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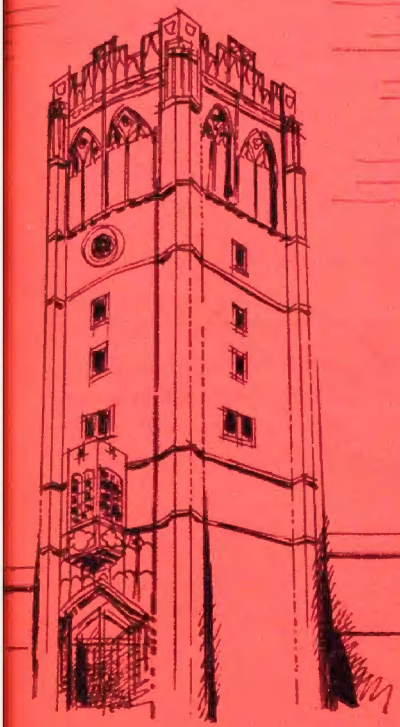

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Notes on Existentialism

by William E. Thirlkel,
assistant professor of philosophy

ALTHOUGH our considerations in this paper will be for the most part speculative in nature, I should like to begin by pointing out a practical truth; a practical truth which, perhaps, is too often overlooked. We sometimes forget that an intelligent man seldom accepts a whole lie—but he may be quite prone to accept a half-truth. Because we overlook this somewhat obvious truth, when we are confronted with a system of thought such as existentialism or any other doctrine which is in some way opposed to that which we ourselves accept, our first inclination is to look for what is wrong in the doctrine. Our first tendency is to belabor—at least in our thoughts—the dull wit who has proposed so unholy a thesis.

Such an attitude is, of course, grossly unfair. It is unfair to the man whom we are criticizing for obvious reasons. But, perhaps of greater importance, it is unfair to ourselves. For if we do not take the time to discover what truth lies hidden in the doctrine we are attempting to criticize, we close the door tightly upon the only possibility we have of understanding the doctrine.

Existentialism is a system of philosophy which had been developed by a relatively large group of men who are extremely intelligent, a group of men whom some would describe as "brilliant." There must be something which is very close to the truth buried deeply in the intellectual roots of Existentialism. Our aim will be to uncover, if possible, the seeds of truth which have given Existentialism its vitality. Then, having examined the sources of its life, we may perhaps be in a position to understand the fruit which Existentialism has produced in its maturity.

It is an axiom among the Existentialists that existence is not known—it is felt. Is there some important truth buried in this seemingly paradoxical statement? If there is, that under which it is buried is the ambiguity which surrounds that word "know." Overlooking for the moment all of the difficulties involved in distinguishing sensory knowledge from intellectual knowledge, and the

more profound difficulties involved in distinguishing clear knowledge from confused knowledge, let us concentrate our attention upon some of the difficulties which are inherent in the understanding of intellectual knowledge alone.

Our intellectual knowledge is a conceptual kind of knowledge. That is to say, we know intellectually by means of concepts. These concepts, in turn, are very closely related to essences. The relationship is this: we have a proper concept of a thing precisely when we know the essence of that thing. Consequently, we have intellectual knowledge most properly so called when we have a knowledge of the essence of some thing. If we apply this, now, to the Existentialist's problem, it follows that we have an intellectual knowledge of existence precisely when we know the essence of existence. But alas! What is the essence of existence?

This is a truth which has gripped the very souls of the Existentialists. Perhaps it is a truth only in the form of a very true, or very pertinent, question. But taking even this minimum, it is a question which has been either overlooked or evaded, but certainly not answered, by philosophers almost universally from the thirteenth century to our present day.

Let us see, as a next step, if we can, without becoming involved in all of the profundities of metaphysics, find here more than just a true or pertinent question. In other words, is there a certain sense in which it may be true to say—at least—existence is not known?

If we accept the doctrine of S. Thomas that in the order of created being essence bears to existence the same relationship that potentiality bears to actuality, it will follow that the existence of any created thing is nothing other than the act of some given essence; and the created thing which comes to be as the result of this joining of these two principles is an existence in which the act by which it exists is limited and made to be precisely the act that it is by its essence. Note what this means. It means that this essence is the cause of this existence's being precisely the kind of existence that it is. Thus when we form our concept—which as you will remember is always of the essence—we know not existence precisely as existence, but this existent in terms of its essence. Thus, from the conceptual point of view I do not know existence

as such; rather I know what to exist as man is, and what to exist as animal is, and what to exist as plant is, and so forth.

We may now answer the questions proposed by Existentialism. We may say yes; there is a certain sense in which existence is not known. If by knowing we mean to have conceptual knowledge, we may say that we do not have a proper concept of existence. This, then, gives us the clew to the answer we may give to the first question. If again by knowing we mean to have a proper concept, we must say we do not know what the essence of existence is.

But—this is only half of the truth. However, it is the half which the Existentialists have seen perhaps more clearly than any other group of men in the whole history of philosophy. And this half-truth has become one of the pillars upon which their doctrine has been erected.

Let us return to this fundamental premise of Existentialism—existence is not known, it is felt. It might be said that the Existentialist is not very concerned about existence in general; rather, his object of grave concern is the existence of this very singular thing, and most particularly the existence of this very singular thing which is himself. His problem, which he attacks with a kind of hysteria, is, "What *am I*?" And in this question the emphasis is more or less equally distributed between the words *am* and *I*. He is acutely aware of this thing called "I." He wants to know what it is to be an ego, and just what sort of existence an ego has, if, indeed, it has any at all.

Here is another seemingly paradoxical question. What sort of existence do I have, if, indeed, I have any at all? Does the Existentialist here doubt his own existence? Or are there some other truths hidden in the paradox? In answering the question this time we may take a somewhat different approach. We might ask a question in return, and say, "What is it that causes the Existentialist to ask such questions?"

One answer, which most critics agree is somewhat incomplete, but which may throw some light on the road which we hope to travel, is as follows: Although it is true that every philosophical system is more or less a part of the historical flux of any given era, this is especially true of Existentialism. It is said that Existen-

tialism is simply the intellectual facet of the historical man of the early twentieth century. If it is possible to characterize a whole half century in one word, the word which would best describe the first fifty years of the twentieth century is "disillusionment." Man of the twentieth century thus far has suffered one disillusionment after another. During the nineteenth century, the idea of "progress" had reached its full flower, science was to answer all of man's questions, science was to solve all human problems, man was at the threshold of the promised land, and it remained only for science to open the gate. Thus the heirs to nineteenth century culture came to the dawn of intellectual light with the firm conviction that the millennium was here. But alas, the perversity of things human!

The century had scarcely begun when Europe was ravaged by a horrifying war, the war was followed by a degrading depression, the depression gave birth to the monster which was Nazi Germany, and then followed an even more devastating war. Twentieth century man began to have doubts; he began to ask questions. Is this progress? Did science lose the key to the door? Can science answer all questions? Can science answer any questions? What does science tell me about *me*? Does science tell me how to find a job when there are no jobs, how to find food where there is no food, how to get ahead of men who are struggling with every conceivable device, honest and dishonest, to get ahead of me? What does science have to say about all of the pettiness of men, their utter stupidity, their boorishness, their callousness, their selfishness, their profound ignorance? Does science tell me what I am? There is some talk about my being a certain amount of carbon, and a certain amount of hydrogen, some oxygen, a dash of iron, a few nitrates, and other odds and ends all neatly compounded in a most delicate proportion. What a pity that such a devil's brew should have to suffer toothaches and neuralgia, loneliness and destitution, frustration and boredom, politicians and landlords, saints and sinners, and heaven and hell—or at least the thought of these.

The universal answer given these questions and a thousand others is that science tells me nothing. Science simply kills, it sterilizes, it fossilizes. Science is remote, it is removed from life and all things living. Science never touches the heart of things living save to kill them and preserve them in formaldehyde.

Science does not know things which exist, it can only preserve the relics of what has existed in mathematical formulae.

Does this, then, mean that the Existentialist has no regard for science? Again the answer is a paradox. The contrary is closer to the truth—he has a profound respect for science. So profound is this respect that he equates science and knowledge. To know is to have science. To have science is to know. But note the conclusion to which this leads. Science tells me nothing about things which *exist*. But to have knowledge is to have science. It follows: existence is not known—it is felt.

And other things follow too. If existence is not known, then my existence is not known. And if my existence is not known, then I do not know what I am, because I can be only what I am. And this train of thought leads me to the nether end of doubt—do I, then, have any determinate existence at all? Am I a *what*? Or perhaps another less enigmatic way of saying it—is it legitimate for me to ask the question "*What* am I?"

Again the Existentialist has, if we may change the metaphor, run aground on some rock bottom half-truths. Recall that we said that the Existentialist was most interested in the existence of the singular, and in particular, his own singular being. And recall that the Existentialist complains that science tells him nothing of what exists—meaning the existence of the singular. Perhaps you will also recall that it is an essential point in the Aristotelian-Thomistic doctrine of knowledge that there is science only insofar as we abstract from singulars—that there is no science of the singular. The Aristotelians and the Existentialists arrive at this conclusion by very different routes to be sure, but this point is a rock bottom truth in both systems. But it becomes a half-truth in the mouths of the Existentialists because they limit knowledge to science. Neither S. Thomas nor Aristotle equates science with knowledge. Moreover, it becomes a half-truth in the mouths of the Existentialists because they limit science to positive science, and neither S. Thomas nor Aristotle does this. But the important thing for our purposes is that, truth or half-truth, there is truth in the premise that science tells me nothing of the singular. And truth wherever it is found has the power to enslave the human mind.

If indeed, the Existentialists had come upon this truth in the same way that Aristotle and S. Thomas came upon it, they would not have been stranded upon the next rock of half-truth. These earlier philosophers came upon this truth because they came to know the contingency of things material, and they came to know the relation between contingency and necessity. Not so the Existentialists. They came to understand—or perhaps, I should better say to see—the contingency of things material, but it must be doubted that they have ever seen the relationship between contingency and necessity. And so, they cling with a feverish tenacity to the half-truth that man and all things created are contingent.

What does it mean to be contingent? To be contingent means several things. First of all, to be contingent means to be in a way accidental; and to be accidental, in a way, means to be by chance. To be contingent also means to be dependent. Finally, and of greatest importance to the Existentialist, to be contingent means in some way not to be at all.

Examine now some of these meanings. To be contingent is to be accidental and to be by chance. The implication of the first is explained by the well-known ditty: For want of a nail the shoe was lost, for want of the shoe, the horse was lost, for want of the horse the rider was lost, etc. And so it is with everything in this world. Everything man does is contingent upon something else. Man is contingent in the very act of his being.

What is perhaps not so easy to see is that to be contingent is in a way not to be at all. Reducing this problem to its very simplest terms (and even making allowances for a certain amount of oversimplification) we may argue somewhat as follows: To be simply is to be infinite. For being simply is not opposed to itself, and limitation presupposes opposition. But the being which we know is not infinite. Consequently it is not being simply. Now the only thing opposed to being is non-being. Hence if the only being that we know is not being simply, but is finite, its limitation implies opposition—the opposition of non-being. Hence these beings which we know must also in some way be non-being, otherwise they would be being simply, and infinite. To have being of this kind, implying both being and non-being, is to have contingent being as opposed to necessary being, or being simply.

Moreover, since being of this kind is not its own act, it must

receive its act from another; thus, in a very real way, the contingent being, when considered in itself, is nothing. Perhaps a familiar phrase from sacred scripture may help to clarify this point. Recall the words of S. Paul, that with Christ he is everything, without Christ he is nothing. The second part of this phrase is S. Paul's description of contingency. Without the creative and conservative act of God the creature is literally nothing. Here, again, the Existentialist takes half the truth; he is overwhelmed by the nothingness of creatures and overlooks the somethingness—and the great somethingness—which is received of God.

In summary, then, the Existentialists have seen ever so clearly a number of fundamental philosophical truths. Because, however, each of these truths has a correlative truth which the Existentialists have failed to see, when taken in their proper perspective, each of these great truths becomes a half-truth. However, the point which we must emphasize again is that these things which the Existentialists have seen are truth as far as they go, and for the Existentialists they are the whole truth, and truth wherever it is found forces the human mind to assent. The Existentialists have given a fervent assent to these truths: (1) we have no conceptual knowledge of existence; (2) there is no science of the singular; (3) man is contingent; and to be contingent is to be in a way accidental, to be in a way by chance, to be in a way nothing at all.

One question remains to be answered. Using these half-truths as principles, what sort of philosophy does the Existentialist produce?

Because his problem is largely a personal one, he begins with the contingency of man. He lays bare the next-to-nothingness of man in eloquent word-pictures. He echoes and re-echoes the words of Pascal:

> When I consider the tiny span of my life, which is swallowed up in the eternity which precedes and follows it, when I consider the tiny space that I occupy and can even see, lost as I am in the infinite immensity of space which I know nothing about and which knows nothing about me, I am terrified and marvel to find myself here rather than there, for there is no reason at all why "here" rather than "there," or why "now" rather than "then." Who put me here? By whose command and under whose direction were this time and this place destined for me?

Man is an existent. And his existence is merely an infinitesimal point hanging perilously between two infinite abysses of nothingness.

Man is literally next-to-nothing—he is surrounded by nothingness, and but for that spark which is his existence he would be engulfed in it. He has an infinity of nothingness behind him, an infinity of nothingness before him. To become initiated into the ranks of the Existentialists it is necessary for each man to experience or feel his existence in precisely this light. This experience is what they call *anguish*. This anguish is a momentous passion summing up in itself all of the overtones of terror, awe, despair, and rapture. This anguish brings us to the very verge of nihilism, but it does not destroy. On the contrary its effect is cathartic, it purges us of all fear, all despair, it carries away every illusion, and consequently every possibility of disillusionment, it enables us to feel in the depths of our being our innate and perfect freedom.

Although Frederick Nietzche wrote the words which follow in a somewhat different context, they describe most aptly this feeling of freedom which the Existentialist knows.

> . . . Hearing that the old god is dead, we feel ourselves illumined as by a new dawn. Our hearts overflow with gratitude, surprise, foreknowledge, and suspense. . . . Now at last the horizon, even if it is not clear, is free once more; now at last our ships can weigh anchor and sail to meet any danger; now once more the pioneer of knowledge has license to attempt whatever he will; the whole expanse of the sea, *our* sea, is accessible to us once more. Never before, perhaps, was there such an open sea.

Looked at philosophically, the freedom which the Existentialists feel is the freedom from determinacy. We feel, or see, or know—use whatever word you wish—the complete indeterminacy of our being. There is nothing any less determinate than nothingness. But we are next-to-nothing. And the little being that we have which has just been salvaged from the indeterminate nothingness of the past is even now about to be engulfed in the indeterminate nothingness of the future. Thus the only determination we have is that which we will give to ourselves. We shall be in the next moment of our next-to-nothing existence whatever we make ourselves to be. This is perfect freedom, complete—or almost complete—lack of determinacy, and complete self-determination.

This escape from determinacy has another aspect which ties in with the other principles we mentioned above. The determinacy from which the Existentialist is escaping is the determinacy imposed by essence. This is, perhaps, seen most clearly if we revert to the com-

plaints which the Existentialists made against science. In the traditional philosophies essence was a principle of determination—it made a thing to be what it was. For the Existentialists essences are merely the things we know. Essences are the things with which science deals. An essence is nothing more than a crystallization or a fossilization of that which has existed. Thus, science, if it is anything at all, is simply a kind of history; it tells me nothing of what I *am*—only of what I was. Thus, although I have no essence, I may be known in an essence. But the knowledge will be a knowledge of the "historical ego" only, never a knowledge of what I am. Hence there is always a certain gap between my knowledge of my being and my very being.

This gap is due to what the Existentialists call *transcendence,* and transcendence is due to freedom from determinacy. Transcendence is a necessary consequence of the next-to-nothingness of man. Because man is only an existent, he is caught in a state wherein he is not yet quite what he will be, and at the same time he has just about ceased to be what he was. At the moment, he is only what he has made himself to be, and will be only what he now makes himself to be. Thus man is constantly going beyond himself simply in order to continue being himself. He exists only by continually transcending his own being, by the act in which he determines what he shall be. What he was exists no longer except insofar as it is fossilized in an essence; what he will be is not as yet. Here, we have man, again, hanging between the nothingness which is the past and the nothingness which is the future, a being which is nothing in itself, for it never really is a *what,* but is a fluid, self-determining existent.

Thus we have two sharply distinguished realms, the realm of knowledge or science, and the realm of existence. I never know what I am, because I am always ceasing to be what I am and becoming something else. Yet I can know what I was in terms of essences. This is the realm of science. What I am is the realm of life, the realm of existence.

Hence the man who exists in the fullest sense of the word is the Existentialist, the man who has gone through the purgatory of anguish and has seen his own perfect freedom, his complete ability to determine himself, to make himself to be whatever he will be. Here is the man who lives enthusiastically, robustly, free from care. Here is the man who is a lord among men.

This is the final paradox of Existentialism. It is a system which is born in the pessimism of near despair, yet it ultimately flowers into an almost ecstatic optimism. The Existentialist conceived in chains is delivered into a godlike freedom. The Existentialist is the freest of free men.

What appraisal, then, can be made of Existentialism? First of all, if there is any truth in the theory that Existentialism is an attempt to escape from the frustration brought about by the historical events of the twentieth century, it certainly must be said that the Existentialists have found a *personal* means of escape. It might also be said that the Existentialists have led the revolt against the excesses of the scientism which so dominated men's minds at the beginning of the century. In accenting the evils of this cast of mind, they have rendered a great service to all mankind. Again, we may say of the Existentialist what can be said of every one-sided system of philosophy—by its own excesses it has helped others to see the truth which lies in the middle of the road. And lastly, these very excesses have already doomed Existentialism, perhaps somewhat unfairly, to be considered by many as nothing more than the current fad in the world of philosophical speculation.

The Call

Here in a cool, dull, classroom
I sit immersed in drones.
But my soul attends the wind
That calls with soothing tones.
It swirls outside, capricious, free,
And bends the newborn bough,
Carrying wide a freshness
Sprung of the rolling plow.
It tosses clouds far overhead,
High-piling sun-bleached plume,
And cools the trailing rays
That seek the soft earth's bloom.
I hear now Horace, Shelley, Keats,
Who fluted lyrics sing.
I yearn, and feel the call
Of God's orchestral Spring.

—Kevin Tobin.

When I Graduate

by Kevin Tobin

ONE of the common problems of the gay college man is that everyone—to a man—seems to expect him to do something worthwhile, or at least lucrative, when he graduates. Hard-working collegiates, who are always deeply involved in the necessities of everyday college life, borrowing money, counting cuts, are constantly haunted by the same question:

"And what, my little man, are you going to do when you graduate?"

The questioner always seems to expect some sort of pat answer, and is invariably horrified, even indignant, to find that you really haven't decided yet. He knew what *he* was going to be when he was ten! Sure, he's a bricklayer, and rich.

But now, at last driven to desperation by the gooey smiles of inquiring relatives, I wish to announce publicly that I have decided what I am going to be. All my mother's secret fears are justified. I am going to be a failure.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not going to be any kind of common failure. I am going to be, and this may well become a new profession, a successful failure. Any bum can be a bum, but a *failure,* well now, that takes some doing, especially if it's to be done right.

My plan is fairly simple, but it requires a great deal of patience and timing. One slip and I could easily become a failure as a failure.

I'll have to return to college next fall and spend another two years deeply engrossed in some sort of post-graduate study. This part, despite its odious connotation of work, is absolutely essential. Post-graduate study will cause people to begin to look at me (discreetly, of course) and comment that I will surely be a success some day. Just look at all that ambition! What a wonderful fellow! Do you see now how it will work? Years from now, as I lie dying in a Salvation Army ward, my friends (such as they are) and relatives can stand silently at the foot of the bed, peering sadly into

my wasted visage, and say, "He had such great possibilities, so much talent! What a pity! What a pity!" It almost makes me cry to think about it.

There will have to be, of course, a girl. Somewhere along the line, preferably soon, I will have to meet a beautiful young creature who will fall madly in love with me. She must be a female without peer. I prefer that she be beautiful, but she may be merely unusually pretty, providing that her other qualities make up the balance. She must be known far and wide as one of the worthiest girls ever created. She must be known for her deep personal qualities, so that even other women will think highly of her, exclaiming upon the mention of her name, "Oh, she is one of the worthiest girls ever created!"

Ah, Ha. All the better when I have broken her heart, and consequently her life. I can see the scene now. Somewhere, possibly in a railroad terminal, we will meet. We have not seen each other for months, not since the night when I embarked on my latest, though not my first, binge. (The binge may be of alcohol, cocaine, laudanum, or anything suitable.) She pleads with me. "Darling, darling! Come back now to your family and friends, to little Clearview cottage where we planned to live and raise happy little ones. Leave behind the demon alcohol (cocaine, laudanum) and come again to my arms!"

For a moment I will hesitate, as if on the brink of a glorious decision, but then, as a roaring train drowns out her pleas, I will plunge into the crowd and an oblivion of dissipation.

What happens to her after that is not important in detail, but, in general, the rest of her life should be spent peering through lace-covered windows, perhaps at Clearview cottage, waiting patiently to see my handsome figure at the garden gate. You see now, one more great possibility has been left behind.

Years after this I will be picked up from the gutter, a sodden bum, by some earnest young Salvation Army worker. Several times I will rally to his pleadings, and almost give up the demon alcohol (etc.), but each time at the crucial moment I will slide back into the gutter, finally to reach a point where death is impending. It is essential, too, that I die fairly young, so that all my old friends and relatives, who knew me when I had such promise, will be around to bemoan me.

The Salvation Army worker will, at great pain and with many a sad look, gather these old friends and relatives around my enameled cot. There they will, as I have mentioned, murmur among themselves about the pity of it all. I had so much! Perhaps I will waken, and nod to them in faint recognition of my long forgotten past, perhaps not. But I will certainly die a failure, a perfect failure.

I don't want to recommend this course of action to too many graduating seniors, because I don't want to overcrowd the field. Being a failure, remember, demands great timing and dramatic sense, and if you haven't got it, stay in medicine or teaching. Don't mess things up for those who have what it takes.

A Priest's Mother

Upon God's altar he does stand
With hands that aren't his own,
To offer the great sacrifice
Up to the heavenly throne.

He sits in the confessional
With power not of man,
And shrives us of our blackest sins
As agent of God's plan.

O God of Peace! O God of Hosts!
O God of Burning Love!
To think that Thou sent down to us
That power from above.

And you, O mother of a priest,
As you gaze at your son,
You do not see him as before,
For he's a chosen one.

And then there swells within your heart
A pride, sincere and true;
For you have given back to God
His greatest gift to you.

—Andrew Drobnak

The Humid Side of Life; Jungle Poems of Sir Timothy I. Peters

by Terry Brock

TAKE one jungle, add a few natives with their tom-toms, stir in a lonely poet, and the result will be a recipe hard to beat. Something about the jungle gets under a poet's skin and itches until he produces.

From an invaluable little work which I have used before, a collection of poems by Sir Timothy I. Peters, an English poet, I select the following two poems to represent the "popular" jungle poems, those seeming to incorporate to some extent most of the devices of "jungle poets."

Betrayal

From the dank, steaming jungle,
From the blackness of the night,
Through the heavy, wet mist
That holds the jungle tight,

From the solemn native ritual,
'Round trees of slimy bark,
Comes the menace of the tom-tom
Throbbing through the dark.

In guttural tones, the chieftain
Harshly calls his mate;
A twig snaps, and foolishly
A watcher dooms his fate.

A cry of vengeance rises
As the spy essays to fend
The upraised spears of iron,
But they savagely descend.

Morning brings the vultures,
They see, and down they cast;
Of the secrets of the black man
The white man saw his last.

African Fury

Forever and forever,
Never will we ever,
Fathom the rhythm
That beats from within

That deep, dank jungle,
That weird, pulsating jungle,
Where the dark, fierce natives
Sound their tom-toms so akin

To the heartbeat of the devil,
And in that sound they revel,
While the maddened, mystic mists
Covet, hold the beauty fast

That the gods above have molded,
And their mysteries unfolded,
Only to the lowest—
To the savage of the past.

Insofar as plot is concerned, "Betrayal" is definitely the more specific. "African Fury" is a generalization on the mood of Central Africa, one of the remotest places in the world today. Vast areas are unexplored and populated only by "the black-skinned savage of the past." For a white man to venture into this forbidden land is a sacrilege.

The setting and mood, although secondary in most poetry, are primary in a good jungle poem. Self-expressive and onomato-poetic terms are used profusely, but rarely indiscriminately. Every word creates and builds atmosphere.

One can almost see heavy green trees drooping with slime, feel the hot, clammy air, and hear the incessant drip, drip, drip, of oppressive heat and humidity. At night one realizes that he was better off during the day. Now everything is hidden, lurking in shadow, watching and waiting for him. All around him is the mystery of a million forms of life in this sweet-smelling, God-forsaken jungle.

The quatrain, *abcb* arrangement of "Betrayal" is common enough; but the metrical construction of "African Fury" intrigued me. Its rhyme scheme, *aabcddec,* keeps the poem moving at a

fast pace. Further augmenting its speed is the separation of the stanza in the middle of three clauses.

Very few jungle poems delve into the deeper philosophies of life; they stay close to the surface, as is witnessed by the fact that setting is their leaning-post. Subordination of depth of thoughts to depth of words gives jungle poems their popularity. For sheer enjoyment, a shudder or two, and a tickling sensation in specific locations on the anatomy, jungle poems are just the thing to read.

Ed. Note—One of the more interesting aspects of Mr. Brock's analysis is the fact that an intensive search through English literature has failed to turn up any such person as Sir Timothy I. Peters.

War

Place your bets cried the croupier
Steel muscles ripple in the saffron twilight.
Cold Iron echoes its symphony of Death.
Trampled corpses and shields lie together
in a hollow pile.
Seven on the red and pass the dice
Swords are painted red and Dark Death
seizes the loser.
How soon will the red sand be forgotten?
Place your bets
Men are afraid but they do not complain.
Their eyes are dry.
And you're just in time—to place your bet
But what of the wasted men,
Are they to be buried in the sand?
But the hollow men—
But nothing
The Game has begun
Last call—place your bets

—Mark Betterman

Fate Favored Fleury

by Rupert P. Thornton-Berry

THE element of chance often affects us when we expect it least and can cause us to alter our cherished opinions. I am witness to these generalizations and as I reflect upon them I am reminded of an incident which occurred in the small French fishing village of Fleury, Normandy, shortly after the Second World War.

The French coast has many small fishing villages and, as their fishing industry declined, they came to rely more and more heavily on their tourist trade. It is seldom that any event will shake the tranquillity of such a community, but the events of a certain warm night in June several years ago were destined to alter the course of Fleury's history.

At this time the village of Fleury was faced with the problem of increasing its tourist business, since the war had severely damaged the fishing industry and there was a possibility that Fleury would gradually fade away like so many of the other villages in the vicinity.

The one hotel was owned by a former French resistance leader, Pierre Dubois, who found it difficult to attract a sufficient number of tourists to stay in business. I had known Pierre in the dark days of the war when he was a member of the *Maquis* or French resistance movement under General De Gaulle. He had made a name for himself with his capable leadership and unchanging optimism. He was a well-built man of about thirty-five, with piercing black eyes and a strong, determined chin; but his crowning glory was a great black mustache which gave him a sinister appearance and struck terror into the occupation troops.

I had planned to spend a few days' vacation in Fleury and I had no difficulty obtaining rooms at the hotel.

The great season in Fleury was in summer when the traveling circuses came to "town." Pierre would say to his guests, "Ah, *mon ami,* the circuses are not like the wonderful 'big tops' you find in Paris and London, but they are an essential part of our social life and a welcome change in our everyday routine."

Pierre was a genial host and it was largely due to his personality and stories of the occupation that his hotel managed to stay in business at all.

Now the only suitable place for the circus was on a waste piece of ground near the jetty where the fishing boats docked to put their catch ashore. It was on the left of the sea wall, bounded on two sides by the overhanging cliffs and on the other side by the sea. At night it was a perfect place for a circus with fairy lights strung out along the sea wall and the wavering reflections of a thousand lights from the anchored fishing and pleasure boats in the bay. Of course the circus was crude and had none of the refinements found in the big-city shows. Plain oaken benches were placed in a circle and two rough posts were set up in the middle of the enclosure for the trapeze acts.

It was a beautiful, warm night, and not being a circus fan, I remained on the hotel porch. I had to rely on Pierre for an account of events at the show.

The acts were not outstanding, he said, and consisted of a few trapeze acts, a group of performing dogs, some vaulting, and some indifferent juggling. The show seemed to be drawing to a close when the *maitre* announced in a loud voice—*"Mesdames et messieurs, la grande fin est les familles heureuses."*

For this dramatic ending the circus personnel had collected a motley array of their performing animals and a few domestic animals. The group included two shaggy ponies, the performing dogs, some hens, geese, pigeons, ducks, a tame red fox, a large Alsatian, some white rabbits, two mangy cats, and—most surprising of them all—a large pink pig. The idea of this act was to show the audience the apparent amity of this group of animals generally considered to be natural enemies. The animals were brought into the enclosure where they stood blinking at the audience and the *maitre* was preparing to herd them back to their respective caravans when suddenly pandemonium broke loose. "The Happy Family" was disturbed by some loud and unexplained noises which seemed to come from the audience. Nature reasserted itself. The cats spat at the dogs, the dogs retaliated, and in the resulting confusion the ponies lashed out with their legs scattering the rabbits, pigeons, fox, and other members of the group.

FATE FAVORED FLEURY

I was sitting on the terrace of the hotel looking out toward the bay when I heard the noise. Looking up, I saw a good many people rushing out onto the stone jetty, and something that looked like a water-borne hunt crossing the bay. There were several of the small pleasure boats, lights blazing, crowded to the gunwales with shouting figures, and behind them sailing and row boats. Straight across the bay came this strange armada, until a few feet from the shore—then many hands pulled a kicking, dripping object out of the water.

It was the pig, which in the confusion had rushed under the benches and across the jetty into the sea. At this point the wall was about twelve feet high and the pig had no chance of getting back the same way. It had therefore taken matters into its own hands and decided to swim to the shore several hundred feet away.

The great excitement caused by this unusual incident was due to the widely held belief that pigs are incapable of swimming. Most people suppose that a pig in water will knock itself out because its legs are too short and its knees will hit its chin. However, "Penelope the Pig" proved this belief erroneous by covering a distance of several hundred feet before she was rescued by the excited crowd.

The news spread rapidly in the hotel and the next day the whole village and neighboring countryside knew about the unusual incident. The "Swimming Pig" proved a stroke of luck for Fleury as it was publicized greatly in the continental papers, and the charm and beauty of the small village soon became known to the outside world. Needless to say, Pierre Dubois soon had the most successful business establishment in the rapidly growing seaside resort. The circus also had record attendance and advertised Penelope as the "Only Swimming Pig in Europe."

Many of us will still speculate whether "Fate favored Fleury," as the inhabitants of the resort believe, or whether the whole incident was a clever publicity stunt—possibly originated in the agile mind of a certain ex-member of the French Resistance movement. I would like to add that Fleury is still an ideal place for a vacation, although the village may have lost some of its appeal for those who desire complete rest.

Religion and Ortega's Revolt of the Masses

By Robert Dober

Hamlet: By the Lord, Horatio, this
three years I have taken note of
it—the age is grown so picked
that the toe of the peasant
comes so near the heel of the
courtier, he galls his kibe.
—Hamlet, *Act V sc. I*

ONE of the great paradoxes of the Christian era is that the most profound insights of the most profound philosophers are often reduced to stupidity when compared to an Act of Faith, reduced to sterility when compared to an Act of Hope, and reduced to nothing but vanity when compared to an Act of Charity. How often do these philosophers shake their sistrums, in the manner of the ancient Egyptian priests, before the gods of their own ideas, proclaiming to the world that the salvation of civilization is wholly dependent upon the acceptance of their propositions! The world has seen what a dead Ficthe can do when brought back to life by a living Hitler. The world is now seeing that Marx is not dead!

Yet it must be conceded that sometimes the sounds of these sistrums add some harmonious tones to the symphony of truth—and may even turn men's eyes to the Divine Conductor. Jose Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* can be classed as a "profound" book, somewhat stupid, almost completely sterile, and exceedingly vain, but it has at least one tone of truth which might, through the reader's insight, turn him towards God, and thence to an understanding of modern problems and their possible solutions. Here, it is only honest to say that Ortega's insight into the world's problems is keen and that, from the point of view of having these troubles sharply outlined, his book has some value. But his basic thesis concerning "obedience," the tone of truth spoken of above, lacks the foundation necessary to sustain his conclusions; also the

elaborate arguments defending his solution woefully lack the elements necessary to convince the reader that he is correct.

Ortega declares: "The world today is suffering from a grave demoralization which, amongst other symptoms, manifests itself by an extraordinary rebellion of the masses . . ." One element of this "extraordinary rebellion" is the "mass-man," he who, according to Ortega, is commonplace, knows he is commonplace, proclaims the rights of the commonplace and imposes them wherever he will, is indocile to the superior minorities, does not obey them, follow them, or respect them; on the contrary he pushes them aside and supplants them. This, in itself, may be one of the grave causes of trouble today. But in all sincerity one may ask, "Why obey?"

Ortega emphatically states that he believes in a hierarchic order of society, one which of its very essence is "aristocratic" (not an aristocracy of blood but of "the superior minorities"); therefore there is necessity of obedience. But this reasoning by itself is hollow; the absolute and only basis for any hierarchic order is that God is, and Ortega completely ignores Him.

He probably would be in partial agreement and partial disagreement with M. Jaures, and in the last analysis label him a "mass-man," for on February 11, 1895, Jaures spoke as follows in the French Chamber of Deputies:

> The most priceless good conquered by man through all his sufferings and struggles, and despite all his prejudices, is the idea that there is no sacred truth; that all truth which does not come from us is a lie . . . if God himself ever appeared before men, the first duty of man would be to refuse obedience and to consider Him as an equal with us, not as a Master to whom we should submit.

Jaures would be a "mass-man" because he would refuse to obey One who is above him. But Jaures who would disobey the Infinite is more logical in his perversion than Ortega who dogmatically states that obedience is a necessity in civilization, and, at the same time, ignores God and denies His existence . . . therefore destroying the foundation for the very thing he is striving to build up. Perhaps the arguments that he uses to defend his thesis, augmented by the realization that he has failed completely to supply the vital foundation, might either show or strengthen the fact that a system without God cannot demand, let alone expect, obedience.

Another symptom of this "grave demoralization" is that "we live at a time when man believes himself fabulously capable of

creation, but he does not know what to create. Lord of all things, he is not lord of himself. He feels lost amid his own abundance. With more means at its disposal, more knowledge, more technique than ever, it turns out that the world today goes the same way as the worst of worlds that have been; it simply drifts." No one would deny the sense of this analysis. But one could easily point an accusing finger at Ortega and say that he is one of many philosophers that have joined Jaures and his kind to produce this type of world he so laments to behold! For with their philosophies they have pumped out of men's souls almost all of the necessary absolutes. They have produced vacuums within men, and these vacuums are psychologically abhorrent to the natures of man—man is made for God. Containing within himself this void, modern man is crushed by the overwhelming pressure of his environment. He is lost and has no purpose in life. Of course there are exceptions to this fact; one of which is that some men have been filled with the false absolutes of Marx; their lives are directed to the accomplishment of certain ultimate goals. They do not drift.

Ortega's negative approach to the study of history is that "history prevents our committing the ingenious mistakes of other times;" and as a result "preserves and continues civilization." According to Ortega the only value history has is preventing mistakes, but he says this value is a great one. In any case his view of history is very narrow. In fact he seems to be ignorant of the writings of Herodotus when he states that specialization starts in the nineteenth century; for Herodotus lamented about the specialization of his time.

Concerning the question of specialization Ortega states very convincingly that it (specialization) leads to barbarism. His argument is that the specialist carries over the confidence he has in his own work into unrelated fields and thinks himself to be an expert in all, while in reality he is "radically ignorant" of all but his own. This leads to false views that may be generally accepted and thence to the downfall of civilization. One cannot help thinking that the scientist who recently developed the phosphorylated hesperidin pill is "radically ignorant" as far as morality is concerned. There is no doubt that this type of specialist is blindly doing his part in paving the road to barbarism.

It is a tragic thing that Ortega can grasp the truth concerning the causes of the world's troubles and yet be so far away from the whole truth. His thesis concerning the revolt of the masses could be concentrated into one sentence by Dom Aelred Graham: "The outward forms of sin may change, but its chief motive remains what it has always been: man's desire for self-sufficiency, to be a law unto himself." Ortega emphatically agrees that the masses desire "to be a law" unto themselves; and he would probably say that they "sin" against the "superior minorities," but not against God. One must admit that his most profound insight, when considered together with all truth, is shattered into a million pieces by Dostoevski's statement, "If there is no God then everything is permissible."

The following quotations are but a few examples of the above mentioned insight of Ortega:

> This is the new thing: the right not to be reasonable, the "reason of unreason."
>
> Restrictions, standards, courtesy, indirect methods, justice, reason! Why were all these invented, why all these complications created? They are all summed up in the word civilization, which, through the underlying notion of *civis*, the citizen, reveals its real origin.
>
> This is the gravest [here the superlative is out of order] danger that today threatens civilization: State intervention, the absorption of all spontaneous social effort by the State.
>
> Society will have to live *for* the State, man *for* the governmental machine.
>
> Life is lost at finding itself all alone. Mere egoism is a labyrinth.
>
> Immoralism has become a commonplace, and anybody and everybody boasts of practicing it. [Here Ortega has come upon a question of great significance, although his definitions of "morality" and "immorality" are questionable.]
>
> Barbarism is the absence of standards to which appeal can be made.

The objection might arise that there is little value in presenting these quotations out of context. But it is an expedient way to present a greater number of his ideas, showing that he has perceived and grasped at the periphery of truth—and that if these ideas were developed without some of the impediments that hinder Ortega they could be the basis for genuine reformation.

But because of this hindrance the solution Ortega has offered to the problem of the demoralization is inadequate. His solution is

simply: unite Europe. He reasons that in striving to unite Europe, the European (he limits his examples and discussions to Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Germans) will again have a goal, will regain confidence in himself, will believe in himself, and will make demands on and therefore discipline himself. The demoralization would disappear in the process. But subsequent history (*The Revolt of the Masses,* 1930) has proved that certain Europeans did not lack a goal, confidence, and belief in themselves, and that they were willing to make great demands on themselves. The result of their efforts is the greater demoralization of the world.

Yet Ortega, who claims to know and understand history, forgets the many examples prior to 1930 that are similar to events after 1930, and laments the fact that the pessimism and depression which weigh down the European are mainly results of the loss of "radical faith" in himself, and the loss of "respect" for his state. Bishop Sheen has said that "it is apt to be the error of the Western World to believe that man does everything and God does nothing." This results in pride and to the proud "disaster is the negation and overthrow of his whole philosophy of life." It becomes evident that the very things Ortega wishes to reinstill in great measure into the European are some of the causes of the world's troubles, especially if they are reinstilled without the complete truth. A solution that is totally political is destined to failure. To have "goals" and "faith in himself" are fine for every man; that is, if the goals are the right ones, and the faith is not developed to such a degree that it excludes God.

Ideas without foundations are stupid; ideas that cannot be used or carried out are sterile; and ideas that completely exclude God are vain. *The Revolt of the Masses* is filled with these types of ideas. (If this judgment seems exaggerated, it would be best to quote Ortega: "If you prefer not to exaggerate, you must remain silent; or, rather, you must paralyze your intellect and find some way of becoming an idiot.")

In the final analysis the world may one day see that the profundity of the world's Ortegas cannot equal the great wisdom of the following paragraph by Jacques Maritain:

> The pitiable state of the modern world, a mere corpse of the Christian world, creates a specially ardent desire for the reinvention of a true civilization. If such a desire were to remain unfulfilled

> and the universal dissolution to take its course, we should still find consolation, because as the world breaks up we see the things of the spirit gather together in places in the world but not of the world. Art and poetry are among them, and metaphysics and wisdom; the charity of the saints will lead the choir. None of them has any permanent dwelling here below; each lives in casual shelters, waiting for the storm to pass. If the Spirit which floated over the waters must now hover above the ruins, what does it matter? It is sufficient if it comes. What is certain, at all events, is that we are approaching a time when any hope set below the heart of Christ is doomed to disappointment.

Contributors

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