

LIMITATIONS OF IMAGINATION AND EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER 16.

Why is it that a marriage of minds is so devastating in war? And why do I say it is equally necessary in the civilian world as well? In War, because until Alamein, the Germans ran rings round us; and it looked as if we were going to lose. In Russia, what General von Manstein did with his Corps on the Leningrad front was beyond belief. For much of the time he was 50 miles ahead of his Army; and as he laconically remarked, provided one kept swanning around, there was not much danger of being caught. A marriage of minds enormously increases the imagination of both minds involved; and if their opponents have not this advantage, in comparison they cannot cope. The Germans only came to grief in Russia when winter arrived, because Hitler had not the forethought to order winter clothing to be issued to his troops, and maybe he did not have any; he was persuaded the war in Russia would only last a few weeks. And nobody on the German staff had read Caulaincourt on Napoleon's retreat. It must have been the same lack of imagination that supposed during the early days of the Nazi movement that being a shipping clerk in Hamburg qualified a man to be their foreign affairs spokesman. In some ways Hitler was extraordinarily parochial. He only left Germany once before the War, for a short holiday in Italy. And it was a miracle for us, when he took personal command of the Wehrmacht in Russia. It destroyed at one stroke German versatility on a grand scale, and put an end to von Manstein's idea of a strategic withdrawal into the Dnieper bend, with a view to destroying the Southern Soviet armies.

I found the same in the Law. It took me 15 years to master the skill of persuading men whom I considered dishonest to tell stupid obvious lies in the witness-box, **of their own freewill**, although some of my best successes were in the earlier cases. And I could never have mastered it, unless I had believed at first that there was a sense of communion between myself and another, regardless of whether this belief was fact or fantasy. It always surprised me that none of my colleagues tried to imitate me. Of course they could do many things better than I. But in this particular skill, I not only had no rivals, I had no competitors. About the only colleague with whom I discussed it, called it "diabolical"; but that was only because he could not do it himself.

So I know what I am talking about, within the narrow limits of my experience. And naturally having spent my life studying the human mind, I think that it provides an obvious opening for trying to understand something of the structure of Society, and with luck some inkling of how to build it up, when so many people seem intent on pulling it down. If you discover the destructive power of two minds in the realm of conflict, you may be able to learn

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its creative power in the world of harmony. At any rate, I think that the fundamental religious unit is the couple, not the individual. Individual man alone with his God, is either too abject or too ruthless to do much except destroy. You only have to remember the Old Testament prophets. It is when this solitude is softened by relationships with others, that a man's skill becomes constructive in the everyday world. There is a certain parallel with chemistry, where the fundamental particle in practice is the molecule, not the atom. Except for the inert gasses, you never get atoms in practice; you get ions in solution, but not atoms. So far as I am aware, isolated atoms do not exist in Nature; and until you have grasped how molecules are formed into crystals, rock, and organic compounds, you are not going to understand much about structure. So with people; a group of isolated individuals chanting slogans is not a Church; it is a mob. Only when they are linked by a web of personal relationships, can you hope to build them into a Church which believes in something, and stands for something. Only if you view the basic human unit as the couple, which depends on trust, are you going to understand the structure of Society, the conditions necessary for its growth, and the evils which will destroy it. Neither astronomy nor nuclear physics is going to contribute much to this knowledge.

Indeed I think science has already performed its supreme contribution to modern life; namely it has given us back a cosmic view of creation, which we have not had in Europe since the Middle Ages. The rest is house-keeping, even though it might seem condescending to the enthusiastic seekers after a theory of all things, to say so.

Actually to call it a "theory of all things" that they are pursuing is most misleading. It would be like claiming that an understanding of the majesty of St. Paul's cathedral could be obtained by studying the composition of Portland stone, as compared with the sandstone with which cathedrals were usually built, and the ability of calcite to twin and glide which allows mortar to be ever so slightly mobile, which avoids the building cracking every time a bus passes. Whereas most people would say that you should study the architecture, to appreciate how the simplicity of the design shines through the complexity of the building; then you might enquire into the remarkable engineering necessary to construct the building at all. Lastly, you might look at the foundations, to discover how deep they were. To study particle physics is to study the foundations of creation; and it does look as if even the foundations are so incredibly complicated that no-one is going to get to the bottom even of them. It ignores completely the complexity of life, and forgets that Complexity changes the Rules. It was Teilhard de Chardin who first taught me of the complexity of living creatures. For example, he did an amusing calculation that the number of nerve connections in a human brain was roughly equal to the diameter of the known universe in centimetres, and that is 15 billion

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light-years across. And I would go on to assert that the world of relationships is unbelievably more complicated than the physical workings of the brain; and the world of interpenetrating minds unbelievably more complicated still. Yet all this is ignored in the claim that particle physics will reveal all the secrets of the Universe. Particle physics is the very simplest of the deep mysteries of Nature. It would be better to call it a search for a “unified field theory”.

I would not dream of calling my theory of consciousness by any such name. It is just the first tottering steps in the right direction, I mean towards discovering a theory of thought, and what we can do to influence evolution in the right direction. I am so diffident, because when one considers consciousness one must remember that thought and will influence matter. Of course they do, or we would never get out of bed in the morning. We all learn skills. An advocate’s eloquence is second nature; he only has to think what to say, hardly at all the words to use, save for the crucial points he wants to make. A carpenter’s skill is in his fingers. An amateur may worry over the order of doing things, lest he makes a mistake that spoils the wood, and he has to start again; the tradesman does it as a matter of habit, and things are always done in order. How thought sends impulses along the nervous system to get the muscles into action is, as far as I am aware, a mystery beyond our understanding. But it is a characteristic of thought and will to be able to influence matter, both on the scale of the human body and on the scale of commanding armies; you might call it one of the Laws of the Spiritual World. To deny that they do, is to stand creation on its head.

But this extravagantly pompous title, given to such a comparatively modest objective, does prompt the question why anyone should want to discover that the mechanism of our world is mechanical? Expressing the question in this way, acts as a reminder that those who assume there is a causal explanation for all that happens, are likely to find that there is a causal explanation. Whereas those who assume that freewill is liable at any moment to interrupt the dreary flow of causality, are likely to find that this is exactly how the world works. Of course most truth you can only discover; there is little you know a priori by the light of reason; and the whole of experimental science is based on this belief or assumption. But as Clausewitz wrote, “The first, the grandest, the most decisive act of judgement which the Statesman and General exercises is rightly to understand the War in which he engages, not to take it for something, to wish to make it something, which by the nature of its relations it is impossible for it to be”. He knew that judgement or wisdom has a price above rubies.

I think the most charitable answer to this question, is that people who struggle to find that the world is a mechanical ritual, want to escape the responsibility of making decisions. In particular, why do biologists preach evolution to prove that this is a godless world – with all

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the fervour of evangelicals? Why are they not content just to preach the truth of evolution? Their conclusions so grossly exceed their legitimate arguments, that one suspects at once that they have a hidden agenda. I accept their exposition of the wonders of Nature, and share their sense of wonder that a creation so marvellous should have come into being. But I am still entitled to scrutinize their arguments, even while I would not consider questioning their truly biological opinions. So when a biologist says there is no goal at the end of evolution, and that it is human vanity to think Man is the final product of evolution; I am entitled to point out that this is not a statement of fact, it is a statement of opinion couched in highly emotive and prejudiced language. It is a colossal non-sequitur, and the wildest of illegitimate inductions, from their explaining the possible, and maybe probable, steps in natural selection. When you reflect that evolution has actually progressed along the road of complexification of the central nervous system in living creatures, until it has reached the cerebralization of man, there is nothing absurd in Teilhard de Chardin suggesting that actually this was the underlying purpose all along. Nor does an underlying purpose invalidate any of the hypothetical and speculative steps of natural selection that the biologist describes. Indeed his account is probably correct, whether there was, or was not, an underlying purpose.

And when Teilhard de Chardin goes on to point out that man has taken over the direction of his mental and spiritual evolution, even to the extent of building tower blocks of flats, which are so corrosive of former local loyalties, one cannot but admire his colossal edifice of the Noosphere, or the mental and psychological envelope of thought which he says surrounds the entire biosphere. His hypothesis may be right, or it may be wrong, but it is the most imaginative concept. In contrast the pure biologist, I say "pure" because Teilhard de Chardin was a biologist amongst other things, when he "explains" evolution in terms solely of natural selection without purpose, has actually not explained anything. Quite the contrary; he has stripped the known-world of all explanation and meaning. Whilst I concede that this may be the truth, that it has no meaning; it is an unhappy conclusion to reach. Compared with the colossal and majestic concept of the Noosphere, I'm afraid the "explanation" of the pure biologist is most depressing. But of course I concede that one must struggle to grasp the truth, even if it is most depressing truth.

And one of the most depressing features of any purely biological description of natural selection, is the complete absence of any admission that thought and will influence matter. I could understand how a sightless creature long ago, might have conceived ever-so-dimly a desire to become more aware of the "other" round about it; and so developed a patch on the skin that became sensitive to light. And I could understand how that patch might ever-

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so-slowly have evolved into an eye. If the wish is father to the deed, it “explains” cumulative selection being preferred to random selection. But when one considers the incredible ramification of zoological species, some changes must surely be retrograde, just as some are progressive? And in a completely meaningless world, I would have thought on a purely statistical basis, some retrograde changes would be the abandonment of cumulative genetic change for random change. If so, that would mean the end of evolution for that creature? Whereas if complexity changes the rules, as I believe it does, it at once becomes obvious that one of the rule-changes might be that (apart from disease and decay) future changes had to be towards greater complexity. And that would mean that evolution ceased to be non-directional, and had acquired a purpose.

In addition there is a difficulty in applying observations on primitive creatures to an understanding of man; quite apart from the fallacy of illegitimate induction, there is the difficulty that you, the observer, are a man. To have a detached perspective, when you are not detached but part of the process, requires an insight of which few of us are capable. And to assume that you are detached, when you are not detached, introduces an assumption which is obviously false, and which may falsify all your conclusions. And you cannot possibly know whether it does, or not!

But it may be objected, “Don’t be silly. Common sense tells us that no animal likes being eaten by a predator. Of course it wants to stay alive”. Maybe so; but then evolution is not non-directional. It has as an undercurrent the desire for life; and if the desire for life, why not the undercurrent of a desire for greater life, and a more complicated nervous system? And if it has the desire for greater life, why not the desire for cerebralization and to be like its creator? So we come up against the admonition, “Who told thee that thou wast naked?” Which is the more likely speculation: that in a completely purposeless world in which the mechanism of natural selection “explains” that there is no explanation for it at all, a man suddenly conceives the desire to be like his creator [who doesn’t of course exist, and is merely a figment in his imagination] out of an environment which is completely purposeless; or that the Creator put into man’s mind the desire to be like Himself, even if He did it as an undercurrent of evolution? One must be ready to grasp unpleasant truth; and the truth for one man may be different from the truth for another man. We are told that 2 electrons are identical; were it not so, molecules and therefore structure would be impossible. Maybe even atoms would be impossible. And if you have 2 electrons in a box, you cannot distinguish between them; because of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, you cannot follow one electron around the box, and keep track of it. You just have 2 electrons in a box. But the same Rules

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may not apply to man. Man is not a trillion times more complicated than an electron; he is trillions of times more complicated than a unit cell, which in turn is trillions of times more complicated than an atomic particle. So one man's life may be completely without purpose, have no evolutionary undercurrent, be without even the ability to desire to be like the Creator; whereas another may have purpose and the desire to know his Creator. The first may die, and disintegrate into a heap of dust; and that will be that. "Full stop. No more explanation needed", as young girls say when in love. Another man may have the capacity to reach heaven, or if he is too ambitious, hell. And we bump up against Calvin's ideas on predestination; not ideas that I have ever liked, but then of course one must embrace the truth even if it is very depressing truth. And the truth for one man may not be the truth for another. Who says it should be?

It is fashionable nowadays to discredit Lamarck, and his ideas of inherited characteristics. Yet Darwin agreed with Lamarck's views; so it is difficult to suggest there can be a serious conflict between natural selection and inherited characteristics. Again the mistake of those biologists who disagree is surely to think on too small a scale. This is why I keep emphasising that science's greatest gift is to have given us back the cosmic outlook; the ability to see things as a whole. I accept that if a biologist says that inheriting characteristics through the genes is just not possible, the high probability is he is right. His mistake is to think that inheritance must be through the genes, because that is what he knows about. On the contrary, inheritance can come through the atmosphere of the home, books, education, the ethos of school, the esprit de corps of Regiment, the conventions of a profession. In ordinary speech all this is called an inheritance; and it is correct in every sense to describe it so. Indeed such an inheritance may be a more powerful influence in life, than the inheritance of genes. If Lamarck made a mistake, it may have been no more than attributing to genes a function in creating what he saw clearly enough in the world of the spirit, either in whole or in part.

I could quite understand a biologist saying that his lifetime's study of natural selection had led him to think that God played no part in it. He might have given the process a push to start with; but after that [if He existed at all] He remained transcendent in his heaven. But firstly, why need evolution be a single stranded process? Why should not inherited characteristics be at least as important, once creatures have achieved a certain consciousness? And secondly, if you argue that studying natural selection proves the absence of God, why not go on to say it proves the world of the spirit is an illusion too? Proves that all imagination, all poetry and beauty, all love and mutual affection, all truth in the Law Courts, all heroism in War and all ruthlessness in conflict, is a bi-product of biochemical reactions in the brain, set

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in motion by the genes? And to say that in my judgement, and it is a judgement not a statement of fact, is so crazy, that it is difficult to take anything else that person says seriously. It is difficult to believe that it is the truth, as they see it. You can only inspire people to believe you. You cannot demand people believe you are speaking the truth. Marshall Saxe, a distinguished French general of the 18th century, spoke to his doctor as he was dying. "Doctor", he said, "all life is a dream, and I've had a good one!" Well, it's better than talking about biochemical reactions in the brain.

I do not believe you "explain" any of life's mysteries. Max Plank suggested in his little book, *The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics*, that by making yourself familiar with the world of sense perception, the world of appearances, you were able tentatively to grasp the real world beyond. And that about sums it up, for me. Newton understood that there was no intrinsic reason why matter should behave consistently. Why should not amino-acids combine one way on Mondays, and in another way on Tuesdays? After all, Sir William Bragg said we used the classical theory of physics on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and the quantum theory on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. And Eddington's comment was that it ought to make us more sympathetic to the man whose philosophy of the universe takes one form on weekdays, and another form on Sundays!

Anything which you can understand, you can surely recreate yourself? Biologists may one day create life; but they haven't done it yet. And until they do, they can hardly say they have understood the processes they have studied. So I await with interest to see if biologists ever get to the heart of Nature's complexity, just as I await with interest to see if nuclear physicists ever get to the bottom of the foundations of Nature.

Whereas in the world of action, it is different. General Montgomery having destroyed the myth of German invincibility at Alamein, was able to reproduce victory again and again. He did understand what he was doing. At the defensive battle of Medenine, he was so confident of victory, he spent the afternoon writing his private correspondence. Field Marshall Rommel achieved tactical surprise by attacking through thick mist; but all he succeeded in doing was to lose 50 tanks, without even penetrating the British anti-tank gun screen and hardly reaching the British armour in its hull-down positions. In the Law too, you have an instinct whether a prosecution will succeed, although everything may be won or lost in the play. What you need is the imagination to see how to win. And theories that life is no more than a mechanical ritual are utterly irrelevant, and are like children's games. When men talk about their detailed experience, they are usually fascinating; it is when if they step outside their competence, unless they are cautious, that they can become absurd. For

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example: it is unwise to pontificate about God, unless you have at least tried to reproduce his creative power; and even then better not to say too much. Can biologists create life? The real question is not whether evolutionary biologists might be right in thinking there is no spiritual world; but rather how they can be so unobservant as not to see that all life contradicts them?

The whole point of science is that it investigates inorganic and organic matter, and leaves out of account any spiritual component which this matter may have. So of course science postulates a mechanical view of the Universe; it is the whole business of science to do just that. But when you explore the world of the spirit and imagination, you may come to a very different opinion; and unless the entire world of the spirit and imagination is an illusion, you are likely to do so, because **Complexity changes the Rules.**