Ecology and the Angels

by Brian Wicker

'Nature is never spent' (Gerald Manley Hopkins).
'One day soon, maybe . . . there will be no more Nature' (Prince Bernhard, at a Wildlife Fund dinner).
'There is no more Nature' (Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*).
'Nature fights back' (Rachel Carson).

The disappearance of Nature is a central theme of modern fiction,. Among those novelists who tend to see it as an accomplished fact already, two responses seem to prevail. The first is typified by Robbe-Grillet's verdict that modern man feels no deprivation at the loss of Nature, for Nature was never more than an illusion, comforting perhaps in a meaningless world but no less illusory for all that. To be rid of Nature is to be at last free. The second response is typified by Beckett's verdict: there is no more Nature, and the loss is tragic and the deprivation catastrophic. To be rid of Nature is to be in the realm of the lost ones, in a world of sheer 'lessness'. A third response, however, has to be considered. This is latent in Mailer's identification of the source of our troubles about Nature in the triumph of what he calls corporation-land: that combination of technology, materialism and exploitative brutality towards the environment which is most evident in the cities of America. However, in Mailer's case there is also a certain fascination for, as well as hatred of, this massive agglomeration of brutalities: there is pride, energy, vitality in it, as well as regimentation, pollution and despair. Mailer's ambivalence is characteristic of a general uncertainty about 'the big plot being hatched out by Nature'.

This uncertainty is evident enough elsewhere, in the utterances of people speaking from many different viewpoints. Thus Harvey Cox, in his plea for a matter-of-fact acceptance of the positive Christian values of the 'secular city', admitted in the early nineteen sixties that modern man's attitude to what he called (after Max Weber) 'disenchanted Nature' was essentially childish:

> 'Like a child suddenly released from parental constraints, he takes savage pride in smashing Nature and brutalising it'.

But everything would come out right in the end: the brutality was only a passing phase.

> 'The mature secular man neither reverences nor ravages Nature. . . . Nature is neither his brother nor his god'.[1]

[1]Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, London (SCM Press) 1965, p. 23.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1974.tb07913.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

The trouble with this view was that it was far from clear how modern man could avoid either reverencing or ravaging the world. Cox pleaded for an attitude that would treat Nature matter-of-factly, since man is not an expression of Nature, but a subject facing it, even a monarch surveying it. But the very facts seemed to be against this so-called matter-of-factness, as Rachel Carson saw:

> 'The balance of Nature is not the same as it was in Pleistocene time, but it is still there: a complex, precise and highly integrated system of relationships between living things which cannot be safely ignored any more than the law of gravity can be ignored by a man perched on the edge of a cliff. The balance is not a *status quo*: it is fluid, ever shifting, in a constant state of adjustment. Man, too, is part of that balance'.[2]

Because man is part of Nature, a crucial element in its 'balance', he must take up an attitude towards it which can only be called a kind of reverence. He must develop a reverential sensibility because this is necessary to his very understanding of the facts:

> 'We see with understanding eye only if we have walked in the garden at night and here and there with a flashlight have glimpsed the mantis stealthily creeping upon her prey. Then we sense something of the drama of the hunter and the hunted. Then we begin to feel something of the relentless pressing force by which nature controls her own'.[3]

Rachel Carson's plea for reverence clashes not only with Harvey Cox's secular theology, but also with the optimism of some of her opponents in the debate about the environment. Thus, for John Maddox, her plea for a reverential sensibility is little more than a 'literary trick'.[4] Yet it seems to be generally agreed—though the limits of the agreement are far from clear—that Rachel Carson's main point is valid: man *is* part of the balance. As the generally middle-of-the-road report by Barbara Ward and René Dubos for the United Nations conference on the environment, called *Only One Earth* puts it, in a chapter entitled 'A Delicate Balance',

> 'the lessons learnt in piecing together the infinite history of our universe and of Planet Earth . . . teach us surely one thing above all—a need for extreme caution, a sense of the appalling vastness and complexity of the forces than can be unleashed and of the egg-shell delicacy of the arrangements that can be upset'.[5]

But the delicate balance that has to be respected is not just an ecological problem: it is also a human problem. If the 'balance of

[2]Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, (New York, 1962) Penguin Books 1965, p. 215.
[3]Carson, op.cit. p. 217.
[4]John Maddox, *The Doomsday Syndrome*, London (MacMillan) 1872, p. 15.
[5]Barbara Ward and René Dubos, *Only One Earth*, Penguin Books 1972, p. 85.

Nature' compels us to adopt the ethical attitude which Albert Schweitzer called 'reverence for life', for the sake of our own biological survival, the balance of justice in the world seems to compel us to be ready, if necessary, to ravage nature for the sake of our survival as civilised human beings. *Only One Earth* presents the dilemma very clearly:

> 'The astonishing thing about our deepened understanding of reality over the last four or five decades is the degree to which it confirms and reinforces so many of the older moral insights of man. The philosophers told us we were one, part of a greater unity which transcends our local drives and needs. They told us that all living things are held together in a most intricate web of interdependence. They told us that aggression and violence, blindly breaking down the delicate relationships of existence, could lead to destruction and death. These were, if you like, intuitions drawn in the main from the study of human societies and behaviour. What we now learn is that they are factual descriptions of the way the universe actually works'.[6]

Yet despite this new understanding of the 'delicate balance',

> 'most developed peoples are still affected with one type of 'tunnel vision'. Although they make up no more than a third of the human race, they find it exceptionally difficult to focus their minds on the two thirds of humanity with whom they share the biosphere. Like the elephants round the water hole, they do not notice the other thirsty animals. It hardly crosses their minds that they may be trampling the place to ruins. . . .'[7]

In short, without a balance of human justice between the haves and the have-nots in the world, there may come a catastrophic imbalance in Nature itself. Nature may then be forced to unleash its own vast and complex forces, to 'fight back' against human aggression for its own survival, by terrifying 'ecological invasions' of its own.[8] We may come full circle to that point in ancient tragic thinking at which the Furies, present as the forces in Nature itself, turn upon mankind and

[6]Ward and Dubos, op.cit. p. 85.
[7]Ward and Dubos, p. 205.
[8]On this, see *Blueprint for Survival, The Ecologist* Volume 2 No. 1, (January 1972) reprinted by Penguin Books, 1972: 'The greater the number of different plant and animal species that make up an eco-system, the more likely it is to be stable. This is because . . . in such a system every ecological niche is filled. That is to say, every possible differentiated function for which there is a demand within the system is in fact fulfilled by a species that is specialised in fulfilling it. In this way it is very difficult for an ecological invasion to occur i.e. for a species foreign to the system entering and establishing itself, or worse still, proliferating and destroying the system's basic structure'. But, as the authors go on to point out, 'as industrial man destroys the last wildernesses, as herds of domesicated animals replace inter-related animal species, and vast expanses of crop monoculture supplant complex plant eco-systems, so complexity and hence stability are correspondingly reduced.' Hence the very activities of man in trying to increase production, and thus to provide for the needs of developing peoples, are adding to the possibilities of ecological disaster.

pursue him relentlessly until he has atoned for his vile offences and the balance of things has been restored.

The reference to ancient tragic thinking here is far from incidental. For if it is true that modern discoveries have brought back into focus the older moral insights of man, they have also resurrected the older conceptions of the tragic consequences that follow from disturbing the 'delicate balance'. If the modern problem is that of maintaining, at one and the same time and by one and the same means, the balance of forces in Nature and the balance of human justice among nations, then the problem is not really modern at all. It is simply a restatement of the ancient wisdom which refused to drive a wedge between Man and Nature. To take just one expression of this wisdom, the ancient Greek notion of *Dike* implied both the business of maintaining a balance in Nature and the business of restoring justice between men. *Dike* operated, without essential distinction both in 'Nature' and in human affairs. It signified what was simply natural in the sense that, for example, rivers flowed downhill because of it, but it also signified a logic in human behaviour: thus if you killed someone, *Dike* would ensure that someone else killed you. That was how the world went.[9] It followed, of course, that a man's task was first of all to find his place (his *moira,* or portion) in this universal and self-adjusting system and then to keep to it. If he did not, then the Furies, that is the process of *Dike*, would come to see that he was brought to book. But exactly the same went for the natural order. It was because of *Dike* that the sun had to keep its place in the heavens, just as a man had to keep his place in the society: and if it did not, the Furies would come and put it right, too. The Furies not only policed mankind: they policed Nature as well.

However, there is one element in the modern situation that was not available to the ancient Greek tragedians: this is the feeling, very apparent as we have seen in much modern fiction, that in any case the fight for a maintenance of the balance is hopeless. The iron laws of entropy will ensure that. Nature is not in balance but in decline. We live in a world that is on the wane. At best, human civilisation is a temporary regrouping of the forces that are trying, against impossible odds, to form a rearguard against the onset of chaos. At worst, it is actually hastening the catastrophe.[10] Is there anything in

[9]Leo Aylen, *Greek Tragedy and the Modern World,* London (Methuen) 1964, Appendix p. 354. See also A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy,* London (Methuen) Third Edition, 1968, p. 4.

[10]The second law of thermodynamics states that in any closed system all differences of temperature must tend to even out spontaneously. That is to say, a dissipation of energy tends to proceed throughout the system, thus increasing the randomness, or lack of order, without the system. Now the irony at the heart of this idea, which has caught the imagination of creative artists, is that whereas the presence of *life* within a system is always the presence of a certain order, or organisation of matter and energy, which is counterentropic, i.e. is a centre of 'negentropy'; the communication of *information* always hastens the dissipation of that organisation, since the transmission of any message dissipates the information it contains. Hence human civilisation, which depends on communication

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1974.tb07913.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

the 'older moral insights' of man to cope with this new form of tragic thinking?

Perhaps the Christian equivalent of the idea of *Dike* can help us here. There is a parallel in Christian thought to the Greek conception of powers which operate simultaneously in the natural and in the moral spheres: it is to be found in the unfashionable but highly pertinent doctrine of the angels. A brief consideration of the meaning of this doctrine may be of some use in making sense of the contemporary possibility of a radical imbalance in Nature brought about by some kind of conscious choice.

Originally, the angels were scarcely distinguishable, in the Biblical writings, from God himself. They are part of God's 'court', and go-betweens mediating God's thoughts to men.[11] Indeed, in the Yahwist tradition they were simply ways of talking about the holiness of power of Yahweh.[12] But when it became necessary for the Israelites to find some means of accommodating their experience of alien nature religions to their own monotheism, they did so by interpreting the nature gods of these religions as subordinate powers serving under Yahweh.[13] Thus Yahweh's supremacy was preserved while the 'gods' of surrounding cultures became the powers of nature through which he ruled the world. However, if the angels were responsible for policing nature, they were also responsible for meting out human justice. Just as they emerged slowly from God's bosom into separate identities as the powers of Nature, so too they emerged slowly as separate powers meting out God's justice to men. (God's accusatory wrath—his 'satan'—became 'Satan', his personal prosecuting counsel.)[14] Thus the inextricable connection between the balance of Nature and the balance of justice remained perfectly clear.

Nevertheless, the 'balance' as envisaged in Jewish religion was radically different from that of Greek thought for one overwhelming

between people, is itself bound to undermine the resistance of mere biological life to the increasing randomness in the system. (This may be seen as the basis for Lawrence's emphasis on the 'greater morality of life itself' over the merely 'social' morality of civilised man). See Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, London (Sphere Books) 1968, Chapter II *passim;* Jaques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* Appendix 4; Tony Tanner, *City of Words*, London (1971), Chapter 6 passim; and Lévi-Strauss, *A World on the Wane*, London 1961, p. 397.

[11]*Job*, Chapter 1: vi; *Psalm* 89: vi-vii; *1 Kings*, Chapter 22: xix; see also Jacob's dream at Bethel, *Genesis*, Chapter 28: x-xii.

[12]Timothy MacDermott, OP, *The Devil and His Angels*, in *New Blackfriars*, Volume 48, No. 557 (October 1966) pp. 16-25.

[13]G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, Oxford (Clarendon Press) 1956, pp. 1-4. Caird notes that Philo of Alexandria (b. c. 25 B.C., d. A.D. 40) mingles Greek (Platonic) and Jewish (scriptural) thought on the angels in a remarkable way. 'Philo uses the word "powers" . . . to denote one of three things: sometimes they are attributes of God, sometimes they are created beings identical with the Platonic ideas, and sometimes, again, as in Stoicism, they are immanent causes in the material world, though Philo censures the Stoics for imagining that such powers could be corporeal and independent of any higher cause. In their third capacity, the powers are occasionally to be identified with angels'. See also Newman, Sermon on *The Powers of Nature*, Parochial and Plain Sermons Vol. II (London 1868).

[14]Caird, op.cit. pp. 31ff, MacDermott, op.cit. p. 19.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1974.tb07913.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

reason: man was a 'fallen' creature in a 'fallen' world. And just as the fallenness of man was the result of an aboriginal calamity that had distorted the very meaning of human justice, so the fallenness of the world was the result of an aboriginal calamity that had disorientated the whole of Nature.[15] The fall of the angels and the fall of man were twin aspects of a single gigantic tragedy. Yet if the tragedy was vaster and more catastrophic than anything that a Greek tragic thinker could envisage, it was also less final: for it was of the essence of the matter that somehow the tragedy was the product of free and conscious choice—a choice that could be reversed.

It is the contention of the New Testament writers that this aboriginal disorientation of both Nature and justice *has* been reversed. Christ's defeat of the 'principalities and powers' means that one and the same redeeming act of love has restored the balance of both Nature and justice. For it was lack of love which led to the 'fall of the angels': that is, to the collapse of both justice and Nature into chaos. The tragedy of Satan's fall lies in the fact that, as God's prosecuting counsel, he became such a stickler for the divine law that he would go to any lengths to secure a verdict, forgetting altogether the claims of love:

> 'His tragedy consists in precisely this, that law is not the ultimate truth about God, so that, in defending the honour of God's law, Satan becomes the enemy of God's true purpose.' [16]

Now the divine law which Satan takes to be ultimate and irresistible is precisely the law of *Dike*. In moral terms this is the law of an 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. In religious terms, it is the legalism of a system which thinks of man's dealings with God as a kind of cash-register religion of rewards and punishments. But the law for which Satan is such a stickler is not confined to these human planes. Nature's 'laws' too are misconstrued and distorted by the Satanic powers.[17] People are made physically and psychologically ill

[15]The traditional notion of the fall of Satan, in Jewish apocalyptic, represented it as having occurred at the beginning of the world: the God of suffering and service could no longer be identified with the great accuser, who had therefore to be cast out. But in the New Testament this tradition is modified: the fall of Satan is there represented as happening at the moment of Christ's triumph. (*Revelation*, Chapter 12: x; *Luke*, Chapter 10: xvii-xx). But I do not think the traditions are really contradictory: we are dealing with a description of a state of chaos (disorganisation, entropy) in the world, brought about by a 'fall', not with a temporal event.

[16]Caird, op.cit. p. 37. See also MacDermott, op.cit. pp. 21-22.

[17]The 'powers' are deceptive, making men think that laws and processes which are actually the results of God's will are somehow unalterable decrees of fate, that is, simply part of the 'human condition'. See Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, Freiburg and London (Herder and Collins) 1961, p. 29.

by them;[18] even the wild animals become their prey[19]. Finally, through such superstitions as astrology the very stars themselves are recruited into the Satanic service for the exercise of evil.[20]

Now the ultimate truth about God which Satan forgot is the law of love: and it is the work of Christ, as the New Testament sees it, to show that it is love, not *Dike* which makes the world go round. To the apparently invincible law of blind and tragic vengeance, Christ replies with the love of enemies which breaks the vicious circle of unending tragedy.[21] To the religious legalism of the Pharisaic spirit he replies with the Holy Spirit which blows wherever it will, and leads men into the truth without prior conditions.[22] Against the apparently invincible political powers of the world Christ sets the assertion that all power comes from God, and that without it the political powers are helpless.[23] And to the Satanic grip on Nature itself, Christ replies with the exercise of a power to cast out demons, and to control the elements themselves—the wind, the water, the tempest. Even the wild animals are tamed: he rides the unbroken colt.[24] Now all of these victories over the fallen powers are represented as victories for love. But what can such talk *mean*? That the power of love should conquer fear, legalism, political injustice is perhaps understandable: but that it should put right the very balance of Nature itself is hardly intelligible at all. No doubt this is why the 'mature secular man' finds it necessary to de-mythologise the Christian gospel's teaching about the redemption of Nature, and to say that all the talk in the New Testament about Christ's victory over the fallen powers of Nature through love is just—to use Eliot's words—a 'periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion' [25] or, in Donald Mackinnon's terms, mere 'remote metaphysical chatter'.[26]

But it is just at this point that the findings of the biologists and the environmentalists seem to demand a return to the 'older insights'. We must become 'friends of the earth', they say, and not hurt it.[27] We must pledge loyalty to the vulnerable and fragile planet:

[18]Schlier, op.cit. pp. 21-22.

[19]Caird, op.cit. pp. 56-60. According to Caird, the consorting of unclean animals with demons testifies 'to the existence of a strong popular feeling that not only in human life but in the world of nature there is a residue which cannot be brought into congruity with the holiness of God'—and which is under the control of the demonic powers. Caird, op.cit. p. 59. Caird refers to *Deuteronomy*, Chapter 32: xvii; *Psalm* 106: xxxvii; *Leviticus*, Chapter 16: viiff; *Isaiah*, Chapter 34: xiii-xv.

[20]Schlier, op.cit. p. 23.

[21]*Matthew*, Chapter 5: xliv; *Luke*, Chapter 6: xxvii-xxxv.

[22]*John*, Chapter 14: xvii.

[23]*John*, Chapter 19: xi.

[24]*Mark*, Chapter 11: i-vii. See also Caird, pp. 70ff.

[25]T. S. Eliot, *East Coker*, II.

[26]Donald MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, London (Lutterworth Press) 1968, p. 92.

[27]See G. Rattray Taylor, *The Doomsday Book*, London (Panther Books) 1970, Chapter 11 *passim*.

'Alone in space, alone in its life-supporting systems, powered by inconceivable energies, mediating them to us through the most delicate adjustments, wayward, unlikely, unpredictable, but nourishing, enlivening and enriching in the largest degree—is this not a precious home for all of us earthlings? Is it not worth our love'?[28]

Or, to put the same point in another way,

'We travel together, passengers on a little space-ship, dependent on its vulnerable supplies of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace, preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and I will say the love, we give our fragile craft.'[29]

But, it will be objected, this is not the Christian point at all. It is one thing to say that unless we 'love' our planet it will refuse to go on supporting us: it is quite another to say that it is love which keeps it going. How can we talk of it being love that makes the world go round, when we know that the world is dominated by the DNA molecule and the second law of thermodynamics? It is at this point that the Aristotelean, 'transitive' concept of causality—a concept radically connected with the transitive notion that all things have natural tendencies to behave in determinate ways—becomes crucially relevant. For at the level of transitive causality, neither Clausius's law nor Jacques Monod's chance and necessity have anything relevant to say. Such men are 'sentimental professors'[30] who have been swept away by mere associations, mistaking the empirical generalisations and experimental discoveries of science for

'mere mechanical processes, continuing their course by themselves . . . by fixed laws, self-caused and self-sustained'.[31]

For love is not the answer to the question *how* the world goes round, but *why* it exists at all, and the only answer to that question is—*magic*.[32] And magic, in Chesterton's sense of the term, is only another name for the causal contiguity continually at work in Nature for which another term is the angelic powers—who are, as Newman said, the powers of Nature.[33]

Luckily, however, even if the sentimental professors cannot get away from their sentimental associations, the novelists see things dif-

[28]Ward and Dubos, op.cit. pp. 298-299.
[29]Adlai Stevenson, speaking to U.N. Economic and Social Council 1965 (quoted in Maddox, op.cit. p. 20).
[30]As Chesterton called them, see *Orthodoxy*, London (1908), p. 92.
[31]Newman, *The Powers of Nature*, in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. II (1868), p. 263.
[32]As Chesterton saw, op.cit. p. 91. Newman makes the same point, op.cit. pp.361-362.
[33]Of course, according to Newman (and Christian tradition generally) the angels are not *just* the powers of Nature. That is to say, the term 'angel' is not just equivalent to the term 'natural tendency' *tout court*. But I am not concerned here with the theological question whether, or how, angels are said to be more than the powers of Nature. That they are this is enough for my argument.

ferently, and more clearly. Certainly the theme of entropy; that is, the prospect of an apparently irresistible social disintegration and even cosmic collapse, prefigured in numerous dealings with incomprehensible bureaucratic mazes, hidden plots, occult influences and unseen presences, arbitrary and unintelligible turns of events, all of which are based upon a fundamental uncertainty about 'the big plot being hatched out by nature', is a prevalent one in modern fiction. But over against the forces of disintegration and entropy there is invariably placed some individual or group who acts as a centre of resistance; who refuses to bow to the inevitable, who retains a sense of dignity or a sense of humour, who remains capable of purposeful human activity even if this can only take the form of 'a retreat to the desert to fight'. Even in the work of Samuel Beckett, who is surely the profoundest exponent of this vision of a world entering its last phase, its 'endgame', the 'greater morality of life itself' is continually being reasserted even if only in the tiniest and most ineffectual gestures of verbal wit, in pathetically treasured memories or the telling of endless stories, in the sheer fact of 'going on' at all. In other words, where there is life there is hope. Nature has not quite collapsed into a heap of broken images.[34] Life, organisation, communication thus revolt against the seemingly iron necessities of entropy and decay.[35] Most modern novelists, perhaps with the possible exception of Robbe-Grillet, make this revolt a central element of their art. Yet their revolt only makes sense if the metaphors of fictional narrative are allowed to have their due metaphysical resonances, their complementary analogical dimension:[36] that is to say, if it is understood—as Hopkins saw in 'God's Grandeur'—that the reason why 'nature is never spent' is that the Holy Ghost broods over it 'with warm breast and with ah! bright wings'. And to say this is simply to recognise that the instincts of the novelists are essentially the same as those of the New Testament writers. For they too are concerned with presenting a figure who is the very incarnation of 'the greater morality of life itself' and who constitutes in his own person *the* centre of tragic (though far from wasted) resistance to the chaos and disintegration of the world: a chaos that they also see in terms of hidden plots, occult influences, arbitrary events, bureaucratic unintelligibilities and the like, and which they sum up as the work of the fallen angels, the 'principalities and powers' of this

[34]See T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*. 19-22:

> 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of Man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images . . .'

[35]That many novelists picture, in their fictions, some kind of resistance to the law of entropy which the sentimental scientists regard as written into the human condition, surely shows that they believe entropy not to be the final truth about human civilisation, just as *Diké* is not the ultimate truth about God.

[36]Without this, of course, Lévi-Strauss would be right: 'entropology' would be the proper term for the study of human cultures. See my article *Analogy and Metaphor, New Blackfriars*, Vol. 53, No. 631 (December 1972).

world. In other words, the Christ of the gospels, is life itself, and thus the arch-enemy of the cosmic collapse: the centre of a life-asserting organisation and energy directed towards the defeat of an otherwise inexorable process of disintegration. But, as Camus saw, such defiance of what presents itself as an irresistible decree of fate is the very essence of the tragic:

> 'Revolt is not enough to make a tragedy. Neither is the affirmation of a divine order. Both revolt and an order are necessary, the first pushing against the second, and each reinforcing the other with its own strength'.[37]

In this sense, we have to see the death of Christ in tragic terms.[38] He is destroyed because he defied the limits set by the system of political, social and metaphysical powers which St John calls 'the world'. Indeed, in his death, the prince of this world seems to have conquered for good and all. Love seems to have been finally defeated, so that the process of entropic disorder and corruption can go on unchecked. And having been apparently destroyed, Christ seems powerless to help those who try to carry on the struggle. He can do nothing to stop the inevitable process of *Diké* by which the world takes its due revenge:

> 'Because you do not belong to the world, because my choice withdraws you from the world, therefore the world hates you . . . indeed the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God'.[39]

But if the New Testament reveals Christ in death as defeated by the powers of this world, it also reveals in his resurrection that, ultimately, it is they who will be finally defeated. That is to say, not only will the human world be brought to a final justice, but the very cosmos will be brought into the power of overriding love—a love which will show that the second law of thermodynamics is not an inexorable and invincible decree of fate, promulgated from the very beginning of the world, but that even the physical universe is subject to God's mercy and love.[40]

[37]Camus, *Selected Essays and Notebooks*, edited and translated by Philip Thody, Penguin Books 1970, p. 198.

[38]See the articles by Donald MacKinnon, *Theology and Tragedy*, in *Religious Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (April 1967), pp. 163-169 and *Atonement and Tragedy* in *Borderlands of Theology*.

[39]*John*, Chapter 15: xix—16:ii.

[40]*Colossians*, Chapter 1: xviii-xx:

> 'As he is the beginning,
> he was first to be born from the dead
> so that he should be first in every way;
> because God wanted all perfection
> to be found in him
> and all things to be reconciled through him and for him
> everything in heaven and everything in earth,
> when he made peace
> by his death on the cross'.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1974.tb07913.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Yet the fate of Nature is still bound up with the fate of men. It is not divine love in some abstract sense, but as manifested in the love of human beings for one another, that will somehow determine the fate of at least that portion of the cosmos with which human beings have anything to do. What they achieve, in their hungering and thirsting after justice, will radically affect the kind of environment in which they finally find themselves. If this is what the environmentalists are saying in their pleadings for a new kind of love and loyalty to the planet earth, it is also what we learn from the Christian text which best sums up the true dimensions of the contemporary debate about the maintenance of the balance of Nature and the balance of justice: I mean St Matthew's stupendous vision of the solemn courtroom scene in which the choice that faces mankind is at last made absolutely plain, our 'sense of an ending' to the human story completely vindicated and the 'narrative structure' of our consciousness, the 'story shape' of our world unambiguously manifested. If men are capable of loving one another enough to satisfy the hunger, and to slake the thirst for justice that they all feel, St Matthew seems to say, then the world which they ultimately inhabit will be a world worthy of the reverence they will have shown towards it: but if they are not, then they will be sentenced, by an inexorable *Dike* of their own making, to eternal life in a ravaged environment appropriately prepared:

> 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand. 'Come, you whom my father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me. The virtuous will say to him in reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?' And the King will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me'. Next he will say to those on his left hand, 'Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food; I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink; I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, naked and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me'. Then, it will be their turn to ask, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1974.tb07913.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help? Then he will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me'. And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the virtuous to eternal life'. [41]

On Not Quite Agreeing with Marx

by Hugo Meynell

Marx denied that he was a moralist[1]. But it can hardly be disputed that anyone who thinks seriously about certain matters which have to do with morals—the nature and causes of wrongdoing and suffering in human society, and how they may be remedied—must come to grips with his arguments. To put the matter bluntly, any responsible intellectual who is not a Marxist must at times ask himself just why he is not; and in what follows, I shall try to explain why I am not. To cope with the whole range of Marx's writings, one needs to be a specialist; those who are not so may well be, as I am, deeply indebted to David MacLellan for his admirable summary, supported with copious quotations, of the main features of Marx's thought.[2] For better or for worse, anyway, my Marx will be largely Marx as McLellan presents him.

It is fundamental to Marx's thought that human relationships, and consequently the whole web of institutions which make up society, are determined by the material circumstances in which men live and work; and consequently that if you change these material circumstances, you will change human ideas and behaviour at large. This thesis is generally labelled 'historical materialism.[3] Now the word

[41] *Matthew*, Chapter 25: xxxi-xlvi.

[1] *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London, 1970); p. 104.

[2] David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx* (London 1971). All references not otherwise assigned will be to this volume.

[3] Marx himself did not use this expression; yet it seems a convenient label for his philosophy (cf. 123). Engels admitted (cf. 124) that some statements by Marx and himself had encouraged an extreme and erroneous view of the dependence of ideas on material circumstances. Cf. also the Third Thesis on Feuerbach, to the effect that men change their circumstances as well as being the product of circumstances. In *The Communist Manifesto* the question is asked: 'Does it require intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?' (45). It is highly reasonable to believe that they do; but the question remains whether these

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