

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

In the first chapter of Volume 2 of the DU, JGB introduces a bunch of dyads, starting with Fact and Value. He presented the whole of Vol 1 as concerned with Fact and Existence. Now, tackling Value, he needs the concept of Essence. Naturally, *Essence does not exist!*

In the traditional Thomist (after Thomas Aquinas) system essence is 'what something is' that is quite distinct from its existence. Some philosophers, especially modern ones, downgrade essence to a concept relegated to mind alone. And we have of course *existentialism* which puts existence first and tends to assert that there are no essences only misunderstood concepts.



BEING encompasses both essence and existence. These two terms resonate with many other pairs such as Impossible – Possible and Value – Fact but we can never quite identify any of these pairs with another one of them. When essence is brought into existence it is called *realization* in contrast with the *actualisation* of potential, which only lies in existence. Nevertheless, realization acts through hyparxis, our mysterious dimension. But remember that JGB puts all the dimensions of existence on the same footing. Is he cheating here?

All these various terms can be confusing and we can feel lost in a sea of abstractions. We all have to find our own questions or starting point, otherwise the

concepts can't mean very much *to us*. If we can't ask a hard question we can't get interesting answers. These sorts of answers are not 'out there' but created by individuals in their *work*.

Here's another shot at a basic outline:

In physics there are laws of conservation (e.g. of energy, charge, mass, etc.) which means *in a sense* that nothing changes. So we get a picture of a total, contained whole that allows for the 'ringing of changes' on the surface of its invariant (quantitative) persistence.

One such 'ringing of changes' is the interplay between potentiality and actuality. We burn up fuel (chemical potential energy) to drive cars (actual kinetic energy). We can pedal (actual kinetic energy) to charge up a battery (potential). We can call the realm of potentials 'eternity'.

We then have to consider what governs the interplay of the temporal and eternal (the actual and the potential). JGB gave it the name 'hyparxis' but it might be called anything.

If we move on to consider human experience of choice it would seem that this is involved in the relation between time and eternity. Hence hyparxis is the dimension of choice.

We now extend the concept of 'potential' to the deeper one of 'possibility'. Out of a set of possibilities only a sub-set can become potential, and of these only a sub-set can become actual. So, the ringing of changes involves time, eternity and hyparxis or the actual, potential and possible. Here we encounter a *reflection* of JGB's archetypal triad: Function, Being and Will.

All of that is contained in Existence. All that exists obeys the framework conditions of space, time, eternity and hyparxis. Anything possible within this framework exists – though it may not be actual. Seen from inside it, it is everything, complete and 'essentially unchanging'. *Nothing really new can happen*. What appears to happen is just the ringing of the changes.

[Clearly, there are some issues here about understanding the meaning of 'new'.]

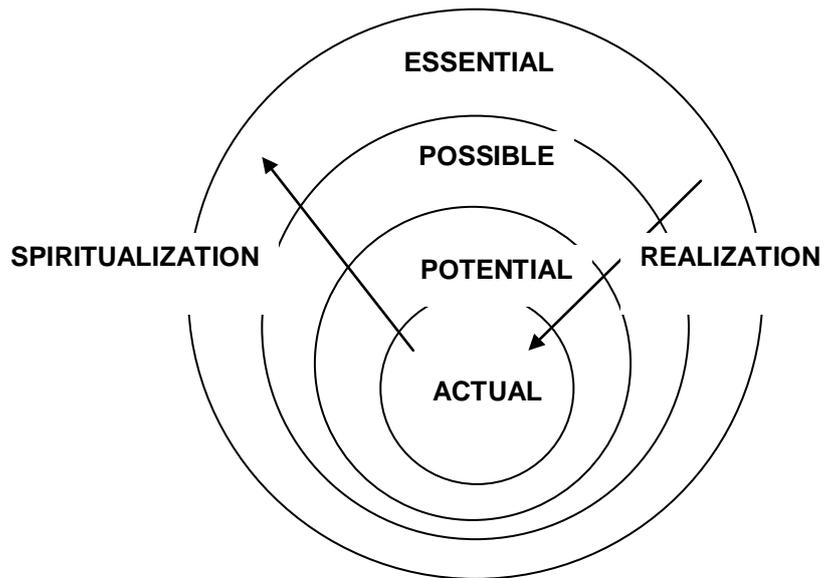
Seen from outside or beyond it, existence is *porous*. This means that the new can enter existence. This is not any model of creation as usually imagined. It can be associated with the Christian idea (Scotus Erigena) of *perfecting*. Perfecting is more than the actualisation of potential and we associate it with *realisation of essence*.

Essence associates with the impossible, values, quality and will. In ordinary parlance it is called *spiritual* (see JGB's *A Spiritual Psychology*).

Essence to Existence is as Quality to Quantity. Or, visualise it like this:

Essence Quality
_____ = _____
Existence Quantity

This diagram summarises some terms but not others. The boundary between the essential and possible is enigmatic.



We are back to the puzzle of how one can have one's cake and eat it!

How can we die and yet be immortal?

How can we be individual and yet in communion?

How can there be freedom when there are laws of existence?

Does God cheat?