

***COLLECTED
PHILOSOPHICAL
ESSAYS***



John O'Loughlin

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By

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PREFACE

Having already published my essays in two volumes of 'collected essays', viz. *A Knowledgeable Approach to Truth & A Truthful Approach to Knowledge*, the former of which included an aphoristic appendix, I have decided to republish them in one volume (minus the aphorisms) for convenience's sake, in the interests, one might say, of structural and thematic continuity together with a certain essayistic purism that sets definite bounds to the scope and style of the contents, dovetailed, as they are, into a somewhat voluminous but nonetheless highly accessible project whose material spans the period 1977–84, during which all of most of my early philosophical writings were composed. Thereafter matters became increasingly aphoristic and hence, to my mind, increasingly metaphysical, with what I would regard as truth effectively eclipsing the discursive nature of these essays and, indeed, knowledge generally. But that would not have transpired without both the essays (as here) and the dialogues (published in a separate collective volume), together, as noted, with the early aphoristic material that at least had the merit, so far as I am concerned, of anchoring me in a more genuine approach to philosophy than could ever be found in works of a philosophical nature diluted, as here, by prose and, hence, a discursive want of both logic and system unworthy, in my estimation, of true philosophy.

Nonetheless, the reader will be aware that philosophical essays are still distinct from literary prose, all the more so when, as in this volume and various others, the material has been centred, the better to intimate of a sort of metaphysical aloofness from the pediment-slavering world which customarily fights shy, in the angularity of its untransvaluated nature, of anything resembling, no matter how metaphorically, the curvilinear subjectivity of a dome, particularly when intimating, in true religious vein, of transcendental possibility, a possibility very much a part of the best of the essays included in this one-volume presentation.

John O'Loughlin, London 2022

Perfect or Imperfect

What, in the final analysis, is the chief distinction between a perfect and an imperfect man? Is any man perfect at all, or is human imperfection the eternal rule, the condition to which all men must be reduced if they are to survive?

Some people would have us believe in the moral imperfection of man as though it were an indisputable fact, one derived from his 'sinful' nature and consequent need of salvation.

Others would contend that man is mentally imperfect, and that his frequent mistakes, stupidities, superficialities, illusions, contradictions, deceptions, etc., emphasize this condition all too plainly.

Yet others, probably a minority, would contend that man is usually mentally perfect, but that only a small number of men are ever permitted to actually realize their perfection, the rest of mankind being reduced, through economic and political tyrannies, to a state of spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social deprivation.

Finally, there would be those who, whilst acknowledging that man is usually mentally and physically perfect, would contend that some men are either born or become

mentally or physically imperfect: that a person with a spastic body, a crippled limb, a mental disorder, or a heart disease is undoubtedly imperfect when compared with somebody whose body and mind are hale.

Yes, this latter case is probably more relevant to most people living today than are any of the others. But let us take a closer look, if only from curiosity, at what these other cases are saying.

To begin with, the church in virtually all of its denominational manifestations, though especially the Catholic one, believes quite emphatically that man is a sinful and, hence, imperfect creature. The clerical servants of the church believe in the imperfection of man, in what they take to be his perpetual backsliding into sinful habits like sex and alcohol. Through regularly confessing these sins to a priest, a man may secure forgiveness from God. But, if he is to be logically consistent, he must confess everything, not forget to mention anything or allow himself to overlook something which he might foolishly regard as trivial and therefore hardly a sin at all. For God, being omniscient, can still see into his mind and will know if there was anything which should have been confessed to but which, for one reason or another, was overlooked.

However that may be, both the Catholic and, to a lesser extent, the Protestant clergy believe in man's imperfection and, thus, perpetual need of redemption. They have, it seems to me, a somewhat partial view of

man. They do not want to accept him in the round but only in the part, with particular reference to his 'sinful nature'. For if they once accepted the dualistic integrity of man, their conception of his imperfection could soon dissolve under pressure of the following fact – namely that man can only be good *because* of his intermittent evil, since his sinfulness, whatever form it may take, is fundamentally the sole guarantor of his goodness.

But such an acceptance of man's whole nature would not be to the lasting advantage of the clergy! For if a man's good actions (those stemming from positive feelings) are fundamentally dependent upon the periodic manifestation of his evil actions (those stemming from negative feelings), how can one possibly maintain that he should strive to eradicate as many of the latter as possible or, alternatively, confess what wrong he has done in order to be forgiven? Undoubtedly a ticklish problem for the clergy to address, particularly since their justification as priests largely depends upon the contrary idea which, if pushed far enough, tends to divide a man against himself, making him hostile towards his dual nature.

However, it is not for us humble philosophers to attempt to change their views, since that would certainly be to overlook the power of tradition and entrenched dogma. As a freethinker living in a country which permits free thought, I shall simply put my case before the public tribunal and pass on.

Which leads me to our second conception of man's imperfection – namely to the assumption that his periodic mistakes, stupidities, superficialities, contradictions, etc., are all clear examples of it. Indeed, it is not only clergymen who maintain this belief, but people from just about every walk of life. If they are figure clerks, then a wrong addition or misplaced numeral is obviously, if regrettably, another instance of human imperfection. If they are teachers, then an inability to trace a certain date, name, or reference in their memories may subsequently lead them to draw similar conclusions, though not in front of the class! If they are philosophers, the assertion of a particular contention that they imagined was true, but which subsequently transpired to being false, will probably trigger off a similar barrage of self-condemnation. In truth, the numbers of possible instances are endless, though they all point in the same direction – namely, the assumption that our respective mistakes, failings, delusions, etc., are conclusive proof of human imperfection.

But is man a computer, we may object, that he should be exempted from error? Is his evolution directed towards some future mastery of himself, some grand epoch when the likelihood of a wrong addition, a memory failure, or a fallacious contention will be rendered impossible? If so, then I must confess to having serious misgivings about man's future! I can well appreciate his use and development of computers, but I do not believe that he should subsequently become computerized as well!

If a man makes occasional mistakes, then let us at least have the insight to assume that he didn't commit them on purpose (for no genuine mistake can be made intentionally) but, rather, that they happened in accordance with a deeper law of his being, which effectively proclaimed the justification of an occasional mistake as a means of maintaining his overall efficiency and general ability to avoid making mistakes at certain other times.

And the same may be held true, I suspect, of his many other failings, each of which exists primarily to protect and maintain his overall efficiency. So I do not believe that a man should necessarily be classified as imperfect because he makes mistakes from time to time. Classify him imperfect if he never makes mistakes, has no faults, is without stupidity, superficiality, illusion, or contradiction, if you like. But the condemnation of his natural condition is something of which I do not see the sense.

However, let us now progress to the third possibility which, as we saw earlier, concerns the alleged perfection of the Few and the imperfection of the Many. To some extent, it is of course fair to suggest that most people are crushed or moulded by fate into a particular way of life which can only be described as constrictive. They may be obliged to earn a living in uncongenial circumstances. Their health is gradually undermined, their imagination becomes increasingly circumscribed, their senses are

dulled, their intellect becomes progressively more stultified, their opinions become stereotyped, their spirit atrophies, and their willpower, initiative, and self-confidence sustain an irrecoverable loss. Yes, it is probably fair to suggest that these sorts of misfortunes have befallen a great many people; though it is probably also fair to suggest that a majority of them don't seem to worry very much about it. After awhile they take their condition for granted, not really being in a position to do much else.

Indeed, for some people stultification of one degree or another isn't at all a bad thing; at least it prevents them from worrying or suffering too much in consequence of an acute awareness of their deprivation. But, for others, it is virtually the end of the road, a ghastly horror from which they recoil, as from a poisonous snake. Probably no-one can escape a certain amount of intellectual stultification, dulling of senses, atrophying of spirit, etc., even under the best of circumstances. Yet there are those who regard such a prospect or actuality with great dismay, much as though people were thereby rendered imperfect and consequently unable to live as they should. It is a great evil of society, they claim, that so many people should be crushed down for the sake of a minority who are enabled to live to the maximum of their ability. It isn't right, they say, that a majority of people should be compelled to live a sort of living death for the sake of a privileged few.

Undoubtedly, this is the kind of viewpoint one would

ordinarily associate with certain types of communist revolutionaries and social agitators. But I cannot personally grant it much credence. It seems to me that those who think like this are insufficiently aware of the temperamental, social, psychological, and intellectual differences between people. A person who does what you or I might regard as a dull job isn't necessarily worse off than one whose job is more exciting. It depends entirely upon the nature of the person concerned. For if one isn't very intelligent to begin with, then a dull job is not only the best thing, it is the *only* thing, and anything else would be unsuitable. But if one *is* pretty intelligent to begin with, then, conversely, a dull job would be unsuitable. Now one cannot seriously contend that a person born to a dull task has been deprived of an opportunity to realize his perfection through, say, one or other of the fine arts, higher sports, or professions, when it wasn't given him to realize his perfection in that way.

Yet this is precisely what certain communist revolutionaries and social agitators are apt to overlook, whether intentionally or unintentionally, when they speak in terms of social inequality.

Frankly, one cannot really contend that a majority of men must lead imperfect lives for the sake of a lucky few, when the lives they lead are the only possible ones that they could lead anyway. Is a man to be pitied because he wasn't born with the potential of a poet, musician, writer, artist, or philosopher when, by accident or design, he was born with the potential of a carpenter, builder, plumber, tailor, or car mechanic instead? Would

you demand of car mechanics that they become playwrights in order to realize their perfection to the full, irrespective of the fact that they may prefer being car mechanics and can better realize *their* perfection in that way?

No, nobody but the most unreasoning of persons would demand any such thing! For there are as many ways of realizing one's perfection as there are people, and what would suit one type of person could well prove the ruination of another.

So I do not believe that people who are unable to discover themselves in the more creative or authoritative spheres of life should be considered unfortunate for having to do comparatively mundane or servile things instead. Each man has his own problems to live with, whether he be a king or a beggar. Indeed, there is at work in this world a vast levelling process which adds something here only to subtract something there, which renders *every* occupation, no matter what its nature, subject to certain drawbacks, limitations, or hardships, and no-one in his right mind would really pretend otherwise, no matter how unfortunate he thought he was, or how many uncongenial experiences accrued to his particular occupation. Even in the most boring office jobs one may be able to converse with one's fellow workers on occasion – a thing an artist, writer, philosopher, or poet is seldom if ever in a position to do, bearing in mind his solitary circumstances. But even boring work is better than no work at all, and most

people would rather be bored at work than bored or, worse still, lonely and without purpose from being out of work.

Thus, in returning to my original theme, I do not agree with the notion that society requires a large percentage of imperfect men in order that a small percentage of the total population should be able to develop their potential to the full and thereby realize their perfection. Where a man is insufficiently intelligent or talented to do a highly skilled or responsible job, he has absolutely no business doing it. Where, on the contrary, he *is* sufficiently intelligent or talented, then he will do his best to get himself accepted for it and, eventually, he will probably succeed. Whether he becomes a bookbinder, a sculptor, doctor, judge, architect, or novelist, whatever he does will be right for him. There could be no question of coaxing him out of it. For if all men were born to do the same thing, the world would collapse in no time. A few billion artists would spell the ruination of art, a few billion doctors the ruination of medicine, and nobody would be able to realize or even discover his perfection at all.

But that a man should consider himself a failure because he is not a poet or an artist or a musician ... is as stupid and illogical as, for the sake of argument, it would be for a tortoise to consider itself a failure because it is not a hare, or a mouse to consider itself a failure because it is not a cat! Let a man do what he can do as well as possible, let him live according to his capacity, and he

will soon discover his true worth. A person can be as satisfied in the humblest or lowest-paid job as dissatisfied in the most exalted or highest-paid one. It entirely depends upon the nature and circumstances of the person concerned.

But let us now leave the above aspect of the problem and turn, finally, to the more obvious criterion of perfection and imperfection: the difference, namely, between a person with a sound, healthy body and mind, and one, by contrast, who is afflicted with some serious mental or bodily deprivation. Here we do touch upon the essential distinction, the glaring inequality, between the normal and the abnormal, the healthy and the sick.

The instances of human imperfection are numerous, but they all revolve around severe mental or physical anomalies. Schizophrenia, mental retardation, and various forms of advanced insanity are typical of the former; blindness, deafness, deformed or crippled limbs, obesity, and various internal malfunctions are typical of the latter. But, whatever the anomaly may happen to be, *there* lies the basis of human imperfection. It has nothing whatsoever to do with 'sinning against the Light' (unless, however, one's 'sins' are of such a grave and frequent character that there is a strong justification for regarding them as the direct consequence of some mental or physical disorder). Neither does it have anything to do with making mistakes (unless, however, one does little else). Still less does it have to do with the type of work one does (unless, however, one would

rather not do any work at all and simply rot away in sordid isolation). No, the phenomenon of human imperfection is always chiefly characterized by such anomalies as those to which I have referred, never or rarely by anything else. For if you are reasonably sound in body and mind, you are as perfect as you need to be. And a 'perfect man' isn't usually the exception; he is the rule!

Interplanetary Equilibrium

Throughout the history of civilized man people have often posed the question 'Why is there life on Earth?' and endeavoured to answer it in a variety of ways, some religious, others scientific. The different viewpoints appertaining to the reasons for life on this planet, and man's relationship to whichever of the heavenly bodies he has hitherto been aware of, have ensured that, with each succeeding generation, the question is posed and answered in a different way or, at any rate, in a manner considered most suitable to the understanding of the people of the time.

At present it is the scientific viewpoint which prevails over the religious one where the interpretation of this perennial mystery is concerned, and so it is to science, in