

Chapter 9

The Unity of Personality and its Decay

1. The Unity of Personality

Every anthropology must deal with the question of the unity of personality; in one sense or another it must begin with this as a fact. But the method of treatment will vary considerably. The obvious starting-point is the unity of the physical *organism*. But even this unity, which distinguishes the organism from a conglomerate mass, is a problem for which a purely mechanistic, atomistic conception seems inadequate. The riddle of the organic structural unity already points beyond the visible sphere towards an invisible sphere, to a structural principle of unity, an entelechy, a dominant, or whatever we may call this 'X' which co-ordinates the parts into a whole. It is possible, as in American Behaviourism, to refuse to inquire into the basis of this unity and to confine our attention to the unified expression, the 'behaviour' of this given totality.¹ But even the most realistic, matter-of-fact observer cannot overlook the fact that this being, called man, reacts in a way in which other living beings do not react—or rather that he 'acts,' and does not simply re-act; to turn from the outward to the inward is seen to be inevitable. From the time of Aristotle we have been accustomed, even in scientific thought, to call this 'inner' entity the 'soul.'² But here again we are confronted by the same question: Is it a unity, or is the 'soul' only a collective name for a variety of psychical elements? Does 'the soul' really

1. From the most extreme point of view: Watson, *Psychology from the Standpoint of the Behaviourist*. More moderate and therefore more instructive: Thorndike, *Educational Psychology*.

2. The significance of Aristotle's *De anima* for the whole of European psychology is incalculable (cf. Siebeck, *Geschichte der Psychologie*; Dessoir, *Abriss einer Geschichte der Psychologie*). From the outset, too, this Aristotelianism has been at home in the theology of the Church. Tertullian, it is true, is more inclined to follow the Stoics, but the Greek Fathers have all learned from Aristotle. Psychology as a whole is one of the gates through which ancient thought entered into Christian doctrine. As such it is all the more important, since its influence was exerted more or less unconsciously, and was not supervised at all. Cf. Appendix I (pp. 499 ff.).

exist at all? Again and again, in spite of all atomistic efforts to the contrary, it has been recognized that we must at least assume something which cannot be further divided, and is therefore an inexplicable unity. We must do this partly in order to understand the unity of the organism, and partly in order to be able to understand the cohesion of the psychical processes themselves, both conscious and unconscious. Even the inquirer who has no use for metaphysics is forced to such an idea of unity, simply from the standpoint of purely psychological observation. Within modern psychology the most illuminating attempt, undertaken solely under the pressure of psychological necessity, seems to be that which tries to understand the whole of the psychical life from the one fundamental impulse of the *libido*. In so doing, of course, the necessity of distinguishing different kinds of *libido* immediately became evident.³

Ultimately, however, this psychological method of approach proves inadequate. The very science one employs in this approach cannot itself be understood simply as a psychological phenomenon, as an expression of the *libido*, and so on. It is itself based upon the distinction between valid and invalid, true and false statements. From the psychological way of approaching the problems there emerges the noetic, from the 'soul' there arises the Nous, the reason, the mind, as the capacity to grasp truth, to demand and to produce that which is valid and in accordance with a norm, to perceive ideas, and through them to bring order into a chaotic mass of impressions, sensations, and instincts. Once more the movement goes a step further, either inwards or upwards. We perceive a unity 'behind' the psychical plane, a principle of unity, which co-ordinates the psychical realm into a structural whole, just as the structural principle (mentioned above⁴) co-ordinates the organism of the body: this 'unity' is the mind. Here all mere observation ceases. We do not reach this mind, its thought and creativity, save as we identify our thought and creativity with it. The philosophy of the mind penetrates behind psychology

3. A powerful influence which counterbalances psychological atomism is provided by the *Gestalt* Psychology and by the Würzburg School, which is akin to it (Wertheimer, Koffka, Külpe, Messer, etc.). 4. P. 215.

in order to be able to pierce to the heart of the highest unity of man, or in man, which dominates everything else. But it has scarcely set itself this task than it transcends the mind of man itself, and is directed towards a unity on a still higher plane, a unity which must not only be capable of explaining the agreement of the individual minds of men in one truth, or one idea, but, above all, which must be capable of explaining the valid truth comprehended according to its own unity.⁵ So far as the definition of this ultimate unity is concerned, however, this unity which is enthroned above the minds of men, this all-inclusive principle of all truth and validity, of all meaning and relevance, men's views are hopelessly at variance, and have been so for nearly three thousand years, ever since the problem was first raised. In order to know what is the unity in man, we would have to know what is the attitude of the 'mind' to the 'minds' of men, how it, the mind, regards the totality of being, above all of material being, in which man participates through his body, and how, from that standpoint, the relation between body and mind, soul and mind should be understood. It is precisely this question of the unity in man which has given rise to all the problems of philosophy, and it seems as though they can never be settled.

Even the latest attempt to understand the unity of human existence as 'objective existence-in-the-world,' and in so doing as 'anxiety' and 'existence-for-death,' important and instructive as it is, is far from being a satisfactory answer to the question: in what does the unity of man consist, on what is it based, and how far does it extend? Perhaps its greatest advantage consists in the fact that it leads us back to that which the simple man, who knows nothing of philosophy or science, knows of his own unity.⁶ The simple human being solves the problem

5. From Plato onwards these problems dominate philosophy; the necessity for this enlargement of the horizon can be perceived especially clearly in the most recent times in the development of phenomenology.

6. Heidegger, *Sein und With* the concept of *Dasein* ('existence') Heidegger develops what is intended to be a formal structural anthropology, but he leaves a large number of the fundamental questions of anthropology entirely unanswered. (On *Dasein*, cf. Nicolas Berdyaev, *Solitude and Society*, pp. 41-8, 51-2, 154.-Translator.)

with the two words: 'I myself.' That is the unity of personality in which he lives, of which, without reflecting upon it, he is aware, and perhaps knows more about than when he begins to think about it. And yet—who then is this 'I' Myself'? What do these two enigmatic, pregnant words mean? Do they mean the same, or, if not, what is their relation to one another? We seek the answer to this question not in philosophy and not in psychology—little as we desire to depreciate the truth which we learn from both—but in the Word of God.

We shall never understand the unity of man, the enigma of the 'I-Self,' save in the light of man's Creation in and for the Word of God. Man has been created by God as a psychophysical unity. This duality—(with the exact meaning of which we shall deal later on)—cannot and ought not to be removed, neither by materialism, nor by Idealism, nor by any theory of identity. But this does not mean that if we are Christian believers we cannot or ought not to understand man as a unity. We should and may know him as a unity, only not from himself or in himself, but solely from the truth of the Divine Creation. Here, too, is the basis of his 'hierarchical' constitution. Since God has created man in His image He has created him as person. It is not the mind, nor the soul but the psycho-physical whole, the person 'man' whom God has created in His own image. The unity of man is the unity of his personal being. But we can only perceive his personal being through faith, in the light of the Word of God, namely, as the creature which has been called to communion with God, and thus to responsibility-in-love. That is the Scriptural basis of the understanding of the 'I-Self'.

Man is in the Image of God, his personality derives from God's, yet just because it is from God his person is different from God's. God—the God known to us in His Word—is the unconditioned, the underived, the eternally self-sustained person, on no side limited, and, save from Himself, by naught determined, absolute and, to Himself, absolutely transparent Spirit. Yet this designation 'absolute Spirit' would forthwith land us in the bottomless and impersonal could we not at once add a second : He is to Himself self-related, one knowing and willing Himself in love, the

Triune God. Wherefore, only the Triune God is genuinely personal, for He is within Himself self-related, willing, knowing, loving Himself. The God not known in His Trinity—which is to say, not from the revelation in Jesus Christ—is not the God who within Himself is loving, therefore also not a God who within Himself is person. This Triune personal being of God is the original image according to which and for which man has been created. This Trinity is the basis of both facts: first, that man, like God, is person, and, secondly, that he is person in quite a different way from the way in which God is Person.⁷ God, the Primal Word, is creative, self-existent, and self-sufficing love; man has been created by God as a responsive, reflexive love, that is, a love whose content is outside itself. With God, the ‘I’ of man has its ‘Self’ in the Word of God. In Himself God is love,⁸ but man can only be love from God and unto God. His love can only be of the kind indicated in the words: ‘Let us love Him, for He has first loved us.’ Whenever man tries to love by his own efforts, or to love himself, in the same way as the Triune God loves, he distorts himself and splits his personality. Only in the love of God can man be loving, and therefore be himself. The fact that the love of God is the content of his being is the point at which he resembles God. In this he is the reflection of God. ‘But

7. Augustine’s profound researches into the relation between the Divine Trinity and the structure of human personality—in his work *De Trinitate*—have never been rightly understood by Protestant theologians, because these theologians saw in them merely the danger of a speculative argument for belief in the Trinity. Yet in the mind of Augustine they were not intended primarily—if at all—as apologetics, but as Christian ontology. In this study Augustine is concerned with the question: How is the personal being of God related to the personal being of man? Thus understood, the work *De Trinitate* is an inexhaustible mine, and research in this direction is far more useful than any general observations on the theme of the *analogia entis*—which has a vogue at the present time; in my opinion, up to the present this line of thought has produced confusion rather than clarity.

8. Nygren raises the extremely important question: Does the Fourth Gospel, by its emphasis upon love within the Trinity, weaken the contrast between the *Agape* of the New Testament (groundless love) and the Platonic *Eros* (love for that which is worthy of love)? (*Eros and Agape*, pp. 128 ff.). In any case the problem should be noted.

we all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory.⁹ But the fact that man has this content and meaning not in himself but in the Word of God, which gives him the love of God, means that he is absolutely unlike God, he is a creature. In the fact that, like God, he can say 'I,' he resembles God; but as soon as he truly desires to say 'I myself,' he must immediately refer himself to God as the ground of his selfhood, to whom he must be responsible; in this respect he is absolutely unlike God.

When theologians speak of the 'I' of man, and begin with 'knowing' instead of with 'love,' this is a relic of Greek thought, and is abstract and unscriptural. Love is the unity of willing, knowing and feeling, the sole total act of the person. Hence also the nature of the 'I' must not be defined from the point of view of knowing, nor from that of self-knowledge, but from that of God-given responsive love, of responsibility-in-love. The final ground of personality is not to be found in self-consciousness, nor even in the act of will; to begin there means to desire to understand man severed from God as person, and that means, to fall a prey to that primal misunderstanding about oneself. In contrast to all rational definitions of the Self the right religious self-consciousness of man is this: man becomes conscious of himself in the Word of God. The isolated self-consciousness, the *cogito ergo sum*, is the result of apostasy. The self-consciousness of man is 'theological' because man is a 'theological' being. The 'I' with which the philosophers tend to begin is, like the 'I' of God, an independent entity; this is why the 'I' philosophy, in some way or other, always leads to self-deification.¹⁰

It is the same with self-determination. It is true, of course, that self-determination belongs to the nature of person as person. But the self-determination proper to an original personal being created by God can only consist in being determined by God, as Kierkegaard finely puts it: 'The formula which describes the state of the Self, when despair has been completely eliminated: in the attitude to oneself, and since it wills to be itself, the self bases itself transparently upon the power which

9. 2 Cor. iii. 18. See above p. 96.

10. Cf. on this Sannwald, op. cit.

created it.¹¹ But this “power’ is simply the love of the Creator, and to “base oneself transparently upon it’ must simply mean that we gratefully say “Yes’ to this love, which we call the love of God or faith in God.¹² Thus even when the Self has been harmonized, when its faculties are in order, and all is quiet within, it is not dependent upon itself, but it rests in God and depends utterly upon Him; and thus it knows the “peace of God, which passeth all understanding.¹³

To be person is to be in relation to someone; the Divine Being is in relation to Himself; man’s being is a relation to himself based on his relation to God. This concept of personality can only be gained from love, and not from the subject of the processes of knowledge. It is because natural knowledge does not and cannot know this—for one can only know this in the Word of God—that there is such an absolute gulf between the intellect and love in the natural understanding of man. When the effort is made to understand man from the point of view of the intellect, an abstract conception of the ‘I’ severed from the “Thou’ is developed, a monological, indeed a monomaniac intellectuality, whose first result is solipsism, an abstract, heartless, cold reason, where personality is expressed in almost mathematical or logical terms. When, on the other hand, love is made the point of departure, because there is still an idea that man is pre-eminently a being who wills love, then—owing to the fact that neither the origin nor the content of love is known—the result is an unintelligent and irrational idea of *libido* which conceives personality in biological or psychological terms.

It is the same with the relation to the “Thou,’ which is

11. Kierkegaard, *Die Krankheit zum Tode*, p. 11.

12. Nygren is particularly clear on the relation between faith and love. He shows how Paul has substituted the concept of faith for the Synoptic idea of love to God (op. cit., pp. 106 ff.) because he wants to make it plain that faith is receptive and love is that which gives. On the other hand, Luther, in his *Sermon on Good Works*, has shown how inseparable are faith and the love of God. ‘Indeed, when we look at it aright, love is the first or is at the same time with faith. For I would not trust God if I had not thought that He would be favourable and gracious towards me, by which again I am moved to respond to Him with a heartfelt trust, and to ascribe all good to Him’ (WA. 6, 210). 13. Phil. iv. 7.

originally posited in the nature of the human personality. Rightly understood concrete personal being¹⁴ is always the same as 'being-in-community,' a responsible 'existence-in-love.' Where man's origin is not known the person is either falsely isolated in an abstract intellectual individualism—the self-sufficient, autonomous rational 'I'; or the unified and independent personality breaks up into purely vitalistic relations. At the one extreme, man is a god, sufficient unto himself; at the other, man is a member of a species, the *animal homo sapiens* in the human herd.

Of all the thinkers who do not take their stand upon the Christian revelation probably Kant and Plato are those who come nearest to the Christian view, the one through his concept of the person as that of responsible being, and the other through his understanding of man from the point of view of the *Eros*. The comparison between the Kantian conception of personality and that of Christianity is most instructive. Since Kant, in accordance with his conception of reason, may not start from the divine love as the ground of personal responsibility, he defines his concept of responsibility as relation to the practical law of reason. This produces the following parallels and contrasts: Personal being¹⁵ is understood, it is true, as being consisting in relations, but these relations are not personal; they are related to the law of reason and therefore ultimately—so far as motive and content are concerned—they are impersonal: self-respect as the motive, and a universal rule as the content. Personal being is based, it is true, in a kind of calling; this calling, however, is not the gift of the Creator but pure obligation; hence personality cannot realize itself in

14. The word 'person' itself presents a complicated historical problem. (Cf. Hirzel, *Die Person. Begriff und Name derselben im Altertum*, Munich, 1914, *Sitzungsbericht der bayrischen Akademie*; Rheinfelder, *Das Wort persona, Geschichte seiner Bedeutungen*, 1928.) The allusion to the 'mask' should be used very cautiously, and the etymology per sonare should no longer be used.

15. Kant has various conceptions of personality: psychological, moral, and that of the theory of knowledge. They are nowhere combined into a unity. But his conception of personality as the 'freedom of a rational being according to moral laws,' and, based upon that, 'freedom and independence of the mechanism of the whole nature,' is decisive. (Kehrbach, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 105.)