



BERNARD SHAW AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Bernard Shaw, Paul Ricoeur, and the Jesusian Dialectics of Redemptive Living



Howard Ira Einsohn

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Bernard Shaw and His Contemporaries

Series Editors

Nelson O'Ceallaigh Ritschel
Massachusetts Maritime Academy
Pocasset, MA, USA

Peter Gahan
Independent Scholar
Los Angeles, CA, USA

The series *Bernard Shaw and His Contemporaries* presents the best and most up-to-date research on Shaw and his contemporaries in a diverse range of cultural contexts. Volumes in the series will further the academic understanding of Bernard Shaw and those who worked with him, or in reaction against him, during his long career from the 1880s to 1950 as a leading writer in Britain and Ireland, and with a wide European and American following.

Shaw defined the modern literary theatre in the wake of Ibsen as a vehicle for social change, while authoring a dramatic canon to rival Shakespeare's. His careers as critic, essayist, playwright, journalist, lecturer, socialist, feminist, and pamphleteer, both helped to shape the modern world as well as pointed the way towards modernism. No one engaged with his contemporaries more than Shaw, whether as controversialist, or in his support of other, often younger writers. In many respects, therefore, the series as it develops will offer a survey of the rise of the modern at the beginning of the twentieth century and the subsequent varied cultural movements covered by the term modernism that arose in the wake of World War I.

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Howard Ira Einsohn
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*For Alfred Turco, Jr.: an inspired and inspiring teacher, scholar, mentor,
and friend.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Bernard Shaw and Paul Ricoeur are widely recognized as among the most internationally renowned figures of the twentieth century.¹ They excelled in their chosen vocations to an extraordinary degree. Shaw revolutionized the modern European theater with a drama of ideas that ultimately earned him a Nobel Prize in 1925, and Ricoeur received the Kluge Prize in 2004 for his significant contributions to most of the major philosophical traditions that find a home in the academy. The two globally esteemed awards are equivalent in status, the one including disciplines not covered by the other, and both recognize individuals who have conferred noteworthy benefits upon humankind. In addition, Shaw and Ricoeur were prolific authors, and each was an engaged public intellectual who had much to say of acknowledged import about the pressing social issues of the age. Of particular interest to us here is the fact that they were also dialectical thinkers who shared many substantial affinities, especially with respect to their outlook on life and living. As I employ the notion, dialecticians approach existential questions, as well as mundane ones, with a characteristic strategy that aims to reconcile conflicting ideas, practices, or situations through analytical reasoning. The method privileges mediation over absolutism, synthesizing over dichotomizing, flexibility over rigidity, in an effort to bring concord out of discord argumentatively. It eschews the mindset that proclaims, “it’s my way or the highway.” It routinely avoids rendering

judgments in terms of black and white. It prefers fusion instead of atomization, in a perpetual search for amalgamation in lieu of fragmentation. Fundamentally, it is a technique for overcoming theoretical or concrete impasses through intellectual as opposed to authoritarian means. Dialectics enables us to originate new conceptual insights and enhanced practices by harmonizing polar opposites.

That Shaw and Ricoeur are kindred dialecticians might at first seem unlikely given the differences in nationality, profession, and schooling that distinguish them. The former is AngloIrish, the latter, French. The one is a playwright by occupation and mostly self-educated, the other, a trained philosopher who taught at prestigious universities in Europe and the United States. Furthermore, neither knew the other's work and they were not correspondents. I doubt the artist and the academic crossed paths even once. Shaw was born in 1856, Ricoeur in 1913, and both lived into their early nineties. Thus, they were contemporaries for a little less than four decades, as Shaw died in 1950, and for many of those years, Ricoeur was not yet an adult. Additionally, Ricoeur published the first of his roughly thirty books in 1947 and his inaugural English-language essay in 1952, one of five hundred or so articles that appeared over an exceptionally long and admired career. It is thus improbable that Shaw ever heard the name Ricoeur or read anything by or about him. Similarly, nothing I know of indicates that Ricoeur was familiar with the particulars of the Shavian corpus. Essentially, Shaw and Ricoeur were perfect strangers, two ships that passed in the night, uneventfully. Nevertheless, despite the gulf that seemingly separates them, they do in fact have much in common that is critical to planetary wellbeing. Of particular interest to us is the dialectical synthesis the two effect between wisdom and power. The resultant meld underwrites everything they attempted to achieve in the way of fostering human flourishing during their uncommonly lengthy lifetimes.

My thesis in the study before you is the following. Shaw and Ricoeur are connate dialectical thinkers who use the same combinatory method to fashion the same worldview. We can state the *Weltanschauung* they share this way. Humans are to synthesize dialectically wisdom and power in the service of universal wellness on a healthy planet at peace with itself. For convenience, I sometimes use the familiar phrase *the good life* to signify this mutual perspective. For Shaw and Ricoeur, achieving the good life for everyone is the purpose, the goal, of living, and the wisdom-power dialectic is the overarching means of reaching that destination. Wisdom without power is impotent; power without wisdom is dangerous; thus, to make

our way through life productively, we need to synthesize the polarities dialectically in a manner that preserves their strengths and discards their weaknesses. This element of blending-plus-augmenting is precisely what renders dialectics a potent tool for theorizing. It is difficult to think of a domain that would not profit significantly from dialectical reasoning. In fact, Shaw and Ricoeur also employ the technique in their approach to the three major spheres of existence: the ethical, the political, and the spiritual. On each plane, the two thinkers posit a congruent auxiliary dialectic that they believe facilitates the optimum functioning of the architectonic wisdom-power dynamic. Respectively, these are the ethics-morality dialectic, the ideology-utopia dialectic, and the theism-atheism dialectic. Collectively, the four dialectics compose a coherent conceptual framework that provides an algorithm for how the peoples of the world can live redemptively.

Moreover, the algorithm Shaw and Ricoeur create is profoundly Jesusian at its core. This is so for two main reasons. Shaw and Ricoeur anchor their thinking in the social gospel Jesus lived and taught, and the Nazarene was himself a dialectical thinker, who produced the prototypical wisdom-power dialectic in the form of a serpent-dove dialectic. The dialectics are equivalent, and the locus of the latter is Matthew 10:16.² About to dispatch his disciples on their missionary work beyond the environs of Jerusalem, Jesus says to them: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”³ In spreading the social gospel, the twelve nonviolent ambassadors are admonished to synthesize the virtues of the serpent and the dove in protecting themselves and others from human predators. In his admonition, Jesus ties wisdom and power together dialectically. He invokes creatures with opposite characteristic and asks his emissaries to combine the traits as they carry out their mission. The pairing must have startled the Nazarene’s original audiences. It also initially strikes the modern ear as incongruous, to say the least. The serpent, let us recall, is the corrupt power that poisons existence, whereas the dove signifies innocence, gentleness, peace, and life. While we readily understand why Jesus wants his acolytes to be dove-like, why on earth would he instruct them to be serpent-like as well? The answer lies in the reason Jesus labels the serpent *wise*. For him, the enlightened snake is indeed judicious because it knows when to strike and when to retreat. The reptile has the inborn sense to take circumstances into account rather than reflexively attack for no apparent reason. Metaphorically speaking, the infamous viper uses its power wisely and primarily for

defensive actions. By nature, the creature is nonaggressive. With these distinctions in mind, the clarion call Jesus trumpets to the generations becomes clear: like the original Apostles, we are to synthesize wisdom and power dialectically in the service of Creation ascendant, in the service of everything the dove represents. In doing so, we are to conduct ourselves peacefully unless aggressors leave us with no choice but to respond with physical force in self-defense.

A brief look at two Jesusian parables, the Lost Sheep and the Good Samaritan, should suffice to illustrate how the ancient serpent-dove dialectic is equivalent to the modern wisdom-power dialectic Shaw and Ricoeur later adopted. The Nazarene faced danger not just from the Caesars but also the Hebrew elite: the Pharisees and the scribes, both of whom feared that the upstart rabbi was not just mingling with transgressors but also usurping their authority in the Jewish community. In return, Jesus upbraided these so-called leaders for failing to responsibly steward the oppressed Jews during their first-century bondage under Roman rule. Why so? Because, in his eyes, these supposed spiritual guides had no time to tend to the needs of the least among them, since they were too busy living the good life in return for collaborating with their overlords. It was against this bleak backdrop that Jesus deployed his preferred method of teaching—the parables. These narratives worked by metaphorical analogy. They provided indirect examples of how to live righteously, and they challenged listeners to choose which world they wished to live in, the decadent imperial realm of the Arena or the Jesusian compassionate realm of the social gospel. The time had come, the Nazarene proclaimed, for the governing and governed alike to make existential decisions about the direction their lives would take. In this consider the parable of the Lost Sheep, for example.

When Scripture tells us Jesus is “the good shepherd” (John 10:11–18), what do mature readers ordinarily understand? Generally, the experienced do not say that the Nazarene dedicates his time and effort tending to woolly four-legged creatures professionally. Rather, they state that Jesus cares for his human flock (the analogized critters) with all the admirable traits associated with diligent shepherds vis-à-vis their real sheep. The metaphorical declaration, then, reveals not what Jesus *is* but what he is *like*. In other words, Jesus is not a literal herder, in the traditional sense of the term; instead, he is likened to one figuratively, with approbation. That is, he is favorably compared to the laudable shepherd via analogy. Hence, in the parable of the Lost Sheep that has gone astray, Jesus asks rhetorically:

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing” (Luke 15:4–5).⁴ The expected answer is “no man.”⁵

In fact, Jesus does go after the missing one. He seeks to recover the lost human being, the “sheep” at issue, even to the extent (as John says) of laying down his life. But this is demonstrably not what the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes routinely do, according to the Nazarene. In his estimation, they shirk their obligations, shamefully, by ignoring the destitute. His rebuttal to them reduces to the following. “You claim you worship your heavenly Father religiously; then consider this. If a shepherd will go after a lost sheep and rejoice when he finds it, how much more will God search for a lost/strayed person and rejoice when that individual is recovered! Yet your deeds show that you do not honor your Father’s wishes. Go, hence, and do what I do. Seek the wayward and exult when you reclaim them.” Thus, the parable functions tropologically as an implied analogy. The actions and attitudes portrayed in the telling mirror the actions and attitudes of those who either affirm or disdain the social gospel Jesus commended. In this instance, the Pharisees and scribes, as well as we contemporaries, are directed to model our behavior on the parabolic protagonist who goes to extraordinary lengths to search out the forlorn and celebrates extravagantly their return to safety.

In short, Jesus indicts the highest echelons of Hebraic society for dereliction of duty, for failing to protect the sheep—*all* the sheep—from the wolves, from those predatory *humans* who victimize the vulnerable. The elite, the Nazarene alleged, failed to synthesize dialectically the virtues of the serpent and the dove in the appropriate proportions. Or, expressed in the equivalent modern idiom, they failed to unite productively wisdom and power (the serpent) in the service of life ascendent (the dove). Specifically, the Jewish aristocracy made no effort to retrieve the lost souls who deviated from the path of righteousness. Rather, they chose to leave these “sinners” to their fate, without attempting to bring them back into the fold, back into the congregation. They simply abandoned them, which the Nazarene found reprehensible. Indeed, Jesus made it his mission in life not just to lobby for the social gospel he taught but to practice it faithfully by not resting until he rescued as many strays as he could in the time allotted to him. Thus, he enjoined the twelve ambassadors to continue his endeavor once he was gone, and to do so always mindful of the admonition to be simultaneously serpent-like *and* dovish. Ironically, despite the

tireless restorative efforts he undertook, his own compatriots branded him a false messiah, a blasphemous pretender to divinity, an unworthy imposter who, among other committed impieties, knowingly consorted with the unclean, including Hebrew tax collectors and prostitutes; and who also violated the sabbath, performed Satanic exorcisms, and administered demonic healings. Nonetheless, the Nazarene remained undeterred in his quest to redeem a recalcitrant race, and the rest, post crucifixion, became hallowed history for many peoples of the world.

Similarly, the parable of the Good Samaritan delivers a supplementary lesson.⁶ Even those unfamiliar with the parables will most likely know the “moral” of this tale: be kind to strangers in distress. Teachers everywhere incorporate the precept in their lessons. Be a “good Samaritan and help others,” they tell their students over and over. Is there anyone who has not been so advised? Probably not, in the normal course of events. Nevertheless, while the maxim is surely ennobling, it does not encompass the full significance of the story. True, the Jesusian social gospel teaches us to care for the needy, provided we do not unwillingly endanger our own wellbeing in doing so. We may choose to give our lives for another, as often happens on the battlefield and elsewhere, but the letter of the Mosaic law does not enjoin supererogatory behavior. At the same time, the instruction to assist the injured, for instance, complements the notion of loving your neighbor, and it exemplifies using one’s power wisely to promote life. But Jesus’ original audience would have been shaken to the core by the very idea of a *Good Samaritan*. They would have found the concept incomprehensible. Why? Because the Israelites and the Samaritans were constantly at each other’s throats through the centuries. There was fierce enmity between them. So, then, why would a haughty Samaritan stoop to help a lowly Hebrew (the figurative *sheep*) in need?

Attentive auditors would have been dumbstruck by the recounted spectacle. Moreover, they were in for another, perhaps even bigger surprise. For Jesus offered a second astonishing revelation. He disclosed that contrary to conventional thinking, the two persons most likely to stop and aid their beaten fellow traveler, who was lying in the road after being assaulted by wolverine robbers, did not pause to help. Shockingly, the priest and the Levite, both distinguished members of the Jewish community, passed by indifferently, one after the other, despite seeing that the victim was still alive and the danger had passed. Here was a reversal of expectations worthy of the best storytellers. Still, there was more to come. Not only did the unlikely hero dress the sufferer’s wounds, but he also put him on his own

horse, transported him to a nearby inn, and left a down payment to cover the cost of room and board, with the understanding that he would pay any balance due for the care rendered on a return trip. Simply stated, the improbable humanitarian put the orthodox sons of Abraham to shame. The aristocrats, unlike the Samaritan, failed dismally to use their power wisely.

Upsetting the mores of the day is an effective method of jolting people out of their complacency and settled ways of doing things. It invites listeners or viewers to rethink their orientations to life and living. It may motivate them to see the world through different lenses, and it may impel them to treat others with respect and concern. It is not enough to hear the parable; people must listen to the teaching, digest it, reflect on it, and act on it in their daily lives. “Heed my words. Use the serpentine power at your disposal wisely and go and do as I do: attend to the dovish, the needy and the pariahs, compassionately”—this is the Jesusian proclamation to a broken world. Thus, the Nazarene was after more than just teaching us to be kind to one another. He also wanted us to ponder our unexamined prejudices, our cherished beliefs, and our entrenched practices so that we serve life not ego. Sometimes, the honored fall short, and sometimes, the adversary rises to the occasion. In the parables, then, individually and taken collectively, the itinerant storyteller signals that the age is ripe for a paradigm shift, for a new world order, the inverse of the corrupt one that currently prevails; and in me—the emissary who embodies the optimum blend of serpent and dove—the Nazarene says, the necessary transformation is already underway. Do your part, my flock; follow in the footsteps of your good shepherd, and a kingdom of heaven on *earth* will one day be within reach.

Noteworthy, too, is the parable’s frame. A lawyer may or may not be testing Jesus’ probity—the narrative is not clear about this—when he asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Eventually, the answer turns on the two love commandments: love your God and love your neighbor as yourself. The questioner comprehends the former but has a concern about the latter. He wants to know who qualifies as a neighbor; so, by way of reply, Jesus tells him the parable of the Good Samaritan. Now, the mere fact that the lawyer does not raise a more nuanced question could suggest that his intentions might not be innocent. After all, he is an educated person, perhaps a Pharisee, and presumably an expert in Mosaic law. Hence, he might have asked Jesus, “what does Leviticus 19:18 mean by ‘neighbor’: friend, acquaintance, companion, or human being?” But he poses a

generic query. Thus, is he or is he not quizzing Jesus? Another factor places a cloud over his motive. The lawyer uses the word “inherit” in his inquiry, implying what he surely knows is a counterfactual: that Hebrew Scripture does *not* require an individual to merit reputable standing, that somehow the passport to “eternal life” *can* be passed down from generation to generation through a last will and testament. Whereas, in fact, salvation must be gained the old-fashioned way: by *earning* it. Is he, therefore, laying some sort of trap for Jesus, to determine whether he is as knowledgeable of the Tablets as purported?

The issue is murky. But we can bracket the matter since at the very least, it shows that the questioner is not a follower of Jesus. Because if he were, he would know that for the Nazarene, neighborliness has no set boundaries, though it may have an upper threshold for most individuals—preservation of self, family, or treasured others. *Prima facie*, we ought to be neighbors, that is, serpent-dovish helpers to everyone, the Nazarene says, even more so if a person needs the assistance we can safely provide. In principle, then, the Jesusian social gospel places no absolute limit on how far neighborliness extends. It alights on every corner of the globe. It excludes no one, in the first instance. And to reiterate his view, Jesus asks the lawyer which of the three passersby is a neighbor to the unfortunate wayfarer; to which he replies, the one who showed mercy, that is, the Samaritan. Presumably, the teacher then gives his perhaps duplicitous student an “A” for his answer and tells him to go do as the merciful one did, to go use his power wisely by being neighborly to the universe of others, to the degree possible, if he wishes to live virtuously and eventually qualify for “eternal life.” Thus, the Jesusian answer to the question initially left suspended, “And who is my neighbor?” should be clear: anyone you treat in a neighborly fashion. In other words, we do not *have* neighbors. We use the power of solicitude wisely to *make* ourselves someone’s neighbor, which means, in Jesusian practice, that we assist everyone—unless there is just cause to do otherwise.

No wonder, then, that the Hebrew elite outraged Jesus. From his perspective, they were pretenders who did not practice what they preached. To him, these poseurs were more concerned with appearing good than in doing good. They were quite content to leave those they considered society’s dregs to wallow in the muck. They dedicated their lives to establishing an impassible gulf between the pure and the impure, between themselves and anyone they believed did not meet their exacting standards of rectitude (the root meaning of *Pharisees* is “separates”). These

dissemblers, according to the Nazarene, made no effort at all to reach out a recuperative hand to the marginalized, the dispossessed, and the outcast, the very ones they were enjoined to shelter and nourish, like good shepherds. Indeed, the self-described paragons of Jewish civilization embodied everything Jesus repudiated. They did not, as he would put it, combine the valorized attributes of the serpent and the dove. Put differently, in the corresponding language of Shaw and Ricoeur, they did not use their power wisely to serve life ascendent. They failed miserably in their sacred charge to look after the people entrusted to them.

Therefore, the arrogantly aloof, the Pharisees and their scribe enablers, also needed retrieval, a service Jesus would have happily rendered if only they were willing to meet him halfway. They refused, so it should come as no surprise that Jesus might have had Ezekiel (ch. 34) in mind when he castigated his negligent spiritual leadership. A few of the relevant verses read as follows: “Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.”⁷ The prophet spoke these words six hundred years before Jesus was born, yet the Nazarene himself could have uttered them in his own day. They fit the Palestinian status quo perfectly; the situations were tragically similar. It was *deja vu*, to the maximum: human wolves still preyed on human sheep while the designated guardians of the throng stood idly by on the sidelines. Good shepherds were nowhere to be found in Jesusian Judaea. In sum, the paired parables before us (and the same holds true for all the others in the New Testament) showcase the foundational significance the serpent-dove dynamic had for both the Nazarene and the revolutionary renewal project he inaugurated. Epochs later, Shaw and Ricoeur would continue that enterprise by employing their equivalent dynamic, the wisdom-power dialectic, in their attempts to foster progressive social change along social gospel lines.

Viewed in this context, Shaw and Ricoeur are authentic Jesusian envoys, numbers thirteen and fourteen, if you will. They urge us to use whatever wisdom and power we have to promote the good life, to promote the advent of a kingdom of heaven on earth along the lines Jesus sketched. Like the dialectics under discussion, the desired end-states are similarly commensurate. The argument here is not that Shaw and Ricoeur had the

Matthean passage specifically in mind when they crafted their wisdom-power dialectic. As far as I can determine, they did not. Rather, what we encounter is a majestic historical instance of great minds thinking alike even though millenniums separated them. Just as Shaw and Ricoeur effected their dialectical synthesis independently of one another, so too did they construct their amalgam independently of the Nazarene. Nonetheless, the three form a trinity that holds the key to a redeeming way of being in the world. It is important to note, however, that the Nazarene our contemporary dialecticians revere is the Jesus of history, not the Christ of theology. A crucial distinction divides the conceptions. The one is terrestrial and temporally open ended; the other, supernatural and temporally predetermined. From this angle, I prefer to see Shaw and Ricoeur as *Jesusians* rather than Christians. Why so? Because they both rejected the transcendent, expiatory apparatus of Christianity but nonetheless saw Jesus, the fully flesh-and-blood human being, as potentially messianic if only we could devise a program to implement his teachings practically and humanely. Jesus urged us not just to live but to live abundantly, where abundance signifies a wealth of compassionate conduct as opposed to a bounty of material possessions. Hence, Shaw and Ricoeur say, the telos of existence is to come as close as humanly possible to realizing a Jesusian kingdom by making the best use we can of the wisdom and power at our disposal.

We should also note that the three previously specified planes of existence form a constellation of interrelated ideas. The ethical explores how we are to treat ourselves and others. I acknowledge myself as an autonomous human being with inherent dignity that merits recognition. But I also understand that others can say the same thing about themselves. So, it is clear to me that we ought to treat one another with respect and solicitude and that we ought to treat our individual selves the same way. Moreover, it is no less clear to me that my success in life depends on the cooperation of others, and vice versa, which reinforces the notion that mutuality ought to be the norm rather than the exception. This brings us to the second major region. Implicit in the ethical perspective is the anthropological view, which dates to Aristotle, that humans are creatures of the polis, who cannot realize their full potential in isolation. The State, then, is the outward face of the political. Among other things, it alone is authorized to use physical force in the first instance to ensure that those under its care behave in ways that contribute to the good of the commonweal. This highlights the practical problem associated with the I-you

relationship: some individuals do not behave ethically—they intentionally inflict harm. To deter unethical behavior, the State empowers a judicial system to enforce decency when necessary. Thus, to the I-you nexus, the political adds a third term, a “they,” in the form of *institutions* that dispense justice, that seek to make demonstrably aggrieved individuals whole again. The same holds true at the international level. Like-minded peoples of the world create cross-border agencies designed to monitor relations between and among nations. The guiding principle is fourfold: to promote universal peace and wellbeing; to mediate disputes before they boil over into armed conflict; to sanction proportionately violent aggressors economically, diplomatically, commercially, and, if justified, militarily via active intervention; and to hold accountable rogue actors who commit crimes against humankind. We have now arrived at the third crucial dimension, the spiritual. Properly construed, religion performs genuinely vital functions for millions of individuals. It provides an animating connection to what they consider sacred, it bestows meaning and purpose to living, and it extends the hope that we can effectively combat the always already there-ness of wickedness. All of which closes the circle by engendering what becomes the existentially controlling wisdom-power dialectic.

No matter the millennium, it seems, humankind confronts the same dilemma: finding humane methods of harnessing productively the potential energy latent in a fruitful union of the serpent and dove in ways that tilt the center of gravity away from the cruelties associated with exploitative behavior toward the benignities associated with compassionate behavior. An abundance of flowering Creation on a healthy planet at peace with itself, where no one lacks the benefits of a just and caring society, is what our two principals devoutly sought through their Nazarene synthesis of wisdom and power. The following chapters explore this vital nexus between Jesusian-like dialectics and redemptive living, as Shaw and Ricoeur conceived it in the congruent worldviews they independently constructed.

Chapter 2 focuses on dialectics. It includes a non-specialist introduction to the topic and a brief survey of four dialectical thinkers who are relevant to the project we are undertaking: Plato, Kant, Hegel, and Marx. The discussion outlines their positions without oversimplifying them to the point of distortion. They provide summaries to help orient readers to the presentation’s main contentions.⁸ In addition, Chap. 2 offers an abbreviated comparative treatment of Shaw and Ricoeur that makes three main points. First, the pair’s characteristic mode of thinking is not only

dialectical but also dialectical in the same manner. Second, the dialectical thinking Shaw and Ricoeur share is the preferred methodology the two utilize to formulate their congruent worldviews, which include agreement on the pressing issues they each deem the most urgent confronting humankind. Third, this same common dialectic drives the parallel lifelong projects Shaw and Ricoeur undertake to make the world a better place than they initially encountered. The methodology is implicated, either explicitly or implicitly, in everything substantial they thought, wrote, and did. Moreover, the chapter characterizes dialectics as a mediating process which, if productively executed, theoretically resolves conceptual conflicts that challenge public servants or jeopardize social stability. It does so, when successful, by synthesizing opposites in tension, by incorporating the strengths of colliding polarities and discarding their weaknesses so that an augmented—and presumably more efficient and arguably humane—conceptual framework emerges.

Chapter 3 returns to the Jesuan serpent-dove dialectic and elaborates it in terms of the shared contemporary equivalent Shaw and Ricoeur utilize extensively: the wisdom-power dialectic. The emphasis falls on the age-old conflict between the latter that has plagued humankind since scribes began to record history. Put simply, wisdom without power is impotent to do the good, while power without wisdom is inimical to doing the good. Dark events in recent memory attest to the horrendous costs incurred if we fail to keep these elemental energies in equilibrium: two dreadful world wars of unprecedented lethality, the latter including a Holocaust and eviscerating atomic bombings, coupled with a multitude of sundry outrages against the person. Could anything else prove more demonstrative? To promote the good life, humans must find a productive way of synthesizing these frequently dueling factors dialectically so that they cooperate harmoniously in the interest of securing global wellbeing. Otherwise, the species and the planet will remain in peril indefinitely. If such troubling trends continue unabated, our precarious hold on existence may end abruptly, sooner rather than later. In this connection, the chapter also begins a dialogue about perhaps the most perplexing enigma of all: the existence of that which ought not *be* but *is*—evil. It offers no definitive response to the enigma but opens a space for spirituality to fill the void constructively.

Chapter 4 elucidates the ethics-morality dialectic Shaw and Ricoeur share. The issue turns on the question of why the English language uses two words, *ethics* and *morality*, to designate the area of thought that

probes the difference between permissible and impermissible conduct. Why is neither term on its own sufficient to define the subject matter under exploration? Why are both required? To answer this question, Shaw and Ricoeur invoke the conflicting perspectives of two of the most celebrated theoreticians of what is acceptable and unacceptable in human behavior: Aristotle, the teleologist; and Kant, the deontologist. The purpose of the invocation is to reconcile the contending orientations dialectically in a synthesized conceptual construct that produces what we may label *the ethos of decency*.

Chapter 5 adds a complementary sphere to the discussion: the political. The wisdom-power dynamic is germane here because politics takes the required step of translating the ethics-morality dialectic into an institutional milieu. Why is the translation necessary? Because just as fish live in an aqueous domain, humans live in a political one. We mortals cannot escape this reality, so a governing structure must be in place to administer the modern state not only efficiently but also justly. Otherwise, absent propitious circumstances, individuals may be unable to become everything they could be; or, adverse conditions might compel them to live under authoritarian rule. For Shaw and Ricoeur, only one type of government meets their standards: a representative democracy that maintains an optimal balance between two primal concepts that are ever present and inevitably clash at the national level—ideology and utopia. Ordinarily, these terms have pejorative connotations, but our present-day dialecticians see things differently. They maintain that these conflicting sets of beliefs also have corresponding positive aspects, and the chapter elaborates the joint way Shaw and Ricoeur dialectically synthesize the intricate interplay between them. Their efforts, they believe, yield a coherent political philosophy that can withstand critical scrutiny. Chapter 6 looks at the effort Shaw and Ricoeur make to provide moderns who reject otherworldly religion, but nonetheless seek the numinous, with a credible faith they can affirm. Membership in this group is steadily rising as traditional belief systems grounded in the supernatural continue to wane at a brisk pace. The genocide of Jews and other unspeakable obscenities have made it increasingly more difficult for reflective individuals to trust in the biblical OmniGod. For them, too much injustice, suffering, and death give the lie to the notion that a beneficent, omniscient, and almighty deity governs the universe inerrantly. Nevertheless, these disaffected worshippers refuse to surrender to total denial or indifference. They yearn to connect with the holy; it bestows meaning, purpose, and significance on their lives. The

painful dilemma they face is palpable. On the one hand, the spiritually shaken find the strain on their credulity too onerous to bear, yet phenomenologically they do not feel comfortable in a world bereft of divinity, on the other. Thus, it is precisely for the disenchanting questers among us that Shaw and Ricoeur—who themselves are devout searchers—dialectically synthesize atheism and theism to generate a *suprathetism* (from the Latin *supra*, in the sense of *beyond the limits of*) that productively amalgamates and surpasses the two opposed viewpoints. The result is a blended credo that is Jesusian in substance and terrestrial in orientation. I call this suprathetistic religion, *Jesusianism*. The designation signifies that the Nazarene Shaw and Ricoeur revere is the Jesus of history, the dialectical prophet, not the Christ of theology, the expiatory offering. The former is fully a human being whose teachings are potentially redemptive, and the latter is a fictional creation projected by a vulnerable religious community under Roman persecution. In this instance, the mundane supplants the supernatural.

Chapter 7 concludes the study with a summation and some closing thoughts that round out the presentation. The former remarks provide a recapitulation of the main arguments offered throughout, while the latter touch on three relevant issues that warrant articulation: the justification of beliefs, the creative imagination, and the critical distinction between hearing and doing. Now that the chapter's reflections have supplied the necessary preliminaries, we can turn our attention to the central notion of "dialectics."⁹

NOTES

1. For interested readers coming to Shaw and Ricoeur for the first time, let me suggest three titles for each that may help orient you. Two recent biographies of Shaw are very instructive: Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition* (New York: Norton, 2005), and A. M. Gibbs, *Bernard Shaw: A Life* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005). Also informative is *George Bernard Shaw in Context*, ed. Brad Kent (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). The volume provides a panoramic view of Shaw's numerous interests and achievements.

For Ricoeur, the corresponding entry in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provides a valuable introduction to the many multifaceted projects that occupied the philosopher's attention. It also includes a biographical sketch and is a good place to start for those just getting their intellectual feet wet. Two additional titles nicely complement the *Stanford* overview.