

ABSOLUTE (lat. *absolutus* — complete, perfect, absolute, unconditional) — that which is not in any respect subject to conditions or limited: the first being which is independent, subsistent, possessing within itself the reason for its existence and its qualifications, the fullness of being, the fullness of perfection.

Plotinus introduced the term "absolute" into philosophy to designate the reality from which everything else originates (the primordial One). However, he was not the author of the first philosophical conception of the absolute. The problem of the absolute is associated with a type of philosophical cognition which inquires into the first principles (*αρχή* [*arché*], *principium*) of the world, the causes, primordial elements, or fundamental structures from which all things arose.

The variety of the conceptions of the absolute is conditioned by the variety of philosophical trends and systems. In the history of philosophy, the absolute was understood as: a) the primordial and fundamental principle (*arché*, *principium*), the basic factor of the cosmos, the first, primordial and fundamental reality (the Ionian philosophers of nature, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus); b) the personal Absolute (the Christian God) — Thomas Aquinas, the Christian thinkers of the "golden Middle Ages"; c) the praeter-personal absolute — the absolute starting point in a necessary process (e.g. absolute substance — Spinoza; absolute self — Fichte, Schelling; absolute spirit — Hegel); d) contemporary syncretic and synthetic conceptions of the absolute.

IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY the problem of the absolute, and thus the problem of that which is first, fundamental and enduring — as opposed to that which is secondary, derivative and transitory — was posed by Thales of Miletus, the creator of the philosophy of nature (*φύσις* [*physis*]). According to Thales, the absolute principle (*arché*) or cause of all reality is water — "the beginning of everything". Water is that from which all things are and from which they first arise, and to which they ultimately return (*Met.*, 983 b 20-25).

According to Anaximander, the absolute principle, and thus the first and ultimate reality, was the boundless (*ἄπειρον* [*ápeiron*]). The boundless has neither beginning nor end. It did not come into being and does not perish. It encompasses, directs and governs all things. It is spatially infinite and cannot be qualitatively defined. There is also an infinite number of worlds that arise from it; the worlds are infinite with respect to their sequence in time and with respect to their co-existence in space. The world ends and is reborn an infinite number of times. This cycle is repeated unto infinity. Infinity (the boundless) is immortal and indestructible (divine) — "eternal and forever young".

According to Heraclitus, who emphasized the dynamism of reality, (*παντα ρει* [*panta rhei*], all things flow, nothing endures) — the absolute principle is symbolically expressed as fire, to which Heraclitus ascribes thought and intelligence. Reason (*λογος* [*logos*]) or thought thus constitutes the law that permeates all nature and causes the unity of opposite. "Opposite things join, and from things that differ arises a most marvellous harmony, and everything arises by conflict" (Diels-Kranz 12 B 1). The *logos* is the harmony of opposites and explains all reality. "This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out" (Diels-Kranz 12 B 30). "All things are exchanged for Fire, and Fire for all things as wares are exchanged for gold, and gold for wares" (Diels-Kranz 12 B 90). "Fire is day and night, winter and summer, strife and peace, satiety and hunger, which

means that it is the satiety of opposites, the hunger of a thing that destroys things and causes them to perish" (Diels-Kranz 12 B 67). Heraclitus ascribes to fire (the logos) the eschatological function of the highest judge: "For when fire suddenly takes over everything, it will judge and condemn" (Diels-Kranz 12 B 66). For Heraclitus there is only one wisdom: to recognize the reason (logos) which rules and permeates all. Thus the logos designates a rule by which all things become reality, and a law that is common to all things and rules all. Thus it contains rationality and intelligence.

Pythagoras took number as the absolute principle of everything. He understood number as a synthesis of two more primordial elements: the boundless (that which is unlimited), and the limited. Number as a synthesis always presents a definition of what is undefined in a boundary, and therefore since it is such, in turn it is an element that determines things, and a constitutive principle of other things. Number is a divine element, the principle and guide of divine and heavenly life; without number everything would be indefinite, uncertain and unclear. Thus number designates rationality: "In fact, whatever can be known has a number. Without number we cannot grasp with thought nor know anything" (Diels-Kranz 44 B 4). "Neither the nature of number nor harmony admits into itself any falsehood [...] Falsehood and inadequacy are proper to the nature of the indefinite, the unknowable and the irrational. Falsehood will never enter into numbers. For falsehood is inimical and unfriendly to the nature of number. Truth, however, is proper to the species of number and rooted in its nature" (Diels-Kranz 44 B 11). The domination of number means the domination of rationality and truth in the cosmos.

Xenophanes regards the god-cosmos as the absolute principle. It is one, the highest among the gods and men, neither in body or mind similar to men, one in whom "the whole sees, the whole perceives, the whole hears". "But without effort it sets in motion all things by mind and thought". "It always abides in the same place, not moved at all, nor is it fitting that it should move from one place to another" (Diels-Kranz 11 B 24-26).

Parmenides introduced some new aspects into the understanding of the absolute, which was connected with his transformation of cosmology into ontology; being, whose essence is absolute identity, is unchanging, necessary, and the only object worthy of rational knowledge. "Being is, and it is impossible for it not to be". Being is pure positivity, and non-being is pure negativity; every thinking is a thinking about being: "For to think and to be are the same thing" (Diels-Kranz 18 B 8-34). "Therefore thinking and that by reason of which thought exists are one and the same thing, for you will not find thinking without the being from which it receives its name. Nor is there nor will there be anything apart from being; for fate has linked it together, so that it is a whole and immovable" (Diels-Kranz 28 B 8-34). Parmenides was the first in the history of philosophy to formulate the principle of non-contradiction in ontological terms. Being neither arises nor perishes. There is neither past nor future, but the eternal present without beginning and without end. Being is unchanging and absolutely immobile, it is closed and complete, lacking in nothing and needing nothing, and therefore it abides in itself, the identical with the identical, the only worthy object of knowledge (thought). Parmenides used the image of a sphere to present being: "it is perfected on every side, like the mass of a rounded sphere, equally distant from the centre at every point" (Diels-Kranz 28 B 8-43), which indicates that being, despite its abstract character, is understood by Parmenides as the being of the cosmos.

Zeno of Elea and Melissos of Samos provided arguments for Parmenides' conceptions and in a certain sense modified it. Eleatic philosophy concludes with the recognition of the absolute

as the eternal, infinite and incorporeal being which precludes any possibility of plurality, since at the starting point this philosophy eliminates the recognition of phenomena.

According to Empedocles, the principle of the universe is not some single thing, but something which is manifold in structure. The principle of the universe consists of four substances that are unbegotten and indestructible: air, water, earth and fire. The emergence and destruction of things is the combining and disconnecting of these things under the influence of the cosmic powers of love and hate. When love prevails in the cosmos, the elements are a compact unity, which Empedocles calls the One or the Sphairos (Σφαιρος). The Sphairos is absolute perfection. "It is equal to itself in all directions and a completely boundless sphere, rejoicing in complete solitude" (Diels-Kranz 21 B 28). "It is a sphere equal to itself in all directions" (Diels-Kranz 21 B 29).

For Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, the absolute was the Nous (Νους- divine mind) whose motion causes the emergence of all things from existing parts and germs called homoiomeré (ομοιομερη). Nous is "unbounded, independent and unmixed with anything, but only one exists from itself [...] It is most delicate and most pure in all things, has full knowledge of all and possesses extraordinary power. Nous as cosmic intellect moves and orders everything".

With Anaxagoras' philosophy, the thought of the absolute, often described as divine, becomes more refined. The philosophers of nature could not see beyond their naturalistic assumptions and therefore could speak only of natural conceptions of the divine. The absolute of the philosophers of nature, although it possessed certain divine features (infinity, eternity), did not extend beyond the reality of the cosmos (physis) which was for them the entire world: they identified the divine with the cosmogenic primordial principle. However, we may see an effort to acknowledge the absolute as a reality that transcends the world (e.g. the Nous of Anaximander).

Democritus saw absolute atoms (ατομοι, elementary particles) as the foundation of reality. These atoms are qualitatively uniform and quantitatively and geometrically varied. All things, their properties and states, arise from atoms. Atoms of the same nature are in eternal motion. The world was created by atoms and their motion. "All things happen by virtue of necessity, the vortex being the cause of the creation of all things, and this he calls necessity" (DLaert IX 45).

Plato applied a philosophical method ("a second navigation") different from that of the philosophers of nature and discovered a new type of absolute. It was pure intelligible, supra-sensible reality, the "real reality" which consists in the world of ideas, the world of unchanging, eternal, subsistent and general beings. Plato conceived an hierarchical structure of reality. The sphere of the plurality of sensible things depended upon the sphere of ideas, while the sphere of the plurality of ideas depended upon the next sphere of reality from which ideas were derived. This next sphere was the One and the undefined Dyad, and this is the first sphere in an absolute sense. It is the principle of everything, and thus the principle of a global metaphysical explanation of all aspects of reality. It has a bipolar structure. The One acts upon the Dyad, which is hierarchically subordinate to the One, yet is essentially connected and co-eternal with the One. The plurality, variety and gradation of beings comes from the action of the One which determines the opposing principle, the Dyad. The Dyad is indeterminate quantity (a special kind of intelligible matter). The One and the Dyad are equally primordial; they require each other.

The One is identical to the Good. The One is the essence of the Good. The Good is the One, and the One is the highest measure of everything. The Absolute — the One (the Good) determines the Dyad at different levels and creates being, the knowability of each thing, the intellect and the value of each thing. It is the cause of the universe in rightness and beauty, the source of truth and reason (*Resp*, VI 508 E — 509 B). Plato did not identify the philosophical absolute — the idea of the One (the Good) with the God of religion, not even with the Demiurge. In his philosophy we must distinguish "the divine" from God as a person. The Demiurge possesses the personal characteristics proper to God and is the builder of the world (the divine mind) who knows and wants. However, the Demiurge is lower in the hierarchy of beings than the world of ideas (which comes after the idea of the Good), since the Demiurge did not create it, but in a cognitive and normative sense is dependent upon it.

Aristotle developed a conception of the absolute, in a certain sense the most perfect conception in the ancient world, in his "first philosophy" (ontology, metaphysics). It is associated with his realistic attitude and his conception of being as substance (being in itself) that is composed of the determined and determining elements of matter and form, and with his understanding of being in terms of dynamism (potency-act). For Aristotle, the absolute was being in the absolute sense, the most perfect substance, the highest in the hierarchy of being, necessary, unchanging, knowable, pure form, pure act. The absolute is identified with unity and good, the intellect, the self-thinking thought. As spirit and thought, as immaterial substance, the absolute (Intelligence) is the immaterial, unchanging (immobile) and eternal cause that is transcendent to the eternally existing world that undergoes constant change. "Such is the first principle upon which the sensible universe and the world of nature depend" (*Met.*, 1072 b 15). "[...] Now thinking in itself is concerned with that which is in itself best, and thinking in the highest sense with that which is in the highest sense best. And thought thinks itself through participation in the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought by the act of apprehension and thinking, so that thought and the object of thought are the same [...] Life belongs to God. For the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and the essential actuality of God is life most good and eternal. We hold, then, that God is a living being, eternal, most good; and therefore life and a continuous existence belong to God; for that is what God is" (*Met.*, 1072 b 19-30).

Aristotle's absolute, which he calls God, as a pure immanent thought, is the most perfect part of the world, and although he is separate from the world, he is necessary for life upon earth and for motion in the world. He is primarily the final cause for the world, the object of contemplation and the motive for the motion of the "first heaven". The first heaven contemplates him as the highest good and thus sets itself in motion, thereby becoming the first mover that is itself moved by love, and it becomes the source of motion for the lower cosmic spheres. The absolute is thus the first unmoved mover (the final cause and efficient cause of motion) of the world.

The Aristotelian God did not create the world, for the world is eternal and God is separate from the world. Therefore God knows neither the world nor men. God is not providence for the world and so cannot be the object of religious worship. In Aristotle, the philosophical absolute was unified with the conception of God as possessing the characteristics of a person. However, God in Aristotle's system was not identical to the God of religion, because he had no contact with the world, and no contact with man. Aristotle's philosophy, however, was an important step toward monotheism. It paved the way for the conception of the complete identity of the philosophical absolute and the religious God, which conception was

inherited by Christian thinkers.

The absolute in the philosophy of Plotinus is the highest reality, the ultimate principle that is intelligible in itself — the One which does not depend upon anything in its existence. In itself it is its own definite nature. It acts as it must act in accordance with what it is by necessity. It is the one unbegotten principle. It is beyond being, beyond thought, and beyond the duality of existence and thought. "What reason will it have to think? That which neither arose nor has before itself anything else, but is always that which it is" (*Enneads* II 822-623).

From the fecundity of the One by necessity a second principle arises lower than the first, but also eternally existing — intellect (logos). It is the self-existing knowledge of what is intellectually knowable. In the logos exist the ideas of all things (manifold self-intelligible unity).

The soul of the world, which is incorporeal and undivided, comes from the intellect, which is beauty. The soul of the world is the link between the world above the senses and the sensible world (human souls come from the soul of the world). Below the sphere of the soul is the sphere of the material world. Although Plotinus regarded matter as the principle of evil (the antithesis of good), for matter is the end point of emanation, he did not disparage the world, which is eternal, endowed with unity, joined by harmony, and ruled by providence.

Judaean-Christian revelation introduced important philosophical truths to culture and enriched the understanding of the absolute. The God of Jews and Christians is the most perfect Person, the fullness of Truth and Love, an absolute being different from the world (transcendent), and not subject to the condition of the world. The Church Fathers in the first centuries of Christianity developed a metaphysical interpretation of the revealed truths about the person, single, and transcendent God. They drew upon the metaphysical resolutions of Greek philosophy, especially Plato, Plotinus and Aristotle. Although their approaches were often eclectic, they showed how the Christian concept of God agrees with the philosophical idea of the Good, the One, the Logos and Pure Form.

This found expression in the thought of St. Augustine, among others, who was inspired by the philosophy of Plato in the modified version of Plotinus. Augustine developed an ontology that had traces of Greek ontology. God is the self-existent Truth and in Him are contained all ideas and eternal wisdom. Eternal wisdom directed creation as the eternal law, and natural law is a participation in the eternal law. God is before all else the ultimate reason for the world's knowability and the truth of human knowledge. God's essence is self-existence, immateriality and immutability — in keeping with his conviction that to exist is to be what a thing is (an essentialist conception of being). Creation is a gift of God that is expressed in number, form, order and unity. Augustine modified the Platonic theory of participation and showed that God is the creator of everything, the efficient cause, exemplar cause and ultimate end of all.

Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite expressed the truth about the Christian God in the terminology proper to Greek philosophy. He could not overcome the primacy of good over being. The absolute was according to him above good and above being: "But if It is greater than all Reason and all knowledge, and hath Its firm abode altogether beyond Mind and Being, and circumscribes, compacts, embraces and anticipates all things while Itself is altogether beyond the grasp of them all, and cannot be reached by any perception, imagination,

conjecture, name, discourse, apprehension, or understanding, how then is our discourse concerning the Divine Names to be accomplished, since we see that the Super-Essential Godhead is unutterable and nameless?" (*On the divine names*, I 5).

IN MEDIAEVAL PHILOSOPHY philosophical investigations developed concerning the absolute. There are two distinct tendencies: 1) the trend influenced by the thought of St. Augustine (Anselm, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus) in which philosophical investigations were strictly connected with faith (theology), a certain domination of thought (speculation) over cognition (the Platonic tradition), and the domination of will over reason; 2) the trend connected with Aristotle's philosophy, whose chief representative was St. Thomas Aquinas. He clearly divided the rational order from knowledge based on faith. In both trends there was an intense creativity that led to the Christian thinkers' developing their own ontology and metaphysics. Differences in their understanding of being found expression in how they understood the absolute, and the conception of the absolute changed. If ancient philosophy emphasized the self-sufficiency (autarchy) of the absolute, the mediaeval philosophers emphasized the existence in itself, non-composition and the distinctly personal character of the absolute.

According to Anselm of Canterbury, God is the absolute being greater than which none can be thought. Anselm formulated arguments for the existence of God and His attributes on a purely rational foundation, in the conviction that what we confess by faith can be known by reason. According to Anselm, a being exists whose internal necessity is so great that it is reflected in the idea that man possesses concerning Him. God exists of himself in such a necessary way that even in human thought He cannot not exist. "And He is truly such that one cannot even think that He is not". The affirmation of his existence is thus required by the thought which conceives of Him.

In keeping with this position, Anselm formulated what came to be called the ontological proof: "Even the fool is convinced that something exists beyond which nothing greater can be thought. For since he hears and understands, he understands that something exists in the intellect. Certainly that beyond which nothing greater can be thought does not exist only in the intellect. Since it exists in the intellect, we may conceive that it exists also in reality. This is more perfect (real existence is more perfect than mere existence in thought). Thus if that beyond which nothing greater can be thought existed only in the intellect, it would be that beyond which something greater could be thought, which is certainly impossible. Thus without doubt something exists beyond which we cannot think of anything greater, both in the intellect, and in reality" (*Proslogion*, ch. 2). The ontological proof, although it was criticized (by Thomas Aquinas, Kant and Locke) as an illegitimate transition from the order of thought to the real order, many thinkers accepted and modified it (Bonaventure, Descartes and Hegel).

According to St. Bonaventure, the absolute (God) is a simple, unchanging and necessary being, and most of all, the absolute is an uncreated good. Bonaventure developed investigations in the nature of God and his relation to the world and man ("the ways of the soul to God"). He brought together several philosophical lines into a great mystical-theological synthesis. Intellectual philosophical considerations accompany faith in God. God, according to Bonaventure, is immediately present in the human mind as the source of all understanding. God's presence in the mind is the basis of our knowledge of Him, and our possession of a concept of God implies His existence. Since He is a pure and simple being, unchanging and necessary, therefore to say that God is God is to say that He exists (*De*

*mysterio Trinitatis* I 1, 29; V 48). God is the creator of the world and He is above all the Good to which man aspires, and He is the Truth — the source of all human truth. Man's conviction concerning God is the result of the shining of the Divine Being (the Highest Truth) upon human thought (illumination). Bonaventure in his synthesis also considered philosophical lines drawn from Aristotle, including the cosmological proof, however it was the Platonic-Augustinian tradition that was the dominant influence upon Bonaventure.

Thomas Aquinas developed a new conception of the absolute. He distinguished rational (natural) knowledge from knowledge accepted on faith. He developed a metaphysics which was new compared to the received philosophical tradition, including Aristotle. Its central point was the understanding of being as something that exists. The metaphysics of existing being ascribes the greatest perfection to the act of existence in being, and this led to a new conception of the absolute. The Absolute is the Fullness of existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*), Subsistent Being, Pure Act, incomposite Being, unchanging, eternal, the Absolute Person (intellect and will), the Fullness of perfections (Truth, Good, Beauty), the absolute spirit, independent of matter and of the whole world. He is the creator of the world (*creatio ex nihilo*). The Absolute is thus the first cause of the emergence and duration of the world (the efficient cause), and also the final cause (the Highest Good) to which ultimately all created beings aspire, and the exemplar cause of existing being (He creates according to thoughts-ideas).

Thomas Aquinas developed an epistemology adequate to his metaphysics. He described the roads of cognition that can lead to an affirmation of the necessity of the absolute's existence. He asked concerning the existing beings that are given in immediate knowledge "why do they exist, since they do not need to exist?". He applied the principle of "*habitus principii*" and arrived at the necessity of an affirmation of the absolute as the reason of existence for non-necessary beings.

Thomas expressed these analysis in his "five ways" which lead to the knowledge of the absolute. They all begin with the affirmation that many beings exist. Their existence is examined under different aspects: I — the becoming of beings, II — duration in existence, III — the non-necessary connection between the content of a being and its existence, IV — the possession by beings of gradated perfections — the so-called transcendental perfections, V — the teleological action of beings, esp. non-rational beings. He shows that the coming-into-existence of a being, which is an act, can be caused by an existing (actual) being. The world is composed of beings which at a certain moment arise and are subject to changes, and as such the world requires us ultimately to accept a being who is pure existence — the act of existence. Only a self-intelligible being who exists of himself and is the act of existence can provide an explanation both for radical changes (the very emergence into existence of a non-necessary being), and changes in a being's development. The existence of efficient causes none of which is a cause of its own existence, but which cause the existence and duration of other beings, requires us to accept the first efficient cause, the Being who exists in Himself and through Himself.

The non-necessity of beings that arise and perish, which do not possess existence by their nature, in which "to be something" and "to exist" are not identical, is empirically affirmed. It is impossible that all beings are members of the set of non-necessary beings. Thus there must exist as the reason for non-necessary (contingent) beings a necessary Being to whose essence belongs existence.

The variety of beings with respect to the properties that belong to all beings (the transcendental properties — distinctness, unity, truth, good, beauty) requires the existence of the Being who is fullness with respect to all these perfections, the fullness of existence, of unity (the Unique), of distinctness, truth, good and beauty. The action of non-rational beings, the regularity of their action which is a consequence of an organized nature, of an essence which in itself is something rational (knowable), requires us to accept the Absolute who is Intellect, from whom all beings come by way of thought.

The metaphysics of existing being was the only one in the history of philosophy to indicate the identity of the philosophical principle (or cause) that is called the Absolute, and God as the Person with whom man may enter into conscious and free relations (religion). The Absolute — the God of philosophy and the God of religion are identical. They are one and the same designate.

Duns Scotus brought some changes into the understanding of the absolute and how it is known, in connection with his conception of being and ontology. The absolute is an infinite being, the first being, the first cause, the ultimate end, the fundamental structure undetermined in itself of all reality, different from all determinations and internally free of contradiction. Being is common to the absolute and to beings that come from the absolute. The absolute is defined by considering the complementary properties of being. The first two modes are "finitude" and "infinity", followed by "causality" and "producibility".

Investigations into "causality" and "producibility" lead to the possibility of the existence of a first being, a first cause. The first cause by definition is possible. In reality, if an uncaused first cause is possible, it is possible per se (such a being is the only intelligible cause of its own possibility). Thus if the First Being is possible, then it exists.

As for the infinity of the First Being, his investigations have a similarly speculative character. Nothing limits the First Cause in its causality, and thus it is infinite. This infinity is confirmed by that fact that the absolute is an intelligence that knows everything that can be known. Therefore in the first intelligence there is an infinity of intellectually knowable beings, and consequently the Intellect that encompasses all beings at once is actually infinite.

The nominalistic conception of knowledge influenced a change in position on the question of our knowledge of the absolute. Ockham eliminated all concepts of essence that could be referred in a proper sense to the absolute. Ockham's position with regard to knowledge became the source of modern empiricism.

By the end of the middle ages, an eclectic approach to philosophical problems brought, among other things, a conception of the absolute as a Being who, according to Nicholas of Cusa, is the absolute and perfect "coincidence of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*). The absolute is the ineffable coincidence of maximum and minimum, and thus is the coincidence of absolute possibility, for it is the infinite possibility of all things, because in it all things are in act. In such a situation, learned unknowing (*docta ignorantia*) and a knowledge of formal logic become the ways to a knowledge of the absolute.

IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY, due mainly to Descartes, there was a fundamental change of paradigm for doing philosophy. The characteristics of the new paradigm were: consciousness as the starting point ("*cogito ergo sum*"), the primacy of thought over knowledge and over being, the primacy of essence and nature over existence; the connection of metaphysics with



a physical and mechanistic image of the world; radical rationalism — the desire to explain the mysteries of the world, man and God, by pure reason. This began a rupture between the absolute as a philosophical principle and the God of religion, and consequently led to pantheism (Spinoza), deism and atheism.

According to Descartes, the absolute is an infinite and perfect being whose essence is "to be the cause" of itself, of the world understood in mechanistic terms, and of human nature, and to be the guarantee of our knowledge of the truth and the eternity of the human soul. The foundation of Descartes' speculations on the existence of the absolute is the clear and distinct idea of the thinking substance, uncreated and independent, which is innate in man primarily as the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity in man must precede the idea of the finite self, which of itself as imperfect cannot produce the idea of the Infinite Being. The Absolute is the cause of the idea of the Infinite Being and of the idea of the man himself who possesses this idea. The existence of the idea of God in man is thus a proof for His real existence, therefore the existence of the absolute is for the rational spirit (*res cogitans*) almost self-evident. On the basis of the idea of the Perfect Being, man knows that He is and who He is. "There is the great advantage in proving the existence of God in this way, viz., by his idea, that we at the same time know what he is, as far as the weakness of our nature allows; for, reflecting on the idea we have of him which is born with us, we perceive that he is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent [...] in fine, he has in himself all that in which we can clearly discover any infinite perfection or good that is not limited by any imperfection" (*Principles of Philosophy*, I, 22).

According to Descartes, God's essential function is "to be a cause". In the first place, God is the cause of his own existence. He is also the source of secondary causation, a manifestation of which is the creation and conservation of the world as understood in mechanistic terms, where everything may be explained by the geometrical properties of space and the physical laws of motion. Finally, Descartes reduced the absolute to the function of the highest cause of nature, which consequently led to the identification of God with nature: "for by nature, considered in general, I now understand nothing more than God himself, or the order and disposition established by God in created things" (*Meditations on First Philosophy*, VI, 11).

Malebranche understood the absolute as the infinitely perfect being, who in his own substance knows the essences of beings and their possible activity. The absolute is the cause of everything to such an extent that created beings are merely an occasion for his activity (occasionalism). Man's every act of knowledge is a work of God, and every thought implies a thought about God; thus He is known in every act of conceptual knowledge (the germs of ontologism).

According to Spinoza, the absolute is an infinite substance, uncreated (*causa sui*), whose essence is existence, who is perfect and contains an infinite number of attributes, including extension and thought. Each of these attributes is identical with God's substance and expresses His essence, which is one and simple. God, who "alone exists by the sole necessity of his nature and acts by the sole necessity of his nature," (*Ethics* I, 17, coroll. II) is identified with nature: "*Deus sive natura*". God is thus the absolute essence whose internal necessity makes necessary the coming-into-existence of everything that is. Thus the absolute is everything, and everything that is "contains in itself the necessary and infinite essence of God" (*ibid*, II 45, 184).

According to Leibniz, the absolute is the necessary being whose very possibility implies

actuality. "This is in fact an excellent privilege of the divine nature, to have need only of a possibility or an essence in order to actually exist, and it is just this which is called *ens a se*" (*Discourse on Metaphysics*, XXIII). Since he is a perfect being, the absolute is infinitely perfect in thought and cannot help but to share his perfections. He morally obliged to create the best world. Otherwise there would be something that could have been done in God's work. The best of all possible worlds is this one in which we find ourselves.

The Deists (Fontenelle, Rousseau, Diderot, Wolter) accepted the philosophical absolute as the highest essence, the necessary and eternal Being who is the cause of the world's coming into existence. The absolute was understood as the "clockmaker", the "supreme engineer" of the enormous machine which is the world understood mechanistically. The absolute was only the starting point of the world. Thereafter nature works efficiently without its help; the absolute is not interested in the world or man, and man does not form any religious relations with the absolute.

Hume and Locke, the representatives of British Empiricism, denied the philosophical principles of causality and substantiality. This inevitably led to the rejection of metaphysics as the philosophy of being, and by the same token made knowledge impossible. Kant intensified the rejection of metaphysics as an explanation of reality by causes. He was the creator of the critical philosophy of the subject (transcendental philosophy). The divorce of the idea of the transcendent God from the empirical world of experience cannot be overcome. The speculative intellect cannot know God. Kant sharply criticized all the proofs for God's existence. As a result he proclaimed a complete agnosticism. Man has an idea of God, and this is a transcendental idea of pure reason which performs the role of unifying human knowledge. Kant accepts God's existence is a postulate of the practical reason; faith in God is necessary in order to guarantee the moral order. The practical reason is dependent upon the choice of our will. The will becomes in Kant the source not only of the moral order, but even of the affirmation of God's existence.

H. Taine used the concept of the absolute to designate an abstractly conceived law of the world.

Among the 18th-century German idealists, the absolute again became a keystone in a philosophical system, and the absolute was different than the God of religion.

Fichte conceived the absolute as the absolute, pure and creative self, a non-substantial and unconscious pure activity (the absolute I). It produces within itself the world of nature and of limited selves. It is not a being, but a pure activity, a life and a principle of the super-sensible order of the world (*Fichtes Werke*, L, 1919, 261). The super-sensible moral order of the world is completed in and by man. The absolute is eternal and infinite will (the identification of reason and will, the dynamic and creative reason is the will), and it is the basis for finite selves and creates the world in the only way available to it: "in finite reason". "Only the reason exists; the infinite reason — in itself alone; the finite reason — in the infinite reason and by it. Only in our minds does it create the world, and in each case that from which we develop the world and that by which we develop it: the call to duty and the unique feelings, insight and laws of thought" (*Powołanie człowieka* [Vocation of man], Wwa 1956, 191). The absolute being is expressed in finite rational beings and maintains them all in himself, but their knowledge of this being is this being's self-knowledge. The finite mind can never conceive the absolute Being.

With Schelling, the absolute is pure identity of subjectivity and objectivity, or nature and spirit. It is all-encompassing reality. In itself the absolute is the eternal act of knowledge and it has distinct phases. The first phase is the objectification by the absolute of itself in the form of ideal nature (*natura naturans*), then objectivity is transformed into the absolute as subjectivity, in order to arrive at a synthesis "in which these two absolutes (absolute objectivity and absolute subjectivity) become one absolute" (*Sämtliche Werke*, St 1856-1861, I 714).

The absolute as an eternal essence or idea that is objectified in nature, returns to itself in the world of representations as objectivity, and then in and by philosophical reflection it knows itself as the identity of what is real what is ideal, of nature and spirit. The absolute in the ideal order is also the absolute in the real order.

In Hegel's ontological idealism, the absolute is the absolute spirit, which is the entire process of self-expression (self-manifestation), the self-realization of the absolute idea of being in that which is finite. From the eternal idea of being, understood as the collection of rationality in which being and non-being are identical, and thus which is internally contradictory, there is of a necessary triadic movement through the material world of nature. Nature is the necessary introductory condition for human consciousness: it is the sphere of the objective, without which the sphere of subjectivity could not exist. The one and the other sphere are moments in the life of the absolute. In the sphere of human self-consciousness, the absolute returns to itself, i.e. it returns as spirit. The spirit in turn undergoes a triadic development: from the subjective spirit that appears in man as subjectivity (the thesis), through the alienation of the objective spirit: language, law, social institutions (the antithesis), it becomes the absolute spirit, which itself develops triadically by way of religion, art and philosophy (the synthesis). In philosophy, the absolute becomes conscious of itself and of the world. Mankind's philosophical self-knowledge is the absolute's self-knowledge. The absolute is a synthesis of dialectic, and man is the place where the absolute becomes self-aware (the birth of God). The absolute is thus an all-encompassing process, and the world and man are necessary phases. Creation is a necessary part of the absolute's self-realisation (pantheistic monism).

The Hegelian left rejected the absolute as absolute spirit. They made man the absolute (Feuerbach), or made matter and society the absolute (Marx). If by the absolute one understands the source from which all reality flows, then in Marxist philosophy this is matter's function: to matter is ascribed absolute characteristics such as eternity, self-sufficiency and boundlessness. By dialectic development, inorganic matter produces the world of nature (dialectic materialism) and the human world (historic materialism). At the same time, Marxism is a continuation of Feuerbach's anthropocentrism, ascribing to man "*aseitas*" (existence by or from himself) and characteristics of God: complete autonomy, and auto-salvation by the transformation of the world.

Hegel's conception of the absolute was taken up and modified by the representatives of British idealism (F.H. Bradley, B. Bosanquet, Aspringle-Pattison, J. McTaggart). McTaggart held that the absolute is society, that is, the spiritual system "I". In the USA, J. Royce was the representative of idealism in the Hegelian spirit. According to Royce, the absolute is the absolute thought. The world is the self-realization of the absolute thought.

The creator of pragmatism, A. Peirce, held that the absolute is the absolute idea that appears in the world and aims at complete self-revelation in the ideal boundary or at the ideal end of

the evolutionary process. God as creator is absolutely first, but as the terminal point of the world, as the completely revealed God, he is "absolutely secondary".

Dewey held that the term "God" designates the unity of the ideal possibilities that man can realize by intelligence and action.

Among Polish philosophers of the 19th century, the problem of the absolute was taken up by J.M. Hoene-Wroński, who was influenced by Kant and Hegel. According to him, all the definitions or descriptions of the absolute (the highest reality, the maximum self-activity, the infinite good, etc.) do not show the essence of the absolute, but its relation to other objects. Hoene-Wroński, like Hegel, aspired to draw out from the absolute the entire plurality of beings according to one law: being is created, grows, takes on its entire variety by way of dichotomy, the collapse of every unity into the contradictions that dwell within it. For Hoene-Wroński, this law was not only a principle that shapes being, but a rule that must be followed by every essence that is aiming to realize the possibilities that dwell within it.

In contemporary philosophy, the problem of the absolute took shape chiefly under the influence of the philosophies of Kant and Comte. Both philosophers were firm opponents of metaphysics (the philosophy of being). Under Kant's influence, philosophy developed in an anthropocentric direction, while under the influence of Comte there was a growing conviction that philosophy does not provide an autonomous explanation for the world's ultimate structure, but is merely a completion of the particular sciences.

In the new intellectual situation, the problem of the Absolute is not as clear as before, because there are no longer any uniform standards of thought in investigations concerning the absolute. If the problem of the absolute appears, it is most often the result of some confusion of elements from rational (scientific) knowledge, religious faith, and man's natural tendency to try and apprehend things in their entirety.

In the question of whether a philosophical knowledge of the absolute was possible, there was a spread of agnosticism: Mill, Spencer, Littré, Durkheim, and the neo-positivists. There was still discourse on the absolute within classical philosophy and within irrationalistic tendencies where the chief interest was the problem of the existence of the absolute and our knowledge of it rather than its nature. We may reduce the positions in this matter to three groups. In the first group the dominant opinion was that our knowledge of the absolute is a matter of personal experience: the heart, feelings, or faith — but not reason — are the proper factors in the search for the absolute. Intuitionists held that we arrive at knowledge of the absolute by intuition, which appears in different forms: as ontological intuition (M.F. Sciacca), intuition of the whole (J. Hessen), intuitive reduction (H. Dumery), or as the intuitive ability to affirm God based on the indistinct idea of God that exists in man (H. de Lubac).

According to existentialism (J.P. Sartre, A. Camus), whether the absolute is accepted or rejected is decided by praeter-rational arguments — "inclinations of the heart" ("we reject him, others accept him").

Kierkegaard, in reaction to Hegel's conception of the absolute, emphasized the role of the existing individual and his experiences. According to Kierkegaard, to exist is to be present. The absolute cannot be demonstrated by reason, but one may accept him by an act of personal faith (a leap from despair to faith). Faith opens unto infinity, "and to believe is to

want".

Within phenomenology, which continued in taking consciousness as the starting point in philosophy, if the problem of the absolute appears, it is always joined with human consciousness. Husserl drew consciousness from the transcendental "I" and made the reality of the world relative to consciousness. Every object must be constituted by consciousness. As he investigated the course of pure and absolute consciousness, he perceived its teleological and reality-oriented character: in his conception, the absolute was an imposing reason of a teleological character for constitutive processes that occur in pure consciousness. Ingarden in his ontology accepted the absolute as one of several possible modes of existence. He distinguished four kinds of beings: absolute, real, intentional and ideal, and held that the absolute would be the primordial non-temporal being, the eventual reason for the world's facticity. In Scheler's philosophy, the problem of the absolute also occurs as the Transcendent Absolute Being (the personal infinite Spirit), and as the Highest Value (holiness). This is connected with the division of the order of being and value, and with the priority of religion in relation to metaphysics. Metaphysics inquires about the primordial principle of reality. Metaphysical propositions have a hypothetical value. The consequence is a probabilistic metaphysics of the absolute Being. To show the reality of God, Scheler made appeal first and foremost to man's experiences. He thought that the religious act that indicated God's essence and existence was self-evident. In religion there is a connection formed between the divinity and the values that are based upon the values of the infinite personal Spirit and the world of values connected with him. The gradualism of values is ultimately finalized in the transcendence of the absolute value (sanctity).

According to Scheler, man is a spirit directed toward divinity and sanctity. Man is a microcosm, and is the first access to God. "Man is also a being in whose free decisions God is able to realize and sanctify his own pure nature. Man's vocation is something more than merely to be a 'child' of a God who is limited in his perfection. In his being, man -- as the subject of decisions -- bears the higher dignity of a companion warrior, moreover, of God's co-creator, who in the storm of the world, at the head of the parade of all things, must bear the standard of divinity, the standard of the 'deitas' who is realized only in the process of the world's development (Pisma z antropologii filozoficznej i teorii wiedzy [Writings from philosophical anthropology and the theory of knowledge] Wwa 1987, 426).

In Scheler, the conception of "divinity" and "holiness" follow the same line of thought in which "something" from man co-constitutes God. God does not exist independent of human consciousness — this is connected with Scheler's view of man's "divinity". Man is a spirit, the place of God's auto-creation. Man is "God's co-creator". It should not seem strange that in the next stage of his philosophical reflection, Scheler embraced pantheism. Scheler's philosophy, with its division of being and value, became an inspiration for the appearance of the category of the sacrum as a certain kind of religious absolute (Otto, Eliade, Weber).

The philosophers of the second group arrive at a knowledge of the absolute in a rational way. They do this in two ways: either they connect the problem of our knowledge of the absolute with the particular sciences, esp. the natural sciences (E. Whittaker, Teilhard de Chardin, Whitehead, C. Tresmontant), or they examine the question of the absolute within the framework of classical philosophy. In the latter group there are two dominant positions: the first under the influence of J. Marechal uses the so-called transcendental method (K. Rahner, J.B. Lotz, E. Coreth); the second group uses the objective method of the philosophy of being.

P. Teilhard de Chardin accepted the absolute (God) as the ultimate unity of cosmic matter. God exists by the process of his own unification. This is connected with Teilhard de Chardin's henological conception of being according to which existence consists in the unification of the world's basic elements. Teilhard de Chardin negated the concept of creation as an absolute beginning. Creation is the evolution of that which is already present. Absolute plurality is impossible, and it is the same as nothingness. God introduces a principle of unification into the eternal plurality. Unity and unification are a consequence of existence, and the calling into being is a "participation" of existence. In the plural world spirit is present as a property of matter (panpsychism). The spirit gradually and systematically reflects the passage from unconsciousness to consciousness, and from consciousness to self-consciousness (a change in state on a cosmic scale). To explain the process of the world's emergence and evolution, Teilhard de Chardin accepts the existence of the "cosmic Christ".

"God could not have been the first mover, if the God-Man, the historical Christ, did not exist" (*Wybór pism* [Selection of writings], Wwa 1996, 41). According to Teilhard de Chardin, Christ could not have justified man if he did not first transform and renew the whole universe. God is the apex of the universe, which has a uniform directional structure and is subject to a still unfinished process of evolution. Christ must by virtue of his creative influence lead the cosmic noogenesis to its natural completion. Thus the phenomenon of universal Christic energy gradually emerges — an energy that simultaneously supernaturalizes and superhumanizes, in which the field of universal convergence is materialized and personalized, and which is a condition for the rolling up of the universe.

In Whitehead's philosophy of process, the ultimate metaphysical principle is "creative progress toward newness". The absolute thus has the character of an all-encompassing process. God is an important factor in this process. In his primordial nature (the mental pole of God), he is the fundamental starting point of the cosmic process. He is also the end of the process by his nature as an effect (secondary nature). God is a cause by which the possible is actualized. The world is objectified in God, in his nature as effect. God is thus constituted by the world's creative progress. Whitehead does recognize a difference between God and the world, but at the same time he treats them as being most closely joined; the world is unthinkable without God, and vice versa. God is only an actual distinct being, not fully perfect, and is dependent upon the world. He is not infinite and unchanging. He is not a personal being but is a principle that brings aesthetic harmony to the world and guarantees the logic of its structure. God is thus an element of the order by which creativity rejects certain features and without which concrete events would not be possible. The eternally existing world is not His creation and is necessary in relation to God. It is the plane where the aspect of His nature as an effect is manifested. In the aspect of his nature as an effect, God is thus changing and immanent in relation to the course of nature (panentheism).

The transcendental method was applied to classical metaphysics for the purpose of "renewing" it, to transform man's non-reflective and immediate apprehension of being into an explicit body of knowledge with systematic foundations. The starting point was the contemplation of human action, and metaphysical conclusions are drawn from this. In the opinion of the transcendentalists (Rahner, Coreth, Lotz), all previous proofs for the existence of God must be located in the fundamentally free activity by which man affirms his own contingency and in this way attains the Absolute Being.

Lotz, under the influence of Heidegger, starts from man's existence, which is given

immediately. Man sees the reality of the world by way of his own being. When man experiences himself as real, he can progress with the help of a "*reditio completa*" to a knowledge of God's being, in which existence is revealed as the deepest foundation for man's being.

The problem of the absolute at present appears most explicitly and most fully in the metaphysics of existing being. In France, E. Gilson represented this metaphysics. In Poland, the Lublin school continues philosophy in the classical sense as the knowledge and explanation of reality by indicating the ultimate and sufficient ontic factors of the beings that are affirmed in experience and which exist independently of human thought. In metaphysics knowledge has an existential character (reality is investigated under its general existential aspect, the aspect of existence), an analogical character (the existing beings affirmed in experience are varied, although with respect to their structure as beings they are similar) and a transcendental character (the knowledge of such properties of beings that belong, although in various degrees, to all existing beings).

The analysis and interpretation of existing beings reveals that they are composed of elements that are mutually irreducible, that they change (they arise, develop, cease to exist), that they are dynamic (they act and by acting develop). Metaphysics concentrates on the so-called compositions of being (matter—form, potency—act), which provide an explanation for motion, transformation, plurality and dynamism. All the types of composition indicate the fundamental composition of a being's essence (content) and existence, which (existence) is the reason for the facticity of beings.

The plurality, composition and mutability of beings leads one to pose the chief question of metaphysics: on what account do beings exist, since they do not need to exist? Their internal structure provides an explanation for much, but it does not provide an explanation for the very fact that they come into existence. Existence is neither an endowment of the being's essence (nature), nor can it be drawn out as a result of the factors of content (essence). As we answer the existential question: why do beings exist which do not need to exist? — and we are guided by the principle of the reason of being (causality — *habitus principii*) — we arrive at the necessity of accepting a Being who Is Fullness of Existence (*Ipsium esse subsistens*), a Being existing of itself, unconditioned, who is the ultimate reason for the existence of composite, changing and non-necessary beings. The Absolute also provides an explanation for the fact that existing beings possess the so-called transcendental properties, that is, for the fact that despite their composition they are (each) something one, separate from other beings, knowable (intelligible), good (lovable), all of which implies their origin in the Absolute, who is absolute unity (the Single Being), absolute identity, Intellect, since He creates according to thought, and the Highest Good (Love).

The particular relation between the world of real and non-necessary beings and the Absolute is explained by the metaphysical theory of participation. This theory shows that the Absolute is the efficient cause (the ultimate source of existence), the exemplar cause, that is, He creates by knowledge (Thought), and the final cause (the fullness of good), which is the motive for creating the world and the ultimate end and terminal point at which consciously or unconsciously all existing beings aim. Thus understood, the Absolute is the most perfect Person, the conscious and free Creator of the world. He is not tied by relations to any point in space (omnipresent) or in time (eternal), he is fully autonomous, acting by himself as intellect and will (Truth and Good).

The absolute is radically different from the world. He is a transcendent being both with respect to existence and knowledge, because he is a fully autonomous and subsistent being. No reference to the world is necessary to his existence and understanding. He is the free creator the world. At the same time, as the ultimate Source of existence and the ultimate End of the world, he is immanent in relation to the world. The world of non-necessary beings exists by participation in the existence of the Absolute.

Thus understood, the Absolute known in metaphysics as the Fullness of existence and perfection and the Highest Person is identical with the God of religion.

The concept of the absolute was not always identified with the religious concept of God. If in certain philosophical systems, the Absolute was called God (a god), this was the "God of the philosophers". He was understood either in non-religious terms (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Spinoza, Hegel), or as the ultimate Cause of the world, the Absolute Existence, the Fullness of Truth and Good, the Most Perfect Person (the metaphysics of existing being). In the latter case the designates of the terms "Absolute" and "God" are identical, but differ only in content. The particular characterization of God comes from praeter-rational sources, i.e. from Revelation. Then the religious concept of God is connected with theology, since the metaphysical Absolute constitutes the rational foundations of monotheism.

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Zofia J. Zdybicka

THE ABSOLUTE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE EAST — In Indian philosophy. The clear majority of schools are interested in ultimate (soteriological) questions, and so the question of the Absolute and God is for them one of the basic questions. Apart from Vedic literature, the question of God should not be confused with the question of the gods, that is, superhuman beings, devas and asuras (demons, titans), who are accepted as existing by all Indian religions, but which are regarded as not absolute and as subject to the laws of samsara.

The division of philosophical and religious systems into theistic (seshvaravāda) and atheistic (nirishvaravāda) does not coincide with the division of these systems into orthodox (astika) and unorthodox (nastika), and it crosses with the division into non-religious system (akriyavāda) and religious (kriyavāda), that is, into those which do not accept or do accept the obligation of the moral law of repayment for actions (karman), concerning which the



thought of the ajivika holds a special place.

In Brahman and Hindu thought. In the Vedic texts were finds various ways of interpreting the relation of the Absolute Being to the world: polytheism, henotheism, pantheism, panentheism, theopantism, and pure monism. We find the oldest term to designate the Absolute in the hymn *Nasadiya* (*Rgveda* X, 129): "tad ekam" (the one), which existed before empirical being (sat) and non-being (asat). Another concept proper to these texts is the "Golden Sprout" (Hiranyagarbha). The absolutization of the role of sacrifice in the *Brahmanas* had the result that brahman (initially: "sacrificial power") became the universally applied term in later thought, which by magic equivalence from the time of the Upanishads and later by metaphysical reflection was identified with atman (soul, subject) and its three most important aspects were recognized as being, consciousness and happiness (saccidananda). The Upanishad *Mandukya* discusses the Absolute (and the reality of the atman that corresponds to it), as well as its four aspects (states, "steps") as what is designated by the holy syllable AUM. The Upanishads distinguish three aspects of brahman's subjectivity - as knowing (jnatr), as acting (kartr) and as undergoing action (bhoktr).

The thinkers of the vedanta schools are occupied with an analysis of brahman in its personal and non-personal aspects and the numerous variants (monistic, dualistic and pluralistic) of its relation to the world and to the human soul. The followers of Hinduism recognize the infinity and ineffability (anirvacaniya) of brahman's non-personal aspect, and in its personal aspect they identify brahman with the Lord, the Creator God (Ishvara). They select some single aspect (istadevata) for the purposes of religious practices. Philosophers of the nyaya and vaisheshika schools accept only the personal aspect of Ishvara as the only one that can be conceptually grasped and treat him as the greatest soul, the Creator of the world and the ultimate (instrumental) cause of all effects. This school formulated the classical Indian arguments for God's existence. The *Bhagavadgita* acknowledges the person of Krsna as the highest aspect of God, and in comparison to him, the impersonal brahman and all the devas are only lower aspects. Beginning with the *Bhadavadgita*, in the philosophy of Hindu schools the concept of love for God (or devotion - bhakti) begins to play a large role as a way of liberation. The post-classical theistic schools (sheshvaravada) accept God as Visnu, Krsna or Shiva - primordial and transcendent in relation both to the impersonal brahman and to the personal Ishvara, whether they hold to a monistic or pluralistic interpretation of the world, while shaktism and tantrism more than once accept Shakti (the Goddess or the Godhead's power) as the Absolute. The philosophy of tantrism arrives at the concept of the Absolute by the principle of the "unification of opposites".

The autosoteriological classic samkhya is an atheistic school (nirishvaravada) that accepts only two eternal and independent principles: purusha (spirit) and prakrti (primordial matter), and rejects the concept of the Creator, but post-classical samkhya, similar to yoga, accepts Ishvara as a distinct purusha. The school of the ritualistic exegesis of the *Vedas*, mimamsa, is also an atheistic school (which does not mean non-religious): it rejects Ishvara while explaining the eternal world, and for the thinkers of this school the absolute reality is the word (shabda, vac), that is, the holy books (Shruti, *Vedas*) and sacrifice (yajna). Closely related to the mimamsa is the school of grammarians (Bhartrhari) who acknowledge the word as the Absolute (shabdabrahman).

The metaphysical and moral order of the world, described in the *Vedas* by the term "ṛta", while in later Hinduism and in heterodoxical religions it is called "dharma". In Hinduism, God (Visnu, or less frequently Shiva) is incarnated in this world in the form of avatars

whenever there is an excessive drop or threat to dharma and the excessive influence of adharmā.

The conception of liberation (mokṣa, nirvāna) from the circle of incarnations (samsāra) associated with the Absolute, seemingly convergent with the Christian concept of salvation, is subject to very different interpretations in various trends, schools, and systems. In some it is implied that God is the one who gives the grace of liberation as he freely chooses (in the philosophy of Madhva it is even admitted that some souls "are condemned to eternal incarnation"), or that God gives this grace in response to the act of a devotee: bhakti — faith, love, the dedication of all actions and their consequences, the yogic dedication of oneself by contemplation of the Lord (Shivaism, Vishnuism, yoga). In others we are dealing with a complete autosoteriology (samkhyā, similar to Buddhism and Jainism) or with something that is very close to it (advaitavedānta). The state of liberation itself (in trends that accept the Absolute) may be understood as a belonging to God (Rāmaṇuja), closeness to God (Caitanya), or as complete fusing into unity with the personal God (or the non-personal Absolute). The concept of liberation does not stand by itself in Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā.

In Buddhist philosophy. A critique of the concept of the soul, the person and stable substance (anātman), and the acceptance of the eternity of the universe as a process led Buddhists to reject the concept of the Absolute, or of God, as concepts necessary to explain the world. The only absolute concepts they recognized were Nirvāna, or liberation, and dharma, or the teaching of the Buddhas. Although a personally conceived Absolute is not mentioned, in the Buddhist religion they sought escape in the "three jewels": the Buddha, dharma and the sangha (the Buddhist community); there was a gradual deification of the Buddha, and in Mahāyāna the figure of the cosmic Buddha appeared, of which the historical Buddha was only a manifestation in accordance with the theory of the three bodies (trikāya). In Mahāyāna philosophy (esp. Madhyamika) the conception of the eternal principle of the universe (dharmatā, tathatā) developed. This concept involved the concept of the "void" (sunyatā) and dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) and essence (svabhāva). The concepts of Buddhist "theology" are: the conception of the primordial Buddha (Adibuddha Vairocana), identical to the "dharmic body of the Buddha" (tathāgatagarbha) present in every being, developed in Chinese and Japanese Buddhist philosophy. In the philosophy of yogācāra, the role of the absolute is performed by "store of consciousness" (ālaya-vijñāna). Buddhist philosophers in their discussions with Brahman schools devoted many works to a critique of Brahman concepts of the absolute, such as ātman-brahman, brahman, puruṣa and prakṛti, Ishvara or śabdabrahman.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism and in Tantric Buddhism, as in Hinduism, AUM is the mystic syllable that symbolizes absolute reality.

In Jainist philosophy. Jainism accepts the eternity of the world and, in light of the above, it rejects the concept of the God-Creator, often drawing upon the same arguments as mīmāṃsā. Both metaphysics and theory of knowledge in Jainism are based on the principle of non-absoluteness (anekāntavāda). Thus they also reject the concept of a non-personal absolute. Like Buddhism, Jainism is a religion without God, but they do recognize twenty four tīrthāṅkara (ford-makers) who show to the faithful the road from the reality of samsāra to the absolute reality of nirvāna; thus the only absolute concepts are: doctrine (dharma) and liberation (kevala, nirvāna).

In the philosophies of akriyavāda. In the thought of the Ajīvika (sometimes held to be a sect of Jainism), the role of the concept of the absolute is played by fate or predestination (niyati). Indian materialists (loka<sub>y</sub>ata) and agnostics (ajñānikah) reject any concept of the absolute.

In Sikh thought one un-named God is recognized, who is common to all religions, the Creator, the One Power, the Judge. God may be imagined either as the non-personal Absolute (Nirgun) or as the Person God (Sagun), who is often spoken of as the "Name" (Nām, Onkar). Under the influence of the Islamic theology of the Koran and the Hindu theology of the Vedas, the Sikhs held that their own holy book, called *Adi Granth* (*The Primordial Book*) or *Shrī Gurū Granth Sahib* (*The Reverend Guru, Lady Book* or *The Lady Book of the Gurus*), was an aspect of God. In contemporary Indian Islamic thought, the position of Muhammad Iqbal is noteworthy. He connects the classic theology of Islam (esp. Sufism) with elements of the theistic philosophy of Vedānta.

In Chinese philosophy. Chinese religion, both religious Confucianism and religious Taoism, worships the spirits of the ancestors rather than the Supreme Bing. As the counterpart of the concept of God, Chinese thought takes the concept of Heaven (Tian), the source of the world's moral, social and physical order, and only the emperor was authorized to worship it. Confucius speaks of the "mandate of (the will of) Heaven" (Tianming), but then Mo Di bestows Heaven with a truly personal character when he speaks of the love (ai) of Heaven for all things; a closely related concept is the Supreme Lord (Shang Di). Taoist philosophy regards Tian as a synonym for what is natural and adheres to a non-personal ontic and moral absolute called the Way (dao), the primordial order and primordial reality, not as providence but as an omnipresent power of completion — it acts by the highest virtue (de) which destroys all individual aspirations. The School of the philosophers of nature (yin-yang-jia) holds a dualistic vision with two eternal principles — yin and yang.

With the arrival of Buddhism in China, specifically Buddhist concepts of the absolute appeared in Chinese philosophy (alavijñana, tathagatagarbha, the nature of the Buddha), and these were re-interpreted on a Chinese ground. These contributed to a new look at the problem of the absolute in Taoist thought. The attempt to reconcile Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist (esp. chanu) theories and the school of Yin-Yang in neo-Confucianism contributed to the development of the concepts of Heaven and the Way such as they were found at the time, and this led to the formation of new conceptions of the Absolute Being: esp. "the boundless" (wuji) and "the supreme unity" (taiji) in Zhou Dunyi, and of the two foundations: the "principles" or "forms" (li) and "energies" (qi) in the thought of Zhu Xi. In later Chinese philosophy, the personal character of Heaven is rarely discussed, and after Zhu Xi identifies it with "principle" (li), the view that it has a non-personal character prevails.

In Japanese philosophy. Japanese thought in its oldest books is strongly rooted in the Shinto religion. This religion accepted many superhuman beings called kami, but did not accept one Creator God. Such a concept did not take shape in Japanese philosophy until contemporary times. With the influx of Chinese philosophy and Buddhism, there appeared in Japanese thought certain concepts of the Absolute proper to those philosophies, esp. "Heaven" (ten), "the Way" (do), "the dharmic body of the Buddha" (hosshin, dharmakaya), "the primordial nature of the Buddha" (bussho, tathagatagarbha), which underwent a further independent development in Japan. In particular, the concept of the "way" as the moral absolute became the starting point in the development of an independent Japanese moral philosophy, e.g. bushido, or the philosophy of Ogyū Sorai. We should include the conception of the

immanent Buddha Amida among the original concepts of the ontic absolute (although it is associated with the conception of the "three bodies of Buddha"). In contemporary Japan, the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō creatively develops traditional Buddhist thought (esp. zen) in the terminology of the western philosophy of Bradley's moral absolute.

In Korean and Vietnamese philosophy. Korean and Vietnamese thought, although not lacking in its own features, continued the main trends of Chinese, Confucian and Buddhist thought.

In Tibetan philosophy we are basically dealing with a development of the thought of mahāyāna Buddhism, since even the pre-Buddhist religion of Bon, reformed under the influence of Buddhism, accepts the basic concepts of mahāyāna philosophy.

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