Collected Essays on Philosophers

By

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Colin Wilson's first book *The Outsider* was published to great critical acclaim in May 1956. It was the first of six philosophical books, known collectively as 'The Outsider Cycle'[1], compiled by Wilson during the following decade. These non-fiction works were accompanied by a string of novels, Wilson's way of putting his philosophical ideas into action. A summary volume, *Introduction to the New Existentialism*, appeared in 1966. When this was reprinted as *The New Existentialism* in 1980, he wrote in a newly penned introduction:

> "If I have contributed anything to existentialism—or, for that matter, to twentieth-century thought in general, here it is. I am willing to stand or fall by it." (*The New Existentialism*. London: Wildwood House, 1980, p.8).

Colin Wilson's new existentialism—a life-affirming, optimistic philosophy—is in stark contrast to that of his more famous Continental contemporaries: Sartre and Camus. His differences of opinion with these two existentialist giants are clearly documented in the essays reprinted in this volume. Proof of his status within the movement came when he was asked to write Sartre's obituary for a London newspaper in 1980 and when an extract of his long essay 'Anti-Sartre' was included in the 2nd edition of Robert C. Solomon's *Existentialism* (Oxford University Press, 2005) (both reproduced here).

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[1] 'The Outsider Cycle' comprises: *The Outsider* (1956), *Religion and the Rebel* (1957), *The Age of Defeat* (published as *The Stature of Man* in the US) (1959), *The Strength to Dream: Literature and Imagination* (1962). *Origins of the Sexual Impulse* (1963) and *Beyond the Outsider: the Philosophy of the Future* (1965).

In 1968 *The Daily Telegraph* commissioned him to interview and comment on the work of five prominent philosophers: Ayer, Broad, Popper, Strawson and Warnock (all reprinted here). Apart from Popper, he found little common ground and was clearly at odds with another contemporary, Bertrand Russell, as his essays on him clearly convey.

During the 1970s, Wilson's interests became, on the surface, more varied, publishing books on criminology, psychology and the occult. But he always maintained a philosophical stance, irrespective of subject matter, and continued to write purely philosophical essays for journals, magazines and symposia. In one of the latter, his essay on Spinoza for *Speculum Spinozanum* (1977), he wrote: "Philosophers are never so entertaining—or so instructive—as when they are beating one another over the head." It is that statement, applied to this particular volume, that makes the following essays, from England's only home-grown existential philosopher, so eminently readable, stimulating, instructive and, sometimes, controversial.

—Colin Stanley, Nottingham, UK; January 2016.

Note:
Letter and number references in bold (e.g. **C93**, **A61)**, refer to the book/essay as listed in my *The Ultimate Colin Wilson Bibliography, 1956-2015* (Nottingham: Paupers' Press, 2015).

Introduction

John Shand

When Colin Wilson started thinking and writing about philosophy in the 1950s the world of philosophy was divided roughly in two: those who were interested in answering the question of how we should live our lives and those who thought that philosophy could have nothing to say about such a question. The first lot were called existentialists and the second were called analytical philosophers. The first often functioned outside universities, and while sometimes writing academic discursive papers and books, they also wrote in the genres of polemical essays, novels, short stories, and plays. The university analytical philosophers stuck to the discursive papers, published in reputable journals, and books. The existentialists existed mainly in France, but also other Continental European countries, especially Germany, with the analytical philosophers existing mainly in Britain and America. This is a very crude picture, as there were exceptions on both sides. Ancient Greek philosophy formed some kind of underlying connecting causeway via the classics. And of course it would be astonishing if the one group did not read and listen to the other to some extent, and be influenced by them. Famously a great party of well-known philosophers, mainly from Oxford, headed to Paris around this time to talk to their Continental counterparts, and by all accounts, spent the sessions talking past each other. In Britain, for example, in the 1950s there grew up a strong tradition that philosophy could say nothing about substantive ethical matters, as philosophers were no wiser in life than anyone else; rather it could only look at what kind of statements ethical statements were and what we were doing when we made ethical statements. In France however, interest was intensely focused on whether life could be construed as having any

meaning, and, if not, what could be made of the absurdity of living such a meaningless life, especially if it meant living life inauthentically as if it had meaning.

When Colin Wilson presented his philosophical ideas they fell on the English-speaking world as water on parched land. A refreshing and welcome opening of a door onto what mattered to people that had seemed to have been slammed shut. Colin Wilson, on the matter of what philosophy could do, sided with the existentialists. But he thought they were wrong. Wrong in the answers they gave to how we should live our life against a background of whether life had meaning. In fact, because of a philosophical mistake, that of how we viewed what the world was really like, their conclusion, that life was meaningless, essentially absurd, and could only be lived authentically, honestly, in full recognition of that human condition, was precisely the truth turned upside down. Coming to this conclusion was a revelation for Colin Wilson. It was a hard fought battle against his own actual, and not just theoretically posited, experiences of overwhelming despair, or as he called them 'vastations'. Existential despair, nihilism; despair at the world, the human condition. The attempt to see a way out of this, to answer the question of why one should not simply commit suicide, led him to a mammoth exploration of every scrap of writing addressing the experience of life as seeming utterly devoid of meaning or point, along with the attempts to find a way out of that. Many of the people he considers are, strictly speaking, literary figures, as well as others being philosophers in the usual sense—that the former are present is no surprise because he sees the malaise of nihilism as pervading deeply ideas about the human condition. This sense of utter meaninglessness became personified in the 'outsider' figure—a person, who having seen the meaningless absurdity of life, is utterly unable to take part in any of it. He is unable to take any of it seriously. He stands outside life. Colin Wilson's first, and still most famous book, published in 1956, is titled *The Outsider*. The book starts with an inscription by Bernard Shaw, from a play, *John Bull's Other Island*, and the last part involves an exchange between two characters: '"You feel at home in the world then?" "Of course. Don't you?" (from the very depths of his nature): "No."' This book, *The Outsider*, was the beginning

of a series of 'outsider' books, which looked further, and, most importantly, beyond the original book—to seek a solution to the outsider problem—and culminated in a work summing them up, *Introduction to the New Existentialism*, published in 1966. Ten years of hard and meticulous toil. All done outside the supporting props of university academia, where it is doubtful that Colin Wilson would have flourished, and would indeed have been intolerably stifled. In this work, he was not just interested in reading philosophical speculations on whether life was meaningful or absurd and what one should then do. He was also interested in reading about how people who had an inkling of the problem lived their lives, if it was written about in an illuminating way. This is most important. The subject was not one confined to the university seminar room, a matter of philosophical theory, cured like David Hume's 'philosophical melancholy and delirium' by leaving it behind and mixing in normal life. If one really understood the outsider problem, had it as a lived part of one's way of going on, something that permeated everything one might think and do, and think of doing, one then carried the problem into every aspect of one's life whatever that life might consist of. Nevertheless, the problem and its solution is essentially a philosophical one; the failure to solve it is a result of a philosophical mistake.

So what was the philosophical mistake of the existentialists? One can start by looking at how they were right. They were certainly right about the question of whether life has meaning being a proper one for philosophy. Indeed they were right about it being a proper question for anyone with a modicum of curiosity and reflective inclination. Some people seem disinclined to ever get started on such destabilising, disturbing thinking. This is Sartre's *salaud* (roughly translated as 'bastard'), who lives inauthentically, in 'bad faith', refusing to face up to the complete freedom of choice that comes with seeing the unjustifiable and meaningless nature of existence. These *salauds* do their jobs, and act as if they have no choice—the comfort of imposed restriction closing off the need and responsibility to think and choose. Generally speaking among the existentialists God is out of the picture—although some existentialists battled to keep him in quite possibly under the guiding thought that religion at least thought the meaningfulness or

otherwise of existence a legitimate question—but for most, and certainly Sartre, who may stand as the most well thought out and systematic existentialist of the sort Colin Wilson wishes to upturn, God was, as Nietzsche had most crushingly put it, dead. So, if God is dead, everything is permitted, some claimed. Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* puts this into practice by putting an axe through an old pawnbroker's head. It is done rather as an experiment. If one can choose anything, why not choose this?—something seemingly so forbidden—and see what happens—see if one can live with that kind of free choice that should be no more momentous than any other. In fact Raskolnikov finds that psychologically he cannot—but that's another story. In the case of the inauthentic, 'bad faith', *salauds*, the dissonance in their lives simply fails to register with them. They live, perhaps even with an intellectually and emotionally insulting shrug of their shoulders, at best with the dishonesty of knowing one thing but acting as if it were false, and with the added dishonesty that really they have no choice doing this. People, one might say, gifted with shallow minds, able to live with and by falsity. But the authentic existentialist has to choose. But what to choose? Of all the ways one might choose to live? This is where existentialism runs into an insoluble problem. If life is fundamentally and irredeemably meaningless and absurd, then no choice would seem to have any more weight or justification, any more value, than any other. Hence the exemplification in many existentialist inclined writers of precisely this, acts that seem utterly without reason. In Camus' (the existentialist, incidentally, that Colin Wilson knew best personally) story *L'Étranger* (The Stranger) the protagonist Meursault, shoots dead a virtual stranger after a sequence of contingent events, inexplicable and absurd, that appear to the protagonist as insignificant as those in a dream—it is treated as an event of no point, no value, and moreover little significance. This is the absurd life. Random, pointless, meaningless. This is against the background of Camus' exact portrayal of how life is encapsulated in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus), a man destined to massively exert himself by pushing a huge boulder up a hill, only to see, when he gets to the top, it roll back down again, and to then go on to repeat the episode forever. It is worth noting that Sartre

promised to follow up *Being and Nothingness*, his metaphysical *magnum opus*, with a complementary work on ethics, but he never did. Not surprisingly. The problem of what to choose, when freedom to choose is absolute, could not be solved. As Colin Wilson might characterise it, if value in the world is just a matter of at best giving it value as a matter of random subjective free choice, then all is lost as far as the world having any real value is concerned. Whatever we might choose, we would always know that the value that appears then to be in the world is really only a subjective projection, and the world itself is intrinsically meaningless and absurd—we would still be living our lives inauthentically.

Colin Wilson's solution is to look again at the phenomenology of our experience of the world, at the structure of that experience—in particular the relation of our consciousness to the world. His starting point for this is Edmund Husserl, who thought that conscious experience could be studied separately from any metaphysical commitment as to how the world is—a matter that could be 'bracketed off'—and that this could be done because consciousness is always 'intentional'. It has an object whether the object exists or not, so one may examine our consciousness of experience itself. One might be looking for a mouse in a room even though there is no mouse, and there will be something it is like to experience doing that. If Colin Wilson's philosophy might be said to start with Husserl, it should be noted that it culminates in Nietzsche, the only philosopher in Colin Wilson's view who managed to find a way of overcoming total nihilism and thus could affirmatively be 'yea saying' to life.

This consideration of the phenomenology of experience brings a solution to the outsider problem by revealing a false assumption made by the old existentialism. The fundamental mistake of the old existentialism is to take a projected particular subjective view of life as meaningless and absurd as a true view as to how the world really is. But there is no reason to do this. Sometimes, as Colin Wilson states, it is a merely a personal, even pathological, view that is projected and then taken for reality. However, life often does not seem absurd and meaningless. On the contrary it often seems clearly full of meaning, pleasure, point and joy. As it seems when

we wake refreshed on a spring morning; after sex; walking in beautiful countryside; listening to fine music. There is no reason to privilege as true or truer the meaningless, pointless, absurd view over the view where the world appears meaningful, full of point, and not absurd. This positive sense of the world culminates in what Colin Wilson calls 'peak experiences', when the world seems incorrigibly suffused with joy. One feels, as W. B. Yeats put it: 'That I was blessed and could bless'. There is no reason to think this is an illusion, or if held to be true of the world, a delusion. The world experienced as absurd might just as readily be called a deluded view. If one takes it as that, the question it raises of how to live in such an absurd world need not be answered—which is just as well as it turns out it never could be. One cannot pump life into a corpse of a world. Most of the time, Colin Wilson says, we live in a state of 'robot' automatic consciousness, that makes the world seem at best drab, and at worst stripped of all joy and point. We feel bored, restless, dissatisfied, irritable. But this is just laziness. We can discipline our consciousness not to exist in this dire flat state. We can raise our consciousness to see the world as full of joy and meaning.

Colin Wilson in fact sees this sort of awareness of the world not as a subjective projection of a positive mind set, but as objectivity. Here things get a bit more complicated in the argument. One can grant as Colin Wilson's major breakthrough exposing the presumption that the grey, meaningless, absurd view of the world need necessarily be taken as the true view, how the world really is. There is no reason to privilege this particular view over a way of experiencing the world as permeated by an easily discernible sense of meaning and fulfilment. But this still just looks on the face of it a matter of mere choice—albeit now a more reflective choice—but one still arbitrary and without justification. The lack of necessity in being true that applies to the subjective view where the world has no meaning and is absurd surely also applies to the subjective view that it is meaningful and not absurd.

There are various things one can say to this. One is to wonder why one would choose the miserably joyless view now that it has been shown that it is not inauthentic to reject it. Why not choose a world that is far more satisfying and fulfilling to live in? That's a

start. Colin Wilson has one further argument to fall back on. He holds that conscious experience of the world as meaningful and joyful is more objective. This is not quite the same as saying that it is objective in the sense that it is a view of the world as the world is in itself. Rather it is to say, as Colin Wilson does, that the positive experience of the world is more comprehensive of the range of our experiences of the world, including perhaps an awareness that we might fall back into it viewed where it is meaningless and absurd; it is to make a claim for the positive view being more objective on the grounds of its being more disinterested, less locked into our narrow idiosyncratic subjective prejudices, so to speak. Just as no judge in a court or journalist writing a report may ever be said to be totally objective—or have a totally objective view—this does not mean that both may not become more objective by setting aside their personal subjective view to the greatest extent that they can. Some have certainly claimed that because we cannot be absolutely objective, or we cannot but be to some extent subjective, that there is no point in trying to be more objective. But this is a *non sequitur*. The 'peak experience' view is more encompassing of the ways we experience the world—the world experienced as meaningless and absurd is narrower and less encompassing—in that sense we may say the view that sees the world as meaningful, and not absurd, is more objective and truer.

Colin Wilson goes on to make further claims that the new existentialism is an evolutionary step for humankind. However that may be, only the future can be a judge. But his basic idea, the solution to the outsider problem, is most certainly a view worth taking seriously, and studying, and thinking about, and we should all at least do that.

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The pieces gathered here, written by Colin Wilson, range from the deep and substantial, to the slight and entertaining. But always interesting. It is not surprising that Colin Wilson found more that interested him in some philosophers than others, as only some were interested in the outsider problem, and some were not remotely

interested in it at all. But each essay gives us an insight into each philosopher, and by reflection into Colin Wilson's ideas.

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I would like to complete this introduction on a personal note, which I hope also adds to the understanding of his ideas. I met Colin Wilson three times, but each time was relatively extended, and an occasion that involved substantial discussion of his ideas. I also corresponded with him extensively over a couple of concentrated periods. Like many others, I was partly inspired to study philosophy at university by having read his books, in particular *The Outsider*—not that when one turned up at university the manner in which philosophy was done was anything like that found in the book. In fact, gratifyingly, fashion has swung somewhat in the direction of Colin Wilson's way of approaching philosophy. The subject today is far more eclectic in the sources it considers suitable for philosophical study and illumination, as well as the subjects considered proper for philosophy, in particular, alongside the usual central subjects, there is more interest in highly applied philosophy. Nevertheless, Colin Wilson has found virtually no place in university academic philosophy. And there is what one may only describe as a snobbishness about his work. This is a pity. But it must also be said that the university is not, and perhaps was never intended to be, the place for it. Colin Wilson wanted to address the world; anyone who would listen because he felt he had something important to say, something that would not just be registered and forgotten by perhaps apathetic students, but something that would change how people lived.

He was a remarkable man to meet. Charming and startlingly direct by turns. He seemed to like nothing better than to hold forth on his ideas, and reflect on those of others, in a manner that was forthright and almost overpowering. You had to be prepared to stand up for yourself in the conversation. But I never felt he minded if you did. He had many thousands of books at his house, and his erudition was such that one could quite believe he had read all of them.

My view is that Colin Wilson's fierce claim to have beaten nihilism, to have expelled vastation from his outlook, from his very psyche, was not totally convincing. This is not a bad thing—it meant that he still felt the keenness of the fight he had on his hands not to fall into existential despair. The proclamation that he had solved the problem not only for others, but personally for himself, could come across as protesting too much—a kind of whistling in the dark—keep up the noise, keep saying it, and demons of negative thoughts would not come back while that was going on—the very act of declaring in a certain way that the demons were banished would itself mean that they were. But my impression was that part of him knew they were still there waiting to pounce on the weak. He was no cheerful fool. His vociferous dislike of Samuel Beckett's work, of *Waiting for Godot* in particular, as the ultimate example of what he most opposed, could not stop you thinking that a side of Colin Wilson still admired Beckett, if only surely because he laid out the problem to be defeated so acutely. It's not as though he stopped writing about Beckett. One only has to hear the relish with which Colin Wilson reads aloud, as he does superbly on the recording *The Age of Defeat*, the bitter and grim poem 'The Harlot's House' by Oscar Wilde, including such lines as, 'Sometimes a horrible marionette/Came out, and smoked its cigarette/Upon the steps like a live thing', to understand how empathically and passionately he can tap into its sentiments. One only has to hear him read this to know there is more than meets the eye about him. As I say, I do not think this is in any way a criticism of his ideas or his proclaimed position, or of the success of the solution to nihilistic despair—rather it gives it deeper authenticity. The opposite brings to mind Bertrand Russell's remark that, 'Most people would rather die than think and many of them do!' This is to live without any understanding of the problem, so of course there is no dark problem to solve. For Colin Wilson existential nihilism is a philosophical and personal problem, and inseparably so. He could see the problem, and one got the impression he knew perfectly well what it was like to experience it—but remarkably he had perhaps conquered it to as great an extent as any who understand what is being opposed can. In some manner a great man.

A. J. AYER

[Extracted from: 'The Thinkers': a *Daily Telegraph Magazine* article, dated November 1, 1968 (no. 213), p. 62-75. (**C93**)]

A. J. Ayer, 58, is the leader of the English school of logical positivism. *Language, Truth and Logic*, published when he was 26, caused something of a revolution in English philosophy by dismissing most of the philosophy of the past as "nonsense". He is Wykeham professor of logic at Oxford, and has published half-a-dozen other books, including *The Problem of Knowledge* (1956) and *The Concept of a Person* (1963).

When I first met Ayer, many years ago, I half expected him to have scaly wings and a long tail. Logical positivism struck me as a kind of deliberate murder of everything important in philosophy. But in fact, Ayer is a witty and highly sociable man, who talks and thinks with great rapidity. (One philosopher observed wryly: "He can talk faster than I can think—even in French.") The secret of Ayer is not only the dazzling rapid intelligence, but an almost puritanical distaste for strong emotion.

When Ayer left Oxford in 1932, he went to Vienna and came under the influence of the original circle of logical positivists—a group of philosophers and scientists influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and led by Moritz Schlick. His *Language, Truth and Logic* is basically a statement of the views of the Vienna Circle. These views might be summarised like this: "There are only two kinds of meaningful statement. If I say 'It is snowing outside', this is meaningful because you can go outside and see if I am telling the truth. If I say: 'One and one makes two', that is meaningful because you can verify it by showing that its denial entails a logical contradiction. Any statement that cannot be verified in one of these two ways—by experiment or logic—is nonsense." This is called the "verification principle", and it did away with 99 per cent of what

had always been called philosophy, and left the house looking beautifully clean.

One of the chief arguments against philosophy is that although philosophers have been arguing for nearly 3000 years there is still no agreement whatever about the basic questions—there is still not even an agreement about what philosophy is supposed to be. Logical positivism made it look as if, after 3000 years of bungling and squabbling, philosophy had at last got away to a fair start.

This hope has gradually faded, for a simple reason. If we accept the verification principle in its strongest form, then nearly all statements about history become "meaningless", because you cannot walk backwards into yesterday and "prove" them. The same goes for the laws of science; I can prove that if I drop this little apple, it will fall to the ground, but this doesn't prove that gravity is a *law*. In other words, history and science both become nonsense if I accept the most extreme form of the verification principle. Ayer faced this problem, and tried to modify the principle, so that it would still leave science standing, but would destroy all forms of metaphysics and speculative philosophy about God and the universe.

The enterprise has been unsuccessful, for the obvious reason. If you weaken the verification principle enough to admit science, you also allow metaphysics to squeeze in through the door. Ayer has not shirked this issue. He has remained a "sceptic" in the strictest sense of the word, and he has tried to preserve his original principles intact. His books are always full of the dazzling glitter of his logical mind, but the beautifully clean house has gone forever. The problem is obviously far more complicated than it looked in 1936.

I asked him about the influences on his philosophy, and he mentioned Moore and Russell—particularly the latter's *Sceptical Essays*. I asked him about his politics: "Left wing, like most of us, I imagine." I asked if there was any connection between his philosophical views and his politics: "None whatever." And his attitude towards religion: "I'm inclined to believe that any good contemporary philosopher is bound to be an atheist." "Are you an atheist?" "Yes." "How about the question of life after death?": "I don't expect to survive my death in any sense at all."

Bertrand Russell once defined philosophy as an attempt to understand the universe; I asked Ayer if he would agree with this definition. After a moment's hesitation: "No, I think that's too broad." How would *he* define philosophy? "Trying to think clearly about philosophical topics."

Ayer is certainly a long way from the layman's idea of a philosopher—the man with the Karl Marx beard who wears odd socks. He has a wide circle of acquaintances in Oxford and London (where he keeps a flat), and admits to enjoying parties and appearing on television. To my own slightly prejudiced eye, it often seems that he is at his best as a critic of other people's ideas rather than as an originator. But the speed at which his mind works is always awe-inspiring, and British philosophy owes him a great deal.

C. D. BROAD

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[Extracted from: 'The Thinkers': a *Daily Telegraph Magazine* article, dated November 1, 1968 (no. 213), p. 62-75. (**C93**)]

Professor C. D. Broad, 80, is one of the father-figures of the present generation of philosophers. He lives at Trinity College, Cambridge in rooms once occupied by Sir Isaac Newton. His most important works are *Scientific Thought* (1923) and *The Mind and Its Place in Nature* (1925), although my own favourite among his books is his three-volume *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*. The interesting point about this book is that McTaggart was a disciple of Hegel, the last of the great "universal" philosophers—whom the new generation regards with contemptuous disgust. And yet Broad's book on McTaggart, while destructive, is scrupulously fair and balanced.

This is somehow typical of him. His mind is obsessively tidy and orderly. When he discusses a philosophical question, he begins by neatly dividing and subdividing it into every possible heading. One might therefore be tempted to dismiss him as the dullest kind of academic philosopher. Nothing could be further from the truth. For Broad is a strange paradox as a philosopher. A delightful and amiable man, his charm overflows into his books, which have a flavour reminiscent of Charles Lamb or Hazlitt. (He would wince at the comparison.) His autobiography contained in the volume *The Philosophy of C. D. Broad* (Tudor Publishing Co., 1959) is a minor classic that brims over with the author's delightful personality.

Broad differs from his younger contemporaries in another important respect: he is deeply interested in psychical research, and accepts that there is probably a life after death. Oddly enough, he says he doesn't like the idea. "I've been terribly lucky in this life; everything has gone very well, I've achieved all the success I could probably want—probably far more than I deserve—so I don't much

like the idea of taking a chance in another world. I'd rather just come to an end." His *Lectures on Psychical Research* is a strange volume to come from a philosopher with such a passion for science; but he fails to see this point of view.

> "If these facts of psychical research are true, then clearly they are of immense importance—they literally alter *everything*. So how can a man call himself a philosopher and leave them out of account? Surely they at least deserve disinterested investigation? And yet most philosophers treat them as totally irrelevant."

I asked him his views on politics: "I'm afraid I'm well over to the right." And on religion: "No, I wouldn't describe myself as religious. I don't feel that the reality of psychical phenomena necessarily entails religious consequences." I also asked his views on philosophy, which turned out to be surprisingly gloomy: "I'm inclined to doubt whether there can *be* any more philosophy in Plato's sense of the word. Philosophy may have come to an end."

Broad distinguishes two types of philosophy: "speculative" and "critical". Speculative philosophy is the kind with which all the great philosophers, from Plato to Bergson, have been concerned. Broad has little patience with it, because he feels it is too much influenced by human hopes and fears. He feels that philosophy ought to be the critical, scientific examination of such simple concepts as "cause", "quality", "individual".

Broad has a great deal in common with his younger contemporaries at Oxford. Yet his view of them is unenthusiastic. He remarks that if the "common language" philosophers should tease him with the accusation that his McTaggart book consists of "difficult trifles", he would heartily agree, and retort that the writings of their school consist largely of easy trifles. "I shall watch with a fatherly eye," he once wrote, "the philosophical gambols of my younger friends as they dance to the syncopated pipings of Herr Wittgenstein's flute."

Broad is startlingly modest about his own position. He remarked about a trip to America: "It was fun to be treated as a great philosopher. I do not think it did me any harm, for my knowledge of the works of the great philosophers…enables me to form a pretty

shrewd estimate of my own place in the hierarchy." He frankly admits that he "shot his bolt" as a philosopher in the mid-Thirties, and lost interest in philosophy from then on. He says that he retired at 65 with "positive pleasure", delighted not to have to occupy "the ambiguous position of an un-believing pope".

At 80, Broad is as lively and as charming as ever. He looks absurdly young, and walks and talks like a man in his fifties. He has just been made Kitchen Steward, slightly to his disgust. The great love of his life is Scandinavia—and he intends to spend more time there when his present term of office is over. Whether or not he is still interested in philosophy, his outlook—with its emphasis on scientific detachment and his dislike of deep feeling—has been a major influence on the present generation of English philosophers.

ALBERT CAMUS

[First published as '"Lucky" Camus', an extended review of Herbert Lottman's *Albert Camus: a biography* in *Books and Bookmen*, (August 1979), p. 42-49 (**E168**); then reprinted in *Anti-Sartre, with an essay on Camus*, by Colin Wilson. San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1981 (**A60**) and *Below the Iceberg, Anti-Sartre and Other Essays*, by Colin Wilson. Borgo Press, 1998 (**A151**)]

On the evening of Sunday, January 3, 1960, I was about to set out to meet my wife from the station—she had been away for the week-end—when the phone rang. A voice with a very heavy French accent said "Meestair Veelsong?" I said it was. "Thees ees Agence Nationale de...something-or-other. Did you know that Albert Camus was killed today?" I said: "I'm delighted to hear it." Now this was not callousness. It was just that my friend Bill Hopkins was always ringing me up and pretending to be a Chinese Laundry, or the head of a chain of German brothels inviting me to do a publicity tour; and the accent sounded very like Bill's idea of a music hall Frenchman. Naturally, I assumed this was Bill, trying to convince me that another literary rival was no longer in the running.

Eventually, the voice at the other end of the line convinced me that this was not a joke—he obviously knew too much about the accident, mentioning—what Bill would certainly not know—that Camus was returning to Paris with Michel Gallimard when the car skidded off the road. If Camus had been wearing a seat belt he would have survived; as it was, he was catapulted head first through the rear window. He died instantly.

I made my inane comments, and drove off to the station. I had not known Camus well, but we had met in Paris, and corresponded amicably for a few years. He was supposed to be writing an introduction to the French edition of my second book *Religion and the Rebel*, and I wondered if he'd had time to do it before he was

killed. (He hadn't.) Then I caught myself thinking these purely selfish thoughts, and thought: "This is stupid. I don't know whether his death is a major loss to literature—I doubt it—but he was one of the few genuinely original writers of our time. His death seems *stupid*. Why did a man like that have to die?" And it struck me that this was, in itself, a Camus situation. His death was "absurd." And here was I, trying to respond to it, and yet feeling nothing deep down….

Does the question itself seem absurd—why did Camus die?—sounding like one of those Victorian moralists who asks indignantly how God can permit the death of innocent people? I suppose it does. And of course, we are all nowadays logical enough to see that such an approach is irrational. And Camus especially, who did not believe in God, would have been quick to point out its absurdity. Yet I am not so sure. Camus' work was basically about *that* kind of question, the problem of the "justice" of such matters. And I admit that I have a feeling that, in some obscure way, life usually does make sense….

I knew, for example—what was something of a closely-guarded secret—that Camus was something of a Don Juan. Simone de Beauvoir had hinted something of the sort in her *roman à clef*, *The Mandarins*, where Camus is "Henri," but she had limited Henri to a few selected "love affairs"; a close woman-friend of Camus' had told me that, in fact, Camus' loves were often purely a matter of physical satisfaction. He was married, she said, but spent much of his time living in hotel rooms, leading an oddly rootless existence. I certainly didn't disapprove of this—all healthy young men would like to make love to every girl in the world—but had experienced enough of it myself to know that it produced an odd sense of futility.

And then there was his philosophy. He spoke about "the absurd"—that is, man's preposterous tendency to believe that the universe somehow cares about him—but it was really an updated version of Thomas Hardy's belief in a malevolent deity who enjoys screwing us up. He was fascinated by a story of a traveller who returns home to his mother and sister after many years, deliberately concealing his identity so he could spring it on them the next morning; but in the night, they murder him for his money.... He

thought so much of this nonsensical anecdote that he used it twice, once in a full-length play.

So although I couldn't *feel* Camus' death as I drove to the station, I began to feel I could understand it.

Now, at last, what looks like the standard biography of Camus has appeared—seven hundred and fifty pages of it—and I feel more strongly than ever that my intuition was basically correct. Camus' death was not a violent and tragic interruption of a purposefully-evolving career. In a certain sense—and I will qualify this later—Camus' career was already at an end when he died at the age of forty-six.

It is a curious and ironic life story that is recounted by Herbert Lottman, an American highbrow journalist. Camus was born just before the First World War, and spent a poverty-stricken childhood in Algiers; his father was killed in the early months of the war. He grew up in the household of a dominant bully of a grandmother, a thin, slight boy, who showed no signs of future genius. He loved football and swimming (and was still a football fan when I knew him). Fortunately, the boy also had a dominant male to model himself on: his uncle Acault, a butcher with literary leanings, who lent him books and engaged him in arguments.

When Camus was sixteen, Uncle Acault lent him Gide's *Nourritures terrestres*, but it failed to make an impact. Then, at seventeen, Camus "woke up." What happened is that he suddenly went down with consumption; it seemed likely that he had not long to live. The prospect of death made Camus look at life with a new interest; it made him appreciate his "sun-drenched" Mediterranean. Convalescence also gave him time to read; he re-read Gide, and this time was deeply impressed by it—as his uncle had expected him to be.

So Camus was turned into a major writer by consumption. And while it would hardly be true to say he never looked back, it is quite clear that the brush with death brought him a new kind of self-awareness. He began to mix with intellectuals, and to spend hours sitting in cafés holding arguments. Under the influence of a teacher, Jean Grenier, he began to write. Grenier was the author of a book of slight Mediterranean sketches; but he also seems to have been a

psychologist of some penetration. One of his remarks, quoted in this book, strikes me as startlingly perceptive:

> "People are astonished by the great number of diseases and accidents which strike us. It's because humanity, tired of its daily work, finds nothing better than this miserable escape into illness to preserve what remains of the soul. Disease for a poor man is the equivalent of a journey, and life in a hospital the life of a palace".

This is the kind of questioning of human existence that became second nature to Camus.

At nineteen, he made what at first looks like a stupid and rash decision: to marry a pretty drug addict who came from a higher social class. In fact, I suspect that some deep instinct for self-education was operating. His period with the girl brought much interesting experience. He worked as a clerk, did amateur dramatics in his spare time, and began to evolve into the cool, ironic, questioning personality of later years. He rented a flat overlooking the bay, which he shared with two girl students, and began writing an early version of *L'Étranger* called *A Happy Death*. On a holiday in Germany, he discovered that his wife had been sleeping with a doctor to obtain drugs—probably more than one—and the marriage foundered. I suspect that it was this kind of experience that made Camus regard the universe with the same suspicious eye as Thomas Hardy ("What has God done to Mr. Hardy," Edmund Gosse wanted to know, "that he rises up and shakes his fist in His face?").

Camus then joined the Communist party, presented his own dramatization of Malraux's *Day of Wrath*, produced his first small book of essays, got mixed up in Algerian Nationalist politics, and finally broke with the Communists (who denounced him as a Trotskyite, a name communists often apply to anyone who is too idealistic). Then, in the pre-war years, he marked time, working as a journalist, even as an actor. He met the girl who was to become his second wife—a demure young lady of bourgeois background—and laid aside other love affairs to "pay court" in the accepted bourgeois manner. When the war came, Camus moved to Paris, and became a journalist on *Paris Soir*, the French equivalent of a Hearst newspaper. The major phase of his career now began.

By this time, he had written two of the works for which he is best known—*L'Étranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Both, fortunately, were short—an advantage in wartime Paris, where paper was scarce. They appeared in 1942. And their appearance at this time could be regarded as Camus' first stroke of extraordinary good fortune—or, alternatively, as the first blow of a fate that intended to kill him with kindness. France was occupied by the Germans; therefore, the French had temporarily abandoned their customary trivial-mindedness; they were in a Dostoevskian mood, and these grim little meditations on suicide and death, on the apparent futility of human existence, and on its absurd delightfulness, were read with heartfelt appreciation. Since there were so few other new writers around—Sartre being one of the few exceptions—Camus was received with respectful attention, even by critics who felt that *L'Étranger* was too Americanized.

Camus spent the remainder of the war writing his new novel, *The Plague*, and a couple of plays; and working, in a vague and desultory manner, for the Resistance. It is difficult to judge how dangerous this was. The Germans seem to have been, to their credit, extremely liberal towards French intellectuals, and allowed French literary life to proceed much as usual. André Malraux, a noted communist, was allowed to move around freely; Gallimard was allowed to publish communist writers. So although Camus undoubtedly ran a certain risk in the Resistance—mostly writing for the underground newspaper *Combat*—it was not quite the life and death situation it sounds in retrospect.

The end of the war came, and Camus' "lucky period" really began in earnest. *Combat* could now publish openly, and Camus became editor. Naturally, it was read by everyone. Camus' editorials made his name known throughout France. He was in a marvelous position—the young hero of the resistance, a major intellectual, prophet of the new morality—and all at the age of thirty-two (anyone who wants to get an impression of what these years were like should read *The Mandarins* by Simone de Beauvoir). Moreover, Camus was part of the most influential literary movement in Europe: existentialism. His friend and colleague Sartre was receiving enormous acclaim for plays like *Huis Clos* and novels like *The Age of Reason*. The press decided

that existentialism was the credo of a new "lost generation" who spent their nights in wine cellars in Montmartre and the Boul' Mich; Camus and Sartre—who liked to sit up all night boozing—would often notice journalists scribbling in their notebooks at the next table. When Camus' novel *The Plague* appeared in 1947, it became an instant bestseller—making him affluent for the first time in his life, and bringing him world renown. Two or three years later, when I was married and living in north London, I recall hearing some lady on the BBC's *Critics* program saying that *The Plague* was the most important novel to appear since the war. I rushed to the East Finchley Library and borrowed it; then spent the next few days wondering what the hell she was talking about.

What happened to Camus and Sartre was, to a large extent, what happened to myself and John Osborne a decade later in London: the sudden acclaim as Angry Young Men, serious social thinkers, etc. There was one major difference. Osborne and I were totally unknown before our first appearance in print. Camus and Sartre had an impressive body of work behind them, and reputations as Resistance heroes. And France had been rendered serious-minded by the war. So where Camus and Sartre were concerned, it took several years for the counter-reaction to set in—a counter-reaction that was inevitable, because it is a basic quality of human beings to prefer to believe that something is cheaper and sillier than it seems to be. People are always delighted to see pedestals shaking.

Camus' success was almost too good to be true. Lottman tells a story of a young journalist who jumped up onto the bar of a nightclub to make an impromptu speech about Camus—who was present—declaring that Camus was a walking injustice, because he had everything it takes "to seduce women, to be happy, to be famous," with, in addition, all of the virtues—"Against this injustice we can do nothing."

Even Sartre, who was notoriously ugly, felt keenly the injustice of Camus' success with the female population of the existentialist bars.

Yet this delightful "injustice" was building up tremendous disadvantages for Camus. To begin with, he felt uncomfortable being a walking institution, being constantly treated with such seriousness. Lottman has a nice anecdote about Sartre and Camus

returning from an all-night drinking session in Les Halles, Sartre remarking ruefully: "To think that in a few hours I'm going to give a lecture about the writer's responsibility." There is a point at which fame becomes an absurd irrelevancy. You can only live one life. You can only eat one dinner. You can only sleep with one girl at a time. To be treated like the Delphic Oracle seems, under the circumstances, derisory. What made it worse for Camus was his image as the Gallic literary conscience, the secular priest of French letters—a role for which he was a good thirty years too young. This meant that he only dared to show to a few intimate friends his other aspect, the faun who gleefully accepted the sexual favours of his leading lady as a bonus for writing the play, and who thought that anything in a skirt was unutterably delicious. He talked gloomily to Simone de Beauvoir about wishing he could really tell "The Truth." Yet another aspect of him was horrified at the idea of the truth being known. His wife hired a rather incompetent maid; one day, at dinner, one of their friends recognized her as a free-lance journalist. If Camus had really wanted the truth to slip out, he would have let her write her candid story of his private life; instead, he fired her on the spot, and then rang every newspaper to which she might have sold the story to warn them off.

The real problem in such a situation is sexual self-division. It seems clear that Camus loved his wife and children. But, like H. G. Wells, he felt it was a sheer waste of opportunity to turn down all the admiring females who were dying to share his bed. Wells' wife did her best to put up with it, convinced by her fast-talking mate that husbands and wives do not "belong" to each other. But she wilted away, and after her death, Wells was wracked with conscience. But Camus set himself up as some kind of moralist, and his wife was an eminently good and intelligent woman of considerable character. There can be no doubt that the moralist in him told him to behave like an adult, and treat his wife as she deserved. This satyr contented itself with an occasional insincere prayer: "Oh Lord, make me good—but not yet!" This, I think, was why Camus felt himself somehow lightweight, a kind of fake. He was a thoroughly self-divided man, and his contemporaries regarded him as the spokesman of justice and the voice of conscience.

On top of all this, he found that he no longer had the freedom to relax in cafés and drink with friends. He was working not only as a writer, but as a publisher for Gallimard. To be a well-known writer means receiving letters every day of one's life except Sundays and holidays, and being expected to reply; meeting all kinds of people; signing petitions; writing letters to newspapers; and lending one's name to protest demonstrations. Privacy became a nostalgic memory of the old days. Even when he and Sartre disagreed on an intellectual issue, it became front-page news. This occurred in 1951, when his essay on anti-authoritarianism, *L'Homme révolté*, was published. Camus had always regarded himself as part of the French tradition of revolution; he once told a French audience that they should never forget that the real greatness of France was demonstrated in 1790 and 1848. But, being a philosopher, he was bound to reach the point where he raised the question of whether revolt—especially political revolt—is the universal panacea that all good leftists believe it to be. Camus, like Dostoevsky, was fascinated by "rebellion"—but by moral rather than political rebellion, the "revolt against God" demonstrated in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and the "Pro and Contra" chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*. *L'Homme révolté*, an attempt to pursue the concept of rebellion to its logical conclusion, ultimately decides that most political revolt is half-baked emotionalism springing out of the anti-authoritarian hang-ups of the individual revolutionaries, something that Chesterton had said earlier in *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

Sartre, far less of a realist than Camus, had spent much of his life involved in a kind of political romanticism. For reasons which appear unfathomable, he always regarded the arguments of Marxism as more or less inescapable truths. Moreover, as an "intellectual revolutionary" (all intellectuals are, in a sense, revolutionary, since thinking is somehow contrary to human nature), he felt that he ought to make common cause with the communists. French intellectuals seem to have the odd ability of being able to believe two contradictory philosophical tenets simultaneously. Sartre's friend, the important Husserlian philosopher Merleau-Ponty, even found himself apologizing for the

Stalinist reign of terror. What Sartre was doing was precisely what Julian Benda called "the betrayal of the intellectuals."

Camus overestimated Sartre's intellectual honesty, and was shocked when Sartre authorized a hatchet job on *L'Homme révolté* in *Les Temps modernes*. Sartre had already stated his position in *Les Mains sales*—that if you want political influence, you have to plunge your hands up to the elbows in shit. He felt Camus was being whiter than white, and basically irresponsible. What should have been a quiet disagreement between friends over a bottle of wine became a public brawl in *Les Temps modernes*, and fodder for the gossip columnists in the dailies. Camus was shattered and utterly depressed by this public condemnation. For ten years he had received little but praise and respectful discussion, so he was emotionally unprepared for this indignity. He was a man who liked to be liked, and was inclined to wonder what he had done wrong. The answer, of course, was nothing; but the emotional shock of Sartre's attack withered his none-too-robust creativity for years. The end product of the controversy was a weird piece of breast-beating called *La Chute*, about a man who is universally regarded as a philanthropist and moralist, and who sees himself as a whited sepulcher, a fraud. It must have seemed to Camus the height of irony when his "confession" was received as an attack on *mauvais-foi*, self-deception, hailed as a masterpiece, and awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

After the Nobel Prize (1957) Camus was fair game. He was now just a little too famous and successful, even for a war hero. Some of the jibes in *Les Temps modernes*—about Camus' naiveté and hypocrisy and pseudo-intellectualism (they objected that Camus had never actually read Marx or Lenin)—had stuck. Just as the intellectuals of England and America were deciding that Camus was the most important voice in modern French literature, his fellow countrymen were deciding that he was, after all, something of a fake. Camus' remark, on being told (by a waiter) that he had won the Nobel Prize, was: "I am castrated." And, in fact, the Stockholm visit was something of an anticlimax. He arrived to find that a newspaper had published an interview with him—which he denied had taken place—and had attacked him for his lack of involvement in the then-current rebellion in Algeria. He was treated

roughly by students at Stockholm University, who called him a political coward; a young Moslem piled insults on him. Camus was so upset that he refused to see anyone but close friends after his return from Sweden; his health broke down (his tuberculosis was always inclined to return when he was under stress). His last major dramatic effort, a play based on Dostoevsky's *Possessed*, was a financial flop, losing large amounts of money before being closed.

So the accident that caused his death, six months thereafter, took place when his career had already reached a nadir. His reputation was in decline, and continued to decline steadily—in France at least—after his death. The general feeling seemed to be that Camus had been vastly overrated, and that there was less in his work than met the eye. And while various articles have been published in recent years declaring that there is now an immense Camus revival among the young in France—who have just discovered him—and that his work is now selling better than ever, it has failed to come to the attention of John Weightman, an expert on French literary life, who commented in a recent review of a Camus biography that Camus' reputation had never recovered from his "Great Fall."

How far did Camus deserve his enormous reputation during his lifetime, and how well is he likely to stand up to the scrutiny of future critical assessment?

My own feeling, as I have hinted, is that Camus' achievement, while considerable, was nonetheless overrated. But in order to assess it fairly, we must understand how Camus' work came to be regarded as classic in his own lifetime. What was it that his immediate contemporaries felt so significant?

The answer is plain enough. The two books that introduced Camus to the French public, *L'Etranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, suggest a French Ernest Hemingway, but with a clearer, more incisive mind, and a capacity for philosophical thought. *Sisyphus* opens with a statement: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide." Camus goes on to talk about Kierkegaard and Kafka and Husserl and the Russian thinker Shestov. Yet, although three of these men are religious thinkers, Camus insists that we must live "without appeal"—that is, without appeal to religion. Man finds himself tossed on this earth without a "by your leave," rather like being hurled into the middle of some

preposterous football game, where he is immediately trampled upon by the other players. If he flings himself into the game and uses his feet and elbows, he stands a good chance of survival. If he stands still and demands to be told the rules of the game, he will soon find himself face downward in the mud. But all thinkers want to know the rules before they start. So where living is concerned, the intelligent man seems to be at a disadvantage. His most sensible course would seem to be refusal to play—suicide. Hence Camus' opening statement. All other philosophical questions, he says, must come after this first great question; before asking them, one must decide to join the game.

Here was a thinker who was asking the same questions as Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard, here was a man to be taken seriously. *L'Étranger* showed that he also had much in common with Hemingway. His hero has a deep appreciation of physical things: food, the sun, the sea, women, cigarettes: he may just be a slob, but he faces things honestly and squarely, without telling himself—or other people—lies. When made to face death—due to an absurd misunderstanding—he shows the same courage and honesty. Unlike Hemingway's heroes he does not bring this courage and honesty to bullfighting or dynamiting bridges; but then, Camus was more concerned with honesty than with courage.

The war made everybody more serious-minded. Camus' heroic stoicism was like a gesture of defiance against the Germans. The climate could not have been more favourable.

International acclaim came with *The Plague*, a novel about bubonic plague in Oran, in North Africa. A priest declares from his pulpit that the plague is a punishment for sin, but when a little boy dies in agony, he has to admit that this rationalization fails to fit the case. The priest himself finally dies, already halfway towards losing his faith. But Dr. Rieux, Camus' mouthpiece, concentrates on the business of alleviating suffering. A political agitator and an "investigative journalist" both abandon plans to flee the city to help in the common fight. And finally, the plague goes away. Again, Camus seems to be saying: ignore religious consolation, but do your best to be honest and useful. The plague of Oran can be seen as Camus' symbol for the human condition.

In fact, as Lottman makes clear, the plague was really supposed to be the German occupation. This was why the French bought a quarter of a million copies of the book in just a few months; they saw it as a novel about what they had been through under the Germans. No doubt Camus intended the universal overtones: but to assume that this was his central intention—to compare human existence to life in a plague-ridden city—is to invest the book with a significance never sought. Still, *The Plague* was soon published in England and America, and Camus' literary stock suddenly doubled in value—the inevitable prelude to a fall.

In fact, the philosophical content of Camus' first three books (I am ignoring, for the present, two early volumes of essays) is less significant than meets the eye. They are all strongly tinged with the spirit of Thomas Hardy. Meursault, the hero of *L'Etranger*, is basically a brainless idiot. His death is thoroughly contrived. Camus has to stretch his powers of language to persuade us that Meursault somehow manages to shoot an Arab in "self-defence." We also find it difficult to believe that a French judge would have convicted a Frenchman of killing an Arab in Algeria in the 1930s; he would certainly have accepted a plea of self-defence or accidental manslaughter. But then, Camus had to place his hero in this situation so that Meursault can lose his temper with a priest who is trying to bring him the consolations of religion, thus dying as honestly as he has lived. As if to underline his theme of the sheer malice of "fate," Camus includes the story of the mother and daughter who kill the son before they realize his identity. Camus wants to have it both ways. He wants us to believe that he is an objective philosopher who rejects religion because it is dishonest. But in place of the benevolent God of Christianity, he has set up the malicious Fate of Thomas Hardy, which is just as hard to swallow. The truth is that Meursault is the brother of Sade's Justine, and Camus, like Sade, is trying to replace God with a kind of devil. This may make good fiction, but it is not objective philosophy.

In *Sisyphus*, we can suddenly see Camus' basic mistake. Life, he explains, is "absurd"—meaningless. You get up in the morning, go to work, spend four hours in the office or factory, eat lunch, work four more hours, go home, eat, sleep, for five days a week—endlessly. And one day you suddenly feel a great weariness and

ask: "Why?" One stage further still, and you begin to experience what Sartre calls "nausea," "sensing to what degree a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, with what intensity nature or landscape can negate us. At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman…." We manage to live with material objects by imposing our feelings on them, until the truth dawns upon us. You see a man in a telephone booth, and again you become aware of the absurd. All of his expressions are part of a dumb show.

This last example really gives the game away. For this kind of absurdity is untrue. Camus' absurdity is not reality seen naked; it is reality deliberately distorted or *drained* of meaning. To point to a reality drained of meaning, and then to claim that this example proves reality itself is meaningless, is a strange kind of logic. Camus' vision of the world is the vision of a young romantic, heavily tinged with self-pity and a sense of personal inadequacy. Nietzsche began his career in much the same way, by swallowing Schopenhauer in one monstrous gulp, and then groaning with indigestion for two or three years. But Nietzsche outgrew his juvenile pessimism, and created Zarathustra. Camus found the process of transition slower and more painful, because he insisted on clinging to the fallacy that "absurdity" (or "nausea") is a vision of the fundamental truth—life seen without illusions. His failure to see through the fallacy is typical of the lack of logic that characterizes French philosophy in general.

When I first met Camus, in 1957, this was the problem I most wanted to discuss with him. Gallimard had published the French translation of my book, *The Outsider*, whose title I had borrowed from the English edition of *L'Étranger*. To some extent, I owed my own overnight success to Camus, for the English edition of *L'Étranger* had been introduced by Cyril Connolly, the Francophile critic, and Connolly felt that my use of the title was a kind of compliment to himself; so he launched my book with an enthusiastic review. Camus was also complimented by my treatment of his own ideas in my book, and said nice things about it. With allies like this, it was impossible to fail.

In the summer of 1957 the Arts Council sent me on a lecture tour of German universities; when I told Camus I would be passing through Paris, he invited me to call at his office at Gallimard, in

Rue Sebastian-Bottin. Like T. S. Eliot, Camus supplemented his income by working as a publisher.

I suppose I expected to meet a kind of French version of Eliot (whom I'd met in London)—someone rather quiet, sober, perhaps a little cagey. What surprised me when I walked into Camus' office was that he positively sparkled. Most of his photographs make him look serious, as if brooding on questions of eternal justice. In fact, he seemed very young—I would have guessed his age at thirty—and he radiated friendliness. It struck me he had an urchin-like quality—capable of knocking on someone's door, then suddenly running away.

I asked him what he was working on currently, and he told me he was writing a novel called *The First Man*. It was, he said, about a man who starts off by rejecting education, morality, religion, and ends up having to construct all three for himself. As he explained it, it sounded like an interesting extension of the theme of *L'Homme révolté.* The revolutionary feels that society wants to tie him in a strait jacket, cramming his head full of useless facts (education), forcing him to pay constant attention to the wishes of other people (morality), and to accept its notion of what he ought to do with his life (religion). He begins by rejecting all three and living according to his own natural sense of fitness. He feels, for example, that if a girl attracts him, the natural thing to do is to sleep with her, and ignore the parents and relatives who feel he ought to get engaged, then marry her in the proper manner. But even a simple situation like this is set with traps. What if, after sleeping with her, he wants to move on, and the girl wants him to stay (a situation Camus often encountered)? The natural rebel would ignore her wishes and leave her—and then wonder why it makes him feel like a bastard. At which point, it may strike him (if he is capable of thinking) that "morality" is not really an invention of the bourgeoisie; it is inherent in human relations. And if you become involved with a group of other people in some mutually advantageous relation, you soon discover that there is also such a thing as social morality which, when projected into the field of social organization, becomes political morality.

This struck me as a fascinating and important advance on the position of *L'Étranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. These start from

the "rebel" assumption that religion and morality are human inventions—and lies designed to make us feel comfortable. From what Camus told me, the hero of *The First Man* would begin as another Meursault, and end as...as what? Presumably, as an Albert Camus, since the novel was meant to be basically autobiographical, according to Lottman. (Lottman makes it sound as if it was quite simply an autobiography). And this again made me aware of the question I really wanted to put to Camus. How did he see his own development. To me, it looked as if he had reached a dead end, a kind of *cul de sac*, although I was not rude enough to say so. Admittedly, his outline of *The First Man* made it sound like a rejection of the position of *L'Étranger*—a rejection of the ethics of rebellion. But a rejection is only a halfway house.

Those early books are about man's clumsy attempts to impose his own crude meanings on reality, and about the way reality declines to be caught in his nets. They are very closely related to Sartre's first novel, *La Nausée. L'Homme révolté* is a detailed examination—and rejection—of the ethics of rebellion, pointing out that there is a strong element of the spoilt child about most rebels—resentment at a world that refuses to take them at their own valuation, and a desire to smash everything and start all over again. In *The Plague*, Camus is still concerned to attack the "false solutions" of religion. After *L'Homme révolté*, the next logical step would have been to attack the equally false solutions of political extremists. In fact, Camus did take this step. But he sidestepped the issue by adapting a novel of Dostoevsky—*The Possessed*—rather than writing his own. *The Possessed* is designed as an attack on the political "nihilists" of the nineteenth century; it applies just as much to today's terrorists and Red Army factions. By dramatising the novel, Camus emphasized his own estrangement from the "revolutionary" tradition. Sartre and Jeanson indignantly labelled him a reactionary, a conservative, a turncoat. In fact, Camus' conservatism was like Dostoevsky's—an affirmation of another kind of value, an assertion that the "morality" of revolution is usually a rationalization of personal hang-ups.

He was, I suggested, moving towards his own kind of mysticism, an ethic of freedom that is essentially non-social. The word mysticism seemed to surprise Camus. I pointed out that there

are, in fact, a number of places in his work where he seems to be expressing a kind of mysticism. One occurs in an early essay on the wind at Djemila (in *Nuptials*), where Camus explains why he rejects words like future, good job, self-improvement. All these things—including religion—seek to deprive man of "the weight of his own life." "But as I watch the great birds flying heavily through the sky at Djemila, it is precisely a certain weight of life that I ask for and receive." And at the end of *L'Étranger*, after shaking a priest by the throat, Meursault receives a kind of mystical illumination, when he accepts everything, and recognizes that "I had been happy and I was happy still." The story "The Woman Taken in Adultery" (in *Exile and the Kingdom*) again deals with a kind of mystical illumination: a woman who experiences a kind of orgasm as she feels total unity with the African night. I compared the latter story with the work of D. H. Lawrence, and Camus remarked that I was the first person to see the connection with Lawrence; he had, in fact, been thinking of that author when he wrote the tale.

But were not these experiences, in a sense, the answer to Meursault's sense of the absurd—just as Alyosha Karamazov's mystical illumination, his sense of unity with the stars, is the answer to Ivan's determination to "give God back his entrance ticket"? The idea seemed to worry Camus. He gestured out the window, at a Parisian teddy boy slouching along the other side of the street, and said: "No, what is good for him must be good for me also." What he meant was clear enough: that any solution to this problem of "absurdity" must be a solution that would be valid for the man on the street as well as for mystics and intellectuals.

This, it seemed to me, was a mistake, and I said so. Because a problem is comprehensible to the man on the street, this does not mean that the answer must also be understandable to him. Anybody can understand the problem implied by the question: "Where does the universe end? Does space go on forever?" Einstein's answer involves such concepts as space-time curvature, and seems to be understood fully only by mathematical physicists. The same thing, I suspect, may be true of the question of the meaning of human existence. Mystics who claim to have glimpsed the answer say that it is too simple to be expressed in words. They seem to imply that

our basic method of approaching the question is mistaken. But the basic method is that which seems to make sense to the ordinary man. So we may well have to begin by forgetting the ordinary man, and thinking in terms of the extraordinary.

Or, to put it as simply as possible: if the answer lies outside the normal range of everyday consciousness, in some paradoxical glimpse of freedom or intensity, then it is no use trying to translate it into terms of normal consciousness. The result would be bound to be a complete falsification.

To explain this would have been beyond the capacity of my rather limited French: I contented myself with saying that his assertion was equivalent to holding that Einstein should never have created the theory of relativity, because it was beyond the understanding of a Parisian teddy boy. He clearly disagreed: his basic premise seemed to be that all human beings are in the same boat, and that one of these days, if God condescends to explain to us what life is all about, we shall *all* groan with exasperation and say: "Of *course*!"

I see from my journal that I spent two hours talking with him; but I have no further notes of what we said. I left with a sense of intellectual deadlock. It seemed to me that Camus' political development had been interesting, but that there had been no parallel philosophical development. Like Dostoevsky, he had moved from radicalism to conservatism, from a Nietzschean rejection of morality to a feeling that the individual must create his own morality. But his still left him trapped, as it were, in a form of individualism. Although, like Sartre, he claimed to be a kind of Husserlian, he was never able to accept the notion that meaning is an external datum, that it really exists *out there*.

Yet for the man who had written those lines about the great birds in the sky at Djemila, those final pages of *L'Étranger*, and *La Femme adultére*, it does not seem such a difficult step to take. Why, then, did he find it impossible? The answer, I suspect, lies in *The Fall*, a novel that grew out of a short story. The book is basically an extended self-accusation. The lawyer, Clamence, is generally regarded as a generous, altruistic individual; he seems to have every reason for regarding himself with warm approval. He enjoys being liked. Then, one night as he crosses the Seine, he hears the splash of

a girl throwing herself into the river. He ought to do something quickly; instead, he decides it is too late and walks on. The episode marks the beginning of a breakdown of his self-complacency. He has always thought of himself as a decent, open-hearted individual; but if he can ignore a cry for help when no one else is around to observe him, then his decency must be merely a disguised form of selfishness. He also describes an argument with a motorcyclist at a traffic light that wounded his self-esteem, and left him dreaming of violent revenge. But above all, it is his relations with women that fill him with guilt. He has charm; he is a highly successful Don Juan; but again, this is a further example of his need for self-assertion, that is, pure selfishness. So he gives up his flourishing practice and becomes a kind of penitent in a run-down quarter of Amsterdam.

This is an ambiguous book. Lottman points out that Clamence's description of himself tallies closely with what we know about Camus. Is Camus therefore accusing himself of being a fraud? Not quite, for in a prefatory note, Camus asks: "Is this man…putting himself on trial or his era?" Clamence is supposed to be in some way typical of the modern liberal intellectual; if Camus was criticizing himself, he was also accusing Sartre and Malraux and the rest. Yet the most specific part of Camus' accusation—the Don Juanism—applies quite specifically to Camus himself.

When I first read the book—not long before meeting Camus—l read it solely as a study in *mauvais-foi*, without any autobiographical element. And it seemed to me, quite simply, that Camus was being unfair. A man does what good he can; and if he manages to do some good, why should we censure him for doing it for the wrong reasons? It is always hard to draw the line between selfishness and altruism, between the personal and the impersonal. And it seemed to me that, as in *L'Étranger*, Camus has introduced an unreal catastrophe as the pivot of his story. Most people who heard a splash and a cry for help would do something—find the nearest telephone, run back to look over the parapet, flag down a car. Or, at the worst, tell themselves that it was probably someone fooling around. Clamence's reaction is as unbelievable as Meursault's murder of the Arab. I put this to Camus, and his answer did nothing to resolve my misgivings. He explained that Clamence had walked

too far past the girl to be able to run back and look over the parapet; it was purely a question of distance. It confirmed my feeling that the story was a framed indictment.

On re-reading it, I see that I was being misled by Camus' apparent objectivity—the suggestion that he is probing the bad faith of liberal intellectuals. If the story is read purely as a personal statement, then the unreal catastrophe ceases to be the point at issue. Clamence is saying that while he sincerely believes that he cares deeply about human welfare, his relations with women give him the lie. All Casanovas argue that sex is a simple physical pleasure, a transaction between two consenting adults; and that to condemn it on moral grounds is absurd. Which sounds convincing enough, but misses the real issue. We have no hesitation in condemning a rapist who beats a woman unconscious in order to satisfy his own desire. But a man who seduces a girl into a personal relationship, when his basic desire is simply to "make" her, is doing very much the same thing. There is a difference in degree, not in kind. He may argue that he is doing her no harm; but the truth is that he is swindling her, making her the victim of a confidence trick. Clamence is a bastard. So the episode of the suicide becomes symbolic, emphasizing the lack of personal involvement.

This is not a moral problem so much as a matter of psychological self-division. It is clear from Lottman's book that Camus loved his family. His philandering was not the outcome of an unhappy marriage; it was simply that he enjoyed love affairs too much to pass up a good opportunity. Fame greatly increased his opportunities. Yet he was basically a serious-minded man, a moralist. So he was in the position of, say, a magistrate who experiences a periodic compulsion to go shoplifting. This is the problem he was trying to work out in *The Fall*, and his honesty compelled him to self-condemnation. At the same time, caution led him to disguise it as an impersonal study in bad faith. He had to give with one hand and take back with the other. He could not even allow himself the satisfaction of telling the truth in public.

This, I feel, goes a long way towards explaining that general unsatisfactoriness that bothers me when I try to read Camus. His work is full of unresolved contradictions. He was a moralist, yet he liked to talk about "moraline poison" (Nietzsche invented the word,

implying that morality is a poison like nicotine). He was a stoic, yet the most interesting moments in his work are moments of Dionysian ecstasy—Chesterton's sense of "absurd good news." He was a mystic who insisted that he was a materialist, a romantic who insisted that he was a realist. Sartre, who was bedevilled by similar contradictions, managed to preserve his sense of consistency by clinging to his political extremism, even when it made him look ridiculous. Camus' mind was too lucid for this kind of muddle-headedness, and the current of his ideas swept him inevitably towards a position that was the exact reverse of the one he started out from. The revolutionary existentialist was becoming a conservative moralist.

The situation has its ironic parallel in a section on the poet Lautréamont that Camus included in *L'Homme révolté* (it caused a quarrel with André Breton, who felt impelled to defend Lautréamont against the charge of adolescent rebelliousness). At the age of twenty-two, Lautréamont produced a work of "total rebellion," *Les Chants de Maldoror*—it even includes a gleeful passage describing the torture of a child. Yet before his death, two years later, his ideas had come full circle, and *Poésies* praises conformity. After attacking Lautréamont—and rebels in general—for immaturity, Camus goes on to attack him for becoming a conservative: "Conformity is one of the nihilistic temptations of rebellion... Lautréamont, who is usually hailed as the bard of pure rebellion, on the contrary proclaims the taste for intellectual servitude which flourishes in the contemporary world." Camus seems to imply that conformity is as bad as pure rebellion, and that he personally has a more honest solution. In the final chapter of *L'Homme révolté* he explains that "the revolutionary mind, if it wants to remain alive, must...return again to the sources of rebellion and draw its inspiration from the only system of thought which is faithful to its origins: thought that recognizes limits." He is still anxious to proclaim his intellectual sympathy with rebellion, and implies that "thought that recognizes limits" should not be confused with political reaction. Yet the section on Lautréamont contains the statement: "Lautréamont makes us understand that rebellion is adolescent. Our most effective terrorists, whether they are armed with bombs or with poetry, hardly escape from infancy." If Camus

means what he says, then all his insistence on his sympathy with rebellion is no more than doubletalk. Whether he likes it or not, he is moving inevitably in the same direction as Lautréamont. His conservatism may be intellectual and analytical rather than emotional, but it amounts to the same thing. Camus was following the same route as Lautréamont and Dostoevsky. Unlike them, Camus was unwilling to admit his conservatism. Yet if, in fact, *Le Premier homme* is a kind of sequel to *L'Homme révolté*, he must have found it increasingly difficult to avoid admitting his new direction to himself, since his purpose was to show how his amoral hero is forced to acquire a morality.

At all events, the problem was left in suspension on that damp January day when Michel Gallimard's car swerved off the road. Camus was carrying the manuscript of *Le Premier homme*; it was less than half finished.

When Lottman's biography of Camus arrived in the post—over 700 pages of it—I suspected that I was going to find it hard going. In fact, I read on with increasing fascination. I suppose I have always envied Camus that uninterrupted rise to international eminence: so, to begin with, I read the book for the sake of the success story. I ended by reading it as a moral parable, with special application to myself. My own basic preoccupations have always been much the same as Camus'. Reviewing my *The Outsider* in *Encounter*, Professor Ayer went to some length to compare it (unfavourably) with *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The book brought me acclaim at the age of twenty-four; Camus was twenty-eight when *Sisyphus* and *L'Étranger* appeared. Four years later, Camus went on to international renown with *La Peste*. Four years after *The Outsider*, my own reputation had taken a nose dive—soon after Camus' death, I had to go on my first lecture tour of America, in an attempt to repair my shattered finances. Camus' fame lasted a full decade before the inevitable reaction set in: my own was leaking badly after a few months.

Yet when I look back on that period of non-stop publicity about the "Angry Young Men," I remember how much I hated it. Privacy had vanished; it was like living under a spotlight in front of an audience. No one can do his best work with the feeling that a crowd is looking over his shoulder. A writer needs to be alone: he needs to

be allowed to concentrate his full attention on the problems that preoccupy him. He needs to be allowed to live his own life, without worrying about the reactions of other people. In 1957, an attempt by my girlfriend's parents to horsewhip me landed me in the newspapers of two continents; by 1961, I doubt whether anyone would have paid much attention if I had dived off Westminster Bridge with fireworks in my pockets. But at least I had recovered my privacy. For Camus, there was no escape from the spotlight—even when, in the last three years of his life, his reputation was already in decline. To be that successful, that early, is to lose your freedom of movement and much of your freedom of thought. It is the curse of Midas. The journalist who complained that Camus was too lucky can hardly have wished him a more frustrating and ironic destiny.

ERNST CASSIRER

[Extracted from *The Books in My Life* by Colin Wilson. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., 1998 (**A152**)]

Ernst Cassirer was once regarded as one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century; now his name is virtually unknown, except to students of philosophy.

This is a pity, for Cassirer is a thinker of extra-ordinary range—his mind resembles, in many ways, that of Whitehead, who is perfectly capable of quoting Einstein and Wordsworth on the same page. But in spite of a rather Germanic mode of expression, Cassirer is far more readable than Whitehead. And this is partly because Whitehead, except in *Science and the Modern World,* is concerned with expressing his own philosophical ideas, while Cassirer, who began as a brilliant historian of ideas, enjoys expounding other people's. He once remarked, "The custom ... of hurling one's ideas into empty space, as it were, without enquiring into the general development of scientific philosophy, has never struck me as fruitful"—a sentence I might well quote as a defense of my own method, from *The Outsider* onward.

Cassirer was also one of the cleverest men of the century. His memory was phenomenal, and one of his professors recollected that he could quote page after page of poetry. The range of his knowledge was so enormous that he gave the impression that he remembered every book he had ever read.

Typical of his brilliance is the fact that when he became a professor at Oxford in 1933, he had to teach for the first term in German. After that, he taught in English, which he had learned during the first term. And in his later years—he died in 1945, at the age of seventy—he always wrote in English.

The reason that Cassirer has been half-forgotten is simple. Look

him up in any dictionary of philosophy, and you will learn that he is regarded as a member of the Marburg school of neo-Kantian philosophers. Most people are not even quite sure what a Kantian philosopher is, except that it sounds irrelevant to the twentieth century, and a neo-Kantian sounds doubly irrelevant.

Let me explain briefly: Descartes tried to create a new kind of philos-ophy based on "doubting everything"—that is, anything that could be doubted. Anything that was left standing was beyond doubt—like Descartes' famous, "I think, therefore I am."

John Locke turned to the senses in his quest for certainty. The mind, he said, is a kind of empty blackboard—tabula rasa—and our experience gradually fills it. So "you" are merely the sum of your experiences. There is nothing in the mind, said Locke, that was not first in the senses. Descartes had already concluded that animals are robots; Locke came close to regarding man as a robot.

Bishop Berkeley turned Locke's empiricism inside out. "Very well," he said, "it is true that I know the world through my senses. But many things change according to the state of my senses—for example, when I have a fever, my food may taste extremely odd. So how can I say that the 'normal' taste of food is the way it really tastes?"

He then took a controversial—and to us absurd—step. If things change according to the state of my senses, then would it not be true to say that my senses create taste and smell and color? The answer, of course, is no—if that were true, then your senses might arbitrarily make a banana taste like an orange. But if, for the sake of argument, we leave Berkeley's point unchallenged, then his next step follows logically: that it is possible that our senses create the outside world. Perhaps when you walk into a room, it suddenly pops into being—rather like a television set that switches itself on as you open the door.

Berkeley probably had his tongue in his cheek—after all, he was a bishop, and would hardly dare to doubt God's creation—but his basic purpose was serious: to suggest that reality is mental or spiritual in nature. But David Hume was a more combative type; he felt that a great deal of religious belief is nonsense, and he managed to doubt more than Descartes would have thought possible. For example, he doubted that we have a real "self" inside us. He said

that when he looked inside himself for the real David Hume, he just saw a lot of ideas and impressions, whirling around like autumn leaves. According to Hume, "thinking" is a mere association of ideas. He even doubted whether there is any necessary connection between cause and effect.

Kant was deeply shaken by Hume's trenchant skepticism. Yet it seemed to him obvious that we see a certain order in the world, and this order is not an illusion. If I comb my hair, I make it neat and tidy by making its strands run parallel. And we make the universe neat and tidy by imposing certain forms of understanding (concepts) on it—for example, we distinguish between liquids, solids and gases. We impose order on events by the use of clocks, which gives them an arrangement in time, and by maps, which gives them an arrangement in space. Perhaps the simplest example is the way we impose order on things by giving them names. That four-legged creature is called a cat, and that one a dog, and that one a cow. We know that these are not really their names, but it simplifies things to behave as if they were.

All these things—liquids, solids, gases, space, time, cats, dogs and cows, are examples of "combs" that make reality neat and tidy. Kant called these combs "categories" (although concepts would have been a better word), and agreed that we create them with our minds. They might also be compared to colored spectacles through which we see reality.

One further thing must be said about Kant. Recognizing that our senses and our assumptions (concepts) change what we see, he concluded that the "true reality" that lies behind these—the "thing-in-itself" or "Ding-an-sich"—is unknowable. This doctrine led some of his distinguished contemporaries to despair—for obvious reasons. If reality is unknowable, then we are living in a kind of shadow house of illusions. And nineteenth-century poets had enough problems without this. (Kant's views were instrumental in driving one of them, Heinrich von Kleist, to suicide.)

One of the chiefs of the neo-Kantians, Hermann Cohen, had the good sense to reject this aspect of Kant. He felt that when you look at the moon in the sky, what you are seeing is really the moon. It is true that you do not know the moon as you know your own backyard; but that is only because you do not know enough about it.

In theory, there is nothing to stop you knowing the moon as well as you know your own backyard. The "Ding-an-sich" is not, as Kant believed, "unknowable."

There is another central difference between Kant and the neo-Kantians. Kant thought of his categories as permanent—they do not change their nature from age to age, because human beings do not change their nature But it struck Cassirer one day—as he was sitting on a bus—that many categories do change. For example, what would Kant have made of Einstein's strange view of space and time, or of Riemann's spherical geometry?

This insight did not bother Cassirer. For he suddenly saw that a great many human creations—language and myth and religion and art—are also spectacles through which we see reality. Human beings are fundamentally creative; we possess imagination and freedom.

What happens when you look at a painting, or read a novel, or listen to a symphony? You appreciate what the artist or novelist or composer is "saying," although you may see the world in quite a different way. This is because all creators use symbols, and we have created a common language of symbols.

Animals seem to be quite different from humans. When an animal receives a stimulus, it simply responds directly to it, like a penny-in-the-slot machine. But when you drop a penny into a human being, his response is not at all direct; it has to be filtered through a world of symbols. In fact, the penny falls into a whirlpool of symbols, and is spun around as if in a washing machine, before producing a response. "Man," says Cassirer, "lives in a symbolic universe."

It is a pity that Cassirer never wrote about the one subject that would have made his meaning clear to all—sex. The male response to a female is, as we have seen earlier, almost entirely symbolic. This can be clearly seen in a recent case of a Roman Catholic priest who was found guilty of paedophile offenses against boys. There were found in his possession around thirty thousand items of child pornography. It would seem that he spent most of his life in a state of sexual arousal at the thought of sex with children—not a particular child, but virtually any child. The fact that he was a Catholic priest underlines the point; this was not simply a kind of

animal innocence, like the fox's predilection for chickens. He must have been fully aware of the conflict between his symbolic response to the image of a child, and the teachings of his church, which declared paedophilia contrary to moral law. The case enables us to understand not merely the power of the symbol, but of man's slavery to the symbol.

The book that gives the clearest idea of Cassirer's remarkable mind is probably the late *Essay on Man* (1944), written in the year before his death in an attempt to provide a straightforward summary of his "philosophy of symbolic forms." It is full of fascinating examples of what he means. To illustrate how an individual can pass from the "practical attitude" to the "symbolic attitude," he cites the case of the blind and deaf girl Helen Keller. Her teacher, Mrs. Sullivan, had somehow taught her to spell and to understand words by writing on her hand. But the child must have felt she was living in a confusing and chaotic universe. For example, she was not quite clear about the difference between "mug" and "milk."

Then one day, her teacher taught her the word "water," and later, as they stood in the pump house, Helen held her mug under the pump. As cold water rushed over Helen's hand, Mrs. Sullivan once again spelled "water." For the first time, Helen grasped that "water" was this cold stuff pouring over her hand, and had nothing to do with the mug from which she drank it. "She dropped the mug and stood as one transfixed. A new light came into her face. She spelled 'water' several times. Then she dropped on the ground, and asked for its name and pointed to the pump and the trellis.... in a few hours she had added thirty new words to her vocabulary."

This knowledge—that each thing has a name—excited her so much because it offered a method of getting to understand her world, of simplifying it, and ultimately of controlling it. This is what Kant meant—that we achieve mastery over the world by classifying things—like "mug" and "milk"—under concepts.

Helen Keller is, incidentally, the ultimate refutation of Locke's view that there is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses. She ended with a great deal in her mind that was not first in her senses.

In a central chapter called 'Facts and Ideals', Cassirer speaks of the problems that arise when our symbolic function is impaired.

Patients who were suffering from aphasia (defective power of speech) lost the power to think abstractly about certain things. For example, a patient who was suffering from paralysis of the right hand could not even say, "I can write with my right hand." Laura Bridgman, a deaf and dumb girl who was not as intelligent as Helen Keller, had the utmost difficulty grasping abstract ideas. When her teacher read her a sum from an arithmetic book, she asked, "How did the man who wrote that book know I was here?" When asked a sum involving the cost of barrels of cider, she replied, "I wouldn't give much for cider, because it's very sour."

The rest of us are so accustomed to the idea that a problem in arithmetic is not "real" that we fail to grasp that, for Laura Bridgman, it seemed as abstract as the page of algebraic symbols that baffles many of us.

But this also makes us aware that the process of evolution must involve an increasing capacity for abstraction—that is, for grasping the world in terms of symbols rather than "facts." And it also makes us aware that most of us spend our lives trapped and surrounded by mere facts, which enmesh us like a spider's web. The stupidest—and most malicious—people have no capacity to see beyond facts. They are trapped in a "worm's-eye view," what another writer, Ayn Rand, calls "the anti-conceptual mentality." And the problem of becoming truly human depends on our developing the capacity to see the world from a bird's-eye view.

I must admit that when I first came upon Cassirer, I was inclined to think of him as a kind of inferior version of Edmund Husserl. (I still feel much the same about Kant.) Husserl wanted, like Kant, to create a truly scientific philosophy, which he called phenomenology. His major step in that direction was to recognize that all perception is intentional. Things do not walk in through my eyes and implant themselves on my brain; I have to pay attention. If I look at my watch without paying attention, I do not see the time. If I read a paragraph without attention, I have to reread it.

Intentionality can also have physical effects. If someone talks about itching, I often begin to itch; it would seem that itching is, to some extent, intentional. So is being ticklish. If you reach out to tickle a child, he is screaming with laughter before your hands reach him. If someone talks about something disgusting while you

are eating, you feel sick. And if you are feeling low and depressed, you may actually become sick, by a form of hidden intentionality.

When you see a conductor directing an orchestra, you can see that he is imposing his intentions on the orchestra. But when you walk about on a spring morning, and feel that the whole world is wonderful, you fail to recognize that a kind of invisible inner conductor is orchestrating your sense impressions into a kind of symphony. Husserl called this invisible conductor the "transcendental ego," and used the interesting phrase, "the hidden achievements of the transcendental ego." (The transcendental ego was Kant's term for the "real you.")

In other words, Husserl's basic insight was that we transform our world by a kind of unconscious intentionality. And this is identical with Kant's basic insight—that our minds impose order on the world we see. If someone had drawn his attention to it, Kant would undoubtedly have recognized that intentionality is the ultimate category.

Cohen, as we have seen, disagreed with Kant about the "thing-in-itself," insisting that we know something by acquiring knowledge about it. This again is a basic tenet of phenomenology. It is basically a form of "realism;" it rejects Berkeley's "idealism"—the notion that our minds create the world—and insists, for example, that it is quite meaningless to say that grass is not "really" green.

This is why, to begin with, I was inclined to dismiss Cassirer as a kind of less perceptive Husserl. Even now, I can see that there is an element of truth in this view. But then, Cassirer has certain definite advantages over Husserl. To begin with, he is far more readable. Second, his omnivorous interest in physics, biology, psychology, history, art, language, and myth, means that his work is a kind of plum pudding, full of fascinating insights and anecdotes. He loves citing examples to reinforce his facts, and these examples—like the story of Helen Keller and the pump—give his work a resonance that is associated with art rather than philosophy. (I particularly recommend the chapter on history in the *Essay on Man,* and its discussion of the two different accounts of why Cleopatra fled from the battle of Actium.)

Cassirer seems to me to epitomize what he is saying about

symbolic forms—art, myth, language. His basic insight is that they are dynamic expressions of the human spirit, and he quotes Kant to the effect that any intelligent person can learn to grasp what Newton said in the *Principia,* but that no matter how much he knows about poetry, he cannot write good poetry on command. In other words, art is an expression of freedom. And as we read Cassirer, we feel what it means to be a dynamic thinker, swinging daringly from concept to concept.

This means that it does not matter too much when Cassirer is occasionally wrong. Giorgio de Santillana attacks his concept of myth in *Hamlet's Mill,* and it is true that *Hamlet's Mill* has a brilliance and audacity that gives Santillana the right to criticize Cassirer. Similarly, we could criticize Cassirer's comment—at the end of the *Essay on Man*—that there is no genetic inheritance of acquired characteristics; since Cassirer's death, an increasing amount of evidence for such transmission has accumulated. It is true that Cassirer is making the valid point that man has discovered another method of transmission of his "spiritual acquisitions." But it seems to me that the statement that there is no transmission of acquired characteristics runs counter to Cassirer's basic insight—that the spirit of man is essentially dynamic and creative.

The point might be expressed like this. If we look at a candle flame burning on a perfectly still night, its lack of motion gives an impression that it is solid; it might be an illuminated jewel. But we only have to place a hand above it to realize that the stillness is an illusion; the flame is actually a mass of seething energy. Similarly, if a child goes into a library, he feels overawed and oppressed by the sheer number of books; they seem to be so much dead paper covered with printer's ink. Yet for a scholar, or a philosopher like Cassirer, each of them burns with a living flame. Moreover, the knowledge that they epitomize is not dead knowledge; it is in a continual process of transformation.

In *The Occult,* I have devoted two pages to examples that seem to contradict "Darwinism" (although it must be remembered that Darwin himself was willing to concede that there might be inheritance of acquired characteristics). One of the oddest examples is a flatworm called microstomus, which gobbles up a polyp called hydra, which has stinging capsules to which the flatworm is

immune. But when the polyp has been digested, the hydra's stinging cells are picked up in the lining of the flatworm's stomach, and passed on to other cells that carry them, in the way that builder's labourers carry bricks, through to the flatworm's skin, where they are mounted like gun turrets pointing outward, to discourage predators. Once the flatworm has a full set of these gun turrets, it will no longer eat hydra—in other words, it eats the polyp solely to steal its defence system. Sir Alister Hardy, who cites the case, quotes a zoologist as saying that such behaviour can only be explained by some kind of "group mind" among the flatworm's cells.

The same seems to apply to a tiny creature called the flattid bug, which combines with hundreds of its kind to form a kind of coral-colored lilac, green at the tip and changing color with subtle gradations. Here again, the only possible explanation for its evolution seems to be some kind of "group mind."

Darwinism attempts to "staticise" nature, to explain it as a mechanical process, but the microstomus worm and the flattid bug seem to suggest that there is a far more dynamic mode of evolution. Cassirer sensed this mode in his "symbolic forms," but failed to see that it ought to apply elsewhere in nature.

All this makes no difference to the dynamism of Cassirer's work, just as it makes no difference to the greatness of William James that psychology has changed unrecognizably since he wrote *The Principles of Psychology*. Like James, Cassirer is so readable because his brilliant mind is always throwing off new ideas.

Husserl remarked that the calling of the philosopher is so important because it "is linked with the 'possibility of a radical transformation of humanity,' and not only with a radical transformation of humanity but also a 'liberation,' and this possibility makes the calling of the philosopher unique..." This quotation again emphasizes the similarity between the basic visions of Husserl and Cassirer, and makes us aware that Cassirer's work could be labeled a phenomenology of culture.

But it is probably just as well that Cassirer failed to recognize this. The thought of playing second fiddle to Husserl might have discouraged him from pursuing his own remarkable course, and robbed us of some of the most stimulating philosophical writing of the twentieth century.

JACQUES DERRIDA

Derrida and Deconstruction

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Derrida's rise to fame was as romantic and abrupt as that of any pop singer. In 1966, at the age of thirty-six, he attended a conference at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland and read a paper on "deconstruction." It was a period when American literary criticism had run out of steam, and deconstruction seemed to offer a new breakthrough. The result was what Christopher Norris has called Derrida's "rise to intellectual stardom." Deconstruction took American literary departments by storm. Its success knocked the breath out of the old guard of "New Critics"; it was as shocking as if some musical theoretician had proposed to abolish the study of classical music and replace it with jazz. But it "took," and within a year or two, Derrida was as famous in the universities of Europe as in America.

"Deconstruction" is a method of criticism that begins with the assumption that the author himself does not understand what he is trying to say, and is as likely to be wrong about it as any critic. The job of the critic is to analyse what the writer thinks are his intentions, to trace the thread of logic until it leads to a self-contradiction, or a piece of muddled thinking (aporia) that gives the game away.

What was so astonishing was that Derrida was not a literary critic but a philosopher, and that his philosophy was as impenetrably obscure as that of Heidegger. His style seemed designed to confuse

rather than enlighten, as if it was the private language of a small "in-group." And while the literary departments surrendered without much struggle, the philosophical departments rejected him with rage and derision. They denounced deconstruction in much the same way that post-war philosophy departments had denounced existentialism, and accused Derrida of being a literary con-man.

The accusation was understandable. Derrida seemed determined to thumb his nose at critics whose basic standard was coherence and clarity. One book (*Disseminations*) begins: "This (therefore) will not have been a book." Another (*Margins of Philosophy*):"To tympanize—philosophy," then goes on cryptically: "Being at the limit: these words do not yet form a proposition, and even less a discourse. But there is enough of them, providing that one plays upon it, to engender almost all the sentences in this book." The key word here is "play," which—said the critics—might be translated "refusing to be serious."

All of which helps to explain why Cambridge exploded into controversy at the idea of granting Derrida an honorary degree. A philosopher who is flippant about philosophy is as suspicious as a politician who declares that politics is a joke. Among serious philosophers, Derrida is regarded as the equivalent of the Monster Raving Loony Party.

Now this is undoubtedly unfair. If Sartre and Camus are philosophers, then Derrida most certainly is. To actually explain his philosophy in a brief space is appallingly difficult; however, I will do my best.

Derrida's starting point is the "phenomenologist" Edmund Husserl. And Husserl, in turn, began by revolting against the irrationality of much nineteenth-century philosophy. (He thought that the rise of Nazism was partly a consequence of philosophers shirking their duty to clarity and reason.) Objecting to such notions as the Idea, the Will, the Life Force, etc., Husserl thought that philosophy should try and make a new start with simple, objective *description*, and do away with such underlying "presences" as Plato's Ideas and Hegel's Absolute. He spent his life trying to live up to this program, but died a tired and frustrated man, denounced by the Nazis, and feeling that perhaps he had spent too much time in an ivory tower and not enough in the real world.

Derrida began his career with two books which are Husserlian in spirit, yet which criticise Husserl for not being "phenomenological" enough, and for letting idealism in by the back door. Now in fact, Sartre had started his career in exactly the same way, criticising Husserl's idea that behind our conscious personalities there lurks a "real you," which Husserl called the Transcendental Ego. Sartre denied this. He said that behind the conscious personality there is nothing. We are empty in the middle, like Peer Gynt's onion. Our sense of reality derives entirely from *outside*.

This, of course, contradicted the view that Sartre came to hold during the war: that man is basically *free*. If we are empty in the middle—and therefore little more than slot-machines—then how can we be free? Sartre never escaped the cleft stick in which he had got himself jammed, and his later philosophy collapsed in an intellectual tangle; he never succeeded in finishing what was intended to be his major work.

There is a sense in which Derrida is Sartre redivivus. He would also like to create a philosophy free of those underlying "presences" like the Idea and the Absolute. Like Sartre, he feels that human beings are hopelessly prone to self- delusion; "deconstruction" is basically a technique of exploding the illusions. And since the illusions tend to get expressed more in literature than philosophy, Derrida's technique is peculiarly well suited to literary criticism. Anyone who would like to grasp the spirit of Derrida's philosophy could not do better than to read Rupert Brooke's sonnet "Love," with its lines:

> 'When two loves, thirsty for each other, find slaking,
> And agony's forgot, and hushed the crying
> Of credulous hearts in heaven, such are but taking
> Their own poor dreams within their arms, and lying
> Each in his lonely night, each with a ghost…'

And concluding:

> 'All this is love; and all love is but this'.

We might say that this "deconstruction" of love is in the essential spirit of Derrida, except that the very essence of Derrida is that

"essential spirits" and "very essences" are themselves illusions that keep re-imposing themselves on us through the treachery of language. (I would say, nevertheless, that anyone who wishes to grasp the very essence of Derrida should read that last sentence half a dozen times.) For Derrida, as for Brooke, there is no real dividing line between lovemaking and masturbation.

This is why Derrida is so influential in literary departments. He has no respect for "masterpieces." He insists that creation is a kind of free play, and that there is a sense in which a critic is just as creative as a poet or novelist. Naturally, the critics are delighted with this upgrading of their function. Instead of being academic hacks, they are jazz improvisers whose motto is "Roll over Beethoven"—or Tolstoy or Jane Austen.

So it would be unfair to dismiss deconstruction as a kind of snook-cocking. It is built on a genuine philosophical foundation. And clearly, the merit of deconstruction depends on whether that foundation is as solid as it looks.

That, of course, is the sixty-four-thousand dollar question. It cost me a year of hard work to penetrate Derrida's linguistic obscurity and understand what he is saying. And when I understood, I concluded he was wrong. He has repeated all Sartre's errors, and landed himself in the same philosophical *cul de sac*.

Like Sartre, Derrida believes there is no "hidden me" hiding inside my head. What is more, there is no genuine "meaning" out there either. He calls meaning "presence," and explains that it is an illusion caused by time.

A crude analogy may help. If you look at a newspaper photograph, it seems to be a "picture" of reality. But if you look at it through a magnifying glass, it will turn into dots. So, Derrida says, if you look at the world closely enough, its "meanings" dissolve into dots. "Meaning is a constituted *effect*."

That analogy also demonstrates what I consider to be the real objection to Derrida. If the girl in the newspaper photograph is smiling, it is a genuine smile. It may dissolve into dots when you look at it through a magnifying glass, but when you take the glass away, you see the smile is no illusion. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. It is what psychologists call a "gestalt," an overall meaning that is more than its bits and pieces.

The English philosopher Whitehead said we have two kinds of perception: "immediacy" perception and "meaning" perception. When you are very tired, meaning seems to vanish (Sartre calls it "nausea") and the world dissolves into bits and pieces. But *this* is an illusion, caused by tiredness. On the other hand, when you are drunk and feeling rather jolly, the world seems to be *all* meaning. But your perception of the "dots" becomes blurred; you cannot even get your key into the keyhole.

On the other hand, there are certain moments when you are feeling happy and excited—perhaps on a spring morning—when the two modes of perception seem to blend together perfectly. You have a wonderful sense of meaning, yet you can see the "dots" quite plainly.

Do you recall the film *The Dam Busters*, in which the RAF had to drop bombs that bounced along the Moener Lake like billiard balls, and the problem for the pilot was to know when he was at exactly the right height to drop them? The solution was to place two spotlights on the plane, one in the nose, one in the tail, whose two beams converged at exactly the right height. So when there was just one spot on the surface of the lake, he released the bombs.

According to Whitehead, our most brilliant moments of insight happen when the two beams—immediacy perception and meaning perception—converge. Derrida says such moments are a delusion; there is only one beam: immediacy. Whitehead disagrees. So do I.

If Derrida is wrong—and there are many similar points upon which he can be demonstrated to be wrong—then his philosophical foundation is unstable. Deconstruction remains an exhilarating game, but should not be taken too seriously. Unfortunately, most literary dons are too untrained in philosophy to see where he is wrong, and most philosophical dons too impatient and irritable to want to help them.

One of these days, I shall try to improve the situation by writing a book called *Derrida Deconstructed*.

Notes on Derrida for Rowan

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[NOTE: When my son Rowan was at Oxford, he had to study Derrida for his literature course. Since—understandably—he found it gobbledegook, I wrote the following digest for him].

Derrida derives heavily from Edmund Husserl, whose aim was to place philosophy on a "truly scientific" basis. The trouble with philosophy—as compared to science—is that science deals with facts, whereas in philosophy you haven't got any "facts." You can start where you like: matter, spirit, free will, chance, necessity, anywhere. So Husserl said: "Ok, let's try to have a truly scientific philosophy, a philosophy without prejudice. Earlier philosophers were like painters, painting pictures of the way they saw the universe. Like Christopher Isherwood, I want to be a camera, taking unprejudiced pictures of what is there. So if you ask me about free will, I don't start off with religious generalisations. Instead, I start by trying to *describe* precisely what it feels like to exercise free will, and I go on from there, *trying to stick to the facts*." (His method of "photographing" is called "bracketing" or the *époché*.) In other words, Husserl is trying to "deconstruct" our inbuilt prejudices, or what he calls "the natural standpoint"—just as Copernicus "deconstructed" our "natural" prejudice that the sun goes round the earth.

Derrida doesn't object to Husserl's aims. He just claims that Husserl doesn't go far enough in deconstruction. Husserl, for example, believed firmly that we have a "soul" (although he used Kant's term, the "transcendental ego"), the ego *behind* consciousness, the archer who fires the arrow of perception. He believed that there is an underlying truth behind the universe (Bertrand Russell said philosophy is the attempt to understand the universe), and that if we are "scientific" enough, we can begin to grasp this truth. Geometry, he said, is a model of this kind of "indubitable" (or apodictic) truth, and there is no earthly reason why we shouldn't have the same kind of apodictic knowledge of all the basic problems: free will, reality

("how far is what our senses tell us true?"), consciousness, etc. For him, philosophy is just another name for truth.

Derrida disliked this aspect of Husserl (just as Sartre—who strongly influenced him—did). He claimed he was going to be even more "scientific" (or "phenomenological") than Husserl. And one of his main (and central) criticisms concerns Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. Husserl said that we have two distinct ways of grasping meaning, and he called these "retention" and "reproduction." Retention is the *immediate* grasping of meaning in the present moment; if someone shouts "Bugger off" at you, you don't have to get out a dictionary to realize that he is suggesting you go away. On the other hand, if you try to tell someone about a moving experience you had yesterday, you have to fish around in your memory, and *piece* it together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Derrida denies that there is any such difference. He might point out that in order to grasp the meaning of these words, you have to pay careful attention, and remember what I said in the last paragraph, etc. You "put it together." And "Bugger off" requires the same "reconstruction" of meaning. It isn't a spontaneous flash of meaning, like a flash of lightning.

I would reply: Yes, talking like this—in an abstract manner—is a special case. You *do* have to add the pieces together, like a jigsaw puzzle, and that helps to conceal the much more spontaneous meaning-grasping activity, the *insight*, the lightning flash. But you can't *reduce* "lightning flash" meaning to jigsaw puzzle meaning. They are quite different modes. A baby grasps its mother's face by a "lightning flash" (a "gestalt"), not by noticing that she has a different shaped nose and ears from his elder sister.

All this takes us back to the arch-sceptic David Hume, who came close to wrecking philosophy and leaving it high and dry. But the real trouble began with Descartes, whose method of "getting at truth" was to doubt everything, and to say that anything that can't be doubted ("I exist") must be true. Berkeley doubted that what our senses tell us is true, and concluded that the external world *could* be a creation of our own minds. Hume went one further. First of all, he even doubted his own existence. He said that when he looked inside himself, he didn't see a "real David Hume," but just a lot of feelings

and impressions. There is no "essential you." "You" are literally held together by things that happen to you.

Second, Hume went even further than Locke or Berkeley by doubting causality. An effect *follows* a cause, so we assume that they are, so to speak, welded together in the universal scheme of things. In fact, perhaps God is pulling our legs, and a kettle ought to freeze when you put it on the fire.... Causality, like the rest of our "certain knowledge," is thrown into doubt.

This threw philosophy into total confusion. Kant tried to save it by insisting that our "world" is entirely a mental construct, in which our minds create even space and time. But that isn't any cause for gloom. It only proves that our minds are godlike, and that our first step towards "understanding reality" is to study our own godlike powers. (This is a very crude exposition of Kant—for a better one, see my chapter "The Strange Story of Modern Philosophy" in *Beyond the Outsider*.) But Kant's view—that the ultimate reality "out there" is unknowable (the "Ding-an-sich," the "thing-in-itself") was almost as bad as Hume's doubt, and caused much gloom and despair among German romantics—one of them, Kleist, even committed suicide....

The real solution to Hume's scepticism was produced by Alfred North Whitehead. He pointed out (in a book called *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*) that we do not have just one "mode of perception" but two. One is "immediacy perception," our moment-to-moment perception of the outer world, which is like a series of snapshots, and has to be "put together" like a jigsaw, just as Hume says. But the other kind is "meaning perception"—like a baby recognizing its mother's face. In fact, Whitehead called these two modes "presentational immediacy" and "causal efficacy." The latter was a sideswipe at Hume. He said that if you hear the words United States you don't add together "united" and "states" and say "Ah yes, America." They are, in effect, one word, which you grasp like a flash of lightning. Of course, a foreigner who understood English very poorly might have to think for a moment, "add them together" and say "Ah yes, America!" And Derrida would insist that we all do this, only so quickly that we don't notice the "adding together" process. Whitehead, like Husserl, would disagree. (You can see that Whitehead is making exactly the same point as Husserl:

"presentational immediacy" is Husserl's "reproduction" while "causal efficacy" is Husserl's "retention.") And, as you can see, this disagreement is fundamental. If you accept Derrida's "deconstruction" of Husserl, you are back with David Hume, and his view that there is no "real you," that consciousness is a mere association of ideas, etc. (This led to a psychology called "associationist" psychology, which in turn led to a view—held by Mill—that "truth is merely psychological"—known as psychologism, the view Husserl set out to destroy.)

In a basic sense, there are only two basic attitudes in philosophy. It is like a billiard table with only two pockets, and you have to end up in one or the other. You could call them "tough-minded" and "tender-minded" as William James did. Or you could speak about idealism and materialism, existentialism and positivism, absolutism and relativism—or simply science and mysticism. These are all different versions of the "two pockets." Derrida has landed in the Humean pocket. (As Sartre did; he also denied that there was a "transcendental ego," declaring that consciousness is "pulled" by the world as the tides are pulled by the moon, not "fired" at it by an invisible archer.)

Derrida has one more basic criticism of Husserl. In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl distinguishes two kinds of meaning: expression and indication. Expression is something you say (as it were) with feeling. On the other hand, the meaning of a flag, or a brand name on a tin of beans, is merely an "indicator." It doesn't express anything (like me saying "Ouch!" when I sit on a pin, does).

Again, Derrida "deconstructs" this opposition. And his reasons for doing so go to the heart of his "philosophy." He says that we make a naive assumption that when we speak, we are "expressing" ourselves—language expresses the soul, so to speak (so you can "pour out your heart"). But language, he claims, has an *inbuilt ambiguity*. Words mean different things in different contexts; they don't have some absolute meaning. And, according to Saussure, language operates on "difference." The simplest way to understand this is to think of music. You feel that music "means" something, yet you couldn't say exactly what. You couldn't go and look up the meaning of the notes in a dictionary. Think of some phrase of music

that strikes you as "meaningful"—say the opening four notes of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. Its "meaning" lies in the *relation of the notes to one another*. The basic "unit" of meaning is the difference between just two notes. (Seen most obviously, for example, in a fanfare—like the one in Strauss's *Don Juan*—which "soars" from a low note to a high one and produces a sense of excitement.) Language, according to Derrida, is a bit like the surface of the sea. No waves are permanent; they move continually. The "naive" theory of meaning sees language as a huge mirror reflecting reality. (Think of some vast plate glass window reflecting the whole street in front of it.) For Derrida, language is more like a tree, each of whose individual leaves is a small mirror. But they are all at different angles, and are blowing in the wind; they can't give you a big, reliable picture of reality. And this, according to Derrida, is why philosophy is impossible. Unlike mathematicians, philosophers don't have a common language and common presuppositions. (Heidegger has a piece in *Being and Time* about the ten or so meanings of the word "logos"; in order to speak of "logos" without ambiguity, you would need to have a dictionary with "logos 1," "logos 2," up to "logos 10." And every other key word would need a similar list. But even that wouldn't guarantee non-ambiguity, because words would still be influenced by context.) So one philosopher can't really "answer" another philosopher. They are not even speaking the same language. There are millions of tiny differences of emphasis and presupposition that make non-ambiguity impossible.

This is equally true where literary texts are concerned. They are even more like symphonies, whose meaning can never be "pinned down." So according to Derrida (who derived it from Barthes), "ambiguity" is an essential part of the very nature of literature, and "criticism" is not an attempt to get at "what the author meant" in a work. The author himself couldn't have said what he meant in so many words, or he wouldn't have written the book. So the critic certainly can't. He can only regard himself as a kind of jazz improviser, playing his own version of the "tune" of the author. This view became understandably popular with critics, who enjoyed the thought that they were jazz improvisers rather than academic hacks trying to be faithful to the text.

Another of his basic themes is an attack on what he calls "presence." This is derived from a Marxist critic called Althusser, who attacks the view that the thinker has some kind of direct intuition of reality. The naive view, says Althusser, is that thought encounters reality, and sets out to uncover its essence. But according to Althusser, knowledge is not "vision" but a kind of "production" like a spider spinning a web out of its own bowels. (Marx, of course, would say that the kind of "knowledge" expressed by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* is actually a "production" of the economic realities of his society.) This notion of the simple "presence" of truth or reality must be replaced by a more complex insight into the "differential" nature of language.

In other words, Derrida is saying: it is all much more complicated than you thought. You naively thought that the great writers and philosophers were, like the great scientists or mathematicians, all speaking the same language, all dealing with the same world, all reflecting (with small differences of emphasis) the same truths. In fact, the differences are vast; they form unbridgeable chasms....

It seems to me that Derrida is overdoing the "complications." All writers know about the ambiguity of language: Eliot says "Words slide, slip, crack under the strain." But "linguistic slippage" isn't really cause for a kind of defeatism (which is what Derrida's "philosophy" basically *is*).

All this structure is built on Derrida's "deconstruction" of Husserl. I have shown that he is simply mistaken about retention and reproduction. The same goes for expression and indication. Words are not really like notes of music; they differ in one basic respect: that they do have "dictionary meanings." You couldn't get anywhere trying to explain "what" is communicated by music (or why, for example, Beethoven strikes most of us as "music" while Boulez doesn't). But since a word *does* have that basic foundation of "dictionary meaning," its "ambiguity" isn't really all that serious. We often have a basic "intuitive" understanding of what someone means even when he is expressing himself badly. And this is because, as Whitehead says, we have "meaning perception" apart from "immediacy perception."

This means in turn that demonstrations of the "impossibility of philosophy," like Derrida's and Rorty's, should not be allowed to depress us too much. In fact, Rorty ends, like Derrida, by contradicting himself. He says: "Let us get rid of the idea of philosophy as a search for truth, and accept that a work of philosophy is more like a symphony or a poem. The purpose of philosophy is *bildung* ("education" in the sense used by Goethe—learning about life). It is the enrichment of consciousness..." etc. But what does education aim at except truth? For example: I may have a highly romanticised idea of actors; then I go to work as a stage manager, and get a more accurate and realistic picture. My idea of actors is now closer to the truth. When you "learn" something, it is (we hope) true, and that is what learning means. If you claimed that you had "learned" that lying is better than telling the truth, that cruelty is better than kindness, most of us would feel we have a right to reply that you can't really have "learned" that, any more than you could have learned that one and one makes three.

I suspect that the solution, where Derrida and Rorty are concerned, is simple. Neither are original thinkers; they have nothing much to say. But they are very acute critics—like G. E. Moore or (more recently) Ernest Gellner. Moore said he would never have thought about philosophical questions if he hadn't heard other people talking about them, and started criticising what they had to say. Nietzsche is another brilliant critic (or "deconstructor" of ideals), which is why Derrida admires him so much. But if you had said to Nietzsche: "All this criticism of other people—from Socrates to Kant and Wagner—is all very well, but where do you stand?," he would have handed you *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Heidegger is another great deconstructor—particularly of Husserl. But this is because he thinks of philosophy as a kind of "listening," an attempt to tune in to a vast reality "beyond" us. (Oddly enough, he has this in common with Bertrand Russell and with the Aldous Huxley of *Doors of Perception*.) In other words, he feels that philosophy is a kind of "negative capability" (Keats's words about poetry), and is objecting to Husserl as any poet might object to any scientist—for example, William Blake to Newton ("May God us keep/From single vision and Newton's sleep.").

Derrida's objection to philosophy is not in the name of poetry, but of the "inbuilt ambiguity of language." It is not dissimilar to Kierkegaard's objection to Hegel: that as soon as you begin trying to construct vast philosophical systems—the equivalent of Newton's *Principia*, as it were—you lose touch with the complexity (and ambiguity) of living experience. And if you want to stay in touch with the truth of moment-to-moment experience, you can't really go in for philosophical system-building. "An existential system is impossible," said Kierkegaard. To which anyone who wants to express his philosophical insights in words can only reply: "It's bloody well *got* to be." Whitehead came closer to the truth of the matter when he defined philosophy as "an attempt to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted," then goes on to say "experience drunk and experience sober, experience sleeping and experience waking, experience drowsy and experience wide awake, experience intellectual and experience religious…," and so on for a dozen lines (*Modes of Thought*).

What Derrida is really doing is a useful bit of finger-wagging. "Don't think it's as easy as it looks." In the same vein, Eliot once said: "The spirit killeth but the letter giveth life." But then, Eliot didn't *quite* mean that; he was saying it *in reaction* against the sort of people who waffle on about Spirit and Truth. If Derrida is taken in the same spirit—of criticism of starry-eyed idealists like Rousseau—then what he is saying is bracing and salutary. Take it too far—as so many idiot "deconstructionalists" now do—and it becomes an excuse for not even trying to think creatively. Russell approved of Gellner's attack on the Oxford linguistic philosophers, and of Gellner's comment that linguistic philosophy "has an inverted vision which treats genuine thought as a disease and dead thought as a paradigm of health." "Deconstruction" has come to mean much the same kind of thing—a new and clever way of refusing to focus on major questions, and insisting that we had better concentrate on the minutiae. It has become associated with a shallow and smart kind of scepticism. (Salman Rushdie carefully dropped various "buzz words" like "deconstruction" and "text" into his ICA address defending his amusing, but basically silly and shallow *Satanic Verses*.)

The comment from Eliot also underlines what is wrong with Derrida's position. To say "he didn't really mean it" seems to be playing into Derrida's hands—language is "difference" through and through, and can't "mean" anything unambiguously. Similarly, Nietzsche once said: "The will to war is a greater will than the will to peace." But if Bismarck had tried to use that as a justification of his militarism, Nietzsche would have winced. He didn't *quite* mean it that way. Another point for Derrida, apparently.

But you could say to Eliot or Nietzsche: "Come on, that isn't quite what you mean, is it? Take a deep breath and explain yourself further." And they could have done so. It might take a page, or a dozen pages, or even a large book, to explain *precisely*, but it could be done. If we accept that we can clarify *anything*, then we have also accepted that it could be made finally "unambiguous."

If *this* is what Derrida is saying—that meaning needs to be "refined"—then he is stating a commonplace. If he is arguing that the inbuilt ambiguity of language means that it can never be pinned down, then he is merely siding with various other sceptics and relativists, and needs be taken no more seriously than they are. (Even Kierkegaard couldn't really have believed that "an existential system is impossible" or he wouldn't have bothered to *say* it—merely to say a thing is to turn it into a concept, which is where "systems" begin.) There are only two pockets on the billiard table of philosophy, and Derrida has undoubtedly landed us back in the one labeled "David Hume."

MICHEL FOUCAULT

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Michel Foucault became famous on May 29, 1966, when the French newspaper *L'Express* came out with a headline: THE GREATEST REVOLUTION SINCE EXISTENTIALISM, above an enormous photograph of the author. The result was that Foucault's latest book, *Les Mots et les choses* (translated as *The Order of Things*) became an instant bestseller. And within a few weeks, Foucault had accomplished what he had dreamed about for years: toppling Sartre from his intellectual pedestal and taking his place. And although few people understood what he was talking about, his immense erudition, presented with an obscurity so typical of modern French philosophers, maintained him in that position until his death—from AIDS—in June 1986.

The Order of Things was not Foucault's first book. This was a large work called *Madness and Civilization* (*Folie et déraison*) in 1961, which had been received with a mixture of respect and bafflement, as well as a historical study, *Birth of the Clinic* (1963).

Precisely what he was suggesting in *Madness and Civilization* was not at all clear. The argument went something like this. In the Middle Ages, the leper was an outcast, regarded with revulsion and horror. According to Foucault, he therefore served a useful purpose, allowing the rest of society to feel healthy, virtuous, and lucky at his expense; the most poverty-stricken wretch could look at the leper, with his distorted limbs and ravaged features, and think "Thank God I'm normal." The leper—as Foucault puts it—served as "the Other."

By the Renaissance the incidence of leprosy had diminished; but during this period Columbus's sailors brought back venereal disease from the New World, and the syphilitic replaced the leper as society's scapegoat; so "normal" people still had someone they could look down on as "the Other."

By the middle of the 1600s, plague and warfare had brought widespread poverty to Europe. The poor and destitute became the new outcasts. The French (on whom Foucault concentrates) began to build workhouses, and vast numbers of beggars and madmen were consigned to these "hospitals." In effect these were prisons, and those who were confined in them were condemned to hopelessness, filth, and stagnation. Many who were sane when they were locked up soon joined the ranks of the insane.

The declared intention of these workhouses was to help the poor; the real intention, according to Foucault, was to neutralise the threat to society posed by crime, misery, and resentment.

And now we come to the essential step in Foucault's argument. It was during this period that René Descartes laid the foundation of modern philosophy by inventing the method of "radical doubt"—doubting everything that *can* be doubted, so that what is left over is beyond contradiction. Descartes created a philosophy of pure reason. And although he remained a good Catholic, and insisted that Reason proved the existence of God, he had, in effect, struck the most telling blow so far against organised religion. After Descartes, the ultimate court of appeal was not God or the pope or the king, but the power of Reason. And when, a century later, the workhouse gave way to the insane asylum, the madman was firmly in his new role as the scapegoat, the social outcast. In effect, the mad victims of the Age of Reason; they were locked up in asylums and forced into a mould of docile conformism. According to Foucault, the modern age has turned its back on the "truth" of the experience of madness.

The argument is so intricate and complex that it is hard to see precisely what Foucault is driving at. Later, R. D. Laing and the "anti-psychiatry" school hailed him as a kind of founder member. But Laing was arguing that madness is not a disease, but a more-or-less sane reaction to an insane world. Influenced—as he admitted—by my own book *The Outsider*, Laing saw the madman as an

outsider figure, overwhelmed by a sick society. Foucault never states his thesis as clearly as this. What does emerge is that he sees modern society as a version of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with everyone forced into conformity by Big Brother. Unlike Laing, he does not seem to be suggesting some new clinical approach to "insanity". But he has a great deal to say about the Marquis de Sade as a figure of rebellion, shaking his fist at God and authority. Throughout his life, Foucault seemed to experience a strong identification with de Sade.

Although *The Order of Things* claims to be a sequel to *Madness and Civilization*, it can be most easily understood as an attack on Sartre. According to Sartre, man is basically free, and should use his freedom to try and improve the world he lives in. Although there is no God and no moral law, man should "commit" himself, either to political change, or to some "project' that will increase man's sense of freedom—like Flaubert's commitment to the art of writing.

Now according to Foucault—and his colleague Jacques Derrida—this is absurdly optimistic. Like Freud, they feel that man is in the grip of immense unconscious forces which he cannot escape. Derrida believes that the most important of these forces is language, the invisible net that entraps every thinker. But in *The Order of Things*, Foucault has another suggestion. History, like the weather, is shaped by hidden forces, and while individual thinkers may feel that they are free to shape their own ideas, they are—in fact—incapable of escaping the spirit of the age, the *Zeitgeist*. Foucault claims that, as he studies individual epochs, he can perceive this spirit that shapes the ideas and beliefs of the period. He calls these periods "*épistèmes*."

Disentangled from Foucault's incredible obscurity—next to Derrida he is the obscurest of modern French writers—it can be seen that this basic idea is pure Marxism. Marx argued that, while philosophers and theologians believe they are expressing basic insights into the nature of reality or God, they are merely reflecting the ideology of the ruling class of the time. Aquinas and Hegel can both be used by the rulers to keep the common people in their place. Foucault is slightly more subtle. An "*épistème*" is not merely a reflection of the ideas of the ruling class; it is shaped by the forces

of history, as the geology of a mountain range is shaped by the forces of the earth. So there is a sense in which all the revolutionary thinkers—Descartes, Hegel, Darwin, Marx—*had* to say what they actually said. Marx thought he was up above history, but he was entrapped in it like everyone else, "like a fish in water." (Here Foucault is cocking a snook at Sartre, who believed that Marxism is the only ultimate philosophy.)

The brilliance of *The Order of Things* lies in its subtle analysis of various "*épistèmes*" or periods; the reader is overawed by Foucault's apparent omniscience. Yet it is still possible to feel that the book is at once too subtle and too obvious. The subtlety is self-evident, and led one critic to compare him to a Jesuit. But it is also obvious in the sense that we all instinctively recognize "*épistèmes*." We can see that it would have been impossible for Bach to have written like Mozart, or Mozart like Wagner. They were all "trapped" in their period. The fact remains that they all wrote works of genius, and works of considerably less than genius. And we recognize the works of genius as works in which, in some wholly unexplainable manner, they somehow exercised more "freedom" than in their less inspired works. If this applies to composers, then it must also apply to philosophers—which seems to contradict Foucault's thesis that they *have* to say what the age dictates. And even if Foucault was willing to agree that some works can contain more "freedom" than others, his argument still reduces to the truism that no man of genius can escape his own age. For all its immense subtlety, the underlying argument of *The Order Of Things* is curiously simple and crude.

There is another obvious objection. If thinkers "swim" in their age like a fish in water, how has Foucault succeeded in climbing out of the water? By what right does he condemn Marx for being an unconscious puppet of his age, then insist that he alone has discovered the key to history?

In fact, Foucault's position becomes steadily more Marxian in succeeding books. The hints of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Big Brother become steadily stronger. His basic obsession was the "will to power" exercised by society over its individual members. His next major book, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), is about the forms of punishment that society inflicts on its rebels. Beginning with a

horrific account of the execution of Damiens, torn into pieces for trying to assassinate Louis XV, Foucault goes on to offer a history of punishment that has much in common with his history of madness. The book reaches a kind of climax in his description of the "panopticon" of Jeremy Bentham, a ring-shaped prison with a tower in the center, from which the guards could keep perpetual watch on the prisoners in their cells—the ultimately "rational" prison, in which men are reduced to mere cogs in a gigantic clockwork machine—the nightmare of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. At the time he wrote it, Foucault had been involved for some years in the students' revolutionary movement, which started with the Paris uprising of 1968. Naturally, the book had appeal to left-wing intellectuals, the same audience that was enthusiastic about Chomsky's denunciations of American involvement in Vietnam. But prison reformers felt that the book lacked practical application.

The chief resemblance to *Madness and Civilization* lies in its unexpected attitude towards humanitarianism. In earlier works, like Gregory Zilboorg's *History of Medical Psychology*, psychiatric pioneers like William Tuke and Philippe Pinel are seen as "the good guys," rescuing psychiatry from mediaeval barbarism. Foucault seems to regard them as power maniacs who want to impose the "calm world of traditional values" on the tormented world of the insane, which he greatly prefers. In *Discipline and Punish,* it is the prison reformers who are somehow cast in the role of villains, and the criminals who seem to emerge as the heroes. It is as if Foucault has a deep hostility to all the values of the "Enlightenment."

This leaves most readers scratching their heads. It is not simply that Foucault's ideas are difficult to grasp; it is that they seem to cancel one another out. He dismisses Marx; yet his "hidden *épistèmes*," which control us all like puppets, are pure Marx. He jeers at revolutionary philosophies, then allies himself with the Paris students. He is clearly a rebel, yet he puts forward no positive ideas to replace the ones he seems to dislike. In a sense, he seems to be an old fashioned anarchist, who believes that change has to start from the individual. In another sense, his closest literary relative is D. H. Lawrence, with his hatred of "merely rational" philosophers like Bertrand Russell, and his emphasis on the dark world of instinct and sexuality.

One thing was certain: that Foucault had achieved his aim of replacing Sartre as the best-known French intellectual. His lectures in Paris were always jammed. When, in 1980, he lectured at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, police had to be called in to restrain the huge crowds. Yet his published writings gave the unmistakable impression that he was running out of steam. Friends reported him as saying that he thought of abandoning writing.

In June 1984, Foucault fainted in his Paris apartment. This was the onset of the AIDS that would confine him in hospital for the last two years of his life. When he died on June 25, 1986, the obituaries were lengthy and respectful. But one paragraph in *Libération* struck a jarring note, denouncing the rumor that Foucault had died of AIDS, and adding, "As if it were necessary for Foucault to have died in shame." The suggestion that AIDS was shameful aroused violent protest, and added a touch of scandal to the mourning. One writer, Pierre Bordieu, restated what was now a general suspicion when he wrote: "Foucault's work is a long exploration of transgression, of going beyond social limits, always linked to knowledge and power."

The full truth about Foucault would emerge only in 1993, in James Miller's biography *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, a brilliant book that probably ranks among the best philosophical biographies ever written. Miller begins by addressing the rumour that Foucault suspected he had AIDS, and nevertheless continued to live a fairly promiscuous sex life; on the whole, Miller is inclined to doubt it. But what he makes quite clear is that Foucault's sado-masochistic sexuality is the key to his work. An earlier biographer, Didier Erebon, describes the difficulties of being homosexual in the forties and fifties, and says that Foucault's fellow students recalled him as being "balanced on a tightrope between sanity and madness." In 1948, at the age of twenty-two, he made a first suicide attempt, which Erebon attributes to distress over his homosexuality. But if this was Foucault's only sexual problem, it would hardly have warranted a suicide attempt; since the 1920s, most cultured people had accepted that homosexuality is hardly a matter for shame. What seems to have distressed Foucault is that he was strongly drawn to inflicting and receiving pain. This explains his

life-long interest in de Sade, and in the work of Georges Bataille, a writer whose work hovers between Nietzschean rebellion and sadistic pornography. Bataille once jeered at the modern admirers of de Sade who were afraid to put de Sade's ideas of torture into practice, and he once seriously planned a ritual murder, which was postponed by the outbreak of World War Two.

Miller reveals that it was in 1975 that Foucault first visited San Francisco, and discovered the gay sado-masochism (S/M) scene in Folsom Street, with its endless fantasy environments—dungeons and cells with whips, chains, spiked bracelets, all enhanced by drugs, and full of leather-clad men in dark glasses. After publication of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault would tell an interviewer about a young man who came from California to announce: "Erections are out." What he meant was that one of the favourite forms of sex was "fist-fucking," in which a greased fist is inserted into the anal passage—with infinite caution—and moved about, neither participant—usually—experiencing an erection.

Miller also reveals that what most fascinated Foucault was the concept of "sex with the stranger"—the notion of entering a dark room and sodomising—or being sodomised by—someone whose face was invisible. This, it seemed to him, was the very essence of sexuality.

Foucault's admirers would certainly object to the simplistic notion that his work can be explained in terms of his sado-masochism, and they would be right in the sense that the chief pleasure in reading Foucault lies in his exploration of obscure by-ways of knowledge. Yet it cannot be denied that, once we know about his sado-masochistic obsession, his work suddenly ceases to be obscure (except stylistically) and becomes as clear as crystal.

One of the earliest and most powerful influences on Foucault was Nietzsche, with his emphasis on the sudden Dionysian ecstasy. One of Nietzsche's major formative experiences occurred when he was a student, oppressed by the emotional problems of adolescence. During the onset of a storm, Nietzsche took shelter in a shepherd's hut, where kids were being killed. The sight would normally have revolted him, but as "the storm broke with a tremendous crash, discharging thunder and hail.... I had an indescribable feeling of well-being and zest.... Lightning and tempests are different worlds,

free powers, without morality. Pure Will, without the confusions of intellect—how happy how free."

Again, when he was a hospital orderly during the Franco-Prussian war, returning home exhausted after a day in the field hospital, he stood back against a wall to allow his old cavalry regiment to ride past. Once again he was over-whelmed by a feeling of sheer joy, and a conviction that "the strongest and highest will to life does not lie in the puny struggle to exist, but in the Will to war, the Will to Power."

It was experiences like these that led Nietzsche to feel that Christianity was a religion based on the exaltation of sickness and weakness. In books like *The Genealogy of Morals*, he makes a dangerous distinction between "master and slave morality," or between the "knightly-aristocratic morality," which he admires, and the "priestly morality," which he deplores. And while it is true that Nietzsche detested Prussian militarism and Anti-Semites like his brother-in-law, it is also true that his views on master and slave morality have inspired many varieties of political extremism, from Nazism to modern racist ideologies. The same outlook led him to express admiration for Cesare Borgia's murders of political rivals.

From the time he read Nietzsche's *Thoughts Out of Season*—at the age of twenty-seven—Foucault regarded himself as a Nietzschean—although he usually confined himself to enigmatic utterances about his admiration for Nietzsche without spelling out what he meant. To explain precisely what he meant—to say: "I am a homosexual sado-masochist, and I regard it as extremely unfair that society should regard my tastes as perverse"—would have been to place himself in the same vulnerable position as writers like de Sade, Bataille, and Genet. Besides, he was not a dramatist or a writer of fiction; he was by temperament an academic. So his works are basically a defense of social outcasts and an attack on authority, disguised as "discourses" (his favourite word) on madness, crime, and sexuality.

The problem with this type of writing—personal conviction disguised as logical argument—is that it makes an impression of special pleading. The professorial urbanity fails to disguise the underlying self-pity. All this enables us to understand why books like *Madness and Civilization*, *The Order of Things*, and *Discipline*

and Punish never quite seem to make sense. They never say what they mean: only hint at it. Is Foucault saying that the mad would be better off if they lived outside city walls? Or that modern psychiatry should be abandoned in favour of strait jackets? Or that criminals would have more self-respect if we kept them in mediaeval dungeons rather than open prisons? Whenever challenged on matters like these, Foucault would explain that his point was far more subtle and complex, and slip into abstract philosophical jargon.

In one of the most interesting chapters of his biography, James Miller speaks of the enormous impact made on the young Foucault by *Waiting for Godot*. In 1953, French intellectual life was overshadowed by the immense figure of Sartre, and by his conviction that serious intellectuals ought to be "committed" to some political aim, preferably revolutionary. Foucault was too entangled in his own dark emotions to take an interest in politics. This is why *Waiting for Godot* struck him as a revelation. Beckett's play declares that life is meaningless—not in Sartre's sense that there is no God, but in the sense that all human striving is blatantly absurd. In this empty and tragic universe, any kind of commitment would be a bad joke. Beckett's two tramps wait indefinitely for something that will never happen. Says Miller: "The world of *Godot* is a world where the very idea of freedom and responsibility have been dramatically emptied of any moral significance."

Godot gave Foucault the license to feel that all the talk about politics and commitment could be ignored. He could forget it with a clear conscience, and focus on his own inner torments.

Unfortunately, his inner torments offered him no kind of solution, either to the problem of how to live his own life, or how to dethrone Sartre as the leading French intellectual. It was the fashionable new science of structural linguistics that showed him the way. Its prophet was a long-dead Swiss professor, Ferdinand de Saussure, whose work had been published posthumously. Its argument, crudely summarized, is this: our natural assumption is that a word has a fixed meaning, defined by a dictionary, and that when we speak, we are reflecting an underlying world of meanings. Saussure pointed out that words continually change their meanings according to their context, (i.e., "He is trying," "He is very trying"),

so that they are in a continual state of flux, like waves on the sea. In fact, Saussure never denied that the basic meaning of words is defined by the dictionary. But a generation of French intellectuals, intoxicated by this notion that language is a realm in itself—like the sea—found freedom and release from the "troubles and perplexities of intellect" in plunging into the waves. Miller says: "In the mind of some, it was as if the discoveries of modern science had vindicated the nihilist slogan: Nothing is true, anything is permitted." And he quotes Edward Said as saying that the study of language became "an aesthetic activity, a release, so to speak, from the tyranny of time and history." Saussure seemed to reinforce the message of Beckett. But he also offered a method of bringing order into the chaos. It was known as Structuralism. Language has hidden underlying structures: grammar, syntax, and so on. So, according to the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, has society. So, according to the psychoanalytic philosopher Jacques Lacan, has the unconscious mind. So, according to the critic Roland Barthes, has literary composition.

And so, added Foucault, has history. It is not a continuous unbroken flow, like a river, but a series of small whirlpools called "*épistèmes*"; and philosophers who believe that they are driven by a Will to Truth are really leaves caught in the whirlpool, as incapable of influencing history as Beckett's tramps….

His theory of history made him famous, and achieved his aim of making him Sartre's chief rival. Unfortunately, the basic nihilism of his position meant that it was incapable of any real development. So any reader who has the stamina to read through the major works: *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, *Discipline and Punish*, and the unfinished *History of Sexuality*, has a sense of listening to someone who has forgotten what he started out to say, and goes on talking while he waits for it to come back to him. Some of his most famous pronouncements, such as "Man is a recent invention—and perhaps one nearing its end," turn out, on closer examination, to be meaningless, except as a deliberate echo of Sartre's "Man is a useless passion."

In his last major work, *The History of Sexuality*, he poses the question: why does sex strike us as a *moral* concern?

Why, for example, do we not associate "forbiddenness" with eating, or the performance of our civic duties? He then ignores the obvious reply: because sex involves the "invasion" of another person, and therefore contains an element of "forbiddenness," and instead offers three volumes of analysis of classical antiquity that fail to shed any real light on the question. The fact that he abandoned the project long before it was complete suggests that he felt that his *magnum opus* was losing its way.

In fact, the reason becomes clear in the second volume, *The Use of Pleasure*. So far, Foucault's work has been basically "reductionist"; he has always been contemptuous of such ideas as truth, morality, and reason, declaring that they are merely an expression of the will-to-power, an excuse for society to discipline its outcasts and rebels. In Foucault, the word "discipline" always carries the implication of tyranny—his hero seems to be the rebel shaking his fist at authority.

Now where sex is concerned, this would seem to justify an attitude of free-wheeling promiscuity, of "do what you will." But when Foucault comes to consider the uses of pleasure in ancient Greece and Rome, he has to admit that there is a great deal to be said for the idea of self-discipline, and that a person who lacks self-discipline lacks freedom. But if you admit that freedom depends on self-discipline, then what happens to the view that discipline is another name for tyranny? Of course, we can insist that self-discipline is quite different from discipline imposed from above. The fact remains that if any kind of discipline is commendable, then rebels are not wholly in the right, nor tyrants wholly in the wrong. In effect, Foucault was undermining the position he had taken since the *History of Madness*—the whole long diatribe against power and authority. He must have recognized that, for all his intellectual subtlety, there was no way of disguising the fact that he was beginning to contradict himself. The game of intellectual hide-and-seek was coming to an end.

To summarize: Foucault's books are immensely subtle, immensely erudite. But once we possess the key to the puzzle, nothing can disguise the fact that they have nothing to say, and that a writer who tries to deceive his readers in this way is less an

intellectual than an intellectual con-man—in fact, that he is, in his way, as much a charlatan messiah as David Koresh.

In fact, Foucault furnishes an interesting insight into the psychology of messiahs, particularly into one of its most interesting aspects: the obsession with sexual promiscuity.

As already noted, the male sexual appetite tends to be omnivorous, in that virtually any woman can be seen as a desirable sex object, quite apart from her individual characteristics as a person. It would be missing the point to condemn this as mere hyper-sexuality, for it is basically the appetite of all healthy human beings for experience that will facilitate their personal growth—what Nietzsche meant when he spoke of "How one becomes what one is." In that sense it is as natural as the slum child's longing for ice cream and trips to the seaside.

But where male sexuality is concerned, the appetite tends to overreach itself—as we can see clearly in the case of David Koresh. By assuring his followers that God wanted him to give his seed to their teenage daughters, he found a way of realising his daydream of a harem of underage girls.

What happened next is an interesting lesson. The daydream he was trying to put into practice was one in which he was a kind of ultimate dictator, to whom every girl in the world was available. His dream was the same as that of Foucault: "sex with the stranger." A dozen or so mistresses was only a drop in the bucket. So he announced—in his sixteen-hour sermon—that all the women in the compound were his by right, after which he proceeded to put his decree into practice. Yet far from satisfying his craving for power, this only made it more intense and violent; from being an intellectual con-man he began to turn into something like a homicidal maniac.

In a sense, this was inevitable; he was like a child who fails to realize that too much of anything makes you sick. In his case, the problem was compounded by his lack of self-control, the fits of screaming rage whenever anyone contradicted him—as Marc Breault occasionally dared to. He was on a collision course with reality, and the final holocaust was inevitable.

Like Koresh, Foucault was equally obsessed by the problem of "how one becomes what one is." Where he differed from Koresh

was that the desires he experienced could not be "socialised," any more than the daydreams of a serial killer. He could express his dislike of the social establishment, but he could never—like Karl Marx—express a vision of an alternative establishment, a society in which rape and flogging and "sex with the stranger" would be the "norm."

In practice, Foucault was just as determined as Koresh to find "a place in the sun." Yet in theory he seems to reject the idea; from *Madness and Civilization* to *Discipline and Punish*, he scorns authority and identifies with the outcast.

The fantasy world of Folsom Street, with its drugs, S/M, and motorcycle gear, changed all that. It came as such a pleasant shock because he had never believed it might be possible to act out his daydreams, even in a toned-down version. In the past, Foucault had often remarked that he regarded himself as a writer of fiction; now the fiction paled before reality, and his literary drive began to evaporate. It is significant that his major theme up to this point has been repression. Readers of *The History of Sexuality* undoubtedly expected him to continue in the same vein; instead, he begins by denouncing the Reichian notion that the modern world suffers from sexual repression. And from that point onward, the book meanders to a premature close. (It was originally intended as at least six volumes; it ends after three.)

In other words, what Foucault experienced after Folsom Street was a version of Koresh's disorientation when he achieved a harem.

The daydream of fantasy-fulfillment plays an important part in the lives of most people; in messiahs, it seems to achieve an explosive growth that seldom stops short of self-destruction.

EDMUND HUSSERL

Husserl and Evolution

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It must have been in the early 1960s that I went to call on Sir Julian Huxley at his house in Pond Street, Hampstead. At the time, I was working on a book called *Beyond the Outsider*—the sixth and last of my "Outsider Cycle"—and I really wanted to ask Huxley how he could be the foremost living exponent of man's future evolution, and still regard himself as a strict Darwinian. Expressed in that way, the question may not make too much sense—for after all, there's no contradiction between human evolution and Darwinism. But, as all Huxley's admirers know, he had swung from a rather narrow form of Darwinism—with the emphasis on genetic factors—to a kind of Shavian optimism about man's future as the "managing director of the universe."

Huxley's explanation was roughly this: that in the past, all evolution has been purely "mechanical," dominated by the brute need for survival; nature favoured the strong. But man has opened up a new phase in evolution. His mind wants to embrace the whole universe; *not* for survival, but from sheer delight in knowledge for its own sake. Animals are "conscious," but only of their bodies and of the immediate present; this extraordinary creature called man is distinguished by his curious desire to *escape* the present, to give his mind a free run of other times and other places—as well as of a whole world of abstractions that do not exist in time and space. This new "dimension" of consciousness has enabled him to look down on himself from above, as it were, to consider himself as a creature,

and to ask himself *how* he would like to evolve. He is, potentially at any rate, "in control."

And *how* can he control his own evolution? I wanted to know. Huxley mentioned genetic engineering. Then he said something that puzzled and excited me. "Have you ever thought about the significance of the development of art?" I found it hard to relate this to Darwinism or genetic engineering, and asked him to explain himself; but he declined to enlarge. "Think about it" was all he would say.

And, on and off, I have been thinking about it ever since.

The simplest way to approach this whole topic is to speak of the work of Edmund Husserl. This may seem to be superfluous, since there are already so many books and articles about him; but then, most "phenomenological philosophers" are seriously handicapped by their academic status, and their dry and precise evaluations are often so abstract that they can only be understood by other academics. So let me attempt a simple, straightforward statement of Husserl's aims and methods.

When a baby opens its eyes, it finds itself in a world that seems to belong to other people. It is a world full of dozens of different kinds of information, from children's comics to Open University on radio and TV. It is a world that is self-evidently real, self-evidently self-sustaining, self-evidently *meaningful.*

As the child gets older, he makes the upsetting discovery that meanings and values tend to fluctuate. A table loaded with mince pies and jellies looks marvelous just before a party; a few hours later, when he is miserably sick, it seems disgusting. He feels betrayed.

By the time he enters his teens, he makes the interesting observation that the adults do not know as much as they like to pretend. A politician sounds wonderfully knowledgeable on television; then he hears his father say that the man is a complete and utter moron. And since, by this time, he has discovered that his father is also liable to make mistakes, this seems to introduce an awful element of ambiguity into the whole universe. If he studies philosophy at High School, he makes the even more disturbing discovery that the greatest minds of the human race often regard one another as idiots.

It begins to look as if that marvellous, objective world of

Meanings "out there" no longer exists. All that is "out there" are things, objects. But meanings exist *in our heads,* and are a matter for argument and dispute. Perhaps there just isn't such a thing as truth. Perhaps human life is completely meaningless and futile.

This process is only partly intellectual. I have described it on the intellectual level to make it plainer. But something analogous happens even to very stupid people. *All of us* lose that original, childlike vision of a world packed with objective meanings. Most people live in a completely personal world of their own problems, their own emotions and sensations, just as if they had sealed themselves inside a kind of glass bubble.

Intellectually speaking, this attitude began to express itself nearly three centuries ago in the work of Locke, and reached its fullest philosophical development in Hume and Berkeley. In effect, they suggested that there may be no meaning "out there"—that it may *all* be supplied by our instincts and emotions. Keats said that beauty is truth and truth beauty—and, after all, we all know beauty is in the eye of the beholder.... By the time of Husserl—in the last decade of the nineteenth century—this attitude had become one of the basic premises of philosophy. And of psychology. There was an increasing tendency of philosophers to try to answer the basic questions of philosophy—of ethics, metaphysics, logic—by asking: "How do our *minds work* when we discuss such questions?" This became known as psychologism.

I suspect that Husserl, like Hegel, began life as a poet and a mystic rather than as a philosopher. At all events, he reacted against the whole "intellectualist" position with a return to what might be called Childhood Realism. For Husserl, the universe was the large and amazing and fascinating place that it was for Charles Dickens or G. K. Chesterton. Around 1900, Chesterton was declaring his conviction that the aesthetes and philosophers had *devalued* existence, and succeeded in making us lose sight of just how marvelous the world really is. But Chesterton was regarded as a jester—and later, as a man who had sold out to the Catholic Church. How could a philosopher assert such a view—and assert it in such a way that other philosophers would have to take him seriously? Husserl did this in two ponderous volumes of *Logical Investigations*—which appeared in the same year as Chesterton's

first book (1900)—in which he argued simply that logic cannot be explained or defined in purely psychological terms, because logical truth stands *outside* the human mind.

What Husserl wanted to do was to argue that all the other major philosophical questions—ethics, metaphysics, religion—also stand outside the human mind. But how was this to be done? At least psychologism provided a *unified* approach to all forms of knowledge, even if, in doing so, it made them all "relative." Was it possible to produce a new unifying approach—some way of placing metaphysical questions on the same level as logical questions? Husserl turned his attention to this question of method. And—unfortunately—there he stuck for the rest of his life.

But at least, his method was brilliant and original. The "psychologists" had said that all the data of consciousness are relative, so truth is also relative. Husserl simply pointed out that this is not quite true. It *is* true that my mind, my emotions, my approach to things, tends to distort the data, so I may well describe someone as ugly when what I mean is that I don't like him. Indeed, I may actually *see* him as ugly because I don't like him. But, said Husserl, there is still a level of primitive perception, before these distortions creep in. And, if I take the trouble, I can learn to distinguish between this primitive level, this purely "receptive" level of consciousness, and my later prejudices and preconceptions. (Even the word "preconception" recognizes the truth of Husserl's basic proposition: that "conceptions" can slip in there on a subconscious level, so we don't even notice them, like Kant's blue spectacles.)

Husserl produced an even more startling proposition, which can be expressed crudely thus: In order to see anything at all, you also have to *feel* about it. Ugliness, beauty, etc., are not simply an adulteration of some primitive perception; they are of the *same nature* as the perception itself. Because in order to perceive, you don't just open your eyes. You have to *cast* for the perception, like an angler casting for a fish, and then wind it in.

This instantly introduces an element of confusion. It would be marvellously simple if we could say: There are two forms of perception: (1) feelings—beauty and so on—which are "intentional" ("added" by ourselves), and (2) some primitive perception that is non-intentional. But if even "primitive perception" is intentional,

where is our simplicity? Sceptics said that Husserl had landed himself back in Berkeley's dilemma, of making "the world" so dependent on "mind" that it is impossible to draw a dividing line. And Husserl continued to circle the problem for the rest of his life, doing his best to build the foundation for his nonrelative philosophy, and never getting it completed. Understandably, he once described himself as "one who has had the misfortune to fall in love with philosophy."

I personally cannot afford to get stuck in this problem—to begin with, because if I did, this article would become as long as a book. So let me try to resolve it directly and crudely, and hope the result does not scandalize too many philosophically-trained readers. Let us try suggesting that the world "out there" *is* real, and that its "relations" constitute a network which is exactly analogous to the relations of logic or numbers—i.e., "meaning" really exists outside my mind, just as electric currents exist apart from voltmeters. My mind is no more than a rather imperfect voltmeter which occasionally manages to attach itself to reality in such a way that it succeeds in registering meanings. In order to perceive this reality at all, it has to "reach out"—or, to use my other analogy, to "plug in" to the current. Otherwise, the voltmeter lies disconnected on the table, and nothing happens. As soon as "connection" occurs, there is your "primitive perception." However, the voltmeter happens to be *me;* that is to say, it has appetites and desires and instincts, which are essential to its constitution. These are going to add another level of "intentionality" to the reading. However, let us not despair. After all, I usually know—or at least suspect—when I'm being prejudiced. So, as Husserl says, with a little effort I can learn to distinguish between primitive perception and my own later distortions. This is Husserl's *epoché*—or "act of withdrawal," or filtering, or whatever you prefer to call it. Dr. Johnson said he wanted to be a philosopher but cheerfulness kept breaking in. But in fact, this position that I have outlined is a pretty cheerful one. It supposes that the kind of world the child glimpses at Christmas is a very diluted vision of what the real world is like. And of course, Husserl himself came to recognize this increasingly, even though he never managed to justify it intellectually. (So did his one-time disciple Heidegger, which explains the odd fascination of

Heidegger's philosophy.) That is to say, Husserl recognized that the task of philosophy is not simply to separate our perception into strands and achieve the ideal *epoché,* but to recognize how far purely negative elements have entered into our perception of the universe and throw these out. We must, says Husserl (in an unpublished part of *The Crisis in European Philosophy)* study intentionality in action, and the aim is to approach Goethe's "Mothers," the "keepers of the keys of Being." And Heidegger's own philosophy is based on this intense perception of the way we devalue our experience—"forgetfulness of Existence"—and how incredible the world turns out to be when we manage to stop "forgetting" and devaluing.

I cannot pretend that my discovery of Husserl made any great difference to my own approach to philosophy; it simply made me aware that I had already been carrying out his recommendations all my life. That is to say, I have always been obsessed by the changes in the states of our consciousness, and the way these cause us to alter our view of the world from day to day. For better or worse, I was trained as a scientist; it has been in my blood since the age of ten. In effect, I have always accepted that there is a real world "out there," and that changes in my consciousness (my body, my emotions) distort this. And since I have always been interested in literature, I have also been fascinated to observe how different writers "see" the world. If an intelligent Martian were to read Dickens, Trollope, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, Tolstoy, and G. K. Chesterton, he would probably conclude that they came from six completely different planets. As a scientist, I feel a need to reconcile their different "world views" and suggest one that embraces them all. If phenomenology is the study of subjective states, then I have always been an enthusiastic phenomenologist. The entomologist studies insects, the lepidopterist studies butterflies, I study states of consciousness—my own, of course, since I have no access to anyone else's, except at second hand—and try to pin them neatly in my display cases.

I will try to summarize my basic results, which will—as will be seen—bring us squarely into the center of the topic raised by Sir Julian Huxley.

We can start with a purely physiological observation. The eye,

when it has nothing interesting to look at, tends to *lose focus.* So does the mind, as we know from experiments in sensory deprivation. In fact, you could say that the mind, left to itself, tends to *collapse in on itself.* The phenomena of hypnotism are based on this insight. First, the subject's attention is "starved" (by making him focus on something monotonous), and then the subject becomes completely suggestible.

This draws our attention to an important aspect of consciousness, which I can best express in terms of metaphor. When I become bored, I tend to "retreat" inside myself. You could picture my "inner being" as a kind of cave with a long, narrow passage which leads out to the sunlight. When I am excited and interested by things going on around me, I come and stand in the doorway of the cave. If the conversation begins to bore me, I stroll back down the passageway, and watch things from "down there."

Now if I turn my back on the outside world and go and stand at the very entrance to my inner lair, what do I perceive? Hume has already told us. Thoughts, feelings, impressions, emotions, value - judgments.

When I am standing at the doorway of the cave, fascinated by the sunlight and colour, I cease passing judgments; I merely "absorb"—Keats called it "negative capability." On the other hand, if I wake up in the middle of the night and lie thinking, I am down in my inner lair, surrounded by my mental furniture. This is rather a dangerous world, for if I am worried or gloomy, my emotions may gain a certain negative momentum until I feel panic stricken or suicidal. I become a victim of my own subjectivity—of the tendency of consciousness to collapse in on itself. I *need* the external world to keep reminding me that my gloomy forebodings are probably nonsense, and that reality is far more complex and far more interesting than these simplified photographs of it that I keep in the filing cabinet in the corner of my lair.

This is what Heidegger meant by "forgetfulness of existence": this tendency to forget the size and complexity of the real world, and to accept your photographs as substitutes.

In fact, most of us spend little of our time at the doorway of the cave, *or* down in the inner lair. We tend to ramble up and down the passageway, where there is a free intermixture of impressions from

the external world, and photographs and judgments from the inner world.

And herein lies one of our most basic human problems. We become accustomed to some favorite spot halfway down the corridor, which gives us a clear (if narrow) view of the world outside, and allows us comfortable and convenient access to our files—and to the world of dreams and fantasies that comes from shuffling the files. And this state of affairs has its own peculiar danger. For when I wake up from sleep, at least I know I have been asleep, living in a world of dreams. But when I am established in my favorite spot in the passageway, I fail to recognize that I have one foot in the world of dreams, and that I am a long way from "the real world," the world out there. If I am in a Black Room, subjected to total sensory deprivation, I soon begin to experience hallucinations, due to a kind of oxygen starvation. But when I am seated comfortably halfway down my tunnel, I fail to recognize that I am slowly poisoning myself with my own carbon dioxide, and that my consciousness is now a mixture of "perception" and hallucination. I sink into a gloomy state of more-or-less permanent "devaluation," and am not even aware that this is *not* genuine objective consciousness.

It is important to realize that I am not now describing some semi-pathological state, but the so-called "ordinary consciousness" in which most of us spend most of our time. "Ordinary consciousness" is *devalued* consciousness. This is something that is known to all poets and mystics. Their problem has always been how to express this in terms that mean anything to the rest of us—or indeed, to themselves when they are no longer in a state of "intensity." Chesterton speaks of the feeling of "absurd good news." But what good is that unless you can give some idea of what the good news is about?

Let me, at this point, anticipate an objection that is going to be raised by orthodox Husserlians: that the kind of "description" I have offered above does *not* constitute a piece of phenomenological analysis, but that it is merely a metaphor, which may be as apt—or otherwise—as a dozen others. The phenomenologist aims at describing his inner states in terms that can be recognized as valid by other people. What he is attempting to do is to *point out* aspects

of consciousness that are generally overlooked.

Here, for example, is a simple "experiment" in phenomenological observation that anybody can verify. Most people have, at some time in their lives, had the experience of lying down and closing their eyes, and feeling the room "swim around them"—either because they have drunk too much, or are feeling ill. Consider this more closely. *Before* you lie down, you may be feeling cheerful and healthy and "with it." So the feeling of dizziness as you close your eyes is the first indication you have that you have drunk more than you realized.

Try to "compare" the two states of consciousness—before and after. Of course, lying down may have something to do with it. But a little careful observation will reveal that the real difference is that when you lie down and close your eyes, you *withdraw* an element of consciousness which is there when you are sitting up with your eyes open. You *switch* something off. What? What is present when you are sitting up, looking around you? An element of attention, of grasping what is happening. And how about *will?* It seems an odd word to use in this connection, for "paying attention" does not seem to involve any obvious effort of will—we do it so "naturally." Yet a little further thought leaves no doubt—in *my* mind, at any rate—that the reason you feel dizzy is that you have switched off the will, and suddenly allowed the queasy stomach to gain the upper hand. While you had your eyes open, perhaps watching television, you may not have been conscious of any effort of will, yet you were making a certain *automatic* effort. In short, you have noted that consciousness is intentional. (There are phenomenologists who object that the term "intentional" does *not* involve will, but only "reference to an object"; for reasons I shall try to explain, I cannot agree.) Again, we have all observed how, if we happen to be feeling sick, and someone says something that *interests* us, the sickness vanishes. If we made an actual effort to *will* the sickness to go away, it might well have the reverse effect. Yet "interest" causes a contraction of the senses—the vital forces—which can dissipate the sickness. Again, we are able to observe "intentionality" in action.

These examples may not justify my descriptive analysis of the "devaluing mechanism" of everyday consciousness, but they at least give an idea of how I arrived at it.

I said above that the "devalued" nature of everyday consciousness is known to all poets and mystics. And here, it seems to me, we have at last made contact with Huxley's question about the significance of art as a factor in human development. I am unwilling to lay too much emphasis on the parallel between art and mysticism—if only because mysticism has a bad name among scientists and philosophers—but it is surely unarguable that they have one thing in common: the tendency to create an effect of being somehow "above" human existence. Einstein made the same point when he said of Planck that he longed "to escape from personal life into the world of objective perception and thought" (echoing Husserl), and went on: "This desire may be compared with the townsman's irresistible longing to escape from his noisy, cramped surroundings into the silence of high mountains, where the eye ranges freely through the still, pure air and fondly traces out the restful contours apparently built for eternity." Wagner had spoken in similar terms of the purpose of art, and its power to "raise us above human existence." (It is interesting to have Einstein's testimony—later explored by Polanyi—that art and science are driven by identical longings.) What Einstein is saying—and what has been observed by innumerable romantic poets and artists—is that the contemplation of art—or of the universe, which is the domain of the scientist—seems to produce *another type of consciousness.* Everyday consciousness is characterized by a certain narrowness and heaviness. So, for example, we recognize boredom and fatigue as an extension of one of the basic qualities of "normal" consciousness. On the other hand, when we become absorbed in this world of art or ideas—it may be through music or poetry or painting, or perhaps through a book like Kenneth Clarke's *Civilisation* or Bronowski's *Ascent of Man*—there is sometimes an odd sensation, as of a balloon that has slipped its moorings and rises into the air. We seem to expel an inner sigh, the mind relaxes, in the way that a child relaxes on a train to the seaside, and we seem to contemplate wider and wider vistas—Einstein's mountains. We are contemplating something like an *inner* mountain landscape.

The state could be compared to that induced by drugs or alcohol; but, as far as we know, there are no chemical changes in the body. All that has happened, apparently, is that we have somehow

convinced the subconscious mind to let go of its normal, neurotic obsession with the present, and to allow itself to swing into a wider orbit.

Although the work that induces this feeling may be fiction, there is a strong feeling that we are somehow closer to reality. There is the feeling of being "at the door of the cave." The world that surrounds us seems a more interesting place, full of possibilities that are ignored by "ordinary consciousness."

In one of his essays, Julian Huxley remarked that human consciousness represents a new dimension of existence. A stone merely exists; it is "one dimensional." An animal is also conscious that it exists; yet its consciousness is narrow and dull, little more than a reflection of the present; it is "two dimensional." Man, said Huxley, is conscious that he is conscious; he has a third dimension. I suspect that when Huxley wrote this essay ("Man's Place and Role in Nature"—from *New Bottles for New Wine)* in the 1950s, he had not fully recognized that this third stage, the "human level," is found most often in association with art. (He speaks of it as the "psychosocial leve1.") But he *had* recognized it when he spoke to me in the early sixties.

All of which raises an absorbing question: at which point in his evolution did man begin to develop—or discover that he possessed—this faculty for "floating" in the new dimension? Obviously, it occurred at a fairly late stage, when he had developed the use of language. By analogy with what we know about human history, we may guess that there appeared, at some epoch in the past, a number of men who all developed exceptional skill for describing events in language. We can imagine two parties of hunters meeting over the evening campfire. One of them points at the magnificent bison or bear they have dragged back to camp, and proceeds to describe, with a series of grunts and gestures, how they tracked it into a ravine, blocked the far exit with thorn bushes, then drove it out of its cave with fire and smoke...The description is intended merely to convey information; yet the hunters who actually took part in the capture find themselves listening with the same absorption as the party who were elsewhere. Without clearly formulating the insight, they realize that experience "recollected in tranquility," as they gnaw a chunk of bear's meat, can have a

greater intensity than the experience as lived.

I have even suggested, in a book about wine, that the discovery of alcohol may have been the turning point in human evolution—probably around 10,000 B.C. But perhaps this view places too much emphasis on the chemical element. At all events, we know that early man used alcohol and various drugs—like peyote—in religious ceremonies; clearly, he felt that these "floating" states were allied to the god-like. And it may have been many millennia later that he clearly recognized that art can produce the same effect without the use of chemicals; if only a blind minstrel strumming his primitive harp as he sings of battles. Another thousand years or so went by; man learnt to preserve the stories of battle by writing them down on the skins of animals or on leaves. And so, almost unnoticed, the tremendous revolution has taken place. For how could you convey to an animal—even if it had the understanding—that a man could sit and read signs on a piece of dried skin, and induce a mental state similar to that produced by drugs or alcohol? It would simply be beyond its comprehension. In fact, expressed in that way, I have to admit that it is almost beyond mine.

Another three thousand years go past, and we find ourselves in the mid-eighteenth century. Half a dozen men of genius, including Richardson, Rousseau, and Goethe, invent the form we know as the modern novel. The French revolution and the Romantic Era arrive simultaneously. Poets like Coleridge, Schiller, Novalis, Holderlin, declare that "everyday consciousness"—mere animal consciousness—is intolerable. If they cannot spend far more of their lives in "floating consciousness," they do not wish to live at all. And the early death rate among the poets and artists of the Romantic Era is astonishingly high.

A great deal of my own work, beginning with *The Outsider,* has explored this phenomenon: romantic world-rejection, the demand for a higher form of consciousness. Yet when Huxley spoke to me of the significance of art in man's evolution, I at first failed to understand what he was getting at. Why? Because, I think, it was unexpected *coming from him.* If the same remark had been made by an existentialist philosopher—like Sartre—or an art historian—like Gombrich—I would have felt that I understood immediately. The fact that it happened to be Huxley made me think he was referring

to the biological significance of art. Another reading of his essay on "Man's Place in Nature" made me see this was absurd; art does not exist on the biological level. It also made me see that a biologist is actually *more* qualified to grasp the significance of art than a philosopher or an art historian. From his detached, scientific viewpoint, he is able to grasp the sheer *strangeness* of this phenomenon we call art, and the form of consciousness it strives to mirror.

But if I finish this essay at this point, it will imply that I feel that man can safely leave his future evolution in the hands of the artistic faculty. But what about Husserl's "study of intentionality in action"?

In his book on the Phenomenological Movement, Herbert Spiegelberg quotes Max Scheler, who remarked to Husserl in 1905 that he felt that "What was given to our intuition was originally much richer in content than what could be accounted for by sensuous elements, by their derivatives, and by logical patterns of unification." Here we are back at the fundamental Chestertonian insight. (The sceptical philosopher would, of course, dismiss Chesterton's "absurd good news" in terms of sensuous elements—arguing that it is merely the outcome of a good digestion, etc.) Scheler is saying what Husserl later said (in Vol. 2 of the *Logical Investigations): that if you can actually grasp primal perception before our filtering mechanism gets to work on it, the result is startlingly rich and delightful.*

Everybody experiences this at least once a week: the "spring morning" feeling. Normally, we are busy conceptualizing our experience, rather like a hostess counting her guests, and, for the moment, treating them as mere numbers. This is so automatic we find it hard to stop doing it. Then what happens when we stop?

The hostess metaphor suggests the answer. Normally, few things will distract her, and if a waiter whispers in her ear, she will wave him away and go on counting under her breath. But if the next guest is an old friend she hasn't seen in years, or someone to whom she owes a debt of gratitude, she will stop counting and smile a welcome.

If I experience a sudden feeling of relief, I find myself doing the same thing: suddenly looking at things with *gratitude.* Edmund Wilson spoke of the basic impact of good literature as the "shock of

recognition." Why a shock? Because it makes us realize something we had forgotten—that our "normal" state of consciousness is as different from "real consciousness" as dehydrated milk is different from the milk straight out of the cow. It is not only rarified and filtered, but also *reconstituted.* This is the heart of Husserl's philosophy, his basic recognition.

Art can produce the "shock of recognition," *but philosophy must take over from there.* Husserl devoted his life to trying to discover how the mind reprocesses primal perception until it has been tamed into "everyday consciousness." This was an important and fruitful approach, but it was only a first step. Once we understand that "everyday consciousness" (which Husserl called "the natural standpoint") is not the real thing, we are in the important position of being ready to try to see beyond it, to brush it aside in favor of "primal perception." For although the "taming" process is important to human evolution—it could be compared to ploughing the land—the revitalizing or fertilizing process is equally important. This can only be done by trying to go back to "things-in-themselves," and to recognize that they are always richer and more complex than our "tamed" perception can understand.

And here, I think, is the basic meaning of Huxley's insight. It is completely natural for us to think of "the natural standpoint"—everyday consciousness—as being identical with consciousness itself. Yet consciousness shows an odd ability to extend into new dimensions—that is, to develop new levels of control over itself. It has learned to do this—instinctively, as it were—through art. The next step is clear. The instinct itself must become "conscious." We must develop a level of consciousness that is able to unmask everyday consciousness for a liar—or at least, a harmless impostor. We require an instinct—or a habit—which leads us to constantly reject the world presented to us by everyday consciousness—like a man trying to poke a hole in a piece of stage scenery. This instinct—or habit—can only be acquired by the constant practice of phenomenological analysis. As to the aim—whether we call it "uncovering the secrets of the Transcendental Ego" or striving "to approach the Keepers of the Keys of Being"—this hardly concerns us at the present stage. It will only concern us when we possess real consciousness.

HERBERT MARCUSE

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I switched on the car radio last night, driving home from the local pub, and heard Alistair Cooke talking about writers he admired. And describing H. L. Mencken to his audience, he commented that Mencken's influence had been deeper than that of Kafka, Beckett or Dr Marcuse—the latter, he added, was sometimes known as Dr Mabuse. The audience laughed politely, but 1 would like to bet that most of them had never heard of Dr Marcuse, and that to the rest he was some kind of philosopher who happens, for unknown reasons, to be fashionable in America. The recent publication of his *Essay on Liberation* in England seems to have aroused little interest. The few English critics I have read seem to wonder whether it is a joke, or whether Marcuse is simply some kind of publicity seeker who is tired of having a merely academic reputation. Could anybody be sincere in encouraging hippies not to wash, to cultivate the "methodical use of obscenity," to refer to President X and Governor Y as "pig X" and "pig Y" and to address them as "mother-fuckers" because they "perpetrated the unspeakable Oedipal crime," to take drug-trips to escape the "ego shaped by the established society" and to seize every opportunity for social sabotage? What seemed to dismay the critics was the apparent *pointlessness* of all this revolt. Communist revolutionaries at least talk in terms of definite aims; Marcuse can only pontificate polysyllabically about a "new quality of life" until it sounds like the idiot's speech from *Waiting for Godot.* The final effect seems to be as naively violent and destructive as the *Chants de Maldoror*; but Lautréament had the excuse of extreme youth, and even he outgrew its attitudes before his death at 24. The worst of it is that all this talk of violence is not

literary, as in *Maldoror* or de Sade; it spills over into real life. A Sunday newspaper reported recently that Marcuse had failed to show up at a literary conference in England; the publisher who ran it commented that Marcuse tried hard to be elusive because people kept threatening to assassinate him. And the day after this report came the news of two Hollywood murder cases in which the multiple killer scrawled "death to pigs" in blood on refrigerator doors. There was no way of knowing whether the killer was influenced by Marcuse, or is an illiterate psychotic who detests bacon. The disquieting thing is that Marcuse's *tone*, in the *Essay on Liberation* could conceivably provoke a nut to use violence against the capitalistic bourgeoisie. And this explains the frigid hostility which has greeted the book in England. The general feeling seems to be that it is a silly and irresponsible book that could cause a lot of trouble of a kind that its author would not support.

I would not disagree with this view. But I am less interested in condemning Marcuse than in finding out "how he got like he is" and in understanding whether there is more to this romantic anarchism than senile decay or confused messianism. It seems self-evident to me that, whatever his intentions, he has become identified with the most brainless kind of radicalism. A television film of a weekend conference of 'revolutionaries'—including Stokely Carmichael and Marcuse—at the Chalk Farm Round House in London, was one of the saddest and most futile things I ever saw. I have never even attended a faculty meeting that reached quite the same high level of non-communication.

To anyone who has read Marcuse's books, and understands the genesis of the problems he is discussing, this kind of thing is doubly absurd and depressing. The British critics may have been accurate in their assessment of the value of the ideas put forward in *Essay on Liberation*, but few of them realized that its confusion is tragic rather than comic. Marcuse's roots are in the 19th century, and he is trying to offer a solution to a problem of industrial man in a secular age, of the "devaluation of values." In this sense, Marcuse is a serious thinker in the great tradition. The central question, of course, is: within what terms does he do his thinking? After all, T. S. Eliot, George Lukasz, and Sartre also belong to the tradition, and they have little enough in common.

Marcuse began as a pupil of Heidegger, and his first important work was a book on Hegel's ontology interpreted in Heideggerian terms (1931). The existentialism gradually yielded to an ambiguous Marxian humanism; in this respect, Marcuse's development parallels Sartre's. Marcuse, like his Frankfurt colleagues Horkheimer and Adorno, became preoccupied with the problem of *praxis*. They were rationalists, humanists, men of good will; their Marxism was broad and undogmatic, with its roots in Hegel rather than Engels. Man is a historical creature, not some kind of pure, free-floating spirit whose only basic affinity is with the absolute. This means that in order to understand what he is and what he ought to do (i.e. his morality) he must understand his historical situation. This, in turn, can only be fully known through action; contemplation is not enough. Stephen Dedalus can say proudly that history is a nightmare from which he is trying to wake, but the Frankfurt sociologists could not take refuge in aestheticism, for they believed that it was precisely this kind of intellectual aestheticism that betrayed culture to totalitarianism. This is the problem that preoccupies Marcuse throughout the essays in *Negations*, written mostly in the thirties. He is understandably obsessed by totalitarianism. And when he came to America before the war, he no doubt hoped that it would prove to be the ideal free society. It must have been something of a psychological shock to discover that American society is almost—if not quite—as repressive as Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia. Marcuse's early period—in which, like Rousseau, he tries to reconcile political theory with liberal and humanist values—is summed up in his study of Hegel, *Reason and Revolution* (1941)—regarded by many as his best book. By 1951, the emphasis had changed; what now preoccupied him—and has continued to do so ever since—is the problem of "the repressive society," and the Rousseau-like pipe dream of some ideal un-repressive society. The obsession with the repressive society is Orwellian and pessimistic; and my own feeling in reading the later books is that Marcuse, like Orwell, has become so obsessively tangled in his own gloom that he has lost all receptivity; he continues to chew and re-chew the cud of his demonstration that the evolution of society involves the negation of the individual. The equation is first presented in his "Freudian" study *Eros and*

Civilisation (1951), which takes its starting point from the Freudian notion that civilization involves the repression of man's natural instincts. He is not entirely pessimistic. Technological civilization *ought* to mean more leisure for everybody. Instead, "Advanced industrial society is in permanent mobilization against this possibility." At the back of Marcuse's mind lies a dream in which there is a "harmonization of instinctual freedom and order." *Eros and Civilisation* is concerned with this on the sexual level. In the repressive civilization—as in *1984*—sex becomes another instrument of repression, a way of curbing revolt, of preventing people from thinking. Wilhelm Reich would appear to be behind this theory—it was Reich who first linked totalitarianism and sexual repressions, and believed that sexual freedom was the antidote to totalitarianism—but Marcuse's only reference to him is brief and patronizing. Marcuse's objection to Reich is that he made no distinction between "repressive and non-repressive sublimation." Repressive sublimation, or repressive de-sublimation, is what happens in *1984* and *Brave New World* or—the origin of both—Zamyatin's *We*. Sex becomes an escape, a reward, like drug-taking, to divert the attention from man's basic dissatisfaction. *Eros and Civilisation* is concerned with non-repressive sublimation, in which the sexual impulses are, so to speak, made co-partners with man's aesthetic and intellectual impulses, and the whole thing is raised to a higher level. But, as in the work of the thirties, Marcuse is at his best when analysing "negations," stating the problem. His vague concept of non-repressive sublimation is linked with his equally vague concept of a non-repressive society. Again, one has the feeling that it is all a beautiful, Rousseauish dream, rather like Stavrogin's dream of a golden age in *The Possessed* in which beautiful sunburnt people lounge on beaches all day long.

One Dimensional Man (1964) begins by stating what has become the Marcuse obsession: "A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress." In spite of the book's Germanic vocabulary and battery of psychological and sociological terms, it says nothing that has not already been said less abstractly in David Riesman and in Whyte's *Organisation Man*, and the arguments are oddly similar to those that Chesterton and Belloc

used fifty years ago to justify their "two acres and a cow" distributism. This is the chief problem in Marcuse's analyses. All he is saying, basically, is that progress involves all kinds of evils. He is not sufficiently naive or idealistic to turn back to the past, and dream about a return to mediaevalism or the Catholic Church. Instead, he sets up his misty dream of the un-repressive society in which somehow everything is going to be transformed. The *Essay on Liberation* seems to indicate that he is becoming increasingly bitter and antagonistic towards all existing societies, and is hoping that the various protest movements are a sign that other people feel the same. Otherwise, the book shows no advance on *Eros and Civilisation*.

The above brief summary of Marcuse's work may seem casual and dismissive. But however much one respects Marcuse's cultural breadth and earnestness, it is impossible not to become aware that, like Horkheimer and Adorno, he had got himself into a *cul-de-sac*, involved himself in a set of contradictions that he cannot solve. Whenever this happens to any kind of writer, the result is predictable: an increasing aridity and bitterness. Hemingway is an example of a different kind, although the basic problem is identical. Civilisation leads to the poisoning of the instincts; one must therefore reject it—and the kind of intellectualism that goes with it—and get back to wholesome, simple things. And as the barrenness of this credo becomes more obvious, he becomes increasingly neurotic and bitter and generally objectionable. Unsolved problems lodge in the system like splinters. The most one can say for Marcuse is that he continues to be the Shelleyan-idealist, cherishing his golden dream of an ideal society. Fundamentally, he remains a Reichian: in the *Essay on Liberation* he talks about "men and women who do not have to be ashamed of themselves anymore because they have overcome the sense of guilt." The dream is there alright. What does not seem to be there, in any degree, is practical realism.

To criticize Marcuse seems not only too easy, but somehow anachronistic. It should have been done by T. E. Hulme in 1912 or T. S. Eliot in 1920. He has reached his present intellectual position by a long and winding road, via Heidegger, Hegel, Marx and Freud. The result ought to be rather more interesting and sophisticated than

it actually is. And the reason for this seems to be that in spite of his intellectual attainment, and the formidable abstractness of his modes of thought, he holds a curiously ingenuous view of human nature. To begin with, the rioting in America, France, Italy and Ireland in recent years proves nothing at all about the "repressive society." As I write this, riots have been going on in Londonderry, Ireland, for the past week, and it has become increasingly clear that the root of the trouble is not the opposition of Catholics versus Protestants, but the natural belligerence of the Irish temperament, which is delighted to be given an opportunity for stoning the police and setting houses on fire. Bernard Shaw remarked cynically in *Back to Methuselah* that when the Irish were finally given all the rights they had been demanding for centuries, they found themselves completely at a loose end, wishing they still had something to protest about. The riots have been going on in Londonderry for night after night, not because they are fighting for their rights, but because it is a kind of holiday from the dullness of everyday existence. Hemingway went big game hunting for the same reason. And this is not just a Celtic characteristic. A friend in America last year remarked that what most amazed him about the Negro riots was that they destroyed their own property, not that of their "natural enemies," the whites. Which, I would suggest, argues that the social resentment is only the detonating cap of far greater forces of boredom and futility.

In the same way, Marcuse speaks about a society in which man can realise the possibility of an enormous amount of free time, as if this in itself would be a good thing. Years ago, the British drama critic Kenneth Tynan—hardly a great social thinker—suggested that the government would sooner or later have to set up a Ministry of Leisure to teach people what to do with their increasing amount of free time; Tynan at least recognized the problem that Marcuse evades. Kierkegaard recognized the same problem when he wrote that "the gods were bored so they created man. Adam was bored…and so Eve was created…Adam was bored alone, then Adam and Eve were bored together, then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*; then the population of the world increased and the people were bored *en masse*"…and so on. No one would deny that man's capacity to utilize his leisure fruitfully might

be increased. *But at the moment, the affluent society is depriving man of his challenges and problems quicker than he can learn how to do without them.*

This, it seems to me, is the root fallacy in Marcuse's thought. The typical crime of the 20th century is becoming the crime of boredom, from the youth who slashes bus seats to the sniper who decides to shoot a few old ladies in the park. Norman Mailer pointed out several years ago in one of the *Presidential Papers* that gang warfare in new York is the outcome of boredom, and that society ought to create *artificial* challenges to allow them to let off steam: he even suggested a huge concrete tank of live sharks in Central Park into which the kids could dive with a knife between their teeth. Marcuse continues to believe, in the face of all the evidence, that the "revolt" in modern society is a revolt against the disguised totalitarianism of our institutions. The mistake seems so elementary that it scarcely seems worth the trouble of pointing out.

These remarks are admittedly destructive. A more fruitful approach might be to consider the factors that have led Marcuse to his present untenable position. The trouble lies partly in the sheer Teutonic orderliness of his mind. The style itself is hopelessly muscle-bound, seldom succeeding in stating anything aphoristically or clearly. He prefers the grotesque neologism "societal" when he obviously means "social." (He would no doubt argue that there is some subtle distinction here; I can only suggest that the reader tries substituting "social" for "societal" on any page of his books and see if it really affects the meaning.) Perhaps the blame here should be put on his master Heidegger. Style can be bad for various reasons: because the thought is confused; because the writer is unskilled and self-conscious. But the commonest reason for the bad style is a failure to do things in the right order. It could be compared to several people squashed in a doorway because they are too impatient to go behind one another; or again, to a learner driver trying to start the car in gear. Abstract thinkers are particularly prone to this fault, because they like to see the whole syllogism clear in their minds before they get started, with the result that the purely literary "instinct" doesn't get a chance to operate: for the latter works on the principle of a chain reaction, allowing one thing to lead to another. The abstract mind works like a painter who

needs to sketch out the "composition" of the whole canvas before he paints a stroke. Heidegger's style, while effective enough for his purposes, is often like a tortured ballet performed on one foot to very slow music. The same is true of Marcuse's.

This abstract tendency means that such a writer prefers to think in terms of antitheses, which are one of the few forms of short cut he can afford. Benda begins *Trahison des Clercs* with the story about Tolstoy rebuking a Russian officer for striking a soldier. "Haven't you read the Gospels?" "Haven't you read the army regulations?" retorted the officer. The Russian novelist Merejkovsky worked almost entirely in terms of antitheses: flesh and spirit, Christian and Pagan, Apollo and Dionysus, and so on. Koestler's yogi and the commissar is another example. Antitheses are useful tools. Their main disadvantage is that they destroy *flexibility* of thought. Real thinking crystalises from a cloud of intuitions, a forward moving excitement, which tends to make up its own terms as it goes along. Everyday language suffices as its basic instrument. It has the advantage of allowing new considerations to slip into the argument without upsetting the whole scheme. I once heard a story that was attributed to Chesterton, about a rationalist who woke up one rainy autumn morning and decided to draw up a balance sheet of his life, with one column for pros and one for cons. At the end, he realizes that he is heavily in the red, and will continue to get more so; the answer is to cut his losses by killing himself immediately. Being of a methodical turn of mind, he writes a note to the milkman cancelling the milk; but as he goes out to pin it on the front door, he is struck by the smell of wet leaves in the rain, and realizes that he has left it out of the "pro" column. This reminds him of other "imponderables"—spring mornings and so on—and he decides he won't hang himself after all.

Rational argument has this tendency to pessimism because it misses the important "imponderables." Marcuse knows this—rationally; hence his early enthusiasm for Hegel, who made such a heroic effort to create a logic that doesn't end by strangling itself to death. But Hegel and Heidegger are discouraging examples, since in their attempt to capture the principal of existential spontaneity, they pile new dependent clauses into their thinking, so the final effect is to double the amount of abstraction.

In Marcuse's case, the antitheses were presented to him by Nietzsche, Marx and Freud: reason versus instinct, freedom versus authority, subjectivity versus objectivity, Apollo versus Dionysus, and so on. Unfortunately, as a Hegelian, he is also aware of the way that each of these abstractions tends to turn into its opposite. Start the argument with the need for anarchism, and you end by recognizing the need for authority, for example. (Hence Marcuse's fascination for Hegel's politics.)

As one follows Marcuse's arguments, from Hegel to Freud to something not unlike Netchaev, one can see that everything he says is logical—provided one sees the world through his eyes, just as Graham Greene's demonstration of the need for Catholicism is logical if you agree that his novels present an undistorted view of life. One should add that the final step in Marcuse's argument—from *One Dimensional Man* to the *Essay on Liberation*—is *not* logical; for all its appearance of logic—due to the abstract language—the *Essay on Liberation* is basically an emotional scream of indignation that has more in common with *Mein Kampf* than with the *Philosophy of Right*.

I am aware that all this leaves a fundamental question unanswered: can the other type of thinking—the kind that avoids exhausting itself by wearing too much chain-mail—offer any less depressing prospects for the future of Western society?

I am inclined to believe that the answer is yes, and I have tried to explain my reasons elsewhere.[*] I cannot argue the point here, but only try to explain it.

I have said that Marcuse's development parallels Sartre's: the early influence of Heidegger, the conflict of reason and existence, freedom and necessity, reflection and *praxis*—the latter leading to the modified form of Marxism to be found in the later work. But before one can assess the conclusions of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, it is necessary to scrutinize the foundation on which it is built: the notion of consciousness as an "emptiness," leading to a deterministic view of human behaviour and to the notion that "man is a useless passion." Everything stems logically from a fundamental disagreement with Husserl on the nature of consciousness expressed

[*] For example, in the final chapter of my *Bernard Shaw: a Reassessment.*

in Sartre's work *The Transcendence of the Ego*. If one rejects this view of the ego as an "object" like any other, then there is nothing logical about his later Marxism.

In the same way, if one rejects the Marxian notion of man as primarily a historical creature who can only know himself through action—held in common by the Frankfurt School—then the arguments of *One Dimensional Man* cease to be compelling, for they rest upon this notion which, it should be noted, is close to the Sartrian presupposition of the ego as an object; (readers who are not acquainted with phenomenology should not bother about following the parallel too closely). To put it simply, Marcuse has never really abandoned Rousseau's position that man is born free and is enslaved by society, and he continues to ask how man can make maximum use of his "inborn freedom." The "conservative" reply to this (and I mean by "conservative" a line of thought that runs from Dostoevsky to Arnold Toynbee) would be that if a man is an emotional, undisciplined fool, then he has no freedom. It would be instructive, for example, to do a detailed comparison of the thought of Robert Musil with Marcuse, for there is nothing in Marcuse's analysis of society that cannot be found in *The Man Without Qualities*. But Musil's starting point is discipline; his hero is a militarist who has rejected militarism as insufficient and tries to push beyond it into a new conception of freedom based, in a way, upon an even more rigid concept of self-discipline. Musil failed to solve this problem, but he took one clear stride beyond Marcuse. (It is amusing to speculate on what Musil would have thought of the army of long-haired beatniks.) The one thing that came over clearly from the Chalk Farm Round House debate was that nobody was interested in reason or discipline; it was a circus of emotional self-assertion.

I would suggest that the categories of conservative and radical have lost their usefulness, for they indicate rigid opinions and made-up minds. They also indicate a faith in some social solution to the problem: i.e., some solution involving everyone in society.

Now if one rejects the Marcuse-Sartre premise of man as an object to himself, as an *essentially* social and historical creature, then one can begin to consider the problem from an altogether different angle. One might say, with T. E. Hulme, that man is a

creature who is capable of some small degree of freedom, but who seldom realizes this possibility because he *is* so much a mere reflection of his environment.

As to myself, I am frankly more interested in the possibility of a few remarkable men transcending the old limitations, and establishing a *new* dimension in human freedom, than in social panaceas. Marcuse's view seems to me to be naive. In previous centuries, society was fundamentally authoritarian, with the church and the aristocracy cracking the whip. The rise of science and technology paralleled the rise of freedom from the old authority; but, as Burkhardt and Tocqueville noticed, the rise of democracy is also the rise of mediocrity. We are confronted with a choice of two evils, as Marcuse sees so clearly: the restoration of authority to the few (totalitarianism), or the kind of confusion that comes from too many heads, too many cooks spoiling the broth. Faced with this choice, Marcuse has decided that it is not a real problem. The real problem is that the rise of technology has allowed his old enemy—repression—to sneak in through the back door. America and Russia are two totalitarianisms. The answer is to establish real democracy through some spiritual rebirth that will transform hippies and junkies into angels of the new order.

That is to say that, in the last analysis, what Marcuse is reckoning on is not a non-repressive political system, but some change in individuals themselves. One might begin, therefore, by reminding him of a piece of information that has been known to biologists for some years: that in any animal group—including the human—precisely five per cent comprise the "dominant minority" the ones capable of leadership. If there is going to be some "rebirth" in individuals, it will only apply to a maximum of five per cent—at least to begin with.

But if we agree that the problem can only be solved in individual terms then, it seems to me, the answer must be sought in the psychology of individuals. And, it should be added, in terms of individuals remarkable enough to be exemplars. Musil understood this when he tried to solve his social problem in terms of Ulrich, the man without qualities. The black room experiments offer a practical example of what I have in mind. When a man is placed in a totally black and silent room, his personality disintegrates—which appears

to support Sartre's view that the ego is an intentional object that, like a movie, needs the screen of the world to project itself on. But some people can suffer the black room longer than others, and highly integrated, creative personalities can stand it a great deal longer than anybody else. That is to say they are at the opposite extreme from Sartre's café proprietor of whom he says "When his café empties, his head empties too." If this does not prove the existence of the Husserlian "transcendental ego," it at least demonstrates that such people possess some faculty for transcending the equation: "ego-satisfaction equals social satisfaction"; no matter how undeveloped.

What, then, is the alternative to "social satisfaction"? Not merely imagination, if by that we mean the capacity to sustain mental images of the external world; but, oddly enough, the capacity to treat oneself as an object, to "turn inward" and treat one's inner-world, with its capacity for reason, vision and intuition, as an intentional object capable of creating a focus.

This is the direction in which I think the answer lies. I agree with Marcuse that man is, at the moment, one-dimensional; but I cannot believe that any amount of revolt will provide another dimension.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

"Dual Value Response"... a new key to Nietzsche?

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"I must, I *must,* before I die, find *some* way to say the essential thing that is in me, that I have never said yet—a thing that is not love or hate or pity or scorn, but the very breath of life, fierce, and coming from far away, bringing into human life the vastness and the fearful passionless force of non-human things." The quotation, oddly enough, is by Bertrand Russell, from a letter written to Lady Constance Malleson in 1918; he was having a love affair with her at the time, which may explain the uncharacteristically romantic tone.[1] It has always struck me as one of the most Nietzschean sentences written in the twentieth century. It also helps to answer a basic question about Nietzsche: why his work has shown such extraordinary vitality since his death in 1900. All philosophers who are worth anything keep trying to say that "essential thing": that feeling of the infinite world of *objective meanings* that surrounds us, waiting to be gathered like apples in an endless orchard. But philosophy attempts to say it by circumscribing a subject, plodding around it like that greedy peasant in Tolstoy's "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" And when he has finished, he is breathless and exhausted, and the "thing" remains unsaid.

This is the challenge of Nietzsche. There is something about him that cannot be pinned down. Eminent interpreters have been trying for years: George Brandes, A. R. Orage, Karl Jaspers, Walter Kaufmann, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger probably comes closest to

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[1] *Autobiography* of Bertrand Russell (London, 1968), II, p. 87.

the essence of Nietzsche; not in that monstrously prolix book, which loses the essence in comparisons with Plato and Descartes, but in some of the shorter pronouncements, such as the essay "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'" in *Holzwege.* For Heidegger allows us to see that what fascinates him about Nietzsche is also what fascinates him about Holderlin—something elusive, but oddly real—something like a smell or taste, or that madeleine dipped in tea that reminded Proust of his childhood. "Knowledge is in essence the schematisation of chaos" says Heidegger in his book on Nietzsche. But in that case, is the aim of philosophy really knowledge? We can agree that the aim of physics or chemistry is "to know," for when I know something about nature, it gives me power over nature, or rather, an aid to power, just as a railway timetable gives me an aid to travel. But I am a living being, in continual direct contact with the world, with "life," and philosophy is basically my attempt to *adjust* to the world, to my own life. A baby's problem is not simply to know his mother, but to *suck her milk.* The philosopher's problem is not simply to know "life," but to get to grips with it. And by that, I do not mean "commitment" to some merely human problem. I mean in the sense that Russell meant; somehow *contacting* the "breath of life, fierce and coming from far away," and the "fearful passionless force of non-human things." For it is this actual contact that gives the philosopher what he needs most—his vision, his feeling of direction and meaning. Philosophy cannot operate *in vacuo,* because, unlike science, it does not have a clear and well-defined object. Its "object" is illuminated by flashes of vision, by a sense of wonder.

Nothing is harder to actually grasp than this. For after all, when a philosopher has written a book, it *looks* like a book on physics; it seems to be full of "propositions" that relate to the "real world," and so on. It is only when you examine it more closely that you realize that its "content" is much closer to the content of a poem or a symphony, that it suggests a *way* of seeing, of feeling, and not "knowledge" at all. What is a symphony *for?* It is designed to put you in a certain mood, to mould your feelings; but not in the same straightforward way as a cigarette or a glass of whisky. It aims to cause you to "open up," so as to change your normal relation to the world around you, to see things you hadn't noticed before, to

experience a sense of mystery and excitement. And ideally, to an intelligent reader, a volume of philosophy does *exactly* that. Philosophy is *very* closely related to music; and hardly at all to physics.

Jaspers remarked in an essay ("On My Philosophy") that Nietzsche became important to him "as the magnificent revelation of nihilism and the task of going beyond nihilism"—a strange sounding remark if one thinks of Nietzsche as the philosopher of the "breath of life," of the Dionysian upsurge of vitality. And Heidegger also lays emphasis on Nietzsche's nihilism, his anti-metaphysical trend, in the essay "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'." How is it possible for two "existential" philosophers to regard Nietzsche as primarily a nihilist? What is nihilism anyway? The Russian revolutionary Pisarev stated its credo: "What can be smashed should be smashed," which sounds like Nietzsche and his hammer; but Pisarev was talking about the political institutions of Tsarist Russia, and Nietzsche was not remotely interested in this kind of nihilism. The nihilism of Turgeniev's Bazarov consists largely in atheism and materialism *à la* Büchner, and Nietzsche's atheism (if that is what it was) has nothing in common with Buchner's. The "God" who was dead was closer to Blake's Old Nobodaddy. So what precisely does it mean to call Nietzsche a nihilist? What Nietzsche wanted to "smash" is stated clearly and repeatedly in his work, in *The Antichrist* for example: "All these great enthusiasts and prodigies behave like our little females: they consider 'beautiful sentiments' adequate arguments, regard a heaving bosom as the bellows of the deity, and conviction a criterion of truth." What is being attacked here is German romanticism—Schiller, Jean Paul, *et al.*—with its "Kantian" moral tone and Rousseauistic gush. If this makes Nietzsche a "nihilist" then Jane Austen is a nihilist for satirizing the same kind of thing in *Northanger Abbey.* Jane Austen's mockery sprang from a firm sense of reality; so did Nietzsche's philosophizing with a hammer. People who dislike Nietzsche—Bertrand Russell, for example—dislike him because they do not share his sense of reality. When they attack him, they have the relatively easy task of pointing out the contradictions inherent in his "irrationalism," and the potentially dangerous nature of his superman doctrine. People who admire Nietzsche—including Jaspers and Heidegger—share his basic

intuition; they do not object to his "contradictions" because they can see how each opinion was an expression of this basic intuition. In some cases, the expression was more careless or bad-tempered than in others; hence the "contradictions."

Now *if* that is true, then real understanding of Nietzsche can only come from a grasp of this basic intuition. And in order to define this, we must speak of a psychological phenomenon which, as far as I know, has never been described in standard textbooks. I have called this, for want of a better term, "dual value response," and it has some relation to the religious conversions described by William James. A situation that has aroused a neutral or negative reaction quite suddenly arouses a very positive response; black becomes white, as it were. It is most typical of poets and mystics, but I think that everyone experiences it at some time. Yeats describes such an experience in the poem "Vacillation"; it took place in a London teashop:

> 'While on the shop and street I gazed
> My body of a sudden blazed;
> And twenty minutes more or less
> It seemed, so great my happiness,
> That I was blessed and could bless.'

If we choose to take a reductionist viewpoint, we can, of course, dismiss this as a mere "feeling." I shall try to show that it is, in fact, a *perception* of value, and can be analysed precisely in phenomenological terms.

Nietzsche was unusually subject to "dual value response," perhaps because of his invalidism. A man whose health never fluctuates seriously takes up a certain attitude towards the world—what he enjoys, what is a nuisance—and maintains it year-in and year-out, until it becomes a habit. The invalid swoops up and down like a swallow; in the morning, life seems a burden; by evening he feels magnificent, and life is self-evidently good.

The exact mechanism of this becomes clear if we consider how we make our moment-to-moment judgments on situations. Let us take a hypothetical situation. I am on holiday, and my car breaks down in a lonely place. My first response is gloom, for there is no

"positive side" to this situation, no "bright side" to look on. This is 100 per cent nuisance. Another car comes along. My spirits rise. The motorist offers to take a look under the hood. He says that it could be a broken pump, which is fairly serious; my spirits sink. Then he notices that the lead is off one of the spark plugs; the trouble may be less bothersome than I thought; my spirits rise. Perhaps the most absurd thing is this: that if I succeed in effecting some kind of repair, and I drive on, I may find that I feel much happier than I felt before the breakdown—an absurdity because I had nothing to worry about then, and now I know that I may have to spend an hour hanging around at the next garage. *Obviously, our "value response" to things that happen to us is, to some extent, quite arbitrary.* "An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered," says Chesterton, "an inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered."

Why is this? Because our "responding mechanism" has the power to *change focus.* It is as if I possessed a sort of combination of telescope and microscope. I can either look at a situation "from a distance," to get the over-all effect, or I can focus upon some minute particular. I change focus as I need to. For example, if I am in process of changing the spark plugs, and I drop the spanner in the deep grass, I switch instantly from my over-all view of the whole job to this smaller problem of finding the spanner. But in switching to the smaller task, I must not lose sight of the larger one. If I glance up from my search for the spanner, and see that the car is running away downhill because I forgot to leave it in gear, I realize that I have made a fundamental mistake—of forgetting the general in order to concentrate on the particular.

Nietzsche's life affords many examples of "dual value response," two of which are particularly striking. The first is described in his letter to Carl von Gersdorff. It took place in the year 1866, when Nietzsche was 21, and often in a state of fatigue and depression. Climbing a hill called Leusch, he took refuge from the rain in a peasant's hut, where the peasant was slaughtering two kids, while his son looked on. Nietzsche was not fond of the sight of blood. But "the storm broke with a tremendous crash, discharging thunder and hail, and I had an indescribable sense of wellbeing and zest." He added: "Lightning and tempest are different worlds, free powers,

without morality. Pure will, without the confusions of intellect—how happy, how free."

The second experience occurred in 1870, when he was serving in the ambulance corps during the Franco-Prussian war. He had been in the cavalry, but a fall from a horse had caused severe complications. One evening, after a hard day's work with the wounded, Nietzsche was walking along the Strasbourg road, alone. Cavalry came up behind him; he drew under a wall to allow them to pass. It was his old regiment; as he watched them pass, he experienced again the sense of tremendous exaltation. Later, he told his sister that this incident was the origin of his philosophy of the will of power: that as he watched these men riding to battle, perhaps to death, he realized suddenly that "the strongest and highest will to life does not lie in the puny struggle to exist, but in the Will to war, the Will to power."

Both are clear examples of sudden and total *change of focus,* from a state of fatigue and self-pity into a state of exaltation. What happens is, to some extent, explained in William James's important essay "The Energies of Men":

> "Every one is familiar with the phenomenon of feeling more or less alive on different days. Every one knows on any given day that there are energies slumbering in him which the incitements of that day do not call forth, but which he might display if these were greater. Most of us feel as if a sort of cloud weighed upon us, keeping us below our highest notch of clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding. Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our possible mental and physical resources. In some persons this sense of being cut off from their rightful resources is extreme, and we then get the formidable neurasthenic and psychasthenic conditions, with life grown into one tissue of impossibilities, that so many medical books describe."[2]

He goes on to point out that when mental patients sink into a condition of depression and exhaustion, "bullying treatment" often

[2] *Memories and Studies* (New York, 1912), pp. 237-238.

works. "First comes the very extremity of distress, then follows unexpected relief."[3]

Now James is obviously right to emphasize that what we are dealing with here are underground energies, invisible reserves way below the surface of our conscious awareness. Being so far below the surface, they are not available for conscious inspection. When a crisis is forced upon us, our first response appears to verify the certainty of being close to exhaustion, "the extremity of distress." The gauge seems to register an empty fuel tank. And then, abruptly, the needle swings back to indicate "full." The gauge was telling lies. We had reserve energy tanks, and the emergency has caused them to connect up.

All this has obvious implications for morality. For what, on the whole, is our definition of evil? "Evil is physical pain," said Leonardo; we associate with the cruelty, the oppression of the weak by the strong. If you saw an old lady with arthritis walking painfully upstairs, and you set your bulldog on her, that would be cruel. But suppose the emergency made her skip upstairs like a goat, and the arthritis vanished? The whole business of the "dual value response" introduces an ambiguity into matters of morality. Yeats's wise old Chinamen, in "Lapis Lazuli," look down on the tragic confusion of history, but their "ancient glittering eyes are gay." Unlike Arnold Toynbee, they are not appalled by "the cruel riddle of Mankind's crimes and follies."

Bertrand Russell's response to this kind of Nietzschean philosophy is whole-hearted condemnation: Nietzsche was a sick weakling who had compensatory fantasies of power.... But it is all rubbish and double-talk. Good is good and bad is bad, and if Nietzsche cannot tell the difference, that is because his romanticism made him incapable of thinking clearly.

Nietzsche's reply would be that it is Russell who is not thinking clearly, or rather, who misunderstands the nature of philosophical thinking. Thinking is not a linear process that could be carried out by an adding machine; it depends upon *insight,* and insight depends on an upsurge of vital energy. It is true that it *can* occur without; something may "dawn on you" for no particular reason; but a

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 239.

problem is more likely to be solved in a flash of vitality than not. Current thinking on the nature of the insight process—in Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge,* in Bernard Lonergan's *Insight,* in Maslow's *Psychology of Science,* in Koestler's *The Act of Creation*—is wholly on Nietzsche's side. Husserl's phenomenology had established the same point in the first decade of this century, but it was not generally understood then. Perception is intentional, a *reaching out,* not a passive process. But philosophical thought is a process of perception, and therefore depends upon the drive, the energy behind it. It also follows that under-energized thought will actually falsify the objects of perception. To put it another way, thought requires a bird's eye view, and a bird requires the lifting-power to hover in the air. A worm's eye view is not necessarily false, but it is a close-up, and its perspectives are distorted.

These insights are very gradually becoming familiar to philosophers nearly a century after Nietzsche went insane. Nietzsche did not possess the *concepts* to undermine the currently accepted attitudes of his time. If he had bought and studied Franz Brentano's *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint,* published in 1874, he might have realized the significance of the concept of intentionality; but that is doubtful, since Brentano himself did not grasp its full significance. (It was left for Husserl to develop it into a powerful philosophical tool.) Nietzsche was forced to attack the "linear" philosophy of his time in the manner of a dive-bomber, swooping dangerously from above. This is the reason that Nietzsche's work is fragmentary. It is not that his thought is disconnected; only that, since his own basic insight remains constant, he is always being irritated into pointing out the fallacy of current attitudes. It is an unsatisfactory way of doing philosophy; to begin with, it encourages a continual state of irritation or excitement, which is wearing for the nerves. A philosopher should start from "first principles" and work outward, as Kant and Hegel do—as even Schopenhauer does. Husserl was luckier. He was also irritated by the psychologism, the relativism, the nominalism, that had permeated philosophy since Locke. But he demolished them with irrefutable arguments in the *Logical Investigations,* and laid his own foundations. Nietzsche completely lacked foundations in this sense. His work is a series of brilliant guerilla raids on enemy

positions; but a guerilla is at a psychological disadvantage, being a man without a home, without an established position. The two polemics against Wagner are superb; but one can sense Nietzsche's underlying envy of Wagner. Wagner had his Bayreuth, his Cosima, his disciples; he could get on with the business of creating, of building. And Nietzsche could only criticize, like a disgruntled reviewer....

Nietzsche's fundamental insight was a feeling about human beings and their relation to the world, to "life." It was a vision, in the sense that we speak of the vision of a painter or a novelist. Expressed in words, it was something like this: human beings are permanently "under the weather," permanently unhealthy—a disease for which the complexity of civilization is partly to blame. Because they are so poor-spirited—human, all too human—their vision of the universe is also poor-spirited. Like one of James's neurasthenics, they stagger around in a state of self-pitying fatigue, permanently listless and miserable.

But the theory of meaning that I am propounding in this essay states that meaning is perceived correctly and objectively only when the mind can perceive it from a distance, from *above,* like a bird. And this in turn requires a certain energy—in fact, a tremendous energy and drive. Early space rocket engineers worked out that a space vehicle would have to travel at seven miles per second to escape the earth's gravity. And thought needs a comparable kind of speed and drive to escape its own limitations and to become objective. Or one might compare human thinking to an under-capitalized business that can never get clear of its debts. "Close-upness deprives us of meaning," and human beings are permanently too close-up to their lives, to their trivial problems, to see things objectively. They need a touch of the frenzy of Dionysus to make them snap out of their neurasthenic state, to grasp their own possibilities and those of the world.... Nietzsche's philosophical books are a series of judgments on the nineteenth century from his own "bird's eye view"—a view that struck most of his contemporaries as "ruthless" and a little paranoid.

Nietzsche suffered under one tremendous disadvantage that has never been sufficiently emphasized by his biographers. Living in an age of Prussianism and prudery, he was unable to give sex the

central place that it should occupy in his philosophy. D. H. Lawrence and Frank Wedekind were the first moderns to be able to do this.

We do not find much about sex in books on Nietzsche: a few paragraphs about Lou Salome, speculations as to whether he really picked up a venereal disease from a prostitute. It was natural for Brandes and Orage to think of Nietzsche as the solitary thinker, brooding idealistically on Kant and Socrates and Wagner, and only occasionally wishing that he had a wife. But in this age of frankness, we know that sex occupies a central position in the lives of most human beings. In the mid-thirties, before the days of Kinsey, Abraham Maslow did a study on the relation between dominance feelings and sex in women. His conclusions, briefly, were that women fall roughly into three classes: high dominance, medium dominance and low dominance. Low dominance women actively dislike sex; it frightens them, and they regard the male sexual member as ugly. High dominance women, with rare exceptions (due to puritanical upbringing) love sex, tend to be promiscuous, masturbate, and regard the male sexual member as an interesting and delightful object. (Medium dominance women, predictably, share characteristics of both classes.) I am not sure whether anyone has done a comparable study on men, but I am fairly certain that it would turn up the same results: that there is an immediate, direct relation between male dominance and sexuality. And male sexual dominance differs slightly from its female counterpart in having an element of sadism. By this I do not mean a desire to cause pain; but the attitude of a cat towards a mouse, (i.e. the feeling that the mouse is both a plaything and a meal). Even the most highly dominant females, Maslow found, enjoyed having a more highly dominant lover; in fact, they could not give themselves completely to less dominant men. In one case, a woman would provoke her husband into a quarrel, in which he would treat her very roughly; after which, they made love. Female sexuality has a masochistic element; male sexuality has a sadistic element—the cat licking its lips as it watches the mice wandering innocently past. Even in the closest love relationship, this element remains.

Now Nietzsche was beyond all doubt highly dominant. He was physically courageous; he had fought duels (if only friendly ones)

and been a fine horseman. He had the dominant man's attitude to women, "don't forget your whip," etc. Unless one supposes that Nietzsche's puritan upbringing inhibited him for life, it would be logical to suppose that he spent a good deal of time in auto-erotic fantasies.

I make this point because we ought to bear in mind that the sexual orgasm is the commonest form of the "dual value response," the moment when the world is seen as if from a higher plane, when the negative becomes positive. Again I must emphasize the *extreme* nature of "dual value response." Most moralists suggest that ordinary values are too materialistic, too much a compromise with the trivial values of everyday life. But in Ibsen or Tolstoy or Russell, there is a plain and evident *connection* between "everyday values" and the higher values being suggested: people should be more honest, more compassionate, public-spirited, etc. In Nietzsche, as in D. H. Lawrence, there is a lack of this "connection," a feeling of a *gulf* between the everyday standpoint and this vision of reality. The only other examples of a similar vision who come to mind are religious mystics. Pascal, for instance. But Pascal's vision differs as fundamentally from Nietzsche's—or Lawrence's—as Nietzsche's does from Tolstoy's; it is religious in the most essential meaning of the term, involving a sense of man's nothingness and God's greatness. Nietzsche, like Lawrence, has a fairly high opinion of himself; he feels this kind of abnegation to be a form of intellectual cowardice. He is not genuinely atheistic in spirit, being too much of a poet, but his sense of "another standard of values"—*other* in the most profound sense—is quite unconnected with any notion of God. And this, I would argue—indeed, I would state dogmatically—indicates that the standard is derived from sexual experience. I regard Nietzsche as a sexual mystic, in the same sense as Wedekind or Lawrence. There is no other *type* of human experience, religious, moral, aesthetic, natural, that carries with it this insight of a standard of values that is alien, non-human, "other." (The quotation from Russell with which I began this essay is an exception, and I cited it there as an unusual example of the Nietzschean vision.) It could be argued that music is an exception, and there is some truth in this. It is just possible that Nietzsche's "dual value response" came from music, particularly in

view of Nietzsche's response to Wagner—until we recall the later revulsion from Wagner, the preference for the "Mediterranean" lightness of Bizet. A baffling change of loyalty; why Bizet, who is delightful, but no more profound than Chabrier? But then we must remember *which* Bizet—*Carmen,* that Wedekind-like study in sexual slavery, in the power of the eternal feminine.

The above comments should not be interpreted too simply. I am not suggesting that Nietzsche spent his days masturbating, and that his basic vision—of "dual value response"—was derived from a kind of phenomenological analysis of the meaning-content of the orgasm (although I am not discounting this either). I am suggesting that Nietzsche was what we would now call highly sexed, *very* highly sexed, that woman represented for him an alluring mystery, and that his "dual value response," like D. H. Lawrence's, arose from the intensity of his consciousness of this mystery. (If I had space, I could elaborate an interesting parallel with David Lindsay, the author of that strange masterpiece *A Voyage to Arcturus,* a work in which "dual value response," the feeling that all "human" values are totally false and that "true" values are totally *other,* is taken even further than in Nietzsche; for Lindsay, although a shy, puritanical man, was also obsessed by the sexual mystery.[4])

Sexual response *is* "dual value response", by its basic nature. This is recognized in popular wisdom—for example, "A standing prick has no conscience." Sexual response is basically a kind of shock, as all pornography recognizes. A man in a state of sexual excitement is aware that he is channeling forces that have no connection with his everyday "social" personality. Sexual response is a spark leaping the gulf between our everyday standard of values and that "other" standard, oddly non-human. All the attempts to domesticate it with religion, morality, even humour, fail because they ignore its non-human—its Dionysian—nature. Thomas Mann's Nietzschean composer remarks in *Doktor Faustus* that the words of the marriage ceremony—"These two shall be one flesh"—are nonsense, because *if* they were "one flesh" they wouldn't attract one another; it is the alienness that causes the attraction, and which

[4] See E. H. Visiak, J. B. Pick and myself, *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* (London: John Baker, 1969).

continues to do so as long as the marriage has a sexual basis; it cannot be domesticated.

Nietzsche is important because of his uncompromising honesty, because he remains an honest votary of Dionysus. He suspects—as we all do—that it may be impossible to reconcile Dionysus with civilization. The Greeks came to terms with Dionysus by worshipping him. Christian civilization tried suppressing him in the name of morality, and has more recently tried turning him into a decent member of society in the name of "sexual freedom." The argument goes that if men and women can find a new uninhibited sexual relation, the old "class war" between the sexes will vanish; the cat will lie down with the mouse, and will be quite cured of his desire to make a meal of her. Nietzsche would have smiled grimly and recommended a reading of *The Bacchae.*

Heidegger said that Nietzsche was important because he is the culmination of European metaphysics—in fact, its end. Such a view obviously makes Nietzsche extremely important *in himself.* I am suggesting the opposite: that what we call Nietzschean philosophy—meaning his critique of nineteenth-century values—is not particularly important, while even his philosophy of evolution, of the superman has been largely superseded by Shaw, Teilhard, Julian Huxley. I would suggest that Nietzsche is not particularly important for what he said, but rather for what he found it impossible to say. One might say that all his work is a commentary on the incident on Leusch, and that unfortunately, he did not possess the analytical tools for understanding it. For the incident on Leusch suggests a theory of meaning that Nietzsche was able to understand intuitively, but not logically. It suggests that "meaning" is not available to our ordinary, everyday, two-dimensional consciousness, and that consequently nearly all our humanistic values and ideas are false. But meaning *is* available to a far more highly energized consciousness. The search for philosophical truth should aim for Shaw's "seventh degree of concentration" rather than Russell's kind of analytic procedure in which philosophy is not basically different from mathematics.

If Nietzsche had been a contemporary of Husserl, the two might have formed an unexpected alliance. For the relationship between the two is closer than appears at first sight. To begin with, both

regarded themselves as psychologists, in the basic, pre-Freudian sense. But the relationship goes deeper than that. I will try to elucidate briefly.

Brentano, Husserl's predecessor, recognized that all mental acts must be directed at an *object.* We love someone or something, we think *about* something, we imagine a situation, etc. Brentano was concerned to oppose Hume's view that thoughts are a kind of casual by-product of the brain, created *accidentally* by its processes of association; so Brentano emphasized the purposive nature of thought. Husserl went further. He stated, to begin with, that there *is* a reality "out there," which is just as fascinating and complex as it seems. But, he added, this reality is quite invisible to us unless we make the necessary "intentional effort" to apprehend it. An obvious example is glancing at your watch for the time; if you are engaged in conversation you can *see* the position of the hands, yet still fail to register what time it is. And so it is with all perception; you grasp the richness and complexity of reality only insofar as you make the requisite effort to do so. Opening your eyes is not enough.

If Nietzsche had lived long enough to read Husserl's *Ideas* (by which time he would have been 68), I suspect he would have instantly seen the connection with his experiences on Leusch and the Strasbourg road. In both cases, an exciting stimulus caused him to make an *effort of will* over and above what he had intended a few minutes earlier. The immediate result was an enormous sense of enrichment of "reality." Let us ignore the feelings of delight that accompanied the insight, which is irrelevant, and concentrate on *what* he saw. The world, which, five minutes before, had seemed a miserable and tragic place—and certainly pretty dull—was suddenly perceived as infinitely complex and interesting.

If Nietzsche had known about separating the intention from its object—the noema from the noetic act—he would have ignored the stimulus itself (the shepherd killing the goat, his old regiment riding past) and concentrated on the *way* that an act of will had "boosted" his perception. So we might have been spared a great deal of misleading stuff about Cesare Borgia (that egotistic roughneck), and later assertions that Nietzsche was the forerunner of Hitler. But—far more important—Husserlian phenomenology would have taken an important stride forward. Husserl might have grasped

clearly what is inherent in his philosophy of intentionality. If our "gaze" is a spear thrown towards its object, then *meaning* depends on how hard you throw it. Perception is not merely "reference to an object" (Brentano). It is not merely the intelligent effort of interpretation (Husserl). It is a process *of the will.* The will enters into it as directly as into lifting a heavy object; and it can be intensified by an effort of the will, of concentration. Perception is a process that can be brought to the same kind of perfection as playing the violin or doing acrobatics. All this is inherent in Nietzsche.

Perhaps the more immediate and useful application of the idea lies in psychiatry. Neurosis may now be seen as a kind of dialectical process, a "downhill dialectic" so to speak. On Leusch, a violent stimulus and a violent effort (for in Husserl a response *is* an effort) cause Nietzsche to burst through to a higher level of mental health and a deeper perception of value. Conversely, a tendency to slip downhill (into passivity), together with a belief that this is the *logical* response to a situation in which effort is "not worthwhile," leads to the de-energizing of consciousness, a loss of meaning, and to a situation in which the meaninglessness seems to be the result of honest perception and logical response to it: in short, a vicious circle. Perhaps the most optimistic consequence to be drawn from Leusch and "dual value response" is that man is free to choose, *and that a choice of effort is automatically a choice of meaning.* Students of modern existentialism—particularly as Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre present it—will see that this view flatly contradicts the currently accepted position on freedom and meaning. It is an interesting thought that, philosophically speaking, Nietzsche should be regarded as the successor of Sartre rather than as a predecessor.

"Six Thousand Feet Above Men and Time": remarks on Nietzsche and Kierkegaard

[Extracted from *Eagle and Earwig* by Colin Wilson. London: John Baker, 1965. (**A15**)]

Whenever I look at the row of Nietzsche's works on my bookshelf, I feel immediately that he *represents* something more important than he ever succeeded in writing down; the same, to a lesser extent, is true of Kierkegaard. He expresses in a particularly pure form the basic human aspiration, the aspiration expressed in all art: to control life by the activity of mind. And his life poses in a particularly pure form the basic question of human life: whether the human mind, whether human effort, can really alter human life, or whether there will always be a fundamental sameness about it. H. G. Wells wrote in his autobiography: "We intellectual workers are reconditioning human existence", and the question that any "intellectual worker" asks himself is: "*Are* we?" Man is distinguished from animals by his use of mind to alter his own existence. The child who first discovers the pleasure to be derived from books catches a glimpse of the mind's power to recondition human existence in an immediate and personal way. Yet because of our weakness, the strangely limited quality of human consciousness, we never seem to realize these possibilities that most of us glimpse in childhood.

In Goncharov's early novel *The Usual Old Story,* the two alternative attitudes are shown in the characters of the idealistic young man and his "realistic" businessman uncle. The young idealist believes that the world could somehow become something like the vision of Schiller or Lermontov; his uncle advises him to concentrate on the problem of security and human relations and forget his dreams. Inevitably, the uncle wins; Goncharov would have had to be a far greater novelist to have shown the nephew winning. But let any reader of this novel ask himself how it could be rewritten so that the idealist wins. Of course, the nephew might become a famous poet, and justify himself in this way; but this is not really the answer. What would it really mean if the nephew were right and the uncle wrong? This is the great question, the most

important question a human being can ask. For the novel *could not* be written so that the nephew wins. At least, it would have to become a fictional history of the whole future of the human race, ending in a vision of "men like gods".

A few other writers have presented this central issue of human existence—the *Lebensfrage*—with a similar clarity: Wells, for example, in *The Undying Fire.* But individual works of art are inevitably disappointing because they can so easily be outgrown. In the age of Joyce and Eliot, readers found Wells' style old fashioned, and his later work was forgotten. This can happen at any time to any work of art. This is why Nietzsche is so much more important as a figure than anything he ever wrote. His work is disappointing. Many of us were intoxicated by *Zarathustra* on a first reading, and later found the style an obstacle to life-long admiration. Yet all of the other books are too fragmentary to produce any lasting satisfaction. It is easy to imagine that one has outgrown Nietzsche, until one reflects on what he stood for. And what precisely *did* he stand for?

In the last act of *Back To Methuselah,* Lilith says of the Ancients: "Even in the moment of death, their life does not fail them". But life is always failing the rest of us, like a schoolboy who is bored with a holiday after the second day. Absurd though it sounds, the profoundest of all human problems is that of boredom. If we assess it on the purely historical evidence, human life is a poor and unsatisfying thing, made tolerable only by illusions and our chronic bad memory and laziness. But the activity of the human mind, particularly in the past two centuries, gives the lie to this view. When the idea of Zarathustra came to Nietzsche, he wrote on a slip of paper: "Six thousand feet above men and time". Here was a vision that could transform human life. Again, in a letter to his friend Von Gersdorff, he described how he had tried to escape a mood of depression by climbing a nearby hill, and was overtaken by a storm. He took shelter in a herdsman's hut, and there saw a herdsman killing two kids; at the same time the storm broke with thunder and lightning, and he felt an overwhelming sense of well-being. He wrote: "Pure Will, without the confusions of intellect—how happy, how free." In these moods he felt an ecstatic certainty that man need not ultimately be defeated. And when one turns to his

works, one discovers that he seems to be using his mind with a strange optimism, with a feverish excitement, like a revolutionary planting a bomb or a scientist discovering how to split the atom. When we read Kant or Hegel, we receive a certain intellectual satisfaction; but this phrase would be too feeble to describe the feeling that Nietzsche often produces. What Kant is writing about can never touch the realities of our everyday lives—or the chance seems remote. Nietzsche's work seems more like scientific research. This is not dead philosophy; it is as practical as the discovery of penicillin. Nietzsche never actually uses the phrase "men like gods", but as one reads his works it somehow becomes far more of a reality than Wells or Morris ever succeed in making it. When the mind is used with this kind of vigour to dissipate illusions and create new values, how is it possible to doubt that the human mind really can recondition our lives? And Zarathustra suggests that health gets the last word—not sickness and defeat—as the other romantics seem to believe.

There is a case cited in Medard Boss' book *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis* (Basic Books, New York (1963), pp.155), that will help to bring out the implications of this last statement. Reading books on psychoanalysis often produces a feeling that human beings are, after all, miserable and limited creatures, who succeed with difficulty in retaining their normality in the face of the appalling complexities of everyday existence. At first Boss' case gives one this feeling. The patient, Maria, had an immensely fat mother. Until she was fourteen, this did not bother her; then she began to hate her mother and to eat as little as possible. A platonic love affair restored her to normality for a while, then she was almost raped at a dance, and broke with her boyfriend. Intense neurotic symptoms now developed: fits of hysteria and "possession", heart abnormalities, and finally a compulsion to eat continuously. Her teaching work suffered and she consulted a psychoanalyst. The results of his treatment were entirely successful. Towards the end of the treatment the patient had a dream that showed that her fundamental attitude to existence had become health-oriented and optimistic. She was in an analytic session when a man with an unusually intelligent face entered the room—a professor. She and the professor departed together and went to a

party. There they went out on to a balcony and looked at the night sky. She was overwhelmed by a sense of wellbeing. She knew that she would marry the professor, that they were united in their thoughts and emotions, but that there was no physical urgency. The stars now arranged themselves in the form of a Christmas tree, and she heard celestial music; she awoke in a mood of great happiness. In fact, this dream heralded a new beginning; the patient actually married an unusually gifted professor, and their relationship was satisfactory on every level. She became healthy, creative, and able to cope easily with problems and difficulties.

On a smaller scale, this patient had passed through the same problems as Nietzsche. But the result here was entirely satisfactory. In her early days the patient no doubt felt that she was "fated" to tragedy—or at least to frustration and illness; the results showed her to be wrong. Unfortunately Nietzsche was not equally lucky. Syphilis contracted as a student undermined his health so that the obstacles he encountered drove him insane. In the light of his final insanity, the optimism of Zarathustra strikes us with a sense of tragic irony. This leaves us confronting the question: Which was the illusion, the vision "six thousand feet above men and time", or the defeat and death in a mental home? Like the uncle in Goncharov's novel, the latter alternative has "reality" on its side; but Nietzsche's life and work speak with equal authority of the power of the human mind to overcome any obstacle.

With most art and literature it is possible to take the negative view: that art is the creation of illusions to reconcile man to the harshness of a reality that always has the last word. But the greatest art has an urgency that makes it seem that this is untrue. In that case Nietzsche's life and work somehow contain the stuff of great art. Nietzsche believed that health has the last word, and that sickness and neurosis are a temporary consequence of man's new-found freedom. He possessed enormous moral strength, but not quite enough to demonstrate the truth of his theory.

This seems to be verified by the case of Strindberg, which I have cited elsewhere. Strindberg was also a defeatist from childhood onward, inclined to expect cruel blows from fate and to brood on his various ills and misfortunes. In a successful love affair with a beautiful woman this ingrained pessimism destroyed his happiness—

as becomes clear from *A Fool's Confession.* After this, Strindberg became insane, and suffered from various delusions and a conviction that enemies were planning to kill him. The interesting thing is that he did not know he was insane, and so never lost the moral courage that made him go on writing books and plays about his neuroses. Finally he wrote himself out of his insanity, and produced the strange and powerful works of his later years. If, after writing *Inferno* (the most clearly insane volume of his autobiography) someone had convinced him that he was mad, no doubt he also would have died in a mental home, like Nietzsche. Strindberg is clear proof that the will to health can only be destroyed from within by pessimism.

This, in fact, is a view that modern psychological science is coming slowly to endorse. Professor A. H. Maslow, for example, has conducted a series of researches into extremely healthy people that have led him to conclude that health and optimism are far more positive principles in human psychology than Freud would ever have admitted.

Man is a slave to the delusion that he is a passive creature, a creature of circumstance; this is because he makes the mistake of identifying himself with his limited everyday consciousness, and is unaware of the immense forces that lie just beyond the threshold of consciousness. But these forces, although he is unaware of them on a conscious level, are still a far more active influence in his life than any external circumstances. Freudian psychology, for all its achievements, has made a twofold error: it has tried to anatomize the human mind as a pathologist would dissect a corpse, and it has limited its researches to sick human beings. Sick men talk about their illness far more than healthy people talk about their health; in fact, healthy people are usually too absorbed in living to bother with self-revelation. Psychology has consequently been inclined to divide the world into sick people and "normal" people, regarding occasional super-normality as the exception; Maslow has shown that super-normality is a great deal commoner than would be supposed; in fact as common as sub-normality. Ordinarily healthy people often experience a sense of intense life-affirmation (which Maslow calls "peak experiences"); and examination of peak experiences has led Maslow to conclude that the evolutionary drive

(which is so clear in art and philosophy) is as basic a part of human psychology as the Freudian libido or the Adlerian will to self-assertion.

Maslow is by no means the only one who is working along these lines. For more than fifty years now, a revolt against the reductionism and materialism of nineteenth-century science has been building up, particularly in the field of psychology. When men like Blake and Kierkegaard objected to the scientific tendency to reduce the higher to the lower, science could reasonably object that its principles were pragmatic, not idealistic, and ignore their protest. For the objection of Blake was only that a narrowly materialistic view cannot explain the complexity of human existence; science could reply that it was not concerned with human existence, but with physical laws. In the twentieth century, science itself has come to object to the narrowly materialistic view on the ground that it cannot explain the *scientific* facts. Obviously, from the point of view of the scientist, this is a far more powerful objection. Phenomenologists have been the leaders of this attack against "reductionism". For example, Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* is concerned to demonstrate the inadequacy of the behaviourist school of psychology.

Nietzsche was born half a century too early: one can feel this as one reads his works. At the time he was writing *Beyond Good and Evil,* the citadel of nineteenth-century philosophy and science seemed impregnable. He had a sense of being one man alone against the world. The weapons that Husserl and the *Gestalt* psychologists were to forge were not yet ready to hand. This fact is responsible for his worst faults: his occasional hysteria, his tendency to excess, the disconnected and chaotic nature of his thought. His limitations were essentially those of his position in history. Had he been born in 1900 instead of 1844, he would have found that time had already tumbled many of his enemies from their thrones and was causing the slow disintegration of others. The violence would have been unnecessary. A Nietzsche born in 1900 would never have acquired the same reputation as "the philosopher with the hammer", the great rebel; but neither would he have become a symbol for anti-rationalism and messianic power-mania. These aspects of Nietzsche are irrelevant historical accidents. The

true Nietzsche was a positive and constructive thinker, whose deepest impulse was his sense of evolution, his rejection of pessimism. Nietzsche's present position is paradoxical. He is universally regarded as the philosopher of anti-rationalism; and yet his work produces its impact because of his obsessive conviction that man can somehow become the master of his life through the use of his mind.

When I wrote a book called *The Outsider* ten years ago, Nietzsche was given a central position in its argument. He symbolized the problem that the book set out to state: whether the use of the mind can really give man control over his life, or whether "man is a useless passion". I still have a great affection for *The Outsider* for, whatever its literary faults, it succeeds in stating the question more clearly than any other work I know. It is the most fundamental question that human beings can ask, and to state it clearly is worth doing. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, was hardly mentioned at all; in spite of his qualifications as an "outsider", an existential thinker, a rebel, it seemed to me that he had ultimately chosen the wrong alternative in remaining a Christian. Kierkegaard is also a symbolic figure, but what he stands for seems to me less important than what Nietzsche stood for.

Temperamentally, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had an immense amount in common; both had a background of Christianity; both were small men who suffered from feeble health and who remained lifelong bachelors. Both were devastating critics of the dishonesty and stupidity of their contemporaries. Both recognized that the moral disease of the nineteenth century was nihilism, the collapse of faith due to the rise of science, and that the worst aspect of this nihilism was a complacent limitedness. But here Kierkegaard showed his inferiority to Nietzsche. A man who experiences nothing but impatience and contempt when he looks around him naturally hungers for something of which he can entirely approve, and which he can flourish under the nose of his contemporaries as the ideal to which they ought to aspire. If there is nothing, then he has to go on alone. Now, since the nihilism of the nineteenth century was due to the decay of religious conviction, it follows that religion is in some way desirable. If religion is defined in the words of Julian Huxley as "the organ by which man grasps his destiny",

this is obviously true. But this is a definition of the *spirit* of religion, and the Christianity that was already decaying in the nineteenth century was more body than spirit. It was a Church with certain dogmas and rituals, and its chief dogma was that Christ died on the cross to redeem man from the consequences of original sin. Nietzsche declared, very rightly, that this had nothing whatever to do with the spirit of religion, and that the whole notion of the vicarious atonement was an invention of the guilt-ridden and neurotic St Paul. Therefore, in spite of his respect for the founder of Christianity, Nietzsche would have nothing to do with it as a religion. Nietzsche possessed an honesty that was incorruptible by loneliness or self pity. Kierkegaard took the alternative course—of justifying Christianity to himself in order to possess a wall to press his back against.

Now this procedure is extremely dangerous, not because there is so little truth in Christianity, but because there is so much. In the same way, a scientific theory that is almost right—like the phlogiston theory of combustion—is more dangerous than one that is obviously and absurdly wrong. Kierkegaard was deeply religious—but then, so was Nietzsche. He was also extremely intelligent. It would have been immensely convenient if a careful examination of Christianity had revealed that it could satisfy his intelligence as well as his religious craving. Kierkegaard performed a subtle piece of casuistry. What he detested about his own time was its lack of conviction, its complacent materialism, its certainty that it was "without sin". The centre of the Pauline version of Christianity is its certainty that man is a sinful creature, incapable of saving himself. Kierkegaard worked this into a positive mysticism about man's weakness and sinfulness. Danish Protestantism was also inclined to take Christianity for granted as a religion of mercy and cheerfulness; therefore Kierkegaard emphasized that to be a Christian is to invert all one's normal standards about suffering, and to accept that the closer a man gets to God, the more he suffers. In short, Kierkegaard's Christianity is thinly disguised masochism.

All this is not to deny Kierkegaard's deep religious insight, or that his paradoxical and masochistic Christianity was in many respects deeper than the current Protestantism of the Church of

Denmark. But it does mean that there is something essentially static about Kierkegaard's position, an internal deadlock. If Nietzsche had lived and stayed sane, his thought could have continued to develop indefinitely; his last book, the fragmentary *Will to Power,* does not give a sense of coming to an end; on the contrary, it has a new power and grasp of its problems, and is one of his most rewarding and stimulating books for the twentieth-century reader. Kierkegaard's last works are religious treatises, culminating in the thoroughly negative *Attack on Christendom.* Kierkegaard could not have developed as a philosopher without outgrowing his negative Christianity.

The problems raised by these two great nineteenth-century thinkers are still with us. Neither can be swallowed whole—there is too much about their work that irritates. But neither can be ignored or rejected, except at our own peril. And Nietzsche remains a symbol of all that is best about literature and philosophy: the sense that life is basically meaningful, and that man has no alternative but eventually to become responsible for the whole universe.

KARL POPPER

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Sir Karl Popper, an Austrian, was born in 1902. He is best known as a philosopher of science and logic. Originally associated with the "Vienna Circle" of logical positivists (although never a member), he is emphatically not an "Oxford philosopher". His books include *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1935), *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963). He is a professor of logic at the London School of Economics.

Sir Karl is an intellectual European of the finest type, and the friendliness he gives off is of a totally different order from the kind of thing one finds in England. It springs from a passion for ideas that establishes an instant and close relationship with anybody interested with ideas.

I arrived at his beautiful house in Penn, Buckinghamshire, just in time for tea on the lawn. The place is surrounded with lawn and woodland. Popper is a small, distinguished man who looks more like a famous conductor than a philosopher. Before I could speak, Popper had seized my arm:

> "Come and walk. I want to talk to you about *The Outsider*. I have only just read this book. I have no wireless or television, and I never read the newspapers. You see, what is wrong with your book is that you think all that matters is self-expression. But this is not so. An artist or a poet is just like a scientist if he is any good. He becomes great insofar as he reaches out to something *outside* himself."

It was delightful to hear a philosopher use the words "artist" and "poet" again; I had almost forgotten that such things existed at

Oxford. I soon discovered that this is typical of Popper. He is certainly the only one I met who conforms to the average man's idea of a great philosopher—of enormous breadth of culture, a lover of music, poetry, art and literature. And he is a philosopher because he is also fascinated by science and logic, and these two types of intelligence—artistic and scientific—interact like two chemicals.

Popper left school at 15 because he felt the need to identify more closely with the under-privileged, and he actually became a cabinet maker for a time—possibly influenced by Tolstoyan ideas. He was, of course, passionately Left-wing, and since he is also Jewish, this led, in time, to the necessity of a hasty exit from Germany. His second book (the first was unpublished) made him famous; it was called *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1935) and has become a classic in the field. From then on, there was no lack of offers from universities.

He was also loosely attached to the Vienna Circle of logical positivists; but he disagreed with them in many basic respects.

In Popper's view, the real task is not to decide what is meaningful and what is nonsense, and then separate them with a sharp line, but to distinguish true science from pseudo-sciences, such as astrology and metaphysics. But even so, one ought to recognise that pseudo-science may serve a valuable purpose in inspiring true science.

His views on science itself are equally distinctive, not to say revolutionary. He points out that science is not "scientific" in the sense of being a plodding, logical investigation of the universe. It proceeds by flashes of intuition, exactly like poetry, and these are then subjected to the test of reason; it is essentially a process of learning by mistakes. But the intuition is, so to speak, the flash of lightning that starts the whole process.

So, he is suspicious of Oxford philosophy, since it exalts analysis to the position of king of the philosophical universe. He dislikes metaphysics, but for a different reason. His most famous work, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, is an attack on Plato, Hegel and Marx for using metaphysics to buttress totalitarian ideas and threaten human freedom. Popper is obsessed by reason, but he is equally obsessed by the idea of human freedom.

Popper is much concerned with the boredom of the younger generation and with the LSD cult. Questions of religion also strike him as real and meaningful. He blames Aldous Huxley for encouraging a cult of mysticism and vague irresponsibility. Above all, Popper is a responsible man in every sense: intellectually, politically and personally.

I must confess that, although I found the English philosophers humane and obviously *good* men, it was not until I talked to Popper that I had a genuine sense of communication on the real level. He possesses all the basic qualities of a philosopher: he is broad, deep, humane, and in the last analysis, *wise*.

I think it is also significant that he was the only philosopher I talked to who was genuinely optimistic about the future of philosophy.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Bertrand Russell: philosophical partygoer

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I am told that Bertrand Russell didn't like me, and I don't blame him. When his name occurs in my first book *The Outsider* (1956) it is as a *bête noire,* the worst kind of shallow, self-complacent rationalist. The publicity received by the book gave these opinions a wider circulation than they would have otherwise achieved, and produced, in turn, violent retaliation from some of Russell's admirers, including A. J. Ayer. I found this hard to understand. My dislike of Russell as a philosopher entailed no personal dislike; on the contrary, I admired him for his courage and honesty. Before writing the final chapter—on Whitehead and Wittgenstein—in my second book, I wrote to Russell, asking him various questions about these two philosophers, who were both his personal friends. In reply I received a two-line note saying that he could not comment, since he did not understand the later philosophy of either of them. He added an irritable postscript: "Before you write to someone, you should take the trouble to find out his name." I had spelt Russell with one 'L'. It struck me as an inaccurate sort of comment for a logical philosopher; his name is still the same, whether spelt with one or two L's.

When, earlier this year, I read *Russell Remembered* by Rupert Crawshay-Williams, I understood his irritation. I had always supposed Russell to be a detached, logical sort of man, kindly, but rather remote. According to Mr. Crawshay-Williams' portrait, he was anything but remote. The most surprising thing about it is that he emerges as oddly un-grown-up, an octogenarian schoolboy, brilliant, good natured, egotistic in a quite charming way (i.e.

seizing a newspaper with an article about himself, and shouting at someone who started to talk: "Shut up, I'm reading about *myself*"). Such a man would obviously take my attacks rather personally.

Members of my generation—I was born in 1931—first became aware of Russell as a rather precise, professional sort of voice on the BBC Brains Trust—not a particularly good introduction, since radio, like television, is a great "diminisher".

It was in 1946, at the age of 74, that he achieved his first best-seller, *A History of Western Philosophy.* (It came at the right time for Russell; he had had a bad time in America during the war, losing two university appointments on the grounds that his books were "immoral and irreligious", and was literally broke at the end of the war.) But it was in the fifties and sixties that Russell, now an octogenarian, achieved a kind of apotheosis, largely as a result of his anti-war and anti-bomb views. CND enthusiasts regarded him as a kind of liberal saint. They could see no wrong in him. He was a "great philosopher", a fearless defender of sexual freedom, a rebel against religious hypocrisy, a fighter for peace, a defiant proclaimer of unpopular opinions (in fact, the author of a volume called *Unpopular Essays*). When he sent telegrams to Kennedy and Khrushchev over the matter of the Cuban crisis, begging them to avert war, he struck many people as the sort of highly responsible public man who should serve as a model to politicians.

On the other hand, I have known men whose intellects I respected—among them Sir Oswald Mosley and the late Robert Pitman—who regarded Russell as a silly philosopher who developed into a harmful old busybody. My own view is about midway between theirs and that of Russell's admirers. I will try to explain the reasons for my ambivalence.

When I look back on that Cambridge generation of the 1890s, I feel a powerful nostalgia. It was the sunset of the British Empire, but no one was aware of it. For Russell, Moore, Whitehead, Lowes Dickenson, Keynes, Forster, Strachey, that period was like a long summer afternoon in the middle of the cricket season. It was the end of one of the greatest centuries in human history, and they were the heirs to all the greatness. Buckle's *Civilisation in England* is full of that feeling: that after the turbulent centuries of wars, religious persecutions, massacres, the world—or at least, our corner

of it—had emerged into calm waters, the cool light of intellect. Nietzsche prophesied the coming of nihilism and despair, but no one at Cambridge had ever heard of him. Russell and his friends could spend their afternoons in long, brilliant discussions with the comforting certainty that there was nothing better to occupy their time.

Cambridge philosophy was dominated by Hegel, who had demonstrated impressively that although "the universe" is really inside our heads, this doesn't matter, because the world itself is made of "mind-stuff". This nasty, hard, solid-looking world around us is really Mind in disguise. The Germans, in their war-torn land, no doubt found this view a comfort. Russell, in the drowsy peace of Cambridge, soon found it stifling, and decided one day that the world really exists in its own right. "With a sense of escaping from prison, we allowed ourselves to think that the grass is green, that the sun and stars would exist if no one was aware of them..."

At Cambridge, Russell had many advantages besides being the son of a Lord. He had been a lonely child, and a puritan upbringing inclined him to brood on his sins. It was not that his family background was gloomy—although he lost both parents when a baby—but that he was naturally rather solitary. He wrote later "I was born unhappy", and although this is not entirely true, it explains why he came to derive such keen pleasure from reading and from mathematics. (He took to Euclid like a duck to water.) Since he was educated privately, he had every chance to develop his sharp mind and peculiar individuality. When he went up to Cambridge—in 1890—these years of lonely self-absorption "paid off"; everyone regarded him as extraordinarily brilliant and remarkable. He was tremendously happy at Cambridge.

As a rebellious young anti-Hegelian, he chose to devote his mind to the study of a philosophy of mathematics. Reading Leibniz had interested him in the idea that it ought to be possible to "do philosophy" with mathematical symbols. His teacher Whitehead had written a book dealing largely with Boole, an Englishman who tried to create a "calculus of logic". Russell discovered other thinkers of the same type—Peano, Frege, Grassman—and proceeded to work on various problems to do with the philosophical foundations of mathematics; later, with Whitehead, he produced the

huge *Principia Mathematica,* an attempt to reduce mathematics to a sub-department of logic. I would regard most of this work as interesting but unimportant; it reminds me of the kind of propositions the Sophists used to waste their time discussing, or Greek paradoxes like Achilles and the tortoise, which "proves" that Achilles can never pass the tortoise no matter how hard he runs. If, for example, I say "The sentence between these inverted commas is a lie", is this true or false? If true, then it *is* a lie (i.e. false); if false, then it must be true ... But then, any fool can see that if I say "This sentence is false ..." I do not mean *this* sentence I am now speaking; I have got to be *pointing to* another sentence. It sounds absurd enough, but it was a similar paradox that made Russell decide that the whole *Principia Mathematica* had been a waste of time.

In 1915, Russell met D. H. Lawrence, and it seems to me that the story of their brief and stormy relationship makes a point that is vital for the understanding of Russell, with all his peculiar faults and virtues. At this time Russell was in an extremely bad temper with the human race, for the war struck him as a preposterous waste of everything that had been achieved by European civilisation during the past century. He was also shocked by the irrationality of people; he could not understand this destructive desire for "a good fight". So when he first met Lawrence (introduced by Russell's mistress, Lady Ottoline Morrell), both men had an impression of being on the same wavelength, since Lawrence was also disgusted with the human race. "He had such a hatred of mankind," said Russell, "that he tended to think both sides [in the war] must be right in so far as they hated each other."

There was a fundamental difference, which Russell did not appreciate, then or later. All poets and mystics have a fundamental feeling that *this world is false.* If I walk down the main street of any large town, I think I see "the world as it is". For example, I might describe it carefully in a novel, and people reading it in a hundred years' time, or another country, might say, "Yes, that is what an English main street *was really like* at that time". But then, supposing I undergo some powerful, dazzling experience that affects me like a spiritual earthquake. I have a feeling of seeing wider vistas, deeper depths, of suddenly seeing the truth about life—or at least, something truer than my previous *superficial*

vision. A man like Lawrence gets these glimpses fairly frequently; he would like to have them all the time—for they are the most deeply satisfying thing in existence—and he is somehow shocked and hurt by the fact that most people accept their superficial world as the only reality. He feels all the time that this lying world could be swept aside at any moment to reveal the strange and overwhelming truth. He sees the world as stage scenery, and most of its inhabitants as characters in a bad play.

Russell *did* have a little of this in him. He wrote to Constance Malleson (another mistress); "I must, before I die, find *some* way to say the essential thing that is in me, that I have never said yet—a thing that is not love or hate or pity or scorn, but the very breath of life, fierce and coming from far away, bringing into human life the vastness and the fearful passionless force of non-human things". This *is* the mystical vision. But for the most part he was a satisfied man, used to exercising his own form of cleverness among approving colleagues, to weekends in country houses (see his portrait as Mr. Scogan in Huxley's *Crome Yellow,* an excellent sketch of the period) and affairs with attractive girls who were overawed by his intellect. Russell never looked below the surface of things, and Lawrence must have thought him the shallowest kind of complacent intellectual dilettante. When two people are as far apart as this, it is easy for them to see no good in one another, like a married couple who have come to loathe one another. In his essay on Lawrence (in *Portraits from Memory,* later salvaged for the rag-bag of an autobiography) Russell sneers at his inconsistency, his emotionalism, his "blood philosophy" and fascism. He is not entirely wrong—Lawrence was something of a hysteric—but he is simply overlooking everything that is important about Lawrence. Russell was not in any way a poet. He treated the world as if it was a flat surface. I think it must be remembered that many of his forebears—including his father—were politicians; this is the temperament of the politician and social reformer: an over-simplified, black-and-white view of things.

I have no wish to be unfair to Russell—he was himself an eminently fair man. The essay on 'Mysticism and Logic'—which one might assume to be a mere rationalistic attack on mysticism—reveals this fair-mindedness. But it also contains the statement that

he himself knows nothing about the mystic's world. This was not true—as the quotation from the letter to Constance Malleson shows. And this pinpoints my complaint. Any intelligent man *who makes the effort* can understand points of view as diverse as Russell's and Lawrence's—or, for that matter, as diverse as Hitler's and St Theresa's. Russell *could* have intuited his way into the heart of Blake if he had taken the trouble—or of Lawrence. That he didn't try is a sign of a serious limitation.

I must deal with another rather delicate point: his Don Juanism. While a charming man, he was not particularly physically attractive, having a face like a rabbit with a receding chin. The writers of memoirs in those days lacked our frankness in sexual matters, but his pupil T. S. Eliot went further than most in his poem 'Mr Apollinax' when he refers to Russell's "pointed ears" and speaks of the "beat of centaur's hoofs over the hard turf". Russell was something of a satyr. This indicates a certain emotional immaturity; and since he seemed to have something of a preference for the wives of friends, one might also suspect a moral immaturity. There is no great harm in this. But from Russell's writings on sex, it seems clear that he rationalised this desire to seduce every pretty girl he met into a proof of his freedom from moral claptrap, his advanced liberalism. Lawrence detested promiscuity and adultery; Russell made a slighting reference to his puritanism, as if it was a proof that Lawrence was a dupe or a moral coward. Whereas in fact, Lawrence was, in this respect, more grown up than Russell, and did not have to keep on salving his ego by seducing empty-headed young women. Russell's idea of trial marriages was not the abstraction of a lofty social reformer, but of a man who would have enjoyed keeping a harem.

This would hardly be worth mentioning if it did not affect his philosophising. The sections on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are among the most unfair in the *History of Western Philosophy*. When he writes about Whitehead, or even Wittgenstein, there is this same complete failure to grasp the *vision* that drove them—just as with Lawrence. His book on *Power* (1938) says all the things you would expect of a liberal anarchist: he thinks it is just a Bad Thing. I would say that, as a philosopher, Russell thought he possessed "deep seriousness", but he lacked the real thing; even his

description of himself as a "happy pessimist" reveals a failure to get to the bottom of things. The pessimism, as expressed in later works, is of a rather smart kind: human beings are hopeless, the world is a mess; but he lacks any deeper vision to console him. However, he likes the good things of life, so he's happy. His philosophy never plunges to profound depths. An exasperated critic might say he was a philosophical partygoer, chattering brightly with a glass in one hand, watching a pretty neighbour out of the corner of his eye.

After the war, Russell often expressed his dislike of the new "linguistic" school of philosophers, who treated philosophy primarily as a matter of confusions of words. But his own attitude spawned the school. Gilbert Ryle became one of the most influential philosophers of the postwar years with his *Concept of Mind,* which argues that man is not made up of body plus spirit, two warring principles. He argued that "spirit" is an emanation of matter, just as light and heat are emanations from burning coal; i.e. they are essentially made of the same stuff as the coal itself. Russell expounded this view in *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) calling it "neutral monism". The danger of the view is that it can be used to completely dismiss the kind of "depth vision" possessed by Lawrence. "The world is what it is. To say that "this world" is in some sense false is meaningless emotionalism." Given the chance, Russell might have tried to "cure" Lawrence by sending him back to school and making him study mathematics and economics. It is amusing to think that in his last years, he saw his own views carried to new extremes by even more rabid and fast-talking rationalists like A. J. Ayer, and was horrified to see what he'd started.

It is more difficult for me to explain why I cannot find it in me to admire Russell the Advocate of Peace, the leading spirit of CND. Russell was acting upon the assumption that the Cold War might become hot at any moment, and that as a consequence, the human race would probably destroy itself. If, in 1946, he could have looked forward a quarter of a century to our own time, he would obviously have been relieved. But I doubt whether it would have altered his feeling that mankind has gone mad. Again, this pessimism was part of his rationalism. Yeats's poem 'Lapis Lazuli' ends with the lines about the philosophers looking down from a mountain top upon the violence and chaos of civilisation, but never-

theless: “Their ancient, glittering eyes are gay”.

Russell would have found this another distasteful example of Lawrence-type mysticism. To me, it seems an example of the strange, god-like detachment that the poet achieves in certain moments of intensity. Men of genius are radio sets who pick up their instructions from beyond—or below or above—the personality. Russell always stuck close to the surface of the world, like a blind man tapping it with his stick. He was not an intuitive man. His pessimism was an over-reaction to the world’s problems. The cause may be entirely to Russell’s credit—that as a lifelong lover of science, he felt that science had betrayed humanity—but in retrospect, his strenuous public activity may remind posterity of the suffragettes who chained themselves to Whitehall railings.

In a piece of this length, it is unfortunately impossible to do justice to Russell’s real achievements. Like H. G. Wells, he grew up at a time when science was taking the greatest strides in human history. More than two thousand years after Democritus, men could suddenly study the behaviour of atoms in the laboratory. The theories of Einstein and Planck changed the universe from the cold, empty place of the Materialists into a kind of mad fairy tale. Russell felt—rightly—that the poets and literary men were unaware of what was happening. His philosophy is basically a justification of science—this new science of Rutherford and Bohr. All this produced in him an enormous excitement and optimism: the kind of optimism that one finds in Wells’ books on social reconstruction. I suspect that Russell felt that the scientists of the 20th century were almost a new species of human being. I am enough of a scientist to share his enthusiasm. Until the First World War, he was totally absorbed in philosophy. The war woke him up. He and Bernard Shaw were almost the only two eminent thinkers who stood out against the war. He describes returning from a walk on the Downs with Constance Malleson: “The station was crowded with soldiers, most of them going back to the Front, almost all of them drunk, half of them accompanied by drunken prostitutes...all despairing, all reckless, all mad.” As a philosopher, he was feeling a contempt for the common man very close to Lawrence’s. But it involved an odd lack of insight. He describes how, when he was in bed with Constance Malleson, “we suddenly heard a shout of bestial triumph

in the street. I leapt out of bed and saw a Zeppelin falling in flames. The thought of brave men dying in agony was what caused the triumph in the street...” But he could hardly expect ordinary Londoners not to cheer when they saw a Zeppelin in flames, since it came to drop bombs on them. The fact was that Russell simply did not care for the game called war, any more than he cared for the equally mindless game called football and its rowdy supporters. And after two wars, a lot of people came to share his views. As a scientist, Russell felt as separate from the crowd of singing Tommies as Lawrence did.

He adds: “The harshness and horror of the war overcame me, but I clung to [Constance]. In a world of hate, she preserved love...” And he describes how, after spending the night with her, he walked home through the early morning, and met an old man selling roses. He paid him for a bunch and asked him to deliver them to Constance Malleson. “Everyone would suppose that he would have kept the money and not delivered the roses, but it was not so, and I knew it would not be so.” This captures the essence of Russell. The love affair, the roses, represented a cleaner, saner world, the kind of world he wanted to see. But the real world is inhabited by violently emotional people who cheer when their governments start a war. He has faith in ordinary men as in the old rose seller—but not in their ability to decide what is good for them. Thereafter, all that is best in Russell was devoted to trying to convince a few of them that a world of decency and peace and philosophy is desirable. As far as actual philosophy went—the academic sort—he became something of a pessimist, accepting that he was not going to produce new answers to the old questions, that man could never achieve certainty. But the series of books that begins with *Principles of Social Reconstruction* reveal a man with another kind of vision, doing his best to tell the truth as he saw it. Inevitably, it was a losing battle, and he expected it to be: he did not expect to alter human nature. What is so impressive is his tenacity in the face of increasing discouragement.

In ‘My Mental Development’, Russell wrote some lines that mirror his importance, and also, perhaps, his tragedy:

> "I have always ardently desired to find some justification for the emotions inspired by certain things that seemed to stand outside human life and to deserve feelings of awe. I am thinking in part of very obvious things, such as the starry heavens and a stormy sea on a rocky coast; in part, the vastness of the scientific universe ... Those who attempt to make a religion of humanism, which recognises nothing greater than man, do not satisfy my emotions. And yet I am unable to believe that, in the world as known, there is anything that I can value outside human beings ..."

A Superior Liberal

[First published as a review of Rupert Crawshay-Williams' *Russell Remembered* in *Books and Bookmen* 16 (January 1971), p. 28-29 (**E66**)]

"When I die, my mss should be sold quickly, before I am forgotten," wrote Bertrand Russell in 1949. But in the year since he died, there has been no sign of this collapse of his reputation. Why should he be an exception to the usual rule? The reason, I think, lies in the three volumes of his autobiography, published in the last years of his life. His accounts of himself are so disarmingly—and often scandalously—frank that there is nothing much left for hostile critics to say. Most major writers become monuments towards the end of their lives and everyone is glad to see them go; Russell de-monumentalised himself. And in this delightful and casual book, Mr Crawshay-Williams carries the process still further. It is not just that he shows Russell *en pantoufles.* As far as one can make out, Russell never wore anything but slippers all his life.

This is an interesting discovery. I must admit that in the past I have always found it too easy to dislike everything about Russell. My indictment went roughly like this. He began life as an old-fashioned, Herbert Spencer type of sceptic, feeling very daring to call himself an atheist. He gained his early reputation by a misguided attempt to prove that mathematics is a branch of logic—misguided because he also took it for granted that philosophy *is* logic, which is like claiming that there is no difference between a stuffed tiger and a living one. Nevertheless, his best work as a thinker was done during this period, in the first 15 years of this

century. After this he became increasingly involved with pacifism and with social issues—questions about marriage and free-love, the education of children, Soviet communism and so on—on most of which his views were "rationalistic" in the worst sense—i.e. shallow. (T. S. Eliot attacked Russell's "credo", *A Free Man's Worship*, for precisely this reason.) Significantly, he loathed D. H. Lawrence, and the feeling was returned. As a philosopher, he gradually lost direction instead of gaining it; the quest for certainty led to the conclusion that it is unattainable. After the Second World War, he gained sudden fame and fortune with a *History of Western Philosophy* which again reveals total blindness and prejudice in its treatment of religious or vitalistic thinkers (Aquinas and Nietzsche, for example). His natural pessimism led him to predict disaster for the human race and to spend the last 20 years of his life in encouraging marches to Aldermaston and generally behaving like a busybody. There is no proof that he did the slightest good, although he became the hero of the empty do-gooders of the Left.

There is, I think, a great deal of truth in this assessment. Where it fails, though, is in judging Russell by a set of standards that do not apply to him. Aldous Huxley portrays Russell in *Crome Yellow*: "In appearance Mr Scogan was like one of those extinct bird-lizards of the Tertiary. His nose was beaked, his dark eyes had the shining quickness of a robin's. But there was nothing soft or gracious or feathery about him. The skin of his wrinkled brown face had a dry and scaly look…his speech was thin, fluty and dry." But Scogan emerges as a rather nice man, amusing, cultured and without malice, not in the least formidable, certainly not an intellectual Torquemada. And this becomes very clear in Mr Crawshay-Williams's account. Chapter Three is interestingly entitled 'A Need for Reassurance', and the reader is surprised to learn that Russell was highly vulnerable to hostile criticism, and could keep on fishing for compliments like Groucho Marx. When a newspaper arrived with a long article about him, Russell grabbed it avidly, "'What a *lot* about me!' said Bertie, licking his lips." Throughout the book the author refers to Russell as "Bertie", admitting that the name is "diminishing". This is true, and the diminishing effect ends by making Russell endearing. Even more so is Russell's recognition of his own limitations: "I've got a one-dimensional mind," he

admitted to Crawshay-Williams.

I would say that this book makes one thing clear: that, in a certain sense, Russell never grew up. This is by no means a bad thing: it makes for liveliness and spontaneity. There is a delightful anecdote of Russell coming to Wales to try to persuade the architect and builder to get on with his house more quickly. In the car, he and the author discuss logical philosophy; Russell breaks off halfway through a sentence to go into the house. There he shouts and splutters at the builder and architect, using words like "intolerable" and "outrageous". They get back into the car, and Russell continues the sentence about philosophy as if nothing had happened. He admits frankly that he has been thoroughly unfair, but feels that this is the only way to achieve results. The author remarks: "Russell was brought up to feel in his bones that he was superior to "inferiors". And his liberal opinions…were incapable of diminishing his feeling of constant superiority." The reader may smile at the anecdote, but it reveals that the other side of Russell's frank egoism was a lack of "empathy" for other people. Since Russell was such an "unformidable genius", perhaps this matters less than it might.

The book is not wholly personal or anecdotal. The author is a thinker in his own right (his *Comforts of Unreason* is a minor classic), and his analysis of Russell's later philosophy, and his disagreements with the linguistic analysts, is probably one of the best accounts that exists in English. It is not the author's fault if he ended by convincing the present reviewer that the kind of philosophy that is "done" by Russell and Ayer is fundamentally a game that should not be taken much more seriously than football or cricket. I do not doubt that, in his way, Russell was as "passionate" a thinker as D. H. Lawrence; but the impetus disappeared sooner.

Heroes & Villains: Bertrand Russell

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In the *A Dual Autobiography* he wrote with his wife Ariel, the historian Will Durant describes how Bertrand Russell tried to seduce Ariel. It was rather a stab in the back, for in his bestselling *Story of Philosophy* Durant had praised Russell. After meeting at a public debate in 1927, Russell had dinner with the Durants. He then asked Ariel if she would like to ride with him back to his hotel, and on the way there began to fondle her hand in the back of the car. Then, unaware that the driver was Ariel's brother Mike, he asked him to make a detour through the park. Mike stonily ignored the request and drove Russell straight home.

Durant adds forgivingly that Russell believed that any man who is absent from his wife for more than three weeks should be allowed a moratorium on monogamy; but that hardly seems an excuse for trying to seduce the wife of a man who has just given you dinner.

As I read this anecdote the other day, it reminded me of how deeply I dislike Russell. This revulsion, I should add, is not inconsistent with an admiration for his work as a philosopher. Intellect and reason are not so common that one can afford to spurn someone in whom they are developed to a high degree. But when combined with complacency, a blindness to one's own faults and a childish "spoiltness", they make an unsatisfying human being somehow more insufferable.

The philandering was a lifelong obsession that continued into his eighties—one lady complained that his gropings in an automobile were like "dry leaves rustling up your thighs". But a memoir by the philosopher Sidney Hook makes it sound like vanity rather than sexual desire, recording the glee with which Russell "volunteered confessions about his sexual powers…On occasions I was rendered speechless by his unsolicited advice on how to "make" a girl and what to do after one made her. 'Hook,' he once advised, 'if you ever take a girl to a hotel and the reception clerk seems suspicious, when he gives you the price of the room, have her complain loudly,

'It's much too expensive!' He's sure to assume that she is your wife…'"

Hook went on to list the three faults that prevented him from thinking Russell one of the "great minds who were also great human beings". The first was intellectual vanity. "He once told me that whenever he met a man of outstanding intellectual reputation, his first unuttered reaction was: 'Can I take him or can he take me?'" The second trait Hook disliked was Russell's greed. "I was shocked to find what Russell would do for a little money." Since Russell was always strapped for cash, I find this the easiest of his faults to overlook.

But Hook's third point seems to me the most damaging: Russell's cold-bloodedness. "I reluctantly came to the conclusion that Russell's religion of truth overlaid a strong streak of cruelty." In fact, this comes out especially in Russell's *Autobiography*. At the age of 20, Russell fell in love with a Quaker and married her. After three weeks of marriage, "under the influence of sexual fatigue, I hated her and could not imagine why I had wished to marry her". One day, out bicycling, he realized he was no longer in love with her, and rushed home to tell her so. The poor woman was naturally shattered and went on clinging pathetically to him for several years. Russell ignored her, preferring to betray his friend Philip Morrell by having an affair with his wife, Lady Ottoline. While still involved with her, he went to Chicago, where he seduced the daughter of a surgeon, and invited her back to England. By the time she arrived, he was already engaged in his next seduction, and had lost interest in her. The same story was repeated throughout his life.

I am not attacking Russell on grounds of morality, but on his blindness to his own shortcomings. He liked to think of himself as a philosopher in the traditional sense of the word—that is, one possessing a certain wisdom as well as knowledge. Yet he failed to see any inconsistency in devoting his life to the pursuit of teenage girls and other people's wives. He had learned to find ways of excusing himself, of ignoring the sense of guilt, as all crooks excuse their delinquencies. And in so doing he remained a self-divided man: an intellectual heavyweight and an emotional adolescent.

His admirers would probably argue that this was a minor character flaw in a great and humane man. His *Autobiography*

opens with the words: “Three passions …have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.” But I suspect that anyone who reads the *Autobiography* straight through will end by feeling as I do: that the real passion of his life was a childish egoism, and that everything else was made to serve it.

Russell once said that philosophy is the attempt to understand the universe. I would be inclined to define it as an attempt to achieve some kind of contact with reality. It seems somehow typical that Russell’s definition should direct attention towards the cosmos and away from himself and his shortcomings.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Anti-Sartre

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In February 1936, Jean-Paul Sartre was writing his book *L'Imagination*, and became interested in the problem of dreams and dream imagery. One of his former students, now a doctor, suggested that Sartre should go to Sainte-Anne's Hospital and have a mescalin injection, which might induce hallucinations. A houseman who had tried it told Sartre that it was a delightful experience—he had romped through flowery meadows full of houris.

Sartre's experience was altogether less pleasant—he had a classic "bad trip." Later the same day he talked to Simone de Beauvoir on the telephone, and told her that before she interrupted, he had been having a battle with some devil fish, which he would probably have lost.... He was lying in a dimly-lit room, and umbrellas seemed to turn into vultures, shoes turned into skeletons, faces leered at him, and crabs and polyps seemed to be hovering on the edge of his vision. In the train on the way home he was convinced that an orangutan was hanging on to the roof by its feet and peering in at the window.

The next day he was back to normal; then he became depressed. Again, the mescalin hallucinations returned; houses seemed to become leering faces, clocks turned into owls' faces, and he was convinced there was a lobster trotting beside him. These unpleasant after-effects seem to have persisted for many weeks after the

original injection. He was still suffering intense depressions months later.

For the past two years, Sartre had been engaged on a kind of novel which began life as a pamphlet about "contingency." This was an idea he seems to have developed early—Simone de Beauvoir mentions that he was already speaking of it at the age of twenty-three (in 1928). Sartre defined "contingency" as the recognition that "existence is not necessary." What Sartre means is that things have a casual, unimportant quality, as if it didn't matter whether they exist or not. When we read about something in a book, or see it in a painting, it seems to have a dimension of "importance" that it does not possess in real life. A volume of philosophy may give the impression that the universe is significant and necessary, but when you encounter the universe, actuality seems oddly unnecessary....

In the novel, the idea of contingency was expressed by a character called Roquentin, a historian; the novel was to express the contrast between the "reality" and "necessity" that he gives to events when he puts them on paper, and the contingency of his own existence.

The mescalin experience seems to have given the novel a new direction, a new depth. What Roquentin now experiences in sudden flashes is a sense of horrified meaninglessness. We can see the development of one of its major themes from an early letter to Simone de Beauvoir. It begins:

> "I have been to look at a tree.... It was extremely beautiful, and I have no hesitation about setting down here two vital pieces of information for my future biography; it was in Burgos that I first understood the meaning of a cathedral, and it was in Le Havre that I first understood the meaning of a tree.... After about twenty minutes, having exhausted my arsenal of comparisons destined, as Mrs. Woolf would put it, to turn this tree into something other than itself, I got up and left with a good conscience."[1]

The tone here is flippant, chatty, and the implication is that he studied the tree to come to grips with its "meaning." The remark

[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, p.89.

about turning it "into something other than itself" is something of an afterthought.

In the famous passage of the published novel, *La Nausée* (which appeared in 1938), the tree has become—like his mescalin visions—rather horrifying—a "black, knotty lump, entirely raw, frightening me." And as he stares at the tree, Roquentin is overcome by an insight. We see things, but we do not really *believe they exist*; we treat them as if they were a painting or stage scenery—mere sense impressions. And now, he says, he is suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that things exist in their own right, and their sheer reality seems to mock our attempt to categorize them, to keep them "in their proper place." Reality, says Sartre, is "naked with a frightful and obscene nakedness." "Turning a tree into something other than itself" with literary comparisons is now no longer seen as a harmless and pleasant amusement; it has become an instance of the way in which we all deceive ourselves.

Sartre calls this revelation of contingency (or meaninglessness) "nausea." And it becomes, in a sense, the cornerstone of his philosophy. Human beings are so wrapped up in themselves that they treat reality as if it was there for their convenience. (We can also sense here the basic attitude that turned Sartre into a Marxist, for this is also the way that the spoilt rich treat their servants.) They take things for granted with a kind of silly conceit. They are not interested in the real complexity of things; only in what happens to suit their self-absorbed little purposes. If they are suddenly forced to recognize that things exist in their own right, they experience a kind of distress, like a child confronted with a page of mathematical equations. This is "nausea"—revulsion. It keeps happening to Roquentin as he tries to write his book about the diplomat Rollebon, producing the feeling that this attempt to endow Rollebon's life with meaning is a charade.

Inevitably, the sense of the "contingency" of things gives him a feeling that his own life is meaningless. He recalls how, when he was asked to join an archaeological mission to Bengal, he had a sudden sense of waking up. "What was I doing there? Why was I talking to these people? Why was I dressed so oddly?" He feels that he is an actor in a play—an actor who has suddenly forgotten what it is all supposed to be about. Here Sartre is echoing a theme that

Tolstoy had explored in a story called "Memoirs of a Madman," in which a landowner who is travelling to a distant place to buy more land suddenly wakes up in the middle of the night with the feeling: "What am I doing here? Who am I?" The desire for more land suddenly strikes him as an absurdity. But in the Tolstoy story, this is the prelude to a kind of religious conversion—as it was in Tolstoy's own life.

We should note that Sartre did his best to live up to his own standards. Simone de Beauvoir notes:

> "Torpor, somnolence, escapism, intellectual dodges and truces, prudence and respect were all unknown to him. He was interested in everything and never took anything for granted. Confronted with an object, he would look it straight in the face instead of trying to explain it away with a myth, a word, an impression or a preconceived idea: he wouldn't let it go until he had grasped all its ins and outs and all its multiple significations."[2]

That is to say, Sartre did not try to ignore the complexity of things. He referred to the kind of people who ignore it as "*salauds*"—shits. The act of ignoring complexity he calls "*mauvais-fois*"—bad faith or self-deception.

On this foundation, Sartre constructs both his existential metaphysic and his political philosophy. It is an impressive structure—made more so by his use of "phenomenological" procedures derived from Husserl and Heidegger. Kierkegaard objected to philosophy on the ground that it is too vague and abstract to apply to real life—like trying to find your way around Copenhagen with a map on which Denmark is the size of a postage stamp. No one could throw this accusation in Sartre's face. He insists on bringing philosophy down to minute particulars—like how a man can be an idealist when his mistress needs the money for an abortion. His immense works on Genet and Flaubert show the same obsessive need to bring real life within the bounds of philosophy. No one can deny that he has shown an almost heroic determination to keep one foot in the world of reason and the other in the realm of practical necessity.

Anyone who has never read Sartre might be excused for

[2] Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, p. 342

assuming that this tremendous effort has resulted in a philosophy of great subtlety and complexity. It comes as something of a shock to turn to the end product and discover a crude pessimism combined with political extremism. Somehow, it seems incongruous to hear an ageing philosopher proclaim himself an atheist, and state his belief that true progress now lies in the attempt of the coloured races to liberate themselves through violence. This is the kind of thing we associate with the young—which is to say that it is the kind of thing that most reasonable people dismiss as hot-headed nonsense. But in Sartre's case, it is clearly not unthought-out nonsense. So we glance again at that intimidating structure—beginning with two books on the phenomenology of imagination, and culminating in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*—and wonder whether there are arguments for pessimism and violence which we faint-hearted "*salauds*" have managed to overlook. How did he get from the early analyses of human "*Dasein*" and the structure of consciousness to his passionate hatred of "that hell of misery and blood known as 'The Free World'"? Is the thought really as consistent and logical as Sartre clearly believes?

I may as well state here my conviction that it is not: that both his metaphysics and his political philosophy are invalidated by a number of serious mistakes. It was a conviction I felt a quarter of a century ago when I began *The Outsider* with an analysis of *La Nausée*, and which has deepened as I have read Sartre's later work. Periodically I have toyed with the idea of writing an extended critique of Sartre's philosophy. The present essay will attempt to summarize my central objections.

Let us begin by considering Sartre's account of perception and consciousness in *La Nausée*. The substance of Roquentin's "vision" is that we treat the external world *as though it were unreal*. "I was like the others... I said, like them, 'The sea *is* green; that white speck up there *is* a seagull,' but I didn't feel that it existed or that the seagull was an 'existing seagull'..." Now that existence has "unveiled itself," Roquentin feels negated, superfluous.

> "We were a heap of existences, embarrassed at ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason to be there... In vain I tried to count the chestnut trees, to locate them by their relationship...each of them

> eluded the relations in which I tried to enclose it, isolated itself and overflowed. I felt the arbitrariness of these relations (which I obstinately maintained in order to delay the collapse of the human world of measurements, quantities, directions). *Superfluous*...."

But is this an accurate analysis of the way our senses deal with the "world"? Babies are born into a confusing world of sights and sounds and smells. Little by little, their senses discern order in the chaos: the mother's face, the brightly coloured toy, the smell of food. Their senses have to learn to ignore "irrelevancies" and to concentrate on the comfortable, the familiar. This "filtering"—ignoring the irrelevant—is not due to "bad faith," or even laziness; it is not an attempt to pretend that the world is something that it isn't. It is an attempt to bring order into chaos; the alternative would be to be overwhelmed by it.

As the child grows up, he is forced to extend his command of the chaos—a new school can be a traumatic experience for the first few days—but he cannot run away from it. If he is basically confident and determined, he gradually learns to order his "reality" with some degree of skill; his attitude to "chaos" is like that of a Sergeant Major with a squad of raw recruits. But it would hardly be fair to call the Sergeant an authoritarian "*salaud*," for if he declines to accept authority, the result will be nervous breakdown.

There are, of course, occasions when human beings attempt to ignore things that worry or frighten them; but this is relatively rare, compared to the number of times we grapple with new complexities and try to absorb them. We know instinctively that running away is dangerous.

So how *do* we fall into states of "nausea"? The most familiar pattern involves becoming "overwhelmed"—that is, problems increase until they become uncontrollable. In effect, we become "shell-shocked." The same kind of thing happens if we are forced to cope with problems that strike us as basically futile or boring; in this case, our vitality seems to leak away. Finally, we may simply find life *too* unchallenging—unproblematic but dull. Here again, the problem is due to a diminution in vitality. The Sergeant Major can see no point in drilling the recruits; in fact, he wonders why he ever bothered.

Clearly, it is the third case that fits Roquentin—and Sartre. Sartre was bored with his *locum* job as a professor in Le Havre; Roquentin is bored with his academic research in a town obviously based on Le Havre. But we must also take into account the mescalin experience on which Roquentin's "attacks" seem to be based. Psychedelic drugs have an "uninhibiting" effect; they remove some of the "filters" that protect us from being overwhelmed by the complexity of experience. They also make us more vulnerable to our unconscious attitudes. "Reality" is suddenly magnified. The effect could be compared to waking up suddenly on a train and finding a stranger with his face within an inch of your own. Most people would find the experience unpleasant because our attitude toward strangers is basically mistrustful. A baby would probably smile with delight, because he is used to seeing his mother's face at close quarters; his attitude is basically trustful. Sartre's own mescalin experiences contrast sharply—for example—with those of Aldous Huxley, as described in *The Doors of Perception*. His unconscious attitudes toward the world are plainly a great deal more mistrustful than Huxley's.

So Roquentin is devitalized by boredom, and he suffers the equivalent of a "bad trip" because his attitude to the world is mistrustful and defensive. Yet Sartre ignores—or is unaware of—these factors, and tries to convince us that Roquentin is seeing things "as they really are." We might illustrate Roquentin's view of perception by the example of a wealthy man who has always regarded servants as machines, and who is shocked and embarrassed to realize that they are human beings like himself. In short, Roquentin believes that we habitually ignore the *complexity* of the world, and try to impose our own false categories on it. We have seen that this view is untrue. We do not "ignore" the complexity, in the sense of pretending it does not exist. We are fully aware that it exists; we mostly do our best to absorb and control it. We "filter" it for the sake of survival. The filtering is not an act of self-deception, but a necessity of survival, like breathing. So Roquentin's perception, far from being a vision of things "as they really are," is a kind of chaos.

The point might become clearer if we compare this world of experience with an orchestra tuning up. If a stranger walks into the

concert hall, he hears only a confusion of sound. But the conductor can distinguish various instruments, and even observe that the second violin is out of tune. Who has the "truer" perception of the reality of the orchestra—the conductor or the inexperienced stranger? Clearly, the conductor. Roquentin's unconscious 'conductor' (or Sergeant Major) has abdicated, and he only hears a chaos of sound.

I apologize for spending so long on what may seem to be a rather technical matter. In fact, it goes to the heart of Sartre's philosophy. We might say that he is attempting to convict the mind on a "trumped up" charge. Moreover, he assumes the charge to be proven, and makes this the basis of a philosophy of pessimism. In fact, he is simply failing to grasp the mechanics of perception. "Nausea" is a form of bewilderment in the face of complexity. But how can complexity be meaningless—surely it is a contradiction in terms? The image of the schoolboy dismayed by a page of algebraic equations provides the answer. He is perfectly aware that they are not meaningless; he is really appalled by the effort he is being asked to make to grasp their meaning. It is true that they are meaningless *for him*, at this particular moment; but that is a purely subjective matter. Roquentin tells us about his sense of meaninglessness, and insists that it is an objective fact. We can only tell him that he is blaming "reality" when he should be blaming himself.

What is happening is that Sartre is allowing his inborn tendency to pessimism to sneak into his philosophy as if it were some kind of logical premise. Simone de Beauvoir quotes a very early essay of Sartre, written when he was a university student at the Sorbonne:

> "It is a paradox of the human mind that Man, whose business is to create necessary conditions, cannot raise himself above a certain level of existence, like those fortune tellers who can tell other people's fortunes but not their own. That is to say, man is trapped in matter, in contingency. That is why, at the root of humanity, as at the root of nature, I can see only sadness and boredom... We are as free as you like, but helpless... For the rest, the will to power, action and life are only useless ideologies. There is no such thing as the will to power. Everything is too weak: all things carry the

seed of their own death."[3]

We can sympathize with this as a piece of juvenile pessimism, particularly since he admits this is a personal view. "I can see only sadness and boredom." Nietzsche felt the same at the same epoch in his life—at the time he discovered Schopenhauer. But Nietzsche later rejected this early pessimism as Byronic *Weltschmerz*, based on self-pity. Whether or not we can accept the philosophy of the later Nietzsche, there can be no doubt that statements like "we are free but helpless—everything is too weak" are expressions of a mood rather than the kind of objective statements philosophy attempts to make.

The same objection applies to Sartre's analysis of "contingency." To be contingent, says Sartre, is to be unnecessary or superfluous. Elsewhere in *La Nausée* he prefers (like Camus) to use the word "absurd" rather than contingent. "A circle is not absurd... But neither does a circle exist. This root, in contrast, existed in such a way that I could not explain it. Knotty, inert, nameless, it fascinated me, filled my eyes, brought me back unceasingly to its own existence." A circle is an idea; it belongs to the realm of the "necessary," the meaningful. The same applies to art; we think of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* as "necessary," meaningful. We are making a kind of innate distinction between the meaningful and the futile or trivial. When a man sets out to write a novel, he is attempting to raise the triviality of everyday life to a level of more general meaning—rather as Euclid attempted to state general propositions of geometry. We are all familiar with the experience of going out into the street from a cinema or theatre, and finding "real life" confused and bewildering in contrast to the world of art. (It is worth mentioning, in parenthesis, that Sartre and Beauvoir seem to have spent an enormous amount of time in cinemas.) Does this "prove" that real life is chaotic and meaningless? Obviously not, for we have moods in which we can walk down a crowded street, or sit outside a boulevard café, and find the complexity satisfying and exciting. But are "moods" relevant to a philosophical discussion? In this case, yes, for we are again discussing which is "truer"—the

[3] Simone de Beauvoir *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, p. 345.

perception of the conductor or of the unmusical stranger. For this same stranger, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* may seem confused and bewildering; but we would have no hesitation in agreeing that he is failing to hear the meaning that is so plain to the rest of us. This is not a matter of relativity—of two equivalent judgments. If the stranger learned to understand Beethoven, and still felt the *Ninth Symphony* was meaningless, we would be in altogether deeper waters in trying to contradict him. But where he simply fails to grasp what is being said, there is no question of respecting his "judgment."

We might turn aside briefly to mention a similar fallacy in the work of Camus—who, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, uses the word "absurdity" to express what Sartre means by contingency. Camus' clarity makes him rather easier to lay by the heel than Sartre. He begins by speaking frankly of boredom: "Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday according to the same rhythm... But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement." That is to say, the feeling of "absurdity" begins in a sense of futility, with the question "Why on earth am I wasting my life like this?" He goes on: "A step lower and strangeness creeps in; perceiving that the world is 'dense,' sensing to what degree a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, and what intensity of nature or a landscape can negate us." Here, very clearly, we are speaking of Roquentin's nausea—the "denseness" of reality, the "foreignness" of a stone. He goes on:

> "Men, too, secrete the inhuman. At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspects of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime, make silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show; you wonder why he is alive. This discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this "nausea" as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd. Likewise the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs is also the absurd".

These examples really reveal the flaw in the argument. If you turn down the sound of the television set at a moment of high drama, the faces of the characters look "absurd," with their mouths opening and closing, their expressions tense or horrified. But this is because you have deliberately *robbed* them of a dimension of reality—a dimension necessary to grasp fully what is going on. Similarly, if you walked into a play halfway through, it would mean less to you than to someone who had watched it from the beginning. But you would not argue that your lack of understanding was somehow "truer" than the view of the other person. The same argument applies to the man gesticulating in a telephone booth. He has been stripped of certain essential "clues" that would enable you to complete the picture. But it is hardly fair to allege that your incomprehension somehow proves his "inhumanity." The image of the photograph shows the fallacy most clearly of all. Photographs are notoriously deceptive. You might see a thousand snapshots of a man, and yet still know less of him than would be revealed in ten seconds of actually talking to him, or seeing him on the screen in a cinema. The same applies to places. You may have studied a thousand views of the pyramids; the moment you actually see them, it is quite different; they then stay in your mind with their own peculiar "smell" of reality, which could not be supplied by an infinite number of photographs. A photograph can seem "absurd" because it lacks this dimension of reality.

The mirror image is an even more interesting case. Simone de Beauvoir has also used this (in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*) to demonstrate "contingency." "I look at myself in vain in a mirror, tell myself my own story, I can never grasp myself as an entire object, I experience in myself the emptiness that is myself, I feel that I am not." What is happening is that the mirror image is being misinterpreted by your "alienated" senses *as another person*, while you realize consciously that it is you; it is the clash between these two contradictory views that produces the sense of the absurd. But again, it is because the Sergeant Major has gone on strike, so that what you are seeing is *less* true than your normal view.

In short, the "absurd" is due basically to a *falsification* of the data. The satirical magazine *Private Eye* prints photographs of a politician making some expansive gesture, with an absurd caption

coming out of his mouth; but it is, so to speak, a deliberate frame-up; he is being *made* to look absurd. No one would claim that the picture "tells the truth." Similarly, you could take a Sunday school picture of Jesus extending his arms and saying "Come unto me all ye that are heavily laden," and substitute the caption "You should have seen the one that got away." It might be regarded by some people as funny, but only a fool would pretend it was a valid criticism of Christianity.

But the really important observation is one we have already made: that the "nausea" reaction is basically like that of a schoolboy confronting a page of equations. It is not meaninglessness, but the sense of too much meaning, that produces the nausea. Nausea is the mind's sense of its own inadequacy. What really produces the unease, in certain moments of intuitive perception, is that our minds are quite inadequate to grasp the meaning that surrounds us. Mystics have always asserted that their "moments of vision" reveal that human perceptions filter and cramp and distort the meaning of the reality that surrounds us—and this view *is* perfectly consistent with what we know about the operation of the senses.

To summarize this section of the argument: we must strive to make a distinction between the subjective and objective elements in perception. If a child watches television for too long, he becomes dull and bored, and finally, everything he watches strikes him as dull and boring. His sense of reality is blunted; he finds it hard to remember whether something actually happened, or whether he saw it on TV. If he persisted in watching, for lack of anything better to do, he would end by experiencing "nausea"—the feeling "What am I doing here, watching these meaningless events?" His nausea would tell us something about the state of his perceptions, but not about the quality of the television programs. Similarly, if we knew a man was suffering from indigestion through overeating, we would not take his word for it if he said "This food is awful." We would recognize that a healthy appetite is an essential prerequisite for judging a meal. In failing to make this distinction, Sartre and Camus are guilty of a misunderstanding that amounts to a schoolboy howler.

But it is worth noting that Camus quickly became intuitively

aware of what he had done, and tried hard to backpedal. Books like *La Peste* and *La Chute* are attempts to re-establish moral values; they fail because he was unwilling to face up to the fallacy involved in his notion of "the absurd," as expressed in *L'Étranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Intellectually speaking, Camus remained trapped in a snare of his own making.

The same, we shall see, is true of Sartre; and it is necessary now to look more closely at the "development" of his ideas from these early days to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

One evening early in 1933, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were having a drink with Raymond Aron, who had just returned from the French Institute in Berlin. Aron pointed to the apricot cocktail and said to Sartre: "You see, my dear fellow, if you were a phenomenologist, you could talk about this cocktail and make a philosophy out of it." Beauvoir says that Sartre "turned pale with emotion," because this was what he had been longing to achieve for years—to describe objects just as he saw and touched them. Sartre immediately bought a book on Husserl, and began reading it as he walked home. "His heart missed a beat when he found references to contingency" (in case Husserl had forestalled him), but he soon decided that contingency played only an unimportant part in Husserl's work.

Husserl's phenomenology is an attempt to bring scientific objectivity into philosophy. Philosophy, after all, is an attempt to "understand the universe." One might feel justified in assuming that the older a person is, the more understanding he or she possesses. But we only have to ask our grandparents a few basic questions to see this is not so. The most rational and intelligent person is quite likely, in a moment of frankness, to come out with some bigoted religious or political opinion. Then how do we set out "being philosophical?" According to Husserl, we must direct all our efforts at analyzing our response to things, and trying to discover what is truly objective about our perceptions, and what we are "adding"—i.e., what prejudices are sneaking in. Husserl suggests that we must begin with an act of *withdrawal* from the world of things—he calls it the *époché*. We must perform the same *époché* on our own feelings and responses and judgments. We must attempt to describe everything in clear, cold, unbiased terms. This is the essence of Husserl's "method."

In the course of his analysis, Husserl made one observation of immense importance. In order to perceive something, you must want to perceive it. This sounds obviously untrue—I am always seeing things I don't particularly want to see. But that is to miss the point. When I see something, I am "looking," I am *prepared* to perceive. If I look at something when I am talking or thinking about something else, I may simply not notice it. Perceiving, says Husserl, is "noticing." It is *intentional*.

If, for example, someone raises his finger and says, "Listen!," I concentrate, I prepare to hear something. And in order to hear anything at any time, I must, to some extent, be "prepared" to hear, I must be "listening." This listening attitude is, of course, on a largely unconscious level—like the "filtering" mechanism that enables us to ignore ninety percent of our experience—yet it must always be there if I am to hear anything. We could think of our senses as grappling hooks that have to be fired at objects. If I fail to make this deliberate effort—if my mind goes blank as I look at something—then I do not see or hear.

All perception, says Husserl, is intentional, and this explains why we are such bad philosophers. Since you have to make an effort to perceive anything at all, it is too easy to "add" that little bit extra to your perception, to allow the element of prejudice to sneak in. We continually see the world through our emotions and desires, and if we are to be real philosophers, these must be rigorously excluded, "filtered" out. Philosophy should be a science.

Many philosophers were unconscious "phenomenologists" long before Husserl appeared (in the early twentieth century). Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* is, for example, an attempt to discuss the way our senses grasp the world, and is therefore an attempt at phenomenological reduction. But one of Hume's conclusions was to have enormous repercussions on the history of philosophy. Like Husserl, he was concerned about the things we "add" to our raw perceptions, and he singled out our "expectations." If I add one and one to make two, I feel (quite rightly) that this is cause and effect; it would be impossible for them to make anything else. If I drop a book, it falls to the ground, and again I feel it is cause and effect. But this, says Hume, is an error of judgment. It is perfectly possible that the book might fly into the air. It is not *necessary* that it should

fall, in the way that it is necessary that one and one should make two. (Or, as Sartre would say, as a circle is "necessary.") We "add" cause and effect to nature, just as our tongues "add" the sweetness to sugar (we can easily imagine a Martian for whom sugar tasted bitter) or the blue to the sky (blueness does not exist in objective nature—only light of a certain wavelength). Colour and sweetness, like cause and effect, are really just "prejudices."

Hume's picture of the human mind is of a "blank" that merely responds to its impressions, like a slot-machine reacting to coins. His philosophy was an important influence on Husserl. But Husserl could see an obvious objection to this notion of the mind as a "blank." If it was a blank, it wouldn't see anything at all. Perception is intentional. When you see something, it is as if you *fired* your perception at it, like firing an arrow at an object. But *who* does the firing? Hume rejected the obvious answer—you. He insisted that when he looked inside himself to discover the real David Hume, he could not discover any such person. All he could discover was ideas and impressions. Hume concluded that there is no "you" who holds all your perceptions together. "You" are merely a series of automatic responses, reflexes, like tapping someone's knee. In short, man is purely passive, like a computer; he can only *react*.

Husserl could see that this was clearly false. When I perform the *époché*, the act of "bracketing" reality, I am withdrawing my consciousness from its involvement in the world of objects. And, quite clearly, I am withdrawing *something*, not nothing. If Hume is right, there is nothing to withdraw; I am merely a series of responses to stimuli.

To put this another way: if perception is an arrow fired at objects, there must be an archer. In his early work, *Logical Investigations*, Husserl formulated the idea of the intentionality of consciousness, but agreed with Hume that there is no "I" which presides over consciousness. By the time he published *Ideas* in 1913, he had completely changed his position; he now felt that there must be an "archer," a "transcendental ego" that presides over consciousness.

This conclusion is obviously of some importance for existentialism in general. From Tolstoy's "madman" onward, existentialists have been asking the question: "Who am I?" Clearly, they also meant the same thing as Hume: that when they look inside

themselves, they cannot locate an "essential me," just a lot of conditioned reflexes. Husserl replies, in effect: That may be true. But you are not looking deep enough. You are allowing yourself to be confused by reactions, emotions, preconceptions about your "identity." The "real you" is almost invisible because it presides *over* consciousness. But it is there.

It is not necessary to be clairvoyant to imagine Sartre's reaction to this notion. A writer whose premise is that men are helpless self-deceivers is bound to sniff the odour of religious idealism in the very expression "transcendental ego." Sartre's response was to reject it decisively.

This is a crucial point in Sartre's development, and the issue needs to be made very clear. The phenomenological reduction reduces reality—as it were—to the status of an inkblot in the famous Rorschach test. We know the inkblot is a matter of pure chance, so when the patient says it reminds him of an elephant or a woman's behind, the psychologist can study his reactions—his mental acts—in isolation. There is an ancient joke in which the patient thinks that every inkblot looks like a naked woman; when the psychologist tells him he is obsessed by sex, he replies: "You're the one who's been showing *me* the dirty pictures." He is failing to distinguish between the inkblot and his own responses, and Husserl complains that philosophers habitually make the same elementary mistake. The "reduction" was designed to eliminate this problem.

For Sartre, this was more than a purely philosophical issue; it was also a matter of art. We can see, for example, that what excited him about the novels of Hemingway and Faulkner was that both make use of a kind of phenomenological reduction: they describe events coldly, objectively, avoiding the "involvement" and emotionalism of their predecessors; the result is an increased artistic impact. The aim of phenomenology is to handle the world with surgical gloves. And it can be as effective in art as in philosophy. So Husserl's notion of a "controlling ego" struck Sartre as an impurity, rather as if Hemingway had begun canvassing his own opinions and feelings in the midst of a description of a battle.

To this accusation, Husserl might have raised a counter-objection: "It is you who are being emotional. You are allowing an emotional desire to escape from human fallibility to blind you to a

philosophical necessity. Surgical gloves imply a surgeon—this is a matter of logic."

The burden of proof lies on Sartre and *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936) is his attempt to provide the proof. His argument is that Husserl has made an elementary error in assuming that consciousness has to be controlled by an ego, transcendental or otherwise. Our sense of ego, says Sartre, is something we get from things that happen to us. A girl looks at a man with admiration; his ego "swells." She regards him with contempt; it shrinks. Ego is rather like his own face; it is something he sees in a mirror of events. And ego, like the face, is "contingent"; if someone kicks you in the face, it changes. The ego, like your hat and overcoat, is "out there," not "in here."

Then what *is* "in here"? Consciousness itself? Not according to Sartre. Husserl argued that a dragon is a "content of consciousness" (*i.e.*, it doesn't exist in reality), and that if I close my eyes and imagine a dragon, then my consciousness is performing the act of intending a dragon. Not so, says Sartre; the very expression "content of consciousness" is misleading, because consciousness has no "contents." It is not a kind of bag. It is an activity, like playing football. It has no "inside." If it could be compared to anything, it would be to a "great wind." "If, against all impossibility, you were to enter 'into' a consciousness, you would be seized by a vortex and thrown out...because consciousness has no 'inside'; it is nothing but the outside of itself." And he illustrates his meaning with a powerful image:

> "Imagine a series of linked explosions which wrench us from ourselves...which throw us on...the dry dust of the world, on the rough earth, among things; imagine that we are thus rejected, forsaken by our very nature in an indifferent, hostile, and restive world; you would then know the profound meaning of the discovery that Husserl expresses in that famous phrase: 'All consciousness is consciousness of something.'"[4]

[4] Both quotations are taken from "A Fundamental Idea of the Phenomenology of Husserl: Intentionality," *Situations 1*; quoted by Maurice Natanson in *Literature, Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, p. 28.

Here we can see that Sartre takes the phrase "All consciousness is consciousness of something" to mean: "Consciousness only comes into existence from objects; it is *completely dependent* on objects."

Sartre has certainly got rid of the transcendental ego. But he has done this at the cost of going "back to David Hume." This "new" picture of the ego and the world offered by Sartre is identical with Hume's picture in the *Treatise*. Consciousness is not even a "great wind"; it is more like the tides, helpless and passive, being drawn by the moon. This is the view of consciousness Husserl began with in his *Logical Investigations*, and later rejected—because an arrow implies an archer.

The real objection to Sartre's "new" picture is that he is confusing the ordinary ego and the transcendental ego. Husserl chose the phrase (he borrowed it from Kant) presumably because he had no wish to confuse the issue by talking about the will. For this is clearly what is at issue. In considering the quarrel between Sartre and Husserl, we are really back to the old squabble between free will and determinism. We may recall, for example, that William James went through a mental breakdown in his late twenties—haunted by a feeling of human impotence in the face of evil or disaster—and that his slow recovery began when he read an essay by Renouvier in which free will is defined as "the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts." In James's later essays on free will, he rehearses all the usual arguments to demonstrate why free will does not exist: that anything we do can be "explained" in terms of motives and stimuli, and can therefore be regarded as "mechanical." But he remains basically convinced of the reality of free will. Sartre is quite determined to cling to the Humean position that we are "slot machines." It is, as we can see, the only logical way of escaping Husserl's conviction that consciousness is not a mere "stream," an association of ideas, but a self-governing entity.

Sartre's remarks about the ego are undoubtedly true: but they apply to the "everyday self" rather than to Husserl's "director." Sartre's analyses of the everyday self—the "personality"—are always perceptive. He points out, for example, that shame depends essentially on the "gaze of others"; if I am caught looking through a keyhole, I feel myself an object in the gaze of the other person. This

is an example of what he means by saying that the ego belongs "out there," in the world of objects. But then, a Buddhist would say that most people are confused by false notions of "who they are"—notions based upon desire, fear, conditioning—and that if these can be pushed aside, then a man may eventually realize "who he really is." This latter notion obviously corresponds to Husserl's transcendental ego. And Sartre, as an atheist and pragmatist, who is positively revolted by anything that smacks of mysticism or religion, finds it thoroughly objectionable. And we may feel that he is allowing this aggressive rationalism—so closely allied to Voltaire's anti-clericalism—to sneak into his analyses, making nonsense of his claim to be a phenomenologist.

At all events, it seems quite clear that Sartre's rejection of the "transcendental ego" is part and parcel of that general attitude to human existence that he formulated in the early essay quoted by Beauvoir: there is no will to power because we are too weak. Man cannot "raise himself" above existence; he is stuck, like a fly on fly paper. Working to improve man is useless. We may be "free," but we are helpless.

Here the assertion that sticks out like a sore thumb is "We are as free as you like, but helpless...." Surely, the two are contradictory? If a man is lying paralyzed in a desert, unable to move even an eyelid, does it mean anything to say he is "free?" In the following sentence, Sartre contradicts himself: "Above all, adventure...is a delusion. In this sense, the 'adventurer' is an inconsequential determinist who imagines he is enjoying complete freedom of action." This is badly expressed—he means that an adventurer's actions are completely determined, not that he is a determinist—but the meaning is quite clear. There is no adventure, because we cannot do anything that is not determined by circumstance. In which case, free will is also an illusion. Yet, as we shall see, Sartre is unwilling to admit this particular consequence of his pessimism, for it would deprive him of all right to advocate his own view. (How could a man say: "Free will does exist—but I who tell you this am merely uttering these words mechanically, as the wind makes a noise in the chimney. You must not assume they mean anything..."?)

Let me, then, summarize this stage of the argument by saying

that if we agree with Husserl (and William James), then we have no alternative than to reject Sartre's views on consciousness and the ego. But even if we choose to accept Sartre and reject Husserl, it must be with the clear understanding that his position is not an "advance" on Husserl's crypto-idealism; it is a return to a position that Husserl had already held and found to be illogical. Sartre's insistence that he is more logical than Husserl must be quite simply rejected; it is founded upon his inability to perform the required "phenomenological reduction" upon his own emotional conviction that "Man is a useless passion." Where phenomenology is concerned, Sartre is quite determined to have his cake and eat it.

La Nausée was published, as we have seen, in 1938, and it should now be possible to recognize how much of it is founded on the "phenomenological philosophy" that he believes he has derived from Husserl. Roquentin is a man who has been thrown "by a series of linked explosions" into an indifferent and hostile world. Living alone has deprived him of a sense of ego, so he feels himself to be a series of mere responses to events. Then even his purely habitual sense of meaning collapses, and he finds himself overwhelmed by "raw existence." The nature of his revelation, he feels, is that human beings impose their own meanings on reality—rather as they eat and kill cattle for food. He is like a man who is stricken by a sudden and instinctive vegetarianism, a desire to cease to commit this injustice on reality.

But now the nature of Sartre's basic error appears quite clearly. Like Husserl, he agrees that *all* perception is intentional—which is to say that its relation to objects is active, not passive. Yet he is asking us to accept that Roquentin's nausea is *non-intentional* perception—that its "intentional" element has broken down, and that this is why he is "overwhelmed" by "things." What he has done, in fact, is to invent his own version of "intentionality." It is described in Husserl's sentence "All consciousness is consciousness *of* something." This, as we have seen, Sartre takes to be an admission that consciousness is totally passive: no object, no consciousness. It is hard to see how he feels justified in referring to such total passivity as "intentionality," which implies direction and purpose. Sartre has imported into *La Nausée* the same confusion that underlies *Transcendence of the Ego*.

Transcendence of the Ego is a very small volume: so is *A Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, which appeared immediately after *La Nausée*. Here Sartre continues his attempt to describe the world of human consciousness in purely mechanical terms. He is concerned with the phenomenon of emotion, which might seem to be at the opposite extreme from "mechanicalness": after all, a machine cannot feel emotion. Sartre would agree, but insists, nevertheless, that emotion must be seen as a purely mechanical reaction. The word "reaction" is here important. Emotion, according to Sartre, is what we feel when all the roads to *action* are blocked. When we can act, we do so, and the action is satisfying in itself—like eating. When we are frustrated, our need to act "backs up" on us, and *then* we experience emotion. Imagine, for example, a young lady reading a novel about a tragic love affair. She identifies with the heroine: she also feels the need to bestow herself, to offer her love; but it is only a book, so she feels sad and cries instead. As to the heroine, she feels sad because her love is frustrated by circumstance.

Sartre illustrates his theory with the example of a man who reaches out for some grapes that are beyond his reach, and mutters "They are too green anyway." This cry of "sour grapes" is an act of self-deception to make him feel less frustrated. Sartre says he is "conferring" greenness on the grapes, and that it is a kind of "magical" act. Similarly, a man faced with a charging lion faints away. He cannot make the lion go away in practice, so he does it "magically" by fainting. He is like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. In a word, emotion is wishful thinking.

And what of positive emotions—like happiness? Sartre here makes a distinction. Joy is not necessarily an emotion. A hungry man may feel joy as he eats his dinner, but that is a physical sensation of satisfaction, not an emotion. But as to the *emotion* of joy—what a lover feels when told his mistress is arriving on the afternoon train—this is quite a different matter. This must also be regarded as a "magical" act—as wishful thinking. Why? Because, says Sartre, *the reality is always disappointing*. The pleasure "will yield itself to us only through numberless details," little by little; what is more, it will soon become blunted. So the emotion of joy is just as much a piece of self-deception as the man's reaction to the "sour grapes."

Here is a case in which Sartre seems to be stretching the facts on a rack to make them fit his theory. Surely, to begin with, it is a mistake to dismiss the "sensation" of joy (as distinguished from the emotion) as a physical matter. What a child feels at Christmas, or as he sets out on a holiday, is surely an emotion of joy—quite unlike the physical sensation of eating. Is Sartre saying that we must distinguish the "emotion" of joy by its element of *anticipation* (which is always disappointed)? If so, then he is mistaken. Abraham Maslow spent years studying the phenomenon he called "the peak experience"—the sense of an overflow of pure joy that comes at certain moments. The peak experience is not a physical sensation—like swallowing food—yet it has no element of anticipation; it is perfectly contented to rest in the present moment. Neither can we argue that the peak experience involves some sort of self-deception. On the contrary, it seems to involve a "wider" view of reality than we normally take, a kind of bird's-eye view as opposed to our normal worm's-eye view.

Here it seems to be Sartre's basic assumption that is at fault. Does it really make sense to say that when Romeo makes love to Juliet, he feels no emotion of joy, only an unreflective sensation? Or that a mother who has just been told that her child is alive after all feels a sensation but not an emotion of joy? If so, why is she crying?

Even the account of negative emotion is suspect. Impressed by Sartre's insight that negative emotion involves frustration, we swallow without examination the claim that it also involves self-deception—magic. But I can feel frustrated that the grapes are beyond my reach without feeling that they are sour. Or I may remind myself that there will probably be grapes at home, or that last time I ate them they gave me diarrhoea. In short, I can *control* the emotion as well as merely submit to it. Sartre ignores this option because it raises the possibility of freedom, and he is concerned to demonstrate that the whole process is purely mechanical.

What should now be clear is that it would be inaccurate to say that Sartre evolved his philosophy of human nature through Husserl or Heidegger. The philosophy—with its profound pessimism—was there long before he discovered either of them; he merely used their language and methods to express his own feelings. It may help to

place these feelings in perspective if we speak briefly of his early life. He was born in Paris in 1905; his father died two years later, and his mother was forced to take the child to live with her parents. (The situation was closely paralleled in Camus' life.) His grandfather, who dominated the household, was an indulgent tyrant with a histrionic streak—he looked like God the Father, with his beard, and was given to striking noble attitudes. The child Sartre escaped his loneliness by reading—and writing—stories. Sartre was brought up a Catholic by his Catholic grandmother, but had to listen to a great deal of ridicule of Catholicism from his grandfather.

Regarded as a child prodigy, Sartre sat at a special desk near the teacher and never played with the other boys. He was ugly and cross-eyed, and they wanted nothing to do with him. At home he was bored and lonely. His mother remarried when he was ten; he disliked his stepfather and felt estranged from his mother. He systematically stole from his parents—when money was not available, he stole books and sold them. At school, his work went badly. But by his mid-teens, he began to distinguish himself at school, and some of his juvenilia was published. By the time Simone de Beauvoir met him in 1928 (when he was twenty-three), he was known as a brilliant student, and was enjoying life among intellectual equals. But the unhealthy and unhappy up-bringing had left their mark in the form of self-disgust and pessimism. As early as 1924, he was obsessed by the notion that consciousness is "contingent," "an emptiness in being." That is to say, consciousness (we could substitute the word "man") is a kind of void in nature, an emptiness in an otherwise solid world.

The novel *La Nausée* and the stories in *Le Mur* make us realize that this was more than a philosophical attitude. It was a state of mind. His heroes are too conscious, too aware of everything that goes on around them. Sartre is an observer, coldly watching the world and wishing he could be a part of it. "From time to time he said in his head, 'How I love my dear Mama.' There was always a little corner of him which wasn't quite persuaded, and of course God saw that corner...." Because of this excessive self-consciousness, the observation is often brilliant; he describes a servant girl the hero is thinking of seducing: "She stood there, her arms stiff, red and docile, her lips bunched around the cigarette like

a thermometer stuck in her mouth." But it seems clear that Sartre's normal mode of consciousness is a sense of being overwhelmed by reality, negated and cowed by it. Other people are more self-confident; they behave as if they belonged in the world. This is clearly because they are stupider than he is; they are "*salauds*."

So the world is divided into stupid and self-confident "bastards," and intelligent, observant, but basically passive people like himself.... In the story from which the above quotations are taken ('Childhood of a Leader'), the oversensitive hero finally succeeds in getting rid of his awkwardness and self-consciousness by becoming a rabid anti-Semite—which, for Sartre, is the equivalent of becoming an alcoholic. Sartre can conceive of no other way of escaping from the anguish of self-awareness.

Clearly, what Sartre is expressing is the "Outsider syndrome" which is so common among the romantics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—Joyce's Stephen Daedalus is another example. Stephen regards his friend Mulligan as a "salaud"—well-fed, self-confident, basically stupid. But whereas Joyce attempted to become an "affirmer" in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Sartre decided to extend his "phenomenological" criticism of human nature into the full-scale nihilism of *Being and Nothingness*.

Let me briefly summarize the basic doctrines of this book, Sartre's major contribution to philosophy. He begins by distinguishing between two major types of being or existence. Objects—chairs and buildings—exist in themselves: they have the simplest kind of solid existence. But a conscious being exists *for-itself*—it is aware of itself as existing. But what do I mean when I say I am self-conscious? I mean that I experience myself as a *gap in nature*, a kind of hole. I do not experience my consciousness as something positive so much as a void surrounded by nature.

There is, according to Sartre, a third kind of being, *being-for-others*. Other people make me feel I exist by looking at me; they define my self-awareness by the way they treat me. (We have already discussed this notion in speaking of Sartre's view of the ego.) But in making me see myself through their eyes, other people take away my freedom. Of course, if someone does this very openly—by trying to dominate me—then I retaliate by trying to do the same to him—by trying to take away his freedom.

The result, says Sartre, is that human relations are basically a form of conflict. I am trying to get you to acknowledge me, and I can do this best by dominating you. You want me to acknowledge you, and try to dominate me. We may, perhaps, reach a kind of truce, whereby we agree to minister to one another's egos—a mutual admiration society; but this is obviously "bad faith." As to love, it does not exist—it is another mutual admiration society which is really based upon a desire to get something out of one another. When a man says: "I love you" to a girl, he is really saying "I desire you," and trying to make her love him, so that she will give herself. Respect for the other's freedom is an empty word, says Sartre. The conclusion of *Being and Nothingness* is expressed in its final pages: "It is meaningless that we live and meaningless that we die.... Man is a useless passion."

Is there, then, nothing positive about human existence? Is it all conflict and frustration and self-deception? According to Sartre's book, yes. But, oddly enough, not according to *La Nausée*. Roquentin's experiences of "nausea" are counter-balanced with something altogether different. On at least two occasions, his nausea vanishes completely, and he experiences a sense of being wholly alive. Both occur fairly early in the book. On one occasion, he is sitting in a park when he is overtaken by the nausea, and makes this interesting remark: "The Nausea is not inside me; I feel it *out there* in the wall... everywhere around me." The statement is plainly inaccurate—a piece of bad phenomenology. He means that it does not seem to be a mere "feeling," but an objective perception. It is rather like saying: "The stomach ache was not in my stomach but in the sour apple I had swallowed." Then Roquentin asks the waitress to put on one of his favourite records, a negress singing "Some of These Days" (one critic took the trouble to try to locate a recording of a negress singing the song, and concluded that Sartre meant the Polish singer Sophie Tucker): "I grow warm, I begin to feel happy...the Nausea has disappeared. When the voice was heard in the silence, I felt my body harden and the Nausea vanish. Suddenly: it was almost unbearable to become so hard, so brilliant...." And as he reaches out for his beer: "this movement of my arm has developed like a majestic theme, it has glided along the song of the Negress; I seemed to be dancing."

And suddenly, he no longer feels that "there's no adventure":

> "I am touched, I feel my body at rest like a precision machine. I have had real adventures. I can recapture no detail, but I perceive the rigorous succession of circumstances. I have crossed seas, left cities behind me, followed the course of rivers or plunged into forests... I have had women, I have fought with men.... Yes, I who loved so much to sit on the banks of the Tiber at Rome...I am here, living in the same second as these card players...."

The feeling he is describing is familiar to most people, the "bird's-eye view" of one's own life, the ability to see it from a distance, as it were, instead of too close-up. The last sentence is particularly important, describing his sense of *continuity* with his own past, and also his sense of existing here, in the present, almost as if he is saying: "What, *me*, *here*?" with a kind of delighted astonishment. He is no longer a "hole" in nature, a candle in the sunlight. The candle is, so to speak, outshining the "sun" of the natural world, asserting its own superior existence. In short, the normal sense of contingency has been turned completely upside down; both he and his surroundings seem "necessary."

A few pages later he mentions that this "nausea" has developed fairly recently; two years ago, he was in a continuous state of bubbling vitality. "I could conjure [up] faces, trees, houses, a Japanese girl in Kamaishiki washing herself naked in a wooden tub, a dead Russian, emptied of blood by a great gaping wound...." We gather that he is a big, powerful man who has lived dangerously; even here he is having an affair with the wife of the *patron*. "This joy was used up a long time ago. Will it be reborn today?"

It is, in fact, reborn a couple of days later, on a Sunday. As he goes into the park in the sunlight, he notes: "It didn't have its usual look, it smiled at me." As he walks around the town, everything suddenly seems interesting. After lunch he goes for another walk. "I felt the afternoon all through my heavy body. Not my afternoon but theirs..."—the inhabitants of Bouville. But again, the incipient disgust seems to evaporate. "The sun was clear and diaphanous like white wine." And toward evening, he again has the sense of reconciliation, of being at rest. "The light grows softer.... A gas

lamp glowed.... The sky was still clear, but the earth was bathed in shadow.... For a moment I wondered if I were not going to love humanity. But, after all, it was their Sunday, not mine....” A small boy murmurs in ecstasy as the lighthouse is switched on. “Then I felt my heart swell with a great feeling of adventure.”

Now it must be emphasized that neither the park scene nor the description of Sunday are set up so they can be knocked down again; Sartre is not saying that this is just another illusion. He is sufficiently honest to let these scenes take their place among the others as another aspect of human consciousness. But the episodes are placed early in the book, so they seem to be negated by his later experiences of nausea. Yet at the end of the book, as he prepares to return to Paris, Roquentin decides that perhaps he should try to put up a fight—perhaps to write a book, “...not a history book; history talks about what has existed.... Another type of book. I don’t know quite which kind—but you would have to guess, behind the printed words, behind the pages, at something which would not exist, which would be above existence.... It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence....” Of course, Sartre is convinced that “art” is a lie, a way of making existence seem non-contingent. Yet Roquentin keeps on recalling the negress singing “Some of These Days”; this is what he would like to capture on paper—this curious, simple perfection that can lift the listener—or reader—out of the sense of meaninglessness. At the end of *La Nausée*, it seems clear that meaninglessness does not necessarily have the last word. Yet this is apparently a matter on which Sartre himself has not made up his mind. Are the “peak experiences” some kind of illusion, a form of self-deception, as he argues in the *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*?

The question can only be answered by a phenomenological analysis of these states of consciousness. And the first thing that seems clear is that the amount of energy and conviction we put into everyday life is not an invariable quantity, and that its fluctuations are by no means “mechanical.” They depend upon our mental attitudes. If something shocks or upsets me, my energies “drain away.” If I anticipate something pleasant and exciting, I feel energy “flowing into me”—as if it were water trickling into some inner cistern.

Moreover, my sense of meaning (or contingency) depends on

the amount of energy in my "cistern." Contingency could be described as a feeling of disconnectedness. My consciousness has no *continuity*. When I am feeling full of energy, I can recall something pleasant that happened yesterday, and feel a glow of pleasure. When I am feeling low and frightened, I can remember something pleasant that happened only ten minutes ago, and I feel nothing. I try to recall another time, another place; they seem dim, faraway, unreal. I can say, "Yes, I know Paris well," and even though it is true, it seems a lie; I don't believe it.

In short, the "pressure" of my consciousness is so low that it can only focus on one thing at a time. Here is a point that Sartre overlooked in describing consciousness: that it has "pressure"—like a gas cooker. When the gas pressure is low, consciousness is restricted to the present. If I try to perform some task when the pressure is low, it seems pointless, meaningless, "not worth the effort." Whereas, when I do something with pleasure and conviction, my mind keeps a grip on the overall task, from beginning to end.

Here, then, we have reduced the problem to one with which we are all familiar: the way that things seem important, exciting, when our "inner pressure" is high, and pointless and "not worth the effort" when it is low. Am I, as Sartre says, indulging in self-deception when I experience a sense of meaning? This would be hard to maintain. It is the "low" mood that tells lies; it tells me that I have not been to Paris when I know perfectly well I have. Besides, it is not even true that I lose all sense of meaning in the low moods; I can still see the purpose in doing something, but I no longer *feel* it. The sense of contingency or absurdity begins with this "disconnection" between perception and feeling. (Coleridge says of the stars, "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.") Medically speaking, this is known as schizophrenia.

What Sartre and Camus are arguing is that "low pressure consciousness" gives us a more truthful and accurate picture of the world than "high pressure consciousness." And it is plainly untrue. Practically speaking, consciousness is a kind of light which enables us to see and grasp the world around us. When it is feeble, it only illuminates the immediate present; when it is strong, we can see further. No one would argue that a weak light enables us to see

more clearly than a strong one.

What is this "pressure" of consciousness? Husserl has provided the answer: it is intentionality. Consciousness is intentional (all consciousness is consciousness of something). Perception is an arrow fired toward the object. If the bow-string is slack, it fails to reach its target and we remain "unaware" of the object—even if we are looking straight at it. If I am doing something boring or unimportant, I *allow* the pressure of consciousness to drop; I allow intentionality to become slack and feeble. If I am defusing an unexploded bomb, I concentrate all my forces; my aim is to increase this inner pressure, and thereby to *increase intentionality*.

So Camus' "absurdity," Sartre's "Contingency," are not some kind of unusually honest (i.e., non-intentional) perception; there is no such thing. The difference between moods of "nausea" and "peak experiences" is simply that in nausea, *intentionality is weaker*. It is also significant that we use the words "intensity" and "vision" interchangeably, recognizing that in moments of "intensity," we *see* further. The searchlight beam of intentionality illuminates more. Sartre's statement that "nausea is out there" is simply bad phenomenology; he has failed to grasp what Husserl is talking about.

And how, in view of the sweeping pessimism of *Being and Nothingness* (which was, in fact, begun earlier than *La Nausée*—Sartre says it took twelve years to write) was Sartre nevertheless able to reach the conclusion that human beings possess freedom? The answer is that the analysis of freedom in *Being and Nothingness* is not a logical outcome of what has gone before; he is simply concerned to speak of something that seems self-evident. Let us suppose, he says, that I set out for a hike with some companions, and after several hours, I experience painful fatigue. "At first I resist, and then suddenly I let myself go, I give up." He throws down his knapsack and flings himself down beside it. One of his companions reproaches him for holding them up—meaning that he was free to choose whether to give up or not. He replies that he was too tired to go on. Who is right? In order to answer that, says Sartre, the question must be rephrased. If he decided to go on, it would not be a purely "local and accidental modification" of his behaviour, but a part of his *total* sense of meaning, of value. Which

is to say that in order to answer the question, "Is it worthwhile going on?" he must ask: "What is ultimately at stake?" His whole attitude to himself and to life is involved in the question. His willingness to accept failure springs out of a sense of inferiority, and this sense of inferiority is part of his *chosen* attitude toward himself. It is part of his assessment of his life and its possibilities. In short, Sartre is saying that he agrees with his reproachful companion that he was free to choose whether to go on or give up—and that he is exercising the option to give up.

It seems, then, that in spite of his analysis of human helplessness and the contingency of consciousness, he has come around to agreeing with Renouvier and William James that free will exists. But he has also made—from the point of view of the present analysis—a more significant concession: that my freedom depends upon my overall attitude to my existence and to life in general. Whether we believe in free will or not is not some abstract metaphysical issue. James plunged into nervous breakdown when, in a state of depression, he recalled a catatonic idiot he had seen in a mental home, and was shattered by the thought, "There but for the grace of God go I—if the hour should strike for me as it struck for him, nothing could shield me from his fate." "There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid in my breast gave way, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this, the universe was changed for me altogether."

This is very much what we would expect, since we have noted that when something upsets me, my energies "drain away," while when something pleases and excites me, I feel energy flowing into me. So James's sense of his own contingency ("my own merely momentary discrepancy from him") will be bound to produce a sense of inner-collapse, a sudden fall in the pressure (intentionality) of consciousness.

It also follows quite clearly that a man whose basic conviction is that "it is meaningless that we live and meaningless that we die" has ensured the perpetuation of his own sense of nausea, and that this ensures that his reasoning remains trapped in a vicious circle. His "deflated consciousness" causes him to react to the world with nausea, but since he is convinced that "the nausea is out there," he

has no reason to make the effort that would raise its pressure. Roquentin *chooses* his nausea by a gesture of inner collapse, as the hitchhiker flings down his haversack. He allows himself to be overwhelmed, not by a sense of meaninglessness, but by a *conviction* of meaninglessness. When, in Indo-China, he "woke up from a six-year slumber" and asked: "What am I doing here? Why am I talking to these people?" he was choosing between this present feeling of futility and the certainties that have guided his actions in the past, and deciding that the present "meaninglessness" is *truer*. The past sense of meaning was an illusion, from which he has now awakened. Roquentin has chosen to accept the truth of the meaninglessness on the basis of what we have seen to be a faulty piece of phenomenological analysis—a mistake.

But now, like William James, Sartre has at least come to accept the reality of freedom—in moments of immediate choice. Unfortunately, he fails to grasp that what Roquentin experienced as he listened to "Some of These Days" is also freedom—on a larger and more satisfying scale. And if the hitchhiker is free to choose, then so, paradoxically, is Roquentin. I say paradoxically, because it hardly seems to be self-evidently true that we can "choose" peak experiences—surely people would like to have them from morning till night? Yet consider the matter more closely. Most of us can remember days when everything seemed perfect, and when the world seemed a marvellous and exciting place—for example, during certain Christmases during childhood. If we think about it, we realize that the sense of optimism slowly builds up, little by little. The presents, the decorations, the lights on the Christmas tree, the smell of cooking, the good humour of the adults, the Christmas carols on the radio—each one is like a small weight added to the positive side of a balance. On a normal day, the balance can swing either way; something causes a flash of optimism, then something else causes a flicker of depression. Moreover, I am aware of a self-division in myself, one aspect of me inclined to believe the best of everything, the other inclined to sneer and pour cold water on his optimism. The sense of inner serenity has to be built, little by little, as a child builds a sand castle with buckets of sand. That "other self" can destroy hours of work with one kick. Which seems to explain why, in the course of everyday existence, we seldom

achieve that expansive sense of freedom.

Still, the "bad child" aspect of us does not have it all his own way. As the sense of optimism builds up, we become more expert in making him keep his distance from the sand castle. And once we have passed a certain point of happiness, nothing seems to be able to disturb it. This is because the optimism seems to enable us to grasp more, to see further, toward wider horizons; and, oddly enough, the wider we see, the more optimistic we become.

But this same analysis demonstrates why pessimism—or at least a rather sour realism—is the human norm. From childhood on, we are inclined to exaggerate immediate problems, and to allow them to plunge us into self-pity. And since everyday consciousness *is* consciousness of immediacy—an endless succession of minor tasks—we are usually confined within the boundaries of a certain pessimism, an expectation-of-the-worst.

The peak experiences and moments of optimism convince us that this is a mistake, that life is far more fascinating than we give it credit for. In such moments, we can also see clearly the solution: that *if only* we could act upon this assumption, we would instantly deactivate the chief cause of our pessimism: the tendency to exaggerate minor problems. In these moments, it seems self-evident that our usual attitude of caution and mistrust is *completely unjustified* by the facts. Therefore, we have only to bear this clearly in mind, and the moods of buoyant optimism would cease to be a rarity.

Then we wake up the next morning, feeling rather dull, and confronted by the usual problems and necessities. Out of habit, we slip into the usual attitude as we slip into our clothes. And if we remember the resolution of yesterday, it seems another reason for gloom: for we plainly cannot live up to it. It seems a pipe-dream, an alcoholic glow, a completely unwarranted optimism.

Nevertheless, the refusal to be convinced by our emotions, to be bullied by our self-pity, to be overwhelmed by immediate problems, has the effect of causing small but definite changes in the inner balance of power. The next time the mood of optimism occurs, it costs less effort, and we can survey the extent to which we have ceased to be victims of our own tendency to defeat.

So there is no paradox in the statement that the peak experience

is "intentional." It may be impossible to achieve at will; yet it is possible to create *the conditions* in which it can occur.

What happens to those who make no such effort? Nothing in particular. They go on. But they remain essentially victims of circumstance. If life is obliging enough to present them with interesting challenges, they may even improve. But under normal circumstances, the odds are against it. There has been no time in history when things did not seem to be getting worse, and since "immediacy" is our daily lot, the normal pattern of the "unexamined life" is increasing defeat. The only real defence against such defeat is the power of logic. Husserl would have said that the key to human greatness lies in "science." Insofar as he is a Husserlian, Sartre would seem to endorse this view. Unfortunately, as we have seen, he is not Husserlian enough.

This excursion into the phenomenology of nausea and the peak experience should also have made it clear why Sartre's attempts to make any positive extensions of the philosophy of *Being and Nothingness* must lead to failure. He has carefully incorporated a fundamental contradiction into his foundation. He wishes to develop a morality; and a morality is, by definition, a philosophy of freedom. (Morality consists of statements of what we should do with our freedom; consequently, it is founded on the notion of freedom.) Yet he makes it a premise that consciousness is contingent, that there is no "controlling ego." Therefore, freedom is an illusion.

Sartre himself is vulnerable to a criticism he made of the communists in an article called "Materialism and Revolution." The Marxist affirms that idealism is a bourgeois delusion; the truth lies in materialism; we are the product of material forces. Having said which, the Marxist proceeds to make abstract statements concerning the non-existence of God, the aim of history, and so on. How can a product of material forces set itself up as an arbiter of truth? Precisely the same objection applies to Sartre's philosophy, as outlined in *Being and Nothingness*. If there is no Cartesian *cogito* (the "I" who says "I think therefore I am"), if consciousness is entirely dependent on its object, then there is certainly no such thing as freedom.

How, then, can Sartre claim to find any basis for the idea of

freedom in his existential phenomenology? The answer is that he *defines* the nature of the "for-itself" (human consciousness) as pure freedom. The for-itself envies nature (the in-itself) its solidness, its unquestioned existence: it is the "eternal hunter of the in-itself." Its very emptiness, its *lack of real definition*, means that it is free whether it likes it or not. A stone is what it is; man isn't what he is; therefore he is "free." In fact, says Sartre, he is "condemned to be free." He does not explain how, if consciousness is a mere reflection of objects, and there is no controlling ego, we can regard consciousness as pure freedom.

But even if we ignore the contradiction, we can see that Sartre's extremely limited concept of freedom is not going to be of much advantage to him as a "moralist." It amounts to little more than Renouvier's definition—that I can choose whether to sustain a thought or think of something else. He has forgotten Roquentin's experience of meaning while listening to "Some of These Days." Or, if he has not forgotten it, he has certainly failed to see its significance as an experience of a wider sort of freedom.

So what can man do to exercise his freedom? The answer, says Sartre, is that he can form "projects" and carry them out. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* he cites Flaubert as an example. Flaubert was a *petit bourgeois* (and for some reason, Sartre had a lifelong detestation of the *petit bourgeois* that amounted almost to paranoia). He might have chosen to be a middle-class nobody, a *rentier*; instead, he created a mental image of himself as a great artist, then spent his life realizing the "project." "You can create nothing but yourself," as Shaw says in *Back to Methuselah*. Man can accept "what he is" as if it were unchangeable, or he can catapult himself toward his "project."

Even so, Sartre sees it as a rather bleak choice. His studies of Baudelaire, Genet, and Flaubert are intended to illustrate how man can achieve a certain control over his destiny by accepting even its most negative aspects and transforming them through a "project." In the last sentence of his book on Baudelaire, Sartre states: "The free choice that a man makes of himself coincides absolutely with his destiny." Baudelaire was solitary, alone, unhappy. He chose to accept these as his destiny and made poetry out of it—and so transcended his frustrations. Genet was labelled a thief as a child;

he chose to accept the label, *became* a criminal, and again, made literature out of it. But a reader who feels that Sartre's notion of freedom is too narrow may object that such a choice is not quite the triumph that Sartre makes out. To say "I am unhappy and frustrated; very well, I accept it as my destiny" can be no more than a surrender to self-pity. That such a surrender can produce art—even great art—is not in doubt; but it is not the surrender that produces the art, but the determination that accompanies it—a determination which, united with a different attitude, might produce even greater art, like the music of Beethoven.

It follows, then, that the human world, as represented in Sartre's plays and novels, is going to be a rather dreary place. His premise is that his characters are trapped in contingency, in the stream of their own experience, in immediacy, and there is very little they can do about it. Of course, they can resist, they can decline to allow themselves to be totally defined by their experience; they can set up brave "projects." But, oddly enough, Sartre has never chosen to write about such a person in his fiction; the hero of his major novel *Les chemins de la liberté* (*The Roads to Freedom*) seems to be able to do little except gloomily observe his own impotence. The nearest Sartre seems to have come to illustrating his philosophy of the "project" is in his unfinished book on Flaubert, *The Idiot of the Family*—which, significantly, he insists should be treated as a kind of novel.

The novel is perhaps the most significant form of self-revelation in which a writer can indulge; for no matter how much wishful thinking he may infuse into it (if he happens to be a romantic or an author of adventure stories), what finally emerges will be a picture of reality as he experiences it in his everyday life. It reflects his "normal" state of consciousness. To compare, let us say, the deathbed scenes in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* is to grasp instantly the difference between what it was like to "be" Tolstoy and to "be" Huxley. And the most significant insight to emerge from reading Sartre's novels and plays is that his world contains very little freedom. Neither *La Nausée* nor *The Roads to Freedom* are the novels Roquentin thought of writing, something as "beautiful and hard as steel [that would] make people ashamed of their existence." His fiction tends to be an extended

illustration of his theory of the inevitable conflict between human beings, and of their tendency to fail to make use of their freedom.

How then can man hope for any extension of his freedom? Sartre's answer is: through political revolution. To the English speaking reader, this answer is bound to come as something of a surprise, even if he happens to be aware of Sartre's leftist affiliations. The English and American inclination toward democratic politics means that we inevitably think of revolution as a form of extremism that is foreign to common sense. Even Camus' demonstration—in *L'Homme Révolté*—that revolution inevitably leads to tyranny strikes us as slightly superfluous, since history makes it self-evident. In the case of Sartre, the revolutionary politics is doubly surprising, since it is hard to see what difference it could make to his overall view of human existence. Would it make the slightest difference to the characters of *The Roads to Freedom* if the scene was Moscow or Peking instead of Paris? Would their problems miraculously vanish under communism? Would Mathieu and Daniel and Boris and Ivitch realize that their destiny lies in serving society, and become wildly happy? Could Sartre even conceive of a communist society that would raise human beings above their present level of misery and contingency? The premises of *Being and Nothingness* show too clearly that he could not. Then how is it possible for a thinker as intelligent and as realistic as Sartre to deceive himself into believing that human salvation lies in the proletarian revolution?

The answer must be sought in Sartre's biography rather than in the arguments of *The Communists and the Peace* or the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (which, as we shall see in a moment, are as self-contradictory as those of *Being and Nothingness*). Sartre's life in his grandfather's household and his later unfortunate experiences of school turned him into a rebel against all authority; the very idea of authority makes his hair bristle. Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography shows her and Sartre practicing a thoroughly negative kind of social criticism. She admits: "I refused to envisage other people as potential individuals, with consciences like myself. I would not put myself in their shoes; and that was one reason for

my addiction to irony."[5] She goes on: "Sartre worked out the notion of dishonesty (*mauvais-foi*) which, according to him, embraced all those phenomena which other people attributed to the unconscious mind. We set ourselves to expose this dishonesty in all its manifestations.... We rejoiced every time we unearthed a new loophole, another type of deception...." She began to buy a true detective magazine, and came to feel that many criminals were really social rebels—rebels against the detested *bourgeoisie*. "We set particular store by any upheaval which exposed the defects and hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, knocking down the façade behind which their homes and hearts took shelter.... The bulk of the verdicts reached, too, fed our indignation, for in them society shamelessly declared its class-ridden, reactionary attitudes." Occasionally, they were forced to recognize that their indignation was misdirected. In 1933 two sisters called Papin, maids in the house of a provincial solicitor, murdered their mistress and her daughter, afterwards mutilating the bodies and gouging out their eyes (Genet used the case as the basis for *Les Bonnes*). Sartre and Beauvoir thought they understood it all too well—the awful *petit bourgeois* mistress who would deduct the price of a broken plate from the servants' wages. "It was their orphaned childhood and subsequent enslavement, the whole ghastly system that had made them what they were."

The two sisters had a lesbian relationship, which Sartre and Beauvoir found rather touching. But the preliminary hearing made it quite evident that both sisters were paranoid. "We were therefore wrong in regarding their excesses as being due to the hand of rough justice, suddenly unleashed.... We could not bring ourselves to believe this, and obstinately resisted in our admiration for them—though this did not stop us getting very cross when government psychiatrists pronounced them both of sound mind...." Yet although the tone is confessional, Beauvoir seems unaware that she and Sartre were indulging in the *mauvais-foi* they were so quick to condemn in others. Beauvoir describes how she attended a concert, "and when I saw the pampered audience all around me, prepared to digest its ration of aesthetic beauty, a feeling of misery swept over

[5] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, p. 105.

me." It does not seem to have struck her that the audience was there for the same reason that she was, and that if they deserved condemnation for enjoying music, then so did she. She and Sartre continued to find nothing but bourgeois nastiness and wickedness all around them. "According to us, there was only one way of preventing general madness, and that was by the overthrow of the ruling class; I was even less tolerant of its lies, stupidity, prejudices and false virtues than I had been when I was twenty." But, "happily, the liquidation of capitalism seemed to be close at hand. The crises that had broken out in 1929 seemed to be getting steadily worse...." But she admits that "what we never considered was the possibility of joining a Communist splinter group. We had the very highest opinion of Trotsky, and the idea of "permanent revolution" suited our anarchist tendencies far better than that of constructing a socialist regime inside one single country. But both in the Trotskyite party and the various other dissident groups we encountered the same ideological dogmatism as we did in the Communist Party...." Their natural anarchism made them revolt against any form of dogma or authority. Yet because they were themselves members of the *petit bourgeoisie* who were in revolt against their background, they could hardly reject Marxism as crude materialist dogmatism. If they had been born in Russia, no doubt their natural anarchism would have made them reject Marxism as decisively as they rejected Catholicism. Since they were born in France, their indignation had to be directed against the *bourgeoisie*.

All this is understandable enough, and hardly constitutes an indictment of their youthful enthusiasm. But what seems quite clear is that these attitudes were not the result of profound analysis of "*la condition humaine*," but the usual emotional prejudices of dissatisfied, middle-class intellectuals. How could Sartre, after the subtle analyses of human motivation in *Being and Nothingness*, embrace again the simplistic revolutionism of his youth?

Again, the answer seems to lie in the events of Sartre's life. Human freedom, he insists, is limited, since we are trapped in contingency. (Beauvoir mentions that he planned a novel whose epigraph was to be: "The pity of it is, we are free."[6]) The best we

[6] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, p. 262.

can hope for lies in choosing a project and devoting ourselves to it. But *what* project? As a child, Sartre wanted to be a writer; it would rescue his life from meaninglessness. By the time he was thirty-three, Sartre had realized this particular project; *La Nausée* became a bestseller, and he was compared to Proust, Nietzsche, and Kafka. Four years later, *Being and Nothingness* confirmed his stature as a serious philosopher. The theatrical success of *The Flies* followed. Sartre was, of course, living in occupied Paris; he had been a prisoner of war for just under a year. In the prison camp he had written a Biblical play *Buriona*, whose hidden message to his fellow prisoners was that they must still resist the Germans. Whether he liked it or not, Sartre was being dragged into the world of political actuality. Back in Paris, he joined the Resistance. The German occupation had given the word freedom an entirely new—and pragmatic—meaning. Sartre wrote later: "We were never more free than under the German occupation.... For the secret of man is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex, it is the limit of his freedom, his ability to resist torture and death."[7] And in 1943 he again proclaimed the doctrine of freedom in *The Flies*. Jupiter asks Orestes: "Who made you?," and Orestes answers: "You did, but you made one mistake: you created me free."

Free for what? If Sartre had been a different kind of philosopher, he might have thought in terms of the psychological freedom that Roquentin experiences in the café. But his premises ruled out that possibility. He was in the position of preaching freedom with no definite course to advocate. But his emotional rejection of the *bourgeoisie* remained as strong as ever, and so did the vaguely revolutionary attitudes that went with it. In wartime France it was easy to identify emotionally with the banned Communist Party. So although Sartre and Beauvoir remained as rebellious as ever about Party dogmas, they gradually came to feel a closer identification with the aims of the Party.

Sartre's attitudes to Communism remained as paradoxical—that is to say, as confused—as ever. In *The Communists and Peace* (which appeared in his magazine *Les Temps Modernes* in 1952),

[7] *Situations III*, p. 11-13, quoted in *The Philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre*, edited by Robert Denoon Cumming. New York: Random House, 1965.

Sartre asserts that the worker must become a communist, because in France democracy means power in the hands of the *bourgeoisie*. The worker needs an Authority to direct his aspirations. If they learn obedience now, it will guarantee their freedom later in a world in which the *bourgeoisie* have been ousted from power. But while advocating that the workers should join the Party, Sartre reserves his own right to remain outside it. Sartre's position is, in fact, very close to that of a neo-religious thinker like T. E. Hulme, who, although he remains basically an unbeliever himself, nevertheless believes that the Church is the only force strong enough to save society from anarchy. Sartre even supports the use of a certain amount of "terror" if it will bring about the revolution more quickly. His old friend Merleau-Ponty was bitterly critical of these rather cavalier attitudes (in *Adventures in Dialectic*), pointing out that whenever the Party had gained that kind of power, it had invariably used it for totalitarian purposes. He was also curious to know how Sartre could recommend the workers to join the Party while reserving his own right to remain uncommitted.

Sartre's attitude toward the Party has remained ambivalent. He has always rejected its total materialism, its insistence that human motivation can be reduced to economic factors. In 1956, the Russian invasion of Hungary led Sartre to denounce Communism—or rather, Stalinism. (He remained optimistically convinced that they could be distinguished, in spite of Merleau-Ponty.) Yet he could hardly now turn his back on all forms of collectivism; he was too far committed to it. (The second and third volumes of *The Roads to Freedom* are made virtually unreadable by his insistence on skipping from one social group to another; the plot finally loses all impetus.) His logic had driven him inevitably to the conclusion that if freedom is to become more than a synonym for individual impotence ("the pity of it is, we are free"), it must find its expression in revolution. Yet the philosophies of existentialism and Marxism were opposed on every fundamental issue. Existentialism is a philosophy of individualism. Marxism insists on collective action and has the utmost contempt for individualism. Existentialism regarded man as helpless and contingent; Marxism takes a sturdily optimistic view of his ability to change the world. Existentialism regards "all men as enemies"; Marxism regards them

as brothers. Existentialism is anti-authoritarian; Marxism is authoritarian. Sartre's existentialism and Marxism have only one thing in common; loathing of the *bourgeoisie*. A hostile critic might say that Sartre finds this single common factor more important than a thousand disagreements.

Having said this, it is important to realize that Marxism and Sartrian existentialism have one basic thing in common: both are materialistic and deterministic. At first sight, this may seem unfair to existentialism—after all, it lays enormous emphasis on the individual and his ability to choose. But then, as we have seen, Sartre's view of freedom is unbelievably limited. During the crucial formative years of his career he regarded it as non-existent; it made its appearance at a relatively late stage, in *Being and Nothingness*; and, as we have seen, there is reason to suspect that this was not a case of philosophical development so much as response to the events of the war. Even so, Sartre's philosophy of freedom is completely lacking in any sense of optimism or uplift; he tells us dejectedly that "freedom is terror," that man is "condemned to be free," and that it is all rather a pity. Apart from those two scenes in *La Nausée*, it is obvious that he has no conception of freedom as an oddly paradoxical experience, as Chesterton's sense of "absurd good news." So apparent differences between Marxism and existentialism are deceptive; in practice he is in complete agreement with Marx's belief that men are created and conditioned by history, by circumstance.

Oddly enough, the nature of Sartre's error is so elementary that it is hard to believe he has really made it. Quite simply, he fails to grasp the obvious fact that freedom, first and foremost, means an *inner condition*. Freedom is a feeling, a sense of potentiality. The internal evidence of Sartre's novels makes it clear that he experiences this sensation so infrequently that he simply fails to take it into account. So when Sartre uses the word freedom, he means freedom of choice, or simply emptiness. "The worker learns his freedom from things, but precisely because things teach him that he is anything but a thing" ("Materialism and Revolution"). "Freedom coincides at its root with the non-being that is at the heart of man." (Here, to do Sartre justice, he means man's "*no*-thingness" rather than "nothingness.") "If freedom were easy, everything

would fall apart at once." "Even freedom...seems to be a withered branch for, like the sea, there is no end to it." There is no joy or exultation in Sartre's idea of freedom; it is not an inner-recognition, but merely a kind of abstract "right," something to which man can lay a moral and—as it were—legal claim. Sartre knows nothing of freedom as excitement, as expectation, as the joy of anticipation; not just as the ability to choose, but as the sense of endless exciting possibilities *from which* we can choose.

So both Sartre and Marx (and Engels) look at freedom "from the outside." They see man as a creature of circumstance; freedom is simply the extent to which man can resist or alter his circumstances. Yet the idea of freedom is really as foreign to Marxism as to Sartre's existentialism. If a full-blown "mechanist" or behaviourist got into argument with a Marxist, and contended that nothing man can do is really "free," because all his actions can be explained in terms of stimulus and response, the Marxist would find the argument irrefutable; for his own belief in freedom is an act of dogmatic faith rather than a logical consequence of his philosophy of man. All this needs to be understood if we are to explain why Sartre came to make such a desperate effort to create a synthesis of existentialism and Marxism. *If* it could be achieved, the result would certainly be the greatest philosophical synthesis of our century, a structure of truly Hegelian magnificence. And in a basic respect, it would be superior to Hegelianism, since Hegel was successfully challenged by Kierkegaard on the grounds that he was not "existential" enough. Sartre could at least claim that his foundation is truly existential. In 1960, the first instalment of Sartre's "great synthesis," his philosophical *summa*, appeared. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is as long as *Being and Nothingness*, and even more obscurely written. It is an attempt to translate the psychology of the earlier book into Marxist terms. The real problem was to link Marx's conception of the worker, alienated from his environment by the machinery of capitalism, with his own conception of the "for-itself" alienated from the "in-itself" by contingency. The major contradiction lay in the difference between the Marxist view that all men are brothers and Sartre's conviction that all men are enemies. Sartre argues that men are naturally alienated from one another by a fundamental relation of rivalry. If a

man goes for a country walk, he resents the presence of other people; nature would be more attractive if he was alone. When he joins a bus queue, every other person in the queue becomes his rival; the conductor may shout "No more room" just as he tries to climb on board. If he could perform magic by merely thinking, he would make the others dissolve into thin air—or, like Wells' "man who could work miracles," send them to Timbuktu. A crowded city, a crowded supermarket, is an unpleasant place because all these people want *their* turn. Moreover, man lives in the world of the "practico-inert," the world of things, and these can sometime seem actively hostile, as when you tread on a rake and it gives you a black eye.

But then, the basic "hostility" between men can be dissolved as soon as they agree to cooperate. A bus queue is a mere "series" of people, but a football team is a *group*, working toward a common aim. When I go into my local pub or club, I no longer feel that all these people are nuisances; on the contrary, if the place was empty, I would complain that it was too quiet. And a rake is an extremely useful instrument when I want to move dead leaves. It would be stupid for me to refuse to own a rake because it can give me a black eye. And it would be stupid of me to want to withdraw from society because other human beings are my rivals for food and services. If human beings can become a group rather than a series, there would be no end to their possibilities of mutual aid. The last phrase reminds us that its inventor—Kropotkin—was an anarchist, and that all Sartre has really done is to move from his philosophical vision of human beings as enemies to the anarchist notion that they can create heaven on earth by deciding to be brothers. In effect, Sartre's social philosophy is no more specifically Marxist than it is Christian. It may be his awareness that he could be moving in the direction of Christian principles that leads Sartre to insist that the group should, if necessary, be compulsory. Members must pledge themselves to cooperate, and the pledge must be enforced, if necessary, by terror. (At the time Sartre was writing the *Critique...*, Camus was working on a dramatization of Dostoevsky's *Possessed*, whose central event is the murder of a "fellow traveller" by a terrorist group; as usual, Sartre and Camus were in opposite camps.) Sartre's rationalism often takes him dangerously close to fascism.

The attempt to weld together Marxism and existentialism is ultimately a failure—as the non-appearance of the second part of the *Critique...* seems to indicate. Existentialists and Marxists remain as far apart as ever. Where Marxism is concerned, Sartre has reached the correct conclusions—about group cooperation—but he has reached them by the wrong route. The truth is that the working class movement, in all its forms, is based upon the notion that all men are brothers; it is, in fact, a secularized and sentimentalized Christianity. It is only necessary to read any of the classic socialist fiction, from Tressell and Morris to Gorky and Sholokhov, to realize that the spirit of Sartre and the spirit of socialism are in fundamental conflict. Where human relations are concerned, the socialists are starry-eyed idealists, and Sartre is a cynic and a realist. All the philosophical machinery of the *Critique...* cannot succeed in blending the milk of socialism with the lemon juice of existentialism. If the unthinkable ever occurred, and the *Critique...* became the Bible of some future socialist state, the socialists would continue to find it abstract and repellent while the existentialists would find it sentimental and dishonest. Nothing will convince a Roquentin that the disappearance of "scarcity" will transform *salauds* into angels and make *him* feel at home in the world. In fact, anyone who reads *La Nausée* can see that it is self-evident that no political change can make the slightest difference to its vision of "contingency." The Sartre who wrote *La Nausée* would have regarded the very idea as a blatant example of self-deception.

Peter Caws' book on Sartre[8] recognizes this element of wishful-thinking in his political philosophy. The "Introduction" contains a paragraph that goes straight to the point. After distinguishing three basic philosophical approaches—the subjective, the objective, and the collective—Caws remarks that "we may say of Sartre that he begins in the subjective tradition and moves toward the collective, but that he is completely indifferent to the objective." And he underlines the criticism by quoting Beauvoir on Sartre: "'he flatly refused to believe in science,' going so far as to maintain 'that microbes and other animalculae invisible to the naked eye didn't exist at all.'" This is tantamount to accusing Sartre of a form of

[8] Caws, Peter, *Sartre*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

dishonesty—that is, of flatly refusing to believe in the existence of things that contradict his rationalistic categories. Caws goes on to remark that, "For a writer wholly nurtured in the objective tradition to undertake the very reading, let alone the exposition, of Sartre, especially in view of the latter's punishing long-windedness, requires explanation." His explanation is that philosophy needs variety, and that it would be anti-philosophical to dismiss Sartre because he is not Wittgenstein or Austin.

The exposition that follows is admirably balanced and fair; in fact, Caws seems to get into the spirit of Sartre as he goes along, so that at times he is positively sympathetic. He is particularly good in his exposition of the early Sartre of *The Transcendence of the Ego* and the two books on imagination. It is when he gets into the more controversial area of Sartre's "existential morality" that the disadvantages of fair-mindedness begin to appear. Instead of pointing out contradictions, confusions, weak arguments (as Maurice Cranston does in his excellent little book on Sartre[9]), Caws is content to explain what Sartre said. In the chapter on politics and dialectics, he makes a few mildly personal remarks about Sartre's "unconventionality in his personal attitudes," then immediately apologizes for "these *ad hominem* remarks." In other words, he fails to see that, in writing about a man who insists that he is an existentialist before he is a philosopher, *ad hominem* remarks are not only excusable but highly relevant. Sartre himself acknowledges this when he says that his life as a writer has been an attempt to impose some sort of order on contingency—an order he nevertheless feels to be an illusion. But the reader does not need this admission to feel that Sartre tends to use philosophical language as a kind of heavy artillery to stun the reader into accepting his own highly personal views. It seems a pity that a writer with Caws' qualifications spends so little time calling Sartre's bluff and exposing his vagaries. If Caws is exasperated by Sartre's long-windedness, why does he shirk his obvious duty to deflate it? The reason, I suspect, is that while he is irritated by many of Sartre's attitudes, he is not able to put his finger on quite why he feels them to be unsound. So his account of Sartre's ideas, while

[9] Cranston, Maurice, *Sartre*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962.

scrupulously fair and admirably balanced, is just a little too good mannered to arouse much enthusiasm.

Am I advocating critical bad manners? By no means; but it seems to me important to be prepared to hit a nail on the head. This is a virtue possessed by a number of Sartre's American commentators, including Jacques Salvan (the author of *The Scandalous Ghost*), Hazel Barnes, and Wilfrid Desan. The latter's two books, *The Tragic Finale* and *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*[10], are devoted respectively to analyses of *Being and Nothingness* and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In a crucial passage of *The Tragic Finale*, Desan places his finger squarely on one of the fundamental contradictions in Sartre: that in spite of his denial of the ego, "his argumentation is grounded on the implicit affirmation of a real and existing Ego." He goes on:

> "Although Sartre remarks that the existence of a completely solitary For-itself is not altogether impossible, nevertheless the presence of the Other has been proven a primary and permanent *fact*. And Sartre even goes so far as to say that 'if there is an Other, I must above all be the one who is not the Other, and it is in this negation applied by myself to myself (I am not the Other) that I make myself to be and that the Other emerges as the Other.'
>
> One wonders if this whole argument has the slightest value if I am not? Sartre's dialectic collapses if there is not somebody at each end of the line...."

This is the kind of criticism that enables one to see precisely where an argument is unsound. And I have to admit that it brings me an almost physical sense of relief to be able to see it, instead of wrestling with a vague conviction that there is a fallacy somewhere....

And Desan's insight allows me to state more clearly my own basic objection to Sartre. It is this: that he seems to me to make a fundamental mistake concerning the nature of consciousness: to accept it at its face value as "that which confronts the material

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[10] Desan, Wilfrid, *The Tragic Finale: an essay on the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954.
The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965.

world." And this, in turn, involves an assumption that the "for-itself" is "irreducible," an ultimate entity. Let me again quote Desan:

> "For Kant, the self was a regulative function; for Descartes it was a fact...both considered the Cogito in the *second* degree, however, namely, in the *reflexive* manner, where we consider consciousness itself as an object. And it is precisely at this moment, through the apparition of the reflexive act, that the Ego emerges as *apparent* cause and center of the irreflexible (prereflexive Cogito). Thus the Ego, according to Sartre, is the result and creation of the reflexive act. There is usually no Ego when I read a book or drive a car. Then suddenly I become aware of what I do; I reflect. The result is that I am aware of my driving-a-car or reading-a-book. Consequently, we should not in the prereflexive act say: "I am conscious of a chair," but rather: "There is consciousness-of-a-chair." As soon as reflection arises, we apprehend and *constitute* the Ego."

In short, according to Sartre, the "I" suddenly makes its appearance, like a stage demon popping up through a trapdoor, when *I become conscious that I am conscious of a chair*.

This is also, of course, in line with Sartre's theory of emotion. There is no emotion when I am "acting"; emotion appears when action is blocked. Clearly, Sartre regards the Ego and emotion as much the same thing.

Now it so happens that a recent work throws an interesting new light on this whole problem; it is *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* by Julian Jaynes, a lecturer in psychology at Princeton.[11]

Jaynes advances the startling—and at first preposterous—thesis that our ancestors of a mere three thousand years ago lacked reflexive consciousness—the modern "subjective ego." In a remarkable analysis of the *Iliad*, Jaynes tries to show that "there is no consciousness in the *Iliad*." There is not even free will. The heroes do not reflect, "Shall I do that or shan't I?... We cannot approach these heroes by inventing mind-spaces behind their fierce eyes as we do with each other. Iliadic man did not have subjectivity

[11] Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.

as we do; he had no awareness of his awareness of the world, no internal mind-space to introspect upon." In short, he was oddly like a machine. Then why did he act at all? Jaynes says that he was given orders "by the gods"—or thought he was. Voices inside his head *told* him what to do.

In a sense, Jaynes seems to be on the side of Sartre. He begins the book by pointing out how little "consciousness" we actually require to get through the average day. He points out that a man playing the piano hardly needs consciousness. His fingers carry out an amazing variety of tasks, while all this time, his *consciousness* "is in a seventh heaven of artistic rapture," hovering above his performance, so to speak. So, argues Jaynes, there is nothing contradictory in the idea of the ancient heroes lacking this extra dimension of awareness. In short, Jaynes is saying that Homeric man was conscious, but not (as Sartre would say) reflexively conscious.

This curious thesis seems to have come to Jaynes one day when he experienced an auditory hallucination—a voice spoke out of the air as he lay on a settee, saying "Include the knower in the known." He peered around the room, convinced someone had spoken to him, and finally realized it was a hallucination. (He seems to have attached no importance whatever to the "message," but in view of Sartre's thesis it becomes highly significant.) A little research revealed that such hallucinations are extremely common.

Where do they come from? Jaynes concluded that the answer lies in the fact that our brains contain two cerebral hemispheres—the walnut-shaped area which presses against the top of the skull. And these have totally different functions. The left hemisphere deals with "rational" functions—speech, reason, calculation. The right deals with recognition. To put it crudely, you could say that the left-brain is a scientist and the right-brain is an artist. The left is logical, the right intuitive.

Brain physiologists do not yet understand why the two hemispheres duplicate so many of one another's functions. For example, we seem to have two memory-storage systems, although we only need one. (Could it be in case one is destroyed? If so, the extra system is wasted in most human beings.)

Speech is a left-hemisphere function; yet there is a corre-

sponding area in the right brain, whose purpose is still obscure. Jaynes suggests that this is the hallucinatory area, the area left free for the language of the gods. Homeric man acted simply, unreflexively, he contends. And the part played in modern man by self-reflection was played in ancient man by the "voices of the gods," which gave him orders.

But *who* was giving the orders—since presumably Jaynes does not really believe in Pallas and Aphrodite? The answer to this question is crucial. Jaynes points out that we literally *have two people inside our heads*. In the late 1930s, scientists tried splitting the cerebral hemispheres down the middle to see if it would reduce epileptic attacks, which operate through a "feedback" process, bouncing back and forth between the two halves. The severing of the nerves between the two halves (known as the commissure or *corpus callosum*) made no difference whatever—or appeared not to; the patient seemed to behave quite normally. But one American experimenter, Roger W. Sperry, discovered this was not so.

For some odd reason still unknown to science, the left hemisphere controls the right half of the body, and the right hemisphere the left. For practical purpose, you could say that your left eye is connected to your right brain, and your right eye to your left. (This is not *quite* accurate—it is the left visual field which is connected to the right brain, and vice versa; but for the sake of this argument, let us simplify it and speak of eyes.) So if a split-brain patient is shown an orange with his left eye, and an apple with his right, and you ask him what he is looking at, he will reply "An apple," because his left-brain is only aware of the right visual field. However, if you place a pencil in his left hand, and ask him to write down what he has just seen, he will write "An orange." Asked what he has just written, he will reply "Apple." The left half of the brain doesn't know what the right is doing. Moreover, when Sperry showed a patient an "indecent" picture with the left eye, the patient blushed; asked why he was blushing, he replied truthfully: "I don't know."

The "ego," the person you call "I" resides in the left cerebral hemisphere. Another "you" lives a few centimetres away in the right hemisphere—a completely separate identity.

Does this apply only to split-brain patients? Clearly, no. Otherwise Jaynes would not have experienced his auditory hallucination.

In a sense, we are *all* split-brain patients. We all have two people inside our heads, and are only aware of one—the "left-self," the conscious, rational ego. In simple, "instinctive" people, there is a closer liaison between the "two selves" than in highly rational and conscious people—like Sartre. That is, "instinctive people" are aware that the rational ego is not the real "them"; intellectually-dominated people are more easily taken in.

I am inclined to reject Jaynes's argument that Homeric man had a rigidly "compartmentalized" (bicameral) mind; he seems to me to have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. It is we who are compartmentalized and self-divided. I suspect that Homeric and preHomeric man was altogether more "animal"—that is, his "mind" was an *instinctive unity*—something like the sense of "oneness" with nature experienced by mystics, or described by patients who have taken mescalin or other psychedelic drugs. Yet oddly enough, this makes little difference to the real argument: that modern man has two people living inside his head, and "identifies" with the one in the "rational" half of the brain.

Now we can see what is wrong with Sartre's argument about the ego. Sartre points out, quite rightly, that a man driving a car or playing a piano is not "conscious" of an ego; instead of "I am conscious of a car or piano," we should say "There is consciousness-of-a-car," I become conscious of driving, and the "ego" appears. *But only the left-brain ego*.

Enjoying music is a right-brain function; a musician with right brain damage ceases to be able to recognize the simplest tune. So it is not quite accurate to say that playing the piano is an "ego-less" activity. It is played by that *other* ego, in the right. We may here make use of a distinction made by Michael Polanyi: that "attending to" things is less important than "attending from" them. If I attend "to" things, I often make a mess of them. A pianist who attended to his fingers would play badly; he must attend *from* his fingers, *to* the music itself. Or, to put it more simply, the left-brain ego had better pay attention to the music, and leave the right to get on with playing it. If the left tries to interfere, it is a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth.

Similarly, if the teacher looks over the schoolboy's shoulder when he is writing, he begins to write awkwardly. He says this is

because he is conscious of the teacher; but this is inaccurate. What has really happened is that the teacher has made him *conscious of himself*; he has, in Sartre's terms, constituted the ego—the left-brain ego.

Jaynes's example of the man playing the piano makes us aware that Sartre is simplifying when he says that a man driving a car has no "ego." The man playing the piano has an ego—it is *listening* to the music ("in the seventh heaven"). And a man driving a car has an ego, although it refrains from interfering too much. It *must* interfere to some extent. A driver who is wholly immersed in conversation with a passenger is likely to make more mistakes than a driver who remains "alert." ("Sorry, officer, I'd forgotten this was a one-way street.") Insofar as he makes an effort to remain alert and drive safely, he is an "ego."

But then, a pianist who is in the "seventh heaven" is aware of himself as a *double-ego*. If he is playing brilliantly, absorbed in the music, he is aware of the music *and* of himself playing the music, and of another "self" listening. And of course, it is nonsense to say that the rational ego plays no part in the procedure. Every good pianist knows differently. It makes delicate suggestions, which are put into practice by the "right ego" which is doing the playing. Normally, the interference of the left would put the right off its stride; but in certain moments, the two seem to reach a state of harmony, and there is a "feedback" process—the approval of the left stimulating the right, the brilliance of the right stimulating the left to further approval.

As a writer, I am aware of the same "feedback" process. My right brain produces the intuitions, my left has the task of turning them into words. When I was a beginner, I did it so clumsily that I usually killed the intuitions, and when I read it later, the words seemed dead and empty. Then I got better at it, until the left could catch the intuitions like a good fielder. Sometimes it did it so well that the right would get enthusiastic to see itself so well expressed; and then the left would be spurred to still greater efforts by the approval of the right, and the whole process would build up until I felt positively "inspired."

These states of "inspiration" are basically what Roquentin experienced listening to "Some of These Days." In such states, "I"

(left-ego) am aware that I am only a part of a larger being. On the other hand, when I feel tired and low, I am "trapped" in the left brain, as it were. There is no "deeper self"—just "me" and the world. *This is the state that Sartre takes for granted as "normal consciousness."* Indeed, it is; but it is necessary to add immediately that it ought not to be. This "normal consciousness" is basically a liar, for it assures us that "this is all there is." In the states of wider consciousness, "the double ego," I can see this is untrue. This wider and deeper consciousness is "normal." Ordinary consciousness is sub-normal, and any philosophy that accepts it as a norm is based on a fallacy.

So Roquentin's nausea is not a more truthful form of perception; the contrary is true. It is isolated, left-brain perception, and it has been robbed of an essential dimension of meaning. It is also rather dangerous; for its conviction that it is more "truthful" than "normal consciousness" sets up a pessimistic vibration which, like optimism, can be amplified by the "feedback" process—sometimes to the point of suicide, or at least, of a nervous collapse like that experienced by William James. In fact, the state described by Sartre as nausea and by Camus as absurdity is known to psychotherapy as schizophrenia—a loss of contact between feeling and perception resulting in a sense of meaninglessness, unreality. A schizophrenic who was convinced by Sartre or Camus would be more prone to suicide or mental breakdown than one who was aware that it was merely a case of left-ego isolation that would in due course give way to a more normal balance.

While we are discussing these psychological matters, we may as well draw attention to another problem of which Sartre seems unaware: to the "automatic" element in consciousness—the element that might be called the robot. When I learn to do anything complicated—like learning to type, or speak French—I have to do it slowly and consciously. At a certain point, an "automatic pilot" in my unconscious mind takes over, and does it far more quickly and efficiently than "I" could. Is this "robot" not another name for the right brain? Clearly not, for the right brain deals in pattern-recognition, intuition. Equally obviously, it is not the left-brain ego, since it has *taken over* from the left ego. It seems probable that another part of the brain, the cerebellum, is responsible for

"robotic" functions.

The robot is, of course, immensely useful: we could not live without him. Yet he also reduces the quality of life. When I am tired after a hard day's work and I go for a walk, my perceptions remain "mechanical," and I do not enjoy the countryside. When I know a symphony too well, the "robot" listens to it instead of me, and I do not enjoy it. If "I" consisted only of the right and left hemispheres, life would be far simpler; but the robot also demands his share. When I am full of interest and excitement, he is an invaluable helper: but when I let things "get on top of me," he does my living for me, and consciousness becomes a burden.

Reading Sartre's novels and plays, it is obvious that most of his characters suffer from "too much robot" as well as too much "left--brain ego." Roquentin's consciousness is little more than a combination of left-ego and robot. Yet he regards it as "normal"—even as more accurate and truthful than a more "instinctive" consciousness. We can see he is mistaken. We can also see why it is impossible for him to see he is mistaken.

The autobiography *Words* enables us to understand the curiously claustrophobic quality of Sartre's mental world. The "shades of the prison house began to close" when he was still a child. Childhood was tinged with tragedy: the death of his father, the loneliness of his mother. "...no one remembers if he moved me, if he took me in his arms or if he looked at his son with his clear eyes, now eaten away...." "She would tell me her troubles and I would listen sympathetically: I should marry her later on...." He was sickly and spoilt: "[My mother] held out: she would, I think, have liked me to be a real girl." "Breathing, digesting, defecating listlessly, I went on living because I had begun to live. I was unaware of the violence and fierce cravings of that forcibly fed companion, my body: it brought itself to my attention by a series of cozy illnesses, greatly encouraged by the grown-ups." "I saw death.... At that time, I had an assignation with it every night in my bed.... I had to sleep on my left side, my face to the wall: I would wait, trembling all over, and it would appear, a very conventional skeleton, with a scythe...." "I felt superfluous so I had to disappear. I was a sickly bloom under constant sentence of extinction. In other words, I was condemned, and the sentence could be carried out at any time." "I had been

convinced that we were born to play-act to each other: I accepted play-acting but I insisted on taking the lead." He was an ugly child: "I disappeared and went and made faces in front of a mirror. When I recall those grimaces today, humility to avoid humiliation...the mirror was a great help to me: I gave it the job of teaching me I was a monster...." "The remedy was worse than the disease. I had tried to take refuge from glory and dishonour in the loneliness of my true self: but I had no true self: I found nothing within me except a surprised insipidity...."

So the spoilt but unhappy child took refuge in daydreams, which he describes at length—rescuing girls from death as he slaughters whole bands of brigands, or striding across a blazing roof with an unconscious girl in his arms. The cinema fed his intense romanticism: "Inaccessible to the sacred, I adored magic: the cinema was a dubious phenomenon which I loved perversely for what it still lacked. That stream of light was everything, nothing...." As his mother played the piano he would slip into the study in the dusk, seize a ruler and paper knife, and become a musketeer. "Taken in huge doses, the music would at last begin to work. Like a voodoo drum, the piano would impose its rhythm on me.... I was possessed; the devil had seized me and shaken me like a plum tree. To horse!" He describes these fantasies for page after page. "I was leading two existences, both of them lies...." In practice, his ugliness and small stature made other children shun him. Then, on holiday, he wrote a verse letter to his grandfather, who replied in verse, praising him. "I saw words as the quintessence of things." He wrote down the preposterous adventures he had imagined: the hero swimming for three days in a shark-infested sea, or escaping from a ranch surrounded by Red Indians. He even borrowed the name of one of Goethe's heroes for his own: Goetz von Berlichingen. (Later he would call the hero of his own play, *Le Diable et le bon dieu*, Goetz.) His mother, reading over his shoulder, would cry "What imagination." "I began to discover myself. I was virtually nothing, at most an activity without any content, but that was enough. I was escaping from the Comedy: I was not yet working but I had already stopped playing: the liar was finding his true self in elaborating his lies. I was born from writing.... By writing I existed. I escaped from the grownups." "The writing profession seemed to me a grown-up

activity, so heavily serious, so pointless and deep down, so without interest that I did not doubt for a second that it was to be mine." Writing was Sartre's way of growing up, of becoming "serious," of escaping that sense of ineffectuality and childishness, as well as the self-disgust of being a spoiled brat who always played up to his audience. His grandfather tried hard to turn him against writing. He "persuaded me I was not a genius. In fact, I knew I was not, and I did not care." Sartre decided that if he could not be a hero, "a writer-knight," he could at least be a "writer-martyr," one of those doomed writers who tell mankind unpleasant truths. "I absorbed spites and acerbities which were neither mine nor my grandfather's; the ancient bile of Flaubert, of the Goncourts, and of Gautier poisoned me; their abstract hatred of man, introduced into me under the disguise of love, infected me with fresh pretensions." So the attempt to leave childhood behind went a stage further. He was still play-acting, trying to imitate the attributes of writers he felt were bound to be taken seriously because their view of life was unromantic. He became fascinated by words; looking at a plane tree, "I did not study it; on the contrary, I trusted in space and waited; after a moment, its real foliage loomed up in the form of a simple adjective.... I had enriched the universe with a mass of shimmering leaves." Words seemed to offer the kind of romantic immortality he had longed for in daydreams of heroism. "When I took a book, I opened and closed it in vain a score of times: I could see quite well that it did not change...I [was] passive and ephemeral...invisible in the shadows, the book continued to sparkle, for itself alone." So the old romanticism was replaced with the new. "As a rhetorician I loved only words: I would raise up cathedrals of words beneath the blue gaze of the word sky...." Now he daydreamed of fame. A book he has left abandoned in a cupboard is taken to a publisher. "It would be a triumph: ten thousand copies snapped up in two days. What remorse in people's hearts! A hundred reporters would start out in search of me but would not find me. A recluse, I would long remain unaware of this veering of opinion. Eventually, one day, I would go into a park to shelter from the rain. I would espy a magazine lying there, and what would I see? 'Jean-Paul Sartre, the hidden writer....' I would be exquisitely sad...." And so on—Tom Sawyer never day-dreamed with more

passionate absorption. But he mentions how many of his daydreams ended in his tragic death. "I was intoxicated by death because I did not like life."

So Sartre came to write out of what Maslow has called "deficiency needs"—an attempt to supply through imagination an essential vitamin necessary for his development. If he had been less intelligent, he would have written a series of preposterous romantic novels like those of Amanda McKittrick Ros. But Sartre never lacked intelli-gence: besides, he was saved from becoming a male Barbara Cartland by a "cloacal obsession" as intense as that of James Joyce. (I note in *The Outsider*: "Neither Joyce nor Dostoevsky give the same sensation of the mind being trapped in physical filth.") Like those insects who discourage predators by imitating the characteristics of some foul-tasting fellow creature, Sartre disguised his emotional romanticism as intellectual realism.

The trouble with this literary "disillusionment" was that he ended by convincing himself. No one can be more ruthlessly "honest" than the romantic determined to change his spots. We have seen—from the letter to Beauvoir written in his twenty-fourth year—that Sartre still went and looked at trees in the park in order to improve them with appropriate verbal "foliage." We have seen that the hatred of the bourgeoisie, the sympathy for the criminal and the underdog, was little more than romantic revolutionism. The philosophy that insisted "there is no essential ego," "consciousness has no inside," has the air of another anti-romantic reaction. Yet the mescalin experience seems to have introduced a note of real sincerity into Sartre's pessimism. The philosophy of "contingency" provided no defence against this new and alarming experience. The old romanticism was destroyed: Sartre found himself in the dilemma described by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, faced with a choice of suicide or of somehow rescuing a vestige of meaning from the waste of "absurdity." The response—as in the case of Camus—was a rather tight-lipped and stoical "philosophy of freedom": human life may be a farce, man may be a "useless passion," but at least he can rescue his self-respect by treating his fellow man with decency. Even this conclusion is a *non sequitur*: given the premises, it is no more valid than de Sade's decision to rescue self-respect by treating his fellow man as badly as possible;

perhaps less so, since the demonic seems less impotent than the angelic. (In spite of his new found realism, Sartre continued to show a romantic interest in the idea of evil—in Baudelaire, in Genet, in the heroes of plays like *Le Diable et le bon dieu* and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*.)

So the pessimistic conclusions (in *Words*) are hardly surprising:

> "My retrospective illusions are in pieces. Martyrdom, salvation, immortality: all are crumbling; the building is falling in ruins. I have caught the Holy Ghost in the cellars and flung him out of them. Atheism is a cruel, long-term business: I believe I have gone through it to the end. I see clearly, I am free from illusions, I know my real tasks, and I must surely deserve a civic prize; for about ten years I have been a man who is waking up, cured of a long, bitter-sweet madness, who cannot get away from it, who cannot recall his old ways without laughing, and who no longer has any idea of what to do with his life.... I have renounced my vocation, but I have not unfrocked myself. I still write. What else can I do?"

Yet he is also frank enough to admit that the old romanticism lives on:

> "...I am troubled by my present notoriety: it is not glory because I am alive and that is enough to give the lie to my old dreams; could it be that I still nurse them secretly: Not quite: I have, I think, adapted them: since I have lost the chance of dying unknown, I sometimes flatter myself that I live misunderstood."

Coming from any other writer, these confessions would have drawn a shout of "I told you so" from those who dislike his politics or his pessimism. But since Sartre has always professed disillusion, the meaninglessness of human life, the admissions of *Words* become *his* way of saying "I told you so." They should be taken in the same spirit as the words of a saint who assures us that even in his abasement, he remains displeasing to God.

Yet is it possible, in view of this analysis, to accept his statement: "I see clearly, I am free from illusions"? At no point has Sartre seen clearly; at no point has he been free from illusions. Even his training in phenomenology was no benefit, for he used it only as a form of trimming around his romantic pessimism. Sartre's

phenomenology, like his Marxism, is another disguise. Even the assertion of the non-existence of the ego is a disguise. Tug at the whiskers, and he stands revealed as a romantic egoist, as incorrigibly self-obsessed as Stendhal.

As a writer he will probably survive as long as Stendhal; as a thinker, probably only as long as he can persuade us that he is misunderstood.

A Sartre Obituary

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In Paris in the late 1960s, foreign visitors were often surprised to see a tubby, cross-eyed little man standing on a barrel at street corners, haranguing a mob of enthusiastic students. A few worried-looking gendarmes were usually hanging around in the background, trying not to look foolish. They had reason for embarrassment: the little man was selling copies of a banned Maoist newspaper, and openly preaching bloody revolution. He might praise the Baader-Meinhof gang, and declare that true progress lies in the attempts of the coloured races to liberate themselves through violence. And since he also happened to be the world's most famous and respected living philosopher, there was not a thing the police could do about it....

As far as the authorities were concerned, Jean-Paul Sartre—who died yesterday at the age of seventy-four—was less of a thorn in the side than a pain in the neck. But where his admirers are concerned—and they are still to be counted in the millions—he remains one of the strangest enigmas of the twentieth century. He spent the first forty years of his life developing a philosophy of the blackest pessimism—a scenario in which man is an absurd accident in a Godless universe. Yet the philosopher who taught that "it is meaningless that we live and meaningless that we die" and (perhaps his most famous pronouncement) "Man is a useless passion" also

believed that man is ultimately free, and that if we could only destroy the middle classes, we would have something like a perfect society.

The hatred of the middle classes stemmed from his own childhood. So did the strange conflict of ideas that dominated his life. He was brought up in the house of his grandfather, Charles Schweitzer—uncle of the famous Albert—a romantic show-off who liked to talk at the top of his voice. His grandmother was a cold, reasonable woman who enjoyed pouring cold water on her husband's enthusiasms. Sartre turned into a mixture of the two, and the ice and fire inside him caused the violent explosions that made him France's most controversial writer in the forties and fifties.

The young Sartre was clever and spoilt; everybody adored him. Life would have been ecstatically happy except for one problem: his physical appearance: he was cross-eyed, undersized, and so ugly that other children refused to play with him. "The mirror was a great help to me," he said later, "I gave it the job of teaching me I was a monster." So the spoilt but miserable little boy took refuge in endless daydreams, in which he rescued little girls from brigands and red Indians. He spent hours in the cinema. He wrote poetry, and his grandparents said it was marvellous. When finally he went to college, he knew ten times as much as the other students. His fellow students admired him—even the girls. One of them, a pretty girl named Simone de Beauvoir, became his mistress. And Sartre decided that this was the way to conquer the world—by becoming a famous writer.

Sartre was lucky: his first novel—*Nausea*—made his reputation at the age of thirty-two. It was an unlikely bestseller, devoted to the proposition that life is totally meaningless, but that human beings make it bearable by imposing their own delusions on it. Its bitter realism struck a chord in the late 1930s. The sexual overtones of his short stories (published in England as *Intimacy*) scandalized even the open-minded French. Sartre then proceeded to devote his life to an immense volume of philosophy whose purpose was to explain that human life is entirely a delusion—he called it *Being and Nothingness*. But at this point, fate intervened. The Germans marched into Paris. As a philosopher, Sartre was a pessimist, but as a Frenchman he was a patriot. He made a basic and important

change in his philosophy. Man, he said, lives in an empty and Godless universe; *but he is free*, and must be prepared to exercise his freedom. A thousand young Resistance fighters shouted "We agree," and Sartre became an underground hero. When the Germans released him from prison camp, Sartre himself joined the Resistance. And before the end of the war, he had become a living legend.

Another young Resistance fighter, Albert Camus, shared his fame: he also edited the underground newspaper *Combat*. When the war ended, it was inevitable that the two of them should become rich and famous. They founded an exciting new philosophy called Existentialism, which became fashionable among the young people who thronged the Left Bank cafés. This philosophy declared that we should never again be taken in by "noble ideas"; instead, we ought to live, and study the actual texture of life from moment to moment. Sartre and Camus would sit up all night at their table in the Deux Magots, surrounded by attentive disciples, while journalists sat at the next table and took notes of everything that was said. Sartre's play *Dirty Hands* made him rich and world-famous; Camus' novel *The Plague* sold by the million. Suddenly, Europe was full of existentialists—I can remember sitting up half the night discussing their ideas when I first came to Soho in the early 1950s.

Inevitably, it had to collapse. Sartre had always been driven by his hatred of the *bourgeoisie*, and his conviction that everything they did was stupid and dishonest. He decided that France needed a total change of society, and that only Communism could bring it about. So the man who continued to preach that life is meaningless became a Marxist, and devoted much of his influential magazine *Les Temps Modernes* to Communist propaganda. When Camus became disillusioned with Marxism and wrote a book denouncing it, Sartre broke with him—perhaps the most widely publicized literary quarrel of the twentieth century. But by the time Camus died in a car crash in 1960, people had lost interest in their ideas, and many people regarded Sartre as a paper tiger, a man who preached revolution because it had become a habit. When he refused the Nobel Prize in 1967, he declared that it might undermine his influence as a writer; but many people felt it was

really out of pique that Camus had been given it some years earlier. And when, two years later, he decided that he would like to have the money after all, he seemed to be driven by some masochistic desire to destroy his own intellectual credit.

The Paris students' revolt of 1968 looked as if it might justify his belief that France will eventually succumb to violent revolution. Sartre actually managed to get himself briefly arrested, but the government refused to allow him to be a martyr. When stability returned to France, Sartre refused to believe it; his denunciations of American imperialism and French cowardice became shriller than ever. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—the world refused to listen. Tired, disillusioned, but still angry, Sartre went back to literature, writing a vast book about the novelist Flaubert which is longer than Flaubert's collected works. His death at the age of seventy-four will strike many people as an out-of-date sort of catastrophe—his influence as a philosopher predeceased him by at least ten years. Yet anyone who looks back on those novels and plays of the 1940s will have to agree that this unhappy romantic-rationalist was one of the most exciting and brilliant figures in twentieth-century literature.

BENEDICT DE SPINOZA

Spinoza the Outsider

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Spinoza has the curious distinction of being the least influential of the great philosophers.

To someone approaching Spinoza for the first time, this is the most obvious and puzzling thing about him. Every history of philosophy devotes a chapter to Spinoza, and no one seems to doubt his right to so much space. But why is he so important? What other great philosophers did he influence? Where can we find any trace of his ideas—no matter how diluted—in the modern world? There are still plenty of traces of Platonism and Aristotelianism and Cartesianism—even Hegelianism. By comparison, Spinozism seems to have been a kind of dead end—his ideas influenced a few eighteenth-century Deists, and a few nineteenth-century atheists, then seemed to fade away. History has played the same trick on a number of other philosophers who seemed highly significant in their own time—Reid, Lotze and Eucken, to name a few at random. So by what right does Spinoza continue to occupy his position in the histories of philosophy?

Of course, the *Ethics* is obviously a philosophical masterpiece. But even this only underlines the problem. For it is essentially a closed system. And in philosophy, closed systems are at a disadvantage. Nietzsche continues to exercise more influence than Schopenhauer, not because he is a better writer—he is not—but because he left most of his questions unanswered. The same goes for Kierkegaard and Husserl and Wittgenstein. The great syste-

matizers—Hegel, Lotze, Whitehead—are somehow too impressive; they kill all desire to take up where they left off. Spinoza's *Ethics* is considerably shorter than Lotze's *Macrocosmos* or Whitehead's *Process and Reality,* but its geometrical propositions make it look even more impregnable. Goethe used to read it in Latin, but I can think of few modern poets who would attempt it even in English.

Nietzsche made the same point about Spinoza in *Beyond Good and Evil,* in a scornfully hostile passage. And, oddly enough, came close to putting his finger on the reason for Spinoza's fascination for other thinkers. He attacks the 'tartuffery' of Kant, then turns his fire on Spinoza,

> "the hocus pocus in mathematical form, by means of which Spinoza has clad his philosophy in armour and visor—in fact, the 'love of *his* wisdom', to translate the term fairly and squarely—in order to strike terror into the heart of the assailant who would dare to cast a glance on that invincible maiden, that Pallas Athene; how much personal timidity and vulnerability does this masquerade of a sickly recluse betray."

And then he goes on to make one of his most celebrated statements:

> "It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of—namely, the confession of its inventor, and a sort of involuntary and subconscious autobiography."

Now Nietzsche is not entirely wrong to look askance at Spinoza's 'armour'; his own polemical and dramatic methods are certainly more striking. But when he suggests, in effect, that we forget the philosophy and look at the philosopher, he immediately provides the answer to his own attack. Anyone who knows the slightest amount about the life of Spinoza knows that it is nonsense to speak of his personal timidity and vulnerability. Like Nietzsche—another sickly recluse—he revealed remarkable courage and inner strength. His greatness lay, to a large extent, in his capacity for 'outsiderism', in standing alone, apart from society, in renouncing the pleasures that make life tolerable for most of us, and transcending personal needs in pure creativity. Once we have come to admire this courage and inner strength, we can also see how it is reflected in the 'impersonal' form of the *Ethics.* Like Plotinus, Spinoza believed

that a philosopher should leave the personal behind. He began a semi-autobiographical treatise—*On the Improvement of the Understanding*—but seems to have left it unfinished. But his major work was an assertion, both in form and content, of the transcendental nature of philosophy. Nietzsche is defiantly polemical. Spinoza is defiantly scientific.

Now those of us who know something of the history of philosophical logic since Leibniz will be inclined to shake our heads. Russell and Whitehead pursued a related dream; so did Hilbert; Frege and Gödel brought their edifices crashing. I am inclined to believe that Spinoza's work is vulnerable to the same sort of criticism. But before I consider this possibility, I would like to follow Nietzsche's prescription, and examine the philosophy as part of the personal development of the philosopher.

For a contemporary Englishman, the background to Spinoza's philosophy is almost impossible to grasp. This is partly because the battles Spinoza fought were won two centuries ago. There is still plenty of religious—and racial—intolerance in the world; but now no intelligent person accepts it as norm. We find it almost impossible to imagine a time, for example, when the majority of people approved of the Inquisition—or at least, took it for granted. (As an imaginative exercise, we might try it in reverse, and envisage a completely vegetarian society that regards our meat-eating as a horrible, grisly remnant of the Dark Ages.)

So to even begin to understand Spinoza, we have to make an effort to understand the long-standing persecution of the Jews in Spain and Portugal—an effort that is aided by our proximity in time to the Nazis. In 1492, three hundred thousand Jews were expelled from Spain, and thousands died of starvation or in shipwrecks. Some took refuge in Portugal; they were made to pay a high price in exchange for a limited period of time there; those who were unable to leave when their time was up were enslaved. The others moved on to further sufferings.

The Spanish atrocities against the Protestants in the Netherlands are an equally brutal and horrifying story. So when the Dutch revolted and threw off the Spanish yoke, Jews and Protestants felt they were united by a certain common cause. This is why Spinoza's grandfather—a Portuguese Jew who had been forcibly 'converted'

to Christianity—came to Amsterdam. The Jewish community found religious freedom in Holland.

All of this may enable us to understand—even if we fail to sympathize with—the religious bigotry of Spinoza's co-religionists. From Voltaire to H. G. Wells, rationalists have shaken their heads over Jewish religious fanaticism, and suggested that it is an unfortunate reaction to centuries of persecution. (This argument is hardly convincing; intense devotion to their religion has been a Jewish characteristic since long before the Diaspora.) Whatever the reason, it seems clear that Jews—like Christians and Mohammedans—have been capable of a pretty high degree of bigotry and intolerance in matters of religion. Spinoza wrote:

> "The love of the Hebrews for their country was not only patriotism, but also piety, and was cherished and nurtured by daily rites till, like the hatred of other nations, it must have passed into their nature. Their daily worship was not only different from that of other nations (as it might well be, considering that they were a peculiar people, and entirely apart from the rest), it was absolutely contrary. Such daily reprobation naturally gave rise to a lasting hatred deeply implanted in the heart: for of all hatreds, none is more deep and tenacious than that which springs from devoutness or piety, and is itself cherished as pious." (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, 17*).

From which we may infer that Spinoza would have thoroughly approved the 'forecast' made by H. G. Wells in *The Shape of Things to Come:*

> "And yet...in little more than a century, this antiquated obdurate [Jewish] culture disappeared. It and its Zionist state, its kosher food, its Law and the rest of its paraphernalia, were completely merged in the human community. The Jews were not suppressed; there was no extermination...yet they were educated out of their oddity and racial egotism in little more than three generations."

In his early teens, Spinoza had a chance to observe this 'antiquated and obdurate' bigotry at first hand. Uriel Acosta was a Portuguese Jew of considerable eminence; in Lisbon, he had permitted himself to be forcibly converted, and risen to an important position in the

service of the State. Preferring freedom, he moved to Amsterdam and reverted to the religion of his fathers. Acosta had a passionate belief in reason, which he carried to aggressive extremes. A treatise pointing out that the traditions of the Pharisees were at variance with written Law was taken as an unfriendly act by the Jewish community, while another work questioning the immortality of the soul provoked bitter fury. He was twice excommunicated from the religious community, and the sentence was lifted only when he grovelled in the dust on the threshold of the synagogue, allowing the congregation to walk over him. Being a man of spirit and intelligence, he was soon excommunicated a second time, and the 'retraction' was repeated. When he rebelled a third time, the community united to force him into submission; he wrote a violent denunciation of the elders, and shot himself. The story aroused enough controversy to be turned into a popular drama by Gutzkov. Spinoza was fifteen when Acosta killed himself in 1647. By that time, he was already aware that his own temperament was basically rational and scientific, and must have anticipated a similar fate.

Spinoza lacked Acosta's hot-headedness; his motto was *Caute* (caution). There were many pressures on him to conform; his father and grandfather were prosperous merchants; in the small, closed Jewish community of Amsterdam, the highly intelligent youth was inevitably a person of some prominence. He showed considerable distinction as a student of the Talmud; from this he passed on to Jewish philosophy and Cabbalistic mysticism. Unlike the empirical Anglo-Saxons, Jewish communities are inclined to take a certain pride in their more brilliant sons. Spinoza's father probably had every reason to assume that he would, in due course, become the religious and intellectual leader of the community.

It would be fascinating to know at which point Spinoza himself realized that this was out of the question—that his commitment to reason would inevitably sunder him from the society of his co-religionists. Possibly it happened as a consequence of the suicide of Acosta. It must certainly have taken many years to develop into a powerful and settled conviction, sufficiently strong to enable him to bear the shock of total rejection when it came. Dates are unfortunately lacking in the biographical materials, so it is not clear when he first began to abandon his attendance at the synagogue.

Nor do we know how soon thereafter he abandoned caution and allowed himself to express his increasing scepticism to other young men. But common sense suggests that it was fairly close to his twenty-fourth year—when he was excommunicated. As Nietzsche's Zarathustra points out, separating oneself from the herd is a painful and exhausting process. Nietzsche was the son of a Protestant clergyman, and went through the same experience. His letters and autobiographical fragments make clear the spiritual agonies he suffered; yet nineteenth-century Germany was an entirely different matter from seventeenth-century Amsterdam; to begin with, there were educators like Schopenhauer to turn to. Spinoza's equivalent of Schopenhauer was Giordano Bruno, and Bruno was burnt alive for his freethinking. Spinoza's agony must have been even greater than Nietzsche's. Logic suggests that he kept his rebellion to himself for as long as possible.

Neither do we know how much pain the break finally cost him. We are told only that he was summoned before the Rabbins and elders of the synagogue in 1656 and accused of 'rationalistic' views, such as that angels do not exist, that the soul might simply be another name for life, and that the Old Testament says nothing of immortality (the opinion that had caused Acosta's downfall). We are told that Spinoza stood his ground, declined an offer of an annuity if he would continue to conform to the external practices of his religion, and that when he still refused, there were violent threats of excommunication. The struggle may have continued for days or weeks. Finally, on 27 July 1656, there was a solemn ceremony of excommunication, which was, in effect, a spiritual execution. G. H. Lewes describes it:

> "High above, the chanter rose and chanted forth, in loud lugubrious tones, the words of execration; while from the opposite side another mingled with these curses the thrilling sounds of the trumpet; and now black candles were reversed, and were made to melt drop by drop into a huge tub filled with blood. This made the whole assembly shudder; and when the final *Anathema Maranatha!* were uttered, and the lights all suddenly immersed in the blood, a cry of religious horror and execration burst from all; and in that solemn darkness, and to those solemn curses, they shouted Amen, Amen!"

How far this description is accurate is open to question; but the actual formula of excommunication, published by van Vloten, makes it clear that it comes fairly close to the actual spirit of the ceremony. The aim was to break Spinoza and throw him into the outer darkness, to make him feel that his wickedness had led to his total rejection by every decent man and woman.

Shortly thereafter, to emphasize that he was now some kind of human offal, a fanatic attempted to stab him to death in the street. The blow missed and tore his coat. Lewes says he 'walked home thoughtful'—a statement that reveals his inability to imagine himself into the situation. Spinoza must have walked home shattered and traumatized, realizing that there was now no point in trying to salvage a little security and normality from the situation. He had to turn his back on the world of his childhood and accept solitude and exile. When he left to live outside Amsterdam, he must have felt like some wounded creature dragging itself away to die. All of which sounds melodramatic; but then, Spinoza's situation *was* a subject for melodrama.

It is interesting, and by no means entirely futile, to ask: What sort of philosopher might Spinoza have become if he had been born into a non-Jewish community—perhaps in England or France? We know that his philosophy was deeply influenced by his studies of the Talmud, and by the peculiarly intense nature of Jewish Theism. But then, he had also read certain mystics like Ibn Gebirol, Moses of Cordova and Bruno himself. As an Englishman or Frenchman, he might have been equally influenced by Plato and Plotinus.

I am willing to be corrected, but it seems to me that Spinoza's temperament was scientific and logical rather than religious. Under different circumstances, he might have been another Descartes, or Newton, or even Shelley, a 'beautiful and ineffectual angel'. By temperament he was a Platonist and something of a Stoic. (Significantly, Goethe used to travel with the *Ethics* and the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*.) That is to say, he was an idealist in the Platonic sense, one who agrees that our human purpose is to lift the mind beyond desires and trivialities, beyond merely incidental beauties, to contemplate the truth and beauty of the universe itself—as Socrates explains in the *Symposium.* In a sense, it is quite inevitable that a great philosopher should be a Platonist,

since the basic aim of philosophy is to rise beyond the 'triviality of everydayness' to a bird's-eye vision of broad generalities. Einstein compared the scientist to a town dweller who enjoys getting into the country, to contemplate mountains and lakes instead of endless bustle and chatter. Individual scientists and philosophers may differ in a thousand ways; but all share this common impulse to achieve a 'bird's-eye view'.

The evidence of his book on Descartes suggests that Spinoza was basically a rationalist who, under different circumstances, might have learned to accept some modified form of Judaism (as Descartes and Leibniz accepted Catholicism), while his main interests were directed towards a kind of critical philosophy. In which case, we might only know his name as an obscure commentator on other philosophers, a minor disciple of Descartes, like Geulincx (Spinoza's fellow countryman).

Whatever else the effect of the excommunication, it must have driven all tendency to amateurism and dilettantism out of his system. It faced him squarely with the question of what he really believed, and whether his belief was worth the discomfort and loneliness he had to endure. At least the bigotry of his fellow Jews accomplished one important result: it prevented him from ever taking intellectual freedom for granted as some basic human right, like the air we breathe. Having paid such a price for it, freedom of thought became a positive ideal, a kind of religious conviction.

But then, reason itself seems a feeble battle cry. On its most familiar human level, it is little more than the ability to add up a column of figures correctly. Descartes's radical doubt only led to a self-contradictory Dualism. (If the world is mind and matter, how do they interact?) If Spinoza was to justify his sacrifice, his freedom had to lead to something a little more inspiring than that.

It led, of course, to that gigantic philosophical counterpart to *Paradise Lost,* Spinoza's own Promethean effort to justify the ways of God to man, the *Ethics.* In the meantime, as an intermediate step, there came the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* a seminal work of rationalist criticism of the Bible. Issued anonymously in 1670, it caused widespread controversy and ran through many editions. When his identity became known the book was denounced as an instrument 'forged in Hell by a renegade Jew and the devil'. It is, of

course, a remarkable work; but if Spinoza's reputation rested on this alone, he would be classified with Voltaire and Tom Paine as a moral rebel rather than a philosopher. It was the *Ethics* for which Spinoza spent his life preparing, the great Hegelian synthesis, the Ultimate System. (In fact, Spinoza never wrote the projected work: the book we have is no more than an outline.) The *Ethics* was his answer to his old master Morteira and the other elders who had expelled him.

In his two-volume work on the philosophy of Spinoza, Harry Austryn Wolfson has pointed out the dozens of influences that went to make up the *Ethics,* from Plato and St Anselm to Bruno and Descartes. Yet it was Whitehead who remarked that Western philosophy could be regarded as a series of footnotes to Plato, and it would not be inaccurate to regard the *Ethics* as an enormous commentary on the *Symposium,* with its view that man's highest aim is contemplation of universal truth. From the modern point of view, the *Ethics* has been written back to front. The final Part (V) deals with man's aims and purposes, Parts III and IV with the emotions, Part II with the mind, Part I with God and the universe. The last three Parts are an attempt at a phenomenological psychology of man, the first two at a metaphysics.

I shall not attempt a summary of the *Ethics*—which would take far more space than I have available—but confine myself to some general comments. This is basically an immense and static System, based on the mystical notion that God *is* the universe, and vice versa. One commentator remarks that Spinoza does not assert the existence of God; he asserts that existence *is* God.

That sounds the kind of meaningless and irritating proposition that makes logical positivists reach for their revolvers. But, in fact, Spinoza is prepared to argue his way towards it step by step, starting from man and his problems. The first and most basic question is obviously: why, if God is the universe, is there such a thing as evil? To which Spinoza replies that there isn't. All creatures have their own trivial, personal view of evil and good, based on their desires and needs. A cold wind seems bad to a man who has just fallen in the canal; itself, the wind is neither good nor bad—just air in motion, according to natural laws.

Man himself is merely a fragment of the whole—a leaf on a tree,

a blade of grass in a field. His basic aim is self-preservation, and this governs his notions of good and evil. His powers are obviously very limited indeed. He is not body *and* soul, as Descartes taught; the mind is the mirror of the body. Here we seem to be fairly close to the psychology of Hume and the empiricists—and possibly of Gilbert Ryle—in which mind is a product of the body as smoke is a product of fire. But it is also worth bearing in mind the view of Whitman and D. H. Lawrence that man is a living unity, and that 'mind' and 'body' are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Spinoza's basic feeling seems to come closer to this attitude.

The emotions cause man to be a slave to nature and its forces; understanding and self-control can free him from this slavery. Maugham borrowed the title of Part IV—*Of Human Bondage*—for his novel about an intelligent man's irrational slavery to a worthless woman, and the book is a fairly accurate reflection of Spinoza's view of the emotions. 'Evil' is basically ignorance. Man achieves freedom by using his understanding to dispel it. Selflessness is not a virtue; all of us are self-seeking, but the wise man seeks things of permanent value; the stupid man is misled by his emotions to strive for unworthy aims and objects.

All this sounds drearily deterministic; it is certainly thoroughly naturalistic, only one step away from the naturalism of Hume or the total materialism of nineteenth-century thinkers like Büchner. Religious people will object that it denies human freedom; idealists that it denies transcendental values; evolutionists that it offers a static universe. Aware of these objections, Spinoza takes a bold leap into theology, and leaves all his opponents startled and bewildered. The world consists of shadow and substance—Plato's 'form' and 'idea', Schopenhauer's 'Will' and 'illusion'. Spinoza calls them 'mode' and 'substance'. 'Modes' are the temporary forms of the basic underlying reality. This reality is God. God is infinite and incomprehensible; in our worm-like state (at one point, Spinoza compares man to a worm living in the bloodstream of the universe), we can only see two of God's attributes—thought and extension. There are millions more which are beyond our comprehension.

All the same, because we are fragments of God, we possess the ability to rise above our mere humanity and glimpse the essential

nature of the universe and of God. So the aim of life is clear: to increase the understanding.

It becomes possible to see why Spinoza ceased to exercise any profound influence in philosophy after the seventeenth century. His 'improvement' of the Cartesian dualism is not really acceptable on any practical level. To accept it as satisfactory, you have to rise to Spinoza's idea of God as one with nature, then transfer this mystical idea to the human realm. It is very hard—in fact, it requires a kind of mental sleight of hand—to see mind and body as somehow inseparable—at least, without slipping into the materialist viewpoint that mind is merely a product of body. The trouble is that human experience keeps making us aware of ourselves as mind *and* body. We say 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak'. Every day of our lives we become aware of ourselves as two conflicting forces. So monist solutions, no matter how logically satisfying, fail to appeal to our common sense.

But all this is far from the whole story of Spinoza's declining influence. Altogether more serious is the kind of criticism implied in Nietzsche's comments about 'unconscious autobiography'. Apart from the accusation of 'timidity and vulnerability'—which we have seen to be unfounded—Nietzsche is accusing Spinoza of being a kind of liar, or at least, a self-deceiver.

Admirers of Spinoza may shrug and ask why Nietzsche deserves to be taken so seriously. The answer is that Nietzsche's attitude has become, to a greater or lesser extent, the attitude of modern philosophy. And not merely 'existential philosophy'—the school with which Nietzsche's name is usually associated. Kierkegaard—the founder of existentialism—criticized metaphysical 'Systems' on the grounds that trying to shape your conduct according to one of these systems is like trying to find your way round Copenhagen using a map of the world on which Denmark is the size of a pinhead. In short, that a System is too much of a 'bird's-eye view' from whose dizzy altitude the real world becomes practically invisible. And this is a matter in which logical positivists find themselves in total agreement with existentialists. Both agree that philosophy ought to deal with reality as we actually know it, not with some idealistic abstraction. And so, for practical purposes, we may regard Nietzsche as the spokesman of the whole anti-

metaphysical point of view. Let us, therefore, try to grasp the essence of Nietzsche's objection to Spinoza, and the existentialist viewpoint from which it sprang.

Interestingly enough, most of Nietzsche's references to Spinoza—they can easily be tracked down through the index to his Collected Works—indicate his sense of kinship; he speaks of him as 'the most upright of sages', and praises his stoicism and self-sufficiency. And Nietzsche was too self-analytical not to be aware of the parallels between himself and the Jewish philosopher. Both were 'sickly recluses'; both were 'outsiders', rejected by their own community, living in rented rooms on a low income, devoting themselves to the life of the mind. Neither were celibate by choice; both had fallen in love and been rejected; both shrugged off the disappointment and turned back to the serious business of creating a 'revaluation of values'. Both were men who, in the words of Husserl, had had 'the misfortune to fall in love with philosophy'. Both were obsessed with truth. Clearly, then, Nietzsche's rejection of Spinoza was no sudden flash of irritation. There were two other major figures towards whom Nietzsche's attitude was equally ambiguous and ambivalent: Socrates and Wagner. It was where Nietzsche felt most attracted that he felt the need to reject most violently.

The attraction is easy enough to explain. Spinoza is an immensely attractive figure. Goethe regarded him as a kind of saint. 'None had spoken so like the Saviour concerning God as he,' he told Lavater. And Bertrand Russell, who is predictably hostile to Spinoza's metaphysics, nevertheless describes him as 'the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers'.

All of which makes us aware that the truth about Spinoza—as we intimated at the beginning of this essay—is that any attempt to judge him must start from Spinoza the human being. Judged *in vacuo,* the *Ethics* may be 'noble', but it is rather repellent. And as speculative philosophy—according to Moore the art of arousing thought in other philosophers—it has been a great deal less fruitful than Hume's *Essay,* Kant's *Critique* or Husserl's *Ideas;* in appearance, at least, it is a little too inhumanly perfect. It is when we have come to know Spinoza the man that we are in a position to appreciate him as the author of the *Ethics.*

What we admire is the man of incredibly tough moral fibre who stood up against the whole age, the 'prophet who contradicted the Prophets', as Goethe called him. Apart from Nietzsche, the other 'outsider' he most resembles is the mystic William Blake, another intransigent visionary who lived a life of neglect (although Blake at least had a wife to share it with him). Spinoza's enemies drew strength from bigotry and the opinion of 'the herd'. Spinoza not only stood alone; he refused to be embittered or prejudiced. Yet in spite of his mystical love of God—which he equated with knowledge—we feel that Spinoza saw the world through natural eyes. If he is a martyr, it is to reason, not religion.

And reason is simply the intellectual form of freedom. In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* he is concerned with religious and political freedom. In the *Ethics,* be becomes concerned with the freedom of the spirit itself, man's longing to escape all the limitations of the earth and of his own weakness. He avoids the usual snare of religious pietism. He has little use for pity, and none for humility, which he regards as hypocrisy or weakness. He dismisses the usual notions of good and evil; for Spinoza, as for Nietzsche, virtue is based on power and ability. Neither does he have any use for the view of Socrates that, since the philosopher spends his life trying to escape his body, death is some kind of consummation. Altogether, he seems to have escaped most of the fallacies that Nietzsche most detested.

And yet it is at precisely this point that Nietzsche and Spinoza part company. Nietzsche was physically sickly, but he carried his gospel of power to its logical conclusion. When he conceived the idea of Zarathustra, the preacher of the Superman—he was above the lake of Silvaplana at the time—he wrote on a slip of paper: 'Six thousand feet above men and time.' The idea that came to him was that all religions and philosophies have so far been mistaken about the highest good. It does not lie in moral virtue, or in self-restraint, or even in self-knowledge, but in the idea of *great health and strength.* This, says Nietzsche, is the fundamental constituent of freedom. Once man has these the others will follow, for most of his evils—and his intellectual confusions—spring from weakness.

It follows that the philosopher should recognize man as inadequate 'human, all too human'—and strive to bring about the

advent of the superman. For Nietzsche, reason is a manifestation of strength. Man's chief duty is to nurture his strength and his optimism, and to teach men to strive to evolve.

Now Spinoza quite definitely sets his face against evolutionism—or teleology—in the appendix to Part 1. Since God is perfect, he asks, how can he have mere purposes? Admittedly, he seems to risk self-contradiction at this point. For he admits that God is 'partly' personal, and that will and thought are among His attributes. Nevertheless, we would be mistaken to think of God as sharing such personal qualities as desire and purpose. For a moment, we seem to glimpse Spinoza's mental picture of God; some unthinkable gigantic creature, like nature itself, breathing quietly in its sleep, unconsciously producing all the activity we see around us as a mere by-product of its tremendous breathing ....

For Spinoza, man's ultimate perfection is to achieve 'cosmic consciousness', to transcend all his mere emotions, and to rise on wings of reason to the contemplation of this vast indifferent godhead.

Now at a fairly early stage in his career, Nietzsche had admired Socrates above all other philosophers; it seemed to him that the ultimate good was Thought. Then, in *Human, All too Human,* he turned against his old masters and ideals; he comes to feel that thought is trivial and unimportant compared to life. He ceased to believe in thought or reason as the vehicle that would transport man to the infinite. The thinkers, from Socrates to Kant, are deniers of the body and of life. And Spinoza, he feels, is unrealistic; he scornfully dismisses 'the no-more-laughing and no-more-weeping of Spinoza, the destruction of the emotions by their analysis and vivisection, which he recommended so naively'.

And so his indictment of Spinoza amounts to this: that the philosopher, rejected by society, withdrew into solitude and sought consolation in thought. He 'transcended' his humanity by rejecting it, dismissing the emotions as trivial. Now Nietzsche, like Blake, believed that the right way to transcend the emotions is to outgrow them; *not* by starving them to death. Zarathustra loves life; he loves nature; he loves to see pretty girls laughing and dancing. Spinoza's solution smacked to him of sour grapes.

This is not to say that Nietzsche did not believe in thought, or in

self-discipline. But he believed they were only part of the answer. If a man is hungry, he cannot satisfy his belly by thinking about food. But he can use his intelligence to find ways of obtaining food. And it is better to find food than to talk yourself into believing you are not hungry. It is better to have a wife or mistress—than to find ascetic reasons for condemning sex. To over-indulge the emotions is disastrous for the philosopher; to starve them in the name of reason is just as bad.

Basically, then, Nietzsche is accusing Spinoza of producing a false solution to the problem of the philosopher. Nietzsche created a new concept of the philosopher; not merely Rodin's thinker, sitting with his chin in his hand, but a whole and complete human being—something like Plato's philosopher-king. In *Man and Superman,* Shaw has a thoroughly Nietzschean definition of the philosopher: "he who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so discovered means." Obviously, Spinoza fulfils the first clause triumphantly. But he erected this activity of contemplation into the whole duty of the philosopher, his ultimate aim and purpose. His only 'action' was to write and think, and he attempted to give his ideas an air of icy self-sufficiency by casting them in the form of Euclidean propositions. It could be argued that his book justifies inaction, withdrawal from the world.

Since Nietzsche, this notion of the philosopher as the complete human being has become an integral part of the twentieth-century philosophical tradition—and not only for existentialists. A. N. Whitehead expressed it forcefully in his last book *Modes of Thought:*

> "Nothing can be omitted, experience drunk and experience sober, experience sleeping and experience waking, experience drowsy and experience wide-awake, experience self-conscious and experience self-forgetful, experience intellectual and experience physical, experience religious and experience sceptical, experience anxious and experience carefree, experience anticipatory and experience retrospective, experience happy and experience grieving, exper-ience dominated by emotion and experience under self-restraint, experience in the light and experience in the dark, experience normal and experience abnormal."

It is true that few philosophers measure up to this standard; but most existentialists nevertheless take care to bear it in mind.

At which point I must 'declare my interest', and explain the nature of my own approach to the problem. My first book, *The Outsider,* was concerned with such men as Spinoza and Nietzsche —men whose inner development demanded a rejection of society— and often their own rejection *by* society. Whitehead defined religion as 'what a man does with his solitude': and since such inner-development usually demands a withdrawal into solitude, it would probably be true to say that most 'outsiders' are concerned with religion—although often of a highly personal and mystical kind.

In the great ages of religion, such men could usually find refuge in the Church. They might still be 'outsiders'—like Eckhart and Savonarola and St Francis and St John of the Cross—but they could nevertheless find in the Church a creative outlet for their energies. Outsiderism—the sense of not belonging to society—could be justified as a need to belong to a still higher society—of saints and god-seekers. So, in a paradoxical sense, there *was* a place for 'outsiders' in society.

Then, for better or for worse, the Church ceased to be the dominant intellectual force in society, even if it could still bully Descartes into suppressing his major work on the universe. Modes of thought were 'secularized'. The man with a powerful urge to inner development now had to find his own way to self-realization. Spinoza was one of the first of these 'outsider' figures. Two centuries after this death, 'outsiderism' had become the intellectual disease of the West. My own interest in the subject arose from the fact that so many of the great Romantics of the nineteenth century died tragically—either through insanity or disease or suicide.

But because the sickness had become so widespread, it was easier to reach a diagnosis. Many of the Romantics, from Shelley and Kleist to Van Gogh and Stefan George, were inclined to believe that life is fundamentally tragic. Man has brief glimpses of god-like intensity, but they vanish and leave him trapped in 'this dim vast vale of tears'. Yet other 'outsiders' took a less pessimistic view. William Blake insisted that man consists of three components: body, emotions and intellect. When intellect—which he called Urizen—is allowed to dominate, it becomes a force for evil, and the

Fall occurs. In a healthy human being it must combine with emotions and body; these then give birth to a fourth component, imagination (Los). Half a century later, Dostoevsky—another seminal existentialist thinker—expressed the same view symbolically in the three brothers Karamazov. Ivan, the intellectual, comes close to insanity by suppressing emotions and body in the name of intellect.

Nietzsche, we have seen, reached the same position; but only after he had purged his system of the pessimism of Schopenhauer, which had totally dominated his early thinking. And having achieved optimism at the price of ruthless self-vivisection, he became violently intolerant of thinkers like Socrates and Spinoza, whom he regarded as 'life-deniers', glorifiers of 'Urizen'.

We may feel that, in the case of Socrates, this is hardly fair. Socrates was a soldier as well as a thinker; he could apparently out-drink and out-march his friends as well as out-think them. He held love to be as important as reason, and seems to have regarded the health of the body as equally important (as did Spinoza). Nevertheless, Nietzsche condemns him as an arid rationalist who allowed reason to dominate his life. The citizens of Athens who condemned Socrates to death seemed to believe that he was primarily a sceptic—a sneerer. Nietzsche seems to feel they were not entirely wrong.

And what of Spinoza? I would suggest that, while Nietzsche's 'existential criticisms' were, to a large extent, justified, there are nevertheless elements in Spinoza's temperament that Nietzsche left out of account because he was unable to understand them. His criticisms apply to the naturalistic part of Spinoza—Spinoza the sceptic—not to Spinoza the mystic.

Now to a modern reader, Spinoza's psychology seems as inadequate as John Stuart Mill's. Here we feel most strongly that Spinoza's insight was limited by the strength of his reaction against contemporary 'unreason'. He begins Part III by stating aggressively that most writers on the emotions have treated them as if they belonged to the realm of the 'soul'; he, Spinoza, proposes to treat them as if they obeyed the usual laws of nature—which he proceeds to do in a manner worthy of Somerset Maugham. No doubt his method was a salutary shock to most of his readers. But after three

centuries, it has ceased to be shocking. Freud went much further in 'reducing' man to a bundle of uncontrolled impulses. And there are modern behavioural psychologists who have gone even further. Now the reaction is setting in. Many of us feel that the naturalistic view of man leaves out more than it puts in. The philosopher St Martin pointed out that the kind of 'humility' that insists that man is a mere grain of sand on some universal beach leads to laziness and cowardice. It is easy enough to demonstrate that every man suffers from the delusion that he is the most important being in the universe (what Robert Ardrey calls 'the fallacy of central position'), but it is too easy to slip into the opposite assumption—that he is the least important being in the universe. Even Freud's naturalistic psychology opened up all kinds of strange possibilities—for once we have admitted the existence of the subconscious, we have taken a long step away from naturalism. (This is why some behaviourists have refused to acknowledge its existence.) We find ourselves having to decide on the possibility of a 'collective unconscious', which in turn may lead to questions about telepathy and psychokinesis, and whether the subconscious mind may be responsible for poltergeist phenomena. Spinoza would have dismissed all these as superstitions.

Probably the closest modern equivalent to Spinoza's psychology is the 'existential psychology' of Sartre. Sartre's first book, *A Theory of the Emotions,* stated the thoroughly Spinozist doctrine that an emotion is simply another name for frustration; when we want something and we act, we feel no emotion; it is when we want something and are frustrated that we feel emotion. The more elaborate psychology of *Being and Nothingness* is constructed on this foundation. Emotion is basically an attempt to deceive ourselves. But for Sartre, there is no God, so the trivial drama of human stupidity and self-deception is played out against a background of universal emptiness.

On the other hand, comparison of Spinoza with Sartre makes us realize that Sartre is in one respect immensely more sophisticated; he had grasped Husserl's insight that all consciousness is *intentional*—that each perception is fired towards its object like a grappling hook. This in turn led Husserl (though not Sartre) to the notion of a 'transcendental ego' presiding over consciousness and

ultimately responsible for intentionality; he came to see philosophy as the task of uncovering the secrets and mysteries of the transcendental ego. We might say that Husserl counterbalanced the Freudian Unconscious with the notion of a Superconscious mind.

Again, many non-naturalistic psychologists have felt that the most basic and interesting fact about human consciousness is that *there seems to be something wrong with it.* Pascal and Newman chose to call it 'original sin'. But it was also recognized by Gurdjieff, who said that our problem is that 'ordinary consciousness' is a form of sleep. While we are asleep, says Gurdjieff, we are little more than machines. He would have said that Spinoza's psychology is simply the psychology of the machine. What interested Gurdjieff was the possibility of awakening from sleep and utilizing some of the hidden potentialities of consciousness. Again, we are close to Husserl and the 'secrets of the transcendental ego'.

So Spinoza's psychology, while brilliant and full of insights, will strike most modern readers as simplistic, not to say mechanistic. It is perhaps significant that he called his Part IV 'Of Human Bondage', while Pascal wanted to call the equivalent book of his own psychology 'The Greatness and Misery of Man'. One feels sometimes that Shaw's remark about Shakespeare applies equally to Spinoza: that he understands human weakness, but not human strength.

But then, the essence of Spinoza lies not in his vision of man, but in his vision of God. And here we see why Nietzsche found it impossible to come to grips with this aspect of his thought. In this respect, Nietzsche was a thoroughgoing nineteenth-century rationalist, like Tennyson and Emerson and Carlyle; he might have an idealistic hankering after the transcendental or the absolute, but in his heart of hearts he believed God to be a crude superstition, a hangover from the ages of unreason. Spinoza, on the other hand, felt himself at home in a great mystical tradition that can be traced back in ancient India, China and the Middle East. In all natural things—practical things—he felt himself to be a reasonable, natural human being. But he felt that a point came where human knowledge had to recognize its own inadequacy. G. K. Chesterton once pointed out that mystics should not be considered less rational

and practical than other people; on the contrary, they are often more rational and practical because they know precisely where their knowledge begins and ends. One of the oddest things about mystics is that they often seem to have very precise insights into the nature of God. As they struggle to express these insights, with immense clumsiness, you feel that this is not romantic verbalizing; they are struggling for precision, but language defeats them.

I do not know whether Spinoza knew anything about the mystics of China or India, or even about the Sufis; what is quite certain is that he would have felt perfectly at home in their tradition, as he did in the tradition of Cabbalism. For these mystics, God was not an idea, but a reality. They experienced God in moments of deep insight or of sudden intense ecstasy. A hungry man is not more certain of the existence of hot soup than the mystic is of God.

In this sense, God is an insight, a 'bird's-eye view' of the universe. I should say, perhaps, that God is *experienced* as an insight. Man is confined in the narrowness of personal existence, and all his habits seem determined to keep him trapped, like some prisoner chained to the floor of his cell by an iron collar. The philosopher observes with pity and irony the triviality that wastes the lives of most men. He feels that they are stuck in the present like flies on flypaper. His aim is freedom, and he knows that the first step is to avoid the flypaper. So the two parts of the *Ethics* on human bondage should not be regarded as a comprehensive psychology so much as a series of moralistic observations on human nature, of the kind that can be found so abundantly in the writings of the religious philosophers, from Boethius to Loyola.

What is perhaps most difficult to understand from the 'natural standpoint' is that once a man has clearly grasped the nature 'of human bondage', he may quite suddenly experience a deep intuition of the nature of freedom. The Hindu saint Ramakrishna was about to kill himself with a sword when the 'Divine Mother' revealed herself, overwhelming him with a tremendous vision of *meaning*—of some vast torrent of universal energy that drives nature like a giant dynamo. Nietzsche himself experienced this vision on at least two occasions, and felt that it transcended all human ideas of good and evil. And Bertrand Russell—another 'sceptic'—once identified the source of his own scientific inspiration as 'the very breath of

life, fierce and coming from far away, bringing into human life the vastness and fearful passionless force of non-human things.'

This is the mystic's basic realization, and to some extent, it is accessible to all of us, at least by analogy. I may *say* that I know what a rose smells like, yet when I first smell a rose bush in spring, I realize how much I had forgotten. The reality is somehow so much more real and rich than anything I could conjure up mentally in midwinter. And the same goes for all the meaning of the universe. We are cut off from meaning as a prisoner in the deepest and dampest dungeon in the Bastille is cut off from the sunlight. The prisoner may imagine the sunlight; he may even dream he is outside; but when he actually feels the sun and breathes in the air, he realizes that the mind is absurdly inexpert in conjuring up absent realities. The mystic 'knows' a little of the nature of God by pursuing this analogy—by imagining a reality a thousand times as great, and a thousand times as real and startling, as a spring morning. Of course, the imagination is totally inadequate; yet it *can* catch a glimpse of this vision of meaning. And this is enough to make him aware that all our human 'knowledge' is crude and absurd and totally inadequate. The reality is so infinitely rich that it is absurd to speak about 'evolution'. In believing that the universe could 'evolve', we are merely projecting our human inadequacy on the ultimate reality....

And now, perhaps, we can begin to see the paradox of Nietzsche's criticism of Spinoza. In effect, he read the last four parts of the *Ethics* and accused Spinoza of mistaking his intellectual concepts for reality. If Spinoza had been alive, he would have pointed to the first part of the *Ethics,* and accused Nietzsche of using the word 'reality' without the faintest insight into its meaning. Yet this, too, would have been unfair. Nietzsche also had his glimpses of that 'breath of life', fierce and blowing from far away. The two great philosophers approached the same basic concepts from opposite points of view. Both had glimpsed the reality, but they called it by different names.

And ultimately, Spinoza had the last word. For ultimately, Nietzsche became a Spinozist. That may sound absurd; yet how otherwise can we interpret the idea of Eternal Recurrence? It makes no sense in the context of Nietzsche's evolutionary philosophy. Yet

it makes sense to a mystic. Nietzsche began his life as a disciple of Socrates and the stoic philosophers. He swallowed Schopenhauer's Buddhistic pessimism. Then came the 'visions', the glimpses of 'bliss rising from the depths of nature' (as he expressed it in *The Birth of Tragedy*). Nietzsche transcended good and evil and Socratic 'reason'. He came to feel that man owes allegiance only to that 'fearful passionless force of non-human things'. He preached the superman. And then, as his imagination grasped for a moment the concept of the superhuman, he saw that ultimate force as something too vast to be contained in such a mere human concept as evolution. In the angels' chorus at the beginning of *Faust,* Goethe had written:

'Es schaümt das Meer in breiten Flüssen
Am tiefen Grund der Felsen auf,
Und Fels und Meer wird fortgerissen
In ewig schnellen Sphärenlauf.'

('Against the cliffs with roaring song
In mighty torrents foams the ocean
And cliffs and sea are whirled along
With circling orbs in ceaseless motion.')

Imagine this vision multiplied a thousand-fold and you have an approximation to Spinoza's vision of God—and Nietzsche's vision of that mighty ultimate force behind the universe. 'Circling orbs in ceaseless motion'—eternal recurrence. It became Zarathustra's ultimate affirmation, beyond the superman. And so, in the end, the vision of Spinoza and the vision of Nietzsche blend into a kind of unity.

From our point of view, it is fortunate it happened so late in the day. Philosophers are never so entertaining—or so instructive—as when they are beating one another over the head.

P. F. STRAWSON

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[Extracted from: 'The Thinkers': a *Daily Telegraph Magazine* article, dated November 1, 1968 (no. 213), p. 62-75. (**C93**)]

P. F. Strawson, 48, a Fellow of University College, Oxford, is generally regarded as the most high-powered philosophical mind of his generation. He reached this position in a single leap in 1950, with a short article called 'On Referring', and confirmed it with *Introduction to Logical Theory* (1952) and *Individuals* (1959). He is probably the leading exponent of "ordinary language philosophy".

To understand Strawson, it is necessary to bring in another of the sacred names of Oxford philosophy, J. L. Austin, a tall, thin man who loved dictionaries and grammars and used to read them for fun. Austin, who died in 1960, agreed with the later Wittgenstein that most philosophical problems have defied solution because our language is too slipshod. A typical story illustrates his sense of the *exact* meaning of words. One of his colleagues asked: "And when might we hope to see your book published?", and Austin replied: "You may hope whenever you please." Austin felt that the main trouble with philosophy is that its language is so crude that it can't hope to get anywhere, any more than you could pick your teeth with a broom handle. Most of his work—his books were published posthumously—is concerned with the precise meanings of words and concepts. Every younger philosopher at Oxford has been more or less influenced by him.

Strawson combines Austin's precision with an altogether broader approach to philosophy; it is significant that his latest book is about Kant—another of the "great unmentionables" in the eyes of most modern British philosophers. But it is difficult to summarise Strawson's approach, because his ideas are so closely connected with those of his predecessors—Russell, Austin, Wittgenstein and Ryle. In the most controversial chapter of *Individuals*, for example,

he discusses the mind-body problem—the "ghost in the machine"—and argues that the concept of a "person" is the primitive concept from which the idea of mind was derived. 'On Referring' is an attack on a doctrine of Russell's called the theory of descriptions, but in effect it is like a criticism by the later Wittgenstein of his younger self—the author of the *Tractatus*—since it argues against a strict, logical view of language, and emphasises that words have many uses, and have to be judged by context.

Strawson's writing gives an exhilarating impression of a powerful and imaginative mind, so that when I called on him in his rooms at University College I expected to meet a rather formidable man of the Carlyle type. I was surprised to discover that the eminent philosopher looks about 40 and has a humorous and slightly self-deprecating manner.

He explained that the great influence on his early years was Rousseau's *Social Contract*, which produced in him the delighted feeling that philosophy could really say something important about man and society. He was, of course, left-wing. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* converted him to logical positivism in the Thirties. (I asked him why it had such enormous effect, when Wittgenstein had already said much the same thing in the *Tractatus* in 1921. "Not many of us understood the *Tractatus* in those days," he explained. "That came after the war.") Then came the war and army service. He returned to an Oxford in which Austin's views were exerting immense influence, and which was listening intently for the occasional roll of prophetic thunder from Wittgenstein in Cambridge.

Was it a good thing for philosophy to be so analytical? "Yes, I think so. Surely it's important to ask basic questions about the way our minds work? It's important to get the foundations right." "But once you've got the foundations right, do you see yourself building on them? Coming closer to Russell's idea of trying to understand the universe?" "No, I don't think so. I think the foundations are important in themselves."

I asked him why he does philosophy. "Because I'm good at it and I enjoy it." Certainly, Strawson represents what is best about Oxford philosophy, as well as its limitations. His writing is lucid, perceptive, imaginative, first-rate within its own field. He tried to

extend this field in his own patient way—as in this book on Kant. But there is also a curious narrowness of interest. I asked him why Oxford philosophers take so little interest in the phenomenologists, when phenomenology is surely one of the most powerful methods ever developed for doing philosophy. He shrugged: "I don't think they know much about us either."

Is Oxford a good place to do philosophy? In one sense it is too comfortable, in another, too distracting. This may account for the extremely small output of most of the Oxford philosophers. (Russell, after all, has produced 40-odd books.) And Strawson admitted to me: "Teaching courses on philosophy takes a lot out of you. At the end of term, I often feel I don't want to read or think about philosophy for months."

G. J. WARNOCK

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[Extracted from: 'The Thinkers': a *Daily Telegraph Magazine* article, dated November 1, 1968 (no. 213), p. 62-75. (**C93**)]

G. J. Warnock, 45, is another influential member of the Oxford group and also its historian; his *English Philosophy since 1900* (Home University Library) is incomparably the best introduction to the subject. He is a fellow of Magdalen College and has also published *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (1967). His wife, Mary Warnock, has written on existentialism, and is the author of a book on Sartre. Warnock is a smallish man, bespectacled, with a quiet and unflappable manner. Together with J O. Urmson, he has edited the philosophical papers of Austin.

> "Austin felt sick of the way that philosophy never seems to get anywhere. After all, people have been doing philosophy for over 2000 years. So Austin said, in effect: 'Look, let's stop being too ambitious. Let's try and get just *one* thing right, and it'll be a start…' But you mustn't think of Austin as being terribly pedantic. He was simply fascinated by details. He was also a very funny man—his papers are full of humour."

Warnock, like Strawson, has come to philosophy rather indirectly through social concern. Born in Leeds, in 1923, he was oppressed by the "vast areas of slum left over from the industrial revolution—places that simply shouldn't exist". He came to Oxford immediately after the war to do "PPE"—philosophy, politics and economics. He was caught up, like Strawson, in the Austinian revolution, and suddenly realised that he was good at doing philosophy and enjoyed doing it. The violent preoccupation with social concerns has tended to diminish as he has become more absorbed in philosophy. "But I'm not a terribly important figure," he added modestly. "I wouldn't

place myself in the front rank of British philosophers." "Who would you place there?" He thought for a moment: "Strawson."

Speaking to Warnock, I came to feel that there is probably far more good in this "Oxford analysis" than I had previously been willing to admit. Wittgenstein declared that what he wanted to do in philosophy was to bring words back from their metaphysical to their *everyday* use. Warnock's way of discussing philosophy epitomises this approach: clear, patient, very down-to-earth. "My mind moves rather slowly. I keep worrying a problem until I see what it's all about."

My final question was whether he agreed with Ayer that a good philosopher should be an atheist. "Not at all. A lot of good philosophers at Oxford are Christians." "But not you?" "No."

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

Whitehead as Existentialist

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The title sounds almost self-contradictory. What has the creator of the philosophy of organism in common with Kierkegaard, Sartre or Heidegger? The answer is: more than at first appears. "Speculative philosophy," says Whitehead, at the beginning of his book *Process and Reality*, "is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted." And what does he understand by 'experience'? The answer can be found in Chapter XV of *Adventures of Ideas*:

> "Nothing can be omitted, experience drunk and experience sober, experience sleeping and experience waking, experience drowsy and experience wide-awake, experience self-conscious and experience self-forgetful, experience intellectual and experience physical, experience religious and experience sceptical, experience anxious and experience care-free, experience anticipatory and experience retrospective, experience happy and experience grieving, experience dominated by emotion and experience under self--restraint, experience in the light and experience in the dark, experience normal and experience abnormal."

Even the words "experience drunk and experience sober" make us recognise that Whitehead is thinking in the same categories as

Kierkegaard and Sartre: *everyday experience*, not philosophical abstractions. In fact, in *Science and the Modern World* he says "Philosophy is the critic of abstractions."

Whitehead began his career as a mathematician, and it is to this period that his *Mathematical Concepts of the Material World* (1905) belongs. These years culminated in the three volumes of the *Principia Mathematica* (1910, 1912, 1913) co-authored with Bertrand Russell. This was a heroic attempt to reduce the principles of mathematics to logic, and, in a sense, to create a foundation-stone for all scientific knowledge. However, it was subsequently undermined by Kurt Gödel's discovery in 1930 of the Incompleteness Theorem, to the effect that no set of postulates can ever be comprehensive, but will always give rise to further questions that cannot be answered on the basis of the postulates. I would suspect that there is a similar Incompleteness Theorem in philosophy.

Whitehead's extraordinary powers of intellectual concentration can be glimpsed in this paragraph from Russell's autobiography:

> "His capacity for concentration on work was quite extraordinary. One hot summer's day, when I was staying with him at Grantchester, our friend Crompton Davies arrived and I took him into the garden to say how-do-you-do to his host. Whitehead was sitting writing mathematics. Davies and I stood in front of him at a distance of no more than a yard and watched him covering page after page with symbols. He never saw us, and after a time we went away with a feeling of awe."

Whitehead's 'second period' is marked by his work in the philosophy of science, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (1919), *The Concept of Nature* (1920) and *The Principle of Relativity with Applications to Physical Science* (1922). *Science and the Modern World* followed in 1925. This may be seen as providing the foundation of all his subsequent work in philosophy. It is deservedly Whitehead's most popular book. It's an exciting historical overview that gives the reader the feeling of a journey in an old-fashioned airship, travelling calmly across the landscape at a height slightly above trees and church steeples.

For me, its most fascinating chapter is the fifth, 'The Romantic

Reaction', about the revolt against what Whitehead called the 'bifurcation of nature' created by Locke's secondary qualities - which were in turn a response to Galileo's division of the world into the 'apparent' and 'true scientific reality'. *Primary* qualities, like length and weight, are basic and a real part of the external world. *Secondary* qualities, like colour and smell, vary according to our senses, and exist only in minds. Bishop Berkeley, probably with his tongue in his cheek, went on to argue that even primary qualities are relative, since shape, for example, depends on the angle from which an object is viewed. David Hume's scepticism was more devastating and serious. He argued that the only things we can know for certain are *sense impressions*, which make the impact of 'presentational immediacy' upon our minds. Compared to these, our other 'certainties', like what we did yesterday, are dim and vague. So all we know for certain is *immediacy*. Everything else we 'know', such as that the sun will rise tomorrow, is non-immediate and therefore doubtful.

The 'romantic reaction' was not an *intellectual* revolt against the 'mechanical nature' of Galileo and Newton and the bifurcation of the world into the apparent and the unknowable, but an *instinctive* rejection of these concepts by poets. Before Newton, Milton had no need to revolt; he took it for granted that he was capable of "justifying the ways of God to men." So did Pope, who in the *Essay on Man* refers airily to the world as "a mighty maze, but not without a plan." Yet by the time of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' in 1849, doubt had set in like a toothache.

What had intervened was the Romantic revolt. Where Wordsworth for example differs most basically from poets of the previous age is in his sense of a meaning *behind* the face of nature. In Book 1 of *The Prelude* he describes how, rowing out on the lake in a borrowed boat, "a huge cliff / Rose up between me and the stars," and how, for many days after, "my brain work'd with a dim and undetermined sense of unknown modes of being."

Locke or Hume might say he was merely sensing secondary qualities/impressions, but for Wordsworth, what he grasped was *the truth behind nature*. It's also clear that Wordsworth has no sympathy for science or scientists: "We murder to dissect."

Shelley, on the other hand, loves science, and invokes it in poem

after poem. He is thrilled by the tremendous forces of nature, and can see no contradiction between the power of the west wind and the power of the human mind to understand it.

Such a serene union of mind and the natural is what was lost through the 'bifurcation of nature'. And by the end of the 'romantic century' it had also been lost from poetry. A mere generation later, Tennyson is deeply troubled by "Nature red in tooth and claw," and by the fact that "the stars...blindly run." But if the stars blindly run, then so, surely, do the molecules of the human brain and body? Are we not in the end living in a mechanical universe, in which we are also machines?

Whitehead's next book was a small volume less than a hundred pages long, called *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927). In my view, this is not only one of Whitehead's most important books, but one of the most important books of the 20th century. I contend that Whitehead was the first to clearly pinpoint David Hume's inadequate view of perception, and that this recognition is the central significance of the philosophy of organism.

Fairly early on he speaks about Hume and impressions. Compared to these, most of our other pieces of knowledge, for example, ideas and memories, are rather indefinite, like poor copies. And I suspect that it was in the paragraph describing the way a wall presents itself to our senses that Whitehead saw what is wrong with Hume's account. 'Presentational immediacy' (Whitehead's phrase) may be our most definite form of impression, but there is another, weaker, but just as important form, which helps us make sense of the world. If Whitehead had taken more interest in psychology, as Edmund Husserl did, he might have come across it sooner, under the name of 'Gestalt'. A gestalt is a combination of the qualities of experience into a meaningful, coherent totality, and it is fundamental to the way we perceive things. Gestalt psychology had been created around the beginning of the 20th century by experimental psychologists such as Kurt Koffka, Max Wertheimer and Wolfgang Kohler.

In order to grasp the significance of Whitehead's insight, we must go back to Wordsworth and Shelley—Wordsworth recognising the "unknown modes of being" concealed from us by the material world, and Shelley declaring (in 'Mont Blanc'):

"The everlasting universe of Things
Flows through the Mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters—with a sound but half its own,
Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
In the wild woods, among the Mountains lone..."

Shelley is less direct than Wordsworth, but his meaning is plain. The universe is not separated from the human mind; its impulses flow through us, as a brook threads its way through wild woods. The "unknown modes of being" can somehow speak to us in human language. How is it, then, that a few decades later, Tennyson could express the feeling that each individual was now divided against himself, while Matthew Arnold, in *Dover Beach*, compared his contemporaries to people on a "darkling plain", "where ignorant armies clash by night"?

This question was the starting point of my own investigations in my first book *The Outsider* (1956). Why did so many of the poets and artists of the 19th century fall into depression and die tragically, or commit suicide? It all began so optimistically, with Rousseau's conviction that the human mind was about to throw off its chains, echoed in Blake's fragment on the French Revolution and in Wordsworth's comment "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive". Yet by the time Shelley and Byron died in the 1820s, gloom had descended like a yellow London fog, and the age of optimism was over. The mood of world-weariness was expressed by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam in his posthumous play *Axel* (1890) when the hero, about to commit suicide, declares: "As for living, our servants can do that for us."

Of course, it would be a mistake to assume that the world - rejection of Axel springs from the same cause as the gloom of Tennyson and Arnold. *They* are worried by the problem of mechanism, and the status of man in a mechanical universe. What bothers Axel is that there seems to be nothing in the 'real world' that can satisfy the romantic craving for meaning and harmony. Yeats wrote in 'The Shadowy Waters': "What the world's million

lips are searching for / Must be substantial somewhere...” He suspects that all that the romantic revolution has done for man is to awaken cravings for which there is no satisfaction, like a man awakening to his dying of thirst in a desert.

Friedrich Nietzsche eventually saw another possibility. He says:

> “Yesterday an oppressive storm hung over the sky, and I hurried to a neighbouring hill called Leutsch.... At the top I found a hut, where a man was killing two kids while his son watched him. The storm broke with a tremendous crash, discharging thunder and hail, and I had an indescribable sense of well-being and zest.... Lightning and tempest are different worlds, free powers, without morality. Pure Will, without the confusions of intellect—how happy, how free.”

This experience, which occurred in 1865 when Nietzsche was 21, became the basis of his own solution to the problem of self and reality-division: ‘great health’. And if his sanity had not been undermined by (congenital) venereal disease, he might well have been the first philosopher to put such a solution into practice.

As it was, Whitehead grasped the solution to the bifurcation problem with his insight about the refutation of Hume. According to Hume, we have only one mode of perception, which brings us impressions and ideas, ideas being faded sense impressions. Whitehead replied: no, we have *two* modes of perception, and the second mode discloses *meanings*. What happened to Nietzsche on Leutsch was the same order of experience as happened to Wordsworth when he saw the shape of the hill against the sky. It was a perception of a meaning that lies behind ‘presentational immediacy’, as a bird’s view of a landscape is broader than that of a man on the ground.

Whitehead decided to call the other mode of perception ‘causal efficacy’, thinking in terms of Hume’s remarks on cause and effect. I prefer to call the faculty that comes into play ‘meaning perception’. But now we can begin to see clearly what Whitehead was proposing, and its tremendous importance—something his contemporaries failed to grasp because they filed him as a ‘philosopher of organism’ who developed a terminology of appalling obscurity.

In everyday consciousness, immediacy perception is stronger than meaning perception, for a fairly low degree of meaning perception will serve well enough for ordinary purposes, since much that we do is repetitive and mechanical. On the other hand, when we set out on holiday we 'pay attention', although not necessarily as a conscious decision. The prospect of change makes us feel 'more alive', and things somehow look more interesting. Conversely, when we are bored, things seem to become duller and greyer as perception becomes more 'mechanical'.

We take these different ways of seeing for granted, without noticing that they pose an interesting philosophical question. The Victorian magazine *Punch* had a cartoon showing a child standing with his father watching a military parade and asking, "Why does military music make you feel so much happier than you really are?" He means, of course, make you feel happier than usual. We take the level of everyday consciousness for granted as 'normal'. In Whitehead's terminology, a certain balance between 'presentational immediacy' and 'causal efficacy' tends to establish itself in our everyday lives, the synthesis being what he calls 'symbolic perception', and this is taken for granted as our idea of 'normality'. Wordsworth points out in his 'Intimations of Immortality' ode that:

> "There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
> The earth and every common sight
> To me did seem
> Apparell'd in celestial light,"

and he notes gloomily:

> "It is not now as it hath been of yore—
> Turn wheresoe'er I may
> by night or day,
> The things which I have seen
> I now can see no more."

The problem, as Wordsworth sees it, is growing up and having to cope with increasingly complex problems:

> "Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy...
> At length the Man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the light of common day."

The 'light of common day' is our normal human level of awareness. But there is clearly a fallacy here. Every consciousness is a balance between *immediacy* perception and *meaning* perception. And, as the small boy noted, the balance can be changed by military music, and dozens of other things. It can be changed in a downward direction by tiredness or boredom, and upward by a recollection that your wife is cooking your favourite dinner this evening.

C. S. Lewis has a remarkable story called 'The Shoddy Lands' which is to the point. An Oxford professor is visited by a former student who is accompanied by his girlfriend. As they are in the midst of a dull and polite conversation, everything changes and he is alone among trees—dingy, green, shoddy trees: "I felt as if I had suddenly been banished from the real, bright, concrete and prodigally complex world into some sort of second-rate universe that had been put together on the cheap."

What has happened is that in some odd way he is seeing things through the eyes of Peggy, the girlfriend. Walking down a street, everything seems blurred, and the people, like the trees, seem somehow half-finished. Occasional faces suddenly stand out—always men—and also clothes—always women's. Then he looks in a jeweller's shop window, and its sheer vividness takes his breath away. The frocks in the next shop window are just as vivid. So are the shoes in a women's shoe shop. Then he has a vision of Peggy as a sort of giantess wearing a bikini. He is, it seems, seeing the world through the eyes of a complete egoist, for whom other human beings scarcely exist. When the professor finds himself back in his own world he is almost drunk with relief.

The story is a reminder that we all live in subjective universes, and that we allow our preoccupations to determine what we see. Our world becomes 'symbolic' rather than real. Those are not real trees, but cardboard symbols of trees. So how can you see 'real' trees? You can't, Hume would say: you can only see your *impressions* of trees, as if on a television screen.

Whitehead will have none of this. He is a 'Realist'. What you see are *real* trees, albeit partly 'symbolified' by your preoccupations. C. S. Lewis' protagonist luckily awakened from the symbolic world of Peggy. But how could Lewis, or anyone else, make sure that they are not still trapped in their own symbolically-perceived world?

The Zen Master Ikkyu knew the answer to that. When a workman asked him to write something on his tablet, Ikkyu wrote 'Attention'. Disappointed, the workman asked him to add something more. Ikkyu responded by writing 'Attention. Attention'. "But what does 'Attention' mean?" asked the workman fretfully. "Attention means attention," said Ikkyu.

He meant that by preventing our senses from lapsing into mechanicalness we become more aware. Ikkyu's meaning can be glimpsed by casting our minds back to Bertrand Russell's description of Whitehead sitting in the garden and writing page after page of mathematical symbols without noticing his companions. Whitehead possessed the capacity for 'Attention'.

When I am feeling low and dull, I am trapped in the mode of presentational immediacy, which is also what Sartre means by 'nausea' in his novel of that title. Whitehead cites the British Prime Minister Mr Pitt, who on his death bed was heard to murmur "What shades we are, what shadows we pursue." Whitehead comments: "His mind had suddenly lost the sense of causal efficacy [meaning perception], and was illuminated by the remembrance of the intensity of emotion, which had enveloped his life, in its comparison with the barren emptiness of the world passing in sense perception." In other words, Pitt was simply tired, and was mistaking his tiredness for an ultimate perception of the empty futility of life.

I would say that this feeling is the starting point of a great deal of existentialism and post-modernism. This, for me, was the fundamental 'Outsider problem', the problem of so many of those oversensitive romantics who committed suicide or fell into depression, the problem of 'negation' as expressed by Dostoevsky in *The Possessed* or by Eliot in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*. I asserted in *The Outsider* that this is the most basic problem of human existence—all others are trivial in comparison.

For me, this problem of 'meaning perception' or its lack has always been fundamental. When van Gogh painted *The Starry Night*, he was overwhelmed with a total conviction of meaning. When he shot himself in the stomach, he was overwhelmed with a total conviction of tragedy and meaninglessness—not just personal, but *universal*: "Misery will never end," he said. Dostoevsky raised the same question in the most powerful chapter in all his work, the 'Pro and Contra' chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*. And in Whitehead we have a respectable philosopher in the British empirical tradition going right to the heart of the matter and declaring that our 'meaninglessness' is a delusion, like our conviction that the Sun goes round the Earth. Reason tells us that 'immediacy' is a half-truth, the other half being 'meaningfulness'; but we find it very hard to trust reason on such a momentous issue. Yet we are all familiar with the two opposed modes of perception. There are days when I feel totally trapped in the present moment, and days when I have a curious feeling of strength and optimism, a certainty that 'I can win'. The problem is that the two feelings tend to be mutually contradictory, like two extremely honest people each assuring me that the other is a liar.

However, what I found most significant is that there are moments when the two visions seem to combine. Even Sartre's 'nauseated' hero Roquentin experiences such moments—for example, when listening to a record of a woman singing 'Some of These Days', "My body feels at rest, like a precision machine." Yes, in such moments we experience a curious sense of precision, of control. It is as if the two beams of perception—meaning and immediacy—combine and operate simultaneously. Such moments, I would contend, are the moments of vision experienced by Wordsworth and Shelley and van Gogh, and they are the closest a philosopher can come to a truly objective perception.

What conclusions can we draw from this? Well, first of all, such conclusions are bound to be practical—*existential*—as well as philosophical. As far as Whitehead is concerned—and this is confirmed in his later *Adventures of Ideas*—the aim is a raising of perception to a higher level, such as Wordsworth, Shelley and Ikkyu achieved. The two beams of perception must be drawn together until we become aware of vibrations of meaning that lie

beyond the flat 'ordinary consciousness' we take for granted.

The ending of *Process and Reality* sounds oddly Hegelian: "The consequent nature of God is the fulfilment of his experience by his reception of the multiple freedom of actuality into the harmony of his own actualisation. It is God as really actual, completing the deficiency of his mere conceptual actuality."

Whitehead never expressed so clearly his sense that we are living in a dynamic, not passive, universe—a universe full of 'unknown modes of being' waiting for us to discipline our senses until we see them. We might even say that in *Process and Reality* Whitehead brings Hegel and Kierkegaard together in an act of synthesis.

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

Wittgenstein and Modern English Philosophy

[An Introduction to 'The Thinkers': a *Daily Telegraph Magazine* article, dated November 1, 1968 (**C93**)]

Britain has ceased to exert any great influence as a world power, and her export trade is not all that it should be. But there is still one export in which Britain leads the world, and exerts an influence out of all proportion to her size. It is about the unlikeliest one you could imagine—philosophy. In every major university in the world, from Oslo to Los Angeles, from Berlin to Tokyo, you will hear the same thing: the greatest influence in modern philosophy is exerted by about a dozen British philosophers, who exercise something like a benevolent dictatorship over the subject.

It is true that there are a few influential philosophers who are not English: Heidegger in Germany, Jaspers in Switzerland, Zubiri in Spain. These men are "existentialists". There is also a powerful movement called phenomenology; this is connected with existentialism, and is highly influential in Europe and America. But existentialism is no longer a very powerful influence in philosophy; in fact, it is almost dead. Which leaves the British philosophers the run of the field. You might assume that these British thinkers are influential because they are bold, colourful, speculative. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are influential because they approach philosophy in a typically British way.

There is a kind of blunt, cautious, common-sense approach that always makes me think of J. B. Priestley and the old Radio Doctor. They are a long way from the layman's idea of a philosopher—a man with a white beard, sitting in the attitude of Rodin's Thinker, asking: "Why are we here? What is life all about? What am I supposed to do now I'm here?" Most English philosophers would

say that such questions are meaningless, because there is no possible way of getting at the answer.

Simply as a matter of temperament, few English philosophers are very interested in why man is alive, in whether Beethoven's Ninth Symphony somehow gets closer to "reality" than the leading article in *The Daily Telegraph*, in whether there is meaning in human life that transcends its banalities. They are not interested because they are not that type of person. They don't necessarily condemn that type of person, they simply aren't interested.

Prof C. D. Broad, respected Elder Statesman of English philosophy, belongs to an older generation of philosophers, who all worked at Cambridge. The most influential members of this Cambridge school were G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. All had in common the "hard-headed" attitude to philosophy. Russell agreed with Broad that philosophy ought to model itself on science—particularly on mathematical physics. Moore thought that philosophy should stick as closely as possible to common sense and everyday language. As to Wittgenstein, the most influential of the three, he was almost a total sceptic about philosophy; his early philosophy says philosophy is nonsense, and his later philosophy argues it is largely a misunderstanding of language. You might even say that words are an attempt to "digest" our experience; if they don't perform this function, because they are used in artificial or highfalutin' ways, the result will be severe indigestion. Most philosophy is simply an attempt to supply Alka Seltzer.

Wittgenstein can be regarded as the father figure of all subsequent British philosophy. Most of the younger philosophers can be found at Oxford—Ryle, Ayer, Strawson, Warnock, Urmson, Quinton—and so their ideas are said to belong to the Oxford school of philosophy. It is also known sometimes as "common language philosophy" or simply "linguistic philosophy", because of its emphasis upon the ordinary use of language. Most Oxford philosophers would deny that they are members of a "school", or even that they have much in common with their colleagues. But there is a strong family resemblance.

Any attempt to describe the work of these analytic philosophers must begin with Wittgenstein, a strange tormented man to whom

philosophy was almost a religious urge, a demon that drove him in a lifelong quest for certainty. At one point, he inherited a fortune and gave it away, because he felt that a philosopher would be better off poor. He became a gardener in a monastery, and later on a hospital orderly; he hated the academic atmosphere of Cambridge and took care to violate it in every possible way. Yet in spite of his love of music and poetry, and his interest in religion, his philosophy seems aggressively rationalistic. His first book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, declares that language is simply a picture of "facts", it is "about" facts, just as mathematics is about figures. Now we all know that figures cannot tell you anything about God or ultimately reality. Neither, said Wittgenstein, can language. *Philosophy is an attempt to make language do something it was never intended to*.

But midway through his career, Wittgenstein changed his mind. He was arguing one day with an Italian colleague, when the colleague suddenly made the Italian equivalent of the V-sign, and asked what "facts" *that* expressed. And Wittgenstein saw his point—that real language is infinitely complicated. It doesn't have one set of rules it has dozens of sets, depending upon which particular "language game" you are playing. And most philosophical problems are misunderstandings, due to a tendency to apply the rules of poker to snakes and ladders.

Personally, I am out of sympathy with the Oxford philosophers. What they are doing seems to me extremely interesting, but far too narrow, and the results it achieves are disappointingly small compared to the effort that goes into it. In my own view, philosophy must be as broad as possible; it should attempt to understand art and poetry and religion as well as science, and it has a quite definite relation to human existence.

Orthodox religion has been dying for several centuries, and it is now at its last gasp. Ideally, philosophy should fill the place of religion. It can move towards this by becoming a *science of consciousness*, just as biology is a science of living organisms and geology a science of rocks. This science of consciousness is called phenomenology. There is certainly not a philosopher in England today who would agree with me.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Colin Wilson was born in the East Midlands city of Leicester in 1931. After the phenomenal success of his first book *The Outsider* in 1956, he moved to Cornwall where he pursued a successful career as a writer, producing over 150 titles in fifty-five years. Essentially an existential philosopher, he has also written on crime, psychology, sex, the occult, literature, music, unexplained phenomena, history, pre-history and over 20 novels in various genres. He died in December 2013.

Colin Stanley was born in Topsham, Devon, UK in 1952 and educated at Exmouth School. Beginning in 1970, he worked for Devon Library Services, studying for two years in London, before moving to Nottingham where he worked for the University of Nottingham until July 2005. The Managing Editor of Paupers' Press, he is also the author and editor of several books and booklets about Colin Wilson and his work. His collection of Wilson's work now forms *The Colin Wilson Collection* at the University of Nottingham, an archive opened in the summer of 2011 and which now includes many of the author's manuscripts.

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