

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

LET me begin from emotion recollected in tranquillity, and represent it by two short poems which meant much to me in my youth. The first was written by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, on 'The Pride of Unbelief':¹

When I complained that I had lost my hope
 Of life eternal with eternal God;
 When I refused to read my horoscope
 In the unchanging stars, or claim abode
 With powers and dominations—but, poor clod,
 Clung to the earth and grovelled in my tears,
 Because I soon must lie beneath the sod
 And close the little number of my years,—
 Then I was told that pride had barred the way,
 And raised this foul rebellion in my head.
 Yet, strange rebellion! I, but yesterday,
 Was God's own son in His own likeness bred.
 And thrice strange pride! who thus am cast away
 And go forth lost and disinherited.

The second was Matthew Arnold's well-known sonnet, 'The Better Part':

Long fed on boundless hopes, O race of man,
 How angrily thou spurn'st all simpler fare!
 'Christ', some one says, 'was human as we are;
 No judge eyes us from Heaven, our sin to scan;
 'We live no more, when we have done our span.'—
 'Well, then, for Christ', thou answerest, 'who can care?
 From sin, which Heaven records not, why forbear?
 Live we like brutes our life without a plan!'

¹ *The Love Sonnets of Proteus*, 1880.

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So answerest thou; but why not rather say:
 'Hath man no second life?—*Pitch this one high!*
 Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sin to see?—
More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!
 Was Christ a man like us? *Ah! let us try*
If we then, too, can be such men as he!'

Matthew Arnold's sonnet did not come to me, at seventeen, as the 'mere morality' with which some people would class it. It was the resolution of a larger discord. It gave a focus under which one might gather one's vision of the universe and find it worth while; knowing not merely the commandingness but the adorableness of that *Virtus* which when other things had vanished was still left. Without disputing matters of fact as I had come to see them, this poet enabled me to see them in such an aspect that acceptance and worship and the inflow of strength came back; and in his person I found human brotherhood as well. In a word—in that sense of the word which I ask leave to use in this essay—by his help I was able again to find religion.

Having thus gained a foothold, I was able by and by to go farther. There was the beauty and majesty of Nature, for instance—Wordsworth's path to religion joining Matthew Arnold's. Each man's path must depend a good deal on the kind of good fortune that falls to his lot; whether he meets at the right moment with splendour in mountains or with splendour in human thought and life. And all such good fortune will have more than one side—it may bring first the 'homeliness in desert air', as it did to me, or first the 'sovereignty in spaciousness'; the surprise and the widening out of the world; the shock of 'numen inest'. (Each worshipper knows the special advantages of his own entry, and mine I think had one advantage in connecting so clearly with the practical issue of loyalty. If one bowed down in this chapel, something had to be done about it.) The goodness of the fortune again must be determined partly by very early

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experience, and by temperament, and by obscure factors far too many to identify. Almost the same aspect of Nature may come to one man as adorable, to another as dreadful; and the same may be said, it seems, of some aspects of moral life:

‘Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sin to see?—
 More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!’

The phrases are almost the same that Freud uses in his later writings¹ to picture the ineradicable self-driving and self-tormenting of poor humanity. I can only say that to me they came with no torment but with music and release. I had found a way out of prison and a gate into the Temple.

If I may use the name of God for that which I worship and that whose presence upholds me—for the sum or the substance of all good—then I find that the great language of traditional religion is full of meaning for me, and that in prayer the sayings of the masters of prayer come true, even for a feeble disciple. The philosophers whom I most esteem have not forbidden this position to be held. But outside the circles of technical philosophy (and of course by many who are within them) it seems often to be ruled out with scarcely a glance. ‘Religion’, say my friends who write in *Theology*, ‘is not to be had upon such terms.’ ‘Religion’, say my friends of the Rationalist Press, ‘is a relic of superstition, to be cast out before the widening light of day.’ As often in the past, so in our own age, a living world ranges itself in opposing battle-lines, and enters on the inevitable waste and distortion of war. A fence is set up to cut a great estate in two, and troubled youth finds itself disinherited on both sides. It seems that those no longer young might do some service by insisting on their inheritance. To sit on a fence, after all, may be one way of protesting against its being built.

¹ E.g. *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Engl. tr. pp. 105–8, 121–8.

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I attempt therefore in the following pages to map some few landmarks—to re-state some part of what I have received. My motive is the compound one which must work in all who set their hands to this eternal task. Such writers must hope, first, to make their own thought clearer to themselves; and, secondly, they hope that some point here or there may prove serviceable some day to others, since they know that to themselves at any rate it has rendered help.

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Chapter II

THE CONCRETE UNIVERSAL OF GOOD¹

I

I TOOK leave just now to use the name of God for 'that which I worship and that whose presence upholds me; for the sum or the substance of all good'. This seems a description sufficient to localise our subject. In so far as any man has found an aspect of reality which comes under the first half of the description—in so far as he really worships and is really upheld—he has found his way into some part of religion and is in touch with some aspect of God—some goodness, even if it proves to be the gleam of light reflected from a tawdry jewel or an edge of broken glass, or the beautiful colour of a poison. The second part of the description demands, not that his intellect should grasp the whole mass, existent and potential, of what is good, but that the weight of his response to the good thing that he can see should rest *on its goodness*, not on the defects which would send him astray. The development of his seeing and responding must lead him, let us say, not into a world of poisons or of broken glass, but into that of light and colour. He may begin by worshipping the goddess of fertility or the god of battles, provided he so worships that there may be no final bar to his coming also

¹ This book was written before Professor Laird's Gifford Lectures were published, but I recognise in them with pleasure a position akin to my own, reached by a very different approach and supported by far greater learning. The most relevant summaries are contained in *Mind and Deity*, pp. 161–72, 201, 291–3.

Incidentally it is interesting to notice the concurrence (again after very different approaches) between Professor Laird's treatment of 'unplanned teleology' and the exposition given by another Gifford Lecturer nearly thirty years before. Compare the respective chapters on Teleology in Laird's *Theism and Cosmology* (especially pp. 252–60) and in Bernard Bosanquet's *Principle of Individuality and Value* (especially pp. 147–55). What I owe to Bosanquet is beyond all computation.

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to bow down to, and be upheld by, the spirit of chastity and peace.

The classics of religious literature have seldom attempted to explain what is meant by these terms of worshipping and upholding. The words indicate sides of experience which we must know, it is supposed, if we have become interested enough to inquire into the matter at all. If a man has found himself saying 'Good!' in his heart, to the utmost of his present power, he does know them. But we cannot insist on his producing a definition of that word any more than of the former words; nor can we insist on his analysing out of the situation before him, in explanatory sentences, exactly the aspect or feature which made him say it. Both these tasks will be worthy, and inexhaustible, matters of study, but the experience will always run ahead of the explanation. 'When you know what you mean, you have achieved philosophy; but when you know that you mean something, and cannot tell what, you have already achieved something. . . . The first stage in knowledge is the discovery that you mean something: the stage in which the mind's reach exceeds its grasp, and barely touches a conception as yet undetermined.' 'The process of knowledge is not so much an alternation of question and answer as a perpetual re-statement of the question, which is identical with a perpetual revision of the answer.'¹

At every level of development it is right that religion should try to explain itself, yet it must not be discredited at any level by the inevitable failure sufficiently to explain itself. At a low level, it may be much easier to mime or to dance some part of the matter than to put it into words.² At an

¹ R.G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, pp. 89, 80.

² 'Although the ceremonial life is the outstanding feature of all primitive culture, . . . even for those concerned it would appear to signify very little that can be put into the form of ideas. It is as if they could express the faith that is in them only by means of a rich confusion of muscular metaphors.' (R.R. Marett, *Sacraments of Simple Folk*, p. 12.)

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advanced level, we find religious language continually resorting to the use of paradox, as though only the violence of self-contradiction could hold together the different aspects of what religion wants to say. Sometimes we seem deliberately to use words of double or multiple meaning; saying several things at once because we cannot disentangle them enough to say them separately. Modern critics have studied this shimmer of ambiguity in Poetry, which nevertheless, as an older critic has said, is 'the language in which man comes nearest to being able to speak the truth'. It is likely enough that some words that we need have not yet been invented, and ideas that we need have not yet been reached; we can see well enough, looking back at old halting-places in man's thought, that culture and language had to be developed further before some particular barrier could fall. And it is not merely likely but certain that better minds than man's must come into existence if all difficulties are to be solved that man's present mind can just see. Meanwhile we grope our way forward as well as we can, with recurrent pauses. 'It is this—but it is not merely this—nor merely anything that we have yet said.'

II

I assume all the foregoing if I now start again with another localising description. Let God be the concrete universal of good.

'Concrete universal' is a phrase which is not much used outside technical philosophy, and which has been the object of controversy and criticism inside it. 'A universal' is generally allowed; meaning something that can be identical in different cases or modes or forms. An 'abstract universal' is the bit of bare unaltered sameness picked out from amongst the differences—let us say colouredness picked out of all the colours; meaning hardly more than mere visibility. But when we speak not of colouredness but, in more ordinary

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language, of colour, we are thinking in a different way; of something that goes out into all the different tints and shades and fills them; embodies itself or expresses itself in them; and holds together all of them in a unity. The full being of Colour is all that Colour is capable of being; not smaller and thinner than the particular instance but richer. We can envisage it, when we wish, as concentrated into a small space on our field of thought; or we can see it, not (like colouredness) as a tiny disc of highest-common-factor extracted from the differing modes, but as a star-like, many-dimensional figure running out into all of them; or we can spread it out into an infinitely complex, infinitely inter-related, colour-world; a world with laws that we can explore. Possibly we came to grasp this part of reality with the aid of a first step that might be called abstraction, but the final result, of perceiving and holding an identity that takes on so many differences, and so many differences that press into an identity, is not an abstraction but a concretion.

In the same way the concrete universal of water is all that water is capable of being—waterfall and lake and sea, the reviving draught and the driving shower, and the ice and the cloud—drawn together into an essence which is each of them.¹ Or we may emphasise a standard or norm—instances of blue may be more or less blue, and may be a better blue or a worse. We may say of some member of the Christian Church, ‘He *is* a Christian!’ whilst another may embody that essence in a weaker colour and more twisted shape, disfigured by much that fails to be Christian at all. Or consider an individual, in that legitimate and illuminating way of thinking which sees the man as the concrete universal of all that he is, living in all his modes and qualities while they live in his unity. He cannot disown them, yet he may legitimately say of one part of his living, ‘Here I am most truly

¹ Mr G.K. Chesterton uses this instance of water in his excellent brief exposition in *St Thomas Aquinas*.

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myself', and of another, paradoxically, 'I cannot be myself here.'

Let us add an instance from ancient Israel as it is interpreted by a modern scholar:

What is the relation between the conception of the grave and that of Sheol? The attempt to unite them usually offers such difficult problems to the minds of scholars that they make a sharp division between them. . . ; the more general conception of Sheol being said to be of later, possibly foreign origin. But he who is satisfied with this view will be disappointed if he proceeds to other peoples, for there he will constantly be confronted with the same problem. . . . Sheol is the entirety into which all graves are merged; but no more than the other entireties which fill the Israelitic world of ideas, is it the result of a summing up of all the single parts, . . . the sum of the graves. All graves have certain common characteristics constituting the nature of the grave, and that is Sheol. The 'Ur' grave we might call Sheol; it belongs deep down under the earth, but it manifests itself in every single grave, as *moabh* manifests itself in every single Moabite. Where there is grave, there is Sheol, and where there is Sheol, there is grave.

The darkness wells forth from the non-world into the world of light. It abides with sinners and men of evil, for they themselves belong to the world of Sheol. . . . Just as the wilderness crops up in the land of man and is to be found wherever evil abides, so also the nether world, after it has come to stand for the home of the wicked. . . . The nether world is wherever there is a nether world nature. He who is struck by unhappiness, disease or other trouble *is* in Sheol, and when he escapes from the misery and 'beholds the light', then he has escaped from Sheol. The thought is so obvious to the Israelite, because he is always governed by the totality. If he has any of the nature of Sheol within him, then he feels it entirely. He feels the desolation of the grave, the oppressing darkness; nay, even the waves of the chaotic ocean he feels beating about him with their slime and mud.

Joh. Pedersen, *Israel, its Life and Culture*, Copenhagen, 1920, Engl. tr. 1926, pp. 461-2, 466.

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III

It is interesting to note how irresistible (and rightly irresistible) is the tendency to see, and to rest upon, the universal in things; even in those thinkers who believe it to be wrong. The authors of *The Meaning of Meaning*, protesting against 'the peopling of the universe with spurious entities', attack what we have called the abstract universal. 'To raise a bogus problem here is quite as unnecessary as to assume a universal "redness" because red things are every one of them red.' Yet a little farther on, studying problems of metaphor, they write: 'Each single metaphorical shift does, of course, depend upon some *common element* which is shared by the original reference and by the reference which borrows the symbol.'¹ Mr H. G. Wells defends mediaeval Nominalism. 'The Nominalist believed only in the reality of things and individual instances. . . . Only the indifference of school and college to current thought has prevented every thinking person from becoming a Nominalist by this time.' Yet the *thing* which he allows the true believer to keep must itself be the concrete universal of an infinite number of particulars. And Mr Wells himself deals in universals in the blithest way. '*The name, the word*, which is man's implement, can easily become his master.' '*Science* has never pretended to that finality. . . .' 'There has been and there is only one *human civilisation* and it has manifestly been spreading and varying and wandering and drawing itself together again into larger and fewer units of law and organisation since the beginning of the human story.'² Is this any different from the writing of that Realist who allowed himself to say that 'Love never faileth'? 'Science' is something which penetrates through each individual science

¹ Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 2nd ed. pp. 94, 95, 129. (Italics mine.)

² See *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, 1932, pp. 64-74, and *The New America*, pp. 7-8. (The italics are mine.)