

Is Humanism Enough?

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FOR nearly two thousand years the Church has been teaching that this life is a pilgrimage. It is not an end in itself, nor complete in itself. It is essentially a time of trial, in which each human being must prepare himself, with God's help and by the exercise of his own free will, for a life of perfect happiness and union with God for all eternity in Heaven. All the events of this life - its joys and sorrows, its successes and failures - must be judged ultimately according as they help or hinder the achievement of this purpose. The gaining of eternal life is the only goal of human endeavour which is unconditionally valuable: the failure to do so is the only ultimate failure. It follows that life on this earth is essentially ordered to something beyond itself, and is unintelligible unless it is viewed in its relation to this end. The ultimate significance of man's life lies outside this world; it is supra-mundane.

Corresponding to this view of the significance of man's life on this earth is the Christian view of his nature. Man was made for God. He is a creature intended for eternal happiness, and God has given him a nature which can never be permanently or wholly satisfied with anything else. {Footnote: We are considering man in the concrete circumstances of this life. We are not concerned with the abstract question whether God could have created a different world in which men might have been satisfied with something less. In the world as it is, no such lesser goal is open to man, and it would not satisfy him if it was.}

The good things of this world - earthly happiness, beauty, nobility - are radically incapable of giving him full satisfaction. Only the infinite Goodness, Wisdom and Love of God can be the adequate object of his desire. Without these; he is always more or less hungry and discontented. He may for a time persuade himself that earthly success has given him everything he wants. He may do this either by lowering his ideals or by exaggerating the value of some finite good; but in proportion as he succeeds in being fully satisfied with this world, he is making himself something less than human. He is failing to rise to his full stature as a man.

This supra-mundane attitude to life is perhaps more uncompromisingly asserted by Christianity than by other religions, but it is by no means peculiar to it. To a greater or lesser extent it is found in practically all human societies. Almost without exception they recognize that man has some essential relation to a transcendental power or powers, and that his life must be interpreted and ordered in the light of this relation.

During the past two centuries or so, a rival view of man's nature and destiny has grown up - a view which has taken to itself the name of Humanism or, sometimes, Scientific Humanism, but -which is better called by the more specific name: Secularist Humanism, or Secularism. The interest of the Secularist Humanist is centred exclusively on this life. The visible tangible world of experience is for him the only reality, or at least the only one which matters for us. Life on this earth is the sum total of all our being. The individual comes into being at birth, he lives and he dies, and that is the end of him. When he dies, his account is closed. His previous successes and failures have then no

further significance for him. His joys and sufferings are wiped out as if they had never been. The potentialities of his nature which he was unable to develop - the happiness or the greatness which he might have achieved but did not - are frustrated for ever. Death concludes all.

Man's destiny, for the secularist, is not essentially different from that of the animals. He is a mere product of natural forces - an animal that happens to have reached a higher stage of evolution than the others. He belongs entirely to this world, just as they do. All his interests, ideals and needs are products of his natural development, and can in principle be satisfied within the context of this world. He ought to confine his endeavours to working for the improvement of our present life. Any craving for something more - something which this world is radically incapable of giving - is a sign of ignorance or weakness, and is unworthy of an enlightened man.

There are perhaps few completely logical secularists, just as there are few logical Christians. One may surmise that nearly everyone, however much he may be under the general influence of secularism, has an obscure recognition that this life is not complete in itself, and that he is answerable to some Power beyond the visible world for the things he does, and the use that he makes of his capacities. Nevertheless it is certain that secularism is the dominant influence for very many people nowadays, and that political, social and philosophical doctrines are being more and more judged from this standpoint.

Christianity and secularist humanism are clearly incompatible. If one is right, the other is wrong. And if Christianity is right, man's nature cannot find its true fulfilment in a secularist world. If man is a being whose needs are infinite and can only be satisfied by union with the infinite perfection of God, then we cannot put him into a world in which only finite and imperfect objects are presented to him for his striving, and expect him to find joy and peace. A society which fails to provide an adequate object for man's highest aspirations cannot continue for long at a high cultural level. Man's spiritual energies will either tend to atrophy through disuse or will be deflected to some unworthy end with disastrous results. The society will either degenerate or collapse.

The slow degeneration of a civilization owing to the absence of an ideal worth striving for is a familiar phenomenon in world history. Before the Christian Revelation it was almost inevitable that successive civilizations, groping their way towards the light but never seeing more than faint glimpses of it, should eventually lose heart and die.

The problem today is different. Man has had his revelation. For the first time in history, Christianity showed him an ideal which corresponded to the inescapable needs of his nature. It gave him strength and inspiration to develop his spiritual energies without limit, and it gave him a goal which he could recognize as worthy of those energies; a goal he could strive after with his whole heart, soul, mind and strength, without fear of frustration or disillusion. Two thousand years of Christianity have impressed this vision of human nature and destiny so deeply on the mind of Western man that there can now be no question of simply forgetting and beginning again. The spiritual energies liberated by Christ will continue to clamour for their satisfaction. What will happen then, when a society ceases to be Christian? What will happen when men find themselves impelled by infinite desires, but have rejected the only system which can make sense of these desires or provide an adequate goal for them? We can see the process already working itself out in the modern world. We shall consider the question briefly under four different aspects: man's need for perfect love, justice, happiness and immortality.

THE NEED FOR LOVE

God gave man an infinite capacity for love: a capacity which finds its true expression in unlimited devotion, self-dedication, worship. This capacity can never be fully exhausted by any created object whatsoever. Every finite being has some imperfection or limitation which makes it unworthy of a man's absolute unconditional devotion. The love of wife, family, friends, country, are good, but they are not enough. They still leave him unsatisfied. Only God can be the absolute, fully adequate object of his love. Hence, in a world from which God has been eliminated, man's nature is doomed to frustration, He finds himself with infinite desires and no worthy object for them. If he is to live in such a world, he must force his nature into a mould which is too small for it; into which it was never designed to fit. He must try to satisfy his infinite hunger with mere creatures.

One of two things will happen. Either his capacity for love, being unable to find an adequate object, will tend to atrophy; he will lower his ideals and will gradually become more and more selfish and intent on his own personal gratification. Or his urge to love and self-dedication will possess and dominate him; he will set up a creature as his god. When this happens, there is no limit to the cruelty and depravity of which he may not be capable.

I am not suggesting that every individual secularist must necessarily choose one or other of these alternatives. Much will depend on temperament, education and the general climate of opinion, which in this country is still to a large extent determined by the Christian origins of our civilization. Nevertheless, a secularist society will inevitably tend to move in one direction or the other. The process has already revealed itself with horrifying clearness in the case of Nazi Germany. The typical fanatical Nazi chose the second alternative. He lavished on Hitler and on the German race a love which was designed by his Creator to be given to God alone. They became his god. The consequences have been only too evident. The service of false gods turns a man into a helpless instrument of evil. Love, under these conditions, breeds hate. If you love Hitler, you must hate his enemies. The more ardently you love, the more fiercely you will hate. And hatred - real hatred - is the most degrading and diabolical of all the emotions. If the young Nazi's capacity for love and self-sacrifice could have found their true goal, they would have made him into a saint. Directed as they were to a false ideal, they corrupted him and brought down upon his country the most appalling disaster it has ever known. Yet we cannot blame him too severely. The true begetters of Nazism were those liberal secularists of a previous generation who turned his eyes from God and sought to confine his spirit within the strait jacket of this world.

THE DESIRE FOR JUSTICE

God has given man a very deep-seated instinct for justice. We see a man injuring a child. We say he ought to be punished. We see an employer cheating his workmen of a fair wage: we say he ought to make restitution. The order of justice has been subverted and ought to be restored. There is a certain ideal pattern to which men ought to conform, in their relations with their fellow men; any infraction of which is recognized as being in some way hurtful to society and to every member of it, until the disorder has been rectified. A more or less obscure recognition of this fact, and a corresponding urge for justice, may remain in a man or society even when most of the moral law has been lost. A man whose notions of right and wrong have become thoroughly vague may still boil with indignation at what he considers to be a serious injustice.

The instinct for justice was given to us by God, and is good. But it must be rightly directed. It was never intended to operate in a secularist world. For if we confine our attention to this world alone, we find that in practice the order of justice is not and cannot be fully vindicated. Right is often

defeated; wrong is often triumphant. For the Christian this is saddening, but it is not a final disaster because he knows that ultimately justice will prevail; if not in this world, then in the next. God is the final judge, infinitely wise and powerful; and He will not be mocked for ever. The unjust man succeeds in everything he does, and dies peacefully in a ripe old age. Never mind; he will pay his debt in the next world. The just man is robbed of everything he has and dies in penury ; he has kept the one thing that matters - his love of God - and he will be happy with Him for all eternity. So the Christian, having done what he can to maintain the right in this world, need not despair if he sees his efforts ending in apparent failure. He can quietly leave the final issue to God. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay", says the Lord.

Now what happens in a world which has forgotten God? If God's justice and the future life are left out of account, then the order of right is frequently not vindicated in this world. The unscrupulous business man amasses a fortune by cheating the poor, and when he dies he is beyond the reach of justice for ever. His victims were deprived of all that human happiness which was theirs by right, and their final defeat by death inflicts a wound on humanity which can never be healed. If a man's sense of justice is keen, this state of affairs, and his powerlessness to remedy it, will hurt him intolerably. We all shrink from pain; hence there will be a strong tendency for the sense of justice to become deadened. He will become callous or cynical. Justice is replaced by expediency, and the way is opened to ever greater tyranny and injustice, merely because people are too apathetic to resist.

On the other hand, the urge to justice may conquer and dominate the man till he becomes a fanatic. We can see the result of this process in Communism. The sincere Communist is urged by a need of his nature which is noble in itself, but like the Nazi he is trying to satisfy that need in a world in which it cannot be satisfied - a world without God. He is impelled by a passionate desire for justice, and a genuine hatred of the exploitation of the weak by the strong. He is striving for a perfect vindication of the right in this world. His task is hopeless, but he will not admit the fact. If he cannot do it by persuasion, he will do it by force. The more he is thwarted the more ruthless he becomes. Everyone who obstructs his plans is liquidated without mercy. If a million Poles or Czechs refuse to co-operate, they are sent to Siberia. If a million Ukrainian farmers refuse to be collectivized, they are starved to death. He must have power and more power; not only power to compel people to do what he wants them to do, but also to think what he wants them to think, and to will what he wants them to will. Only so can he carry out his purpose and establish his ideal social order.

In the event, however, justice is farther than ever from being achieved. Power on this scale inevitably corrupts those who wield it and those on whom it is used. The erstwhile idealists become fanatical tyrants; the ordinary people are robbed of their fundamental rights and dignity as human beings. The striving for justice defeats itself in a secularist world, and the more passionately it is sought, the more disastrous are the consequences.

THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS

The violence and ruthlessness which characterize Nazism and Communism make little appeal to the British temperament. Nevertheless we also are men with a hunger for perfection. In proportion as the secularist outlook grows stronger, so must this hunger try to satisfy itself within the limits of the present world. The characteristic result in this country is the tendency which may be called Secular Humanitarianism. This is a rather vague and amorphous ideology, motivated by a general

benevolence to all men and an antipathy to suffering in any form. It differs from Nazism and Communism by being both less dynamic and less doctrinaire. Like Communism, it looks forward to a Utopia in which all men shall live together happily and at peace. But where Communism stresses social justice, Humanitarianism stresses individual happiness. Happiness, in this life, and without reference to anything beyond this life, is the only thing worth striving for. Anything which stands in the way of this ideal is bad; anything which furthers it is good. Expedience rather than abstract principle is its guide.

In itself, the urge for happiness, like those for justice and love, is good. Man was made for perfect happiness, and nothing less can ultimately satisfy him. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that it cannot be attained within the context of this life alone. The perfect happiness for which God has destined man is to be found not in this world but the next. Confined to this world, it defeats itself and ultimately produces only unhappiness.

The self-destructiveness of the secularist search for happiness may be illustrated by some examples. Firstly, concerning divorce. "In the secularist Utopia there must be no unhappy marriages. However, it is inevitable that now and again two unsuitable people will marry and find it impossible to live happily together, or some unforeseen circumstance will arise during the marriage to destroy their happiness. It is intolerable that this state of affairs should have to continue without a remedy. Hence, provision must be made for divorce." In fact, however, this provides no real solution. The recognition of divorce undermines the stability of the marriage bond and weakens that sense of security and unity which are of the essence of a healthy family life. In the long run it produces much more unhappiness than it was designed to remedy. The secularist is therefore in a dilemma. He recognizes that in any foreseeable future some marriages will always be unhappy. He is convinced that there must be some way of making everyone happy in this world. Unless he admits divorce his whole ideal will collapse. Under the circumstances he will too easily overlook the insidious corruption which attacks society when divorce is allowed, in order to eliminate the more obvious but ultimately less dangerous suffering caused by unhappy marriages.

As a second example we may consider the humanitarian attitude to disease. "Disease and deformity produce unhappiness; therefore they must be banished completely from Utopia. Curable diseases must be cured. But some diseases are incurable. If anyone suffering from such a disease should wish to be liberated from his unhappiness by taking an overdose of morphia, he must be allowed to do so. Perhaps, however, there will be some misguided sufferer who will shrink from this irrevocable decision and will wish to prolong his unhappy existence. Here, sooner or later, the State will have to step in to save him from himself. He is unreasonable, misguided and selfish. There is no point in his continuing to live. He is causing unnecessary unhappiness to his friends who must watch him suffering; he is occupying a valuable bed in a hospital; his pain is a shadow lying across the sunlit happiness of Utopia. Gently and painlessly, but firmly, the State will put him to sleep."

"Some incurable diseases are hereditary. There is only one way to eliminate these. All who are afflicted with such diseases or who are suspected of carrying them, must be prevented from having children. At first this can be voluntary. They can be invited to submit to sterilization, or can be instructed in reliable methods of birth control. But again it may be that some people, through selfishness or negligence will decline to make use of the facilities provided. This refusal will be so clearly anti-social on their part, so unfair to their children, and so contrary to the Utopian ideal, that the State will have the right to intervene and to make for them the decision which they ought to have made for themselves."

"There will be others too: the feeble-minded and cripples ; the social misfits; those who are incurably restless and dissatisfied in Utopia and want something more. All these will be obstacles to the perfect society - elements of discord where one would have looked for harmony. It will be necessary to give to the State very wide discretionary powers. . . ."

We have not yet gone very far along this slippery path, since at every crucial point the secular humanitarian finds himself in opposition to the moral law, which the ordinary man still accepts in principle for the most part. He does so, however, with a steadily diminishing confidence. A good deal has already been surrendered and much more will be abandoned in the near future unless the present tendency is reversed. Once the principle is admitted that an innocent man may be killed or mutilated for the benefit of society, there will be no logical stopping-point on this side of a complete totalitarianism. Every man's life will be at the mercy of the Government official whose duty it is to decide whether his continued existence is or is not conducive to the greater happiness of society as a whole. It needs little imagination to recognize the progressive loss of human dignity, the debasement of social and personal relationships and the hard tyranny which will eventually result.

The Christian does not deny that happiness in this life is a good and desirable thing. But it is not an absolute or unconditional good. It is only good in so far as it does not obstruct the attainment of the perfect happiness of the future life. It must always be subordinated to the moral law, since human nature cannot rise to its full perfection when this law is flouted. Similarly, suffering in this world is not unconditionally bad, since this also can help the soul towards its final perfection if it is properly used. The Christian can and ought to work for the relief of suffering by all legitimate means. He will recognize, however, that human nature will not be radically frustrated even though his efforts can never be wholly successful in this life.

IMMORTALITY

Man was created for immortality, and nothing less can satisfy him. However successful his life has been, he must recognize that he has not yet developed himself to his full stature as a human person. He has not achieved the perfection of his being. Whatever happiness or wisdom or goodness may have been his, he can never say to himself: Now I have everything I am capable of having; my history is complete; nothing remains for me; any further existence would be meaningless. If there is no life beyond this one, then death will always bring with it a final frustration and loss : the frustration of all the perfection a man might have achieved but did not; the loss of all that he has in fact achieved. All, so far as he is concerned, will be blotted out as if it had never existed.

In a Christian society men know that they have an immortal destiny, and they can judge their successes and failures of the present life in the light of this knowledge. Without such knowledge a satisfactory human life is impossible. Human nature demands it. In a secularist society, this demand cannot find its true fulfilment, yet it cannot be permanently suppressed. It must seek a substitute. We see this process at work today in the changing relations of the individual to the community. The individual dies and, according to the secularist, is gone for ever. But the society to which he belongs is potentially immortal, or at least so long-lived as to seem immortal. Therefore, if a man can identify himself with his society; if he can lose his individuality in working for it, sinking himself in it and in its interests; then he can feel that he lives on vicariously, after his own death, in its continued life. His labours, sacrifices and sufferings are no longer futile ; they make him a member of an organism greater than himself, which will live on after him. The more he can identify himself with his community, the more he partakes of its immortality and the less tragic his own individual

death will be. Who would not willingly sacrifice his own unimportant little rights and interests in order to obtain this privilege? So we see the Nazi joyfully sacrificing himself for the immortal German race, and the Communist for the brotherhood of man.

In this country also, we find a growing tendency to exalt the community at the expense of the human beings who compose it, but there is no very clear appreciation of the general issues involved. The most explicit formulation of the secularist attitude is perhaps to be found in Philosophical Evolutionism, or what has been called the Religion of Progress. This movement, which is associated chiefly with Professor Julian Huxley and the late H. G. Wells, would find the immortal society in the human race regarded as a biological species which is evolving towards perfection. The individual is nothing in himself, but he can find himself and acquire significance in being a member of the race. Considered as individuals we are poor transitory creatures, full of biological and psychological imperfections, doomed to perpetual frustration and eventual extinction; but we are also members of a race which is growing steadily to perfection. We are more than mere individuals; we are links in a chain, or threads in a developing pattern, and in this lies our whole meaning and purpose. Our greatest privilege is to subordinate ourselves to the interests of the species, and no religious or moral scruples must be allowed to hamper us in this work.

The Religion of Progress is a rather thin ideal for the ordinary man, and it will never set the world on fire, but its indirect influence on social, economic and religious thinking today has been considerable. It has undoubtedly enhanced the prestige of Utopianism in many people's eyes, by providing it with a pseudo-scientific foundation.

If the urge to immortality is strong in a secularist society, it is bound eventually to have serious consequences. It must always tend to depress the value of the individual as against the society, and to make him a mere means to an end - an instrument with no value or rights of his own, to be used by the society for its own ends, and then to be cast away when no longer useful. The result is inevitably a progressive degradation of the human personality; a loss of dignity and a rapid descent to the Servile State. The ideal which is aimed at is in fact self-destructive. A society is composed of its individual members. If we regard these as mere means to an end we necessarily degrade them, and in doing this we necessarily degrade the society which they constitute. A noble society is impossible unless it is composed of noble men. We cannot have noble men unless we teach them to regard themselves and others as having absolute value and significance in themselves. And this is impossible unless they believe in personal immortality.

CONCLUSION

Let us briefly summarize the argument we have been developing. Man was created for an infinite and immortal destiny. In order that he may achieve it, God has given him spiritual needs and energies which are essentially ordered to this goal, and cannot be fulfilled in any other way. If he tries to find his full satisfaction in this world his energies are frustrated; they turn against him and corrupt him. His striving for love breeds hate; for justice, injustice, for happiness, unhappiness; for a perfect society, a corrupt society. The more dominating his ideals are, and the more dynamic his striving after the good, so much the more complete is his spiritual disaster if those ideals and energies are centred upon a false goal. Nazism, Communism and the rest are not simply or absolutely evil. Evil is not something that men seek for its own sake. It is a perversion of some good - a good thing gone bad. And this perversion is bound to occur when the goal is contrary to that for which man was created.

One possible solution remains for the secularist. If he cannot provide a worthy goal for man's energies, can he put them to sleep? Can he take the child and condition him scientifically from infancy so that he will never awaken to the full potentialities of his nature; so that he will remain unaware that there is anything in life beyond his job, his television set, and a fortnight's holiday at Margate? Will he be able to satisfy the child with such small ideals as: 'Be kind to others because this will make you feel happy'? There is a new and rapidly developing science of 'psychological tailoring' which sets out to conform the mind and character of each citizen to the exact specification demanded by the State. We cannot as yet assign limits to the power which this science may give to the expert over the ordinary man: It is certain, however, that no such solution could be permanently successful. One might turn the human race into a sleeping volcano, but this particular volcano will not sleep for ever. Man cannot permanently deny his nature. He may not know what he wants, but he will always know obscurely that he wants something more than the secularist can give. Sooner or later his spirit must reassert itself and burst through the bonds in which it has been constrained. Moreover, the Catholic at least has the Divine assurance that the Church can never finally be defeated. She will always remain on the earth to proclaim the truth to those who can hear it and perhaps, eventually, in His own good time, to bring the world back to God.
