-identity. We cannot have knowledge and understanding of truth and beingness without the understanding of the possibility of untruth and non-beingness.

## BEING AND BECOMING

A human being is more than a bundle of traits--more than behavior plus mentality, more than a set of psychological processes

(perception, learning, memory, thought, intelligence, skill, communication, motivation, emotion, personality) more than a name, a wardrobe, a creature with a home life and a work life, more than a 'culture bearing animal' or 'symbolic creature'. A human being is more than a body with a soul and a mind and a shadow--a human being is more than a 'thing'. Human being is a living state, a super organic condition, a synergism of reality, a unity of reality and undivided totality of experience. He cannot so much address it as be addressed by it. We cannot know it so much as be known by it--it always encompasses our comprehension--always 'something more' than our 'nothing but's'. Human being exists in the world and happens of the world.

To say that 'human being' is an oxymoron of knowledge and understanding--it compels an unnatural kind of self reflexivity, an apperceptive awareness of our own being in and of the world--trying to 'objectify' the intrinsically 'subjective'. We say 'well of course human being, what else?' Indeed what else can there be? To subtract either the human or the being from the equation of experience--to inform knowledge or understanding 'as if' either were unnecessarily absent, is a falsification of actual experience. Of course we can imagine with a high degree of scientific certainty that should all humankind perish in turn, the universe would continue to exist without us, but our essential experience of it would have vanished into nothingness and along with us, the knowledge that there is a universe. There is no point quibbling.

Perhaps it is better to say 'beingness' instead of just 'being' to convey the 'sense' of 'state' or 'condition', to better emphasize its unequivocal experientiality or self evident essence. It is perhaps the only true synthetic a-priori which necessarily comes before everything else. Being has always been enough.

And yet in our world dominated by scientific rationality it is no longer simply 'to be' as a unquestionable given, as an uncontestable 'fact' of experience itself. (and it probably never really, absolutely has been) Being human in the modern sense has come to mean much more than simply human being. The principle of progress and its premises of perfectionism make it imperative that we will 'become' something more than we 'are' or have 'unbecome'

something that we 'were' before. The need to 'become' has its own 'superhuman methods' and its own 'superhuman madness'. And 'becoming human' is never quite enough.

## PERFECT MIND AS A STATE OF PATHO-LOGOS

Perfect mind arose from the principle of becoming which became a substitute for the dialect between being and non-being--it arose from a denial of non-being and hence implies a denial of being. Its aim is a perfect logos, a state of perfect space and perfect time, from which non-being as an imperfect state is exorcised.

To the extent that perfect mind is based upon a principle of becoming which denies the dialectic of being and non-being, it must be construed as an 'unnatural' hence 'pathological' state of mind. It must be construed as an intrinsically maladaptive kind of mind.

It is not difficult to look around and see social pathological states of collective mentality which exist as self fulfilling prophecies of their own culture historical traditions--modern militarism, MAD and the Pentagon's power are peculiarly pertinent examples. Implicit to these pathological states of collective mentality is a shared delusions. Such social pathologies have as their purpose not the 'beingness of the mind' in terms of the self, but in the destruction of the self in the service of the other--or of a symbolically depersonalized 'system'.

Rational idealism and scientific rationalism promotes a logo-centrism which leads to reification of abstractions and to a misplaced concretization--this kind of logo-centrism can be seen to promote a frame of mind which aims towards a perfect state of mind which is reinforced by and reinforces a perfect social system.

---

Blanket Copyright, Hugh M. Lewis, © 2005. Use of this text governed by fair use policy--permission to make copies of this text is granted for purposes of research and non-profit instruction only.

Last Updated: 08/17/06

