

The Transformation of Man

by David Holbrook

I find it very difficult to enter into an adequate debate with Mrs Haughton over the whole field of her argument. It is impertinent for me to do so, since I do not recognize the reality which to her is predominant. She says,

All conversion involves repentance, a turning away from all that prevented the self-giving of love, a realization that, as preventing love, much in the past was incongruous and evil (p. 118).

I could go so far with her, though I would need to argue about the exact meaning of 'repentance', 'incongruous' and 'evil'. I would argue that the last word tells us more about those that use it than the quality or condition it is supposed to describe. But debate in this dimension would for me be valid. However, Mrs Haughton opens up a whole other dimension when she says

. . . the prophetic calling involves repudiation of much more than unworthy and unloving behaviour. It sees that *everything* in the life of the flesh—the world as we know it—is futile and useless as a means of accomplishing the will of God. The truth of the world is so distant an approximation to the naked truth of the spirit, as perceived in the moment of revelation, that it can only be discarded (p. 118).

Mrs Haughton is not, I think, characterizing this as a particular view of the prophet: she assumes it as a necessary attitude for her whole argument. For me there is only this world, and so from my point of view there is something irrational and even psychopathological about an attitude which discards this world in favour of a postulated ideal 'other' world of the sacred, though I can see how men can arrive at such a concept. But though I respect the point of view which discards this world, I can't accept it, and so I don't see how any argument between Mrs Haughton and me can be ultimately valid: the difference is a question of belief.

How organic life came into being, how this organic life became human, how the human organism became self-aware and able to conceive of a God and a heaven seems to me deserving of all our reverence, awe, and attention to its truth. This seems to me enough to which to apply one's understanding, and I do not want my search for truth here to be obscured by postulates of a 'sacred' reality. If I did believe in a sacred reality I believe I would say that the way to discover this reality is by studying the truth of man and his inner life in complex with his outer environment. To me the inner reality of

man, including his experience of God, is primary. To discard this marvellous complexity of being and existence in favour of an assumed other reality seems to me in itself as much an impertinence and ignorance, as, no doubt, my rejection of the sacred world seems to a Catholic. So, in the large view, there seems little point in us arguing: we can only agree to differ. Yet we should be able to debate at the level of what each of us feels about human reality in the here and now, so long as we play fair. So, I shall try to discuss Mrs Haughton's book in terms of what I feel it may or may not contribute to our attitudes to human nature.

Here again, of course, we are in difficulties at once, for as Mrs Haughton indicates, terms do not mean the same to her as they mean to me.

Many of the words and concepts we use in expressing the nature of Christian community are, indeed, words which are not necessarily connected with the sacred; they can be used, without translation, in talking to people to whom our specifically religious (in any special sense) vocabulary is meaningless. These are all words that deal with formation—words like patience, chastity, birth, justice, trust, poverty, belief, sorrow, fortitude, hope, sin, death. It is true that many of these words have extra resonances in the religious language which almost transforms them, and that that when they become part of the language of conversion they are so changed as to be scarcely recognizable . . . (pp. 261-2).

These words, she says, belong to 'morality and ethics', though she keeps in reserve a kind of double meaning in them for subjects to do with 'conversion'. So I am at a disadvantage, since if ever I begin to discuss one of these terms she can begin to switch its meaning and double round me. For her there are other words which belong exclusively to 'the sacred'—'redemption, conversion, salvation, God, Christ, resurrection, glory'. These are 'no use whatever' in talking about 'formation'. So, I can't use these words at all, it seems:

The only way they can then be used is as the words of a mythology, and this is fine for Christians, among themselves, because they know—or should know—that mythology is a language that indicates a reality beyond the reach of any language. But people who aren't Christians and don't recognize the existence of any such reality (although they may experience it) can hardly be expected to realize that a mythological language, as used by Christians, refers to anything but a myth. This leads to fearful confusions . . . (p. 262).

Mrs Haughton thus divides her terms and her universe into two worlds, the world of formation and the world of transformation. What marks the change from one to the other is the 'salvation' event: a moment at which all the positive developments belonging to this world are transmogrified into a development belonging to

the other world, by a kind of transubstantiation, an intermission of God's love, an opening of the soul to a new dimension of giving.

All this makes debate very elusive and difficult, and I must restrict myself to conveying the way in which Mrs Haughton's work comes over to me in its attitude to human nature. Now it seems to me that her technique is derived from Sartre—as with the 'chunks of quasi-novel', such as Sartre employs to seek to justify his schizoid philosophy. Her 'experimental theology' she claims to be based on 'experimental knowledge' by which she means accounts of 'real human experience', as distinct from 'myth'. But she does not see how much this selection from experience requires what Keats called 'a greeting of the spirit'—an act of perception and selection. Any account of reality is itself conditioned by the fact that the only way a human being can give an account of 'real experience' is by symbolizing, a process involved with his inner reality, which conditions all his capacities to perceive outer experience. That is, it is only possible to give an account of 'real experience' in such a way as to stamp the picture with the figure of one's own soul—and the figure of those whose attitudes have influenced one's perception.

One of the influences here is clearly Sartre. There is the welcome concentration on 'existence' before 'essence'. But there is also the fashionable feeling that 'mere' life is but a filthy *boue* and *merde*:

But this world of men that God so loved is in a sorry state, is soaked through and through with a penetrating glue that seals people's eyes and ears, and congeals their movements and coats their sense of touch and fastens them in isolated proximity. So 'the world' and 'sin' are coextensive (p. 280).

This concept of 'sin' seems to me the least useful of Mrs Haughton's terms. As indicated above, she puts this term among those which apply to the situation of 'formation': yet it seems to me to apply to this world only if this world is rejected in favour of a better elsewhere. I am shocked by the difference between what is implicit in Mrs Haughton's position, and that of the medical psychotherapists I have been reading, in terms of hope for man, and belief in man.

One of Christ's most telling statements was 'let him who is without sin cast the first stone'. This is a recognition that when we seek to condemn others we are in fact seeking to punish something that is in ourselves. We are afraid of it in ourselves, so we are impelled to split it off and project it over others, whom we then attack. Object-relations psychology has come to see this mechanism—one of the most radical in human nature—as a flight from ego-weakness. Fundamentally, it is an expression of that primitive hunger which we felt in our earliest days. We needed to incorporate to survive. Anything which frustrated our incorporative needs threatened loss of viability. Where the assurance that we were loved failed, or where our love seemed not to be accepted, then we concluded that love was harmful, and in place of the capacity to love as a means to strength of identity,

we took to the paths of primitive hate. Hate is the expression of the psychic need for incorporation, expressed in an inverted form—we need to ‘eat’ others, to alienate them in case they love us (which would be too dangerous), to steal from them what was not given us naturally by love, to scoop them out, to thrust harm into them because of our envy of their ‘good content’. Behind all these mechanisms is the essential fear of being too ‘empty’ to survive. All human *wickedness* can thus be accounted for as a manifestation of needs of identity—of a positive desire to survive: and even of a deep need to love and be loved. This is to read ‘sin’ as ‘human wickedness’.

The importance of Christ’s injunction above, and the Christian maxim ‘Judge not that ye be not judged’, is in their indication that insofar as one rejects the symbolism of a ‘wicked’ person’s hate, one both fails to see that he is expressing a need, and also fails to see the same need in oneself. By a punitive attitude one merely condemns oneself by confirming that one shares the same hate, and fears it so much one is likely to project it over others. This is the root of much human cruelty.

Recent psychoanalytical thought embodies these profound insights: and at the same time it has discovered that in these same mechanisms lie the roots of all morality. For as the self first becomes aware of the ‘not-me’, at a time when still dependent on the other, deep doubt arises that the hungry need to survive has such an incorporative power that it may ‘eat up’ the other. From this arises the saving grace of ‘concern’—that capacity and need to give to others, in order that they, and oneself, shall continue to exist, good and whole, as continuing and secure identities.

By such realistic objective exploration of the nature of human nature this branch of medical thought finds no need for recourse to transcendental values to explain the continual concern of the human being with redemption, salvation, altruism and integration. Men are naturally good. Their wickedness is but a distortion of their quest for integration and fulfilment of being. Ethics is not a mere matter of communication, but the expression of the healthy moral sense that grows in most individuals, through a satisfactory early nurture on the mother’s lap. Moreover, from this experience come values which can be embodied not as absolutes, but as collocations of naturalistic ethical description. As Professor John Wisdom says, there is a pondering of one’s experience and inner motivation which is ‘living ethics’, from which values can be embodied in shared ethical standards, however much not absolute:

. . . rightness is constructed from what really seems right to A, to B etc., and what really seems right to A is constructed from what seems right to A at first blush, and still seems right to A after review, comparison etc. . . . To say that right is what at infinity still seems right to everybody and that what seems right to so and so is a matter of what he finally feels, is not to make right more

subjective than red or round (though it is *more* subjective). But it is a naturalistic and anti-transcendental *metaphysic* of ethics, i.e. ultimate description of ethical activity.

The basis of the complex between 'what at infinity seems right to everybody' and 'what so and so feels (to be right)' has its origins in the earliest moral experience with the mother:

The mother says, 'How would *you* like it?', i.e. 'How much is your complaisance due to the fact that it's you who are pulling the cat's tail and not vice versa?'. And in this she is *not* merely putting something into the child but *bringing out* the uneasiness which lurks in *him* just as it did when biting her breast he laid waste his world and with it himself.

Review of Waddington, *Science and Ethics, Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 102-111.

What I find shocking is that a writer such as Rosemary Haughton prefers the attitude of a Sartre to human evil, to that of the recent psycho-analytical writers whom Professor Wisdom is endorsing here. In this she is of course following fashion. She refers to all the 'in' terms—the 'leap in the dark' (p. 118), 'futility', 'compromise and despair'. She attributes failures in human situations to the theme of *huis clos* so dear to Sartre, to the 'failure of communication' school of followers of this literary fashion such as Pinter ('The circles of frustration, vengeance, hope and frustration go on', p. 21). Sartre's revulsion from whole living bodily experience, as a kind of sticky and nauseous glue, is surely behind Mrs Haughton's attitude to *all* human experience as 'sin':

It is the whole messy condition in which people live. . . . This world, in a state of sinfulness, is full of people knocking up against each other in a haphazard way. . . . Sin, it must be said again, means *both* the messy human condition—an environment that we are soaked in—and *also* the shabby and unloving behaviour that we indulge in . . . the state of sin, the sickness in which the whole world was soaked . . . (p. 65).

Sin is also 'the fearful refusal of love' and has to do with a 'simplifying fog of sensuality'. Sin to her is not the weakness of false solutions to weakness—but our whole living existence.

If this is sin, then it is life, and I see no point in rejecting this messy condition, since it is all we have. To me it seems important to distinguish between the 'messy condition' and that kind of negative choice and action, impelled by hate, which make it messier: which we call wickedness. Where human wickedness is concerned, I follow the psychoanalytical interpretation of this as a manifestation of the human need to feel real. In the child, 'it is *hope* that is locked up in the wicked behaviour'. In the adult 'wickedness' is often an attempt to 'attach a sense of guilt to something' and sometimes 'a desperate attempt to feel real' (the phrases are Winnicott's).

Wickedness is a problem of hate, especially with schizoid persons,

and it is these individuals who tend to invert all normal values. In a particular minority, who have 'never been convinced that they were loved for their own sakes in infancy', there is a deep feeling of emptiness, of dissociation, and of having no human value. These are schizoid individuals. Since their love was never accepted they came to the conclusion that it was harmful, and 'bad stuff'. They have only bad stuff inside them. Any substance they have in them they have had to steal. To love or give would thus threaten emptying of the identity. To be loved is too threatening. They have no resources within them, nor is there anything outside on which they can rely. (A schizoid patient said to Fairbairn, 'Whatever you do you must never love me'.) The only way for a schizoid person to feel a secure sense of identity is to invert love to its opposite and to feel real by hating, and to alienate others.

Sartre is such a schizoid person, and his philosophy is a philosophy of hate. He sees no future in any love affair except sadism, masochism or indifference. He proclaims we have nothing within us nor outside us on which we can depend. The collocation of values in a sense of rightness combined with 'what feels right' from the natural growth of a moral sense within us, *this he does not recognize*. It is meaningless to him. But it is not meaningless to most of us, and it seems to me particularly grotesque that Christian apologetics should swallow Sartre's schizoid nausea at all life, rejecting it all as 'sin'.

There is in Sartre's existentialism a valuable concentration on the need to look at *experience* without bending it to preconceived 'essence'. This valuable concern emerges from the predicament in which he and his 'saints' (like Genet) find themselves: this is the only way they can feel real. They claim the freedom each to make his own voyage. But when examined, Sartre's ultimate freedom in this is the freedom to hate. As Mary Warnock points out, the Existentialists are curiously silent on the subject of how much

the desires and wishes of others, their interests and their liberty, constitute a limit to the morally desirable exercise of our own freedom to satisfy *our* desires. . . . *Existentialist Ethics* (p. 38).

If we turn to *Being and Nothingness* to find out what answer Sartre gave there to the fundamental ethical questions: 'How ought I to treat other people': and 'what is it which should be valued above everything else?' . . . the answer is

other people are 'the original scandal of our existence'. We are committed to endless hostility, and our own freedom must often be won at the expense of sacrificing the will of another. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 44).

It is surely odd for a theological writer to wish implicitly to endorse this essential Existentialist ethic?

Futility is a characteristic schizoid affect. So, to Sartre, the attempt of consciousness on the world is doomed to frustration:

We may experience nausea when we survey what seems like the **teeming, thick, viscous** 'stickiness' of the world. Sartre thinks that **such substances** as treacle and honey are natural symbols of what **we most hate** in the world of things: they represent anti-value. **For, instead of being tidy and manageable**, such that we can pick them up, manipulate them and define their boundaries, they are glutinous and spreading, neither liquid nor solid, possessing us by their stickiness, which clings to our fingers if we try to shake it off. We are naturally committed to feeling horror at this aspect of the world. (*Existential Ethics*, p. 45.)

The world of people is even more distressing, because other people are free, and so might threaten us:

It is thus the *freedom* of other people which is an outrage to us, and we try to overcome it by pretending it does not exist (*ibid.*).

To Sartre, '*L'Enfer c'est les autres*'. He can only see a relationship as ending in sadism or masochism: but to this conclusion he adds a note, and in this note we may see the origin of Mrs Haughton's concerns with transformation:

'These considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion which we cannot discuss here.'

Sartre's conversion became a conversion to Marxism—which we can see as but another symbolization of the schizoid problem (to remove scarcity from the world, as a symbol of removing emptiness from the identity). But how can a possibility of 'deliverance and salvation' acceptable to Christianity be taken over from an atheistical philosophy based on the freedom of endless hostility—of hate? To me this is puzzling: but it is really what Mrs Haughton does.

It will be obvious from what I have said that Mrs Haughton's attitude to human experience and 'sin' derives from Sartre, and is fundamentally schizoid—that is, it is based on hate—on impulses which, since love is unacceptable, must be used to coerce others for the sake of one's own reality and security.

I hope this conclusion will prove startling, to those who acclaim her as a new Catholic thinker.

To Mrs Haughton, our messy condition, life, represents, as it does to Sartre, a threat and a danger. To control this danger she invents something called the Law: God must intervene, to tidy up human life, and overcome that '*l'Enfer*' which is '*les autres*'—

People can't altogether direct or organize their lives because they don't understand either themselves or other people well enough to do so; therefore the relations between them are likely to be a series of destructive clashes (p. 77).

Of the majority of normal people this is simply not true. It may be true of certain manifestations of collective psychopathology in our time (as it would have been of the Holy Wars or the Inquisition). It is true of the schizoid minority. But to proclaim it true of all human

beings is to proclaim an untruth in the absence of a recognition of the reparative impulse, and the growth of 'concern' and the moral sense in every child in whom, in Winnicott's phrase, 'civilization is born anew'. If it were true that without the Law we would only be capable of 'destructive clashes', civilization could not last another day—while religion would be useless and irrelevant.

This untruth, where it is proclaimed, is proclaimed in the spirit analysed thus by D. W. Winnicott (in *Morals and Education*):

For the psychiatrist the wicked are ill . . . there do exist wicked people. In my language this means that there are persons in all societies and in all ages who in their emotional development did not reach to a stage of believing in; nor did they reach a stage of innate morality involving the total personality . . . moral education that is designed for these ill persons is unsuitable for the vast majority of persons who, in fact, are not ill in this respect (p. 95).

There are (says Winnicott) those who make the existence of the minority of wicked persons the excuse to seek to exert a morality of 'stern or repressive measures' over the majority, to whom it is irrelevant, unnecessary, or harmful. To Mrs Haughton the whole world, the whole of humanity, is in a state of dangerous sin, and must be controlled by the Law. The Law forces people to be good by its *external* influence:

So, there is separation of one kind of activity from another kind of activity, arranging of categories of living, planning of relationships. This is the Law. The disorganized bashing about of human beings is to some extent prevented, and people assume a pattern and a meaning in relation to each other.

Can we believe that this only comes about by coercion by 'the Law'? To object-relations psychology, the good order of normal society and the 'ordinary good home' comes about because each human being seeks a sense of being, fulfilment and goodness *from within*. Where this organizational impulse, linked with the need to love and to give, is impaired, it is because of fundamental ego-weakness, of 'ontological insecurity', due to early failures of environment (not-good-enough mothering).

Mrs Haughton believes that 'the chaotic and unformed life of the flesh must submit to the governance of the law'. To her the 'vague, untamed areas of life' . . . 'belong to the devil'. Her rejection of the 'messy frightened condition' which is 'sin' seems to me, as I have said, a rejection of life, despite her concern to vindicate passion ('the recklessness that passion demands') as a salvific experience. I find myself asking why does this woman who believes that God made man in his own image ('Having a glass of blessings standing by, as Herbert put it)—why does she have an estimation of human nature so much lower than that which comes to me from those who study human nature professionally? From those with no concern other than to

help others achieve a little more sanity? How is it, despite her belief in a sacred reality, she has a lower view of man than people who, like myself, believe that man just grew, as a manifestation of the dynamics of matter?

Where an individual is frightened of his 'messy condition' and is impelled to reject it, it is because he fears that the intractable 'glue' of existence will lead to the collapse of his viability of identity by invading him, flowing out of him by explosion, or threatening implosion of his identity (see Laing). His inability to love and give, in any complex, springs from his fear of emptying and being emptied. There are true solutions to these underlying schizoid problems, which are those of love, of finding the true self, in relationship with others recognized as real, in self-discovery, in the discovery of a sense of being. I do not find that Mrs Haughton prefers this path, for all her appearances.

She prefers the solutions of hate: coercion, magic, splitting, and denial. Her 'double-crossing' of terms and realism I see as dissociation. To Mrs Haughton 'the giving of love' is not hard for some because of a fear of loss of identity: it is always a death for *everyone*, 'precisely because of this background of sin'—because all life is Evil. 'Sin, it must be said again, means *both* the messy condition, and also the unloving behaviour. . . .' We find it hard to love because we are unloving, and because our condition is messy. This seems merely a *huis clos* of argument itself. So, to her, to break out is to die:

giving love finally involves a sort of death . . . the lover dies in giving his love . . . and out of this death a *new life* is born, one which is shared (p. 81).

Her rebirth, involving a jump into a void, is the fashionable Existentialist one. But it is not, like Sartre's, taken in a state of being '*abandonné*.' It requires the support of a whole Church, a theology, and a reality of a sacred cosmology: a 'dressing up':

the dressing up can bring us face to face with the naked truth (p. 84).

As I see it, the 'dressing up' makes her kind of solution a false solution. I am of the Devil's party: if the 'mess' of life's experience is 'sin', then I love sin. To me the 'vague, untamed areas of life' are what make life significant and marvellous, and it is these which are deserving of study, in order that we can discover the truth of human nature, and seek to make it possible for us to come to terms with what we are. Only thereby can we make the subjective acceptance which releases our sense of wholeness of being, a subjective coming to terms such as Job made. This means swallowing a great deal more of the truth about ourselves than Mrs Haughton is prepared to swallow: not least of our hate and weakness. We cannot export these manifestations of 'wickedness' by splitting them off as 'the Devil' while keeping our purity unspoilt, split off in a postulated pure

'sacred reality': we must accept both the love and the hate in ourselves, and accept our responsibility for these.

Her attempt to subject life to control, and to coercion, in the name of the realm of the Sacred, seems to me a mark of unconscious hate, and it surprises me that a theology of hate should seem to so many to represent a fresh direction and energy in the Church. As I see it, we may as well begin to learn the ancient Christian injunction, which we have not made very much progress with yet, 'love one another'. To become able to love thus is surely no death, a dangerous contact with *l'enfer of les autres*, but a discovery of the ability to tolerate their weaknesses, in complex with our capacity to learn to tolerate our own? To 'love one another' we must 'include hate', not seek to split it off (as 'sin') and attack it by magical hate solutions.

It is this toleration that I believe Mrs Haughton can neither achieve nor promote. She wishes to transform man for his own good, not out of charity, but because she fears him and wishes to control him—and what she fears in him she fears in herself—which is life. Perhaps this is what makes her so modern? Or is Catholicism a schizoid religion which attracts schizoid individuals? This might explain much. When I saw the Last Judgement in a mediaeval cycle recently I found it almost unbearable. What was the point of Creation if at the end of it God displayed to the Damned such terrible hatred—essentially for those who became imperfect through the conditions in which he set them? Man by contrast is capable of achieving a profound charity by his objective study of human nature, by which he sees that the most evil behaviour is but a distorted manifestation of the need to feel real and alive, and of the need for love—and so to be pitied. If God is an invention of man, how revealing that he should be conceived of as and endorsed by the Church as being less than human. Rosemary Haughton's sacred reality seems to me, insofar as she indicates it as being so much *purser* than this 'messy' world, a world of pure hate—so I hope never to be transformed into it.

Some books referred to:

Morals and Education, in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, by D. W. Winnicott, Hogarth Press, 1965.

Psychoanalytical Studies of the Personality, by W. R. D. Fairburn, Tavistock Press, 1952.

Existentialist Ethics, by Mary Warnock, *New Studies in Ethics*, Macmillan, 1967.

The Divided Self, by R. D. Laing, Tavistock Press, 1960.

The Ordination Prayers of the Ancient Western Churches

Alcuin Club Collections, No. 49

H. B. Porter

25s net

Conveniently in one volume, the ancient rites of Rome, Gaul, Spain, and England, each in Latin and English on facing pages; with introductory comments, annotations, and critical notes.

Christianity in its Social Context

S.P.C.K. Theological Collections, No. 8

Gerard Irvine: Editor

19s 6d net

Essays on the extent and importance of the influence of the social context of Christianity in its expression of doctrine, its liturgy, its literature, and its expression of Christian living.

Signs of the Times and Ecumenical Aspirations

H. E. Cardinale

3s 6d

The text of a lecture delivered at Chichester by the Apostolic Delegate to Great Britain as part of an ecumenical series on 'Approaches to Christian Unity'. Archbishop Cardinale's subject is the signs of the times and the ecumenical aspirations of the Roman Catholic Church in the light of Vatican II.

Anglican Initiatives in Christian Unity

Lambeth Palace Library Lectures, 1966

E. G. W. Bill: Editor

27s 6d net

paper 18s 6d net

foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury

The story of the various Anglican attempts towards Christian Unity, from the Reformation up to the present time, containing material hitherto little known presented in a fascinating way.

S - P - C - K