

WHAT IS INFINITY?

PART II: THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE.

CHAPTER 14.

At the very beginning, the penalty for failing to believe in the resurrection, in the case of doubting Thomas, was to be told that others might be more blessed than he. In the 16th. and 17th. centuries, the penalty for declaring that you did not believe in the resurrection might well be burning at the stake. One would need to be obtuse not to see that a metamorphosis of opinion had taken place. The composer Verdi, in his operas Aida and Don Carlos, went out of his way to portray the clergy as the most reactionary, cruel, and stupid class in the community. Yet in the beginning, their job was to bring life and hope to a weary and disillusioned world. Not many people succeed in turning a great blessing into a liability; so it is not disloyal to the Church to ask what went wrong and why? And is it still wrong today?

The Pauline Epistles encourage us to put on the mind of Christ. Well, let us take him at his word, and try to do so! Let us try to put ourselves into the position Jesus was in, whilst he was in the desert trying to work out what exactly his vocation was, and how others would expect him to implement it? Except of course, that we are in Europe today, and not in Palestine 2000 years ago, and what is more we have the benefit of his experience so long ago.

He is supposed to have raised three people from death; Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus. In John's Gospel, he is supposed to have said on two occasions that anyone who believed in him would never see death, whatever he meant by that phrase. So he evidently believed that one should allow one's imagination considerable latitude in deciding what might be possible. Since his time many people have speculated on the nature of immortality, of the possibilities of infinity and of different worlds or universes, and in the last hundred years of time-machines. It should be obvious to anyone prepared to put on the mind of Christ that there has been quite enough thought, and what is needed now is a bit of action. However pleasant it is to speculate about infinite worlds, whether they are possible, and whether they exist beyond our ken; it does not actually result in anything being done to change or improve the society in which we live. It is a little bit like the hero in Flecker's Hassan wondering whether a piece of paper floating down from an upstairs window, might be a new Chapter of the Koran. Christ did not speculate about political philosophies, when he emerged from the desert; he set to work at once. So should we. Now if action is required, one place to begin is with the human mind itself. And Goethe wrote of the mind:-

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“Was ist unendlichkeit?
Wie kannst du dich so qualen?
Geh’ in dich selbst.
Entbehrst du drin Unendlichkeit in Sein und Sinn
So ist dir nicht zu helfen.

What is infinity?
How canst thou so torture thyself?
Look within:
If there thou lack’st infinity in being and thought,
No help for thee”.

However merely to descend into the unconscious is a very dangerous thing to do, as anyone who reads about Jung’s attempt to do just that between 1914 and 1919 should appreciate. Besides the depths of the unconscious are probably places where you get further and further from everyday reality. So it is not the single mind you need to investigate; it is the interaction between two minds. And one starting point is the tradition of the German General Staff that a marriage of minds is necessary for the effective and efficient conduct of War; and we should ask, in our imitation of Christ, whether this marriage of minds can be reproduced in the civilian world as well? My opinion, which I expressed in a “Reconciliation with Science and War”, is that the world of interpenetrating minds is unbelievably more complicated than the world of relationships, and that there are probably worlds beyond worlds beyond this; for instance in the experiences Jesus must have had before he led his disciples up the mountain for the transfiguration. But one step at a time; and my experience largely ends with the world of relationships. So the world to explore is the world of interpenetrating minds. With luck, it should become relatively clear what is possible, and what is fantasy.

In order to help keep this distinction clear, may I recapitulate some facets of my Theory of Consciousness, which I believe to be true, but which may of course be mistaken. Their relevance is to distinguish between beliefs which are real, because they are fortified by experience, and intelligent speculations which may well be pure undiluted fantasy. I believe every attitude of mind is induced by a certain nervous tension in the body, which incorporates certain unspoken and usually unconscious assumptions in the mind, which in turn form the bedrock of that attitude of mind. Not only that, these assumptions or this nervous tension mould the logic or reasoning in that frame of mind; it is as though they create an envelope of

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consciousness which disciplines all thought in that frame of mind, in rather the same way that Einstein's Space by its curvature controls Gravity within that space. In other words, these assumptions **shape the reasoning** within that frame or attitude of mind. If you adopt a scientific frame of mind, you think and reason as a scientist. If you have spent your life as a lawyer, you think and reason as a lawyer, and justifiably regard the advice of a scientist, or even an academic lawyer, on how to present such and such a prosecution as so much rubbish. It is not just that the scientist without legal experience will not know how prosecutions go, he will think differently! There may be rare instances when the academic mind, without specialist experience, may be able to provide fresh insight into a non-academic problem. But generally when academics stray into the professional world, their contribution is not helpful. So in my opinion, there is no such thing as abstract logic; logic or reasoning is always within an attitude of mind, and the logic itself will be slightly different from the logic in a slightly different frame of mind. And unless there is an interpenetration of two minds, in which each can read each other's thoughts because each person's thoughts take place in the other's mind, there is always the possibility of misunderstanding. Naturally if two people have the same training, and are talking about the same subject matter, there should be no misunderstanding; but there is always plenty of scope for it.

So to take the extreme example, my opinion is that the world of which we can have information is limited. It is the envelope of space, at the edge of which galaxies are moving away from us with the velocity of light; because modern physics says that nothing moves faster than that. If things, eg: galaxies, exist beyond this envelope, and presumably they do, we cannot know about them, because no information can possibly come to us about them. So all thoughts about infinity exist only in the minds of people thinking about infinity; none the worse for that, but there is nothing in this world of flesh and blood and spirit which could give confirmation of these speculations, neither in the material world nor in the world of the spirit or psyche. The only exception is the Creator, who has always been regarded as Infinite. John's Gospel says, "Eternal life is knowing Thee, the only God", which if true is our one access to infinity. All other speculations about infinity are delightful daydreams and fantasies. When some impertinent cardinal asked Michelangelo if he could draw, Michelangelo bent down and drew a perfect circle on the ground. By that is meant, he drew as perfect a circle as you could draw with a pair of compasses. But even that is not perfect; the point will dig deeper as the pencil transcribes the circle, and the width of the pencil line will vary as it goes round. It is a close approximation to a perfect circle, which exists only in the mind and imagination. And the symbol Pi, which as every schoolboy knows reflects the ratio of the

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circumference to the diameter, and which is represented by a decimal fraction that goes on and on for ever, can never be verified. If you measure the circumference and diameter of a pencil circle, the best you can hope for is a close approximation, because measurement is never perfectly accurate. And one must not mix up dreams with verifiable experience.

So does infinity exist? Well, it does in the mind, because there is a whole mathematics of it; but Georg Cantor who first explored the mathematics of infinity went mad, and I would have thought it was a risky business to cut oneself off from the possibility of verification in the natural world. And I cannot see that there are any infinities in the natural world; I may be wrong, but I cannot see them. Just as there are many risks in mountaineering that I was unwilling to take, although I might have got away with them; so I would have thought one risked disorientation if one got too involved in the imaginative world of infinities, and soon found one ceased to see things in proportion in the real world of flesh and blood and spirit.

If I am right that in any attitude of mind, there is an envelope of consciousness which disciplines all thought in that attitude of mind, then the largest envelope possible is the entire knowable world, stretching to the furthest galaxy of which we can have knowledge. In this frame of mind, one views the cosmos as a whole; and one can speculate innocently enough on what God's purposes might be. But if you go beyond this, are you not bound to lose any envelope of consciousness that has any meaning? And I would have thought at the same time, you were in danger of losing track of the unspoken and unconscious assumptions on which your attitude of mind is based. Of course one can invent fantasy worlds, Lewis Carol did with Alice; but is not the danger that one makes words mean what one wants them to mean? Should we not submit to the constraints of the world we live in? This is the great virtue of War, that it winnows terribly reality from illusion. I am in favour of letting the imagination run riot occasionally, as my "Reconciliation with Science and War" and "Man's Relationship with God" make abundantly plain; provided it submits to the constraints of the created world.

So can one verify that one is speaking to God, although He is spirit and invisible? Or does one risk here too getting lost in a world of imagination and make-belief? Yes of course one can, to one's own satisfaction at least. All family affection and loyalty is in the world of the spirit, and is invisible. It may be manifested in visible acts; it may be proved by acts of heroism. But in itself affection is spirit, and invisible. In the same way one can confidently assert one knows God, even though agnostics and atheists would say one is deluding oneself! One consequence of my theory of consciousness is that religious experience is the same as any other sort of experience. So experience of God can bring verification, as the needle of a galvanometer in a laboratory, or trusting a companion on a climbing rope. It is all one world!

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On a more mundane level, and leaving the cosmic attitude behind, if my theory of consciousness is correct, any attitude of mind and any intellectual discipline whatever is governed by the unspoken and often unconscious assumptions on which it is based. So if you adopt an attitude of mind that rules out the existence of God and freewill, and consider the physical world and evolution, naturally you will reach conclusions which rule out the influence of God and freewill on what you have observed. I understand that mathematicians hold the view that the axioms on which any mathematics is based can lead to absurdity, if they are not sufficiently related to experience. My theory simply says that it is the same in any intellectual discipline. Your underlying assumptions must be sensible, for your attitude to be sensible. So when people say we are all pre-programmed by our Genes, they are in principle saying much the same as Thomas Aquinas. They are assuming before they begin, what they then set out to prove. Nothing necessarily wrong in that, provided you realize your proofs are only persuasive proofs; not rigorous proofs. It is ignorant not to understand this.

In conclusion, I think you can destroy the validity of peoples' prejudices or beliefs, by invalidating the whole attitude of mind that those people have adopted. But if the attitude of mind is valid, then you can only destroy those prejudices and beliefs by argument from within that attitude of mind. To seek to destroy religious belief by arguing from the attitude of mind of a biologist, who discounts entirely religious belief, is as foolish as to try to rubbish biological beliefs by reliance on the Bible, which whatever anybody says is a wonderfully inspired book but hardly a textbook on biology. To anyone who is interested in the workings of the human mind, I would recommend Clausewitz's *On War*. He spent his whole life in the army, he was an Ensign at Valmy, and a Major-General by the end of his career; and he knew only too well the human desire to make facts fit one's preconceived opinions. And I reckon the heart of his teaching about the human mind is that Rules, whether they are the outward Rules of conventional theory, or the inner Rules of habitual thought, exist to guide judgement and discretion: not to control judgement and discretion. So judgement is supreme. You must make up your mind either to believe in God, or deny there is a God; and you are unwise if you think that any proof that He does exist, or does not exist, is worth much.

Besides, you do not want proof; you want trust. One of the most remarkable incidents in the Alamein campaign was the meeting between Lieut. General Montgomery and Brigadier de Guingand at a cross-roads on the edge of the desert, early in the morning of the 13th August 1942. Brigadier de Guingand was considerably younger, but they knew each other well, having met first in about 1932. Before 6.30pm that evening General Montgomery had decided to make de Guingand his Chief of Staff; and in the cool of the evening he

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addressed his assembled staff officers, and ended his address by announcing that he appointed de Guingand Chief of Staff of the Eighth Army, every order given by de Guingand would be regarded as coming from him, and would be obeyed instantly! It was little short of a miracle that the two men should meet, and establish such a degree of trust within a single day; and nothing short of genius that General Montgomery should have announced that trust in the way he did. Similarly with God; proof that God exists is a waste of time. What you want is complete trust between God and man, and man and God. Then there is a chance of getting something done, in the world of the spirit; without it, there isn't. It is as simple as that.

In the Army, the constraints of military discipline in a way make it easier for there to be this mutual trust. In civilian life, the only situation which is readily going to provide the need for such trust is the family; and whilst the need for such trust is every bit as necessary as it is in War, it is not so pressing. Furthermore the situation is confused by sexual allure, which may attract men and women to each other who are hopelessly unsuited, and who could not be faithful for more than a few years. Nevertheless, confused or not, nothing can be achieved unless the parties desire to trust each other, and are prepared to declare their trust in each other, in part at least. In this context discussing whether other universes exist, only provides trivial conversation on a Sunday afternoon. It has no more relevance than that.

So how do men and women who desire to trust each other, learn to trust each other more? Through adversity. In Part II of Faust, Goethe marries Faust to Helen of Troy. All is happiness while the sunshine lasts, but when adversity strikes their affection is soon on the rocks. Romantic love is always liable to disintegrate when called on to endure more than it had bargained for. The mistake is to bargain. Shakespeare summed it up, when he wrote:-

“Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove:

...

If this be error and upon me proved,

I never writ, nor no man ever loved”.

You do not bargain, because that means you have a hidden agenda; and that prevents the possibility of complete trust ever emerging. So it does no harm to base human relations on the pattern of your relationship with any real or mythical God in your mind – because there can be no bargaining with Him. The danger of proclaiming Sunday by Sunday that you are a miserable sinner, is that if your protestations of guilt were even half true, nobody in his

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senses would trust you an inch. The modern system of tax-credits may undermine the viability of marriage; but the Church's insistence on abject penitence world without end, if taken seriously, would effectively prevent anyone getting married at all. How long does a partnership between druggies last? How loyal is a thieves' kitchen? To trust, you have to believe in the other's integrity; for God to trust you, He has to believe in your integrity.

It is a waste of time nowadays expecting leadership from those in authority. We have entered a culture, in which as a matter of course the wrong people are appointed to positions of responsibility; and those who fail are rewarded with sinecures or golden handshakes. Even in the Army, it is beginning to look as if senior officers, when faced with the conflict of interest of protecting their subordinates or their own reputation and careers, weigh in the balance which is better. In contrast, if one puts on the mind of Christ, one starts with the grass roots, as he did. You start to create the perfect society, without fuss and without ostentation, among the people you meet, and bump into, every day. You do it by example; by the example of being willing to create trust. And you do not let yourself be diverted from your sense of purpose, either by the hypocrisy of bishops or by the dreamers about infinities. No-one was ever persuaded to behave better, except by the example of someone who did behave better.