THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY IN THE THOUGHT OF JOSE VASCONCELOS

THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY IN THE THOUGHT OF JOSE VASCONCELOS: FROM THE ATOM TO THE ABSOLUTE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the religious thinking of José Vasconcelos (1882-1959). Vasconcelos was a Mexican thinker, politician and philosopher who worked out a theory of philosophical thought which he called Aesthetic Monism. In that title lies the key to an understanding of his philosophy: it is aesthetic because Vasconcelos felt that feelings and emotion best put the knower into contact with the known object, and it is monistic because Vasconcelos envisaged all reality unified in what he refers to as the Absolute or God.

Most of our knowledge of the Absolute and Vasconcelos' religious philosophical thinking are contained within his work, Todología. Therefore, for this as well as for other reasons, I have decided to analyze this work in detail. Our understanding of his religious thought, however, depends on our knowledge of how he approaches philosophy generally, and, in particular, how he conceives the nature and function of the aesthetic a priori.

Consequently, after the early chapters on his life and influences on his thought, I will spend some time surveying his philosophy, especially the way he conceives the instruments of the unification of reality. Vasconcelos wants to establish the unity of existence and in order to do this, he proposes a method of synthesizing various levels of reality -- cycles of being, in His terminology -- in

an upward progression towards the highest levels of being. This is accomplished by human consciousness employing the instruments of the aesthetic *a priori*.

This thesis takes the view that the *Todología* adds, in outline form, the completion of this synthesis on the spiritual level of being, that of the absolute. I will argue that the synthesis needs this level and the activity of the absolute in order to attain the complete unity of existence which Vasconcelos set out to achieve. Our analysis of *Todología* in Chapter Four, consequently, is the heart of this study and I attempt to show in detail the necessity of the absolute for Vasconcelos' synthesis and, therefore, his contribution to religious philosophy.

The thesis attempts to be both expositional and critical in character. I propose to outline only as much of his philosophical thinking as is necessary to comprehend his religious thought and thus avoid an exact duplication of other studies on his philosophy. At the same time, because Vasconcelos is controversial and, at times, inconsistent and vague, I intend to offer critical evaluations where appropriate, keeping in mind at all times, however, the nature of the man and the culture within which he formulated his thought.

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I

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

José Vasconcelos was born on the 27th of February in 1882 in Oaxaca, Mexico. Almost all of his early life was characterized by moving and travel from one city of Mexico to another. His parents were Ignacio Vasconcelos and Carmen Calderón Conde. José was the second of nine children born to this marriage and eight of them survived through infancy, Luis dying at a very young age in Oaxaca.

Vasconcelos' father, Ignacio, was employed with the government service as a customs official and this necessitated many moves with the family while José was growing into young manhood. The effects of these many moves are debatable and, while we may concede that there were the usual psychological effects of leaving friends and making new ones in the town of his father's next assignment, there did not seem to be any other lasting deleterious effects on Vasconcelos. He seems to have remained close to his family, especially to his mother, and there is no evidence to suggest that his education suffered from being enrolled in several different schools.

On the contrary, the move to Piedras Negras in northern Mexico in 1891 and the education he received while his father was stationed in this post served him well for the rest of his life.

Young José did not attend school in the Mexican city but crossed the Mexican-United States border and received about four years of instruction in the schools of Eagle Pass, Texas. In later years he reflected that not only was the instruction excellent but it enabled him to acquire a knowledge of English and have a first-hand acquaintance of the "Yankee" world. One could argue whether Eagle Pass or any town bordering on the Mexican frontier gives a true picture of the Yankee United States but for Vasconcelos the idea of Yankee influence and the Anglo-Saxon culture were first encountered here at a very young age and were to remain a part of his thinking for the rest of his life. He argued against the influence of the United States in his country and the whole idea of the Anglo-Saxon influence was disputed in such works as La Raza Cósmica (1925) and De Robinson a Odiseo (1952).

Between these years and the years of instruction at the Nacional Preparatoria, not too much is known of his early life and education. He went, as we mentioned above, where his father's work took him. Consequently, he spent a short time at the Institute at Campeche and studied there for a year and a half. This instruction, so he tells us, compared badly with the instruction that he had received while a student in Eagle Pass, Texas.[1]

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[1] José Vasconcelos, Ulises Criollo, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957), I, 372.

One facet of his education during these years and one that he did not receive within the classroom has to do with his religious instruction from his mother. She was especially concerned that José remain a true and loyal son of the Catholic Church; consequently, she made sure that he thoroughly assimilated the basic tenets of the Roman faith. She conveyed to him her fear of Protestantism and, while allowing him the freedom to do or become anything he wished, she also insisted that this be done within the Church. As a result, Vasconcelos always seemed to see the work and influence of Protestantism in any threat to his personal being or to his country; thus, "Protestant" and "Yankee" were to become synonymous in his thinking.[2]

Several authors, such as Bar-Lewaw, de Beer, Gómez and Villaseñor, attest to the fact that Vasconcelos was not a very good "practical" Catholic during most of his life but, it should also be pointed out, as his family strongly emphasizes even today, that he did return to the faith and die in the graces of the Church. A crisis with the Catholic faith seems to have occurred with the death of his mother. He relates that when his mother became seriously ill, it was his inclination from rigorous training to pray to God for her safe recovery. She did not recover from her illness and subsequently passed away. He then questioned whether

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[2]Gabriella de Beer, José Vasconcelos and His World (New York: Las Américas Publishing Co., 1966), p. 145.

or not there was a God at all, much less a God who could answer our petitions.[3]

But his involvement with Catholicism and God went through various stages of intense and lukewarm faith during his life. He always thought of himself as a Christian and a man of good deeds; his religious position throughout most of his life, as he formulated it in Ulises Criollo, was reached with the help of Menendez y Pelayo. In this definition of his religiosity, he looked upon himself (in the terms of Roman Catholic definitions) not as an unbeliever but simply as a heretic. He affirmed that all religions have their own validity because they all profess a deity and propose a moral way of life.[4]

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[3] Jose Vasconcelos, op. cit., p. 427. For just about all of his life Vasconcelos manifested little respect for the moral lessons his mother had conveyed to him. He had, for example, little regard for the fidelity of the marriage vows and possessed an enormous sexual appetite which he satisfied with a variety of mistresses and prostitutes. He was married twice, first to doña Serafina Miranda and then to doña Esperanza Cruz. And of all the women in his life, he had three favorites, Adriana, Charito and Valeria; they were a profound influence on his life and he wrote of his affairs with them in great detail in his autobiographical works.

Moreover, despite his Roman Catholic upbringing, he flirted with the Communistic and Nazi ideologies. When he was formulating his plan for the Ministry of Education, he was greatly attracted to the ideas of the Russian, Lunatcharsky. This man, more than any other foreigner, influenced his own arrangement and implementation of the educational policies in Mexico during Vasconcelos' tenure as Minister of Education. In 1940, Vasconcelos was the publisher of a weekly, El Timón, a mouthpiece of the Nazi propaganda during the second year of World War II. In June, it was forced to cease publication by the Mexican government.

[4] Ibid., pp. 302-303.

Yet, in his personal life he did not manifest the signs of interior acceptance and belief. He soon lost any desire to associate himself with ritual practice; he dismissed the Catholic notion of Holy Communion and before he was married the sacrament of Confession was a traumatic experience for him. He was not able to confess his sins but neither did he feel comfortable expressing his doubts at such a time. In 1916 he reports that he had a vision of the Christ and this was a refreshing and strengthening experience for him, a "return to the faith but not a conversion" in the strict sense.[5] In 1927 he visited the Holy Land and tells us that the close proximity of the sacred places of Christ's life cleansed his soul and renewed his good will. A more fundamental resolution towards goodness of life and action resulted from this experience and he tried to formulate his religious approach once more. In this formulation, he seems to have come to grips with his inclinations and puts more emphasis on the universal virtues of humanity: "I am going out into the world, O Lord, and I am sure to sin because this is the law of my flesh but I am also going to struggle in some fashion for truth and justice. And in this struggle I promise to be faithful to you at all costs."[6]

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[5] José Vasconcelos, La Tormenta, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957), I, 1062-1063.

[6] José Vasconcelos, El Desastre, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957), I, 1731.

We may debate at great lengths about the philosophical contribution of José Vasconcelos, but there is without doubt almost universal agreement as to the positive contributions he made towards education in Mexico. He was made the Minister of Public Education by Obregon and the dates are usually roughly given as 1920 to 1924. In reality, he held this post for only two years and eight months, from October, 1921 to June, 1924, so that his achievements in this post are even more remarkable, considering the short time he had in office. He is often referred to as the Founder of Modern Mexican Education[7] and some of the principles he laid down for the formal education of the Mexican people are still in force today. In many ways he continued the policies of Justo Sierra who had seen even before the time of Vasconcelos the direction that Mexico was taking under the regime of Porfirio Díaz. Just as Sierra hoped to recapture the spirit and essence of Mexican life through his writings, so Vasconcelos hoped to base the education of the Mexican on the tradition and heritage of his country.

The essence of Vasconcelos' approach to education is contained in his work, De Robinson a Odiseo. Robinson (Crusoe) in his mind signified the typical Anglo-Saxon approach to education in which instruction is conceived of in technical and

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[7]Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), p. 152.

practical terms. It is an education that concentrates on how to do things and how to handle and manipulate externals.[8] Odysseus, on the other hand, is a humanistic and idealistic approach to education in which the emphasis is on the development of the person in his intellectual and emotive capacities. Consequently, Vasconcelos strove to create a Mexican system of education that emphasized active participation of the people so that the personhood of the Mexican would emerge from his past. His educational system was based on the history and spiritual qualities of the Mexican, on "our blood, our language, our people."[9]

Consequently, there emerged under his leadership a renewed interest in culture and the arts that were specifically Mexican and "he showed great respect for the traditional arts, encouraging the ancient folkways in pottery, weaving, music, poetry and dance among the Indians."[10] The concert halls produced not only the music of the European masters but also the song and dances of Mexico that had been long neglected; the great muralists and painters such as Orozco and Rivera received support and encouragement. Libraries and cultural institutes

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[8] I. Bar-Lewaw Mulstock, José Vasconcelos, vida y obra (Mexico City: Clasica Selecta Editora Librera, 1965), p. 140.

[9] Octavio Paz, loc. cit.

[10] Bradley Smith, Mexico, A History in Art (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1968), p. 281.

were created in both urban and rural parts of the country and a series of books for the Mexican were published under the direction of the Minister of Education, books translated into Spanish whose authors included such men as Plato, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe and many others.[11] Vasconcelos was criticized for his efforts to bring the classics to the Indian and mestizo population but he felt the Indian should receive treatment equal to that extended to all the populace.[12] For this reason a department within the ministry was established to handle specifically the education of the Indian.[13] Finally a whole system of schools was established and teachers, who were capable of making this educational system effective, were sent to even the smallest villages.

The culmination of this kind of thinking for Vasconcelos was the theory of the unity of Spanish America popularized in his work, La Raza Cósmica, (1925). According to his thinking, the center of the world would some day be Latin America and the Latin American man, properly trained and educated in his system, would emerge as the great synthesizer of thought, culture and race. Even though Vasconcelos was a man of vision, this whole theory was a highly personal one and never was adopted seriously by many

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] José Vasconcelos, El Desastre, p. 1226.

thinkers. It is interesting in itself and is expanded to include more of his philosophy, as we shall see in the next chapter, but it remained the creation of a talented though individual Mexican thinker.

In order to understand the involvement and contributions of Vasconcelos to the political realm of Mexico, we should first discuss the relationship of philosophy and politics in Mexico during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Politics and philosophy were closely connected during the nineteenth century, the century of Vasconcelos' birth, and when we first begin to see him involved in public life these two elements of society are still intimately joined. It is an almost impossible task to isolate philosophy from politics or to separate politics from philosophy as motivations for some of Vasconcelos' actions because of their close bond in this period of Mexican history. Positivism, as "the propaganda arm of President Díaz, 'the honest tyrant'", had received political support and become the official philosophy of Mexico during the time we are concerned with, i.e., the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it had an important role to play in Vasconcelos' development.[14]

Consequently, there are several tasks that confront this section of inquiry. First, we are interested in discovering how

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[14]Patrick Romanell, "Bergson in Mexico: A Tribute to Jose Vasconcelos", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XXI, (June, 1961), pp. 502-504.

and when Positivism made its appearance in the intellectual life of Mexico. Secondly, we must try to present the main tenets of the positivistic doctrine as understood by Mexican thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, in what might well be the most difficult part of this section, we will attempt to explain how Positivism became the "official" philosophy of the political regimes of Juárez and Porfirio Díaz; this is a crucial point and involves an explanation of how one philosophical system was used to justify and expand the influence of a particular point of view. This final point is important also because, as we shall see, it is the point of departure for Vasconcelos in his own political and philosophical life.

Vasconcelos' involvement with the Ateneo de la Juventud does not seem at all strange or unusual considering the strictness and sterility of the education he received in the Preparatoria Nacional and in the law school. Very simply, this education was strictly positivistic and, as Vasconcelos described it later, it was not only painful but lethal to the world of imagination, abstraction and metaphysics. Positivism is a development of the classical empiricism of Hume, Locke and Comte. It holds that only that which can be experienced directly by the physical senses can be known. It is critical of metaphysics and theology, and asserts that the only legitimate forms of knowledge are the natural sciences (especially physics) and the social sciences only insofar

as they can resemble the methods of the natural sciences. Sometimes people speak of Positivism in less formal senses, for example, with reference to law (jurisprudence): e.g., what is right or legal or lawful is what the state decides; to say a man is guilty means the court has decided or ruled that he is guilty. Positivism, in a more formal sense, characteristically regards normative questions as "non-sensical" and meaningless. One can only know what is the case, not what ought to be the case, e.g., how people do act and not how they ought to act.

Vasconcelos recognized that Positivism rendered religion impossible and that it restricted the creative and artistic life of the Mexican. When we look at the totality of his life, we may see that even as a young man Vasconcelos knew there was more to the intellectual life and to reality than what could be accounted for on the doctrines of Positivism. This conviction caused, no doubt, his strong reactions to Positivism as he expressed them in the early chapters of Ulises Criollo.

In this autobiographical work he refers to the foundational work in education done by Gabino Barreda in the middle of the previous century. This man, more than any other, was responsible for the introduction of Positivism into Mexico. It continued to dominate philosophy, education and politics until the first two decades of the twentieth century.[15] Barreda had studied for a

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[15] José Vasconcelos, Ulises Criollo, p. 399.

period of time in France where he discovered this philosophy, and its acceptance in Mexico was facilitated by the prevailing cultural and political conditions.

From one point of view, the independence that Mexico enjoyed in the nineteenth century was one of the most important conditions that contributed to the acceptance of the Positivistic philosophy during this century. Independence from Spain meant that the Roman Catholic Church was cut off from its protection and support and was left, so to speak, in a vulnerable position in which it had to stand by itself. Independence also produced conflicts of interests and in this situation the conservative and liberal elements of politics and thought in Mexico struggled for supremacy. What may be classified as the "conservative" element favored a strong, central and monarchical government and special privileges for the military and clergy. The liberal elements, on the other hand, favored a federalized government, shared democracy and the treatment of all men and classes as equal. With the rise of Benito Juárez to power, the liberal elements, in effect, triumphed in the struggle and had the opportunity to incorporate its beliefs and policies into Mexican life.

At this point, then, Positivism assumed an important place in the government of Juárez because it gave him ready justification for the policies and rulings of his government and later contributed in an ideological way to the continuance of his rule. A parallel situation to Europe was drawn in Mexico so that

the three stages of Comte were seen to apply also in Mexico.[16] The theological state, represented by the privileged classes, had been overcome by the reform elements in Mexico and now it was time to establish a social order in the positivistic stage. Barreda believed that Positivism was the best ideology available upon which to construct a social structure. Barreda was in favor with Juárez and he was made Minister of Education, a post whose authority allowed him to incorporate the Positivistic sciences into the system of education. He was a liberal and anticlerical; consequently he determined to replace the Catholic Church with the Positivistic Church and "to substitute an order based on Positivist sciences for the order founded on the divine will."[17]

We will discuss the influence of Positivism on the Church in Mexico later but first we should be aware of Barreda's attempts to produce social unity and order through education. In Barreda's mind, education according to the Positivistic sciences would produce a unity of thinking in Mexico. The anarchy and diversity of thinking in the Mexican nation in the last half of the nineteenth century was the result of highly specialized education. The balance and order of society necessary for harmony and liberty would come to pass only

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[16]Samuel Ramos, Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico, trans. Peter G. Earle (Austin: The University of Texas Press, the Texas Pan American Series, 1972), p. 81.

[17]Leopoldo Zea, El Positivismo en México (México: El Colegio de México, 1943), p. 56.

if ideas which produced intolerance were to be replaced by ideas whose truth depended on scientific demonstration and observation. Patrick Romanell describes Barreda's approach to education as the solution to Mexico's problems in the following way:

> Barreda had a tremendous faith in a scientific education because he saw in its intellectual order the very "key" to the social and moral order which Mexico needed so badly. Using an economic metaphor typical of the nineteenth century, he argued that science with its reliable method of acquiring knowledge would issue in "a common fund of truths", which would guarantee a community of interests to offset the class conflicts within Mexican society.[18]

In other words, if everyone were educated alike, everyone would think alike.

Positivism was useful because of the way it emphasized the immediately given data of reality. In other words, it accepts as valid, true and trustworthy only what the senses perceive in immediate sensation of the external world and discards whatever may be termed abstract or metaphysical as unreliable and illusory. Consequently, the test of truth is observation and experience but experience that is limited to the external and sensible variety; internal experience has no scientific value and Auguste Comte, an early formulator of Positivism, regarded as mythology any attempt to deal with psychical experience.[19] It is a great mistake,

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[18] Patrick Romanell, Making of the Mexican Mind (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), p. 48.

[19] Auguste Comte, The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte, translation of Cours de Philosophie Positive, Harriet Martineau, translator, in The Age of Ideology, edited by Henry D. Aiken (New York: Mentor Books, 1956), p. 122.

according to the Positivist, to engage in speculation about what is beyond immediate perception.[20] As a further consequence, it was acceptable and even necessary to conclude to a type of pragmatism in the operation of human life, i.e., since we must rely on experience then what is present before our perception must be acceptable as the most nearly valid or the best or the most nearly perfect in a given situation. This was a valid way of proceeding, from a negative point of view, for the Positivist because there was nothing else to go on except the data of immediate perception.[21] There could be no appeal to general, universal rules because this would be to enter into an area of useless speculation and abstraction. In a strange, perhaps unique, mixture of philosophy and politics, this pragmatic schema was to have serious consequences in the civil life of Mexico.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Positivism was enthroned as the ruling power of political and philosophical life for every Mexican. Positivism was not so much a subject of discussion among philosophers and scholars as it was an object of practical application by the government so that it became the official policy of the rulers.[22] With the liberals in power, the

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[20] Ibid., p. 117 and pp. 132-134.

[21] Elizabeth Flower, "The Mexican Revolt Against Positivism", Journal of the History of Ideas, X, January 1949, p. 119.

[22] Gabriella de Beer, op. cit., p. 2.

elite classes in Mexico, those who had received favored treatment in the past under the domination of Spain and, later, Maximilian of Austria, came upon hard times. Juárez was an open liberal as a ruler and he was bent on making his country a federal democracy with every man receiving equal treatment. The institution that was to receive the most interest in this regard was the Church in Mexico and the official philosophical basis of his government, Positivism, helped to attain his aims.

This period of Mexican history, i.e., the rule of Juárez and his approach to the Roman Catholic Church, is a delicate one to discuss and at the same time a very complicated one to understand. The problem is acute because it is only too easy in this discussion to proceed from a certain bias and be severely harsh on the Church in this period of time. Several authors (e.g., Zea, Gómez, de Beer) objectively discuss both the positive and negative contributions of the Church from the beginnings of Mexican history. Thus, we have to begin with the association of the Spanish conquistadores and the Roman Catholic missionaries from the fifteenth century onwards. This association proved beneficial not only for Spain in the conquest of the Indians, and not only for the Church which received many new members by the preaching of the Gospel message but also for the Mexican Indians themselves. The point is that the Church in Mexico, despite its faults and shortcomings in dealing with the indigenous Indians, did benefit this Mexican

populace through its social and educational programs. As a result, the Church had attained a position of great respect with the Indian and had acquired enormous power and wealth as a landholder. Consequently, it was a privileged class endowed with strength and dignity in the Mexican society. In a political sense, perhaps the greatest mistake of the Church was its support of the Spanish colonial power in the struggle for independence. Had the Church supported the liberal and nationalistic elements in this struggle, the history of Church/State relations in Mexico from the mid 1800's on would have been different. However, the Church remained loyal to its source, i.e., Spain and, as a result, suffered the consequences.

Juárez, as a liberal concerned with the welfare of the Mexican people, initiated an anticlerical, antireligious program aimed at destroying the privileged classes of Mexico, especially the Church which had been in a position of supremacy since the Spanish conquest. This attack, like most of the attacks against the Church in Mexico, was not directed against the Church as a religion but rather as a political and social institution. Juárez was determined to dissolve all the special classes of interests of Mexico; the Church, as an economic and political force, was a part of his attack. He imposed his "Reform Laws which put an end to special privileges and destroyed the material power of the Church."[23]

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[23]Octavio Paz, op. cit., p. 125.

Positivism played a convenient role in this endeavor because it provided the philosophical base for the government to enact regulations against religion. The liberals were not concerned with debating the abstract principles of Positivism; they were attracted by its practical applications and what appealed to them in this case was Positivism's rejection of any metaphysical or theological grounds of knowledge. The Church under this attack suffered the loss of its prestigious position as landholder and ruler of the people and even though it tried to align itself with the liberal governing forces it was not able to withstand the underlying philosophy of this government.

Later in this century, Porfirio Díaz continued the government with the same basis of positivistic philosophy and with many of the same ideals for the equality and liberty of the Mexican people. The role of Positivism in this regime changed somewhat because the moral and intellectual necessities of the Díaz dictatorship had provoked chaos and disorder within the political scene. A philosophy of order and precision was needed for its justification and Positivism again provided the tools.

Positivism, in its practical applications, often suggests liberalism and pluralism. Because normative questions are meaningless, according to Positivism, the rulers of a state imbued with positivistic principles should not try to impose ethical standards but should make it possible for various groups and people to pursue

their peculiar preferences. In effect, this atmosphere often results in so undermining traditional moralities as to make people especially vulnerable to the dynamics of scienticism and technology. If a society were dominated by Positivism, that society would tend to favor the empirical sciences and rely on the sense data of experience in its decision making processes rather than on abstract generalities.

The politicians of the Díaz regime interpreted Positivism in their own way for their own purposes. They were not concerned with the precise application of Comte's three stages; they were not interested in uniformity of thought as Barreda had been; nor were they bent on destroying the social and political institution of the Church as Juárez had done. The Díaz political rule was interested in self-preservation. Whereas previously, the equality of all men had been a basis of good government, Díaz and his associates shifted the emphasis to ensuring the continuation of their own term of power. Equality now became less important than the survival of the government and the men who held positions of influence. A whole political movement which began with Independence was now endangered by the very ideology which had been its main support. The Positivism of Comte had now been modified by the thought of Spencer and Darwin for the sole purpose of maintaining a dictatorial government. It was, as Octavio Paz rightly observes, nothing more than deception and simulation on the part of Díaz and his politicians.[24]

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[24] Ibid., p. 133.

The difficulty with maintaining the government on the basis of Positivism stems from the fact that the Díaz regime had merely taken this European philosophy as it had been introduced into Mexico by Barreda and tried to make it over in such a way as to benefit the continuation of the government. The regime had not given it life nor conceived it to begin with. Thus, it found itself in the curious position of domination and dependence in regard to a way of thought which was not its own but which was yet necessary for the existence of the government. It could not completely adopt the philosophy of Positivism for to do so would be to expose itself to its own weaknesses before the Mexican people and yet it could not divorce itself sufficiently to be critical of this philosophy. Historically, Positivism did not belong to the Díaz regime and this dictatorship ". . . based on great rural holdings, bossism and the absence of democratic freedoms, could not make these ideas its own without either denying itself or disfiguring them beyond recognition."[25] It was the "superimposition" of a foreign thought producing equally foreign cultural, political and social forms which controlled and smothered the Mexican spirit but which did not permit a change of government during the long term of office enjoyed by Díaz, some thirty-four years.

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[25] Ibid.

In summary, we have tried to show how the "marriage" of the philosophy of Positivism and the politics of Mexico occurred from roughly the years 1857 to 1910. We must repeat that Positivism was not attractive to the liberals because of its theoretical and abstract principles. It was of interest during this period of time in Mexico because of its useful applications by the political leaders for their own purposes. Juárez found it to be a useful ideology to break down the old social order of privileged classes. Barreda found it useful in educational terms to establish a new order of common thinking and unity within the Mexican populace. The regime of Díaz found it useful in combination with the ideas of evolution borrowed from Darwin and Spencer to justify his lengthly dictatorship. But Justo Sierra perceived the weakness of this imported, foreign thought imposed on Mexican society but conceived for a French society and foresaw its consequences.[26] He inaugurated a new period of thought in Mexico and after him others would complete the period, among them José Vasconcelos.

This was the Positivism and its history in Mexico that Vasconcelos confronted in his higher education and these were the effects of that philosophy and the uses it was put to by Díaz that he lashed out against in Ulises Criollo. In his second year

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[26] Ibid., p. 134.

of the Preparatoria his course of studies was exclusively positivistic with classes in mathematics, chemistry, physics, natural history and psychology. In this program there was no room for any work in that kind of philosophy which would engage in speculation nor was there room for any kind of religious instruction, whether apologetic or academic.

Nor was this the limit of the indoctrination into the Positivist way of thinking. Gómez informs us that added to this basic course of study there was an addition, an extracurricular program of sessions called "Academias" whose sole purpose was to reinforce and intensify the classroom training in the ways of positivistic thinking.[27] These sessions were innocently referred to as "conferences of general instruction and scientific history" but it seems clear from what Gómez says that this instruction and history had the definite flavour of an exclusively empirical mode of thought, i.e., Positivism all over again. The total effect of a[redacted]is exposure to this way of thinking was a thorough grounding in Positivism based on only scientific and methodological criteria.

The slogans of Positivism, as Gómez notes and Vasconcelos conveys to us in his autobiography, were constantly repeated to him and the other students in their education: "Do not give assent to faith but only to the testimony of the senses" and "Observation and

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[27] Alicia Gómez (Orozco), El Joven Vasconcelos (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, M.A. Tesis, 1965), p. 11.

experience constitute the only sources of knowledge"; or "The only absolute is that everything is relative." Such an approach to education, Vasconcelos felt, destroyed not only intellectual speculation but any activity of fantasy and imagination.[28] Even in this early part of his life he felt urged to go beyond the empirical and to search for something that experimental reasoning was not able to give him. Unfortunately, his positivistic training denied him this path and in the early pages of Ulises Criollo he relates how he looked around at the lecture halls and classrooms and felt cheated for what the sciences were engaged in was really an insult to his talent and he felt more comfortable leaving them entirely alone.[29] When he reflected in his later years on this period of his training, he realized that he was involved in a general but quiet and unpublicized quest for the world of the spirit, a quest that issued from "the impulse which seeks the supernatural".[30] This was a quest for immortality and Positivism did not offer him an answer to this question.

In his years of training to be a lawyer, Vasconcelos began to discover a different way of thought, a way of philosophy that

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[28] José Vasconcelos, Ulises Criollo, pp. 427-428.

[29] Ibid., p. 400.

[30] Ibid., p. 408.

included speculation, abstraction and one that was to give him some of the answers he was seeking.[31] After he had completed the requirements for his law degree, he became interested in philosophical writings, sometime between the years 1905 and 1910. He read all the works of philosophy that were available to him and he was joined in this discovery of new philosophical ways of thinking by other Mexican men of letters. By 1910 a group of men including critics like Eduardo Colín, essayists like Alfonso Reyes, Julio Torri and Jesús Acevedo, poets like González Martínez, humanists like Pedro Henríquez Ureña and philosophers like Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos had solidly joined together in what was called the Ateneo de la Juventud for intellectual and political discussions (the group had first come together in 1908, two years before the political revolution began.)[32] This desire for new ways of thinking was perhaps inevitable because the reign of Positivistic thinking had become identified with the ruling political system of Porfirio Díaz during the thirty years of his rule before 1910. It was the unusual situation wherein the political/social regime strenthened and proved itself by the appeal to philosophy, that of Positivism. The argument of the ruling politicians was actually very pragmatic and simply stated that since Díaz was and had been the political force

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[31] Ibid., pp. 445-6.

[32] Samuel Ramos, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

for so many years and had done so successfully, empirical evidence indicated that he should continue to rule.

The opposition to Díaz was initiated by Justo Sierra who founded the National University and in the process separated himself and its curriculum completely from Positivism.[33] Sierra's opposition inspired the Ateneo de la Juventud which began to discover and study philosophers who had been previously banned by Positivism. The students and teachers first began to meet wherever they could, in or close to the school, later in the private homes of students and teachers such as Caso and Reyes.[34] The giants of European philosophy and some American authors were the favorites; Vasconcelos speaks about discovering the metaphysical thought of Schopenhauer in his commentaries on Kant. He refers to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason at one point as "the book of the day" and mentions others who began to break the Positivistic mold of their minds, men such as Nietzsche, Schiller, Bergson, William James, Croce and Hegel. The formation of the Ateneo and its lectures and discussions was a successful attempt to breathe new life into the intellectual and, eventually, the political life of Mexico.

Vasconcelos was, of course, an intimate part of this process and it helped to mark the formal transitional step from lawyer to a mind engaged in the questions of philosophy. Vasconcelos read a

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[33] Elizabeth Flower, op. cit., p. 122.

[34] José Vasconcelos, Ulises Criollo, p. 507.

lot in philosophy, he spoke of himself often and consistently as a philosopher, he wrote what he called philosophy, some of his contemporaries frequently thought of him as a philosopher. Hence, in spite of the fact that some critics of Vasconcelos may challenge his right to be called a philosopher and believe his self-designation to be pretentious and finally unwarranted, it seems to us quite natural to refer to Vasconcelos as a philosopher -- in some sense or another.

But then there is the question: in exactly what sense? This is an important question. It is also a difficult one and this for at least two reasons. First of all, it is difficult because a normative and proper definition of the term is difficult to come by without begging many questions. The task of defining the discipline of philosophy -- its scope, objective, methods and significance -- is itself a philosophical question. Indeed, philosophers, especially philosophers since Descartes and Kant, characteristically spend a large portion of their energies trying to define, clarify, and ground the discipline itself. Naturally, we will not want to try to resolve this issue before continuing with our study. Secondly, it is difficult to answer because of the nature of Vasconcelos' writings. While he does make reference to philosophy in a general sense as a type of wisdom or knowledge (sabiduría),[35] it would be uncritical

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[35] José Vasconcelos, Lógica Orgánica, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 496.

for us simply to take over Vasconcelos' definition of philosophy and assume it in calling him by that noble term.

So we will have to settle for making at this point a merely procedural decision. We will not mean by "philosophy" anything very technical nor anything that will satisfy a purist of any sort. We will not now define philosophy by reference to any particular conclusions, nor any precisely defined methods, nor by any particular philosophies self-definition. Nor will we even use it in a highly eulogistic sense to mean "great thought, of a highly original and significant sort." We will settle now for calling Vasconcelos a philosopher only in the sense that he seriously and persistently concerned himself with some of the "big questions" that have perennially exercized a hold on men qua men: those fascinating, difficult and perhaps mysterious questions having to do with nature, man and God; those questions having to do with the nature of reality, the meaning of life, the best society, and the Transcendent. These were questions that characteristically grasped Vasconcelos, he pursued them energetically, and he wrote in the hope and at times confidence that what he said was not only valid but of universal significance. In this intentionally loose sense of the term, then, we are referring, from the outset, to Vasconcelos as a philosopher. Part of the aim of the study, however, will be to try

to come to a clearer and more exact understanding of what senses Vasconcelos can be thought of as a philosopher. But this will obviously require the study itself in order to do so.

The question of how to characterize Vasconcelos according to these definitions involves a lengthly discussion that can be better presented and understood afer we consider the content of his writings usually referred to as philosophical works. In the meantime, however, we do intend to refer to him as a philosopher and to denominate some of his writings as philosophical and religious philosophy as we proceed through the rest of this study. When we use these terms and phrases we are referring, for the present time, to the concept of philosophy in the general and broad sense; we do this for purposes of convenience and because the body of literature on Vasconcelos commonly refers to him as a philosopher. A final discussion on the accuracy of these statements, however, will be reserved to the section on evaluations in the concluding chapter.

Several other noteworthy facts of Vasconcelos' early life should be noted. In 1900 he received his initiation into the world of writing and publishing. With two companions at the Preparatoria, he published five or six issues, now lost, of what he refers to as a "most humble journal".[36] One of these companions,

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[36] Ibid., p. 436.

a man referred to as Campos, played the major role in the publication and he contributed a great deal of his poetry to its pages. Vasconcelos seems to have had a smaller role since he was in charge of the section on the Philosophy of Art. And in 1902 he published his first article in a periodical, also now lost, that was, by his own admission, an attack on the Porfirist regime for its mistreatment of some of the working class. It is interesting to see that, seven or eight years before the actual incorporation of the Ateneo, Vasconcelos' dissatisfaction with Díaz was strong enough for him to risk publication of a critical article dealing with the President's policies.

Finally, we should point out that despite his strong reaction to his positivistic training and his discovery of other philosophical ways of thinking, Vasconcelos did not totally escape the influence of the officially imposed philosophy. Positivism did continue to exert some influence and the Spencerian ideas of evolution are evident in his professional thesis for the law degree, Teoría Dinámica del Derecho, (A Dynamic Theory of Law), 1907.[37] Yet, despite these influences, which he himself recognized by the time he wrote Ulises Criollo, he was never able to remove himself from the idea of the Absolute or the idea of God that had been a part of his religious training as a youth. He tells us that he accepted the

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[37]José Vasconcelos, Teoría Dinámica del Derecho, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957), I, 14-15.

mechanical cosmography of Comte, Spencer and others but ". . . without prescinding from the first mysterious mover . . ." which was to play an important part in his philosophy for the rest of his life. As we shall see in the next chapter, moreover, the idea of a quasi-evolution of the higher from the lower is the key idea for Teilhard as he attempts to unify reality in his concept of the Absolute.

II

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Introduction

There are several major works on the philosophy of Vasconcelos which also include a survey of some of the influences on his thought.[1] Moreover, in his work on Vasconcelos, John H. Haddox enumerates in a brief listing many, if not most, of the influences on the Vasconcelian system.[2] This listing, Haddox tells us, is taken from Agustín Basave (Fernández), a condensation of his chapter on this subject; we shall also use and quote from Basave in detail in our treatment of these influences on Vasconcelos.

Admittedly, we will not treat in detail all those thinkers who influenced Vasconcelos; the principle we have

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[1] José Sánchez Villaseñor, El Sistema filosófico de Vasconcelos (Mexico City: Material Polit., 1954). This is a comprehensive life of Vasconcelos and a survey of his philosophical works published at that time; this is a good introductory work on Vasconcelos but slightly poetical in its approach.

Rodolfo Shumada, The Philosophies of Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos with Special Emphasis on their Concept of Value (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1959). This work, even though it is limited in its purpose and not concerned exclusively with Vasconcelos, does provide a good survey of some of the more important principles of his metaphysics and aesthetics.

[2] John H. Haddox, Vasconcelos of Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 75.

used to select one philosopher for discussion and to exclude some other philosopher from our discussion is intimately connected with the main purpose of this work. In other words, our concern is the religious aspect of Vasconcelos' philosophy and not the exposition of the entirety of that philosophy. Consequently, only those philosophers whom we consider to have made a significant contribution to Vasconcelos' religious thought will be discussed in detail.

We could be open to criticism for neglecting some important contributors to the Vasconcelian philosophy but in our defense we contend that our immediate interest in Vasconcelos is religious; the general scheme of his philosophy has already been adequately done by other writers and they have also expressed very well the influences on his thought. Consequently, to accomplish our limited purposes, we will discuss Pythagoras, Empedocles and Potinus (who manifests the general Platonic influence on his thought); then Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, and in order to point out a particular religious problem as well as to help us keep in view the primary religious purpose of this work, we shall discuss the influence of Immanuel Kant.

Pythagoras

Pythagoras was one of Vasconcelos' earliest discoveries

in his philosophical readings and the subject of one of his earliest works, Pitágoras: Una teoría del ritmo.[1] The Pythagoreans thought that not only can all things be expressed numerically but that all things are numbers; they postulated a harmony, an order and balance between things in the universe -- a proportion which could be expressed numerically. They even went so far as to speak of cosmical harmony.[3] The concepts of harmony and proportion were to be particularly appealing to Vasconcelos but he did not incorporate the Pythagorean doctrine literally into his own thought but rather reinterpreted it for his own purposes.

First, he interprets the Pythagorean concept of number in such a way as to have a view of rhythmic, open-ended reality. Reality, with this interpretation, is characterized by conditioned equilibrium and circular dynamism.[4] This allows Vasconcelos, then, to develop a concept of reality that will coincide with his desire for a monistic view of existence, i.e., the ever-developing and unfolding concept of reality which points upwards and to the future for its final completion.

In the second place, Vasconcelos "internalizes" this particular interpretation of number in the sense that he holds that the spirit of man operates according to this Pythagorean

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[3]Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1962), I, part 1, Greece and Rome, pp. 49-50.

[4]Villasenor, op. cit., p. 25.

rhythm by infusing and transforming material reality. He maintains that there are two poles or extremes to existence, the material world and the world of the spirit. Through the use of rhythm of the spirit, in the reinterpreted Pythagorean sense, man saves and redeems the reality of the material order by incorporating the natural rhythm of the material into the psychical rhythm of the spiritual realm. In this process man is much more akin to the artist than the scientist or the engineer because he works on the material order, infuses it with a new rhythm and gives it new life in the world of the spirit. The artist operates in much the same fashion and Vasconcelos finds in the artist, i.e., the person of the fine arts, and in the elements of artistic creation, primary examples to explain the particular view of philosophy which he adopts. Thus, in one place, he concludes that the philosopher is a poet with a system.[5] One of the foundational elements of this system and one that will be mentioned many times in this explanation of his philosophy is that of the rhythm of the spiritual order which he assimilated from Pythagoras.

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[5]Jose Vasconcelos, Etica, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1959), III, 699.

Empedocles

Empedocles was a significant influence on the thought of Vasconcelos because of the way in which he conceived reality and the way in which he coordinated this reality. The problem that Empedocles faced was the reconciliation of the view of Parmenides with observable change and motion; in other words, since Parmenides had stated "What is, is", Empedocles was confronted with the problem of permanency and change. To solve this problem he interpreted Parmenides in his own way and postulated four elements as the "roots" of all existence: earth, air, fire and water.

First, he agreed with Parmenides that there is some permanency to reality by stating that these four basic elements never change; as elements, they never cease to be nor does one change into another. Secondly, he accounted for change and movement by insisting that these elements combine and mingle with each other to form the objects of reality. But in the process of combination, the elements do not change; "the four kinds of matter are unchangeable and ultimate particles which form the concrete objects of the

world by their mingling."[6]

However, he still had to account for the very process of mingling and combining of the elements. He did this by adding the forces of Love and Strife which he conceived of as forces of Harmony and Discord or attraction and repulsion. These are material forces with length, breadth and weight[7] and they excercise their power in alternate stages within the Sphere in which we live. Love acts as the unifier of these elements and Strife functions as the divider of the elements. As Empedocles conceived reality, Love is supreme in the first stage and there is no distinction of one thing from another. In the second stage, Strife begins to make its appearance; in the third period, Strife becomes supreme and the four elements are distinct and separate. In the final period, Love again enters the sphere and the elements begin to mingle with each other in various associations.[8]

Vasconcelos found several things in this theory which attracted him. This is one of the instances in which we see Vasconcelos borrowing certain things from another philosopher

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[6] Copleston, op. cit., p. 79.

[7] Rex Warner, The Greek Philosophers (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1958), p. 34.

[8] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

while rejecting other concepts from the whole theory. In this case he did not adopt what is, in effect, a pluralistic view of reality presented by Empedocles, i.e., he rejected the four elements as the "roots" of all things in favor of a monistic view of reality. However, he thought that Empedocles had discovered the most valid way the philosopher can approach reality and praised him for his respect of the elements of existence just as they are in reality.

The fact that the elements of existence are unchangeable meant, for Vasconcelos, that Empedocles had respected the quality rather than the quantity of existence. Vasconcelos insisted throughout his philosophical works that philosophy is destined to fail if it attempts to reduce the elements of existence to one common denominator; rather, philosophy can succeed only if it approaches the world just as it is, in its fullness and integrity and with the realization that beings possess a character irreducible one to another.[9]

For Vasconcelos, this is the philosophy of quality which is far superior to the philosophy of quantity. We shall return to both of these themes many times throughout the remainder of this work, but for now we should be aware of the source of Vasconcelos' ideas regarding quality. Empedocles maintained the

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[9] José Vasconcelos, Todología, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 878-880.

unchangeability of the elements of existence and Vasconcelos incorporated into his own thought this approach to existence just as it is. Empedocles conceived a coordinated existence in which the elements retain their individual character and Vasconcelos developed his own theory of coordination in which the quality of the elements of existence are of most importance.

Plotinus

Another philosopher who excercised a profound influence on Vasconcelos was Plotinus. It is not easy to comprehend very clearly why Vasconcelos found that the return to the thought of Plotinus seemed to him a most natural step.[10] But when we raise the question as to why this step was natural, as Gómez does so well,[11] then we are faced with the task of unravelling Vasconcelos' thought regarding modern science, man's primary intuition, the concept of energy and his quest for a monistic view of reality.

The year 1910 and his involvement with the Ateneo de la Juventud marks a kind of philosophical stand for Vasconcelos and from that point onwards he looked for a way to build a system of thought that would be characterized by unity rather

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[10] José Vasconcelos, Pitágoras, in Obras Completas (México City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1959), III, 37.

[11] Alicia Gómez (Orozco), El joven Vasconcelos (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, MA Tesis, 1965), pp. 130-131.

than diversity or by homogeneity rather than heterogeneity. He felt that the analysis of the universe, i.e., the distinction of one thing from another, also needs the work of synthesis in order to make the universe intelligible; and in this case he took the "Universe" in its strict sense of "one". He expresses the thought in one place that when the mind divides the universe into two orders, it cannot return to unity without some kind of mechanistic doctrine or dogmatism.[12]

For the rest of his philosophical life he rejected absolutely any dualistic approach to philosophy because it results, he believed, in a great chasm being set up between man and the universe. Vasconcelos simply could not accept any view that produced a separation between man the knowing subject and the world of reality as the known object. Having thus dismissed this approach to philosophical knowledge, he not only desired to form a system which emphasized man's emotional and aesthetic qualities as instruments of knowledge, but he also sought to produce a system which was totally monistic. As we shall see (ch. 3, pp. 83-85) Vasconcelos develops a theory of knowledge which assumes that the emotions of man are characterized by a fullness and richness of content based on their

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[12] Vasconcelos, Pitagoras, p. 35.

immediate relationship with experienced reality. According to Vasconcelos' theory of knowledge, intellectual knowledge has certain limitations, but that kind of knowledge which uses emotion much like the artist uses emotion -- aesthetic knowledge -- unifies all levels of reality by bringing the knower into contact with the objects of existence.

Vasconcelos' contact with Plotinus seems to be indirect. As Bar-Lewaw tells us, his knowledge of Plotinus comes through Philo and he follows the works of Vacherot and Bréhier.[13] While Vasconcelos found value in Philo's philosophical concept of the Word (Verbo) derived from the One and Ineffable God -- a concept which provides a means of communication between God and creatures[14] -- he needed even more the Plotinian concept of the soul (alma) which coincided, in Vasconcelos' mind, very precisely with what science was telling him about the structure of the universe.

In Pitágoras Vasconcelos refers to Maine de Biran and agrees with this author that the primary intuition of man is one of energy.[15] The modern science of his day, even more

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[13] I. Bar-Lewaw (Mulstock), José Vasconcelos, vida y Obra (Mexico City: Clasica Selecta Editora Librera, 1965), p. 88.

[14] José Vasconcelos, Historia del Pensamiento Filosófico, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, (1961), IV, 215.

[15] Vasconcelos, Pitágoras, p. 37.

than his own logic, had convinced Vasconcelos that a dualistic conception of the universe is untenable because science had shown that matter was energy, i.e., the latent energy of the atom. Thus, if science has convinced us of anything, according to Vasconcelos, it is the fact of the monistic view of reality, "The scientific affirms a dynamic monism, i.e., a movement whose resemblance is found only in the subjective order within human consciousness."[16] In his work on Pythagoras, he explains modern science has helped to convince him of monism:

> Science describes the atom as the place where two forces meet . . . the object and energy. In this way it can be affirmed that matter returns to spiritual being. The concept of the atom is identified with the immediate data of consciousness: the idea of energy, the sentiment of strength (energy) which Maine de Biran speaks of.[17]

Vasconcelos seemed strangely drawn to Plotinus whom Basave had called "the predecessor of contemporary scientific thought". Basave also sees Plotinus as the mentor or guide for the entirety of Vasconcelos' system of thought; he is the philosopher who allows Vasconcelos to trace a continuous path "from the atom to knowledge of Divinity".[18] Vasconcelos tells us that he thinks it is better to return to a study of the

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[16] José Vasconcelos, El Monismo Estético, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 62.

[17] Vasconcelos, Pitágoras, ibid.

[18] Augustín Basave (Fernández del Valle), La filosofía de José Vasconcelos (el hombre y su sistema) (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1968), p. 55.

ancient philosophers for explanations rather than adopt any contemporary thought because their view of reality more closely approximates the findings of contemporary science than any other group of philosophers throughout history. Among the ancients, Plotinus, for various reasons, seemed to be the best philosopher for Vasconcelos to use in his philosophy. The idea of energy proves to be of prime importance for Vasconcelos. He admits that he has a highly personal and subjective view of the universe as composed of various and complex works of energy. Plotinus, as we shall see, enabled him to explain and justify this personal view.

However, it appears to us that the choice of Plotinus as his philosophical guide is based not so much on the idea of energy as it is on the idea of the integral process of emanation and the period of descent and ascent of reality away from and returning to the One. In other words, Plotinus had a monistic view of emanation and return that served Vasconcelos' idea of the homogeneity of reality well. But at the same time, this is not to diminish the role that "energy" plays in his system; the concept of energy is the key, the tool and the principal instrument to explain how monism is accomplished.

Vasconcelos incorporates the concept of all emanating from the One into his system of thought. The concept itself belongs more to Plotinus than Plato, although it is one that Plotinus developed from the philosophy of Plato. The concept

of the emanation of reality depends in the beginning on the concept of the One which is the principle of all knowledge and on whom all things of the world depend. All else proceeds from the One by a process of descent or emanation which is both free and necessary: free because the One is the fullness of being, has no need for other being and neither loses nor gains anything by emanation; necessary because the One is immutable. On the first lower level from the One and the first emanation from the One is Nous, intelligence and unchanged ideas. It has a three-fold object of its thoughts: the One, itself and the Ideas which are a part of its spiritual nature. Multiplicity, or, in Vasconcelos' concept, heterogeneity begins at this level because Plotinus made a distinction between the Nous and its ideas.

The next emanation is that of the World Soul and becuase it proceeds from the Nous and the Nous proceeds from the One it is inferior to Nous. It has two kinds of activities, that of contemplation in which it centers its thoughts upon the Nous itself; its other activity is practical and productive in which it forms the particular things of the universe according to the exemplars of the ideas contemplated in the Nous.

The final emanation in this "period of descent" concerns the universe and its contents, i.e., the sky, the forces of good and evil, human souls, matter and evil. Matter is the last step

in the process of emanation and is viewed as something of darkness and evil. The human soul is conceived by Plotinus as pre-existing at one time in the Nous but it now exists in a state of bondage and imprisonment in the material, human body. Similar to the actions of the Nous, the human soul also has two activities; one tends to the formation of ideas and the other handles the activity of the material body.

These steps of emanation mark the process of coming-to-be that Plotinus developed under the influence of the philosophical system of Plato. However, there is also a "time of ascent" that Plotinus enunciated and which had a marked influence on the system of thought in Vasconcelos. Just as the process of descent begins with the One, so the process of ascent tends to produce a reintegration and reabsorbtion into the One, i.e., the One marks the beginning and the end of this whole process. The ascending process is characterized by three stages which we may call the practical, the contemplative and the ecstatic or mystical.[19]

The practical level concerns life in the sensible world and its virtuous activities concern man's ability to control the forces of pleasure-seeking so that the other and

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[19]Carmin Mascia, A History of Philosophy (Patterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1957), p. 123.

higher stages of this ascent may be realized. The second stage, the contemplative, is characterized by those virtuous activities which are either aesthetic or rational (i.e., discursive or philosophical). Through aesthetic activity, our mind can separate intelligible ideas from matter and be united through contemplation once more with the World Soul where the ideas of beauty reside. Through rational activity our mind contemplates these ideas under the aspect of truth; this is the activity of philosophy or discursive reasoning and thus the mind is united again with the Nous. The third stage, the ecstatic or mystical level, marks the culmination of this ascent and consists of the mind's contemplation and union with the One.

Why did the ideas of Plotinus appeal so much to Vasconcelos? In a certain sense he was preconditioned to employ the general outlines of Plotinus' way of thought throughout all of his philosophical writings. Thanks to his early and strict religious training as a youth, the reality of the Spirit and the whole idea of the spiritual world was deeply ingrained in his manner of thinking. Thus, the One, the World Soul, the Nous readily made sense to him so that the "return to Plotinus seemed a most natural thing to do."[20] Vasconcelos thought that the spiritual world was

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[20] Vasconcelos, Pitágoras, p. 37.

superior to the material world and somewhere within that spiritual world was the finality of existence for man and the universe. And so, he could also readily accept the fact that matter constituted the lowest level of emanation and it was man's task to remove himself from the limitations of materiality and make his way back to the One, or in his usual term, back to the Absolute. "Plotinus points out that the ways of purgation or purification are: music, love and philosophy. These are the beginnings of philosophical life properly speaking: to overcome the lower levels of Being by meriting the ineffable union with the One."[21] For Vasconcelos, here at last was something other than the empirical world of the Positivists and he found in Plotinus the seeds of a philosophical way of thinking that would provide adequate space for him to develop a total philosophy of man: a way of thinking that would include not only the materiality of the universe but also his spirituality and his relationship with the Absolute.

There are two other reasons that we can briefly mention to help explain why Vasconcelos was attracted to Plotinus. First, we mentioned above (p. 5) that he desired to develop a system with a homogeneous view of reality. One

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[21] Gómez, op. cit., p. 134.

of the basic concepts that he uses throughout his writings is that of unity. He felt that any system of thought which considered only a part of total reality could not arrive at total unity. For Vasconcelos, reality includes not only what can be verified by sense experience but also the realm of the spirit beyond immediate sense data. According to Vasconcelos' interpretation, Positivism neglected the realm of the spirit and therefore he could not possibly employ it to coordinate the reality of the universe. The monistic view of emanation and reintegration that he found in the system of Plotinus allowed Vasconcelos to attain this coordination. At the same time the thought of Plotinus fulfilled Vasconcelos' desire for homogeneity in his own system, whereby the diversified elements of reality could be unified in a schema that terminated in the Absolute.

The second and final reason for this affinity that we shall consider, is the relationship that he saw between his belief in the idea of energy as the underlying force of existence and the idea of the Soul which he found in Plotinus. The second activity of the World Soul mentioned above, i.e., its practical activity, was necessary to the completion of Vasconcelos' adherence to what the science of his day taught him about reality. The practical activity of the World Soul produces the elements of reality and in this Vasconcelos

thought he had discovered the role and place of the energy which underlies these elements. Whether he actually did or not is an open question, but in theory, at least, the Soul in Plotinus' system provided a link between antiquity and the contemporary scientific discoveries of Vasconcelos' day.

Schopenhauer

Vasconcelos held Schopenhauer in special esteem since he considered him to be one of the perennial philosophers and one to whom he owed the power and strength of his thought.[22] There is some similarity between the Will of Schopenhauer and the concept of energy in Vasconcelos: according to Schopenhauer will ascends from the level of inorganic nature to the vegetable and animal world and finally to the higher animal species;[23] in Vasconcelos, energy is present on the level of the atom, the cell and human consciousness and the ascending process terminates in the level of the Absolute. It is impossible to say with any certainty but the resemblance seems to be more external than essential in Vasconcelos' scheme of

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[22] José Vasconcelos, Ulises Criollo, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957), I, 545-546.

[23] Copleston, Modern Philosophy, Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, pp. 38-39.

thought.

However, Vasconcelos makes explicit reference to the importance of Schopenhauer's contribution in his reflections on the value of music. Vasconcelos sees a transcendental conclusion in Schopenhauer's assertion that music is a representation of the will itself and not a mere copy of ideas as is present in the other arts. This is significant for Vasconcelos because he feels that music can begin to free us from our emotions and intellect. It "shows us the eternal" whereas the other arts bind us to the things and shadows of this existence.[24] This part of Schopenhauer's aesthetic was one more of those influences which enabled Vasconcelos to formulate his ideas which center on the return to the Absolute, the value of aesthetic-emotive knowledge and the limitations of intellectualism.

Nietzsche

Vasconcelos owes much of the spirit and vigor of his aesthetic to Nietzsche because, according to one commentator, the artistic tendencies of Vasconcelos allowed him to be influenced by the poetic genius of Nietzsche.[25] Some of the most profound history of philosophy composed by Vasconcelos

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[24] José Vasconcelos, Manual de Filosofía, in Obras Completas (México City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1959), IV, 1142.

[25] Basave, op. cit., p. 79.

shows the traces of this influence. The most notable example of the influence of Nietzsche on Vasconcelos appears in the Estética where Vasconcelos enumerates the categories of beauty. The first two, the Apollonian and Dionysian, Vasconcelos has taken from Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, Dionysus represents the symbol of light and the principle of individuation.[26] For unchangeability of the elements of existence and Vasconcelos incorporated into his own thought this approach to existence just as it is. Empedocles conceived a coordinated existence in which the elements retain their individual character and Vasconcelos developed his own theory of coordination in which the quality of the elements of existence are of most importance.

Bergson

Another influence on Vasconcelos was Bergson. It is not quite as clear as Alicia Gómez would have us believe that "Vasconcelos is a Bergsonian"[27] in his philosophy and writings. His relation to Bergson is more complicated than that. At the

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[26] Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963), VII, Modern Philosophy, part 2, Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, p. 171.

[27] Gómez, op. cit., p. 141.

same time we suspect that Gómez does not intend that statement to be taken at simple face value since it is obvious, even with a cursory reading of Vasconcelos as well as on the testimony of numerous commentators on the Vasconcelian system, that Vasconcelos' philosophy does not fit neatly into the school of intuitionism. It does bear similarities to this system of thought and consequently to Bergson. Thus, it will be our task to explicate some of these influences of Bergson on Vasconcelos.

Bergson (1859-1941) echoed the thought of the ancient philosopher Heraclitus with the concept that "all things flow" in the world of reality. Another way of saying this is to consider reality as a continuous series of becomings with no fixed terminal point for any being which exists. The principle of this continuous developing reality is what Bergson called the "vital impulse" which is attained by man, not by an intellectual or rational concept, but by a direct and immediate act of intuition. This "vital impulse" however, is grasped by man only when he becomes an intimate part of the flow of reality; if we are separated in some way from the continuous flow of reality then we are unable to comprehend ourselves and the world around us. It was also a part of the Bergsonian system that the "ego" or the "I" of personality is known only under the condition of an intuitive

act and not by the rational process.[28]

There are three areas we will investigate to show the relationship between Vasconcelos and Bergson so that we can see what influence Bergson exercises upon Vasconcelos. At the same time we will see what Vasconcelos found of importance and took for his own system of thought. These three areas are the following: 1) the immediate data of consciousness; 2) the function of the intellect; and 3) how these two thinkers conceive the definition of life.

First, Bergson defines the immediate data of consciousness as a "pure quality", a continuous and progressive multiplicity. He does not accept the explanation of this data as a relation of qualitative elements nor any explanation of data which views them in terms of the relationship of cause and effect.[29] For Vasconcelos, the immediate given of conscicusness is the unique, irreducible and qualitative data. The immediate given is not the succession of images, ideas and objects obtained by sensation or intelligence nor the quantitative, phenomenal dynamism determined by its relation to cause and effect. Thus, Vasconcelos speaks in much the same language when he rejects, as Bergson does, the explana-

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[28] Mascia, op. cit., p. 459.

[29] Gomez, loc. cit.

tions of quantity and cause/effect relation as inadequate for the data of consciousness.

Secondly, when we compare what Vasconcelos and Bergson say about the operation of the intellect, we again see some similarities of thought. Bergson describes the function of the intellect as rigid and immobile in the sense that it operates by a process of separation in which the knower and the object known remain definitely apart. Vasconcelos also views the operation of the intellect as a process of separation in which the knowing subject is divided from the object known.

In many ways this is a crucial point in understanding his thought as well as a foundational principle which helps to explain his move away from rationalistic philosophy to a philosophy which emphasizes the emotional nature of man. Basave and Gómez[30] both refer, in this regard, to the "irrationalism" of Vasconcelos, basing their judgment and conclusions on his criticism of the rational process which separates object and subject. Rather than irrationalism, his approach might be better described as "anti-intellectualism", a term which Basave does use but only on one occasion. Basave calls this irrationalism the "Captial sin of the Vasconcelian system . . ." and accuses him of projecting himself ". . . into the throes of his power of imagination without taking care to test his premises

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[30] Ibid.

with reality. Don José Vasconcelos does not want to understand that philosophy is rigorous knowledge and therefore it deals with concepts and reason."[31]

There can be no doubt that Vasconcelos does not give reason the usual high regard it has enjoyed in a long philosophical tradition. But to view this "sin" as caused by a mistrust of the separative process is to see only half the explanation that Vasconcelos offers. We have made reference earlier, in several places, to the desire of Vasconcelos for unity and homogeneity in his philosophical approach to reality and this is at least the other half of the explanation for his "anti-intellectualism". Reason does not work in his system simply because it constantly repeats the disjunctive process which we are confronted with in the world; in other words, it produces heterogeneity, not homogeneity. Consequently, there is a similarity between Vasconcelos and Bergson to the extent that Vasconcelos rejects reason as a philosophical instrument because it operates by separation, not unification; they both believe reality cannot be adequately grasped by reason (so conceived).

Before we leave this comparison of the intellectual process as presented by Bergson and Vasconcelos, it would help

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[31] Basave, op. cit., p. 76.

us to see other similarities if we consider what both men view as the purpose or finality of the intellectual process. For Bergson, rationality is directed to science and consequently to the order of practicality and the management of things. For Vasconcelos, rationality is directed by some "interest", i.e., some further end or value. In some sense, it is "interested" in an additional value beyond itself. For Vasconcelos, the guide of this interest is scientific knowledge, or better, scientific knowledge guides interest and directs it to action, usefulness and the practical order. Thus, for both men, the function of the intellect is characterized as instrumental and leading to something else; both reject the idea of the rational process as a value in and of itself; and both conceive of science as intimately connected with the operation of the intellect although Vasconcelos differs from Bergson in giving science a directive activity over rationality.

In the third and final comparison of Bergson and Vasconcelos, we shall look at how each of these thinkers approach a definition or concept of life because, here again, Vasconcelos manifests the influence of this French thinker although he does, as in the second comparison, go on to develop some differences that are peculiar to his own system of thought. Bergson states that we comprehend the "elan vital", i.e., life, in an intuition and not rationally. In this intuition,

we are presented with the reality of life; as a result, we view life as a living continuity and as progressive, dynamic and cummulative.

For Vasconcelos, life is comprehended by the immediate knowledge of rhythm. In Pitágoras, he equates rhythm, in all the ways he refers to it, with the immediate data of consciousness. Rhythm, or as he calls it at various times, "a rhythmic force", "subjective rhythm", "spiritual bearing", or "the rhythmic dimension of substance", is a constant dynamism by which I know myself. However, this dynamism is an ongoing and progressive force so that it is affected not only by interior alterations but by all the external modifications of the world. This rhythmic substance is comprehended, not by some rational process for Vasconcelos, but by a process which he does denominate as "knowledge" but qualified as immediate or direct knowledge, i.e., what he calls a "mixture of vision, of the sense of touch and of hearing, taken from the flow of the rhythmic current."[32]

But rhythm, for Vasconcelos, is not limited to self-knowledge. By the same process, man intuits the rhythm that is operable in the external world. Rhythm is discovered "in the laws of things, in the combination of the two formal

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[32] Vasconcelos, Pitágoras, p. 50.

sources of the external, space and time."[33] Consequently, Vasconcelos views life in a homogeneous manner because he holds that in rhythm man (the "I") and external reality are as one. In the rhythmic dimension of substance the "I" and the forms of reality are found combined or collected within the same dimension, that of substance.

These three areas should give us some idea of the relation between Vasconcelos and Bergson, but more importantly this study allows us to fulfill the place of Bergson in Vasconcelos' thought. On the one hand we see the role that intuitive thought plays in the Vasconcelian system in regard to man's comprehension of himself and conscious knowledge; Vasconcelos, at this point, is remarkably similar to Bergson. Yet, on the other hand, we can see the kind of eclecticism that is at work in Vasconcelos' scheme: in the definition of life, Vasconcelos takes over but goes beyond Bergson's idea of "elan vital" and posits rhythm (a concept borrowed from Pythagoras and reinterpreted) as the ultimate explanation.

Kant

The discussion of Kant's influence on Vasconcelos does admittedly fall outside the chronological order we have been

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[33] Ibid., p. 58.

following in this chapter, but we have decided to consider Kant at this point because of his importance in Vasconcelos' thought and because of the influence he exercised upon the development of Vasconcelos' religious thought. The relationship between Vasconcelos and Immanuel Kant is, in many ways, a curious one because on the one hand there is ample evidence that Kant exercised a profound influence on his thought but yet, on the other hand, Vasconcelos rejected an integral part of Kant's thought and took only those ideas which best served his purpose in his explanation of human knowledge. This strange combination of rejection and acceptance provides us with an opportunity to illustrate the eclecticism of Vasconcelos, a point we mentioned above in our discussions of Empedocles and Bergson. We said in those discussions, and Kant is here a perfect case in point, that Vasconcelos was influenced by many thinkers and he borrowed some elements of their teaching, obviously more from some than others. These ideas and concepts he then incorporated into a system of thought that is truly his own and since he started with and, for the most part, maintained certain principles throughout his philosophical writings, he tended to use those ideas from other thinkers that were useful and consistent with these principles.

Vasconcelos' appropriation of Immanuel Kant is a

good example of this kind of borrowing because of what Vasconcelos chose to use of his doctrine concerning the synthetic a priori judgment. First, Vasconcelos took from Kant the idea that the discipline of metaphysics is intuitive knowledge.[34] In the area of aesthetics, Vasconcelos acknowledges that Kant contributed the notion of a priori but he departs from much of the practical application of this concept. Vasconcelos believed that Kant had confused the aesthetic a priori and the logical a priori because he recognized only that aesthetic pleasure derived from the inner causality involved in the development of curves and geometrical planes. But, as Vasconcelos tells us, "this is not aesthetic pleasure but purely logical because aesthetic pleasure is obtained when the law changes and things develop, not geometrically but melodically and rhythmically according to a standard given by the spirit, not according to a standard which imitates logical necessity."[35] Thus, according to Vasconcelos, Kant did not uncover the distinction between the aesthetic a priori and the logical a priori and consequently confused the beautiful and the intellectual.

Vasconcelos had read Kant's Critique of Judgment (as well

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[34] Bar-Lewaw, on. cit., p. 90.

[35] José Vasconcelos, Estética, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1959), III, 1202.

as the other Critiques) and concluded that Kant saw aesthetic pleasure as subjective. Vasconcelos could not agree with this, insisting that aesthetic pleasure depends on a judgment which "takes possession, apprehends or rejects (its object) and not only according to pleasure and pain . . . because the soul exercises a free choice in its preferences." He contends that if we know by means of taste, then the aesthetic judgment is cognitive (i.e., not subjective) but in its own proper way and not intellectual.[36] In this section of the Estética, Vasconcelos seems to be saying, in effect, that the knower's reaction of pleasure and pain is not the only aspect when one is faced with an aesthetic object. Pleasure and pain are a part of the process but Vasconcelos insists that we also make a cognitive judgment which belongs to the aesthetic order as a part of our interaction with the object. Thus, we go beyond the subjective judgment which Kant enunciates in the Critique.

Without allowing this discussion to cloud the perspective of the entirety of this work, we have to question whether Vasconcelos understood the concept of "subjective" in Kant's aesthetic. For Kant, the object in aesthetic judgment is not important but the representation of the object to the mind of

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[36] Ibid., p. 1200.

the subject is the important element. It is the object as experienced, not the object itself, which evokes feelings of aesthetic pleasure. Kant's distinction of the noumenal and phenomenal world must be kept in mind because he insists that aesthetic experience is the experience of the noumenal world as it is filtered through the phenomenal world. He also insists that aesthetic experience must be a pure experience, i.e., an untainted, uncorrupted experience of the noumenal world. Given these conditions of the Kantian metaphysic, the mind must act passively or subjectively. But we should note that these conditions are present and necessary before the reaction of pleasure or pain. Vasconcelos seems to emphasize only the latter and ignore the former.

Consequently, when he speaks about preferences and choices in the aesthetic judgment, he seems to be unaware of the necessity of the purity of experience in the Kantian aesthetic. For Kant, once an object has been "objectified" or determined by consciousness it is no longer a pure thing-in-itself and the experience of the object is no longer a pure experience. Once cognitive elements are allowed to enter the aesthetic experience, an impurity is introduced and the experience of the noumenal is not free to be what it properly is.[37] Thus, according to the conditions of the Kantian aesthetic --

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[37] Robert L. Zimmerman, "Kant: The Aesthetic Judgment", in Robert Paul Wolff, ed., Kant: A Collection of Critical Essays (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967), p. 391.

conditions which Vasconcelos seems unaware of -- the aesthetic judgment cannot be intellectual but only subjective.

Finally, Vasconcelos took from Kant the notion of the synthetic a priori judgment. Because of the a priori form or category, understanding reduces sensations to a unity in the Vasconcelian scheme. But Vasconcelos makes a radical departure from Kant in the use of the a priori category. Whereas Kant envisaged the a priori forms in the area of reason and of rational knowledge, Vasconcelos employs the a priori form in emotional and aesthetic knowledge, in this case manifesting implicitly his distrust of the rational process.[38] And whereas Kant held that the noumena remain unknowable, Vasconcelos posits a consubstantiality of emotion and emotional knowledge with the essence of things.

Thus, although Vasconcelos gives Kant credit for developing the a priori forms in the intellectual and logical orders and admits their validity in these orders, he departs from him on the question of the application of these forms to human knowledge. Ahumada points out that Vasconcelos regards knowledge "as essentially more empirical than Kant" meaning by

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[38] Kant included certain a priori "regulative ideas" in The Critique of Judgment. For Kant, however, "regulative ideas" are empty and not informative (even if useful) unlike "constitutive ideas." The former are only for reason (Vernunft) and the latter for "understanding" (Verstand). There is no evidence in the literature that Vasconcelos was aware of this distinction of Kant's. Even if he had been the concept of God (Absolute) would have been a "constitutive idea" for Vasconcelos according to Kantian terminology.

"empirical" not only scientific observation but also the activity of the emotional nature of man which orders and arranges the objects of reality according to the demands of spiritual and spiritual rhythm.[39] In this process of ordering and arranging, the a priori categories of Kant enter into play but this is on the level of aesthetics in human knowledge, not intellect. Kant, therefore, exercised a great influence on a critical part of Vasconcelos' thought; but because of his principle of rejecting strict rational/intellectual processes, Vasconcelos went a step beyond Kant's concepts and added another dimension to his own philosophical thought, a system whose complexity we shall see in more detail in Chapter Three.

Why was it necessary for Vasconcelos to alter radically the ideas of Kant? Three possible reasons may be considered. The first, which we have already mentioned above is Vasconcelos' consistent adherence to the idea that reason is divisive in its function. Some of the inconsistencies are obvious in Vasconcelos' system but he never wavered on this principle. In the second place, it is obvious that the world of reality, i.e., Kant's noumena, must come or be put into contact with man if Vasconcelos' theories of monism and the homogeneity of all existence were to be perfected in his philosophical system.

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[39] Ahumada, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

Thus, Vasconcelos had to reject the unknowability of the noumena and use the *a priori* categories as applied to aesthetics. In the third place, it may be argued, but with some reservations, that the Kantian system with its doctrine of the hidden noumena was untenable in its entirety for Vasconcelos from a religious point of view. The complete acceptance of the Kantian system would have meant for Vasconcelos the rejection of metaphysics as well as any inquiry into scientific, philosophical religion. This would have placed Vasconcelos in the very same position he had been in with positivism but for different reasons. In the Vasconcelian system the noumena had to be knowable: Therefore, that part of Kant had to be rejected. But at the same time, the *a priori* categories allowed him to explain "in aesthetic terms . . . the transformation of reality by imagination."[40] Therefore, this part of Kant could be accepted and used as one of the elements of the system of aesthetic monism.

These, then, are the major influences on the mind and work of Vasconcelos, especially the thinkers who helped in the

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

formation of his religious philosophy.[41] Chapter Three will be devoted to a more precise and detailed exposition of his total philosophical scheme. We have maintained throughout this work that this philosophy culminates in a religious aspect, i.e., in the concept of the Absolute. In a later chapter, therefore, we shall consider this aspect. But for the time being, we shall delve further into his philosophy.

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[41] We have not discussed any possible Nazi or Communistic influence on Vasconcelos in this section simply because it is not clear that they exercised any influence on his philosophical thought. We mentioned these ideas previously in this chapter to indicate more completely the total personality of the man, Vasconcelos.

III

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF VASCONCELOS

Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of chapter three is a survey of the philosophy of José Vasconcelos. As we have mentioned before, there are several excellent works on this part of Vasconcelos' writings, either in the form of expositions or in the form of commentaries; this chapter will not be a mere duplication of these works. Because of the general nature of our study there are limitations that we must place on any discussion of his philosophy. The pervading view of this work is a religious one and for that reason Vasconcelos' philosophy cannot be covered in intimate detail lest the religious aspect get lost in the profound depth and multitude of concepts that go to make up his philosophy.

Consequently, although the following pages on his philosophy may seem sparse compared to the work of Augustín Basave or the theses/commentaries of Rodolfo Ahumada and Margarita Ponce, we must realize that they have been severely limited by intention. For that reason we have entitled this chapter "An Analysis" in the sense of a survey or over-view

to indicate to the reader that we intend to speak only of those basic elements of his philosophy that contribute directly to the understanding of his religious stance and those which will be of most value in the discussion of his Todología in the following chapter. With this discussion, then, the primary quest of this work--an understanding of the religious thinking of Vasconcelos--will be possible of attainment.

The Vasconcelian corpus is truly enormous, comprising his books, pamphlets and articles; but of all these writings there are, at the most, five or six published books which he intended as expositions of his philosophical thinking. It is these works that this chapter is concerned with and they include Pitágoras: Una teoría del ritmo (1921), Tratado de metafísica (1929), Etica (1932), Estética (1935), El monismo estético (1918) and Todología: filosofía de la coordinación (1952). This chapter will attempt to condense and synthesize this part of his thought.

Consequently, some of Vasconcelos' more popular works will not be discussed. Much of his thought that is specifically personal (e.g., his autobiography) or social and political (e.g., La raza cósmica) will not appear in these pages, not because these are unimportant or lesser works, but simply because they do not form part of what we term his

"philosophical" works nor are they as useful for tracing the development of his thought as are his works of philosophy.

This chapter, then, will have two main parts, each with a short introductory section: 1) the first will be a search for the foundational principle of his philosophy: 2) and the second will consider the essence of his philosophical method, the aesthetic a priori.

1. The Foundational Principle of the Philosophy of Vasconcelos

Introduction to this Section

The first task in this discussion of his philosophy is to try to determine the most basic principle of his thought. This is not an easy task for very few, if any, of the commentators on his philosophy have seriously undertaken the work of trying to determine the one, central fact of his thinking, but rather have been concerned with listing the elements of his thought that are important to an understanding of his philosophy.

This task of isolating one principle is further complicated because there are several principles which appear to have an important place in his scheme of philosophy. Thus, it is critical in the process of ranking that we do not minimize the other parts of his thought. The one principle which we have selected and will try to defend appears to be the most

basic and universal that pervades all of his thought; but this is not to say, for example, that within the Estética there are not other elements which make Vasconcelos' philosophical aesthetics intelligible.

In order to try to arrive at the crucial principle of his thought, it might be of some help to sketch or outline the several constantly recurring ideas which give focus to Vasconcelos' way of thinking. In general, Vasconcelos' thought may be characterized by the ideas of development and progression. By this we mean that for him everything in reality, i.e., the material, sensible world as well as the spiritual world, seeks to return to its origin. He does not seem to explain this in strictly evolutionary terms and he objects to those who would view his philosophy as simply a branch of evolution.[1] He viewed this progression, rather, in terms of the higher level of existence drawing or compelling the lower form of existence to a higher level. He is not perfectly clear here and even the term he likes to use, "revulsion", does not add much clarity. But in his mind, this process takes place from above. "The higher levels of existence transform the lower and raise them progressively to more advanced forms of being."[2]

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[1]José Vasconcelos, Metafísica, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1959), III, 570-571.

[2]Rodolfo Ahumada, The Philosophies of Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos with Special Emphasis on their Concept of Value (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1965), p. 86.

Another general characteristic of his thought has to do with the important place man plays in this process of return and development. Intimately connected with the role of man is the idea that everything is destined to progress towards and attain the source of its origin. As Vasconcelos sees the things of existence, there is disharmony or heterogeneity present among all these elements. The grand design of all his philosophy terminates in a state of harmony or homogeneity which man, as the active agent, produces by his peculiar activity.

The first evidence that a fundamental principle in Vasconcelos' philosophy might exist comes from a type of compulsive feeling as one reads through his philosophical writings that this must be the case. This is hardly a rational proof for the existence of such a principle but it does indicate that a feeling or an intuition tends to make one think that everything in Vasconcelos' philosophy leads to such an underlying principle. If such a principle can be discovered it would make our task of analysing his work that much easier since we would have a fundament to which we could constantly refer and something with which to check our understanding of his philosophical work.

There is also an element of convenience that prompts our search for this one principle. The philosophy of

Vasconcelos is so complicated in its scheme and depends on the understanding of so many details in each area of study that it would be of inestimable help to the student of his work if we could point to the one concept that underlies all these details.

From the point of view of his religious thought, it would aid our understanding if we could isolate only one principle. It makes some sense to search for one principle that unites a monistic thought pattern. What we hope to show is that Vasconcelos defends the position that reality progresses from whatever state we find it in to the Plotinian notion of the One or to the Vasconcelian Christian concept of the Absolute. This religious/philosophical quest could be more easily defended if there is one and only one principle that pervades this inevitable development to the Absolute.

At this point in our study, consequently, we propose that the one underlying, foundational principle of the Vasconcelian system is a particular concept of unity. However, defining this unity is not as simple as making the statement of the principle of unity. The problem is that we are not involved in a type of unity that we might label "logical" in the sense that everything in existence, whether spiritual or material, is unified with definable and perceivable connections. We are not able to point to the unity of this system and see that Object A is connected to Object B and so on all the way to Object Z. The

unity of Vasconcelos, in other words, is not based on such an organic structure.

Our understanding of this unity has to be grasped within the particular kind of method Vasconcelos employs, a method that Basave describes as mystico-emotive. He cautions us: "In his system we should not look for a logical unity but a feeling of unity. This is the major difficulty with which he struggled in what he wanted to study."[3] This fundamental principle of unity, then, is best described as a unity of feeling, a unity that we intuit more on the emotional level than on the rational level. Under the guidance of this principle we have to operate on the same level on which Vasconcelos himself operates, the level in which we sense the totality of existence.

Arguments for the principle of unity. -- The first argument for this principle is based on the elements of energy and rhythm in every being. Each object in existence possesses its own particular type of energy and this is the basic component and the primary data of consciousness for the object of reality for Vasconcelos. The energy of each thing, however, is manifested in different ways, depending on the proper rhythm of each particular thing. He distinguishes a particular rhythm

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[3] Augustín Basave (Fernández del Valle), La filosofía de José Vasconcelos (el hombre y su sistema) (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1958), p. 50.

on three levels: the atom, the cell and human consciousness.[4] The constant material of these levels is energy by which each level acquires and maintains its unity; thus, by means of the progression of energy through the different cycles or levels, the unity of all existence is achieved.[5]

Another argument for the principle of unity can be drawn from the texts of Vasconcelos. He tells us in his Metafísica in the summary of the "Transcendental Mechanic" of his system that through energy, existence acquires its own unity; and a few lines later he explains that existence is both real and a unity even though existence becomes individualized and takes on many forms in the process of reintegration with the Absolute.[6] Further, he tells us in the prologue to his Estética that everything is being and as being it participates in the one same substance depending on its proximity to the Absolute; we discover this unity in our own existence but it is encountered in a condition of separation and disharmony. The task of the philosopher, then, is one of explaining reintegration.[7]

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[4]Vasconcelos, Metafísica, p. 525

[5]Ibid., pp. 570-576.

[6]Ibid., pp. 570-572.

[7]José Vasconcelos, Estética, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1959), III, 1121.

Another series of arguments comes from the writers and commentators on the Vasconcelian system. John Haddox argues that Vasconcelos had to have such elements as unity and synthesis as well as heterogeneity because the world he encountered was in itself a unity with a variety of manifested forms.[8] In another place he tells us: "Unity, Vasconcelos maintains, is the supreme law of philosophy; but it must be a unity which respects heterogeneity -- the varied character of the world known and of the faculties by which it is known."[9]

Augustín Basave maintains that the system of Aesthetic Monism was motivated by Vasconcelos' attempts to explicate the concept of unity. He says: "By thirsting after unity, he worked eagerly in constructing a complete cosmovision . . . He was not able nor did he wish to limit himself to one particular perspective because a desire of reintegrating himself with the Absolute possessed his whole fibre."[10] A few pages later, when he discusses the "concurrent" method of Vasconcelos, he makes the point that the whole purpose of Vasconcelos the philosopher is to draw out the unity contained within the multiplicity of the world.

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[8] John H. Haddox, Vasconcelos of Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 21.

[9] Ibid., p. 15.

[10] Basave, op. cit., p. 52.

Finally, we can argue for the foundational principle of unity in Vasconcelos' system from the religious aspect. Vasconcelos' adoption of the Plotinian concept of emanation leads his philosophy back to the Absolute based on the desire of Being to reintegrate itself with its source. The idea of the existential unity of all things known by man through emotion and feeling is a most convenient base to explain not only the descent from the One, but especially the intricacies of the return to the One or the Absolute.

Arguments can be made for other ideas within his system as the most important of his principles but of all these ideas there does not seem to be any that stand apart so clearly in his own words as that of unity. The conviction that there is a unity to existence, we argue, pervades his work, gives life and meaning to his monistic concepts, and was the constant motivation for the construction of his system.

Consequences of the principle of unity. --What are the effects of this principle for our particular study? Above all, we should begin at this point to acquire a more complete notion of the philosophical method Vasconcelos employs. We have referred in several places to his system as that of "Aesthetic Monism" and we have suggested the implications this has for a specialized form of emotional knowledge. The principle of unity helps to draw out these implications even more; now we

can begin to see that the aesthetic method of Vasconcelos is a highly personal and subjective approach to philosophy based upon a particular form of knowledge.

This is an emotional knowledge which surpasses rational knowledge and he wishes to ". . . invite us . . . to immerse ourselves in his sentiment, attitude and feelings along with him . . . he proposes . . . with all his heart . . . to convey to us his over-all state of felling and to convey it to us by means of aesthetic emotion and the work of art."[11] However, Vasconcelos has a very precise meaning of "emotional knowledge" and sometimes refers to it as "aesthetic" knowledge in his writings. We will have a better understanding of "aesthetic" knowledge if we briefly look at his approach to the general problem of knowledge and the types of knowledge that he distinguishes.

According to Vasconcelos, knowledge in general has several characteristics which apply universally. First, knowledge has the function of changing the existence of the object which is known. When the human person knows a particular existing thing, it means that the thing assumes a different and higher level in the process of development and return to the Absolute. At the same time, there is a change

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[11] Ibid., p. 50.

in the knower because of the way he reacts to the environment. Because of his relation to the external world, the knower becomes more personally involved in the process of aesthetic knowledge than he does in rational or logical knowledge. Vasconcelos rejected the latter because he considered it to be impersonal, i.e., it converts the personal (the relation of the knowing person to his world) into the impersonal (adequation, but not identification or absorbtion, of subject and object.)[12] By defining knowledge as a reaction to the environment, Vasconcelos includes the personal being of the knower in his relationship with the world. Thus, "we know as human beings with all our faculties alive, not as pure intellects."[13]

These words of Vasconcelos suggest that his concept of the kinds of knowledge will include more than merely the intellect. Earlier (ch. 2, p. 6) we made the observation that he would try to develop a kind of knowledge that included the emotional part of man so that he could propose a theory which will allow man to come into contact with and unify all of reality. Here his reference to "all our faculties" involved in knowledge seems to emphasize this effort and it

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[12]Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1214.

[13]Haddox, op. cit., p. 26.

indicates that Vasconcelos thinks that more than intellect or any one faculty is involved in his concept of knowledge.

Vasconcelos seems to be trying to combine many elements in this concept: the knowing person, all his faculties, the personal approach to knowledge, and interaction and contact with the environment which is distinct from the personal knower. It is very difficult to bring all these facets of the problem under one concept of knowledge, especially since Vasconcelos himself seems to make no effort to do so, but we shall develop the ideas of aesthetic knowledge later in this chapter (pp. 18-20). Without imposing artificial constructs on the thought of Vasconcelos, we might hazard a comparison between the way Vasconcelos develops the elements of his theory of knowledge and the way John E. Smith develops his ideas of the elements of experience in his book, Experience and God.[14] We are not saying, of course, that there is a direct relationship between Vasconcelos and Smith but if we can appreciate what Smith means by the involvement of the experiencer in experienced material, then we might make better sense of what Vasconcelos means by knowledge as personal involvement of the knower with all of his faculties.

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[14]John E. Smith, Experience and God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 21-45. One important and relevant contribution that Smith makes is to distinguish two types of empiricism: "classical empiricism" represented by Locke, Hume, and the positivists and "radical empiricism" represented by James, Whitehead, Dewey and himself. The former meaning unfortunately has tended to become almost normative in common usage.

In these pages, Smith suggests that we can recover the value and authenticity of experience if we realize that experience is an encounter between one capable of having an encounter and some material that is there to be encountered. For Smith, experience is a product of the intersection and interaction of these two elements; if we interpret experience as something only in the mind or consciousness of the experiencer, then "subjective" and "objective" labels are inevitable. Experience as a "product" makes such labels unnecessary. Further, the experiencer is also a part of reality and does not approach what is to be experienced as a "tabula rasa" who merely reflects in a passive way what he encounters in reality. "The one who experiences refracts as well as reflects, and it is through such refraction that the material of encounter comes to be 'taken' or encountered."[15] Such interpretation of the experience is possible, Smith tells us, because "The total nature of the being who experiences enters into the transaction, which means that the being is not simply a theoretical knower, but one who lives in and through experience . . . "[16]

Vasconcelos' interpretation of knowledge seems to be inclined in this same direction. He thinks that in aesthetic knowledge especially the knower cannot be separated from what is to be known, that there must be personal involvement of the

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[15] Ibid., p. 25.

[16] Ibid.

knower through his reaction to the environment and that the complete being of the knower must be operative with "all (his) faculties alive."[1] Thus, this first characteristic of knowledge for Vasconcelos has a certain resemblance to Smith's insistence that experience is a vital and engaging encounter between experiencer and reality. For Vasconcelos, knowledge changes the knower because he is totally attentive to the known element; he does not simply reflect passively what he encounters but he reacts personally to reality.

Secondly, all knowledge begins and works with the fundamental material of sensation. The world is real for Vasconcelos, and even though the mind brings certain categories to bear on the world in the process of knowing, the world is a reality and exists independently of the knower. And finally, knowledge is pragmatic in the sense that it leads to something else, i.e., a higher and more perfect form of existence.

There are, for Vasconcelos, many forms of knowledge which he enumerates in his Estética[17] and as summarized by Haddox.[18] On the one hand he approaches a classification of knowledge based on the cycles or levels of reality comprising

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[17]Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1240

[18]Haddox, op. cit., p. 26.

the atom, the cell and consciousness. But it is also possible to classify his kinds of knowledge as intellectual, ethical and aesthetic.

Intellectual knowledge. --Intellectual knowledge produces its content by the interaction of the matter of sensation with the proper a priori forms of cognition which are brought to bear on the objects of sense. These forms organize the world of sense, produce logical patterns of thought and allow the knower to contact the material world. The result is an objective but essentially static world intuited under the forms of space and time and the intellectual a priori forms. The static nature of this process is described by Haddox: "The intellect is, of itself, cold and empty, analytic, indeterminate, and lacking in vitality, purpose, direction."[19] The object itself remains unknown by intellectual knowledge, as it does in the Kantian scheme.

Ethical knowledge. -- The idea of knowledge as the reaction to the environment is exemplified in ethical knowledge because the intellect of the Knowing subject is confronted with some object which is judged as good or evil. The problem is that the will may not always follow what reason dictates. Just as all rational knowledge is deficient for Vasconcelos, so rational

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[19] Ibid., p. 15.

ethics is insufficient to motivate the will of man. To overcome this insufficiency, he adds the element of emotive-aesthetics to ethical considerations.[20]

The ideal in ethical knowledge is a combination of the two tendencies of man's emotional and moral nature: selfishness and disinterestedness, i.e., correct ethical knowledge involves an emotional response that satisfies the needs and desires of the individual in response to his situation. At the same time, however, the individual should transcend this aspect of mere good and evil by following after the aesthetic inclination and search after the beautiful in its intrinsic perfection.[21]

The artist does this type of thing in his work when he takes some material and imposes a form upon it so that a new creation of beauty comes to be. Thus, just as the sculptor takes the material of clay and imposes the form of a bird into it to create a beautiful object, so in the ethical consideration ethics and aesthetics become one when the virtuous man creates a life of beauty by including the aesthetic consideration in his deliberations. We progress to a higher level of existence for we have moved beyond the mere considera-

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[20]José Vasconcelos, Etica, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1959), III, 868.

[21]Haddox, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

tions of moral judgment and have turned " . . . to the intrinsic perfection of the beautiful."[22] Thus, in ethical knowledge the morality of the decision depends on its ability to transcend existence and remove man from "chaos and animality."[23]

Aesthetic knowledge. --Our consideration of aesthetic knowledge in this section has to be restricted to a certain purpose because it is really the heart and soul of the operation of the aesthetic a priori, the subject matter of the last section of this chapter. We treat it here only to show that Vasconcelos' primary principle of unity which pervades his philosophical thinking is attained by his use of this particular form of knowledge.

Aesthetic knowledge is difficult enough to understand in itself but some of the commentators produce more confusion by the several different names they apply to this category. The most unfortunate name for this knowledge seems to be that of "emotional" knowledge, a literal translation and a perfectly proper and precise word in Spanish when Vasconcelos uses it at times (conocimiento emocional). The connotations of this word in English, however, make it an inappropriate term in the

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[22] Ibid., p. 28.

[23] Genaro Fernández MacGregor, Vasconcelos (México: Ed. de la Sría. de educación pública, 1942), p. xxvii.

Vasconcelian scheme. The more acceptable and most accurate word, it seems to us, is a choice of either aesthetic (aesthetical) or aesthetic/emotive as the term to describe what we are talking about. We shall limit ourselves to the use of one or the other of these.

For Vasconcelos, aesthetic knowledge manifests a high degree of precision and stability and for this reason he argued against those who criticized this kind of knowledge as vague and confused.[24] Aesthetic knowledge plays an especially important part in his method for he sees it as resolving the problem of the synthesis of the heterogeneous: "The artist, without abstracting, incorporates themes in a union in which the significance of the parts is enlivened."[25] Within this activity, Vasconcelos saw the essence of aesthetic knowledge as unitative because it integrates the complex whole into an organic Total by giving all the heterogeneous elements meaning and by elevating them so that they participate in human consciousness.[26]

Aesthetic knowledge is emotional knowledge but it includes more elements than just the emotions. As all know-

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[24]Ahumada, op. cit., p. 100.

[25]Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1278.

[26]MacGregor, op. cit., p. xxv.

ledge, it operates through the senses and intellect; Vasconcelos adds the element of emotion to this process because only emotion gives Being (the object) meaning. This is a most critical point in the whole of Vasconcelos' approach to the aesthetic function and it stems from his firm conviction that only emotion can approach, touch and penetrate the noumena, which, in that part of the Kantian philosophy adopted by Vasconcelos, remains unknowable through sense and reason. Emotion is necessary for this kind of knowledge. "To know is not to reason about things but to feel them. Knowledge is an emotional intuition with an aesthetic character which apprehends the concrete by a spiritual 'feeling-with'."[27]

The purpose of this sketch of the types of knowledge is to show that unity is the foundation of Vasconcelos' thought; it should also convince us that he employs a peculiar if not a unique method in his philosophy, i.e., aesthetic/emotive knowledge. He indicates this when he says that philosophy is "a qualitative synthesis, a gradual organization of our sensations with a unity analogous to a melodic phrase."[28] The details of this method will be treated in the next section on the aesthetic a priori.

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[27] Basave, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

[28] Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1214.

2. The Aesthetic A Priori in the Philosophy of Vasconcelos

Introduction to this section

This section may well be classified as the very center of the Vasconcelian synthesis. Vasconcelos is a complicated and difficult philosopher; the difficulties come sometimes from his inconsistency, sometimes from his lack of precision in using key words or phrases but most of the difficulties arise because of the huge problem he has undertaken to resolve through his philosophy: the synthesis and unification of all existence in the Absolute. The aesthetic a priori is the method by which this synthesis takes place and, therefore, the understanding of his philosophy and especially the understanding of his religious thought in which the Absolute is the central focus demands a thorough investigation of the method by which all of this is accomplished.

In order to prepare ourselves for some of the difficulties we shall encounter in the aesthetic a priori, we should note well some of the reflections of John Haddox in his work on Vasconcelos. Haddox tries to ease the task of the reader who approaches the study of philosophy with a logical and rational frame of mind. Vasconcelos has referred to the philosopher as "A poet with a system" and Haddox points out that the problem in understanding Vasconcelos is that in

his writings he has emphasized the former to the exclusion of the latter ". . . so that one can enjoy the insights of the poet without being able to discover the system of the philosopher." A great deal of the attractiveness of Vasconcelos lies in his highly personal and emotional style but this may well be an obstacle to those who are used to logical precision so that ". . . it may be difficult -- if not impossible -- to feel with him, to be touched by or to respond to his poetic prose."[29] These comments of Haddox should help us to see that within the poetic, literary and musical references of Vasconcelos there is a method to his philosophical system.

We will approach this section on the aesthetic a priori from the point of view of problem/solution, rather than simply provide a commentary on the aesthetic or a schematization of its contents. Consequently, this section has the following division: 1) in the first part we will attempt to present the problem that Vasconcelos wrestled with in his philosophical thinking; 2) in the second part we shall consider his solution to the problem which, in essence, comprises the substance of his method, the aesthetic a priori.

The problem: existential heterogeneity. -- The basic problem that Vasconcelos faced was the diversity and multiplicity of

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[29]Haddox, op. cit., p. 40.

the existing world. Convinced of the concept of the unity of things, his own mind was faced with the opposition manifested in the universe. By the time he actually got to the point of working out a solution to this problem, we should remember that he had been exposed to a variety of philosophical views as a member of the Ateneo de la Juventud and through his own studies. He had earlier rejected Positivism because it left no room for the realm of the spirit, a realm that was as real to his mind as the realm of physical objects. He had rejected the Kantian conclusion about the unknowability of the neoumenal world although he had accepted the Kantian a priori character of the forms of cognition.

He had also rejected any intellectualistic, rationalistic, or logical approach to philosophy because these approaches still left the mind searching for agreement and unity with reality. In an article he expressed the problem in these words: "The difficulty of philosophy begins when the elements of a projected synthesis are not homogeneous but heterogeneous . . . What is the secret of the reunion, the unification, the reintegration of heterogeneous elements in their active, vital forms?"[30] In devising his own solution he first set out to present the problem in great detail, beginning at

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[30] José Vasconcelos, "Etapa de armonía", Logos, I, 3 (September, 1951), p. 23; quoted in Haddox, op. cit., p. 13.

the most basic point he could conceive of, the substantial constituent of reality.

For Vasconcelos, the most basic element of reality is energy; we have spoken earlier (ch. 2, p.) of how he was influenced by the science of his day in reaching this conclusion. In the Metafísica he conceives of energy as an eternal but ever acting force which manifests itself in the world of reality in many forms, each having its own proper rhythm.[31] He sees energy as the fundamental principles of all existence and its extension is from the lowest, smallest "monad" type of existence, all the way to the Absolute. He feels that man can detect such a degree of extension through his power of memory: man can recall the past and through his operation in the present join this whole series to the future.

Rhythm manifests various units of existence which Vasconcelos refers to as levels or cycles of reality. He distinguishes three levels in his Metafísica, the atom, the cell (the biological level) and consciousness (the level of the human person, personality and human will). On the level of the atom, energy is manifested in a uniform, more or less mechanical and non-teleological fashion; the characteristic

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[31] Vasconcelos, Metafísica, pp. 421-551.

act of this level is that of repetition.

The biological level, in contrast to the first level, is an act capable of finality. On this level, the cell itself ". . . is the central origin of impulses (whereas the atom is acted upon from external powers) and moreover, such impulses tend to organize themselves in order to attain definite purposes, such as nutrition, defense, etc."[32] The energy of this level manifested by rhythm is more organized and exhibits a greater degree of unity than the first level.

The third and highest level is that of the human soul or consciousness. Vasconcelos claims that consciousness has a creative power to produce transcendental modes of existence. The origin of consciousness is situated within the image and it attains mind or spirit on a level above life in the hierarchy of being.[33]

Consciousness, for Vasconcelos, contains all the forces for translating the physical, biological levels of existence into the immaterial world, thus elevating their level of existence, changing their direction and giving them new meaning.[34] He tells us that man fulfills a cosmic,

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[32] Ibid., p. 534.

[33] Ahumada, op. cit., p. 163.

[34] Vasconcelos, Metafísica, p. 563.

transcendental function by converting the object to an image and transposing the entirety of creation to a level different from the physical, one approaching the immortal and the divine: thus man saves the world. "The entire universe, coming into contact with our hearts, leaves the impression of a thirst for the divine and changes its rhythm to that of the spirit; the image acts as the sign of this conversion process."[35] Consciousness, then, possesses a creative quality of energy which can perform this process of conversion within man for the entirety of existence.

The movement from one level to another is not explained by a theory of gradual and even evolution. These movements are more like "leaps" from one level to the other.[36] They are explained by Vasconcelos with the term "revulsion" which denotes an "instantaneous concentration of energy to produce a distinct and violent effect, (it) is the progression from atomics to biology and then from this to consciousness."[37] Every revulsion is based on the particular nature of energy which has an organizational capacity. The move from the atom to the cell on the biological level is a move from the indeterminate expression of energy to an expression which is

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[35] Ibid., p. 564.

[36] Haddox, op. cit., p. 25.

[37] MacGregor, op. cit., p. xxvi.

purposive. When the revulsion occurs between the biological and the aesthetic level (consciousness), energy is expressed as indeterminate (i.e., free on this level) ". . . yet it is not inexpressive but, on the contrary, it is the language itself of expression: the voice of the immaterial realities like the voice in artistic emotion or in music, etc. . . ."[38]

There is a proper rhythm for each of these three levels of existence and every object within a particular level maifests its own proper rhythm. The heterogeneity that Vasconcelos perceives in existence stems precisely from the different rhythmical character of each object which puts one object in opposition to another because each has its own peculiar rhythmical characteristic. The problem, then, is in terms of uniquely different pulsations of rhythm that the objects of existence manifest and which in turn produce a heterogeneous state of reality or opposition. On some occasions Vasconcelos manifests either an inconsistency, which is not an infrequent occurence, or simply a change of mind when he refers to currents of energy rather than the concept of rhythm in each object.

This heterogeneity could only be resolved, Vasconcelos felt, by a synthesis which would resolve the rhythmic

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[38]Vasconcelos, Metafísica, p. 532.

opposition. There are two reasons which indicate the necessity for a synthesis of this opposition. First, his system is founded on unity as a basic, elemental principle. Therefore, the diversity between one object and another must be resolved if he is to be consistent with this fundmental principle.

Secondly, the Plotinian concept of the ascent of reality to the Absolute led him to conclude that there is an essential and natural reason for the resolution of opposition, i.e., he looks upon things as having ". . . a tendency to free themselves from their own proper movement by realizing the course of the interior movement of the soul."[39] Basave reflects this idea when he says that "In aesthetics, matter desires to transform itself into spiritual substance."[40] As a consequence of this desire, objects themselves seem to manifest a drive and a movement based on energy toward more complicated yet integrated levels of rhythm.[41] Thus, as reality expresses this drive in its upward development, opposition must and will be overcome so that a new, higher and final harmony will be established, or, as Ahumada expresses it, "The substantial universe must be changed in

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[39] Ibid., pp. 473-474, 576.

[40] Basave, op. cit., p. 268.

[41] Haddox, op. cit., p. 25.

its meaning and direction, i.e., it must be elevated to higher forms of being."[42]

The solution of Vasconcelos. -- With the problem defined in this fashion, we can now proceed to investigate its solution as proposed by Vasconcelos in the elements of the aesthetic a priori. We are at the heart of his philosophy and we should remember that the "poet with a system" is here at work in the most intricate part of his thought. In other words the rationality of the process may not be as clear as his poetic intuitions because Vasconcelos will be using the language, the phrases and the similes of the fine arts as he works out this solution. Thus, aesthetic pleasure and beauty will appear in an elevated position in his aesthetic a priori because we are involved in the area of the spirit, not logic or external sense; and in the realm of the spirit pleasure is evoked when we sense, intuit or feel the rhythmic development of existence. Consequently, creative insight is a more apt description of the presentation of Vasconcelos' aesthetics than rational, logical argumentation and our own critical sense must be aware of this approach as we work through the solution with him.[43]

There are a variety of elements to be considered in

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[42] Ahumada, op. cit., p. 82.

[43] Ibid., p. 161.

the method of the aesthetic a priori, some of which we have discussed before, such as 1) energy, 2) rhythm, and 3) the insufficiency of intellectual knowledge. There are other elements that are more directly involved in the aesthetic and which are developed and explained by Vasconcelos in his Estética: 4) imagination/phantasy, 5) the image, 6) emotion (from the point of view of what it adds to aesthetic knowledge as compared to intellectual knowledge without emotion), and 7) the a priori forms of the aesthetic: rhythm, harmony, melody and counterpoint.

These latter a priori forms are usually separated, even isolated, by other writers on Vasconcelos under the title of something like, "The Principles of the Aesthetic." It is our feeling, however, that at least all of these seven elements work together in an intricate and balanced way to explain the problem of the synthesis of the heterogeneous, even though some of them have been mentioned earlier in separate places unconnected with the aesthetic a priori. Consequently, we shall consider all of these elements in the presentation of Vasconcelos' solution to the problem.

Energy. -- As we have indicated in several places in this work, the science that Vasconcelos knew in his day had convinced him that the substantial element or constituent of existence was energy. Our first impressions of reality at its most

basic level and all our intuitions indicate energy as the prime element of reality.

Rhythm. -- Next, his initial insight as regards rhythm was from Pythagoras, but he added his own interpretation so that he could develop a concept of rhythm that was dynamic and forward-looking, as opposed to the previous static, numerical qualities of rhythm. In the aesthetic a priori rhythm takes on the character of an instrument because Vasconcelos conceives it as the manifestation of the energy within the various levels of existence; furthermore, it is important for the aesthetic a priori because it includes the area of the spirit in man, i.e., a spiritual rhythm exists in human consciousness. As the manifestation of energy, then, rhythm indicates to us that every object has its own proper constitution exhibiting its own unique rhythmic pulsations. Vasconcelos feels that this is the indicator of the element of opposition in reality and homogeneity will be produced in the aesthetic only by a resolution of such opposition. This is the task of man the philosopher and thinker, for only man, through human consciousness and the instruments of the aesthetic a priori, has the ability to transpose the other levels of reality to higher levels of existence. Man, for Vasconcelos, is "a being of two aspects, situated between the material world with its aerial spaces and

the immaterial world made up of clear spaces."[44] He is able to penetrate the essence of each object and convert its rhythmic pulsation in such a way as to harmonize it with his own spiritual rhythm.

Insufficiency of intellectual knowledge. -- Vasconcelos maintains throughout his writings, not only in the Metafísica but even in the Lógica Orgánica, that intellectual, rational knowledge separates the knower from the object known. He admits that through sensation an image of the object is produced by man and he also allows that there is true knowledge in this process. His objection to intellectual knowledge stems not from the fact that it does not know but from the fact that its comprehension of the known object is too severely limited to be of value in solving the problem of diversity in the universe. Intellectual knowledge simply does not penetrate to the essence of the object -- in truth there is no essential contact between conscious man and another level of existence -- and the state of separation, opposition and diversity between man and object continues to exist. This is and remains the noumenal world of Kant and as such it remains unknowable. Homogeneity, unity, and a synthesis of reality can never be reached with an instrument

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[44] Margarita Ponce Torres, La Metafísica de José Vasconcelos (México: Univ. Iberoamericana, Incorporada a la Univ. Nacional Autónoma de México, Tesis, 1962), p. 172.

which is separative and divisive, i.e., by reason as Vasconcelos understands it.

Imagination and Phantasy. -- When we begin to consider the question of imagination and phantasy as elements of the aesthetic a priori, we are dealing with a part of the aesthetic that we have not yet considered. There is a difficulty in isolating exactly what Vasconcelos means by imagination and phantasy and there is also a problem in trying to determine which one of these plays the most important role in the aesthetic.

At this point in our study the best way to solve this difficulty seems to involve our attempt ". . . to feel with him . . . and to respond to his poetic prose."[45] In other words, we should not expect logical precision in the questions of phantasy and imagination because Vasconcelos is working more on the level of creative insight and intuition rather than on the level of formal logic. Consequently, our analysis of this section involves a close look at what he says about these elements and then an attempt to summarize what his creativity seems to be saying.

In the beginning of his treatment of these elements he makes a distinction between creative imagination and phantasy and tells us that this distinction is significant. He views

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[45] Haddox, op. cit., p. 40.

the operational level of creative imagination to be on a lower or primary level where the images of creative imagination try to form a world like the real world but just barely superior to it; it is important to remember that its end product is myth.

Phantasy is best exemplified, according to Vasconcelos, in Dante's Divine Comedy. He calls this an important and sophisticated work of art in which the characters have solid roots in a "poetical or celestial world which is not a fictitious reality but one superior to the physical world. Therefore, the poem of Dante is not whimsical (fantastico) but liturgical."[46] Vasconcelos then says that liturgical writing best exemplifies what he is trying to say because we see in it that ". . . phantasy operates in the poet when he firmly manages the realities of the world of the spirit and thus it differs from simple imagination which is limited to fable and myth."

From these references to the words of Vasconcelos, we should note that he has mentioned creative imagination, phantasy and simple imagination. It would seem also that from these words, Ahumada took his observation that "In phantasy religious truths are represented, not the things of our common

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[46] Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1331.

experience, but the reality of a spiritual world."[47]

Of these three elements Vasconcelos has distinguished -- creative imagination, phantasy and simple imagination -- phantasy at first glance would seem to be the most important power to be employed in the aesthetic method because of its connection and involvement with the world of spirit. However, this kind of logical reasoning runs amuck when Vasconcelos makes references later in the Estética to the process of transformation which allows man, through the realm of spirit, to reproduce the object of reality in knowledge thus attaining the essence of the synthesis of the heterogeneous elements of reality.

We would expect to see references to the power of phantasy when he speaks of this process but we can indicate two instances where this simply does not happen. In the section where he speaks about rhythm as an instrument of knowledge, he tells us that through rhythm we obtain the desire of our own spirit for order in the world of reality. "Imagination, also, by means of rhythm reveals a process independent of the physical dynamic."[48] Again, when he analyzes music for the purpose of showing how rhythm functions

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[47] Ahumada, op. cit., p. 147.

[48] Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1339.

in the aesthetic, he tells us that we imagine a system of vibrant unity within aesthetic being.[49] In both of these instances, phantasy would seem to be the proper word to be used instead of "imagination" or "imagine" because rhythm is being considered precisely as the instrument which reduces reality to human consciousness and elevates it to the world of spirit.

At this point of our discussion, then, we could possibly have four elements which Vasconcelos describes as operating in that area of aesthetic knowledge where spirit and reality come into contact: creative imagination, phantasy, simple imagination and imagination. If we allow ourselves at this point to use some reasoning by way of logic and strict definition, it is possible to eliminate some of the confusion by noting that "creative imagination" and what he calls "simple imagination" both deal with myth. It is reasonable to suspect, given the method of Vasconcelos, that he simply is not very careful about the use of qualifying adjectives at this point and that therefore creative and simple imagination are more or less the same thing based on the object they attain and their area of operation.

However, we still have to deal with the problem of

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[49] Ibid., p. 1344.

phantasy and imagination. Ahumada's observation that "the creative imagination and phantasy operate according to the forms of the aesthetic a priori . . ."[50] does not help us to arrive at a solution but, rather, further complicates the problem since there does not seem to be any evidence to our eyes that Vasconcelos actually makes such a statement. Neither does it seem possible from our reading of this section of the Estética to intuit that Vasconcelos actually considers these two to go hand in hand through the aesthetic a priori. Ahumada's statement becomes even more difficult to comprehend since, by his own admission, "Imagination . . . is primarily directed to things of the world . . . Its materials are still those of our every day world."[51]

At this point we hesitate to offer our own solution because the answer to this problem is intimately bound up with the next element of the aesthetic a priori, the image. After we discuss the image, we will return to the problem of phantasy/imagination. With the help of Vasconcelos' teaching about the image and the role that it plays in his synthesis, we will propose a possible understanding of the function of phantasy/imagination in this synthesis.

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[50] Ahumada, op. cit., p. 147.

[51] Ibid.

The image. -- The image, we propose, is the key concept which unfolds the manner in which this scheme of philosophy harmonizes all of reality from the atom to the Absolute. The obvious objection to this categorical stand would have to be that there are other important elements in the aesthetic a priori and we agree that there are. But we maintain, for reasons that we will present in this discussion, that the purpose of the aesthetic a priori cannot be achieved without the image.

Vasconcelos refers to the image in his Lógica Orgánica when he comments on the distinction between the logic of art and formal logic. The latter employs abstract concepts but is sterile and superficial; the former uses concrete images and is "analogical, rich, fertile, and penetrating."[52] In the Estética he develops his concept of the image and indicates why it is included in the aesthetic method: "Images are the elements of the aesthetic procedure and that which we refer to as the aesthetic a priori is really just the way of employing these images."[53] A few pages later in the same work he makes two important statements which help to explain

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[52] José Vasconcelos, Lógica Orgánica, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 767-775.

[53] Vasconcelos, Estética, pp. 1316-1334.

the function of the image in the aesthetic:

> The image is the primordial (primary) element of the aesthetic endeavour: the image is the point of contact of the spirit toward reality, for the purpose of organizing it according to its perceptions; therein lies its difference from the idea which is a "taking possession of" according to artificial thought which establishes geometric relationships ... The image captures the purely sensual characteristics on the level inferior to consciousness, and on the level that surpasses reason, i.e., the aesthetic level, the image recreates the perceived object in synchronization with the higher energy.

The notion of the image which we have at this point shows it to be the instrument at the heart of the aesthetic a priori; it differs from the idea, i.e., the formal image, in quality because it is fuller and richer. Instead of surrounding the object of reality as the formal image does, the aesthetic image is the bridge from the spirit of man to reality. But it does even more than serve as a connecting link between these two for in contacting reality it also brings the rhythm of the object into agreement with the spiritual rhythm and thus raises the object to a higher level of existence, i.e., the level of aesthetic energy.

Further, he considers the idea to be a formal representation, such as the formal image employed logically, but so formal that it actually impoverishes the object of thought. The aesthetic image, on the other hand, is a representation of the object, but it enriches that object by emphasizing

certain of its qualitative characteristics, or, as Vasconcelos explains, ". . . it does not tend so much to simplify as to complete, create and construct . . ."[54] The aesthetic image also brings the object into contact with the spirit: "The image approaches that which conforms with the spirit."

The image, besides being the instrument of the aesthetic, also has a creative aspect which it employs in dealing with the objects of reality, i.e., it has a tendency "to complete, create and construct . . ." This is the critical point in Vasconcelos' aesthetic philosophy for we now have not just contact or possession of the object in aesthetic knowledge but a definite mechanism or organ that we can point to which will explain how the lower levels of existence come to exist on a higher level of existence. The image has the ability to create, or as Vasconcelos explicitly tells us: "The true aesthetic image is endowed with a creative power and functions after the manner of the divine reason in the Gospels whose process of thought does not take place through discursive and formal action."

Now, let us continue our discussion of phantasy and imagination, keeping in mind what we discovered about the image. If the image has this creative power which serves as the contact between spirit and reality, we have to resolve two

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[54] Ibid., p. 1524.

difficulties: 1) the possibility and, 2) the meaning of this creative power.

To answer the first problem, the possibility, we have to look at what he says about imagination in other places of the Estética. At one point he says: "The imagination possesses a selective and at the same time constructive capacity which permits it to capture reality with more efficacy than any art and with more certainty than any science."[55] We should note that he uses just the word "imagination" without any qualification. It is not clear that he posits a cause/effect relationship between imagination and image. The most that we can say at this time is to paraphrase him thusly: The imagination is this and has such a power - The image is this and has such a power. Both have a constructive power; the image has a creative power; and the imagination has a selective power. The imagination and image seem closely related in their function in the aesthetic.

But is this really the imagination at work? We think it is not; it rather appears to be phantasy for two reasons. First, when the image is employed, one level or term of its operation is the realm of the spirit; it connects spirit and reality and also recreates the object on the aesthetic

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[55] Ibid., p. 1322.

(spiritual) level. Clearly, for Vasconcelos, the level of the spirit and the spiritual realm are different from the materials of the every day world. The concern of phantasy and its area of operation is the spiritual, not the material. So the use of the word "imagination" in connection with this type of operation can only refer to phantasy in the strict sense.

Secondly, in trying to "feel with Vasconcelos", we can intuit or sense in some way other than the logical way that it is the operation of phantasy in conjunction with the image that produces the synthesis that he is striving to illustrate. There is no precise reason that we can point to that will prove this for we are involved in an area where reasons do not suffice. It is purely and simply a feeling that flows from everything Vasconcelos has said about the image and its invaluable place in the aesthetic that leads to this conclusion.

The second difficulty we have to resolve concerns the meaning of the creative power in the image. This refers to the ability of the image to transform, magnify and ultimately elevate the object so that it comes into contact with spirit. In conjunction with phantasy (although, in the context Vasconcelos again uses the word "imagination"), the image has the capacity of taking only those qualitative characteristics

which are valuable, authentic and appear to us as valuable and preferable over other characteristics of the object; Vasconcelos refers to this power of transforming the object as a semi-divine power.[56]

To illustrate this process he uses the example of the memory of a loved one: in memory we embellish and attribute to the loved one those aspects which give us the most pleasure. Memory represents certain sensations of the object: visual sensations which are related to objects and auditory sensations which represent emotions. The visual auditory images compose the scheme or outline which produces the object as spirit, i.e., a new creation. The image first comes into contact with some object in reality (therefore it is reality-based and not idealistic) and then harmonizes the rhythm of the object with spiritual rhythm by recognizing those attributes of the object which are the most important.

Vasconcelos claims that the ability to reproduce the object has been changed into an activity of recreation because the image gives us, not simply a transposed object but a transfigured object.[57] The image, in conjunction with phantasy with its unique selective, constructive and creative powers, allows

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[56] Ibid., pp. 1322-1323.

[57] Ibid., pp. 1328-1329.

Vasconcelos to produce a homogeneous world extending from the lowest atom through the biological cycle to human consciousness and ultimately, as we shall see, extending even to the Absolute.

Emotion. -- Vasconcelos looks upon the element of emotion as an extension of ordinary knowledge and as an attracting force with a unifying function. In the Metafísica he refers to all knowledge which extends beyond ordinary means of cognition as "antenal" knowledge. The emotions are classified as this kind of knowledge because they can contact areas of reality that our ordinary means of knowledge cannot.[58] As an attracting power they move and stir us to act; just as one is moved to a beautiful object, so emotion draws one to an object of knowledge with a kind of love similar to the love that draws one to the beautiful. "Love is anything but blind, for Vasconcelos; it is the only way to real knowledge."[59]

Emotion, in opposition to reason, is an important concept in Vasconcelos' whole system. He insists that "I am" is a higher critical principle in philosophy than "I think" because existence is the elemental notion ". . . given to me by emotion before, during and after the exercise of reason."[60]

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[58] Vasconcelos, Metafísica, pp. 491-493.

[59] Haddox, op. cit., p. 45.

[60] Vasconcelos, Metafísica, p. 512.

This driving and attracting power enables emotion to unite us with objects in reality as the final term of its action. Consequently, emotion is involved at all levels of reality and is an intimate part of Vasconcelos' sythesis.

The principles of the aesthetic a priori. -- The principles of the aesthetic a priori are rhythm, melody, harmony and counterpoint. The reason for including these in this whole discussion of his philosophy is well put by Ahumada when he says that "The creative imagination and phantasy operate according to the forms of the aesthetic a priori." However, for the reasons given above, we sould simply delete the words "creative imagination" while accepting the rest of the statement.

The meaning of a priori generally is found in Vasconcelos' Lógica Orgánica.[61] There he tells us that the a priori embraces a group of powers or instruments which enable consciousness to learn from objects and to operate immediately within them. Contrary to the claims of the materialistic philosopher, the a priori powers are independent of external reality; however, Vasconcelos did recognize that the operation of an a priori depends on either an external or internal stimulus. That is, he did not believe that the a priori elements are productive of knowledge by themselves; a posteriori

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[61] Vasconcelos, Lógica Orgánica, pp. 544-547.

encounter with reality is required.

The first of the a priori forms is the element of rhythm which Vasconcelos defines as "the successive ordering of qualitatively diverse elements in a lineal series without scale and melody simply by the repetition at variable intervals of the same or different sounds."[62] The aesthetic effect of rhythm can be physical but the more precise meaning of rhythm is seen in its spiritual effect since we can consciously order sounds and achieve a significance of rhythm that stems from the correspondence between our spiritual desire to order things in reality and the external rhythm of reality. In this process the image operates by taking possession of the external for a final, aesthetic purpose; rhythm, then, "is the fundamental a priori of the distribution of these images, whether they are auditory, visual, etc."[63] This is one example of the unification of the heterogeneous and it is comparable to logical classification except that the process of logic terminates in an abstract general class while the product of rhythmic ordering is spiritual significance.

The a priori form of melody represents a higher level of aesthetic pleasure and ordering of reality. For Vasconcelos, "A melody is not a simple succession of notes just as a phrase is not a succession of words. The melody and the phrase consti-

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[62] Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1335.

[63] Ibid., p. 1341.

tute an articulated continuum, an organic whole with notes or words as the elements."[64] While the phrase is controlled by an inflexible sense of logic, melody is free of such a restriction because it consists of a successive arrangement of sounds and "obtains its results by awakening in the soul significant pleasures." He distinguishes from all other forms of logic the "logic of the spirit or the logic of aesthetic emotion" which has a method sui generis and whose elements are in the image; its approach is found in such diverse things as art, rhythm, symmetry, melody and harmony. This ordering of the sounds of melody is higher than rhythm because it is not merely successive and repetitious; it is creative and ascending.[65] Human consciousness orders the notes of melody in such a way that the soul becomes attentive and awakens to the aesthetic pleasure of melody.

The a priori form of harmony, Ahumada tells us, is a totality based on the combination of various elements in such a way that the elements not only retain their individuality but also "are realized in their completeness."[66] Harmony joins and combines different melodic series at the same time in the unity of the musical composition. This is incompre-

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[64] Ibid., p. 1352.

[65] Ahumada, op. cit., p. 150.

[66] Ibid., p. 151.

hensible for "our poor logical attention, accustomed as it is to handling one idea after another."[67] Harmony represents a further step in the synthesis because it introduces the element of simultaneity by which diverse objects are united qua diverse and take on added significance. Vasconcelos asserts that through its own unique logic, harmony produces a series of flowing combinations which are unrealizable in the physical world or in any material object. Thus it is that the composer in his work manifests a type of divine power because through his consciousness a global unity is produced, an organization of several melodic series into significant groups which frees the mind from operating on the physical level and allows it to enjoy the aesthetic level of existence.

The final a priori form is that of counterpoint which Vasconcelos describes as

> . . . a simultaneity of various, comparable parts; we call it an organic unity by analogy with living being; thus, the musical composition in counterpoint is not a developing element like melody, not complete agreement like harmony, but a pleasing being made up of parts which unify one intention, spiritual joy.[68]

This form of the a priori is based on the juxtaposition of several melodies which interrelate with one another, oppose

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[67] Vasconcelos, Estética, p. 1360.

[68] Ibid., p. 1366.

one another and come together finally in a state of reconciliation.[69] The form of counterpoint allows consciousness, through the work of the image, to produce a unified, balanced whole which not only combines diverse melodies but enriches them by elevating the whole to the level of the spiritual. Counterpoint differs from logic in that logic works on reality only by way of abstraction before it organizes the objects of reality. Counterpoint works over these elements and produces a unity which is of a higher level and much richer than what existed before counterpoint was brought to bear through phantasy and the image.

The kind of unity that this synthesis attains is, for Vasconcelos, a unity conditioned by his aesthetic view of reality, i.e., a unity that is attentive to the quality of existence. So while the synthesis unifies the heterogeneity of reality, it does not do so at the expense of the very diversity which seeks unity. Otherwise, the references Vasconcelos makes to balance, harmony, and coordination of existence would be meaningless. This balanced unity which allows for diversity is, in some ways, similar to Charles Hartshorne's balance or harmony of contrasts. According to his view, there is, ideally, for each level of existence "a balance of unity

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[69] Ahumada, op. cit., p. 151.

and diversity . . ." and the beautiful manifests this balance. "Discord, diversity not integrated by unifying factors, is not very good; but a too tame harmony or unity, not sufficiently diversified with contrasting aspects, is not very good either."[70]

In making this comparison between Vasconcelos and Hartshorne, we intend only to show a possible way that Vasconcelos' unity can be interpreted. Vasconcelos does not develop the idea of unity within the same context of the aesthetically beautiful as Hartshorne does, but Vasconcelos does seem to indicate that, similar to Hartshorne, unity implies a mixture of likeness and dissimilarity. The harmonious balance of Vasconcelos' aesthetic requires the contrasts of the heterogeneous as well as the likenesses of the homogeneous. Too much diversity in Vasconcelos' system leaves his goal of unity unachieved; too much unity belies his initial principle of the heterogeneity of existence. Moreover, a unity without diversity in Vasconcelos' synthesis would violate the necessary respect for the quality of the levels of being, and it is this respect which allows consciousness to encounter reality just as it exists.

Earlier in this chapter we indicated that this outline

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[70] Charles Hartshorne, Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1970), p. 304.

of the philosophy of Vasconcelos was for a particular purpose and therefore limited in its scope and details. That purpose is the better understanding of his religious thought. We have limited this discussion to those concepts, ideas and elements that are necessary for the comprehension of Vasconcelos' view of reality as unified in the Absolute. Consequently, we have deliberately omitted some concepts that do not directly aid in this comprehension even though they may be important and even necessary from points of view other than our own.

As a result of the discussion of the aesthetic a priori, we should now be able to appreciate Vasconcelos' claim that his aesthetic is a formal science with its own categories of thought, but with its own particular forms of operation. He was convinced that he had shown that the secret of aesthetics is in the composition of the elements, i.e., aesthetics, using phantasy and the image, arranges heterogeneity in such a way that it acquires meaning and significance in that world of existence which pertains to the soul. At the height of aesthetics he conceives of beauty as the disposition of the heterogeneous elements which arrives at a unity based on rhythm but yet allows the elements their own individuality.

Yet, this is not the end of the synthesis for we must still account for the Absolute. The system is not complete

without this consideration for like the artist who is not content with concepts about reality but strives to express the fullness of reality through artistic creation, so Vasconcelos, the "artist" of the aesthetic philosophy, looks upon the work of the aesthetic as the construction of a road which leads to the divine state where the Absolute is realized. Aesthetics, thus, cannot be a closed system like dialectics but must be open in order to reach this point. In the next chapter we will try to follow him along this road to arrive at the Absolute.

IV

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TODOLOGIA

Introduction to the Chapter

The main point of this work is directed towards the concept of the Absolute in Vasconcelos' thought and the use he makes of this concept. We maintain and hope to demonstrate that this latter aspect constitutes the uniqueness of the philosophical and religious contribution of Vasconcelos to human knowledge. In our view no other commentator or student of Vasconcelos has approached his body of writing from the specifically religious point of view with the purpose of showing the Absolute (we may freely substitute, as Vasconcelos seems to do in the Todología, God and/or Trinity for "Absolute") is the ultimate point of his system and, with the inclusion of this concept in his thought, his philosophy takes on a distinctive religious aspect. The importance of the Absolute appears, for example, in a passage in which he discusses coordination:

> We cannot doubt that the faculty of identification is two-fold: the Universe is identified -- we

> say "coordinated" -- in the divine consciousness; man conceives this unity, this coordination in an imperfect way for his consciousness is an image of the consciousness of God but not the same as God's consciousness.[1]

We will see, then, as this chapter develops that the Absolute is crucial for his philosophical system because the consciousness of the Absolute is introduced and plays an important role in the philosophy of coordination. Up to this point in his philosophy, Vasconcelos has stressed the importance of man in the synthesis of the levels of reality which is directed towards Unity. Now, he is taking the process a step further by directing our attention and his philosophy to the role of the Absolute in his scheme of thought. We shall also see that the Absolute comes to occupy the highest level of being in his system, yet Vasconcelos maintains that it remains separated ". . . guarding his detachment and his power upon which the rest of beings depend."[2] However, in the Vasconcelian view, there is an element of integration throughout the realm of being in the sense that "Existences are related among themselves by the bond of origin, in the common Creator."[3]

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[1] José Vasconcelos, Todología, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 889-890.

[2] Ibid., p. 919.

[3] Ibid., p. 920.

In order to explain all these facets of the Absolute in the Todología, this chapter will have the following main divisions: 1) briefly, how Vasconcelos refines his philosophy and makes it more precise in the Todología; 2) how the Todología explains the importance and central position of the Absolute in Vasconcelos' thought; 3) and finally, the method of the coordination of reality in the Absolute.

1. The Philosophical Method of Vasconcelos in Todología

Introduction to this Section

The reason for spending a short time with the method of his philosophy again is simply to indicate the way Vasconcelos' mind works in this book which may be considered as the end of his philosophical cycle of works and one of his last major published books. The Todología represents the high point of his philosophical speculation and actually takes the place of a mystical work which he had originally intended to write as the culmination of his philosophical writings.[4] The title of the work itself is untranslatable with an exact English expression since Vasconcelos coined a word to indicate that it was his

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[4] Patrick Romanell, "Bergson in Mexico: A Tribute to José Vasconcelos", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, April, 1960, p. 507.

intention to "study everything", i.e., to bring together and complete what he had developed in his previous philosophical works.[5]

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[5]We can make several attempts to translate the word "Todología" into English. Perhaps the most literal translation would be "the science of everything" or even "the science of all". This is not really the sense of the title of the book, however, nor does it convey the exact flavour of Vasconcelos' thoughts in the book. In no sense does he have a science of everything in this work; he is, rather, concerned to bring together in one place and in a condensed though more complete fashion everything he has talked about in his other philosophical writings. Also, the word "all" in this translation is far too unspecified as compared to the actual limitations present in the work.

Another possible meaning of Todología might be seen in Vasconcelos' identification of this word with theology on p. 949. Yet, the Todología cannot be construed as theological simply because of its enormous philosophical content which Vasconcelos has included. Moreover, we will show in the fifth chapter (p. 5) and we will point out again in this chapter (p. 40) that his distinction between theology and philosophy is, at best, hazy. Consequently, we cannot simply call the Todología theology and convey its precise character.

In the light of these difficulties, we think it best not to translate the word as we use it in the text but simply point out what Vasconcelos himself says about the nature of this work. He tells us on p. 821, for example, that he is attempting to harmonize natural and divine knowledge. "This present book endeavours to capture a vision of the Universe which begins on the magnetic level (of being) and terminates in the Trinity -- a vision which St. Paul has defined." In another place (pp. 818-819) he tells us that there has been a chronological progression of his ideas, beginning with his Pitágoras in 1916 and continuing through the Metafísica (1929), the Etica (1931), the Estética (1935), and his Lógica Orgánica (1945). The Todología, for Vasconcelos, confirms and brings into sharper focus the ideas of all these writings. "The purpose of this present work is to indicate the paths which lead to the harmonization of all knowledge." (p. 818) From these

We have selected this work for a detailed study in this thesis because it not only proposes to gather all of his thinking on philosophy, reality and the world, but more importantly because it represents the best illustration of Vasconcelos' religious philosophy. The latter can be seen from the many references Vasconcelos makes to the concept of completion and unification in the Absolute. In this work the Absolute takes on a prominence that is lacking in his earlier writings in such a way, as we hope to show, that the entirety of his system of thought can be brought together with a clear understanding of this concept. This should not be too surprising since we are dealing with his last major philosophical writing and we should expect to find, therefore, his most mature thought on questions and problems that he had spent years developing.

Several notes of caution should be sounded, however, at this point in our study. First, Vasconcelos is never too precise about his philosophical definitions as we should be aware of by now from our discussion in Chapter Three of his concept of imagination and the word "image". Secondly, neither

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descriptions of Vasconcelos we should be able to get a notion, at least, of what he intends the nature of this work to be. In the text of our work, then, we will not make use of any translation of the title of the work since none are completely satisfactory. Rather, we will simply use the word, "Todología".

is he too much concerned about an outline or any kind of order as he writes his works. He admits that "The arrangement of the chapters is perhaps not too rigid but only because the immensity of the theme very often brings us into distinct areas, apparently unconnected."[6] This did not present too much of a problem in the previous chapters of our study; for one thing, we were helped by the previous work of other Vasconcelian scholars. There is, however, virtually no previous scholarship pertaining to the Todología. Basave Fernández has one chapter devoted to this work but it is purely expositional in character and makes no attempt to provide a logically ordered commentary on the Todología.[7] He goes through each section of the Todología just as it appears in published form; sometimes he repeats paragraphs of the work verbatim and at other times he condenses certain sections and provides a brief commentary. There are times when he is quite critical of Vasconcelos, as for example, when he suggests that Vasconcelos should have studied in more depth the concept of being in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. We found the initial section of his chapter on the nature of the Todología to be especially helpful but his rigorous adherence to the plan of the work prevented us from arriving at

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[6]Vasconcelos, op. cit., p. 819.

[7]Augustín Basave (Fernández del Valle), La filosofía de José Vasconcelos (el hombre y su sistema) (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1958), pp. 397-443.

a clear conception of the important ideas of the Todología.

A certain portion of the material of this chapter represents original investigation and the order we intend to follow in this investigation will not necessarily be the order that Vasconcelos follows in Todología. We do not mean to say that an order and system is lacking in the Todología. Vasconcelos proceeds through such concepts as unity and variety, knowledge, the method of coordination, harmony and the theology of St. Paul. Since he intended this work to be the collection of all his ideas, the Todología has a logical system to accomplish this purpose. However, our purpose is somewhat different than this because our primary concern is the Absolute and its place of preeminence in the religious consideration of Vasconcelos' thought. Thus, while the order and logic of the Todología as Vasconcelos conceived the work is well suited for the purposes of the book, we will attempt to make explicit a logic and structure that is already implicit within its pages -- a logic and structure that perhaps Vasconcelos did not consciously recognize but one that will help us to accomplish our particular goals.

All the materials for our investigation are contained in the Todología but they are diffused throughout the entirety of the work. The ideas and concepts that we wish to discuss are often repeated by Vasconcelos in several different places,

approached from different points of view at given times and defined in a variety of ways. Consequently, our task has been more difficult because we have had to organize the ideas of the Todología according to the order that will attain our purposes and not according to the order of Vasconcelos. Only then was it possible to delve into these ideas, particularly the Absolute, and arrive at conclusions.

By now we should be fairly familiar with the method of philosophy that Vasconcelos generally employs and there is no need to go over that material again. What we propose to do now is to give some characteristics of that method to which he makes direct reference in the Todología since these attributes will help us to understand the main point of this chapter. Consequently, we will mention what he adds to his philosophy in Todología in order to clarify it and make it complete. Thus, we will consider his philosophy 1) as a philosophy of quality; 2) a philosophy that is synthetic and aesthetic; and 3) as a philosophy that is characterized by a particular approach to truth.

The philosophy of quality. -- The concept of quality in the philosophy of Vasconcelos shows the influence of Empedocles on his thought. In Chapter Two we spoke about this influence and in the Todología Vasconcelos acknowledges that the predecesor of the philosophy of coordination is Empdocles. "He was the

first to say that the secret of being is in the combination of the elements."[8] What particularly attracted Vasconcelos was the respect that Empedocles showed for the elements of existence. Empedocles, in the estimation of Vasconcelos, sought and found in a philosophy of coordination the superior elements of reality which still allowed reality to be itself: ". . . within which white and black are explained while they continued to be black and white."[9] Empedocles insisted that the four "roots" of existence -- earth, air, fire and water -- never change nor can one element become another element. They combine with one another to produce objects in reality but they retain their individuality. Vasconcelos says that in this way Empedocles showed that he had no intention of reducing the quality of existence.

Influenced by the thinking of Empedocles Vasconcelos worked out his own philosophy of quality which, as it developed, proved to be in opposition to the kind of philosophy he labels as abstract, quantified or conceptual and rational. In the context of his praise for Empedocles in the Todología, he says: "Our philosophy is one of quality in opposition to the abstract philosophies which, for the purposes of generalization, prescind from qualities and those characteristics which individualize

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[8] Vasconcelos, op. cit., p. 878.

[9] Ibid., p. 877.

beings." He thinks that the individual characteristics of beings are irreducible one to another and that there is no such thing as a common denominator. He has no time for the rationalist or intellectualist in philosophy who attempts to reduce everything to entities and numbers. He rejects this because he believes this account of reality to be truncated. That is, he is not necessarily opposed to focusing on mere quantity and on static and discreet entities for some purposes; what he objects to, however, is the tendency of much modern philosophy (Empiricism and Positivism) to take this aspect of things for the whole of reality. Vasconcelos thinks quantity, discreet entities, etc. are an abstraction from the concrete whole, a whole characterized by dynamic flux, interconnectedness, unified or harmonized variety. In other words, the abstract philosophy which conceptualizes reality is nothing more than a type of mathematics for Vasconcelos which ends up with a summation of very general qualities. While in itself this method may be acceptable to some, it is inadmissable because of what it misses, nem., the individual qualities of the world as it is. Summations and common denominators are not a part of philosophy for Vasconcelos because these things do not touch reality but are only a skeletal image of it.

Contrary to the ways of reduction, Vasconcelos conceives his philosophy of unity which does not, and indeed, cannot ignore the quality that exists in the beings of reality. He tells us

that his philosophy is concerned with more than quantity and in this sense goes beyond arithmetic. Philosophy recognizes the inequality of reality, i.e., the disorganization and heterogeneity and the coordination of such inequality is placed before the philosopher "as the goal or aim of the superior harmonies of what exists."[10] He defends his way of thought as truly philosophical because first of all it is not concerned with grasping reality in terms of only abstract entities and secondly because its primary concern is "the coordination of events and facts similar to a hierarchy which proceeds from the atom to the cell and thence to the consciousness of man who is a person, and finally is directed to the highest person who is God."[11]

Vasconcelos states that the function of thought is to order but he sees two kinds of order at work: one which is employed by the rational philosophies and which operates through genus and species and another which his aesthetic philosophy employs and which produces "order similar to the affinities and relations which things themselves and beings manifest according to their internal constitution and their reciprocal relations . . ."[12] The problem with rational or

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[10] Ibid., p. 863.

[11] Ibid., pp. 950-951.

[12] Ibid., p. 879.

conceptual philosophies has been their attempt to falsify through abstractions. His philosophy of quality considers the relations that exist among the existing beings of reality whereas abstract philosophies consider being as entity or a thing or a group of things. In an illustration which he uses, Vasconcelos seems remarkably close to Whitehead's reference to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness which consists of "mistaking the abstract for the concrete."[13] In the Lógica Orgánica, Vasconcelos criticizes mathematics for ignoring the qualities of reality and quotes Whitehead as saying: "Mathematics, in recent years, because of its speculative interest in various kinds of order, has developed them (kinds of order) without reference to the particular entities which illustrate them."[14]

In Vasconcelos' criticism of the abstract philosophies, he uses the example of two pears and two apples on a table. The abstract philosophies, as he interprets their thinking, would generalize and speak of four "things" or perhaps four pieces of fruit. Vasconcelos says that his reasoning would be split or divided if he were to speak in this way. He would

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[13]Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 74.

[14]José Vasconcelos, Lógica Orgánica, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 800.

rather verbalize about the particular qualities of the fruit and relate their pleasing color, their lustre and appealing taste.[15] His philosophy does attempt to obtain unity from plurality but it does this by discovering the proper qualitative order of existing beings and then synthesizing each level of reality from the atom to the Absolute. The concept of quality in Vasconcelos' philosophy will be considered further in the next section when we discuss the aesthetic character of his philosophy.

The ideal goal for this method of philosophizing is to conceive being in simultaneity, i.e., the philosopher, having recognized the qualitative relationships of the objects in existence, should pass beyond the vision of reality as a successive progression of moments and obtain the vision of the Absolute or God. For Vasconcelos, "The criterion (judgment) of philosophy ought to be that of simultaneity: to try to see the totality of a time, or better, outside of the succession of times."[16]

The synthetic and aesthetic philosophy. -- In the Todología Vasconcelos continues to define his philosophy more precisely with a distinction that he makes early in the work between

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[15] Vasconcelos, Todología, p. 879.

[16] Ibid., p. 897.

analytical and synthesis philosophies. The analytical philosophies are reductionist in that they tend to reduce all reality to one common concept. They are also abstractionist in that they tend to remove real knowledge from reality by isolating only one feature of some existence and ignoring all other characteristics (qualities) which they do not consider as essential to knowledge or capable of being known at all.

Vasconcelos composed a two-part list of those philosophers he considered to be analytical, on the one hand, and synthetic on the other. He considered as analytical such thinkers as the Eleatics, Socrates, Newton, Comte, Hegel and Kant. Thales, Heraclitus and Anaximander fall within this classification because of their search for the one element of existence. In the text of this part of the Todología, he discusses in detail Pythagoras and Aristotle. He considers the Pythagoreans as part of this trend in philosophy because of their ". . . practice, that of identifying reality with the mathematical order of quantity . . ."[17] Considering the influence of this school of thought on Vasconcelos, we may think this strange but his argument with the Pythagoreans on this point is simply that they tended towards idealism by ignoring the qualities of individual things in reality.

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[17] Ibid., p. 831.

Aristotle also receives some criticism but in a restrained fashion; he is critical of Aristotelianism because abstract entities replace qualitative reality and even "the infinite greatness of the Absolute is reduced to the poverty of pure act."[18] Yet Vasconcelos does admit that Aristotelianism does not completely ignore the physical order and is generally considered a philosophy of realism.

In his discussion of the synthetic philosophies, Vasconcelos makes it clear where his method of philosophy lies. His list of the synthetic philosophers includes (among others) such men as Empedocles, Plato, St. Augustine, Bergson, Whitehead and modern Personalism in the United States. The philosophers of synthesis "try to explain reality by the coordination of all its factors."[19] The Vasconcelian desire for unity which we expressed in Chapter Two is here exemplified because he considers synthesis as the proper method of approaching a study of reality. This is so because in the process of synthesis, disparate (heterogeneous) facts and events are brought together in a coordinative effort but precisely as they exist in reality, not removed from it. For example, Vasconcelos refers to Augustine as "the philosopher" of synthesis because under his influence "all of Christian philosophy is an

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[18] Ibid., p. 832.

[19] Ibid.

effort to incorporate thought about the world to thought about the divine order which is Theology."[20] In this kind of philosophy the universe is viewed as an entirety or a totality and the synthetic mode of thought is the only way of embracing this entirety.

Here we must remember not only the fundamental principle of unity in Vasconcelos' thought but also the references we made earlier to his words about the fact that thinking aims for unity. Moreover, he even tells us that "thought tries to understand plurality by penetrating the intimacy of its processes. Philosophy ceases to be concerned with abstract being and proceeds by way of Aesthetics; we are within the area of the philosophy of quality."[21]

The aesthetic philosophy is, for Vasconcelos, the concept of getting at the heart of reality as it is in itself, i.e., without abstraction and without the use of isolated and self-contained entities. Abstraction, for Vasconcelos, means that important elements of human experience are rejected as unimportant in the cognitive process which employs abstraction. He does not criticize abstraction in the same way that Whitehead, for example, criticizes classical empiricism for abstracting, i.e., beginning with types of experience which are

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[20] Ibid., p. 833.

[21] Ibid.

derivative and not basic at all.[22] Rather, Vasconcelos tells us that if he has to say "four objects" in order to be a philosopher, then he would reject that philosophy. He feels that in the process of abstraction which arrives at a numerical entity, all the "precious particularities" of the four objects have to be sacrificed. Consequently he proceeds to an aesthetic philosophy because of what he considers the confusion and impossibility of those philosophical systems which employ abstraction. Aesthetic philosophy removes such confusion simply because "It expresses the thing in itself, the irreducible element, the element irreducible to reason."[23] Once we arrive at this element, this thing itself, we touch the quality of reality without concern then for the mere quantity of reality.

The "aesthetic" idea and the idea of "quality" seem at times to be closely identified in his thinking particularly here when we get to the essence of Vasconcelos' method. On the one hand he tells us that with the use of the aesthetic we get to the real center of reality and yet on the other hand he maintains that other philosophies are insufficient because they have sacrificed reality and life itself by abstracting from

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[22]Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1938), pp. 72-73.

[23]Vasconcelos, Todología, p. 879.

quality. This latter approach does not work because ". . . the consciousness of man is never satisfied in prescinding from quality. In quality we encounter not only the essence of each existing thing but also the law of its determination and development."[24]

Aesthetic philosophy and quality, then, are closely related and when we ask what significance aesthetics has in this method Vasconcelos responds with the notion of quality. In his view, the unity of all reality from the atom to the Absolute is accomplished by the unique task of philosophy, that of coordination. Vasconcelos says much about coordination, but the one, underlying theme in all of his references seems to be that of bringing together the distinct spheres of reality (or from the point of view of the knower, the distinct spheres of knowledge) into one significant meaning while allowing the distinct elements of reality to remain in their purity. Vasconcelos seems to have the idea that when the philosopher attempts to remove the existing reality from its place in the world he does violence to that reality because he has to produce it by way of abstraction; and abstraction or a conceptualized entity is a falsification of reality because the abstract entity does not represent the integrity of the thing. While it is impossible to prove with certainty, Vasconcelos seems to manifest an

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[24] Ibid., p. 877.

unacknowledged debt to Whitehead's analysis and critique of the fallacy of simple location when he postulates a philosophy of aesthetics which attains reality just as it is because its object is the individualized qualities of things in reality -- qualities of existence which other philosophies abstract from.

In the Todología we begin to see how the concept of aesthetics in Vasconcelos' philosophy bears a relationship to the Absolute, because Vasconcelos explains a structure of reality based on the concept of quality of beings. He thinks that the whole realm of existence is made clear to the philosopher when he employs this "experientalist" method, i.e., there is manifested a structure of hierarchical orders or spheres of existence which are controlled and ordered in the structure by the influence of quality. He has thus placed the atom at the lowest portion of this structure because it better controls whole and entire units of existence; at the highest end of the structure he places a Divine force because it handles and controls the entire spectrum of existence.[25] In this particular section of the Todología he calls this Divine element the Most Holy Trinity and it appears that this concept has the same function and role in this scheme of philosophy as that of the Absolute. He is quite inconsistent in the use of

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[25] Ibid., p. 886.

a name for this highest power (as we have mentioned before) and, unfortunately, nowhere does he discuss the various names that he uses or indicate in one, clear, unequivocal statement that he has one idea in mind and uses various synonyms for variety or some other reason to indicate the same reality.

His is a philosophy of harmony in the sense that it deals with proportional relationships between the existing things of reality. In the Todología, he contrasts the mathematical, logical approaches of philosophy to his approach because of the difference between measure and proportion; he sees the concept of measure as something static and abstract, an approach, consequently, which ends up with static entities. With the idea of harmony, however, the life and activity of existing reality is emphasized. He rejects what he considers to be static instruments of knowledge, i.e., ideas and number, and emphasizes those instruments which give us order and movement: "The instruments of knowledge which are referred to active knowledge are: rhythm, melody and harmony, of an unstable (non-static) type because they manifest to us reality in movement. They allow us to order events."[26] In Vasconcelos' view all existence is ordered according to qualitative characteristics, so much so that he even considers the so-called rational

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[26] Ibid., p. 927.

ordering according to genus and species an ordering according to qualitative forms. The proper criterion of unity for this kind of structure can be nothing else than harmony because only harmony gives meaning to events and existing reality by considering these elements in their natural movement. Harmony is the unitative law of this world ". . . because the parts of beings which constitute the tangible, living and real world are related and integrated similar to proportion and harmony."[27]

In order to illustrate the harmonious balance of the whole of reality, even up to the level of the Absolute, Vasconcelos uses such examples as the composition of gun powder, the relationships necessary to make chloride from sodium and the proportion between hydrogen and oxygen in the composition of water. He states that the differential relationship between "left" and "right" is a necessary condition for "the functional organism". All of these qualities in existing reality are subject, not to reason or the Logos, but rather to rhythm and harmony. He considers it evident that reality exists under the conditions of agreement and disagreement ". . . similar to the laws of proportion and function which pertain not to the Logos but the Harmony in the sense in which Plato defined it exactly . . ."[28]

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[27] Ibid., p. 922.

[28] Ibid.

It is clear that Vasconcelos, especially in the Todología, was convinced that the natural sciences and philosophies modeled after the natural sciences (i.e., classical empiricism, Positivism, etc.) offered only a very partial account of reality. It was not that they offered an entirely false view of reality, but rather that their viewpoints were only partial. And if they were successful in claiming to be the only accesses to reality then a very dangerously one-sided and truncated Weltanschauung would result.

The reason the natural scientific perspective on reality is inadequate, according to Vasconcelos, is that it is inevitably too abstract. It is abstract in the sense of leaving something out. Science studies only certain very formal aspects of things. And this is acceptable since modern science has rather utilitarian purposes, having to do with man's effort to control his external environment. But this focusing on external, quantifiable, formal features of things gains scientific precision only by prescinding from and abstracting from the concrete reality of things as they really are. Or we can put this differently. The scientist attends to certain types of experience and dis-attends to others. Since he is interested in precision and isolating the predictable, he focuses on those features of experience that are "clear and distinct", self-contained, discreet, quantifiable, etc. It is only this sort of experience that is scientifically manageable and useful. This may be an acceptable procedure for modern science, this type of concen-

tration on this sort of experience. The danger comes, however, when we forget that we focus on this type of human experience only for a limited purpose and come to believe that this sort of experience is the only type there is. This is disastrous because this sort of experience, upon which science builds, is only an abstraction from the totality of human experience. If we hold that this experience, and only this experience, gives an acceptable account of reality, then we avoid the fact, as Smith relates it, that ". . . no single set of conditions governing any one dimension of experience can be made universal and legislative for all dimensions."[29] While it is true that the concrete totality of man's experience is too vague, dense, jagged, dynamic, and variegated to be of scientific (i.e., utilitarian) use, still it furnishes the matrix in terms of which the "clear and distinct" features of experience must be understood.

In order to avoid the utilitarian uses of science and, at the same time, in order to capture the concrete reality of things as they really are, Vasconcelos rejects rational philosophy and its method of abstraction. In the process, he strengthens the position of his own aesthetic philo-

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[29]John E. Smith, Experience and God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 41.

sophy by indicating that it surpasses reason. Thus, he presents us with a philosophy which

> . . . is frankly, openly rhythmical and harmonic. This is what causes us to say that now is the time in which philosophy passes from the Logos to Harmony for the purpose of establishing itself finally in Eros, understood, of course, in the Christian sense as: Love of the Father for his creations and vice versa.[30]

The question of truth. -- Our final consideration of Vasconcelos' refined explanation of his philosophy in the Todología has to do with the concept of truth as it appears in this work. His aesthetical philosophy produces a view of harmony of things in reality, a structured view which differs from that of reason or Logos because it considers the quality of reality in active and living existence. The concept of truth is intimately connected with his position that reality is harmonic. Philosophy thus has two stages: 1) that of Logos (reason) which deals ". . . with concepts and the discipline of proportions . . ." and 2) the activities of harmony which Vasconcelos attributes to the influence of Plato.[31] It is the function of harmony to coordinate the individual units of the totality of existence and to bring the totality into relationship with its final termination, i.e., into relationship with the Absolute.[32]

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[30] Vasconcelos, Todología, pp. 921-922.

[31] Ibid., p. 926.

[32] Ibid.

Just as Vasconcelos had rejected any form of rationalism as incapable of touching or portraying reality, so, on the basis of harmonic coordination of reality, he rejects that approach to truth which depends on the adequation of thing and reality for its validity (the so-called correspondence view of truth). On the contrary, his consistency on the point necessarily leads him to posit truth as harmony. He distinguishes between passive and active truth, calling the former the concept of the adequation of thing and idea and referring to the latter as the certainty the philosopher has in the combination of the various elements of reality.[33] Passive truth, for Vasconcelos, is what he refers to as a development of Scholasticism, founded on Artistotle's theory of matter and form. He rejects passive truth for use in his philosophy because he thinks that it is purely a process of intellectualism: it can be employed strictly only in terms of the idea of an object and the definition of that object because we never find exact identity between the object manifested in nature and the idea engendered from that object. Active truth, on the other hand, remains <u>with</u> reality (rather than abstracting from it) and takes account of the activity and movement of the various levels of existence. This is, for Vasconcelos, a valid notion of truth because it comes into contact

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[33] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 869.

with reality in its qualitative features and centers on the vital aspects of reality rather than on the quantitative and mathematical aspects of reality. It is important for Vasconcelos to relate his concept of truth and movement because movement (in the beings of reality) is an indication of the process of unification towards, in the ultimate place, the Absolute. Movement "introduces the factor of finality, the tendency towards an object", and thus coordination of reality in the Absolute becomes possible.[34] This is not a mechanical movement of unification but movement which is responsive to creative rhythms and harmony in such a way that the element of finality helps us to make sense out of the diversity of reality or, in other words, to make homogeneous what is heterogeneous.

Truth, then, is really more of a function for Vasconcelos than it is a concept or idea. He tells us that ". . . truth is manifested as a function and correlative of activities which coexist and at times concur and often disagree."[35] Truth is operational in this system when it presents to human consciousness a balanced view of reality. This function of truth is much more in line with his thinking than the rational ideas of truth because it allows us, through human consciousness, to touch the

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[34] Ibid., p. 890.

[35] Ibid., p. 928.

plurality of reality just as it is, "diverse, active and coordinated," but without employing the process of abstraction.[36] Truth as identity (adequation) produces great separation between the mind and reality. But Vasconcelos does not believe, as Hegel held, that "being is idea". Things do not come to us as ideas but through experience. Reality is manifested to us in ways that are constantly variable since they are subject to our feelings, our memories and imagination. Yet there are laws to which reality is subject, i.e., the a priori laws of rhythm, melody and especially harmony. Truth, then, as harmony expresses again the aesthetic character of Vasconcelos' way of thought. This view of truth enables Vasconcelos to come closer to the solution of the problem of philosophy because he now has a functional element which can coordinate separate areas of knowledge into ". . . one meaning (significance) which embraces them and organizes them according to hierarchies of finality orientated to the Absolute."[37]

In terms of philosophy, Vasconcelos shows us in the Todología clearly and emphatically that he not only rejects rationalistic philosophies, whether they deal with abstraction, entities or the "correspondence" approach to truth; but

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[36] Ibid., p. 870.

[37] Ibid., p. 928.

he also indicates in much more detail the nature of his thinking about philosophy. His more complete system of philosophy in the Todología places before us a system of coordination through aesthetic principles and the help of human consciousness which tends to go beyond the human level of activity. The factor of finality which movement introduces is the unity of existence, but Vasconcelos, in the Todología, begins to indicate that the faculty of coordination is actually two faculties: the human consciousness to which he has referred many times and divine consciousness which seems to have the character of a complete, total and perfect faculty of coordination.

2. The Place of the Absolute in the Vasconcelian Synthesis

At this point in the philosophical scheme of Vasconcelos, the final completion of the coordination of all reality begins to appear. The Todología is important not only because of the previously unmentioned insights to the Vasconcelian philosophy, but also because his whole system of thought is rounded out, so to speak, with the explicit inclusion of what may be called the concept of the Absolute. Our concern in this section is to indicate the essential role the Absolute has in the mind of Vasconcelos as he expresses the summation of his philosophy in this work. We must sound a note of caution, however, because Vasconcelos does not simply write one section

or chapter about his concept of God or the Absolute and indicate its importance for his way of thinking. What the serious student of his writing has to do is to search carefully and interpret in context what few statements there are which bear on the meaning, function and value of the Absolute in Vasconcelos' thought. According to the statements we have, then, about the Absolute, it seems best to organize this section according to the following division: 1) the Absolute as a new level of existence, and 2) the Absolute as the term of the unification of reality. Because these divisions both concern the Absolute, they are not mutually exclusive and, consequently, there will be some over-lapping, especially when we consider the Pauline influence on this concept.

The Absolute as a new level of existence. -- Our study of this section begins with Vasconcelos' discussion of the concept of being in others (i.e., persons or objects).[38] He makes the point that the other existing things of reality complement and complete the individual's own being; and then goes on to explain "my own being" needs a support or base for its continued existence. However, much later "I" discover that the "other" is also a corporeal body and subject to the same limitations of the physical order to which I am subject. I then discover that

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[38] Ibid., pp. 903-905.

I need a support or a base to prevent my being lost in the world. Vasconcelos says that, thanks to gravity I am not projected off this planet to wander aimlessly through ages of helplessness. Yet, my helplessness to prevent my projection into the abyss of life continues and to conquer this I need some "other" for a foundation.

Given the Christian and Catholic background of Vasconcelos, we might expect him to introduce the Absolute as this foundation. We suspect that Vasconcelos hints in this direction but it must be admitted that the reasons he offers for this conclusion are not clear and precise. In the clearest statement he makes which leads us in this direction, he tells us that our condition of helplessness will continue for an infinite period of time unless the "other" we seek as a support and aid turns out to be God himself.

This argument for the fact that there is an Absolute seems to be predicated on two conditions: 1) it is the fact of human experience that the "other" is a body similar to the body I experience with all the frailities, anguish and suffering that I experience; 2) human experience also shows that I and the "other" are helpless to solve the condition of suffering and to escape the plunge into the abyss of life. Vasconcelos seems to argue, then, for the Absolute, for God, on the basis of these conditions of human experience and the human need to

alleviate our helplessness. At one time in our lives, our condition of weakness and helplessness was removed by a father, a mother or some friend. Once we realize the fragility and temporality of these people, we search for a permanent "other" to support us. For Vasconcelos, the Absolute provides this foundation.

This may be a good argument for the fact of the Absolute in that it is based on the psychological need of the human person to find security and stable support for life. The argument, however, lacks clarity and order of presentation. Instead of following up on the argument and expanding its implications, Vasconcelos somewhat mysteriously turns to the problem of knowing the "I" of the person. He then introduces the theological example of the Trinity: just as unity is characteristic of the Trinity so "My being, its spark, is the invisible power of unification of everything which enters my field of operation."[39]

It seems to us that a question of more importance than the power of unification in human persons has to be the qualities of the Absolute which constitute it as the proper satisfaction of our need for support. This only comes after the example of the Trinity and the statement of our power to

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[39] Ibid., p. 904.

unify existence. The description of the Absolute in this and other places manifests the elements of Christian belief, Roman Catholic training as a young boy, and the acceptance of Biblical teaching by Vasconcelos. The Absolute is the Creator, for Vasconcelos, and the Creator has freely given life to each person; God is not the soul of the universe, he is not immersed in his creation nor does he depend on it; and finally, he has the power to destroy his work if he so desires. In the view of Vasconcelos, the Absolute provides the perfect support for the human person because he is himself removed from the human condition, not subject to its suffering and anguish, and has sufficient strength as Creator to provide for the needs of persons.

We get more insights into the way Vasconcelos emphasizes the importance of the Absolute from his other statements about his concept of being. One of the most constant themes about being is the idea of movement which is characteristic of being. He tells us very directly that "Being is never static; the suspension of movement brings death . . ."[40] But the movement of the human being and that of the Absolute differ for several reasons. First, there is a natural and observable movement in being according to which it goes through a cycle of existence

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[40] Ibid., p. 911.

and proceeds directly to a terminal point. In the case of the lower levels of existence (atomic, cellular and conscious life) being proceeds to a higher level. The Absolute, however, is characterized by the idea of immortality and by this Vasconcelos indicates that the term of existence, that to which all existence tends through the cycle of existence, is the Absolute which, however, does not itself proceed to another terminal point.

Secondly, he conceives of the Absolute as not only the term but as the origin of all being and thus it differs from being as Creator to creature. Vasconcelos does posit a type of participation between creature and Creator but it is a concept by which the creature shares something with the Creator. There is even a sharing in movement between creature and Creator but Vasconcelos points out the difference: ". . . the movement of the creature is a portion of movement, the Creator is inexhaustible."[41]

The place and rôle of the Absolute begins to take on a more logical and orderly pattern when Vasconcelos states his views about being and the individualities of being. In these cases we can begin to get more than hints and suggestions as to the real function and value of the Absolute. We have talked

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[41] Ibid., p. 912.

previously in this work about the categories of being which Vasconcelos sees in reality. In the Todología he again enumerates and defines these levels: the Atom, the organic Cell and Consciousness but it is significant for our purposes to note that he now adds a fourth level of being, that of the Divine Person. This addition is important because we can now see the completion of reality in this level. But Vasconcelos is careful to avoid the accusation of Pantheism when he discusses this being and he does this simply by being consistent with his principle of quality as opposed to quantity. In other words, the Divine Person, God, the Absolute is not to be conceived as a quantitative summation of all the other levels of existence so that we end up with some idea of the Absolute existing in a certain degree in all parts of reality. On the contrary, the level of being called the Divine Person is a self-subsistent principle which is indeed communicated to all levels of creation but a principle which at the same time remains detached from other existence. There is a participation in power, creation and dependence between the Absolute and the creature, but yet it is clear from this enumeration of the levels of being that the Absolute retains a qualitative separation. What Vasconcelos gives us in this section, then, is a clearer statement than he has given before of the levels of being which must include the Absolute Being on the fourth level

to explain the origin and existence of the other three levels, but in such a way that the Absolute is neither completely identified with creation nor viewed as an evolutionary step comprising the quantitative totality of creation.

We get more evidence of the natural tendency of existents to proceed to a level that is beyond what Vasconcelos has described before in a brief passage which discusses the various individualities of existence. Part of this passage reiterates his insistence that the genus/species method of ordering is really a qualitative approach, but the important part of this passage is the way he refers to the groups of individuals and what he considers their direction to be. He tells us that all existence, ordered according to ". . . proper determinations of each family of individuals -- atomic family, cellular family, conscious family, spiritual family -- all existence tends toward a center of equilibrium and power."[42] Here we find the additional inclusion of a higher level of existence and this time he refers to it as a spiritual realm of existence. Anticipating the obvious objection against this jump to the spiritual, Vasconcelos tells us that in his view we are faced with an experiential fact ". . . whose mysterious processes are not any more

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[42] Ibid., p. 921.

unfathomable than the mystery of the "leap" which occurs from the atomic nature to the cellular nature or to man."[43] He seems to be saying that there is no insurmountable barrier to such movement from the conscious to the spiritual level. We have already seen the upward movement through the first three levels of existence and, to his mind at least, the final movement to the highest level of existence is of the same type and kind. There is here obvious evidence of the role that the Plotinian concept of "return" plays in his thinking; it is not unusual, then, for Vasconcelos to complete the process of existence by positing this level. His concept of truth may also have exercised some influence on his thinking regarding the level of the spiritual; if truth is the harmonious unification of reality, then he would have had to include this level to account for all reality. The one significance which embraces all levels of existence "orientated towards the Absolute" now takes on added meaning at this level of existence.

The tendency of the various families of existence helps us to see in a somewhat better way the thought that Vasconcelos is trying to express, namely, that all existence -- now four levels instead of the previous three -- is unified. In this matter we see again the fundamental principle of Unity which

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[43] Ibid.

we discussed much earlier in this work as well as the concept of the Plotinian return to the Absolute exercising a strong influence on Vasconcelos' Todología. He is convinced that the totality is unified; he tells us that the tendency of these families of existence which we observe allows us to make a "natural conception" which is not dependent on the rational or dialectical processes. We deduce, then, ". . . the totality as one pluralistic creation which begins in the atom and finds its necessary end precisely in Revelation according to St. Paul and St. John."[44]

Paul, according to Vasconcelos, solved a problem which philosophers have struggled with for centuries. Vasconcelos refers to Paul as a philosopher who combined the triad of Creation, Fall, Redemption, which he took from Revelation, with all the events and facts of reality. The result of this combination is the kind of synthesis which Vasconcelos sees as the culmination of his philosophical thought. He looks upon Paul as the thinker who gives coherency to all beings of existence ". . . not through intellectual activities which create fictitious words of essences and entities but because matter and spirit, unified within a transcendental plan, acquire new meanings and tend toward common purposes, i.e.,

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[44] Ibid.

redemption . . ."[45] Vasconcelos, through the words of Paul, sees all existence on a new level, that of spirit and, consequently, all reality is seen in a new light. The key element in his interpretation of Paul is the idea of Redemption because it provides the method of Paul's cosmovision whereby all existence is synthesized in the level of the spirit. Vasconcelos is not particularly concerned to define the kind of Redemption that takes place; he briefly mentions that we might call it "grace" but he avoids any discussion that would make it precise. He is, rather, simply concerned to see that existence is transformed and elevated to a higher level: ". . . the transfiguration of all existence and its inclusion in the incorruptible and eternal (realm)."[46] Vasconcelos speaks of this transformation in a way that is similar to Hegel, but we cannot say for sure that a Hegelian influence is at work here because in this section of the Todología Vasconcelos does not refer to him directly. The suspicion of some influence, however, develops because in another work, Manual de Filosofía, Vasconcelos interprets Hegel's synthesis in this fashion: "We only arrive at the fullness of being in se when we are raised to the I of

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[45] Ibid., p. 950.

[46] Ibid.

Humanity which embodies the unique and identical spirit of the divine reason; this reason lives and develops in the progressive history of the spirit, in the history of Science, Art, religion and Philosophy."[47] And further on he adds: "Divinity, which is the supreme synthesis, is manifested in the history of the human spirit."[48] Vasconcelos had undoubtedly read Hegel and these words indicate the way in which he regarded Hegel's thought; perhaps he had some of these same concepts in mind when he was discoursing about the transfiguration and elevation of existence. Whether there is direct influence or not, this interpretation does serve the purposes of the Vasconcelian synthesis.

What we have tried to establish then, in this section of our writing, is the fact that Vasconcelos sees a structured existence of reality comprised of various levels and families of individualities. This structure is synthesized into a new unity and, for Vasconcelos, Paul provides a good model or vision of how the synthesis takes place. This is convenient for Vasconcelos' system because his philosophy is concerned, as he tells us, ". . . with coordinating events and facts similar to a hierarchy which proceeds from the atom to the

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[47] José Vasconcelos, Manual de Filosofía, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 1093.

[48] Ibid., p. 1094.

cell and from this to the consciousness of man who is a person and thence to the highest person who is God."[49] The explicit and repeated reference to this "highest person" represents an advance of his thought in the Todología and constitutes a new level of existence. The precise significance of this concept of God, Divine Person or the Absolute will be our next consideration.

The Absolute as the term of the unification of reality. -- One of the clearest statements which Vasconcelos makes about the Absolute is in terms of its authority and domination. In a section on the concept of coordination, he tells us that each being reaches its final end by fulfilling its proper function in life.[50] To indicate, however, that each being does not act with complete independence and autonomy, he adds that the Absolute is not uninvolved with the quest for the final end but does, in fact, ". . . rule the Cosmos." He goes on to tell us, with a statement that is perhaps more of faith than philosophy, that this Absolute is made known first to us ". . . in the fullness of his existence . . . according to the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[51] The point is

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[49] Vasconcelos, Todología, pp. 950-951.

[50] Ibid., p. 881.

[51] Ibid.

that each level of existence, as it progresses in the return to the Absolute, is still under the control and domination of the Absolute. For Vasconcelos, the Absolute constitutes the end of existence but the Absolute remains in control of the process.

The Scriptural influence on Vasconcelos is obvious and he is trying to combine what he takes from Revelation with what he has developed in his philosophy. We might be tempted to think at this point that Vasconcelos has left the discipline of philosophy and entered into theological considerations. But the evidence indicates otherwise; in fact, the distinction of philosophy and theology, as we might suspect, has very little importance in his thought. He has the view of a unified world with all beings fully integrated in various levels of perfection, i.e., the cycles or levels of existence we have already distinguished.[52] The proper discipline to study this model of existence is a philosophy which is one with or in accord with Revelation. John Haddox expresses this well when he says that the Mexican philosopher ". . . simply presents a system of Christian thought, and his synthetic view includes all sources of knowledge: natural (the senses, intellect, imagination, emotions) and supernatural (revelation and grace)."[53]

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[52] Ibid., p. 839.

[53] John H. Haddox, Vasconcelos of Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 37.

The notion that the Absolute is in control of the progressive development of existence is explained by Vasconcelos from two points of view: 1) that which considers the creative power of the Absolute, and 2) that which considers the creature's return journey.

The first aspect is explained by a passage in which Vasconcelos refers to the creative power of the Absolute. In this section he is talking about the concept of being and is trying to get at the essence of being-in-itself. He maintains that when we attempt to answer this question by abstraction there is no answer. We have to understand that "Ideas, memories, premonitions, feelings, sensations -- all spring forth from the complex singularity of Absolute Being and from our consciousness which is its image."[54] Again, we can see that existence and the process of development falls under the domination of the Absolute. Vasconcelos discusses the second aspect we mentioned above in a section where he discusses the process of all existence. In this section he distinguishes between that kind of philosophy which is called rational and that kind of philosophy which "Plato called harmony." The latter kind of philosophy allows us to coordinate beings in so far as they are "partial but living units (of a totality), as well as the relations of

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[54] Vasconcelos, Todología, p. 900.

this with the Absolute where the totality proceeds."[55] Both of these references give us more insight as to how Vasconcelos views the Absolute and its importance for his philosophy as the controlling power and terminal point of each level of existence.

Vasconcelos refers to his philosophy in many places as one of coordination and it is in connection with the idea of coordination that the Absolute plays perhaps the most important role in the Vasconcelian scheme. We made the point in the third chapter, which no other commentator of Vasconcelos had made previously that the image, in conjunction with human consciousness, provides the key instrument for the unification of reality. In the Todología this is still the case, but Vasconcelos adds another element to the process of coordination. This element is the role of the Absolute in the unification of reality. What Vasconcelos gives us in this work is the completion of the process and he now explains it in such a way that the Absolute occupies an essential place in his whole system of philosophy.

What Vasconcelos presents us with in the Todología is a two-fold faculty of identification or, properly speaking, coordination of the Universe. He now mentions explicitly the

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[55] Ibid., p. 926.

consciousness of the Absolute as one of these faculties and, at the same time, still maintains the role of the consciousness of man. The immediate problem one has with these two faculties is concerned with their mutual relationhip. We will delve into this problem in detail in our next chapter on evaluations and criticisms but for now our immediate difficulty is in presenting what Vasconcelos says.

Vasconcelos indicates that these are two distinct faculties but they do have a definite relationship. They are distinct because each performs its own proper kind of coordination of the universe. The consciousness of the Absolute is concerned with the totality of the coordination while human consciousness is concerned with what Vasconcelos calls a partial coordination. The implication is that human consciousness operates within its own but limited area of reality while the consciousness of the Absolute is infinite, i.e., unlimited because he has dominion over existence and rules it through his creative power. The infinity of the Absolute is not intended by Vasconcelos to mean that the Absolute is quantitatively greater than any magnitude but ". . . it means only that no magnitude limits God because he produces and defines all magnitudes."[56] Thus, th ons ous-

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[56] Ibid., p. 916.

ness of the Absolute has the ability to integrate and coordinate all that human consciousness coordinates and more. The Absolute corrects, transcends, and completes the unification of reality which all organisms and especially man partially achieve. That is, an Absolute is required to fulfill the metaphysical principle of the unification of variety. Short of the Absolute the principle lacks completeness: e.g., at man's level we have many (a variety) of centers of unification but a higher being is required to unify these many centers. Otherwise, the final schema would be composed of just the many, the variety (the consciousness of many individual humans unifying diversity). This would not conform to Vasconcelos' principle of harmonized, balanced unity. It would, rather, be aesthetically unbalanced.

Human consciousness is related to the consciousness of the Absolute as part to whole and imperfect to perfect. The coordination which human consciousness achieves is a partial coordination of the universe as compared to the coordination of Absolute consciousness which Vasconcelos refers to as the totality of coordination. The former is also imperfect because ". . . his consciousness is an image of the consciousness of God but not the same as God's consciousness."[57] From

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[57] Ibid., p. 890. In this connection Vasconcelos adds: "The living center of all the coordinations is the Creator of the Universe. A type of unification is at work in Him which leaves intact the individuality and the personality of each one of the parts of the whole, although he works with a whole which is much more vast than the Universe itself." p. 867.

another point of view, human consciousness is only as perfect as the product of any tool is perfect under the guidance and domination of the one who operates that tool. Vasconcelos indicates in another passage that human consciousness should be characterized in this way because ". . . human consciousness . . . (is) . . . an instrument of the Creator whose consciousness is the essential order of Plurality."[58] He also conceives man as the module (modulo) of coordination, implying by the use of this word a certain proportional relationship between man's consciousness and that of God. For his part man embraces the Cosmos and transfigures it "in the direction of the Absolute; at the same time he discovers the germ (germen) which will give it citizenship in the Universe of the Invisible. God, for his part, unifies the Universe which is His creation with His person or His consciousness."[59]

It is important to note that in the Todología Vasconcelos does not imply that the value of human effort in the process of coordination is in any way diminished. His explanation of the relationship of these two faculties conveys the impression that both have their area of proper operation. There is a relationship between the two of total and partial; Vascon-

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[58] Ibid., p. 928.

[59] Ibid., p. 867.

celos also implies that Divine Consciousness coordinates the universe in a perfect way when he says that human consciousness coordinates in an imperfect way because it is an image of Divine consciousness. Even though these terms -- total and partial, perfect and imperfect -- may usually imply an operative value judgment, Vasconcelos does not extend the comparison of these two faculties to the point where such a judgment might be applied to them. He seems more concerned with indicating that whatever human consciousness accomplishes in its area of activity there is still something more or some higher level of completion for it to strive for. This level of completion is clearly, in Vasconcelos' explanation, the level of the consciousness of the Absolute.

According to his approach, the Absolute can perform this function of completion because in its creative potential, it has control over existence and provides the faculty of consciousness for the complete integration of reality. In this instance the synthetic character of his philosophy stands out because he is now able to say that all factors and all levels of existence are coordinated in a unity precisely because of what he attributes to the Absolute. It completes, with the function of human consciousness, the return to the One and, as MacGregor says, ". . . in our struggle for coordination, the blending of the heterogeneous elements . . ."

man discovers the One.[60]

3. The Method of Unification in the Absolute

The final question of this chapter involves a discussion of how the coordination (or unification) in the Absolute takes place. So far we have seen in our analysis of the Todología that Vasconcelos adds to and fills out his system of thought in such a way that the necessity for the inclusion of the concept of the Absolute is apparent. Now our problem is to try to present how Vasconcelos conceives the method of this process in the Todología.

Vasconcelos' explanation of unification is consistent with the view of the universe he has maintained in his other works. We have made reference in earlier parts of this work to the doctrine of coordination and, in the final analysis, it is through the work of coordination that Vasconcelos unifies in the Absolute his view of reality. He insists that coordination is the proper view of the universe and that this is the quest of philosophy: ". . . the philosopher searches for the coordination of inequality as the goal or aim of the superior harmonies of what exists."[61]

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[60] Genaro Fernández MacGregor, Vasconcelos (Mexico City: Ed. de la Sría. de educación pública, 1942), p. xxiv.

[61] Vasconcelos, Todología, pp. 862-863.

Any explanation of the process of this unification must start with Vasconcelos' view of the universe, i.e., the way he looks upon the reality that he assumes to exist before him. All existence, all being which he perceives has at least two fundamental characteristics: 1) he perceives it on various levels of existence which we have discussed above; and 2) he attributes activity and movement to the existing beings on each one of the levels of existence. This movement is not precisely defined by Vasconcelos beyond the idea of the activity which beings manifest. He is not clear whether he is referring to internal or external movement nor is he very precise in stating the impetus of this movement. The impression is clear, however, that the movement Vasconcelos has in mind is one that is progressive, and one that tends to place existing beings on a higher level of existence and thus advance being to a fuller existence.

Coordination, as "the proper view of the Universe", operates through man's consciousness to bring into intelligible conjuncts or wholes all the heterogeneous beings from their various levels of existence. This is not merely an additive process but one which is attentive to the relationships which exist between beings on the different levels of existence. Thus, it is not a process whereby the three or four levels of existence taken together are equal to the

Absolute but rather a process whereby consciousness detects the relation between one level and the other and then brings existing being into a balanced coherency, operating at all times according to the aesthetic principles of rhythm, harmony, etc. The end product is a totality for Vasconcelos but a totality "which is not chaos but a strict (non-logical) order, i.e., an existential order of harmony and proportion . . ."[62] To illustrate this coherent, balanced totality he uses examples of color, sound and the image of the film: ". . . in order to develop color (or sound) it is indispensable that each one subsists, the note and the color, faithful to itself."[63] The cinematographer uses images which are or can be separate and individual; yet, in combination, the images produce a transition to something which is graphic and significant of life itself. The final product, the film, does not result merely from the addition of all the images together but the resultant movement ". . . arises from a concurrence of heterogeneous elements and not from the sum of its parts."[64]

The combination of these elements in his examples shows us how the coordination of existence into a totality

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[62] Ibid., p. 867.

[63] Ibid., p. 864.

[64] Ibid.

is the function of man's consciousness and the power of the image which we discussed in the previous chapter. Coordination gives man the power to introduce order and significance into the movement of existence so that coordination becomes the law of concrete movement from atomic energy to the soul, thus embracing all levels of existence. The task of man in coordination is a difficult one for he faces a universe of heterogeneous elements so diverse and complex that he can unify it only in reference to some ultimate end. For Vasconcelos, it is possible to unify the Universe only by employing the concepts of coherence and coordination. He is convinced that we have in this system a philosophy of life and not abstract thought. "Unification through harmony operates in living creation; thus it differs from abstraction which is static and breaks down in entities."[65]

The Vasconcelian insight that all of this process terminates in the Absolute shows, more than in any other place of his philosophy, not only in the Todología but in all his philosophical works, the influence of his early religious training. It is at this point, the "height" of his philosophical discourse, that he speaks of the Absolute with definite aspects of a Christian interpretation. Towards the

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[65] Ibid., p. 923.

end of this work he includes a section on the theology of St. Paul and depends heavily on the interpretation of Pratt.[66] He feels he has a philosophical affinity for Paul because he sees in his writings the same philosophical vision of unity that he has worked for. Vasconcelos' attraction to Paul seems to come from two sources: 1) the strength of Paul's explanation of unity and 2) the respect for quality which Vasconcelos sees in Paul.

First, he refers to the "vigorous synthesis" of Paul, as described by Pratt, and points out that his whole theology or todología revolves around one, unifying and central fact: the person of Christ.[67] Paul's use of this one principle would naturally have been of interest to Vasconcelos because of his desire for unity, but even more so since he thinks that Paul has achieved the unity of Creation, Fall and Redemption not by an appeal to intellectual processes "which create a fictitious world of essences and entities" but through the use of a "transcendental plan" which gives matter and spirit a new meaning.

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[66] Vasconcelos does not give a precise reference to this work but it is assumed to be: F. Prat, S.J., La Théologie de Saint Paul (Paris, 1923). In the Todología the name is printed as "Pratt" and is so reproduced in this work but the more common spelling appears to be Prat.

[67] Vasconcelos, Todología, p. 949.

Secondly, Vasconcelos seems to see in Paul's synthesis a similarity to his own aesthetic philosophy of quality. What Vasconcelos thinks Paul has done is to take all of existence as it is experienced in itself, i.e., in its qualitative aspects, and unify it in the ultimate existence of God or the Absolute. In other words, Paul has approached existence as in need of redemption and has unified it, under the word of Christ the Redeemer, in a condition of salvation before God, the creator.

By way of observation, we should point out the confusion that Vasconcelos seems to manifest in his discussion of Paul between the disciplines of theology and philosophy. We mentioned earlier (p. 49) that Vasconcelos does not seem too concerned to maintain the distinction of these two areas of study and this discussion brings into clearer focus this lack of concern. Early in the discussion, he seems to distinguish the two and refers to Paul's system of thought as theology or <u>todología</u>. Yet, later on Vasconcelos is attracted to the philosophical qualities of Paul's system, i.e., the concept of quality which he emphasizes. This is perhaps a result of Vasconcelos' lack of precision or a manifestation of a change of mind on his part. Whatever the case it does illustrate the way philosophy and theology are not carefully and consistently distinguished by Vasconcelos.

Because Vasconcelos has maintained that ". . . existence in the ultimate term depends on God"[68] he can readily adopt these Pauline concepts. He has also argued that coordination according to harmony and not according to mathematics takes into account the individuality and quality of existing beings. Vasconcelos sees in Paul the consideration and recognition of the individual being in his experience, i.e., Paul does not abstract and make entities out of the beings of creation but rather sees redemption and eventual unity with God in love as a personal relationship with the creator.

At several points in these pages in which Vasconcelos discusses the Absolute as the termination (or culmination) of his philosophy he mentions the idea of love or Eros. The immediate connection with the Absolute is not made clear and, as we have seen on other occasions, his descriptions of the concept give us only a hint as to the meaning he has in mind. Essentially, the idea of love or Eros has both a Christian and a philosophical meaning for Vasconcelos. On the one hand it means the mutual love between God and creature; on the other hand, however, he also calls it "that sentiment which most closely resembles eternity."[69]

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[68] Ibid., p. 920.

[69] Ibid., p. 952.

The former concept of love is the same as the Eros of the Gospels and Revelation for Vasconcelos. Philosophy, he insists, has reached the point where it must go beyond Reason (Logos) and his philosophy now surpasses harmony and coordination to terminate in Eros ". . . (which) permits us to enjoy the ultimate fullness of existence in God."[70]

The latter concept of Eros, that of the philosophical concept, brings his thought into conjunction with the level of the Absolute. The process whereby the totality of existence, beginning with the atom, finds its end in "the person who is God",[71] is the process whereby the corruptible and temporal become the incorruptible and eternal. In the Todología, the completion of his philosophical speculation, Vasconcelos states that this change does not occur according to metaphysical principles but rather according to the principles of the Gospel in which the corruptible "puts on" the incorruptible. The process begins with the atom, proceeds to the cell, then to human consciousness and finally to the Absolute; in the Todología, this final "leap" is not any more mysterious than the previous developments through the levels of existence. Eros, then, is the level of the eternal and the attainment and practice of Eros completes the final passage of existence to the

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., p. 951.

Absolute. Thus, Vasconcelos tells us that the final termination of philosophical speculation is the Eros of the Gospel ". . . whose necessary antecedents are: Logos and Harmony."[72]

The Absolute or God becomes necessary, then, for the Vasconcelian system because it involves the inclusion of every level of existence and brings the totality to the level where eternity coincides with the simultaneity of the harmonious vision of all existence. Without this activity of God, the final account of reality would have to end in the unaesthetic spectacle of nonunified plurality, variety without synthesis, i.e., discord. Hence the aesthetics of human consciousness longs for a final and perfect term of the process of coordination begun on the lower levels of existence. Vasconcelos posits such a term.

CONCLUSION:

In this chapter we have seen how Vasconcelos completes his thought with the inclusion of the concept of the Absolute. The distinctly religious contribution he makes to philosophy is the way he has been able to unify the entire spectrum of reality in and through the spiritual being he calls the Absolute. This unification is accomplished by a process of "leaps" or revulsions which he explains as the capacity each lower level of

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[72] Ibid., p. 924.

existence has to ascend to even higher levels under the influence of the consciousness of man. He has presented us with an explanation of unification which combines the function of Absolute consciousness with that of human consciousness in such a way that each retains its own proper functioning in the joint process of coordination. There is, thus, a blend of the human and divine in such a way that the uniqueness of humanity is preserved while the power of divinity is acknowledged.

Vasconcelos manifests through the pages of the Todología his deep belief in the spiritual realm and his conviction that this is the destiny of creation as well as the work of the philosopher to explain such a destiny. He also continues his argument in these pages against the kind of philosophy he refers to as "rational or abstract" philosophies. This leads him to posit an alternative way of bringing together all aspects of reality under one concept or, better, under a single (though admittedly complex) reality. According to his system, man can understand being without leaving behind anything of being by way of abstraction. Rather, his view allows man to capture the individual being of reality because he is concerned with the qualitative aspects of individual being. He feels that because of its synthetic character his method arranges all the parts of the totality of existence into their proper order according to

their qualitative relations. The parts (limited centers of unification) can now be seen in terms of the whole which embraces them; thus, they can be seen in a truly "realistic" perspective. Their proper value is confirmed and grounded; they have a real, even if limited, worth and beauty in this ultimate context. What is unique in this view is that Vasconcelos attains, what is to his mind, at least, a balanced, harmonious and therefore truthful view of reality that is unified in one act. That act, in the final analysis, is the simultaneous vision of reality in the order of the eternal.

V

EVALUATIONS, CRITICISMS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction to the Chapter

In the final chapter of this work, we will complete this particular study of José Vasconcelos with a critical review of his thought and, specifically, his religious philosophy. The first section of the chapter contains our criticisms and will center on those aspects of his approach to reality and its unification which seem to be incomplete and misleading or else show Vasconcelos' lack of depth in his philosophical reflections. In particular, we judge there are four areas where some legitimate criticism can be directed: 1) Vasconcelos' interpretation of Paul: 2) the relationship between Absolute and human consciousness; 3) Vasconcelos' contention that movement tends toward a finality; and 4) his rejection of the rational processes of knowledge.

In the second section of the chapter we shall propose some evaluations and draw some conclusions in three areas: 1) we shall discuss in what sense Vasconcelos is called a philosopher; 2) we shall look at the worth and value of the

Vasconcelian religious philosophy; we will be especially interested in questioning whether or not the synthesis of reality terminating in the Absolute truly completes Vasconcelos' thought in the spiritual realm; 3) finally, we will evaluate Vasconcelos' aesthetic-emotive type of knowledge.

1. Criticisms

There are many approaches one could take to a critical evaluation of Vasconcelos' thought and his religious concepts; but it seems best to us, first to stay within the limitations of what we have discussed so far and, secondly, to look at the major problems and questions that remain unresolved in his thought. The areas that we have selected for attention seem to contain difficulties which Vasconcelos never did solve.

Vasconcelos' interpretation of Paul. -- The particular problem we propose to investigate in regard to Vasconcelos' interpretation of Paul is an instance of the larger problem which Vasconcelos seems to have in handling Christian theology per se. Vasconcelos relies heavily on the thought of Paul in the Todología in order to place his synthesis on the level of the Absolute. However, we may question the depth to which he has investigated this thought because he cites only one commentator

on Paul, the work of Pratt.[1] Our problem does not involve questioning the authority or acceptance by New Testament scholars of Pratt -- different schools of biblical studies might offer differing estimates of its value -- but our problem does involve questioning Vasconcelos' use of only Pratt. Because of the importance Paul has in the Vasconcelian system we have to wonder why Vasconcelos' presentation is lacking a wide variety of opinions or interpretations of Paul.

When we turn to the question of grace as the explanation for the transformation of existence, we may well question how accurately Vasconcelos follows the theology of Paul. Contrary to the method of Paul, Vasconcelos seems to refuse to involve himself in the complexities of this concept; this is a glaring lack of consistency on his part because he manifests, at the least, an incomplete knowledge or appreciation of the man whom he describes as the finest Christian philosopher. Vasconcelos incorporates into his own system the Pauline concepts of Redemption, the unification of matter and spirit, and the transformation of all

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[1] As we mentioned in Chapter Four, Vasconcelos does not make an exact reference to this work, but we have assumed it to be: F. Prat, S.J., La Théologie de Saint Paul (Paris: 1923).

existence; for Paul, grace is essential for the accomplishment of all of these.[2] Yet it is surprising to see that Vasconcelos gives only a passing reference to the concept of grace and thus leaves his own explanation incomplete.

We may speculate that the history of the controversies over this theological problem of grace was more than Vasconcelos wanted to handle or was capable of handling. The concept of grace might also have signified a rigid doctrine for him that would have demanded a faith commitment at that point in his life, a commitment that he was not prepared to make, whether it be to Roman Catholicism or any other organized form of belief. However, these are purely speculations because Vasconcelos does not inform us of his reasons for not delving deeper into grace as the explanation of the elevation of existence to a higher level. It is, perhaps, the best procedure to take this lack as consistent with his general method of thinking; just as, for example, he took only part of the Kantian doctrine of a priori for his particular purposes and rejected the remainder, so we may view the avoidance of the particulars of Paul's explanation, i.e., grace, as another instance of Vasconcelos' selection process from the thought of other thinkers.

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[2] As examples of Paul's concept of the value of grace, cf. Romans VIII and Colossians I.

This is not to say that Vasconcelos of necessity had to admit the existence and function of grace. He has been an eclectic thinker throughout all of his other philosophical works, hence we should not be surprised to find him continuing to be eclectic in Todología. We do maintain, however, that Vasconcelos is not free to accept the product without the means of production, the brick building without the mortar, so to speak. If he should do so, and he has accepted the Pauline view, then he must address himself to the question of grace or be criticized for his incompleteness.

This particular problem is related to the larger problem of understanding precisely the basis and structure of Vasconcelos' view of reality. That is, one conversant with the history of Western religious and philosophical thought is accustomed to distinguish between pure philosophy or "natural theology" which is based on reason and "dogmatic theology" which is based on supernatural revelation accessible only to faith. Aquinas' procedure, for instance, comes to mind. It is, however, impossible to distinguish these elements or to separate these approaches in Vasconcelos' thought. With apparent ease he interweaves insights from a variety of sources so inextricably that one can neither call his thought "pure" philosophy nor revealed theology. He seems to be aware of such distinctions as, for example, when he entitles a section of

Todología, "Filosofía y Teología".[3] However, when he becomes involved in the detailed questions of his thought, the distinction has little, if any, practical significance. For all the difficulties of the word, we will have to call his thought "religious philosophy". We may ponder the viability, the merits and demerits of this approach (it has precedents in Augustine, Anselm, and others), but at the least it illustrates Vasconcelos' desire to overcome dichotomies and to unify all aspects of human experience in a wholistic vision.

Absolute and human consciousness. -- Our second area of criticism concerns the relationship of Absolute and human consciousness. In the earlier chapters of this study we established the role of human consciousness, with the use of the image, in the coordination of all reality. In Chapter Four, we indicated that Vasconcelos added in Todología the concept of Absolute consciousness as the perfection of this coordination.

In its final form coordination is the product of both of these operations. The relationship between the two is that of partial and imperfect to total and perfect operation. Human consciousness has a given area of operation within reality but Absolute consciousness has the power or capacity to coordinate

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[3]José Vasconcelos, Todología, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 836-848.

this reality as well as more, i.e., the totality of reality. The problem concerns the lack of definition regarding these two faculties. While, at first glance, partial and total, imperfect and perfect may seem to be adequate explanations, the question arises as to the necessity of the function of human consciousness in the synthesis of reality.

Vasconcelos maintains that Absolute consciousness can coordinate all that human consciousness coordinates and, if this is so, why posit human consciousness at all? The function of Absolute consciousness seems certainly to go beyond the function of human consciousness; more importantly, it seems to embrace and contain the function of human consciousness. It is possible, then, to draw a conclusion from this line of argumentation which Vasconcelos would not have drawn himself, given the emphasis he places on the value of human consciousness in his synthesis. That is, from the relationship between Absolute and human consciousness we have just outlined, we could conclude that human consciousness is superfluous in the synthesis once the function of Absolute consciousness is introduced. If Vasconcelos had explained this process within a certain time reference, i.e., if human consciousness operates within a given Time X, and then if Absolute consciousness continues its operation in Time Y to complete the synthesis, then the value of human consciousness would never by questioned.

But his explanation is not this precise and we might be inclined to reject totally the value and function of human consciousness.

If we are to give in to this inclination, however, then we would have to deny the obvious fact that human consciousness is important and that Vasconcelos spent a considerable amount of his philosophical effort establishing that point. The problem is forced on us and on Vasconcelos because, once again, he leaves us with an incomplete explanation. As far as he goes in this discussion, he establishes a proper relationship between these two capacities. However, because he did not fully develop the relationship, his explanation is open to interpretations which he did not envisage and ones which he would obviously have trouble incorporating into the totality of his thought.

In what follows, we offer a possible way of interpreting what Vasconcelos says about the relationship between Absolute and human consciousness. We do not assert that our explanation is Vasconcelos' explanation because we only have what he wrote and there is no possible means available to us to add directly to his words. We do think, however, that there is a possibility of preserving the place of human consciousness in his synthesis. It seems to us that Vasconcelos himself had all the elements to provide a solution to this interpretive problem had he only gone further in applying the ideas of principal and instrumental

causality. He tells us that ". . . human consciousness . . . (is) . . . an instrument of the Creator . . ."[4] but he fails to go any further with this line of argumentation. The explanation would have been more complete and perfect had he explained that human consciousness, as an instrumental cause of coordination, operates under the direction and influence of the principal cause, i.e., Absolute consciousness, but that it still maintains its own unique character and individuality. The instrument, under the domination of the operator, is not destroyed; on the contrary, its individuality is necessary to a strong degree so that the product of its activity can be attained within its own given area of operation. In this sense the instrument is necessary for the principal operator and without it the effect could not be attained. The effect, however, in its complete state, is more than the instrument itself simply because it receives from the principal operator a certain power or force to accomplish the task. This power flows through the instrument or is employed by the instrument under the direction of the principal causality and the instrument is in no way changed as a result of this shared power. Indeed, the peculiar nature of this instrument for this particular task makes it suitable for the accomplishment of the purposes of the

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[4] Ibid., p. 928.

principal operator.

If Vasconcelos had explained the relationship of Absolute and human consciousness with the completeness of the nature of instrumental causality, then the value of human consciousness would have been maintained in his synthesis. As his explanation stands we are left in a state of doubt as to the real importance of human consciousness in his thought, although we must be inclined to say that, for Vasconcelos, it must have some value considering the totality of his thought. But we must remember that he started life as a lawyer and the life of a serious philosopher was far from his intentions until he had already completed his legal studies. Perhaps if he had pursued a systematic program of philosophical studies he would have received the necessary history and logic courses in philosophy to have prevented such a problematic and unclear explanation as he presents us with in the relationship of Absolute and human consciousness.

Movement toward finality. -- Our third area of criticism is concerned with Vasconcelos' ideas of movement and its tendency toward finality. In the other chapters of this study we have tried to show how the system of Vasconcelos leads to a necessary religious aspect because his synthesis terminates on the spiritual level of the Absolute. One of his most important arguments for the introduction of the Absolute is

the idea that movement directs reality to a final terminal point and, for Vasconcelos, that point becomes the Absolute.

Our point of criticism here is not to disprove the notion that there is an Absolute which manifests a function of synthesis since its necessity for the completion of the system has been well established. We simply want to raise the question as to whether Vasconcelos has made an unwarranted "leap" of his own from sense data (movement) to an ultimate conclusion (the existence of the Absolute).

The grounds which Vasconcelos invokes for positing the existence of the Absolute constitute a mixture of faith and several philosophical arguments, but it is virtually impossible to rank the various arguments he employs in any order of importance. First, there is the conviction, for Vasconcelos, that the Absolute exists as a matter of belief or on the basis of his own personal faith, a belief he probably acquired as a young boy and one which seems to be present at least implicitly throughout his writings. Secondly, there is an argument that we might possibly call an anthropological argument in that it depends on man's reflection concerning his human experience. In the process of looking at man's human condition of helplessness, Vasconcelos exhausts the human possibilities of solving that condition and uncovers the Absolute as the ground and solution of man's inability to

encounter the world alone. As far as this argument goes it is sound, but we question whether it is sufficiently complete. Smith raises two other questions, in addition to the condition of need, which must be answered in the course of self-reflection in order to detect within our experience the presence of God.[5] Vasconcelos' argument manifests a concern for the contingency of life; but over and above this Smith argues that in reflecting on our experience we should also be concerned for the limitations of life brought on by the fact of death, and we should be aware of our moral responsibilities in determining the quality and direction of our life. It is in the midst of reflecting on these three concerns, according to Smith, that man "encounters the signs or marks of God."[6] Vasconcelos expresses very well a part of this argument, that of man's need to rely on some other, but he also shows that his reflection on the total human condition was incomplete. We might speculate that Vasconcelos had thought about the inevitability of death and the quality of life, but it would be no more than speculation on our part. Unfortunately, Vasconcelos' argument for the Absolute from the human condition is very brief and the literature does not allow us to make the argument any more complete.

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[5]John E. Smith, Experience and God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 151.

[6]Ibid.

In the third place we have the argument that is of most concern for our criticism at this point. This argument for the existence of the Absolute develops from Vasconcelos' observation that movement tends toward finality. From the starting point of movement Vasconcelos deduced the finality of the Absolute. Our problem with this line of argumentation stems from the fact that the "movement-finality" equation is not one that wins universal assent among modern men nor carries compelling force with philosophers. Even when we find it receiving approval the problem has always been one of determining what constitutes the finality under discussion. Vasconcelos seems to posit too quickly the finality of all movement as the Absolute in the Todología. Instead of giving the reader a detailed analysis whereby motion moves successively from one finality to another and completes the process in the Absolute, or instead of providing a metaphysical analysis of motion towards an end, Vasconcelos immediately concludes to the Absolute.

The argument from the concept of movement could actually be a very good argument for the Vasconcelian synthesis. He has established in his philosophy certain levels of existence which are characterized by progress in a forward and upward direction. He has also provided the mechanics for this development by indicating the function of the various faculties employed

in the coordination of existence. But in order to make this argument effective he should have used in this discussion these concepts which were already a part of his system and gone through each level of existence to show its finality of movement, then to the next level and finally to the level of the Absolute.

Instead, we once more have the structure or outline of a good idea but one that is incomplete. Perhaps Vasconcelos thought that "movement introduces the factor of finality"[7] would be quite evident to the reader and thus needed no further development, or perhaps he did not appreciate the complexity of this line of argumentation. Whatever the reason we can only propose a possible interpretation in our attempts to make the argument complete.

Once again one is prompted to wonder about the logical and cognitive status of Vasconcelos' philosophy, this time with reference to his positing of the Absolute. Is the Absolute posited by faith or does it rest upon strictly philosophical proof or demonstration? If the latter, has he merely ignored or legitimately circumvented or overcome Kant's contention that God is only a "regulative idea" for reason and a "belief" for moral faith and in no case an object of real knowledge? One

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[7] Vasconcelos, op. cit., p. 890

is not obliged necessarily to agree with Kant, of course, but we might have hope that one who is indebted to Kant on so many points would have made clearer his response to Kant on this crucial issue.

We are left with a notion of the Absolute posited on what appear to be weak or, at least insufficient, grounds and an Absolute that is characterized by the attributes of Classical Theism as well as the elements of a dipolar approach to God. On the one hand he tells us that the Absolute can be described as Eternal, Omnipotent and a gratuitous Creator, as we have already mentioned in Chapter Four (p. 31).

But Vasconcelos also gives us a vision of the Absolute which incorporates a unification of variety or, better, the harmonized extremes of heterogeneity in reality. Vasconcelos argues that, in the final analysis, Absolute consciousness synthesizes all the levels of being and their diversity into one unified whole. Thus, the Absolute represents to us the coordination of all existence through his productive act of synthesis. Vasconcelos has explained the synthesis on the lower levels of existence by the ability of one level to be elevated to ever higher levels of existence. On the human level, consciousness has synthesized the diversity of existence and included it within its sphere of action, but we are still faced with a variety of individual human consciousness. The

ultimate unity of Vasconcelos' system demands the activity of Absolute consciousness in which we see both variety and harmony, diversity and unity taken up and included within the Absolute.

Vasconcelos does not expand this characterization of the Absolute in any great detail but we feel this is the implication of the activity of Absolute consciousness. For our own clarification, we might compare this image of the Absolute which Vasconcelos gives to the unity of the human body: the physical body of Smith is one and unified under a certain aspect but under a different aspect Smith's body is made up of many organs which, in turn, are made up of many individual cells. Just as the individual cells go to make up the unity of the organs and the individual organs go to make up the unity of Smith's body, so Vasconcelos presents us with an explanation of the unification of reality which uses the individual units of one level of existence progressing constantly upwards until the level of the Absolute wherein diversity becomes total unity.

Rejection of rational/intellectual knowledge. -- Our last area of criticism involves the negative approach Vasconcelos takes toward rational/intellectual knowledge. This criticism presents us with something of a dilemma because, on the one hand, we think it is inappropriate that Vasconcelos should reject rational/intel-

lectual knowledge so completely and yet, on the other hand, we feel there is something fresh and innovative in the method of aesthetic-emotive knowledge which he proposes as the alternative type of knowledge.

Also, this is one of those rare instances in the Vasconcelian system in which he makes a complete and entire presentation of his ideas, i.e., in explaining aesthetic-emotive knowledge he covers all the details of his thought from several points of view so that the reader, at least in this case, has a thorough grasp of what Vasconcelos substitutes for rational knowledge.

However, the question that we raise at this point is directed to the profundity or lack of it that Vasconcelos manifests in his understanding of rational knowledge. His system seeks a unity of the diverse elements of reality and he thinks that the way to unify diversity is through a knowledge that captures objects just as they are and one that is attentive primarily to the quality and proportional relationships of objects. He rejects rational knowledge because it is concerned, so he tells us, with mathematical relationships and because it is static, i.e., concerned with entities and essences and not with living reality.

The rationalistic philosophies would counter, however, by saying that we have to look at the whole spectrum of the

rational process. The process of abstraction employed in those systems of philosophy which Vasconcelos criticizes is not, they would argue, simply for the purpose of achieving a lifeless entity, but rather for the purpose of allowing the intellect to confront the variety of objects of existence and attain knowledge. It is true that the image of sense knowledge is restrictive and places limitations on the mind but only because it is always the image of a particular object. Thus, this image is static or non-vital because it is bound to one individual, concrete object and in this area of rational knowledge the criticism of Vasconcelos has merit.

Much of the rational tradition of human knowledge also considers the concept as a further product dependent upon and flowing from the sense image.[8] The concept has an immaterial and universal character and while in some philosophies it does attain the essence of an object it also serves as the means of explaining uniformity and sameness in the midst of the diversity of reality. Because of its universal character the concept can stand for one thing in any time or place despite the changing conditions of size, shape or weight of that particular thing.[9]

It seems to us, then, that Vasconcelos is only partially

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[8]Manuel García Morente, Lecciones Preliminares de Filosofía (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, S.A., 1960), pp. 124-125.

[9]Daniel J. Sullivan, Fundamentals of Logic (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1963), p. 22.

correct in his criticism of rational knowledge. According to the school of thought which he criticizes, the significance of the concept is not restricted only to the essence of the object of knowledge. Moreover, rather than being limited by mathematical considerations, the concept of rational knowledge offers a possible way of going beyond such considerations in an unlimited way. It is our belief that Vasconcelos does offer a plausible method of unitative knowledge through his aesthetic-emotive approach. However, by rejecting the totality of rational knowledge, he may well have overlooked a viable way of explaining and unifying the diversity of reality.

In short, the dilemma is this. Vasconcelos may well have been correct in rejecting the positivistic account of experience as mere sense data, of reason as abstract, mathematical logic, of reality as numerous unrelated, static and self-contained entities. He may have been justified in believing that the positivistic idolatry of the "scientific method" inhibits and hampers the human spirit, and that the reality enjoined, expressed, and celebrated in the arts, in religion, and ancient philosophy and religion is indeed real and much richer than the universe delivered by the Positivists. Nevertheless, one cannot help but feel that Vasconcelos' reaction was an overreaction or at least an unsatisfying one. And this for two reasons: one, he often gives the impression of denigrating the scientific realm

altogether. Surely there is a difference between relativizing science and technology and denouncing it wholesale. Two, Vasconcelos appears to indulge in over-kill in his attacks on reason. Again, it is one thing to criticize a truncated account of reason and another to try to go beyond reason per se. The overreaction weakens the status of Vasconcelos' own philosophy. It seems to us that it is a sign of human maturity to ask always for the reasons for believing this account of reality rather than another (e.g., Vasconcelos' rather than that of the Positivists). One would tend to be more sympathetic to an argument for a better account of experience and reason than a plea, however earnest, that we "go beyond" or "do without" reason altogether and get along without appeal to ordinary human experience. Vasconcelos is not as clear on these and related issues as we might have hoped.

2. Evaluations and Conclusions

The three areas that we wish to spend some time with in this section are the following: 1) Vasconcelos as a philosopher; 2) his religious philosophy; and 3) his aesthetic-emotive type of knowledge.

Vasconcelos the philosopher. -- In the first chapter of this work we touched upon the question of whether Vasconcelos can rightfully be called a philosopher or not. We did not resolve the problem there, preferring to delay any conclusion until we

had seen and discussed some of his writings commonly called "philosophical". Instead, we merely offered a functional definition that could serve us until we had experienced the spirit and flavour of his thinking and thus could attempt to arrive at some conclusions.

The problem of determining whether or not Vasconcelos is a philosopher may be viewed as one of definition but if it has no other consequences it will at least enable us to classify and evaluate him within the ranks of the thinkers of history. But, of course, the consequences are greater than mere classification for if it appears that he is not extraordinarily philosophical then we may be in the position of considering as valuable only his social, cultural and biographical works. On the other hand, if he is a philosopher in some meaning of that word, then we may rightly expect to discover new insights or new ways of looking at reality.

When we first read some of Vasconcelos' philosophical writings we might be inclined to think that Vasconcelos has only done a great deal of borrowing from other thinkers. There are traces, sometimes definite references, to the early Greek thinkers, to modern German philosophers and to nineteenth and twentieth century French thinkers. With this variety of thought from other men, it is somewhat natural to raise the question of his status as a philosopher.

In our first approach to an answer we must be concerned with a proper and adequate concept of "philosopher" and "philosophy" or otherwise no conclusion is possible. In this area of discussion the definitions of these two terms are almost as numerous as those thinkers who offer definitions. Each person who has reflected on the nature of philosophy or the characteristics of the philosopher seems to have concluded to a definition that appears to be different from each other thinker. However, there may be one or several common elements in all of this discussion that will enable us to have some background against which to compare Vasconcelos.

The most general approach to philosophy might be loosely characterized as an attempt to know and understand what is beyond our immediate experience; or we might refer to this characteristic as the attempt to penetrate beneath the surface of things; to go beyond the dimension of reality which is immediately given to mere sense experience. The philosopher who answers to this description attempts to provide answers to the important questions of life. He is concerned with such problems as the nature of man and the world, the concept of knowledge and the possibility of the existence of a world of spirit. He investigates these and other questions for the purpose of providing answers for the human race and he necessarily relies on the investigations and findings of other thinkers who have

investigated important questions at some earlier time. He makes a serious attempt to arrive at a particular kind of wisdom which is capable of alleviating the ignorance and doubt of mankind.

There may be some bias in formulating a very general definition of philosophy in this way and, if so, it is conditioned by the way in which the mind of Vasconcelos operates. In other words, our inquiry at this point would not derive any satisfactory answer if we try to define philosophy, for instance, according to an idealist approach or that of nominalism or even that of linguistic analysis. Whether this discussion concludes that Vasconcelos is a philosopher or not, it must face the fact that he accepts a real world distinct from the knowing subject, that he accepts universal thought and that he acknowledges the existence of a world beyond sense reality.[10]

According to another definition of philosophy, the essential characteristic of the philosopher is creation or discovery as far as his thought and his written work is concerned. Thus, this kind of philosopher uncovers some cause, some explanation to a serious question of the world or of man, etc., which no other thinker has ever expressed. Or his whole approach may be a creative insight into the nature of reality expressed in a system of philosophy that is truly unique in the history of

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[10]Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "Don José Vasconcelos", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, March, 1947, p. 454.

thought. Plato and Aristotle among the ancients may be cited as examples of this kind of philosopher or, in more recent history, Immanuel Kant may serve as such an example. This is a strict and confining definition of philosophy but it does have the advantage of ensuring that a person who can be called a "philosopher" according to these criteria has earned this title by uniquely creative effort. On the other hand, because of its strictness, there are some thinkers we are accustomed to calling philosophers who may not qualify for the title at all according to this definition. They may be nothing more than good thinkers who contributed only excellent thought to the history of ideas but failed to meet the marks of exceptional originality and creativity.

On the basis of this definition, we can classify Vasconcelos as a philosopher only within certain limitations. If we are looking for an original and creative effort on his part, we can isolate a part of the aesthetic a priori and discover something that is truly unique.[11] In Chapter Three the discussion of phantasy and image became much more extensive than originally intended because in the process of studying these elements the suspicion grew that perhaps these ideas, particularly the element of the image, were the expression of the precise instruments

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[11] José Sánchez Villaseñor, El Sistema filosófico de Vasconcelos (Mexico City: Editorial Polis, 1939), p. 129.

which put the human in direct contact with the essence of the objects of reality and raised existence to the level of spirituality and the Absolute. The importance of finding and explicating these instruments stems from the fact that Vasconcelos had rejected other systems of philosophy because, in his opinion, they did not arrive at true knowledge of reality and, therefore, could not attain the unity of existence. With his system he tells us true knowledge of reality is possible and claims that he has arrived at homogeneity. The image, as he conceives of it and explains it, is what gives substance for the high claims of Aesthetic Monism. Consequently, a comprehension of the image along with the idea of phantasy allows us to see his system in all its creative uniqueness.

For the most part he proves to be an excellent collector of the thought of others. The influences on his own thought are many and varied; Plotinus and Neo-Platonism affected him strongly, Pythagoras was one of his earliest discoveries and enabled him to begin to have an insight into the dynamic character of reality when he reinterpreted the concept of number. Because he thought he could incorporate all knowledge into one system, he investigated Indian Vedantic thought and this in turn proved to be a strong influence on his intellectual work.

Unfortunately, according to the terms of our strict definition, the universality of his interest and his great desire

to combine many strains of thought did not permit him to exercise the creativity that would have marked him as this kind of philosopher. Still, we should not take too lightly the one element of his aesthetic philosophy that is unique and creative, i.e., the idea of the image in the aesthetic a priori. He had, undoubtedly, the a priori of Kant as a preliminary model but as Brightman asserts, "It is in his doctrine of the aesthetic a priori that one finds much that is fresh and original in Vasconcelos."[12]

When we realize how sparse the creativity is within his system, we should remember the early education Vasconcelos received: he was trained to be a lawyer and the legal profession was what he considered to be his work in life. When he began his academic training as a young man, philosophizing was far from his mind. Consequently, he was not trained to be, nor did he give much thought at first to being, a philosopher. We may only speculate what the originality of his system might have been if he had received a more thorough grounding in the history and methodology of philosophical thought.

Vasconcelos' role in the Ateneo undoubtedly helped it to be a force in the early stirrings against Díaz but for the purposes of our discussion it indicates the time that he first became serious about philosophy, a time when his mind began to open up to other ways of speculating about the world of reality.

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[12]Brightman, op. cit., p. 456.

It was not, however, a time of instruction that was carefully programmed according to one or various systems of philosophy; it was, rather, an unsystematized approach to reading and discussion, a kind of grasping for new philosophical ways of thinking. In the process, Vasconcelos acquired a great deal that was new and no doubt some insights began to form in his mind, but it was hardly the training and schooling that the creative philosopher would have needed to be successful in his endeavors.

We shall not argue, then, that Vasconcelos was a philosopher in the strict sense of the definition since this is a claim we might well regard as excessive. Rather, we shall argue that he does offer us something of philosophical value which is worthy of our study, as these pages have tried to point out. Despite the general lack of creativity, there are insights and new ways of looking at existence in his writings that merit our serious concern. And despite the fact that he changes his mind from one work to another and that he may even be wrong, according to the opinion of some scholars, in some of his conclusions, his approach to reality, the unity that man introduces into the elements of the world and the culmination of all existence in the being of the Absolute make his thought an apt, if not near perfect, object of religious/philosophical study.

A broader, more general definition of philosopher and

philosophy best describes Vasconcelos and his work. Probably the best way to characterize his approach is to view him as a synthesizer of many strains and influences in the history of ideas. He is a philosopher in the sense of trying to discover causes and reasons for a world beyond the sense world. He makes an effort to look at the totality of reality in an attempt to discover the unity of the universe, its ultimate causes as well as its ultimate destiny. When he investigates and writes about the important questions that have faced man, it is obvious that he has borrowed ideas and concepts from many sources. His writing is his own as is the way he puts his ideas together, but the influence of others from Plotinus to Bergson is easy to identify. The totality of his thought and work is a synthesis of these men together with his thoughts and feelings so that the end product resembles many men but has the definite stamp of Vasconcelos' individual approach. However, it is not as though he intended only to collect the thoughts and ideas of other thinkers throughout history and combine them into a synthesis. There is a purpose as well as a certain creative element to his thought and he used the writings of others that would enable him to compose his own synthesis to present his ideas.

<u>The Absolute and Vasconcelos' Religious Philosophy</u>. -- One of the most unique features of the Vasconcelian system is the way

he is able to view reality with all its diversity as completely synthesized and unified on the spiritual level of the Absolute. It is a view that takes into account all aspects of existence and gives a detailed explanation of how existence progresses to this synthesis. What Vasconcelos has done is give us a breakdown of existence into various levels which show higher developments of life and activity as the synthesis progresses. In order to help explain this development Vasconcelos uses the idea of "revulsion", a concept which signifies the process by which one level of existence raises a lower level to a higher place in the process.

Vasconcelos seems to have avoided any accusation of evolutionism by positing the power of elevation in the higher level, i.e., a particular level of existence does not have a natural or inherent power of self-elevation but depends on some higher level for this to be accomplished.

On the level of the soul or the human level, Vasconcelos has a better explanation of the mechanics of the synthesis than he does on the lower levels. On this level it is clear that human consciousness effects the coordination of reality because the human intellect, drawn to reality and united with it by the emotions, particularly that of love, can employ the image of the faculty of imagination to recreate the other levels of existence in one coordinated view. The a priori

elements put consciousness in touch with reality in a unique way so that the objects of reality are attained just as they are in their qualitative existence.

At this point in the synthesis, Vasconcelos could have completed his work, but our appreciation of his desire to develop the synthesis one step further depends on our recognition of the characteristics of the man and his personality. He had rejected Positivism definitely by 1910 and its claims of the value of only the scientific method. He was not a materialist in the sense of accepting this doctrine as a philosophical stance, but he did acknowledge the existence of material reality by his concern for social reform and educational opportunities for all Mexicans. The development of his synthesis to the level of the Absolute was most likely prompted by his Mexican and Spanish heritage with their strong emphasis on the religious and spiritual nature of man. He always manifested an acceptance and deep belief in the spirit, even in his last writings published posthumously.[13] Moreover, he began his philosophical quest in reaction to the materialistc limitations of Positivism. He was also convinced from an early stage in his writings that it was possible to unify all existence, including the

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[13]José Vasconcelos, Letanías del Atardecer (Mexico City: Clasica Selecta - Editora Librera, 1959), p. 49.

the level of the spirit, into one comprehensive view.

Endowed with these characteristics, then, Vasconcelos found it not only necessary but convenient and logical to complete his system of thought by including the Absolute and a further level of existence as he does in the Todología. Unfortunately, the Absolute lacks the precision we would like to have as the culmination of his system but the concept itself and the way Vasconcelos explains and employs it is not foreign to that system; on the contrary it follows naturally from all that precedes it. The Absolute enables Vasconcelos to complete the process of the emanation and return of existence which he borrowed from Plotinus but most of all it provides the center or focus of the unified system which he desired to formulate. In coordinating reality, the Absolute functions much like human consciousness except it does so on the highest level of existence postulated by Vasconcelos.

The Absolute and this level of spiritual existence conveys the religious dimension to Vasconcelos' thought and without this consideration his philosophy would remain incomplete. If we were to remove or not consider this aspect of his thought as integral to the system, we would have an incomplete picture of his whole purpose in trying to philosophize. We would still have a synthesis but it would be purely one of material reality

and no more satisfying to Vasconcelos and the Mexican mind than Positivism was in Mexico in 1910. Thus, we maintain that the inclusion of the Absolute is essential for the completion of his system and enables Vasconcelos to present to the reader a unique view of reality that attains his quest for the unity of existence.

Aesthetic-emotive knowledge. -- In the first section of this chapter which dealt with our criticisms of the Vasconcelian scheme, we spoke about Vasconcelos' rejection of rational thought but we indicated that he also substituted a method of thought which we find to be one of his positive contributions. For one trained in a rational tradition, it is sometimes hard at the beginning of a study of Vasconcelos to handle much less appreciate the hard words he employs in his rejection of some of the rational/intellectual tradition. Likewise, it is difficult at first to accept his contention that there is a valid approach to knowledge based on the functioning of emotion, aesthetics and artistic endeavour since these concepts might be regarded (e.g., by Positivism) as outside the spectrum of the rational process of knowledge.

But the value of the aesthetic mode of knowledge begins to be evident when Vasconcelos speaks about the activities of the poet and the artist. He has rejected rational philosophy primarily because of its separation from reality and its ultimate

isolation from the objects of knowledge. Even though it attains the essence of what it knows, the human intellect performs its operations in a cold, detached and impersonal way. Vasconcelos thinks that if the rational process cannot touch reality in its state of existence, then there is no possibility for it to attain a living synthesis of that reality.

The aesthetic-emotive method of knowledge, however, overcomes this difficulty because it operates much like the artist operates. The artist uses not only his intellect but especially his emotions to come into contact with the living essence of reality. He portrays the reality as his emotions react to it or as he feels, as well as sees, the essence of reality to be. Even the so-called abstract artists first have some emotional response to what they convey in a highly personal and individualistic way through their medium of art.

The artistic image is thus a concrete image which conveys to the intellect much more than reality itself.[14] With the emotions, the artist can add more content to the image than he would be able to do with only the operation of intellect. Aesthetic knowledge, then, can portray more than rational knowledge, for Vasconcelos, because it touches and captures the living, rhythmic quality of objects just as they exist in reality.

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[14] José Vasconcelos, Lógica Orgánica, in Obras Completas (Mexico City: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1961), IV, 768.

Just as the artist does not disrupt reality through a process of abstraction but represents it just as it is after uniting himself with it through his emotions, so the aesthetic-emotive mode of knowledge does not use abstraction and thus suffer its drawbacks but comes into contact with a living reality that is unchanged by the operation of rationality.

Finally, the attraction of this type of knowledge which Vasconcelos proposes stems from his insistence that this is a way for the whole of man to be involved in a knowing experience. It is true, as the rationalists would insist, that the senses are involved in that type of knowledge but it is also true that they would downplay the emotions because of their instability. In aesthetic-emotive knowledge, all the faculties of man are involved: not only the intellect and external senses but also the imagination, the image and the emotions in a very special way. The value of the Vasconcelian system, then, embraces not only the process of coordination but also the approach to knowledge which does not dichotomize man but allows him to operate as a complete unity while he strives for the unification of all reality in the Absolute.

CONCLUSION:

As a result of our study we have to admit that it is too much to claim that Vasconcelos was anything like a great philosopher. He was too eclectic, too derivative, too unclear

and unsystematic for such a conclusion. He had nothing approaching the originality of a Plato or Kant, the comprehensiveness and learning of a Hegel or Whitehead, nor the penetration of a Locke or Wittgenstein. Nor did he have the theological erudition and power of an Aquinas or Schleiermacher. It is, however, quite possible to admit that he fell short of such greatness and yet find much of interest and importance in the man and his work.

He was above all a man of the uniquely Mexican culture with its ties to the Indian heritage and the Spanish colonial influence. He thought within this context and he cared about that culture, its uniqueness and the rightful place he felt it deserved in the contemporary world civilization. This concern showed most prominently in his desire to create that part of his world into the Cosmic Race.

He thought that philosophy should not be cut off from human concerns understood in a wide and rich sense. Theory and practice went hand in hand for him as we can see during his time as Minister of Education. A theory without practice, for Vasconcelos as for Kant, is empty and a practice without theory is blind.

The role of science and technology is perhaps the key question for modern civilization and Mexico shares this concern with the rest of the world. One of the major problems confronting

Mexico is that of coming to terms with the merits and demerits of modern science and technology. Technology can help perhaps alleviate the problems of poverty, suffering and illness, and Mexico has attempted to employ it in that fashion, expecially in the field of social medicine and hospitalization. But the danger is that a gross absorption in science and technology can destroy the very soul of Mexico; it may deprive her of the greatness of her religious and cultural heritage, send her into the massive technological empire and homogenize her into the countries of the North American continent.

Vasconcelos' thought was a protest against this and against the philosophy of Positivism. He raised a prophetic voice a generation ago to warn Mexico against many of the problems she is now encountering. In his view, Positivism was an instrument of the tehcnological spirit which meant the destruction of religion and metaphysics, as well as the destruction of culture and tradition itself. Unless Positivism was tempered by an alternative philosophical way of thinking, Vasconcelos could only envisage the elevation of the spirit of modern science and technology to the point of idolatry at the expense of the cultural heart of Mexico. The result would be to make Mexico vulnerable to the all but irresistable pressures of the modern western trend.

Whether or not one feels any persuasive force in Vascon-

celos' arguments, one can hardly help feel the force of the human spirit in his protesting against the threat to his culture, against the "thingification" and "objectification" of man. He felt Positivism had a truncated and dangerous view of man and of the power of science.. One can appreciate this point of view even if one feels he overstated his case and went too far in his general condemnation of the scientific approach exemplified in Positivism.

This leads one to wonder, consequently, if he did not fail, if he did fail, because he attacked the intellect and the rational processes per se rather than false accounts of them. One cannot help but speculate whether a better account of reason and experience would not be a better ally for the human spirit than a wholesale attack on it.

Vasconcelos wanted to reunite all the faculties of the human spirit, the senses, imagination, the intellect and the emotions. He wanted to see the whole of reality with all its parts reunited in one vision because he felt that the whole without the parts is empty and the parts separated from the whole involves a loss of perspective for the parts. His view of the harmony of the parts is contrasted to the evils of individualism and collectivism; it is the secret, even if he expressed it quite formally, of a good society comprehended in a good and beautiful Cosmic Order.

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