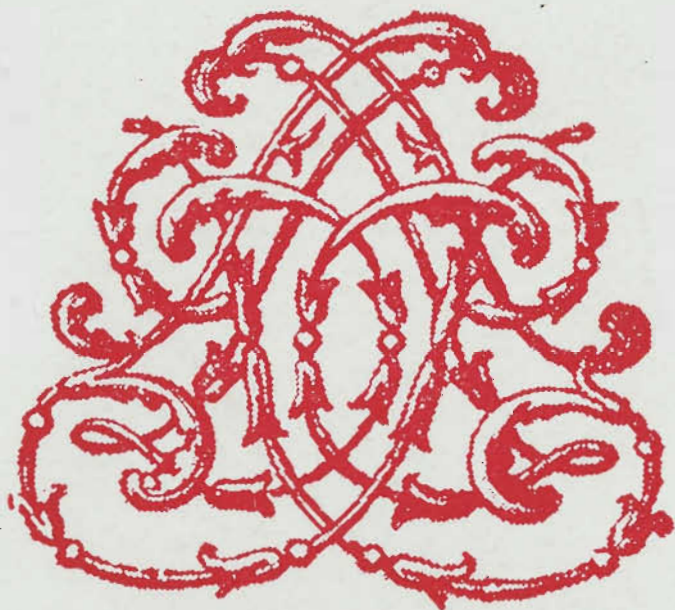


THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE FOR 1970

PLODDINGLY UPWARDS
FROM
DOGMA TO DISCOVERY

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This is the Essex Hall Lecture for 1970, and was delivered in London on 8 April, 1970. Essex Hall is the headquarters of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, and stands on the site of the building in which the first avowedly Unitarian congregation met in 1774. The lecture was founded in 1892, and many distinguished men in varied fields have contributed to the series. The delivery of the lecture is one of the leading events during the annual meetings of the Assembly.

A list of the previous lectures still in print will be found in the catalogue of the Lindsey Press.

FIFTY YEARS AGO this year was published Samuel Alexander's Gifford Lectures, *Space, Time and Deity*. In a review at the time Dean Inge said of it: 'This philosophy seems to be entangled in a subtle materialism which must prevent it coming to terms with any genuine Christian philosophy'.¹

Subtle materialism *versus* genuine Christian philosophy! Alexander had no need to reply, but a dozen or so years later, with no ill feeling, and doubtless without even thinking of it, he set the record straight when he wrote of Inge's *God and the Astronomers*, that he came away from reading it with the feeling that there were two kinds of minds which, in dealing with the all-important question of the connection of religion and philosophy, are apt to lose touch with one another. And he continued:

The one works ploddingly upwards from experience and finds religion and God at the end of it, never entertaining a doubt that a sound philosophy must find its place for a fact of experience so indefeasible as God and the worship of him. The other takes the conceptions nearest to its religious wants, and I think, distorts the conceptions in physical experience to suit them.²

So much for Christian, or any other partisan philosophy! So much, too, for materialism! If 'ploddingly upwards' is the badge of materialism, well, that is greatly in its favour; but in truth materialism was no part of Alexander's normal vocabulary, doubtless for a reason that has been put by Sir Peter Medawar, when he wrote, in more disrespectful terms than Alexander would have used: 'I cannot hope to be lucky enough to escape the charge that my approach is materialistic. I can neither deny the charge nor admit it, because "materialism" is a word that has lost its power to convey an exact meaning; I can, however, resent it, because it is a word that has not yet lost its power to cause offence'.³

Like 'materialism', 'dogma' can be used to cause offence: 'I argue; you merely dogmatise.' This has been so especially in the courtesies of sectarian

The Lindsey Press, 1-6 Essex Street, London WC2

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Set in Linotype Plantin

Printed by J C Culpin PO Box 90 Leicester

strife. But it is worth remembering that in some religious communions dogma is cherished as something legitimate for beliefs that are, and, perhaps have to be, taught with authority. It is worth remembering, too, that in matters of morals, whether we like the word or not, we can all be just as dogmatic as any credal church. With impeccable authority we tell a child that it must not take things out of other people's pockets and we make the dogmatic statement that stealing is wicked. Moreover we can give the term a quite precise meaning—and I do not think I am cheating if I give it a precise psychological meaning.

A dogma, then, is a claim to authoritative truth; and my point is that the authority that gives it this character is instinctive. It grows out of the instincts that make man a gregarious animal. When we use 'the imperious word *ought*' (as Charles Darwin called it) the dogmatic assurance with which we do so is a characteristically instinctive reaction.

In saying this, there are two things that I do not mean. The first is that I am not using the term as we sometimes do when we speak of a man as being an authority on a certain subject because he has made himself an expert in it; we are then speaking metaphorically. In the second place, of course, I do not mean that ethical rules or commands are themselves instinctive. I would not for a moment suggest that the last of the Ten Commandments, whether we take the later version, 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife etc.' or, still less, the earlier version, 'Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk' was instinctive; what is instinctive is the authoritative assurance with which 'Moses' pronounced them; that he thought that he brought them down with divine command from Mount Sinai was doubtless a natural interpretation and one which has frequently been made since.

I must not stay to discuss fully the marks of instinct, but I might fill out the picture a little in this matter of authority by reference to three of them: (1) the parallel between human and animal behaviour; (2) the tell-tale appearance of characteristic emotions; and, (3) finally, and rather more fully, the characteristic of deceptive obviousness that leads into instructive anfractuosités of the human mind. First then a dispassionate study of your authority (even if, in very human fashion, he sometimes fails to obey), his dog will disclose his gregarious fidelity, his obedience and acceptance of your pleasure when praised, his abasement when scolded. In the second place, emotions have been called the boiling over of instinct. We may suspect them in a dog and they are familiar enough in ourselves; there is the guilt felt if caught in any dereliction of duty and the bad conscience over some action that would spell disgrace if discovered. Add to these self-consciousness and

shame; add also the glow of satisfaction at doing a good deed in a naughty world, especially when joined with others in so doing; and too, the glee of indignation in denouncing the sins of the world.

The bare essentials may be summed up in certain key phrases adopted by C H Waddington, such as the 'authority-bearing system' or the 'socio-genetic system' by which he means that genetically the child is adapted to take in and accept what it is taught at its mother's knee, at school and in its widening social experience. This includes its mother tongue, the words and forms of speech of its own language; information of all sorts, true and false, and, most characteristically the do's and don'ts with which its conduct is plentifully hedged about and by which it is transformed into a civilized being. The particular language, English or French or whatever, the particular information, the various particular do's and don'ts provide the social contribution while the instinctive or genetic contribution is the implicit authority with which all these particulars are accepted as dogmas that must-be-so; so much so that many, indeed most, become internalised as if they were the child's very own thought and belief.

In passing we may note that this internalisation constitutes the essence of what Sigmund Freud termed the super-ego; it is also the essence of the otherwise inexplicably self-evident character of the authority of dogma. And it leads on to my third chosen mark of instinct, its deceptive obviousness.

Obvious, because it is a mark of instinct that we tend not to think of asking for reasons; deceptive, because, if challenged, we are more likely to think up seemingly good reasons than give the right reason that instinct is the cause. The point of obviousness is delightfully put in a famous passage of William James which begins:

It takes . . . what Berkeley calls a mind debauched with learning to carry the process of making the natural seem strange, so far as to ask for the *why* of any instinctive act. To the metaphysician alone can such questions occur as: Why do we smile when pleased and not scowl?

It is too long to quote in full, but it ends with the irresistible:

To the broody hen the notion would seem monstrous that there should be any creature in the world to whom a nestful of eggs was not the utterly fascinating and precious and never-to-be-too-much-sat-upon object which it is to her.⁴

Spinoza in an equally famous passage makes the same point but links it with a deceptive sense of freedom that he finds involved. It is even more striking in that it brings us close to, if it does not actually anticipate, Freud's use of the term unconscious. It runs:

An infant thinks that it freely desires milk, an angry child that it freely desires vengeance, or a timid child that it freely chooses flight. Again a drunken man thinks he speaks from the free will of the mind those things which, were he sober, he would keep to himself . . . Experience teaches us as clearly as reason

that men think themselves free on account of this alone, that they are conscious of what they do but ignorant of the cause why they do it.⁵ That last sentence explains a great deal. Whatever else may lie behind the movable frontiers of the Freudian unconscious, it seems certain that, as W H R Rivers has insisted, it is in this *terra incognita* that instinctive urges arise and gather to themselves sundry experiences and modifications whose origins are lost to memory.⁶ As a consequence our desires and likes and dogmas seem to ask for no explanation.

In the matter of ethical and other dogmas it accounts at once for the unreserved authority behind them and at the same time for our imagining that rules which we have in fact been taught are backed by our own intuitions or our own individual judgments, when they are no more than second-hand beliefs derived from our social surroundings. And so, by a queer paradox, what we think of as thinking for ourselves can turn out to be thinking like everybody else; thinking for ourselves can so easily mean thinking for ourselves what we are expected to think, so that when someone genuinely thinks for himself, we get a shock. There is a story about the mother of the poet Shelley when she was choosing a school for her son. She asked a friend for advice. Without stopping to think the friend replied, 'Oh, send him somewhere where they will teach him to think for himself'. 'Teach him to think for himself?' exclaimed Mrs. Shelley in horror: 'Oh, my God, teach him rather to think like other people!' And that is how we very well may feel when we come on any offbeat thought.

In spite of the way in which instinct deceives us as to whence our ethical thought so often comes, there are yet things that direct our attention and thought to the problems involved. Of these I will only mention one that has historically proved the most disturbing to any complacent feeling that dogmas of right and justice must be not only obvious but self-evident and even God-given. This disturber of complacency is the opening-up of our world by travel and exploration and contact with remote peoples, and it has disclosed vast variations and inconsistencies. When moral horizons were bounded by our village, our town, or our country, there was little room for doubt or questioning, but when we learn of inconsistencies and, with Pascal, find it disconcerting that there should be 'truth on this side of the Pyrenees, error on that' it is not surprising that we should find it 'droll justice which is bounded by a stream or a mountain'. He would have agreed with F C Gould:

Whether we gibbets find or grace
Depends upon accident of place,
For what is vice in Turkestan
May be virtue in Japan.

Nevertheless, such is instinctive authority that, despite disturbing evidence of

inconsistency and contradiction, we are more apt to laugh at or lament the uncouth dogmas and taboos of savages than to scrutinise our own, or even realise that we have any.

Disturbing; but we don't always miss the point that our own dogmas can be queer. Taking the point we may be partially satisfied by the reflection that biologically speaking and from the point of view of natural selection it is a matter of indifference how odd and inconsistent beliefs and customs may be so long as in any given community we all have the same and act together as one unity. Only suicidal dogmas will be eliminated and they will be eliminated only because they are suicidal. No doubt a little sad that we should have to wait until then to find out.

Disturbing; but whether we like it or not, we have to remember how much we owe to natural selection and the socio-genetic system that it evolved. Without it and the 'authority-bearing system' there could have been no community life to give added strength with which to face the dangers of the world. Without it, in that phrase of Thomas Hobbes, the life of man could not have been other than 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. Without it there could hardly have been the enormous build-up of tradition handing down from generation to generation, arts and crafts, the making of tools, the making of clothes to keep us warm, houses to protect us from the elements, fires to warm us and cook our food and all the rest of the amenities that we think of as civilisation; and above all, without it, there could have been no spoken and written language in which to embody and explain the workings of all these traditions—language of which Michael Polanyi has rightly said that 'all the towering superiority of man over the animals is due almost entirely to man's gift of speech'. No wonder that Aristotle, reflecting on these things, could exclaim that Nature did nothing in vain or purposelessly. 'Not in vain': yes indeed, with such results,* but 'purposefully': no. It was Darwin's great achievement to show that there was no such purpose in natural selection, that natural selection could not plan the astonishing end-product or intend our noble selves, or know best how to organise life. In marvelling at the end-product we forget the bewildering proliferation of extinct species which followed ways that proved in the end suicidal. As Sir Peter Medawar has succinctly put it:

It is a profound truth . . . that nature does not know best; that genetical evolution, if we choose to look at it liverishly instead of with fatuous good humour, is a story of waste, makeshift and blunder.

* Though of course the authority-bearing system only perpetuated what it did not create.

What if dogmatic authority and the morality it supports, with its debilitating emotions of guilt and shame, should itself be a makeshift, and even eventually, in the long term, suicidal?

In one important respect this may be the case. So far we have partitioned the socio-genetic system into its genetic and social aspects and assigned the multifarious dogmas with all their variability to their social origin, while to the genetic or instinctive is assigned the authority that gives to all or any of such dogmas the quality of an imperious *ought*. But there may be one area of conduct where both dogma and authority are alike instinctive. We shall probably be not far out if we say that the primitive situation that gave the community its biological value was the protection that it afforded to its members against marauders and enemies without. This gave certain forms of behaviour a more fundamental importance. As Charles Darwin put it in his *Descent of Man*: 'No tribe could hold together if murder, robbery, treachery etc. were common; consequently such crimes . . . are branded with everlasting infamy'. But Darwin, shrewd observer that he was, was careful to add that such crimes were branded with infamy only 'within the limits of the same tribe' and that they excited 'no such sentiment beyond these limits'.⁷ To kill an enemy outside the tribe was part of the protection that you gave your fellow tribesmen. The gregarious world was from the outset divided into friend and foe.

The persistence with which these instinctive correlatives, friend at home and foe abroad, have lived on into the modern world can be seen in such a remark as, 'To lie to your enemy has rarely been thought a sin, as the history of modern diplomacy too plainly shows'. And who made this sapient remark? I asked a friend, who hazarded the guess, 'Harold Macmillan'. But in fact it was another of Darwin's careful if quizzical, observations.⁸ So in war, killing is not murder; cheating, lying, spying, are not sins, but simply one's plain unambiguous duty—that stern daughter of the voice of God. Some daughter! Some voice! Some God!

But more, there is a deep emotional satisfaction in this situation that supports my belief in its instinctive character. The experience of two world wars should have taught us something here. The release of tension, the spontaneous welding of the community once more into a band of happy warriors ready for a crusade against a wicked foe—we find something of this spirit in the writings of 1914. Witness the religious fervour with which so sombre an observer as Thomas Hardy was trapped into greeting the bursting out of a new-found purpose in his *Song of the Soldiers*, 'Men who March Away':

What of the faith and fire within us
Men who march away?
Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye,
Who watch us stepping by,
With doubt and dolorous sigh?
Can much pondering so hoodwink you?
Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye?

To this rhetorical question the expected answer is of course a resounding:
Nay. We well see what we are doing.

. . .
Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away.

But that friend with the musing eye, I cannot help feeling, was Hardy himself and his sorrowful answer, in the depths of his being, was 'Yes, a purblind prank.'

It is not as a pacifist argument that I put this forward; it may be when communities have got themselves entangled in hostilities, that the common citizen has little option. All that I wish to do is to uncover the instinctive and emotional roots of something that could someday end human history with another extinct species.

Nor am I saying that there has been no resistance. The Book of Leviticus might uphold the old instinctive pattern of friend and foe and, while commanding love for one's neighbour, make it very plain that those in foreign tribes were not neighbours, nor were they to be loved. But the Sermon on the Mount resisted this dogma: 'Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies'. And Jesus drew from a reluctant lawyer the admission that, despite Leviticus, an alien Samaritan foreigner could be one's neighbour. But in liverish or cynical mood we have to observe that Jesus' reward from natural instinct was to have a church founded in his name which very soon, in the old instinctive fashion, was finding enemies to hate on every side—in heretics and heathen and schismatics; and in recent times we have to admit that relations between Catholics and Protestants have not always been of the most cordial. This is not to say that there have not been valiant efforts to re-Christianise the churches and reclaim them from being just so many tribes observing the law of the jungle, and to transform them into something more like a universalised tribe 'cutting across distinctions of kinship and culture'. All honour to Christians endeavouring to do this. My problem and theirs is closely akin, to understand the *why* of this age-old menace.⁹

Thus far I have been trying to exhibit the lumbering uncertain progression

of natural selection which has brought us where we are but may yet take us where we do not wish to be. The essence of the story is condensed into a couple of verses by Thomas Hardy which at the same time point the way forward. Doubtless taking his cue from Darwin and looking 'through nature up to nature's God', Hardy puts this God to the question and draws from him this response:

Then he: 'My labours—logicless—
You may explain; not I:
Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
That I evolved a consciousness
To ask for reasons why.
Strange that ephemeral creatures who
By my own ordering are,
Should see the shortness of my view,
Use ethic tests I never knew,
Or made provision for!'

Using ethic tests he never knew. In a clandestine fashion that is just what I have been doing. By what ethic tests do we consider the second edition of the Ten Commandments an advance on the first? By what ethic tests do we applaud the resistance of Jesus to the rule of hating foreign foes? By what ethic test does Sir Peter Medawar, albeit in liverish mood, attribute blunders to nature? By what ethic test do we call war-fever a purblind prank?

Hardy hints at an answer when he calls in 'a consciousness to ask for reasons why'. Consciousness, but do we know what consciousness is? Is not this an explanation of the obscure by the more obscure? What indeed is consciousness and what is it worth?

Perhaps we know more than we think. As conscious beings we ought to know. I think we do. When we recognise others as being conscious we do so by finding them akin to ourselves in displaying intelligent adaptive activity that is not automatic, routine or mechanical. We have no doubt when we talk with a bright child that it is very definitely conscious; there is no need to stick pins into it to find out. So what we are aware of, from within, as being conscious, we recognise in others, from without, as being intelligent. But do we know what intelligence is? Perhaps we don't, but that is so with most things; we do not know what electricity *is*, or magnetism, or light. We only know what these things do. So, too, of intelligence, we can know what it does. Psychologists have done yeoman service in telling us what it does, describing it, illustrating it, making valiant attempts even at measuring it and in proposing a good working definition of it. W H Thorpe, using the alternative term, 'insight', and going back to Spearman, defines it as 'apprehension of relations'.¹⁰

A good definition because it ties intelligence down to dealing with relations,

but note that word 'apprehension', which is not the simple physical act performed by a policeman in apprehending a criminal (or one of your relations, shall we say?). Mental apprehension is just insight or intelligence over again. How easily familiar words conceal a mystery! The truth is that here we are in face of a central marvel which defies definition and which we too much neglect because of its homespun familiarity and because it is so easy to dispel wonder with a word. How wise old Nathan was when he said that the greatest of all miracles is that the genuine miracles should be so familiar!

We must take a closer look at this very familiar miracle; it is perhaps easier to do so with a picture. Our type picture shall be the famous experiment of Köhler with the banana, the bamboo rods, and the ape, Sultan. Sultan was quite used to finding a banana outside the bars of his cage and raking for it with a bamboo rod. On this occasion two bamboo rods were left handy in the cage and the banana too far outside to be reached with either rod alone. Try as he might, stretch as he might, Sultan could not reach his banana. Then he turned to merely playing with the two rods with no apparent purpose, until he found that one rod could be pushed into the end of the other; in a moment the light dawned, and with the two rods joined clumsily together he raked for his banana and got it.¹¹

If we look at it closely we can see two, if not three, characteristics of Sultan's intelligent discovery.

1. In the first place Sultan did something new, something not given in any previous habit, training, or instinct. His discovery was for him a complete novelty, bearing comparison with any notable scientific discovery. Something new was born in Sultan, but novelty cannot be the whole story. A kaleidoscope can turn up new unprecedented patterns at any moment. Bare novelty is not the whole story.

2. So in the second place, however the novelty comes into being—it would seem to have been largely chance in Sultan's case—we have to add that the animal somehow sees the significance of his new action and how he can profit by it. We have to say that it has—however dimly—gained insight into its problem. But there we go, with our inveterate human propensity for quieting wonder with familiar words; or, as Michael Polanyi put it of the equivalent word 'understanding': 'I must not smuggle in unnoticed this apparently harmless but in fact sharply controversial word'.

Whether we speak of consciousness, intelligence, insight, or understanding, the vital element is not novelty so much as this unexplained 'understanding' which knows what to do with novelty when it has got it, and which may

indeed create it. And we should note that understanding is at least as important where its manifestation is not so striking. For if Sultan had merely been *shown* how to join two bamboo sticks and how to make use of them, nevertheless, lacking the vital element of understanding, he could never have seen the point of the trick, no matter how often it was shown to him.

3. We may carry the matter one stage further, and find a third characteristic if we wish, though it is only the same characteristic in a different form; it is the appreciation of truth, understanding somehow what makes a statement true, as for instance that joining two bamboo rods makes a rake longer than either rod alone. The problem is whence this knowledge? What is its cause?

The first answer must be a negative one, that it is not produced by natural selection. 'It would seem', to borrow an expression from David Lack, 'that if our theories and beliefs are solely the product of our evolutionary history, there is no valid reason for supposing them to be true.'¹²

The second answer is the simple-minded recognition that the mind understands truth, sees truly the relations between things, and cannot of its nature see falsely. Is this an overbold leap in the dark for one working ploddingly upwards? I do not think so. It seems to me the only workable assumption. Without it there can be no valid reason for supposing that we can ever know that any theory, scientific or other, is true. Any other assumption sets the insoluble problem—short of divine intervention, which we could not know was divine—of how to import truth into a truthless, or (shall we say), dogmatic, world. But if the mind sees truthfully, how then does error arise, as it obviously does? This at least is a manageable question, which the alternative question is not.

I must touch only on the fringes of this delectable and profitable question. (1) If the objects of thought are too numerous we cannot hope to see the relations between them; we cannot see the wood for the trees. (2) If some factors, vital for our purpose, are unknown or are not present in consciousness, however truthfully we sort out the rest, we shall not reach the truth we need. It would seem that the difference between the truth as discovered by Newton and by Einstein is that Einstein was able to include facts unknown to Newton. (3) Some vital objects of thought may be withheld from our conscious attention, being repressed in the Freudian unconscious. (4) Some of the objects of thought present to consciousness may be false beliefs, palmed on us in the course of education, on, say, dogmatic authority, or just bad observations. If they had been true, intelligence would not have gone astray; indeed it did not go astray; it sorted out soundly the material it had, but the outcome would have been different if only some of the material had not been

false. If you take it as axiomatic, as Nelson did, that 'You must consider every man your enemy who speaks ill of your king: and . . . you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil', you are not likely to reach the conclusion that neighbourliness could with advantage be so extended as to embrace the whole world.

But when the mists clear away which obscure relevant facts, when the miasma of misbelief is dispelled, the astonishing miracle is disclosed in all its splendour, like the sun rising at dawn, that conscious intelligence, if it sees them at all, sees truly the relations between things. That it does so may be inexplicable but we may rejoice in it and be content to accept it with natural piety. Once we realise it, there is no need to discuss whether computers could be built to take over the functions of the mind. For, as someone put it, the machine may be fast and accurate, but it is stupid; man, though slow and slovenly, is brilliant. This shining if fitful brilliance of the mind, when it cultivates its own proper garden plot of the things that it can understand, is our hope and assurance.

The massive advance of science can hardly leave us in any doubt that our intelligence can sort out truthfully the relations between things. But can it do as much in ethics? Can it authenticate those ethic tests that nature never knew? And if it can, can it help us mould our own conduct accordingly? I don't want to get bogged down in the Socratic paradox that we only do wrong through ignorance, or the assertion that we know the better yet do the worse; I prefer to take this question ploddingly and, I hope, upwards.

The first thing to notice is that it is of the very essence of intelligence to alter behaviour; what else was the result of Sultan's intelligent discovery about bamboo rods? In short, intelligence is the handmaid of instinct and by it we surmount obstacles in our path. The second thing is that instinctively we are gregarious creatures. We have already seen that this makes us readily imbibe the customs of our community and is what gives them dogmatic authority. At the same time, we are gregarious, or social, animals in the sense that we crave companionship with others and if we are denied such companionship we suffer the acute mental distress of loneliness. As with other needs, intelligence should help us here too. And so it would if companionship were our sole need, but it is not; it comes into conflict with many other private aims and desires. Moreover, achieving good social relations does not depend solely upon our own individual intelligence; that of others—often very numerous others—is involved. As a consequence the problems of getting good social relations are much more complex and

difficult.

But if the problems are more complex and their solution more difficult, we are at least provided with a definition of ethics and so with the key to those ethic tests that nature never knew. One of my most vivid memories of my old teacher, Samuel Alexander, was his leaning against the blackboard in the logic class and coming out with the revealing *obiter dictum* (I don't think it had any connection with his immediate logical business!) that the Golden Rule was not so much an ethical law as the very definition of ethics itself. In the light of this definition or any other that defines ethics as the study of harmonious social relations we have the ethic test to be applied to such questions as the relevance of seething a kid in its mother's milk, or the appropriateness of the injunction to love one's enemies, or the question whether on occasion nature may be said to have blundered. Looking on social relations, as it were, from the outside, an intelligent survey is not difficult. In so far as our prejudices (alias our ethical dogmas) will let us, we can see what is amiss in, say, industrial disputes, and we can sometimes congratulate trouble-shooters and negotiators in labour relations on the intelligence with which they resolve conflicts that endanger social harmony. But that is not the whole of the ethical story; without some measure of goodwill on the part of the disputants, no trouble-shooter or negotiator can achieve anything. Ethics is not only a matter of adjusting conflicts between individuals, but also of adjusting conflicts within individuals. If there is bloodmindedness in management or strikers; if there is the debilitating fear of vindictiveness or victimisation in the minds of the participants, what is the cure for this? Can intelligence help here?

Perhaps a less immediate and less emotionally supercharged example, and one where there has been a historical development, may help. 'Vengeance is sweet', says natural instinct, but within a tribal community the proliferation of private vendettas could well be destructive of community life. Then some genius of a Moses or other lawgiver saw a way to soften the individual's renunciation of private vengeance. As quoted by St Paul the injunction runs: 'Avenge not yourselves . . . for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord'. No doubt such a dogma could and did, have a profitable measure of success. (Incidentally it may be noted that there is no evidence for the truth of the dogma—a nice example of a false belief proving socially profitable.) But then, on top of this development, comes a determined attempt to apply intelligence to the matter, such as we get in Spinoza's *Ethics*, where we come on the assertion, proved so far as Spinoza can prove it, that 'He who wishes to avenge injuries by hating in return will live in misery'.¹³ One may

give intellectual assent to this as a truth and yet find that the lure of revenge is still sweet; instinct is not to be diverted by a sublime truth. I once knew two sisters in a mothers' meeting who many years before had quarrelled—no one knew what it had been about—and there they would sit side by side, their backs half-turned towards each other, and never a word passed between them. No doubt they relished their mutual silent high disdain, and yet one wonders whether they would not have been happier if they could have made it up; though of course one must admit that the heart has its reasons that the reason knows not of.

Spinoza's wisdom about hatred being misery may be true and yet not help us, but he has his explanation: 'A true knowledge of good and evil cannot restrain any emotion [his word for a desire or drive] in so far as it is true, but only in so far as it is considered as an emotion'.¹⁴ So we have to dig into these springs of action, that he names emotions.

It is here that Sigmund Freud made his greatest contribution, taking up (though he may not have known it), and at the same time illuminating, one of Spinoza's penetrating insights.¹⁵ We may look at his contribution in a common and a simple example, borrowed from W H R Rivers.¹⁶ The particular example is that of a man suffering from a severe claustrophobia. As a child he had been caught in a narrow passage with a snarling dog in front and a closed door behind and no way of escape from the dog or the terror that it caused. In later life all recollection of that traumatic incident was lost; what was left was a terror of being caught in an enclosed space. No amount of arguing with himself about the truth that it was absurd to be afraid of enclosed spaces could disabuse his mind of his affliction. His cure ultimately lay in regaining from behind the arras of the unconscious the long stifled memory of that haunting terror. But how did the cure come about? The answer may be given in words taken from R Money-Kyrle:

The primary aim of psychoanalysis, in opposition to the avowed aim of all other therapeutic methods, is not to cure but to make conscious. The cure is a secondary result.

(Freud gives a similar account in his *Autobiographical Study*.¹⁷) Once the repressed memories have been brought into full consciousness, the patient can deal with them intelligently. The log-jam with the claustrophobic was that the wounding memory that had caused, and perpetuated, his fear had become unconscious and repressed in a way that prevented recovery except after prolonged assistance by Rivers who teased the unknown memory back into consciousness. Then consciousness did the rest.

Turning to Spinoza's anticipation of Freud we have to note, first that it applies much more widely than to the restricted field of the neuroses; hence

its importance. In the second place it is concerned with the welling up from the unconscious of what may never have been conscious and so could not be a repressed memory; although, in so far as most human desires are developed modifications of primitive instinct, there can to this extent be memories of the development which might be recoverable. Spinoza's words are:

An emotion that is a passion [shall we say an emotion inflicted upon us unconsciously?] ceases to be a passion, once we have a clear and distinct idea of it . . . The more an emotion is known to us, the more it is within our power and the less the mind is passive to it.¹⁸

The meaning of 'clear and distinct ideas' is one of the difficulties of Spinoza's ways of thought. Elsewhere he spoke of knowledge such as we sometimes enjoy in grasping simple mathematical relations as distinct from using a learnt formula. It is perhaps not unlike a distinction used by the Jesuit, Paul Segneri; speaking of 'acquired contemplation' he said that it consisted 'in perceiving at a glance truths that we only discovered before by long discourse'. What may be implied is that there is a need to get the feel of a truth so that it shall in some way be emotionalised. Was Spinoza stealing the thunder of the contemplatives? If so, modern contemplatives might return the compliment by stealing some of Spinoza's thunder.

Stealing Spinoza's thunder has some inviting possibilities. We find ourselves being asked to trace our impulses back to their source. It is like being invited, following Fichte, to catch ourselves in the act of thinking; which of course we cannot do, for we are no longer thinking that 'think' when we try to think about it. At best we can catch ourselves in the act of having thought. Still, that is something. And if the act of having thought was, for instance, a sudden angry response to an annoyance, we can at least learn something about this funny thing of being carried away, or being passive to, something welling up within us, seemingly from nowhere, ours and yet not ours. We might like to disown it, or possibly we may catch ourselves in the process of hatching up some justification for what we said or did, trying to disguise from ourselves (or from others) that there is something to be explained away. We may have to keep up appearances or make excuses for the benefit of the outside world, but why should we trouble to do so with ourselves? Why should we not find release in a rather crude theism and say, 'Dat is how de Gude Lawd made us' and remember that the same Gude Lawd made a lot of other funny things, too? Spiders for instance (whose antics, by the way, filled Spinoza with merriment) and ducks and duchesses, and cabbages and kings—the Lord God made them all—including ourselves!

By such contemplation we may learn something about the motivations and

dynamics of our make-up and the more they are known to us the more they will be within our power. This is what Spinoza meant by freedom and the outcome should be our disenthralment with some attractions and the enhancement of others.

For Spinoza those from whose thralldom he would escape were in the main bound up with the lure of social standing, status, ambition, which required that one should live in accordance with the dogmas of others, 'shunning what they commonly shun and seeking what they commonly seek'. No doubt this was not very new and maybe he was thunder-stealing again, this time through a Quaker-like community to which he belonged and which took its inspiration from the outlook of Jesus, who, it will be remembered (with, I suspect, a similarly liberating concept of the Kingdom of God) was tolerably scandalised when his disciples came to him with a question as to the status they would enjoy in the episcopal hierarchy of Heaven as if the one thing that mattered in the whole wide world was the social and instinctive pecking order amongst hens, monkeys and Debrett's peerage.

It is a reasonable forecast that, given insight, the lure of status is something we shall be glad to lose, as also the hold on us of dogma. But what is to be the forecast of the loves we should wish to discover and to keep? Spinoza's aspiration came to rest in what he called, in an inspired phrase, the 'intellectual love of God', whose service, he might have added with the Book of Common Prayer, is perfect freedom. It was a term sufficiently explicit to indicate that with discovery we are in the realm of religion and at the same time inexplicit enough not to forecast what our discoveries about ourselves will be. I will attempt no forecast either; should I not be attempting to add more dogmas to the tally, when the whole point of discovery is that it shall be *discovery* and not dogma?

For some, I make no doubt, such a conception of religion will be their heart's abhorrence, an attempt to lead them into a quagmire haunted by will-o-the-wisps and vain imaginings where no sure footing is. Religion for them, I suspect, is bound up with what I have called dogmatic authority; indeed, for them God is the apotheosis of this authority, and any loosening of it will be blasphemy.* And they will have no love, intellectual or any other, for Spinoza's God, the totality of things, of which Samuel Alexander wrote, that 'as the argument proceeds the cold initial conception is warmed and enriched by the reflection upon it of our human experience, and becomes

*Doubtless such authority still has its uses, but one wonders whether such dogmas as we need could be a little less erratically determined than in the past.

the object of a passion of religious worship'.*¹⁹ It is seemingly and essentially the self-same deity that the poet Shelley approaches with an even warmer form of address when he sings:

Mother of this unfathomable world!
Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
Thee ever, and thee only: I have watched
Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries . . .
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
Thy messenger, to render up the tale
Of what we are.

The tale of what we are, the key to the door of all the rest; with that lone ghost, the most familiar and most genuine miracle, the homely, questing, mother-wit of the minds of human kind.

NOTES

1. S Alexander, *Philosophical and Literary Pieces*, 1939, p.65.
2. *ibid.*, p.84.
3. P B Medawar, *The Future of Man*, 1960, p.13.
4. William James, *Psychology: briefer course* (1892), 1920, p.394.
5. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III.2. sch.
6. W H R Rivers, *Instinct and the Unconscious*, 2nd ed., 1924, p.38.
7. P B Medawar, *The Future of Man*, 1960, p.100.
8. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, ed. Watts, 1930, pp.129-31.
9. An editorial in *Theoria to Theory* (Sept. 1969) encourages me to think there is something in the argument I am trying to develop.
10. W H Thorpe, *Learning and Instinct in Animals*, 2nd ed., 1966, p.110.
11. W Köhler, *The Mentality of Apes*.
12. Ian T Ramsey (ed.) *Biology and Personality*, 1965, pp.45/6.
13. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV. 46. sch.
14. *Ibid.*, IV. 14.
15. cf. M Hamblin Smith 'Spinoza's anticipation of recent psychological developments' *Brit J of Med Psychol*, v pp.257ff.
16. W H R Rivers, *Instinct and the Unconscious*, pp.17off.
17. R Money Kyrle, 'Remote consequences of Psychoanalysis', *Brit J of Med Psychol*, xi. p.174; S Freud, *An Autobiographical Study*, 1936, p.53.
18. Spinoza, *Ethics*, V. 3.
19. S Alexander, *loc. cit.*, p.336.

*Spinoza's term is 'nature', but I have preferred Alexander's 'totality of things' as more expressive and because Spinoza's 'nature' was inclusive of mind and intelligence and different from 'nature' in the restricted sense in which I have used the term in this Lecture.

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The Rev Roger Thomas has had a varied career, as Unitarian minister and as theological librarian. He was for some twenty years in the active Unitarian ministry, serving churches in London, Stourbridge and Croydon. In 1946 he took charge of the Dr Williams's Library in London, and continued in this position for some twenty years. He is now Secretary of the Hibbert Trust, and Treasurer of the General Baptist Group of Unitarian Churches.

Mr Thomas's education was also varied. He started as a student at Manchester University, then went to the University of Brussels, where he was a research scholar in classics. Later he was at Manchester College Oxford, and finally was Hibbert Scholar at the University of Strasbourg.

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