

We are, physically, indissolubly bound to a whole of which we are part, and which contains much to distress us as well as much to delight us. The Divine is that aspect of the whole that binds us, spiritually, to it, giving ~~us~~ comforting us, making us satisfied with our mortal state, giving us hope and strength to persevere in our highest aspirations.

## THE QUEST OF THE DIVINE

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# THE QUEST OF THE DIVINE

*AN INQUIRY INTO THE SOURCE AND  
GOAL OF MORALITY AND RELIGION*

By

ALEXANDER F. SKUTCH

*Alexander F. Skutch*



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*To*  
*MY PARENTS*

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Sed qualescumque sunt, tu illos sic lege,  
tamquam verum quaeram adhuc, non sciam,  
et contumaciter quaeram.—But whatever  
the quality of my works may be, read them  
as if I were still seeking, and were not  
aware of, the truth, and were seeking it  
obstinately, too.—*Seneca*.

God's being is sacred from ours.  
To co-operate with his creation of  
the best & rightest response seems  
all the wants of us. In such co-  
operation with his purposes, not in  
any chimerical speculative con-  
quest of him, not in any theoretical  
drinking of him up, must lie the  
real meaning of our destiny.

— Wm James

(in *Harvardiana* & *Review*, p. 345)

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## FOREWORD

I can best explain the purpose of this book by telling how it came to be written. It might be briefly described as the outcome of an effort to make peace between a religious attitude toward the world and a somewhat sceptical mind. Almost from childhood, I have felt that the Universe contains something, far more widespread, ancient, and enduring than mankind, worthy of my love, reverence, and loyalty—something wholly beneficent and divine. Yet the habit, encouraged by scientific studies and some philosophical reading, of subjecting all my beliefs to a merciless critical examination, made it impossible for me to give credence to any of the more widely accepted religious interpretations of the world. Moreover, the vast amount of evil and suffering which we have witnessed in our time weighed against the notion that the world is governed or pervaded by a benign power, which is the foundation of all the higher religions. Thus, for more than two decades, I went through the world with a reverent attitude yet an almost total absence of doctrine or belief—with a religious heart and a sceptical head. This is a most unsatisfactory way to live. Such a divorce between one's most pervasive intuitions and his intellectual concepts is devastating to the will. Although the deepest springs of life are beyond reason, the latter must mediate between them and the sensuously perceived world in which we live and act. Unless we can express in intelligible terms those principles whose roots lie in the depths of our



being, we find it scarcely possible to apply them consistently in our daily life, and even more difficult to defend them against critics and scoffers.

Over a period of many years, devoted largely to the study of nature in the wilder parts of tropical America, I pondered much over these matters, and hit upon a few ideas that seemed to be worthy of further development. About seven years ago, I decided that it might repay me to make the elaboration of my philosophy my major endeavor. I was then residing on a rough farm in a tropical country, many miles from the nearest city, where by living with great simplicity I enjoyed a generous leisure, but had access only to such books as my own little library contained; and the difficulty of procuring works to which I needed to refer retarded the prosecution of my self-imposed task.

I am acutely conscious of the perils I incur in offering to the public this first fruit of my meditations. On the one hand, there will be orthodox believers who maintain that the attitude which prompted the writing of this work is not truly religious—that it is, in fact, decidedly irreligious. To those blest with insights and certainties which so far exceed my own, I have nothing to offer except my admiration, and perhaps my apology for venturing timidly into a domain where they tread boldly with confident steps. On the other hand, there will be those who point out that the mind that conceived this work was not adequately critical, but rushed to premature conclusions on some of the most difficult and controversial questions of philosophy. I owe it to myself to explain to critics of the latter class that I have in fact pondered these problems far more carefully than might appear from the book before them. The studies I made before beginning the present work occupy many pages, and their

publication by a writer known only in other fields offers difficulties. It seemed best to condense the more important conclusions into a smaller volume, which would give a comprehensive outline of my views, even if this obliged me to make here and there statements which might appear dogmatic in the absence of a detailed presentation of the reasoning by which I was led to them. If the way of viewing the world here outlined proves attractive to enough readers, I can promise them a more adequate discussion of some of the more difficult points in the near future. When we are looking for a house, we do not as a rule take the trouble to examine its foundations unless its more obvious features, such as its appearance and comfort, recommend themselves to us; yet before acquiring it as his permanent home, the prudent man will make sure that it is firmly founded. Accordingly, in the present work, I have concentrated upon certain religious and ethical aspects of my philosophy; for it is by religion and ethics that we live.

The past few centuries have witnessed a vast expansion of our concept of the Universe, along with the intensified investigation and more adequate understanding of all that it contains, down to the most obscure of its processes. At the same time, we have in a spiritual sense shrunk away from the surrounding world. This paradoxical contrast between our intellectual expansion and our spiritual contraction calls for explanation. It is certainly due in part to the fact that we can no longer seriously contend, in the manner of our ancestors, that mankind occupies a central position in a world created expressly for our use. Hence we have tended to sever spiritual bonds with a Universe which seems increasingly hostile, or at least indifferent, to our presence in it. But perhaps we have



drawn false deductions from obvious facts. If the whole world is not exclusively dedicated to human ends, the reason might be, not that it is alien to these ends, but just the reverse, that similar ends are far more widely diffused through it than we imagined. Those aspirations which we like to believe are so peculiarly human may in fact be a revelation of something which pervades the whole creation, reaching in us a clearer and more pointed expression than we can detect elsewhere, but not for this reason strictly confined to ourselves. The principle of continuity in all evolutionary sequences, upon which our modern science so strongly insists, makes it highly probable that this is true. Thus if the Universe is not wholly dedicated to the service of man, this may be because man is not the only being through which it can reach its culmination, but it supports countless other processes tending in the same direction. Far from causing us to feel more alien to our world, this thought should make us more at home in it.

Our ancestors directed their thoughts and loyalties beyond mankind to God. The deity they worshipped was too often merely a glorified man; but at least he served to impress upon them their dependence, spiritual no less than material, upon something beyond themselves. Today the humanists recommend that we concentrate our allegiance upon mankind alone. In so far as this attitude leads to more devoted service to humanity as a whole, now and in the future, it has much to commend it. But in so far as it represents a spiritual withdrawal from the wider Universe, it is constrictive and retrogressive. At times one feels almost stifled by the stuffy atmosphere of a crowded humanity absorbed in its own little affairs and oblivious of the vast environing world. Our vision is so con-

tracted by our thronging, clamorous neighbors that we can hardly see the horizon or the stars. What more than all else we need today is to throw open the windows of the mind so that cosmic influences may stream in. Any book that, however imperfectly, points the way to such spiritual expansion, need make no apology for its appearance at the present time.

Spiritual truths necessarily differ from mathematical or physical truths in their mode of presentation and acceptance. The latter win approval if based upon a flawless argument or supported by sufficient observations. Spiritual truths, however, are not demonstrated so much as felt; and their acceptance depends upon their appeal to something deep within us. With respect to them, the task of reason is not to prove their validity so much as to show that at least they are not incongruous with the accepted facts of experience or science. Their worth must be tested not by ratiocination but by meditation, or best of all, by a prolonged and earnest endeavor to live in their light. From one point of view, all religion has been an effort to give a tenable conceptual form to intuitions that arise from the depths of the human spirit. Neither a thousand failures to find a satisfactory intellectual dress for these vague glimmerings of profound truth, nor all the ridiculous or gruesome practices to which they have led, can invalidate the intuitions themselves; for the task of giving a unified account of the inner world of feeling and the outer world revealed to us through sensation taxes to its limit our intellectual power. We are led by the demands of our nature to tackle this problem again and again, in the hope that as we increase in understanding, both of ourselves and the external world, we shall come a little closer to our goal, and make the way clearer to those who follow us.





# The Quest of the Divine

## CHAPTER I

### THE REJECTION OF THE GODS

#### 1. *Precipitate Atheism*

The question we so often hear, "Do you believe in God?" is so vague and ambiguous as hardly to deserve a reply. Before attempting to answer it, the thoughtful man will ask in turn "Which God?" or he will respond "That depends wholly upon how you conceive God." For God, or the gods, have been many things to many men. On the one hand, there were the insatiable gods of the Aztecs, who created mankind to serve them and demanded for their nourishment the flesh and blood of their human cattle. At the other extreme, there was the God of Jeremiah, who proclaimed through his prophet that his covenant with his people was not to supply him with burnt offerings, but that they should love their neighbors and cultivate justice. From another point of view, we have the creator-god of *Genesis*, who formed the world by the power of his word; and we may contrast with this concept the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, who set the cosmos in motion merely by the power of attraction. If we compare visual representations of the gods, these range all the way from the hideous idols of barbarian tribes to the Zeus of Phidias, resplendent in ivory and gold, which



inspired deep religious sentiments by the sublimity and benignity of his countenance; and to the dazzling point of light which Dante, in the highest heaven, first saw in the eyes of Beatrice, like a flame reflected in a mirror. In view of this tremendous diversity in men's concepts of the gods, one who has escaped from the narrow bounds of a dogmatic religion, and come to view the problem of deity somewhat broadly, will certainly wish to know which god he is asked to acknowledge.

With so many diverse notions of God, traditional and philosophic, to examine and appraise, it would seem that only after long years of study and meditation would a man dare to proclaim: "There is no God. I have investigated the problem from every angle and find no concept of deity compatible with reality." Yet again and again we find youths in the vigor and excitement of their first intellectual awakening calling themselves atheists, or if more moderate in their enthusiasms, merely agnostics. This rejection out of hand of deity would not be so lamentable if the rejecter recognized that it has reference, as it almost invariably has, merely to the particular god of his family religion, or to those relatively slight variations in the notion of god which pervade a single culture. Thus the denial that there exists a being corresponding to the ideas of deity which we in the West have inherited from the Hebrews, and modified under the influence of Greek philosophy, should leave unaffected the question of whether there might be, for example, a god such as the Brahman of the Hindus, who as philosophers and theologians have shown themselves to be certainly no less profound than Europeans. But too often the youth who finds unacceptable the first god presented to him brushes aside every other

concept of deity in the same sweeping rejection, and engrossed in the thousand cares and distractions of our perplexing modern world, taking his cosmological views from a science whose methods are not conducive to the discovery of the Divine, he may never at a later period pause to re-examine the question with a more mature mind.

## 2. Repugnant Notions of God

In the next chapter we shall point out some of the unfortunate consequences of this rejection of the concept of God, while in this we consider the reasons for it. The first, and that which often bears most weight with the young idealist, is that he is frequently offered a concept of God which is inherently repugnant. The *Bhagavadgita* is one of the greatest of all sacred writings, inspired by the highest religious ideals. In this ancient poem there is a famous passage<sup>1</sup> in which Krishna, the incarnate God, accedes to the entreaties of Arjuna and manifests himself in his true form. We shudder at the vast figure with numberless arms, bellies, faces, and eyes, with mouths terrible with tusks like Time's devouring flames, into which rush all the hosts of kings. Many men, caught between the dreadful teeth, have their heads crushed to powder. This is obviously no more than a poetic attempt to conceive the inconceivable and give visual form to the formless; yet it is the product of genius of a high order, and the result is not altogether happy from our modern point of view. Even less attractive in our eyes are some of the soma-quaffing celestial aristocrats of the Vedic hymns, or the more

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XI, "The Lord's Transfiguration."



familiar Olympians, so vividly portrayed by the Hellenic poets with all their jealousies, quarrels, lusts, and deceptions. We do not wonder that the earnest and ascetic Epicurus was moved to write to his friend Menoeceus, in a letter fortunately preserved for us by Diogenes Laertius: "Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them, is truly impious."

These hideous and repugnant notions of the gods, we say, are the products of the crude and undisciplined imagination of distant generations, and our own concepts are purer and nobler. But are they? Does the God of Christian orthodoxy stand much higher when we view him with eyes cleared of the fog of prejudice and custom? Let us recall how the Western concept of deity, as refined by Greek philosophy and mediaeval theology and the selectiveness of the Reformation, affected the generous spirit of young Shelley. Who can read without recognizing their force and justice those burning lines which in *Queen Mab*<sup>1</sup> he placed in the mouth of Ahasuerus, that passionate rejection of an "omnipotent fiend . . . vengeful as almighty"? It is difficult to reconcile Christian doctrines of damnation with a concept of God that is wholly good and lovable.

Another reason for rejecting the gods is the foul and wicked deeds done in their name. The ethical monotheism of the Jews was by general consent the purest and loftiest religion of any ancient people, at least west of Persia; yet the restored temple at Jerusalem, the heart and center of the Jewish cult after it had outgrown much of its primitive savagery, was,

<sup>1</sup> VII, lines 97 and 85.

as we glimpse it in the Apocryphal *Letter of Aristeas*, hardly more than a gilded slaughterhouse, with admirable arrangements for washing away the blood of the sacrificial victims. It is probable that we more squeamish moderns, far from being elevated and inspired by such worship, would after five minutes of the spectacle be overcome with nausea. Such bloody sanctuaries were all too common in the ancient world, where human sacrifice, which we like to associate only with the rudest and most barbarous races of men, persisted even within the civilized Roman Empire through much of the Imperial period. Who can fail to sympathize with Lucretius when, after his moving account of the sacrificial murder of Iphigenia at Aulis to raise a wind for the becalmed Grecian fleet, he exclaims: *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*<sup>1</sup>—so great are the evils which religion persuades men to perform? And if such practices seem very remote from us, expressions of a false religion in a barbarous age, we need only recall how relatively recently Europe was drenched with the blood poured forth in religious wars, massacres were undertaken from religious motives, and heretics in their thousands were tortured and burnt alive by the Holy Inquisition.

All the base and repulsive notions of the gods which men have entertained or continue to hold, all the cruel and loathsome deeds done in their names, not only by religions of distant lands and remote epochs but by those which still flourish in our midst, can hardly fail to affect the thinking of the generous and ethically sensitive man who contemplates them. In contrast to the unsavory aspects of religious history, we might place the nobler concepts of deity and innumer-

<sup>1</sup> *De Rerum Natura*, I, line 101.



able beautiful, kindly acts which religion has inspired. But the more sublime notions of God have usually been philosophic rather than popular; and isolated deeds of pure and generous spirits fail to stir the imagination as strongly as mass movements like religious wars and systematic persecutions. With these facts before him, one who, from a position of scepticism or unbelief, accepts a religious interpretation of the world, must often overcome a strong initial repugnance.

### 3. *Obsolete Reasons for Belief in God*

Not only is there sometimes a strong affective bias against the notion of a deity, there are even stronger intellectual grounds for banishing the gods to the limbo of outworn superstitions. The very conditions of human thought which led man to believe in supernatural beings no longer exist in civilized societies imbued with the concepts of modern science. There have been many diverse theories as to the origin of the idea of god; and it is probable that more than one is sound, or becomes false only when it pretends to be the only explanation of religious notions. It is unlikely that a body of beliefs and practices so complex as those of even a relatively primitive religion can have sprung from a single source, or represent the evolution of a single idea. Men are highly complex beings, and they face an exceedingly complex world, which at first they strive to explain and to conciliate by religious concepts and procedures; so that it is intrinsically improbable that all the so varied phenomena of religion can be reduced to a single notion or a solitary motive. If fear and greed have entered largely into men's religious thoughts, so have love

and gratitude. If the ghosts of departed chieftains have contributed to the idea of God, so too has the mana or effective power of striking natural phenomena.

Among the varied factors which led our remote ancestors to believe in supernatural beings, the problem of causation occupies a prominent position. The only casual agent with which primitive man was familiar was an animal will acting through an animal body; and even today we, who have become accustomed to the notion of all sorts of inanimate causes, can form no vivid apprehension of causality save in these same crude, anthropomorphic terms. Thus when, instead of accepting them without curiosity, our forefathers tried to account for such familiar occurrences as the daily march of the sun and stars, the changes of the seasons, rain and wind and storms, the growth and decay of vegetation, and disease, they could do so only by attributing to natural forces themselves something very like a human will and purpose, or else by supposing that they were controlled by beings which comprised at least the effective part of human personality—desires, will, and purpose. And when they had reached this point of view, what more natural than that they should strive to placate these supernatural beings who controlled the processes upon which their prosperity depended, resorting to the same devices which they knew to be effective with their fellow men—gifts, supplications, praises, and submissive attitudes. Whatever other elements entered into the making of the earliest religions, certainly this was a most important ingredient.

But today science has banished this naïve animism from our systematic thinking, although again and again in our unguarded moments it surges up from the depths of our minds. We have learned through



centuries of painful striving that not by prayer and sacrifice, but rather by careful manipulations that have developed through long and patient observation and much costly experimentation, we can best control those natural processes upon which our prosperity depends. Thus one of the strongest motives for the recognition and ritual service of supernatural beings has disappeared from the more advanced societies. We have learned that the sun will rise whether or not we nourish and propitiate the sun god, and that agriculture is more securely based upon fertilizers and irrigation than upon fertility rites and sacrifices to the rain gods.

#### 4. *The Barren Notion of a First Cause*

But if we have become increasingly competent in tracing each natural event to antecedents of the same material order, which can be measured and described in purely physical terms, the origin of the whole series still baffles and perplexes our thought. Of course, there is always the possibility of infinite regress—the casual sequence may have no beginning but come to us from an infinitely distant past. Yet this prospect tires the mind, and we eagerly search for some definite point of departure. Men who no longer imagine gods or spirits in particular natural objects and events, like the sun and the lightning flash, conceive one supreme God, who created and set in motion the whole cosmos, regulating it, perhaps, by “laws” or processes which operate precisely without further intervention by the Creator. But a little calm reflection soon convinces us that this solution of the problem of Being scarcely adds anything to our understanding of the mystery. The God whom we postulate as the Creator of the

phenomenal Universe is even less comprehensible than the Universe itself; and how he could have created it out of nothing can be conceived only by minds which do not insist upon perfect clarity of thought. If the origin of the phenomenal Universe is a baffling mystery, so is the origin of the origin of the Universe. If to conceive the infinite past existence of the natural sequence imposes a painful task upon the human mind, to imagine the infinite duration of a supernatural Creator is hardly easier for us. By postulating such a Creator, we complicate the problem without clarifying it. The First Cause argument for the existence of God no longer appeals to careful thinkers.

#### 5. *The Exploded “Argument from Design”*

But the Universe not only exists, it exhibits form, order, and seemingly, purpose. If we no longer appeal to a deity to explain Being, perhaps we must still look to God as the source of adaptations. The crude materials of the world might have existed from all eternity; but without some Mind to give them form and order, they would still remain a formless collection of “jarring atoms”. Just as, in erecting a building, an architect gives a useful and often beautiful form to materials he did not create; so God may have brought order into a Universe whose crude matter is coeval with him, or even older than him. Although long ago Epicurus and his followers attempted to account for the origin of the heavenly bodies and living beings from the chance concourse of atoms, they lacked the necessary foundation in observation and experimentation; and until about a century ago the “argument from design” was perhaps the most convincing proof of the existence of God—



a God who, as Kant pointed out, must in this case be looked upon as the Architect rather than the Creator of the cosmos. But since Darwin published his great work on *The Origin of Species*, we have gradually become accustomed to looking upon the most complex and admirably adapted organic forms as the outcome of countless random variations, sifted through the fine screen of natural selection; and the argument from design, the bulwark of natural theology, has lost much of its force. At least, it is no longer tenable in its naïve original form.

#### 6. *The Ontological Proof*

Still less attractive to the modern mind is that triumph of logical subtlety, Anselm's "most perfect being" proof of God's existence. We may concede that a being which actually exists is more perfect than another, in all other respects similar, that lacks existence, hence is a pure figment of the mind. But it is by no means obvious why there should not be two or many beings so nearly alike that we can distinguish no gradation in their perfection. The vastitude of the Universe, no less than our common experience that individuals represent classes, make such a situation probable. Accordingly, the ontological argument might be used to support polytheism rather than monotheism. Nor does it follow that the most perfect being that actually exists should bear the attributes that we spontaneously demand of divinity; it might be too imperfect or too impotent to excite our admiration and compel our homage. In certain circles, it has become the custom to look upon man as the highest and most perfect being the world contains; but

we know ourselves too well to suppose that we are gods.

#### 7. *The Problem of Evil*

A further reason for disbelief in a divine ruler of the Universe is the tremendous amount of pain and suffering, of ugliness, frustration and evil, which it contains. Inherent in the notion of deity is that of goodness; no matter how powerful a being might be, no matter that it could create and destroy suns and planets and living things, unless it be good and benevolent we, like Prometheus, refuse to recognize it as divine. But even in our own time we have seen and felt so much evil in the world that no amount of dialectic subtlety can convince us that it is pure illusion and does not really exist. Good and evil are correlative terms, each inconceivable without the other; and both must be recognized as equally real unless we are determined not to recognize them at all. But if the all-wise and all-powerful ruler of the world is good, whence cometh evil? This objection to the existence of God appears to me to be insuperable, if we follow traditional Western theology in insisting that he is omnipotent and omniscient; but it loses its force if we consent to reduce our perhaps too bombastic claims for the greatness of the being we reverence and adore. It is certainly possible that there might exist a being perfectly good and benevolent, and of such vast creativity that we could not refuse to recognize it as divine; yet the power of this being might be limited by forces or factors in the Universe that it could not control nor conciliate. Such is the Zoroastrian view, which looks upon the world as the field of battle between two beings almost matched in power,



one the author of goodness and light, the other the source of darkness and evil. Such was the view of Plato, who in his creation myth, the *Timaeus*, represented the beneficent Demiurge as coming to terms with Necessity, the eternal ground of things which is not wholly amenable to reason. It may be that in order to achieve a religious yet rationally tenable view of the world, we shall be obliged to return to this ancient belief, abandoning the uncritical mediaeval habit of heaping upon the Godhead all the most flattering and grandiloquent adjectives at our command, and giving our allegiance to something which is wholly benevolent even if not omniscient and omnipotent.

Although we could not attempt, within the limits of a chapter, to analyze and assess all the endlessly varied concepts of deity which through the ages men have held, we have found many reasons for rejecting some of the more widespread and popular of them. These reasons are in part emotional and esthetic, in part moral, and in part intellectual. All the repulsive and even obscene notions of the gods which men have held, all the cruel and disgusting deeds which have been done in their names, are likely to prejudice the generous spirit against the very notion of a deity. If we overcome this initial aversion and examine the question in the cold light of reason, we find that the state of mind which first led men to imagine gods no longer exists among educated people; for science has accustomed us to a view of causality which leaves no room for primitive animism. Although we can now give intellectually satisfying explanations of many particular events, we are still very much in the dark as to the origin of the whole series of events which

science strives to analyze; and it is tempting to postulate some being of vast power as the author of the whole. But by placing at the head of the series an inconceivable being of ill-defined powers, who by unimaginable methods brought forth something out of nothing, we merely involve in additional obscurity a problem which is already sufficiently baffling. Even to make the smaller assumption, and look upon God not as the Creator of the materials which compose the cosmos but the Architect of its familiar forms, has become unnecessary in view of our modern understanding of evolution. And the vast amount of evil in the world weighs heavily against the hypothesis that it was framed by a being at once perfectly beneficent and of unlimited power.

Thus the honest and courageous man, who strives to see things as they are and refuses to accept opinions merely because of the prestige of those who uphold them, is led to reject the gods. And by disencumbering his mind of unexamined or untenable beliefs, he leaves it open to the influx of a religion which may satisfy the spirit without embarrassing the intelligence.



## CHAPTER II

## THE EMPTY UNIVERSE

1. *Unhappy Consequences of Rejecting the Gods*

When we have cast forth from our minds the notion of a powerful being who has given the Universe its known order and possibly still guides its multitudinous events, we find that it still jogs along in the old familiar pattern. The sun rises and sets; the stars shine forth by night; rain falls and winds blow; vegetation flourishes and decays; we live and enjoy and suffer just as we always did. We have not by rejecting the idea of a First Cause or an omnipotent Ruler diminished our capacity either to explain or to control the processes which affect our lives. On the contrary, by ceasing to perplex ourselves with thoughts of vast ultimate causes and concentrating our attention upon particular proximate causes, we increase rather than diminish our understanding and control of nature. By sweeping our minds clean of archaic rubbish, we have come to enjoy a new prosperity, and seem all the better for the bold step we have taken.

Although at first we may revel in the exhilarating intellectual freedom we have won by emancipating our thought from old dogmas, as the years roll on we discover that a subtle and disquieting change has come over our world. The sensuous forms in which we perceive it are exactly the same as before, but they have lost something of their old value. Some of the warmth and friendliness and light have departed from

the starry heavens and the verdant earth. Although it would in most instances be an exaggeration to say that life has lost its purpose, that purpose does not seem so lofty and commanding as when a divine being dwelt in the world; and it is more difficult to persevere in our moments of doubt and dejection. The Universe, for all its countless hosts of galaxies and suns, has become strangely empty and void of meaning. We come to understand why Pascal wrote of the misery of man without God; why Marcus Aurelius, the self-searching, duty-conscious Stoic emperor, declared that he would not care to live in a world without gods; and why Epicurus, who represented the opposite school of thought in the ancient world, steadfastly refused to banish the gods from his atomic Universe, even when he discovered that they were wholly unnecessary for its governance, but preserved them in a serene heaven, where they served as exemplars of just the kind of life to which the Epicureans aspired, never troubling themselves to intervene in worldly affairs or to punish the wicked but—a point on which modern scholarship has corrected an ancient and apparently wilful misconception—revealing themselves to good men whose lives resembled theirs.<sup>1</sup>

2. *The Delusion that the Universe is Hostile*

It is most difficult for men to preserve a perfectly neutral, dispassionate attitude toward anything that enters largely into their lives. When love dies away we rarely remain quite indifferent to its object, but begin to dislike if not to hate the one we loved. Those

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Farrington, *Head and Hand in Ancient Greece* (Watts & Co., 1947), Chapter IV, "The Gods of Epicurus and the Roman State."



who are not with us seem always to be against us. The man who ceases to be our friend is soon suspected of being an enemy; and conversely, former enemies become our friends. The deserted house, where cheerful voices are never heard, is peopled by our fancy with dreadful phantoms and unholy sounds. So, too, the Universe as a whole, when it has become empty and indifferent, cannot long remain in this state of unstable equilibrium with reference to our interests; and we soon suspect that it is hostile to us. This grim doctrine of a hostile Universe, which has been advanced by some of our leading modern thinkers, is something new in Western thought, which inherited both from the Greeks and the Hebrews the concept of a beneficent deity, who governed a cosmos on the whole favorable to human interests. So long as men recognized such a god, the world could not appear quite hostile to them.

For all our probing science, the Universe still holds many mysteries and vast uncharted regions; but on one point we may rest assured: It is not hostile toward us, and can hardly even be justly called indifferent. How could puny mites like ourselves preserve our being in the face of a hostile Universe; how could we live if our world refused to support us? As to our presence here, only two explanations seem possible. Either we are a late product of the same evolutionary process which without external direction produced first our solar system, then the humbler forms of life, and finally ourselves; or we were placed here by some Power which stands beyond and above nature. If the latter, then the world is not devoid of a Being who made us and probably loves and protects his creatures. If the former, the least we can say is that our status as products of evolution is just the same as that of

the trees, the herbs, the birds, and other creatures which surround us. But it never occurs to us to say that the world is hostile to vegetation or the animals which dwell in its midst. The earth seems everywhere to invite its mantle of green; the sun daily pours down its rays to support its growth; showers fall to refresh it. Would we not laugh out of court the philosopher who solemnly declared that the continents and islands are hostile to plant life and the seas to fishes? Yet we accept without demur the statement that the Universe is hostile to ourselves, who stem from the same source as all other living creatures. The worst we can say is that we are not the favorites of nature and no preferential treatment is reserved for us; yet, perhaps through a series of fortunate accidents, we have been endowed with exceptionally efficacious means for taking care of ourselves, in a world which as a rule richly rewards our intelligent efforts.

It is sometimes said that we yearn for cosmic support and fail to find it. Certainly everything mankind has achieved has been supported by the cosmos, which has supplied us with a standing place and materials, and energy to carry on our tasks, and the light whereby to see, and the manifold beautiful forms which cheer and inspire us. Nevertheless, most of us cherish in our hearts unrealized aspirations, and perchance blame the cosmic order for failing to support them. But let us be honest with ourselves: Is it the wider Universe which refuses to give substance to our dreams, or the men around us who deny us the sympathetic coöperation we need for their realization? Are not most of these aspirations—and nearly all that we publicly avow—for which support seems to be lacking, schemes for a better social order, plans for more harmonious living, of such a nature that they



could not possibly be carried into effect without the aid of those who would share their benefits with us? More often than coöperating, those upon whom we depend for help scorn or actively oppose our cherished aspirations. Until we have with a united effort asked the cosmos to support something better than our present imperfect society, let us not blame the Universe for refusing to support it. So far, the wider world has not denied its support to the things which men have earnestly, persistently, intelligently, and unitedly tried to erect within it.

### 3. *The Loss of an Object of Allegiance*

Thus we seem to exceed the mark when we declare the Universe to be hostile, merely because we can find no divine being and divine purpose within it; yet it is admittedly most difficult to view it in just that neutral tone which the case demands. But if not inimical, it is still empty of many of those things for which men have been accustomed to look beyond themselves—to their gods. The three grand objectives of religion have been support, orientation, and identification. Men have cultivated their gods to ensure the continued prosperity of their societies, as a source of moral guidance, and as objects of mystic union. In the most primitive religions of which we have knowledge, the first of these objectives was overwhelmingly the most important, although the second was not wholly absent. Primitive ritual is predominantly concerned with ensuring the daily return of the sun, the procession of the seasons, the growth of crops, the fertility of women and animals, success in battle, and freedom from disease; yet at an early period, the tribal deities also became the authors and enforcers

of the tribal customs. As men increased in culture and moral sensitivity, the second and third aspects of religion became more prominent. But even today, in industrially advanced countries, men pray for rain in time of drought, when formerly they might have sacrificed a hecatomb of captives, thus proving what a firm hold on our minds the most ancient religious notions still possess.

Despite these attenuated survivals of ancient practices, educated moderns are on the whole convinced that astronomical and meteorological phenomena can hardly be influenced by human prayer; and even our crops will grow better if we cultivate and fertilize intelligently than if we have recourse to primitive fertility rites. But it still remains to be seen whether we can find adequate moral guidance, and something beyond ourselves with which we can identify ourselves unreservedly, in a Universe from which we have dismissed the gods. I shall return presently to the subject of moral orientation, and wish at present to stress the less often recognized importance of having something with which we can identify ourselves without reservation. This deep-rooted human impulse finds its highest and most characteristic expression in the mystic yearning for absorption in God, but in less intense form it is far more widely spread through mankind. Men seem to be happiest, and to put forth their best effort, when they have some object which they can love and serve wholeheartedly and intensely, whether it be their family, their country, their art or science, or their god. Yet perhaps it is only the last which can call forth this sentiment continuously and to the highest degree, for men and their productions are too imperfect and inconstant to elicit our approval and loyalty without the slightest reservation. In rejecting God,



our greatest loss is not that of an object of praise and worship or of a supernatural being to whom we can look for help in time of pressing need, but of a being with whom we can identify the best that is in us, an object beyond ourselves to which we can give undivided loyalty and perfect allegiance.

#### 4. *The Inadequacy of Pantheism*

Men have sought in two directions to replace the loss they feel when they can no longer recognize a divine being. The first is pantheism, which deifies the whole world. An inevitable corollary of a logically consistent pantheism is that all that exists and all that happens is equally divine and has the same claim to our allegiance and support. Should not the consistent pantheist give the same love and admiration to the venomous snake and the innocent fawn, to the saint and the felon; for in his view God is everything and everything is God; and is not God the highest and best we can conceive? Similarly, pantheism affords no ground for moral guidance and choice; for everything that happens is equally a part of the onward march of nature; and to love one's enemies or to eat them are, as facts of existence, on precisely the same level. It would seem that a pantheistic ethic would find in the biological struggle for existence its only guidance, and approve of every act that furthered our individual or racial survival. But pantheism can have no reference to morality; for it is wholly unselective toward the world, whereas it is the essence of ethics to be selective. I am aware that good and benevolent men, like Spinoza and Shelley, have been pantheists—the former, in his philosophy of wide-eyed acceptance of everything that befalls us, consistently; the latter,

in his zeal for humanitarian reform, most inconsistently. If the whole world is God, then everything in it is equally divine; and to wish to change any least part of it seems irreligious. The poet's intense opposition to every form of oppression and falsehood could not have been simply an expression of the All; for these things are equally parts of the All; but some privileged part of the whole might have been at work to produce these sentiments within him.

#### 5. *Humanism an Unsatisfactory Solution*

The second effort to replace the lost deity is humanism, which has become increasingly popular in recent years. This term has acquired the most diverse meanings; and even in its more restricted signification as a sort of moral philosophy or pseudo-religion, it covers a wide variety of views, whose common feature is the shift of man's allegiance from the forces that created him to humanity itself. Thus it tends to reject religious and idealistic interpretations of the world and inclines toward materialism or positivism. Humanism usually inculcates devoted service to the best interests of mankind, in this world rather than the next, at times rising to almost religious fervor in this dedication; but instead of serving men to the glory of God or for his soul's salvation, in the manner of the higher religions, the humanist serves mankind to the glory of man himself.

Although it would be folly to deny that much that is fine and worthy in our modern world has enlisted itself under the banner of humanism, one grave danger of this movement is immediately apparent. It tends to distort our perspective, magnifying what we owe to our conscious human endeavor at the expense



of what we owe to forces wholly beyond our control and processes that were at work long before men began deliberately to take a hand at moulding their own destiny. Although men have done much to improve themselves and their position in the world, and this is indeed the glory of mankind, the proportion of all that gives value to life that we owe to our own efforts is relatively slight; for this has consisted largely in making certain refinements, some of them most admirable it is true, upon a broad foundation already prepared for us. Thus humanism tends to increase inordinately our already egregious human pride—a most dangerous tendency. And for all the moral zeal it is at times capable of arousing, it is essentially irreligious; for religion is above all the grateful recognition of those forces to which we owe our being but which owe nothing to us.

Men, as we have said, have looked to their gods for support and moral orientation, and as objects with which they could unreservedly identify themselves. Can humanity as a whole, by serving these three functions, take the place of the gods it tends increasingly to banish? It is true that man is a social animal, and apart from his fellows finds it difficult not only to support his life but even to preserve that psychic tension which we call the will to live. But for long ages men have looked for this fruitful coöperation and moral support to a relatively small group of their fellow men, and their chief danger has been the implacable enmity of surrounding groups. One of the principal functions of the tribal god was to preserve his people from human enemies, and he lost prestige and authority when he failed to do so. Petty tribes have amalgamated into teeming nations, and the number of people we include in the "in-group" is many

times greater than in primitive societies. But at the same time the "out-groups," if fewer in number, are incomparably more powerful; and the threat they wield still hangs over us like a dreadful nightmare. And even within the most orderly modern state, the strain of competition with our neighbors to acquire and retain the means of subsistence and of preserving our prestige is at times overwhelmingly severe; so that at times men feel that without help from beyond they can scarcely carry on.

There is a sort of metaphysical no less than a biological unity of mankind, in the common origin, common nature, and even common destiny of all its members. At the same time the human race is composed of a vast number of separate entities in constant agitation, now assisting and now opposing each other. These discrete units are the concrete realities with which a positive science must deal; "humanity" is an abstraction, like a Platonic Idea or a Scholastic category. By making this abstract "humanity" an object of allegiance or devotion, almost of worship, humanism is no less "metaphysical" than some of those systems of thought which it opposes.

It is undeniable that we look to our fellow men, especially the older and more experienced of them, for moral guidance; and even the most sensitive and independent ethical philosopher scarcely ever discovers a new maxim of conduct. But if we survey the moral notions of mankind somewhat widely, we find them conflicting and contradictory. There is scarcely any practice, even the most abhorrent to ourselves, such as murder, infanticide, parricide, cannibalism, incest, theft, which has not been allowed and even approved by some moral code. Even in a single cultural tradition, such as that of Western civilization, we find



the most diverse ethical doctrines upheld by respected philosophers. There is no single human morality, but many separate moralities. We may, if we are docile and uncritical, follow blindly the accepted norms of our country and generation; although even as to these, if we examine them carefully, we shall find a bewildering diversity of opinion. But if we strive to build our moral life not upon the shifting sands of custom and usage but upon the bedrock of stable principles, we shall find that humanity as a whole is only indirectly of assistance. It offers us a vast diversity of ethical theories and moral maxims, but forces upon us the exacting task of choice. The principles which govern this choice may be at the core of our own being or they may be in the heavens above; but they are not the recognized and obvious possession of humanity as a whole, waiting for us to reach out and grasp them.

At its highest development, religious feeling takes the form of a burning desire for identification or union with something wholly good, pure, and beneficent. The pious and devout spirit is not content merely to receive the support of his god in all the affairs of life and to look to him as a distant source of moral guidance; he wishes to become like his god, or at least worthy of him, so that he may be linked to him by the closest bonds. But no sane man has ever supposed that he could approach the highest being he could conceive just as he found himself, with no special preparation. Every great religion has insisted with all the weight of its authority that men must purify themselves of their unruly passions and base desires in order to approach the deity. Not the whole natural man, but only the highest and most sacred element within man, can claim to be godlike

and worthy of union with God. This very insistence upon selection and purification is the strongest proof that humanity as a whole can never be the supreme object of religious aspiration; for humanity is composed of men like ourselves, infected with just those hates, resentments, and crude appetites of which we believe we must purge ourselves in order to approach the Divine. We belong to humanity by nature, not through the strength of our aspirations. Some of us are a little better, some a little worse; but on the whole we are very much like the rest of mankind; so that they cannot hold us aloof on the ground that we are unworthy of them.

It is precisely because other men are so much like our natural selves that we cannot accept humanity without reserve, giving it our total allegiance and identifying it with the best that is in us. To yield this spiritual acceptance to humanity just as we find it, we should need to regard as of equal value all the components of our undisciplined nature; and this the religious man consistently refuses to do. He may serve humanity with all his strength, but he cannot regard it as wholly good, hence cannot ally himself unreservedly with it. There is that within him which aspires to a higher goal. He may indeed yearn to lift up the whole of mankind along with himself, not in obedience to the requests of his fellow men, but in response to an internal command. This inner compulsion to serve mankind may expose him to ridicule and contempt, if not to more active persecution, proving once more how far an abstractly conceived humanity fails to replace the banished gods. For in addition to looking to their gods for support and guidance, men have ever been impelled to serve them, in primitive religions by erecting altars and sanctu-



aries and offering sacrifices, in more advanced religions by acts of righteousness and charity. The gods have nearly always accepted, without demur, whatever service men felt called upon to proffer them; and this has been a great solace to the human heart. But humanity is less grateful, often refusing the most devoted efforts of those who wish it well; and this has brought much heartache to some of the best of men.

#### 6. *The Problem Stated*

The majority of educated men are now convinced that their material prosperity is unaffected by their recognition or cultivation of the gods; and the perceptual forms in which the Universe presents itself to us remain precisely the same whether or not we postulate a divine being. Yet to many of us a godless Universe seems empty; by merely denying in thought that which eyes have never seen nor ears heard, we have deprived our world of one of its most precious constituents. Attempts to remedy this unsatisfactory situation by looking upon the whole phenomenal Universe as divine, as in pantheism, or by pushing humanity into the place left vacant by the exiled gods, as in humanism, prove to be unsatisfactory expedients. Are we to conclude, then, that only by cultivating an illusion can we find warmth and meaning in the world, that we are so constituted that falsehood is necessary for our spiritual health?

May it not be that from the first men were dimly aware of some actual component of the Universe of which they could as yet give no adequate account, and that all their false religions and absurd cults sprang from groping attempts to conceive and come to terms with that which was beyond their comprehension?

Russell's assertion that the Universe contains nothing non-human worthy of our worship is an inherently improbable statement. Despite a thousand failures, we are impelled to try again and again to express, in conceptual terms which do not clash with the other accepted contents of our minds, that which we feel within our spirits. When we achieve this harmony, we say that we have found truth; for the coherence of our ideas is our only criterion of truth, and every other test is delusive. The following chapters are an attempt to reach, by a radically new approach, a concept of deity which satisfies the spirit's demand for something ampler and more powerful than itself to which it can give its unrestricted allegiance, yet which is wholly consistent with our current scientific construction of the world.

We shall confine our attention to the immanent aspect of deity; for of this alone can we hope for knowledge which is more than opinion and vague conjecture, provided we are content to know it by its activity rather than by its essence—by what it does in the world rather than by what it is. This immanence of deity, this presence of God in the world, we call "the Divine," without prejudice to the question of God's transcendence. We shall not in the present work tackle the difficult question of whether the Divine is co-extensive with God or merely one aspect of a Being which reaches into vast realms beyond our comprehension. The latter seems probable; but to insist upon what we cannot prove is futile. If we limit ourselves to God's immanence—to the Divine as we here define it—I believe it possible to reach a concept of deity which is compatible with positive science, yet which is adequate for the purposes of religion and ethics. On this second point I am not so



sure that I have succeeded as on the first; for men differ widely in their notions of what God must be. At any rate, those who are not satisfied with the concept of the Divine here outlined may at least find it of service as a point of departure, from which they may be able to build higher than I.

Whether there is a God, or at least some component of the Universe which we can acknowledge as Divine, is a matter too important to accept on faith. Unless we know the answer with at least the same degree of certainty as we demand in other questions that seriously affect our lives, it is hardly worth having. A hypothetical deity is hardly better than none at all. But once we are sure there is a divine presence and purpose in the world, we may hold a rational faith in certain corollaries that seem to follow from this fact—for example, that good will ultimately prevail over evil, or that the human spirit will not wholly perish.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE SEEKER

##### 1. *Alternative Approaches to the Problem of Man's Nature*

The temple at Delphi in Greece was dedicated to Apollo, yet inscribed upon it was not "Know thy god" but rather "Know thyself." The second seems the more urgent and fundamental need, the first may well follow from it. Perhaps if we knew ourselves more intimately, we should find less difficulty in conceiving that from which our being springs. This at least is the approach we shall take in the present work, in the belief that when we begin to understand ourselves, and particularly that within us which reaches out toward the Divine, we shall the more readily recognize the object of our quest.

We are beings so complex that it is most difficult to decide how to begin to describe ourselves; yet the choice of a starting point is of the utmost importance; and our whole theory of man may depend upon the chance selection of a point of departure. Each of us knows himself both as a subject, a thinking being who perceives, feels, cogitates, and hopes, and as a material object, a body. One's knowledge of himself as subject is complete; for obviously he can have no thought or feeling of which he is not aware, no shade of consciousness of which he is not conscious. Yet if one's knowledge of himself as a subject is complete, it is not adequate; for it fails to reveal how conscious-



ness is related to our body and to the surrounding world, or how our mind performs its most commonplace operations. The most fundamental processes of thought are a mystery to the thinker himself, who can never explain how he carries out such basic mental functions as the association of two ideas, or the recognition of similarities and differences. The fact that a complete knowledge of ourselves as subjects is inadequate for the comprehension of mental processes points to the conclusion that consciousness is not self-subsistent, but rests upon some more fundamental mode of being.

A man's knowledge of his body is neither complete nor adequate. There are regions of his external surface which he cannot see without a system of mirrors. With his complex internal structure he has no direct acquaintance; there are whole organs and systems of organs whose presence within himself the man who has not studied anatomy never suspects, except perhaps when they get out of order and cause discomfort. When we start our inquiry into the nature of man with our individual selves, it is easy to believe that the conscious mind, which we know so completely, is primary, and that the body is merely a complex, gradually developing idea in this mind. The mind might postulate the body to serve its own ends. Without the mind, the body seems quite meaningless; could there be anything more vain and futile than a body without consciousness, unless perchance it served some other sentient being? Thus when we start our inquiry with ourselves in the manner so congenial to philosophers, we readily reach the position of idealism—or, less ambiguously, mentalism—the doctrine which holds that mind is the primary form of being, and matter or body an idea of the mind. Since it is an indisputable

fact that *as known to us* matter is only a mental idea, it is most difficult to dislodge the mentalist from his philosophical bastion.

When we begin our inquiry not with ourselves but with other beings which, externally at least, somewhat resemble us, the whole question assumes a totally different aspect. The first point that strikes our attention is that no single one of all these other animate beings wholly resembles us, so that each of us seems altogether unique. These other organized beings fall into a graded series, beginning with the individuals of our own race who most resemble us, passing through men of more or less different races to the anthropoid apes, to mammals of other classes like cows and squirrels, to birds, to the cold-blooded vertebrates such as frogs and fishes, to the insects and mollusks, and finally to motile bits of protoplasm to be seen only with the aid of a microscope. All of these so diverse beings bear many resemblances to us, for they move, are sensitive to light and other stimuli, ingest and digest food, are generated, grow old, and die. And each of these we can, as anatomists and physiologists, know as objects far more thoroughly and intimately than we know our own bodies, which we cannot dissect without destroying ourselves.

But we have no direct knowledge, received through our senses, of any of these other beings as conscious subjects, not even of those most like ourselves; for their thoughts and feelings are not open to our inspection. Nevertheless, we often form a vivid representation of the subjective states of these other beings, usually on the strength of their gestures and expressions, or the sounds or other signals which we receive from them through our senses. This sympathetic participation in the inner life of others seems to be a



product largely of spontaneous inference from sensuously perceived signs; although, in the present state of our knowledge, the possibility of immediate, extra-sensory perception of emotions and ideas cannot be rigidly excluded.

However, we cannot demonstrate by the approved methods of science that any of these other beings is conscious, or that sentience occurs anywhere in the Universe save in our individual self. Hence the scientific, as opposed to the philosophic, approach to the problem of man's nature readily leads to the conclusion that mind, if indeed it is present outside of oneself, is a product or emanation of the body; therefore that matter, of which the body is composed, is primary, while mind is a derivative. Some thinkers hold that consciousness as such is powerless to influence the actions of the body and through them the course of events in the external world; so that we must regard it as an epiphenomenon or accidental by-product of the chemical processes that take place in brain and nerves, related to them as the squeak to a poorly lubricated cart-wheel, with the difference that the squeak represents an actual expenditure of energy, which consciousness on this view does not. When they do not carry their doctrines to this extreme, nearly all who take this approach to the problem look upon the mind, not as the end for whose service the body exists, but as an instrument evolved for the body's service, to help it avoid dangers and satisfy its vital needs.

We are thus offered two alternatives: (1) that mind is primary and matter an idea it has created for itself; and (2) that matter is primary and mind its product or emanation. It may be concluded from the first view that the body exists for the service of the mind, to

provide it with concrete experience; from the second, that the mind is primarily an instrument evolved to serve the body's needs. Neither of these two forms of monism is in my opinion tenable. No one has yet given us a lucid theory of how matter can produce consciousness, far less provided a scientific demonstration of the process. To materialism, the fundamental activity of matter, from which all its appearances must be derived, is motion; and between motion and consciousness no connecting link is evident; the two occupy wholly different planes of being. On the other hand, unless he becomes a solipsist and looks upon every appearance of the external world as pure illusion, the mentalist must explain how the primary or cosmic mind projects its ideas in such a manner that they appear as solid, self-subsisting objects to minds like ours. Certainly I am not aware that my mind is endowed with the power to project its ideas in such a manner that they become objects to other minds; and a "mind" which differs so fundamentally from that which we currently call mind would seem to deserve another designation.

I believe, then, that in all humility and honesty we must in this controversy preserve a neutral attitude, which will take the form of a provisional dualism, refraining from assigning a primary position to either mind or matter until we know far more than we do at present. At the same time, if we admit what seems obvious to most of us, the interaction of mind and matter, yet wish to avoid the complex business of a pre-established harmony in the sense of Leibniz or of occasional causes in the manner of the Cartesians, we must recognize that they possess one "dimension" or attribute in common; because between two entities which have no single point in common no interaction



seems possible. This point of contact between mind and matter suggests a common origin; so that the dualist, who refuses to judge prematurely the conflicting claims for primacy of matter and mind, is led to postulate one single ground or substance, which cannot properly be called either mind or matter, but may be designated as "neutral" or, as I prefer, "transcendent." Matter is one of the modes of appearance of this Primal Substance to its product, mind.

This long digression is not intended to be an adequate treatment of one of the most persistent problems of philosophy, but merely a summary statement of a position which I have more fully presented elsewhere, and which seems pertinent to our present inquiry. For our immediate purposes, it seems better to approach the problem of what we essentially are, not from the point of view of substance, but from that of process.

## *2. The Body's Growth as Harmonization*

Each of us began his mundane existence in the form of a fertilized ovum, barely visible to the naked eye, but through a powerful microscope exhibiting a certain complexity of structure, although its subsequent history suggests that its actual complexity is many times greater than that which the microscope reveals. Attached to the maternal placenta, the ovum grows by absorbing materials from outside and incorporating them into itself. Chemically these materials are most varied, and they bear no determinate relation to the pre-existing structure of the ovum. From its point of view, they are crude novelties, entering its orbit as though by chance and from an unfathomed elsewhere; and its problem is to fuse them with the

matter it already contains to form a harmonious whole. For at every stage in its development, from the unicellular germ to the fetus composed of countless millions of cells, the embryo must form an integrated, functioning whole, each of whose parts has reference to and interacts with every other part, hardly less than in any free, adult organism. If we wish a single term for this synthetic process whereby heterogeneous materials are taken up singly or in small amounts and fused into a closely integrated whole, we might call it "harmonization". Growth in every form is a process of harmonization.

Birth, the emergence from the uniformly favorable temperature and moisture of the womb into the more varied and often inimical conditions of the outer world, causes no interruption of the body's growth. Only now, instead of receiving already prepared plastic materials through the placenta, the child soon takes more varied substances through the mouth; and its organism must exercise greater selectivity in what it absorbs for incorporation into the growing body. Birth makes an even greater difference to the young animal by imposing upon it the unending task of adjusting itself to fluctuating external circumstances. From the moment it issues from the egg-shell or the womb until at last it dies, a major part of every animal's effort is directed toward the maintenance of a favorable balance with its environment. By brooding their nestlings or chicks, by covering their babies, by providing milk or predigested food for them, parents of various kinds ease in many ways the little one's task of adjusting itself to the ambient. But as it grows older, each living thing must increasingly shoulder its own burden of adaptation, a process we may regard as the complement of growth. The latter consists in



organizing the parts within the body, the former in fitting the living creature as a whole into the world which envelops and sustains it. This is accomplished in part by adjusting the organism to its environment, as when its rate of heat-production rises with falling external temperatures, in part by adjusting the environment to the organism, as when men build houses and heat them. As animals become more intelligent and better able to manipulate materials, they make increasing use of this second method. The process of bringing the organism into equilibrium with the surrounding world is another aspect of harmonization.

### 3. *The Growth of Knowledge as Harmonization*

A process of the same nature as growth in the body takes place in the mind. Each of us is born, as Locke insisted, with a mind wholly devoid of ideas. Yet to compare the infant mind to a blank sheet of paper is not an apt simile; for the paper's surface is without structure and will receive indifferently any characters we please to inscribe upon it; whereas the mind has from the first a wonderfully complex structure, which determines the form taken by the materials poured into it through the senses. Kant's elaboration of this point was his great contribution to the theory of knowledge.

The constructive process which underlies all perception and all knowing begins in the hidden depths of our being, below the threshold of the conscious mind. I look through my window and behold a flowering shrub, which in the bright morning sunshine sends to my eyes trains of luminous vibrations, that are focused by the optic lens upon the myriad rods and

cones of each retina; so that in each eye there is a mosaic of excited nervous cells, spread over a curved surface. But I do not perceive the shrub as a multitude of discrete points, like the dots on a magnified photo-engraving. I do not even see it as two slightly differing images, corresponding to my right and left eyes, which view it from different angles. I behold it as a single unitary image, in which all the details that I can by a deliberate effort pick out from it are fused into an integrated whole. In the fraction of a second which elapsed between the activation of my retina by the luminous vibrations and my awareness of the image, a wonderful synthesis has taken place, from innumerable separate nervous excitations producing a single act of consciousness. Without knowing far more than we at present do about the relation of mind to body, of thought to the brain, we cannot tell how or where this synthesis was effected, whether by the nerves or at higher levels; but we are sure that it was not done consciously.

Similarly, in an act of hearing, many separate vibrations of the tympana are fused for us into the unity of a single note; and a yet higher synthesis is subconsciously effected for us when we hear a spoken sentence as a meaningful whole, or respond as to a single entity to the multitudinous notes of a melody. In knowing the world through the senses, we are never passive recipients, but all unwittingly carry on a great constructive labor as we transmute separate nervous excitations into impressions that are not only meaningful but often at the same time beautiful. Perception is a synthetic process, a mode of harmonization analogous to growth, but carried on with different materials.



Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting are the chief modes of perception; and they supply our minds with a multitude of representations or images, now delightful, now painful, now almost neutral in themselves, but wholly bewildering in their immense variety and confusion. In order to make the best use of them, to understand them and feel at home with them, the mind spontaneously arranges them in some sort of unity and order, uniting them into classes or categories according to their resemblances, recognizing constant sequences, learning to infer from one sensation the approach of another. This process goes on effortlessly in animals and children; but when made a deliberate objective and cultivated by set procedures and rules, it becomes science and philosophy. The awakened mind strives to unite all its contents, from whatever source they come, into a single coherent system, so that each has its place in the scheme, can be related to all the others and explained by them, and there is nowhere an unreconciled contradiction. In so far as it achieves this high aim, it feels satisfied and claims that it has found truth; when it fails in this endeavor, it is perplexed, distressed, and stands self-accused of falsehood. And this harmonious integration of its contents, in accordance with the rules imposed upon it by its own innate structure, is the mind's only criterion of truth or right knowledge. We often hear that truth is the agreement of an idea with its original in the external world; but this is a test we cannot by any means apply; for how can we pluck an idea from the mind and place it beside the original, so that we can regard it also as an object, and see whether, viewed under the same conditions, the two correspond?

#### 4. *A Living Being as a Product of Harmonization*

I think that now we are beginning to see the answer to that so baffling question "What am I?" Whether I am composed of one substance or of two finally separable substances, body and mind or spirit, is a problem of the greatest interest to me; for my continued existence as a person is bound up with it; yet no answer upon which thinkers can agree is at present forthcoming. But from another point of view, it is less doubtful what I am. I am a process whereby heterogeneous materials are taken up and bound, more or less permanently, into a coherent unity. We have agreed to apply the term "novelties" to the crude materials which flow into us from the outside world, and "harmonization" to the process which unites them into a concordant whole. The process then advances from novelty into harmony. Each living thing, from the amoeba to man and from an alga to the sequoia tree, is as long as it continues to develop an instance of the process of harmonization, and at any given moment a product of this process.

To say that human life is essentially a process of harmonization may seem a poor return for the labor we have expended, and like any intellectual formulation of the mystery of life, a weak, pale, insipid shadow of the warm reality. But it is intended to be only a sign or mnemonic aid for a more vivid apprehension. I believe that we shall be richly rewarded if we accustom our minds to think of ourselves as we actually are, the harmonious fusion of a myriad elements, a point of concrescence in the midst of space of things which have flowed into us from the envying vastitude. In the formation of a man, atom unites with atom to produce complex organic molecules,



molecules are conjoined into cells, cells into tissues, tissues into organs, organs into that complex unity which we call an organism, in which each smallest part is so bound to the other parts and dependent upon them, that it has been truly said that in a living being the whole determines the parts rather than the parts the whole, as in a stone wall or some other lifeless structure.

The mind is the product of a movement essentially the same at that which formed the body. Many nervous vibrations unite to produce a single sensation, which is the basis of perception. Innumerable perceptions enter into the formation of a concept or universal, and these in turn are conjoined into coherent systems which are the ground of understanding. Some minds strive ceaselessly to combine all their concepts and all their partial views into a single comprehensive world-view. An inclusive system of thought bears the same relation to the discrete particulars of experience as the body to the nourishment it absorbs as it grows. Each is a harmonious synthesis of the novelties which have flowed into it. In body and mind, and in the close union of the two into a coherent whole, each of us is a product of harmonization. But the active principle which effects these syntheses does not reside in the materials which enter into them. Left to themselves, the substances we ingest as nourishment would never make a human body; nor would the excitations this body receives from manifold sources give rise to a mind capable of knowing its environment. Only by means of a process which life transmits to life, and which so far as we know never originates in lifeless matter, can these syntheses be effected.

### 5. *Psychic Consequences of Harmonization*

The process which made us also determines our feelings and emotions. Since our life depends upon the harmonious integration of all our constituents, harmony is agreeable and eagerly sought by us; and so long as we can preserve it we are happy. Health, which is the foundation of all solid felicity, is the harmonious coöperation of all the organs and functions of the body; and this in turn depends upon its nice adjustment to the environment which supports it. But we are not mere thoughtless organisms; and unity of purpose and interests, intellectual clarity, are as necessary to our happiness as physical health. Disordered thoughts and discordant aims can make us as miserable as an upset stomach or a toothache. Moreover, we interact in manifold ways with those who surround us, so that spiritual unity and friendly coöperation with them contribute much to our felicity. Happiness is not merely a constant succession of agreeable excitements and pleasant sensations, but depends far more upon the coherence of our lives than upon the miscellaneous pleasures we manage to cram into them. These three kinds of harmony, in body, in mind, and in our psychic adjustment to those around us, are its surest foundation; because when we succeed in preserving them we maintain the direct course of the movement to which we owe our being.

Even our pleasures are not capriciously determined, but on the whole have reference to the process of harmonization. The influx of things which can be harmoniously incorporated into body or mind, as wholesome food which sustains or builds up the body, fresh ideas which strengthen our conceptual edifice, usually gives us pleasure. On the other hand, the in-



gression of elements which jar with the existing pattern, and even more the intrusion of things which actually disrupt this pattern, as unwholesome food, a thorn or a bullet forced into the flesh, an idea which clashes with all our cherished beliefs, is the source of more or less acute pain. Similarly, the removal of some harmonious component of our pattern of life, as the death of a beloved person, the loss of a serviceable object, the forgetting of pleasant or useful information, causes us pain. On the other hand, the extrusion of an inharmonious component, as the departure of a troublesome associate, the removal of a splinter from the flesh or corrupt matter from the body, brings a feeling of relief, which is akin to pleasure if not positively gratifying. There are, of course, exceptions to these rules; but they usually have to do with objects or situations with which neither we nor our ancestors have had much experience, so that judging merely by first impressions we welcome them gladly, until we have learned to our sorrow that they disrupt the integrity of our lives. Pleasures and pains, then, are associated with single experiences; but happiness depends upon how all the components of a life are conjoined into a coherent and satisfying whole.

Certain of our affections are the direct, inevitable expression of the process which made us acting through a mind increasingly sensitive to its surroundings, living and lifeless. Such are love, friendliness, benevolence, kindness, and sympathy. Feelings of this sort are just what we expect to find in a sentient creature formed by harmonization, for under their influence we strive to carry this process beyond the limits of our body and embrace all the beings which surround us in one inclusive concord. On the other hand, we are all too familiar with passions of an opposite

tendency, which seem wholly alien to a being whose existence depends upon the establishment and maintenance of harmony. How could hate, rage, malice, envy, cruelty, and similar disruptive passions and attitudes ever spring up in an animal whose prime requisite is harmony? Their presence points to a change in the direction of the creative process, a reversal of the movement which brought us into being. They seem to have been forced upon animal life rather than to be a spontaneous expression of the process which created it. How this occurred we shall consider in Chapter VIII.

#### 6. *Further Products of Harmonization*

The higher activities of men carry forward on the plane of conscious endeavor, and on the whole with materials external to ourselves, the same movement which created us. Harmonization appears to have acquired a momentum which does not permit it to stop short when it has fashioned a man, but compels him to extend the process into his surroundings. We who are products of harmonization find our highest and most satisfying vocation in infusing order and harmony into the surrounding world. The practical arts, including agriculture, architecture, engineering, and a variety of crafts, are concerned with creating a harmonious physical environment. The fine arts are dedicated to beautifying our surroundings by producing harmonious patterns of forms and colors, or of masses, or of sounds, which appeal directly to our senses. In science and philosophy we strive to bring conceptual order into the bewildering diversity of crude experience.

But the greatest and most momentous of the tasks



imposed upon us by the process which we are in that of bringing harmony into our relations with other living beings, of our own and of other kinds. From one point of view we call this moral endeavor; from another politics or the science of social organization; but it is impossible to draw a sharp line between the two, and thinkers like Aristotle and Confucius have treated them as continuous. A society is held together by the moral relations between its members, and without such ethical qualities as justice, helpfulness, restraint, and veracity it would promptly disintegrate. A society is sometimes called a superorganism, an organism composed of organisms; and this is a useful concept provided we do not carry it too far. At least it calls attention to a fundamental similarity between an individual animal and a society composed of such individuals. Each is formed by the fusion into a coherent whole of separable units, in the first case of particles of matter derived from the external world, in the second case of living organisms. In each the parts make diverse contributions to the welfare of the whole, and are in turn dependent upon the whole. The more complex the society and the greater the specialization in function of its members, the more strictly this comparison holds; for then each thinker or laborer contributes one particular service, like an organ of the body; and he is hardly able to survive without the services of his fellow citizens, just as an organ cannot live if severed from its body. A society is formed by carrying forward with more complex materials the same process of harmonization which created each of its members.

In so far as it is coherent and orderly, a society represents a concrete moral accomplishment. But all actual societies contain much friction, much injustice,

much evil; and their relations with surrounding societies are often disorderly in the extreme, leading to all the violence and destruction of war. Because our moral aspirations are never satisfied by actual societies, we are led to make of ethics a special discipline which strives to discover the innate foundations of harmonious living, to establish ideals of conduct, and to win allegiance to them. The ultimate goal of ethics is to bring harmony into our relations not only with all men but with all living things of whatever kind, and with everything that surrounds us; and if this seems a too grandiose undertaking, certainly not to be realized within the lifetime of men now living nor by any means we can at present foresee, we are driven to it by the impetus of the very movement which created us. We can assign to the process of harmonization no arbitrary limit, such as a family or a state or even the whole of mankind. As a vigorous stream will inevitably either overflow or undermine any dam we throw across its channel, so the process which created us will overcome all artificial barriers. We who are formed by a movement which united atoms into molecules, molecules into cells, cells into tissues, and tissues into an organism, who live in societies formed by the continued impetus of this same movement, will be carried by our own internal forces to a universal concept of morality, whatever obstacles custom and prejudice and narrow theories at present oppose to it.

### *7. Religion as an Outgrowth of Harmonization*

If our efforts to realize an ever wider harmony were invariably successful, if we encountered no obstacles and were ignorant of opposition, strife, loss, and pain, we should look upon the whole world as



blest and divine, and our daily life would be our religion. It is the failure to experience in life the harmony which their nature demands that led men to seek and to propitiate supernatural beings who could help them in their recurrent difficulties. The earliest religions were invariably attempts to find benevolent beings willing to succor the harassed tribesman, or if these supernatural powers were not originally well inclined, to make them so by suitable gifts and flatteries. Even with our modern conception of inexorable natural law and our growing competence in controlling natural processes, the religious quest still engages us, but has taken a somewhat modified form. We are aware that we are not self-created, nor self-sufficient, but dependent upon forces and processes older and more enduring than ourselves. We cannot believe that our demand for harmony, our moral aspirations, are wholly accidental and foreign to the world in which we find ourselves; the very concept of continuity, to which our newer doctrines of evolution have accustomed us, makes such a conclusion unacceptable. But even as little can we believe that the world just as we find it, with all its strife and evil, is an adequate or final expression of that same energy which issues in our moral consciousness. We cannot accept and give unrestricted allegiance to the whole world; yet we cannot without violating our deepest impulses isolate ourselves spiritually from our world and regard it as wholly foreign and hostile. Hence we are driven inevitably to seek that within the world, or beyond it, which we can revere and accept without reservation. Perhaps this thing, whatever it turns out to be, will not be able to set aside the established processes of nature in our favor or assume visible form for our instruction. No matter; if we can yield

it our entire allegiance, identify with it that which is best in ourselves, look to it for orientation, our gain will be immeasurable.

We set out at the beginning of this chapter to discover what we are, in the belief that this knowledge would help us to understand what it is we seek. Whether we consist of one substance or of two separable components, body and spirit, is a question to which no generally convincing answer is at present available. However this may be, we are demonstrably the product of a process of a special kind, which we call harmonization, and which consists in fusing materials from various sources into a coherent, harmonious whole. By this process, our bodies grow from minute bits of protoplasm to marvellously complex structures, consisting of innumerable diverse parts functioning as a single whole; our minds build from many discrete sensations a coherent system of ideas; and body and mind are conjoined in a single functioning whole. All our higher activities, as the arts, sciences, social organization, and moral endeavor, are merely the continuation on another plane, with diverse materials, of the same process which made us what we are. This process of harmonization strives to complete itself in the realization of a comprehensive harmony including ourselves and all that surrounds and influences us, but is baffled by the persistent discords of the external world. Thus we are driven to seek beneath the surface of the world, or beyond it, that which corresponds to the process which made and imposes this quest upon us, so that we may ally ourselves with it and give it that unlimited allegiance which the world as a whole repels.



## CHAPTER IV

## CRITERIA OF THE DIVINE

1. *Contrasting Concepts of Deity*

A quest, whether of a material or an ideal object, is a voyage into the unknown; and like any journey, it requires two points for its orientation. The first is the point of departure, which in the present instance is our essential self; and in the last chapter we tried to establish its latitude and longitude in the realm of Being. The second is the destination; and even if this be still uncharted, we must have some notion where it lies; for otherwise we shall have no reason for preferring one direction to another. Furthermore, we must know in general terms the nature of that which we seek, else we may not recognize it even if we stumble over it. Those who set out to find God would save themselves much trouble and much bitter disillusion if they would at the outset have clearly in mind the criteria of that which they seek—the marks by which they will recognize the Divine. For men have conceived God in the most diverse ways; and one who sought a divine being corresponding to one of these concepts might not recognize a god who conformed to some other concept, even if he met this god face to face.

The bewildering diversity of gods conceived by various religions and philosophies might be classified by their functions in the cosmic system or by their outstanding attributes. A god may be the creator of

the world, or merely its governor and ruler; or he may be above all the author of the moral law and the judge of men's actions; or he may combine these offices in various ways. In some mythologies, as the Babylonian, the Norse, the Aztec, and many another, the creator-god scarcely originated the stuff with which he worked, but merely formed the cosmos from materials already present, and of unexplained origin. Often some primeval monster, which after a struggle the god had slain, was the source of the indispensable material; as the huge Ymir furnished the materials with which Odin and his compeers formed heaven and earth. Such gods were architects rather than creators in the strictest sense. In the case of Jehovah or Jahweh, who was destined to become the God of the Western world, the position is not wholly clear. A careful reading of the first chapter of *Genesis* leaves the impression that the Lord, who separated the waters from the earth, worked with pre-existing materials, hence was merely the architect who brought order out of chaos; but Thomas Aquinas maintained that God created primary matter, hence was a creator in the fullest sense.<sup>1</sup>

As king succeeded king on earth, so god might succeed god in heaven; and the reigning deity, whom chiefly men worshipped and strove to placate, was not necessarily the world's creator or even its architect, but merely the wielder of the supreme power. Such was the case with many of the religions of primitive peoples, and even of some who achieved a high culture, as the ancient Greeks. Their supreme god, Zeus, it will be recalled, was not the world's maker, but merely the third in succession on the Olympian

<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Q.44, Art. 2.



throne, having in a great battle wrested the power from his father Kronos, who in turn had supplanted Uranos; and even he had not actually created the world. When facing momentous decisions, the Homeric Zeus called a council of the other chief deities and heard their opinions, although his word was final. Yet the commands of the wielder of the thunderbolt could be neither arbitrary nor capricious; for above all the gods stood Fate or Destiny, whose inexorable laws set a limit to the power of the reigning deity. Greek thought was not wholly consistent on this point; for although in the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus it is clearly stated that Zeus cannot escape what is fated, elsewhere, as in Pindar, Zeus and Fate are more closely identified. A similar notion was held by the ancient Aryans of India, who saw in Rita an eternal law or necessity which set bounds to the power of Indra, Varuna, and the other Shining Ones of the Vedic hymns. Although some of these ancient beliefs may seem childish to us today, we should not forget that for a long while they satisfied the religious needs of sensitive peoples with rapidly growing cultures. In particular, it should be noted that the highest deity was as a rule far from omnipotent; for above him, limiting his power, stood Necessity, rooted in the very foundations of the cosmos, to whose decrees even the Godhead must acquiesce.<sup>1</sup>

It was only at a relatively recent date in the long history of mankind that the deities men worshipped acquired an elevated moral character. Very often the highest gods were far from being exemplars of righteous, or even decent, conduct. Their outstanding

<sup>1</sup> For an illuminating discussion of Rita and Fate, see Henry Osborn Taylor, *Ancient Ideals* (Macmillan, N. Y., 2nd. ed., 1913). The scattered references are indexed.

attribute was power; and like powerful men, they indulged their appetites and passions without being called to account. On the whole they were greedy, lustful, vengeful, capricious, and wholly undisciplined. An early protester against these crude, anthropomorphic notions of the gods was Xenophanes of Colophon, who in the sixth century before the Christian era conceived of a single eternal deity, all eye, all ear, and all thought. Little by little, as men grew in moral sensitivity, they formed nobler concepts of their gods and ascribed to them ethical functions. The Egyptian Osiris became judge of the dead, before whom departed souls stood to undergo a rigorous scrutiny, before they were dispatched to those rewards or punishments which their conduct while on earth had earned for them. Zeus, the Olympian philanderer of the early Greek bards, was transformed by the philosophers and dramatists of a later age into a heavenly ruler, supremely righteous and good, a noble and inspiring being as we glimpse him in the pages of Plutarch or Epictetus. Unfortunately from the point of view of religion if not of art, the early Greek myths were too vivid and alluring, the plastic representations of their gods too lovely and life-like, for men ever to forget the pristine character of the Olympians and raise the cult of Zeus into a true ethical monotheism. This momentous development in religion was reserved for the Hebrew prophets, who carried out their theological reforms unhampered by an artistic tradition which bound men's thoughts to a more romantic, if less disciplined, past. It is chiefly to them that the Western world owes the concept of a deity who above all insists upon the rectitude and purity of his worshippers. Meanwhile the Indians, following their own



peculiar genius, developed quite different notions of the moral governance of the world.

Standing aloof from the current of popular religious thought, yet often profoundly modifying it in the end, philosophers were free to develop their own peculiar concepts of deity, which in some instances were shaped to fit the requirements of their particular system of thought. Such was the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, who never acted because he was perfect and needed nothing, whose very thoughts were confined to the eternal laws of thinking and never strayed to transient mundane events, yet who kept the heaven in motion through the power of attraction alone. So, too, was the One or the Good of Plotinus, the supreme object of desire, but never a meddler in the world's affairs. The *Ens Perfectissimum*, the Most Perfect Being of the mediaeval Schoolmen, whose essence involved existence, met a formal requirement of thought, apart from any cosmic or religious functions this being might also fill.

This perhaps too hasty survey is intended primarily to show that men's concepts of the gods may emphasize: (1) power or causal efficacy, (2) ethical qualities, or (3) formal perfection. Although these three aspects of deity may in fact be combined, even in the highest degree, in a single being, it is not evident that they must be; and we shall simplify our quest if we decide at the outset which is primary. What, above all, do we require of a being we can acknowledge as Divine? It is scarcely less difficult to know what we mean by "God," than to learn whether God exists.

## 2. *The Divine Must Above All Be Beneficent*

As we have already pointed out, we no longer believe

that powerful supernatural beings are necessary to activate natural processes; for these are kept in motion by inherent forces acting in an orderly, predictable manner, which is what we signify by the laws of nature. Accordingly we have lost, or are rapidly losing, the habit of appealing to a god to grant us special favors or to alter the course of nature for our benefit. Moreover, to invoke a deity as the origin of Being fails to satisfy the critical mind; for thereby we push the greatest of mysteries a step farther away from us without coming a whit closer to its solution. Modern man, who controls sources of energy never dreamt of by the most puissant monarchs of old, seems to be becoming a trifle weary of power in whatever form, and distrustful of it. We have become so familiar with power and its misuses that we no longer respond to it with the awe and reverence it once stirred up in the human breast. We might deem it prudent to attempt to conciliate a god who was almighty without being beneficent or just, but we could hardly love and revere such a deity.

Some of the notions of god as formal perfection, such as Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, delight the philosophic mind, which is slightly envious of the capacity to evoke such sublime concepts; but they are perhaps too coldly impersonal, too far aloof from our human toils and aspirations, to enlist our loyalty and affection. And when all the other functions once ascribed to the gods have become obsolete, we still yearn for something beyond ourselves to which we can give our wholehearted allegiance, which we can love and reverence, with which we can identify what is best in us.

We learned in the last chapter that whatever else a living thing may be, it is a process which fuses diverse materials into a coherent whole. In such a whole, each



part is harmoniously adjusted to every other part, and coöperates with it for the benefit of the association. Such a harmonious relationship, or a system of such relations, we call "good". We also apply this over-worked word to that which produces good; but it will lead to clarity in the present discussion if we agree to use the adjective "good" exclusively as a relative term, which designates the harmonious adjustment of one entity to another. That which is good in one context may be bad in another; as a man who is a good husband may be a bad neighbor; or a tool which is good for a carpenter may be useless to a plumber. That which produces good we shall call "beneficent", and that which merely wishes good "benevolent". Although we often hear of a good will, and Kant declared that nothing is good without qualification except a good will, we shall avoid confusion if we call such a will benevolent; but we may also designate it as beneficent if its intention lead to effective action. Thus we shall reserve the adjective "good" for an entity which can enter into reciprocal relations with other things; whereas "beneficent" or "benevolent" may apply to that which is beyond such relations.

To make these distinctions clearer, let us imagine a hermit who dwells in a cave in the forest, subsisting upon such edible fruits, seeds, and roots as the wilderness affords, in the manner of the *vanaprasthas* of ancient India. On the outskirts of the forest is a village of peasants which the hermit often visits. When he finds men quarreling, he intervenes and with persuasive speech settles their disputes, bringing peace and friendship to men who were enemies. If he sees parents treating their children stupidly or harshly, he gently points out better ways; and he knows how to make recalcitrant children more docile and obedient.

Whenever he comes upon farmers mistreating their animals, he chides them so mildly and tactfully that for very shame they desist from harsh usages; and he has the gift of making lazy oxen and horses pull their full weight at the plow or wagon, so that it is no longer necessary to apply the whip or the goad. With a mind clarified by long meditation, he understands the peasants' tasks better than they themselves; so that he can show them how to improve the yield of their fields, to mend broken implements, and to cure the ailments of man and beast. Yet he will never take food, alms, or reward of any kind from the villagers, whom he helps from the fullness of his love and spiritual strength, not because he needs anything from them. His benign influence makes the people good neighbors, good parents, good children, and good masters, and likewise makes their animals better; for he brings increased harmony into the reciprocal relations of neighbors, of parents and children, of masters and animals. But with respect to the people he is not good in the sense in which we have decided to use this adjective; for there is no reciprocity in his relations with them, since he gives much but receives nothing. Yet he is wholly benevolent and beneficent.

The process which makes a living being would be beneficent even if it stopped abruptly when the organism ceases to grow and led to no further developments; for by this process distinct parts are brought into harmonious reciprocal relations with each other. But actually harmonization in living things is not so narrowly restricted; it not only produces organisms, but impels them to enter into harmonious association with other organisms. In many animals, it goes no further than the formation of pairs or families; but in man and numerous other creatures, it leads to the



development of societies, which tend to grow in amplitude and coherence. This same movement of harmonization, governing the mind no less than the body, impels it to seek coherence in its thoughts; and likewise impressing its character upon the will, it causes it to become benevolent. A benevolent will is one which desires to produce in the external world, among men and animals and things, relations of the same sort as prevail between the parts and organs of a healthy body, between the ideas in a clear and coherent mind. The same constitutive process which makes of each of us not only an organism but likewise a social, truth-loving, moral, and benevolent being, further impels us to seek beyond ourselves that which is of the same nature as itself, so that it may identify itself with it. The quest of the Divine is accordingly the quest of the beneficent. Whatever else the Divine may be, it must be beneficent; for it is the yearning of the beneficence which pervades us toward a wider beneficence that creates our demand. For us, then, the ethical aspect of the Divine is paramount.<sup>1</sup>

To find a man who is wholly benevolent and, within his limited human capacity, beneficent is one of the most momentous discoveries we can make. Even to behold such a man through the mists of history is gratifying to us, while to meet him face to face is one of life's rarest privileges. The world becomes more

<sup>1</sup> At this point I find myself in an embarrassing predicament. I hesitate to refer to the Divine as "he"; for this pronoun implies an animal of the male sex, and moreover inevitably suggests an anthropomorphic concept of deity. On the other hand, "it" implies an object among objects, which the Divine certainly is not. But precisely because "it" is usable in a wider range of contexts than "he" and is accordingly less definite in its connotations, I prefer to employ this pronoun to avoid the tiresome reiteration of the word "Divine". Our language reveals here a definite deficiency, which we hope the future will remedy.

kindly and friendly; we feel less alone; we are heartened to face our daily tasks and encouraged to make generous resolutions. This is precisely the way the Divine affects us, but in far higher degree. The Divine must certainly be more than the best of men; and the question is: How much more? It must be at every point that we can reach, so that it may be constantly with us wherever we may be; preferably, it should pervade the whole Universe. And it must be enduring, so that it may influence the course of cosmic evolution, and through knowledge of its character we can explain the present and predict the future. Likewise, it must be effective, able to accomplish things in the world, which is what we mean by power. If mere benevolence, without a corresponding beneficence, were sufficient to constitute divinity, we might ourselves be divine.

### 3. *Extravagant Notions of Deity and their Harmfulness*

Yet it is easy to exaggerate our demand for these several qualities in the Divine, and this has too often been done by theologians. Although the Divine must pervade wide regions of the Universe if not the whole, infinity is foreign to our notion of it. To the Greeks, whose clear thought preferred the definite and the limited to the vaguely indefinite, infinity seemed to detract from rather than to enhance the world or god, as we see in the systems of Plato and Aristotle. Even today we are not sure that the Universe is infinite; the theory of relativity points to a contrary conclusion. We cannot conceive infinity; our bravest efforts to visualize it die away before its appalling vastitude; and the word becomes a mere cloak for our ignorance.



phenomenal Similarly, the Divine need not partake of eternity, which is to finite time what infinity is to finite space. We cannot be sure that the Universe has existed without beginning or that it will persist without end; and the Divine need not be more enduring than the world as a whole.

Even less can we insist that the Divine be omnipotent, which is an ambiguous, almost a foolish, word. Does it mean that God can accomplish everything that he can conceive? What do we know about God's imagination, and what right have we to assume that his ability to conceive is limited by his power to act? Certainly our own conceptual power is not held in thrall by our capacity to realize our conceptions; dare we attribute to God so severe a limitation? Does God's omnipotence mean, on the contrary, that he can accomplish everything that men can conceive? But many of our conceptions are self-contradictory, so that they contain within themselves factors which cancel their very possibility, and others are wicked. Even when not logically contradictory, they may be incompatible with the actual structure of the Universe. Or does to say that God is omnipotent mean merely that he has caused everything that has happened in the world? In this case, the meaning of omnipotence is clear enough; but now we simply equate the power of God with that of nature; and moreover we make God directly responsible for all the ugliness and strife in the world no less than for its goodness and beauty.

Although the notion of omniscience is logically clearer than that of omnipotence, we have as little reason to ascribe this attribute to the Divine. Far from being an essential constituent of the idea of the Divine, it is wholly foreign to it. The formally perfect deities conceived by Aristotle and Plotinus

were in no sense omniscient; on the contrary, they knew nothing of the phenomenal world; because to think about the contingent and the transient, to say nothing of things ugly and evil, would have detracted from their perfection. I am not sure that the Divine knows at all, in the same way that men do. Our conceptual knowledge is always external to its object, rarely revealing its intimate nature to us. Mostly we learn to do things through trial and error; for our understanding does not lay bare to us that internal constitution of objects which would permit us to see at once how we must treat them in order to produce some desired result. Or if we can foresee how we must act in a given situation to accomplish a certain result, it is because the situation is complex, and its several elements are already familiar to us from past experience. To carry on its beneficent activity, it seems necessary that the Divine be related to the world in a manner far more direct and intimate than human ideas are related to their objects. Nor can we afford to overlook the possibility, even the probability, that there are many more modes of being than we are familiar with—modes we cannot even imagine, because experience has provided nothing to guide our imagination. The Divine may apprehend the world in a manner which is not that of human conceptual knowledge, but far more direct and adequate.

The notion that God is an infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, supremely perfect being, merciful and just, bears the aspect of a deliberate invention, spun from the busy minds of men with little respect for the realities of existence. Some of these attributes are among the "metaphysical compliments" which, as Whitehead remarked, philosophers have the habit of paying to deity. The ancients made no such extrava-



gant claims for their gods. Zeus, it will be recalled, was far from omnipotent, for his freedom of action was limited by inexorable Destiny; while the Vedic gods submitted to the unshakable necessity which pervaded the Universe in the form of Rita. Plato's Demiurge, who fashioned the world in the *Timaeus*, was supremely benevolent but by no means omnipotent; so that he was obliged to persuade Necessity to cooperate with him in his creative endeavor; and residual defects in the cosmos were due to the original irrational element which remained obdurate to reason. The ancient philosophers generally saw in matter a refractory element not wholly amenable to divine guidance. In early modern times, Spinoza, for whom God was the single ground of all that exists, likewise recognized a dominant necessity, and declared that God could not have made the world in any respect other than it is.<sup>1</sup> Other courageous thinkers, like Zarathustra, contemplating the mixture of good and evil in the cosmic fabric, have felt able to explain the facts only on the assumption that the beneficent creative power is limited by another of almost equal might but exactly contrary moral character. This Iranian dualism has been carried over into Western theology in the form of the Devil, who seems an anomaly in a world ruled by a being at once omnipotent and supremely good.

Men love to contemplate any object which stands far above the range of common experience, and to exaggerate any attribute which powerfully affects their fancy. In the repetition of legends and fairy tales, giants become ever more gigantic, pygmies ever more diminutive, magicians more powerful, kings more

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, Pt. I, especially Prop. XXXIII and scholia.

magnificent and wealthy, heroes more heroic, until the hearer's imagination is stretched to its limit. The notion of God has undergone an exactly similar evolution, largely in the mediaeval schools. Because God is the highest being that men can conceive, the Schoolmen felt justified in expanding the notion to the uttermost bounds of their conceptual powers. As though there were necessarily an exact correspondence between what men can imagine and what actually exists! Even a thinker so original and acute as Descartes fell into this fallacy, when he argued from the fact that he could conceive a being far more perfect than himself that such a being necessarily is.

But this uncritical, uncontrolled magnification of the concept of God has had certain lamentable results. The notion of an omnipotent deity had as its correlate the concept of a representative on earth invested with unlimited spiritual and even temporal authority, and gave rise to a savage religious intolerance never witnessed among people who made more modest claims for their gods. Moreover, the attempt to reconcile the supposed attributes of God with the actual character of the world he created and governs led to amazing feats of intellectual and even moral jugglery. If supremely merciful, God would pardon all the sins of men; if perfectly just, he would punish each of them according to his merits. Faced with this dilemma (so St. Augustine held) God showed his justice by punishing some men with the torments of hell, his mercy by admitting others to the delights of heaven, notwithstanding that, since all mortals are sinners, they did not deserve this beatitude!

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is good, how could evil enter the world? The stock explanation is the free will of man, his ability to choose between good and evil uncoerced by physical or divine necessity, which, if it be a fact, must have its origin in a self-limitation of the omnipotence of God. Might not men have exercised this precious freedom by choosing between two goods, perhaps differing in quality as well as degree, without being exposed to positive evil? A more serious objection to this view of the origin of evil is the fact that ills of the same sorts as afflict ourselves are found throughout the animal kingdom, and even among plants; for in every order, living things oppose, thwart, maim, and destroy each other. Hence, in view of the relatively recent origin of mankind, such evils must have been rife in the world long before the advent of men endowed with free will. Yet it is commonly held that non-human animals are not gifted with free choice. The difficulty of reconciling the observed character of the world with the supposed character of its ruler has led many a thoughtful man to deny that the ruler exists; for the only alternative offered to him was that between a being who combined all the most grandiloquent attributes that men could apply to it and the total rejection of a divine being. It is time that we abandon this all-or-none attitude and undertake a fresh appraisal of the situation. Perhaps if we demand less, we shall gain more.

#### 4. *The Divine Need Not Be a Person*

Finally, we must decide whether personality is an essential constituent of the concept of the Divine. Must we refuse to recognize a divine being if we cannot discover a divine person? One of the distinguishing features of a person is that he surveys the world

from a particular center with a particular bias. His experience is characterized by a certain unity of place and time; for a person there is always a Here and a Now. The consciousness of a person is that of a subject who views all the remainder of the world as an object external to himself; and personality further enjoys the privilege of expressing itself by acting upon some of the external objects. It is sometimes alleged that a person differs from an inanimate thing in that the former contains a component that is transcendent, or inaccessible to the cognition of all similar persons. But this is no true diacritic, for no least thing is wholly revealed to us. The being of men and animals, rocks and dewdrops, extends into a transcendent realm whither our perception cannot follow it; and things have a transcendent component even if they lack consciousness.

We cannot constitute a universal person merely by rolling into one a vast number of little persons like ourselves. All their particular points of view, all their limited perspectives, would tend to cancel each other; as the colored beams into which a ray of sunlight can be decomposed neutralize each other and produce colorless light when recombined. It is impossible for us to imagine how a being which pervades the whole Universe, or even vast segments thereof, could preserve that peculiar limitation of outlook which we associate with personality. What meaning conceivable by us could Here and Now have for such a being? If we assume a unity of consciousness in this being, it is further necessary to suppose a means of communication between all the far-flung regions which it pervades. Nothing that we know travels more swiftly than light, which is millions of times more rapid than our own nervous impulses; yet the Universe is so vast



that light requires thousands of millions of years to traverse it; so that the Now of a cosmic being with the sort of personal unity that we are familiar with would comprise a span far in excess of the whole of human history! If we contract this being to a point without magnitude, in the manner of Aristotle and Dante, it would seem to be far out of touch with the more distant portions of the Universe. Moreover, the externality of a person to the objects upon which he acts would seem to preclude that intimate union between the Divine and the world implied in the fertile doctrine of immanence. These are only a few of the difficulties that arise in attempting to apply the concept of personality to the Divine.

We frequently hear men deplore their spiritual isolation from other persons, even those most closely allied to themselves by ties of blood or affection. How difficult it is for us to understand each other's aspirations, to relieve each other of our spiritual burdens! At times we seem to be separated by interplanetary distances from those who surround us. These are the inevitable limitations of personality, the price we pay for being an integrated individual able to view the world from a particular center, which seems to be the only possible manner of viewing it. Yet, paradoxically, these same men who so acutely feel their isolation from other persons frequently find consolation in viewing God as a person, and a whole cult of Personalism has arisen in recent times. Rather than undertake the quest of the Divine with the prejudice that the object of our search must be a person with all the limitations this implies, we should on the contrary hope that we shall find something with which we may enjoy far more intimate union.

To sum up this survey of the criteria of the Divine, the inner demand which makes us seek the Divine cannot be satisfied unless it is above all beneficent. The ethical aspect of the Divine is for us supreme; and although it must possess causal efficacy, without which beneficence is reduced to helpless benevolence, power is subordinate to the use that is made of it. The Divine must be widely diffused through the world and enduring, but it need be neither infinite nor eternal, which are terms that we can scarcely comprehend. We do not demand that the Divine possess omnipotence, which upon analysis proves to be an ambiguous and even a foolish notion. Far from insisting that the Divine be omniscient, we are not even sure that it knows at all, in a manner corresponding to human knowledge. In order to carry on its beneficent work, it would seem to require some relationship with the world far more intimate than that of cognition, and this may be of a sort so foreign to our experience that we cannot even imagine it. The Divine need not be a person; and on the whole we shall be better satisfied if it turns out that it is not; for then we may enjoy a far more intimate union with it.



## CHAPTER V

## THE CREATIVE PROCESS

1. *Is Quantitative Creation a Completed Act or a Continuing Process?*

Nothing so fills the human mind with wonder, awe, and a sense of mystery as creation. Even in its more familiar forms, which we daily see repeated before our eyes, it so far transcends our power of comprehension that our puny intellect stands humbled and abashed, acknowledging its inability to explain what we behold. Although the development of a baby in the womb, of a chick in the egg, has been many times described in the most meticulous detail, and the underlying processes analyzed with all the skill of the chemist, the physicist and the geneticist, the formative principle still eludes our prying minds, and we recognize that we stand face to face with an inscrutable mystery. Even the creative activity of the mind itself shares the inexplicable character of all true creation. Poets and musicians have more than once confessed their inability to follow the steps by which a lyric or a symphony takes shape in their heads. Some of their finest productions seem to well up unbidden, in a manner wholly beyond comprehension, from the unfathomed depths of the spirit; and their subsequent, more deliberate efforts are directed largely to refining and polishing that which has come to them like a divine gift. We sit before a sheet of blank paper, on which we intend to set down some thoughts which

*Change or omit this section. It is not necessary  
to postulate indeterminacy*

have been struggling for expression in our mind but have not yet clothed themselves in words; and how we ever succeed in completing the first paragraph remains a wonder and a mystery to us.

The wonder which envelops all creation is a thousand times intensified when from some familiar contemporary instance we turn our attention to that of the Universe itself. Not only are the dimensions of the problem immeasurably expanded, but a wholly new enigma now confronts us. In the more familiar examples of creation, as of an animal, a building, or a work of art, we can take the materials as given and are called upon to explain only how they acquire their distinctive form. In the case of the Universe, the origin of the materials itself is a mystery, and the greatest of mysteries. Here two distinct problems confront us: How have the materials of which the world is composed arisen; and how have they assumed the forms in which we know them? Since ancient times, thinkers have found it convenient to analyze the problem of Being into these two distinct aspects, matter and form. Yet we are familiar with no matter which does not present some form, however irregular; nor are we aware of actual forms not embodied in matter, although we may conceive immaterial forms. Even if this disjunction of matter and form is somewhat arbitrary, making the separation between the two sharper than it is in nature, it is a necessity of human thought; and without it we can hardly begin to tackle our problem. For convenience we might call the origination of the stuffs of the world, whether one or several, "quantitative creation", while we designate as "qualitative creation" the process that gives form to them. The first is concerned with the origin of novelties, the second with the increase of harmony.



Our conceptual powers have grown out of our concrete experiences, whether of the external world or of our affections and modes of thought. Because these experiences, especially those concerned with the outer world, are confined to the transformation of matter and energy already present, this is the only sort of process we can distinctly conceive; and the primary origin of anything, its emergence from a substratum which appears to us to be non-existent because it fails to provide sensuous impressions, utterly confounds our thought. Thinkers have always been inclined to push the ultimately incomprehensible into regions infinitely remote, in the hope that at such vast distances of time and space it would no longer rise up to trouble them. This is what they do when they assert that the Universe is eternal, or that it was at some definite date in the past conjured out of nothingness, by a divine being whose powers men can hardly hope to understand.

These solutions of the problem are undeniably convenient, but they have one inevitable consequence which may be unacceptable even to those who favor one of them. They give us a wholly determinate world, in which every last event was predetermined in the infinitely remote past or, if one prefers the theological view, during the brief period of creation. In such a world novelty, spontaneity, free choice are radically impossible; all that we behold is transformation according to unvarying laws; all that at present is, was implicit in the world ages ago. And we must recognize this as true because any instance of indeterminacy, however slight, any human choice not strictly compelled by physical law, bears the aspect of primary creation. Any occurrence which is not an instance of transformation in a purely determinate manner in-

volves something which surges up, if not from the void, at least from the unfathomable depth of a transcendent realm. The least example of indeterminacy or true spontaneity is just as inconceivable by us as the creation of a world out of nothing. It is, in fact, creation in miniature, a repetition, on an infinitesimal scale, of an event such as might have brought a world into existence.

To Parmenides, for whom timeless Being was the only reality and all change an illusion, as to the materialistic science of the nineteenth century, led by intellectual pride to draw vast and unwarranted conclusions from its success in explaining some of the simpler phenomena of nature, creation was an act completed long ago. But when we consider all the consequences of this assumption, we shall not lightly dismiss the opposite alternative, that quantitative creation is a continuing process, going forward here and now. As to conceivability, neither of these two views has the least advantage over the other; for we are just as little able to conceive the existence of the world through all past time as its emerging from nothing, just as little able to conceive the smallest instance of indeterminacy or true spontaneity as the creation of a world.

The laws of the conservation of matter and energy are at least approximately true and have been of great service in guiding scientific investigation. But the experimentation upon which they rest has not been so extensive and precise as to rule out the possibility that minute quantities of matter or energy were arising *de novo* in the systems under observation, or even being annihilated within them. The quantitative constancy of the constituents of the world is a postulate of great practical convenience, like that of the quali-



tative constancy of biological species. Unless we assume that the offspring will resemble the parents, we have nothing to guide us in breeding animals and plants. Unless we assume that the quantity of matter and energy in a closed system remains constant, we shall find difficulty in predicting what will occur in this system. Yet we know that in living things the progeny rarely quite resemble the parents, and in the course of millenia the cumulative effects of these slight divergences are very great. Similarly, vast consequences might in the course of ages result from deviations from the laws of conservation too slight to be detected in the laboratory. Or quantitative creation might occur under forms inaccessible to physical science. This question cannot be finally decided in the present state of our knowledge; but we shall do well to keep an open mind, recognizing that continuing creation is just as conceivable and just as possible as creation as a completed act, that it opens out vast perspectives of the future, and that it may help to explain certain perplexing problems which seem insoluble on the traditional view, including the origin of minds and the presence of evil.

## 2. *The Evolution of the Physical World*

Although the origin of the materials of the Universe remains an inscrutable mystery, we can be fairly certain that when they first arose they were not combined into complex or elaborate forms. On this point the discoveries of modern science and ancient notions of chaos are in substantial agreement. We conceive of matter as existing in minute particles, far too small to be viewed through the most powerful microscope. But the complex atoms of modern physics resemble

the solid, indestructible atoms of Democritus and Leucippus only in name; and the ultimate particles of which the modern atom is composed dissolve under theoretical analysis into something which hardly conforms to our naïve concept of matter. Still, we can hardly think of matter save under the aspect of discrete parts of some sort; and from such particles our construction of the familiar world must begin.

A multitude of separate particles, each wholly external to every other, could never form a world. Democritus and the Epicureans made heroic attempts to explain the evolution of complex forms by the chance contacts of particles which differed only in size and shape, but their brilliant guesses are no longer convincing. In the absence of forces to draw and bind the particles together, they could never constitute a Universe; but each would remain an independent, self-contained entity, a sort of Universe in miniature. Nor will it suffice to suppose that these forces originate wholly within the particles, whence they reach out to neighboring particles through an intervening void. Such action at a distance is inconceivable. Rather we must recognize that the particles are embedded in a medium which is "empty" only by contrast to them, which is more than a mere container but rather a matrix possessing definite properties of its own. We cannot conceive how two electrified particles can attract each other, or how the sun and the earth can exert a reciprocal pull through space, without the active participation of the intervening region, no matter how vacant it may appear to us. Hence we are driven to recognize an energy or an activity of some sort which pervades the whole of space, even those regions devoid of ponderable matter, blending all it contains



into the single, unified system of interacting parts that we call the Universe.

This activity is creative, slowly and steadily building up the materials of the world into forms of increasing coherence, complexity, and diversity, in the manner so carefully analyzed by Herbert Spencer. We know that the aggregation of matter takes place under the influence of forces that we call gravitation, electricity, magnetism, and more vaguely, chemical affinity. The diversity of these forces suggests that they are not the primary forms of the creative energy; and indeed the more we learn about them, the more it appears that they are so many distinct manifestations of a single energy; so that they are not the creative energy itself, but its ministers or tools. Gravitation draws the diffuse materials together into huge masses, like the sun and other stars. Somehow, by means still not wholly understood, (for astrophysicists have discovered certain difficulties in the brilliant nebular hypothesis of Kant and Laplace,) some of these major celestial bodies came to be surrounded by planets; and these in turn may be accompanied by satellites of the second order, like our moon and the more numerous attendants of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars. Such a solar system, spread out over many millions of miles of space and comprising a multitude of bodies differing greatly in size, acts in many respects as a single unit; and this unity would be impossible unless the space in which the bodies are embedded had definite properties and formed an integral part of the system.

While operating on a scale almost inconceivably vast the creative energy forms galaxies, suns, and planets, operating on a scale almost inconceivably small it gives rise to all the varieties of matter. The first step in this process appears to be the aggregation

of the ultimate particles into those complex systems, resembling in some respects miniature solar systems, which we now call atoms. Where very diffuse and cold, as in interstellar space, or where very hot, as in the sun and stars, matter is unable to evolve into its more complex forms. It is probable that in the interior of the hotter and denser stars even complete atoms cannot persist, but the nuclei remain for the most part without attendant electrons. But in more favorable conditions, such as in the cooling planets, the elementary forms of matter are drawn by the forces which pervade and surround them into a bewildering variety of compounds, some gaseous, some liquid, some solid, exhibiting a vast diversity of crystalline forms, colors, odors, and tastes.

### 3. *The Evolution of Life*

The highest evolution of matter takes place on the surfaces of some of the cooling planets, where solids, liquids, and gases are free to meet and commingle and are activated by radiant energy streaming down from the sun. Here alone, so far as we know, occur organic compounds, which even from the purely chemical point of view exhibit a complexity far exceeding anything known in inorganic matter. These elaborate molecules are in the natural state always associated with living things, whose origin is only less baffling to the human mind than that of the Universe itself. So far as we know with certainty, life can originate only from pre-existing life; so that here, as when we try to explain the genesis of matter, we are faced with the alternatives of infinite regress or discontinuity—for if we say that life arose from lifeless materials, we affirm an occurrence contrary to all our experience.



We are sure that living things are composed largely of matter, and this is all that physical science can detect in them. But we are certain that at least some living beings are sentient, and we can neither demonstrate nor imagine how matter produces consciousness. Hence it would be dogmatic to deny that in the origination of life something is added to matter. For our immediate purpose, the important point is that living beings as we know them cannot arise until inorganic matter itself has undergone a long evolution and attained great complexity and diversity.

Life was destined to bring forth on this planet an endless variety of forms, including some of great beauty; and the least of them is in many ways more complex than the most elaborate entity that the inorganic world can exhibit. Nearly everyone who has given careful, unprejudiced attention to the subject is now convinced that the higher forms, like flowering plants, insects, fishes, birds, and mammals, are derived from the simpler, more primitive forms by an aeonian process of gradual change. Although the examination of long series of fossils embedded in the stratified, sedimentary rocks, no less than observation of the far smaller changes that occur in contemporary races of animals and plants, leaves little room to doubt the fact of organic evolution, the underlying causes are not easily discovered. Biologists have argued endlessly over the possible modes of evolution, and this disagreement as to its method has frequently led the public to conclude that they disagree as to the fact itself. On the contrary, it is their conviction that organic evolution is a fact which has led them to devote so much time and energy to discovering the underlying factors.

The most widely accepted modern view traces the

heritable changes in animals and plants to random alterations in the germ plasm. When we examine under a powerful microscope a properly stained preparation of an actively dividing cell, its nucleus is found to contain a definite number of dark, usually elongate bodies, called chromosomes because they stain so deeply. There is now a good deal of evidence to prove that these are the bearers of heredity. Each one controls the development of a large number of characters or traits of the organism, hence is held to contain a number of parts called genes, whose influence is more restricted; so that one is associated with a single hereditary character, or at most a few of them. These genes, long inferred rather than actually seen, are now identified with the numerous transverse bands visible under the most powerful microscopes in the chromosomes of certain giant nuclei, as those in the salivary glands of flies. Abrupt changes in the characters of organisms, known as mutations, are ascribed to sudden alterations in the molecular structure of the corresponding genes. These mutations are usually slight but sometimes pronounced; and they may affect either the structure, the physiological processes, or the behavior of the animal or plant in which they occur. One mutation will affect the rate of growth or the size of the organism as a whole; another will cause a change in the shape of an organ; a third will affect the color of a certain region or of the whole body; another will alter the occurrence of such unimportant but genetically revealing features as hairs and bristles; still others will change the innate behavior of an animal. Although the kinds of alterations in the structure of the genes which cause these evident changes may apparently take place in any cell of the body, only those occurring in the tissues which give rise to the germ



cells, or in these cells themselves, can cause heritable mutations.

Mutations spring from random, uncontrolled changes in the structure of the genes, often no doubt caused by the impact of radiation of high frequency upon complex molecules. They do not arise in response to some particular need of the race in which they occur, and do not invariably increase its adaption to its environment. On the contrary, these wholly undirected variations are more often useless or even injurious than favorable; as is to be expected when a foreign element intrudes into a context wherein the nicest balance must be preserved. Useful or constructive changes, such as the building up of a new organ or the evolution of a superior mode of life, usually require a great number of mutations occurring in the course of many generations. Since the majority of the random mutations will lead away from rather than toward any determinate end, it is obvious that little will be accomplished without some selective agent, which weeds out the deleterious ones and preserves the fortunate ones. Although various modes of selection have been at work, at least in animals, the most important of them is natural selection, which refers to the selective action of all those forces, living and lifeless, which influence the survival of the race without exercising conscious or deliberate choice. In almost every species of animals or plants, far more individuals are produced than can possibly find the space and materials they need in order to grow to maturity and reproduce their kind. Obviously, those whose fortunate mutations equip them better to face the struggle for existence will be more likely to survive than their less adequately equipped neighbors. In the hundreds of millions of years that life has been present on our

planet, this constant selection of innumerable slight variations, acting now in one direction and now in another, has brought about the vast diversity of living things.

#### 4. *The Unity of All Life*

A mutation, then, is a crude novelty which may happen to harmonize with the pattern into which it intrudes, but more often will tend to disrupt it. A living thing, on the contrary, is a coherent whole composed of many diverse parts coöperating in closest harmony. Obviously such a unified whole is something more than the product of many random changes, more even than a selection of the more favorable of these changes. Mutations would wholly disrupt its unity unless some constructive energy were at work within it. We learned in Chapter III that the outstanding characteristic of life is its capacity to bind heterogeneous elements into a coherent whole, and we gave the name harmonization to the process which effects this synthesis. At the very outset of the development of each individual, when it is a newly fertilized egg comprising two sets of chromosomes which are derived from two parents and perhaps bear divergent hereditary tendencies, harmonization fuses them into the most coherent whole they can possibly yield. Often the hereditary traits are too incompatible to form a functional unity, and the egg rests without dividing. Or it may develop up to a certain point, when the opposing tendencies clash too strongly and the embryo dies. Or the animal may be born, the plant may germinate, with certain deformities which bring about its premature death, or which it may bear throughout a long life. But such is the inherent nature



of each living thing that it effects the most harmonious synthesis which the materials available to it will allow. Every organism strives with all its power to become a coherent whole, and succeeds if its hereditary endowments are not too incompatible, its environment not too stingy or adverse.

Wherever it occurs, in every animal or plant, harmonization is the same. Hence all life is essentially one, unified by the process which brought it into being. Moreover, there is historic continuity between all parts of this process, which began aeons ago in the first living things that appeared on this planet and has marched forward without interruption since that remote epoch, spreading out from one or relatively few primordial centers in the most diverse directions, but preserving its essential nature unaltered. Hence the resemblances of living things, even the most diverse, far outweigh their differences. The latter are in a sense accidental, being no more than the cumulative effects of countless random charges, whose preservation in each line of descent was determined by the particular external conditions to which it happened to be exposed at each stage in its long history. But the likeness of all living things is intrinsic and fundamental, resulting from the sameness of the process which formed them all. Life is everywhere one, although it assumes innumerable forms.

##### 5. *The Continuity between the Inorganic World and Life*

Moreover, there is continuity between the process which creates living things and that which prepared a world for their reception. The constructive work of harmonization began long before life arose, joining

the ultimate particles to form atoms and uniting these in turn into molecules of increasing complexity, drawing the diffuse materials of the Universe together into great rounded masses which became suns and planets, on the latter separating and grading the diverse constituents to produce a solid crust, liquid seas, and an enveloping atmosphere. Not only was it necessary for harmonization to prepare a home for our earliest ancestors in the realm of life; we could neither know nor conceive a world on which this process had not impressed its stamp; for everything our senses are capable of perceiving has structure and form, arising from the ordered aggregation of innumerable smaller parts; the very vibrations which bring us knowledge of them are possible only in a medium which has order and structure. Harmonization did not suddenly intrude into a world already partly formed; any coherent system that could be called a world presupposes it. If both it and the materials of the world are not eternal, then we must suppose that as matter arose harmonization was active in imposing some sort of order upon the nascent particles; for no matter known or knowable by us lacks this order. Beyond the phenomenal world revealed to our senses lies only the Primal Substance, beyond all distinctions, unknowable and inconceivable, yet the transcendent ground of all we know and can conceive.

Although life represents a continuation of the same process which created the heavenly bodies and all the varieties of inorganic matter and set up beneficent circulatory systems of vast extent on our planet, we must recognize a distinction in this process as it is revealed to us in lifeless and living entities. In living things harmonization has been intensified to a degree unknown in the non-living world. In every organism,



a greater diversity of materials has been fused together, they are more closely linked and dependent on each other, than in any lifeless system of the same order of magnitude. We do not know how this intensification of harmonization was brought about. If we could explain this enigma, we might understand the origin of life.

Harmonization is the driving force in evolution, and without this constructive process there could be no evolution. Yet harmonization is not the same as evolution, and we shall go far astray if we confuse the two. The course of evolution has been immensely complicated, especially in the realm of life, by the random intrusions into organic patterns which the geneticist calls mutations, and the clash of organism with organism in a crowded world. The resulting strife tends to conceal from us the essential character of harmonization. Only if the creative process could somehow have avoided these tragic complications would evolution be the pure expression of harmonization.

#### *6. Is Harmonization an Expression of the Divine?*

We have now swung around the full circle and returned to our starting point. We decided that the quest of the Divine should properly begin with an understanding of the nature of the seeker. We who seek the Divine are the result of harmonization, which combines heterogeneous elements into a coherent system. Our whole character bears the stamp of this process, which does not stop abruptly when it has fashioned our bodies or even our minds, but carried forward by its own momentum, leads us to reach out beyond ourselves toward a wider harmony, and especially toward that in the external world with which

we can identify our inmost self without reservation.

Our further investigation demonstrated that harmonization is not peculiar to ourselves. On the contrary, it had a vast labor to perform in the inorganic world before life could arise; and life itself had to undergo a long, slow development, always involving the same process, before creatures as complex as ourselves emerged. Far from being confined to ourselves, harmonization, the process which makes us what we are, pervades the whole lifeless Universe, including those regions which seem most empty to us, as well as every living creature. It is everywhere the same process, differing only in intensity as between lifeless matter and living things.

Processes in general are known to us only superficially as sequences of changes in the phenomenal world, and are themselves neither entities nor forces. Yet each reveals the presence of some being or energy which sets it in motion, although this causal agent may itself remain obscure to us. Thus the falling of a stone is a process which we ascribe to gravitation, a name which certainly denotes some actual component of the world, despite our ignorance of what it is and how it operates. Similarly, we are compelled to think of some energy or agent underlying harmonization, and known to us only through what it accomplishes in the world. It is clear from the foregoing survey that we are linked in the most intimate manner with a process that pervades the Universe and all that is in it. We are indeed a segment of that process, hence are joined by the closest bonds to its hidden source. But actual association does not necessarily determine spiritual allegiance. As we pass through life, we too often find to our sorrow and disgust that we are perforce included in groups and activities which in many



ways repel us. We did not choose the world, the society, nor the family into which we happened to be born; but we can give unrestricted spiritual allegiance only to that which meets certain standards prescribed by the spirit itself.

In the preceding chapter, we tried to discover what attributes would qualify a being to be considered Divine. We must now ask how the being or power which reveals itself through harmonization satisfies the requirements we there set up. In the first place, since the distribution of the cause must be compatible with its observed effects, we are certain that it is widely diffused and enduring, co-extensive and coeval with the Universe itself; for to be a Universe at all, and knowable by us, an order must infuse it; and for this order, from beginning to end, the source of harmonization is responsible. On the other hand, we have no ground for ascribing to the being which reveals itself to us through harmonization such attributes as omnipotence, omniscience, infinity, or eternity; but we decided that these are not constitutive of our concept of the Divine. The fundamental requirement for the Divine is a widespread and enduring beneficence; whatever other limitations it may possess, it must be wholly beneficent. All of order and goodness and beauty the Universe contains, all of the friendship, love, and benevolence of which we ourselves are capable, we owe to the author of harmonization. Hence if the world were free of discord and evil, we should not hesitate to recognize as the Divine the activity that created it. But we are all too familiar with pain and strife as components of the world; and unless we can understand how these might arise in a Universe whose dominant activity is wholly beneficent, we must refuse to accept harmonization as the revelation of the Divine.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

#### 1. *The Reality of Evil*

Our discussion has brought us face to face with a problem which in order of interest and importance holds second place among all those which men have pondered through the ages. Next to the question of how the world arose stands that of how it happens to contain evil; for evil seems to diminish the value of the whole; and it is questionable whether it would not be better to have no world than to have one in which suffering and ugliness abound. Stated bluntly in human terms, the question is: Why make a world that is less than perfect? Thus close on the heels of the great ontological problems, the nature and origin of Being, follows the great moral problem, the source of good and evil. The treatment in *Genesis*, in which the account of creation is immediately followed by an explanation of the origin of sin, shows a profound appreciation of the importance of the questions which contrasts sharply with the naïve simplicity of the solutions.

In addition to the many thinkers who have wrestled earnestly with this baffling question, there have been others who have denied its validity as a problem by asserting that evil is a delusion. Of those who treated the question in this fashion, the most famous are the Stoics, who held that pains suffered by individuals were necessary for the good of the Universe. In any



great organization, such as a business or an army, there fall upon individuals certain hardships and even injustices, which could hardly be avoided without impairing the efficiency of the whole. The Universe, in the Stoic view, was just such an organization, directed toward a beneficent end to which every part contributed, but far vaster and more efficient even than the Roman Empire. In explaining the incidence of sorrow and suffering, this theory seems to recognize rather than to deny the existence of evil. But the Stoics had a further doctrine, that the only thing which really mattered to a man was his own moral purpose as expressed in his willing, which alone was wholly under his control. The things which befell him without his willing them, whether good fortune and pleasures on the one hand, or on the other pain, sickness, loss of property, and death, were in themselves neither good nor evil; and it was only his mistaken opinion of them which made them appear so. But the wise man was not deluded as to the importance of these external accidents; in all circumstances he remained happy and serene, and for him evil simply did not exist.

A somewhat similar view has been held by Origen, Dionysius the Areopagite, and other Christian writers who asserted that evil lacks real existence, is "nohow, nowhere, and no thing." According to St. Dionysius, "God sees evil as good."<sup>1</sup> That evil is unreal or illusory likewise follows from all philosophies which view the phenomenal world as illusion or mere appearance. Thus F. H. Bradley taught that evil is lost in the Absolute, where all failures and partial ends are taken up in one great harmony. Just as error is partial or misplaced truth, the assignment to the wrong

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 107.

subject of an adjective in itself perfectly valid, so evil is good in the wrong context.<sup>2</sup>

But all these subtleties, Pagan and Christian, religious and philosophic, leave us unconvinced. We who have felt evil in our own persons, who are familiar with the long, sad chronicle of humanity and all the strife and carnage of the natural world, and who have moreover beheld such vast amounts of it in recent times, are sure that the word stands for something more than a misconception and an illusion. And this spontaneous impression that evil is no less real than good will withstand any test we apply to it. Both are founded in relations, so that to ascribe either to a being that is beyond all relations would be meaningless. When the relations between entities are harmonious, so that they support or aid each other, or at least one sustains the other, we recognize goodness; when these relations are inharmonious, resulting in discord or destruction, we say that evil is present. Thus objectively defined, good and evil might exist even if there were no sentient beings, endowed with will and purpose, able to suffer and enjoy. Yet in the absence of consciousness, it would seem to be indifferent which sort of relations prevailed in the world; for they could give rise to neither pleasure nor pain, happiness nor sorrow, of which they are respectively the causes. Nearly always it is from these subjective consequences, rather than from the direct recognition that relations are harmonious or discordant, that our judgments of good and evil spring. Even if we look no farther than these subjective states, unless we make the paradoxical assertion that although happiness is real suffering is illusory, we must grant equal status to their correlates, good and evil.

<sup>2</sup> *Appearance and Reality*, Chapter XVII.



If we argue with the Stoics that it is only our opinion which makes things appear evil, we must in all consistency admit that it is only opinion that makes them seem good; and if we often mistakenly declare that to be evil which is not evil, it is equally certain that we sometimes hold to be good that which deeper insight recognizes as pernicious. Even a false judgment is, as a mental fact, just as real as a true judgment; it is not as existing in themselves, but in their relation to something external to themselves, that true and false propositions differ. From any point of view, good and evil stand and fall together. If there is no evil in our actual world, there is likewise no good. If good is unreal, *a fortiori* degrees of good are illusory; whence it may be inferred that all things are of equal value, or more correctly, equally valueless; for the assertion that evil is illusory seems to undermine the validity of all valuations. And if we accept this conclusion, we cannot avoid drawing the further conclusion that moral effort is meaningless; and indeed all human endeavor of any sort, which is always directed to the attainment of some supposed good or the avoidance of some supposed evil, would seem to be futile if the distinction between good and evil is illusory. Far from leading us to optimism, the attempt to pin angel's wings on the Devil plunges us into more than Schopenhauerian pessimism.

It is evident, too, that evil is more than the privation of good, as St. Augustine and others have held. This view of evil is an offshoot of the ancient doctrine of opposites, so prominent in the philosophy of Aristotle, who taught that all process or change is directed from one of a pair of contraries to the other, or at least from an intermediate state to one of the contraries. When we view evil as the opposite of

good, which usually takes the form of some positive advantage, it seems to be the mere absence of the latter. Some forms of pain and suffering do in fact spring from simple privation, as hunger from the lack of food, cold from the lack of warmth, and loneliness from the absence of companions. But disease is often far more than the mere absence of health; a positive factor, in the form of foreign organisms which have invaded the body, is its cause. Enmity, too, is more than the privation of friendship; for our enemy is no less a person of flesh and blood than our friend, and his hatred is just as positive as the friend's love. Ignorance, which if not itself an evil often exposes us to it, is simply absence of knowledge; but false opinion, often far more disastrous in its consequences than recognized ignorance, is not merely the lack of ideas but the presence of wrong ideas, which, as contents of the mind, have precisely the same existential status as true ones. Far from being simple privation, evil is often caused by something positive, exactly as in the case of good.

Just as evil is in many instances more than the privation of a good, so the absence of a good is not necessarily an evil. Indeed, at the proper time and place, the absence of something in itself of greatest value may be a blessing. Light, agreeable activity, companionship, consciousness itself, are very great goods; yet their occasional or periodic absence, as in solitude, rest, darkness, and sleep, are most necessary to our well-being, and without them the greatest goods would lose their zest.

## 2. The Necessity of Evil

Other thinkers, admitting that evil is a fact, have



striven to justify it on the score of utility. For them, evil is still evil, but it leads to certain desirable results which could not otherwise be realized. This is implied even if not recognized in the first part of the Stoic view, that the unfortunate accidents which befall individuals are inevitable if the whole is to be preserved and to fulfill its purpose. But this solution fails to reach the root of the matter, for the question is precisely why the world is so ordered that it cannot operate without so many calamities. We need not take too seriously the Augustinian view that evil adds to the perfection of the Universe by increasing its admirable diversity and setting off the good by contrast. No one would earnestly contend that a mathematical treatise is improved by containing a few errors, an argument strengthened by the inclusion of fallacies, or a painting improved by false lines cleverly placed. It has also been argued that without evil we should not recognize its correlative, good. Doubtless but for evil we should not have formed the concept of good and given it a name; but this deficiency would hardly trouble us so long as we enjoyed the blessings which spring from goodness, which is harmony in all the relations that affect us. Moreover, if there were degrees of good, in the form of more or less perfect adjustments reflected in more or less perfect felicity, we might reach the concept of good without the experience of positive evil.

A more powerful argument for the necessity of evil is that without the possibility of sin and guilt man's moral nature, which expresses itself in the choice between good and evil, judged now not by immediate pleasure or pain but by the wider and more remote consequences of our deeds, could hardly have been developed. Although a sense of moral responsibility

is undeniably valuable, even indispensable, for beings like ourselves in a world such as this, we should doubtless be happier in a world where morality in the strict sense was superfluous, because men were organically good and evil was intrinsically impossible. If in that situation we could not share in the task of increasing the world's perfection, we might at least gratefully acknowledge the blessed order we found already prepared for us and in which we participated. And even here, if it were possible to choose between goods differing in degree, moral responsibility might be developed without the experience of positive evil. The fundamental question seems to be whether it is preferable to have perfection and happiness as a divine gift, or to strive to attain them by our own efforts.

Finally, there is the view that evil serves a definite purpose in the world, by permitting God to manifest some of his attributes which would otherwise remain latent. If there were no sinners who merit damnation, how could God reveal his mercy by pardoning them? This theological view is not so complimentary to deity as it was once held to be. Moreover, all of these attempts to reconcile us to evil, by pointing to certain advantages which follow from it, appear to me to suffer from the same weakness, even if we acknowledge the alleged advantages. The presence of some evil in the world might be necessary to call forth our notion of good, to develop our moral qualities, or even, if one insists, to permit God to reveal his mercy; but the quantity of evil which the world contains seems wholly disproportionate to the ends it serves. A far smaller amount should be sufficient for all these purposes. And until we can gaze bravely and steadfastly upon the world's vast evil, recognizing it to be what it is, any hopeful or optimistic world-



view that we may establish will be built upon shifting sands, ready to topple over at the first tremor of doubt.

### 3. *The Difficulties in Dualism*

The recognition of evil as genuine and on the whole superfluous sometimes gives rise to dualism, which frankly sacrifices God's omnipotence in order to save his perfect beneficence, thereby revealing a true understanding of the essentials of religion—unless indeed one agrees with Professor Radhakrishnan that if God is perfect religion is impossible, and if God is imperfect it is ineffective.<sup>1</sup> The most famous and thoroughgoing dualism is the Zoroastrian, of which the Christian doctrine of the Devil is a pale attenuation. Plutarch, in his essay on *Isis and Osiris*, preserved for us the Magian view, according to which the righteous god Ahura Mazda (Horomazes), born from purest light, contends for the mastery of the world with the evil Ahriman (Areimanios), sprung from gloom. For three thousand years, one of these gods rules over the other; then for the next three thousand years, they fight and destroy each other's domains. But finally Ahura Mazda will emerge triumphant; the earth will be everywhere flat and level; and the blessed men who dwell on it will have one life and one commonwealth, speak the same language, require no food, and cast no shadows.

Plutarch affirmed that the greatest number and the wisest men of antiquity recognized two rival gods, one the creator of good things and the other of worthless; or at least they acknowledged a god and a demon. The Egyptian account of the strife between the good

<sup>1</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (George Allen and Unwin, 1931), Vol. I, p. 97.

Osiris and the wicked Set, like the Germanic myth of Balder and Loki, and many a similar episode in the mythologies of early peoples, are attempts to portray dramatically the contest between good and evil. The Gnostic systems, which flourished in late classical times, saw in matter, if not positive evil, at least a refractory element which set a limit to God's creative power; while others viewed the actual world as the product of a corrupt and fallen divinity, by Marcion identified with the god of the Old Testament.

Every dualistic or pluralistic attempt to account for the evil in the world must strike a balance between two apparently antagonistic facts. Although from the moral point of view the world may contain two opposing principles, viewed scientifically it seems to form a single coherent whole, pervaded throughout by the same laws of nature. In the absence of this unity, this mutual interaction between all its parts, it would not properly be a Universe. It is difficult to understand how the unity which the world presents when viewed scientifically could have arisen, if from its prime foundations two radically opposite principles had been at work in its formation. The moral disunity of the world can, then, hardly be original, but must be superimposed upon its physical unity.

The hypothesis that the world contains an evil supernatural being, or even a principle of evil, leads us also into grave difficulties when we come to consider how such a being or principle could have arisen and acquired power to carry on its maleficent work. Just as mere benevolence is helpless without effective power, so is malevolence ineffectual without power. The ultimate units of the world, whatever they may be, yield singly very little energy. Ordinarily, to effect any change great enough to attract our attention, many



of these units must act in concert. Some integrative agent must first combine them into organized bodies, or at least into masses of such character that they reinforce each other rather than cancel each other's effects by random movements in opposite directions. But such constructive activity is beneficent activity, fundamentally the same as that which created ourselves and all the order and beauty that we know. It would be hardly possible to distinguish it from harmonization.

Thus a malevolent being, if in any sense created, could arise only by means of an integrative process of the same character as that which formed benevolent beings; or if an uncreated principle, it must employ an integrative process to create agents of sufficient power to carry on its nefarious work; or it must somehow seize upon agents already formed by such a process, which is always essentially a beneficent process. It is significant that in the Magian myth reported by Plutarch, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman began their work in precisely the same way, each creating six auxiliary gods; and even if the two bands came later to oppose each other, they were at least the products of similar constructive endeavors. However we view the problem, beneficence must be primary, maleficence secondary. Until there has been construction, not only will there be nothing to destroy, there cannot even be an agent wielding pernicious power. Since good must in the nature of things precede evil, no created being can become wicked without a reversal of the movement which formed it. We cannot admit the existence of a maleficent being or principle coeval and equal in status with the beneficent being or principle. At most we can recognize the possibility that some being originally good, in the sense that it was either capable of creation or at least the product of a beneficent cre-

ative process, later became evil. There can be no Ahriman who was from the beginning the exact contrary of Ahura Mazda; at most there may be a Lucifer, a fallen angel.

The same considerations which lead us to deny the possibility of a maleficent power as an original constituent of the Universe, lead us also to conclude that there can be only one primary beneficent principle. For suppose there were two such principles at work, bringing order into a world filled with vibrating particles without coherence and form. Each would begin its activity by building up coherent patterns from the diffuse primary materials. The two would so greatly resemble each other in their mode of operation that it might be difficult to distinguish them. And if after the creative process had gone forward for a period it gave rise to a single coherent system, such as our Universe proves to be, we should be forced to conclude that only a single formative principle had been at work.

#### *4. Two Methods by which a World Without Conflict Might Have Arisen*

Evil in the broadest sense includes all forms of pain, suffering, strife, frustration, destruction, falsehood, ugliness, and hatred. In all its varieties it is essentially a failure of harmony. We may distinguish between moral evil, which consists of wicked intentions, disruptive passions, and conflicting purposes, and physical evil, which includes all pain, mutilation, and destruction wrought by external agents of every kind, living and lifeless. Since we shall later (Chapter VIII) show that moral evil is the outgrowth of physical evil



rather than the reverse, we shall begin our inquiry into the origin of evil by considering the latter.

Let us begin by imagining a vast space filled with thinly diffused matter, and ask how it might be possible to build up a variety of coherent patterns, yet avoid all strife and conflict between the developing forms. Two distinctive procedures occur to us; whatever physical difficulties they might encounter, they are at least clearly conceivable and for this reason merit our consideration. Surveying this vast, inchoate world, a supreme Intelligence might assess its potentialities and foresee in minute detail the order that could at last be brought forth from it. Then he would impose upon the particles such tendencies or movements that they would begin to coalesce into definite forms, and in the course of ages yield the pre-ordained cosmic order, complete in its grand outlines and every least particular. This foreseen order would at last emerge only if the creative Intelligence were able to impress upon each of the multitudinous particles movements which, following always a minutely calculated course, would in the course of ages result in their aggregation into the desired forms; or if he could constantly intervene to set them right, whenever they strayed from the intended course. Any uncontrolled spin or dart of any smallest component, any slightest deviation from its calculated path, any unforeseen influx of fresh materials from beyond the system, might in the course of time so upset the process that the final product would be far other than what had been intended; unless indeed the Intelligence were able at all times to intervene directly and correct incipient aberrations. The evolving world would need either to be controlled by a finalism and determinism which would rigidly exclude the slightest spontaneity on the part of any

of its contents, lifeless and living; or it would be subject to continual supernatural intervention. Even the highest and most intelligent of the products of such a process would be puppets passively molded by the creative power, enjoying at best the illusion of spontaneity and self-determination. They could in no sense be free coöperators in the task of creation.

An Intelligence such as we have supposed has been imagined by Laplace and others merely to help us understand the implications of a cosmos subject to rigid mechanical determination; but we have no good reason to believe that such a being exists. A god who could set in motion a creative process which in the course of ages, and without further intervention, would result in a Universe such as ours, would need to possess understanding and foresight beyond anything we can remotely imagine. The necessity to intervene more or less frequently to correct aberrations would seem to imply some imperfection in his knowledge or power, which had failed at the outset to impress the proper order upon the developing cosmos; so that, like a faultily constructed machine, it requires continual adjustment by the designer. Even if there existed a being of sufficient intelligence and power to create a world in this fashion, it is doubtful whether he would care to follow a method which would at the beginning impose irrevocable limitations upon the final product, precluding the further development of the Plan itself, and excluding all spontaneous coöperation by the creatures that evolved from it. A world created by this method might be free of conflict and evil, but at the price of all spontaneity.

We can imagine a second method of creation which would obviate all conflict and strife, yet without making such vast demands upon the knowledge and fore-



sight of the Creator. Centers of concrescence might be set up at points so widely scattered through the diffuse primal material that the orderly patterns growing up about each would never touch each other, however extensive and complex they might become. Each developing pattern might be organized on a different plan, and it would at all times form a coherent whole of cooperating parts, a single organic unity. A world evolving in this fashion would in effect consist of a number of "island universes"; but no single "universe" could be so extensive that it lacked the coherent unity of an organism, or at least a crystal; for otherwise strife would spring up among its parts.

Two difficulties are immediately apparent in this second method of creation. The first is that of creating and preserving a highly organized system amidst matter still in its most primitive and diffuse form. An organized entity requires for its support an organized environment; and the higher the grade of organization of the entity, the more orderly must the ambient become. In the midst of chaos, an organized being would be in danger of becoming infected by the surrounding disorder and dissolving into it. Where the particles of matter are in a state of extreme agitation, as in the hot stars, the more complex sorts of molecules cannot develop; and it is doubtful if at the most intense heat even complete atoms can exist. Only on a body like a cooling planet, which gradually acquires a higher grade of molecular organization, can there arise those complex varieties of matter which we find in living things. Similarly, in proportion to their degree of organization, the higher forms of life require the lower forms to create an environment for them. The simplest algae and lichens can live in isolation on exposed rocks; but trees thrive best in

those communities of plants which we call forests, and many cannot even grow in barren mineral soil; while animals can live only after plants have formed an environment for their support.

Moreover, a separation of the centers of creation wide enough to ensure that the entities growing up about each would never collide with or destroy their closest neighbors, would also preclude the coalescence of these entities to form patterns of a higher order or their union into societies. Each would remain forever beyond reach of the others, in lonely isolation. Strife would be avoided, but there could be no fertilizing interchange of materials or ideas, no cooperation. This is the second difficulty inherent in creation at widely separated centers.

#### *5. Evil the Inevitable Result of the Universal Impulsion toward Good*

Although the notion of a creative process that would obviate all strife allures the human mind with the irresistible attraction of all Utopian dreams, we can be sure from the conflict and evil we behold on every side that creation has followed another course. There is much evidence to show that, instead of beginning at relatively few, widely separated centers, the process of combining the crude materials of the world into coherent patterns began at innumerable crowded centers. Wherever particles can unite into coherent associations, they do so under the influence of forces which emanate from or envelope them. The whole Universe is infused with an energy which ceaselessly tends to impress a higher degree of order upon the diffuse primal materials. Following current physical conceptions, we may picture this as the union of



protons, electrons, and neutrons to form atoms; as atoms combining to form molecules, as soon as lower temperatures permit their more than momentary union; as molecules aggregating into liquids, crystals, rocks, and the like; and finally, in certain specially favorable environments, uniting in the most complex associations to form living beings.

An inevitable result of creation at innumerable, crowded centers is that the patterns growing up so close together soon come into contact. At times, when the colliding bodies are organized in much the same fashion, they may combine in an orderly manner to form more extensive patterns, as when molecules of the same sort build up crystals, birds unite into motley flocks, or neighboring tribes federate to form a nation. Often, however, body clashes against body with destructive violence, or entities growing up close together compete fiercely for the space or materials essential to their further development. Such disruptive encounters often occur in the lifeless world, on a small scale in chemical reactions, as when a metal is eaten by an acid or a complex molecule is destroyed, on a large scale in collisions between planetoids and planets. In the course of ages, much material has been added to the earth, perhaps the major part of its present mass, by the falling of meteorites or planetesimals. The destructive violence of these impacts is vividly attested by the vast crater, a mile across and six hundred feet in depth, hollowed out by such a body in the Arizona desert, and by the circle of devastation, seventy-five miles in diameter, wrought in the Siberian forest by the meteoritic fall at Vanovara in 1908.

Yet we see no real strife or evil in all these destructive encounters, so long as living things are not affected. The particles of lifeless matter are marshalled

in the most varied arrays, now in gases, now in liquids, now in diffuse form, and now in shapely crystals; yet so far as we can tell, it is wholly indifferent to them in what combination they find themselves; nor do the larger inorganic aggregates which they form strive in any way to preserve their being. The cosmic strife of Heraclitus is no more than a cosmic dance, in which, so far as we know, none of the participants, from atoms to suns, is ever pained, disappointed, or thwarted—except where life has entered the ever-shifting concourse.

After life arose, the carefree dance took on a different aspect. Soon or late—we cannot be certain at what stage of their evolution—living beings became susceptible to pain and fear. They consciously strove to preserve themselves and to attain definite objectives. But the process of creation at multiple, crowded centers, begun in the inorganic world, was carried over into the realm of life, with the result that organisms were generated in such prodigious numbers that only a small fraction of them could find the space or materials essential to their growth and continued existence. Living thing clashed with living thing, and nature became "red in tooth and claw." Evil is above all the thwarting of that which seeks to fulfil itself, the distortion or disruption of that which strives to preserve a definite form, whence pain arises. With the capacity to enjoy the adventure of existence came the capacity to yearn, to fear, and to suffer. We need appeal to no special principle, no maleficent being, to explain the origin of evil. It is the inevitable result of creation at innumerable, crowded centers. But creation, the bringing of order out of discord, the production of pleasant abodes, beautiful forms, and sentient beings able to enjoy them, who are capable of



love and creative effort and moral endeavor, is beneficent, if anything deserves to be called beneficent. *Evil, then, is the unavoidable result of the universality of the impulsion toward good.*

#### 6. *The Divine Wholly Beneficent in Intention*

In Chapter IV, we decided that, whatever else it might be, the Divine must be wholly beneficent; for only so could we give it our unstinted love and allegiance. In the last chapter, we further concluded that the power which reveals itself to us chiefly as harmonization, the process which brings form and order into the Universe, is adequate to satisfy our concept of the Divine in every respect but one, and that the most important of all. The presence of so much evil in the world raised a doubt as to whether its creative principle could be wholly beneficent. Now we have seen that evil is not a primary but a secondary result of the creative process, which is everywhere directed solely to the production of order or good, but becomes involved in strife and destruction as an indirect outcome of the very intensity of the movement toward good. If this movement were less universal and intense, there would be less evil; if it were sufficiently feeble, there would be no evil.

When we pass a moral judgment upon a man, we distinguish sharply between his intention and the external effect of his act. In many instances the most laudable intention, even when pursued with great vigor and no lack of intelligence, leads to deplorable results, either because of unforeseen contingencies or because the situation in which the man acted was so difficult that by no human means could all loss and suffering have been avoided. Yet we may respect and love the

man whose excellent intentions lead, through no fault of his own, to results which we lament. Indeed, if his motives are pure and his intentions wholly benevolent, we may love and respect him unreservedly.

Although the Divine, we concluded, must have effective power far surpassing that of any mortal, it is not necessarily omnipotent—a term whose precise meaning baffled us. It appears that a stern primal necessity, the unalterable nature of the Primal Substance which is the ground of all that is and can be, limits the creative efforts of harmonization. The Divine can act only within the conditions fixed by that which is the source of both itself and all the materials available for the creative effort. Like ourselves, the Divine must submit to the limitations set by the foundation of all that is. To say that the Divine has an intention or purpose, in the human sense of a mental image of its objective, is to make unprovable assumptions as to its nature. We do not know what in the Divine corresponds to mind and intelligence in ourselves; it may be some mode of apprehension so utterly foreign to our experience that we cannot even vaguely conjecture what it is. Yet we might say that the Divine acts as if it intended to produce only order and harmony. So far as we can ascribe purpose to it, this purpose is wholly benevolent, however unfortunate some of the secondary effects of the creative process turn out to be. Apparently these unhappy effects could have been avoided only by refraining from creation, leaving the world in its primitive, unorganized state. Whether or not one should abstain from beneficent endeavors because of subsidiary effects which are undesirable yet unavoidable, is a difficult moral problem which has been answered in various ways. If the beneficial primary effects far outweigh



X/ the baneful secondary effects, the endeavor seems to be not only justified but binding upon one who recognizes this opportunity to do good. Thus as moral beings we may unreservedly love and revere the power which reveals itself in harmonization, identifying with it the highest and best that is in us. We may venerate it as the Divine.

Y/ The conclusion we have reached, that evil is an unavoidable secondary effect of the same process that created everything good, appears to be the inescapable corollary of every cosmogony which rejects a dualism as radical as that of Zarathustra. A strict monotheism may even fail to make the distinction between God's purpose and the unintended effects which follow from it. "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things," Jahweh proclaimed to Isaiah (45:7.) And later (63:17) the prophet asks: "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?" Although it would be unwise to draw broad conclusions from statements so brief, they certainly suggest that darkness, evil, and error are as much the Lord's intention as light and peace.<sup>1</sup> This early view was modified by later theologians, as St. Thomas Aquinas, who in the *Summa Theologica* (I, Q. 19, art. 9) came to the conclusion that although God never wills evil, he wills goods which are inseparable from certain related evils; as when in willing justice he willed punishment, and in willing the preservation of the order of nature he willed some things to be naturally corrupted. We need not pause here to ask how it is possible to reconcile with the

<sup>1</sup> It is instructive to compare the view of *Isaiah* with that of Plato, who ascribed to his creative power, Soul, the origination of things good and of things evil. *Laws*, X, 896A et seq., 906A.

But he postulated at least 2 souls, at 896E.

omnipotence which the Angelic Doctor attributed to God this inability to attain certain desired ends without avoiding associated evils; but it is highly significant that, from premises so radically different from our own, he reached conclusions so similar. Thus every proposed solution of the problem of evil either attributes it to God's intention or recognizes that it exists because of some limitation of his power. In dualism, the limitation is caused by a being which at least approaches God in power but has opposite aims, in non-dualistic systems, by a fundamental necessity, not unlike the Fate of the ancient Greeks or the Rita of the *Vedas*, residing in the very ground of all existence. This inherent necessity determines what is possible in the world; the deity can act only within the range of this possibility.

### 7. The Two Kinds of Purpose

When we say that a purpose pervades the world, we are perhaps stretching a point by ascribing to the Divine an attribute which, so far as we can be sure, is peculiar to animals that think and foresee. But when we say that the Universe is devoid of purpose, we err even more in the opposite direction, assimilating the Universe to ourselves in our random, shiftless moods. Either way, our conception is anthropomorphic, an inevitable quality of human thought. And the category is exhausted by these two terms, "purpose" and "purposeless," beside which we have no more relevant concept. To compare the Universe with our machines obviously does not avoid the difficulty; for every machine has a purpose impressed upon it by its maker; and mechanism is only a peculiar kind of teleology. In the higher reaches of speculation, we encounter



problems for which every answer we can give either falls short or exceeds the mark. When we approach such questions as "Is there a God?" "Is the Universe finite" or "Is there a soul?", any answer our limited minds can give will either lack conceptual clarity or be more or less false. The best we can do is to choose the less misleading of the alternatives, then strive ceaselessly to clarify the concept we have chosen. One of the questions in this class is that of cosmic purpose; and I am confident that we come closer to the truth when we answer it in the affirmative than when we answer it in the negative. We might modify this assertion by adding that the cosmic purpose is implicit rather than explicit, immanent rather than external, so far as we can tell.

Since we perforce touched in this chapter upon the ancient and knotty problem of teleology, this seems a convenient place to define our position somewhat more precisely. In its classical form, the doctrine of final causes, which has its roots in man's earliest systematic thought and stands forth clearly in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, holds that all the world's multitudinous processes contribute to a pre-ordained end. Often the end is expressed as "that which is best." Not only do all the stars in heaven and every rain that falls or wind that blows on earth conspire to bring on the destined end; but every animal and plant, and every organ in every living thing, has its definite role to play in the grand undertaking. A world which moves to bring to fruition a minutely detailed cosmic plan allows as little scope to freedom and spontaneity as the rigidly determinate world of nineteenth century science. In mechanistic causation, each momentary state of the system reaches forward to determine the immediately succeeding state, without

the slightest possibility of deviation. In finalistic causation, the pre-ordained ultimate stage of the world reaches back from the more or less distant future to determine the stage which will of necessity immediately precede it, and bring it into being through the order of efficient causes; and this first preceding stage reaches back in turn to determine the next preceding stage, the process continuing until the ultimate stage sets its inexorable stamp upon the events of the present moment. Thus, at every instant in the world's history, the series of final causes and the series of efficient causes overlap on the sliding temporal plane; so that it would appear that there must be a sort of pre-established harmony between these two modes of causation.<sup>1</sup> A world dominated by a strict teleology would closely resemble the one which would result from the first scheme of creation which we considered and rejected as improbable in section 4 of this chapter. In such a world, our freedom of choice would be an illusion; for at no point could the onward march of events be permitted to deviate by a hair's breadth from the master plan without changing the final result. It would seem that all of ugliness, cruelty, and suffering which such

<sup>1</sup> A concrete example may make this clearer. Let us suppose that we are on a camping trip and wish to cook rice. The boiled rice is our final cause, and by thinking backward from this we establish a series of efficient causes: boiling water, flames, kindling a fire, arranging firewood, gathering it, etc. This gives us a chain of finalistic causation, whose steps we may designate as F, E, D, C, B, A. When we gather our firewood, kindle it, etc., we operate in the reverse direction by means of a series of efficient causes, a, b, c, d, e, f. Each step that our finalistic thinking showed us to be necessary has its counterpart in an appropriate operation. If the world is in fact governed by strict teleology, then the series of final causes and the series of efficient causes must be related as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} A & \leftarrow & B & \leftarrow & C & \leftarrow & D & \leftarrow & E & \leftarrow & F \\ a & \rightarrow & b & \rightarrow & c & \rightarrow & d & \rightarrow & e & \rightarrow & f \end{array}$$

Hence they form parallel series, and at any given moment corresponding causes in the two series are simultaneously effective, as at  $\begin{smallmatrix} D \\ d \end{smallmatrix}$ .



a world contained were integral, predetermined aspects of the whole.

In addition to strict or rigid purposes, we are familiar in our own lives with a quite different sort of purposefulness, which defines our end in general terms, yet fails to prescribe its details and leaves considerable latitude as to means. When we set out to acquire original knowledge, our purpose is necessarily of this sort; for if we already knew the end of the quest, our task would be completed before we began. A skilled investigator allows himself great freedom in the pursuit of his subject, constantly modifying his procedures in the light of each fresh discovery. When we explore a new country, we do well to leave our itinerary flexible; for fresh vistas are continually opening before the alert traveller. For the active, receptive mind, a flexible purpose nearly always yields richer returns than a minutely detailed purpose. Instead of holding the future in bondage to the past, it permits it to share in its own formation.

Of these two sorts of purpose, the world seems to be governed by the second rather than the first. The creative process is directed toward the building up of coherent patterns of constantly increasing amplitude, imposing upon the crude materials of the world an order of ever higher grade. But only the general direction of the movement is predetermined; its details work themselves out as the process advances. The Divine is ceaselessly at work bringing harmony into the world, but the ultimate form of the harmony is not fore-ordained. It could not possibly be minutely pre-ordained if, as seems not improbable, there is a continued influx of radical novelty from the hidden ground of creation. With such a method of creation, beings endowed with intelligence and foresight may

exercise choice that is not an illusion without imperilling the final state, for this is not yet determined in detail. They are offered the glorious opportunity of becoming collaborators with the Divine in bringing harmony into the Universe.



## CHAPTER VII

## MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIVINE

1. *Immanence and Transcendence*

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(as in  
gallery)*  
The recognition that the Divine reveals its presence throughout the Universe by harmonizing is the beginning, not the end, of our knowledge of it. Philosophers and theologians have distinguished between the immanence and the transcendence of God. The former is his presence in the world as an active agent, the latter that part of his being which, by extending beyond the phenomenal world accessible to human knowledge, wholly evades our comprehension. The immanence of God is his manifestation to us through his work, his transcendence a challenge to future discovery, as through growth in insight and spiritual sensitivity we expand our being into regions hitherto remote from us. Aspects of deity which are transcendent for one man may be immanent for a more highly developed spirit. What is transcendent in one age may be immanent in another. Thus immanence and transcendence are not distinctions which are rigidly fixed, but always relative to the person who makes them.

There are those who lay great stress upon the mysterious, inaccessible aspects of God. Doubtless it is salutary to humble that too rank growth, human pride, by constantly reminding us how little we know and how much rises above our mind's highest flights. But a religion based largely upon the incomprehensible attributes of its deity may make men meek and sub-

missive yet bring them little insight and moral guidance; and the honest thinker will always ask how we can be sure of the existence of that which we cannot know. A religion which strives to give men guidance and ethical orientation, which looks upon them as co-workers in the task of creation, should focus its gaze upon the more accessible aspects of deity. And since God is not an object among objects, to be known directly through the senses as we know an animal or a feature of the landscape, not a superhuman being dwelling on high Olympus or in the heavens above, we can know him only by what he *does*, never by what he *is*. Only by considering God's function in the Universe shall we be able to orient our lives by him. But this immanence of God in the world is precisely what, in the present work, we understand by the Divine, without prejudice to the question of God's transcendence, which is never a matter of present knowledge, merely a challenge and a goal for our spiritual aspirations.

The restless Greek mind made heroic efforts to know God by his essence, to understand and define his nature. The ancient Israelites, on the other hand, were content to know God in a more practical way, through his relations with the world, the part that he played in history, and the demands he made upon man. The *Old Testament* is remarkable for its absence of attempts to analyze the concept of God in the manner of Aristotle, Plotinus, and other thinkers in the Greek tradition. Although in nearly all branches of human endeavor the Greeks far surpassed the Hebrews, the latter revealed the truer insight by striving to know God by his function in the world and the obligations he imposes upon men, and refraining from speculation upon his essence.

There are modern theologians who hold that God



4 / makes great demands upon us, yet that is extremely difficult to know what he wishes us to do. But when we understand the Divine and its work in the world, much of this perplexity falls away. To coöperate with the Divine can mean nothing else than to carry forward the kind of work which it is doing. Since through harmonization the Divine is always active in bringing form and order into the Universe, there can be no doubt that this is the task which it imposes upon us. Although this principle is clear, perplexity arises in particular cases because, as a result of the universality of the movement toward harmony, developing pattern clashes with developing pattern; and to advance one is all too frequently to thwart or destroy another. Hence much practical knowledge, of a strictly scientific sort, is necessary to supplement our spiritual insight and guide us aright. But one mode of advance always lies open to us: we can strive diligently to cultivate our inner harmony of thoughts, feelings, and desires, without opposing the efforts of other beings to fulfill and perfect themselves. In the boundless realm of spirit, we can expand indefinitely without ever clashing with other growing entities; for spiritual things interpenetrate as material objects cannot. And in the measure that we become harmonious within ourselves, some of the external conflicts which once loomed so large diminish in magnitude, or fade away.

## 2. *The Divine as Reason*

It follows from what has already been said that the Divine is above all the rational element in the Universe; for the primary function of reason is to bring order and coherence into the materials upon which it acts. The concept of reason arises from the mind's

reflection upon its own operations, which are directed in the first place, often quite spontaneously, to giving some semblance of order to the heterogeneous materials poured into it through the senses, to classifying them according to their kinds, tracing their interdependence and the relations between them. Having in some measure achieved this inward order, the mind strives to impose a similar orderliness upon the outward circumstances of life. A rational life is above all an ordered, coherent life, in which means are intelligently directed to ends. Since reason as we know it is exclusively a function of animal minds, we are not, strictly speaking, justified in ascribing it to the Divine; for we have already admitted that we do not know what in it might correspond to intelligence in ourselves. But in bringing order and harmony into the world, the Divine acts in a manner similar to reason; and from this point of view we may call it rational. Although perhaps not scientifically exact, the Stoic doctrine of the *Logos*, the reason which orders the Universe, is a most illuminating myth. The irrational component of the world is never the Divine, but that hard Necessity, grounded in the primal nature of things, which limits the effectiveness of harmonization. Plato's allegory of Reason persuading Necessity to guide the greatest part of the things that become toward what is best (*Timaeus* 48A), is about as close as we can come to expressing in human terms the relation between the two. What is irrational in the sense of being random, disordered, refractory to harmonization, is never the Divine, but that which resists the Divine.

Far from being, like the Numinous of Rudolf Otto, the "Wholly Other" with reference to ourselves, the Divine is the Very Same as that which is highest and



purest in ourselves, that which we most essentially are. This is necessarily so, for we were led to seek the Divine by the yearning of our inmost self to find that which resembled it, so that we might give it unbounded love and allegiance. Had it been a wholly other, we should never have found it nor recognized its divinity. This doctrine, I am aware, may lead to dangerous consequences if carelessly applied; but we shall return to this in Chapter IX.

It follows from its similitude to our inmost self that the emotions which the contemplation of the Divine stirs up in us are never dread, fear, terror, nor anything remotely resembling them. Or if the Divine fills us with a sense of fear and abject abasement, it is because our inmost self is so enveloped in disruptive passions that we are not in harmony with it. This dread of the Divine may be the first step toward regeneration; and in the same measure that we purify ourselves, we shall find that it stirs up quite other feelings in us. If anything can strike terror into the breast of the good man, it is not the rational but the irrational component of the Universe; that residue of the primal Necessity which Plato's Demiurge could not persuade. In so far as we are in harmony with it, contemplation of the Divine calms and soothes the mind, bringing it that "peace which surpasseth understanding." For the mind recognizes in the Divine that component of the world whence its reason arose as one among many expressions, and in the presence of its source it feels at rest.

### 3. *The Divine as Love*

It is not merely through the analogy of reason that we begin to understand the part which the Divine

plays in the world. We may agree with Pascal that the heart has its reason no less than the intellect. Among the emotions, there are some which in their outward expression and their influence upon our lives are the affective counterpart of reason; whereas others are an expression of the irrational. Of the former, love holds preëminent place, for when purest it impels us to cultivate harmonious relations with those we love, and this is essentially a rational endeavor. Kindness, benevolence, and compassion are kindred but usually less intense feelings, producing similar beneficial effects. On the other hand, hatred, with its varieties rage, malice, and contempt, bring strife and disorder into life and are upsurgings of the irrational side of our nature. Like reason, love at its highest and purest is the revelation of the Divine within us, and may as adequately stand as its symbol for us. Reason and love are to us as the Divine to the Universe as a whole.

### 4. *The Divine as Beauty*

Reason and love are, so far as we can be sure, confined to the animal kingdom, and in more than rudimentary form probably only to the more highly evolved members thereof. Reason appears to be well developed only in the species whose mental evolution has proceeded farthest of all. We have no right to ascribe these attributes to the Divine, for this would be to endow it with special properties which we know only in a certain class of created things; but we recognize in the Divine something far more widely diffused and fundamental, of which love and reason are special developments, produced by the peculiar conditions of animal life. Likewise, although it would be absurd



to attribute beauty, except in a metaphorical sense, to the uncreated Divine, devoid of all sensuously perceived attributes, we must recognize it as the source of all beauty. Since beauty is by no means confined to animals nor even to living things, but is spread far and wide through the non-living world, it is a manifestation of the Divine more universal than either love or reason.

Beauty is one of the highest products of harmonization. In the absence of animals equipped with responsive minds and sense organs that reveal the external situations that give rise to the apprehension of beauty, it could not properly be said to exist. A lifeless world might contain a myriad forms capable of arousing the esthetic appreciation of a properly endowed sentient being; yet without such a being it would contain no beauty, but only its potentiality. Thus the recognition of beauty requires a certain harmony or mutual adaptation between a living being, itself the product of a long evolution, and the Universe in which it finds itself. And this world itself must attain a high degree of organization before it presents forms capable of stirring esthetic feelings in a properly endowed mind. Even the simplest kinds of beauty, as the blue sky, the curving course of a thrown stone, ripples expanding over the surface of a quiet pool, can occur only in a world pervaded by order and harmony. All the more complex expressions of beauty, as that of a landscape, a garden, a painting, or a melody, require the harmonious blending of many components, in addition to that indispensable concord between the external situation and a responsive mind. Everything beautiful represents an advanced stage in harmonization, and reminds us of the presence of the Divine.

### 5. *The Divine as Value*

Although we have already decided that the Divine need not possess the peculiar endowments along with the peculiar limitations which we ascribe to personality, there will be those who ask whether we are to conceive of the Divine as a Being, a Spirit, or a Substance. These are most perplexing questions, which it is profitless to attempt to answer without a long preliminary investigation directed to the clarification of these difficult terms. One who has taken to heart Berkeley's devastating criticism of the concept of substance will be wary how he uses this word; and he will be especially careful not to discard one notion of substance merely to pursue another that is no less difficult to grasp, in the manner of the genial Irish philosopher. We know what spirituality is, because we experience it in ourselves; but we have no definite knowledge of spirits as substances. Even matter, when we carry its analysis far enough, tends to evaporate into something far other than it seems to the senses. So far as these questions convey a definite meaning, they seem to ask whether the Divine is separable from the world, so that it might have existed before the world was created, might persist after its annihilation, or might withdraw from the world or at least some part of it. It would be folly to pretend to decide these points on the strength of our present knowledge.

The problem raised by these questions is analogous to that of whether the soul is separable from the body. If we mean by soul no more than a mode of activity, an intensity of harmonization, present in living things and quite distinct from anything we know in the lifeless world, we shall find this a useful term. But when we try to decide whether there is a soul in the sense

*which we find only*



of a spiritual substance capable of existing apart from an animal body, we raise a problem that has never been satisfactorily solved by science or philosophy, which can at best point to certain probabilities, leaving the definitive answer, if there is one, to future discovery. I think it likely that if the soul is separable from the body, the Divine is separable from the world; but this correlation does not necessarily hold true.

The recognition of the Divine, then, involves not so much the discovery of an existent which others cannot see as the appreciation of a value—the supreme value. The agnostic and the believer may recognize exactly the same constituents in the world, but one responds to a value where the other finds none. Here the situation is no different from that which holds in the case of all values, the recognition of which depends upon a certain inward readiness and alertness. The esthetically sensitive man finds beauty where the boor sees only colors or hears only noises. One person recognizes as a hero a man whom another sees only as a rash fool; one acknowledges a saint where his contemporaries find an eccentric or a witch. In all these examples, the difference resides in one's spiritual insight, not his sensuous perceptions. Even if the Olympian, the Vedic, or the Old Norse gods were to appear before us in the majestic forms once ascribed to them, we should still ask "Are these effulgent figures indeed deities, or merely giants, monsters, or illusions of the disordered senses?" From this it becomes clear that pantheism is merely a non-selective ascription of supreme value to all that exists, while deism separates such value sharply from the world. Unless we agree upon a somewhat arbitrary definition of God, as a being with certain dimensions and a certain degree of power, the final decision as to the reality of a deity

must always be a judgment of value rather than an affirmation of existence. Where we recognize the highest value, there we acknowledge the Divine. But there must always be an existent of some sort to generate value; for values are not, as some hold, self-subsistent essences, but arise from the interaction of real existents.

### 6. *The Divine as Growth*

Wordsworth had a true feeling for the Divine; and his verse abounds in expressions which, with no straining of their meaning, might be applied to it as we here conceive it, especially his notion of

a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society.

(*Prelude I*, 341-344.)

Fuller and imbued with deeper feeling are the lines which bear witness to

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth . . .

(*Tintern Abbey*).



Although when we share the poet's inspiration we may see the Divine in meadows, woods, and mountains, and all that lives and grows therein; if we expect to find in the natural world its pure and adequate expression, we may be rudely disillusioned. To love nature, we must either view it through a dense haze of preconceptions, which prevents our seeing half of that which goes on around us; or if we see with impartial vision, we must be able to penetrate to underlying causes.

The most adequate expression of the Divine in the external world is growth in all its forms, from the growth of snowflakes in the clouds and crystals in sea-relinquished pools to that of towering trees and all the animate beings that dwell among them. All the necessary preliminaries and adjuncts of growth, as the blossoming of plants, the setting of seeds, the making of nests and hatching of eggs, the nurture of young animals of every sort, partake of that divine character which we ascribe to growth. In the woods and meadows and on the wild mountains, we are surrounded by growing things of innumerable kinds; and in quiet contemplation of the unfathomable mystery of growth, we feel that we draw nearer to the source of our being; for we, too, are one of its products.

But unless we deliberately refuse to see that which we do not wish to see, nature will not permit us to continue long in this mood of reverent contemplation. On every side, living things are destroying living things, cancelling the beneficent work of growth. Perhaps this would not appear so tragic if only organisms which had passed their full maturity and begun to decline were cut off to serve the needs of the young and vigorous. But hungry mouths respect infancy and childhood as little as advanced senility. The tender grow-

ing shoot and the unopened bud are gnawed by the worm and the caterpillar. The half-grown caterpillar itself is infested by the larvae of the ichneumon fly, which batten horribly in its living tissues and consume it before it dies. Or else it is plucked from the leaf by a bird, which itself may be snatched up by a hawk as it carries the food to helpless young, that are left to starve when bereft of parental care. Or a snake may engulf the living nestlings, while the frenzied parents flutter around in futile anguish. The lion and the panther strike down the antelope, leaving her fawn to perish; or else they drag the latter from its mother's side. At times the sensitive student of life is so nauseated by the hideous, senseless spectacle of waste and destruction that he can hardly continue his studies, and seeks relief from the horrors of nature in the realm of pure thought.

We ask in our distress whether there can be anything worthy of our reverence, anything divine, in a process which so ruthlessly annuls even the highest and most beautiful of the forms it has taken so long to produce. If poets and mystics derive spiritual strength from nature, is it not because they are visionaries with little respect for facts rather than trained observers who see things as they are?

As long as we remain on the surface, with the bare phenomena, these two aspects of nature, the constructive and the destructive, the divine and the demonic, seem of coördinate rank and must be allowed equal weight in our interpretations. But if in thought we sink beneath the surface and catch the process at an earlier stage, before its final denouement, its aspect changes wholly. Everywhere we see growth, a striving toward completion and perfection which is throughout the realm of life essentially the same, differing only in the



forms which it produces. We recognize that here is something closely allied to that which is primary and most authoritative in ourselves. The clash of form with form is only the final act, the tragic but inevitable catastrophe, of a process in itself lovable, but one which by its very intensity and universality dooms itself to its own partial suppression and annulment. The closer we reach to the source of this process, the more at peace with it we feel, the more we concentrate our attention upon its final issue in strife, the more it repels us. That is why we are so strongly drawn to the helpless young of almost all animals, finding winsome even those whose truculent parents inspire us with fear or disgust. Innocent growing things are symbols of the Divine.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE TWOFOLD NATURE OF ANIMALS

1. *How Could Hostility Arise in Beings Formed by Harmonization?*

In Chapter VI we concluded that strife, with all the suffering it brings to sentient beings, is the incidental result of a creative process which begins at centers so numerous and crowded that the patterns expanding from each inevitably clash together. That the mutual pressure of growing patterns should result in their distortion, that bodies rushing together should be shattered, causes us no surprise. We witness effects of this sort in the non-living world without suspecting some malignant agent, for they are the direct outcome of mechanical forces. But in the living world the encounters between separate entities take on a different aspect. Here it is no longer simply a case of the inhibition of growth by pressure or of smashing by violent impact. Living things of many kinds display organs and modes of behavior specially adapted to the exploitation and destruction of other living things. They pursue, seize, ensnare, lacerate, dismember, penetrate, and dissolve each other, in a manner that often suggests diabolic intention and special aptitude for destruction. A new principle, not encountered in lifeless matter, seems to be present here; for the destruction we witness is pointed rather than incidental. Finally this fresh tendency, gathering impetus, becoming clearer and more distinctive as it rises into



the more highly evolved forms of life, reveals itself in us as moral evil, the deliberate willing of deeds which injure sentient beings. How can a beneficent creative process bring about effects which represent so complete a reversal of its direction?

This question is closely allied to that which we met at the end of the last chapter, where we were confronted by the enigma of the contrasting aspects of the living world, its innocent growth and its savage destructiveness. This duality is not simply a feature of a heterogeneous assemblage; we meet it in nearly all animals taken singly, except perhaps a few of the most sluggish and defenceless of them, and in a measure even among plants. When we examine the structures and activities of animals, we find some adapted to such constructive endeavors as building shelters or nests, producing and nourishing their young; whereas others serve for discomfiting or destroying their enemies or their prey. Do not fangs, horns, talons, poison glands, traps, and snares, the whole amazing array of animal weapons, seem anomalous in creatures formed by a constructive process, and whose existence depends upon the maintenance of harmony?

In the higher animals, in which we detect indications of an affective life, we find two sets of attitudes and emotions corresponding to their contrasting activities; and these antithetic contents of consciousness are most startling in ourselves, where alone we know them intimately. On the one hand, we are capable of love, friendship, benevolence, compassion, and the helpful, constructive acts to which they impel us; on the other hand, we feel anger, rage, hate, and malice, are cruel, harmful, and destructive. The friendly, constructive attitudes and emotions of the first class are just what we should expect in an animal formed by

harmonization; for they carry over into the mind and into external activities the same movement which created it. The synthetic process, the binding together of molecule with molecule, and cell with cell which goes on during the body's growth, is finally displayed in the mind as that inclination to join ourselves by harmonious bonds with other beings which we know as love and friendship; or its impetus drives us to undertake works of a similar constructive character in the surrounding world. But the hostile, destructive attitudes and emotions seem wholly incongruous in an animal formed by a constructive process, a complete reversal of the creative movement. How could they arise in beings whose inmost nature is harmonization?

## *2. The Friendly Attitudes More Central than the Hostile Attitudes*

The consideration of formative processes points to the conclusion that the friendly, constructive attitudes are primary, central, and deeply imbedded in animals, whereas the hostile, destructive attitudes are secondary and peripheral. Yet familiarity with the vast amount of savage fury of which we ourselves no less than other animals are capable, may make us doubt this interpretation and perhaps even lead us to suspect that animal nature is essentially fierce and hostile, while the friendliness and love it sometimes displays is at best a thin veneer. We may throw some light upon this perplexing point by observing whether the friendly or the hostile attitudes arise earlier in the growing individual. Some animals, which receive no parental care and never unite into societies, are from birth or hatching antagonistic even to others of their own kind. Young snakes, for example, are at a sur-



prisingly early age capable of striking or devouring their brothers and sisters; and the poisonous, viviparous kinds may even be a menace to the parent that bears them. Likewise young spiders may attack and kill others of the same brood. But these creatures are from the very first thrown upon their own resources and forced to make their own way in a perilous world; so that this precocious aggressiveness must be regarded as adaptive, or forced upon them by natural selection. There is an amazing record of a nestling of an African eagle which, when a few days old, fought and sat upon its younger nest-mate until it died; but such infantine aggressiveness is very rare among warm-blooded animals attended by their parents.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly always we find the young of birds and mammals, including the human infant, either quite devoid of fear and hostility during their first days of life, or if not friendly and trusting when we first encounter them, prompt to respond to our kindly advances. If taken early enough, they accept us in place of their parents, often becoming so dependent upon our companionship that they can hardly endure to be separated from us. The annals of natural history contain so many instances of animals, even of the fiercest kinds, which became devoted friends of their human fosterers, that it is needless to repeat them here; the industrious compiler might fill volumes with pertinent examples. Not only do the young of the most varied animals readily become attached to humans, they accept as parents animals of other kinds, even their hereditary enemies, when these suckle and caress them. A fawn or a leveret, for example, will readily respond

<sup>1</sup> E. G. Rowe, "The Breeding Biology of *Aquila verreauxi* Lesson," *Ibis*, Vol. 89, pp. 576-606. 1947.

to the maternal ministrations of a dog or a cat. Moreover, naturally antagonistic animals, like crows and owls, will live in amity if raised up together from an early age. Innumerable facts of this sort leave little doubt that the hostility of animals toward those of other species is not intrinsic but forced upon them by life's necessities. Although in some instances the recognition and avoidance of hereditary enemies is innate, as that of hawks by many other birds, perhaps more often animals learn by the example of their elders to avoid or attack those other animals which have for countless generations harassed their kind. There is even evidence that some carnivorous animals, including hawks and felines, must learn from parental example to capture their customary prey. Aristotle long ago concluded that the strife among animals arose from their pressing need to fill their stomachs. In the *History of Animals* (Book IX, 1, 608b 30-609a 2) he wrote: "One may go so far as to say that if there were no lack or stint of food, then those animals that are now afraid of man or are wild by nature would be tame and familiar with him, and in like manner with one another. This is shown by the way animals are treated in Egypt, for owing to the fact that food is constantly supplied to them the very fiercest creatures live peaceably together. The fact is they are tamed by kindness, and in some places crocodiles are tame to their priestly keeper from being fed by him. And elsewhere the same phenomenon is to be observed."

But we must call attention to an outstanding exception to Aristotle's generalization that when not driven by hunger to attack each other, animals dwell at peace with each other. He was correct in concluding that the strife between animals of distinct species



springs almost wholly from the carnivorous habit, without which an almost Messianic amity would prevail throughout the animal kingdom. Yet another sort of antagonism is widespread in nature, that between adult animals of the same kind and sex, which compete for mates and the territories or home-sites necessary for reproduction. Although found chiefly among the males, females, too, often display sexual rivalry; and in some polyandrous birds, as the phalaropes, the females are larger, brighter, and more pugnacious than the males, which chiefly take care of the eggs and young. As the age and season for reproduction approach, animals which for months have lived peaceably together in the same herd or flock turn against their former companions and contend fiercely with them, trying to drive them off, at times even killing rivals which resist. Such behavior is familiar to everyone who has raised horses, cows, or chickens, and in the wild is conspicuous in the ungulates, the seals, and a variety of birds. A colt, as he matures, will turn savagely against the gelding with whom for years he has grazed and romped in friendship.

Agriculturists have from time immemorial known the cause of this sexual rivalry and how to avoid it in their domestic animals, and more recently experimenters have analyzed in some detail the underlying factors. At the onset of reproductive maturity, the sexual glands, especially those of the male, pour into the blood certain hormones which cause the animal to become hostile to others of his own sex at the same time that he seeks individuals of the opposite sex. When the glands are removed, this hostility subsides; but by the injection of the appropriate hormones into a castrated animal, or into a normal animal at seasons of sexual quiescence, or sometimes even into a female,

the pacific creature can readily be stirred to jealous pugnacity. On the other hand, so far as we know, no hormone is necessary to make gregarious animals seek the company of others of their kind and live in concord with them. This is their original disposition, and the fierce rivalry which converts erstwhile companions into implacable enemies is imposed upon them by a specific chemical substance secreted by their own organs. Acting like a subtle poison, it stirs them to frenzy, until they are as little able to remain at peace with themselves as with their fellows: they roar, bellow, or shout, roam restlessly, neglect food, lose weight, and know no rest until the arduous season passes, the sexual glands become quiescent, they cast off their Nessus shirt, and return meekly to the company of the very rivals with whom they have so fiercely striven.

There is thus a vast amount of evidence to support our claim that animals are primarily pacific, and that belligerent attitudes have been forced upon them by the difficulties of survival in a crowded world. It is in the more highly evolved and intelligent members of the animal kingdom, in which learning plays a larger role in the total preparation for life than in many invertebrates, that we are best able to trace and analyze the origin of the fierce and hostile behavior that in so many instances comes to overlie and mask the primitive placidity. Without the contagious example of older individuals of their kind, many young animals will accept as foster parents or companions individuals of other species which are their hereditary enemies. Even the most destructive of all creatures, man himself, is neither feared nor resented by the birds and mammals of remote islands, which for centuries have been spared his disastrous visits. In mountain forests



seldom penetrated by humans, many of the birds are likewise almost fearless of man, although less consistently tame than on oceanic islands with their far more adequate isolation. At no time are animals more ferocious than in the season of sexual ardor, when even the mildest sorts may attack their erstwhile friends with savage fury; yet we have abundant proof that this rage is produced by substances poured like an exciting drug into their circulation. When this excitant disappears, they again become social and pacific.

### 3. *The Origin and Intensification of Strife in the Living World*

We have so far settled only one of the two questions which confronted us at the beginning of this chapter. The friendly, constructive activities and attitudes are primary, more central to living things, than the hostile, destructive attitudes and activities, which at times so thoroughly mask the former that we mistake them for the animal's original structure. But how was it possible for living things to acquire attributes that clash so violently with the process which made them? How could harmonization give rise to rage and destructive fury? Moreover, it is not merely a question of hostile attitudes and disruptive emotions. These would be largely innocuous without the structures and instincts which support them and make them terrible: the fangs, the spurs, the tusks, the horns, the antlers, the poison glands, the cunning approach, the skillfully concealed snare, the deadly pounce, the innate awareness of the victim's vital centers. How could a process directed toward harmony produce these instruments of discord?

To attack this problem at its heart, we must turn

again to the consideration of how novel characters enter the constitution of living things, upon which we touched briefly in Chapter V, section 3. There we learned that mutations arise as sudden changes in the minute structure of the chromosomes which determine heredity. These alterations in the germinal cells are wholly beyond the control of the animal or plant which bears them, related neither to the past experience of the parent nor to the probable needs of the progeny. They are random and irrational. A new organism developing from a fertilized egg which bears mutant genes faces all unconsciously the task of fusing its manifold genetic potentialities into a coherent, smoothly functioning whole. If it succeeds, it lives; if it fails to effect a harmonious synthesis of all the elements which enter into its hereditary constitution, it succumbs, or lives as a handicapped cripple, highly vulnerable to adverse influences.

These mutations affect structures, functions, and habits, and by way of the nervous system and internal secretions are capable of profoundly modifying the emotions and attitudes of the animals which inherit them. This animal is not always shielded by its parents, but must sooner or later make its own way in a world crowded with competitors and enemies. Any change in structure or behavior which equips it the better to resist their encroachments, or to turn them to its own uses, will give it an advantage in the struggle for existence, so that it will probably live longer and leave more progeny. Further mutations in the descendants may improve or intensify the characters which give this advantage over competitors. No matter that this gain in practical efficiency is bought at the price of raising disruptive passions in the individual and bringing ceaseless strife into the one pacific realm of life.



By a mode of inheritance which places genetic changes wholly beyond their control, living things are caught in a trap, which makes them helpless to resist this invasion of discord into their lives. If by becoming fierce and aggressive, by acquiring deadly weapons, they live longer and breed more freely, they cannot avoid these changes which increase their fitness to survive, however much they may seem to deteriorate when measured by some standard higher than mere survival. Such an intensification of strife must go on until out of the turmoil there arise animals endowed with intelligence and the will to resist this unfortunate trend in evolution. We shall return to this later.

We do not know whether the earliest living things manufactured their own food from simple inorganic substances, somewhat in the fashion of green plants in the sunlight, or whether they found in the surrounding medium some more complex substance, also of inorganic origin, whence they could derive energy. The fact that no such material is known today proves nothing; for conditions on the earth are now far different from those which prevailed when life first arose; and moreover, the multitudes of minute organisms which now exist might use or destroy such a nutrient material, before it could accumulate in sufficient quantity to be detected by us.<sup>1</sup> But of one thing we can be certain: the very earliest living things were not predatory, for the obvious reason that there were still no other living things to serve as their prey. But as time passed and organisms became more abundant, competition for space and nourishment, even for in-

<sup>1</sup> Certain bacteria derive their energy from the oxidation of such inorganic substances as hydrogen sulphide and ammonia; but as found in nature today, these substances are derived chiefly from the decomposition of animals and plants.

dispensable mineral salts, became increasingly intense. In these conditions, and given the variability of all forms of life, some of the primitive organisms must have acquired the habit of using the dead bodies of their neighbors as food. The next step was to overpower and consume them while still alive.

Thus at a stage in organic evolution when moral evil was still in the far distant future, strife was forced upon the living world by the physical evils of overcrowding and scarcity. This in all probability occurred at a time when it still consisted wholly of unicellular organisms. Even today, among creatures so minute that they can scarcely be seen without a microscope, we find a variety of fierce carnivores, like the ciliate *Didinium*, no less than of gentler, self-subsisting types. This early division of living things into predators and prey was the starting point of a long and intricate evolution. As organisms became larger and more complex, every modification in the predators which made them more efficient in capturing and devouring their victims led to their more rapid increase in numbers. At the same time, every hereditary change which helped the hunted creatures to escape their persecutors gave them an advantage in the struggle and prepared the way for their further evolution. As through the elimination of the slow the hunted became more swift, the hunters had perforce to increase their speed to overtake them. As the victims acquired protective coverings, the predators needed stronger jaws or claws to tear them open. As the fugitives became more skillful in eluding their pursuers, the latter developed greater cunning to outwit them. As the animals which served as prey developed cryptic coloration or other modes of concealment, the predators of necessity acquired more dis-



criminating senses. For always there was competition among the predators themselves; and the slower, weaker, or less astute hunter might go hungry and mateless; while its better equipped cousins grew fat and produced many offspring. Thus the carnivores pursued their victims down the geologic ages, matching every fresh stratagem of the latter with a corresponding increase in their own efficiency; for this was the price of survival; until today we have a vast array of aggressive types, from the hawks and owls in the air to the great cats and wolves on the land and the sharks and dolphins in the sea. Hence, too, arose the innumerable horde of parasites, representing lines which found direct assault beyond their power and adopted more subtle and insidious methods of exploiting their victims, attaching themselves to their skin, burrowing into their flesh, sucking their vital fluids, multiplying in the blood stream itself, and apparently causing in aggregate far more suffering and death than the more forthright carnivores.

#### 4. *The Insinuation of Strife into Reproductive Activities*

Most curious of all, this manifold discord entered into the relations of individuals of the same species, particularly in their reproductive activities, where of all places one would least expect to find it. The whole phenomenon of sexual reproduction, the union of two individuals to bring forth others of their kind, is, with the exception of mind and conscience, the culmination of harmony in the realm of life. Consider how many delicate adjustments must be perfected, how many intricate processes coördinated, to make this mode of propagation successful. Two independent organisms,

leading separate lives, must mature their sexual cells at the same time, possibly in a single month out of the twelve. They must be drawn together and respond to each other, which in the higher animals demands complex psychic adjustments no less than physical reactions. Sperm and egg must meet and fuse in a union so intimate that each smallest part, each ultimate gene, finds its counterpart in the other member, and the two sets together form a single, coherent, smoothly functioning whole, capable of giving rise to an organism which blends the characters of the two parents. When the parents collaborate in the care of the offspring, as in most birds, many mammals, and not a few fishes and invertebrates, the habits of one mate must be nicely adjusted to those of the other, at the same time that they are coördinated with the developing reactions of the young, so that parents and offspring together behave almost like a single multiple organism. How could the strife of sexual rivalry and jealousy intrude into this realm of delicate adjustments?

Pugnacity, both in offense and defence, with all its accompanying emotions, seems first to have entered the world in the strife between predator and prey; but once it had arisen, it readily invaded other vital situations. Moreover, the constant struggle between carnivores and their victims placed a high value upon speed, strength, and endurance, whether in pursuit or in flight, as likewise upon weapons both offensive and defensive and upon all sorts of protective armor, and equally upon the fierceness or courage without which weapons are of little use. In this unrelenting struggle for survival, it became of the utmost importance for each kind of animal to produce the strongest individuals it was capable of engendering; among the



predators, so that they might run down and overpower their victims; among the latter, so that they might outstrip or fight off their assailants. Hence there would be great advantage in any system of mating which ensured that the most powerful or most pugnacious males won the greatest number of females in polygynous species, or became earliest mated in monogamous species, so that they might beget numerous progeny to inherit their outstanding qualities. Even among inoffensive herbivorous animals, such selective mating would be profitable; for the strength and endurance which equipped a stag or a hare to overcome his rivals in contests for the females would make him and his descendants better able to escape their enemies. The tendency of living things to vary in almost every conceivable way finally introduced belligerency into the relations between sexual rivals, where, since it indirectly served to promote the survival of the species in all situations in which pugnacity and endurance counted, it was bound to persist and grow more intense. In this devious manner, the conflict between carnivores and their prey stirred up strife among animals otherwise mild and pacific. Here, again, it is clear that physical evil, the clash of form with form in an overcrowded world, preceded moral evil, the deliberate intention to harm one's competitors.

#### 5. *Mitigation of the Strife of Nature*

It is easy by emphasizing the soft and kindly aspects of the living world to distract attention from its harshness; and it is equally easy by dwelling upon its strife and carnage to give an exaggerated picture of its cruelty. But to strike a just balance between these two extremes is most difficult, and few writers seem

able to accomplish it. Yet nothing is more important to us than to have a fair and unbiased estimate of the moral color of that vast system from which we sprang and of which we are still, for all our human arrogance, a part. Although it would be not only false but wicked to deny that an appalling amount of carnage goes on every day in the very woodlands and meadows which we seek for their peace and repose, the bloodshed is not so great as it might be if animals killed wantonly or for amusement as often as men do. Although there are exceptions, predatory animals as a rule hunt when hungry and desist when sated. Their habitual victims are often able to recognize their moods or intentions, a mysterious faculty which resembles the uncanny and often annoying capacity of a horse at pasture to tell whether his master is approaching to put him to work or merely to caress him. Thus antelopes graze placidly in the vicinity of a sated lion, ducks show no fear of a sportive otter, and small birds forage in the same tree where a hawk is resting. Birds of prey often hunt chiefly at a distance from their nest, and permit songsters to rear their families within sight of their eyrie, or even in a little nest tucked into the side of their bulky structure. Everywhere we see unmistakable evidence that the strife of nature, severe as it undoubtedly is, is not pushed to the limit of possibility, but mitigated as far as is consistent with the survival of animals which must kill or starve.

This tempering of the strife is especially prominent in the rivalry between individuals of the same species for mates or breeding territories. The system, widespread among animals, of claiming and defending plots of land for the purpose of reproduction helps to diminish fighting; for animals usually respect their



neighbor's domain; and it has been repeatedly observed, in both birds and fishes, that the male who invades another's territory can be put to flight by the very opponent whom he in turn can easily chase from his own area. These reversals of the relative strength of two individuals point to the operation of a psychic factor not unlike conscience, which intensifies our efforts when we feel that we are in the right, but weakens us when we know that we are wrong. Many birds seem almost to have lost the capacity to fight; and their disputes take the form of protracted bouts of competitive singing, calling, or posturing, in which never a feather is lost, and in which persistence and endurance rather than crude pugnacity appear to be the decisive qualities. The more carefully naturalists have watched the apparently so fierce encounters of ruffs, grouse, and other birds which assemble in one small area to attract the females, the clearer it has become that their conflicts are formal bouts in which injuries are rarely inflicted. With hummingbirds, manakins, cotingas, and numerous species with similar courtship habits, the presence of the same competing males at the same posts, day after day throughout a long breeding season, is convincing testimony to the harmless nature of their clashes, if indeed they occur. Even far lower in the animal kingdom, as among lizards, fishes, and jumping spiders, sexual rivalry often takes the form of display and bluff rather than deadly combat. Long before the emergence of morality in the strict sense of this term, living things were evolving, in obedience to internal forces, arrangements to overcome the strife into which they were thrown by their own teeming fecundity.

### 6. *Life's Intrinsic Goodness and Man's Moral Nature*

From ancient times, men have debated whether human nature is inherently good or bad. Although St. Augustine and many other ecclesiastics have taken a gloomy view of the innate corruption of mankind, earlier sages were less severe in their judgment. The Socratic doctrine that men always seek the good but mistake it, hence can be made virtuous by teaching them to judge correctly, is a recognition of the essential moral soundness of mankind. A little later, the Chinese sage Mencius, who can have heard nothing of the Athenian philosopher, compared human nature with Mt. Niu, once covered with beautiful trees, which had been ruthlessly felled to supply wood to the neighboring city, leaving desolate slopes where every aspiring shoot was cropped by the cows and goats, until people imagined that no forest had ever flourished upon it. It was by virtue of their innate feelings rather than their too often evil actions that men might be considered good.<sup>1</sup>

We can now go even further, and assert with confidence that not only man but every living thing is intrinsically good; for by goodness we understand the association of separable parts into a harmonious whole; and every organism is just such an association. To be absolutely good, a being must be not only perfectly harmonious in itself but in all its relations with surrounding beings. Since most living things, and especially men, have failed to achieve this inclusive harmony but often clash violently with other living things, it is difficult to point to any animal which is wholly good. In each there is a central core of goodness, yet

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Mencius*, translated from the Chinese by Lionel Giles (John Murray, 1942), p. 95.



in each the goodness is limited. But it is just this basic goodness which makes living things effective in their strife with others, for without a high degree of internal harmony they would be powerless. It is only through the harmonious coördination of many cells, tissues, and organs that any multicellular animal commands the force to attack its neighbors; so that we might without exaggeration say that its goodness supports its harmfulness. Even in the most degraded human criminal, whose wickedness far exceeds that of any animal, we must recognize this central core of goodness, deeply buried and desecrated by all his thoughts and deeds; for in its absence he could neither live nor perform the coördinated movements necessary to execute his crimes; and far less could he display that consistency in purpose, that capacity to subordinate immediate to contemplated advantages, without which he would promptly fall into the hands of the police. And this central core of goodness is the one hope for his rehabilitation.

But life does not submit passively to the evil which has been forced upon it as the indirect result of its own inordinate fecundity. A process with a definite direction and character of its own, it struggles to preserve its original course even amidst the strife in which it has become involved, to free itself of the adaptive modifications forced upon it by the struggle for existence and achieve ever wider harmonies. This positive, constructive trend is revealed by all those arrangements, some of which were briefly mentioned in the preceding section of this chapter, which diminish conflict between individuals of the same or different species and lead to the formation of peaceable societies. Before it could achieve the ampler harmony toward which its effort was from the beginning directed,

the Divine had to create adequate instruments; and above all it required a being which could view itself and surrounding beings in one comprehensive survey, weigh the needs and the resources of each, and plan a course which would permit each to fulfill its own nature with a minimum of interference by its neighbors. Such a being must be endowed with both intelligent foresight and a moral sense, which is essentially a deliberate striving toward harmony and perfection. Although a moralness pervades the whole creation, man is the only being which, as far as we know, fulfills this dual requirement of morality in the stricter sense. He is driven by the deepest of vital forces to assert the supremacy of his primary nature over the passions and attitudes which have been forced upon him in the long struggle to survive; and in the measure that he discovers his true self, he yearns to become a co-worker of the Divine in increasing harmony everywhere.



## CHAPTER IX

## THE DIVINE WITHIN US

1. *Spontaneous Expressions of the Divine within Us*

Driven by an insistent inner demand to seek that in the world around us to which we could give our love, reverence, and allegiance without reservation, we cast our gaze outward, and found pervading the Universe an activity, directed unceasingly to the increase of harmony everywhere, which seemed to fill our need. Although we see the effects of this activity on every side, from the rhythmic movements of the heavenly bodies to the colors of the rainbow and the delicate tracery of frost crystals on a window pane, the Divine itself is not an object of sensuous perception; so that if it were possible to know it only as manifested in the external world, it might remain for us a mere intellectual concept, a useful abstraction like gravitation or chemical affinity, rather than a vivid presence which fills our lives with strength and meaning. Happily, we are not restricted to this external acquaintance with the Divine. As we learned in Chapter III, we are impelled to seek the Divine by something within us that yearns to identify itself in thought and feel with that of which it is in fact a part. We have already traced the similarity of the creative process within us to that in the wider Universe. The rule that the principle which determines the whole determines the least of its parts, holds good in this instance also. We must now look within ourselves once more,

and see if by a more profound scrutiny than was advisable at an earlier stage of our survey, we can achieve a more intimate knowledge of the Divine.

We may begin our quest with the certainty that the Divine can never reveal itself directly to us as a visual form, a sound, or any sensuous impression. This is evident from the fact that it is not an object among objects, but an energy or activity which gives to the crude materials of the world that organization and form without which nothing can be perceived as an object by us. Forms and images are never a direct but at most an indirect revelation of the Divine, its creations or symbols rather than its very self. And above all when we look within ourselves, we do not expect to disclose original constituents of our total being in the form of visual presentations, sounds, or in any other sensuous mode; for these contents of the mind are without exception derived from experience of the outer world, however much the raw materials of sensation may be modified and elaborated by the mind's own synthetic activity. Yet frequently enough the devout man in search of God beholds visions or hears music or commands; and this is especially likely to occur to one steeped in the traditions of a religion that leans heavily upon imagery and symbolism. Such visions nearly always take a form made familiar by the current theology or ritual, hence vary with the devotee's religion; so that if we concede that they are immediate revelations of the Divine, we must further admit that the Divine wears a different form in different lands and epochs—which is unlikely. The most that we can infer in these instances is that a mind strongly activated by the Divine creates of itself these images in a form familiar to it; and even this conclusion should be accepted with caution.



Since the Divine is present within us as the creative energy which gives form to our bodies and coherence to our minds, we should expect that it would reveal itself directly to consciousness not as a sound or image, but as an inner impulsion, a silent and at times irresistible command, to perform acts of a certain character or to modify our lives in a certain manner. Especially when we feel ourselves impelled, we know scarcely how or why, to undertake a course which will increase the harmony among living things, produce beauty, or advance truth as we see it, we may suspect the direct influence of the Divine. This is particularly likely to occur in youth, when the creative energy that built the body and formed the mind, having now completed the major part of these tasks, is carried by its own onward surge to seek an outlet in activities of the same fundamental character, but in other fields. The young man or woman is impelled by the momentum of his own growth to dedicate his fresh strength to moral effort, to the service of an art or a science, perhaps to make heavy sacrifices for the advancement of a cause sacred to him. Or else the urge toward a wider harmony takes the form of earnest friendship or devoted love. In later years, when we are caught up in the humdrum round of life and the economic struggle claims so large a share of our strength, such expressions of spontaneous creativity become more rare, but are by no means always absent.

Not only in our heroic moral endeavors and in our great creative enterprises, but in numberless acts of love and kindness that we no sooner perform than forget, does the Divine within us find expression. Indeed, since it is so intimately a part of each living thing, it must be more or less implicated in every act

of every creature. Yet the thoughts and the deeds which are fairly pure expressions of the Divine are relatively rare, for the primary character of living things is overlaid and frequently masked by emotions and attitudes forced upon them in the struggle for existence. Our primary nature is so mixed with our secondary nature that it needs the greatest perspicacity to disentangle these two components of our total being; and we must be exceedingly cautious lest we mistake for expressions of the Divine desires and impulses which have a different origin. Only after a long and severe discipline can we make this distinction with some measure of certainty. Except for one whose nature has been thoroughly purified, the most adequate expressions of the Divine are all too likely to be mixed and tainted with baser motives. Our urge to create things of beauty, our zeal for moral improvement and reform, in themselves upsurgings of our primary nature, are in most instances more or less entangled with desire for applause or fame, jealousy of competitors, pride, self-conceit, and other attitudes which obviously have been fostered by the competition of man with man. The purest love is rarely unmixed with animal passions engendered by the struggle for existence. How are we to distinguish the expressions of the Divine which are genuine and pure from those which are mixed and those which are perhaps quite spurious? Must we wait passively until these revelations of the Divine come to us unbidden, or can we by deliberate effort increase the probability or frequency of their occurrence, or their authenticity?

## 2. *The Mystic's Systematic Quest of the Divine*

Fortunately, we are not wholly without experience



to guide us in these matters; for many before us have tackled the same problem and have left us records of their methods and accomplishments. The effort to come close to the Divine by probing the depths of one's own spirit is the mystic's quest, at least as old as the art of writing, which may be taken as the distinguishing feature of a civilized as opposed to a barbarous or savage community. Portrayals of gods and men in various yogic postures, found by excavators in the Indus cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa and assigned to a period antedating the Aryan invasion of northern India, prove how ancient this discipline is. A custom widespread among the plains Indians of North America, whose men retired into the wilderness in search of a supernatural vision, which was often hastened by the most atrocious self-inflicted tortures, appears to have been a more primitive form of the same endeavor. For thousands of years, amid the jungles of India, on the bleak plateau of Tibet, in the great river valleys of China, in the deserts of Egypt and Syria, and amidst the oak forests of Europe, countless resolute men have pursued this same quest. The vast body of experience they have accumulated, and in part preserved in written records, cannot reasonably be neglected by one who wishes to understand our common human nature, its aspirations, its hidden depths, its limitations, and its aberrations. The fact that these men often fell into ludicrous and even repulsive excesses cannot cancel the value of their testimony. Were the worth of any human endeavor to be annulled by the errors and absurdities to which it all too frequently leads, which of our sciences or arts or institutions could claim our respect?

Everywhere the mystic strove to know God, to attain union with God, or to become God-like, which

are so many variations of the same theme. His method was based upon the postulate that God is not wholly external to man but also immanent in us, a belief symbolized in the most various forms, from the Zagreus myth of the ancient Orphics, the assertion of the identity of the individual Atman with the cosmic Brahman of the *Upanishads*, to the doctrine of the mediaeval Christian mystics that there is a divine spark at the "apex" of the human soul. This postulate, in whatever form expressed, was fundamental; for it was held that the soul can know only that which is like itself. Although when applied to cognition of the physical world we can no longer take seriously the old Greek doctrine that like knows like, in so far as knowledge of the Divine is concerned it is sound. For the Divine is not, like a tree or a stone, recognized by certain physical attributes, but only by its capacity to win a response from something deep within us, which is like itself because part of itself. Unless we possess the touchstone within us, we shall never recognize the Divine.

Despite the great diversity of the creeds they professed and the metaphysical doctrines with which they were imbued, mystics everywhere followed a course of discipline surprisingly similar in its main features, which indicates that it was based upon a correct understanding of human nature and the problem to be solved; for these remain essentially the same beneath all the motley garb of dogma and symbolism. Although we refuse to be shackled by ancient dogmas and undertake our quest in the spirit of explorers about to enter a land hitherto untrodden by human feet, a method so old and well tried is likely to contain something of value to us. Mysticism has almost universally been regarded as a progression, an advance from



level to level effected by the strenuous endeavor of the aspirant, and in this progress three distinct stages are commonly distinguished: (1) purgation or purification, (2) meditation or illumination, and (3) contemplation, or union with God. The last is not so much a stage in the journey as its destination. Although this general sequence, the fruit of much experience, will be useful to us, we need not bind ourselves to follow it slavishly. Above all, in the final stage we shall not, in the manner of many mystics, hope to identify ourselves with a transcendent, supramundane being separated from the naïve human mind by an illusory world. On the contrary, we shall feel amply rewarded if we can distinguish the original divine element within us from the secondary aspects of our nature, so that it may illuminate our thoughts and guide our acts, filling our lives with light and love, and bringing that peace and joy which comes from constant obedience to the central principle of our being. We shall call this final stage and culmination of our quest "unity", because as we reach it the contrast between our primary nature and the antithetic modifications imposed upon us by the struggle for existence is overcome, and we become at last unified or integrated beings.

### 3. *The First Stage, Purification*

The first stage in the progression toward the Divine, purification or purgation, is dictated by the firm conviction that without holiness no man can know God. Whether he thinks of heaven as a special place to be entered by a soul in a resurrected body or merely as a blessed state of mind, no man of religious insight and feeling imagines that he can enter it just as he finds himself, with his thoughts undisciplined and pas-

sions unsubdued. The man who aspires to attain spiritual heights far above the herd must certainly be morally no worse than his neighbors; so he recognizes the necessity of obedience to the moral code of his religion, his nation, his social class, or whatever other standard of conduct he happens to have inherited. We cannot avoid action during our period of mental or spiritual renewal; and the very need to undertake this reconstruction proves that as yet we are without adequate principles of our own; so that unless we sustain ourselves by the generally accepted morality while striving for higher things, we may well fall below it in our unguarded moments. Descartes, it will be recalled, resolved to follow current practices through the period of systematic doubting upon which he embarked with the purpose of building knowledge anew from its prime foundations. No matter that the conventional ethic be narrow and imperfect and we aspire to higher and more generous principles of conduct; it must serve as our point of departure; for every journey necessarily begins from the spot where we happen to be situated.

But this is merely our starting point. We have learned that our primary nature, which is harmonious and godlike, is heavily overlaid with attitudes, passions, and modes of conduct forced upon our ancestors and ourselves by the necessity to survive in a competitive world. Our endeavor to find the Divine within us is inspired by the hope that, as we divest ourselves of these secondary accretions, the divinity within us will shine forth. Although every activity that causes the suffering or destruction of another organized being clashes with that impulsion toward harmony which is the central fact of our own being; to live we must eat, and sometimes defend ourselves



against aggression; and in both of these ways we are forced into conflict with other living things. The best we can do is so to simplify our lives that such competition and destruction are reduced to a minimum. The more frugal our diet, the fewer living things must give up their lives to support ours. The more we succeed in disburdening ourselves of needless luxuries and extravagances, the less we are driven to compete with our neighbors for wealth, and the less frequently we are disturbed by the passions which are inevitably stirred up by the struggle to amass material goods. Upon this point, all men who have striven for spiritual insight, whatever their creed or philosophy, are practically unanimous in their testimony.

This reduction of our material needs and simplification of our lives need not lead to their impoverishment. On the contrary, it prepares the way for their vast enrichment. All the treasures of the intellect and spirit, all the beauty of nature and of art, are still available to us in fullest measure. The material goods consumed by one individual become unavailable to another, hence we are driven to contend furiously for them. But it is the peculiarity of a spiritual possession that innumerable people can participate in it, yet each enjoy it in its fullness. This common sharing of an ideal, a doctrine, a tradition, or an admiration binds men together, just as the strife for the exclusive possession of a material object drives them asunder.

Although, strive as we may, in this world so crowded with living things we cannot live and move without thwarting or crushing some of them, we can at least divest ourselves of those passions and attitudes imposed upon us by the struggle for existence. This purification of the spirit follows closely upon and is com-

plementary to that formal rectitude of outward conduct and simplification of our lives which is the first step toward illumination. The affections from whose tyranny we must liberate ourselves are the well-known swarm of disruptive passions against which the doctors of the spirit have so often inveighed: greed, envy, jealousy, anger, hatred, malice, vengefulness, and lust, in all their endless shades and combinations. Even when we must resist the man or animal who deliberately oppresses or unwittingly injures us, we must learn to do so without anger or malice, and if possible with love. This may be hard and require years of careful self-discipline, but it is indispensable; for nothing so beclouds the Divine within us as the fumes of anger and hatred. What for the spirited and generous man may be most difficult of all, harder even than to confront his personal adversaries without malice or rage, is to view the cruel treatment of helpless and defenseless creatures without losing his temper, yet never cease to oppose such cruelty.

#### *4. Meditation as an Aid to Purgation*

The stages of our progress toward the Divine are not successive but overlap, and this is especially true of the first and second. Purgation, and especially that catharsis of the affections to which we have just alluded, can be greatly advanced by meditation, and indeed in its absence seems scarcely possible. We begin by trying to cultivate the habit of reacting with the intellect rather than the passions to the affronts and rude shocks we receive as we pass through the world. Instead of flying into a rage or meeting opposition with contempt, we pause and ask ourselves: "Why did he do this?" or "Why did it happen this way?" As



we try to understand each event by tracing it to its antecedent causes, our resentment dies away, perhaps to be succeeded by compassion or sympathy. This man who spoke so rudely to me was raised by a drunken mother and had only two years of school; would it not be miraculous if he had acquired a finer courtesy? These animals that damaged my corn bore me no malice, but were driven by the same necessity for food which led me to plant the crop—perhaps on land from which they or their ancestors had been driven. This mouse which has ruined my blanket was merely trying to make itself a warm nest on a cold night. Perhaps I must kill or at least deport it before it does further damage, but I shall not be angry or resentful because a mouse behaves after the manner of mice. Spinoza, however we may appraise his metaphysical presuppositions, is an excellent guide for one who strives to cultivate this habit of mind, viewing each event not as an isolated occurrence but as a necessary link in an endless chain of causation—*sub specie aeternitatis*.

To lead a life unencumbered by superfluous chattels and acquire a calm and understanding mind, it is not necessary to distribute our possessions among the poor, cast off all our obligations, and retire into a cell or a cave. Although this course has been followed by many Seekers in both the East and the West, others have continued a more active life, following a trade, bearing civic obligations or administrative duties, acting as heads of households, yet finding time to pursue their quest of the Highest. It is easy not to be angered by opposition nor distressed by losses if we never deal with men and have no concern for the property necessary to support our life and enterprises. It is just the occasions when, in the course of a more active life,

we meet these affronts and reverses which give us the opportunity to make proof of our progress.

As insects have two methods of developing their physical wings, so men have followed two ways of acquiring their spiritual wings. One is that of the caterpillar, which after attaining full growth encloses itself in a cocoon, where shut off completely from the outside world it rests for many days quiescent, while it undergoes a complete reorganization of its internal and external parts, and its wings are formed, all ready to spread and harden as soon as it bursts from its case. This was the method of the Buddha, the inspired Tibetan yogi Milarepa, and many another Eastern sage; while Jesus and Mohammed followed the same course for shorter periods. The second method is that of the locusts, grasshoppers, and numerous other insects which acquire their wings while leading active lives, by means of successive molts. Perhaps one will say that butterflies and moths, which follow the method of complete seclusion during metamorphosis, produce ampler and more beautiful wings than any insect which remains active while it forms them. Yet men like the Stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius, whom Matthew Arnold called "the most beautiful character in history", and in more recent times Gandhi, show us what spiritual heights we may reach while leading active lives filled with many duties. But our days should not be so crowded, nor our energy so exhausted, by our varied activities that we have not a little time each day, or in the silence of the night, for study and meditation. And it is desirable to retire from time to time to a quiet spot, where for at least a few weeks we may pursue our meditations with little interruption, maturing our thoughts at leisure. But if it is impossible for us to go off to the country or the seashore we can, as



Marcus Aurelius said, retire into our own minds, and find there strength and refreshment.

### 5. *The Middle Way*

We soon discover that we cannot by a simple act of volition free ourselves of all those desires and unruly passions that distract us, nor completely cleanse our minds of anger, envy, and hollow pride. Annoyed by the slowness of their release from these disturbing affections, many Seekers have striven to hasten the process by fasting, exposure, long vigils, self-flagellation in innumerable and often ingenious forms, and even self-mutilation. We have ample testimony that these harsh measures are far from being as efficacious as one might suppose. An exhausted mind, like an emaciated body, may be less able to cast off or correct its own morbid states than a vigorous mind in a healthy body. Yet despite horrible sufferings, men have persisted in such practices, not only because there is a certain exhilaration in making heroic efforts and enduring vast hardships for any cause dear to us, but because the ensuing exhaustion frequently prepared the way for visions, ecstasies, and other extraordinary psychic states. Such experiences are often said to be ineffable; and perhaps this is fortunate; for those which have been recorded in print often fail to impress the reader with a feeling of the Divine, and indeed as a whole fall far short of the most exalted religious imagery of devout poets who make no claim to ecstatic visions. The chief value of these extraordinary experiences lies not in their enhancement of the religious concepts or spiritual insight of mankind, but in their effect upon the subsequent lives of those who enjoyed them. If we assess them by this, which

seems the only fair, criterion, their worth is not negligible; for they have in many instances encouraged the visionary to serve his fellows with renewed zeal.

The extremes of ascetic rigor are not only superfluous but often injurious to the Seeker. This was the verdict of the Buddha, who forbade his disciples the exhausting regimen he himself had followed in his quest of enlightenment; although the Middle Way that he recommended appears harsh enough when judged by modern standards of indulgent living. The mediaeval Christian mystic Henry Suso, after inflicting almost incredible tortures upon himself for twenty-two years, was at the age of forty warned in a vision to desist from austerities that jeopardized his life; and thereafter he advised those under his spiritual direction to practice moderate severity. From every point of view, simplicity and moderation are preferable to either indulgence in luxury or an exhausting asceticism. By this middle course we preserve our sense of the relative values of spiritual and material goods, and maintain our strength for the strenuous pursuit of the former. On the other hand, by refraining from unnecessary food, drink, clothing, and the like, we find it easier to dwell in concord with other living beings. Our food and clothing are invariably gained at the expense of other living things; and even if they are not torn from the bodies of slaughtered animals, when we use more of the products of the earth than we ourselves need, we deprive other creatures of their due share. For this world is so crowded with life that it is scarcely possible for one animal to eat without causing another to go hungry.

A mild and rational asceticism, then, is preferable not only for its immediate effect upon the Seeker, but because it ameliorates his relations with the life which

*Before synthetics like became common.*



surrounds him and expresses his benevolent attitude toward it. If with this regime our disturbing passions do not fade away as fast as we wish, it seems best not to strive by rigorous practices to suppress them, but rather so to intensify our beneficent and constructive activities that they have scarcely room to intrude into our lives. If we cannot stamp out the foul things that creep into our minds from our lower nature, we may at least soar in spirit so high above them that they almost cease to be troublesome. As we earlier remarked, the stages in the Seeker's journey may overlap. Although the first is purgation, and unless we have made a good start at this we cannot advance to higher levels, the process may continue into the later stages; and we can hardly hope to complete it until we attain full enlightenment, if indeed it is possible to divest ourselves of all disturbing passions so long as we live in the flesh.

#### 6. *The Second Stage, Meditation*

The reflections we earlier suggested as a means of soothing our resentment when we are thwarted or injured by the processes of the non-living world or, as far more frequently happens, by living things of all kinds from invisible microbes to men, may well serve as the point of departure for our more systematic meditations. We recall that it is precisely because they are so similar to ourselves, in their origin and mode of development no less than in their needs, that other organisms are thrown into that conflict with ourselves which we have so many reasons to regret. Either they injure us without hatred or malice, as is nearly always the case with the animals that damage our property; or when passions are present they are, as we learned in

Chapter VIII, the effect rather than the cause of the competition among living things for the means of subsistence.

Following this train of thought, we accustom ourselves to look upon all organized beings, from the simplest to the most complex, as products of one creative energy working throughout the Universe to impress form and order upon its crude materials. It has given to the heavenly bodies their spherical form and the steady movements whereby each maintains its proper distance from the others and avoids collision. It orders the rhythmic vibrations which bring us light from the sun and stars. It draws the diffused vapors into clouds, gives rotundity to the rain drops, and gathers the dispersed waters through the rivers into the sea. It builds up the crystalline rock and designs the hexagonal snowflake. These and innumerable other tasks had to be performed before our planet was ready to support the living things which reveal its capacity for organization in a far higher degree. Wherever there is life and growth, there this same creative energy is at work; the myriad forms which living things assume do not prove that diverse principles are at work within them, but result from the operation of this same energy amidst diverse circumstances. When mind appears in the realm of life, the same creative force is at work within it, giving meaningful forms to its sensations, coherence to its thoughts, and making it capable of benevolence and love. Everywhere, from the least to the greatest of created things, we behold that striving toward order and harmony to which we owe all life, all thought, all beauty, all love and coöperation among living things. When we survey the Universe in this fashion, we cannot help but reverence and love the creative power which has given us



life and so many things which make existence precious to us.

And yet there is a gloomier side of the picture. The very exuberance of the creative process seems to have detracted from its perfection. So powerful is the impulsion toward organization, so innumerable and so crowded are the living beings which arise from it, that they clash together, tear and destroy each other, come to regard each other with hatred, anger, and fear. At times the fair fabric of creation seems so infected with ugly passions and violent deeds that we turn away in loathing and revulsion. It is difficult to love beings which not only attempt to destroy us but are constantly attacking and lacerating each other. We can overcome this hatred or repugnance only by looking beneath the surface and beholding there the same creative energy, the same striving toward perfection, which has made us and everything we hold most dear. Each created being is a result of harmonization, a process everywhere directed toward concord and beauty, which encases its products in protective armament, and permits the intrusion of hostile attitudes into them, only when these become necessary to preserve them in a world overcrowded with other expressions of this same fundamentally beneficent process.

### 7. *The Final Stage, Unity*

Perhaps we shall never be capable of loving all the fierce and destructive animals, all the cruel and depraved men, which we see about us on every side. Love is the antithesis of all that such beings express. But when we have meditated long and earnestly upon this matter, we find that we begin to feel sympathy and even love for that which was in the venomous snake

before its fangs, that in the scorpion which is prior to its sting, that in the ravening beast which is more primary than its lust for blood, that in the thief which is deeper than his foolish cupidity, that in the cruel man which is more central than his cruelty. For it required a constructive process, exactly the same as that which formed us, to make the snake before it could strike, the lion before it could spring, the liar before he could lie, the murderer before he could kill. It is only in the final stages of their development, when they are equipped to go forth and make their way in a hostile world, that creatures become antagonistic to each other. Beneath their so often forbidding and repulsive exterior, the armor which shields them from destructive influences, is something we must love, because it is cognate with the source of love within us. Love springs from understanding.

This universal love, sympathy, and compassion, which gradually suffuses our minds when we have cleansed them of disruptive passions and gained insight into the creative process, is the expression of the Divine within us, a revelation of its nature as true and adequate as any we can at present hope for, or need. The Divine is not an object to be known by its form and dimensions, nor a force to be measured by an apparatus equipped with a scale to give pointer readings. It is a universal activity which employs physical forces as its agents and produces sensible forms as its garment. Everywhere it expresses itself in a manner determined by the medium it employs. In the rainbow and the flower its expression is beauty; in the intellect, truth; and in the heart, love which has been purified of all selfishness and passion. Love, which impels us to cultivate harmony with that toward which it is directed, is the form in which harmonization inevi-



tably expresses itself in a sensitive spirit. Through this love, and the moral efforts which it inspires, the Divine strives ceaselessly to diminish and overcome the strife which arises incidentally from the creative process.

When we have thus unified all the aspects of our complex nature and our spirit is suffused with love, we further experience the Divine within us, not as a vision nor a voice, but as an eagerness to dedicate ourselves to works which will increase harmony among living things. Even to gain this illumination, we found it necessary to simplify and purify our lives, in order to diminish the strife with the beings around us; and now this inner light prompts us to intensify the same effort. This impulsion from the depths of our being, however strong, is in itself vague and indefinite, indicating the general trend of our endeavor, but not its concrete tasks. The spirit yearns and aspires, but in this baffling world only intelligence can guide it toward its goal. To learn how to live fully and richly, satisfying our insistent longing to fulfill and perfect our own nature, but in such a fashion that we do not hamper other beings in the fulfilment of theirs, we must turn for guidance to the study of ethics—but to an ethic more broadly and liberally conceived than it has been by the great majority of those who have written so voluminously upon the subject.

Finally, we must guard vigilantly against carelessness and pride. Few men, if any, have attained an illumination which pervades the spirit like a steady flame that neither grows dim nor expires. For most of us, the inner light needs continual renewal; and each rekindling demands an intensification of our effort. Because our mind was once free of disruptive passions and our ideals pure, is no assurance that base and un-

worthy motives will not creep in and corrupt the endeavors for which we claim the highest sanction. Even if we have consciously made contact with the Divine at one point, we cannot claim to comprehend it. To guard ourselves against so absurd a pretension, we need only to reflect how little we understand its workings within ourselves, in our bodies and even in the dark foundations of the very minds that so bravely yet so ineffectually strive to fathom it. We cannot know all the kinds of living things on the speck of cosmic dust we call our planet, far less the organizing principle which has formed this vast diversity. We can only helplessly conjecture to what degree living things beside ourselves are conscious, and whether their minds, in some instances at least, are more thoroughly illuminated by the Divine than our own. We do not know how many of the countless millions of suns that dot the heavens, and reveal themselves in increasing multitudes to each more powerful telescope, are encircled by planets at temperatures which permit the development of higher forms, and whether on some of these planets the Divine has created living things, or perhaps beings whose principle of organization is so different from that of the life we know that, could we see them, we should be puzzled whether to call them living or lifeless, could hardly guess whether they were conscious or unconscious or quickened by something which is not sentience but analogous to it, whose nature we cannot even imagine. Our spirit is exalted when irradiated by an energy that pervades all life, all forms, and all space, making us brothers of everything that breathes; our intellect is humbled by our ineffectual efforts to comprehend the Divine immanent in the world. Of God's transcendence, we can only conjecture.



## CHAPTER X

THE DIVINE AS THE SOURCE  
OF MORAL EFFORT1. *Man's Earliest Gods not Moral*

The host of gods and godlings worshipped by men in the earlier stages of culture, for the most part representing natural phenomena and forces, had little to do with righteousness. This situation persisted for ages; and even people who had acquired a fairly high civilization, as the ancient Greeks, continued to sacrifice to deities to whom they ascribed conduct far from exemplary. But among the beliefs of primitive tribes, even those as low in the scale of culture as the Papuans and the Fuegians, anthropologists have detected a High God, looked upon as the source and upholder of the tribe's unwritten laws, who came into special prominence at the initiation rites, when the importance of obeying and maintaining the tribal customs was impressed upon youths about to enter the status of manhood. These High Gods, who most of the time loomed in the shadowy background of the tribal pantheon, apparently represent the first glimmerings of monotheism among peoples not yet ready for the full development of this grand but difficult idea. Until, after long ages of questioning and study, men developed a unified view of the operations of nature, they were unable to conceive how its manifold and often antagonistic processes could be controlled by a single god, and they needed a separate deity to account for each

phenomenon which strongly drew their attention. A pluralistic view of the world demanded a plurality of governing spirits; and the High God, who had no special department to supervise, remained aloof and mostly unconsidered; while the actual working deities received worship and sacrifices.

As men's ethical consciousness developed, the moral functions of their gods became increasingly prominent. In the course of a few centuries, Greek thinkers transformed Zeus from the impetuous Thunderer of Homer and Hesiod to the lofty moral deity of the tragic poets and the philosophers. The ancient Israelites ascribed the authorship of their Decalogue to Jahweh in a quite literal sense; but in the undeveloped state of their eschatology, he had not yet become for them the judge of souls, like Osiris among the Egyptians and Rhadamanthus, Minos, and Aecus among the Greeks. Until about the time of the Exile, the Jews believed that the people's transgressions would be visited by the offended Godhead upon the nation as a whole, rather than directly upon culpable individuals. It was not until a later period that the notion of personal immortality and a final judgment was borrowed from neighboring peoples, to play so prominent a part in the religions which drew their inspiration from Judaism.

2. *Karma, Deity Reduced to its Ethical Aspect*

In India, the ethical aspect of deity took a very different and highly significant course of development. Although the ancient Aryans had in Yama, the first mortal to die, a king of the underworld and then a judge of the dead corresponding to Osiris and Rhadamanthus, at a remote period this notion was super-



seded, at least among the more thoughtful Indians, by the remarkable concept of Karma. Complementary to the notion of Karma, and indispensable to it, is the older and more widely diffused notion of the transmigration of souls from body to body in successive rebirths. It is obvious to nearly everyone that in this present existence the good are not always rewarded and the wicked punished according to their deserts; but if souls persist from incarnation to incarnation, there is an opportunity for residual injustices to be rectified; so that in the long run each will receive the happiness or the misery it has earned for itself by its own acts. Karma is the cosmic mechanism by which this retribution is effected. To the philosophic Indian, its mode of operation is as impersonal and inexorable as that of a law of nature. In the theistic religions of India the Supreme God, whether called Isvara, Vishnu, or Siva, is the upholder of the Karmic law, in much the same way that a devout Christian might ascribe to God the function of maintaining the law of gravitation. But in the Vaisesika and Samkhya systems of philosophy, as in Buddhism and Jainism, Karma is a self-acting system, as little in need of divine support or intervention as natural processes in the view of mechanistic science. I believe that we may look upon Karma, as we find it in Samkhya or philosophic Buddhism, as the concept of deity pared down to its irreducible minimum, its ethical aspect. Although a savage struggling with problems of natural causation might recognize a god who had nothing to do with morality; without a moral component in the larger world around us, there can be no religion acceptable to civilized man, but at most humanism. To be sure, few men of religious feeling are satisfied with a concept of deity so abstract and severe as this imper-

sonal Karma; and in popular Buddhism gods and spirits have multiplied like saints in Christianity.

To one who adds to a developed sense of justice compassion for the sufferings of all his fellow creatures, Karma and reincarnation provide a far more satisfactory solution of the problem of reward and punishment than the single incarnation, the single judgment, and the endless happiness or torture of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, or Mohammedanism. There can be no proportion between the utmost of good or evil a man may do in a few score years and an eternity of bliss or punishment. The cause and the effect are wholly incommensurate, for eternity exceeds a finite life more than all the water in the oceans exceeds a single drop. Yet since Aristotle clarified the concept of justice, proportion has been inseparable from it; whence it is evident that the dogma of eternal punishment offends a developed sense of justice. The doctrine of Karma escapes this difficulty by allowing to each soul an unlimited number of attempts to free itself of guilt and impurity, so that it may win salvation. If we look upon this world as a school and living beings as its pupils, Karma permits those who fail a grade to repeat it over and over, until at last they pass the final examination; whereas the doctrine of Final Judgment allows each pupil only a single chance to pass, with the direst consequences if he fail. Karma is one of those brilliant solutions of an annoying problem which we wish to seize upon as true. But although, like Pythagoras in ancient times, yogic adepts of India claim to remember their earlier incarnations, most of us can unearth no such recollections; and in the absence of this evidence the critical mind finds it difficult to accept the conclusion. We must look in another direction for



indications of the moral component of the surrounding world.

### 3. *The Morality of Men and the Protomorality of Animals*

Before we can begin to understand this matter, we must have a clear concept of the essential character of moral effort and its relation to the vital and even the inorganic processes out of which it arose. The insistence of so many writers on ethics that morality is something peculiarly human, while it contains an element of truth, tends to conceal from us the true position of moral effort in the evolutionary sequence. Everyone knows that there are certain moral maxims or rules, such as those of the Decalogue, to which he is expected to conform, with censure or even legal punishment as the price of disobeying them; but few have a comprehensive notion of what these rules are intended to accomplish. All moral codes, from the most primitive to the most advanced, have as their aim, recognized or implicit, the harmonious association of the members of a society. Their purpose is to maintain that structure of relations within which men can live, and reproduce their kind, and perpetuate the community. They are not directed primarily to the realization of values or felicity, but to the maintenance of an order within which men may strive to win happiness or experience values in such ways as do not jeopardize the integrity of the social structure. The earliest moral codes applied only to the members of the tribe, within which the "law of amity" prevailed; beyond its narrow limits ruled the "law of enmity," which was in effect the absence of all law. For thousands of years, far-seeing men have aspired to make

of all mankind a single society pervaded by the law of amity; but this is still no more than an attractive dream. Yet the most sensitive ethical consciousness reaches far beyond this, striving to attain harmonious co-existence not only with all men but with all living things, and even with all beautiful forms inorganic no less than organic.

But however high it reaches and whatever elaboration it acquires, morality grows out of men's vital necessity to live in harmony with their surroundings, and in particular with other living beings, who can so readily injure them. If we deny this, we must further deny that the most primitive human races we know are moral; for their morality shows none of those refinements which more thoughtful men have added to it, but consists merely of those attitudes and habits deemed necessary to hold the tribe together and safeguard its prosperity. Other species of animals, facing the same problem of living in the midst of surrounding creatures of their own and other kinds, likewise solved it by developing appropriate modes of behavior. The chief difference between men and other animals is that our modes of conduct are in large measure learned from those around us, by instruction and example; whereas the patterns of behavior of other animals are on the whole innate. Yet this difference is relative rather than absolute; for all human behavior has its innate foundation or component as the essential condition of its development; and at least the higher animals learn much from their companions. The largely innate systems of behavior of animals are, then, analogous to the moral codes of men, and serve precisely the same purpose of permitting the co-existence of individuals and the perpetuation of the kind. The more attentively we study the socially more advanced



of these animals, the more we marvel at the perfection of the arrangements whereby they live at peace with each other, and the more we are inclined to ask ourselves whether, on the whole, our vaunted morality reaches the altitude of "instinctive" behavior at its best.

Whether or not it is correct to call animals moral is a question which merits careful attention. Our blind obedience to authority or to rules we have been taught is certainly no more moral than an animal's unquestioning conformity to rules of conduct which have been impressed upon its nervous system, and which likewise are conducive to its own prosperity and that of its kind. The foundation of all higher morality is the ability to foresee, and to choose between alternative possibilities of action, with some regard for the future welfare of ourselves and those others who will be affected by our acts. Philosophers who apparently have never given serious attention to animals, except possibly dogs and chickens, are fond of making sweeping pronouncements about their inner life, such as a patient student of their ways would never dare to utter. However, there can be little question that men at their best possess these capacities of foresight, compassion, and the imaginative appreciation of the needs of other beings, to a higher degree than any other animal we know; and this gives its distinctive complexion to human morality in its fully developed form. We might suggest the relation between the level of moral attainment in man and other animals by referring to that of the latter as "protomorality". Unless our whole doctrine of evolution is mistaken, our human morality grew out of the protomorality of our distant ancestors; while the protomorality of contem-

porary birds and quadrupeds represents a stage through which the human stock once passed.

#### 4. *Our Morality the Outgrowth of a Moralness which Pervades the Universe*

But the marvellously integrated patterns of behavior, serving much the same end as human moral codes, which we observe in birds, mammals, insects, and other metazoa, are themselves the product of a long evolution. Before such complex behavior could arise, it was necessary that there be multicellular animals, which alone have the organs of perception, the nervous system, and the limbs which make it possible. Since the simplest living things are unicellular, it is evident that the more complex forms arose from the aggregation of single cells, or from their failure to separate after each division, as occurs in the protista. And this process of cell division without separation is repeated in the embryogeny of each multicellular individual. The structural units of each higher organism form a sort of society, whose members have achieved not only the capacity to dwell together in great harmony but to coöperate with extraordinary efficiency for the welfare of the whole. In the most primitive of the metazoa, as with the most primitive human societies, there is relatively little specialization of function among the units; but in the highest animals, as in the most advanced societies, differentiation and specialization of function have become very great, so that it is scarcely possible for one unit to live without the coöperation of many others. To attribute morality, or even protomorality, to the cells which by banding together form organs, or to the organs which coöperate in the functioning of the body as a whole,



would be an unwarranted ascription of psychic life to dependent parts of the body; but we might say that a moralness pervades each organized being. The methods by which the harmonious association of the structural units of an organism is achieved are different from those employed by animals as wholes in forming a society, but the results correspond rather closely.

Even before the simplest forms of life could arise, it was necessary to have a cosmos in which matter was gathered into definite masses which preserved their identity for long ages by moving rhythmically about each other, that is, by achieving harmonious co-existence. Moreover, so far as we know, life can appear only on the surface of a planet where matter is found in a considerable variety of more or less complex forms. The elements or species of matter, we are taught, arise through the aggregation of numbers of the simplest particles into societies of definite form which we call atoms; and molecules, in all their bewildering variety, grow out of the association of atoms in patterns composed of units which are tied together by the closest bonds. Evidently a moralness pervades the whole cosmos, from its smallest particles to its great masses.

Beginning with the complex phenomena of human morality, which is above all an effort to dwell in harmony with the beings which surround us, we have traced it through a descending series of analogous phenomena to the inorganic world which supports us. If we now retrace our course in the contrary direction, we shall gain a clearer notion of where our moral effort stands in the evolutionary scale. At the lowest level, we find the ultimate particles of matter banding together, in obedience to intrinsic forces, to form atoms; and these, when temperatures are favorable,

associating to compose molecules, each kind of which we suppose to have its own distinctive pattern. On the cooling surfaces of planets, under conditions we do not yet understand, molecules aggregate to form living substance. Even in quite primitive living things, as the amoeba, a great variety of molecules, some of them large and complex in structure; coöperate closely with each other to form an entity which, despite its lack of special organs, is capable of a surprising variety of reactions and activities. In the simplest living things, each division is followed by the separation of the daughter cells; but when the products of such division remain in contact, a multicellular organism is formed; and we may regard it as a society composed of numerous cells banded together to lead a common life, which requires the closest harmony among them. In the highest animals, cells of many kinds are conjoined into tissues and organs, which work together for the welfare of a whole which can perform a great variety of movements, explore its environment with a number of senses, utter sounds, and even think.

At every stage in this long progression, each entity, whether simple or compound, is surrounded more or less closely by other entities of the same or different kinds. The existence of each compound entity depends not only upon the coherence of its parts but upon its adjustment to these neighboring beings. The more complex the organism and the greater and more varied its needs, the more difficult it is to preserve harmony with its neighbors, hence the more highly developed the means for accomplishing this end. Each of the higher animals follows a complex pattern of behavior which is largely innate, and which contains special features for adjusting its conduct to that of others of its kind, and even to that of individuals of other



species. Man brings exceptional mental endowments for accomplishing the same end. Roughly speaking, the purpose of his moral endeavor is to establish externally, between separate individuals, the same harmonious association and coöperation which we find among the cells and organs of our body when in health; but at the best we strive to achieve this end without the complete sacrifice of spontaneity and personality, and the reduction of all the members of society to a dead level of uniformity.

### 5. *The Source of Morality is Within Us*

It has become apparent that throughout this long progression a single movement has been preserved, leading from the moralness of the non-living world through the protomorality of animals which follow innate patterns of behavior to the highest morality of man. We have in the present chapter briefly retraced, for the purpose of viewing it from a different aspect, the creative process already outlined in Chapter V; and we find that it is throughout a moral process. *Hence the Divine, which effects this vast, aeonian movement, must be recognized as the prime mover and actual effective power in all moral endeavor.* The Divine is no mere external source of morality, issuing mandates and establishing standards for mankind to follow, but is its origin in a far more intimate sense; for its immanence in each individual impels him to strive for harmony and makes him a moral being. We are moral because the fountainhead of all ethical endeavor lies within us; and we need look to no external source of moral authority.

Our ancestors were correct in supposing that their moral rules came to them from some higher, divine

source. But following the well-known propensity of undisciplined minds everywhere to project into the external world that which is within themselves, they imagined that these laws had been dictated by some superhuman being. Their true origin was those individuals among themselves whose ethical sensitivity was most advanced, and who were at the same time gifted with intelligence and persuasive speech, so that they might interpret for their people the drift of the moral impulsion which was equally present in all of them, but in many too deeply buried to force its way into dull minds infected with disruptive attitudes and passions imposed upon them by the struggle for existence. The ethical advances of mankind have always come from those among us who could best express and give direction to the creative energy, which is always a moral energy, present in all of us alike.

We are moral because that same process which made us harmoniously integrated organisms made us moral beings. Although we may look to the experience of our forefathers, or to those of our contemporaries who surpass us in wisdom and ethical sensitivity, to guide our efforts to do good, without motivation from the depth of our being external guidance could accomplish little. This force welling up within us is felt by the mind as love, sympathy, and benevolence, in the absence of which obedience to ethical mandates remains grim and perfunctory, inspired by fear of the consequences of transgression rather than by devotion to goodness and righteousness. But the monitor in all ethical endeavor is conscience, which is harmonization become conscious of itself, sensitive to its successes and failures. Just as pain springs from the disruption of harmony among the parts of the body or derangement of the bodily functions, so conscience is troubled when



an observed failure of harmony, within ourselves or more often in the external world, is traceable to our voluntary acts, to our carelessness or neglect of obligations.

Although we closely associate conscience with moral situations, and indeed look to it as the court of final appeal in all ethical dilemmas, we may regard it as a peculiarly moral phenomenon only if we take the widest view of morality, as the effort to achieve harmony and coherence in every situation, whether among living or lifeless objects. This truth is recognized by current language; for we speak of conscientious workmen, writers, artists, and the like. To the conscientious carpenter a loose joint, to the writer a clumsy or ungrammatical sentence, to the musician a false note, cause an inner discomfort much like that produced in every normal man by a moral lapse. The usually more acute distress that results from a recognized moral fault arises not so much from an intrinsic difference in its mode of origin as from a number of accessory circumstances. Our technical and professional blunders rarely bring upon us censure so unsparing and severe as our graver moral faults; for only a few carefully trained men are familiar with the special rules of an art or profession, whereas all are held responsible for knowing and obeying basic moral laws. Moreover, it is usually easier to detect and correct our professional blunders before others discover or are affected by them, than in the case of moral aberrations. But beneath these superficial differences there is a fundamental similarity in all the manifestations of conscience, which is the distress engendered by a recognized disharmony for which responsibility is felt, in a being pervaded by an impulsion toward an ever wider harmony. Such a disharmony pains us because it clashes

with our basic organization. Since in our complex human lives disharmonies of some sort are scarcely ever absent, a perfectly satisfied and untroubled conscience may be taken as a sign of moral blindness rather than of absolute goodness. Yet by contrast with the acute distress of an anguished conscience, the relative calm of an average good conscience seems a positive blessing, eagerly sought by those who value peace of mind.

We have seen (Chapter VI) how creation at innumerable, crowded centers led inevitably to the collision of patterns growing up at neighboring points. When possible, contiguous patterns fuse to form one comprehensive system, or somehow accommodate themselves to each other so that both can continue to exist; but except at the highest levels, such adjustments are effected by the interplay of two or more entities external to each other, without planning, supervision, or over-all guidance. But the Divine, ceaselessly striving to overcome the difficulties and conflicts inherent in creation at multiple centers, at last developed an agent capable of dealing with these oppositions in a more satisfactory manner. Such an agent had to be equipped with an intelligence which could view itself and surrounding beings in a single comprehensive survey, so that it could understand the needs of one in relation to the needs of the other, and plan a course of action which would as far as possible allow each being to satisfy its vital necessities with a minimum of strife. But intelligence, even of the highest grade, was not sufficient; the agent had further to be endowed with impulses and sentiments, such as love and good will, which would spur intelligence to interest itself in these problems, and lead to active endeavor in the light of the solutions which reason reached. Moreover, the



agent had to be willing in many instances to modify its own desires in order to allow neighboring beings an opportunity to live and perfect themselves; for much of our moral effort takes the form of voluntary self-limitation in the interest of harmony. A being so equipped is a moral being, an auxiliary which the Divine has made to forward, with an efficiency hitherto unknown, its work of increasing harmony everywhere.

But the same power of choice and self-direction which fits such a being for this task makes it possible for it to give or withhold its coöperation, even to work in opposition to the Divine. Seneca long ago declared that without the god that dwells within each man, none can do good. Yet if the Divine is the prime mover in all our moral endeavors, we are not its passive tools; for without our assent it can accomplish little. The human mind stands, so to speak, poised between the Divine, which draws it toward harmony and righteousness, and those disruptive passions and appetites forced upon animal life by the struggle for existence, which so often pull us in a contrary direction. Although to which side we incline depends upon the relative strengths of these contrasting components of our dual nature, as determined largely by heredity and early training; in this contest between opposing forces our freedom of choice seems not wholly illusory. Our contribution to the task of bringing harmony into the world appears, then, to consist largely in giving our free and unstinted support to the moral energy which wells up into the conscious mind from the depth of our being.

*A good chapter!*

## CHAPTER XI

### THE JUSTICE OF THE DIVINE

#### 1. *The Demand for Divinely Apportioned Rewards and Punishments*

We learned in the last chapter that in looking beyond their individual selves for the source of morality, our ancestors revealed true insight into the nature of the problem, but erred in supposing that moral guidance came to them in the form of verbal commandments from some superhuman being. Although, as they surmised, the direction of moral effort is determined by something more ancient, enduring, and widely diffused than mankind, it was revealed to them not from the outside but from the depths of their own being; and it rested with them, or at least the best and wisest of them, to discover and interpret this inner directive. The correctness of the interpretation can be tested only by that feeling of fulfilment or blessedness which we experience when we have satisfied the highest demands of our nature, and in a subsidiary way by comparing the ethical precepts which we thence derive with the observed course of cosmic evolution.

At the same time that they recognized a divine source of moral commandments, our ancestors believed that the god who issued the moral laws would punish those who disobeyed them, and perhaps even reward those who followed them faithfully. Just as in savage tribes offenses against individuals are not as a rule punished by public authority, and the efforts of the



tribal leaders are directed chiefly to the enforcement of taboos and the prevention of acts which might bring disaster upon the community as a whole; so in the earliest religions the god did not punish individual offenders so much as take vengeance upon the whole tribe for failure to meet its obligations to its divine protector. It was only about the time that the central government, usually autocratic, became powerful enough to preserve the peace between individuals and punish as offenses against the state wrongs done to private persons, that the notion of a judgment of the souls of the dead, and their reward or punishment in accordance with their acts, became established in religion. Our modern concept of individual as opposed to collective responsibility took a very long while to enter the minds of men. It was hardly well established in Judaism, for example, even as late as the Exile, on the eve of which Jeremiah (31: 29-30) prophesied: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." It remained for the prophet of the Exile, Ezekiel (18: 1-32), to give a full and detailed exposition of the principle of personal responsibility. But all the more advanced religions finally adopted the view that each individual will be rewarded or punished according to the ethical quality of his own acts while in the flesh. With the notable exception of those Eastern creeds which recognize a self-acting Karmic law, the supreme deity became responsible for the administration of this system of justice; and this situation has now prevailed for so many generations that the function of judge and dispenser of rewards and punishments has, in the minds of many men, be-

come inseparably connected with the idea of God.

Does this ascription of retributive justice to the source of righteousness meet an unalterable demand of our nature, so that we must refuse to recognize as Divine a power which does not inflict punishment for moral lapses? This question is of fundamental importance, for in the minds of many the validity of our doctrine of the Divine will stand or fall in accordance with the answer we give to it.

One who has devoted serious thought to the matter will at once recognize that here we unavoidably become entangled in some of the most perplexing and hotly debated problems of metaphysics, ethics, and jurisprudence, including those of freedom of the will, personal responsibility, and the justification of punishment. Scarcely anyone has in recent times more ably defended the thesis that the will is free, and that without this freedom moral value and responsibility are delusions, than Nicolai Hartmann in the third volume of his great work on *Ethics*; yet he is forced to conclude that some men may never enjoy this freedom, that even the best of men may enjoy it only occasionally, and that we cannot tell with certainty when a volition is free or the inevitable outcome of adamant causal sequences. With this summary statement of the conclusions of a profound metaphysician, who is at the same time an earnest advocate of the reality of freedom, to serve as a caveat to those who may presume to pass a hasty judgment on this problem, we must leave it for the present, and examine from other angles the question which now confronts us.

The demand for retributive justice is deeply rooted in human nature. Apart from any formal doctrine, we feel that a kind and generous deed, no matter how secret our performance of it, no matter how weak and



insignificant the recipient, must somehow bring a benefit to the doer; whereas a wicked or unkind act, no matter how thoroughly concealed from the eyes of men, must eventually redound upon the perpetrator. The ethically sensitive man feels that the performance of generous deeds, even those so slight as picking a drowning moth from a puddle, wins for him the approval of some higher power, allies him more firmly to it, or raises him in the scale of creation; while an act of selfish cruelty estranges him from this power or lowers his standing in the cosmic scheme. This apprehension of an all-pervasive moral power, an immanent Karmic law, seems to persist, as feeling, even in the face of the reasoned conclusion that it is not supported by adequate evidence and probably represents nothing actually existent.

Perhaps the source of the feeling for retributive justice is to be found in that organization of the nervous system of man and so many other animals which leads them to return, automatically and without reflection, blow for blow, butt for butt, kick for kick, and peck for peck. Long before it has begun to reason, the human child tries to strike one who has hurt it. The primitive nature of this defence reaction is not altered, but only masked, by the fact that in many animals repeated experience of the greater strength of the attacker leads to submissiveness under his persecution. The defence reaction is balanced by another not quite so widespread, that of sharing food or other good things with friendly companions. Possibly these innate modes of behavior are a primal source of our feeling for retributive justice; but undoubtedly other, more intellectual, factors, prominent among which is the demand for symmetry and balance in the inter-

relations of individuals, have contributed much to its development as we now find it within us.

## 2. *Difficulties Inherent in Retributive Justice*

Justice, of course, is concerned with far more than rewards and punishments. The just man strives above all to avoid every unjust act; and if all men succeeded in this endeavor, we should enjoy perfect human justice without the need of punishment. But since men are far from just, they have from early times tried to compensate for this deficiency by inflicting penalties of diverse sorts upon those who deviate from justice in their dealings with their fellow citizens; and this effort has claimed so large a share of men's attention that they sometimes lose sight of the true meaning of justice, and imagine that it consists chiefly in the punishment of wrong rather than the careful avoidance of all unfair acts.

But a punishment is the infliction of some pain, hardship, or loss upon the culprit; and these things are what we recognize as wrongs: so that retributive justice becomes an attempt to balance wrong with wrong; and we fondly imagine that we thereby restore justice. As though one could heal a wounded body by wounding it again! As though one could obtain a positive sum by adding two negative numbers! We cheapen and degrade the sacred concept of justice when we imagine it can be constituted by balancing injury with injury. We may indeed heal justice more or less completely by making amends for the wrong we have done; as when we give full compensation for the material losses we have deliberately or carelessly brought upon another; or when we publicly acknowledge that we have undeservedly injured another man's reputation. But



when the injury is so grave that restitution is impossible or beyond our means, as when we commit a murder or cause losses we cannot repay, we have in fact killed justice; and it is as hopeless to try to restore its life as to revive the dead man himself.

Our modern criminal law, which regards every crime as an offence against the state and does not undertake to restore the losses that individuals have suffered through criminal action, is even less successful in healing injured justice than the more direct methods of those barbarous peoples whose codes provided for restitution to the injured party or his family, as by the payment of a stipulated sum for a murder, or for a mutilation, according to a scale carefully graduated with a view to the rank of the injured man and the nature of the lesion. Closer to justice, too, was the rule of the ancient Indian code of Manu that the sovereign must make good the losses which private persons have suffered through criminal action; for one of the chief duties of the ruler is to preserve order; and every crime committed in his kingdom is an instance of his failure to fulfill his kingly obligations. The one advantage that our modern system of criminal law has over earlier systems, such as the old Germanic wergild, is that by making every crime an offense against the state, it gives the state an equal interest in prosecuting all of them; so that wrongs done to the poor do not go unpunished because they lack the means to carry through a legal process. But we shall show our true appreciation of what justice really means when we cease to miscall our criminal courts "courts of justice", looking upon them rather as clinics for the treatment of moral aberrations and the protection of society from their pernicious effects. Their sentences should be intended to reform the criminal and prevent

further crime, but never handed down in a vengeful spirit. This attitude toward punishment is as old as Plato, but modern civilization is only gradually coming to adopt it.

In addition to the impossibility of constituting justice by balancing injustices, there is the difficulty of assessing responsibility. Even the staunchest advocate of metaphysical freedom will scarcely contend that a man exposed from earliest childhood to malignant influences is as responsible for his own misdeeds as one who has had an excellent background and education. Personal responsibility is the ideal of every ethically mature man. He recognizes that the factors contributing to the formation of his character and the determination of his acts have flowed into him as a center of concrescence from all sides and from the most distant past, and he may even suspect that the strict causal sequence persists everywhere unbroken, just as Spinoza contended. But no matter; he freely takes upon his shoulders this burden from the past, makes himself responsible and accountable for it, and by this willing acceptance of that which has perhaps been forced upon him constitutes himself an ethical person.

Although for the ethically mature man personal responsibility is, at least in large measure, the voluntary assumption of an inherited burden; for the law, as for society in general, it is an indispensable fiction. Although a man's delinquency, like his successes, has many contributing factors, intricately entangled in the fabric of society no less than in that of the larger world, it is obviously impossible for a court of law to trace each of them to its source, which can at best be a proximate and never an ultimate source, and to deal with it in an adequate manner. It must in nearly all instances, as



a matter of practical necessity, treat the delinquent as if he were the primary source of all the factors which contributed to his misconduct, and make him fully responsible for them. This fiction is adequate to justify whatever punishment the security of society demands, including even the highest penalty, and of course all measures for the regeneration of the criminal; but it cannot become the ground for the slightest retributive or vindictive punishment; for this presupposes that the culprit is responsible in the strict philosophic sense; and this question has from the first been begged by the law.

Another difficulty in retributive punishment is that the graver the offense, the less possible it becomes adequately to repay the offender. It is easy to make some petty miscreant feel in his own person as much suffering as he has inflicted upon others—and many times more. But by no human means is it possible to make the great criminals of history experience even the thousandth part of the misery and woe they have brought to others. Hence, when we insist upon retributive justice, we make ourselves absurd by going to great trouble to collect the trifling accounts with heavy interest, while the great ones remain for ever unpaid.

### 3. *Recognized as Insoluble by Man, the Problem of Retribution is Transferred to God*

Because of these and other difficulties involved in the apportionment of retributive punishments, and because the notion of revenge inseparable from it becomes increasingly repugnant to people of refined feeling, thoughtful and morally sensitive men have long been inclined to take the attitude that although the

problem is too complicated for human solution, it must be somehow soluble by God. The Greeks were as interested in the problem of justice from the philosophical point of view as the Romans from the practical side; and their speculations were not without effect upon Roman jurisprudence, as, for example, in the development of the concept of natural law. In a fragment of the Ionian philosopher Anaximander, "All things pay retribution for their injustice one to another, according to the ordinance of time," we have an early recognition of the truth that an injustice committed in payment of a prior injustice calls for yet a third injustice to settle the account, and so in endless sequence.

One of the most thought-provoking treatments of the problem is found in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, as indeed in the whole series of dramas by the three great Athenian tragic poets dealing with the history of the house of Atreus. When the Grecian fleet, gathered at Aulis on its way to Troy, had long been held in port awaiting a favorable wind, the supreme commander, Agamemnon, at the suggestion of the priests, ordered the sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia to appease the gods and break the calm. Upon his return from the war ten years later, the king was murdered by his resentful wife, Clytemnestra. Acting upon the advice of Apollo through his Delphic oracle, Agamemnon's son, Orestes, slew his mother in retaliation for his father's murder, hence may be looked upon as the instrument of divine justice. But the *Eumenides* or Furies, whom we may in this connection consider as the personification of an immanent or Karmic justice, did not view the matter in this light. To them, a man who slew his mother was still a matricide, even if he did it at the behest of a god, and must be



harried like any other matricide. Even after the solemn court of Areopagus at Athens had acquitted Orestes of guilt, the Furies remained implacable toward him; and it required all the tact of the goddess Athena, who had cast the favoring vote which broke the tie among the Athenian judges, to persuade them to desist from tormenting the unfortunate youth and abide in peace at Athens.

In the *Book of Jeremiah* a similar attitude is taken, but applied now to nations rather than to individuals. The prophet looked upon Nebuchadrezzar and his Babylonians as Jahweh's ministers in destroying Judah on account of its abominations; yet he predicted the downfall of Babylonia in retaliation for the suffering it inflicted upon the Jews, thereby again tacitly recognizing the principle of Anaximander, that injury done as punishment for an earlier wrong is still an injustice, and must bear the consequences of all unjust acts—even when carried out at God's command.

Possibly to avoid these difficulties, possibly merely as a consequence of the growing refinement of sentiment, the writers of the *New Testament* adopted a point of view still more advanced. Again and again we meet admonitions and parables which emphasize man's incapacity to assess the guilt of his neighbors and mete out a punishment that is perfectly just: "Judge not, that ye be not judged", "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone", "Let us not therefore judge one another", and numerous passages of similar import. However, this abdication of man's right to pass judgment upon his neighbor's guilt did not signify that the authors of the *New Testament* had outgrown the thirst for retributive punishment. How far they were from that spiritual height may be gathered not only from the unsavory episode of Ananias and Sap-

phira, but even more from the story of Lazarus and Dives, who pleaded in vain for a drop of water to cool a tongue parched by the flames of hell. It is hard to believe that the relative merits of the rich man and the beggar, each of whom seems to have been a fairly typical example of his class, bore any proportion to the rewards and punishments that were assigned to them in the next world. The *New Testament* takes the attitude that, although the problem of retributive justice is too difficult for solution by man, it is soluble by God, who is sometimes represented as merciful and forgiving, and at others as stonily implacable toward even minor offenders, especially if they belonged to the wrong social stratum.

#### 4. *Outgrowing the Demand for Retributive Punishment*

Is it fair of us to expect the deity to solve a problem which we confess our inability to solve, and which, for all we know, may be radically insoluble? A punishment is always the infliction of loss or suffering, which considered in itself is always an evil and an injustice. Can it cease to be so when it is done to requite the evil done by the recipient? When inflicted by God, is it otherwise than when done by man?

Many of those who have thought deeply on the problem of evil in general have concluded that pain and suffering are good and desirable, in so far as they purify and strengthen the sufferer. We have already admitted this contention in recognizing that corrective punishment may rightly be undertaken by society, without awaiting the final solution of the baffling problems of metaphysical freedom and responsibility. In the same spirit, we may admit that the pains of Pur-



gatory, and the temporary hells where, in the Karmic systems, wicked souls must agonize for a while before receiving a new body and a fresh opportunity to win salvation, are ethically admissible in so far as they are cathartic; although we suspect that as commonly depicted the cure is far too drastic, and like an overdose of some powerful drug, is more likely to injure than to improve the patient. But beyond all this, there has ever been in men's religious thought a demand for punishment that is purely vengeful; for it is obvious that when it is continued "for eternity", it cannot be merely purgative and corrective.

The attitude that has demanded this retributive punishment reveals its naked self in the belief of post-Exilic Judaism, recorded in the Pseudepigrapha of the *Old Testament*, that the blessed souls in heaven sat in sight of the tormented souls in Gehenna.<sup>1</sup> Thereby their satisfaction was thought to be increased—much in the vein of that famous passage in which Lucretius describes the feelings of a man who with his feet on solid ground views a shipwreck on the stormy sea. The notion that the joy of heaven was enhanced by the prospect of the wicked souls writhing in the flames of hell was carried over into early and mediaeval Christianity—we find it, for example, in the writings of the twelfth century theologian Peter Lombard—and perhaps is even yet not altogether extinct. It is an expression of that deep vein of savagery which makes men flock to a public execution, a gladiatorial combat, or a bull fight, and which caused the Iberians to become angry when a victim of the Inquisition, by recanting his heresy, gained the mercy of strangulation before being consigned to the flames, thereby depriv-

<sup>1</sup> *Enoch*, 27:2-3; *The Assumption of Moses*, 10:9-10; etc.

*Isaiah*, 66:24

ing the spectators of the pleasure of watching his contortions.

Unless his character were radically changed by death, a man of cultivated sympathies would find all heaven's vaunted bliss intolerable to him in sight of hell's torments. I doubt whether any man worthy of heaven would accept it under this condition. Some even refuse bliss so long as any creature continues to suffer. The Mahayana Buddhist *arhat* who has won Nirvana sometimes vows to defer its acceptance until, with his aid, the last speck of sentient dust has likewise gained release from life's toils. It is time that we frankly recognize that the demand for retributive punishment, by man or by God, represents an earlier stage of human development, which the spiritually more advanced portion of mankind is slowly outgrowing. In fact, there is even danger that we are becoming afraid of corrective and disciplinary measures which, with insensitive natures, must at times be drastic to be effective.

#### 5. *The Justice of the Divine not Retributive but Constructive*

In starting creation at innumerable, crowded centers, the Divine set in motion a process which would inevitably result in the clash of pattern with pattern, and at last the growth of attitudes and habits which would help organized beings to preserve themselves in this inescapable conflict. It is in this strife, under the prompting of the appetites and passions which it fostered, that men do evil deeds and perpetrate injustices. Any deity who is a creative agent and not, like the gods of Epicurus, an otiose exemplar of blessedness, is responsible for the miseries of the world he made; and the more nearly omnipotent and om-



niscient the deity, the more radical his responsibility. Nor shall we permit him to divert our attention from this responsibility by making us feel our utter insignificance in the face of his ineffable power, as Jahweh did with Job. But we have made no extravagant claims for the power and knowledge of the Divine. A creative process that would avoid all strife and pain is apparently incompatible with the nature of things; as even that great optimist, Leibniz, recognized in his doctrine of compossibles. If a world wholly devoid of evil is an impossibility, then to justify itself the world must contain a considerable excess of good over evil, of happiness over misery, of value over disvalue—as ours apparently does.

The Divine, within the limits of its power and the unalterable necessity of the Primal Substance or Cosmic Ground, is ever at work bringing harmony into discord, striving to transcend inevitable conflicts and to reconcile clashing entities in a higher synthesis. In the measure that harmony is achieved, sentient beings know felicity; its failure is their misery. It would be wholly out of keeping with the character of the Divine to mutilate or torture creatures because, under the influence of appetites and passions forced upon them by the conditions of organic evolution, they harmed other creatures. Such retributive punishment is destructive, a reversal of the creative process, which for the Divine is an impossibility, because it would be the negation of its own nature as the author of a constructive process. Its whole tendency is to heal wounds, to overcome conflicts, to move forward to a more inclusive harmony, rather than turn back to inflict vengeful punishment for evils now beyond repair.

All violations of justice may be settled on a higher or a lower plane. When one man injures another,

recognizes the wrong he has done, and succeeds in making restitution, the settlement is on the higher plane; justice is healed and restored. But when, in the absence of an attempt at restitution, the injured one seeks to restore equality by inflicting an equal or greater injury upon the offender, the settlement is on the lower plane. We sometimes miscall this justice, but it is the collapse of justice. When an irreparable injury has been done, it is futile to talk of restoring justice, for justice has been killed. The best we can do in this case is to overlook what is beyond repair, and with all care and tenderness to nurture a new justice to replace her murdered mother—a new situation in which justice will flourish, if we are careful not to outrage her. This is the method of the Divine, which never pauses to inflict dreadful revenge upon the murderers of justice, but with infinite patience builds up a new situation among living things in which justice may reign—and challenges us to preserve it. This we may call constructive justice in contradistinction to retributive punishment, which inflicts injury and is destructive.

Yet it does not follow from this that, apart from man's own efforts to restore justice, there are no rewards or punishments of any sort, and that we fare just as well whether we cultivate benevolence and mercy or lead a life of cruelty and iniquity. There is a recompense for goodness which is automatic, and a penalty for wickedness which requires no harsh judge for its infliction. The wicked man lives under the dominion of appetites and passions which form a barrier between his consciousness and the divinity at the center of his being. He is divided within himself and cannot realize the unity of his own nature; he is never truly himself. He may fill his impetuous life with miscellaneous pleasures, yet is ever far removed from



that happiness which blesses a life that is harmonious in all its aspects. But in the measure that we free our minds of savage passions and disruptive attitudes and dwell in peace with all beings, we become aware of the Divine within us, which is the highest blessedness. This self-revelation of the Divine is the virtuous man's reward, the most perfect recompense for righteous conduct.

## CHAPTER XII

### ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### 1. *The Ethical Problem*

If the recognition of the Divine fails to affect our daily conduct and the course of our lives, we have mistaken its nature. We may have discovered a principle of explanation of the course of cosmic evolution; but if it does not so move us that our whole attitude toward life is changed, it cannot properly be called Divine. For we were driven to undertake our quest of the Divine not by mere scientific curiosity, but to satisfy an inner demand for something external to ourselves and widely diffused in the world which we could love, reverence, and serve unstintedly. If the supposed object of our search leaves us spiritually unstirred, indifferent to its vast implications, it can hardly be that which we sought. It is not an accident that every religion has as its indispensable adjunct a system of ethics; for a deity who provided no orientation in life's course would scarcely deserve this name.

The three great questions which have ever exercised the human mind are, as Kant pointed out, What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? The order of these questions is not accidental. Without understanding the nature of the world in which we find ourselves, it is hardly possible to direct our active lives with an intelligent purpose, adjusted to the realities of existence. In the absence of this orientation we can only follow our appetites and organic drives,



like unreflective animals which never ask the meaning of what they do. And finally, what we may hope is obviously related not only to the character of the world but to our conduct in it. To believe otherwise reveals not only a deficiency of ethical insight but a failure to appreciate the laws of causation, mechanical or spiritual. To suppose that the realization of our hopes is independent of what we do, is to assess at zero the value of human effort.

The problem to which our earlier investigations have led us and which we shall undertake to answer at least in general terms in this and the following chapters, is this: What must be the conduct of a being constituted as I am, who finds himself in a world such as this? Note the two parts of this question. It is not simply How must a being constituted as I am conduct himself? absolutely and with no reference to anything external to myself. Such a question would be stupid; for intelligent behavior always has reference to pertinent circumstances; and a being that found itself alone in the void would probably find no reason for preferring one course of action to another, if indeed it could recognize alternative courses. Nor is the question merely How must I conduct myself in a world such as this? with the emphasis wholly on the world, and without regard to my own nature. In the first place, it is obvious that the behavior of every existent, whether a fly, a worm, a stone, or a drop of water, is determined by the interaction of two sets of factors, one internal and the other external. It acts in such a way because it is such a being in such surroundings. But more, to make our conduct wholly dependent upon the external situation, even were it possible, would violate our ethical integrity as beings with needs, aspirations, and principles of conduct deter-

mined by our intrinsic nature. To make conduct dependent wholly upon external directives is to destroy ourselves as moral beings. We are thus led to recognize two sets of factors which every adequate theory of ethics must respect, one internal or intuitive, the other external, which, depending upon one's breadth of vision and world-view, may be social, or theological, or cosmological.

## *2. Single Motive Systems of Ethics*

Even within a single cultural tradition, as that of Western civilization, and within the last few centuries, thinkers have produced a bewildering variety of ethical theories, usually presented in thick volumes expensive to buy and laborious to read. By attempting to deduce the whole range of moral endeavor from a solitary motive, to show how the good life in all its details follows a single directive, the writers of these books almost invariably obey the philosophic demand for monistic unity at any price. Since it requires great ingenuity and architectural skill to balance the whole moral edifice upon a single foundation stone, the perusal of these works, or at least those which are the product of careful and coherent thinking, is nearly always a stimulating intellectual experience for one who has the time and perseverance to read them. When one has studied a number of these systems, he is likely to wonder how it happens that thinkers starting from such diverse presuppositions reach conclusions on the whole so similar. The foundation stone of the system may be the sovereignty of duty, coherence in willing, the reality of values, moral intuition, moral sense, moral esthetics, the principle of maximum happiness, intelligent selfishness, the will of God, or what not;



yet with surprisingly few exceptions, one who practiced in his daily life the rules of conduct deduced with such elaborate care, from principles so diverse, would be just one of the better examples of the current morality of his country and generation. From whatever side he starts, the moral philosopher reaches substantially the same destination—the best generally accepted standards of his time—which draws him toward a central point as the earth attracts a body free to fall. The authors of moral treatises are, with rare exceptions like Zeno of Citium in ancient times and Albert Schweitzer in our own, not prophets inspired by a fresh moral vision, but diligent philosophers concerned with giving systematic unity to rules of conduct which their society has already provided for them. What most surprises one in the writings of the moral philosophers is their lack of awareness of man's relation to a vast natural world which supports his life—a world which is profoundly modified by his conduct and in turn affects his welfare in manifold ways, so that his treatment of it has great moral relevance. With exceedingly few exceptions, one might suppose that these philosophers dwelt all their days in high-walled cities, absorbed in their speculations, and oblivious of the natural foundations of human life.

Nevertheless, we should be grateful for the lesson which all these systematists of ethics have taught us. If it is possible to find in a single principle or motive support for a fairly good and moral life, and if, as I believe we must admit, a number of the principles which philosophers have chosen as the points of departure of their ethical systems are valid and compelling, how much more firmly established our ethics will be if we recognize all of these motives together, and how much higher and wider will be the moral edi-

fice which we set solidly on several or all of them than that which is balanced somewhat precariously upon a single one! It would seem to be the part of wisdom to use every available stone, and lay the most solid foundation we can possibly prepare, for a building so essential to our welfare. But perhaps we demand of the moral philosopher an unreasonably great sacrifice when we request him to forego a satisfaction such as, for example, Hobbes must have felt when, materialist that he was, he in the course of a few pages of close reasoning derived most of the Christian virtues from his Fundamental Law of Nature: "To seek peace and follow it."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *Innate Foundations of Morality*

We suggested above that a stable system of ethics must rest upon at least two supports, one internal or intuitive, the other external, and preferably cosmologic. Since Locke launched his withering attack upon innate ideas, it has become impossible to maintain the thesis that men are born with specific moral rules somehow impressed upon their souls or minds and needing only the passage of time to bring them into consciousness. A survey of the great diversity of moral codes among the races of mankind, like that begun by Locke himself, carried out on a larger scale by Spencer, and vastly expanded by more recent investigations, makes such a contention absurd. Yet everything a man does freely he does in virtue of some innate predisposition, however much this may have been modified by education and personal experience. When someone suggests that I do something which makes no immediate

<sup>1</sup> *Leviathan*, Part I, chapters XIV & XV.



appeal to me, whose advantage to myself I do not at once see, I ask the reason for it. If the assigned reason is likewise unconvincing, I may request him to point out still further consequences of the contemplated deed. But if I am ever going to act, this process of tracing consequences or giving reasons cannot continue indefinitely, in a sort of infinite regress. It must at some point reach a "reason" or foreseen advantage which makes a direct appeal to something within me, so that I spontaneously approve it and am roused to action; and this by virtue of my original nature, modified it is true by education; but education can alter only what is already present within one.

Although some savage races have approved stealing as an astute way of supplying one's needs, most civilized peoples have not only looked upon it as morally wrong but discouraged it by laws which often prescribed the most severe penalties for petty theft; yet we do not suppose that "Do not steal" is an intuitive moral principle. In early childhood we clutch at whatever attracts us, as little troubled by problems of ownership as crows when they carry off bright and glittering baubles or bower birds when they gather colorful fruits and shells for their structures of interwoven sticks. If as we grow older we acquire the habit of respecting the property of others, it is because we have learned that we shall be punished for theft by our parents or the state, or that we shall incur social disgrace, or that stealing undermines the economic foundations of society, or that the loss of cherished or useful possessions causes the owner unhappiness and inconvenience. Since an impulse can be overcome only by another that is stronger, if we refrain from carrying off some coveted object belonging to another man, it is because these considerations affect us more powerfully than the

desire for possession. The motive for obeying the mandate "Thou shalt not steal" is, then, to avoid punishment or shame, to preserve the integrity of society, to avoid the sympathetic distress which assails the sensitive person when he knows that others suffer, especially through his agency, or simply to preserve a tranquil conscience. These motives are the innate foundations of our obedience to the maxim "Steal not"; and whether we admit that we are equipped with moral intuitions depends wholly upon whether we recognize any of these springs of action as specifically *moral* motives.

Although certain philosophers have held that when a man follows the right course merely to avoid punishment, his conduct, for all its legality, is without moral worth, I believe this is too narrow a judgment. In my opinion, all of the foregoing motives for refraining from theft are moral motives, but of different height or worth. In any case, the highest motives intergrade with the lowest in such a fashion that it is scarcely possible to draw a sharp line of demarcation, on one side of which the motives are moral while on the other side they lack moral worth. When a child or an animal desists from filching tempting food because it fears punishment, it reveals the capacity to forego the immediate gratification of appetite for some greater future advantage—in this case, freedom from pain or censure; and all our moral effort, up to the highest, rests upon this same fundamental capacity of all the higher animals. Similarly with the clerk who refrains from pocketing his employer's cash merely because he dreads going to gaol. In all these instances, there is some regard for the integrity of one's life, viewed as extending beyond the present moment, which would be threatened or broken by a beating, the deprivation of



customary gratifications, or a term in prison. To be sure, this is essentially a vital or biological faculty indispensable to the preservation of life, and perhaps closer to the organic moralness of all living things than to the higher stages of moral consciousness. But it is the link that joins the moralness which pervades all life, and indeed even the non-living world, with the highest levels of ethical endeavor. Our most exalted morality grows out of that striving toward wholeness, completeness, and permanence which is the distinctive feature of harmonization.

#### 4. *The Growth of Altruism*

An ethic founded upon the vital urge to preserve one's organic integrity and enjoy felicity might, when supported by far-seeing prudential calculations, lead to conduct which served admirably the interests of society. But our morality would ever remain narrow and self-centered, incapable of true generosity, if we were not innately endowed with motives which impel us to reach out beyond ourselves and identify ourselves with a larger whole. It is no accident that we have such motives, for life is above all a movement toward an ever wider and more inclusive synthesis. The love and devotion stirred up in the mother by her helpless offspring, which originated as parts of her own body, were apparently, as Alexander Sutherland contended in his great work on *The Origin and Growth of the Moral Instinct*, the first step in the evolution of wider sympathies. Since in all the higher animals the union of the parents precedes the birth of their progeny, it might be argued that sexual love is in the evolutionary sequence earlier than parental sympathy. But the mutual attraction of the sexes need not, even in the

highest animals, involve tenderness, devotion, nor any of the nobler expressions of love; and it may be that these were transferred to the relation of parent to parent from that of parent to offspring, thus leading to those affections and sympathies which bind the sexes together when they form an enduring union and co-operate in the care of their little ones. Such a transfer of aspects of innate behavior from the context in which they originated to other vital situations, and from one sex to the other, is not infrequent in the animal kingdom; and doubtless associated emotions, which we cannot directly observe, accompany the overt behavior which we do observe.

Moral philosophers, especially those of the Utilitarian school, have taxed their ingenuity to derive altruism from egoism, which alone they hold to be an original constituent of human nature; but their results are unconvincing. Yet we need not be distressed by their failure, for they were engaged in a superfluous endeavor. One might as profitably try to account for the presence of the right hand by that of the left! We are innately endowed with both. If, in the animal kingdom as a whole, instincts concerned with self-preservation necessarily preceded those leading to the service of offspring and others; as men we are provided by nature with motives for helping others, no less than with motives for preserving ourselves. Although in the evolutionary sequence parental sympathy is the oldest of these outward-looking affections, we are in fact equipped at a surprisingly early age with a whole array of incentives for taking an interest in the welfare of those about us. These are, almost without exception, the outgrowth of that life in societies for which the parental instincts prepared the way. The first step in the formation of a society, among humans