

THE TRANSCENDENTAL FUTURE

A volume of philosophical dialogues by
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The Transcendental Future published 2008 by Centretruths Digital
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PREFACE

This collection of philosophical writings, dating from 1980, begins with an introductory essay and progresses through some five lengthy dialogues. Subjects tackled include spiritual truth, environmental transformations, the concept of a transcendental future, psychic evolution, and the rise of transcendentalism in art. In sum, *The Transcendental Future* is a far from definitive but, nonetheless, highly engaging and sometimes mind-boggling debate on a variety of controversial issues.

John O'Loughlin, London 1980 (Revised 2008)

INTRODUCTION: THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE

Is there an ultimate purpose to human evolution, and, if so, what? This is a question which serious writers have been asking themselves for some considerable time now and providing a variety of answers to, according to their individual bents. For some, the answers have been flatly negative. For others, by contrast, highly positive. There are those who believe that evolution is a haphazard affair without any ultimate purpose, and others who are convinced that it signifies an important trend in the direction of greater spirituality. There are those who believe that evolution is drawing to a close, and others who are convinced that it still has a long way to go. No matter how diverse the opinions or answers may happen to be, the question remains one to which writers generally apply themselves either negatively or positively, pessimistically or optimistically. It induces a 'yes' or a 'no' response, rather than incertitude.

In this essayistic introduction and all of the ensuing dialogues, I propose to take a 'yes' stance and investigate one or two of the possibilities which human evolution may undergo during the course of the next few centuries. I am going to assume that there is an ultimate purpose to evolution which takes the form of a spiritual transformation of mankind into the Divine, but I'm not going to pretend that such a transformation will come about merely in the course of a few decades. If there is a progressive advancement from matter to spirit, it is not one that proceeds quickly but, rather, in accordance with the overall pattern of higher evolution from ape to man and then on to whatever lies beyond him.

Yes, I am going to contend that we began in very unspiritual circumstances, progressed, via our ape-like ancestors, to beings capable of religious experience, and are still progressing, slowly but surely, from the cultural state in which we have intermittently existed for the past 6-7,000 years towards a higher state of predominant spirituality, after which the material aspect of our being may disappear altogether as we merge into the omega absolute of pure spirit, following transcendence. If that sounds like Vedanta, then so be it! But I am not going to pretend that the ultimate purpose of evolution will be achieved before some considerable period of time has elapsed - enough time, in fact, to enable us to transcend our current identity. For at present we are still men, not godlike entities, and so we shall remain until such time as the next great spiritual revolution and/or evolutionary leap comes about.

We are men, and therefore victims of and participants in history. History largely hinges, we learn from Spengler, a prominent philosopher

of history, upon cultures rising and falling, upon a succession of cultural developments - some great, the majority small. It appertains to that compromise between the sensual and the spiritual which is man. Before the compromise, there is no history. Likewise there can be no history after it. Ape and Superman (to use a Nietzschean term) are each devoid of history and, consequently, of culture. Only man makes history, which will be the greater the more finely balanced the compromise between the sensual and the spiritual. Therefore history must continue, in one form or another, until man is extinguished in the Superman.

But what of cultural history, the history pertinent to great cultures, which Spengler considered the only true one? Does what he saw as the decline of the West, the last great culture to have appeared in the world, signify man's approaching end, or is there likely to be another such culture in the near future?

Of great cultures there have been, according to the aforementioned philosopher, seven or eight, and of this relatively small number the Christian, or Western, was in his opinion the greatest, having had the most far-reaching effects on the world and achieved cultural wonders unprecedented in the entire history of man. It was the last of a succession of great cultures and the most extensive of them all. No previous culture had developed art or music or literature or sculpture or architecture to such a high and complex level, and it is difficult to imagine any subsequent culture surpassing it. If we try to imagine a hypothetical future culture producing great art, we are immediately confronted by the immense difficulty of trying to imagine paintings or music or literature of a superior order to the greatest works of each genre currently in existence. We would have to reconcile ourselves, under duress of this hypothesis, to the implausible possibility of artists producing works superior in essence to Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Van Eyck, Breugel, Dürer, Poussin, Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian, Tintoretto, Tiepolo, *et al.* Composers producing works superior in essence to Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, *et al.* Writers producing works superior in essence to Chaucer, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Swift, Goethe, Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Balzac, Flaubert, *et al.* Needless to say, we are unlikely to succeed in doing that! And so, its being supposed that the arts have attained to their egocentric zenith in the last great culture known to man, we must assume that the cultural process, properly so-considered, has come to an end, never to be supplanted by another such development in the near or distant future.

For what would another culture require in order to establish itself on a proper footing with cultural development generally? It would

require nature, above all regular contact with the best possible type of nature - a type peculiar to temperate rather than tropical zones. A great culture is unlikely to arise in climates which are either too hot or too cold, too fierce or too sultry. It requires proper nourishment, and this can only be obtained in certain regions of the world. Rule out those regions, such as Western Europe and North America, where the representatives of the last great culture still exist, or those regions, including China and India, where an earlier cultural people developed and declined, and what is left? Very little, indeed! Hardly anywhere which is not either already in the hands of the last cultural people or, alternatively, in the hands of an earlier cultural people who have since abandoned or are in the process of outgrowing their culture. Apart from this, one finds regions which are not in the best of geographical positions to foster a great culture. There is something inferior about the climate and the consequent state of nature there. One cannot imagine the world's greatest art ever arising from such places.

But if the proximity of temperate nature is a necessity, indeed a precondition, of higher cultural development, then its abundance is no less so. Thus arises our next objection to the likelihood of subsequent cultural development. For wherever man lives in large numbers, these days, nature is on the defensive, is being ruthlessly exploited and destroyed by him. The larger the cities become, the less does nature come to play a part in the lives of their citizens, with a consequence that cultural activities decline. And because the world is becoming increasingly urbanized and mechanized, there would seem to be little chance of another culture arising. The incentive for it is just not there. Consequently we need not be surprised if the age of separate cultures is at an end.

But what of the world's future, now that we are outgrowing our traditional provincialism and growing into a cosmopolitanism based on the technological advancements and inventions of the West? Is man drawing to *his* end?

There are two ways of looking at this question, and in both cases I would be inclined to grant man the benefit of the doubt and to accord him a survival beyond the cultural phase. In the first case, I would imagine him capable of surviving the catastrophe of a nuclear accident and/or war, even if millions of his kind don't. But in the second case, I would imagine him incapable of transforming himself into the more-than-human over the next few decades. Consequently, the end of man would seem to lie too far into the future for us to have either serious qualms about or any great hopes for his self-overcoming. In the meantime, however, it isn't impossible that he will survive his own self-destructive tendencies and extend his knowledge of space to a point

which may well bring him into contact, whether on a friendly or a hostile basis initially, with other beings (aliens) in the Galaxy.

Conceived in material or scientific terms, evolution should embrace an expanding knowledge of the Universe, and thus confine man to the roles of victim of and participator in the struggles for survival which will probably take place there. Conceived, on the other hand, in spiritual or religious terms, evolution should signify a growing knowledge of spiritual potentialities, and thus involve man in an inner journey towards his Final End through a condition which completely transcends the mundane. If, however, man is first destined to come to grips with the Galaxy, then it's difficult to imagine his transformation from the human plane to the superhuman one taking place before he has done so. As such, one is inclined to push this hypothetical transformation quite a long way into the future!