

UNITY

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THERE is a limited pleasure to be had from neatness. Neatness at home and uniformity at work, both interpenetrating each other, are the modern substitutes for unity. They are habitual, even virtuous. The several relations between them are governed, not only by the overflow of factory method, business method and military method into the home, but also by the simple necessity, where many live in a narrow space, to stow things away, to be tidy. Here we witness an order that is imposed. Behind this lies the mountainous pile of things and information, and our own diminished understanding of their true relations.

In its extreme form, we can speak of this imposed order as Day Lewis did in 1929 in *The Transitional Poem*, of

The tetragonal
Pure symmetry of brain.

This unnatural, not to say inhuman, stamping of life with geometrical patterns draws out of a man, on the one hand an 'acquired instinct' that enables him to live among them at all, and, at the same time, an urge to find the human again by way of this patterned living, which is the only life he knows, and from which there seems to be no escape. Thus a modern game can be interpreted as a picture of man seeing how far he can go within the tetragonal scheme of things on a billiard table, within walls, or on a football ground. The winner is he who has the more flexible control within the limits of the game itself, and the master player is he who controls, not only a ball and an opponent, but may almost be said to ignore, in his control over them, the limits themselves. We speak of him as being *in* his element; he has made the imposed order of tetragonal white lines, or the symmetry of a billiard table or squash court his own natural order, and the process is in the form of a discovery. Indeed, when we say that he 'ignores' the rules and pattern of his game we do not imply that he forgets them, but that he *uses* them so skilfully, so freely that he is always thinking beyond them. Thousands come to see him exercise his skill in this way, and one of the reasons why a

well-played game fascinates people today is that it is a picture of men moving in their element, who transform the tetragonal into a true unity. For though games are becoming better organised, which tends to mean more machine-like, the human factor in a game is striving all the time to find as much freedom as possible within the pattern. Here is a unity nourished by variety, wherein the variety enriches the accepted laws by having always a truly human relation with them. And, though games are mock battles detached from the stream of life, they have in them the principles of organic unity which the world of industrial work has so signally lost.

The games player discovers that he is 'at home' in his artificially made environment, even as the ordinary citizen discovers that he is *not* at home in his. By analogy the artist makes the same kind of discovery as the games player when he finds his true relation with his medium and his subject. He is 'in his element', at one with it. This too is the discovery a man makes when he is married, or has a religious vocation. He accepts, and, in accepting, transcends the limitations. Here, in general terms, is the vocational life; here is the growing Christian life.

Yet, in modern terms, to accept the tetragonal entails becoming a slave to it; though the surrender of freedom and the apparent unity with one's fellows looks, at first sight, like the old ascetic training towards a community life, it is not so. It cannot be used creatively, and there is nothing reciprocal in the routine it demands. Like everything else that is rigid it smacks of death. In contrast, the athlete is the figure of life, the man who has shown that a 'break-through' is possible—but, in an unreal world. In a game there is an easily understandable blend between reason and instinct, which, in art, is only discernible by the trained eye.

There is, however, a particular kind of modern beauty which we can describe as 'easy beauty', as of a problem, that, once solved, no longer fascinates the eye. It is the facile beauty of trying to look like a film star, of masks, of vogue words, of mass-produced ornament. Here again we accept a pattern, in a sense, impose it upon ourselves, and may perhaps feel or think ourselves temporarily into becoming one with it. There is a beauty of pathos in this 'imitation', as in bad Church art, but not in the thing itself, only in the fact that man over-values it. In itself it is an 'appearance', and the satirist uses it—making mocking imitations

of the imitations—like Ruth Pitter, striking them into life:

From yonder gents' department smirks a face

Replete with every artificial grace . . .

She uses it in the hope of making her protest a way through to a discovery of the heart. Man was not made in the image of a tailor's dummy. Here is a neat, formal imitation of a man 'dressed as for an Ascot holiday', but having no unity. The break-through of the artist is always towards the inner core of unity, from which all that has not found its true shaping principle, is shown to be absurd, a house divided against itself.

Thus, much of modern painting and music reflects this division between form and content in modern life . . . is indeed a series of forms reaching out for a true union with content. It is, at present, over-intellectualized and reflects the broken unity at the centre of man's being, the split between reason and instinct, that the modern situation has opened up. Yet, as we know, and as Eliot has written:

Only by form and pattern,

Can words or music reach

The stillness. . . .

And he instances the perfect coherence of a Chinese jar. But although the positive unity of coherence between form and substance is the flowering of art, there is today the opposite and strongly intellectual movement away from this traditional marriage into an isolated world of forms—into the very roots of art. Here we think more of a unity of equilibrium, in which, for instance, forms in a picture, abstracted from nature stand almost as objects in a room. This kind of thing, found in a Ben Nicholson picture, resides at the opposite pole to the positive statement that arises when form and content meet in coherent unity. Yet, in each case, the artist makes a break-through, and John Summer-son, writing of Ben Nicholson, describes interestingly that artist's break through to the unknown.

It is a creative power of an unusual kind: it is a power to deny, discard and eliminate, in pursuit of reality: it is the power to realize a live idea by stripping away the dead ideas which lie around it: it is the power of turning one's back resolutely on the known in order to grasp the unknown. This power is rare—much rarer than that imaginative productiveness which is also

. . . 'creative power', but is, psychologically, a different thing altogether.

And by 'imaginative productiveness' he understands 'the easy availability of unconscious experience, as wit or imagery (in literature) or invention (in music)'. Ben Nicholson chooses *not* to use this power which can lead to easy beauty, or, if used supremely well, to a great positive statement in art. His is the way of a hermit, but it is not so rare as John Summerson claims. His elements are canvas and paint, and his end is to make a correspondence between an abstract idea carried to its furthest point, and external reality . . . simply that, by the way of negation, and to achieve a balance of form, that, short of drawing a circle, is the most simple construction possible to put into space. In a letter, quoted by John Summerson, Ben Nicholson describes a visit to Mondrian, the Dutch abstract painter, in his Paris studios in 1934. He concludes, 'the feeling in his studio must have been not unlike the feeling in one of those hermit's caves where lions used to go to have thorns taken from their paws'. Ben Nicholson is in an isolated position, but it is also a starting point for those coming after him, for he has bequeathed them an abstract of the unity in nature that all need to find.

In general the way of denial which his art entails is now felt by many to be a necessary forerunner to positive speech. Indeed, until the last act of *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot's drama was the drama of the negative approach, and, in that play, the conversion of Edward and Lavinia dates from the moment when they recognize the bond of nothingness between them. The Psychiatrist is speaking:

And now you begin to see, I hope,
How much you have in common. The same isolation.
A man who finds himself incapable of loving
And a woman who finds that no man can love her.

They have to turn their back resolutely on the dream they have been living, and which has died; while, facing them, are the desert bones of nothingness. But this is the starting point for their way back to unity.

And, in accepting a state of nothingness, our disunity, we recognize our dependence upon God and upon society. Here, if we can see it, is the correspondence too between our Lord on the Cross and ourselves. We have to discover, by the way of negation,

the humility of the Cross, and the 'drama' lies in the adventure of breaking through to the unknown. In the *Sea and the Mirror* Auden makes Alonso say:

Thank the bitter treatment of your time
For the dissolution of your pride.

At such a moment the Crucifix alone has true significance. It is indeed *the* starting point, for herein is the death of nothingness overcome.

Modern literature is notable for its 'starting points', which imply *not* that man, the individual, is henceforward going out to conquer his environment, to knock down the impersonal forces of authority. Indeed, man is continually being told by psychologists that he cannot act as an individual. Hence we have to find, by suffering, the true relation we have with society. 'We cannot choose our world' is a repeated theme in Auden's poetry: we have to accept it. In fact, for the Christian, this entails seeing it in relation to eternity, seeing the Crucifixion, as Salvador Dali seems to have suggested, as a bridge between heaven and earth. If ever there was a valid sign for us, this particular view of the Crucifixion is it. It is the narrow way to which all ways lead. 'We cannot choose our world. . . .' We do *not* choose our world, for we seek another, and much of modern literature is concerned with this search. As Christians, we have to try to see where these searches are leading. We live in a labyrinth, and require the visionary radiance of Traherne or Edwin Muir for,

. . . underneath

The soot we saw the stone clean at the heart

As on the starting day. The refuse heaps

Were grained with that fine dust that made the world.

Our acceptance arises out of seeing beyond, and is the ground of all purposeful action. At the end of *Family Reunion* Harry declares:

And now I know

That my business is not to run away, but to pursue,

Not to avoid being found, but to seek.

Once we can know of our dependence upon something real, then we are ready for a love grounded in humility, and the drama, as we have said, lies in the problems encountered in our break through to the unknown. It is a question of recognition, a meeting, in which man sees both God and himself. Broken by dreams

and impersonal fate, he sees for the first time how he can become a unity, which is to say how the *union* of soul and body in the human person can indeed be a unity. He sees how he can be *in* his element, knowing and loving familiar things, seeing them freshly under this new baptism of acceptance.

Every age has to find the means of renewing itself, and this is the modern way. It produces the new hero, the man who breaks through the crust of civilization and apparent unity, to the world where he belongs. He is a conspirator, a rebel searching for a correspondence between his human need and the society in which he lives. But, as St Augustine writes in *De Beata Vita*, 'nobody seeks to find what he does not wish to find'. . . and there are many who break through, but who do not recognize the need for the Christian starting point, who do not use the loneliness of deprivation and dependence as a starting point for love. How, indeed, can we expect them to do so in a world of broken unity? The modern hero is at the opposite pole to the powerful and isolated renaissance hero, for he speaks in terms of 'teach me to sit still', and he asks, as in *The Sea and The Mirror* . . .

Can I learn to suffer

Without saying something ironic or funny about suffering?

He has to achieve, as in the last words of the *Four Quartets*,

A condition of complete simplicity

(Costing not less than everything).

Only thus, among the clash of creeds, can we hear the word of truth that is the unifying word, only thus can we see the order in things, only when we have seen can we act personally, so that the correspondence between God, society, and man becomes, in man, a growing, transforming power. Out of this sense of correspondence arises the unit or group, which is a meeting of persons who recognize the same starting point in the same field of activity. And, even as hermits became monks by accepting a common unity of worship, so have we, in families and in groups to accept each other. Herein lies the organic in society, the field for the operation of variety in unity, and this corresponds to our need.

Many outside the Church explain the number of conversions to Catholicism by showing the need, with the disappearance of the old forms of individuality, that men and women have to be told what to believe and how to act. In this sense the Church is seen to

be as impersonal and tetragonal as any other modern institution. They are, indeed, partly right in this, and, in an age of impersonal power, the greatest danger the Church has to face is not that of being persecuted, but of becoming herself impersonal. Yet, if the neophyte has undergone any kind of conversion at all, he must have turned towards the personal, and felt the unifying and transforming love of God in his life. Again, a break-through of the outer crust has to be made before one can experience the discovery of a Personal God, before one can, not only know truth, but love it. The drama of life in the world is a constant preparation for this discovery. It strips a man of reservations and leaves him in the simplicity of a commitment: 'Not my will, but thy will be done.' For this is the heart of a conversion: it is the starting point and the turning point. It is here that we lose our 'individuality', in order to find unity. It is from here that we can make the invocation with William Foree Stead:

Flow down, O Uriel, flow down, and then
Come welling up, and know Thyself in me.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note how existentialist thought, in an attempt to find unity between man and his fellows, has made a bid to reaffirm the individual in society. Camus, with his belief in man and disbelief in Providence and in the destiny of man, has made his break-through from prison to freedom, without recognizing any other 'beyond' except that of freedom exercised within the limitations of this world. Indeed, being held *within* the finite is necessarily as tetragonal as the more obvious façade of standardized values through which he has broken. We are all, today, looking at the same picture of disunited man, a refugee, lost in a world of appearances, moral neutrality, falsehood and nothingness. In this context the existentialist is the last in the line of persons to assert his individuality, not in isolation, but in terms of his world within a world. From this he can see no way through to God, and he is determined not to make the mistake of the Romantic, who separates thought from action, and then is driven to substitute action for thought. As Richard Wollheim writes in the *Cambridge Journal*, the attitude of the Romantic in existentialist terms, is: 'If we cannot decide how we ought to act, then let us act. If a problem cannot be solved intellectually, then surmount it in practice. By *doing*, by *effecting* things, an attempt is

made to cover up what in existentialist thought is called the *mauvaise foi* of the agent, his refusal to choose. . . .'

The endeavour of the existentialist is to find a position from which, even in the absurdity of his lot in the world he did not choose, he can make a choice. And any choice is made in the name of others sharing his predicament. This may be seen as an attempt to assert individuality, and, perhaps, heroic responsibility with regard to a unity of understanding with others, but the pattern of behaviour of the rebel, when his rebellion has proved successful, we unfortunately know only too well. Thus we have seen the wheel turn full circle. We have here the picture of the man who has mistaken revolution, and the many turning points it entails, for conversion. Fearing the repetition of the rebel-come-dictator relation, M. Camus declares the necessity, in his most recent book, of retiring from the scene, strengthened only by the knowledge that he has behind him the proven means of revolt which he can use again if necessary. This would hardly seem to be a tenable position. Indeed, the dilemma of fighting for 'man' with a philosophy of action and then of having to live in inactivity with the same philosophy can scarcely be resolved in real terms. With its insistence on living for the moment, this way of life could become a game or an art. Perhaps, though a cul-de-sac, it is another waiting position, and one from which the existentialists may be compelled to make a radical revision of their assumptions, and one from which they may break through from the world they have made themselves to a true relation with reality.

We have attempted to examine some of the ways that the familiar isolated individual, confronted by systems, faces his lot. He is the same person who went down before the totalitarian violence in the inter-war years, and who continues to wrap his life round the 'impregnable centre' of which Stephen Spender wrote in *The Trial of a Judge* in 1938.

Yet I believe [says the Judge at the end of the play]
 That if we reject the violence
 Which they use, we coil
 At least within ourselves, that life
 Which grows at last into a world. . . .
 But if we use their methods
 Of lies and hate, then we betray
 The achievement in ourselves. . . .

Since our need is to make a world, a common unity among men, if we can come to the point of recognizing the form of the image of God amongst us, by correspondence, by the knowledge that if we are victims he is The Victim, then, with humility, we can begin. It is to this 'impregnable centre', the core of unity in a man, that God speaks. It is here that he finds, in the words of St Augustine, 'the best part of the whole man', his mind. Yet it is the particular sorrow of the Christian apostle today to find that this centre is indeed impregnable, shut against violence and falsehood, enclosed in an unreal world, shut against love. Here he finds the false unity of narrowly guarded integrity (like that of Aunt Helen in *The Living Room*) and he comes to know that unity which does not lead towards *union* with God is a sterile achievement. Yet, if man, in his simplicity, can be in a position to hear, and to be unified by the gift of love, he may know, as St Augustine wrote, in the full fervour of his discovery, that God whom we seek is a 'hidden sun' who 'pours into our innermost eyes that beaming light. Thence derives the truth that we speak.'

THE PRIESTHOOD AND PERFECTION

By

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(De Sanctificatione Sacerdotum)

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