

# Metaphysical Dyad: Essence – Substance

by Tibor Imre Baranyi

In order for any manifestation to come into existence, the primordial ontological-metaphysical Unity must disintegrate, divide and multiply itself. However, this process is only real from a cosmological point of view, the point of view of a subsequent manifestation: the metaphysical Unity multiplies itself in such a way that its Oneness remains unbroken. The same applies to the sphere, the most non-differential geometrical object, whose circumference (and surface) are the many modalities of the singular centre. These modalities - though they are the result of the multiplication of the centre - in no wise affect it itself.

In the highest sense of the word, even Unity itself is not the primer reality since its Oneness lies only in relation to what is not a Unity, that is, a duality which subsequently gives rise to multiplicity. Indisputably, Unity is the principle of multiplicity, however, it is the metaphysical *Zero* - the Principle of the principles – which, preceding even Unity, is an absolute beginningness and infinite reality. In accordance with the *Tao* of Chinese universalism, the metaphysical “Zero” is far from being identical with Nothing (because in this regard “Nothing” means what modern mathematics designates by the term “infinite”, that is to say, which in effect would be equal to achieving the horizontal asymptote, approximated by the curve of  $1/x$ .)<sup>1</sup> but rather, as a symbolic expression of the hyper-centre, which never abandons its totality, the metaphysical Zero is non-manifested absolute Unity.

Unity itself is an expression of the metaphysical Absolute (Zero) in multiplicity. It is the light of an absolute Totality in the relative multiplicities.

Manifestation, the manifested world is a magical multiplication of the Unity. It is magical because from the perspective of the Unity there is no multiplication: it is a magic (*māyā*) – a reality-like illusion - which exists merely from the viewpoint of manifestation. It is both an existing reality and an illusion because the domain, in which it reveals itself as a reality, is also an illusion. On the other hand, the metaphysical Zero is nothing other than the absolute “Void” in the sense of Śūnyatā of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. The Void is a point-like Unity in relation to “Nothing”. Although Unity is not manifested, it is, nonetheless, the principle of all manifestations.

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<sup>1</sup>( $X$ = natural whole number). In the traditional sense of the word, the biggest number is 1, and the numbers are generated by its proliferation. In fact, it would be a dissolution in quantity, that is an “annihilation” if the curve of  $1/x$  reached the abscissa axis but it is impossible in the context of manifestation.

Symbolically, if manifestation is taken as a sphere, its principle is the centre of this sphere. This centre does not exist anywhere nor can it be found in space since it is the centre which, by multiplying itself, brings space into being. Correspondingly, one cannot find Unity somewhere in space because it is nowhere in the manifested existence as it is Unity itself, by the process of a self-multiplication, which creates manifestation. This process of creation is expressed by the Brāhmana texts when they proclaim that the world has been brought into being by “self-denial” (*tapas*). In this terminology, manifestation is simply the *tapas* of the Unity. The question, for instance, of *how* Unity, by means of *self-denial*, creates manifestation, is meaningless, or more precisely it is a question to which no rational answer can be given. From the vantage point of Unity, Being is free: it has neither reason nor purpose. Furthermore, it is also known by the traditions that it is in effect impossible to give a definitive and complete description about the *nature* of the world. On the dialectical level of manifestation, to say something on the one hand implies its implicit denial on the other. However, everything is possible for the Principle – and also its opposite. When a traditional doctrine gives some sort of description in this respect, it means not only a phenomenological account, but more so, it bears a praxeological purpose; that is, the description always has a certain consequential perspective which may allow changes in the existential order. What is important is not how the world *looks like in itself* (as the modern science suggests) but that from its *appearance* I come, therefore, to see the path which goes back from this limited “world” (the world of multiplicity) to the unlimited “beyond-world” (to the Unity, my own Unified being). This constitutes the central meaning of the various traditional cosmogonies and cosmologies.

Unity is the Essence of the manifested multiplicity. ‘Essence’ (Latin *essentia*) means both “Beginning” and “Origin”: it also closely corresponds to the “Sky” or “Heaven” (Latin *Coelo* and Chinese *Ti'en*); that which is vertical, central and axial, hence perpendicular, essential and ascensional; furthermore light-like, imperial and royal (Sanskrit *Purusa* and Chinese *Yan*), and at the level of the individual relativity, it relates to what is *quantity*, which is expressed by the word *nāma* (name) in Sanskrit language.

At the same time, the essential is also what Aristotle calls *eidos*<sup>2</sup>; which is expressed by the universality of the cosmos: ordered, dominated, controlled and adorned. On the other hand, by means of an analogical transposition, the biblical symbolism of the earthly Paradise is essential; This explains why its symbol is a circle, since the circle, like the sphere in space - due to its isotropic homogeneity - is “the most perfect form” of the plane. However, a circle, taken in its entirety, is the symbol of the Essence only in relation to the most differentiated plane figure that is the *square*. Within the same circle – when the circle symbolises the manifested existence in its

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, (e.g. Book VIII. Part 8.)

entirely – the centre of the circle constitutes the Essence. Therefore, the perimeter analogically corresponds to the square. If one draws two radii from the centre of a circle, to form an acute angle with each other, and connects each intersecting points to the centre, one gets a *triangle*. On this account, it may be said that every triangle is a specific symbol of Existence, or which is the same thing, it represents the manifested world; its pinnacle, which coincides with the centre of the circle, is nothing other than Unity, the unmanifested Principle of manifestation. In contrast to the Essence there is an opposite principle, namely the substantial base of existence and manifestation (i.e. the circumference of a circle and the base of a triangle).

Etymologically, the term “substance” may be correlated with the Latin word *sub stare* as well as ‘substratum’, connoting that which stands beneath.<sup>3</sup> In the most extended sense of the word, substance means nothingness, that is the non-existent in itself, the non-essential, the meaningless and incomprehensible which, according to the transformation process of *prima materia* into *ultimate materia* in Hermetic Tradition, can become everything (among other things, alchemy also regards this principle as *potential passive pura*, namely the “pure passive potentiality”, which stands opposite to the essential “factuality”. Furthermore, it is also called *materia cruda*, *materia lapidis*, *materia proxima* as well as *massa confuse*, or in a certain sense it can be envisaged as *Leo viridis*, that is the ‘green lion’, which belongs to the sphere of the ‘dissolving-water’, the *menstruum*). This is the so called ‘matter’, *in statu nascendi*, without any particular attributes which only potentially contains “matter” and its “birth” in itself; furthermore it is the dark root of existence in the sense of the Sanskrit word *mula prakrti laya* that is the unqualified root of nature (*prakrti* literally means: “pre-creation”); chaos which originally meant “intactness” and not “turmoil”, which is only a secondary and a deduced meaning of the word; which is natural and feminine (in Chinese *Ying*); all that are horizontally and terrestrial in symbolism (in Latin *terra* and Chinese *ti*), which, in another order of interrelationship, is quantitative and formal in the sense of the Sanskrit word *rùpa*.

Ontologically speaking, substance - as I mentioned above - can be symbolised in relation to the essential centre as a sphere in space and a circle in plane. Substance “arises” where the Absolute, without any rationally conceivable cause or purpose, as it were, “eliminates” its Self-being. This is the primordial pre-emergent state of all manifestations which stands in an elementary (desire-like) correlation with the Absolute (as the creator) whom/which, the Absolute as Spirit (*Spiritus*) - or in a different sense as Man, absorbs into itself during his craving for Becoming: the Absolute, as an “Angelic Salutation”<sup>4</sup>, penetrates into substance wherein it constitutes an essential guiding principle, a centre (or in other words *filius*) from

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<sup>3</sup> In order to clarify the century-old philosophical dilemma, Guenon also points out that, due to the erroneous translation of the Greek word *ousia*, what Scholastic philosophy as well as the preceding modern and postmodern ones meant by the word *substance* is eventually the *essence*. Cf. Rene Guenon, *The Reign of Quantity & the Signs of the Time*, (Hillsdale Ny: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 15. Regarding the word *ousia*, See also Aristotle, *ibid*, Book V. Chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Evangelium Secundum Lucam* 1: 35.

Itself. It may be also understood in such a way that Spirit penetrates into substance and by order and degree, it elevates substance from potentiality to actuality, thus reintegrating it into Itself. Hence substance, completely pervaded by the Spirit, – this is the eschatological aspect of the substance, realised soteriologically – is the most differentiated form, symbolised by a square in plane and a cube in space. In short: the ultimate crystallisation of the primordial gems, or put it in hermetic parlance “squaring of the circle”, is the way of all possible manifestation.

It then follows that, Essence and substance are not two equal or symmetrical parts of a whole, but rather substance is part of the essence whereas essence is not part of the substance. And the same is true concerning many analogous relations such as God and the world, Absolute man and Absolute women and so forth.

On the other hand, substantiality has two fundamental aspects according to which the various traditions - Christian tradition, for example - have brought into being their corresponding concepts. Substance, as a principle, may represent either a reflection, or *birth* when the strictly subordinated feminine principle which accomplishes the universal action of the essentially masculine Spirit in the sense of a reaction. Therefore, substance assumes the principle of the *Holy Virgin* (“*the Blessed Mother*”, “*Queen of Heaven*”) along with other analogous principles. Furthermore, it may consist in an absorption when the illuminating principle, representing the Essence, adopts an “independent”, “rebellious”, “hostile”, “demonic” opposition which is a paradigm of corruption, subversion, obscuration and destruction. In this case, substance appears in the aspect of the “Bad” (*kakos, malus, cattivo*) and the satanic principles (*Devil, Diabolos, Mammon, Belial, Ahriman, Lucifer falsus, Mara* etc.).

All that is manifested and arises as an entity in the process of becoming are the result of the different degrees of contamination of the two principles, namely Essence and substance. It is important that duality appears only real from the perspective of the substance since – as noted earlier - from the perspective of the Essence, that is, from the viewpoint of Reality, Essence also encompasses substance in its totality.

The Beginning is superior and light-saturated because the corresponding states of being and consciousness assume an *essentially* dominant position, that is, *essence*, in the beginning, determines manifestation. On the contrary, the dominion of substantiality determines the end of each world circles - as in the case of the present one – whose corollary can be perceived as devastation, metaphysical obscuration and the dissolution of the existential forms in the other world.