



## The Immediate Question

*IMMEDIACY* (noun), *immediate* (adjective), and *immediately* (adverb) are words derived from the Latin *immediatus*, which means “not to be in the middle” — that is, without intervening time, space, objects, events or processes.<sup>1</sup> These terms have a number of common usages. For example, if I ask, “Will you mail these letters immediately?” I mean that the

letters should be mailed without delay. If I say, “My jar labels are stuck together,” I mean that the jar labels are in “immediate contact.” Then there is my psychologist friend who speaks of “immediate knowledge,” “immediate consciousness” and “immediate experience.” He intends to refer to the “content” of knowledge, consciousness and experience rather than any objects, events or processes that accompany, intervene or otherwise relate to knowledge, consciousness or experience. My friend also uses the terms *immediate* and *immediacy* to refer to what he believes to be self-evident or intuitive rather than arrived at by thought or reason. Then I need to remind him of A. J. Bahm’s statement, “The fact that intuition is immediacy does not exclude the existence of mediating factors.”<sup>2</sup> As for my friend’s use of *self-evidency*, I also would suggest that he consider Bertrand Russell’s observation that “[o]ur subjective certainty is usually a result of habit, and may lead us astray in circumstances which are unusual in ways of which we are unaware. For such reasons, no form of self-evidence seems to afford an absolute criterion of truth.”<sup>3</sup>

For other individuals the words *immediate* and *immediacy* have a religious connotation. For example, members of one religious persuasion have long been taught that at some future time those who would be “saved” must be wholly sanctified or they cannot survive God’s “immediate presence.” My brother and I were raised in this fearful belief. One night we looked up from our bed and saw a full moon shining through the window. Suddenly a small cloud — like “a man’s hand” (1 Kings 18:44) — drifted across the sky. We were terrified. Surely this cloud meant that God was already on his way to execute judgment.<sup>4</sup> As I remember, my brother cried out in terror, and my father came

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running up the stairs. Although he calmed our fears, that experience has never been erased from our boyhood memories.

## The Philosophical Meaning of *Immediacy*

Besides the common and cultic uses of the terms *immediacy*, *immediate* and *immediately*, there is a long history of the philosophical understanding of *immediacy*. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was the towering genius of German philosophy.<sup>5</sup> For 200 years Hegelian thought has deeply influenced such figures as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson, John Dewey and many others. Hegel deeply believed in the existence of one supreme, universal God, one universal spirit (“Weltgeist”), one universal consciousness. He also believed that the problem of man’s destiny was the universal separation or alienation that exists between nature and absolute spirit or consciousness, between individuals and that absolute spirit, etc. He further believed that this alienation could only be resolved through what he called “dialectic” — “the Hegelian process of change whereby an ideational entity (thesis) is transformed into its opposite (antithesis) and preserved and fulfilled by it, the combination of the two being resolved in a higher form of truth (synthesis).”<sup>6</sup> For example, let us say that I am afraid of someone, so I have an impulse to run away — an impulse for flight. I can conquer this impulse for “flight” from someone by taking the opposite impulse to “fight” someone and then developing a new and higher synthesis to simply be “assertive” with someone. Through this dialectical process, Hegel envisioned a resolution of human alienation and consequent union with the universal God, spirit or consciousness.

Such ultimate union or “synthesis” for Hegel defined what he termed “immediacy.” Hegel believed that man’s destiny — and therefore the meaning of man’s existence — lay in a final immediacy with God, with God’s universal consciousness, with the “Weltgeist” or “World Spirit.” Hegel believed that, in this historic dialectical process, certain nations and individuals were manifestations of this World Spirit. In fact, Hegel identified his native Germany as such a nation. While Hegel was teaching at the University of Jena in 1806, Napoleon Bonaparte fought the Prussian army and won the Battle of Jena. Hegel encountered Napoleon on his white charger after the battle and returned to tell his friends, “I saw the Weltgeist [World Spirit] riding upon a white horse.”<sup>7</sup>

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## Immediacy and Western Thought

Hegel was deeply committed to his beliefs and developed them in such exhaustive treatises as *The Philosophy of Right* and *The Philosophy of History*.<sup>8</sup> Though the popularity of Hegelianism has ebbed and flowed through the Western world for 200 years, the concept of man’s “immediacy” to and participation in the single, universal,

cosmic consciousness of God remains indelibly impressed on modern minds. For example, the French Roman Catholic priest, paleontologist and philosopher, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), saw mankind moving toward the destiny of all evolution, which he called the “omega point.” He identified that “omega point” as the risen and cosmic Christ.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Danah Zohar suggests that individual human consciousness once split off (“the Fall”) from God’s universal consciousness but that such individuality is destined for “redemption” and return to the “unity” of God’s consciousness. Thus, “in religious terms, the basic drive towards greater ordered coherence might be seen as the physical basis of Grace, that which allows us . . . to transcend our individuality (the Fall) and to return to unity (God).”<sup>10</sup> Despite the protestations of many adherents, these and other forms of Hegelianism are an expression of pantheism, in which, ultimately, everything is God and God is everything.<sup>11</sup>

Hegel’s concept of “immediacy” has long been attractive to those who view religious forms and institutions as unnecessary and irrelevant. They see the end of human alienation in a secular return to unity with and in God’s universal consciousness. On the other hand, Hegel’s “immediacy” also has been attractive to those who are religious. They view God as the supreme Creator and believe that all creatures share the time and space, matter and energy, biological life and consciousness that he made. This conviction is seen as a compelling argument that the destiny of man (male and female) is to acknowledge our immediate conscious union with God. For Hegel and his historic followers, Jesus Christ is the prototypical “Weltgeist” or “World Spirit.” Christ is thus the end of man’s alienation. He is the manifestation of God’s immediate consciousness. Christ, the Adamic man, is the final step in human evolution. As Teilhard de Chardin declared, “man discovers that he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself.”<sup>12</sup>

## Serious Problems with Immediacy

However, other philosophers and thinkers have found that Hegelian “immediacy” itself has serious problems.

### **Immediacy and Consciousness.**

For example, the Danish philosopher and theologian, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), “protested against Hegel’s all-comprehensive World-Mind in which the individual disappeared like a wave in the sea. He introduced existence as a

specifically religious category, meaning by it the single, finite, responsible, simple, suffering and guilty creature, who has to make a decision in face of God.”<sup>13</sup> Subsequent reflection has shown that the immediacy of a single cosmic unity would terminate all relationship, community, interaction and freedom.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, such cosmic oneness or unity — in which there is no true “other” — would terminate consciousness itself. Thus, “A consciousness which would not be consciousness [of] something would be

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consciousness [of] nothing.”<sup>15</sup> Very simply, there can be “immediacy” or there can be “consciousness,” but there cannot be both. The two are mutually exclusive.

**Immediacy and Mediation.** Consciousness depends on language to provide word-symbols or metaphors of “reality.” For example, the other morning I went outside to pick up the morning paper. I noticed that the grass was moist and that the lawn was covered with leaves, branches and bark. After a moment of reflection, I concluded that there must have been a severe rainstorm the previous night. I then decided to pick up the fallen items but not turn on the lawn sprinklers. I was exercising my consciousness. The word *moisture* was in my mind, but the real moisture was on the grass. The words and images of *bark*, *leaves* and *branches* crossed my consciousness, while the reality rested either on the lawn or in my garbage cart. Consciousness, therefore, is a mediated phenomenon<sup>16</sup> — in this case mediated by word-symbols and images of moisture, bark, leaves and branches. To eliminate mediation would wholly remove consciousness, for consciousness cannot exist in immediacy. Again, consciousness demands mediation. “A state of Hegelian immediacy,” therefore, is “free . . . of consciousness.”<sup>17</sup>

**Immediacy and Meaningful Existence.** To press the point further, Hegelian “immediacy” not only would be the end of all consciousness; those attributes we know as “meaning,” “value,” “will” and “purpose” also would vanish for mankind. The questions, “Meaning of what?” “Value of what?” “Will for what?” “Purpose of what?” would go unanswered. Why? Simply because meaning, value, will and purpose only have significance in relationship to some “other.” As Kierkegaard showed, meaningful existence itself is only possible in the face of God, of others, of the world, and of oneself. Thus, the end of the Hegelian dialectic between existence and nonexistence, which leaves only a solitary, universal immediacy, is worse than death — for God, for the universe, and for man.

**Immediacy and Predatory Animality.** The philosophical belief in “immediacy” represents mankind’s persistent longing to return to an earlier animality characterized by immediate instinctual drives that do not require the intervention of human thought, reflection, reason, will and relationships. These instinctual drives are basically predatory in nature. On one hand, they involve man’s attempted domination and possession, ending in an aggressive immediacy devoid of human relationships. On the other hand, they involve man’s attempted submission and absorption, ending in a passive immediacy that also is nonhuman. In either instance the ultimate consequence of predation is the final immediacy of death. Many years ago, on an assignment in the western highlands of New Guinea, I encountered stone-age people whose forefathers had practiced cannibalism. In talking with these tribesmen, I learned that cannibalism was an effort to appropriate the “living spirit” of the victim and thus establish a condition of predatory immediacy and power. In a similar manner, the historic pandemics of violence that continue to overrun mankind are simply efforts by imagined “Weltgeists,” like Hitler and Nazi Germany, to reduce the world and all mankind to their own predatory immediacy.

## The Truth of the Christ Event

If at its root the concept of “immediacy” is erroneous, what is the truth? The truth is found in the Christ event. Indeed, the truth is that the Christ event is not the end of human evolution; the Christ event is its beginning. The truth is that God as Christ passed through the historic, mediatorial (intervening) stage of mankind to reach true human personhood in the resurrection. In complementary fashion, hominids pass from what Mircea Eliade called the “paradise of animality”<sup>18</sup> through the historic, mediatorial (intervening) stage of manhood to reach the transformation to true human personhood at the Parousia<sup>19</sup> (Second Coming). Christ appeared at the great axial point of world history, not to terminate creative evolution, but to begin its transformation.

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In the Christ event the God who created time and space adopted time and space as his own reality. The God who created matter and energy adopted matter and energy as his own reality. The God who created biological life adopted that life as his own reality. The God who created consciousness adopted consciousness as his own reality. Through his once-and-for-all incarnation, that One-and-Only God is now truly human. Moreover, in and through his resurrectional presence, Christ is now mediatorially present with us (Matthew 28:20).<sup>20</sup> As our Friend, he longs to liberate, reconcile and transform us into his own human likeness. Just as he is an enduring individual human, so too shall we be. Just as he lives for human relationship, meaning, value and purpose, so too shall we. The lesson behind the Christ event, behind all consciousness, life, matter, energy, time and space, is just this: Relational human personhood — and therefore mediation and not immediacy — is the foundation of all reality, now and forever. That relationality has its origin and its destiny in the God who became relationally human so that we too might become relationally human with him.

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## Endnotes

1. *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “immediacy.”
2. A. J. Bahm, in Tony Bastick, *Intuition: How We Think and Act* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), p. 302.
3. Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 266.
4. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Jesus Christ stands in the heavenly sanctuary as High Priest and Mediator until the “close of probation.” During the “time of trouble” (tribulation) that follows, the “saints” must stand wholly sanctified in the immediate presence of the Father. Total sanctification is possible only if, in the “investigative judgment,” Christ has blotted out the sins

- of the righteous from the record books of heaven. Those whose names are blotted from the record books of heaven are given over to damnation.
5. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich"; *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Hegel and Hegelianism."
  6. *American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. "immediacy."
  7. *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Hegel."
  8. See Mortimer J. Adler, art. "Hegel," in *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), vol. 46.
  9. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, s.v. "Teilhard de Chardin."
  10. Danah Zohar in Collaboration with L N. Marshall, *The Quantum Self: Human Nature and Consciousness Defined by the New Physics* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1990), p. 229.
  11. Pantheism is "the doctrine identifying the Deity with the various forces and workings of nature" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. "pantheism").
  12. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), p. 221.
  13. F. H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), p. 2.
  14. "The Universal Spirit . . . abolishes precisely what Hegel wanted to save in history — human freedom" — Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 148.
  15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 173.
  16. See Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990), p. 55.
  17. Stephen A. Erickson, *Human Presence: At the Boundaries of Meaning* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), p. 72.
  18. Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 91.
  19. The Greek word *parousia*, translated, means both "presence" and "coming." See *Wikipedia — The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Second Coming, Terminology" at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Coming#Terminology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Coming#Terminology). See also James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 2006: "Parousia is an ancient Greek word meaning presence, arrival, or official visit" (p. 299).
  20. Rather than a nonrelational, *immediate* presence, in which we absorb the Transcendent ("God *in* us") or are absorbed by the Transcendent ("us *in* God"), the evidence indicates that the Risen Christ *mediates* his presence *with* us in history. That is, he reaches us through our neighbors. We reach him through each other. We reach each other and our own objective selves through him. This relational "reaching" may therefore be referred to as Christ's "intermediatorial" presence, which is defined by the gifts of faith, hope and compassionate love. See "The End of Human Alienation," subhead "The True Resolution of Human Alienation," *Outlook* (Prequel 1994.7).

*This article was originally published June 1995 under the Destiny imprint.*