

TRADITION: ITS ORIGIN, PURPOSE, AND OPPOSITION

A Polyvalent Subject. I think it is true to say that even those who are members of a tradition find it hard to talk about, because it is complex enough to invite factual inputs from history, psychology, theology, and anthropology, but my defence against getting entangled in matters of detail will be to focus on a specific reality upon which all traditions appear to be based, one which is metaphysical, and which has been observed in many and diverse cultures.

Firstly, to get what help we can from words, it is not hard to see an ambivalence in the words that apply to this subject. In English, the term "handing" is prominent, as in "handing on" or "handing down," but there is also the dubious "handing over," with its air of treachery. In Latin, *traditio* is the same as our word tradition, but *traditor* means "traitor." In Greek, tradition is called *paradosis*, but that has the further meanings of "handing over," and "surrender." An important truth is revealed in this. In practice, living traditions always deviate increasingly from their most essential truth with the passage of time, until they either bury it or even negate it, and that leads to the strange paradox of having to fight against tradition in the name of tradition.

It will soon appear that a connecting thread running through this subject is Duality. That will in turn reveal something about the difference between tradition and anti-tradition. I shall argue for the view that tradition should rightfully mean sacred tradition, whether it be religious or purely intellectual. Otherwise, it could be too general for any meaningful conclusions;

it could, for example, be generalized to the extent that it meant simply an organized body of knowledge and techniques, applied by successive generations of those who needed it, in which case even the motor car and aircraft industries would be traditions. Within philosophy itself, reductionist and materialistic modes of thought could on the same basis be counted as a tradition, but again only if traditional thought was independent of content.

To Identify the Origin. Until well into the 20th Century, nearly everyone was born in one tradition or another, each with a spiritual message, these being mostly the ancient religions, until an upsurge of individualism turned against such forms of identity. On that basis, then, it appears that tradition is in fact defined by a spiritual content, and by a belief that earlier generations were closer to the Divine origin of the world than the later ones are, even though genuine traditions always progress by revealing more of what they held from the beginning. Consequently, philosophies in which progress is given an all-embracing scope are necessarily anti-traditional; they must mean that ancient times were far below our level. The origins of progressivist philosophies can be seen in the works of Francis Bacon and Descartes, both of whom saw the natural world as a quantity of material with no purpose of its own and without any from God, merely waiting for conquest and exploitation by human activity. For this end, Francis Bacon equated knowledge with a form of power to which we are entitled for some reason, while Descartes declared his aim of replacing theoretical philosophy with a system which would make us the "masters and owners of nature,"

as though nature was related only to the human race and to human purposes.

The idea of power in such thought is quite different from power as understood by tradition, as it is power to change things in the external world, not a spiritual power in oneself or over oneself. It is appropriate that the grand culmination of this kind of thinking should also be its nemesis, namely Marxism, for which the realm of natural stuff to be dominated and exploited is quite logically extended so as to include the human race itself, not least those who believe in this kind of philosophy: history shows that its effect is like teaching turkeys to vote for Christmas.

In general, materialistic philosophies which trace our origins to a series of genetic accidents subvert the cosmic significance of our intelligence; even though our intelligence may be valid for our personal needs, it could have no relevance to our attempts to understand the world as a whole. This is why the kind of truths which are handed down to us by tradition could not survive materialist ideas of our origins. To identify the real starting-point of tradition, I would prefer to rely on what has been learned by anthropology about the common factors in most of the traditions of the world. There is a primal insight or intuition present in them all which is equally relevant for the roots of both philosophy and religion. It is an insight into the difference between appearance and reality, that is, a realm of phenomenal flux on the one hand, full of instability, uncertainty, decay, and dependence of one thing upon

another; these appearances are seen to go on without beginning and without end. On the other hand, this flow of sense-objects arouses a consciousness of its opposite, a self-sufficient realm of real being which is exempt from change, and which confers some of its reality on the realm of change. It differs most prominently from that of matter and change by the fact that in the latter, what is not comes to be, and what is ceases to be, whereas in the realm of intelligence, what is must always be, and what is not never can be. This permanent reality could be a higher order of creation, or the archetypal Forms, or possibly God.

There is an obvious duality in this, and such a view of things is shared by nearly all primitive, or rather primal cultures, even where they do not possess what we would call philosophy. On this basis we can see that Platonism is at one with a universal tradition, and that its "two-world" interpretation, namely the world of Forms and the world of informed matter, shows it to be truly traditional and founded on a universally accepted truth. This is a reason for discounting supposed vindications of Platonism which would make the Forms alone real, in a way that would deprive them of all power to cause anything. In such a case there would be no substantive realities involved, and the philosophy would then be a matter of talking about words.

Parmenides. It is significant that the above dual principle should have been the essential feature of Parmenides' philosophy, with its Way of Truth and its Way of seeming, because Parmenides is regarded with some reason as the first philosopher. He was the first to advance his premises and deduce his conclusions from them, allowing his hearers to make

his ideas their own. His idea of reality, with its two alternatives, was an elaboration of the primal truth in all traditions. The other early philosophers would, on this basis, be better called prophets. Their ideas were implicitly those of authority figures demanding obedience, while the philosophical way is to enable the pupil to have a share in the place of the master. This philosophy was to be a major influence on Plato, including Parmenides' contention that what is, is what can be thought. Descartes, with his *cogito* argument was perhaps unintentionally harking back to Parmenides.

Implications of the Principle. The two modes of being in the Primal Duality, as we may call it, do not make a complete contrast, however, since they both belong within the same hierarchy of reality. In particular, they manifest both freedom and necessity, which exist in both of these realms, even though in very different forms: in the phenomenal or mutable realm, there is a freedom of endless production and novelty with no apparent aim or origin. This gives rise to a corresponding necessity, as where the power of change inevitably eliminates all the entities manifest in it, sooner or later. This property is called Fate when this necessity approaches completeness.

Real being, on the other hand, means a necessity of being which is proof against forces of change, but this is a necessity which also means a freedom from those destructive and disordering forces, and besides a freedom of entities to be themselves and nothing else. The awareness of this duality of permanent and transient realities depends on a property of the human mind which participates in

both of them without identification with either. This results from duality in the composition of the soul according to Plato, for whom the soul is formed from a number of binary combinations, namely of the Divisible and the Indivisible, of the Changing and the Unchanging, and of the Same and the Different, so as to be a "microcosmic mirror of the universe".

We are most often made aware of this dual nature in the soul by the fact that its highest faculties are the intellect and the will, with no means of knowing which should be the higher. They are independent of one another, as can be seen from the ever-present possibility of foolish choices or actions. The working of intellect is tied by its very nature to value and meaning, whereas the will's operations are not, as it has a universality which relates to all possibilities, regardless of value. In relation to the perception of the permanent and the transient, will and intellect are, however, equally necessary: it is the intellect which first grasps this self-evident reality, but without the will, this act of mind would pass on in the stream of phenomena and be lost; the will must grasp it and keep returning to it, and here the will becomes love of truth. This development can most easily become our own through the practices of tradition.

For practical purposes, however, the unity of the personality requires that either the will or the intellect should have first place. Therefore one's response to the discovery of the primal datum, or *traditum*, as it becomes,

could be primarily intellectual and secondarily voluntaristic, or vice-versa. In the former case the alternative would be that of philosophy, and in the latter case would be that of religion, but the point I wish to argue is that religion and philosophy spring from the same root, namely, the perception of the Primal Duality. It may be objected that the root of religion is Divine revelation, but that depends on the prior existence of *natural religion*, which relates us to the Divine through our very nature. Thus all other religion is rooted in the same source at second remove, and hence the common origin.

Accordingly, both religions and philosophies arising on this basis give rise to traditions, and tradition serves the same purpose in either case, the preservation of truth in a living form, and saving us from having to keep reinventing the wheel. It is also necessary since awareness of the Origin may easily be lost, owing to its being a product of reflection, not sense-perception. In other words, the awakening of the intellect by tradition is not purely intellectual, but that is the norm, not a fault. Philosophy, more than religion, is likewise involved in the paradox that the *origin* of a life of reason in a person cannot be rational, because reason cannot directly create a preference for itself. The will must first act in the appropriate direction on its own, though it may be in response to Divine grace. A deep belief in reason is as necessary as reason itself, therefore, and without it a philosophy of pure intellect would be as problematic as a philosophy of pure will.

Truth can be passed on simply by repetition of formulae,

because it remains intrinsically attached to the process of its discovery, for those who want to see this, just as the function of the will is not separable from that of the intellect in traditional thought. Transmission of any truth must involve our creative capacities, or we could not make them our own. The need for this engagement of the creative power should dispel the suspicion that tradition is a kind of tyranny which suppresses individuality and originality. In reality, it is rather membership of a tradition which can give one the strength to develop into a true individual. In support of this idea, I would instance the fact that for the last forty years individualism has been in retreat in this country, without that being of the slightest help to tradition. Anti-traditionalist individualism would therefore most probably be an unconscious by-product of traditional cultures which have been discarded. This creates the illusion that the enemy is tradition.

Anti-Tradition. An increasingly prevalent hostility to tradition is a consequence of the cyclic order of temporal events, in which possibilities are realized in an order which reflects their spiritual value. The later stages in the cycle, therefore, will see the realization of ever-increasing numbers of possibilities with little or no such value, although they may embody new ideas of reality.

In the present day, forces hostile to tradition are now in a position to exploit the weaknesses of people who have been separated from tradition and left with nothing more than their own individual resources. They are often open to seeking a source of strength in some form of pseudo-tradition. That can also result from the present-day crisis in secularism, the conceptual basis of

which has long since collapsed, along with the idea that a theoretical materialism could explain everything. Instead of this leading to a spiritual reconversion, however, the essential purpose of anti-tradition is maintained as strongly as ever by an anti-elite. This will result in borrowings from the traditions, for the service of its own agenda. It was never driven by a desire for truth, but rather by something deep in the subconscious which takes itself to be God. A new openness to traditional ideas need not mean the slightest change of direction, therefore.

One of the signs of advancing pseudo-tradition is a denial or suppression of self-evident truths by leaders of opinion, a major example of which is one I have already mentioned, the difference between the functions of the intellect and the will. This is never stated openly, but it is taken as a basic assumption that the will and the intellect are the same thing. In practice, this assumption appears in the belief that the good and the bad and the true and the false are what most people are willing to say they are, with no objective and permanent standard to support or oppose them. It is never said openly that truth is created by our desires, of course, but that is what the rule of the general will means.

Plato writes about this demonic general will in Rep. Bk.VI, where he compares it to a "great beast," whose handlers rule society according to what pleases and displeases this monster. The popular acceptance of this treatment of truth and value is involved in the workings of the herd instinct, or the

collective pursuit of security by the most obvious route. On the one hand, this instinct seems rational and prudent, since being as much as possible like other people fosters mutual understanding and mutual support, so that for many it is almost a criterion of sanity; and yet on the other hand, it is idiotic, because it means taking as masters and leaders persons whom one knows to be no better and no more intelligent than oneself. That procedure is, besides, precisely anti-traditional, because tradition means spending as much time as

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ble on learning from the greatest minds and their primary sources, and using them as a standard by which to judge more recent kinds of knowledge. Religious practices manifest this orientation by continually dwelling on the events of their own formation or revelation.

For many centuries, the traditions have as it were co-opted the herd instinct for their own purposes, but today society has so very little of a traditional nature built into it that the herd instinct can now realize only its purely negative potentialities. This instinct is even further strengthened by the flattering belief that individuals and their private passions are so valuable as to deserve to be treated as though they were absolutes or paradigms. We are flattered by the anti-traditional belief that every individual is good almost by definition. For tradition, on the contrary, the unreconstructed ego of the natural person has no such value, and can only achieve value by dying to itself in some way or other, and being integrated in the life of the spirit. That is why the creation of a pseudo-traditional world religion would inculcate a complete inversion of spirituality.

To be suspicious of change is necessary, therefore, especially as those who most want change are most likely to be maladjusted, and thus lacking in objectivity. The modern view of change makes a contrast with that of spirituality, which adapts to adverse conditions, and so overcomes them within the individual. Modern social policy rejects this point of view by solving all problems by changing external conditions, and for those who think in that way, the saying that "man is the measure of all things" never refers to an archetypal "Man" but to man solely on a biological level. There is a show of benevolence here which serves to weaken resistance to the advance of collective control, by appealing to a mixture of individual self-interest and fear. Whenever they achieve power, therefore, collectivist tyrannies strive to victimize all independence of their power, whether spiritual or material. This is an obvious consequence of materialism, since independence of any kind is a result of the self-motive nature of the soul, which means nothing to the materialist mind.

Finally, I would like to end by considering the role of science in all this, as it has become the main driving-force behind anti-tradition. It is an offshoot of metaphysics, but without actually being metaphysics. Like metaphysics, it is concerned with the difference between appearance and reality, as where the apparent movement of the sun around the earth is shown to be that of the earth around the sun. In this example, the natural appearance is affiliated, not to an unchanging metaphysical reality, but to a more obscure and subtle kind of appearance. Similarly, white light is shown to be the appearance of the seven spectral colours of light. Here again, appearances as such are

not transcended, and their supernatural origin is not attained or even brought any nearer.

For those who do not see this, science can be seen as a source of metaphysical truth, and that makes it a major source of delusion, despite the honest intentions of scientists. Their sincerity can make the deception all the more dangerous, and give more strength to a belief that scientific knowledge will somehow finally converge with that of theology. Such a convergence is typically believed in as a part of the advancing pseudo-tradition for which human knowledge is destined to merge with Divine knowledge. To believe this is to ignore the objective nature of God, and to equate the Divine with what human beings are able to experience as Divine. Thus the distinction of objective and subjective would be lost at the same time. In this way, mankind comes to worship itself, but what is worshipped remains contingent and mortal, while the scientific semblance of metaphysics makes believe that we are part of this phenomenal world and nothing else.

Nevertheless, science is popular, not only for the power it gives for satisfying desires, but because there is something tranquillizing about it, owing to the way it makes all realities relative to one's ego, as though the universe itself were something on a microscope slide, without giving any hint that the ego itself might be relative to anything. This would be a cheap kind of divinization for all, and I would conclude that this is yet another of the incentives against tradition in the popular mind.

NOTES: RE TRADITION 2018

Transfer of Power. An essential feature of anti-traditional and pseudo-traditional cultures is a continual transfer of power from the inward self to the external world, and from the individual to the collective. It applies to individuals and to whole nations. Traditions support freedom by supporting self-power or self-mastery. Anti-traditional and pseudo-traditional cultures do the exact opposite, by trying to make everyone as dependent as possible on their political controllers. At the same time they act on the assumption that external reality is endlessly benign and generous, which most people want to believe. In this case one believes that the surrender of power and responsibility would put one in a baby-and-mother relationship with the external world, despite a complete absence of historical evidence for that.

Traditional Individualism. The reality of the individual person is a fully traditional idea, firstly because tradition recognises the function of the individual soul as the bearer and agent of all the essential truths. Secondly because tradition is the custodian of Divine revelation, which could have nothing to relate to without the existence of individuals.

The Need for Grace. Membership of a tradition enables individuals to do what they could not do by themselves. It does this by giving them grace in return for obedience to the message of the Founder, whether religious teacher or inspired philosopher. That kind of receptiveness is essential for grace to be received, and where traditions forbid some freedoms, it

is only so as to ensure that grace is received for the sake of more meaningful kinds of freedom.

In a traditional culture, the soul's Yin and Yang are so disposed that one is Yin in relation to the Divine or super-human, and Yang in relation to the external world. That is how each individual is a channel between God and the world. The world of anti-tradition, people are in the opposite state: they are assertive or Yang in relation to Divinity, while being receptive and submissive to almost anything in the external world. This inversion is simply evil. Obedience to the Divine otherness never inhibits anyone's personal development, but obedience to the external world can only suppress it, besides creating a barrier between Heaven and earth where there could have been communication.

Grace, Truth and Freedom. The natural person without grace does not seek either truth or freedom; he only appears to do so because he will seek the truth about particular things and freedom for particular activities. Hence the necessity for grace. Without it one cannot even assent to the truth of correct reasoning. For such persons reality consists wholly of individual desires, passions and impulses.

For traditional thought, freedom does not mean simply doing as you please and that is why it is regarded by many as oppressive. The idea of freedom it contains is a freedom which is never separated from the intellect. The intellect is necessarily related to truth and the values, but the will relates by its very nature to all possibilities, so that the will alone cannot judge the legitimacy or not of its objects, contrary to popular belief.

Thus many things popularly believed to mean freedom result mostly from ignorance and sin, from the point of view of intellect and tradition.

Symptoms of Herd Instinct. A sure sign that one is ruled by the herd instinct is a determination always to back winners simply because that is what they appear to be. This could be called "the worship of the rising sun", a very ancient god indeed. To get free of the herd instinct is to cross a border into a different territory, that of the esoteric. The exoteric, for all the merits it can have, is designed to give a spiritual sense of direction to those who are not expected to escape the herd instinct, and whose development as individuals may not go very far.

The adoption or acceptance of herd instinct is analogous to life in the womb. Whatever the amount of courage may be shown by those who are governed by it, they still lack the courage to live and think without its support. That would mean becoming an individual to the fullest degree, and it would mean going beyond the bounds of the exoteric and into the esoteric. To begin with, this state would be felt as one of weakness, even though it ultimately leads to a kind of strength which cannot be reducible to nature and biology.

The modern crisis in exoteric religion comes from the fact that the culture of the modern world no longer contains anything which is even derivatively traditional, at however many removes. This means that an acceptance of one's own times, which was once fairly innocent, now brings one to the

verge of apostacy, or a conversion to Godlessness, if one professes a religion. This is why exoteric teachings ought for the first time condemn a popular culture as such. But this would mean a rejection of the herd instinct at the same time, after countless centuries in which that instinct was harnessed for traditional purposes. Such a change would be too radical to be made directly, and still less can there be an exoteric recommendation of the esoteric, as that would be to question its own right to exist. Such is the exoteric religious dilemma.

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