

CHAPTER 19.

It is easy to understand why Kant wanted to believe that man's ideas of space and time were a priori: in other words were knowledge which the mind possessed without the need to rely on experience of the outside world. He wanted a firm foundation for his Critique of Pure Reason; and then his powerful intellect would be able to deduce incontrovertible truths in its exploration of the attitude of mind, which had such a firm foundation. We all hanker after certainty. Science tries to make sense of the material world, and map its "Laws" as accurately as possible. Lawyers much prefer a law which enables them to advise a client either to do something, or not do something; if the law says everything must be reasonable, you are left wondering how long is a piece of string. So Kant will have hankered after certainty too. But alas many people nowadays would dispute Kant's premise that space and time are a priori conceptions. They would say, having had the benefit of a little science, that our idea of space begins firstly with the experience of space, principally the experience of touch and sight, and secondly it is perfected by the interpretation which the mind puts on the sense perceptions of which it is aware. These interpretations also stem from experience. And so we end up with our idea of space, which stems entirely from experience. It may be Euclid's three-dimensional space, which was Kant's for practical purposes; or we may be aware that there are a number of geometries, each of which gives us a different interpretation which we can put on our sense perceptions. Now that we are aware that the theory of numbers is the only knowledge which we have that certainly does not depend on experience; it is no longer convincing to suggest that space and time are a priori knowledge.

However Kant was right in thinking that any rational structure, of any kind, must be based on a firm foundation, if it is to be wholly reliable. However he did not seem able to accept that a structure based on a foundation, which was only slightly flawed, and which

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therefore was bound to lead to results which were only more or less true, might still be immensely worth while. The basis of the intellectual structure of my theory of consciousness is the perfectly relaxed consciousness; but one can never know for sure that relaxation is complete. In the silence of a Quaker Meeting, you can sense the silence deepening during the first fifteen minutes or so, of the hour that is spent in Meeting. In the same way there are many degrees of relaxation. How does one know, when one feels most relaxed, that it is complete relaxation; or that it is appropriate to call it the “consciousness of God”? Obviously one does not! Silence and relaxation are the medium by which men through the ages have sought inspiration; but that does not mean that inspiration will come; or that God, if he exists, is willing to speak to you.

Furthermore, to go from my perfectly relaxed consciousness into a consciousness under tension, in which a reasoned thought structure became possible, I had to make a further basic assumption. And it was, that the only beliefs a man or woman really believed were the ones they put into practice every day, day in day out, year in year out; intellectual beliefs to which the mind alone paid lip-service are so pale and shadowy in comparison that they hardly merit the name “belief” at all. In other words, if in practice one never misrepresented the evidence given in Court, and never knowingly put an interpretation on a witness’s evidence which it did not arguably bear, then one can say one believes it is worthwhile to be an honest lawyer. But if one expresses the opinion that it is quite wrong ever to misrepresent the evidence, and says this so often that one “believes it”; but every time one opens one’s mouth in front of a jury, one puts an interpretation on the evidence which is ever so slightly false, but not so blatantly that one’s opponent can object, then one believes that it is worthwhile being a dishonest lawyer. So I think there is substantial truth in my assumption; because it takes in its stride the hypocrisy that is such a frequent companion in the world of affairs. This concept is so important that I spend the early chapters of my book, Man’s Relationship with

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God, expounding it. And the whole of the structure of thought contained in my book is built upon it. Yet I doubt if it is wholly true. Take the case of a man whose religious faith takes him to martyrdom; it may be a faith lived out in his daily life, or it may be an intellectual faith to which the mind alone pays lip-service. But if it takes him to martyrdom, who am I to say it was not genuine belief? So unlike Kant, I am prepared to admit and accept that the basis of my theory of consciousness may be flawed, up to a point; but I still think it was immensely worthwhile to construct it, and that there is substantial truth in it. Though not everything in it is true. It is only a first attempt; and others I'm sure will improve upon it.

My synthesis presupposes that if I regarded my experiences as a microcosm of life as a whole, then if I could make sense of what was happening to me, I could in similar measure make sense of life. A view I think expressed in Goethe's Faust Part II. So if the life of an individual man is bound up with the growth of character and the search for wisdom, or its denial, I conceived it was reasonable to suppose that the history of human society was similarly bound up with the gradual evolution of man's consciousness. Many people would dispute that the purpose of an individual life was the growth and maturity of character; most philosophers seem to think that the purpose of life is happiness, adding that anyone who discounts happiness is probably lusting after power. But my view is that too great a desire for happiness disables a man from standing up to evil when confronted with it, and shuts his eyes to the disagreeable fact that promotion in one's chosen profession often depends on an obsequious devotion to it. To put the proposition bluntly: it is no good pursuing happiness if one is drafted into the Army; the best thing then surely is to obey orders and get on with it, which I did and rather enjoyed it. Indeed the Regiment I was posted to was the best human society I have ever belonged to. And since my experience of life is that it is a continuous battle against evil, which raises its head on every conceivable occasion, it seems to me that

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some of the military virtues are relevant and appropriate in civilian life too. In particular, courage, honour, truthfulness.

Nor is there a consensus of opinion that the golden thread through history is the gradual evolution and maturing of man's consciousness. Teilhard de Chardin thought so; and it may be that it was from him I learned the idea. But alas H.A.L.Fisher, whose *History of Europe* I regard as a work of genius, confesses that he can see no thread through history to make sense of it all, no sense of progress leading to a better future. Maybe the ominous threat of Nazi Germany discouraged him, because his work was published just before the Second World War. But his pessimism is sad, because to me the thread seems clear enough.

In contrast to life having a sense of purpose, the scholasticism of the Middle Ages was a journey down a cul-de-sac, which is the exact opposite of evolution. Thomas Aquinas may have saved the Catholic Church by harnessing the rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle; but surely his answers were foregone conclusions, once you accepted his attitude of mind, the medieval theological frame of mind and the unspoken assumptions on which it was based. Dante disagreed with Aquinas, and I unhesitatingly side with Dante. And I regard Aquinas's arguments as being for those who like to hear what they like to hear, rather than as an intellectual adventure. But more fundamentally, scholasticism was burst apart firstly by the Renaissance and the Reformation, that is by the demand for freedom in secular and religious thought, and secondly almost wholly destroyed by science with its demand that theory be firmly rooted in experience. Ironically Aquinas championed Aristotle, who championed reliance on experience; but there was no enthusiasm to discover new science, and Aristotle in turn became a sacred text, which helped to convict Galileo. But in any event it was inconceivable that mankind should be content to live in such a mental strait-jacket for long; and the problem was that the scholastics could not, or would not, retreat. John Hus was given safe conduct, betrayed and burned. The Reformation was met by the Counter-Reformation,

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which reduced much of Europe to chaos and anarchy in the Thirty Years War; and by the prosecution of Galileo before the Inquisition. It was foolish of the Church to imagine that it could reduce the meek gospel of Christ to formulae, and equally foolish to be intransigent when those formulae were more and more openly challenged. Dean Inge in his *Outspoken Essays* says in terms that had Jesus Christ appeared at that time, he would have been burned. Those who were running the religion, which was in his name, would have found the presence of the Founder quite intolerable. What could mankind do, but destroy a power so misused? Is it not the fate of everyone to be destroyed, who allows himself to get locked into an attitude of mind, from which he will not, or cannot retreat, as in Ibsen's *Master Builder*, whether in public or private life? We may hanker after certainty; but it is unwise to be too sure you have found it. Those who confidently condemn everyone different from themselves, tolerable whilst impotent, are utterly unfit to exercise power; and if they seek to obtain power, has Society any option but to prevent them, by any means that are expedient? If Jesus died to free man's spirit, He did not die so that mankind's spirit could once again be imprisoned in a single attitude of mind, from which those in authority were unwilling or unable to release it.

The merit of classical physics was that its propositions were tentative hypotheses, which were always liable to be overturned by the embarrassing experimental fact that did not fit current theory. Yet ironically today, natural science seems to be providing a strait-jacket similar to the one which religion used to provide, with its overtones of determinism and predestination. Mathematical physicists imagine that they are on the verge of discovering a theory of all things; and I think the public by and large expect them to succeed. I very much doubt if they will. Even if they succeed so far as inorganic matter is concerned, it will be unintelligible to everyone except a mathematician, and impossible even for them to correlate it with experience in the everyday world. And it seems to me that this is the problem. Although in theory an embarrassing experimental fact, which did not fit, would upset the

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theory of all things; in practice how would anyone know, if the whole thing is virtually unintelligible to the non-specialist? In the late Victorian era, when classical physicists literally thought they had little more to discover, the effect of their overweening confidence was devastatingly destructive of ordinary people's confidence in the things of the Spirit. And one of the few bonuses of War is that it reminds us all that morale or spirit is supreme. Now that most people cannot remember the Second World War, is not the same process under way again? This time with the tantalizing lure of a theory of all things somewhere near the rainbow's end? And its effect on the public's confidence in the things of the spirit will, I suppose, again be devastating. Indeed the process may have begun, in as much as the corrosive enervation of determinism is seeping into all our minds. We all look for someone to blame in misfortune, we all think the World owes us a living, we all look for hand-outs from an anthropomorphic Providence. And it stems from the fantasy that the World is governed in its minute detail by the Laws of Science, from the galaxies in the heavens to the centre of the atom. The contrary idea that over the vast bulk of the Universe the movement of particles is utterly chaotic, and it is only when large numbers of particles are involved that they become ordered, seems to pass unnoticed.

I think at heart the battle for the soul of science centres round the question whether the so-called "Laws of Nature" are relationships between concepts in the minds of scientists as Whitehead and Dampier Whetham thought, or between the realities of Nature herself? I firmly believe it is the former; which means that the realities of Nature herself remain complete mysteries. Indeed Newton himself considered force at a distance absurd. Despite his theory of gravitation seeming to suggest that all bodies attracted each other, in proportion to their masses, and inversely proportionally to the square of the distance between them; he still thought that force at a distance was absurd. His view was that God compelled the heavenly bodies to obey the Laws which He had prescribed for them. Newton was too great a thinker

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to imagine that the laws he had discovered or proposed were actually relationships between the realities of Nature, or that he understood “gravity”. Modern science seems to take the other view; and in my opinion is falling into error. We may hanker after certainty; but I do not think you find it in science, which deals only in probabilities.

Once you commit yourself to the belief that the “Laws of Science” are relationships between the realities of Nature, the danger is that it may become an article of faith; in just the same way that at the trial of Galileo, to the Inquisition it was an article of faith that Scripture spoke the truth about the solar system, supported by Aristotle, and Copernicus told lies. And if you commit yourself to an article of faith, how do you retreat? And if it was only possible to formulate modern atomic and quantum theory by subscribing to the belief that science’s laws did relate to the realities of Nature, as I suspect it was, are you not committed to this as an article of faith? If nuclear physicists do think that we are all pre-programmed, that we all obey the theory of all things (discovered or undiscovered), are they not discrediting their own subject, which ought to be a delightful speculative science? It is not similar to the dream of the medieval scholastics that they could set the syllabus for mankind’s religious thoughts, and that men should tolerate their scholastic formulae indefinitely? Science is only partial truth; it is the truth that you discover when you investigate inorganic or organic matter, and leave out of account any spiritual content which it may have. Mountaineers talk about the spirit of the hills, and credit individual hills with having a personality of their own; not without reason, if you are caught in a storm. So I am inclined to think that even the most inorganic piece of rock may have a minimum spiritual element; an idea which is as old as human thought. Newton regarded his scientific knowledge as a grain of sand on the sea-shore, a drop in the ocean of nescience. Something of which the new Science of Chaos gives us a timely reminder. Is there anything to choose between a scholasticism of theology and a new scholasticism of science. Do not both represent an attempt to find certainty, where in fact there is none?

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Of course one has to dedicate oneself to one's profession to become any good at it. It is no good being an amateur; and it has always been said that nothing destroys a young man's chances at the Bar more than a small private income, because it destroys the will to succeed. But there is no need for an over-dedication to it. Seeing things in true proportion is, in my opinion, the very highest intellectual achievement; and with an over-dedication to one's chosen profession, I think one loses this ability to see things in proportion. So my conclusion is that neither in the pursuit of truth through science, nor in the pursuit of truth through reason is there any likelihood of discovering certainty. I do not doubt that absolute truth exists; I only doubt, as I have said before, that it has any meaning for us unless one person is trying to communicate it to another. And then one will see it through a glass darkly, because one will see it through a somewhat flawed consciousness.

I am glad to reach this conclusion, for if it were possible to find certainty in the material world or in the world of ideas, then we would all be tempted to be content with that certainty, whenever we found it. It is only if we can never find certainty, neither in the visible tangible world, nor in Plato's beautiful world of ideas, that men and women are going to repeat the prayer, which I believe is Greek and pre-Christian,

“Oh God, in whom we live and move and have our being, who hast created us for thyself, so that we can find rest only in thee...”

So I would ask which is better? To have a logically complete philosophic system, or a way of life? To have a Theory of All Things, whether it is the latest inspiration of science or the antiquated inspiration of theology; or to be content with a philosophy of natural science which deals only with probabilities and is therefore rather unsatisfactory, and to find with the Creator of all things a companionship full of wonder, and praise?