

CANADIAN FACES OF REASON

PART VI

George Blewett was born in 1873 – one year after John Watson¹ began to teach at Queen’s University – and he died in 1912 in his thirty-ninth year.² Although a quarter-century younger than Watson, Blewett “seems much more remote from us,” an impression Armour and Trott ascribe to “the elaborate Victorian prose” of his essays published in 1907 in *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God*.³ His “simpler, somehow more modern, prose” of his second book, *The Christian View of the World*, published in 1912, “brings him nearer to us, but” – Armour and Trott continue – “even the titles of his books seem to isolate him from the contemporary philosopher and have left him too often buried in the musty shelves of second-hand apologetic theology.”⁴ Armour and Trott judge this “a cruel trick of whatever fates govern popular and philosophic taste,” as “in many ways, Blewett speaks more clearly and with more relevance to contemporary problems than any of the other participants in nineteenth- and twentieth-century idealist philosophy.”⁵ Concerning “the current dilemma of our relations with nature – relations corrupted on the one side, by those who believe in the myth of eternal technological progress and, on the other, by those who subscribe to the mythology of an eternally wise and beneficent nature which must be left untouched by man – he has much say that is vitally important.”⁶

“Blewett’s development of the idealist tradition,” Armour and Trott suggest, “stems from a position which he puts succinctly within a sentence in *The Christian View of the World*,”⁷ a sentence they then quote: “it is plain that any Idealism which is to be of constructive value to the theologian, must have some deeper insight into nature than simply that it is a system of ideas in our minds.”⁸ They identify three “major themes in his philosophy,” namely (1) “Nature is of value and importance in itself and not merely as something to be transcended in the development of experience,” and (2) “Nature and man alike constitute the necessary expression of God as the world,” a view they then reference by quoting Blewett: “God fulfils Himself in nature,” and (3) that “the ‘primary reality’ of the universe consists of ‘self-conscious and self-determining spirits’ who form ideally ‘a certain state of character and society’.”⁹ These three lead to a “further proposition that reality is a developing process whose history and structure are, in themselves, of paramount importance.”¹⁰ That second one follows faith, but one and three plus the “further proposition” seem obvious to us now, do they not? Not so obvious then.

Blewett was born near St. Thomas, Ontario, in the small village of Yarmouth.¹¹ No “a successful preacher,”¹² Blewett switched to teaching, not necessarily an entirely different profession I’d say. Armour and Trott ask: “What kinds of problems confronted Blewett when he began his teaching career in Alberta?”¹³ They answer first

by acknowledging that “he was faced with a rugged frontier,”¹⁴ but at least “the settlers understood the value of learning,” if learning that was practical and taught with a competitive edge, as “they wanted teachers and preachers who could match wits and ideas with any man.”¹⁵ Moreover, “the circumstances of their lives did not make for days spent curled up with a book and the learning they had been taught to value had no immediate practical outcome in their affairs.”¹⁶ Blewett’s encounters with “the Indian schools and missions in the West again revealed the sharp contrast seen in the confrontation of old and new cultural values in an uncompromising environment,” there he found “people engulfed by a new ‘civilization’ whose scattered population had its hands full coping with its own problems.”¹⁷ He found that “the French dream of another civilization, a ‘métis’ civilization, which might grow out of the intermixture of European and Indian, taking on virtues of each and shedding the characteristics of each which made survival difficult in the New West, was already dead.”¹⁸ Armour and Trott tell us that these “people, busy surviving, found him too ‘bookish,’ too absorbed in a kind of thought which, for them, was a luxury.”¹⁹ Luxuries are excellent of course, provided one can afford them: evidently those Blewett taught in nineteenth-century Alberta could not.

“Blewett knew that he had yet to think it all out for himself” – in valuing his own independent thinking and knowing that he had much to learn he was a man after my own heart – and so, in 1895, “both he and the church authorities decided that it would be best if he went back to Toronto to study.”²⁰ Upon his return “he enrolled not in the secular University College but in the Methodist Victoria College in the third year of the honours philosophy programme,”²¹ where his luck changed, as a wealthy Toronto businessman gave him money to go to Germany, where “he enrolled at the University of Wurzburg.”²² Returning to Toronto, “he was awarded the George Paxton Young Memorial Fellowship in Philosophy and, in addition, a scholarship to Harvard, where he received his Ph.D.”²³ Then, for an essay on Spinoza, Blewett was awarded the Bowdoin Prize,” an award accompanied by \$300, which “must have seemed to him an incredible windfall,” as “his entire income for that year was \$450.”²⁴ That prize money enabled him to travel to England where he spent a year at Oxford and Cambridge; at Oxford, he met “Edward Caird who, by one of those quirks typical of the life of Canadian scholars, put him in touch with John Watson at Queen’s.”²⁵ I wonder if Blewett thought that referral paid off, as, “in the spring of 1901, he was offered a post as lecturer on philosophy at Wesley College in Winnipeg – the predecessor of United College which, in its turn, was to become the University of Winnipeg.”²⁶ Surely Blewett would have preferred a post in Ontario. B

“Again, he found the West hard going,” Armour and Trott report, as “students came from the farms with little clear expectation of university life.”²⁷ Armour and Trott speculate that “these two excursions to the West, first to Alberta and then to Winnipeg, no doubt had much to do with Blewett’s continual fascination with nature and the struggle to survive.”²⁸ In 1906, his luck changed again, as the “Ryerson Chair of

Philosophy became vacant at Victoria College,” a post that apparently allowed him to “marry and publish his first book of essays,” enabling him to settle down to a “comfortable scholarly career.”²⁹ Armour and Trott focus not on his marriage but on that first book of essays, *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God*, reporting that it “seems to have attracted some attention,” as “three years later, he was invited to give the Taylor Lectures at Yale.”³⁰ The lectures – titled *The Christian View of the World* – he gave during the winter of 1910-1911; they were published “in Toronto the next year by William Briggs who had published the earlier essays.”³¹ In these lectures, Blewett seems to have found himself,” a conclusion Armour and Trott reach because they find “the prose ... clear, and generally relaxed.”³² Moreover, the “themes of the earlier essays are brought together and made to form a coherent whole.”³³

“Canada’s most distinguished native-born philosopher had come of age,” Armour and Trott conclude, “but he was to write no more,” as he drowned during the summer of 1912, “leaving a pregnant wife and one child, and the hopes of his colleagues, but, as far as we can determine, no manuscripts.”³⁴ “There is, however, a manuscript about Blewett,” Armour and Trott continue, “an unpublished biography, by W.J. Rose,” a biography that “paints Blewett, in general, as a saint,” a portrait, they judge that “may be exaggerated.”³⁵ Blewett was declared to be “a devoted Canadian patriot,” Blewett himself allegedly declaring that “at any cost, he would stay and teach in Canada.”³⁶ Moreover, we are told that “Blewett always supported intellectual liberty.”³⁷ Rose remembers “an evening discussion, in Toronto, during which Blewett was asked to define ‘God,’” which replied, “God is the Home of all relations.”³⁸ Few understood what he meant – I couldn’t claim to – but Armour and Trott decipher the phrase as not only social but ecological, as Blewett insisted that: “Nature had to be conceived not simply or primarily as a neutral background against which engineering technology might have its way, and not, on the other hand, as a charming though primitive delight, perfect in its own right until despoiled by the hand of man.”³⁹ Armour and Trott interpret Blewett this way:

Not only did nature shape the life which man must lead in Canada; it also shaped the nature of man himself. At its crudest, loneliness breeds a demand for certainty and, if that certainty is challenged, it will lead to ugly intolerance. Men too busy fighting nature to have much time to think.... Nature had to be accounted for in its own right both to make a case to which men on the frontier might listen and to explain many of the most obvious features of everyday life in Canada at the turn of the century.⁴⁰

Apparently Blewett emphasized nature’s shaping of human nature, as (quoting Blewett) “nature in all her processes, all her strange blending of apparent indifference and cruelty with unspeakable tenderness and grace” reflected “a relation to God and to the purpose and the ways of God.”⁴¹ So he thought God indifferent and cruel as well as tender and forgiving?

In Blewett's "metaphysical theory" presented in his Taylor Lectures at Yale, Armour and Trott see this theme expanded, as the lectures address "the theory of nature, the theory of human nature, the theory of the Absolute, and the problem of freedom."⁴² Armour and Trott quote Blewett again: "On the one hand, there is 'nature.' Nature, under the aspect of necessity, surrounds us; not only surrounds us but is so in us, that its breath of life is in some sense our breadth of life, and the revelation of its being given by the special sciences a revelation to us of our own being."⁴³ Armour and Trott note that Blewett appears to be saying "that we *are* simply what the descriptions of us given by the special sciences say we are,"⁴⁴ but (now Blewett's words): "On the other hand, there is our assertion of ourselves, not merely in the presence of those necessities of nature, but also upon the basis of them. *We* announce those necessities and then we announce our proposed course of action in terms of them. That we are free to do this is *not*, however, based on a merely abstract and different power of volition."⁴⁵ Armour and Trott emphasize this last point, namely (in my non-nineteenth-century language) that humanity, discursively formed by scientific categories and explanations we not only cognize but also internalize and which then shape what we do, disturb even distort our relationship to the natural world, in Blewett's 1912 words:

One of the unconscious vices that do us wrong to-day, is our impiety toward the earth. I mean not now the impiety of hasty and preoccupied minds, to which the perpetual forms about us and never utter their voice of memory, of consolation, of rebuke. I mean the more terrible impiety practised toward the earth by a race that, after age-long struggle with hunger and with cold, has entered at last upon a day of natural opulence, and in that day has built up a civilization wherein one knows not at which to be the more amazed; the wonder of the achievements; or the incredible profligacies of waste, and the social injustice, the oppression of class by class, which is the inevitable outcome of the spiritual of unashamed and wasteful expense.⁴⁶

Armour and Trott note that "Blewett was fortunate in living before many of our schemes to alter the environment had come home to roost but he grasped that we must, if we are to understand nature, come to regard it as a significant system."⁴⁷ Point well-taken, but I am struck by what Blewett says in that long third sentence, in which he appears to link our "impiety" toward the planet with humanity's atrocities, including "opulence," the loss of "wonder," the "profligacies of waste" as well as "social injustice," and even class warfare. No reductionism it appears – not everything follows from our "impiety" toward the planet – but he does list that first, with everything else following.

Armour and Trott stay focused on Blewett's emphasis upon nature, acknowledging what they term "the Nature-God theory – to the point of view which regards nature as a self-contained system, never to be tampered with, always capable of solving its own problems, perfect apart from our intrusions in it. yet we find that the meaning of nature is not plain on its own terms," adding that "this assemblage of facts

fails to bring out its significance,” as “elaborate ecological theories fail to give us much guidance as to what attitude we ought to take to nature.”⁴⁸ For instance, nature produces “counter-values” as well as “values,” the Armour-Trott example being that nature “produces the rabbit” but “it also destroys it,” adding that “the joint efforts of animal and man are capable of being wiped out by an ice age and may be capable of being even more decisively wiped out by disasters on a cosmic scale – a super-nova, a voracious black hole, a sudden increase in cosmic radiation,” concluding: “To equate nature with God would give us no understanding of these conflicts.”⁴⁹

Armour and Trott interpret Blewett as wanting “to maintain the unity of man and nature” and, as well, “maintain the notion of nature as something important in itself,” thereby bolstering “our failing respect for nature,” even deeming nature “meaningful.”⁵⁰ What Blewett does not want, however, is attempting “to achieve the unity of man and nature through a simple reductive materialism.”⁵¹ Nor does he want “to give nature a spurious meaning by making it a plaything of god.”⁵² And he does not want “to ignore the fact that our ideas and attitudes are, themselves, a part of nature,” as thinks “that nature and our theories about nature are only separable by a kind of abstraction.”⁵³ Indeed, Blewett wants to ignore none “of our involvements in nature,” adding that nature is nothing “fixed.”⁵⁴ In “denying the possibility of reductionist positions,” Armour and Trott explain, “he has rejected the position of both the naturalist and the super-naturalist.”⁵⁵ Construing nature as no “plaything of God, he has denied the most common device by which men have sought to find a ‘meaning’ in nature,” and “by insisting that nature is meaningful, he has rejected, as well, the position of those who think that finding meaning in nature is simply an anthropomorphic projection.”⁵⁶

“Each of the theories he has rejected stems from some of our transactions with nature,” implying, “in one sense, [that] nature *is* the structure of these transactions.”⁵⁷ Yet, “in another sense, we are the outcome of nature,” as “we are, ourselves, intelligible only in and through these transactions.”⁵⁸ Even “reason” itself, by means of which intelligibility becomes possible, “is, in another guise, the structure of nature itself,” implying (Armour and Trott suggest) that “we add consciousness to that structure but we do not make it.”⁵⁹ They quote Blewett: “Things are thoughts – they have an ideal or spiritual nature as elements in experience, but thoughts are objective.”⁶⁰ Armour and Trott interpret Blewett as “saying that ideas, including our theories of nature, our concepts of nature, and the values we find in nature or rightly ascribe to it, *are* objective entities in nature,” and that “we bring them together in consciousness but the order which we represent in consciousness has its own structure.”⁶¹ In other words, “our theories and ideas represent one set of relations; without us there is another set of relations,” but “what is real is the rational order itself.”⁶² When we make mistakes concerning nature, “we are wrong because we abstract parts of that order or because we organize subsets of it in a misleading way.”⁶³ That second assertion seems somewhat tautological.

Almost echoing John Watson,⁶⁴ Blewett believed “that the fundamental dialectic is in our experience itself.”⁶⁵ Also like Watson, Blewett emphasized personality; Armour and Trott tell us that he thought “our experience of personality” to be “the crucial part” of “experience.”⁶⁶ Suspicions of subjective idealism – even narcissism – recede when we learn that “Blewett is saying that we discover our personality in the process of ‘possessing a world,’ the process of self-objectification, and the process of distinguishing events and action,” meaning that, in short: “we find ourselves in and through the world.”⁶⁷ Sounding somewhat phenomenological, Blewett believed “we find the world in and through ourselves,” and (now an echo of Hegel and even Marx), “the process is a dialectical one.”⁶⁸ Despite dialectics,⁶⁹ Armour and Trott report that “Blewett holds very firmly” to the “proposition that freedom is indispensable to knowledge,” not exactly a novel insight but certainly a central one, one that has a subjective substrate, as Armour and Trott also report that “what Blewett calls our ‘self-communication’ is not fortuitous to the possibility of genuine knowledge.”⁷⁰ Here is Schurman’s “interplay of reason and experience”⁷¹ again, emphasizing one’s experience of nature, as (for Blewett, in Armour and Trott’s words) the “nature of our knowledge requires that nature itself is an ongoing and creative process.”⁷²

“Blewett insists that even the earth is to be regarded as something individual and important in its own right,” Armour and Trott continue, and he thought “our failure to grasp this lies behind much of the evil which industrial society has brought upon us.”⁷³ It would seem science more than industrialization is to blame when we read that “our knowledge of the earth is as a collection of fragments –incomplete, imperfectly assembled, poorly grasped,”⁷⁴ inevitable in research that focuses on specific phenomena. And characterizing scientific knowledge as a “collection of fragments – incomplete, imperfectly assembled, poorly grasped” would not necessarily be a criticism, even a point of pride among scientists, acknowledging that there is always more to learn. But for Blewett “the earth itself is a unity, a functioning system, an objectification of rational principles,”⁷⁵ a view I should think few scientists would dispute, although astronomers might – certainly science fiction writers would - question Blewett’s belief that the “same rational principles are capable of being objectified as another planet somewhere else in the universe.”⁷⁶ That conviction he contradicts – or at least qualifies – when he acknowledges that “no doubt there are many such planets,” and “they will not be literally identical.”⁷⁷ Among other things, “they will not, for one thing, occupy exactly the same place in the system,” and thus (is he here returning to earth?) “they will not be the same concrete individual.”⁷⁸

From planets to people: Armour and Trott extend Blewett’s logic, writing: “As such, the earth instantiates the germ, even if only in the most rudimentary way, of the subjective principle.”⁷⁹ And that “principle” appears to be not only subjective but social even structural, as Armour and Trott return to the planet analogy: “If our world plays its part in the system, the system would be different without it and, if that is true, it is literally irreplaceable,” concluding that “our knowledge, if it is genuine knowledge,

must reckon with the creative process by which the general principles of physics come to manifest themselves in a unique state of affairs.”⁸⁰ The first half of that sentence substantiates (logically, at least) the inestimable significance of the individual person, but Armour and Trott ignore that half, insisting instead that the social is primary: “If he is right in believing that experience invariably forces us to the notion of a complete system of things, if nothing is intelligible except by relation to its place in the system, if very individual thing instantiates, in some way, the subjective principle as well as the objective principle, then there must be a perspective which is a perspective of that total system.”⁸¹ What a leap from “*a perspective*” (my italics, emphasizing how partial an individual perspective must be) to the assertion that the “Absolute begins to reveal itself as intelligibility.”⁸² So science – and, I suppose logic – is divine?

It would appear so. It would appear that scientific research – and its apparent compatriot, logic (as philosophers practice it) – is God’s work, as “the Absolute is revealed to *us* as the demand that the fragmentary systems which we have been able to grasp be completed so that they can be rendered self-explanatory.”⁸³ Seems somewhat arrogant, doesn’t it, thinking that humanity will – can - ever understand everything, especially that (imagined) unity congealing all fragments together? Evidently Blewett thought so, as “the Absolute is to be found in the revelation that the entire system has a unity of its own – not a unity which obliterates all the particularities of subjective existence but a unity which reveals the significance of each of its components.”⁸⁴ Indeed, “it is this third sense of the Absolute which Blewett apparently associates with God.”⁸⁵

Apparently Blewett hadn’t read Freud, as Armour and Trott tell us that Blewett thought that “without nature to reflect on, we would remain merely empty.”⁸⁶ He sounds pantheistic, but Blewett’s belief is directed more epistemologically than theologically (although surely the two intertwine), as we read that “each of us is a microcosm of the whole reality and each of us is capable of regenerating that whole system in knowledge,”⁸⁷ the two halves of that assertion also intertwined, although only philosophers – and theologians (the two vocations sometimes, in the past often, intertwined) – could imagine they could be “capable of regenerating” the “whole” of “reality” in knowledge. Theologically that is idolatry,⁸⁸ philosophically ... well, an occupational hazard I suppose. Armour and Trott quote Blewett: “what this means is that God, under forms of externality and necessity, continually is manifesting Himself to us and in us, and by that manifestation is continually developing in us our own capacities.”⁸⁹ That’s a much more interesting thought than Armour and Trott’s treatment implies, as it discloses Blewett’s appreciation for the partiality of his perspective, that our capacity to understand is inextricably associated with the development of “our own capacities,” something almost any educator would acknowledge. I’m unsure why Armour and Trott assert instead that “God, in short, is not another thing added to the universe beyond the domain of rational order and reflective spirit.”⁹⁰ Nor is God “simply the structural properties of that system,” as

“Blewett repeatedly denies that his philosophical arguments should be understood as tending toward pantheism.”⁹¹ For Blewett, “God must exist in a mode beyond time, as eternal and complete,” a conclusion reached more logically than theologically. Oh, that’s right, logic is divine.⁹² But wait: on the next page we learn that “God is in time,”⁹³ a waffling necessitated by his earlier convictions that our capacities are developed by our efforts to render intelligible the universe in which we are embedded.

Next we learn that “Blewett seems to have been telling us that human acts make a difference to the universe and that the universe is to be regarded as seeking a goal which is furthered by God and man in co-operation.”⁹⁴ Those earlier ideas that science and philosophy are divine – implied by the “co-operation” conviction – are sidelined when we read that: “We are working toward a reality which is a ‘society of spiritual beings’ (Blewett’s phrase), but (back to Armour and Trott) ‘we are not there yet.’”⁹⁵ So – shales of Hegel⁹⁶ - the “universe for Blewett has a direction and not merely man but nature as well plays a part,” as “it seems also that, for Blewett, time is real and [again] God is in time.”⁹⁷ Then comes a hedging of bets: “Human knowledge is, to be sure, imperfect; and the object of knowledge never reflects the whole of the reality known,” as reality “is one thing in and of itself and another as an element in knowledge.”⁹⁸ That conceded, they carry on: “Yet we must be able, in principle, to represent it as a unity.”⁹⁹ That we can’t know absolutely yet “in principle” we can continue: “Blewett’s God, strictly speaking, is neither immanent nor transcendent,” adding: “He is not an additional object standing outside the world, but He is not revealed solely in the development of the world either.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover: “He is the ‘creator’ of the world only in the sense that His nature is the best example of that ‘spirit’ which is the *ground* of the world,” and “He is its judge, one would guess, only in the sense that the standards of divine reason must be the standard which set the rule – since the divine consciousness is the best and fullest example of spirit.”¹⁰¹ So much for knowledge being “imperfect.”

Turning to “moral practices,” we learn that “for Blewett,” these “are, presumably, just those practices which do develop the appropriate self-realization – those practices which being inherently reasonable bring about the actual ‘community of spirits’.”¹⁰² Armour and Trott – or is it Blewett – resolve any issue of antagonism between “self-realization” and “community” development by emphasizing “acting reasonably, attempting to bring about the development of oneself along with the development of others, and developing a suitably expanding experience.”¹⁰³ That reconciliation isn’t exclusively or even primarily cognitive, implied when we are reminded that the “praise of the intellect is, as Russell remarked, curiously absent from the New Testament.”¹⁰⁴ That Blewett subscribed to what is written in the Gospels Armour and Trott handle this way: “His most ‘fundamentalist’ mood is the one in which he undertakes to subscribe to the New Testament miracles – but, even then, he talks only about the ‘antecedent probabilities’.”¹⁰⁵ So “Blewett’s account of religion, then, is at least persistently oriented to and by reason,” Armour and Trott commenting wryly: “It would seem, also, that is a rather open religion, one which is, probably,

subject to amendment as we learn more about the antecedent probabilities and about other things.”¹⁰⁶

From Canada’s “most distinguished philosopher” Armour and Trott move to James Ten Broeke, who was “nearly Blewett’s contemporary and who carried on the idealist tradition in Canada until the 1930s.”¹⁰⁷ His “main task,” we learn, was like Blewett’s, namely “bringing about the reunion of the fragmented forms of human knowledge,”¹⁰⁸ a task few undertake today but one I have immodestly taken on in the CSinC project. While I emphasize intellectual history, Ten Broeke emphasized “religion for, as the twentieth century went on, he increasingly felt that it was religion which was in danger of losing its place in the affections of intelligent men and that the greatest challenge was to show that religious claims still figure amongst *bona fide* claims to knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ Few contemporary curriculum studies scholars show the same, although secularization sometimes has a religious zeal embedded in it.¹¹⁰ Certainly the man’s credentials commended him, as the American (“born in Vermont”) studied “at Yale, Berlin, and Oxford,” after which “he took the Chair of Philosophy at McMaster in 1898, seven years after completing his PhD at Yale.”¹¹¹ Armour and Trott consider his appointment at McMaster “a radical departure from the Scottish connection that dominated the Baptist university, to have this European name added to the faculty.”¹¹²

McMaster “seemed not yet as philosophically emancipated from theology as Toronto and McGill and much of what Ten Broeke wrote is riddled with the religious clichés and phrases of the preacher,” a “tendency [that] made him more than acceptable to the surrounding community.”¹¹³ Apparently that “tendency” made him more than “acceptable” to students, as “his classes were full and his students attentive.”¹¹⁴ Despite the “religious clichés,” Armour and Trott discover in his books - *A Constructive Basis for Theology* and *The Moral Life and Religion* - a “serious scholar of philosophy.”¹¹⁵ His philosophy was evidently idealism, leaving him judging Hegel¹¹⁶ and Lotze¹¹⁷ as providing a “better metaphysical foundation for legitimizing theology than did Plato and Aristotle.”¹¹⁸ Idealism was not his only interest, Armour and Trott add, as “Ten Broeke had a strong interest in the new advances being made in psychology,” a field in which he became more involved than John Watson.¹¹⁹ Courses in General Psychology and Advanced Psychology were among those he taught, unsurprising given that “many of the universities in the early 1920s and 1930s combined philosophy and psychology in one department and McMaster was no exception.”¹²⁰ True to Protestantism, “his conception of God” was a “very personal one,”¹²¹ something that seeped into his psychology, as “his theories about epistemology and reality are heavily influenced by a strong awareness of individual differences.”¹²²

James Ten Broeke, Armour and Trott continue, “was intensely interested in making religious consciousness both natural and individual.”¹²³ Indeed, “perhaps his most distinguishing feature as a philosopher is his view that the individual’s perception of reality is what is real,” a view that did not keep him from regarding “the individual as primarily a social being,” enabling him to sidestep the “many worlds” philosophical

problem.¹²⁴ Like his Canadian predecessors, Ten Broeke believed that “a basic unity of consciousness provides the background to all experience,” although “each world, mathematical, chemical, or supernatural is clearly ‘as much a mental construction’ as any other.”¹²⁵ There may be unity in the universe, “yet each mind can experience and/or construct only a partial aspect of the whole.”¹²⁶ While there are “individual differences,” but we are not “confined to our individual percepts,” as “we know that we experience only a part of the whole,” that knowing derived from the fact that “we are social beings.”¹²⁷ Indeed, “there is no individual apart from social relations,” and, moreover “what we do and think is a product of the relations we stand in to the community of which we are a part.”¹²⁸ Reductionism is avoided by casting “personal growth” as a “dialectical process,”¹²⁹ a characterization that reinserts a relative autonomy and even an (let’s say) ontological integrity to the individual person. That recedes, however, when we read that: “Reality, then, for Ten Broeke is the community awareness of shared experiences,” and “its unity is a conscious one,” as “its differences are in the individual’s responses to and comprehension of that unity.”¹³⁰ If experience is “shared” wouldn’t “responses” to it be similar if not the same, but not different?

For James Ten Broeke, the world is moral, a “world of meaningful moral relations, not simply abstracted tables and chairs,” the latter without “meaning independent of the experiencing agents, hence no reality as such in Ten Broeke’s terms.”¹³¹ Yet – back to the apparent inconsistency in his philosophy between difference and unity, the individual and the social – we read that “for the meanings of the world are inexhaustible.”¹³² There are, Armour and Trott continue, “three important features are involved then in Ten Broeke’s view of reality: individual differences, emotional factors, and shared thoughts – the basis for morality as well.”¹³³ Is morality a matter of “shared thoughts” – a mental construction? – yet somewhat shredded by “individual differences” and “emotional factors.” Are the three according equal weight? Yes, it turns out: Ten Broeke criticizes “Platonism” for “neglect[ing] the emotional and volitional factors in its conception of the true reality,” as “they are, he insists, *equally essential* factors of experience.”¹³⁴ That assertion seems undermined, if not contradicted altogether, when we read the Armour-Trott treatment of “Ten Broeke’s theory of the self,”¹³⁵ a theory apparently without those “equally essential factors of experience.” As if anticipating the hegemony of objectives in curriculum theory,¹³⁶ Ten Broeke believed that “our awareness of self is organized around our goals and ends.”¹³⁷ Family, friends, time and place all evaporate in a concept of self that is organized around “goals” and “ends” – except as each becomes useful even exploitable to achieve those “goals” and “aims.” Even memory revolves around aims and ends: “To remember or know who one is, is to remember the set of goals one has attempted to realize.”¹³⁸ If these are “indefinite and unorganized,”¹³⁹ we (quoting Ten Broeke): “fall back into the ceaseless flow of mental states and have no proper individuality.”¹⁴⁰ Certainly I share what is implied in that sentence, that “individuality” requires some degree of subjective coherence – what I term synthesis in the method of

*currere*¹⁴¹ – but it is hardly dependent on one’s “aims,” not the case for Ten Broeke, who concluded: “Thus the permanency of the end becomes the permanency, indeed the substantiality, of the self.”¹⁴² And then we’re whipsawed back into an almost absolute individuality, as morality (and presumably politics as well) means “we must try and allow each person or personality to live out the meaning in which his reality subsists.”¹⁴³

“Ten Broeke’s theory of the self,” Armour and Trott tell us, “is fundamental to his moral theory, which he develops in a book written subsequent to *The Constructive Basis for Theology* called *The Moral Life and Religion*,”¹⁴⁴ wherein he asserts (quoting Ten Broeke): “[T]he only possible relation which can hold between persons is a moral one.”¹⁴⁵ Armour and Trott tie that assertion with his theory of self: “For Ten Broeke, to value one’s car more than one’s family would indicate a serious misunderstanding of what one’s own self was.”¹⁴⁶ Since the self is individual “we will all respond differently to our situations,” requiring us to “talk in terms of moral laws or universal moral rules only tentatively.”¹⁴⁷ Armour and Trott find it unsurprising that Ten Broeke questioned the notion of the Kantian Moral Law, or the universal dictate on which all men can rely,” as “law requires some kind of repetition and there seem to be no repetitions in the moral sphere.”¹⁴⁸ After all, “each person feels that no one could have had just the crisis to face that he has had to meet.”¹⁴⁹ Armour and Trott ask: “How then is morality possible in his view?”¹⁵⁰ They find his answer “refreshingly simple,” namely that for him the “ground[ing] for the universality of ethical ideas is in their ‘sensuous and social origin’.”¹⁵¹ Why that phrase – “sensuous and social” – seems “simple” isn’t obvious, something even Armour and Trott then admit: “There will always be a certain amount of guesswork in moral behaviour.”¹⁵²

We move from “guesswork” to sheer subjectivism¹⁵³ when Armour and Trott tell us that for Ten Broeke “reality is but a category of response of a subject to a certain experience,”¹⁵⁴ quoting him as writing: “Whatever is real is ... a subordinate form of self-conscious experience and properly has no existence elsewhere.”¹⁵⁵ Armour and Trott acknowledge that “his position is sufficiently grounded in his theory of the self to explain moral behaviour without resort to a belief in God.”¹⁵⁶ Is subjectivism somehow averted because “as an idealist he is committed to the unity of rational thought”?¹⁵⁷ But rational thought – in apparent contrast to his Canadian predecessors¹⁵⁸ – isn’t religious, as “it is primarily the force of our feelings of worth and value in experience that produces religious feelings – indeed, that is what constitutes religious experience.”¹⁵⁹ They quote Ten Broeke: “In the first place, the term God is the expression of the immeasurable need of life in its fullness, the persistence of the belief in God is due to the strength of the conviction that there is such life for us, and the difficulty of explaining the nature of God is commensurate with the difficulty of telling what this need of eternal life is.”¹⁶⁰ They then quip: “Broeke had no Bible up his sleeve.”¹⁶¹ What exactly did he have “up his sleeve”? Maybe not much, as Armour and Trott end by telling us: “Ten Broeke died still wondering about the reality of God, morality, and goodness.”¹⁶²

Perhaps my problem is my note-taking, but James Ten Broeke seems to me to be all over the place in his philosophizing. Watson and even Schurman seem more consistent. Nor am I clear why George Blewett instead qualifies as Canada’s “most distinguished philosopher,” but my lack of expertise disqualifies me from questioning the judgment, one I don’t intend (at this point) to make – or at least at this point do not intend to make – concerning Canada’s most distinguished curriculum theorist. (Ted Aoki and George Tomkins come to mind, however.) My interest here is to learn what ideas dominated philosophy in English Canada – philosophy in French Canada to follow - in part because the intellectual histories I intend to compose as one consequence of the CSinC Project will be focused primarily on ideas and only secondarily on those who composed it. I’m not trying to be stingy in praise for those who spent their professional lives thinking about curriculum, but, rather, to emphasize the “thinking” in that last phrase. It is, after all, a field of thought and so ideas rather than names that should predominate.

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- Wexler, Philip. 1996. *Holy Sparks: Social Theory, Education and Religion*. St. Martin's Press.

ENDNOTES

¹ See research brief #109.

²Trott 1981, 321.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 1981, 322.

⁸ Quoted in 1981, 322. This sentence seems more a caricature of idealism than a “development” of it.

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- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ 1981, 322-323.
- ¹⁶ 1981, 323.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid. Concerning University College, see: <https://www.uc.utoronto.ca/> Concerning Victoria College, see: <https://www.vic.utoronto.ca/>
- ²² 1981, 324.
- ²³ Ibid. Concerning Paxton Young, see research briefs #106-108.
- ²⁴ Ibid. Ah inflation, eroding the value of the currency's purchasing power.
- ²⁵ Ibid. We met Caird in research brief #109.
- ²⁶ Ibid. Concerning the University of Winnipeg: <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/>
- ²⁷ Ibid. Some things never change. But I'd add it's not only farm folks who have little "clear expectation of university life."
- ²⁸ 1981, 325.
- ²⁹ Ibid. Those days are long gone. And recall that Blewett's "comfortable" career didn't last long; he died at age 39.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid. I wonder if Armour and Trott crown Blewett – rather than Schurman (see research brief #108) – "Canada most distinguished philosopher" because Schurman's career was administrative and diplomatic more than philosophic. And does the fact that Schurman, while born in Canada, spent most of his life in the United States, demote him?
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ 1981, 326. "At any cost" implies he knew working conditions were better elsewhere, perhaps at Yale - in America?
- ³⁷ 1981, 327.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ 1981, 328. As noted in an earlier research brief, Armour and Trott are using the term "man" in a non-gendered sense, as humanity.
- ⁴⁰ 1981, 329.
- ⁴¹ From *Christian View*, 208; quoted in 1981, 329.
- ⁴² 1981, 331.
- ⁴³ Quoted in 1981, 332.
- ⁴⁴ 1981, 332.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted in 1981, 332.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted in 1981, 333-334.

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- 47 1981, 335.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 1981, 336.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 1981, 336-337.
- 58 1981, 337.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Quoted in 1981, 337.
- 61 1981, 337.
- 62 Ibid. That faith in a “rational order” is not new to Blewett, you will recall: see research briefs #106 and #109.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 See research brief #109.
- 65 1981, 339.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid. For more on Hegel: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics/> For more on Marx: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx/>
- 69 Perhaps erroneously I’ve tended to think of dialectics as deterministic, and its long and varied usage could, I suppose, include such a suspicion, but hardly always: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aenesidemus> There are recent efforts to link dialectics with liberty: <https://www.independent.org/publications/tir/article.asp?id=1517>
- 70 1981, 340.
- 71 1981, 192. See research brief #108.
- 72 1981, 341.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 1981, 342.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 1981, 345.
- 83 1981, 346.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 1981, 347.

⁸⁸ See Pinar 2019, chapter 5.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ 1981, 348.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Not everyone agrees that Hegelianism is teleological:
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hegel-bulletin/article/abs/contrateleology-hegel-on-subjective-and-objective-purpose/53DDF48176135CDCCDE049ECE025463D#:~:text=Hegel's%20system%20is%20not%20teleological.%20For%20a%20philosophy,as%20the%20dominant%20model%20for%20interpreting%20Hegel's%20system>

⁹⁷ 1981, 348.

⁹⁸ 1981, 349

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ 1981, 351.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ 1981, 352. I'm guessing Bertrand Russell:
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertrand-Russell>

¹⁰⁵ 1981, 353.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ 1981, 354.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ There are those who have argued that we're reentering a mystical age: see the later work of Philip Wexler, starting with Wexler 1996.

¹¹¹ 1981, 354. I can't help but add that George Grant taught at McMaster as well, if much later and in a Department of Religion: Pinar 2019.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. With those credentials, one would hope so.

¹¹⁶ Concerning Hegel, see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel/>

¹¹⁷ Concerning Lotze, see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermann-lotze/>

¹¹⁸ 1981, 354. Grant, too, was evidently influenced by Hegel (Pinar 2019, 30, n. 133; 77, n. 155) but by Plato too (Pinar 2019, 9).

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Concerning Watson: again - see research brief #109.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² 1981, 355.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Not sure why inhabiting "many worlds" should be a "problem." If it is, it is a problem shared by many. Ah yes, the self is social. What a sleight-of-hand that is.

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- 125 Ibid. I thought “many worlds” was a “problem.”
- 126 Ibid.
- 127 Ibid.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 1981, 356.
- 131 Ibid. Why would he want to declare tables and chairs – physical objects generally one supposes – without reality? Weird.
- 132 Ibid.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Ibid. Italics added.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 For example: see Pinar 2019, 100.
- 137 Ibid.
- 138 Ibid.
- 139 Ibid.
- 140 Quoted in 1981, 356.
- 141 Pinar 2019, 253, n. 153.
- 142 Quoted in 1981, 356.
- 143 Ibid. Even terrorists?
- 144 1981, 357.
- 145 Quoted in 1981, 357.
- 146 1981, 357.
- 147 Ibid.
- 148 Ibid.
- 149 Ibid.
- 150 Ibid.
- 151 Ibid. Sensuous? I suspect Ten Broeke wasn’t thinking of sexual intercourse as sacred; that comes half a century later in Pasolini: Pinar 2023.
- 152 1981, 358.
- 153 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/subjectivism.shtml>
- 154 Ibid.
- 155 Quoted in 1981, 358.
- 156 1981, 358.
- 157 1981, 359.
- 158 See research briefs #105-109.
- 159 1981, 359.
- 160 Quoted in 1981, 359.
- 161 1981, 360.
- 162 Ibid.