

Drama note 4: The basis of drama.

It may be possible to live the whole of your life without consciously asking what is life, what is it for. Not just how did I come to be here but how does anyone or anything come to be here. A reason for living may be found existentially: a home, food, family, entertainment, belonging to a community, sharing and giving. In crises these things may not be available. This may lead not just to an effort to regain them but the uncertainty caused by their absence may lead to the question how is it that these things could fill and fulfil a life? Given society's economic and political organisation these things may have been denied us by authority or by an enemy. Given the hazardousness of life there may be accidents that destroy not just our house but our limbs. Then the questions seem not to be answerable in terms of the existential satisfaction these things give. And then there is always suicide where the existential satisfactions clearly do not answer the question.

In such crises there are two immediate responses. Firstly a, in a broad sense, political authority knows the answer. Our answer to the question is to obey the authority out of conviction or prudence. But In times of crisis it may be or seem to be necessary to change the authority. This raises the question of why that is necessary. And this raises the question of how in a situation where there is no Hobbesian security could these existential satisfaction have once been taken as an answer to the question. An authority outside the system may seem necessary. This authority is God or Godlike. God knows the answer to the question. But God is an authority that stands outside the system because otherwise God would be another questioner. So any God must raise more questions than give answers. The questioner is forced back to the existential satisfactions but with a new stipulation. It is ordained which existential satisfactions if any really satisfy. This is because there is now an existence beyond the existential. It takes place in the house -- or the land -- of God and its backyard of hell. In practice the questioner is re-submitted to the same political authority but now the psychological nature of satisfaction is changed. There is a dialectic of satisfaction and fear. Sometimes in ages of faith it was even necessary to change or recreate God. The circular process began again. It is a sort of Ideological clockwork that is justified as being the clock of history. But then in this crisis a turbulent questioner is claiming to speak with the voice of God. Every mystic knows that God is silent. That is why he is invented – God cannot be questioned. That means the question cannot be asked. Drama's purpose is to ask the question that is not asked.

*

Contemporary theatre's questions are existential. This makes it anecdotal. Because its evasiveness is unconscious it is not even the cloaking silence I mention above. It is empty, a "nothingness." Nothing is a drug that seeks nihilism. That is its psychological mechanism. The result is that under theatre's jolly mimicry of society and its events lurks malignance and reaction. And like all reaction it is vengeful.

This note begins with an ontological question. It is ontological whether it is asked in a fish-and-chip shop or on the stage. Ontological questions cannot be answered existentially. It is difficult to know what an answer would be. The question is Wittgensteinian: two and two are four but why are they four and how can this be? The question asks what is reality. In what way am I in reality so that it enables me to ask what reality is? I am asking myself like an articulating "two" and I ask it in the midst of the existential and contemporary nothingness.

"Reality" is easily thought of as a gaming board. Objects and people are placed on it. Perhaps the people are cut out of part of the gaming board. They are like chess pieces in the moves of the game. But there is no player. A player would not be on the board. He would be God. He would be the only player and he would have to be blind as well as silent. Otherwise paradoxically he would be as

limited as any piece on the board. I might be chosen to be another player but that would be a trick – I would, paradoxically, have to change the rules of the game or I would be cheating. This is not chaos, it is nothingness.

*

Reality begins in space and time. There could be no space without time because without it space could not be with itself. There could be no time without space because there would be nowhere for it to be. That space and time are together in the totality of being is absolute necessity and it could not be otherwise. There is no elsewhere or before. This is the first basis of drama: S/T. S/T cannot be, exist, without a “thing” in it. Why is this? Without a thing space would have no dimensions and could not be in time. (To put it picturesquely, its as if space and time clung to the thing.) The second basis of drama is: S/T+thing. Physics explains that S/T+thing exploded and made the universe. The S/T+thing that exploded was already reality, reality begins with reality. This is a situation (S/T) and an event (thing in S/T). It cannot be otherwise and is absolutely necessity. Without S/T+thing there is no reality. This is logic made concrete. Logic was of an event and the event was in logic. There is a site S/T and an event S/T+thing. After that an apple and an imagined apple are in reality in the same way.

The universe’s history is the event that made the logic of absolute necessity concrete. The objects, the things, of the universe evolve in that logic. A grain of earth dust has the logical presence of the furthest galaxy. There is a reason for talking in this way. The universe’s evolution repeats the logic in the initial explosion of S/T+thing. It is possible that this logic may not totally determine all events in evolution. Possibly there is chance and accident. The creation of life might be accidental. But the events in chance and accidents will be logical: it is the logic of reality. Part of the universe’s evolution takes place on earth. Inert objects such as rocks and mobile things such as wind evolve. In time some things evolve to be sensate. Some of them produce internal stimuli to which they react. In time some of them will be aware that they react to these stimuli. Such a being comes together in itself. It creates a self that knows itself and what is not its self. This self is called a being, just as reality is being, because the self is not just in reality but is part of reality.

The process of evolution fits objects (rock, wind) to their site. S/T+thing is a site and a situation. Even before human beings there were events that took place in situations. Water declines on slopes but the situation is external to the objects in the event. In so far as human beings are bodies (physical things, as are rocks and water) their situation is external to them. But in human beings there is a further evolution. A human being is both site and situation. The external site is only part of their situation and ultimately not part of the self’s situation. This is because human beings have conscious purpose. (In drama it does not matter if the self is voluntary or determined.) The self is a site that is its own situation. This is the third basis of drama.

The process of evolution is to fit objects (wind, rock) and animals to their site. Nothing is outside the inter-relation of evolution. Whether determined or accidental, its “force” (its incidents) moves towards perfection of fit of situation and site. In evolution there is no independent, undetermined purpose. Human beings must have a purpose, even if it is determined by the logic of evolution. Consciousness cannot be conscious of the determined. Perhaps we are mere sacrifices on the barren altar of the universe. We cannot know this, and it must appear otherwise. Our site and situation are one. Our site is our self and our purpose is our situation.

*

I have stressed the importance of the infant, the neonate, to humanness. The universe's existence derives from S/T+thing and nothing more. In its primal state the evolved universe does not yet exist. The neonate at its birth repeats the elemental primal structure of the universe. The neonate is unaware of the hub-bub and multitudinous stimulations and frustrations of the evolved world, it is isolated from them in the same way that S/T+thing is. As S/T+thing has no awareness, in the beginning reality was isolated with itself. And as this is also the later, historical neonate's situation, its as if it were present at the origin of the universe. The difference is obvious: the universe had no awareness but the neonate has. Its as if the neonate was at the origin of the universe and aware that it was. It is not a matter of ideas, of intellectual understanding, which of course the neonate does not have. It is a matter of the architecture of reality, which reality itself imposes on the neonate's conscious mind. This is the architecture, the structure, of reality, the means of making the universe and the creation of the self. Reality is not conscious but the neonate is. It confronts the universe with the sum of the history of the eons of evolution that produced awareness, self-consciousness. At birth the neonate consciously confronts T/S+thing, the basic structure of reality. Its as if the universe were weighed in one pan of a scales and the self in the other and they achieve equilibrium. Here the words are interchangeable, so you may say that the human self confronted the universe with reality and thus knew its self. The neonate's consciousness is elementary but that is an advantage, it is absolutely condign to its situation. Its elementariness extracts the most from the elemental situation. In this way the neonate is not a limited, pre-human animal. It is confronted with a vast vista, the embodied infinity of reality, and because its understanding is not yet practical it sees in each segment of the universe the totality of reality. Its as if at birth it lived creativity backwards. In its brain there is the sum of the universe's evolution so that it confronts the universe's beginning with the universe's later history. The child is born naked and confronts a naked universe. It is said the child is father to the man. It could be said the child is father to the universe – or, more prosaically, it is father to our humanness. This is the answer to the question at the beginning of these notes. The neonate itself does not see its experience in the images I have used. I use them to illustrate, to our later sensibilities, the structures that the neonate and reality share. I have been describing the space that lies at the centre of Tragic drama. It is the space of all creativity. Because the neonate and reality share the same structures, the stage is the site of the kitchen table and the edge of the universe.

The neonate's awareness is elementary but elemental. The neonate is in the state of S/T+thing, but awareness is added to this. In the primal S/T+thing the thing begins to differentiate into the phenomena of the universe. In the neonate differentiation also comes from conscious experience. The basic S/T+t, which is in both the universe and the neonate, has a striking consequence. It's commonly believed that human creation is the unpacking of the origins of the world, of elemental reality, the discovery and revealing of an intelligence – usually God or Godlike – that existed before the universe and that can be traced or intimated in the phenomena of reality, in nature. It is believed that human creativity is based on reflecting or appropriating this ontological presence. It is a shock to realise that creation is nothingness, null, void, empty. The origin of creativity is S/T+thing, a mechanical emptiness, and at this level even human creativity would be mechanical and empty. If before S/T+thing, there were not just an intelligence but even any presence at all, it would be nihilistic and would result not in creation but in annihilation. The common belief is that freed of human interference nature is not just evidence of God's existence but that in some way God's actual presence can be found, intimated, in it. This opposes sensibility to reason. Rousseau propounded this belief and taught that when this presence was experienced and cultivated it produced a particular, precious human sensibility. But in a few years Rousseau's sensibility became a basis of the Terror of the French Revolution. Any philosophy or culture that holds that the world is created by an intelligence beyond it, is ultimately a form of terror. So is any art based on it, however refined it may appear. It assaults the mind. That is the logic of the human reality that inter-relates objects, consciousness, reason and emotion, and that leads to the inter-relation of history, society and

technology, and that in turn (aided by ideas such as the spirit of history) will inevitably ratchet itself up into terror, into the art of pathos and decadence, the emblems of Hitler and all dictators. This is the under-tow of all human culture. And finally because both the elements and their combination in the make up of human beings are so fragile and tenuous, it leads to madness and fanaticism. All dogma is finally mad. That is the logic of humanness and reality. It is seen in an instance that is small but telling in its casualness, in Blake's image of angels sitting in an apple tree. It is not just an image, he claims (that he does, is logical) to have literally seen it. It combines food and a tree. The food comes from Blake's social compassion in an age of want. But the image of the tree has a different origin. Why didn't the angels sit on a roof? The tree is the Biblical symbol of satanic evil. The angels and the apple tree are joined deep in Blake's psyche. He is "of the devil's party," and the tree comes from his scrupulous but distant awareness of the logical void, the nihilism, that loiters in all creativity. Divine sensibility, however plangent, cannot solve social problems. The solutions must be based on human drama. In drama the logic of humanness tangles with nihilism. Recently a writer claiming to explain my plays associated them with Blake. Wrong. It is based on the evasions and illogicality of liberalism.

*

Ideology blurs and distorts the perception of reality. All ideology is an interpretation of reality that subordinates society to injustice. I have said that the conscious neonate confronts reality as if reality were in a state before society had evolved. It is as if it confronts the void of being that is the origin of reality. In order to be, the neonate must be creative just as reality exploded in order to be. The neonate is a structure of the neo-world. (The Shakespearian reference is obvious.) What the neonate's reality creates is a self. Its as if the self were created by the logic of reality, as if the neonate were pushed into consciousness just as the universe exploded into being. The self is produced by the brain but the mind, not the brain, is creative. The brain is in the nullity, the void, of being. The mind is in evolution and over time the neonate's experiences evolve into a grown person. Since *S/T+thing* is a void, to be creative the self must evolve in inter-relation with already evolved reality. Reality does not appear to the neonate as a void (as death) but as the totality of reality's phenomena. Each human being is created by his or her own neonate. To be creative a person must reach across to the phenomena of reality. It follows that all human acts of creativity are political.

Three things must be distinguished.

1. *The first is S/T+thing*, the primal state of reality. The physical universe comes from this. The physical universe is not made by an act of creation. It is mechanical. To a disinterested observer it is destruction. It is the wizardry of nihilism. Null. It is the void that is in an accident. This leads to:

2. *The second is natural evolution* of objects (such as rocks and water) and later, on earth, to animals. This evolution is not creative. Neither is the natural evolution of life or of sensate life. Natural evolution has the inherent violence of an accident and leads to the survival of the fittest to survive. It is mechanical and has no purpose. This leads to:

3. *The third is creative evolution* of sensate animals that know they are sensate. Their knowing that they are sensate is the evidence that accumulates in a self. The self is a human being. The human being has purpose. The survival of the fittest to survive is replaced by the imperative of morality, the flourishing of the best. Morality is not a chosen contrivance. It is inherent in the situation of the conscious neonate confronted with the two earlier stages of evolution. The imperative is as implacable as the universe that evolved in the two earlier stages. This is the logic of reality and it is the logic of humanness.

It is no more surprising or unlikely that some animals are sensate than that there are any animals at all. T/S+thing does not have “dimensions,” is not a situation, that would accommodate the sensate. The sensate is possible only because the primal state of S/T+thing is a void. Natural evolution contrives the maximum inter-relations of the evolving elements. Some are enhanced, others destroyed, others evolve self-consciousness. Natural evolution evolves the maximum fitness (fit) of inter-relation of evolved things. The technology of natural evolution ensures the survival of what is fittest to survive. The neonate is in evolution but it creates itself. It follows that it is not concerned with the natural survival of the fittest. Before it is inducted into society that would in any case be meaningless. The neonate is conscious and must have a purpose. It is sensate to pleasure and pain. It chooses pleasure before pain and simply seeks to be free of pain. This becomes axiomatic in the self. (Pleasure in pain is a complication of later cultures and ideologies. This is described in other notes.) Natural evolution evolves the maximum fitness (fit) of the inter-relation of evolved things. The neonate, and its later self, does the same but replaces “fitness” with morality. The reason (cause) why natural evolution seeks the survival of the fittest is itself the reason why the human self does not. The neonate thinks itself to be the whole of sensate beings. It seeks to avoid pain not just in its self: what it seeks to avoid is that reality itself should be in pain. This seems improbable and paradoxical until we understand the reality of the neonate. When we do, we see it is part of the logic of reality (even, if it were necessary, that the neonate should be mistaken). The avoidance of reality’s pain becomes the neonate’s and later the young self’s imperative. It is the founding of humanness. Later still, it enters culture as compassion and pity. Even more radically, it is the basis of civilization. In the core of Tragic drama the dramatic protagonist’s imperative repeats the infant’s original choice of humanness -- but the protagonist repeats it against the authority, dogma or ignorance that seek to obliterate it with the nullity of S/T+thing, which in social practice is nihilism. In practice, when the grown neonate has been inducted into society the self seeks to prevent pain in others. This conflicts with the Ideology that controls social administration. Society is unjust. Injustice is the offence that inflicts pain on others. Civilization’s struggle is not to produce art but to create justice. The conflict between Ideology and the imperative to be human produces the paradox of the human situation. It causes the conflict within the self which corrupts the imperative for justice into the lust of revenge. The imperative is innately rational, revenge is a lust because it is based on emotion. It is as if in the inter-relations of the elements of humanness, the situation (in consciousness) has sunk to a more primitive level. The social-self becomes its own antisocial-self. This is a conflict in reality that only the fiction of drama can resolve. The drama is fiction but the living actor is real, and so the actor confronts the fiction as the neonate confronted S/T+thing when it created itself. And what the actor does, the spectator knows and is. The actor is acting in fiction but the spectator is not. Drama dissects the critical situation and disentangles the logic of reality in it. The logic holds for both fiction and reality. This is so because we are not just things placed in reality but are part of reality in the way I have described. Human beings give themselves the human imperative when they create their selves. We can negate the imperative only by seeking to destroy ourselves. If we do that then we will destroy all that has evolved naturally and creatively since the void of S/T+thing. Civilization will be destroyed by the logic with which we created it.

Human evolution (3 above) does not seek the survival of the fittest. Because of the way the neonate creates itself human evolution seeks the survival of the community. And more than its survival, it seeks its well-being and in the end a human world. Otherwise the community will be fatally degraded and the world destroyed. This is our present situation. I have described it as The Third Crisis. Capitalism returns us to the second stage of evolution (2 above). At the most it ensures the survival of the fittest in a community and a world that are not fit to live in. Natural evolution has no judgement of what is humanly fittest, humanly best. Instead in natural evolution it is as if the criminal makes the laws. And in capitalism, which is based on natural evolution, the criminals do make the laws. In capitalism each individual is said to seek his survival, his advantage, and an invisible hand will adjust all things for the benefit of all, for the whole community. That is a covert reference to

God, an external presence. Not only must God be dumb and blind, he must be reduced to a hand. People no longer need to take heed of justice and morality and the things that have made us human. Each of us needs only to pursue our own ends just as a runner in a race cares only for his own speed. Natural evolution produces the survival of the fittest by destroying the unfit. When economists talk of capitalist manufacturing they call this creative destruction. This applies not just to manufacture but to the whole of the capitalist system. Natural evolution destroys the unfit, capitalism destroys the values of humanness and this allows it with a clear conscience to degrade what it sanctimoniously calls the less fit – those whose labour produces its survival. Capitalism is red in tooth and claw. In Western culture the most dominant instance of creative destruction was the Christian crucifixion. According to dogma it destroyed the best so that goodness might prevail. This uses the concept of the survival of the fittest by turning it upside down, but by that time creative evolution had already created the values of good and goodness. The crucifixion was imposed on this existing humanness and was even part of it. It was a deeply subtle re-ratcheting of these values. Otherwise it would have been a call to violence. And that is what capitalism is because it is a blatantly regression to natural evolution. In the terms of its own apologetics it returns to the pre-human. Ironically in a Christian society that return is the resurrection of Satan. And structurally it is even a return to human sacrifice when it tramples on the “less fit.” It has irrevocably forfeited the right to call itself civilized. For a time it may live off the humanness accumulated in the past. But this will soon be exhausted by the mechanism of natural evolution. Capitalism is structured to destroy humanness. It is in the wrong evolutionary, developmental, process for our complex, self-conscious society. The logic of its situation is that instead of the survival of the fittest it must produce the flourishing of the worst. The corporations and institutions of capitalism are riddled with deceit, dishonesty, exploitation, treachery and crime – the things it justifies by the struggle to be fittest. Even if it were possible to return to natural evolution, we could not do so safely. Technology has replaced nature. Technology has furnished us with a complex unnatural world which only conscious morality, democracy and justice can guide and safely control. There are no technological solutions to this death-trap. It is said that capitalism will manufacture super robots that will do our work for us and with their superior brains will lead us to the uplands of intelligence and protect us from our brutality and ignorance. Robots cannot be super-humans because they can have no moral sense. Technology is the use made of natural raw materials and the manufacture of contrivances made from them. Even if intelligence could be extracted from nature, morality can't be. It is not a raw material and doesn't exist in nature. It is created by humans in creative evolution. Replacing creative evolution with natural evolution is a disaster. That which is fittest to survive is also that which destroys the unfit – that is what the words mean. There would not be a struggle between species but within the one human species and in practice between nations and cultures. The one inalienable inexorable law of natural evolution is the survival of the fittest. It can be achieved only by the fittest destroying the less fit. We are armed with nuclear weapons and biological and chemical weapons. We possess more raw power than the whole of previous evolution. Yet capitalism has surrendered the means of creating and sustaining human care to an invisible hand. The invisible hand won't lead us to the promised land but to the wasteland. The finger of the hand is on the trigger. In the end the situation is simple – natural evolution has no intelligence and no matter how sophisticated super robots may be they have no drama.

In the human era creative evolution created the concepts of morality and justice, of the good and the practice of goodness. Natural evolution produces only the survival of the fittest. Capitalism leaves the conduct of culture, of moral value, to the invisible hand. To accommodate its own mechanisms it is already constructing a shallow social system that has only a loose resemblance to human culture. The concept of being led by an invisible hand puts us in the position of a child led by an adult. We cannot know or judge the destination. It might be hoped that in some mysterious way moral discrimination would spring up from our practical activities, from the industrial organisation of society. There are two things against this. It is ruled out by the process of natural evolution, which is the basis of capitalism. And it is totally – heinously! – against the capitalist doctrine of neoliberalism

that decrees that the market must decide. If you say that the invisible hand is the hand of God then God is making our moral choices for us – which is against the whole point of having a God. And if the invisible hand of God is the proffered solution then not only is God dumb and deaf, he must be blind. So natural evolution is taking us on a journey in which in a weird way, and strictly according to the theory, natural evolution approaches us from the wrong direction, from the future – we are not led by the blind man, the blind man is led by his stick. All of which is the sort of human contortion that drama seeks out and exposes: the blind man's stick is leading him and us into the desert. Drama is not made political by the objective description of the surface. It is political when it understands how the inter-relation between society, finance, economics, technology and industry forms the complexities of the self and that it is the inter-relation of all these things that produces the logic of drama.

The Endeavour of Drama

In sum, capitalism now forms society. It replaces creative evolution with natural evolution. Natural evolution is immoral and anti-human. This provokes in drama the pressure to recreate humanness in a modern setting. Capitalism returns to the nullity of S/T+thing. Drama confronts this nullity in situations of social and personal crises. There nullity has the form of nihilism. This is the Dostoevsky question.

The protagonist confronts nullity by taking responsibility for the situation and by acting accordingly. All creativity is political because it confronts the void. This is especially clear in drama because drama is about meaning. A drama objectively depicts a situation of institutional injustice, or one where Ideology corrupts humanness. An example is the distortion of the imperative for justice into the lust for revenge and the psychopathology of sadistic authority. Brecht depicts the situation abstractly. He does not enact the audience's reality in its deformation by Ideology and its excuses and rewards. Oddly like capitalism, he places the audience back in natural evolution. That's as if he placed monkeys in a car and told them to drive. The "car" is the audience's life.

*

We have evolved to be the most complex entities in the universe. We are not in Utopia and it is the conscious struggle for justice that makes us human. Justice is the way evolution brings about the maximum inter-relationship between humans and their natural site. As we are creative and evolution makes us conscious we must seek this maximum.

The lust of revenge may satisfy some people but revenge cannot satisfy societies because it is insatiable and destroys the avenger. That is why Blake put angels on the boughs of evil.

The philosophers' question is why is there something rather than nothing. What is it that is there instead of nothing? We cannot answer this question. An attempt to answer it would itself be nothing and raise the same question about itself. Kant rightly drew the limits of human knowledge. All attempts to penetrate the nullity of S/T+thing have the difficulties that the concept of God has.

Humankind has stopped thinking. The blind man's stick draws in the desert sand the signpost to Auschwitz.