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A Thought Experiment for Our Divided Times.

How shall we describe human relationships in our time? Surely it is a collage of varied and complex dynamics between individuals, groups, cultures, and nations. As indicated in the paper's title, humanity is certainly divided, but not all is bleak and full of rifts. We probably all experience some measure of sincere unity among family members, in marriages, among friends, hopefully at church, and even among some societal groups.[1] Yet we all sense some deep divisions within our society along moral, social, and political values. This was vividly symbolized at the end of President Trump's State of the Union Address, February 5th, 2020, when he appeared to deny Nancy Pelosi's extended hand for a handshake and then her dramatic response of tearing the pages of the speech in half; three sections worth. Was it that long of a speech?

Introductory Outline

As we cascade toward our Presidential election, it is not much of a prophecy to declare that the public rhetoric will only grow more contentious and divisive. Some may develop a sense that the fabric of our society is being torn and not only at the edges, but at the very center of our core values. What follows is little more than a thought experiment. The intention is to provide a possible way to think about and through such an atmosphere of division in hope of providing a means to think and act beyond the polarizations of either versus or, us versus them, me versus you, or even me versus me. First, we will look

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[1] According to Aristotle, we experience at least three kinds of relational unity among those we call friends. The three kinds of friendships are: those based on utility, those based on pleasure or delight, and those grounded in virtue. Hippocrates G. Apostle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1984) Books 8, 1161b11-2a33, 151-160.

at the nature, structure, and syntax of language. The rationale for such a beginning point is based on the assertion that we do not think a thought unless we think it through language. We can have pre-linguistic impressions within our minds, but for a thought to be formulated it must congeal through the medium of language; words minimally formed within the interior conversation of our minds, or more fully, vocally presented in speech.

Next, Aristotle's distinction between the passive and active intellect will be recalled. The distinction is simply to note that the intellect receives impressions from the sensory world exterior to our minds. The intellect, however, does not engage and think about said impressions until the active intellect kicks in by grasping objects via language. The implication, of course, is that one must be reflective and think about things beyond merely reacting upon initial passively received impressions in the mind. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* will also be addressed to remind us of his gem of an insight regarding the nature and structure of the dynamics of virtue, that is, virtue is an excellence of behavior falling within the Golden Mean between two extremes. This suggests one can seek a possible third way of speaking or acting beyond the extreme polarizations of thinking and responding upon most any given issue.

Then we will encounter the mystical and speculative theological thought of seventh century Church Father, Maximus the Confessor, and his cosmic corners. Hegel's philosophical idealism is briefly mentioned to consider a possible synthesis of two opposing thoughts. Undergirding all these suggestive sources is the scriptural metaphor from Paul (I Cor. 12) describing the church as a body and the teleological pastoral prayer for unity among his disciples by our Lord (John 17). We close with an insight from the musical elements of order: counterpoint and harmony. Again, the argument and suggestive models presented below display that much of the divisiveness occurring on a personal level or national level might be avoided or at least somewhat ameliorated by thinking! That is, thinking beyond antinomies or binaries as the only means to frame and so understand conflicts. There might be a third option of understanding a given issue.

A Qualification

Before pressing on, however, it should be noted and underscored that there are indeed, binary realities in life and nothing will overcome them – until, perhaps, when all things of this world are dissolved, transformed, renewed, and reordered (Rev. 21:1, 2). C. S. Lewis prefaces his imaginary tale of the binary of Heaven and Hell, *The Great Divorce*, with a modest counter point to William Blake's, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Lewis contends that Blake along with many others, attempt to make that marriage of uniting of Heaven and Hell a perennial overcoming of all binaries.[2] Lewis continues, "[T]hat the attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable "either-or"; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found."[3] For many people who have grown fatigued with our ugly and painful contentious times, the allure to believe all binary conflicts can be overcome is tempting. But as Lewis says, "[T]his belief I take to be a disastrous error."[4] It is important to note in the previous quote that what he considers to be a disastrous error is when it is assumed that reality *never* presents us with an *absolute* either-or scenario. Lewis illustrates his counter understanding of reality with his more accurate depiction as follows:

> We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle in where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a pool but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good.[5]

Perhaps another note should be remembered here in Lewis' illustration. He is primarily considering moral decision making and not necessarily conceptual understandings of debated social and political issues. Nevertheless, let Lewis' point stand. There are indeed real binaries and antinomies in life.

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[2] C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), 5.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 6.

Yet just as he points out, the disastrous error lies in the "never" and "absolute" belief about binaries occurring in life. We will also hope to avoid that error. We will attempt to argue that with clear thinking there are some possible ways to overcome the polarizations of assumed antinomies or binary conflicts.

Thus, with C. S. Lewis' reminder of existing binaries in life kept in mind, we will press on with our thought experiment in hope of providing some possible ways and examples of overcoming false or artificial binaries.

Structure of Language as a Series of Binaries

Recall I earlier asserted that we do not think a thought unless we think it through language. This assertion is further clarified by acknowledging that there are "context-sensitive embodied representational systems that exist independent of language" according to Guy Dove.[6] Nevertheless, the majority of our cognitive operations are through the medium of language. Dove argues that "[T]he acquisition of a natural language provides a means of extending our cognitive reach by giving us access to an internalized combinatorial symbol system that augments and supports" such context-sensitive embodied representational systems.[7] He continues citing several cognitive benefits of natural language such as "the inherent semantic arbitrariness of words and idioms" and "that linguistic symbols are syntactically re-combinable. This explicit structural flexibility may make it easier to generate new thoughts and encode unexpected connections between thoughts."[8] This observation makes the case for embodied face to face speaking to one another as providing a means to generate new insights and thoughts. We should sincerely speak to each other as means to understand each other! And as a side note, we may detect that Doves' presentation evokes a similarity to Socratic dialectic in which a dialogue of questions and answers garners

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[6] Guy Dove, "Thinking in Words: Language as an Embodied Medium of Thought." *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 6 (2014) 371.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 373. Dove is here referring to Camp, E. "Putting thoughts to work: Concepts, systematicity, and stimulus-independence." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, (2009) 78, 275–311.

insights into the truth of things.[9] This ancient connection tends to affirm the validity and primacy of language for coming to understanding.

We turn now to a consideration of the nature and structure of language. Noam Chomsky, the noted modern linguist, draws from his research that we are forced to conclude through an analysis of grammar that "grammar is autonomous and independent of meaning . . . ."[10] He provides his famous example with this sentence, "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously."[11] While the sentence appears to be nonsensical, it is grammatically correct. Yet Dove points out, "despite the fact that Chomsky's famous sentence is difficult to perceptually simulate or act upon, we are able to infer that if this sentence is true then the relevant ideas are colorless and green, and they sleep furiously.[12] Note the binaries, "colorless green" and "sleep furiously". In fact, Chomsky asserts that a "grammar generates a certain set of pairs" as a general property of language.[13] And while Chomsky's bizarre sentence underscores Doves' point that grammar is autonomous and potentially independent of meaning, it also hints at the deeply embedded binary or antinomistic basic structure of language even as Chomsky alludes to. In fact, Sabastian Shaumyan points out that

> The cornerstone of semiotic linguistics is the discovery and resolution of language antinomies contradictions between two apparently reasonable principles or laws. Language antinomies constitute the essence of language, and hence must be studied from both linguistic and philosophical points of view. The basic language antinomy which underlies all other antinomies is the antinomy between meaning and information.[14]

Key for our investigation is Shaumyan's statement that "[L]anguage antinomies constitute the essence of language." The basic structure of language, all languages, is a series of opposites: short, tall;

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[9] The prime Socratic dialogue modeling his dialectical method of engaging a group of interlocutors with a series questions and answers to gain new understandings is *The Republic* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

[10] Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (Mansfield CT.: Martino Publishing, 2015), 17.

[11] Ibid., 15.

[12] Dove, "Thinking in Words", 373. Dove cites Weiskopf, D. (2010). "Embodied cognition and linguistic comprehension." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 41, 294–304.

[13] Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd ed., 2006), 103.

[14] Sebastian Shaumyan, *Signs, Mind, and Reality: A Theory of Language as the Folk Model of the World* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2006).

big, small; near, far; etc. Thus, our initial thought pattern when encountering a conflict, a disagreement, or confusion is to address it linguistically, that is, to think about the issue through the framework of binaries. The tendency is to structure an issue through terminological opposites. While this initial impulse provides some measure of clarity and range of possibilities for understanding the problem at hand, such antinomies may be inaccurate or mislead or a distort a problem. Further reflection, thought through language, is required beyond the initial binary framing of an issue.

Aristotle's Active and Passive Intellect and Structure of Virtue

The initial framing of an issue in a binary structure tends to be done unreflectively due in part from this deeply embedded linguistic structure of antinomies. Typically, one is not fully aware of this linguistically built-in impulse to initially frame quandaries and conflicts in terms of opposites or antinomies. Aristotle can help us here. He addresses "the part of the soul with which the soul knows and thinks" and in particular for our purposes, "how thinking can take place."[15] He makes a distinction between our passive intellect and active intellect. The passive intellect is "capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, it must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object."[16] Aristotle further says it "is a good idea to call the soul 'the place of the forms'" and that "even this is the forms only potentially, not actually."[17] Thus, the passive intellect receives the form or impression upon the soul of the object(s), but this is only potential knowledge and not yet actual knowledge.

It is the task of the active intellect then to enact the mental movement to make the form or received impression upon the mind actual knowledge of the object. As Aristotle illustrates, the active intellect "is a sort of a positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential colours into actual

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[15] Richard McKeon, editor, *De Anima*, Bk. III, Ch. 4, 429a10-12 in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 589.

[16] Ibid., Bk. III, Ch. 4, 429a15.

[17] Ibid., BK. III, Ch. 4, 429a29. Due to the brevity of Aristotle's treatment of the passive intellect, debates concerning the exact meaning of the passive intellect arose, particularly in the Medieval period between Averroes and Aquinas. See, *Disputed Questions on the Soul* (*Quaestiones disputatae de Anima*). For the purpose of this paper, the dispute is not pertinent to the argument.

colours."[18] In this illustration potential color represents potential knowledge by way of the passive intellect. Aristotle continues highlighting the distinction between the active and passive intellect by pointing out what should seem obvious, namely, that the active intellect's nature is activity and activity is always superior to the passive "and without the active intellect nothing thinks."[19]

So how does this Aristotelian distinction between the passive and active intellect aid us in our aim of overcoming false binaries? The distinction may only be illustrative or parallel to not being aware of the embedded binary structure of language. That is, just as the passive intellect is only potential knowledge waiting to be actualized via the active intellect, so perhaps our inattention or lack of awareness of the tendency to greet each issue as an either-or structure is due to a lack of awareness of the binary structure of language. The initial encounter of a dilemma or debate is to envision it as either this or that is parallel to the passive intellect's reception of the form of an object but is not yet knowledge of it. Just as the active intellect actualizes the passive intellect's reception of the form, so with the first reception of a problem requires active reflection to possibly understand the problem beyond antinomistic structure. Along with Aristotle, we could assert that without such active reflection, like the active intellect, nothing, no one, thinks!

Another illustration from Aristotle for possibly overcoming binaries is found in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Specifically, his depiction of virtue as a mean between two extremes. His densely packed definition with multiple elements is as follows: "virtue, then, is a habit, disposed toward action by deliberate choice, being at the mean relative to us, and defined by reason and as a prudent man would define it."[20] Aristotle presents virtue as a rationale choice of action that falls in between two poles of extreme behavior. An example would be the virtue of bravery. True bravery, an action which has been habituated to the point of becoming a disposition within the soul, falls in between the extreme behaviors

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[18] Ibid., Bk. III, Ch. 5, 429a15.
[19] Ibid., Bk. III, Ch. 5, 429a18, 19, 25.
[20] Hippocrates G. Apostle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1984), Bk. B, 6,1107a, p. 28, 29.

of cowardice and foolhardiness. Aristotle spends four sections discussing the distinctions between actions that are brave and those that merely appear to be brave as well as the particular contextual circumstance of an individual and the specific capacities of an individual that determine where the mean might fall between the two extremes of behavior.[21] Some might think that Aristotle's depiction of a virtuous act with these qualifying factors of an individual's capacity and the particular circumstance in which the virtuous action occurs makes a virtuous act rather relativistic. Yet in fact a virtue "with respect to the highest good and to excellence, . . . is an extreme."[22] The mean of a virtuous act is selected among all the factors of the individual's capacities and circumstances by prudence, that is, by experienced wisdom.

Again, we need to ask how does this schema for ethical decision-making aid us in overcoming conflicts with one another. Is the "Golden Mean" in ethics applicable to polarizations in personal and societal debate? Minimally, it can be asserted that Aristotle's model of seeking a mean between two extremes can serve as an example as to how to consider an issue. One should ask, are the two conflicting positions substantively extreme from each other? Is there a possible middle ground between the conflicting positions and not just as the result of bargaining by giving in on some points to the other side, but rather is there a middle ground that is superior to either of the two preliminary positions? This is seeking Aristotle's highest good, an excellence in the extreme.

An example of this extreme excellence in seeking a middle ground between two conflicting positions is Thomas Aquinas' synthesis of Augustine and Aristotle. Ralph McInerny, editor of Aquinas's selected writings, notes through the years how students are astonished how Aquinas' "thought transcends in a principled way seemingly irreconcilable positions."[23] McInerny notes that for Aquinas, "[D]isagreement presupposes agreement."[24] While Aquinas was well aware of the theological clash, he was living in the midst of it, "he sought to go beyond it in a way that sought a common ground."[25]

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[21] Ibid., Bk. D, 9-12, 115a5-117b20, p.46-52.
[22] Ibid., Bk. B, 1107a5, p. 29.
[23] Ralph McInerny, ed. and trans., *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 193.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

McInerny is assured that all who sincerely study Aquinas will discover "how deftly Thomas arrives at a reconciliation of the Augustinian and Aristotelian accounts."[26]

Allegorical Unity from Maximus the Confessor

We turn now to the seventh century monk, Maximus the Confessor (580-662). He was theologian, and scholar. In his early life, Maximus was a civil servant, and an aide to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. Historically, his life represents a middle ground or mean "in the indefinite transition between early and medieval Christianity. Even geographically, Maximus lived a life on a virtual frontier between East and West."[27] He has been called a cosmic theologian. For him "the world – the natural world and the "world" of the scriptural revelation – is the broad and complex theater in which God's incarnational mission is playing itself out to full completion."[28] George Florovsky describes Maximus' theological achievement "in terms of a grand "symphony of experience" rather than a perfectly contoured and self-enclosed doctrinal system."[29] This depiction of Maximus the Confessor as a theologian hopefully provides us greater sympathy and appreciation for how he goes about interpreting scripture. He is highly Christocentric in his encounter with Biblical passages. For our purposes we will look at his exposition of II Chronicles 26:4-5, 9-10. Maximus presents us with a Christological and allegorical reading of King Uzziah's achievements for Judah.

> He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper. . . . Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, at the Valley Gate, and at the Angle, and fortified them. He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil.[30]

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Paul Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, eds., *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 13.

[28] Ibid., 17.

[29] Ibid., 16. The editors cite George Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, Collected Works of George Florovsky 19, trans. Raymond Miller et. Al. (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsantalt, 1987), 213.

[30] II Chronicles 26:4-5, 9-10. Harold W. Attridge, general ed., *NRSV* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).

The passage evokes a series of questions from Maximus' interlocutor, Thalassius. He asks: What are the "towers," and what is the "gate of the corner"? What is the "valley," and what is its "corner"? And what, again, are the "corners" and the "towers in the wilderness"?[31]

Maximus begins his response by opening with a prayer acknowledging his sinfulness and limited intellect asking for enlightenment to understand scripture and to answer Thalassius' questions.

> And forgive me, O Christ, and have mercy on me, for at the command of your worthy servants, I have recklessly dared to attempt things beyond my power, and enlighten my unenlightened mind for the contemplation of the questions now before me, so that you may be glorified even more, for giving light to eyes that were blind, and articulate speech to a tongue that was mute.[32]

Maximus immediately finds a reference to Christ in the passage via the personage of King Uzziah; up to a point (Uzziah with his successes, becomes prideful and makes an offering on the alter of incense and thus became leprous – II Chron. 26:16-21). His justification is that Uzziah's name translated into Greek means the "might of God" (I Cor. 1:24). He finds this to be an allusion to Christ as "the stone who became the head of the corner" (Ps. 118:22; Acts 4:11; I Pet. 2:7).[33]

With this Christological focus, Maximus envisions numerous points of union in the corners and towers mentioned in the Chronicles passage. The corners of two walls conjoined at a single point represent various unions according to Maximus. There is first the "corner" of the two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, united together in Christ and by the Spirit to be the Church. Then there is union of body and soul of the human being and the erasing of gender differences of male and female to be one in the eyes of God. Other corners of union are between heaven and earth and in the intellect, that is, in the union of particulars with universals and of the sensible and the intelligible. The towers built at the point of these corners represent divine doctrine to strengthen and stand guard over the truth of the church's teaching. The gate represents the faith of the church.[34] Maximus the Confessor presents us with a highly creative,

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[31] Maximos Constas, ed., *St. Maximos the Confessor: On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 267.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 268.
[34] Ibid., 269-79. These allegorical connections are in sections 48.3-5 and 48.15-17.

but not wildly creative vision (his interpretation is controlled and inspired by a Christological key for understanding all of scripture), of bringing conflicting binary oppositions together united in and through Christ. His interpretive vision of connections can be illustrated by the artistic of work of Sean Scully. His paintings consist of crisscrossing strips at right angles forming multiple corners. Scully is described as a "relational painter" with his emphasis on "edges and abutments and relationships" which captures well Maximus' vision of unity of walls intersecting together at right angles connecting at the point of the corners.[35] The work of Maximus and the art of Scully provide us with an image, if not an operative metaphor, for seeking and understanding possible connections among opposing views.[36]

Hegel, Briefly Noted

Perhaps the most radical binary or antinomy imaginable is between being and nothingness. G. W. F. Hegel famously initiates his portrayal of dialectical thinking stating that the "very nature of thinking is the dialectic, that, as understanding, it must fall into the negative of itself, into contradictions. . . ."[37] The initial movement of the mind, movement out of the mind as an empty set, is confronted with the radical contradiction of being versus nothingness. Yet Hegel argues that nothing as an "immediate [term] that is equal to itself, is *the same as being.*"[38] This appears absurd, but Hegel's contention is that in this initial movement of the mind, being and nothingness are like empty sets, devoid of content, and yet in contradistinction from one another. The solution to this seeming illogical logic is Hegel's triad. His claim is that "the truth of being and nothing alike is the *unity* of both of them; this unity is becoming."[39] This creates Hegel's triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis that moves through logic, nature, and all of history

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[35] Cited from an unpublished dissertation, Jessica F. Mecham, *The Eternal World Made Flesh: Spiritual and Religious Implications in Visual Abstraction* (Montgomery, AL: Faulkner University, 2020), 47. See also Brian Kennedy, *Sean Scully: The Art of Strip* (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 2008).

[36] See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). The authors argue that metaphors are the primary way in which we think and understand the world around us. It is noteworthy too that they state that there are some universal metaphors used by all cultures throughout history, 273, 274.

[37] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), 35.

[38] Ibid., 141.

[39] Ibid.

as the *Geist* or Spirit or Mind. Then as the Spirit, in and for itself, it manifests itself in and through art, religion, and philosophy. Hegel's Idealism and speculative philosophy continues to have influence in the form of historical progress. In light of our purposes, we note the initial step in the movement of the mind from the antithetical conceptions of being and nothing to the synthesis of becoming. This is at least another model to consider in seeking possible resolutions to polarized conceptual arguments.

A Bit of Biblical Theology

The function of presenting this array voices and concepts is in hope of providing a means to think and act beyond the polarizations occurring in our society. There is no better source to turn to in finding the most profound motivation and the wisest means of overcoming divisions than scripture. The apostle Paul points to the people of God, the body of Christ, the church, to enact and live out a divine unity. The church is one body with many members, Paul declares, but all, Jew, Greek, slave or free are united through their baptism and all made to drink of one Spirit (I Cor, 12:12, 13).[40] He illustrates how the many members of different ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and even various religious backgrounds can function together like a human body with its various organs and appendages (I Cor. 12:14-26). Paul depicts the various roles and hierarchy within the church as enabling it to function as a whole unified body made up of quite different individual members (I Cor. 12:27-31). Historically, the church has not lived up to this beautiful image, but the challenge of the image is always there to remind the church how to be healthy and honoring of its founder. Yet, there are moments, occasions, even seasons in which the followers of Christ have modeled the united body of their Lord. One and the many can be called back to this lived unity. The passage stands to reprimand, remind, and encourage. The church's people at times have modeled the model. Such beautiful, healthy unity can occur. And there is the pastoral prayer of Jesus praying to the Father that his disciples be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:21-23). May the Lord's prayer be fulfilled in his followers.

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[40] All scriptural references are from the New Revised Standard Version, Harold W. Attridge, general ed., *NRSV* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).

Counterpoint and Harmony

We have touched upon several disciplines and reviewed various examples to substantiate the possibility of overcoming binary conflicts. Allusions to and models of means to find a way beyond stubborn antinomies were offered. Now we will hear what music can offer us in these divisive times.

In a wonderful article, John Ahern, argues that music illuminates social harmony.[41] He first redefines harmony for us. Currently, harmony refers to a tune with "some additional, subordinate music to accompany it."[42] Ahern provides a pop music example with "Taylor Swift as the melody, and her back-up band – its guitars and piano and bass – as the harmony."[43] Yet prior to the seventeenth century "harmony in music had been produced by the pleasing opposition of two melodies according to the principles of counterpoint."[44] Counterpoint is the accumulation of several melodies with none subordinate to the other and the "harmony" among them "is what joins and holds together those melodies, their counterpoint, in a pleasing fashion."[45]

Harmony, however, is often colloquially thought of as synonymous with perfect agreement, but as Ahern points out, "the contrapuntal idea of harmony implies a different vision of social concord, one in which the various parts retain autonomy but find their fullness in relations to each other and to a certain order that arises from their life in common."[46] He cites Walter Piston saying, "[I]mplicit in the term contrapuntal is the idea of disagreement."[47] And again from the fifteenth-century music theorist, Franchino Gaffurio, describes harmony as *discordia concors*, "agreeing-disageement" or "concordant discord."[48] Ahern describes contrapuntal harmony as "a sonic solution to the problem of the one and the many."[49]

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[41] John Ahern, "Contrapuntal Order." *First Things*, April 2020, Number 302, 19-22.
[42] Ibid., 19.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 20.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

It is noted that the science of contrapuntal music is often portrayed as dry and difficult, but Ahern argues that "contrapuntal is simply the playbook for the rules of social conduct between two melodies."[50] Within the rules there are two principles. The first principle: melodies in counterpoint must not be too different; whereas the second principle: melodies must not be too similar, hold the melodies together in harmony.[51] Contrapuntal harmony appears to be quite harmonious with Paul's description of the church as made up of many different parts and yet existing together as one body. For genuine harmony to occur within musical differences, the right amount and kind of differences, must exist. For unity in the church and in society in general there must be differences within the body to function in a healthy harmony. Perhaps for social interactions too, there must be differences among autonomous individuals seeking harmony among the various distinct melodies of people to form a harmonious society.

To Conclude

We maintain, as C. S. Lewis reminds us, there are real binaries in life and they cannot be overcome or erased, but there are many false binaries between people and arguments that can be overcome in life. Our thought experiment admonishes us to realize the very structure of our language encourages us to preliminarily frame a conflict as a binary opposition. Investigate the possibility of overcoming an antinomy by engaging your "active intellect" – think! And perhaps there is a more excellent way of understanding an issue via the Golden Mean. Envision a conflict as a corner, the intersection of two right-angled walls. Try to build a tower of understanding there. Reflect on how a disagreement might presuppose an agreement or how a thesis and antithesis might be resolved a synthesis. In all these admonishments: to investigate, think, envision, build, reflect are to be done in the desire for unity; the ideal unity our Lord calls us to. And finally, listen to the music of counterpoints. The differences might actually be harmonious.

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.