

THE INDIVIDUAL'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE

We are caught up in an age of responsibilities and everywhere we are reminded of our duties to the state, race, nation, ideals and democracy or socialism; but nowhere do we hear about the inner and essential responsibilities of being human and unique individuals. The experience of passing into one of the tragic eras of history and of passing into it out of an age of faith in knowledge as the safe assurance of progress, gives us a rare opportunity of escape from a fallacy which may be called the fallacy of the present”, observed a Philosopher about a quarter century ago, and we too are on the threshold of new changes. This is a critical epoch comprising as it does of two wars which inevitably are consequences of world-views firmly and strenuously held about the nature of the individual and his relation to the universe. Thus we are faced with the problem of determining the future of the individual in the universe, whether he should be moulded in the pattern of a robot or mere worker or a democratic being, whether he should hold servitude as the highest dignity that man can achieve on this terrestrial planet or even afterwards, or whether he should strive and realize the unique status of a free individual, creative and self active and an equal partner in the adventure of life in the

present and in the near future. It is not always that men have been forced to state their problems and face them four square. Nor do all persons think about these problems from the standpoint of reason and cold logic and philosophy. And there is undoubtedly a great deal of truth in the warning M. Bergson gave when he declared;

“There is no limit to the extent of error, or of horror to which logic may lead, when it is applied to matters not pertaining to pure intelligence”. Yet a philosophical approach to the problem of the individual is absolutely necessitated by the present cultural and intellectual situation. A rational consideration of the nature of the individual and his place in the universe is forced upon us by the momentous issues which hang on his fate.

Who is an individual? What are his characteristics? And how can we ever know that there is such a being as an individual? How can we distinguish that from personality? These are questions which every student of philosophy has to face every day. But when all is said we find that neither the idealist nor the realist or the pragmatist philosopher has said anything about the nature of the individual. Defined provisionally, the individual is what the atom (or electron or neutron) is in Physics, and a cell is in Biology. The individual in the unit of the conscious universe, by which I indicate all beings who have sufficient selfness to seek to perpetuate

themselves and strive after certain ends, however vague or undefined. Thus the individual is a conscious being acting and reaching to his environment as a member thereof, but who is seeking to live despite the invasion of the environment which seeks to take away with the other hand what it has given with the one. He is thus the focus of all types of action which originate in society or community characterized by purpose. It is true that efforts might be made to bring under this definition all the spirits and animistic elemental gnomes, if there are any such. But when we speak of an individual from the standpoint of philosophy, we only intend to refer to the ordinary individual we know, who reasons, desires, strives, fights and struggles and, above all, pursues ends. The truth of the individual may be said to lie elsewhere; it may be said that the individual is but a necessary conduit of the Infinite and the eternal truth, the Absolute, the Whole which is the Real. But all these philosophic idealisms miss is the one important fact that the individual is the fundamental brick, the locus of any endeavour however profound and immortal and great. It is this poor insignificant individual who has to represent the grand symphony by telescoping all that vast array within his simplest receptive bosom. He is the fulcrum of all experience; the individual is the moment of reality, even as the case of the present which is the moment of reality for us. He is to adopt the words of Whitehead, the

matter- of-fact, who enfolds within himself universal significance, the message of the universal. The universal may appear more stable, because it is broad –based and is represented or can represent itself in ever so many individuals, but for the individual, he himself is the moment of reality. That is why all speculative affirmations about the ideal reality, which is the most coherent universe, even an organically interrelated Absolute are incapable of granting any dignity and destiny to the individual. The Absolute is incapable of explaining why his Absolute should ever break up its infinity into finite experiences. The best solution for him apparently, then, is to declare it to be false or unreal or less real. But the individual who has himself conjured up this systematic universe of the Absolute so laboriously constructed by logic has now thrown up his hands in defence of his own existence. The logical solution by means of identity in the Whole or of the Whole, though it serves eminently the purposes of architectonic, does not satisfy the actual experience of the individual. Thus we are forced to confess that idealism which promised the peak has failed to reach the base, for it has kicked off the ladder by which it had ascended. In doing so, it has knocked itself out.

The individual is a finite being, conscious of his difference, struggling to achieve a kind of unity with his fellows, however limited, this circle of fellowship might

be at the beginning. It is also true that the theories of Idealism have constantly made this circle of fellowship wider and wider than the biological nucleus of the family and the herd. Man has been not merely a creature of circumstances but also of his manifold wants and his growing dimensions are being more and more recognized everyday by psychology. The Absolutist conception is not so badly mauled by the logic of the individual as by the psychology of the individual, which is more than his logical, and indeed, overpowers his logical. And psychologically considered, that is, considered from the standpoint of commonsense, we find that the “splendid optimism of Absolutism seems less convincing than the apparently less perfect optimism of a philosophy tinged by dualism”. For the obvious reason, the dualistic solution does guarantee the fullest scope for individual realization of his inner powers. It is true that in one sense the environment makes the man, and it is also possible, by conditioning the individual sufficiently early from his infancy, to make him grow into the type of mankind we want, but there are factors even in such individuals so bred up for a considerable period to exhibit features which the breeder would have never dreamt of. One cannot condition the whole history of man, and his thought. The discoverer of inner unity breaks through the closed society with fury and impatience which can never be checkmated. The

individual thus is born as a child of time and the environment, and seeks to outlast time and outwit the environment. **The individual in his mystical consciousness throws overboard all these rigours of the environment, of whatever order, and faces like Prometheus the doom of his hopes and aspirations.**

That is why the individual tends to become mystical, introvert, and exhibits a strange fascination to struggle and achieve his unique nature, his difference from every other, his distinctive mark. Even when he feels the utter futility of existing on this planet, and thinks of suicide, it is because he feels that his struggle cannot avail. Better it is to die than to meet with failure. The glory of sacrifice for this ideal of freedom of the individual, this essential principle of democracy, only dawns on the soul at moments of deepest vision. This principle of love that seeks to realize for others what it cannot itself is at bottom based on the love of uniqueness. This is the secret of liberty and the substance of individualism. It is true this deep and intense feeling for liberty, which I shall call the function of difference, may be “a kind of spiritual firework going off of itself in perpetual night”, may be the solitary experiences of the soul but that is basic truth of our existence. It may, of course, be said that this kind of truth about the individual is itself a universal fact about the individual’s life. But the liberty

that is here enunciated is not the liberty to violate others , Rights and liberties but the unique liberty to be oneself. If this is a general principle about all individuals, there is nothing at all to say that the general absolute is more real, and that the individual experience of liberty is less real. The religious claim on the individual is as insistent a universal fact as the mystical struggles after liberty. For it is the truth of mysticism to affirm the unique value of the individual, and also to deny that there is any difference in the laws which govern the lives of the individuals of the universe. This pan-spiritualism of the mystic is what is usually called the Cosmic Consciousness; it is the Oneness of law everywhere , the Unity of being, its nature and value. All become one society, one community. It is a paradox that all individualists have finally ended as mystics, whereas all these who pleaded for universalism have ended as individualists or dualists. Religious consciousness is common to all races and all peoples and at all stages of human existence. When we remove from the religious expression all its variant garbs, what remains is the feeling of reverence, a awe and dependence ,and a sense of security in its presence or worship. The object of the religious consciousness is exalted by the individual, and he is more and more subservient to it. All his thoughts and ideas are constellated round these objects of his worship. In most cases, an abstract conception of the

object of worship is beyond him the concrete embodiment of this is expressed in the ordinary order of Phenomena of nature, of growth, re-production, of power in some form or other. It is one of the most significant facts of the religious consciousness that the object of adoration is a Power-object. Once this identification of the religious object with Power happens, the transition to the acceptance of kings and warriors and heroes into the pantheon of objects of religion is made immediately. Dependence here is not as simple as in the case of the material objects or even animals. The objects of worship is a member of the common society, but distinguished by his unique valour and skill; and intelligence and other attributes are added on to this idealized being. This idol of the tribe is raised to the status of the Divine. Magic and others follows on this wake. The complete subjugation of the individual is thus accomplished. That is why it is much more difficult for the religious person to abjure his goods, than it is for one who has never experienced this slow process of 'conditioning'. Abasement before elders practiced, when needed, is all to the good, but when it finally becomes as if the individual is eternally a child, and has to behave as such, though it may be all reminiscent of the early days of babyhood, it neither suits the fully grown personality nor should it be made universal. It was William James who said that no animal is more helpless than the

human infant, though no one is more endowed with self-protective instincts than it. The growth of this unique being to its fullest individuality is a fact of maturity, and is conditioned by the environmental influences, but the substratum of this individuation is always present in the individual living subject. Some psycho-analytic schools have developed a theory of individuation, which means that the individual through his will to power or to individuate becomes an individual. Some other psychoanalysts like Jung hold that individuation or growth into individuality is a process of identification with the basic unconsciousness which is common to the entire race through dropping off the wrappings of persona. This introversion-movement is the individuation which Jung equates with self-realization and self-discovery. But this unique difference is achieved by the individual through the discovery of the inward universal of his own existence. In any case, it appears that the truth, according to these two schools of Jung and Adler, lies in the achievement of unity with the Unconscious universal libido, which whilst it may not grant any direction, at least supplies inexhaustible energy of transmutation or sublimation and concentration.

The individual, thus, may be said to attain his fullest stature in the universe at his maturity, and we may also say, that the function of the social life has been to engender this growth, and to mould him in the finest

pattern of his inner depth so that the essence of the individual can be manifested as a unique contribution to the life of the whole. It thus becomes very important in the life of the race to preserve the conditions of growth which will bring to fruition this individuality of immense consequence and worth to the society as a whole. Thus we find that the growth of the individual is an important fact in the life of the individual, and this has a place, the most important, in the community itself. And further, the responsibility of the whole towards this individual, which it has, in one sense, brought into existence through one of its members or more, is of immense consequence itself. More often it has been expressed that the genius is the individual through whom the whole has sought liberation of itself. This is what Bergson considers to be the fundamental way by which the élan tries to make its upward march. Such a splendid concentration may be considered to be a unique and all together novel emergences in the society, but the constancy with which this phenomenon has happened gives room for a different hypothesis. Either this constant emergence is a due to the individual's struggles against dead uniformity which is constantly laying its heavy hand on all endeavour, and thus reveals the instinct of liberty in the individual, or else it is due to the incidence of some higher power of life on this plane of existence, so as to liberation that is the truth of the individual. The romantic

or protestant ideal has this twofold concept of liberty with power, equality with omniscience. It seeks to liberate the lower powers of the mind which have been conditioned heavily by the tradition of conservatism and protection and preservation and sublimate them, though it must be confessed that it succeeds in the first and not in the second part of its effort.

The individual's status, thus, is very important, however much the idealists might try to reduce it to the status of unimportant adjunct, a fictitious thing that is necessary only as an auxiliary to the realization of the Absolute, a mode, a part, a segment of the totality. It is because idealistic Philosophy has reduced the individual to this pitiable condition that philosophy has lost all audience. If we would but seriously understand the unique significance, that is to say, the truth about the individual, then the truth about the whole would clearly be understood. Despite the fact that Bosanquet quoted that beautiful reverie of Tennyson about the 'flower in the crannied wall', he was not seriously-minded to discover the unique, for his whole logical system tended towards the universal. It is precisely here that we get the correct perspective from Plato and the Mystics, who discovered that every individual fact was unique in itself, and whilst it was that, it had wide relationships with the whole universe. Every individual is a center of the universe, a monad which reflects according to its ability and fitness

the whole universe and is equally reflected by every other monad. This is the system of interrelations within the individual who is the unique center, which is reflected in similar measure but not identically in the rest of the individuals. It is thus in religious consciousness that we gain this individual we lost in the logical period.

It may be, of course, seriously contended that the religious consciousness is all bunlum, that it is neither an instinct nor a common property, that it is an imposition and an opiate, a drug that makes all sensitivity to thought impossible, that it is a negator of all sciences and growth and intelligence. All these may, indeed, be admitted only under certain conditions. Every statement is true or false in the context of its utterance. There is no gainsaying the fact that matters of fact of religion are as firmly established as the matters of fact of science. What may be demanded is that these facts of religion ought to be tested in the same way as the scientist does. There is nothing preventing such a testing. One has to bear in mind that the apparatus of testing this should be suited to the experiment that is going to be made. The difficulty with subjective testing is greater than in objective testings. These are more elusive and demand careful subjective cooperation. The sensitivity of the individual becomes more and more acute in the reception of the suprasensuous region when the pain on the physical level increases in intensity a pain that is due to the jamming up

of all the energies in the inward direction. The one thing that sustains the life of the individual in those moments is not so much the joy of future—pleasure and the hope of an ultimate victory, but the inevitability of the experiment. The quality of this inward experience can best be called the value—experience, and it is not to be confused with other experiences. When Des Cartes insisted that the ultimate principle of the most indubitable principle of experience should be self-evidence of the experience, he declared a great truth. But as Dr. Whitehead pointed out, Des Cartes made this self-evidence to consist in mere clearness, and that clarity and power of the self-evident was, as Hume pointed out, to be found only in the sensations which are fleeting, and they are incapable of ever presenting the indubitable self-evidence. For, with all the subtle expositions which have come down to us both in the systems of subjective and sensationistic idealism in the West and in the East, the fundamental defect is that the sensations are not value—experiences in the sense in which we experience our own self-evidence. The religious and the mystical consciousness refer to this self-evidence as the most important, and sense-experience is only subordinate to the supersensory, as it were issuing from it. That is why Leibniz marked a clear departure from Des Cartes and the empiricists, when he sought to make the monad the most self-evident existence, whose sensations were

but representations or appetitions, confused indeed, whilst the real excellence of it consisted in mirroring the whole universe. Prof. Wildon Carr had developed these ideas to a great extent by pointing out that the monad whilst being strictly windowless, that is individual having internal or intrinsic value, was also a member of the universe in which it lived and moved and had its being. Prof. Mac Taggart again in following the pluralistic tendency affirmed the importance of the individual and even conceded its immortality, for this is the universal meaning of the individual. The concept of immortality is closely linked with the intrinsic value of the individual. The non-temporal versions of the mathematicians, and the description of the Absolute as being beyond space and time, owe their inner allegiance, unconscious though this is, to the concept of intrinsic value of the individual. And the universality which many philosophers would fain grant to the individual in his real being merely reveals the psychological need to make his value universally valid or valid for all time. The method adopted in order to achieve this is, indeed, clumsy in Absolute Idealism, since it seeks to confer this unique value not to the real individual but to God or the Absolute. The individuality of the Absolute and its Value may be enchanting speculations to the Idealists and strictly true even in Monotheism, but coming to brass tacks, we find that this ultimately abolishes the

foundations of the principle of value in the individual where alone, if anywhere, they have persistency and consistency. The individual is, of course, closely linked up with the entire universe which he experiences at all moments, as a member of it, and even as belonging to it. He may, even as in herd-instinct, find himself losing himself in it. But the essential 'privateness' of his existence remains as the continuous reminder of his significance in the total whole. The danger of surrendering to the Absolute and the Total Whole or even the Society as such is totalitarianism. No religion or mysticism can escape the all-seductive claims of the political, and unless it ruthlessly refuses to step down its truth of individualism, not merely for itself but for all individuals who are similarly built and who are conscious of their self-evident individuality, the transitions to the totalitarian fiction cannot be escaped by it. "The chequered history of religion and morality is the main reason for the wide spread desire to put them aside in favour of the more stable generalities of science. Unfortunately for this smug endeavour to view the universe as the incarnation of the commonplace, the impact of aesthetic, religious and moral notions is inescapable," said Prof. Whitehead, and this statement really reveals the two-fold reality of the Universe, its individual seeking value in themselves in and through the growing experience of the universe of which they are

The children, members sharing the common fortunes of civilization. Civilization truly and fully explained consist in the common realization of the significance of individual value. Not indeed in the number of inventions, the traffic signals and motor cars, in the concrete roads does civilization consist. It is the realization on the part of each individual that every other individual is also a being like himself, that each individual has value and must be treated as Kant stated, as an end in himself and never as a means. Great civilizations, civilizations characterized by respect for human life and value had flourished in our own country centuries ago, and the love which we bear to human beings and the general treatment of humanity in our country even under the most despotic regimes testify to the wisdom of the ages which has never made man a mere means. The totalitarian ideal, whether it is the dictatorship of the Indian genius. India escaped from this overwhelming preoccupation with the state-craft, because it had realized that the individuals must be free to make their own universes if we may say so. The truth about the individual lies in his discovery of the deity, to realize which he has struggled from the beginning of his experience, dimly, inchoately and yet strenuously and persistently.

The one primary fact about the individual is his unique equipment, which though it is a product in one sense of

the evolutionary urge within him and the environment, in so far as it has appropriated to itself a body of some kind, suitable to its purposes of concrete experiencing, is in another sense, the one multiplicity which upholds and sustains the accomplishment of ends in the universe. It is the body that makes the individual a sharer in the common universe, and if we may speak about a spirit incarnating in the body for the purposes of experiences, we may also refer to this spirit, the soul of evolutionary urge, which makes it appropriate or diversify its instruments of perception and action so as to feel an at-oneness with it. Thus it is that evolution itself has supplied the individual with diverse ways and means of adequate representation or actuality of it in terms of the individual and his universe, that there has been a persistent effort to revalue all philosophies, which for the sake of simplicity have referred creation to the status of appearance, or illusion or a secondary operation or secondary evocation of the static absolute. This persistent effort thus is itself characteristic of the present age, an age of individual realization of the value and worth of the human. The human individual is the most concrete fact involved in process, and the body- soul relationship that we have in the universe in every unending multiplicity of varying diversities is just the one most important primal fact of the nature of the universe. The whole world impinges on the individual,

and he is dependent on it with its diverse strata of matter and living being and minds in every way for his very growth and being. Within his is the consciousnesses which are seeking to express the unique relationship that he bears to the whole Universe and to each of the other individuals amongst whom his lot is cast. The relationship that an individual bears to the world is as changing as his relationship that the an individual bears to the world is as changing as his relationship to his body is unchanging. This significant unity is the primary fact whose nature has been receiving only of late considerable attention from psychologists and psychoanalysts. The individual is the embodied being whose appetitions, gropings and disorders and orders, realizations and failures, aspirations and struggles are strongly marked, and all bring the force of transformation to bear on the environment. No longer can the old view that the body is passive or only ignorantly activated hold the field, nor can the soul or mind be considered to be an alien being somehow thrown into this welter or chaos from which it is his business to extricate himself. Man has in some senses shown that his nature is dynamic and creative. His struggles after liberty and liberation of the passive existence to which traditional conservatism of the consigned him have been marvelous. Man has in these struggles after his own self-being and self-discovery of

himself as a creative individual revealed enormous energy of revolutionary action. It is this sheer individual from his surroundings, and the more forcible the realization of his limitations the more enduring has been his struggles. It is this typical mystical pioneer-mentality that has led him onward on the path of democratic freedom and the affirmation of the need to assure individual freedom and all that entails, freedom of speech, action and self-activity, and equality of all kinds; so that these individuals do indeed supply “Just that extra effort for fulfilling even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is the machine for the making of gods.” It has been finely said, “Democracy is an act of gods.” It has been finely said, Democracy is an act of faith in the ordinary man and mire it is the reality of the pluralistic universe, where every individual is a creative and free individual, conscious indeed of his place in the harmonious scheme.