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 [Incarnate Meaning]

Prior to treating the operations performed by theologians and their normative structures, we are building up a background of relevant materials that are relevant to various parts in the practical consideration. We have considered the notion of method, the human good, and the carriers of meaning, the different ways in which meanings are carried, embodied, expressed, namely, intersubjectivity, art, symbol, language, and, of course, incarnate meaning: the meaning found in an event, Thermopyle or Marathon; or in a person, whomever you please: Jesus Christ for Christians, and so on. Incarnate meaning draws upon all other forms of meaning and gives it the most concrete expression of all.

[Elements of Meaning]

We now have to consider elements of meaning. And we distinguish sources, acts, and terms.

Sources of meaning are all conscious acts and all intended contents, from the dream state in through the four levels of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. The principal division of the sources of meaning is the distinction between the transcendental notions and categories. The transcendental notions are the dynamism that assembles the various components of conscious intending. The categories are the

determinations reached through experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding.

In brief, not altogether accurately but sufficiently, transcendental notions put questions, and answers come in categorial determinations. So much for sources of meaning, all conscious acts and all intended contents.

Next, acts of meaning. We distinguish potential, formal, full, existential-practical, and instrumental. Potential meaning is the elemental meaning in which a distinction has not yet been reached between meaning and meant. It is like the smile before you start talking about smiling, the symbol before you talk about symbols, the inspiration for the work of art before it has been objectified in the work of art, the sensation in the Aristotelian sense; the sensible in act is the sense in act, and the intelligible in act is intelligence in act. There is no distinction yet between meaning and meant. You can have longitudinal waves in the air, but if you have no ears you have no sounding and no hearing. Sounding and hearing, according to Aristotle, are one and the same act. The potential sounding are the longitudinal waves in the air, but actual sounding is when the waves are affecting the ears in somebody that is alive. So much for potential meaning. It is meaning where the distinction has not yet emerged between meaning and meant.

Formal meaning occurs in acts of conceiving, thinking, considering, defining, supposing, formulating. There has emerged a distinction between meaning and meant, the defining and what is defined, but what the distinction is has not yet been determined. Is the object of thought merely an object of thought or also something to be affirmed? And in what way is it affirmed? Is it affirmed as a mathematical proposition or as a proposition about the real world? And so on.

The nature of the distinction between meaning and meant occurs in full acts of meaning, and they are acts of judging. There one settles the status of the object of thought. One decides whether it is merely an object of thought, a phoenix or a centaur, or whether it is a mathematical entity, or a real thing lying in the world of human experience, or a transcendent reality beyond that world.

Existential and practical acts of meaning occur on the fourth level, in which your decisions are changing the world about you and also constituting the kind of a man you are and are becoming.

Instrumental acts of meaning are expressions through any of the carriers of meaning: intersubjectivity, art, symbol, language, or your whole being. Note: you are not to think of expression as something accidentally added on to the other acts of meaning, it is integral to them. Cassirer in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has a long section on pathology in which aphasia, an inability to talk, is always associated with an inability to perceive and an inability to perform. Apraxia and agnosia go along with aphasia; the expression is integral to the focusing of consciousness on precise determinate objects.

Besides this, of course, there is performative meaning; it is an aspect of instrumental meaning. When constitutive or practical meaning is expressed, one has what the analysts call performative meaning: 'I bequeath all my goods and possessions to so and so,' and when you sign that you are *doing* the thing; you are not merely saying so. On this subject see Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self-involvement*, London: SCM Press, 1963.

Thirdly, terms of meaning. The term of meaning is what is meant. In potential acts of meaning, the distinction of meaning and meant is not yet worked out. In formal acts, the distinction emerges but the exact status of the term remains indeterminate. In full acts, there occurs the probable or certain

determination of the status of the term. One settles whether or not A is, or whether or not A is B. In constitutive and practical acts of meaning one settles one's attitude to A, what one will do for B, whether one will endeavor to bring about C. These are the terms of meaning, and they differ for the different kinds of act.

In particular, with regard to full acts of meaning one has to distinguish different spheres of being. One says the moon exists, and one says there exists the logarithm of the square root of minus one. But one doesn't mean the same thing by existence in each case, both cases. When one says there exists the logarithm of the square root of minus one, one does not mean that one can see it sailing around the sky. And when one says that the moon exists, one doesn't mean that one can deduce it from suitably chosen postulates. Consequently, you have to distinguish a sphere of real being, what can be verified in experience, whether sensitive or conscious, and distinguish it from other restricted spheres of being such as the mathematical, the hypothetical, the logical. These spheres differ enormously from one another. They have in common that they are all instances of the virtually unconditioned. They differ insofar as the conditions that are fulfilled differ. For to state that something really exists, you have to be able to have conditions fulfilled in experience. To state that a mathematical entity exists you have to be able to deduce it from suitably chosen postulates, but all you have to do about the postulates is postulate them. To say that an entity is hypothetical, it has to be a possible explanation of data, not a suitably verified explanation of data. And so on.

So while there are several ways, while all affirmations of existence rest upon a grasp of the virtually unconditioned, still one case differs from another insofar as the conditions that are fulfilled differ. And besides the real being and the lesser areas of the mathematical, the hypothetical, the logical,

and so on, there is the realm of transcendent being, which we will have something more to say about in our next chapter, on religion.

Now the foregoing is of course the realist account of the different spheres of being. As you move from one type of philosophy to another, you get a different account of these different spheres of being. The naive realist lives in the world mediated by meaning, but he thinks he knows it by taking a good look. And the naive idealist says, *esse est percipi*, that the world of meaning merely is the world of perceiving. And the empiricist empties out the world mediated by meaning of everything that isn't known by taking a good look. An idealist points out that while that is the real world, what you know by taking a good look, still human knowing is not just looking, all sorts of use of intelligence and reason is involved and consequently the world mediated by meaning is an ideal world. And with each of these shifts in the philosophic background, you get a different account of the spheres of being.

Now our next topic has to do with subdivisions in this world mediated by meaning. For some people the world mediated by meaning is homogeneous, and for others it breaks up into different realms. The process of the development of human consciousness is a matter of understanding that process, and understanding fundamental problems in theology is a matter of coming to grips with the differentiation of human consciousness. We will distinguish the systematic exigence, the critical exigence, the methodical exigence, and the transcendent exigence.

[Realms of Meaning]

Socrates, especially in the earlier Socratic dialogues of Plato, was concerned to show people that there must exist a universal definition that holds *omni et*

soli for every term that people knew the meaning of, and that he didn't know that definition and nobody else did. And he was perfectly right, because common sense does not define. Definition is a later interest, and the possibility of definiton does not lie within the scope of common sense. Common sense knows the meaning of words because it knows how to use them, as the analysts correctly point out.

Similarly, common sense doesn't use principles; it uses proverbs. And proverbs are not things that hold in every case. You have contradictory proverbs: look before you leap; he who hesitates is lost. Proverbs are useful bits of advice that it is often worthwhile to keep in mind; they are not principles. Common sense, as described in *Insight*, chapters 6 and 7, is a nucleus of insights that enables one to know what to do or say on any of the occasions that commonly arise.

What Socrates represented was the emergence of the systematic exigence, which knows the world not in terms of its relations to me or to us, but in terms of the relations of things to one another. Once you start dropping the subject out of the picture and start just relating things to one another, the planets to the sun, and the elements of the periodic table to one another, you move out of the world of what is sensible and you are setting up a fundamental system. Mass is not momentum and it is not weight; temperature is not what feels hot or cold. If you put one hand on a metal object and another on a wooden object, they will both be the same temperature if they have been long enough in the same place; but one will feel warmer and the other cooler because they radiate heat at different velocities. And the electromagnetic field, no one ever attempted to imagine that very successfully. You move out of the realm of things as related to us, as related to our senses, and you set up a system.

Socrates and the Athenians, his contemporaries, were not able to define what they meant by fortitude or by justice or by temperance, and so on. But in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics***,** they are given general definitions of virtue and vice, and definitions of all the virtues and each one of them flanked by vices that sin by excess or by defect. How was Aristotle able to do what Socrates had not been able to do? He set up a system. He scrutinized the meanings of words, listed all the different meanings they had in contemporary usage, picked out the one meaning he wanted, and by picking out that he was setting up a system, gradually setting up a system. And when he had his terms defined, he had the system. But he had also moved out of the ordinary language that was available to Socrates. He introduced a new way of talking. When you do that, of course, you are introducing a new language of technical terms, you are setting up a new social group, the people that can use these terms intelligently, properly; and they can talk to one another, but they can't talk to people who've just got common sense, and so on and so forth. You have a new language, a new social group, and a new world.

Plato had a sense of these two worlds when he distinguished between the noumena and the phenomena. Aristotle had a sense of them when he distinguished between the *priora quoad nos* and the *priora quoad se*, what is first for us and what is first in itself. Eddington bumped into the same distinction when he spoke about his two tables: one was brown and solid and heavy, completely imaginable, and the other was mostly empty space, with here and there an unimaginable wavicle, neither a wave or a particle. There were two tables, both of them existed, but they were two different ways of mediating the same world by meaning: the systematic apprehension of reality and the commonsense apprehension of reality.

Now when you set up two worlds like that, there arises a question. One can say, well, which is wrong? Is the world of common sense just the world of the ignorant and uneducated to be replaced by the dawn of science, or is this scientific world just a mere pragmatic tool for getting results that have no cognitional value? And so there arises the critical exigence. That has been at the root of modern philosophy. Ernst Cassirer from 1907-1922 was occupied in writing *The Problem of Knowledge in Modern Science and Philosophy*, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie and Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*. It is a study of the scientists and the philosophers. The philosophers or the scientists doing philosophy were dealing with the problem: how can this mathematical understanding of things be knowledge of reality? Galileo distinguished primary and secondary qualities. The primary qualities were the realities you could know mathematically; and the secondary qualities such as color and taste and so on were just like tickling, the movement of a feather along your skin. That went right on. It went up to Kant. We had the a priori forms of sensibility in space and time and the filling of these empty forms. Newton had absolute space and time, and so on. They were all dealing with this problem: how can this scientific knowledge be knowledge of reality? And that is the root of the problem of knowledge in the modern world.

Now to meet that problem of knowledge you have to be able to set up both worlds. And to do that you have to move in on the subject, into the world of interiority. Here you again set up a system but this time the basic terms in the system are not something that lie outside human experience. We do not experience mass; we can experience MV and MA, but not just the M. We experience heat and cold, but not temperature. Because things at the same temperature feel somewhat different: one will feel cold and the other warmer. In scientific systems the basic terms are constructs; they are not

contents of experience. But when you move into interiority you can set up a system in which your basic terms are given in consciousness. When you can do that you can account for both the type of knowledge that is common sense and the kind of knowledge that is science, and you can have both worlds, and know why you now use one and why you now use the other and how both are knowledge of the same world but from different standpoints, with different languages, employed by different groups.

And that's the point to the three basic questions: What am I doing when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? And what do I know when 1 do it? So the critical exigence also meets the methodical exigence. Once you know exactly what you are doing when you are knowing, you can go on to explain the methods in the different sciences and you can account for the nature of common sense; and you can explain that what is common to common sense is a way of proceeding, not a content. Common sense differs from one town to another; the fellow from over the hill is a stranger, he's strange, and he has a different brand of common sense. The Irish have their common sense and the English have theirs and the Frenchmen have another and so on for the Germans and the Americans and so on right across the map. Common sense is a mode of developing knowledge, but when situations differ your adaptation to the situation is going to differ, and so you will have a different common sense, a different way of understanding what to say and do in any of the situations that commonly arise, and enough gumption that when the situation is significantly different to pause and take stock and figure out what you are going to do now. Common sense doesn't set up any system; it doesn't use definitions; it doesn't use principles.

Finally, there is a transcendental exigence. In other words, the world of worship. And on that we will have more to say in our next chapter on religion.

[The Functions of Meaning]

Now the functions of meaning; what does meaning do? The most obvious function is that meaning is communicative: one can transfer to another some share in one's meanings. Meaning is cognitive. There is the world of immediacy, the world of the infant, the world constituted by that narrow strip of space/time that has been my immediate experience. There also is the world mediated by meaning. And, as we have just seen, that world mediated by meaning may be undifferentiated, simply a world of common sense, or differentiated into scientific knowledge and commonsense knowledge. That differentiation is reconciled by going back to the root: What am I doing when I am knowing? And why is doing that knowing? This world mediated by meaning doesn't lie in the experience of any individual; it is a group product; there is the sociology of knowledge. It is a group product not of one generation but down the millennia; there is the historicity of knowledge.

Moreover, it isn't the equivalent of everybody's experience; it isn't the totality of all experiences. It is experiences, plus understanding, plus judging, plus deciding. It is a world mediated by intelligent meaning and regulated by values.

Meaning is not only cognitive, it also is efficient. When we do anything we first plan. We decide when we'll go and what will best be said, and so on and so forth. Our meanings will change other peoples' attitudes or their ideas. Our meanings will decide just how and where we are going to build a house, or a road or a factory, and so on and so forth. All this is mediated by meaning. Man's transformation of himself and his environment is mediated by meaning.

Finally, meanings may be constitutive. They determine the kind of a man one is; the kind of meanings one accepts determine one's mentality; the

values one responds to determine one character. A language without meaning is not a language; it is just a series of sounds. Languages, then, art forms, literatures, sciences, philosophies, histories, social institutions, religions, all are constituted by meaning. Meaning isn't the only thing, but it is part of their reality.

I mentioned already that in the early stages of human development there is a lack of control over meaning. When constitutive meaning not only constitutes man in his world but also the world he is in, you have myth. To be able to pick out, distinguish between communicative and cognitive and effective and constitutive functions of meaning is not something that the primitive man can do. For the primitive, all his thinking is penetrated with myth. Similarly, to know the limitations of effective meaning is one thing, but you have to know what you mean by effective meaning before you can start limiting it. When you don't know how to limit it you have magic. You can think you can not only make people do things but make things happen just by saying so. It is a failure to distinguish between the efficient and the merely communicative functions of meaning.

Now, if we advert to a combination – constitutive and communicative meaning – one is at the root of community. Community is not a number of people within a frontier; they can be all isolated from one another, even though they can't get out. But it is a matter of common meaning. Common meaning is potential when people are in touch. It is formal when they understand in the same way or in a complementary way. It is actual when they regard the same things as true; when one is not saying this is so and the other is saying that is so. It is constitutive and practical when they are pursuing the same goals, when they are not opting for contradictory goals.

Inversely, when people are out of touch; when they understand in different ways; when they have opposed judgments; when they opt for

opposed social goals, you have the breakdown of community. When they are out of touch, there is no communication; when they understand in different ways, they misunderstand one another and then begin to mistrust and to fear and perhaps to resort to violence. When they make opposed judgments, they are living in different worlds. And when they are opting for different social goals, they are generating ideological differences.

So common meaning is the formal constituent of community. And entering into community, acquiring that common meaning, is what is meant by education by the pedagogue, and socialization by the sociologist, and acculturation by the anthropologist. It is always the same thing: acquiring the common meanings of the group.

Again, we hear a lot about *Existenz* these days. What is it? It is becoming oneself by one's own choices, particularly when one's own choices are authentic, when one is aware that by one's choices one makes oneself what one is to be. You can have authentic existence, the authentic human person, in which one is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible, and advancing in these, and you can have unauthenticity in scattered individuals or in groups. The group can become unauthentic. The Scribes and Pharisees sit upon the chair of Moses but they don't tell the same story, and so on all along the line. Unauthenticity can penetrate a society, and then being authentic, by the standards of the society, is just an authentic realization of unauthenticity. There is needed social criticism. Finally, the distinction between nature and history arises from the fact that common meaning is constitutive of man and of human community. And common meaning is something that is a function of the place and the time, of the development of understanding in the group. That is the historicity of human meaning. The fact that meanings are something that depend upon understanding and that human understanding develops over time, means that

over time you have different ways of understanding things, different meanings, and consequently different types of community and individuals in the community.

[Stages of Meaning]

A final topic is stages of meaning. The general division of the stages of meaning, the more remote division, is the differentiations of consciousness. The most universal differentiation of consciousness is common sense, on the one hand, and religion on the other. Mircea Eliade has a study of shamanism with the subtitle, 'archaic techniques of ecstasy.' But the East (India, China, Japan) is penetrated with a great concern for the life of prayer. The whole of Christendom has had that concern; it is the most common differentiation of consciousness.

From the Greeks on, we have had the differentiation of common sense and system, theory. In Aquinas you get the differentiation of common sense, theory, and the worshipful attitude, especially at the end of his life when he was no longer able to do theology. In the modern period, we have common sense, theory and interiority, modern philosophy and modern science and common sense. Theology today, I believe, has to have a fourfold differentiation of consciousness, namely, common sense, theory, interiority, and the worshipful attitude, the religious differentiation of consciousness.

Now this differentiation of consciousness means, of course, that there is an ordinal distinction. You have to have one and go on to two and on to three and on to four, but the order in which that differentiation arises is not a chronological order. To distinguish stages of meaning we are going to speak of something much more concrete, namely, language. (The reference to Cassirer I was wanting a few moments ago when I was speaking about

aphasia, apraxia, and agnosia is to the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, pp. 205-77.)

George Herbert Mead has a statement on the social origin of language. You know the meaning of your gesture when you see the other fellow's reaction to it. It is common meaning from the start. Cassirer has a genesis of the gesture: you try to grasp something, and while you don't succeed, at least someone else knows you want it, and your trying to grasp becomes pointing. The ostensive meaning: once you get gestures you can point to things and begin to use words while you are pointing, and in that way arrive at a common language. Also you can have imitation, mimesis, do something like what you want. There was the wife of an American professor teaching as a visiting professor at an English university, and going to the shop she discovered that the American names for all modern products are quite different from the ones in England. She would go in and ask for a wall plug and the clerk would say, 'What does it do, Ma'am?' And she would make do like a primitive. And he would say, 'Oh: what you want is a multiple outlet.' And so on for everything else. There is a way of imitating in which you can communicate what you are trying to talk about.

Similarly, just as you have imitation so also you can have analogy in which the resemblance is finer. Finally, the community by common insights, common needs, common tasks, by intersubjective and symbolic and artistic and and ostensive and mimetic and analogical expressions of meaning can eventually move on to language.

Now, early language is rich in anything you can point out, anything that is spatial, consequently. But in the spatial it can point out the specific but it can't point out the generic. In Homer, I believe, there are all sorts of words for peering and staring and glaring and all the rest of it, but there is no word for seeing, no generic word for seeing. I believe in English words for

couple and team and pair and so on preceded the word 'two.' It can point out the spatial, the specific. It can point out the objective but hardly the subjective. And consequently, possessive pronouns are prior to personal pronouns. I can point out my spear and my bow and arrow and my hut, but I can't point out myself; I can point to my head or my chest, and so on, but not to myself, so that the personal pronoun is later than the possessive pronoun. And you can point to the human but not to the divine. So the generic, the temporal, the subjective, the divine are terms that primitive language, are realms that primitive language does not master, isn't able to talk about.

Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of Mind*, sets forth magnificently the way in which the Greek literature moved on from Homer who described character by comparisons with animals and nature. A lion never retreats; Hector is a lion, never retreats, and so on. These descriptions drew attention to human character, made it possible to talk about human character. The lyric poets expressed personal emotion; the tragedians expressed decisions and their consequences in situations; concern with the theogonies, mythical theogonies, led on to the question of the first principle, the *archē*. Science was first of all poetry; Empedocles says that the moon goes around the earth as the fellow goes round the hub of the wheel; and that the moon throws back the sun's light like an echo; and it is all in hexameter verse.

There are these gradual developments, up to the time of the philosophers; the poetry is constantly opening up further realms of human knowledge and possibilities of expression. The philosophers come in and answer all these questions in a systematic fashion. And what do the poets do then? They write bucolic verse; they are concerned with the simplicities of an earlier age or they write comedy of manners as Menander and Plautus and Terrence. They no longer have the big function they had in the earlier Greek period.

Well, there you have, in that book, a presentation of the gradual development of language, the gradual use of language to cover more and more fields; and the possibility of that development is linguistic feedback. Instead of pointing to objects, you start using language itself as the source for the development of more language.

Now the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle in particular, were a high point of achievement. They changed a culture; Plato's criticism of the gods and so on put something new into the culture. But the theoretic fine point that you have in Plato or Aristotle is not easily communicated. This is the time when the popularizer moves in and explains to the class what they can all understand. He doesn't want them to be as profound as Aristotle was, because that isn't going to happen. This can become a movement, and you have that movement in humanism. Isocrates praised the orator; what differentiates man from the other animals is speech, and the thing to be is to become a rhetorician, an orator. Along with this praise of oratory there went on the *philanthropia*; it was love of mankind and especially of men as suffering. It wasn't exaggerated like when a conqueror is credited with *philanthropia* when he puts some limit to the plundering and enslavement of the population. But there is this element of *philanthropia*, which developed into a humanism, the classicist humanism that has gone on from the Greeks up to modern time. It is the big block in the church's adapting to the modern situtation, because for the classicist things are always the same. You can have accidental differences and change; but substantially everything is always the same, and consequently things shouldn't go too far.