

Universal Values - The Way To Peace And Fulfilment

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In the realm of Theosophy, we have a remarkable confluence of the diverse streams of insight and understanding pouring into the hinterland of what may be called *wisdom about God*, who is regarded as the ultimate ground of religious belief and practice. This is, of course, specifically true about all particularized expressions of various religions of mankind but then Theosophy tries in the light of its own understanding of man's religious nature to study what it considers is the common denominator if not *raison de etre* of man-kind's longing for transcendence in the direction of the Herebeyond. The early pioneers of theosophical movement drew heavily upon the wisdom of East to sustain this thesis. Primarily they placed emphasis not so much upon Eastern wisdom as presented by its sages, philosophers and metaphysicians as upon its occultists, but in the present address one is spared the difficult duty of expounding the specific contribution which theosophy has made to the study of secret doctrine of antiquity for the theme we have to consider is a topical one, nay one which may be regarded as the dominant subject to expound in the Contemporary world, namely "Universal Values — Way to Peace and Fulfilment."

The term 'value' has been discussed from variety of perspectives by modern philosophers of the West and there is such a thing in existence as the branch of philosophy called *axiology* — which is the same thing as statement regarding theory of value. We often hear it said that "Men lose sight of *higher values* when they practise power politics" or sometime it is said that "the task of education in humanities is to make students aware of *values of life*". Value is by now a favourite word amongst sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists. The Readers Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary puts four meanings on the word 'value'; one, amount of commodity, etc. i.e. considered equivalent for something else; material or monetary worth of a thing (face value, surplus value, surrender value of modern economics are essentially variations on the theme of term economic value). Secondly, value means precise number of amount represented by a figure or gratuity. Thirdly, it

means relative duration of tones signified by note; fourthly, relation of part of picture to others in respect of light and shade, part characterized by particular tone and generally it means act of estimating value, of appraising it profession-ally as envisaged in expression like things have high value and are priced, esteemed and appreciated. This vast and impressive array of meanings of the term 'value' show the range of its reach in contemporary thought.

It would suffice to notice for the purpose of present analysis that God has endowed human soul with two faculties: one has reference to its ability or capability of perception and speculation or by which it discerns, views and judges of things and this may be comprehensively called the *faculty of understanding*. The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things but *it in someway inclined with respect to the things it views or considers*. In other words it may be inclined to them or may be averse to them. In this role the second faculty enables the soul to either *like or dislike things or of which a spectator is either pleased or displeased with them*. And it is in that aspect that its actions are determined and governed by the way it is *affected* by the things it perceives and contemplates. It is this second capacity that enables man to bestow value upon things and events. Psychological theory of value asserts that any object, even an object of outside world, has a value only in so far as it produces in the mental life of a subject certain psychic experience peculiar to the individual. According to some theories this experience is the feeling of pleasure (or displeasure); according to others desire, according to some the feeling of value.

The question which we have to answer in this address accordingly may be formulated as follows: What is it precisely that confers value upon *the life* that we perceive within ourselves and whose meaning we try to contemplate? The answer to this question is that value of life is the character which it acquires by being an object of our concern about it. Is it a case of "Dust we are and to dust we return"? Or, is it experiencing Pull of some kind of promise? If so in what we can find its fulfillment. Are they "heat and worry of life's long day of suffering" a permanent feature of it — or can we some-how attain to a total state of peace — of reaching a condition where "no fear would come upon us, nor shall we grieve or have a cause to regret its advent in our being?" In the context of what may be called theosophical approach to the problem of "Universal Values — Way to Peace and Fulfilment" attention must be confined to exploring the specific question relating to the purpose or function of life as its subject perceives it. He may raise the question: In what precisely does the value of my life consist? In what way must I spend my time on Earth so as to make the most of it?

Considering that this question would be raised in the course of one's life as an *ongoing process* and that too in the utter absence of any firm awareness'-or knowledge as to what the ultimate end of life is going to be, one would not be in a position to rely on one's own powers of understanding the Nature of the riddle of life much less find a worthwhile solution to it. This life, according to the "Wisdom of Ages" or "grand old traditions of mankind" does not merely mean the *existing life* but life which is to emerge after the earthly term of one's life is brought to an end. It thus raises the question of approach to death. It is necessary to base one's judgment on the value of life not on what one comes to think about it but upon what the human tradition in which one is embedded or steeped conceives it, or upon what is it that the best that mankind has produced, the sages, the saints, the savants and the mentors of the human race, have said about it.

It is in that perspective that the further question whether the end of life or its meaning is determined by attainment of peace or fulfilment can at all arise. Of course Man can cognitively form the opinion whether this life as it appears is intrinsically acceptable to him. Is it a primrose path of prosperity? Does it appear that all is well with the world — that ultimately the human condition is on the whole satisfactory? But we know that contrary opinion, namely that human condition, as one encounters it, is one of deep suffering or sorrow and that the only way to enter into a worthwhile relation-ship with one's life is to escape its rigor and minimize its suffering. If so, how?

The basic fact about the life of man is that there is something in man called *spirit* which is united in substance with what is termed *flesh* and both of them are lodged in what may be called the universe of matter — of time, of what is continually elapsing. This is, on the face of it, an unhappy condition for man in that it has made man dream of a golden age when he was freed from the contradiction expressed in the adage, viz., the *spirit is so* willing but then *flesh* is so weak. Whether that golden age was at the beginning of creation of man and man thereafter has suffered fall and that golden age lies at the end of the historical process after man has, thanks to his knowledge, learnt to harness forces of Nature for bringing the relief and redemption of man is for the purpose of present argument irrelevant — for, in either case, the present state of man's life exhibits him involved in a miserable condition. Indeed the "tragic perplexity" in which man finds himself placed is referable to the fact that we can neither refuse the existential human condition nor accept it purely and simply. Our existence compels us to stay in the mid-stream of the river of life and does not easily let us change our horses

in the 'midstream' and all man can do is to stay put there with patience and try to listen to the voice of those who have attempted to point out a way

in terms of which he can go beyond his present predicament and so to conduct the enterprise of life that he could obtain worthwhile results of his struggle. This voice is the voice of the prophets of universal religions and Theosophy attempts to rationalize their wisdom just to enable man to define his attitude with reference to them in a positively clearcut and constructive way.

We have just noticed that human condition is unhappy precisely because man is at once flesh and. spirit, a sort of being in transition and he may well be on that account called the *intermediate species* which lies between the animal and the angelic state of being. Heavens, no doubt, proclaim, according to our poets, the glory of God but the earth, upon which our lot is cast, has also been characterised by them as a "vale of tears and turmoil" and man's life itself is "a long headache in the noisy street" and his life is a "long shadow in a weary land". The material universe abounds in wonders and is resplendent with great deal of beauty that no doubt makes evident to discerning eyes the imprint of the holy spirit who made it and al-though there is a huge catalogue of events and occurrences which show nature to be "red in tooth and claw" and man's life to be "nasty, brutish and short", there is also the other side to the coin, viz., that the landscape of life presents evidence of enormous goodness and generosity of being. Indeed human nature itself, particularly as seen through the world of senses, points out much that is enchanting and enthralling with its sweetness and joy and human nature itself is good in essence and this is true for every living being, but pre-eminently for man, to live, is a marvellous gift and yet", says Jacques Maritain, "for all that, a spirit whose operations have need of matter, surmounts matter only with a formidable price and by running at man's risks and is most often scoffed at by it. The "irit is immortal and matter imposes the law of death on the body animated by it. Man has more grandeur than the Milky Way; but how easy is evil for him, how inevitable (if one considers the species collectively) it is, in a being in which sense and instinct and the animal unconsciousness ask only to elude or to twist the judgment of the mind. As for suffering it is already a

frightful thing to see; animals suffer, but the suffering of beasts is of small account in comparison with the suffering that pierces a flesh united to spirit or spirit itself." Hamlet tried to refuse the claim of this human condition by attempting to commit suicide but was restrained from doing so because of the

thought that perchance this life may itself be a preface to another life and that after he takes his life he may land himself in a situation where perchance he may have "to dream" — ugly and unbearable dreams, — a possibility which he could not exclude and this thought itself was sufficient to restrain him from refusing life by putting an end to it. This life does not only confront us with its miserable condition. We live in world of fellowship — in a world where one hears the long cry of the poor, and the ailing ones and sees naked suffering, horror, anguish without consolation. Perforce man comes to the conclusion that this is the background of the world in which the spirit within him must struggle ceaselessly against the fortuitous and the useless and focus its attention upon absolute ways in which it might find the arena for amelioration of the conditions of life for all. There can be thus no simple and pure acceptance of life for its own sake. And if man does so it is because he recognizes the reality of his true habitat in a world which *lies beyond this one* — a world which, for want of better expression, can be called the world of Holy Spirit. Accordingly by accepting this life man accepts the total plan of the Lord of life — not only accepts it but thanks Him for having lodged human nature in this world which is imperfect, full of sorrow and suffering so that by a continual struggle against it man may try to reform it in the light of his ideals and values — of goodness, of truth, of justice, of beauty and purity. In effect man accepts the world not as it is, but as it ought to be made — it provides the opportunity to him to go *beyond* it, to have a vision of his Maker who alone is perfect and to experience the joy of the vision which his faith affords him of the eternal and abiding Face of the Lord — who alone shall prevail whereas everything else will have gone the way of all flesh. The man who accepts the world with this type of reservation has

decided to live *religiously* and he has constrained himself freely not to surrender himself at the altar of the life of senses but to rise above their hold over him — so that even if he, as a result of infirmities inherent in human nature, were temporarily to fall below the standard of the conduct which his religious constraints prescribe for him then *he will repent one day of the sin thus committed* by him in contempt of the religious law. He is fated to return to his Maker in humility to ask for his forgiveness with the unshakable faith that it will be granted.

This is not the only way in which religious man accepts "the miserable conditions of life" He may resort to negotiating other paths to peace and fulfilment. The pathway hitherto described to avail of life's opportunity for man has reference to man's ability to transcend human existential condition in a manner which implies a certain mode of acceptance of it as when he may say to himself that he will through his own forces but with God's grace strive consistently with his true Nature to experience the joy of having the Vision of the Lord and in the process realise the Kingdom of God on Earth. This is essentially the Moslem way — the way of the Prophets of universal religion. Islam considers Prophet Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Ismail, Moses, David and Jesus Christ as Moslems and what they taught was Islam. Of course, there is doctrinal variation to be noticed between what these Prophets taught according to Islam and what they taught according to their followers. But, by and large, the prophetic religions, according to the contention of Islam, have taught one and the same thing: and that is oneness of God and man's accountability for his actions herebelow and this life is to be treated as a seedplot of Hereafter. Of course, there are various religions outside the orbit of prophetic religions and these may be called "philosophical religions" because the founders of these religions have not claimed that they were commissioned by God to convey a message or to bring a law to people for establishing a fixed and a firm way in terms of which believers could negotiate their way to God.

A word or two about this category of religions in the context of ideas that have been presented in this paper may be in order.

Every religion provided a framework in which the existential human condition could be transcended — for the attainment of salvation or redemption. The procedure described so far is for the devotee not only to accept human condition but to transform it by participating in the enterprise of history and adopt an amelioristic attitude to the world of external conditions. But the Indian spirituality, by and large, teaches its votaries, to transcend human condition in a manner which suggests a certain manner of *refusal* of it insofar as man through his, own forces alone undertakes to transcend his limitations — which of necessity would mean that he engages himself in an effort to go against himself or as in the case of Christian claim, man can transcend human condition while consenting to it as this is rendered possible because in his case, *a new situation* has intervened in that God has incarnated himself as Christ and enabled man to transcend his situation not by going against the grain of his Nature but by moving upon a plane which is higher than Nature itself. Here faith in the Saviour serves. The Buddhist spirituality is akin to the Indian one in that Buddha too struggled to acquire enlightenment and did succeed in doing so without his being selected by God to act as a vehicle of the law which he was to bring or the way 'he was to point out to his followers to attain Nirvana. The Christian's way, after Jacques Maritain, could be called the Gospel solution. Jacques Maritain goes on to remark, "By abolishing, by means of a sovereign concentration of intellect and the will, every particular. form and representation, the wisdom of India adheres, through the void, to an absolute which is the Self in its pure meta-physical act of existing— experience conceived as leading at the same stroke either to the transcendence of being (*Atma*) or to total *indetermination* (Nirvana). All forms of illusion in the midst of which our life is spent have disappeared everything is denied and annihilated, there remains only the self in contact with itself. It is clear that to attain such an end (not to speak even of the powers for which one is to search without pause) is to transcend

human condition by dint of spiritual energy but it is also clear that it is to transcend it *by means of refusal*. The living delivered — one gains a sort of intermediary omnipotence by falling back upon himself and separating himself from everything human - he enters into a solitariness incomparably more profound than the solitude of the Hermit, for it is his soul itself which has broken with men and all miseries of their terrestrial existence to pass beyond illusion and to deliver oneself from transmigration or at least from all the sorrow that it carries with it and perpetuates, is at the same stroke to *deliver oneself from the human condition*." (Consult generally on the line of argument presented by Jacques Maritain in his *Moral Philosophy*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons 1964). Jacques Maritain considers the weakness of the spirituality of India in their refusal of the human condition because whatever victories it may bring, in the end there is a final defeat brought about by the apotheosis of *courage* and *pride*, that are precisely the two of the most profound features of human condition. In his words, "The Hindu or Buddhist sage quits human condition only by showing in spite of belonging to it I mean by the very negations to which he is led and all the apparatus of exercises and techniques he needs, and by the kind of never-ending *tours de force* by means of which he comes to transcend his condition. And the living delivered — one still is to die like others he is not delivered like the others which is the most tragically human in the human condition." It is not necessary to explore this line of I thought further.

As I come to the end of this address, I suggest we may have a second look at the theme of this key-note address. If the approach I have made to the understanding of the precise subject matter for which the formulation was evolved to evoke it, namely *Universal Values — Way to Peace and Fulfilment* be not true in that it is not only life as such that can be ascribed a universal value since life is the one common phenomenon which affects all human beings, we will be driven to assign some credible meaning to the term "Universal' Values" in the theme under examination. There is hardly any other universal value that one can think of in this regard. Of course, one could talk of the values like *truth, beauty, goodness, justice*, etc., as universal values following the Greek tradition; but then what is the;

sanction behind the autonomy, sanctity or the indispensability of these values and how are they to be regarded as the indispensable means for reaching peace and fulfilment. *On whose authority are these values to be treated as the necessary means* for leading a man to the way of *peace and fulfilment*. To be at peace is to be left in a state of which no alien element disrupts the harmony of the whole man and the term fulfilment necessarily means realization of the potential inherent in any organism or entelechy — enrichment' of whole can take place by the accretion of new material or transmutation of its unripe part or element into becoming ripe and thus transiting from the raw to the serviceable element in the cosmic process, can be brought by Higher Presence on Finite Consciousness. It will take me too long to talk about peace and fulfilment in the context of the present theme if only because peace is not absence of war or disquiet or unrest. It is a positive condition of being even as silence is not mere absence of sound but is an audible oracle that has its orientation at another, albeit, level of being of which very little can be said in conventional terms. And fulfilment of man can only be from the point of view of the higher Being who presides the coming to fruition of something that was to begin with dead or immature or tender or an inchoate promise for a possible development!