

7. TIDYING UP, & A FEW PRINCIPLES

We have a few loose ends to gather in, and I want to elaborate a few basic philosophical principles.

First, you must all be wondering over some of the teaching and its implications. Let's take Lucy, Julian's young dog, as an instance. You will all accept, on my word and some of the arguments that I have put to you so far, that Lucy's *substance* is immaterial. But where then, you might reasonably ask, does she get her quite solid body, her flesh and bones, her fur, her black coat, her wagging tail, her big set of teeth and her physical vigour? These are, all of them, very material. So where does she get them?

The answer to those questions lies ahead of us.

A clue to where we are going is to be found in a careful consideration of the two compartments into which we have divided the known world in which—

things are either [natural, or
 [
 [artificial,

—and even the artificial things are, ultimately, natural or derived from natural things.

Whereas an artificial thing gets its impetus, as it were, *from outside*, from its human designer and maker, each natural thing gets its impetus *from within* it.

Let us look, first, at some artificial thing. You cannot make something out of unfitting materials. You can't, for instance, make a table out of water (unless its frozen and the temperature stays below 15° below zero—and even then it would be pretty fragile). You can't make a dress out of aluminium, or a ladder of glass. No matter how enthusiastic the maker may be, he has to accept the limitations of the natural substances available to him. And the best makers make sure they use the best materials in order that the thing made will do the job he wants it to do, and for as long as possible. *What it is*, its artificial essence, is imposed on the thing by its maker (designer).

Now natural things, in contrast, are always made of the most fitting materials most suitably arranged to achieve the ends for which they exist. Trees, bushes and grasses have to be tough enough to weather whatever the atmosphere brings, and to be locked into the ground to preserve their life support systems which rely on nutriment and water from the soil and from the atmosphere.

Consider the subtlety of the materials a bird needs in order to fly; muscles and wings rightly shaped and coated with the best coverings, thousands of feathers in different shapes and with different functions, all ordered precisely to enable the bird to leap off the ground and to fly. And it uses these instruments with which its Author has provided it to carry out the operations of its kind. It does them almost infallibly well. The principle under which the bird operates is not imposed on it from outside, but from within it.

Even minerals behave consistently in their limited modes of existence. Oxygen always aids living things to live. Water provides the greater part of the bodies of living things and is constantly available to refresh them. Even the rocks, and the elements hidden within them, behave with rigorous exactitude, such that science can find whole bodies of learning, and faculties of universities, on their consistent behaviour.

This short analysis provides us with the grounds for some definitions which, though not comprehensive, will suffice for the moment.

Natural—that which proceeds from an innate (intrinsic) principle with an end implicit in its operations.

Artificial—that which proceeds from an external (extrinsic) principle in accordance with the inclination of the subject materials.

*

*

I want to turn now to some principles, the first of which will give some proof of the contention that it is form which determines a thing to be what it is.

Principle

"A principle," Aristotle says in the very opening of his work, *Metaphysics*, "is that wherefrom something proceeds in any matter whatsoever". For present purposes, we will take 'principle' to mean 'a rule which applies universally'.

Principle of Indeterminacy

This principle, which dates from the Greek philosophers, runs as follows : *That which can be many is not, from itself, one of the many.* It sounds a bit elliptical, almost circular, but it contains a great truth. Here are a couple of illustrations.

Water can be hot, luke-warm, cold or frozen. From itself, water is none of these. Think of the corollary : if from itself (from its nature) water was hot, wherever there was water there would be hot water ! In order that water be hot, luke-warm, cold or frozen, then, there must be some cause that makes it be one or other of these four as, for instance, a fire, the Sun, a cold sou' westerly wind, or an atmosphere where the temperature is well below zero degrees Celsius.

Plasticine, or as I think it is called today 'play-dough', can be spherical, oblong, box-like or shaped like a dog, all depending on what the child may be making. From itself it is none of these. It gets these shapes from the influence, or cause, of the child making.

Matter can be air, water, a tree, a dog or any of the almost infinite number of things that exist throughout the universe. From itself it is none of these. If, for instance, matter was 'water-y' wherever you had matter you would have 'water-y' matter. But you don't ! Matter from itself has no determining characteristics. Hence, matter gets *what it is* (that it be air, water, a tree, a dog) from some other influence than matter itself. This is how we would set out the deductive argument :

Principle : That which can be many, from itself is not one of the many.
Fact : But, matter can be many [different things].
Conclusion : Therefore, not from itself does matter be any of the many [different things].

Notice that we haven't proved what it is that makes this thing be this, or that thing be that. What we have done is show that whatever it is that makes something be this thing or that IT IS NOT MATTER.

Principle of Receptivity (Quidquid recipitur...)

Whatever is received is received according to the capacity (mode) of the recipient.

What shape has water ? Now, of course, water has no shape. Yet when it is received in a bucket it takes the shape, i.e., the modality, of the bucket and to the capacity of the bucket. Jelly in a mould takes the shape of the mould. Water in a dam is received in the dam to the limit of the dam's capacity. If the volume of water exceeds that capacity, it will overflow.

Let's consider something a little more complex. Let's say you wanted to build a table out of glass. Do you think that it would be easy ? No. Because the recipient, the secondary matter, out of which you chose to build, would not be happy with such an artificial form. You might do it, but it would be a pretty fragile table. It would be otherwise if you chose to build out of aluminium, or of steel. They would be much more robust receivers of the form 'table'.

What about training a dog or a horse ? Every dog owner knows that some dogs are good at rounding up and others are not. Some dogs are good at retrieving, others are not. Horse owners, too, know that some horses are good at jumping, others good at running, others good as stock-horses, at sudden changes of direction, and so on. It depends on the individual characteristics of the dog, the horse, as to how it will receive the discipline of training for a particular purpose. And the wise trainer will choose carefully the dog or horse.



Now, here is another illustration. Some few weeks ago as I arrived at the house, I spoke to Merry, the old cattle dog, after he had stopped barking at my approach. I said : ' How are you Merry ?' He didn't reply, only wagged his tail faintly. To tell the truth, he did not look too healthy. Shortly after I said much the same thing to Julian and he replied 'Well, thank you.' Note that the same sounds I made were received differently by the two different receivers, the two recipients. All Merry heard was the sound of my voice. The fact I used his name, and that I was a familiar face, moved him to wag his tail. He knew the sound and the sight of me, but he did not understand what I said because *he lacked the faculty of understanding*, intellect. But it was otherwise with Julian. He heard a similar succession of sounds but he abstracted from them the concepts they signified. *Julian ; query ; health ; of you (your)*.

And he did so because he was a more sophisticated recipient of what I passed to him by voice. Julian understands universals ; Merry understands nothing, he knows only singular sounds and connections with familiar sounds such as his name. Now here is an interesting thing, had he been able to understand me, Merry might have had a deal to say (if he had had the power of speech). He might have replied : 'Not too well, actually. They dropped a crate on me yesterday afternoon !'

As I speak to you, each of you is a different recipient. Each hears and understands at a different level depending on the talents Almighty God has given you. Some will see clearly, others more obscurely. Some will see one aspect, others another aspect.

Here is another, final illustration. Let's say that Mr Brown hands to me and to Julian a piece of chalk and says, 'Draw a dog'. Well, I have no talent at all at drawing figures other than plans and I would make a mess of it. And I see from Julian's reaction, that it would be the same with him. However, if Mr Brown had handed the chalk to Elizabeth, she would do a much better job because she has the talent to draw !

Next week, we will begin to consider how it is that a thing sustained by an immaterial principle, *substance*, has a very material body.
