

## RESPONSIBILITY AGAIN (II)

*(for Lord Northbourne)*

Translated into the terms of concrete human life and work, man's answerableness in the divine image means free obedience to normative law. Such is the character of human obedience and the proximate definition of man's responsibility. All four of its terms are equally essential. Thus an unfree obedience, whether of ignorance or of force, is to that extent irresponsible, and a freedom which is not essentially qualified as obedience altogether lacks the condition of responsibility, for it is answerable to nothing. Again, an obedience, however free, which has nothing to do with law lacks an essential mark of human responsibility, namely order in and towards the common good. And although we may obey other laws, the character of the law that binds us precisely as responsible beings is to be normative. For a norm is the truth of things understood as a nature to be served and thus binds our will not arbitrarily but through our understanding.

We should recall, as Eric Gill was wont to recall *ad nauseam*, that man's nature is twofold, bodily and spiritual ('spirit and matter, both real and both good'): that human life is the unity of these two elements which are resolved only by death and by false philosophy. But our death looks forward to the resurrection of our bodies. Thus our dependance upon the divine Image is also twofold. It shares the dependance of all created things upon their Exemplar as bodily creatures share it, being fashioned in a determinate scope of growth, of development and decay; and it obeys the laws of heaven as the grass of the field obeys them. But our dependance is also spiritual, of knowledge and of love. So that our correspondence to the divine Exemplar is not merely the unknowing correspondence of life and seasons to the first cause which regulates them all, it is a correspondence by knowing and loving our cause as God. That is what it is to be fashioned in the Image of God, dust of the earth with the breath of divine life in it. For this being made in the divine Image is not understood by any comparison by which we might say 'Behold, God is one of us, for we have a mental life and so has He.' We cannot measure God in that way. But God is our measure: the measure in which the limbs of our spirit have their liveliness and our eyes their sight.

The Image of God is a living measure in which, to the extent of our love, our bodily life also has correspondence to our heavenly principle. Not in blind negation of the body does the Image of God become whole in us, as it is said 'when the eye is lightsome, then is the whole body luminous.' So also it is not by tyranny of the spiritual principle in man over the body, not by the cunning exploitation of its powers and feelings, not by the flattering spiritual presumption of overcoming the bodily nature in us and rendering it at last irrelevant to our pure spiritual interests: not by these means that our bodies are brought into subjection to the law of Christ. It is true to the extent that love has brought the whole man under the discipline of the Image of God that the sacrifice of life or limb or function may be required of us to the end that the whole man be not cast into the furnace. But the requirements of our warfare against sin are not of themselves the norm of our integrity. Their presence in the limiting case give to that integrity the salt of an heroic temper. We do not as a rule rise superior to the body by mutilating it.

Again, it is not only the topmost flower of our bodily life that concerns our spirit as if it were only in the spiritualised distillations of poetry that our bodily life could be tolerable to our spiritual principle. The norm of conformity to the Image of God extends to the roots and the depths of our bodily life, not precisely because it is body but because it is life and of our person. Thus, though it is by our spiritual powers that we apprehend and respond to our divine Exemplar, Christ, it is in our body and not elsewhere that we respond to Him, and the powers of our bodily life are the language of our answer. We do not learn from an abstract heaven the pattern of our bodily behaviour which then, as pure rational beings we proceed to apply as if our body were as impersonal as a machine. We know from Christ in our bodies the norm of our bodily life.

Thus the normative law which defines our responsibility is the divine Exemplar embodied in our flesh, and the law of our bodily life is conditioned by response to Him.

The bearing of these considerations on the social and juridical conception of responsibility may seem remote. Such considerations will even seem alien to the presuppositions of contemporary conceptions of law. It is precisely for this reason we have the duty of recalling them.

The typical conception formed by the modern world in its partial glimmerings of philosophical awareness and corresponding in significance to our conception of a norm, is that of *the random*. Random is the condition of any phenomenon offered to a mind which is sole

source of its own law-making. It is the condition of phenomena precisely in so far as the human mind is called upon to impose law upon them. Thus, to speak strictly, it is not a condition of things or natures independent of the mind. It is an aspect under which one chooses to consider things: it is founded in an attitude of the mind itself. The attitude of mind under which phenomena are considered as random occurrences is at once impersonal, autocratic and quasi-autonomous. In its pure essence, as a limiting case, it is insanity.

But what is the evidence of such insanity in the contemporary world? In effect the evidence is very impressive.

Let us first of all, however, make a little more explicit what we mean by 'the random.' Random is the objective qualification of knowledge *out of kinship*. Wisdom, on the contrary, the type of knowledge presupposed by our understanding of responsibility, is a knowledge in which all things are kin, related in our love's response to the creator of them all. Knowledge of the random is qualified on the side of the knower by a severance of the will and of love from life and the roots of life, giving to it typical characteristics of disinterestedness, detachment, aloofness, frigidity, unrelatedness. In relation to the random the mind's function is not and cannot be understanding, but is rather measure, patterning and manipulation. The formal principles of such patterning belong, as Kant saw, to the mind itself, and can be traced to the tool-using, manipulative function. From this function the abstract patterning of the random has the ineradicable mark of quantity and externity (cf. Bergson). That Kant's critique bears upon knowledge *out of kinship*, and therefore detached and frigid knowledge, knowledge of the *random*, is confirmed in the peculiarly random and somewhat maniacal character of the categorical imperative.

The decisive element in the genesis of the random is a hardening of the heart. From this point, knowledge by kinship in nature gives place to an external quantitative measure. Such a hardening decision usually takes place in the conquest of one people by another. It was said of William the Norman that he numbered every cot and every steading, nay every sty and every swine in his newly conquered kingdom. It takes place wherever men are pressed by other men into the service of money. There is no end to the numeration of the labouring poor, precisely because their numeration involves their alienation from the heart. It takes place wherever man's work in the field of nature ceases to be governed by natures to be served, natures of soil and plant, of cattle and of man himself in all the organic kinship and fellowship of his bodily life, and becomes

instead the exploitation of (random) raw material by technique designed to increase man's autocratic power over *inert* matter.

Neither is such a diagnosis of purely intellectual interest. The people alienated from the heart of their conquerors are the people to whom their governors are always 'they' and never by any chance 'we.' The people enslaved for others' profit are they whose domestic destinies are decided in a market of 'labour'—that utmost de-personalisation of the working man. The fields exploited as so much inert matter, precisely *as* inert matter are washed by flood into the sea, and in a single generation more organic topsoil has been washed away from the Missouri basin than twenty generations of love and patient husbandry can hope to restore.

The sense of the mechanization of modern life,—not only, though especially, of industrial life—is the organisation of the random. It is a process to vacuity. Typically, for contemporary physics the direction of time is determined by entropy, and progress is increase of the random element. The term of such a development is a state of thermodynamical equilibrium, a state in which the universe with all its energies including our own is irremediably pulled to pieces: in which it is finally too improbable that anything further will happen. Such a theory has a psychological relevance though we may reject it as a prognostic.

The triumph of the mechanical or the mathematical unity over organic unity, which we may witness for example in the economy of a mechanized farm manured by chemicals for the sake of money profit, involves more than merely psychological disintegration. It is precisely organic life which is physically dissipated and physically removed from the soil. The same is true of the random sexual alliance—random, though not necessarily promiscuous—of people who have dissociated sex from procreation. The resulting sterility and hysteria are real physical conditions.

It is true that organisation and mechanization are productive of new unities. A machine or a blue-print is itself a unity: a unity in the power of man, of his thought and his muscle. But the process of mechanization turns aside from and leaves behind in a kind of blank nescience unities more numerous and more complex: the unities of life and the unities of love. Man's glittering power over molecules is won at the expense of an extraordinary demission of wisdom, the loss of the most rudimentary knowledge of how to live. The development of mechanism is thus precisely the expression of man's spiritual disintegration; and the mastery over matter, of which he has forgotten all but the quantitative properties involves the weakening and destruction of the natural bonds of life in which he is less

obviously master than child and servant; in which bodily and spiritually he is obedient to a 'nature' which is source of the inner laws of his life, even of his spiritual life.

The organisation of the random is thus the antithesis of that obedience to normative law which characterises man's responsibility; and the spirituality it implies is the antithesis of that responsiveness to the Image of God of which the fulfilment is wisdom.

For it does imply a spirituality: a spirituality based upon the alienation of 'matter' and of man's bodily nature from the heart. It implies a freedom, a 'freedom from the necessities of matter,' of which the intellectual structure is nescience of the organic norms of life in which the mathematical calculation of random probabilities has the place of law. This is true at the base of the economic life where the last decision is pronounced by the actuary and at the base of the mechanical development itself. Freedom thus understood coincides with the most rigorous definition of irresponsibility. Its spirituality is ultimately of the wilderness and the void.

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INTERNATIONAL RE-CONSTRUCTION. By John Eppstein. (Catholic Social Guild; 6d.).

Mr. Eppstein's pamphlet adds little to the spate of maxims and moralisings with which the nation at war has armed itself to face the peace. The first chapter deals with the purpose of re-construction and gleans something from the lesson of the League; every man's stake in the peace is discussed as well as the alternative to the total State. There is added a summary of 'essential documents.' Somewhat less than four pages is devoted, towards the end of the booklet, to the utterances of Pope Pius XII and a little more to the proclamations of British and American 'religious leaders.' On page 16 Mr. Eppstein deplors the basic principles of Christian pacifism and concludes with the rebuke: 'Pacifists should pay more attention to the Devil. Perhaps the practical experience of the unimaginable horrors, deliberately launched upon mankind by Nazi Germany and the militarists of Japan, will have cured this delusion.'

There is little, in the tract, of the fire which Christ came to cast on the earth, and whose kindling can alone solve the problems which face us.

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