

## THE ETHICS OF CHARITY: ANTONIO CASO'S DEFENSE OF CIVILIZATION

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The myth of the philosopher as permanent resident of the ivory tower serves a dual purpose in society. It preserves the philosopher's autonomy of inquiry from the powers that be and it allows the powers that be to exercise their control unencumbered by philosophy. That the tower is a myth seems clear from various perspectives. Outside the tower, in the social world, is both the source of the philosopher's problematics and the philosopher's *raison d'être* (or *raison d'écrire*). The independence of the ivory tower is also questionable when one notes the profusion and profundity of philosophical analyses at times of rapid and unsettling societal and civilizational changes, such as those in fifth century Athens or in Mexico at the turn of the present century.

At no time as much as in the twentieth century have the barriers between the ivory tower and the other social institutions been so permeable. The problem of the relationship between philosophy and a deep concern for the future of civilization engendered a corpus of work which may be termed crisis philosophy and is exemplified in such writings as Karl Jaspers' *Man in the Modern Age*, Gabriel Marcel's *Man Against Mass Society*, and Georg Simmel's *The Conflict in Modern Culture*, among many others.<sup>1</sup> Crisis philosophy, emerging throughout the world in the first two decades of this century, appeared in Mexico as the criticism against the positivistic ideology which was sustaining the waning Porfirian dictatorship. Mexican positivism was based on the principle that both political and ideological diversity could be eliminated by scientific methods, by technocratic administration and an educational system founded on Comte's positive philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The attempt to dispense with both politics and metaphysics (questions of what is of value and what is real) began to be attacked by the very children of those who had instituted the system. A group of the more brilliant students educated in the positivistic mode decided to enrich what they judged to be their deficient education with independent study of the philosophical classics, which they undertook by forming their own school, the Ateneo de Juventud. Among these students were José Vasconcelos and Antonio Caso, who were to become the founders of contemporary Mexican philosophy. Neither Vasconcelos nor Caso ever severed the bond between philosophy and politics which was at the root of their original criticism. The formation of the Ateneo was a self-consciously political, as well as an intellectual, enterprise, although it was not explicitly a challenge to the regime's right to rule. The positivists had already

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breached the walls of the ivory tower by their program of scientific education for scientific administration. The young Mexican critics did not attempt to rebuild the walls but rather brought speculative thought to bear on the public situation.

The criticism forged by the Ateneo was rooted in the philosophy that was becoming dominant in the Western world — vitalism. Vitalist thought was a part of the *fin du siècle* reaction against the restrictive systems of idealism and naturalism, both of which had tried to demonstrate that historical development is rational. Vitalism questioned the principle of a rational basis of society, or, indeed, of life itself, and, thus, undermined traditional justifications for civilization and created, at least, an intellectual crisis. The critics of the regime, by embracing vitalism, were confronted not only with the problem of replacing positivistic rationalism with some other principle, but of building a public philosophy without a rational principle at all. The history of contemporary Mexican philosophy can be understood as the attempt to grapple with this problem and to resolve it.

Antonio Caso, the most influential Mexican philosopher during the first half of the twentieth century, was conscious of the crisis caused by vitalism. In his published work, which spans the period from the years immediately preceding the Revolution of 1910 through World War II, he attempted to determine some basis beyond life itself to ground and explain life, and to provide principles for the conduct of social relations. The following discussion will examine Caso's response to vitalism, his effort to defend a nonrational ground for civilization and social relations, and, particularly, his attempt to create an ethics based on charity. We will argue that his project never succeeds in overcoming its vitalist roots, that his ethic disguises the quest for an ontology, and that his denigration of reason destroys the possibility for a public philosophy.

### Vitalism and the Anti-Vital

Caso's greatest work, *Existence as Economy, as Disinterest, and as Charity* (*La Existencia como Economía, como Desinterés y como Caridad*), exemplifies the mood or mentality of crisis that has characterized so much of contemporary Western philosophy. Caso initiates his inquiry into the fundamental attitudes of human beings towards their existence with an observation of the character of the present era, arguing that the "systematic exaltation" of life above charity, which is a hallmark of the moral consciousness of our time, is really a glorification of "force, unscrupulous domination, and Life without law."<sup>3</sup> Hence, he asserts that "our time is one of the most bitter in the history of the world." Caso's life project as a philosopher can be understood as a continuing attempt to determine a ground for our existence beyond life, to find a basis for overcoming force and domination, to

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give Life a law transcendent over it, and, so, to dispel the bitterness of the time. He is, then, primarily a public philosopher, who intends to explore the inner dynamics of Western civilization, to diagnose its failure by exploring the full range of human possibility, and to move beyond the failure to a new and critically defensible ground for an ethical public situation. Although his thought is directed towards the inner world of the person, towards how human beings make themselves objects of their own existence and determine it, his thought is not enclosed in the ivory tower, but is given principle by the implicit understanding of the philosopher as the guardian of civilized life.

Caso's philosophy is determined by two general and unanalyzed terms, experience and existence, within which the possible attitudes of persons towards their own possibilities are articulated. He observes that "the philosophy of our time has to be based on experience, but on *all* experience: on that of the laboratory and on that of the pew."<sup>4</sup> And then he adds: "Philosophy is the explanation of existence."<sup>5</sup> Implicit in Caso's choice of categories is an understanding of philosophy which later in the twentieth century would be identified with the existentialists.<sup>6</sup> Human beings, for Caso, are existence, always active, always having to take up a stance or attitude (*actitud*) towards themselves and their deeds. The content upon which their determinations are made is experience in its totality, all of that which appears regardless of whether it is conventionally distinguished as external or internal. Within the field of experience, which is given form by the active response of the person, philosophy is the special activity of defining the fundamental possibilities for existence, the categories of possible response. In its most general form, then, Caso's philosophy is what has been called "existential ontology," although Caso developed his system independently and at the same time as Jaspers articulated the first self-conscious European existentialism.

Existential ontology is generally structured by a distinction between orders of existence (what Caso calls *actitudes*) on the basis of their "authenticity" and "inauthenticity," or whether they actualize the human being's essence or falsify it. Such is the case for Caso's system, even though he does not use the terms authentic and inauthentic. The three basic attitudes towards existence defined by Caso, economy, disinterest, and charity, are contrasted according to how fully they actualize the true possibilities of the human being. The root problem of existential ontology is to ground the authentic possibilities in an interpretation of being and to demonstrate how the inauthentic possibilities arise and are related to them. Heidegger, for example, in *Being and Time*, defines Dasein's "ownmost possibility" as being-towards-death and attempts to derive all other "inauthentic possibilities" from Dasein's "flight" from its ownmost possibility into the "chatter" of the They-self, which is merely an alienated or deprived ("privative") mode of resolute choice in the face of Nothing. In contrast, Sartre defines the authentic *pour soi* as absolute self-

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determining freedom and derives inauthenticity ("bad faith") from a flight from self-responsibility into the congealed and defined realm of the *en soi*. Characteristic of all existential ontologies is the separation of authentic existence from any rational principle and the identification of reason with inauthentic existence. This separation raises the question of how it is possible to know that a certain mode of existence is authentic and may account for why each existential ontology interprets the basic categories differently, making each existentialism appear, to an outsider, as merely the product of personal self-expression. Authentic existence is always defined in terms of a notion of freedom, but each existentialism has its own interpretation of freedom, which is radically opposed to the others.

Caso's existential ontology is distinguished from others by its strong dependence upon vitalistic metaphysics. The three attitudes towards existence, economy, disinterest, and charity, are distinguished from one another on the basis of whether they are immanent to or transcendent over life. Unlike most European existentialists, who were critics of idealism and, therefore, initiated their reflections with a critique of consciousness, Caso attacked vitalism and, thus, began by interpreting the category of life. In general, Caso's starting point bound him to a dualistic ontology, which would frustrate all of his efforts to ground civilization anew in a coherent idea of the person. The European existentialists were monists, for whom inauthenticity was, in essence, a "privative" mode of consciousness. For example, Heidegger interprets us as "falling" beings whose vocation is to lift ourselves up into the truth. For Caso, on the other hand, we are *fallen* beings, who are immersed in life and who must transcend our estate heroically rather than merely recover ourselves. Existential ontology, then, is a critical philosophy, which is affected in its results by its original object of criticism.

Just as Heidegger began *Being and Time* with an analysis of our "falling" existence, what he called "everydayness," Caso begins with a description of our fallen existence, existence as economy. According to Caso, life is ruled by the principle of economy: maximum advantage with minimum effort. Unlike many other vitalists, such as Simmel, Bergson, and Ortega, Caso defines life morally, claiming that "vital energy," which is an original and irreducible reality, is "conscious or unconscious egoism."<sup>7</sup> Life, for Caso, is discontinuous with any other order of existence, having its own "immanent finality" which is defined as the monopolization (*acaparamiento*) of all which is not itself. Within this concept of monopolization is summarized all of the various nineteenth century biological and utilitarian interpretations of existence, from the egoism of utilitarianism to the Darwinian struggle for survival. Biologists would not accept such a definition which intermixes the conscious and the unconscious. However, Caso does not claim that egoism is conscious life, but that unconscious life is unconscious egoism.<sup>8</sup> Even play is merely, for Caso, a preparation to do battles with future adversaries.<sup>9</sup>

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Caso's interpretation of life contains the problem of how he is able to know the principle of the unconscious.<sup>10</sup> Critiquing his inability to solve this problem, however, is not our major concern. Instead, our interest is focused on his interpretation of life, which is defined in such a way as to allow no exit from it, except by some movement or act of existence which discloses a mode of being antithetical to life. Life can only be transcended in a way entirely antithetical to itself. This means that Being has to contain at least two separate realities; that Being has to include life within itself rather than to be coextensive with it. Transcendence of life cannot be performed by any act of rational thinking because Caso identifies reason with science and science with economy. Therefore, in Caso's terms, reason is merely an extension of egoism and, thus, does not surpass existence as economy. The first attitude towards existence, then, is not voluntarily assumed, but is a stance which each individual must adopt by virtue of being alive and of being continuous with all forms of life.

The move beyond life must involve the rejection of either one or both of the components of the principle of economy: maximum advantage or minimum effort. Such a rejection could proceed in any of eight possible ways, depending upon the possibilities of modifying advantage and effort by maximum, minimum, or indifference, each combination yielding a uniquely determinable principle. Caso, however, does not discuss nine attitudes towards existence, but only three. An understanding of why he excludes the six other possible principles without even mentioning them will be explored later in our critique of his system. For the present it is merely necessary to describe how he proposes to transcend the vital economy, first by appealing to existence as disinterest and second to existence as charity.

Existence as disinterest is the realm of aesthetic experience and transcends vital egoism according to the principle of indifference to advantage and maximum effort. Caso asserts that "art is *innate disinterest* which life does not explain; it demands an enormous effort and its result is useless."<sup>11</sup> The world of art is not only anti-vital but anti-rational, because "to think is to relate, to utilize," while the contemplation of beauty is exhausted by an intuition in which "the subject *is* the object." Caso is primarily concerned with existence as disinterest in reference to its function as a mediation or intermediate sphere between "vital egoism" (economy) and "heroic altruism" (charity): "Good and evil, combat, triumph, and defeat; all of them can be viewed with disinterest by art."<sup>12</sup> The first step beyond life, then, is the ability to contemplate its dynamics with detachment and to find satisfaction in its expressions for themselves and not for any ulterior purpose. This step, however, is not spontaneous, but requires great effort.

The step to charity requires one further modification of disinterest, in which maximum effort is retained and indifference to advantage is replaced by minimum advantage. For Caso, existence as charity is the complete negation

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and reversal of vital egoism, a movement of conversion in which goodness, love, and sacrifice are identical: "The equation of goodness is expressed by saying: Sacrifice = maximum effort with minimum advantage."<sup>13</sup> Existence as charity, or sacrificial love, is also the "ownmost" human possibility, the perfection of human existence, because the charitable act leaves "nothing *in potentia*," but expresses the completeness of personality actively. In opposition to Heidegger and Sartre, who define authenticity in terms of self-control, Caso defines it as fulfilled self-deliverance, not to an object outside of the self, but to the self's own act. In charity the division between subject and object is not overcome by the absorption of subject into object, as it is in disinterest, or by the absorption of the object into the subject, as it is in the vital economy, but by the absorption of subject and object in a self-giving act which cannot be reasoned, but can only be grasped intuitively in the process of its realization. Existence as charity, then, does not contain a rational ethic, the principle of which can be made a maxim to regulate conduct, but is, itself, the source and actualization of goodness.

Our brief sketch of Caso's attitudes towards existence is sufficient to define the structure of his ontology. The first great division in the ontology is between the vital economy and the two orders of the anti-vital, disinterest and charity. Both orders of the anti-vital are united by their reversal of the law of the conservation of energy; both substitute maximum for minimum effort and exclude the possibility for indifference towards effort expended. In essence, the law of conservation is the principle of instrumental reason, or efficiency, and, so, the anti-vital is primarily the anti-rational. Within the sphere of the anti-vital, disinterest and charity are differentiated by their negations of maximum advantage, aesthetic activity being indifferent to advantage and charity seeking its minimization. Interpreted dialectically, disinterest transcends the moment of vital egoism by surpassing evil through neutralizing the categories of good and evil in pure contemplation of an object, while charity reunites the purified existent with life in an act reversing life's dynamic. In this sense, Caso inverts the dialectic of idealism, which moves from intuition to self-conscious reason, by uniting reason with life on the level of the unconscious and identifying the transcendence of life with an intuition available only in the process of activity. For Caso, then, freedom is opposed to reason, while for the idealists freedom is the manifestation of reason in the world. Caso accomplishes his inversion by narrowing the definition of reason to include only the conservation of effort and by determining conservation by advantage. Hence, reason, even as conservation, can find no object beyond that which life presents to it. Goodness and beauty, then, are not only ultra-rational with respect to their objects (reason is incapable of defining ends), but also with respect to their operation or constitution.

As was noted above, the peculiarity of Caso's ethic is that charity does not provide any principle by which self-conscious actors can regulate their

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conduct. Existence as charity cannot be compelled nor can there be any obligation to actualize it. We may surmise, then, that Caso's theory is not a traditional ethics at all, but an attempt to construct an ontology in which the supreme mode of being is goodness. Although he begins his reflection by revealing an ethical crisis, his definition of life as essentially egoistic deprives ethics of any autonomy and makes goodness dependent not only upon the overcoming of evil, but upon the transcendence of life itself. Yet, for Caso, rational cognition is incapable of attaining to any mode of being beyond life and, so, the transcendence of life becomes equivalent to the transcendence of evil, either through indifference to advantage or through its minimization. In other words, the modes of being beyond life are guaranteed not by knowledge, but by beauty and goodness. Particularly goodness, which is the essence of civilized existence, must be the unsupported guarantor of civilization by providing it with an ontology. In Heidegger's terms, Caso is a "moral existentialist," who makes goodness do the work of ontology. The great problem of moral existentialism, however, is that it must make two dubious and connected claims: A) life is rational, and B) all transcendence of life, which implies the transcendence of reason, is either indifferent to good and evil, or is good in itself. It is clear now why Caso did not explore the six other possible principles implied by his category system, particularly those four which modify indifference to or minimization of advantage by indifference to or minimization of effort. For example, indifference to advantage with minimum effort, or apathy, is anti-vital, but not anti-rational (in Caso's sense), and it has also been traditionally defined as the essence of evil. Similarly, Caso could not admit to the modification of maximum advantage by indifference to or maximization of effort, because to do so would have been to acknowledge that egoism need not be instrumentally rational, but might also be neurotically compulsive.

Caso's development of the attitudes towards existence, then, is incomplete in essential respects. Rather than making the traditional intellectualist and dogmatic claim that knowledge is virtue, Caso makes the anti-intellectualist and equally dogmatic assertion that pure activity, or what one might term will, is virtue. Such an assertion, however, far from resolving the crisis of civilization posed by vitalism, merely intensifies it. Charity, defined as complete self-deliverance in a pure act, is only good, as Kant noted, if the will is good. Yet Caso has no standard for determining the goodness of the will apart from the actualization of the pure act. He can only argue that pure activity and charity are the same because he has previously equated rationality with evil (an act is evil if and only if it is rational). If either irrational evil or rational good are possible, then his system is false. We may note, to anticipate ourselves, that civilization is most directly undermined by irrational evil and most effectively secured by rational goodness.

### The Dialectic of Charity

Taking account of the weakness in Caso's attempt to construct an ethical existentialism, we may proceed to analyze how he attempts to make existence as charity function as the supreme ground of an existential ontology. Having demarcated the transcendent realm of existence as charity, Caso offers an interpretation of the two other Christian virtues, faith and hope, in terms of charity. According to Caso, neither faith nor hope is intelligible without having presupposed the intuition of charity. He goes so far as to argue that we are "the authors of the supernatural world (that which is superposed to the natural) and coexistent with it."<sup>14</sup> Interpreted radically and literally this assertion means that the anti-vital realms of being do not exist in any sense until we bring them into being by contemplating beauty or acting charitably. Such an interpretation, however, would leave the realm of the anti-vital groundless and, so, Caso introduces the idea of multiple "orders" of being, which are independent of each other, but which are also in mutual struggle, a conception which creates the problem of how relations between autonomous realms of being are possible. Caso does not solve this problem, but resorts, instead, to the notion that charity, a radically personal act, is grounded in a cosmic process of individuation presided over by God, who is not a formula, a law, or a supreme category, but a person, an "Individual Being." Hence, Caso's final position, in apparent contradiction to his original description of the attitudes towards existence, is to defend a theistic existentialism.

Having based his theism on the intuition of charity, Caso argues that faith is absurd if it is conceived of as anterior to experience. Faith, for Caso, is a type of nonrational knowledge which can have no basis but the pure act of radical conversion: "Whoever puts faith before charity proceeds in the same way as one who places reason before action. Reason can be deceptive; it is constantly deceptive. But life and the good never deceive; they are."<sup>15</sup> Hence, just as reason is an immanent extension of life, so faith is an immanent extension of charity. Faith is merely the belief that the person is grounded in a supernatural being, whose existence is supported by the experience of our ability to reverse the law of life. Hope is at yet a second remove from charity. It does not ground itself, but is derived from "something else which sustains it and communicates its reality."

*Existence as Economy, as Disinterest, and as Charity* was first published before World War I. Its defense of a nonrational and intuitive ground for the good and for being betrayed an optimism which was to vanish from the mainstream of Western thought in the 1920s. Caso returned to the problem of the relations between the theological virtues in a later work, *The Peril of Man* (*El Peligro del Hombre*), written during World War II. The rise of totalitarianisms, some of them based explicitly upon irrationalist claims, and mechanized warfare had chastened his earlier optimism and, so, he undertook



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a reinterpretation of faith, hope, and charity. Caso believed that civilization was in danger of being destroyed by rampant collective egoism and needed a firmer ground than intuition could provide. Yet he did not alter his anti-rationalist position, believing, instead, that his original diagnosis of the crisis had been most horribly vindicated. He continued to believe that the vital economy could only be transcended by an act of conversion, but this time he appealed to faith in Christianity, not to what he once considered the essential Christian experience, charity. He argued, reversing his previous discussion, that "what we are most intimately is our belief, our faith."<sup>16</sup> He identified three possible commitments for contemporary philosophy, Marx's messianism, Nietzsche's glorification of life, and Kierkegaard's Christianity, choosing the last as the only one which could renew civilization. He further argued that faith is self-grounded in the will to believe and the "love of love": "Faith comes with the will to believe, neither before nor after it." Love or charity is now the mediator between the supreme theological virtue and hope: "Hope is grounded in love, but love is not grounded in nothing."<sup>17</sup> Caso concluded *The Peril of Man* with Kierkegaard's either/or: "Despair or believe."

The shift in Caso's ordering of the theological virtues from *Existence* to *The Peril of Man* not only indicates a pessimism, which is intelligible in terms of the twentieth-century public situation, and a desperate effort to secure civilization by a return to tradition, but also reveals the ultimate intention of his philosophy. In his two discussions of the theological virtues charity and faith change positions, but hope remains as the resultant of their operation. We may surmise that Caso's entire philosophical effort was motivated by a profound desire to secure, through thought, some grounds for hope that the person is sustained by a higher reality in a society which was not only characterized by rampant individual and collective egoisms, but which legitimated those egoisms in its philosophies. His first attempt to ground hope was accomplished by identifying beauty and goodness with the transcendence over life, while his second effort grounded transcendence over life in a traditional faith. In neither case did he give up his fundamental belief that reason is the immanent extension of life or, in other words, that all reason is instrumental reason serving vital goals. The difference between his first and second discussions, then, is not fundamental. He concluded from the bitter experience of the first half of the twentieth century that charity was too frail a support on which to rest civilization. Yet he had written *Existence* decades earlier just because he had judged that faith had crumbled under the onslaught of positivistic models of public life and could only be renewed if it was given a basis in experience. If anything, the prospects for a revival of Christian civilization were dimmer in World War II than they had been before World War I, so we may conclude that *The Peril of Man* was either a work of desperation or a pragmatic appeal for the benefits of the Christian commitment. That it was the former and that Caso had always nursed a

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hunger for hope as deep, though disguised, as Unamuno's "hunger for immortality" is evidenced by his final words: believe or despair. He does not say "believe or disbelieve," or "hope or despair." For Caso, the crisis of our time was the failure of hope that we can transcend life, that there is any ground for belief that we are more than intelligent animals, that there is any belief to sustain the intrinsic value of our charitable acts. In a sense, then, the hidden primacy in Caso's philosophy is the primacy of hope, the virtue which is always vindicated by his philosophy, but which he discussed only briefly. If Heidegger philosophized to make a clearing for Being, Caso philosophized to make a clearing for hope and, so, like Heidegger, for himself.

### **The Ethics of Charity: Personal and Public**

From the standpoint of ontology, Antonio Caso's theistic and moral existentialism suffers from the weakness of all such systems. Tied to the philosophy which they criticize, existential ontologies must either invert their object of criticism, be it idealism or vitalism, or remain within its categories. Yet their ontological failure does not negate their contributions altogether. In the twentieth century existentialism has functioned to defend and vindicate a range of significant human experiences which are not acknowledged by such rationalist doctrines as idealism, positivism, pragmatism, Marxism, and phenomenology. Heidegger's "care", Marcel's "fidelity," Buber's "I-Thou," and Abbagnano's "possibility of possibility" all direct the person to phenomena and "attitudes" which are essential to a full and self-reflective existence. Caso is, of course, in this great existentialist tradition, which seeks to reformulate experiences which were central to an earlier religious era of Western civilization and to carry them forward into a secular society which is oriented, in its public life, towards restricting the range of significant experience to overt behavior. Although Caso was unable successfully to defend an ontology in which charity revealed a higher reality, the experience of charitable action can nonetheless be made actual and is one of the most important possibilities of human existence.

Existence as charity is, in fact, a particularly central human possibility because it touches the core of the self. Following Caso's spirit, though not his attempt to formulate an ontology, we may note that the experience of the self in the twentieth century has been one of profound alienation. As sociologists such as Erving Goffman have observed, in our everyday lives we seek to "present" a "self" to others in order to defend ourselves from exploitation by them and, if possible, to take advantage of them. Hence, if Caso's notion that egoism is the law of life is dubious, at least it seems to be a general feature of our social existence. Exploring the self even more deeply, we find yet another ego which manipulates and constructs the self presented to others, but which

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also does not seem to be our "own" in some indefinable way. We are capable not only of perceiving the insincerity of our superficial and social self, but we are also able to feel an insincerity of ourselves towards ourselves. And, finally, there are moments in which the apparently ungrounded judgment that we are insincere towards ourselves, that we are merely using ourselves as means to some ulterior end, is vindicated, not by a rational cognition, but by an action in which we suddenly overcome all of the distance which separates us from both our conventional self-images and our social presentations, and unite ourselves to the other in a spontaneous act of self-expression which is also an act of love and of free sacrifice. Whether such a self-giving yet self-fulfilling act is called generous or charitable, those who have experienced it acknowledge it as a supreme intrinsic value which, as Caso observes, can neither be coerced through social control nor obligated by a rational ethic. The generous or charitable act is, perhaps, the closest that it is possible for human beings to approach the abolition of self-alienation. A fully expressive act which does *not* include love still demands the separation of the self from others and, therefore, from that component of the self which is lodged in the others' perceptions of the self, what William James called the "social self." Although charity may not be a "pure act," it does seem to be the most complete act of which we are capable.

As Heidegger observed there is an irreducible pettiness which characterizes everyday life and which insures that persons remain alien to one another in the "They." Charity overcomes the "They-self" by presenting the self to the other as an end-in-itself at the same time that the other is treated as an end-in-itself. Charity, then, drives the Kantian maxim to treat others as ends-in-themselves, never merely as means, one step deeper to its root of treating others as ends-in-themselves by making oneself fully manifest as an end-in-oneself. Charity cannot be obliged and is, therefore, not a conventional ethical category, because obligation, whether hypothetical or categorical, demands the separation of a judging self from an acting self, while charity *is* the abolition of all such separation.

The difficulty in Caso's philosophy, then, is not the category of charity itself, which he defines with greater lucidity than any of the other existentialists, but with his use of the category to ground an ontology which might justify faith and hope. Remaining strictly within the bounds of descriptive phenomenology, if charity has any ontological significance it is in the demonstration of our ability to unite ourselves to others by uniting ourselves to ourselves, in the supercession of the conventional dualism between self-realization and the realization of the other. Considered phenomenologically, however, charity implies neither faith nor hope. As Caso noted, it merely *is*, in and for itself. The most that can be gained from the intuition of charity is a later commitment to apply reason to seek the

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circumstances and contexts which are favorable to its actualization, and to create a character which will infuse future charitable acts with intelligence. Caso, of course, did not draw these implications from the intuition of charity, because he believed that reason was enslaved to egoism. Hence, for him, charity could not be intelligent. This, of course, was his greatest mistake; the surrender of reason to his foes. As Marcel noted, just because we cannot count on ourselves being charitable, the basis of morality in personal relations is a "secondary reflection," in which we become aware of our partiality and selfishness, and attempt to rectify it. Both egoism and charity, as well as the many concrete models of being-towards-others which lie between them, are neither rational nor irrational, but are, in principle, capable of being infused with reason. Most fundamentally, then, Caso used charity as a means to defend faith and hope, because he was unable or unwilling to use reason as a means to defend charity.

For our phenomenological interpretation, charity is a personal and not a public perfection; it cannot serve as the basis for justifying civilized life, but is, instead, the ethical consequent of civilization and not its ground. The ground of civilization is the respect for persons as ends-in-themselves, not the perfection of persons, which is a personal or intimate concern. Civilization can create the moral conditions for intimacy and individuality, but it cannot, even in Caso's terms, make intimacy and individuality its direct object. The question, then, arises of why Caso undermined his own project of vindicating civilization by trying to make a personal perfection the basis of a moral public situation, or, in other words, why he denigrated reason and deprived it of any rights in the realm of ethics. Caso, who was the most influential Mexican philosopher in the post-Revolutionary period, may be held at least partly responsible for the fact that the Mexican Revolution had no coherent public philosophy and for the continuing alienation of Mexican philosophers from their public situation.

Just as the French *philosophes* prepared an intellectual climate favorable to the Revolution of 1789, so the young critics of the Ateneo delegitimized the ideology of the Porfirian regime and helped to create a climate of opinion favorable to the Revolution of 1910. Yet there was a decisive difference between the two intellectual movements, which is explained by the moments of Western history in which they appeared. The *philosophes* were progressives and rationalists, attacking a traditional Christian culture in which political rule was supported by religious myth. By the time the Ateneo appeared rationalism had begun to show some of its disastrous public consequences and nowhere more than in Mexico were those consequences more apparent. We may observe that the Porfirian regime was, perhaps, the earliest example of totalitarianism in the West, imperfect because of the relatively low level of Mexican industrial development, but nonetheless totalistic in its program of substituting "scientific" administration for politics and of

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constructing an educational system based on Comte's positive philosophy. The Ateneo, then, was a reaction against positivism and also, by implication, against the positivist glorification of scientific reason. The Ateneo's reaction took the manifest form of re-education in the classics of Western civilization, but Caso's philosophy indicates that its latent intent was to temper secularism and modernization with the Christian values of a previous period of Mexican history. The young critics, then, were neither progressives nor reactionaries, but intellectuals who perceived the costs of modernization and attempted to minimize them by grounding traditional values in new philosophies, just as the German idealists had attempted to purify Protestantism in the early nineteenth century.

Caso and also Vasconcelos failed in their attempts to construct a public philosophy out of a purified Catholicism, and in their later years they both became reactionaries, returning to Christianity as the only buffer against modern egoism. Their failure and their return to tradition can be understood in terms of their original reaction against positivism. Their positivist education had taught them that the only proper use of reason was scientific and their experience of the public situation had taught them that science was merely a tool for rapacious egoists. They never questioned these lessons of their youth and, so, never did surpass their teachers. Their rebellion was moral, not intellectual, in the sense that they accepted the positivistic dogma that reason is only scientific, but declared, against their elders, that reason is evil. If they are to be blamed at all, it is not for their original anti-rationalism, but for their failure to subject the positivist interpretation of reason to thorough criticism in their maturity. This failure was, perhaps, responsible for the collapse of Mexican philosophy into warring schools, imported from Europe and North America, in the post-Revolutionary period, and the consequent absence of any public philosophy in twentieth century Mexico. However, blame should even be tempered here if we consider the situation of philosophy in the contemporary West. There has, as yet, in the twentieth century been no effective defense of practical reason which can limit naturalism and positivism. Heidegger, James, Sartre, and Camus, only to mention a handful, did no better and sometimes did worse than Caso. A public philosophy for the twentieth century has not yet been written and the great question of political philosophy is whether it can be written or whether the supreme possibilities of human existence can only find a personal defense.

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### Notes

1. Among the many other contributions to crisis philosophy are Edmund Husserl's *The Crisis of Philosophy*, Henri Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Pitirim Sorokin's *The Crisis of our Age*, and Unamuno's *The Agony of Christianity*.
  2. For a discussion of the ideology of the Diaz regime and the means of its imposition see: Leopoldo Zea, *El Positivismo en México*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1968.
  3. Antonio Caso, *La Existencia como Economía, como Desinterés y como Caridad*, México: Ediciones de la Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1943, 17.
  4. *Ibid.*, 18.
  5. *Ibid.*, 22.
  6. José Gaos has noted that Caso anticipated the existentialists in his *En Torno a la Filosofía Mexicana*, México: Porrúa y Obregon, 1952, vol. 1.
  7. Caso, *La Existencia*, 33.
  8. *Ibid.*
  9. Not all vitalistic thought identifies life with egoism. For example, Georg Simmel described the phenomenon of "sociability," which is a form of play but is indulged in as an end-in-itself. For a critique of Caso's interpretation of the category of life see: Michael A. Weinstein, *The Polarity of Mexican Thought*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976, Ch. 3.
  10. The problem of how it is possible to know the *principle* of the unconscious when the unconscious is defined as irrational causes difficulties not only in Caso's thought, but in all such vitalistic theories, including Freud's. This is not to say that it is impossible to know specific *contents* of the unconscious.
  11. Caso, *La Existencia*, 101.
  12. *Ibid.*, 127.
  13. *Ibid.*, 154.
  14. *Ibid.*, 178.
  15. *Ibid.*, 162.
  16. Antonio Caso, *El Peligro del Hombre*, México: Editorial Stylo, 1942, 117.
  17. *Ibid.*, 125.
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