

VIEWS & REVIEWS: *Stanley Romaine Hopper's*
"The 'Eclipse of God' and Existential Mistrust"^{*}

A Response to Stanley Romaine Hopper

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IF the eclipse or death of God is a metaphorical way of saying "Yes" to the question of whether or not the meaning of Being has been perverted in the West by the very way in which it has been approached, then Buber's principle of reversal may well contain the seeds of hope which Hopper has so astutely and imaginatively grasped. Within this context, it is significant that Hopper reaches the judgment that the figural terms of Buber's metaphor of "eclipse" are not radical enough to embrace the paradoxical sense of desolation and release which we today experience. Perhaps nowhere else does Buber speak more powerfully to our catastrophic dilemma than when he says that the event that from the side of the world is called reversal is from God's side called salvation. Hopper says that these words profoundly penetrate into the secrets of all metamorphosis in depth. May we ask if the metaphor of eclipse is not radical enough to bring together reversal and salvation?

In speaking of his third paradox of perversity, Hopper says that we must affirm the ontological status of radical metaphor. The mode of metaphor which Hopper seeks is *dia-phor*, a movement *through* the opposites. Not only is this a movement through the opposites, it is also a movement between the opposites, which Hopper chooses to name an *analogia crucis*. Here, we are in the domain of radical metaphor, which Hopper conceives as the recognition of the "as" factor in all our seeing and knowing. Hopper summarizes his own argument as follows: "it seeks to accomplish the negative and to focus our uncertainty infinitely in

^{*} *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. III, No. 2 (October, 1970), pp. 46-70.

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order that the Deity, the positive, that which is already given, might be glimpsed through his creative Presence." We are called to see as God sees, in which case, God would be behind us like the enigma *a priori* and we would be participating in his creative life. Does Hopper mean that to see as God sees is to recognize the "as" factor in all our seeing and knowing? Is this a movement of metaphorical diaphor, a movement through and between the opposites? Is to see as God sees to come down from heaven to the place where the primordial given expresses itself as it is? Is this to overcome a uniquely Western separation of the Real and the ideal? Do we thereby reverse or transcend the eclipse or death of God?

All too significantly Hopper speaks of the Deity as the positive, as that which is already given. Since the positive is already given, what is laid upon us is to accomplish the negative. Is, then, the only true human movement a negative movement? If so, then in what sense negative? A movement of reversing original sin, of reversing all which is humanly positive? Is radical metaphor finally identical with radical iconoclasm? Is to see as God sees by necessity a reversal of all human seeing? Is human reversal identical with that God gives us as salvation? Is this what Hopper means by *analogia crucis*? Hopper seems to imply that the cross is a negation of man, a negation of the humanly positive, and therefore a negation allowing the truly positive to stand forth and appear as the positive, as the primordial and original given. Here, a movement through and between the opposites is a movement establishing the opposites in their original and primordial identities. And, perhaps most significant of all, it is Buddhist language and imagery which seems to lie closest to Hopper's Christian theological stand.

To employ Christian imagery, Hopper would seem to be bent upon recovering God's pristine glance before the Fall. One original meaning that Hopper appears to bring to the metaphor of the eclipse of God is that God is absent or silent in what we know and experience as history. Or, at the very least, what the West has known as history has veiled God in darkness. Speaking as a Christian dialectical theologian, Hopper can even establish a correlation between the Eastern doctrine of no-mind and the Heraclitean *logos*. Thus the Heraclitean *logos* is common to East and West, and within this vision *logos* becomes a metaphor for the speech of things, for the conception of ontology as utterance. And what is uttered? Is it not quite simply God or the primordial given? Here, the spoken is the speaker and the speech is no-speech. The positive is realized through the negative, through the negation of the non-primordial positive or of everything

lying between ourselves and the pristine glance and speech of God. When God is truly behind us, we will look in the same direction as God looks, see as he sees, and therefore we will see nothing of what the West has seen and known as history, as man. To see as God sees is to see as man cannot.

As Hopper notes in his conclusion, his argument is circular, beginning and ending with the metaphor of the eclipse of God. His is a circular argument which accomplished the negative by exchanging one way of seeing things for a possible other. The theology which he seeks will no longer be comprised of theo-logics but rather of the modes and manners of theopoiesis. Like Buber, he seeks theophanies of reversal, but he seeks these theophanies in the mysterious approach of poetry rather than in Buber's mysterious approach of history. History, we may surmise, is not radical enough to allow God to show himself within it, for God becomes manifest only in the light of day, and that day is the pristine day of the primordial given. If ours is a time of the God who, mercifully, does not exist, is the eclipse of God at bottom the death of the God of history? Does the eclipse of God negate every positive which is not already given in the pristine day of God? Is the radical metaphor of theopoiesis an *analogia crucis* is that it effects an ultimate negation of the whole movement and actuality of history? Is the Heraclitean *logos* the logos of such a crucifixion, a logos of reversal, and hence an incarnate logos which reverses the movement of history? Is the *logos* which Hopper seeks the *logos* which the Buddhist knows? Does the death of the God of history make manifest the dialectical identity of Buddha and Christ?

This is one way of interpreting Hopper's program, and at the very least it emphasizes the radical way which he has chosen. For the original given which he seeks is a given which eclipses if it does not negate every historic Christian meaning of God. To follow this path is to negate and annul the God who is the sovereign and transcendent Lord, or, rather, to negate everything which fallen and historical man has known as God. Theopoiesis, as Hopper envisions it, is a way of radically reversing history. Only such a radical reversal can make manifest the identity of historical reversal and divine salvation. Only when history is totally reversed can God appear as the already given. But the God who is the original positive is manifest only by our accomplishing the negative. Deity will be present only when the uncertainty of all things has been thought infinitely. Then a reconciliation of the opposites will occur, as we are released from the negative so as to allow the positive to come forth as it is. Thereby the negative

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will pass into the positive, as we see as God sees, and only the original given will be manifest. Not the least of Hopper's achievements is that he has unveiled an *analogia crucis* which is dialectically identical with the negative way of the Buddha. But is not the price of this unveiling the reversal of everything which the Christian has known as God? Is not Hopper's metaphor of the eclipse of God finally a radical metaphor of the death of God? Are not his theophanies of reversal theophanies which reverse everything within us which negates our primordial identity? Is not the God who appears as the already given a God who negates and annuls the God of Christian history? Finally, may we ask if Hopper's vision of the eclipse or death of God is a Christian vision of the *birth* of the God of the Beginning?