

# Hemingway's Naturalism

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In this article I shall attempt to place Ernest Hemingway in an intellectual tradition that continues to exert enormous influence on our civilization. The paradox of placing Hemingway, of all people, in an *intellectual* tradition will be dealt with in passing. What I wish to do straightaway is to say what I mean by an intellectual tradition; I shall then sketch the particular tradition I have in mind; the body of the article will be devoted to substantiating the thesis that Hemingway belongs to this tradition. By way of conclusion I shall say why I believe this kind of thesis, the establishment of which requires a combination of philosophical and literary analysis, is important.

## I

It is not all that easy to say what is meant by an intellectual tradition in the present context. It does not refer to a single, unified philosophical system but rather to a set or series of philosophical systems that hang together naturally because of certain assumptions or methodological principles common to all of them. It is a fairly loose mesh of ideas the various strands of which represent distinct lines of development but nevertheless interconnect and sustain each other in certain important respects. The three main strands of the tradition to which I shall assign Hemingway are empiricism, behaviourism and naturalism. It will be necessary to say briefly what each is or stands for and why they can be considered as amounting jointly to a distinctive pattern of ideas.

Traditional British empiricism received its classical statement from David Hume and it is to Hume that I shall refer in outlining this philosophical option. The importance empiricism places on the senses and on sensations – what Hume calls ‘impressions’ – is vital. The contents of the mind are divided into ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’, and ideas are said to derive from impressions. This derivation was to be Hume’s major critical weapon when considering the merits of his opponents’ arguments: ‘when we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, “from what impression is that supposed idea derived?” And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion’ (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p 22). By means of

this principle, by checking ideas – especially abstract ideas – against the deliverances of the senses, Hume attempted to clear away much metaphysical nonsense and get at the sensible root of all abstractions and generalisations.

Ideas, according to Hume, are either simple or complex; complex ideas are made up of simple ideas, and simple ideas ultimately correspond to simple impressions. Hume was ever faithful to the particular. Believing that knowing was highly analogous to sensing, he concluded that since the senses have as their object only particulars then knowledge too must ultimately be of particulars. Empiricism is the natural enemy of *gestalt*. Further, if ideas derive from sensations, certain ideas such as our idea of causation – of A causing B – are difficult to explain, for most certainly we never see, hear, smell etc. A causing B. All that we hear, see, smell is first A and then B. Causation is, in fact, no more than ‘constant conjunction’ and a habit of mind which, by the power of association, when it sees A expects B to happen.

Hume’s insistence on the foundational role of sensation was to have profound consequences in the field of ethics. Virtue and vice are not objects of sense. On what grounds then do we consider certain people and actions good or evil? On no other grounds, Hume tells us, than that certain people or actions give rise in us to feelings of pleasure while others give rise to feelings of displeasure – what Hume terms ‘uneasiness’. Morality is delivered over to feeling and the 20th century version of this ethical theory, as outlined, for example, in Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic*, is termed emotivism.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that Hume envisages the knower as an individual on his own. It was no mere coincidence that empiricism arose at the time that Adam Smith, a fellow countryman and personal friend of Hume’s, was preaching the value of *laissez-faire* individualism. All the individual has to go on are his own, necessarily private, impressions, or sensations, and the corresponding ideas. It is a very lonely situation.

By the twentieth century empiricism had undergone a number of refinements and mutations, while retaining its fundamental insistence that knowledge is not only dependent on sensation but is very closely analogous to sensory experience. One development from empiricism was philosophical behaviourism. This is not immediately evident; it can be argued, for example, that behaviourism diverges radically from empiricism by its exclusion of introspection as a valid means of acquiring knowledge. But a little reflection will, I trust, reveal the strong family resemblance between empiricism and behaviourism.

It is true that Hume, following Descartes, considered the inter-

nal more certain than the external, the private prior to the public, thus making the existence of a public world of 'bodies' problematic, but latent within his empiricism are the doctrines that were to bring about a reversal of this order. While Hume may have employed introspective analysis to establish his position, his equation of knowledge with 'experience and observation' leads logically to the conclusion that only the external (the observable and palpable) is a valid object of knowledge. The way is opened to the reduction of all inner states (feelings, thoughts, desires etc.) to observable bodily behaviour. Moreover, Hume's notion of *association*, which supplies the glue binding his world of discrete impressions together, is very similar to the behaviourist account of how stimulus and response are bonded. For example, behaviourism explains that by force of repeated association of stimulus with response, a conditioned reflex is produced in the organism, and this closely resembles Hume's psychological account of causation. The common root from which empiricism and behaviourism develop is sensation. By taking sensation to be the source of meaning, both empiricism and behaviourism are systematically opposed or indifferent to relationships of *intelligible* dependence or interdependence (other than logical entailment) and so, to explain how things or events are bound together, recourse is had to purely contingent relations between things or events based on spatial and temporal contiguity, and psychological beliefs and habits. In a very real sense, both empiricism and behaviourism are ant-intellectual. The difference between them lies in which side of sensation each opts for, the private or the public. Empiricism traditionally maintains that what *I* see, hear, touch etc. is what is alone indubitable and known; hence the hoary empiricist problems concerning the existence of an external world, the problem of other minds, the problem of knowledge of the past etc. Behaviourism, by contrast, opts for the other side of sensation – that which is the object of my hearing, seeing, touching etc. the audible, the visible and the tangible – whence arises the difficulty of explaining inner phenomena solely in terms of what is strictly observable, namely bodily behaviour. Behaviourism is the public face, empiricism the private face, of one and the same thing; or, to put it another way, behaviourism turns empiricism inside out.

The third strand of the philosophical tradition I am seeking to outline is naturalism. Naturalism in its modern form is allied to the Darwinian theory of evolution which, it argues, provides massive evidence for the age-old assumption that man is nothing other and nothing besides the product of nature (cf. *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, J. Passmore, chap. 2). The corollary of this is that to speak of the supernatural, of agents or forces existing beyond the

system of nature, is to be guilty of a basic philosophical error. The methodological principle governing philosophical naturalism is that nature is an enclosed system sufficient unto itself, in no need of any external agency to render its operations intelligible. The same methodological principle is operative in Humean empiricism. While empiricism is usually identified with a particular epistemology, it is important to note that behind the advocacy of a theory of knowledge lies a methodological decision – namely, philosophy must be brought into line with science (cf. Hume's *Treatise*, pp xv-xvi). It is for this reason that all supernaturalism (such as miracles) is to be rigidly excluded and the scope of philosophical inquiry restricted to the world of 'experience and observation' (cf. *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, by A. Flew). Empiricism was developed as a deliberate attempt to import into philosophy the methods of science; evolution, the stronghold of naturalism, appeared to many at the turn of the century as the latest and most powerful vindication of the efficacy of those methods.

If, for the reasons I have just given, empiricism can be considered the grandfather of naturalism, behaviourism can claim to be a first cousin. For the central prop of naturalism is evolution which seeks to demonstrate how animals evolve by means of mutations undergone in the process of adapting to environment in the struggle to survive. Behaviourism describes behaviour precisely as the response of an organism, be it man or animal, to environmental stimuli. From such responses are built up habits, conditioned reflexes, animal characteristics and, in the case of man, human personality. If evolution can be said to provide a framework for a new understanding of the species man, behaviouristic mechanisms can be seen to sit quite comfortably within that framework, indeed to make a notable contribution to the explanation of how the evolutionary system works.

Empiricism – behaviourism – naturalism: what we have here is not a single philosophical position but rather a set of ideas which, for a variety of reasons, are mutually congenial and supportive. It is this set of ideas, I shall argue, that constitute the intellectual universe of Hemingway's art. I put it this way because we should not expect from the artist the same explicit and rigorous exposition of a philosophical system that we demand from a philosopher. Art, we say, does not state its meaning but *enacts* it. To decipher the 'meaning' of Hemingway's art we shall have to be attentive not only to its content but also to its form, that is, to the various ways in which his writing not only declares a philosophy but embodies it, becomes a complete concrete realization of his vision.

To sum up, the various features of the empiricist – behavior-

ist – naturalist intellectual tradition are as follows:

- 1 Ideas derive from sensation.
- 2 Complex ideas are made up of an aggregate of simple impressions.
- 3 Reasoning is tied to experience. By force of this, speculative reason is severely limited and metaphysics excluded.
- 4 Sensation plus the notion of association constitute the kernel of behaviourism.
- 5 Behaviourism concentrates exclusively on 'outer' phenomena and reduces all inner phenomena such as thoughts and emotions to what is observable.
- 6 Morality is a matter of feeling.
- 7 The knower is an individual on his own.
- 8 In the struggle to survive man interacts with, and adapts to, his environment.
- 9 Man is fully explained as an integral part of nature.

## II

Ernest Hemingway's fidelity to the sensations is by now a commonplace of Hemingway criticism. As an apprentice writer in literary Chicago of the early 1920s he would go into the gym where he always received 'many strong sensations' and try to identify the various smells. In the evening he would write the sensations down as accurately as he could. Significantly, he did this while the other members of his group sat in the adjacent room discussing artistic creativity (cf. *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway*, Fenton, p 88). 'You've got to see it, feel it, smell it, hear it' was Hemingway's dictum and one to which he remained faithful throughout his literary career. The direct reporting of the physical, be it landscape or action and the careful itemisation of physical phenomena are the hallmarks of his style. A certain anti-intellectualism was the almost natural concomitant of this emphasis on sensation. 'I was not made to think,' says Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*. 'I was made to eat. My god, yes. Eat and drink and sleep with Catherine'. To find in a writer so suspicious of the speculative functions of intelligence an affinity with a broad philosophical movement might seem surprising, but such surprise would be modified by the profoundly anti-speculative bias of the philosophies I have considered.

What is remarkable about Hemingway is not that he deals in sensations and concrete images – most literary art works through the sensible, the concrete and the particular. It is rather the degree to which his writing places the emphasis on the sensible, on what can be observed by the eye or the ear, the way in which his writing

is subordinate, as it were, to the principle of *sensation*, which is arresting. It would be silly to pretend that he was a philosopher in any professional sense, who rigorously applied empiricist principles to his art. But the subordination of his writing to a basic belief – “You’ve got to see it, feel it, smell it, hear it” – led him, it would appear, to the elaboration of a style and of techniques which project the vision of one who was at heart and despite some regrets a naturalist (a term I shall from now on understand as inclusive of empiricism and behaviourism).

The emphasis on sensation in Hemingway’s work is so all-pervasive as to require no illustration. What is more remarkable, and no one who comes to Hemingway for the first time can fail to be impressed by it, is the frequent itemisation of separate sensations, presented “raw” as the eye, tongue or ear receives them, unaccompanied by commentary or interpretation. A well-known passage from *Fiesta* will serve as an illustration.

After a while we came out of the mountains, and there were trees along both sides of the road, and a stream and ripe fields of grain, and the road went on, very white and straight ahead, and then lifted to a little rise, and off on the left was a hill with an old castle, with buildings close around it and a field of grain going right up to the walls and shifting in the wind. I was up in front with the driver and I turned around. Robert Cohn was asleep, but Bill looked and nodded his head. Then we crossed a wide plain, and there was a big river off on the right shining in the sun from between the line of trees, and away off you could see the plateau of Pamplona rising out of the plain, and the walls of the city, and the great brown cathedral, and the broken skyline of the churches. In back of the plateau were the mountains, and every way you looked there were other mountains, and ahead the road stretched out white across the plain going toward Pamplona.<sup>1</sup>

The technique is a major part of Hemingway’s attraction. It inspired Ford Madox Ford’s admiration, when he says that Hemingway’s words strike us, “each one, as if they were pebbles fresh from a brook. They live and shine, each in its place ... The words form a tessellation, each in order beside the other. It is a great quality”. All interpretative commentary is excluded; each sensation is fed to us in its purity without the distraction of thought or reflection; we are forced by the technique to savour each fresh sensation in turn; the word “and” operates as a simple conjunction and the writing is unencumbered by “since”, “because”, “therefore”, the weapons of deduction, inference, entailment, ratiocination. The thinking mind is kept at bay and we enjoy the immediacy of sensuous impression. What strikes us as we read is how faith-

ful Hemingway is to each separate sensation: there is an absence of summarising, the whole complex picture is built up from separate units of sensation. There is no discernible pattern or *gestalt*, simply a concatenation of simple impressions.

If this were all we might simply say that Hemingway had devised a new and brilliantly successful technique of painting with words, of communicating the physical aspects of scenery and action with surprising freshness. But this is not all. For interpretation is occurring, but in a uniquely singular fashion. In the passage from *Fiesta* we read that Cohn was asleep, while Bill looks and nods his head. The description is purely external, but enough is said for us to sense the fellow-feeling between Bill Gorton and Jake Barnes, their shared sensitivity and like-mindedness and, by contrast, Robert Cohn's insensitivity, his quality of being "outside" the norms which, in this book, Jake represents. Interpretation is buried in physical description; the internal is rendered in terms of the external. This is a common enough device in fiction, particularly in the novel, but Hemingway took it to exceptional lengths. In *Fiesta* and *Farewell* there is virtually no explicit commentary, certainly nothing that is sustained for any length. It is almost as if Hemingway were afraid to move away from the physical description, the world of sensations, of smells, sights, sounds, tastes, which alone are true and real and to be trusted. Theory, abstractions, interpretations, imposed by the intellect on the world of sensations – these are suspect. Abstractions can betray the truth of the senses, as Lieutenant Frederic reflects in *Farewell*:

Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and dates.<sup>2</sup>

To chronicle is valid; to go beyond chronicle – beyond the place-names and the dates – and offer an interpretation of war or events is to move beyond what sense can confirm and verify. Abstract theories are reduced to concrete particulars: "I am for the Republic and the Republic is the bridge", declares Pilar in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.<sup>3</sup> The senses are the test of all fine words: "If qualities have odours, the odour of courage to me is the smell of smoked leather or the smell of the frozen road, or the smell of the sea when the wind rips the top from a wave", Hemingway informs us in *Death in the Afternoon*.

Like all empiricists Hemingway has trouble with religious and other systems of thought or bodies of doctrine that resist testing by the senses. God cannot be seen or heard and when Jake who is "technically" a Catholic visits the cathedral in *Fiesta* he tries to think of himself as praying, but adds: "I was ashamed and regretted that I was such a rotten Catholic, but realized there was nothing I

could do about it, at least for a while, and maybe never, but that anyway it was a good religion, and I only wished I felt religious and maybe I would the next time ...” Frederic Henry is a non-believer; Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* says that he is not religious; neither does Robert Jordan believe and he even goes so far as to reject, not without some hesitation, the notions of divination and extrasensory perception. Where sensation only is to be trusted any speculative or metaphysical belief is difficult to entertain. Speculation has to be broken down to action. Jake says in *Fiesta*: “Perhaps as you went along you did learn something. I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about”. Refusing credence to anything other than the physically palpable leads Jake and Henry to a form of nihilism, the latter spending his leave among “the smoke of cafes and nights, when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring”<sup>4</sup> Frederic’s mood is no doubt brought on in relief from the war and before he has been touched by love for Catherine. But that love merely supplies an interlude. When it is over, we are left with the rain and a mood of blank despair.

In many ways Robert Jordan is the most paradoxical of Hemingway’s heroes. Lieutenant Henry is also involved in a war, but there is never any explanation of why he is fighting, there is no discernible political commitment. It is one man’s war and then one man’s flight from the war. There is not even an account of the larger strategy or the general course of events. There is simply news of defeats and the focus is kept permanently at the level of individual observation: guns and trucks moving, men wading through mud, deserters being shot. Where Tolstoy in *War and Peace* interrupts the narrative dealing with particular characters to engage in a dissertation on high-level planning or the lack of it and at the same time explains his theory of history, Hemingway in *Farewell* avoids this. In *For Whom the Bell tolls* the theme of commitment to a cause that transcends the individual is not so easily avoided. The Spanish Civil War was one which generated a great deal of intellectual ferment: in many ways, so far as volunteers from abroad were concerned, it was the war of the intelligentsia, involving two great and opposing political creeds and historical forces, Fascism and Communism. Robert Jordan fights on behalf of Communism, a political creed which subordinates the individual to the ultimate goal of the classless society and sees the individ-



ual's role as a mere surface detail in the dialectical progression towards that goal. But even here Hemingway's focus is on the particular and short-term, the "now" of intense sensation, and one man's preoccupation with his immediate military objective, the blowing up of a bridge. Certainly, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* marks a movement away from Hemingway's extreme individualism, the individual cut off from his fellows, towards the notion of human solidarity. But what is important to grasp is that this notion of solidarity has nothing to do with communistic beliefs about the priority of society to the individual, but is justified in terms of an individualist philosophy, reminiscent of J. S. Mill's essay *On Liberty*. "All people should be left alone and you should interfere with no one", Robert Jordan reflects. "So he believed that, did he? Yes, he believed that". Accordingly, he has to justify his own interference in Spanish affairs and he does so on purely utilitarian grounds: "So that, eventually, there should be no more danger and so that the country should be a good place to live in". Communism is reduced to its short-term utility: it offers "the best discipline and the soundest and sanest for the prosecution of the war". Marxist dialectics get short shrift: "You have to know them in order not to be a sucker. You have to put many things in abeyance to win a war ... afterwards you discard what you do not believe in"<sup>5</sup> Robert Jordan confesses to having no politics himself and is described by Karkov, the Russian general, as "a young American of slight political development". There had been a time when he was in danger of becoming "as bigoted and hidebound about his politics as a hard-shelled Baptist" but this was dissipated by the experience of sleeping with Maria: "Continence is the foe of heresy". (This is an interesting instance of Hemingway's combination of empiricism and behaviourism. (a) It is suggested that the life of the senses is the only surety in a world of conflicting ideologies; (b) and it is implied that, in matters of ideology, a modification of sensory input results in a modification of one's thought!) When he is dying Robert Jordan is not comforted by the thought of sacrificing himself for a higher cause or political creed. His emphasis as he parts with Maria is on the fact that wherever she goes, he goes with her: individual influence is paramount. Even his dying on behalf of others and his "consecration to the oppressed" are motivated by feelings of sympathy rather than by allegiance to a body of doctrine or political theory. Jordan's purpose is utilitarian, his motivation sympathy. The resemblance to traditional empiricist thinking on justice is striking, for Hume's position is exactly similar: "public utility is the sole origin of justice", but "a sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation which attends that virtue".<sup>6</sup> Like Hume's, Hemingway's position stems from a

fundamental individualism which he has not radically altered. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* might mark a movement away from the near-nihilism of *Fiesta* and *A Farewell to Arms* to a sense of fulfilment by means of human solidarity, but that solidarity is established in purely individualist terms and, in the final analysis, it is what the individual achieves that counts.

Hemingway's presentation of values shares the fundamental empiricist contention that values derive from feelings. There is nowhere any justification on rational grounds of a body of values against which his various characters can be judged. Right and wrong are matters of feeling. "He's one of us, though," Brett observes of the Greek count. "Oh, quite. No doubt. One can always tell". Jake too responds to people according to mood: "Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people".<sup>7</sup> But it is not quite a matter of *arbitrary* feelings. In *Fiesta* Jake is the embodiment of those norms by which everyone is judged, and Cohn is judged wanting – he does not quite "belong". At first this appears merely to be more a matter of style than of anything he does that is wrong: his style violates the ethos of the group, of Jake, Brett, Bill and Mike. Cohn behaves differently, follows a different "code" and so he is disapproved of. In particular he is slavish in his dog-like pursuit of Brett – whereas Romero retains a manly distance, not even looking up during the bullfight ("he did not do it for her at any loss to himself") – and he breaks down and cries. It is this lack of proper emotional restraint which more than anything reveals Cohn as the outsider. Frederic Henry has it:

"Oh, darling," she (Catherine) said. "You will be good to me, won't you?" What the hell, I thought.<sup>8</sup>

Catherin Berkeley has it: "I'm awfully tired ... And I hurt like hell. Are you all right, darling?"<sup>9</sup>

Robert Jordan has it in abundance. Lying dying, he savours each sensation in turn, forcing himself to register each moment sharply and clearly. Emotional blurring is the companion of panic, the contradiction of grace under pressure, of "clarity, distinctness and edge" on which Hemingway places such importance.<sup>10</sup> It is this control under pressure which makes the bullfight an apt metaphor for living.

Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like corkscrews, their elbows raised, and leaned against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. Afterwards, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero's bullfighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his

movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time ... Romero had the old thing, the holding of his purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing.<sup>1 1</sup>

Here we have the most explicit "statement" of Hemingway's ethical code: grace under pressure gives a good feeling and so it is good. (Why it gives a good feeling is a question I shall raise later). Its opposite, the breakdown of control, or worse, blind panic, such as Francis Macomber manifests when he runs away from the lion, is scorned. It humiliates and causes the woman to turn against the man. Later, when Macomber has proved himself against the buffalo Wilson, the English hunter, reflects, "Fear gone like an operation. Something else grew in its place. Main thing a man had. Made him into a man. Women knew it too. No bloody fear".<sup>1 2</sup> There is then in Hemingway a sort of code. Typically it is far from being abstract and is not justified by appeal to first principles or by intellectual reasoning: it consists in physical and emotional control in testing conditions. It is individualistic, the response of the individual to a threatening environment, and has nothing to do with ends, motives or the larger movements of history. Its justification is emotive. "So far about morals", Hemingway tells us in *Death in the Afternoon*, "I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after...."<sup>1 3</sup> The emotive theory of ethics has rarely been stated so bluntly.

It has often been said of Hemingway that he brought a new tone to American fiction after the long sentences and structural intricacies of Melville, Hawthorn and James. In particular, he is frequently praised for his direct statement of emotions in brief, spare, economical prose. While it is true that his prose is usually spare, it is not true that he represents emotion directly. There is, in fact, no direct access to human emotion. Where D. H. Lawrence, another author who likes to stress the natural in human nature, adapts his style in *The Rainbow* in order to delineate the psychic landscape of his various couples, revealing their emotions from the inside, Hemingway works almost entirely from the outside in. His revelation of feelings is peculiarly oblique, feeling being rendered exclusively in terms of behaviour or bodily states. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* fear is several times registered by sweating; even the individual concerned seems to read his own emotions by observing his physiological reaction to a situation, as if normal introspection were not to be trusted: "He felt the sweat that came under his armpits and slid down between his arms and his side and he said to himself, "So you are scared, eh?"<sup>1 4</sup> It is by no means of

such empirical tests that Hemingway achieves his famed objectivity. In the same novel Fernando's pain is suggested by the fact that the fly's tickling cannot penetrate it. This behaviouristic technique is not simply a stylistic device. It is so all-pervasive as to be accountable only as part of Hemingway's basic perspective. Biology takes precedence over thought. Santiago was not born to think about matters such as sin; he was born to be a fisherman as the fish is born to be a fish. Likewise Manuel, the veteran bullfighter in *The Undeclared*, appears to be little more than a constellation of habits and conditioned reflexes acquired in plying his trade, whose thinking is dependent on bullfight slang: "He thought in bullfight terms. Sometimes he had a thought and the particular piece of slang would not come into his mind and he could not realize the thought".<sup>15</sup>

In moments of greatest danger or greatest happiness the senses are at their most acute and each sensuous item, each detail of the environmental scene, is vividly caught. Meals in such conditions are described with minute precision, with meticulous attention to temperature, taste and manner of eating as well as to the incidental details that catch the participant's eye. The outer description acts as an accurate index of emotional heightening – or possibly, it *is* the emotional heightening. When sexual climax is reached between Robert Jordan and Maria it is stated that "he felt the earth move out and away from under them" – the emotion is externalised. In a moment of great danger, when Frederic Henry escapes from the carabinieri, there is no explicit reference to fear, anxiety or despair. The whole effect is conveyed in terms of physical sensations, by means of the rhythm of the prose and with minute physical description.

I ducked down, pushed between two men, and ran for the river, my head down. I tripped at the edge and went in with a splash. The water was very cold and I stayed under until I thought I could never come up. The minute I came up I took a breath and went down again. It was easy to stay under with so much clothing and my boots. When I came up the second time I saw a piece of timber ahead of me and reached it and held on with one hand. I kept my head behind it and did not even look over it. I did not want to see the bank. There were shots when I ran and shots when I came up the first time. I heard them when I was almost above water. There were no shots now.<sup>16</sup>

The tone throughout is unemphatic, but the reader's response (I have tried it out on a group of students) is one of strong empathy. Hemingway evokes a response in his reader by the same technique he uses to reveal his character's psychology: by restricting attention almost exclusively to environmental features. He recalls what

the eye saw or the palate tasted or the body felt at the precise moment the emotion was experienced – and he describes that. The reader's response follows immediately: it is a behaviouristic, stimulus-response, technique. There is avoidance of deliberately evocative words like "terrific", "amazing", "fantastic", "wonderful" etc. There is no overt appeal to emotion, the tone remains flat, unforceful, unhurried, but the itemisation of sensory detail obtains the desired response.

It is part of Hemingway's fidelity to the senses: only what the senses record is true, is real. To project emotional or psychological states directly, without pinning them to sensations, would be to enter the forbidden zone of speculation, where things can get out of hand, where the mind takes off on its own and fake mystery-mongering occurs. The old fisherman struggles to resist the onset of such thinking, forcing himself to concentrate on the practical problems confronting him. At one point in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* it looks as if Hemingway is rising above chronicling into large-scale interpretation of the course of history. After a grand sweep across the major events of Spain's history and her major personalities Robert Jordan concludes, "This was the only country that the reformation never reached. They were paying for the Inquisition now, all right". But any feeling that this is meant to be taken seriously is quickly extinguished. "Well, it was something to think about. Something to keep your mind from worrying about your work".<sup>17</sup> Practical intelligence is fine; strong interpretation or speculation is a mere luxury, at best distracting, at worst positively dangerous. It is also, it is suggested, probably false and dangerous because it is false. In one of his most revealing short stories, *A Clean, Well-lighted Place*, Hemingway gives us a glimpse of what lies beyond the reach of the senses – *nada*. The old waiter describes the darkness that lies beyond the clean, well-lighted cafe where he works, the darkness into which the old man who wishes to commit suicide will soon return, as "a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was a nothing too. It was that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order". Later he parodies the Our Father and Hail Mary, the two most common prayers in Catholic countries: "Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name ... Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee".<sup>18</sup> The kingdom of God is nada, the Lord is nada, grace is nothing. Beyond this life there is nothing, the promises of religion amount to nothing, he seems to be saying. Within the all-engulfing darkness of existence there is one and only one space that is not in darkness – the space occupied by the five senses of the individual human animal. To extinguish the senses is to extinguish all, to "put out the light" in Othello's phrase. To master life is to master

our senses, to keep them alert, ordered and controlled. "Clear up, head", old Santiago continually admonishes. "Clear up".

To live life at its fullest intensity is the most we can achieve. But, significantly, as Jake Barnes observes, "Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bullfighters".<sup>19</sup> The reason for this comment and for Hemingway's obsession with the bullfight which he says gives him "feelings of life and death and mortality and immortality" is precisely because of the bullfight's function as a paradigm in microcosm of all human existence. It is, literally, an encounter with death, as Hemingway makes clear in *Death in the Afternoon*. The bull represents the very imminent possibility of leaving for ever the well-lighted place and returning to the darkness. The encounter can, of course, be faked and then the feelings it produces are also fake because it has lost its value as a metaphor for life. Life's intensity derives from the inevitability of death. Survival in life, like survival in the bull ring, depends upon the exercise of the utmost control, psychological, emotional, physical – only in this way can the bull be mastered: only in this way can life be mastered. Emotional restraint in Hemingway is more than a mere matter of style. It touches on man's capacity to live life in the only way that is worthwhile; in terms of Hemingway's ultimate vision, it is such control and its corollary, the intensification of sensation, which confers on life its only validity. Hence the "short, happy life of Francis Macomber" and hence Robert Jordan's consoling reflection as he is about to die: "You've had as good a life as anyone because of these last days". Hemingway's emotiveness is tied to a vision of man.

The Hemingway here, like the knowing subject in empiricist philosophy, is a loner. This is true of Nick Adams, Jake Barnes, Frederic Henry, Robert Jordan and Santiago. Whatever relationships they form with others are essentially transient. This is surely one of Hemingway's weaknesses which derives from his chosen technique. The empiricist-behaviourist model has frequently been accused of being just too inadequate to explain the complexity of human behaviour.<sup>20</sup> By virtually restricting attention to the life of the senses and the observable Hemingway cuts himself off from large areas of the inner life of his characters. Such inner processes as thinking, reasoning, intending, hoping, trusting, being motivated, being frustrated, the ebb and flow of the feelings – human psychic complexity – all lie outside his range. His instruments are not designed to record, express or analyse such things. Consequently, his man-woman relationships are, at heart, limited, slight, rather playful affairs, in which the man is the object of the woman's uncritical adulation. As such they can hardly be expected to endure, and none does. The technique is superbly equipped to

record the transience of human experience: the sensation occurs and is gone. The favourite conjunction, “and” which gives the style its primitive, biblical quality, also conveys the fleetingness of all experience. It is this surely which explains the mood of nostalgia, of glorious things that have been but will be no more, that hangs over all his stories. Time is always short; annihilation, in the form of death or defeat, awaits us.

The same technique is inadequate to deal with the larger stirrings of history. These cannot be rendered in terms exclusively of the concrete and the particular. In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck, Hemingway’s contemporary, tells the story of the Joad family, but does so in such a way that they are seen as but one example among thousands of the human waste enforced by an impersonal economic system, which is analysed in considerable detail. Such analysis is beyond Hemingway. His style and his vision – which are ultimately one – cannot admit anything other than the world of sensory impressions. For all that his stories are set amidst some of the greatest upheavals in 20th century western history – the First World War, the 1920s, the Spanish Civil War – social content other than the superficialities of dress, idiom and current celebrities is virtually absent. The Hemingway code remains the same whether the hero is shooting fascists in Spain or shooting buffaloes in Africa.

In describing Hemingway as an empiricist and behaviourist I have perhaps overdrawn the picture. It is worth noting, for example, that occasionally, though very infrequently, he does relate the inner emotional condition of his characters directly, more in his later than his earlier writing. And it is highly unlikely that he would subscribe rigorously to every tenet of these philosophies,<sup>21</sup> or that he applied certain academic findings to his writing. What is more plausible is that Hemingway, who had a knack of being in touch with the *zeitgeist*, wrote as a man of his time (*In Our Time* was a very early success) during a period in which, in the English-speaking world, the empiricist-behaviourist-naturalist nexus was in the ascendancy. This explanation involves the highly complex manner in which politics, economics, philosophy and the higher arts – painting, sculpture, literature and music – all interact on each other within the space of a few decades. Yet another part of the explanation may be found in the problems which philosophers and literary artists have in common: the problem of how the individual relates to reality; of what constitutes reality for him; of how he validates his opinions, beliefs and actions. This leads us to seek an explanation in Hemingway’s first principle as an author – to be faithful to *sensation*. He was a craftsman intent on being honest who thought long and hard about his craft, a term he preferred to

art. A craftsman of such seriousness must know his medium intimately. But we would not hope to find in Hemingway any explicit exposition of the principles which govern his style: he confesses to writing "on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows".<sup>22</sup> Hemingway was an artist and the principles he arrived at by remaining faithful to sensation are to be found buried in his art. But his vision reveals its roots.

This vision is given its most explicit statement in his final work, *The Old Man and the Sea*. Santiago, the hero, is a sort of pagan saint (*Santiago*) in total communion with nature (which explains why he is a saint). Addressing a small, tired warbler, he says, "Take a good rest, small bird. Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish".<sup>23</sup> Man, bird, fish — all are part of nature and of the natural processes of living and dying, of preying and being preyed upon. To live one must struggle, as Santiago struggles, sometimes against tremendous odds, but to struggle and endure each has its natural endowment of wit or wisdom or practical intelligence, what Santiago calls his "tricks". To struggle and endure it is necessary to retain control of one's wits and one's emotions — to show grace under pressure. Even if one fails in the worldly sense — the carcass of Santiago's Marlin is devoured by sharks — if one suffers and endures one remains "undefeated" and this, for Hemingway, is the ultimate achievement of man — or bird or fish.

*The Old Man and the Sea* aroused conflicting opinions among the critics. This is significant, for it raises the question of whether Hemingway changed, over-reaching in his later work the style made famous by the earlier work. Philip Toynbee's reaction was extremely adverse: "The book is doctor-bait and professor-bait. And the modern critic of Hemingway should read this nonsense carefully and then re-read *The Killers* or *The Undefeated* ... This is one of the genuine literary tragedies of our time".<sup>24</sup> The reference to *The Killers* and *The Undefeated*, two much anthologised short stories, implies what is a common opinion: what Hemingway is good at, this opinion goes, is the direct rendering of brutal, violent action. What such critics refuse to condone is the metaphysical Hemingway, the Hemingway of a profound naturalistic vision of man and his place in the scheme of things. What they overlook is that the same Hemingway is present in the early stories, from *In Our Time* onwards where Nick heals the wounds of the war by immersing himself in nature, and that to fail to see this is to fail in appreciation of such short stories as *The Undefeated* where the theme of struggle and endurance is treated within a more limited compass. All Hemingway did in *The Old Man and the Sea* was to expose some more of the usually submerged section of the iceberg. But



it was always there.

The value of concentrating on the empiricism and behaviourism latent in Hemingway's naturalism, as I explained earlier, is that they help to reveal that in its main outline his vision remained constant, albeit some metaphysical doubts concerning Christian religion, divination or extrasensory perception obtrude from time to time. Behaviourism borrows from empiricism and is the ally of the naturalistic philosophy founded on the Darwinian theory of evolution which, using the empirical methods of science, sees man as a particular kind of animal, whose thinking and feeling are an integral part of the biological process of interacting with his environment in the struggle to survive.<sup>25</sup> It is this struggle which Hemingway explores in his art. Empiricism and behaviourism are the hidden framework which shapes at once his style and his vision.

To see Hemingway in this light is to see him as an artist worthy of serious critical consideration — because, namely, he is not a mere 'teller of good yarns' but has an important representative function, because he is a vehicle by or through which an intellectual tradition, which has at its centre a particular vision of man, is conveyed with the power unique to art. As Terry Eagleton has remarked, quoting Matisse, 'All art bears the imprint of its historical epoch, but ... great art is that in which the imprint is most deeply marked' (*Marxism and Literary Criticism*, p 3).

- 1 *Fiesta* (The Sun also Rises), Pan, pp 76-77
- 2 *A Farewell to Arms*, Penguin, p 144
- 3 *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Pan p 54
- 4 *A Farewell to Arms*, p 14
- 5 *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Penguin, p 149f
- 6 *Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford, pp 499-500
- 7 *Fiesta*, p 121
- 8 *A Farewell to Arms*, p 25
- 9 *Ibid.* p 251
- 10 See the fine article on Hemingway in *The Reign of Wonder* by Tony Tanner on this and related aspects.
- 11 *Fiesta*, p 139
- 12 *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, Penguin, p 39
- 13 *Death in the Afternoon*, Penguin, p 8
- 14 *For whom the Bell Tolls*, p 304
- 15 "The Undefeated" in *Men Without Women*, Penguin p 36
- 16 *A Farewell to Arms*, p 176 (Penguin)
- 17 *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p 313
- 18 "A Clean Well-lighted Place" in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, p 72
- 19 *Fiesta*, p 10
- 20 This is the contention of Chomsky, for example, on the question of language acquisition.

- 21 In an interview printed in *Writers at Work*, Penguin, Hemingway appears to subscribe to the notion of inherited skills, a notion anathema to strict behaviourists. See p 194.
- 22 Ibid. p 193
- 23 *The Old Man and the Sea*, p 46
- 24 Review of *The Old Man and the Sea* by P. Toynbee, reprinted in *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, Prentice Hall, p 112
- 25 In an effort to achieve a unitary scheme for measuring the behaviour of men and animals Behaviourism accepts no essential difference but only one of complexity between man and animals.

## Rahner Retrospective

### II – The Historicity of Theology

Fergus Kerr O P

Karl Rahner, as we saw last time (*New Blackfriars* May 1980), believes that, however much of Barth's work may endure, it has not settled the questions raised by Liberal Protestantism. To that extent, then, Rahner sides with those who think that no amount of massive reaffirmation of classical Christian doctrine can ever dispense us from facing Bultmann's programme of demythologization.

Schleiermacher, who died in 1834, was the first theologian to face up to the problems of making sense of Christian faith in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. No doubt, by the close of the century, the movement he initiated had degenerated into mere accommodation of Christianity to the spirit of the age. Barth's outcry, particularly in the 1921 version of his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, was a necessary protest against critical methods in biblical exegesis which amounted to rationalism, and against an emphasis on religious experience in systematic theology which promoted subjectivism. The counterpart in the Catholic Church to Barth's protest was the encyclical letter *Pascendi* issued by St Pius X in 1907 condemning Catholic Modernism on much the same grounds as Barth rejected Liberal Protestantism. Even allowing for the difference in literary genre,