EUROPE - AFRICA - ASIA: 
THE CREATIVE PROPORTION BETWEEN THE 
WORLD CULTURES

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Introduction

Not least because of the rapid development of modern technology, the traditional cultures have entered world-wide into communication and interaction. The mutual affection and dependence is growing in diverse areas: not only in economics and politics, but also in sciences and arts, as well as in philosophy and religion. So the evolution of mankind seems to tend to create a 'global unity' of mutual exchange between continents and cultures on all levels of life, in which the ethnological differences and each individual identity of peoples should not be leveled out or even be eliminated, but conserved and integrated, albeit in an altered form. This aim can be represented by the idea of dynamic and creative world peace. It means an order, not imposed violently from outside or above, but which is far more founded from the inside, in as far as it corresponds to the basic disposition of human beings, and therefore advances mankind in being human and in being humane. In any other way, the survival of mankind seems to be impossible, as the destructive potential of technology is growing inexorably and the 'lebensraum' (space of life) is getting scarce.

Such peace would imply a living unity of mutual appreciation and completion in the diversity and variety of ways of life. This peace cannot manifest itself in the long run as a monotone standardised culture, e.g. as a forced form of an intellectual and ideological 'absolute monism', which would suppress or obstruct free individual development of peoples'.

But as well as a mere coexistence of particular cultures, an absolute pluralism of intellectual attitudes and ways of life remained humanly unrelated. Far more peace which basically is pacifying and fulfilling in a humane sense compromises a synthesis between these opposites, as a kind of social organism in which the individual members show a certain independence and autonomy, as well as a certain need of completion and mutual dependence. Only in the interrelation of completion can they obtain a 'wholeness of being' for which they are disposed and where they can find their own complete identity. In contrast to a mere biological organism whose members are determined by something else, e.g. by a superior unity of the whole, a social organism, namely the dynamic structural whole of a human community, consists of members who obtain their determination by their own free and responsible decision. Human beings are not mere objects, but above all subjects of peace.

This has to be taken into consideration, if one compares human creative peace to a melody, a comparison which is plain enough. The acoustic sounds create by their harmony a new musical quality, the so-called 'quality of wholeness', which cannot be derived sufficiently from the quality of the single sounds (but which does not lie beyond them either). In a similar way one could imagine the harmonic accord of the cultures and
peoples as a new and higher quality of being human and humane\(^2\).

Supposing all of this, one has to ask: Is one and the same basic structure of human beings, through evolution, differentiating itself in culturally specific ways, exactly for the purpose of a fertile and creative encounter of cultures, and for enabling a further evolution of mankind? The final sense of differentiation then would be an advancing re-integration. Maybe at this point the comparison with the dynamic order of nature is meaningful. In the one and identical basic structure of human nature there is obviously already founded the contrary differentiation of sexes, in order to enable a deeper realisation of mankind by their encounter. In a similar way one could imagine that also on a level of intellectual and cultural life the diversity of differentiations should finally serve for a higher and more comprehensive humaneness\(^3\).

The traditional cultures, which are infiltrating each other today, also much like a chemical mixture of generative elements, are under situative pressure to confront each other. Like a new substance emerging from a chemical synthesis, e. g. as from hydrogen and oxygen emerges a more complex molecular structure of water with new chemical specifics which could not be derived from the primary substances, similarly cultural encounter today may offer the chance of a creative leap of evolution towards a new and more comprehensive culture of mankind. In this new culture the traditional partial cultures could work in a critical and constructive way as challenging and mutually completing partners, finding themselves, however, permanently forced to alter themselves respectively in their humane qualities towards a more profound identity.

Certainly one cannot predict whether such a directionality of world history can in fact be realised and accomplished, or whether it is bound to fail due to human disorientation and refusal. Historical responsibility demands, however, not unfailing predictions of future events, but rather meaningful courage\(^4\).

Now, which are the conditions of such a "creative encounter", as described above, between the world cultures? As "relevant partial cultures" we will take into consideration primarily the extensive cultural areas of the continents Europe, Africa and Asia.

Our consideration is to be divided into three steps:

**In the first place**, we look at the essential relationship of each culture towards the nature which lays the ground for the given culture; then we put the question to what extent culture is affected by its natural conditions. These are different to a certain degree on the European, the African and the Asiatic continent. Hence the hypothesis arises that the regions of culture differ due to their ontical foundation so that they can complete one another by their specific form of humane value.

**In a second part**, this hypothesis has to be substantiated and differentiated by pointing at corresponding empirical phenomena. Here, at first a "contrary" opposition between the cultural traditions of Europe and Afro-Asia comes to appear; then also a "sub-contrary" opposition between the African and the Asiatic area of culture emerges.

**Thirdly**, we want to ask in ontological reflection whether the cultural differentiation of mankind implies a dynamic-evolutive structure of meaning. As is to be shown, this structure can be
understood as a holistic dialectical-triadic movement of Being. From this point, direction-giving impulses for a more concrete, deeper understanding can result which are important for intercultural action and for promising future developments.

I. The relation culture - nature and the opposition between the spheres of Europe, Africa and Asia

Being the expression and actualization of human spiritual life, every culture depends on physical-material conditions, that is, basically, on the structure of the surface of the earth and on the climate. In this sense culture, so to speak, means the human mind's response to the demanding and provoking challenges given by nature. Apparently, this dialogue between mind and nature partially succeeds; partially, however, it fails. For it is actualized always by the interplay of two components: On the one hand, the full “act-uality” of nature consists in its effects carried out on humanity, and humans have to receive this acting actuality and to take it in. This actuality is “addressing” each person, and the person has to “listen”. But then, on the other hand, one can act back on it and give the “re-sponse”, by articulating oneself in the direction of nature and into nature, forming and determining it, thus actualizing and objectivating one’s ideas and one's will. Thus concrete culture appears to be an always more or less fitting and adequate reaction of humanity towards what nature gives us. This might signify: The world is disposed as a meaningful whole, as an “onto-logical” structure comprehending nature and culture; how this structure is actualized more or less in accordance with its meaning, depends on the historical dialogue between the two.

From this point of view, the extensive main areas of the earth, the continents, inasmuch they show significant differences regarding their natural disposition, correspondingly have brought about different “re-actions” and “re-sponses” of the human mind.

Let us at first take a look at the Afro-Asiatic area: it appears to be a giant bulk of mainland, filled with oppositions which have no less gigantic dimensions, and determined by a transcontinental far-reaching climate rich in contrasts: just think of the monsoons and the trade-winds which cover enormous regions of Asia and Africa.

In contrary opposition to this the continent of Europe shows the face of a delicately differentiated landscape, interrupted and marked by many oceans and middle-sized seas and determined by a moderate climate.

Therefore it might be no surprise if in Africa and Asia reality was understood as unlimited unity of strong contrasts and man there developed an accordingly sensitive, intuitive ability and basic habit. In the formation of its surface, the continent of Africa shows more including transitions and less sharp oppositions as does the continent of Asia. Thus Africa invites people to live immediately out of nature, to choose the “vital identification” with nature as their way of life; the continent of Asia, however, rather provokes an “intellectual withdrawal”, a way of life shaped by introverted “spiritually keeping distance” (and “con-fronting”) against nature by balancing calmness.

In Europe, nevertheless, according to the mentioned geographical-climatic conditions of life, the consciousness primarily inclines to differentiate and to structure reality rationally; there is the typical tendency of setting demarcations and for reaching articulating clarity.
The more intuitive disposition of the African and Asiatic consciousness seems to have a more immediate and original relationship to reality; the European disposition, the stronger inclination to rational differentiation, demands more clearly an objectivation which puts the empirical reality at a distance, a reflection turned outside.

The immediate-intuitive Afro-Asiatic and the abstract-rational European disposition appear to form a contrary opposition, in which, as we will state more exactly later on, between the two modes of African and Asiatic intuitivity again a sub-contrary opposition can be realized. So the differently accentuated structures of consciousness all over the continents could stimulate and complete one another through intercultural encounter; this would promote and enrich the spiritual life of mankind in a "holistic," dynamic-creative sense.

Of course the described dependence of the structure of consciousness on the structure of nature cannot mean a mono-causal deduction of the mental-spiritual from the physical-material. Therefore in this context one should not so much talk of a (total) "determination," but, more conveniently, of a (primordial) "disposition" of the human consciousness through physical reality. Nature, which lays the basis for us and which surrounds us, to the human mind means a provocation and a task. Developing a corresponding structure of consciousness and activity, the mind tries to assimilate itself to this challenge. Such an accordance and assimilation obviously to a certain degree is necessary and inevitable for the sake of survival (and development); on the other hand, it also allows certain degrees of freedom for self-determination regarding the way this is going to take place.

II. Further ontological elucidation of the basic spiritual dispositions of the cultural main areas of the earth

Now let’s try to elaborate in a more differentiated way at first the fundamental contrary opposition between the European-occidental and the Afro-Asiatic hemisphere and then, in a second step, the specific divergence between the African and the Asiatic disposition.

II.1. The contrary opposition between the European and the Afro-Asiatic area of culture

In propositional logic, two propositions are said to be contrarily opposing each other if their positions regarding the same matter are at maximum distance, so that there can be a medium between the two positions. For example, between the proposition "every body is heavy" and the proposition in utmost distance against it, "no body is heavy", mediating transitions are possible, namely, "some bodies are heavy", and also, "some bodies are not heavy".

Now, as mentioned above, the European consciousness tends towards rational differentiation and distinction of partial aspects which it abstractly picks out for itself. Thus it gains fixing and objectivating distance against the unity offered by the experience of the flowing concrete connection of life and Being. In this manner, within the unity of Being European consciousness distinguishes and accentuates the plurality of the entities. Contrary to this, the Afro-Asiatic consciousness has a more original and powerful intuition into the concrete and deep connection of all there is; so it proclaims and stresses within the plurality of the entities the coherence and the unity of Beings which lays the foundation for the entities. Now this is to be explained by some examples for the relationship to
nature and to man which differs according to specific cultural features.

The relationship to nature in the occident, especially since modern times, typically is marked by the intention of the quantifying natural science and technology. Science, according to its modern understanding, has to analyze the empirical connection of reality rationally, i.e. the immediately given “unity of experience” has to be resolved into its components. These components have to be picked out, in order to construct out of them, according to mathematical possibilities, in a technical-creative way, new complex unities which serve the human intentions better than did the structures of reality as given by nature. Therefore in physics, chemistry and biology, as well as in psychology and sociology, by analytic-synthetic acts of science and technology the given structures of the beings are divided into their elements and elementary functions, and out of these new structures are built up which correspond to the purposes of man. Such a transformation of reality through the disposing mind of man is to be understood as the manifestation of a spiritual habit which is typical to modern times. This habit originated in Europe and spread all over the world in a determining manner.

As an example, the European-occidental approach of the science of medicine is different from the Afro-Asiatic tradition in a culturally specific way. If there seems to be, for example, a disease of the liver or of the heart, the Western science of medicine primarily pays attention to the physical organ at question; it tries by analysis of the causes to determine the single elements of the defective structure and function, in order to put them into another, more desirable proportion, influencing it by drugs or attacking it surgically, i.e. through a rationally planned measure centred on the organ. In occidental culture, mind aims at confronting the contents of experience through active determination and alteration, i.e. through destroying the given structures of the physical and mental world until they are reduced to their elements, and out of these constructing new structures which correspond to man’s very purposes. By objectivation and domination of the world, obviously the freedom and all-determining power and glorious mastership of mind is to be experienced and actively more and more actualized. Constituting the world as an object that can be determined and dominated, man aims at his self-constitution as determining and dominating “subject”.

In a totally other, contrarily opposed way the spiritual attitude manifests itself in the area of the Afro-Asiatic culture. There it is tending less towards “objectification” and “domination” but rather towards “participation” and “integration.” Humans experience and understand themselves as part of a preceding meaningful structure of reality. Appreciating this structure, one does not try so much to dispose of it, but rather to be at its disposal, in order to let it “come” and “happen” ever more.

The example of “science of medicine” again provides an illuminating example for this. An organ being diseased, the African doctor does not see the cause primarily in the organ itself (in order to fix it there by analysis of factors). Rather he understands the disease “holistically” as a decrease in the vital force of the whole organism, wherein the affected organ only participates in a special manner. The vital force, however, steadily flows into the organism from the spiritual-divine source of life which is immanent to the organism. To speak more exactly: This source of life does not inhabit the affected individual
organism as a peculiar part, but through the organism's being the member of a more comprehensive community of life. This community comprises not only the short range group of immediate fellow humans, but moreover the whole environmental nature. Therefore a disease basically is made up by vital force flowing only insufficiently into the individual as part of a greater connection of Being, caused by a contraction or pollution of “channels.” Thus these channels include also the contact to crystals, plants and animals, but especially to fellow members of one’s own tribe, including the deceased, the ancestors and the spirits; for only through these “mediators for the transmission of life” can life flow in steadily from the creative divine fundamental source. Hence therapy has the primary task to make conscious any disturbances in the relationship to nature, to the fellow men and to the invisible (but highly active) “spiritual background.” Such disturbances are: being centred around one’s own ego so that others are hurt, and lack of thankfulness, reverence and love. Only through moral purification can the receptivity for the life from God be disclosed anew. In the African “science of medicine” it is essential to check the social relationship to the whole. The contrary-complementary attitude towards nature in occidental culture and Afro-Asiatic tradition reveals itself, as it does in the relationship to nature, maybe even more clearly in the relationship to man. This could already be sensed in the example of medical science. The tendency toward laying emphasis on the individual person against the connection of the whole of reality (up to the degeneration into an egocentric individualism), the proclamation of individual “human rights” as foundation of a “constitutional state”, the claim of “freedom of conscience” demanding respect for the individual decision of conscience even if it is in contradiction to the collective opinion — all these historical phenomena are typical products of occidental culture. Doubtlessly, they embody basic humane values and represent a necessary contribution of occidental culture to a communicative world integration and peaceful global order. This tendency towards stressing the individually-caused social developments which, inasmuch as they imply partially even an exaggeration of the individual and the particular, are ambivalent in their
humane value: in economy “free enterprise” (following the “capitalist principle” of maximisation of individual profit), and in politics the idea of the people’s democratic “self-determination” (which has been understood also as absolute relativity of moral and juridical values). Just recall the emancipation movements which accumulate in occidental history, promoting the freedom of the individual in social and religious communities, e.g. the demand of female “equality of right” in relation to male human beings — this postulate, too, was brought up at first in European-occidental culture, and now it is spreading also over other areas of culture.11

In contrary opposition to this certainly legitimate striving for differentiation and accentuation of the individual against the unity of the whole (a strife, however, that can be perverted into pluralistic separatisms) the Afro-Asiatic area of culture shows the inclination towards highlighting and preferring the unity of the whole against the peculiar identity of the manifold and different members. This has also (at least seen from the European point of view) brought about enforced unanimity, exaggerations, and distortions.

So in the African cultural tradition the individual is defined by its relations to fellow tribespeople. Life is attributed also to the ancestors, inasmuch (and only inasmuch!) as they are immediately present to the unity and to the consciousness of the community12. Mutatis mutandis, also according to Asiatic traditions the Being and the behavior of the individuals were totally determined by their place in the unity of the whole. Just think of the role of women in Islam, of the demands of the castes on their members in Hinduism, or of the detailed moral codes in Confucianism. The principle of “preponderance of the whole against its parts” influenced the formation of marriage and family, economy and politics and the community, and especially religion13.

Now let us summarize. A view of the relationship to nature and to man has shown that the basic reference to reality seems to differ typologically between the European-occidental and the African and Asiatic areas of culture — in the sense of a “contrary opposition.” (Nevertheless, as told above, the concept of “contrary opposition” doesn’t exclude intermediary steps and continuous transitions.)

In the European attitude the interest of consciousness tends from the experienced unity of the connection of reality to the accentuation of the manifold and different, through distinguishing and differentiating rationality, which enters into distance and confrontation against what is immediately given. This ability in an essential and original sense is to be appreciated as something positive (and valuable for all mankind and its further development). Because by the growing distance and confrontation arises the possibility of a more and more conscious, free and decided turning towards reality, in shaping it responsibly and actively according to the principles of sense that have been recognized. However, this also includes a weakness and danger, and to that extent something. Entering into distance from immediate experience easily can be reversed into an alienation from reality, when the component which has stepped out and distinguished itself gets separated from the comprehensive connection and is taken for “absolute” in itself (in “particularism” and “individualism”).11

The consciousness of human beings in the Afro-Asiatic areas of culture, on the other hand, does not look from the unity to the differentiatedness to that extent; rather, it longs for unity in the very midst of the manifold and different. It appreciates
harmony and the balance of contrasts. A weakness, nay a danger — as especially the European senses it — may consist in a lesser disposition to rational distinction and abstract confrontation out of distance. Hence may result also a lesser readiness to change reality actively and to plan a future. Seen from the point of view of philosophy of culture, this means: As a task, mankind's best chance lies in a "creative encounter" between European-occidental and Asiatic-oriental and African cultures.\(^\text{15}\)

But it has to be stressed once more: The concept of "contrary opposition" signifies the utmost distance between two positions within a common medium (as e.g. totally affirmative and totally negating propositions in regard to the quantity of propositions). Between the extremes mean values may occur (i.e., particular propositions). This means in the given context that the opposition between originally European and Afro-Asiatic structures of consciousness in reality is always actualized only up to a certain degree; there are many soft transitions. Especially, there is a so-called "sub-contrary opposition" included in the "contrary opposition," expressing a lesser distance, a closeness of the opposing components. This leads us now to considering the cultural relation of the opposition Africa - Asia.

**II,2. The sub-contrary opposition between the African and the Asiatic area of culture**

As may result from the data offered above, the African and the Asiatic spheres of culture apparently agree with each other in the following respect: they are not dominated by an analytical rationality which gains distance from reality through abstraction. Instead, they are laying emphasis on an intuitive consciousness of the "unity of the connection," of "harmony and balance of contrasts." For sure. African and Asian cultures also possess the rational capacity to objectify and to master nature; this can be proved by many examples. However, this ability does not enjoy such a preeminent position concerning the basic attitude towards reality, as it has in the European culture. So there is another type of rationality, but it is in no way a lesser kind of rationality, concerning its anthropological value. For example, in contrast to their European counterpart, the African and the Asian cultures put emphasis on a consciousness which works not so much in an isolating and explicating manner, but rather in a holistic, complicating way, and which stays closely linked to experiencing and acting in the harmony and unity of Being. Within these common features, however, there seem to exist also significant differences between the large cultural areas of both continents. These differences can be represented by the concept of "sub-contrary opposition."

In logic, two propositions are said to be sub-contrarily opposing each other if their positions regarding the same matter are at some distance, however, not at maximum distance (as in "contrary" opposition; just remember the example: *All* bodies are heavy - *no* body is heavy), but in the sense of a difference between opposite directions and thus clear distinctions. E.g.: "Some bodies are heavy" and "Some bodies are *not* heavy". The relationship of opposition between both propositions is not expressed primarily by the quantity of the proposition ("*Some* bodies..."), but rather by the quality of the proposition ("...are heavy" and "...are *not* heavy"). In this sense, the sub-contrary opposition, too, always is the expression of a "quality" which can plainly be characterized.
“African” and “Asiatic” cultures both lay emphasis on “harmony” and “integral unity”. But they do so in “qualitatively” opposing manners: African spirituality out of the immediate impulse of the natural Being; Asiatic spirituality out of the detached tranquility and calmness of the consciousness. Let’s explain this again in regard of the double aspect of the relationship to nature and to man.

African spirituality expresses itself as being-in-motion which basically is rhythmical: Music, dance and drama permeate the whole life and determine all regions and references of existence. The Being of material nature is experienced as thoroughly “rhythmical”, as “rhythmical event”. This being-in-motion is transferred by “eidetic identity” into the sphere of the intellectual and spiritual. It gains complete expression in the products of culture.

Asiatic mind, on the other hand, shows a more contemplative attitude which can be deepened to a philosophical mysticism, as in Buddhism. The unity, harmony and balance with nature here consists in “standing-in-oneself” in the spirit of partnership against nature: “letting it come” and “letting it happen.” This is neither an “antithetical” grasping of nature (as in Europe) nor a “synthetical (or maybe more clearly: syn-ergetic) penetrating flow of the Being” of nature (as in Africa); rather “synthetical adjustment” to nature and equilibrium characterizes the Asiatic mind.

In African culture, so to speak, mind effuses into the material nature, joining its vibrations and entering into it, “incarnating” in it and completing it. In Asiatic culture mind transcends the material nature and tries to overcome it, to break free from it and any “material dependency and limitation,” as in Hinduism. Correspondingly, African culture discovers the unity of spiritual Being in and together with the plurality of the material beings, in their own midst, as immanent to them. In Asiatic culture, on the other hand, unity is searched for beyond and above the material beings, as transcendent to them. “African harmony” of Being and consciousness is derived from Being; it consists in the immediate vital complex of motion. “Asiatic harmony” of Being and consciousness is derived from consciousness; it consists in the tranquil, detached calmness of the mind, in the habit of “letting the beings happen”, in the disposition of “lettingness”.

In both cases mind does not primarily try to subdue nature scientifically-technologically, but rather to live in consonance with it. This relation to nature is continued in the relation to man; hereby the typical differences between African and Asiatic spirituality may become still more evident. As mentioned above, while in European-occidental culture the human individual determines itself by creating sharp limits against the fellow man (through rational definition of one’s own rights and competencies, up to the danger of egocentric individualism), according to African understanding, human individuality consists merely in its relationships to the fellow men, to the whole group and to nature, in “being there for them.” In this sense, the actualization of human individuality is considered to be the highest value of life. According to Asiatic understanding, on the other hand, individuality is something which must be overcome, for it is limited because it is conditioned by the immersion of mind into matter, whereby mind suffers its spatial-temporal multiplication and a limitation of its unity. So in Asiatic spirituality the struggle for unlimited unity and harmony tends to overcome nature and, through it, human individuality.
This different relation to the human individual is continued, so to speak, beyond death. According to the understanding of African culture, the souls of the dead keep on living in the community of their families, supporting them, inspiring them, protecting them as their "good spirits". According to Asiatic understanding, e.g. in Hinduism, it is considered an evil, a sign of wrong attachments and still unrealized freedom, when deceased souls keep on affecting the living persons in time and space. It fits into this scheme that in African culture bodies are buried (and so given back to the immediate unity with material nature), while in Hinduism they are burnt (in order to complete the overcoming of matter and the detachment from it).

A further interesting expression of the typical difference between African and Asiatic spirituality regarding the relation to the fellow man and to the community can be seen in the different manners in which culture is handed down: In Africa, they prefer oral tradition; in Asia, they prefer written tradition. Through oral narration the generation handing down its tradition in a vivid way gets involved in the contents of culture which are handed down; the current generation keeps on shaping these contents, thus living on with them. The written word, on the other hand, in a certain way is closed and independent of the people handing down a tradition. Herein the detachment and distance of the "general spirit" against the many individuals in space and time which hand it down are documented.

These examples demonstrate that talking about "African" in contrast to "Asiatic" culture can only refer to certain typical basic tendencies of these extensive areas of culture which spread over continents, and which are subject to grave differentiations in their concretions. So one has to speak about the spiritualities of West Asia, South Asia and East Asia, about a multitude of Asiatic cultures rather than about a one and only "Asiatic culture." However, belonging to the same continent does not mean an absolute historical contingency and essential irrelevancy, but, as we tried to show above, a being also ontologically related through the common rooting in spiritual "basic tendencies" typical to the continent; nevertheless, by the progress of technological culture (which originated in Europe) the continental borders grow more and more relative. Against all tendencies towards blurring and leveling intercultural distinctions, however, must be stressed that the primordial spiritual similarities and differences of the world cultures offer essential possibilities of mutual stimulation and completion.

In order to prevent the monistic misunderstanding (which takes the cultural differences on one continent for nothing else than optional variations of one and only one basic theme of culture) as well as the also one-sided pluralistic misunderstanding (which denies any fundamentally common dispositions in the different cultures and spiritualities of the same continent) it would be best to speak about gradual similarities — which are not casual, but essential. Interestingly the widespread inclination to mere "distinction" and to accentuation of differences originates from European science (or maybe from an one-sided use of it) which always provokes the monistic counter-extreme.17

Now let's try to summarize the result of our considerations from the viewpoint gained above. The culture of mankind seems to present itself as a holistic relational structure of the extensive cultural areas of the continents Europe-Africa-Asia. This structure obviously is, to a certain degree,
“pre-formed” in its cultural-geographical properties (or better: basic dispositions) by natural conditions (most importantly, the surface of the earth and the climate) which lay the basis for all human culture, in the sense of a primordial pre-disposition, which means no total pre-determination. Thus human freedom and self-determination are not excluded, but addressed and provoked. This can be shown by corresponding examples, as we tried to do, in regard to the relation to nature and man, differing typically from culture to culture. So the spiritual relational structure of mankind emerges as a complex of contrary and sub-contrary basic references to reality which, in their “humaneness”, can complete one another and thus open a perspective of future cultural development, which means not only a de facto possibility, but also a task to be handled responsibly.

The American (and especially the Latin American) continent is playing a particular role in our attempt to “holistically comprehend the structure” of mankind’s culture. Because there, influences from all large cultural areas - Europe, Africa and Asia - come together. Thus America can serve as an example of mankind’s future task, with all its dangers and sufferings of failure, but also with the chances of creative integration and innovation.19

Now let’s enter into a deepening final reflection: Is it possible to comprehend the dispositional structure of mankind which has revealed itself in the “wholeness of nature and culture”. proceeding from a fundamental ontological principle of understanding? Such a principle is offered in a dialectic-triadic conception of Being.

III. The ontological unity of the formation of nature and the structure of culture as triadic event

At first methodological preliminary remarks may be required. In the following, we don’t want to attempt an a priori proceeding by deduction. This would force the data given by experience to obey a pre-conceived principle, e.g. a triadic pattern of explanation, thereby surely falsifying them. Rather we try to go the way of a posteriori induction (maybe better: transcendental reduction). This way starts from the data given by experience and helps us later to understand them more deeply as expression of a fundamental dialectical meaningful structure of Being.19

Thus our starting-point is the connection of experience described above. According to it, culture results from a permanent encounter between nature and mind: Both form an ontological unity; they are in proportion to each other and can be understood as a meaningful wholeness.20

Within this ontological unity the relationship of mind and nature, as explained, seems to be different according to the different cultures: In European-occidental culture mind seems to be — very clearly since the early modern times — orientated primarily towards the rational ordering and technological domination and “working up” of nature. Inasmuch as nature hereby merely is of interest as “value useful for man” and not respected as “value meaningful in itself”, this leads to a partially aggressive and destructive habit. So mind behaves against nature here as antithesis.

On the other hand, in Afro-Asiatic cultural tradition mind primarily searches for harmony and unity, i.e. participation and integration. However, in as much as hereby not only the unity, but also the difference of mind and nature is relevant (for otherwise one could scarcely speak explicitly about the two being a unity), this means the habit of synthesis.

Synthesis originates from the coming together of “thesis” and “anti-thesis”; its
original basis lays in the one as well as in the other. Now, in the concrete case one or the other of these partial aspects of the basic source can predominate. Depending on this, the character of the synthesis varies "basically." For example, inasmuch as the synthetical harmony flows more strongly from the "thesis", namely nature and the reference to nature, the type of the African culture is characterized. Here unity and balance, as elaborated above, result immediately from vital-natural Being. In Asiatic culture, on the other hand, it results rather from the calmness and "lettingness" by detachedness (and confrontation) against nature; so the emergence of the synthesis here obviously is accentuated by the "antithesis".

Thus the concrete profile of an ontological-holistical interpretation of the unity of nature and culture shows itself in the sense of a triadic-dialectical concept of Being: Nature (as "Being in itself" preceding every cultural working-up, laying the basis for it) is, as a "thesis," sharply confronted by European-occidental culture as an "antithesis." African and Asiatic culture represent two basically different types of "synthesis" and harmony between the human mind and nature. Thus we can cast a glance on the possibility of a creative interplay of the world cultures which offers a chance and task: to become permeable for one another, to notice human one-sidednesses and limitations and to tackle them in teamwork — by mutual complementarity disposed for a humaneness which is "culturally differentiated" as well as "universally integrated" and vivid in the full sense of the word.

The mode of a dialectical intertwining and possible mutual fertilization of cultures described above in particular considers the important distinction grounded in experience: The relation between European and Afro-Asiatic culture is to be understood as contrary opposition; the relation between African and Asiatic culture, however, as sub-contrary opposition. For in the latter the members of the opposition are closer to each other: They are two modes of mediation and balance between mind and nature which are disposed so that they oppose each other. Precisely through their mutual complementary relation they are able to "compensate" the European-occidental disposition and to bring it into proper proportion again, since it tends to grasp nature in active tension, to dispose and dominate it and to make it serve man's purposes like an instrument. (This at first brings about a "lack of balance," namely a "preponderance" of mind in confrontation to nature.) On the other hand, the "scientific-technical" dynamics of the occident can exert its influence on the "distanced spiritual equilibrium" of the orient, i.e. Asia, and the "spiritual vivacity immediate to nature" of Africa, thus promoting the development, respectively, of a "still more active calmness" and a "still more purposeful vivacity." Both influences, as mentioned above, can take place in a mutual fertile complementary relation.

Our dialectical-triadic attempt to understand the actual unity of nature and culture may in a way remind of the philosophical approach in Hegel. However, Hegel's idealistic presuppositions are not shared by us. Especially in calling nature "thesis" we still totally leave out of account whether nature is to be conceived of as position of an (absolute) mind or not; instead of this, we only mean the Being preceding all spiritual working-up and culture, laying the basis for it (and in this sense: being an "immediate" being). Calling the occidental culture "antithesis to nature" intends to express already an "essential aggressiveness", rather than a
confrontation in order to determine the confronted rationally. This confrontation may grow constructive by explicitly and decidedly turning towards nature; but it is also exposed to destructive alienation. Alienation takes place only inasmuch as nature is used as "mere means" — a danger and maybe also a temptation or perversion which certainly to a large extent has become historical reality. And we do not believe that alienation and destruction mean a necessary and unfailing step towards harmony and peace, as it seems according to dialectical idealism.\(^\text{21}\) Hegel's terminology which we used above (not without giving restricting explanations) represents a modern-occidental form of triadic understanding of reality. An example of an ancient-occidental form can be found in Plato's doctrine of the "trichotomy of the soul"\(^\text{22}\). The dialectical vision of reality in Hegel is influenced above all by the doctrine of the three hypostases in Neo-Platonism. Here the second member of the triad, modeling Hegel's "anti-thesis" (in our view, the "confrontation") is already clearly conceived of as "consciousness" and "reason" in Plotinus\(^\text{23}\). He offers some interesting parallels to African and Asiatic conceptions — both philosophical and mythological — of a triadic basic structure of reality.

According to ancient Egyptian tradition, reality is based on three primordial deities: Re ("Creator-God"), Ptah ("Word-God") and Amun ("Spirit-God"). The first one can be interpreted as an archetypical reference to the primordial vital force (especially the sun); the second one as an equivalent reference to confronting consciousness (expressing itself in the word); the third one as reference to love and joy that connects all.\(^\text{24}\)

In the area of Asiatic culture we encounter at first the South Asiatic "Hindu Trinity" ("Trimurti") wherein the supreme Divine Being is represented: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva\(^\text{25}\). In an even clearer way, for Indian thinking the deepest essence of reality articulates itself in the abstract philosophical formula: "Sat-Chit-Ananda", that is, being-consciousness-joy of love. According to the philosophical tradition of East Asia, the wholeness of Being lives in the complementary contrariety of the powers (respective directions of motion) Yang and Yin, which also can be interpreted in the sense of a triadic circular movement.\(^\text{26}\)

Now let's conclude by mentioning the idea of "Analogia et Participatio Trinitatis" as offered in a Christian philosophical-theological perspective. This obviously is of special importance in our context, since the founder of Christianity lived at the cultural intersection of Europe, Africa and Asia, although Christian theology at first was developed more in the form of European-occidental conceptualization.\(^\text{27}\). From this point of view, the Divine basic reality is to be conceived of as a tri-personal unity in motion: Being in an unlimited way, expresses in unlimited knowledge and consciousness of itself its essence as "inner word" (= "Logos"), thus confronting it as its totally co-essential "Thou". The space of encounter between the two which is constituted this way is filled with life by both of them breathing a common "spirit" in mutual acceptance and love, so transcending, i.e. not "blurring" or "extinguishing," but rather "fulfilling" and "heightening" their duality and contrariety, confirming their unity and harmony.

In our context which is coined by the philosophy of culture the following interpretation becomes plausible: Occidental culture in its confronting logicity participates in a special way in and points to the proceeding of the Logos in
the Divine basic reality; regarding the partial alienation and the perversion of meaning of this “logicity” this happens, however, expressed in Christian terms, rather as a participation in the “crucified Logos.” In contrast to this, the area of Afro-Asiatic culture in its different spiritual disposition appears to be embedded more deeply in the proceeding of the divine Spirit: Asiatic “spirituality of illumination” more clearly in the emanation of Spirit from the Divine Logos, African “spirituality of immediacy” more distinctly in the effluence of the Spirit from the Divine Being, inasmuch this precedes Logos and Spirit. Such an attempt to interpret the world event in an onto-trinitarian way hints at the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between philosophy of culture and Christian theology wherein, however, not only European, but also African and Asiatic modes of thinking are to be involved.

Summing up, it may be said that the extensive continental areas of the earth, i.e. Europe — Africa — Asia, in a certain correspondence to the varying natural conditions, have brought forth different mental and cultural dispositions which are complementary to one another and can be understood more deeply in the perspective of a “triadic conception of reality”. Holistic thinking has an important task of philosophical and empirical research, whereby it could give important impulses and helpful orientations to intercultural action.
Notes and References

1. The “protest against the unity in the name of a subdued diversity” (cf. J. Habermas, Nachmetaphysisches Denken, Frankfurt/Main 1992, p 153) manifests itself in the end of the modern era as a criticism of technical rationality, which shows itself as monistic understanding. The so-called postmodernism developed a particularism or radical contextualism (ibid.), which rigidly refuses any unitary perspective whatsoever, in the same totalitarian way as its counterpart erases all specific differences. The claim that reality shows an irreducible diversity will therefore evoke protest against the variety, in the name of a subdued variety. The alternation from one extreme to the other, which leads to mutual destruction, may be resolved only when reality is conceived as multi-unity: as creative tension in which unity and variety symbolize poles of the same origin.


4. On the “whole transcending the sum of its parts” cf. the fundamental works by Arnulf Rieber, Vom Positivismus zum Universalismus. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung und Kritik des Ganzheitsbegriffs von Othmar Spann [From positivism to universalism. Inquiries into the development and critical evaluation of the concept of wholeness in Othmar Spann]. Berlin

On the aspect of living holistic structures differentiating themselves into opposite parts, which reach their completion in a more complex unity, cf. esp. R. Guardini, Der Gegensatz.


6. This typical diverging accentuation in the understanding of reality might be pointed out according to the perspective and terminology of Martin Heidegger’s view of Being: The European-occidental interest is settled on the level of the Ontic, while the African and, in still another way, the Asiatic orientation apparently is directed more consciously towards the Ontological. The former one turns to the different and multiple empirical data which can be rationally grasped and disposed of; the latter one, on the contrary, lives by the intuitive experience of the truth of Being which “lays the foundation” and which cannot be rationally handled by man, which rather grasps and determines man and in which he has to historically actualize himself as an event and to determine himself further. Cf. on this aspect: V. G. Furtado [Bangalore/India], “Asian perspectives for the development of intercultural thought” [contribution to the ‘Primer Congreso Mundial de Filosofia Intercultural’ at the Universidad Pontifica de Mexico in March 1995]; H. Beck, “The relation of European thought to the ‘Logos’ and ‘Logic’. A possible contribution to cultural World integration.” In: Lingua ac Communitas 2 (Warsaw-Poznan 1993) pp 45-55.

rationality in modern times and its expression in the technics of twelve-tone music]. Ibid., pp 221-240.


9. Cf. the explanations of the doctor, philosopher and theologian Cyrill V. Korvin-Krasinski who for a long time lived in different countries of Asia and in dialogue with Govinda-Yoga: Tibetische Medizinphilosophie [Tibetan medical philosophy], Zurich 1964; Cyrill V. Korvin-Krasinski, Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos in religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht [Microcosm and macrocosm seen from the perspective of history of religions], Duesseldorf 1960; Cyrill V. Korvin-Krasinski, Trim Mundi Machim. Die Signatur des alten Eurasien [The triadic structure of the world. The signature of Ancient Eurasia], Mainz 1986 [= an attempt of comprehensive interpretation of meaning, pointing to analogies of a triadic-trinitarian principle of understanding reality which are expressed by the ancient traditions]; on the view of reality diverging in a mode typical to the single cultures as given in the science of medicine and especially in philosophy, cf. Ram Adhar Mall, Die drei Geburtsorte der Philosophie: China-Indien-Europa [The three places where philosophy was born: China-India-Europe], Mainz 1989; further: Hans-Peter Hasenfratz, Der indische Weg. Die Spiritualitaet eines Kontinents [The Indian way. The spirituality of a continent], Freiburg 1994.

10. So the Western empirical-technological science of medicine could appreciate the Afro-Asiatic understanding of wholeness as an exhortation and a direction-giving impulse, encouraging
people to do research in regions of experience which usually are usually neglected. The occidental science of medicine would be able to provide for the African and Asiatic holistic science of medicine more perfect technical instruments which serve the precise dealing with physical (and mental) partial phenomena. For further explanations on these areas of culture cf. author, “Partnerschaftliche Solidarität als Strukturprinzip der zukünftigen Gesellschaft, konkretisiert an Ehe und Familie, Schule, Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Politik” [Solidarity in the spirit of partnership as structuring principle of future society, with concretions in the fields of matrimony, family, school, scholarship, economy and politics]. In: Gunter Poltner (ed.), Personale Freiheit und pluralistische Gesellschaft, Freiburg et al. 1981, pp 23-38; id., “Schoepferischer Gegensatz zwischen westlicher und oestlicher Kultur” [Creative contrast between Western and Eastern culture]. In: Zeitschrift fuer Ganzheitsforschung 26 (1982) pp 99-106.

11. Cf. author, “Decline of culture or setting out toward a more humane world? Philosophical considerations on the present consciousness of crisis.” In: Philosophy and the Future of Humanity 1 (Jakarta/Indonesia 1991, # 1) pp 75-91; modified version in: Journal of Humanities 6 (University of Malawi/Africa, Oct. 1992) pp 17-33. Inasmuch as holistic thinking is involved in the perception of reality in occidental culture, this happens according to the mode of occidental rationality, i.e. rational analysis and synthesis. Especially in modern times, intuitive parts of knowledge serve only as preceding function of direction-giving impulses, or hypothetical pre-conceptions for the rational process, respectively, and are meant to be conclusively comprehending interpretations which scarcely make the claim of “scientific” value. Nevertheless, in this regard the geographically distinct cultural traditions of Europe show significant differences; cf. Arnulf Reiber, “Basic types of holistic thinking in the Occident.” In: H. Beck/G. Schmirber (eds.), Creative peace through encounter of world cultures, op.cit. [note 4], pp 111-144.


16. Into this context a remark by Arnulf Rieber fits in, made during a discussion in our colloquium on cultural philosophy at Bamberg University in the summer term of 1992: “The triangle of cultures - Europe, Africa, Asia”: In African as well as in Asiatic cultural tradition there is the conviction that in nature, e.g. on mountains or on trees, spirits are dwelling (deities or souls of the ancestors). According to African understanding, the spirit is located in the centre of the tree; it forms the “heart” of the tree, its life in a deeper sense of the word. According to Asiatic understanding, the spirit is sending effects into the tree “from above”: it forms the “head” of the tree, dominating it. From the African perspective, the spirit is living in the midst of material nature; from the Asiatic perspective, it is tending towards domination, overcoming and liberation. (Of course, the expressions: “from above”, “midst” respectively “head” and “heart” are not primarily to be understood in a properly spatial sense, but rather in a symbolical and ontological sense.)

17. An attempt to see the different and dissimilar on the background of the common and similar (e.g. the difference between West, South and East Asiatic culture as different modes of expression of specific Asiatic way of culture) was undertaken by myself, entering deeper into the matter: “World peace as dynamic unity of cultural contrarieties” [cf note 13].

basis for an understanding of the structure of the culture of mankind as a perspective for a

19. But even then we must not expect that all data given by experience can be “onto-logically
deduced”. They can only approximately be “elucidated onto-hermeneutically”. To say it
more exactly: The procedure follows a circular figure repeating itself again and again, i.e.
a spiral movement: Departing from experience, we try to view its (“dialectical-trinitarian”) basic source, in order to understand out of this source experience more “basically” (as
more or less coherent connection of meaning). Hence a first, preliminary understanding
arises, a pre-understanding of the data of experience. Still more aspects of experience,
which confronted us as problems before, can be taken into consideration and put into their
proper place. Thus our view can turn back again and so on — in the direction of an ever
more “broad” and “basic” understanding of reality. In this way, the manifold and different
“being of experience” should and can be elucidated in the “truth of the Being which lays
its basis”; at the same time this truth is to be revealed more clearly. The foundation for this
concept of knowledge is the Aristotelian differentiation between the sensual as what is “the
former for us” (the starting-point of our experience) and the basic source of meaning and
Being which is detected hereby as what is “the former by nature” (wherein the inner
constitution of the sensual is apprehended and where our strife for knowledge reaches a
certain conclusion); cf. Aristotle, Anal. post. 1,2 [71b.34]; see also Horst Seidi, Beitraege
zu Aristoteles’ Erkenntnislehre und Metaphysik [Contribution to Aristotle’s theory of knowledge

20. Nature implies, so to speak, the “inviting” and “provoking” possibility which the mind grasps
and actualizes through the work of culture, the receptive potency, into which mind can
express and “objectivate” itself: Mind lays its claim on the possibilities of nature and
fulfills them, shaping them through its ideas. For example, by passing through nature (by
taking into service and actualizing its possibilities) mind can gain more and more its own
actuality; and in a certain correspondence, by “passing through the mind” (i.e. by its
technological-cultural performance) nature gains more and more its own actuality, reaches
an increased energizing of its material and vital potencies. So the work of culture means an
actualization of ontological possibilities of nature by mind as well as of ontological
possibilities of mind by nature. Both correspond to each other essentially and so comply
with the requirements of the concept “ontological unity”. On the further elaboration of this
connection cf. H. Beck, Kulturphilosophie der Technik [note 5], esp. pp 48-73 for the positive
meaning of technology in the context of world history. There we try, from the perspectives
“technics as ‘actualization of the possibilities’ of nature”, “technics as spiritual history of
nature” (and as “natural history of mind”) and “technics as unifying movement of mind and
nature”, to analyse the extent of the mutual, holistically comprehensive dynamis-energeia-
relationship between nature and mind. This holds true especially for the modern culture
which is thoroughly determined by technics.

21. Examples of topical “triadic interpretations of reality” which partially proceed by critical
dialogue with Hegel, and which are particularly inspired by the deeper onto-triadic thought
tradition of the medieval occident, e.g. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, or Bonaventure, are
the following: H. Beck, Der Akt-Charakter des Seins. Eine spekulative Weiterfuhrung der
Seinslehre Thomas v. Aquins aus der Anregung durch das dialektische Prinzip Hegels (Being
as act. A speculative continuation of the ontology of Thomas Aquinas, inspired by Hegel’s


22. Firstly a “vital desire-soul” is accentuated. It is the basis of the human being and lives fundamentally in the abdomen. Contrarily “con-fronted” to it is the “mindsoul” to which the head as main part of the body is ascribed. Between the two the “courage-soul” mediates; it is situated in the breast and in the heart (as origin of “cordial” courage).

In the context of this approach, the essential habit of Europe can be understood as being disposed to ascribe greatest importance for life to the head (with an inclination towards exclusive concentration on the head), while in Afro-Asiatic culture it is more originally the “heart” which marks the disposition of man and whence man lives. Here, the “heart” mediates between “abdomen” and “head”. To continue out of the perspective opened above in a plastic manner: In African culture the heart is motivated more immediately and strongly out of the “abdomen”; in Asiatic culture more accentuatedly out of the “head.” Cf. e.g. Thomas A. Szlezdk, “Unsterblichkeit und Trichotomie der Seele im zehnten Buch der Politeia” [Immortality and trichotomy of the soul in Politeia X]. In: *Phronesis* 21 (1976) pp 31-58.


25. Brahma is believed to be the “Creator-God”, the unlimited primordial unity of Being whence the manifold and limited being emanates. Vishnu is the “Preserver-God” who carries and preserves the emanated manifold and limited being. Because his most important incarnations, as Ram, Buddha (according to Hindu understanding also he is an incarnation of Vishnu) and Krishna, were guiding teachers of mankind, it is not absurd to assume that he is, in his essence, deeply “word-like”. Shiva, the “Destroyer-God”, “destroys” the limitations (and also the perversions of meaning, the evil and the suffering, which are connected to limitation) of the emanated manifold and different, thus giving it back to the unlimited unity and harmony of the origin. - On this context cf. H. v. Glasenapp, *Die Philosophie der Inder, eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte und ihre Lehren* [The philosophy of the Indians. An introduction into its history and its doctrines], 2 vols., Salzburg 1953/56.

26. In this perspective, “Yang” represents the “male” power of the heavens, proceeding from itself and expanding. “Yin” represents the “female” power of the earth, returning to itself and receptive. So a far-fetched parallelism between Yang and the proceeding from “thesis” towards “antithesis” (respectively, from “Being” towards “consciousness” and “word”) can be drawn, as well as between Yin and the re-folding of the proceeded opposition into a “synthesis” of integral unity and fulfilling harmony.

This explanation of the philosophical and mythological concepts of triadic basic essence of reality, which differ typically from culture to culture, may be articulated less clearly in the respective traditions; it may also seem to be far from the perspectives of the individual scientific approaches. Our interpretation, however, suggests itself in the hermeneutic perspective of the given context. The more or less huge similarity and dissimilarity between the given examples even demonstrates the possible difference and multiplicity of the expressions of the basic unity of being human as well as of Being itself; vice versa it demonstrates the unity of the basis in the multiplicity of the phenomena. - An extensive preliminary work on the project of a triadic ontology of culture is contained in E. Schadel, *Bibliotheca Trinitaria*um. *Internat. Bibliographie zur trinitarischen Literatur*, Vol. 1-2, München-New York-London-Paris.

27. On the ‘co-essentiality’ between Logos and Divine Being cf.: “In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was with God and God was the Word” (John 1,1); on the ‘equal rank’ and ‘succession’ of the three Divine hypostases / persons: “Baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28,19).

This means: The unlimited Divine Being proceeds within itself totally “out of itself” (as self-expression in the Word) and “into itself” (as self-completion in the Spirit); thus it enacts a circular motion without any temporal or spatial limitation. The limited world, that is, the unity of nature and culture, by Divine freedom is implied in the articulation of the unlimited Word; therefore it participates in the “swinging” of the Divine Being which is moved in a trinitarian way. Hence the world bears a thorough trinitarian character based on its transcendent and at the same time immanent Divine foundation, hereby pointing to the trinitarian structure of this foundation as its “weak reflection”; on the other hand, understanding trinity can elucidate some aspects of the world.