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MAN IN THE UNIVERSE

WITH this lecture we enter the field of those questions which may be called problems of humanism or the humane. The first of these problems comes from without; it is raised for us by the universe in which we find ourselves. All humanism, whether of a Christian or idealistic type, draws its life from the conviction that man's position within this Cosmos is a distinctive and, indeed, a unique one, and that man has to vindicate against nature something which belongs to himself alone. All humanism gives man a place over, against and somehow outside of nature and elevates him above it. Therefore there is an inescapable either/or between this opposition of man and nature on the one hand, and on the other a conception of continuity which ranges man entirely with nature, and thus destroys the foundations of humanism. Humanism therefore, since it can be destroyed by a complete naturalism of this kind, is not a self-evident proposition.

Now it is curious that this nature-continuum, which denies the uniqueness of man and thereby sinks the human element in nature, stands at the beginning as well as at the end of the human history which we can survey. For the primitive mind there is no demarcation between man and surrounding nature. On the contrary, man and nature form one unbroken continuum. This appears primarily in the scheme by which primitive man interprets his relation to the animal. The totems of primitive tribes show that man believes in a real consanguinity between himself and certain animals, and thereby in a real descent of man from the animal world. Primitive man is, so to speak, a pre-scientific Darwinian, and the Darwinian of our time, by the same token, is a scientific primitive, if by Darwinism we

understand a popular evolutionary philosophy rather than a strictly scientific hypothesis. There is, however, this considerable difference between the primitive and the modern nature-continuum, that in the world of primitive man the continuity is not established entirely at the cost of man. In the same measure that man is akin to the animal, the animal in its turn is akin to man. For the primitive mind, nature as a whole is somehow human. In this primitive world there are no "natural forces" in the present meaning of the word, but only forces which are at once of a personal and in some measure of a spiritual nature. Nature behaves in a way similar to man. You can talk with it, and it talks to you. All this is foreign to the conception of the modern Darwinist. Nature for him is conceived of as an object, *i.e.* it is radically non-personal. Nature is primarily a mechanism, and this is an idea entirely foreign to the primitive mind. The nature-continuum of modern times is established exclusively at the cost of man. Man has ceased to be something particular within a world which is conceived of in terms of mechanism. Therefore he is himself something like a highly-complicated mechanism. Whilst the primitive mind arrives at its scheme of continuity by the personification of nature, the modern mind arrives at it by a depersonification of man. It must now be our task to discover the background of this change in trying to summarise the history of man's thought about his place in the universe.

It is by a slow process that man has overcome the primitive nature-continuum. I would suggest that the best guide for the discovery of the history of human emancipation from nature is plastic art. The continuum is still living in all that mythological art which represents natural forces, understood as deities, in human shape as well as in animal—such art as we find in India as well as in old Egypt and Babylon. The decisive breach within this continuum happened in two distinct places: in Israel and in Greece. Leaving apart for the moment the Biblical concept of man, we may say that it is the unique contribution of the Greek mind to have abolished the animal shape of deity. In the mythological struggle of the Olympic gods against the

semi- and totally bestial monsters, against the figures of the dark regions, there comes to the fore something of this unique inner liberation which takes place within the Greek conception of man. Man rises above the animal world; man becomes conscious of his uniqueness as a spiritual being distinct from a natural world.

But now, alongside this emancipation from and destruction of the nature-continuum, another process takes place, expressing itself again in plastic art, namely the *rapprochement* between deity and humanity which appears in an anthropomorphic deity and in the apotheosis of the human hero. This double process, first taking place in the subconscious forms of mythology, enters the full light of consciousness in philosophical reflection. Man discovers in himself that which distinguishes him from the animal and nature as a whole and elevates him above it, the Nous or the Logos, that spiritual principle which underlies all specifically human activity and gives man's work the character and content of human dignity. Now, this Nous or Logos is, at the same time, the principle which links mankind with the divine; the Logos is not merely the principle of human thought and meaningful action, but also that divine force which orders the world and makes it a Cosmos. It is the divine spark in human reason by which alone man emancipates himself from nature and places himself above it. It is that same divine spark in his reason in which he experiences the divinity of his innermost being. The continuum, then, is not broken, but shifted. Just as the divine Logos permeates nature and orders it, so it also permeates and orders man. But in man this divine principle becomes conscious knowledge. It is in the recognition of himself as partaker in the divine Logos that man becomes conscious of his specific essence and value; his humanity is, at the same time, divinity. This is the fundamental conception of Greek humanism in its conscious reflected form, freed from mythology.

In Biblical revelation the continuum of primitive mind is disrupted in an entirely different manner. A three-fold barrier is erected here: the barrier between God and the world, between God and man, and between man and nature. God is no more the immanent principle of the world, but its Lord and Creator.

He, the Lord-creator, alone is divine. Everything which is not Himself is creature, product of His will. Therefore He is opposite the world, His essence, His divine being, is other-than-world, He is the Holy One.[51] That is why He does not allow Himself to be depicted in any form: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth". But now—and this is the second barrier—it is not merely the nature-image of godhead which is forbidden to man, but equally the man-image. By that same character of holiness by which God is distinguished from nature, He is also distinguished from and placed opposite to man. Man, in spite of every thing he has and is, with all his spiritual as well as natural powers, is not divine. He is a creature. The barrier which separates God and the world also separates God and man.

All the same, in spite of this sharp separation from God, man is not placed on the same level as the rest of the world and not seen in continuity with nature.[52] Although man is not at all God, and God is not at all man, man is distinguished from all other creatures and elevated above them by a criterion of a specific kind. Man alone is created in the image of God. This likeness of man to God is the third barrier which is erected here. For man alone is created *in* the image and *to* the image of God. And this *imago dei* is the principle of Christian humanism as distinguished from Greek. At first sight it might appear as if this concept of *imago dei* meant something similar to the Greek idea that man is raised above the level of nature by his participation in the divine Nous or Logos dwelling in his reason. But the similarity between the two principles of humanism is merely apparent, for man's being created in the image of God does not imply any kind of divine spiritual substance in man, but only his relation to God. That which gives man his specific place in the Universe and specific dignity is not something which he has in his rational nature but his *relation* to the Creator. This relation is established by God's calling man to Himself and is realised by man's hearing this call and answering it by his own decision. That is to say, between God and man there exists the

relation of calling and responsibility founded in the divine Word and man's faith, a faith which works through love.

Christian humanism therefore, as distinguished from the Greek, is of such a kind that the humane character of existence is not automatically a possession of man, but is dependent on his relation to God, and remains a matter of decision. The humane character of man is not guaranteed in advance like a natural disposition. It realises itself only in that answer of man which corresponds to the divine call. There is a possibility of its not realising itself but of being perverted through a false decision into an untrue inhumane humanity. Even more: not only can this happen, but it has actually happened. It is the case that man has made the wrong decision and has thereby lost his true humanity, and can regain it only by a new act of creation of God, by redeeming grace. However, even the man who has lost his true humanity has not altogether lost his distinctive human character. In spite of his wrong decision, he still is and remains within that primary relation of responsibility and therefore retains—if not the truly humane content—at least the structure of human being. He is still distinguished from the rest of creation by the fact that he, and he alone, is a responsible person. Furthermore, to this man who has lost his true humane character, God, by His revelation of divine redeeming love in the God-man, Jesus Christ, has offered the possibility of reacquiring the true image of God; and, lastly, to those who accept this offer in obedient faith, the perfection and realisation of their eternal divine destiny is promised as the final goal of all history. That, in a few words, is the basis and content of Christian humanism.

Although the great difference between Christian and idealistic Greek humanism is quite obvious, they have at least this in common, that in both man is given a pre-eminent position in the Universe and is set over against and above nature on the sub-human level. In both man has a higher destiny, lifting him above the natural sphere and functions, and making him a partaker of a divine eternal meaning. In both the *humanum* has a rich content and is distinctly separated from the animal world.

Therefore it is not surprising that where these two great streams of humanism met each other in history they did not merely flow alongside one another, but merged into one. Thus there was formed in the first centuries of our era something like a Christian-Greek or a Christian-idealistic humanism, a synthesis in which sometimes the classical, sometimes the Biblical element was predominant. But these two kinds of humanism were never clearly seen in their specific nature and so distinguished or separated from each other. It was only in the middle of the second millennium that a double-sided process of disentanglement or dissociation took place, on the one side from a genuinely Christian or Biblical conception of man, on the other side from a renewed classical idealistic humanism. The one we call Reformation, the other Renaissance.[53] In previous lectures we mentioned the fact that the spiritual history of recent centuries is on the whole characterised by a progressive emancipation from Biblical revelation and, hence, by a progressive domination of the rational element. The question which we have to answer is why this process led to a complete dissolution of humanism in the naturalist nihilism of our own day.

It is customary to answer this question by pointing to two epoch-making scientific discoveries, namely the revolutionary change within the conception of the spatial universe connected with the name of Copernicus, and that other no less revolutionary re-establishment of the nature continuum connected with the name of Darwin. There is no doubt that both the destruction of the geo-centric world picture and the expansion of the spatial world into the infinite, as well as the doctrine of the descent of man from animal forms of life, came as a tremendous shock to the generations which these discoveries took by surprise. But in both cases it has become clear that this shock was of a psychological rather than of a spiritual nature. For, if we contemplate these discoveries dispassionately, it becomes clear that, whilst they were bound to shake the frame of the traditional world-picture, they could not by their own truth destroy or even endanger the substance of humanism, whether Christian or idealistic.