

THE VALUE OF THE CREATIVE FACULTY IN MAN¹

WHAT is the nature of Man—"Quid est homo? . . . Constituisti eum super omnia opera manuum tuarum." In what is this superiority? "I have said you are gods." In what way are men as gods? What do we know of God? Credo in Deum . . . creatorem coeli et terrae. *Creatorem*—what does create mean? The Shorter Oxford Dictionary says: to bring into being; to cause to exist; to form out of nothing; to originate.

Now the existence of anything is dependent upon four causes. Take for example this table. (1) There is something that makes tables tables and not candlesticks; this kind of thing, not another kind. But, further, as an individual thing: this particular table and not that; a table like this one and not like that one—what makes tables tables, and this particular table this particular shape is the *formal cause* and without that cause this table would not exist.

(2) It is made of *wood*. If there were not this piece of wood, *this* table would not exist. That is the *material cause*.

(3) It is *made*. Its makers used their knowledge and skill as carpenters or machine-minders . . . and they used saws and chisels and planes and the power of their bodies or of machines. That is the *efficient cause*.

(4) *Why* did they make this table? This table *does* something—it supports things. They had a purpose in view when they made it (if only to make money by selling it). Whatever purpose it was that caused them to make it, that is the *final cause*.

So the created thing has four causes of existence and there is first of all the creative imagination. To create: primarily, to "imagine," as we say, what does not otherwise exist. For to take material and manipulate it to a certain end, to take wood and saw it in order to make a table, results in nothing unless the image of the table to be made exists first in the

¹ Substance of a lecture given to the Leicester Aquinas Society, June 17th, 1935.

creative imagination. This image is the formal cause (as existing in the maker's imagination, the extrinsic formal cause; as existing in the thing once made, the intrinsic formal cause).²

Man is like God in respect of this creative imagination. For the creative imagination does not merely discover what already exists; it creates what does not already exist. Not to use the imagination is to be less than human. If the images it creates do not otherwise exist, then the agent or cause of their existence is responsible for their existence. And as the activity which produces them is an intellectual activity, to deprive people of it is to reduce them to a "sub-human condition of intellectual irresponsibility." That is the condition of men in our Industrialism. The factory "hand" as such is less than a man—he is simply a sentient part of the machinery. He is only a man when he is not working.

But you can begin a different way. *Quid est homo?* You can begin, like an experimental scientist, with the footrule and the microscope and the weighing machine and Co. By an act of faith you can affirm the self-existence of what you call "matter," and the real validity of your experiments. You can be a materialist, and worship power or energy instead of form. You can deny the formal and final

² NOTE: the reader must be careful to distinguish what is here called the imagination from the imagination or phantasia of the scholastics, the "sort of storehouse of sense-impressions" as St. Thomas calls it (I, 78, 4). This latter is a sensory faculty; its images are material images; its function is to take part as instrument of the mind, in the process of acquiring knowledge. But the human mind can do more than acquire knowledge. In a manner of speaking it chews up and digests its sense-impressions, and a new, hitherto non-existent "image" is created. So that when we say a man has "imagination" we mean not merely that he registers his sense-impressions but that he creates images; and when a child draws or a poet "makes," likeness to sensory appearance is the least important as well as the least obvious character of their productions. Now this creative "image" is not purely sensory; on the other hand, it is, as Maritain points out, not a purely intellectual form either, it concerns "not only the intellect but the imagination and sensibility of the artist . . . and for this reason cannot be expressed in concepts" (*Art et Scolastique*, p. 278). This special use of the intellect, imagination and senses, then, is here called, in accordance with common English usage, "imagination."

causes, and accept only the efficient and material causes. You can affirm that there are no forms—only matter . . . no purposes or ends—only effects. This requires an act of faith greater than any made by Hindus or Christians. As H. G. Wells said: "By faith we disbelieve." But that is not so difficult in our Industrial civilization for that civilization is itself one in which both formal and final causes are denied. To the bee, the hive has no "form." To the bee, the question: "What's it all bloomin' well for?" has no meaning and no answer. But English Industrialism unlike that of Russia (i.e., unlike that envisaged by the Communist Party) has not made the necessary "act of faith." It is hampered, marred, by the straggling, ill-nourished but by no means dead remains of the civilization which preceded it. When Mr. Selfridge and Messrs. Vickers proclaim that England is a Christian country, their proclamation has the dregs of truth in it; for neither they nor their dehumanized employees have actually made the act of faith which true materialism demands.

The creative faculty is that one which is the mark of man—it is the one which makes him like God. God created man "in His own image." And the dynamic centre or core of the faculty of creation is the imagination. If you cannot imagine, then, whatever else you can do, you cannot create. But the word "imagination" (and the adjective "imaginative") necessitates a certain apology to-day. Just as the words "father" and "mother" become obscene words in the "Brave New World"—so the word "imagination" is, if not obscene, at least ridiculous to-day. And it carries with it a suggestion of vagueness and lack of discipline—of self-indulgence and softness. It suggests the opposite of "hard boiled." If Tom Briggs the navy or Bill Bones the 365th machine-minder in a boot factory show signs of imagination, they are more likely to get "the boot" than promotion.

"Where there is no vision the people perish." And in a sort of spiritual death men carry on as automatons, "hands," employees . . . But as no means have yet been devised by which men and women can be doped and put on shelves during the hours when they are neither working nor

sleeping (for human beings cannot sleep more than about eight hours a day or work more than ten or twelve, and so there are about four hours of what we call "leisure" to be provided for) so we have to cater for those hours during which, while neither working nor sleeping, they tend to break away from the automatic and let their imaginations "rip," imaginations entirely undisciplined and untrained because entirely unused. Then we talk about the arts and crafts. And the arts and crafts have become a sort of dope—the dope required to keep men and women entertained and quiet during their leisure hours. There are other dopes—the arts and crafts are only one kind—hiking, athletics, the cinema are other kinds.

Now one of the main springs of energy among animals and among human beings (for human beings are also animals) is the sexual appetite. A consequence of the sexual appetite is the increase and multiplication of species. There is no escape from this at present. Males and females we are, and we have an insatiable appetite for one another. But this appetite can be disciplined and the dammed up energy can be allowed to overflow into other spheres. Normally it overflows into the sphere of necessary work. Throughout human history the necessary works of clothing and building and food producing or procuring and the making of furniture and utensils have received a great part of the power necessary for their enthusiastic carrying on from the unused sexual exuberance of man. There could never under any circumstances be full sexual satisfaction; by no arrangement of society could you arrive at sexual satiety, and this seems to be the clear arrangement of the Creator. There is the imagination; but the imagination by itself does not act materially. It must be stirred to action. The energy is provided by the exuberance of the sexual appetite. It is, so to say, an economical arrangement. "Nature" is full of such contrivances. For example, the domestic hen's ability to lay many more eggs than could possibly survive as birds provides innumerable tables with one of the most perfect foods. There is no room for all the oaks which could be grown from all the acorns, but acorns make an admirable

poached egg for pigs. The human face has an apparatus called the eyes for grasping things at a distance. It has a thing called the nose for taking in air and grasping things by scent. It has a hole in the middle for taking in food. By combining all these and other contrivances we are able to put them to uses other than their immediate physical uses. We *smile* with our lips. We forget that we are smiling with the edges of a food hole—using its subtle and delicate membranes for a purpose foreign to their primary physical purpose—it is as though we did actually contrive to shoot the square root of 2 with a gun! In fact, in the economy of nature, the main source of the energy required for what we call “education and culture” is not the desire for knowledge or refinement but is the appetite for reproduction and the appetites for food, clothing and shelter. Thus men and women obtain not only the physical necessities of life but spiritual food also—and both in a manner suitable to them. For not only does man “not live by bread alone” but he is not satisfied by bread which is merely nourishing according to a chemical analysis. And, on the other hand, he cannot support his earthly life simply by nourishing his mind; so paintings and sculptures, music and poetry must have a kind of usefulness. They must be in some way attached to earthly life and be part of it if they are to retain their vigour and not disintegrate and degenerate into pure abstraction and intellectual masturbation. “Art for Art’s sake” is as unhealthy as bread for bread’s sake.

“The value of the creative faculty” derives from the fact that that faculty is the primary mark of man. To deprive man of its exercise is to reduce him to subhumanity. It is not at all out of kindness to animals, the thing we call “humanitarianism,”³ it is not at all from motives of benevolence that we demand scope for man’s creative faculty.

³ The humanitarian is that kind of person who accepts the degradation of humanity which Industrialism involves, but wishes to ameliorate the lot of the degraded victims by factory legislation, the protection of children, the provision of safety regulations where machinery is used, the provision of medical clinics and uplifting entertainments, the spreading of contraceptive instruction and apparatus among what she calls the “working classes.”

It is first of all from motives of rebellion against an irrational and demoniac society—a society diabolical in its direction and destructive of the very nature of man. The value of the creative faculty is that its use enables man to save his soul—for without that faculty he has no soul to save. You cannot save the soul of an automaton; for an automaton has no saveable soul. When they say, when the Catholic priest says, “a man can be a very good Catholic in a factory” he is of course speaking the exact truth. . . . But it remains true that a man is as out of place in a factory as in a lightless dungeon, and that as continual darkness atrophies the eye so continual intellectual irresponsibility atrophies the creative faculty and makes men less than men. If the populations of our factory towns were not constantly recruited from the country they would wither intellectually as certainly as they wither morally and physically. A man can be a very good Catholic in a factory. Yes, but only so long as he remains a *man*.

Some people in our curious society will say: What? You don't mean to say people can't be saved without the arts and crafts; you don't surely mean that the arts and crafts are necessary to salvation? In reply, I might begin by asking: What do you suppose the arts and crafts are for? There is an old saying that “women are saved by child-bearing.” And we may say that all men are saved by labour, for to labour is to pray. But the saying has no meaning if the labour is not the labour of men but of automatons. And it is not the labour of men when the men who do it are deprived of intellectual responsibility for it. The labour of bees is neither prayer nor praise, except that by their labour God praises Himself. In so far then as the works of men are not the product of the creative imagination, they are not properly the works of men, and the labour that goes to their making is destructive of humanity and therefore destructive of their souls and inimical to salvation.

Obviously, we have not yet achieved such a consummation. We have not yet reduced industrial workers to a complete intellectual irresponsibility. I imagine that it would be impossible to do so. Men will certainly rebel before it

could be done. Our masters, the financiers and usurers, will all be bankrupt before their system can be perfected. A civilization founded upon avarice and the worship of power has in it the poison which will destroy it. "Men are not united except in things of the spirit" and they have denied the spirit. They have denied the formal and final causes.

But the destruction of humanity is the goal of Industrialism. It is a goal it can never reach, but it is the goal at which it is directed. And even if it could be shown that no soul has yet been lost, a myriad souls have been maimed by it.

You must note that in all this I am not speaking as a member of that peculiar class of persons called "artists"—people who hanker after aesthetic satisfactions and who only value things on account of the aesthetic satisfactions they provoke. I do not decry aesthetic satisfaction, but I do not believe in arguing from it. If you said: "There's something wrong with Leicester; it's got a putrid smell"—I should say: "That's pretty good evidence." If you said: "There's something wrong with Leicester; it's so ugly"—I should say that too was good evidence. But the trouble then would be that, whereas nearly everyone agrees about bad smells, no two people will agree about ugliness. In fact, you will find that most people who live in Leicester either don't notice its ugliness or else they deny it. From my point of view Leicester is ugly. But from my point of view the whole civilization of Leicester is wicked and foolish, and its ugliness seems to me a natural and proper consequence. So I say, don't let's talk about beauty at all—let's talk only about the good and the true, and let us assume, what seems to me self-evident, that there is not in fact any such thing as beauty as a separate quality in things; but that beauty is simply the manifestation, the radiance of truth and goodness combined. And so I say look after goodness and truth, and beauty will take care of itself.

So I am not talking as an artist. I am not arguing as an aesthete. I have no use at all for "art" as commonly understood to-day (Art with a large "A"—the Fine Arts, the things put in museums and quite right too). I would

abolish the Fine Arts altogether. Music—let us sing in church, and at work, and at harvest festivals, and wedding parties, and all such times and places. . . . But let us abolish the concert hall. Painting and Sculpture—let us paint and carve our houses, and churches, and town halls, and places of business. . . . But let us abolish art galleries and Royal Academies and picture dealers. Architecture—let us employ builders and engineers, and let them be imbued with human enthusiasms and not be moved merely by the desire for money or by merely utilitarian standards. Poetry—let those who can write our hymns and songs and prayers. Let them write dirges for funerals and songs for weddings, and let them go about and sing to us or read to us in our houses. . . . But let us abolish all this high nonsense about poets who are “not as other men.” And let us abolish all the art schools and museums and picture galleries.

“The artist is not a special kind of man—but every man is a special kind of artist”—because every man, because he is a man, has the creative faculty, is a creature with imagination. And a civilization which denies it, which thinks art is something special, that to be an artist requires special gifts—a civilization which condemns the majority of those engaged in the necessary work of the world to “a sub-human condition of intellectual irresponsibility,” a civilization, therefore, in which the primary and often the sole object of working is wages (as profits and dividends are the sole object of our employers) and all things are made for sale—such a civilization is vile and damned, and such a civilization is ours to-day.

And because, in spite of everything, we are unable to deny “the value of the creative faculty,” for we remain men whatever degradations we suffer or inflict, we must even place a special value upon it—give it a special worship. We place the artist on a pedestal and teach him to thank God he is “not as other men are.” We make him into a hot-house flower and place his works in sort of temples called museums and art galleries. We even make some artists into Lords and Knights . . .

And worst of all, we think that the creative faculty is a

special faculty, only possessed by special people, the special people called "artists." Those who paint pictures and make sculptures, those who write music and poetry, and architects! We think creation only means creating special things, we don't realize that the creative faculty, the imagination, is necessary to the mere existence of humanity. The bank clerk and the shop assistant, the lorry driver, the doctor and the lawyer must have the creative imagination as much as those other workmen, the artists. You must imagine the act you are about to perform; you must see it as a thing made—a thing with "form" and "end." If you do not so see it, it is not a human act. It is only to acts so seen, so imagined, that free will applies. And therefore it is only such acts that can merit praise or blame.

So the creative faculty is not a special and peculiar gift. It is the common faculty of men—their distinguishing mark. And good politics are those which foster and encourage and develop human responsibility and enlarge the sphere of the creative imagination. And bad politics are those which discourage and diminish and destroy it.

We are saved by good will, but we cannot see *good* without the creative faculty. So the value of the creative faculty is that it makes a man a man. *And it is man who has been redeemed.*

ERIC GILL.