Man Divided---Notes On A Fault In Modern Experience

FRANCIS M. MYERS

I WANT to pose a problem to tell a story about how I think the problem has emerged, and to illustrate the story. I shall not be able here, to explain how I think the problem might be resolved, but I do want at least to draw a couple of morals from the story.

The problem has been formulated in a variety of ways. Traditional religious thinkers have for years written about modern man's loss of faith. Other thinkers have written about the need to sever science from religious and moral bondage. Still others fear the religious or moral neutrality of science. Recently, both Christian and non-Christian thinkers have written about man's "alienation" — alienation from himself and from "being" — indicating at least a profound cleavage in experience.

But however much our intellectual leaders and oracles may disagree among themselves there is one set of propositions which they affirm almost in one voice. They tell us that our most important problems are basically moral; that science is a force so powerful that it has revolutionized the modern world; but also that science and morals are separate areas of life.

The first two of these propositions have an abundance of evidence to support them. Morals, as I understand the word, has to do with our decisions in regard to the quality of our lives. We make decisions, wittingly or not, about problems of public policy and personal conduct, and they relate especially to the conflicting goals and standards involved in those problems. We mold our own natures, to a greater or lesser extent, in each decision. Surely, nothing is more important to each of us than this.

There is little doubt, also, regarding the revolutionary role of modern science. From Copernicus to Einstein, our world-views and much of our terrestrial world itself have changed drastically. During those centuries, philosophies, religions, developments in literature and the arts, and economic and political changes received stimulus and much of their form from the new science and its technical applications. And men who used the method of that science created ideas about the observable universe which were tested and found fruitful beyond any men had theretofore produced.

To all appearances the new science has profoundly influenced man's moral efforts. Moralities have been modified and re-directed and new goals have emerged in the process. Yet philosophers, theologians, scientists, scholars and publicists of all sorts declare—as insistently as before and perhaps more stridently—that science and morals are logically separate. Scientists, they say, can only describe; they cannot, as scientists, evaluate. They are concerned only with matters of fact; we must turn elsewhere to learn about values. Scientists can tell us what has been, what is, and what may be; they cannot judge those conditions or say what ought-to-be. By way of example, we are told, scientists can help us develop weapons of war or tools of peace; war games and peace games; systems of combat,deterrence, negotiation, unilateral disarmament, or what not.

The gulf between science and morality is clear. Or is it? The words we use in talking about it, indeed, are familiar enough. But we should beware of iden-

FRANCIS M. MYERS is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Denver.

tifying clarity with familiarity, especially when the familiarity is one of verbal habit. We often try to mold life to the form of our words, only to find that our own thinking is all we have succeeded in limiting.

And we have limited ourselves most unfortunately by taking for granted the traditional philosophical separation of science and morals. In recent decades several thinkers have rigorously and, I believe, conclusively criticized that separation. I do not intend, here, to review those criticisms. Instead, assuming their validity, I plan to sketch a few historical developments that may help to illuminate how we have come so tenaciously and irrationally to insist that science and morals—and parallel dichotomies, such as science and religion, fact and value, reason and emotion, and objectivity and subjectivity—are by nature separate or even opposed. Various writers have told this story in a variety of ways. My version of it will not be comprehensive or detailed or new. Yet the story bears retelling, with perhaps some new emphasis, in order to bring into focus once again this problem which is, in my judgment, the fundamental intellectual problem of our time.

In summary, the problem is this: Most thinkers today, like their predecessors, agree that we cannot use the method of science to resolve our conflicting goals, standards and policies—in short, our conflicting values. At the same time, science is the only method that has demonstrated its ability to deal rationally with at least some types of problems. Thus our most imperative values are declared impervious to our most reliable tests of truth; and those who welcome this conclusion in order to call for the external moral or religious evaluations and direction of science, seem to be unaware that they are calling for guidance from that which is entangled in the most intense and fundamental disputes. If morals and religion are without evidential check and science is without self-guidance, we are left with the fanatical leading the blind. How, then, has science, the only method that has demonstrated its competence to solve at least some problems, come to be regarded as impotent in regard to the most important problems of all?

I

Now I shall tell my story. It is a story with an argument, and the argument is that the dichotomies I have referred to constitute a fault in modern experience, and that the fault is not in "the nature of things" but has resulted from identifiable historical developments.

Where do we begin? There are many possibilities, almost any one of which would be helpful. One of the most interesting suggestions is made by Max Otto, in **Natural Laws and Human Hopes:**

> The time came when the poet-philosopher Xenophanes suffered his care-worn soul to be tossed up and down the land of Hellas that he might sing, 'The All is One.' It was a dramatic moment; the most dramatic in human history. Perhaps it was the most tragic as well. . . . It made men conscious of the precariousness of his hopes in the vast universe and aroused in him the cosmic homesickness which no material conquest has been able to appease. Henceforth there was the problem of nature and human hopes.

For Xenophanes the important distinction was between the One and the Many. But what we experience in any public and communicable sense of the word is many; we do not here encounter the One. Later philosophers came to teach—with many variations, to be sure—that exeprience is only the way things appear to us; it is not the way they really are. Thus we have the further distinction between Appearance and Reality and the parallel distinction between the Natural and the Supernatural. Yet Plato, for example, did not go on to divide knowledge into separate compartments of science and morals or fact and value. In the **Republic,** the Good is the Ultimate Fact.

Christian thinkers came to distinguish between rational and revealed truth, and this was another step toward the conflict between science and religion. Yet the implications of this distinction did not emerge clearly until the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, when reason was identified with Aristotelian philosophy and was felt to be in conflict with Biblical revelation as interpreted by the Church. No Christian could seriously consider rejecting the established body of revealed truth. But there were increasing numbers of Christian thinkers who also could not surrender the rational truths of Aristotle. How could the dilemma be resolved?

St. Thomas proposed a solution. Reason and revelation, he said in effect, only appeared to conflict. They did not, really, because they did not apply to the same realms. Reason gave knowledge of the natural world, whereas revelation gave knowledge of the supernatural. Any time one method seemed to yield conclusions opposed to those of the other method, all we had to do was to separate them and assign each to its proper subject-matter. Then the problem would disappear.

St. Thomas did not intend to separate the natural and the supernatural realms. He hoped rather, to bring them closer together. But in sharpening the distinction between reason and revelation and in applying it systematically, he drove a wedge which eventually split the intellectual world asunder.

According to the medieval view, man lived in a finite universe which was purposeful throughout. It was created, ultimately, for the greater glory of God. But man was at the center of the created world. He was on the earth, the earth was the center of the cosmos, and the several heavens which bore the planets and the stars encircled it.

Men and women lived in a universe that was egocentric as well as geocentric. The stars and the planets were placed in the heavens for their guidance and instruction. The sun was for their warmth and illumination. The plants and animals were put on earth for food transportation and other services. The parts of the human body were each of them designed for men's well-being, despite the sinful uses to which they were put since the Fall.

But all of this was stage-setting. Men were the center of attention, on the cosmic stage, as the main actors in the drama of salvation. They were the focus of concern both for the forces of good and the forces of evil as they worked and fought for men's salvation or damnation. But this struggle was not so much a matter of real temporal change as it was the unfolding of a dramatic plot. The stage was set and the plot was already written, the work of the cosmic dramatist who set the stage and the plot so that men acted and spoke extemporaneously but on cue.

To drop the metaphor, men found themselves living in a hard and unpredictable world—yet one that cared about them. Even its hardness could be taken as evidence of care. There were droughts, floods, plagues and other "acts of God," but they were not viewed as "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." They could be viewed either as the work of the Devil or as tests of men's worthiness to view the glory of God. The Evil One and his angels watched each man covetously for signs of weakness; and the God who noted the sparrow's fall certainly watched over men with loving kindness. In either case the universe cared.

And then, this world-view began to disintegrate. The story has been told many times but it is worth summarizing. A method of science emerged which combined a new type of theoretical vision with precise techniques of observation, prediction and control, most of which were coordinated mathematically. Men's technical competence grew rapidly. The new method gave rise to the idea that the earth was not the center of the universe—that, indeed, the universe had no center. And,

increasingly, scientists eliminated the concept of purpose from their explanations.

Strictly speaking, neither the dea that the earth was not the center of the universe, nor the idea that the universe was not purposive, was new. But those ideas came to reinforce each other as part of a positive world-view, which was reinforced in turn by association with the rising prestige of science. According to this world-view the universe was infinite, mechanical, impersonal and indifferent to human welfare. Many men identified the mechanistic world-view with reason and saw revealed religion as opposed to them both. The conflict, moreover, had an intense, personal quality. For when religious leaders decried the ideas introduced by the new science, or associated with it, independent thinkers began either to attack established religion or to cut themselves off from it. But independence had its price. The ideas of an infinite, mechanical universe often produced an acute sense of personal insecurity and aloneness in the universe.

While the medieval view of the universe as finite, purposeful and personal was being wrenched apart and supplanted by a view of the universe as infinite, mechanical and impersonal, corresponding changes were taking place in social affairs. The medieval social universe—if I may use the phrase —of which a man was consciously aware, with any clarity and accuracy, was narrowly limited in scope, circumscribed largely by the area in which he might travel afoot, and by the circle of his relatives, friends and acquaintances. This universe was purposive, in that its seemingly timeless customs embodied, almost beyond question, a man's status and goals and standards by which he was judged. For all of this, the setting was intimately personal and communal at the same time.

Life was hard. In the manufacture and commerce of the town, as well as in agriculture, there was an economy of scarcity and a corresponding uncertainty. But there was also a sense of personal intimacy, warmth and richness which, together with the medieval world-view helped sustain a feeling of security.

The security did not last. The geographical and social horizons expanded, as did the cosmic setting. The purposive structure of human intercourse decayed and crumbled, as communal functions gave way to increasingly specialized activities and impersonal relationships. To a great extent these changes were by-products of greater individual responsibility in social affairs and, however ambiguously, of a real growth in social competence. Yet the greater competence was often accompanied by a new intensification of ancient self-doubts.

Nothing that I have said glorifies the middle ages. I have been writing about a process of disintegration of meaning that has been going on for at least five centuries in western Europe and, by extension, more recently in the United States. But this process is now taking place within roughly fifty years all over the world. And if the disintegration of traditional meanings brings with it unprecedented problems, if many people suffer from the disintegration, resist new ideas and institutions, and look nostalgically to an apparently simple and more understandable past, there are very few people who do not accept technical improvements that come within their grasp, even though, in doing so, they further the disintegration of those meanings they are trying to cling to.

As I use the term here, "meaning" refers to those conscious and unconscious patterns of ideas and ideals, attitudes, responses, feelings and emotions by which we interpret and evaluate the events of human experience. I refer primarily to those broad and fundamental meanings that give form and direction to experience, and by which we try to come to terms with ourselves and our world. We are now beginning to understand that men can withstand

incredible hardships when their structure of meaning is coherent and intact, and that they may go to pieces even in the midst of luxury when that structure of meaning disintegrates.

In this section I have argued, first, that the early declaration that there is a One lying behind the varieties of men's experiences soon led to a separation between Appearance and Reality, the Natural and the Supernatural. Yet, if the world was divided, knowledge still remained more or less whole. Secondly, in time leading philosophers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, proclaimed a separation in knowledge, between science and religion, corresponding to the two worlds. Nevertheless, all of these intellectual developments had attained a coherence and integrity of meaning in a world-view and social order which, consciously and unconsciously, sustained the endeavors of men and women of the western world.

Thirdly, the new way of science, which began to emerge with some clarity in the 16th and 17th centuries, led to new knowledge and technical skills. Men found that they could exercise competent control over many events to which they applied the new methods. Traditional meanings became less relevant. A newly revived and reinforced view of the universe as an infinite machine directly challenged the traditional meanings. But this world-view also helped create in many people the feeling that they were cosmically alone, adrift and insecure. At the same time, human beings were asserting a new individuality in challenging established economic, political and economic institutions. But in the same process, they cut themselves off from established community ties and, here too, often found themselves socially alone, adrift and insecure. In short, at the very time that men and women were actually demonstrating greater competence, they were plagued by intensified feelings of incompetence.

II

So far I have briefly sketched conditions that are important for a historical understanding of the conflict between science and religion, and science and morals. I have emphasized the disintegration of traditional meanings. I want now to show how this process is manifested in the work of several writers, going back to the middle ages and coming down to our own day; and I want, also, to clarify some of the philosophical stages in the process.

The story is long and complicated but, for purposes of convenience, we may begin with Dante Alighieri. He wrote in a context of hierarchical cosmic and social orders that were still fairly stable. Dante could take them both and give them imaginative reformulation in a cosmic allegory. There were nine circles to Hell, not counting the Vestibule and the very Center. Purgatory had nine levels, including the Shore and the region below the Gate. Paradise had nine heavens. There was a place for everyone and everyone was in his place. There was no need to justify this scheme of things. Dante could elaborate his allegory with confident reason and the vividness of experience because its framework was secure.

But that universe had hardly achieved, over the centuries, a definite form on the loom of the imagination when the weavers began, however unintentionally, to change the design. By the time of Copernicus the new design had begun clearly to appear. One hundred years later, Descartes and Bacon were talking of getting a new loom.

Michel de Montaigne published his **Essays** almost midway between Copernicus' **De Revolutionibus** and Descartes' **Discourse on Method.** He worked in a different tradition. He was a man of literature—a Renaissance humanist who modified and matured that humanism. He quoted Horace, Plutarch and Cicero rather than scientists; yet he was aware of the intellectual changes

that were taking place. And for him, as compared with Dante, the commonplaces were not other-worldly purpose and order, punishment and reward and immortality, but rather this-worldly change and uncertainty and human fallibility.

Traditional Christian literature was full of conventional homilies, to be sure, on the pitfalls of human experience, and in many ways Montaigne was a conventional, if not an orthodox, Christian. Yet he did not write of man's earthly condition as a preface to supernatural knowledge and immortal bliss. He advocated independence of judgment, skepticism regarding human claims to virtue and knowledge, and, toward the end, a quiet but full cultivation of human experience. His skepticism was basic. Montaigne did not deny the tenets of Christian faith; he denied only that they could be **known** to be true. He had witnessed too much blood shed in fights among Christian partisans to accept easily any of their claims. By all appearances he was more at home among pagan than among Christian authors. He was aware of different cultures and their different beliefs, and the changes in scientific ideas impressed him deeply.

> The sky and the stars have been moving for three thousand years, Montaigne wrote in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond"; everybody has so believed, until it occurred to Cleanthes of Samos, or (according to Theophrastus) to Nicetas of Syracuse, to maintain that it was the earth that moved, through the oblique circle of the zodiac, turning about its axis; and in our day Copernicus has grounded this doctrine so well that he uses it very systematically for all astronomical deductions. What are we to get out of that, unless that we should not bother which of the two is so? And who knows whether a third opinion, a thousand years from now, will not overthrow the preceding two?

Yes, this world of Montaigne's was very different from Dante's. Man was now a changing creature in a changing natural world which he could not know for sure; and except for rare acts of divine grace—which did not seem to interest Montaigne greatly—men can have no knowledge of the supernatural world. Montaigne made this summary near the end of the "Apology":

> Finally, there is no existence that is constant, either of our being or that of objects. And we, and our judgment, and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling unceasingly. Thus nothing certain can be established about one thing by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion.

Toward the end of his life Montaigne worked his skepticism, derived from conventional pagan and Christian courses and from the new sciences, into something perhaps more distinctly pagan and yet more distinctly his own. He could close his last essay, "Of Experience," on a note of equanimity:

> It is an absolute perfection and virtually divine to know how to enjoy our being rightfully. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and we go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our own legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump.

Although Montaigne communicates a sense of living in a world that was beginning to undergo revolutionary changes, he seems not to have been greatly disturbed by the new universe of science. Perhaps he was not more disturbed by the new world because he still belonged to the old. But even among his contemporaries, many men were not just bothered by the problem of changing social and intellectual conditions, they came to feel that their world was being riven, and they with it.

John Donne was one of these. Both as courtier and as clergyman he belonged to the old order; and yet his style of metaphor and paradox opened to the world psychological states that we like to regard as modern. By this

last I mean that Donne's witty and subtle revelations of the complexities of personal experience have much in common with what we have come to call — turning a commonplace word, existence, into a melodramatic phrase —man's existential predicament. But with all respect for honest expressions for this modern mood, I submit that our fashionable form of preoccupation with "man's existential condition" is a subtle and sophisticated—or perhaps only more recent—form of romantic **weltschmerz:** the old order changeth, how sad, how sad!

John Donne was successively, I repeat, courtier and clergyman. Both the civil and the ecclesiastical orders were changing. In 1611, after his imprisonment and before he took holy vows, Donne wrote "An Anatomy of the World, Wherein, by Occasion of the untimely death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, the Frailty and Decay of This Whole World is Represented." The poem is full of conventional Christian laments upon the evils of man's earthly existence. For example:

Be thou more than man, or thou'rt less than ant.
Then as mankind, so is the world's whole frame
Quite out of joint, almost created lame,
For before God had made up all the rest,
Corruption ent'red and depraved the best.

And later:

She, she is dead. She's dead. When thou know'st this,
Thou know'st how lame a cripple this world is,
And learn'st thus much by our anatomy,
That this world's general sickness doth not lie
In any humor or one certain part.
But, as thou saw'st it rotten at the heart,
Thou see'st at hectic fever hath got hold
Of the whole substance, not to be controll'd,
And that thou hast but one way not t'admit
The world's infection, to be none of it.

All this is conventional. But in between these two passages there is another, related to them, but with a new lament.

And new philosophy calls all in doubt:
The element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world's spent,
When in the planets and the firmament
They seek so many new; they see that this
Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone,
All just supply, and all relation:
Prince, subject, father, son are things forgot,
For every man alone thinks he has got
To be a phoenix, and that they can be
None of that kind of which he is, but he.
This is the world's condition now . . .

Yes, the old orders—cosmic and social—were changing, and poets lamented the change. But in some respects is was men of science, and men intimately familiar with scientific developments, who were most sensitive to the problem. Descartes, for example, re-worked and old idea and gave it a revolutionary impact: the idea that the natural universe is a purposeless machine. But this is less than half of his metaphysics. From a more comprehensive point-of-view he belongs in the great tradition of philosophical compromise, represented earlier by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Both St. Thomas and Descartes were confronted by the problem of conflict between science and religion. For St. Thomas the problem was represented by reason, interpreted in terms of Aristotelian philosophy, and the revealed religion of the Bible. For Descartes the meaning of religion was much the same, but science had come to be identified with mathematical, mechanical physics. Each man sought

to justify both science and religion by assigning them to separate subject-matters. For St. Thomas the subject-matter of science was the qualitative, natural world; that of religion was the supernatural—God. The subject-matter of science for Descartes was extended substance: matter. He also posited another substance: mind. Beyond both was God. Descartes himself identified reason with mind, or thinking substance, and referred religious faith to God. But the substance of mind was also the repository for the various distinctive, non-physical, qualities of human experience, including the emotions. Thus the long-range effect of Descartes' dualism of matter and mind was to set an intellectual basis for a series of parallel cleavages: matter and mind, body and soul, objectivity and subjectivity, science and religion, and, eventually, science and morality, fact and value, and reason and emotion.

The initial conflict was between science and religion. Some people tried to cling to religion and to reject science at any point at which it appeared to be in opposition to religious teachings. This was the position, more or less, of the various types of orthodox Christians. Others accepted the dominant scientific world-view and its half of all the cleavages. This was the position in the 17th century of Hobbes and in the 18th century of the French materialists.

But many influential thinkers could not accept either alternative. In one way or another they chose a third: the type of philosophical compromise exemplified by Thomas Aquinas and Descartes. And they made their choices with a new sense of conflict and urgency. Blaise Pascal, for example, is equally well-known as an important mathematician and as a man of intense religious conviction and feeling. Few men have been so passionately clear in affirming their Christian faith and also its lack of rational justification. Reason had its proper place, but that place was limited even within the natural world. "We know the truth," he said, "not only by the reason but also by the heart; it is by the heart that we know first principles, and it is in vain that reasoning, which has no part in it, tries to combat them."

With Pascal we not only find ourselves in a new world; we also find in him one of the dominant moods of the modern era.

> All this visible world is but an imperceptible point in the ample bosom of nature. No idea approaches it. In vain we extend our conceptions beyond imaginable spaces: we bring forth but atoms, in comparison with the reality of things. It is an infinite sphere, of which the center is everywhere, the circumference nowhere ...

Here, indeed, is a sense of the vastness of the universe and of the minuteness of man; and as he continues we get a sense, as well, of human power and importence, of hope, tension and despair.

> What a chimera, then, is man! What a novelty, what a monster, what a chaos, what a subject of contradictions, what a prodigy! A judge of all things, a feeble worm of the earth, **cloaca** of uncertainty and error, the glory and shame of the universe! .... Know, then, haughty man, what a paradox you are to yourself; humble yourself, impotent reason; be silent, imbecile nature; learn that man infinitely surpasses man, and hear from your master your true condition, which you are impotent of. Listen to God.

Pascal's cry has echoed and re-echoed down the years. One catches the sound even in unlikely places, such as in the neo-classical couplets of Pope. If I may again use Hobbes as a historical bench-mark—not as an influence—Pope often appears to lean, at least, in his direction. Or, if Hobbes' philosophy was too consistent and ruthless even to serve, here, in that capacity, we may say that Pope did accept the Newtonian world-view; and Newton did much more than Hobbes to make the idea of a mathematical, mechanical universe acceptable.

But we should remember that the

great Newton, as a person and as a religious thinker, was, after all, not so very far from Pascal. And neither, at times, was Pope. One of the best-known passages from the **Essay on Man** is a paraphrase, in heroic couplets, of the last two paragraphs from Pascal that I have noted. The passage ends:

> "Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confused;
> Still by himself abused or disabused;
> Created half to rise, and half to fall;
> Great lord of all things, but a prey to all;
> Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd;
> The glory, jest and riddle of the world."

And David Hume, who wrote so rationally to attack the pretensions of Reason, closed his **Natural History of Religion** by saying: "The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery." One result of Hume's critique of the rationalistic arguments for science and religion was to provide a philosophical entrance for romantic philosophy. Perhaps I should say, he provided both a door and a window. In one aspect of his philosophy, Hume carried the empirical tradition to an extreme of subjectivity; in another, not greatly divergent, he clearly and directly based science, morality and religion on custom, common sense and emotion. Immanuel Kant saw in all this a threat to science and religion, which stimulated him to bend his ponderous talents to save both—in the great tradition of philosophic compromise—by assigning each to a separate realm. But he did so, in effect, by canonizing and germanizing Hume's reliance on custom and emotion—and subjectivity, too. Thus the way to the romantic philosophy of testing truth by subjective feeling was paved with a full supply of rationalistic, and even academic, arguments.

Following Descartes, then, men and women of the western world found themselves confronted by a set of alternatives. These alternatives may or may not be valid, but they have been conceptually real enough to influence our lives. Science, reason, objectivity, matter and fact were placed on one side, while religion, emotion, subjectivity, mind and value were put on the other.

It is a commonplace that romanticism took form as a reaction against the mechanistic view of the universe and the mechanization of society through the industrial application of technology. Mechanism symbolized scientific objectivity and both were identified with Reason. Reason, then, and all it stood for, was the enemy. Romantics held it responsible for eliminating from the universe all that was characteristically human. The revolt against Reason and the effort to justify the richness and variety of human experience took the direction of affirming subjectivity. Man's subjective experience would provide the basis for religion, or, if not religion in the orthodox sense, at least for values and emotion.

The romantic stand on subjective experience is an impossibility; one cannot stand on subjectivity. At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the romantics were full of hope for men and women if they would subordinate reason to subjective experience and emotion. But romantic hope has been turning to romantic despair, especially in our own time. "Never before," said the late Paul Henle, "has nausea been promoted from a symptom to a category."

I must confess, for my own part, that I do not know how many people genuinely feel that their existence is purposeless, or to what extent we may recently have been witnessing something like the fashionable melancholy of the renaissance English gentlemen. Yet, if we may believe the Spanish waiter in Hemingway's story, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,"

> Some lived in (nothing) and never felt it but he knew it was all nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada by the name thy kindom nada thy will be

nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee . . .
. . . Now, without thinking further, he would go home to his room, He would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it.

Some of our contemporaries see no way out of despair but Pascal's: "Listen to God." But here, too, there is a strong mood of uncertainty, and large numbers of people seem rather to be listening **for** God, or waiting for God. Samuel Beckett's **Waiting for Godot** not only states the idea; the play mirrors the mood in an irrational, subjective style. The first words in the play are: "Nothing to be done." and it closes:

Estragon: I can't go on like this.
Vladimir: That's what you think.
Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.
Vladimir: We'll hang ourselves. **(Pause)** Unless Godot comes.
Estragon: And if he comes?
Vladimir: We'll be saved.
Estragon: Well? Shall we go?
Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.
Estragon: What?
Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.
Estragon: You want me to pull off my trousers?
Vladimir: Pull ON your trousers.
Estragon: **(realizing his trousers are down)** True **He pulls up his trousers.**
Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?
Estragon: Yes, let's go.
They do not move.
Curtain

III

Let us raise the curtain again and move on. I began with a statement about a fault in human experience. We have inherited an intellectual tradition which inhibits us from applying our best knowledge to our most urgent problems. That tradition began in ancient times with a distinction between the varied nature of human experience and what was declared to be the Ultimate Oneness of things. Before long, this distinction became a separation between the natural and the supernatural. Medieval thinkers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas formulated a parallel distinction between reason and revelation, or science and religion, which, with the "new" science, deepened into what the late Boyd Bode called "the cleavage in our culture." In so far as we take the cleavage for granted we find ourselves with conflicting purposes, or, in some cases, with a sense of individual isolation, subjective aimlessness and futility.

We need not take the cleavage for granted, but it is not easy to say what we can do to bridge it or to avoid it. If we turn to the religion side of the cleavage we still find little guidance. There are ministers, laymen, philosophers of religion, and even theologians, who have attempted seriously and rigorously to interpret religion in the light of new knowledge. But on the whole the side traditionally assigned to religion has been protected by isolating it, in varying degrees from our most adequately tested knowledge. When these efforts have been successful, the main results have been indifference to human problems, obscurantism or an arrogant struggle for power. On the other hand, much of what is vital in the present revival of orthodoxy, and of old heresies under the name of new-orthodoxy, is gained by smuggling information from the sciences, which are yet declared to be irrelevant to the issue.

Similarly, some men and women who are in positions of moral leadership work to re-evaluate the bases of the moral life. But many more reputed leaders wield their often great influence to maintain ancient values inviolate before the radical challenge of new conditions. One result is to produce a massive and frequently self-conscious hypocrisy. Another is to produce an almost hypnotic fascination with a "realism" or a "pragmatism" or an "existential freedom" that sees no way out but to attempt—as if it were pos-

sible — to foreswear principles altogether.

If we turn to the side of the cleavage which is assigned to science, we find that the majority of scientists and non-scientists alike insist that science is inapplicable to our basic problems. Here, too, a creative minority, including some philosophers, is actively re-examining the role of science in relation to religion, morals and values in general. But as we have seen, the dominant assumption is still that the one method that has developed through its ability to give objective demonstration to its conclusion, is declared by fiat to be irrelevant to moral and religious problems.

Now that I have presented a problem, told a story about the problem and illustrated the story, I should draw the two morals I referred to at the beginning. First, many people confronted by the modern disintegration of traditional ideas and social hierarchies, have responded with a romantic despair—or less than despair. When King Lear, early in the modern era, was faced with real, total defeat, he howled. Estragon and Vladimir passively whimper—if that—because an unidentified something does not rescue them from unidentified ills, or from the abstract ill of abstract existence. Others of us—and by no means only the obvious examples of romantic or sentimental nostalgia—lament the passing of a time that never was, rather than meet the hard and complicated possibilities of the present. We have scarcely begun to recognize the extent to which the present world does not fit the ideas we use to interpret it; and in so far as we do sense this, our normal response is to try to impose our interpretation on events. We are likely to be in the twenty-first century—if we get that far—before we will have accepted the twentieth.

The first moral is not just that there are vast possibilities for what Whitehead called "creative advance." This by itself, or even with embellishment, is now as platitudinous as a commencement address. What I am trying to say is that the potentialities of the contemporary world and our experience of it are so vast and rich—and terrifying, too—that our accepted intellectual forms for interpreting the vastness, richness and terror are hardly applicable to the world we live in. The reason for terror is in large measure that we may not succeed in living up to the possibilities that are before us. In order to confront those possibilties effectively, we need to think as we are not accustomed to think—at once coherently and concretely, rigorously and imaginatively.

The second moral follows from the first. If we are to understand the contemporary world we need to re-examine those ideas that have set the fault in modern experience—ideas such as the separation of fact and value, science and religion, reason and emotion. I have argued that the modern mood of romantic despair—and less than despair—has resulted in great measure from the disintegration of established cosmic and social orders. And yet that disintegration was not just accompanied, it was in great measure caused, by a genuine increase in competence in our ways of knowing and working. But these new forms of competence were uniformly believed to be irrelevant to men's deepest hopes and emotional responses. Thinkers of all schools, for example, agreed that reason was essentially mechanistic and void of emotion.

In order to keep the point as simple as possible (and in order, also, to come promptly to a conclusion), I shall summarize this second moral in terms of reason. And I shall risk formulating this second moral in the language of myth:

Though we may live in the heart of darkness, we have inherited Prometheus' gift of fire, which yields **both** warmth and light. Though we grope and fumble, we can see and walk more

surely as we tend the flame of reason. Though the flame may die out or burn destructively if left untended, it remains our only **enduring** source of light —and warmth. For there were fires and flashes of light before and after Prometheus made his gift to men; but there was enduring illumination and warmth only as men learned how to control the conditions, within as well as without, that previously had by chance merely burned or flashed.