

REVIEW ARTICLE

BETWEEN BENEATH, BEFORE AND BEYOND AN EXPLORATION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION BASED ON PAUL RICOEUR

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A Phenomenological Exploration of the Fertile, Frictional and Fragile Human Condition: An Exploration into Kuruvilla Pandikattu's Insights Inspired by Paul Ricoeur, Kuruvilla Pandikattu. Pune: Jnanam and CreatiVentures (2013).

Introduction

“Man infinitely transcends man.” Blaise Pascal

Who am I? What do I know? What can I hope for? In answering these profound philosophical questions, the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), remind us of the human being's transcending nature. Phenomenologically, human beings are unique since in the very process of understanding and answering fundamental questions about ourselves, we are drawn into the question still more. This book is a modest attempt to understand the human nature with a view to fulfilling our human potential to the fullest.

From a phenomenological perspective, this book by Prof Kuruvilla Pandikattu explores the ever evasive nature of the human being. It is divided into three broad parts. The first part, “Human Fecundity,” deals with the positive or the creative dimensions of human existence, which enables a person to create meaning and enhance significance in her or his life. The second part, “Human Frailty,” delves into the frictional and tensional aspects of existence. Here we encounter the challenging dimension of our existence. The third part, “The Human Fallibility,”¹⁷ treats the fragile dimensions of human encounter, dealing with our

¹⁷Ricoeur, P. (1988). *Fallible Man: Philosophy of the Will*. New York: Fordham University Press.

actual brokenness and vulnerability. Together, the three parts throw further light onto the seemingly endless creative, tensional and paradoxical aspects of ourselves. Finally, the concluding section muses on the human yearning for authenticity and reflects on the tensional or creative aspects of human nature, and thereby justifies the title, “Between Beneath, Before and Beyond.”

This book is part of a series which deal with the larger dimension of human existence: dialogue with others, including science and religion¹⁸ and with exploration into human morality.¹⁹ The 10 articles that constitute this book explore the various dimensions of human existence.

In this article I intend to highlight the overall perspective of the book, giving its prominent phenomenological and anthropological insights.

I. Human Fecundity: Fertile Experience

This section dealing with human fecundity and innovative experience enable us to understand the richness and depth of human creativity and nobility.

a. Fertile and Creative Human Experience

The First Part of this focuses on the human capacity to interpret experiences creatively and make

meaning out of them. The first chapter in this section attempts to focus on human beings as story-tellers.²⁰ It is through stories that we as humans understand ourselves, and history reveals stories are the best means of reflecting on ourselves.²¹ Our story-telling has more than entertainment value. It provides us with a way of life with which we are so fascinated. On that note, this chapter

¹⁸Pandikattu, K. (2015). *Ever Approachable, Never Attainable: Science-Religion Dialogue in India*. Pune:Jnanam&CreatiVentures, 2015.

¹⁹Pandikattu, K. (2013). *Gratefully and Gracefully: Scientific and Religious Reflections on Death and Beyond*. Pune:Jnanam&CreatiVentures, 2013.

²⁰Pandikattu (2013), 11ff.

²¹Ricœur, P. (2010). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

also criticises some of the present story that we live, and offers suggestion for another more creative and viable story, of which will enable us to better live our lives. This chapter, then, is an invitation for us to be story-tellers, and open to the creative and narrative part of our human nature.

The second chapter takes up a related narrative issue, the subject of myths, and how they shape human culture. Myths provide meaning and significance to our lives, in that they frame them in a larger picture. Existential and archaeological myths are means by which humans try to reconcile the paradoxical dimensions of life. Since myths enable us to live the reality of contradictions meaningfully, by giving us ideals to live by, myths may be considered as more classical and elaborate stories. Based on Michael Ende's classical and popular novel, *Momo*,²² this chapter helps us to appreciate the mythical dimension of our lives, and enables us to overcome evil²³ and to essentially make human life goal-oriented or directional. It is in this chapter, that we study human beings as myth-makers.²⁴

The aim of the third chapter in Part I is to appreciate the role that imagination (or creative dream) plays in the very understanding of ourselves and God. Viewed from this perspective, we can say that imagination is crucial to our self-understanding. Because we can dream and imagine, we are able to create a world about which we can debate. It is this human capacity that permits us to enlarge or widen our life horizons. Thus, imagination provides us with the potential to make our experiences fertile and our world creative. Human beings, then, are creative dreamers.

The final, chapter of Part I studies the aesthetic experience of human beings. It looks at the human person as a seer or an artist. Following

²²Ende, M.(2013). *Momo: Or the Curious Story About the Time Thieves and the Child Who Returned the People's Stolen Time*. San Francisco: McSweeney's McMullens.

²³Ricoeur, P. (2006). *The Symbolism of Evil*. Boston: Beacon.

²⁴Pandikattu, (2013) 29f.

Paul Ricoeur's methodology, this chapter will first deal with the singular nature of the beautiful. Then, it will reflect on the symbolic and hermeneutic function of art and its significance, including music. Finally, there will be a discussion on art as it relates to ethics, in other words, the artist in relation to the artisan. That is to say, with reference to works of art, the artist plays a role in making the world aesthetically and morally better. That role indicates the symbolic²⁵ and humanizing nature of art leading to human fecundity.

To summarise, Part I works with the fertile and creative dimensions of human experience. Those fertile and creative dimensions enable us as humans to make sense of our diverse experiences and evolve further our creative ability.

b. The Fertile Imagination of Baudolino

the first part concludes with an insightful episode from Umberto Eco. The main character of Umberto Eco's novel *Baudolino*,²⁶ is the boy with a very peculiar nature. In the novel, the peasant boy confesses: "The problem of my life is that I've always confused what I saw with what I wanted to see."²⁷

The emperor of the Holy Roman Empire adopts the peasant boy Baudolino, and educates him in rhetoric, poetry and other arts, and then asks for his counsel. In a kingdom of barbarians, the emperor is expecting Baudolino to suggest ways to govern the empire which do not lead to bloodshed. Such questions on governance are beyond the capacity of anyone else to imagine.

Baudolino is rich in imagination. He says, "When I was not prey to the temptation of this world, I devoted my nights to imagining other worlds... there is nothing better than imagining other worlds to forget

²⁵Pandikattu, K. (2000). *Idols to Die, Symbols to live: Dynamic Interaction between Language, Reality and the Divine*. New Delhi: Intercultural Publications.

²⁶Eco, U. (2003). *Baudolino*. New York: Harcourt.

²⁷Pandikattu (2013), 61ff.

the painful one we live in. At least so thought I then. I hadn't yet realized that, imagining other worlds, you end up changing this one."²⁸. The visualized ideal world will haunt, correct and modify the actual world of here and now. Therefore, those who only look around and don't look beyond, will have nothing to contribute to the renewal of the world. One who sees the world the way s/he wishes it to be, will change it. So imagination and vision do really matter.

Eco's novel is full of philosophical disputations about the characteristics of the visualised ideal world. To a dispute about how the Promised Land differs from Earthly Paradises, our hero Boudolino says, "It is not a question of identifying a place where we will go, but of understanding the nature of the ideal place where each of us would like to go. We are trying to understand what a kingdom of abundance and virtue is like, where falsehood does not exist, nor greed nor lust, otherwise why should one be drawn to it as to the supreme Christian Kingdom?"

c. Poets, Visionaries and Prophets

Poets, visionaries and prophets are people endowed with stupendous imagination. They tell stories that won't stand comparison with life's realities. They describe ideals that entice and beckon. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "Wolves and sheep will live together in peace, and leopards will lie down with young goats. Calves and lion cubs will feed together, and little children will take care of them" (Is 11: 6). All this is wishful thinking for the realists who go solely by facts. It is the prophets of God who are able to imagine a utopian world because they have the heart of God. The visionary's imagination projects God's dream for the world.²⁹

It is the visionary, prophet or seer who has the intense imaginary power, which connects them to God.

²⁸Pandikattu (2013), 62.

²⁹Pandikattu (2013), 63.

In fact, a person of God always confuses what s/he sees with what s/he wants to see and with that should have been. Only a saintly visionary can see a spotless virgin in a prostitute. The actuality of the sinner is confused with the possibility of a saint. The situation of corruption and injustice is judged with God's plumb line, as Amos did. The world of war is visualized as "beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning-knives" (Is 2: 4). Only such a visionary can experience the agony of suffering, see through the tragic pain of Tsunami victims and trace the loving presence of God.

Religious experience and encounter – just like any other genuine human experience – is a matter of imagination, which is purified by the burning coal from the throne of the Most Holy. An authentic religious person is one who has in him or her the picture of an authentic person, who is different from the commonplace, and leads people into that world. A leader bereft of imagination will use her/ his leadership energy to convert everything into cultic irrelevancies.

Finally, the author concludes with the claim of the religious thinker Matthew Fox: If we are in love enough with the Earth and with Being itself – Earth's sacredness – our imaginations will work overtime to find ways to let go of those habits that are destructive so we can be instruments of compassion. This applies not only to ourselves and our own species but also to all beings with whom we share our sacred existence.

Thus, humans are truly dreamers, and capable, competent and creative ones at that! Dreams, driven by the power of imagination, constitute life, and we as humans can dare to go beyond ourselves through our own dreams!

2. Human Frailty: Frictional Existence

Following the discussion on the human creative dimension, Part II of our book treats the frail and frictional aspects of our human life-

experience. It takes seriously the broken, fragile and vulnerable dimensions of our human nature. It takes up significant human issues like freedom, development, capability, poverty, suspicion and trust, all of which make our every-day-life feeble and delicate.

The first chapter in Part II studies the unique human capacity for freedom in terms of the finite self, and opening oneself to the infinite. Using Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology of fallibility and freedom, this chapter relates freedom to the finite human capacity to reach out to the infinite. We as humans experience our freedom as both limiting and enabling. We remain always open to the infinite and yet are rooted in or bound to the finite. The swing, or the tension, between the two poles – bound finitude and unbound infinity – makes humans the unique creatures that we are. It is in this unique “in-between-ness” that we can situate and understand our own freedom. By doing that, we situate humans as in perpetual tension.

The next chapter in this section treats freedom from the categories of capabilities.³⁰ It examines the first Nobel Laureate's, Amartya Sen, understanding of poverty as lack of freedom, which in turn helps to appreciate Sen's notion of development as freedom.³¹ This understanding demands us to apprehend freedom as going beyond unfreedoms, and making ourselves capable of approaching well-being. Then, at the philosophical level, and borrowing from Ricoeur, this chapter presents an analysis of the crucial human fallibility, and relates it to freedom and various forms of unfreedom. Finally, from an anthropological point of view, we study Sen's and Ricoeur's suggestion that creative discourse could be a means by which to befriend human frailty and cultivate freedom both as a means to human realisation and end in itself. In summary, this chapter exposes us to the dilemma of being human.

³⁰Pandikattu (2013), 87.

³¹Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The phenomenology of being human is studied further in the third chapter, which tries to appraise the human situation hermeneutically and phenomenologically. Following Ricoeur's treatment, the final chapter of this section traces the long hermeneutic journey from suspicion to trust.³² Doing this enables one to appreciate the self in terms oneself and the other. With reference to humans' historical conditioning of our own growth, this chapter focuses on the bodiliness of human experience and the ethical importance of human existence. It may be noted that one leads to the other. In this sense, we are "care concerned of the other." Each one of us cared for and are called to care for each other. So, it follows, humans are seen as the bounded openness moving from suspicion to trust and from oneself to the other. It is by maintaining this movement that we realise ourselves.

a. The Masters of Suspicion

In his highly influential work, *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur³³ draws attention to three key intellectual figures of the twentieth century who, in their own ways, sought to unmask, demystify and expose the real from the apparent; "Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud".³⁴

Why were these masters of suspicion so highly impressive to Ricoeur? The answer to this question is not insignificant since it would appear that the suspicion displayed by these three serve as paradigms for Ricoeur's own hermeneutic. Very briefly, Marx's analysis of religion led him to the conclusion that while religion appeared to be concerned with the lofty issues of transcendence and personal salvation, in reality its true function seemed to provide a "flight from the reality of inhuman working conditions" and to make "the misery of life more endurable". Religion in this way served as "the opium of the people".

³²Pandikattu (2013), 109ff.

³³Ricoeur, P. (2008). *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Delhi: MotilalBanarsidass.

³⁴Pandikattu (2013), 113f.

Similarly, Nietzsche's understanding of the true purpose of religion as the elevation of "weakness to a position of strength, to make weakness respectable" belied its apparent purpose, and namely to make life liveable for those with 'slave morality', the weak and unfit, by promoting alleged virtues such as pity, industry, humility, and friendliness. Thus, Nietzsche unmasks religion to reveal it as the refuge of the weak.

Likewise with Freud, the same pattern of "unmasking" to reveal and distinguish "the real" from the "apparent" is evident in his analysis of religion. So, while religion was perceived to be a legitimate source of comfort and hope when one is faced with the difficulties of life, in reality religion was an illusion that merely expressed one's wish for a father-God. These insights of the "Masters of Suspicion" allowed Ricoeur to apply them to religion and culture.

Furthermore, Ricoeur insisted that it would be a mistake to view the three men merely as masters of scepticism. It is true that they are involved in destroying established ideas and, too, "[a]ll three clear the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of a 'destructive' critique, but by the invention of an art of interpreting".³⁵ In other words, each of the masters have, in their own way, unmasked a false consciousness, a false understanding of the "text" (society), by systematically applying a critique of suspicion, and with the result that the true understanding, one that more faithfully tracks and correlates with the real situation, now becomes unmasked and revealed. All three, for Ricoeur, "represent three convergent procedures of demystification".

b. Second Naiveté or Innocence

Such a hermeneutic, when applied to a text, gives rise to the possibility of a "second naiveté" whereby the goal of interpretation may be

³⁵Pandikattu (2013), 114.

reached, namely “a world in front of the text, and a world that opens up new possibilities of being”.³⁶ It seems to us that Ricoeur’s insight here is an essentially valid one. When reading a text, especially one that we are familiar with, it is simply too easy to interpret it with rigidity and complacency tending to “freeze” its meaning irrevocably. To approach the text with suspicion – to query whether what the text appears to say really does correspond with its true message – seems to be both a valid and necessary hermeneutical process.

Ricoeur’s three “masters” highlight another important aspect of this question of suspicion, and namely that it (the suspicion) needs to operate with a bi-polar focus. Just as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, in their own contexts, criticized both the participants (society at large, or individuals) and “the system” (religion), so we too need to be aware that the suspicion has a dual focus as we approach a text. I need to apply suspicion to myself. Am I imposing a meaning upon this text? And I should have a suspicion regarding the text, namely, the question: Is the text really saying this? Both the poles of suspicion are valid and necessary if we are to hear afresh what the other may seek to communicate to us. As G. D. Robinson tells us, “Ricoeur is in a way merely reminding us, in a startling manner, of the reality of the hermeneutical circle”.³⁷ We must approach the text critically and suspiciously in order that its message is heard, and so that our ownpre-understandings and certainties do not mask the truth. This calls for a second naiveté or innocence, that goes more than a naïve simplicity.

c. Metaphor and Parable

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion finds expression in his rich understanding of metaphor. Ricoeur believes that intrinsic to metaphor is both an “is like” element and an “is not” element. The former points to the literary vehicle used to convey the metaphor, while the latter

³⁶Pandikattu (2013), 114.

³⁷Pandikattu (2013), 114.

indicates that the referent of the metaphor is not to be found in literal terms. This tension projects “a world in front of the text” which is the true metaphorical referent. For Ricoeur, “the metaphorical meaning and reference await appropriation through the recontextualizing activity of the current reader”.

By this interaction with the world through a written text, Ricoeur seeks for a “metaphor-faith beyond demythologization, a second naïveté”—a stress on the “is like.” However, Ricoeur simultaneously seeks to stress the critical “is not” aspect, and thus renders his hermeneutic an open system which seeks to avoid a naive credulity. This tension finds expression in three spheres: (i) within poetic language, (ii) between interpretations of this language and (iii) between these interpretations and the lives of the readers or listeners. These tensions find resolution in the present by the creation of the new meanings and new referents.

Ricoeur identifies biblical “limit expressions” where tensions intrinsic to metaphor especially apply, and namely proverbs, eschatological sayings and parables. In applying his hermeneutic of metaphor to parables, Ricoeur sees the “is like” component in the narrative form of the parable (the model), and the “is not” in the way the narrative form is transgressed (the qualifier) by the intrusion of the extraordinary or even the scandalous. These dual components lead to the tension between the “closedness” of the narrative form and the “openness” of the metaphorical process. Again, the tension leads to the projection of a world in front of the text between the interpreter/hearer and the text itself whereby the referent of the parable becomes apparent. Ricoeur’s definition of a parable as “the conjunction between a narrative form, a metaphysical process and an appropriate qualifier” is thus seen to be consistent with both his overall hermeneutic of suspicion and his specific understanding of how the metaphor functions.³⁸

³⁸Pandikattu (2013), 115.

3. Human Fallibility: Fragile Encounter

The final part takes up the tragic dimension of the precarious human existence. This final part of the book delves into the fallible and violent aspects of the human heart and society. This discussion leads to an opening of sorts. In that opening lives a realistic hope, an experiencing the “joy of Yes despite the sadness of the finite.” That “joy of Yes” affirms, unconditionally and unequivocally, our human precarious and precious life.

The first chapter deals with the theme of violence and sinfulness. Without attempting to give a philosophical analysis of the origin of sin and evil, what is presented are some of the dynamics at work in the emergence of evil.³⁹ What is discussed is based mostly on Paul Ricoeur’s and Ernest Becker’s work.⁴⁰ Ricoeur points out that the disproportion that characterizes human beings makes evil possible, though not always. Such a disproportion opens the way to sin and evil. The natural progress from bios to logos has enhanced human life greatly and caused an evil force to develop an enlarged horizon. With reference to evil, Becker’s work showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt to eliminate it. Both Ricoeur and Becker trace the existence of evil (and also goodness and freedom) to the disproportion or in-between-ness in the human condition. This chapter, to summarise, is a phenomenological description of the emergence and progress of moral evil in individual human beings and human society.

The treatments of violence leads to the second chapter and its predominant theme, which is to offer forgiveness.⁴¹ Based on the insights of Ricoeur, this chapter reflects on the depth of fault and the possibility of forgiveness both at the theoretical and at existential level

³⁹Pandikattu (2013), 137.

⁴⁰Becker, E. (2020). *The Denial of Death*. London: Souvenir Press.

⁴¹Duffy, M. (2009). *Paul Ricoeur's Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting*. London: Continuum.

of human beings. Individual history is contrasted to the collective history of a community.⁴² At the individual level, humans can speak meaningfully of a “happy memory”, but for a community such a “happy memory” does not always exist. That discussion naturally leads to topic of the act of genuine forgiveness (both at the collective and individual levels) to the art of creative forgetfulness. Such an approach hopefully provides useful insights for dialogue between and reconciliation of cultures, without which humanity cannot survive. Thus, the aim of this chapter is not so much to focus on the depth of fault, but to remind ourselves of the travesty of justice that human beings – both as individuals and cultures – are capable of committing. Also, this chapter attempts to encourage an opening of ourselves to the promise and possibility of forgiveness – even forgiveness between cultures, which today’s world so badly needs. It is the capacity of human beings to forgive that gives hope to humanity. Such a hope is taken further in the next chapter, which focuses on the human ability to reach out to others and nature.

The third chapter takes up the issue of prayer from phenomenological and a-religious perspectives. In this chapter on spiritual exercise and experience, the agonies and ecstasies faced by the world today are discussed.⁴³ What is asserted is that the uniqueness and versatility of a spiritual exercise is tested by the actual life situation of the community: how far it promotes life, fosters joy and furthers love. After understanding spirituality primarily as an experience, what is attempted is to situate a meaningful spirituality (and spiritual experience) on our collective and contemporary human experience. Next, then, is a discussion on the human longing and fulfilment that is embedded in every spiritual quest – leading to an appreciation of spiritual exercises as an experience of love conditioned by our context and open to the whole of reality. And it follows that that experience can cause a person

⁴²Pandikattu (2013), 155ff.

⁴³Pandikattu (2013), 169ff.

to appreciate the uniqueness and versatility of spiritual exercises and experiences, which leads to a renewed vision of God, world and humans. The focal point of our human spirituality, then, is LIFE in its varied forms searching for fullness, which does not negate the debilitating human experiences of sin and evil in our lives.

The concluding chapter looks at humans as “the between, before and beyond.” In the first section of this chapter, using the ordinary alphabets, we try to indicate that language and reality is more than monadic letters. Then, we take up two scientific theories to indicate the inherent connectedness of the whole reality. We also employ another contemporary scientific finding to show us that we do not perceive much of the empirical world, which can help us to be humble in our approach to the larger world. Then in the light of our scientific study, we recognise human beings not as pure entities (“independently subsisting objects”) but as an evolving horizon that is ever becoming. Finally, we dwell briefly on love as relationality constitutive of reality, which is ever enlarging and expanding.

a. A Renewed Vision of the World, God and the Humans

The spiritual exercises, and the experience derived from them, which we discussed above, lead to a renewed vision of the world, God and humans. This renewed vision leads to a further commitment towards humans and the world and, as well, to a more profound openness towards the sacred and divine in nature.

An exercise/experience of crisis at today’s world: Such a tender, loving and caring affirmation of life forces us to look realistically at the threats and dangers confronting life today. We refer here not just to the threats of nuclear or ecological disaster, but of human tragedies, like the large scale hunger of millions, dehumanised and enslaving economic oppression of the powerless and of the calculated and systematic disinformation campaign for political and economic expediency of a privileged few at the expense of the many. Realising these grave threats

to life, a genuinely spiritual person will resolve to do what is individually and collectively possible, both gently but firmly. An openness to the beauty and preciousness of life helps us to feel in our own bodies the grave threat to our precious planet, and yet without surrendering hope and trust in humanity.

Positively responding to the technological revolution: A genuine spirituality of our times demands of us that we respond creatively and constructively to the technological marvels that we experience today. It is true that most of the dangers that we face are, directly or indirectly, caused by the profound technological revolution. But condemning all technological progress as the devils' work will not help, and, vice versa, nor will regarding technology as a panacea to all human evils. With a spiritual vision and openness, we need to revisit the tremendous technological progress and befriend technology without demonising it.⁴⁴

A deeper understanding of reality and life: Such a healthy befriending demands from us a deeper and multifaceted understanding and appreciation of life and reality. We need to ask ourselves: What is life? What do we want to achieve individually and collectively? What is the meaning of our life? How do we justify our existence to ourselves and find happiness in life? Then, we need to turn to the traditional answers (given by culture and religion) to open ourselves to experience the beauty, bliss and mystery of life and reality. Spirituality then becomes a celebration and affirmation of the beauty and depth of life, and with the capacity to respond creativity and lovingly to the challenges that we face. It is here that our understanding of God also becomes crucial. In the whole drama of life, that is being played in the universe, what is the role of God, the Divine or Sacred? Each religious tradition answers these questions slightly differently, and with varying nuances. But the

⁴⁴Pandikattu (2013), 180.

genuine spiritual exercises and experiences enable us to appreciate the reality of the Divine in a very profound and mystical manner.

b. The Widening of Consciousness

For such an enterprise, we need to be aware, above all else, of ourselves, and our own self-consciousness. Our notion of who we are, what our problems are and how we can confront them, depend on our human consciousness. At the moment, in spite of the development of human knowledge and ability, we are unfortunately stuck with a consciousness that is narrow and anthropocentric. We need to broaden our vision, enlarge our horizon and widen our consciousness. Doing that will enable us to experience the genuine problems that humanity faces, and overcome those problems with tenderness and compassion.⁴⁵

From “Evolution become conscious of itself” to “Evolution able to eliminate itself”: We need to reaffirm the fact that we are in a unique position: We are evolution, become conscious of itself, to borrow an insight from the Jesuit scientist and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In recent decades, however, we have advanced further! We have become evolution that seems to be capable of eliminating itself! Or enhancing and developing itself! The choice is open to us! Standing at the threshold of life – human, animal, vegetative – we can decide for the whole of life, as to whether or not we enhance life beautifully or annihilate it completely! That choice is a tremendous spiritual responsibility and task! Are we ready for such a task? Our actions in the next few decades will decide whether or not we can be in any way called a spiritual generation, and if a next generation will be alive to evaluate us!

The actualisation or fulfilment of the whole living family, is therefore, the need of the hour. This implies a genuine spiritual experience calls us to realise the beauty of life and fulfil the whole of life. We are in a

⁴⁵Pandikattu (2013), 181.

honoured position! As humans – genuine, committed, spiritual, versatile and flexible – we can open ourselves and the whole of life to further enhancement! Doing that is a tremendous spiritual challenge! In the openness, abandonment and realisation of ourselves, we shall be contributing to the overall development and realisation of life itself! So our spiritual life urges us to remain deeply rooted in our earthly existence and embrace, at the same time, the whole of life, including the Divine!

c. The Ecstasy of a Mystic

The crucial spiritual experiences available to us through various exercises are values that promote life holistically: Transparency, gentleness, sensitivity, openness, transformation, innocence, bliss, unitive vision, loving compassion and at-home-ness with oneself and the whole of reality! We are urged to be genuine so as to let life flow in and through us, and thus resonate with the grandeur of life and partake of the flowering of love. Every genuine spiritual exercise is a call to a tremendously life transforming experience of openness to oneself, the world and the Divine. Such spiritual exercises (and experiences) make life on the planet earth more viable, and open us to a fullness that is the Divine. That is the ecstasy open to every mystic, the bliss shared by every martyr and the delight lived by every saint.⁴⁶

4. Concluding Remarks

This book, interdisciplinary in character and phenomenological in perspective, takes the scientific world seriously and is open to other fields of enquiry. Some scientific data and religious insights from both Christian and Hindu traditions for reflection are used. Since the author has been specialising on Ricoeur, who is widely recognised as one of most distinguished phenomenological thinkers of our time, these reflections are heavily inspired by Ricoeur's insights. So these

⁴⁶Pandikattu (2013), 182.

reflections are not an exploration of Ricoeur's thought, but based on or inspired by him. So he deals with some other contemporary thinkers like Michael Ende, Ernest Becker and Amartya Sen, who throws light on the contemporary condition of human beings.

As such, each of these chapters of the book forms an independent unit, and gives its own insight into human nature phenomenologically. Still, the general aim of the book is to trace the common thread running through the chapters and arrive at an evolving, tensional and creative understanding of the human person as poised between the present and the past, between the actual and potential, between good and evil, between freedom and non-freedom, between the real and imagination, and between authenticity and inauthenticity.⁴⁷

The goal of this work is to show that it is in maintaining and not denying the tension that we as humans can truly realise ourselves as the ever open horizon.

a. Creative Tension

Throughout our discussion Pandikattu has trying to see the inherent creative tension that is present in human persons. This creative tension enables humans to be ever open to the new horizon of possibilities.⁴⁸

The tension between the past and the future is only one of the creative paradoxes that we are exposed to. In this book, we first talked of the richness of human experience in terms of fertile experience. That human beings can come up with creative stories and myths in experiencing, encountering and articulating the world indicates the power of imagination that is intrinsic to us.

We then addressed the frail and frictional aspects of human existence in terms of the tension between finite actualities and infinite possibilities

⁴⁷McManus, D. (2015). *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*. New York: Routledge.

⁴⁸Pandikattu (2013), 211.

(freedom). Next, we dwelt on the participative dilemma involved in human development that is both material and spiritual. After that we studied the tensions between a hermeneutics of trust and suspicion, between time (temporality) and history that gives us identity.

In the third part of the book, we dealt with the fragile and fallible human experiences of sin, forgiveness and redemption (through prayer). The experience of sin and woundedness and healing and wholeness for the whole, make longing a necessary and vulnerable part of being human. Such experiences of forgiveness and prayer open us to a new and hope filled affirmation of life.

Finally, emphasizing the creatively paradoxical and tensional aspect of human beings, we focused on the human person as the “in-between-ness” — the present carries within itself past experiences and future possibilities; between the depth of potential (beneath) and the future possibilities (beyond). This may sum up the nature of the human being.

b. The Between-ness of Our Life

Such a human predicament or “between-ness” surrounded by “before” and “beyond” may be also found our tensional and dynamic existence between:⁴⁹

- The past and future (temporal tension)
- now and eternity (temporal tension)
- transcendence and immanence (anthropological tension)
- life and death (“law of life”)
- verb and noun (the linguistic level)
- here and there (spatial tension)
- body and soul (anthropological tension)
- failure and hope (experiential tension)
- joys and sorrows (existential tension)
- memory and forgetfulness (existential tension)

⁴⁹Pandikattu (2013), 212.

True indeed is what the American thinker H. Richard Niebuhr wrote over sixty years ago:⁵⁰

Man lives in two worlds and when he tries to make his home in one alone something goes wrong with him. Our race, like that of the migratory birds, cannot live and perform all his functions in one climate, but must make a periodical flight to another home land ... [Indeed] the life of man, the migratory bird, into whose structure the law of seasonal movement is written, is thwarted and distraught by confinement to one world, whether it be the world of sight or the realm of the spirit”.

c. The Dynamic Titling the Book

The title of the book , “Between Beneath, Before and Beyond,” explained by the author himself gives a good perspective of the book.⁵¹ Firstly, it refers to the tensional existence of human beings, in terms of time. We live in the present, always anticipating the future. So we carry the past, in fact all our past experiences, with us. Secondly, it points to the existential longing for more, which is inherent in human beings. Never satisfied with what we have, we yearn for more, and this more is characteristic of our existence. Thirdly, at the philosophical level, we are always one step beneath, behind and ahead of ourselves. When an actuality is realised, a new potentiality emerges, inviting us to transcend ourselves. It is in this “already and not yet”⁵² that we exist. We are the horizon that is ever elusive: ever receding and inviting at the same time. We are ourselves transcendence – open to The Beyond – and we remain always limited! We seek the Beneath which pushes us ahead. We are the Between.

⁵⁰ Cited in Pandikattu (2013), 213.

⁵¹ Pandikattu (2013), 8.

⁵² Hopkins, K. S. (1993). *Already and Not Yet: The Reign of God in the Land of Limits: A Retreat for the Physically Disabled*. M.T.S. Catholic Theological Union at Chicago

Finally, the author refers to John F. Kennedy who holds that “The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty, and all forms of human life.”⁵³ This is in short the tensional, fecund, frail and fallible human nature that we share individually and collectively.

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⁵³ Cited in Pandikattu (2013), 1.