Concurrent Being
A Philosophic Perspective on Pluralistic Status and
Its Radically Complex Realities

The comments offered here attempt an abbreviated overview of the concept of pluralistic status referred to as 'a manyness in oneness.' This notion of an inherent and irreducible diversity to all particularized identities is addressed under the title of concurrent being. It is elucidated in contrast to a more exclusively singular, unitary concept of the status of things.

Singular versus Plural Status

Objects are particular things having specific traits. Ordinarily each such 'item' is regarded as 'a single entity'—a book, a chair, a person, even a hurricane. In this regard objects and events are entities that have a 'one-ness.' However, nearly all such onenesses can be 'broken down' into component parts. Even the tiniest atoms are judged to be composed of many even smaller elements. From the perspective of this component composition, objects and events are aggregates of other objects and events. Books are composed of pages and words, hurricanes of diverse factors of temperature differences in air and water, wind speeds, land mass resistance, etc. Objects and events can thusly be regarded to have, or be inherently composed by, a 'many-ness.'

Things thus have a status that is both singular and plural, specific and multiple. Ordinarily humans tend to think and speak of things as having singular status—as discreet and unitary entities. When the many-ness or multiplicity of things is acknowledged it is typically understood as unitary or 'self-consistent,' as in 'the parts of an engine'—a many-ness that is not incongruous or contradictory. The pages, words, and covers of a book form a consistent 'whole' that is a particular book. And yet 'a book' can have many pages, various editions with different covers, translations, etc. It

appears reasonable to assert then that there is not only a singular and plural or multiple status to all entities but that their multiplicity can involve some inconsistent diversity. A 'piece of music' is 'an entity' yet each time it is performed or heard it manifests inconsistent aspects. There is thus not only a plurality of component parts to the 'many-ness of one-ness' but often some incongruity among those parts and a variability to their manifestation.

These statuses of oneness and manyness for things coexist in how they are experienced and described. Whether their oneness or manyness is granted primacy depends upon how phenomenon are being represented in thought, language, and even image. Taken together, as mutually valid, these contrasting statuses present a condition of being 'a' many-ness in/as/of a oneness, or oneness that is 'also always already' a manyness. They can even be regarded as complimentary or mutually defining. Without oneness there could be no manyness, without manyness, there would be no possibility of the contrast and likeness necessary to distinguishing onenesses. Nonetheless, there appears a sense of logical contradiction between singular and plural status that requires some 'mediating' if both are to be judged reasonably valid conditions of reality. That tension between singularity and multiplicity constitutes the basis for what is here termed concurrent being and becoming. It also provides the references for posing a concept of radical complexity.

Sequential, Convergent, and Interactively Concurrent Causation

A similar contrast to that between singular and plural statuses for things and events can be discerned in how processes of causation are understood. In one perspective, cause and effect are depicted in linear sequences that progress from one singular status to another. One such 'causal narrative' is 'heat causes water to evaporate forming moisture that rises into the atmosphere where it condenses and falls as rain.' A contrasting perspective poses causal factors as acting in concurrent clusters rather than singular successive instances. The heat that causes evaporations is not a single phenomenon but the action of various instances of sunlight, cloud cover, temperature differentials in land, water, and air, wind speeds, etc. The activity of evaporation is thusly figured as a clustering or manyness of factors, each of which is in turn a manyness of other concurrent events or dynamics, many of which 'converge' simultaneously to generate the phenomena of rain. It is difficult to construct a linear narrative of this view of concurrent causation.

Though the mechanical model of singularly progressive, sequential causation is most useful in understanding and manipulating phenomena, it is not logically definitive of 'what is actually happening.' There appear then different modes of posing causation: sequentially progressive and concurrently convergent, which have rather different

logical qualities. Causation as concurrently convergent activity is not nearly as amenable to systematic ordering and manipulation as is progressively sequential causation. However, both modes are obviously employed and prove effective in human understanding.

A yet somewhat different perspective on causation is prompted by this contrast. In addition to a notion of convergent causation, which suggests the simultaneous 'coming together' of various sequentially progressive 'lines of cause and effect,' there is a perspective that conceives a dynamic of 'interactivity.' In this view, concurrently convergent causal effects are also simultaneously influencing each other. From this perspective, the causes of the effect rain are not simply static conditions in sequential progression or convergent orders. Instead, rain results from the interactions between various causal factors. Thus sun, wind, water, air, land, and temperature factors compose an intricate composite of mutually influencing or bivalently interactive aspects. These are not exclusively singular conditions that independently succeed or converge to cause the effects evaporation and precipitation. Indeed, the effect rain is not, in this view, actually separate from this complex of interactive factors that 'cause' it. Rather, rain is an intricate part of the interactive phenomenal continuum that produces it—as an interactively concurrent phenomenon whose parameters are rather indefinite. Even as 'rain is falling' its causal factors are continuing to interact and that consequence of 'moisture precipitation' contributes yet another factor to the complex of mutually modifying casual relations.

Just as singular and plural statuses appear to have a complimentary relationship, there appears some intricate, co-dependent interplay between sequential and concurrent causation. This antagonistic yet complimentary relationship provides a primary reference for the notion of the radical complexity of concurrent being and becoming.

Simple, Compound, and Radical Complexity

These notions of linearly progressive, convergent, and bivalently interactive causation suggest dramatically different models of dynamic continuums. Each has a rather distinctive quality of increasing complexity. The complexity of linearly progressive causation is accumulative. The more single factors of causation that are identified as part of a 'line of causation' the more complex that 'chain of causation' becomes. Complexity in the case of convergent causation is involves a compounding by the convergence of multiple progressive lines of causation. This can be imaged in a radial scheme, with causal influences converging like the spokes of a wheel. In this view, many factors coincide to cause a particular consequence—the more that converge, the more complex becomes the 'complex of causation.' This complexity of compounding progressive 'lines of causation' by convergence makes it difficult to discern any original

source of causation. Thus proposing a hierarchical order for causation becomes more difficult to establish. Given the convergent model, the effect of rain has many different origins. When those convergent factors are regarded as also interacting with and influencing each other concurrently, in what can be termed 'feedback loops,' yet another quality of complexity is evident. A dynamic of bivalent and concurrently interactive causation emerges in this view that is distinctively non-linear.

That dynamic is not simply progressively convergent but in a sense indeterminably interactive. It complexity is not simply compounded by the addition of causal factors but more exponentially multiplied. This level of causal relations between factors of influence is thus radical in the sense that it has no singular 'line of development' or inherent 'center of directional convergence.' Though one locus or moment of causal effect can be focused upon in this 'web of mutually modifying interactions' (such as the 'falling' of rain), that moment does not appear as part of an exclusively directional progression (linear or convergent). Rather, it is one intersection of many in a 'multidirectional web' of concurrent and mutually modifying causes and effects. Biological evolution can readily be seen to exhibit such radical complexity that involves fantastically intricate, interactive causation. Some 'lines of development' obviously emerge from the concurrency of interactive factors contributing to the evolution of a species, but it remains a radically complex, rather than a simple or even compound, set of interactive phenomena. Such a process constitutes a pluralized, concurrent status of mutually effecting aspects that are also changing over time.

The term radical complexity is here applied to such a status of directionally multiple relations of mutually modifying influences, or causes and effects. This type of dynamical activity is intrinsically multiple, non-linear, and transient. That condition is represented by the term concurrent becoming. Whereas concurrent being is understood as a relatively static condition of 'being variously' or manyness in/as/of oneness, concurrent becoming is posed as the radically dynamical phenomena of 'multiplicity in process,' or 'concurrent being over time.' In one view, such dynamism is chaotic or random because it appears to have no predictable order or sequence of development—and yet there is still cause and effect, still some 'flow' of phenomenal events despite their concurrency of becoming. Notions of dialectical process will also be related to how this quality of polyvalent interactivity in concurrency 'builds upon itself' without being amenable to simple, linearly progressive configuration that produces any exact and final status.

Concurrency and Problems of Identity, Reality, and Representation

The logical bases of linear, convergent, and radically interactive causation are not entirely consistent. Reality and identity are figured quite differently in these

perspectives on causation. The diversified status of manyness in/as/of oneness posits a state of being that is 'unstable' by its being concurrently various. But the radically interactive, pluralized dynamical status of concurrent becoming presents even greater difficulties to knowing 'a self-consistent self' or 'a contiguous reality.' It seems most difficult to represent status as both singular and plural, linearly progressive and bivalently, thus radically, interactive. Any valid 'presence' that is ascribed to being as a singular status becomes dispersed when being is considered as diversified and plural, thus transient. The valid 'presence' of concurrent being and becoming is, in a sense, a 'both/and' condition of 'being this and that'—a manyness or presence and of becoming. However, from the perspective of singularity, this is rather a 'presence of absence' in that it is 'neither here or there,' 'not this nor that.'

This 'presence as singularity' and 'absence as multiplicity' is not so abstract as one might think. A book is an entity, a thing one can hold in one's hand. Yet it is also pages, words, ideas, characters, covers, various copies, editions, translations, references—its boundaries are indistinct. Remove one word and it is a different book. Yet also it is 'mostly the same.' What then is 'the book?' It seems to be both 'the sum of its parts' and also somehow 'more than' or 'other than' the sum of its parts. And, in a further sense, its parts, its origins and continuations, are 'un-sumable.' That is, from the perspective of concurrent becoming, the interactive relations among them, as 'manynesses in/as onenesses' that together cause a book-ness, are indefinite or interminable. Even a book cannot really be reduced to a singularly defined status or even a fixed, if concurrent, manyness.

However, for the practical purposes of everyday understanding and social functioning more specifically singular definitions or representations of identity and reality are necessarily favored. Shared social understanding requires mutually shared categories of relatively singular identifications of things, causes, and effects. Society in this sense tends to represent identity and reality in a reductively singular, often systematic manner. Things, people, and process are positivized as having singular, literal status—as being 'one way' and relatively unchanging. But concurrency is not conducive to such representation. Its overlapping presences and interactive activity, though pragmatically obscured or hidden by reductively singular, positivistic representation of identity and reality, persist and create an 'undercurrent of instability.' Thus, in the pursuit of continuity, socialized identity and reality tend to resist overt representations of concurrent being and becoming.

Society in this sense attempts to impose reductively singular status, definitive categories, and progressive causation upon phenomena—whether such status 'fits' or not. A rather ridged sense of socially determined structure is consequently imposed upon identity and reality. But the radical complexity of concurrency is dynamically

resistant to such structure. It can thus be considered as 'anti-structural' because it is always 'more than one way' concurrently, and thus non-linear, non-hierarchic, and interminably diversified. Such radically diversified or 'centerless' order is thus readily regarded as chaotic and threatening by ordinary, socially structured perspectives on selfhood and reality. And yet, coping with the totality of reality as a species 'living within the radical complexity of nature,' humans would appear to require some means of 'seeing beyond' the reductions of ordinary, socialized definitions.

'How things are,' or 'are supposed to be,' according to socially imposed structure, is not then necessarily how they are 'thought' or experienced. There exists then an inherent tension between the reductive definitions of ordinarily shared concepts for the status of identity and reality and the actual (relatively extra-ordinary) experiences people have of the radical complexities of concurrent being and becoming. In this sense there is 'more than one reality,' or perhaps multiple states of validly real status, depending upon how such status is defined and represented. There appear to be simple, compound, and radical states of complexity to being and becoming. Engaging these diverse yet related states of being obviously requires some mediating of their contrasts. The particulars of that engagement will be explored here in the relationships between ordinarily pragmatic, socially structured representations of identity and reality, and those of art, myth, religion, and science that transgress more ordinary boundaries of identity and reality.

Concurrency and Knowing the 'Thinglessness of Things'

In granting concurrent diversity to 'being a thing' it becomes logical that some appropriately diversified way of representing that status of statuses for identity and reality in consciousness is required. Configuring such representation is logically problematic, since in such a view the 'actuality of things' becomes rather 'unstable.' That is, if things *are* and *become* variously, such that 'a thing' is both 'one way and another,' then, in regard to its phenomenal concurrency, it's 'thingness' is 'dispersed' among various statuses that must be known in some commensurate manner. In so far as its 'thingness' is known by similarly contrasting representations in human awareness, then it is not known as 'a thing' but as those diversified representations of diversified status. Thingness is thus quite difficult to 'locate.' Furthermore, the knowing or representation of both singular and plurally concurrent status are known by way of concepts and imagination, or 'acts of consciousness.' Thus a 'thingness' is doubly dispersed—firstly by its phenomenal concurrency and secondly by its being known variously 'as' intangible 'acts of consciousness,' or representations in image and thought. 'Concurrent things,' it can thereby be ventured, remain 'unknown' accept as a multiplicity re-presented in 'diversified acts of consciousness' that are the 'thingless things of thought.'

Many Cultural Expressions of Concurrency

Though concepts of concurrency in being and becoming are approached here primarily in reference to Western European intellectual traditions, there are certainly other examples. Philosophical aspects of Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions offer some related articulations of the fluidity and plurality of being. Some Buddhist thought in particular probes the transience and uncertainty of identity and reality given the evident plurality of concurrent status, asking questions such as, 'if both chariot and person are made of disparate parts, then just what or where is 'the chariot' or the "I"?' All cultures appear to generate some sense of an 'extra-ordinary' status of complexity and causality, or reality and identity. Those references are more typically mythical than abstractly philosophical, posing realms of chaos, 'super natural' events, and extra-ordinary influences that can cause things and people to undergo some strange metamorphosis. Given that universal heritage of metaphorical representation of radical complexity, the relationship between mythical expressions and understanding of the concurrency of being is a preeminent concern of the work on this web site.

*** Additional elaboration of these concepts in Chapter One of text, **Manifesting the Many in the One** ***

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