colinwilsononline.com /cw-essays/

Essays

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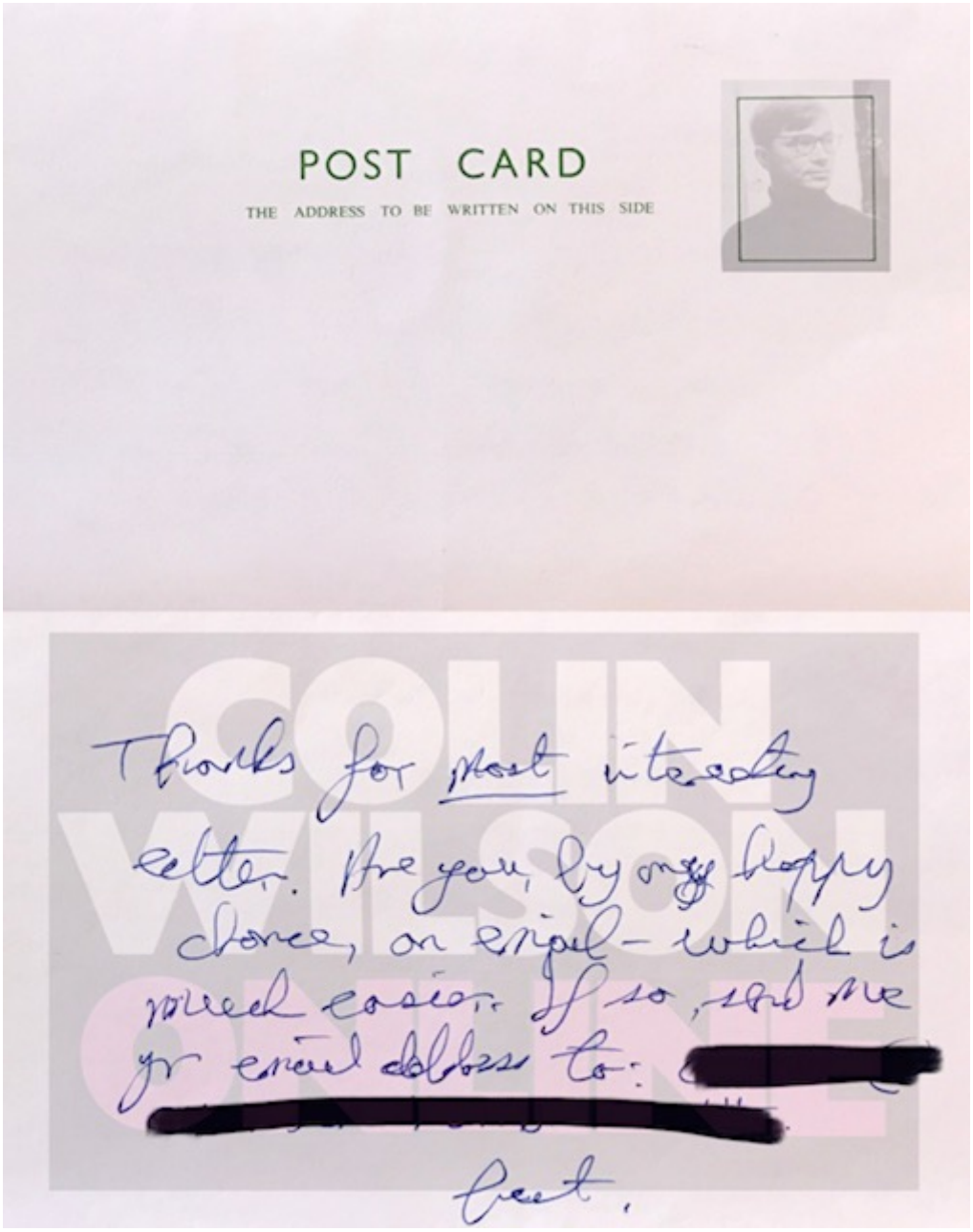


On Wednesday, December the 15th 2004, at precisely nine minutes past eight in the evening, I pressed the ‘send’ button on my email notifying Colin Wilson about a website I’d designed

which discussed his work. At exactly eleven minutes past nine I received a reply –

Fascinating! I have just spent half an hour reading it, and am delighted. I am in process of making a massive website of my own that will include all my books in summary, and I attach what I have done so far herewith. The bits on BEYOND THE OUTSIDER and THE NEW EXISTENTIALISM are some of the best writing I've done in a long time.Thankyou for your spirited defense – this 'middle aged' (i.e.ancient) writer is grateful.

A few months before I'd written a letter to Wilson showing my appreciation of his work. I didn't expect a reply but I thought perhaps he might actually read it. Yet by virtual return of post the next day the stamped addresssed envelope I'd sent came back with a sticker bearing the familiar address Gorran Haven. Inside was a postcard, and scrawled on one side in familiar handwriting – I'd been collecting signed books via the fanzine *Abraxas* – was this message –

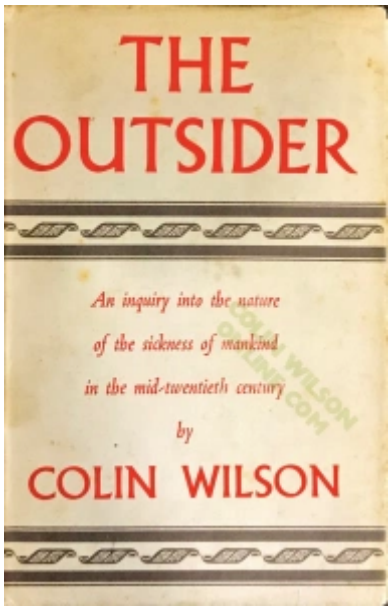
*Thanks for **most** interesting letter. Are you, by any happy chance on email – which is much easier. If so, send me your email address to_____*

An email correspondence was started, and I later got to speak to Wilson on the two occasions I visited his house in Cornwall. The 'massive website' Colin mentioned never materialised, but the document he attached on that first email – with a the number 36 at the top of the page – contained a 'shorter CV' and a longer biographical sketch, plus a bibliography (which are attached as appendices here and here.)

The *précis* of all of his *Outsider Cycle* books – plus the *Encyclopedia of Murder* – which I have included here were all intended for his website. But unfortunately his summation only got as far as *Eagle and Earwig* (this and the summary of the Rasputin biography are short, so are included in the appendix on this page).

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL BOOKS

The Outsider (1956)



A1 Gollancz 1956

This is basically a study of alienated 'misfits', people who do not feel 'at home in the world'. Its origin lay in my fascination with Romanticism – poets like Keats, Shelley, Blake, Goethe, Rimbaud, artists like Van Gogh, Gauguin and Cezanne, musicians like Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner. What all romantics seemed to have in common was that they experienced moods of immense harmony, a feeling of almost mystical insight into nature. But such moods made the inevitable return to the down-to-earth reality of everyday life intolerable. To

illustrate this I have often made use of the story of the Frenchman Alain Bombard, who in 1952 set out to cross the Atlantic in a small dinghy, his aim being to prove that shipwrecked mariners did not have to die of thirst or starvation as they drifted in boats. He carried a net to catch fish, and to gather plankton as he drifted along on the currents; by squashing the fish, he obtained a juice that was free of salt, and he ate the flesh, as well as plankton. But halfway across the Atlantic, he was spotted by a ship which asked if he wanted to be rescued, and he went on board to explain his purpose. He also made the mistake of eating a normal meal of egg and bacon. This almost cost him his life, for once he returned to his diet of squashed fish and plankton, he vomited it up. It took days before he was able to stop his stomach from rebelling.

I saw this as a parallel to the plight of the 'Outsider'. His 'moments of vision' fill him with a sense of meaning and harmony. But when he wakes up the next morning, the return to the squashed fish and plankton of everyday life makes him vomit. This explains why so many of the great 19th century 'Outsiders' committed suicide, or died of tuberculosis.. They found themselves facing the problem that Carlyle calls 'Eternal Yes versus Eternal No', and which is perfectly symbolised by juxtaposing Van Gogh's painting 'The Starry Night', with its overwhelming feeling of affirmation, and his suicide note (written less than a year later) that reads 'Misery will never end'.

For this symbolises the very essence of the problem of our human existence – those moments of delight when the world is seen as self-evidently rich and wonderful, and the far more frequent occasions when we feel that life is merely damned hard work. (Bertrand Russell said, not long before his death, that the

secret of happiness is to accept that life is 'Horrible, horrible, horrible'.) And this, if you come to think of it, is the most basic human problem.

But to return to the romantics …

In the 20th century, romanticism reappeared under another label; it called itself existentialism. It's basic question was expressed a century earlier by Kierkegaard: 'Where am I? Who am I? How did I get here? Why was I not consulted? …And if I have to take part in it, who is the director? I would like to see him'. By 'the director' Kierkegaard meant God. But few of the major existentialist philosophers of the 20th century – Sartre, Camus, Heidegger – believed in God. So it seemed clear to them that man is stranded in a meaningless universe, and must arrive at his own decisions about what to do with his life.

This causes him to feel alienated from the society around him. And I must emphasise that the 'Outsider' should not be equated with the misunderstood man of genius like Van Gogh. That would be an oversimplification. Anyone can experience this sense of meaninglessness and futility. This is why I begin the book by speaking of Henri Barbusse's forgotten novel *Hell*, about a man living in a cheap boarding house, who finds a tiny hole in the wall of his room, and spends his days peering at the guests who come and go in the next room – the perfect symbol of 'the Outsider'.

I pass on from 'secular' Outsiders like Sartre, Camus, Hemingway, to men like Nietzsche, Van Gogh, T. E. Lawrence, who are tormented (and sometimes destroyed) by the craving for meaning, then to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who began to see

an outline of a religious solution, and finally to mystics like William Blake and Ramakrishna, and the philosopher-guru George Gurdjieff. The book ends by suggesting that the answer lies ultimately in the insights of the saints and mystics.

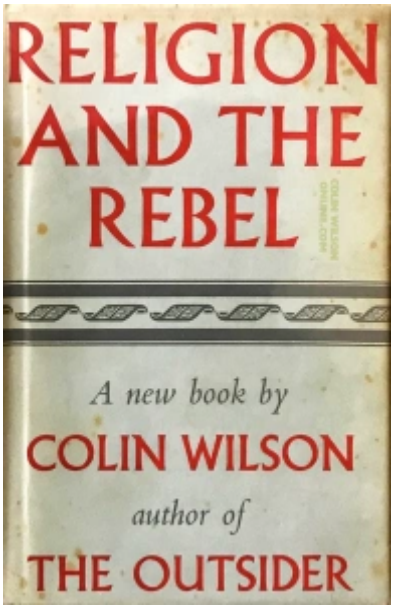
Yet one of the basic aims of the book was to discount the gloom and pessimism of current existentialism, and to insist that the 'Outsider' is often destroyed by his own weakness and his inability to understand what it is that is tormenting him. Instead of wallowing in hopelessness, he needs to understand that what is being demanded of him is to learn to be creative and optimistic. The psychologist Abraham Maslow asked his class 'Which of you thnks that you are going to be great?', and they stared back blankly. Then Maslow said: 'If not you, *who* then?'

I have to confess that in the many years that led up to the writing of *The Outsider*, years when I once came close to suicide, I had felt – as Nietzsche did – that I was carrying the burden alone, and that, like Nietzsche, it might be too much for me and end in insanity. And I also felt that if I could learn to express this sense of the isolation of 'Outsiders', I would meet with the same blank incomprehension as Nietzsche, who first book *The Birth of Tragedy* was dismissed with contempt by his academic colleges and contemporary critics, and who was only just beginning to be understood when he descended into insanity.

That was why I was amazed – and gratified – when *The Outsider* was hailed as a major work and became an international success. Perhaps, I thought, people have grown more intelligent and sensitive since Nietzsche's day. But it took only a few months to realise I was mistaken, and that the overnight 'fame' was entirely spurious, created by journalists

who found my story ‘romantic’, like that of Maugham’s painter in *The Moon and Sixpence*, and that the logical next step was to decide that it had all been a mistake, and that *The Outsider* had been, after all, been a mere collection of quotations strung together by a kind of literary jackdaw. So my ‘fame’ vanished as quickly as it had appeared. And the verdict of these popular journalists was sealed by the totally hostile reception of my next book *Religion and the Rebel*.

Religion and the Rebel **(1957)**



A2 Gollancz 1957

At the end of *The Outsider* I had quoted Eliot’s mentor T. E. Hulme, the philosopher who had died in the First World War, and who felt that what he called ‘Original Sin’ is a basic fact of human nature. But he was not talking of theology. He was attacking the kind of vague Utopianism to be found in Rousseau and Shelley and even Marx, the romantic feeling that man is born free, and that if you overthrow the oppressors and tyrants, everyone will be happy. I could certainly respond to the idealism of Rousseau and Shelley, but an element of realism in me told

me that if you tried to put it into practise, you would soon bump into human stupidity and weakness. I agreed with Gurdjieff that man is 99% machine, and with Shaw that he is not born free, but is a slave to nature and his own emotions. So I could certainly agree with Hulme when he said (in *Speculations*): 'Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal who nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him.'

Yet Hulme does believe in evolution. In an essay of Bergson, he describes it as 'the gradual insertion of more and more freedom into matter', and says that if the amoeba could be compared to a tiny leak into the world of matter, evolution is the gradual enlargement of that leak. This is much the view that Shaw expressed in *Back to Methuselah*, in which the aim of evolution is the total conquest of matter by spirit – or 'the life force'. So there is not really a basic opposition between 'life-forcers' like Bergson and Shaw and neo-religionists like Eliot and Hulme. Religion is basically recognition of the difference between the 'two worlds', spirit and matter, and that they really are two worlds, and not one.

Now I had come to recognise in *The Outsider* that there is a sense in which which the answer to the Outsider-problem lies in religion. In the days when there was a powerful church, 'outsiders' found their natural place in it. I could see clearly, for example, that the 'eternal longing' of so many pf those artists and poets in the 19th century is the same urge that made St Augustine and St Francis turn their backs on the world, and that turned George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, into an itinerant preacher. It is why Bunyan's Pilgrim cries 'What must I do to the saved?'.

It also explains the dissatisfaction felt by the heroes of so many 19th and 20th century novels, from Tolstoy's Peter Bezhukov in *War and Peace* to Sartre's Mathieu in *Roads to Freedom* (who actually speaks of 'salvation', although Sartre was an atheist). Unfortunately, there is no church in which the modern 'Outsider' can take refuge. (It is true that Thomas Merton did, as he describes in his autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and in my teens I seriously considered following his example and entering a monastery.) Which means that he has no receptacle into which he can pour his spiritual energies.

Yet I agreed with Shaw: that civilisation needs religion as a matter of life and death.

So did the historian Arnold Toynbee, which is why, after an autobiographical chapter, and a chapter reprising the 'Outsider' problem in accounts of Rilke, Rimbaud and F. Scott Fitzgerald, I passed on to 'The Outsider and History', discussing various philosophers of history – from Vico to Spengler and Toynbee – who raised the question of where history is going, and whether it is as meaningless as it looks.

Toynbee's most basic concept is 'challenge and response'. Civilisations, like individuals, are at their best when responding to challenge. When a sense of urgency disappears, they 'rest on their oars', and the process of decadence begins. This, of course, amounts to Hulme's recognition that human beings need discipline and organisation to keep them up to the mark, and explains why all dreams of Utopias are unrealistic and unsatisfying.

Now for Toynbee, the most important individuals in any society are its ‘creative minority’ (which can be a minority of one), those who can meet the challenges of an evolving society: thinkers, visionaries, artists. Such men, says Toynbee, achieve creativity through the process of ‘withdrawal and return’, retreating into solitude and striving for their own kind of ‘salvation’, then carrying their visions and insights back into society, where they try to persuade others to put them into practise. (This is done by a process Toybee calls ‘mimesis’, which involves everything from the seduction of great art to the denunciations of prophets.) During the inner struggles that lead to ‘withdrawal’, such individuals are obviously what I had called ‘Outsiders’. As examples, Toynbee instances Buddha, Confucius, St Paul, Mohammed, Dante, Kant and Hindenburg. Civilisations, Toynbee says, decline when their creative minorities fail them.

Now it is obvious that the creative minority finds it easiest to be effective in a stable society with an established religion and church – we have only to think of Europe in the age of the cathedral builders, or Italy during the Renaissance. Sadly, in our modern civilisation, the creative minority has been weakened by the failure of religion. So we have a situation like that of the Victorians, bursting with creative energy yet undermined by the decline of religious belief and a prey to ‘doubts’ – doubts that have come about through the activities of a new kind of creative minority, the scientists – such men as Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Darwin.

Shaw suggested the creation of some kind of artificial religion that combined the best elements of all the great religions. (Oddly enough, this might just work – August Comte dreamed up ‘religion of man’, with various days named after great scientists

and thinkers rather than saints, which achieved a surprisingly large following before it petered out.) But religions tend to need a 'messiah' as well as a set of beliefs, and Shaw would hardly have been a suitable candidate – he was too rational and had too much sense of humour for the job. As to Toynbee, all he could suggest was that we should 'Cling and wait'.

In the second half of the book I examine the lives of various religious figures, such as the mystic Boehme, Nicholas Ferrar (founder of the Little Gidding community, after which Eliot named one of the *Four Quartets*), Pascal, Swedenborg, William Law, John Henry Newman and Kierkegaard; and then, I suppose by way of deliberate provocation, a chapter on Bernard Shaw, who seemed to me to be a writer who spent his life reflecting on basic religious issues, and deserves to be classified with the others. The book ends with a postscript about two philosophers, Whitehead and Wittgenstein.

The former still seems to me one of the greatest and most underrated philosophers of the 20th century. As a mathematician, he was aware that the science of Galileo and Newton is a special kind of abstraction from nature. What has happened, he complains, is that scientists have begun to treat these abstractions as though they were somehow real in themselves. Worse still, philosophers have followed in their footsteps, and oversimplified reality. (This is the complaint Voltaire makes against Leibniz in *Candide*.) The result, Whitehead feels, is that philosophy has abandoned its responsibility to try and grasp reality, and become a kind of board game in which abstractions play the part of chess-men. This is like mistaking a map of Egypt for the actual place.

Maps, of course, are indispensable. You cannot motor in an unfamiliar country without one. But then, tourists frequently put the map aside and go and look at real places, whereas the philosopher is often like a person who studies a map and a guide book, then claims he has been to Egypt.

This explains how Bertrand Russell can state that life is 'horrible, horrible, horrible'. A map is far duller than the place it represents. And if you mistake the map for the real thing, you are going to get a very depressing view of reality. Which is why Whitehead insists that philosophy should include 'experience drunk and experience sober, experience sleeping and experience waking', and so on through a long list that ends 'experience normal and experience abnormal'. The result was a heroic attempt to create such a philosophy in *Process and Reality*, a work that even his admirers admit falls rather short of his intentions.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, a philosopher who, at the time I was writing, was treated as an almost god-like figure by his disciples, is another example of what Whitehead was complaining about. What makes Wittgenstein so fascinating is that he was intuitively aware that there was something badly wrong with his approach, and his inability to put his finger on it nearly drove him mad, and certainly had something to do with his final illness.

He began by deciding that it should be possible to solve all the problems of philosophy by reducing them to a question of language. Language, he said, is simply a picture of the real world, just as the cow in a Nestlé advertisement is an image of a real cow. The world can be reduced to 'atomic facts, each like a picture, and these can be combined into 'states of affairs' (the

cow jumped over the moon), and these into complex propositions. Of course, this is not all reality, which includes religion and morality, but it is all we can actually speak about. But this means that people who think they are talking bout religion and morality are really making meaningless noises – simply failing to give meaning to certain signs in the propositions. When looked at in this way, most philosophy ca be seen quite literally as nonsense.

Then an economist called Piero Sraffa stumped him by making an Italian gesture of contempt – passing his flat hand under his chin – and asking 'What is the logical form of that?' So Wittgenstein abandoned his early 'atomism', and developed a new theory of language, in which words are like different tools in a toolbox, each having a different kind of function. Language is a game, or rather a series of games, for which there is no common definition. The 'game' played by politicians in Congress is quite different from the game played on a barrack square or a preacher in a pulpit. The failure to understand that language is not just one big game with one set of rules, but hundreds of different games, means that philosophers are always misusing language and trying to make it do things it was not intended for. Real philosophy, Wittgenstein thoughts, is an attempt to 'prevent the bewitchment of our senses by language'. Most philosophy since Plato is a misunderstanding of language.

In spite of this insistence on logic, Wittgenstein lived like a tormented ascetic, consumed by guilt about his promiscuous appetite for young male prostitutes, and finally dying of a cancer that seemed almost self-induced.

I included Wittgenstein because he struck me as a practical example of the problem Whitehead was talking about – the need to somehow make philosophy get closer to our intuitive reality – and the perfect illustration of the need for a different kind of philosopher: what I suppose I would describe as an existential philosopher.

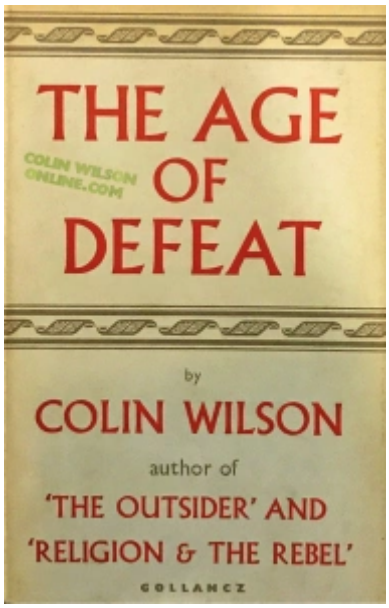
Although I was unaware of it at that time, the mentor of Heidegger and Sartre, Edmund Husserl, had also spent his life trying to create the foundations of a new kind of philosophy. (He once said: 'No man is too good for foundation work'.) He believed that such a philosophy would be based upon a scientific methodology, which he called phenomenology, of which I shall speak later, when discussing the sixth volume of the *Outsider* series, *Beyond the Outsider*. One of Husserl's last works, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, will strike any reader of Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* as an approach to the same problem from an only slightly different angle.

The reception of *Religion and the Rebel* was, to put it mildly, rather critical, and in retrospect I can see why. If I was now invited to rewrite the book, I would cut out that opening chapter on Rilke, Rimbaud and Scott Fitzgerald, which reads like a kind of rehash. I would move straight to the chapter on the philosophy of history, for that is really where the book begins, and where I should have started. And I would label its last two chapters 'Part Three', sine neither Shaw, Whitehead nor Wittgensteain can be classified with the religious figures of Part Two. Finally, I would cut out dozens of references the 'the Outsider' that make the notion sound more concrete than it actually is – for example, as in such sentences as: 'It [self-determination] is, in fact, precisely what the Outsider is striving

for', which makes it sound as if Outsiders could be found in the yellow pages of a telephone book like plumbers and rat catchers.

But then, the failure of *Religion and the Rebel* served a useful purpose in that it gave me back my sense of privacy, and allowed me to forget about trying to live up to the critical expectations aroused by *The Outsider*. A girlfriend once compared me to a mole, and that is a good comparison. I need to work in the dark, and was never more unhappy when the spotlight of publicity was blinding me.

The Age of Defeat **(1959)**



A3 Gollancz 1959

In contrast to *Religion and the Rebel*, I feel that *The Age of Defeat* (in America, *The Stature of Man*) one of my most satisfying books. My two closest friends in the two years before *The Outsider* were Bill Hopkins and Stuart Holroyd. I went to the trouble of making Bill's acquaintance because the girl in whom I was interested at this time (Summer 1953), Laura del Rivo, was in love with him, and I wanted to take a look at this person she

preferred to me. Stuart I had met through a group called *Bridge*, run by a brilliant Jewish exile from Nazi Germany, Alfred Reynolds, a kindly humanist whose political gospel could be summarised as complete tolerance, but who was intensely intolerant of anything that smacked of religion. Stuart and his very pretty wife Anne were among Alfred's disciples. Alfred and I naturally disagreed deeply about religion, which he regarded as a delusion, and eventually, Stuart came to agree with me. He began a book to express his new interest in the religious attitude, and it was when I read its first few chapters that I realised I had better get a move on and write my own book, for Stuart had absorbed my own interests so thoroughly that he actually sounded like me. This was one of my motives in beginning to write *The Outsider*. But Stuart was a slower writer than I was, and *Emergence from Chaos* was not finished until after *The Outsider* had been accepted.

Emergence was accepted by a small publisher called Barrie and Rockiff, who specialised in books with a religious orientation, but after the success of *The Outsider*, my publisher Gollancz offered to do it. He even made the mistake of declaring on the dust jacket that readers who had enjoyed *The Outsider* would find this book equal interesting. But by that time, the 'Angry Young Man' publicity was at its height, and the critics were determined not to launch any more of them. Reviews were patronising, and tended to dismiss Stuart as one of my followers.

They did the same with Bill when his first novel *The Divine and the Decay* was published in 1957, and for this there was far less justification. Bill's novel has distinctly Nietzschean undertones. The hero is the founder of a minor political party who has arranged to have his co-leader murdered, and goes off to one of

the Channel Islands to establish an alibi. He is fascinated by a beautiful girl he meets there, but she resists all his attempts at seduction. In fact, she finds his ruthlessness horrifying. And at the end of the book, she tries to lure him to his death by taking him swimming off the end of the island, where she knows dangerous cross-currrents build up at a certain time of day. But it is she who drowns, while he is suddenly possessed of maniacal energy as he recognises her betrayal, and as the book ends, is quite obviously going to struggle ashore. Bill was a victim of the same hostility as Stuart, and the book received savage reviews.

All three of us had been asked to contribute to a book called *Declaration*, in which various 'Angry Young Man' were asked to explain their beliefs. There were eight contributors: John Osborne, Kenneth Tynan, Lindsay Anderson, John Wain and Doris Lessing. Most of these belonged to the political left, as indeed, I did myself, having accepted the arguments of Shaw's Fabian essays. But the critics divided us into two groups, with Bill, Stuart and myself labelled right wingers.

Tired of being accused of 'fascism' (the label leftists stuck on anyone who did not agree with them), the three of us persuaded Gollancz to publish a manifesto to which each would contribute. Bill would write about politics, Stuart about religion, and I about literature.

In fact, Bill and Stuart delayed so long that I had finished my contribution before they had even started. When I showed it to Gollancz, he suggested publishing it on its own, and since Bill and Stuart were glad to be let off the hook, that is what

happened, and *The Age of Defeat* appeared in 1959, and was not unkindly received.

I had already stated its central theme in my *Declaration* essay, in which I wrote: ‘Our age is essentially unheroic. . Heroism is individualism. We live in an age of numbers and labels…’

My central point is made when I quote Alexis De Toqueville’s *Democracy in America*. De Toqueville explains the modesty of Americans by saying: ‘In democratic communities, each citizen is habitually engaged in contemplation of a very puny object, namely himself. If he ever raises his eyes higher, then he perceives nothing but the immense form of society at large, or the still more imposing aspect of mankind’. That is to say, in the midst of this immense crush of humanity, he feels insignificant. But when Proust describes the hero of his novel tasting a cake dipped in tea, he is flooded with the opposite feeling. ‘I had ceased to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal…’ The ‘insignificance’ is an illusion, a fallacy. Modern man suffers from ‘the fallacy of insignificance’. Faced with ‘the immense form of society’, he feel passive and helpless. But the passivity is an illusion.

The original title of my first attempt at the piece was ‘I glory in the name of earwig’, a quotation from Theodore Gumbril, the hero of Aldous Huxley’s *Antic Hay*. (Another possible title was *The Vanishing Hero*.) In fact Huxley, with his irritating defeated heroes, was the target I had in mind. I could see, of course, why he wrote about characters weighed down with a sense of failure: because as a young man he had been burdened with an inferiority complex. What bothered me was that it remained with him in some form throughout his life, so the central character in

his novels is always the weak, oversensitive man. Either that or a diary-keeping intellectual suffering from guilt.

I agree this is perhaps inevitable, since all Huxley's heroes are introspective. In that case, what about the heroes of Ernest Hemingway? They fight wars and go to bullfights and hunt lions and even bed prostitutes. So why do most of them also end in defeat?

It seemed to me that all the heroes of the past century have been burdened with this sense of defeat. If there is a hell for modern novelists it would have YOU CAN'T WIN inscribed over the gate.

What I was getting at, of course, was already inherent in *The Outsider*, which is preoccupied with the problem of why so many men of genius in the 19th century committed suicide or died insane. They felt themselves weighed down with the problem of 'Eternal Yes versus Eternal No'. And unless they could find some way of saying yes rather than no, a sense of failure was inevitable. Or rather, what they needed was some way of voting 'Eternal Yes' rather than 'Eternal No; and making it stick.

My first attempt at expressing the problem of the vanishing hero can be found in a volume of essays called *Eagle and Earwig*, under the title 'I glory in the name of earwig'. And anyone who reads that essay will see just how hard I was finding it to explain what I meant.

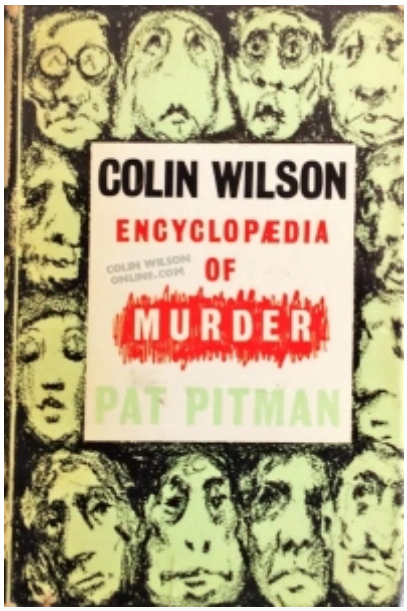
Then one day, I began talking about it to Negley Farson, and he told me about a book called *The Lonely Crowd* by David Reisman, in which Reisman speaks of two kinds of men: 'inner-directed' and 'other-directed'. Inner-directed men are the pioneer

type, and were common in the 19th century. Unsurprisingly, modern society tends to make people 'other directed', more concerned with what the neighbours think.

Negley recommended two other books: *The Hidden Persuaders*, by Vance Packard, and *The Organisation Man* by William H.Whyte. The latter is about the way that big corporations impose conformity on their employees and (more alarmingly) how their employees like it. Packard's book is about the way that modern advertising manipulates us, seeking to make us consume more and more. (At the time I am writing this, 45 years later, it has become commonplace for us to hear that gross national produce has to be increased by 2% (or whatever) per year, or that some big company must increase its turnover if it is to stay competitive, that we never even pause to question it.)

These books gave me the clues I needed, and I was able to write my third of our joint manifesto'. And in the last chapter I have a section entitled 'Towards a New Existentialism', which expresses its dissatisfaction with the existentialism of Heidegger, Sartre and Camus, with their basic pessimism, then states that the answer must lie in the creation of a new existentialism which is fundamentally optimistic. But at the time I was writing, I could not see how this was going to done. That was partly because I had not yet stumbled on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

An Encyclopedia of Murder (**1961**) with Pat Pitman



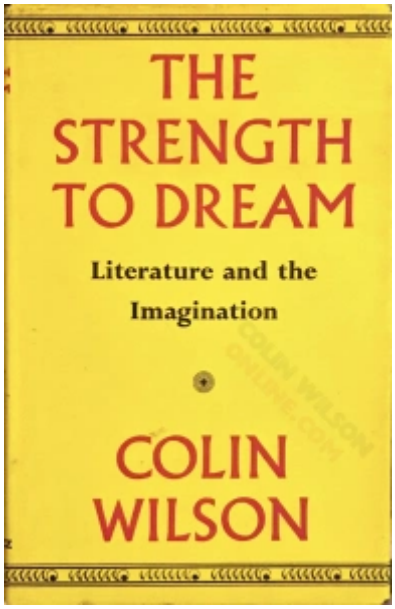
A6 Arthur Barker 1961

After *The Age of Defeat* I completed my novel *Ritual in the Dark*, of which I shall speak later, and then wrote, with Pat Pitman, *An Encyclopedia of Murder*. I see this book as an almost academic exercise. Nothing of the sort then existed, so if I wanted to recall the details of a famous murder case, I had to search through my library of crime books for a chapter in some volume with a title like *A Cavalcade of Murder*. I asked Pat Pitman (the wife of journalist Robert Pitman) to collaborate with me because she was had such a wide knowledge of criminal cases, and also an excellent memory. A book of that size would have taken far too long to write alone.

But this begs the question of why I was interested in crime. I can only reply – as Simenon did once – that I find the psychology of the criminal mind fascinates me. Then, if I try to define that fascination more precisely, I see that it lies in the fact that reading about crime has the effect of awakening us to a sense of moral values, and to the value of life in general. Doctor Johnson remarks: 'When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully' And concentration

is precisely what most of us lack. We walk around in a state that is analogous to sleep. Crisis has the effect of jarring us awake, of freeing us from what I later came to call 'the robot', the mechanical part of us. When the American bootlegger and murderer Charley Berger stood on the scaffold, he remarked: 'It *is* a beautiful world'. Then the trap fell. If he had realised it sooner, he would not have been standing there. But as I read about murder, I am awakened to the value of my own life, and of the value of life in general.

The Strength to Dream **(1962)**



A7 Gollancz 1962

This book, which I regard as the fourth in the 'Outsider series', came about as a result of spending a night at the Dorset farmhouse of a friend, Mark Helfer. Mark, a highly literate American, had married a farmer's daughter out of a desire to return to the simple life. His shelves were full of books he had read at university. Among these, I happened to find an old, yellowing copy of stories by H. P. Lovecraft, a writer of whom I had heard, but never read. (In fact, I had probably read some of

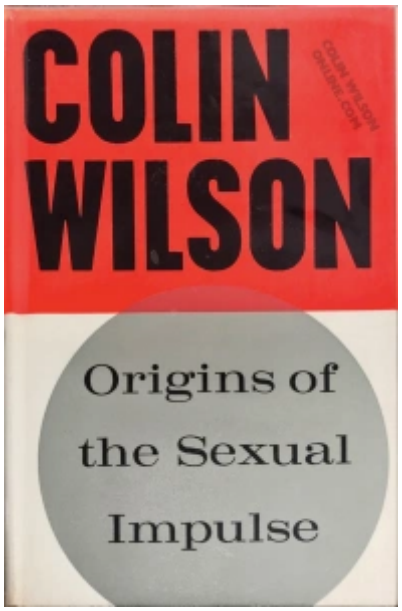
his contributions to *Weird Tales* when I was a child, but had forgotten them.) And as Joy and I drove from Dorset to North Devon, to spend a night with Negley and Eve Farson, I found myself reflecting aloud on why a writer should choose to create this world of gruesome horror.

What emerged fairly clearly from stories like 'The Dunwich Horror' and 'The Call of Cthulhu' was that Lovecraft hated the modern world, and was asserting his own individuality in the face of its dehumanising effect. It was a 'revolt of the soul'. And this, it struck me, was also true of many other writers of supernatural fiction or horror, such as M. R. James and Poe. The same kind of motivation could be traced in the savage pessimism of Leonid Andreyev and Mikhail Artsybashev (the author of the famous *Sanine*) as well as Samuel Beckett.

This desire of the writer to shake his fist at the world can also be seen in the violence of William Faulkner, and in the writings of the Marquis de Sade. On the other hand, in Tolkien and C. S. Lewis it expresses itself as a romantic nostalgia that has something in common with Yeats's early writings about fairyland.

What it all amounted to was Omar Khayam's desire to shatter the world to pieces and 'rebuild it nearer to the heart's desire'. But it was clear that none of these rebels believed it could actually be done. Only Shaw was clear-sighted enough to realise that 'every dream can be willed into creation by those who are strong enough to believe in it'. And here, once more, I was stating my vision of a 'new existentialism' that could cast off the pessimism of the 19th century.

Origins of the Sexual Impulse **(1963)**



A9 Arthur Barker 1963

I had been writing a sequel to *Ritual in the Dark* called *The Man Without a Shadow*, and which its American publisher preferred to call *The Sex Diary of Gerard Sorme*. Now I decided to write a study of the psychology of sexual perversion. I had already written about de Sade in *The Strength to Dream*, recognising that, in its way, the psychology of sexual perversion is related to the psychology of romanticism. Most of us have an obscure conviction that the fulfilment of our secret sexual fantasies would launch a new level of personal development and bring a new kind of freedom.

Ever since childhood I had been what would now be called a panty fetichist, and from an early age – long before I knew about sex – would experience a thrill of satisfaction in pulling on my mother's knickers. In my teens female underwear came to symbolise for me the essence of sexuality. And this essence, I could also see, was what Goethe meant by 'the eternal womanly'. Sexual perversion and the romantic worship of woman are closely connected. And since all my work could be summarised under the heading 'The Anatomy of the Eternal

Longing', it was clear that a volume on sexual perversion should be included in my *Outsider* series.

But that raised the question: where did sexual normality end and perversion begin? Fetichism means using some symbolic object as an aid to masturbation. The most basic sexual stimulus is the sight of the nakedness of a member of the opposite sex. Then why do nudists not find one another exciting? Surely it is because there is no 'forbiddenness'? In the case, sex is exciting because it is 'forbidden'. And why do most men feel more stimulation in watching a woman taking off her clothes than in merely seeing her naked? Is that not 'perverse'.

We know that in male animals, sexual desire is stimulated by the smell of the female on heat. In humans the stimulus has become visual – which means that humans have taken one step in the direction of 'perversion'.

By perversion we mean that the imagination has come to play too great a part, and in the case of, say, a crutch fetichist, this seems obvious. So is the definition of 'normal' sex that imagination plays no part? But surely, all sex contains this element of imagination? In which case, the 'normal does not exist.

In fact, as any teenage boy recognises when he experiences sexual excitement, all sex contains an element of the 'fordidden', and therefore of guilt. Hesse's Steppenwolf says 'Every living thing, even the simplest, is already guilty, already multiple'.

So I go on to look at various degrees of perverseness: the 'hypersexuality' of Casanova and Frank Harris, then of the sexual criminal. De Sade inevitably plays a major part in the

analysis, and leads on to a discussion of sadism and necrophilia.

All this is moving towards the most important chapter in the book, 'The Theory of Symbolic Response', in which I point out that all sex is a response to a symbol. A naked girl is herself a symbol. What distinguishes man from the animals is that he has, so to speak, added an extra dimension to the world of mind – the dimension of symbolism. (I speak more clearly of this in the chapter on Cassirer in my 1998 volume *The Books in my Life*.) Man is capable of 'perversion' because, as Hessse says: 'Man is not of fixed and enduring form. He is an experiment and a transition'. Man is an evolutionary animal.

This chapter was also a watershed for me because I point out in it a fact that refutes the notion that man is a kind of penny-in-the-slot machine – a view first argued by the French materialist philosopher Julien La Mettrie in *Man the Machine* (1747), and still held by psychologists who call themselves 'Behaviourists'. When an animal is bored it looks around for something to do – a puppy will find a slipper and take it behind the settee to chew. It looks outside itself for stimulus. But in my teens I had noticed that when I felt bored, my will began to scan my inner being for purpose, becoming quiescent and trying to become a kind of radio set that does its best to pick up some vibration of meaning. In other words, our will does not simply respond to purpose; it can go out and look for it. But who ever heard of a penny-in-the-slot machine that goes out looking for pennies?

At the beginning of the 19th century the philosopher Maine de Biran had made a similar observation in his attempt to contradict the 'mechanists' – that when I make a deliberate effort of will, it

feels different from when I do something merely because it's got to be done.

Again, when the young William James had a nervous breakdown in which he experienced a feeling of helplessness, of having no power to will, made worse why his conviction that man is a machine who cannot will, he was saved by a comment of the philosopher Charles Renouvier, who pointed out that there is one proof that I possess free will: the fact that I can think one thing rather than another. I can change the direction of my thoughts as often as I like.

This, of course, is what Edmund Husserl meant when he said that all perception is intentional.

And as soon as we recognise this, we can begin to see other ways in which we can express free will – for example, I can scratch myself whenever and wherever I like. This recognition of our freedom was to be my greatest asset in trying to break away from the pessimistic existentialism Sartre, Heidegger and the rest.

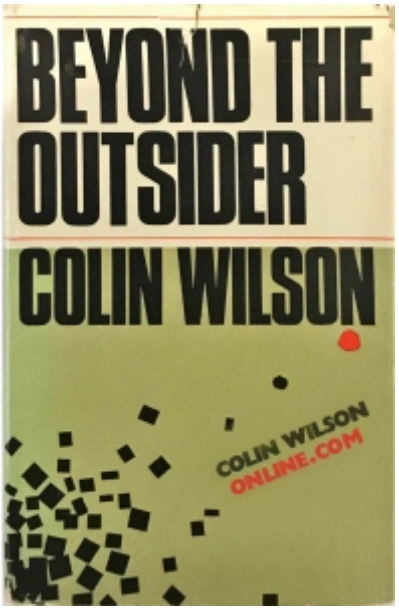
Another thing that fascinated me in *Origins of the Sexual Impulse* was the will o' the wisp nature of sex, the way that it can dissolve like fairy gold. Man likes to imagine some sexual experience so ultimately satisfying that it will have the effect of transforming him, turning him, as it were, from a caterpillar into a butterfly. Yet as the sexual criminal puts his fantasies into practice, he becomes subject to a kind of infinite regress; a kind of law of diminishing returns, so that the ultimate satisfaction always eludes him. The reason for this is simple. As Husserl recognised, perception is intentional. Merely looking at

something does not make you perceive it, although we all labour under this fallacy. For example, if you look at your watch while thinking of something else: you don't 'see' the time, and have to look again. Perception is grasping something, like gripping an axe when you are using it to chop wood. And the 'hands' of the mind are too weak and tend to lose their grip. This is what happens in sex, in what Stendhal called 'le fiasco'. The hand loses its grip, like a baby's hand; it is too feeble.

This, of course, is what the religious ascetic is striving for: he wants to strengthen the mind. If a man has a weak stomach, the best food in the world will make him feel sick And if a man has a weak mind, all experience will be unsatisfying. Which is why so many sexual criminals have admitted to feeling an odd sense of being 'let down' after a crime that should have left them totally satisfied and replete.

But by the time I wrote *Origins of the Sexual Impulse* – indeed, by the time I wrote *The Strength to Dream* – I had discovered the work of Husserl, and so finally had the tools for creating a new form of existentialism that could break out of the cul de sac of pessimism of the older existentialism that began with Kierkegaard.

Beyond the Outsider **(1965)**



A14 Arthur Barker 1965

In September 1961 I set out on my first lecture tour of the United States. It proved harder work than I expected. I often visited several colleges or universities a week, and probably talked non-stop for five or six hours every day. And at every college I had to start again at the beginning, and summarise the ideas of *The Outsider*, *Religion and the Rebel*, *The Age of Defeat* (which had been called in America *The Stature of Man*, the Americans preferring an 'upbeat' title) and *The Strength to Dream* (which had been written but not yet published).

Repeating my basic ideas over and over again made me familiar with them in a new way, and made me more aware of their implications. For example, I began to see that existentialism was simply a new form of 19th century Romanticism – Romanticism Mark II, so to speak. Romanticism Mark I was the 'Eternal Longing', that craving for something beyond mere material existence, which tormented them like a sickness. Most of them concluded that it was unattainable, and sank into a despair that shortened their lives – hence those poets of the late 19th century that Yeats called 'the Tragic Generation' – Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, James Thompson, Oscar Wilde,

Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, who seemed born for tragedy. On the other hand, the existentialists philosophers, who had their roots in Kierkegaard, faced life with grim acceptance. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus says that Sisyphus is doomed to roll a rock uphill and watch it roll down again forever – yet we must consider Sisyphus happy, for he possesses the inner-freedom of his own mind – that freedom that Byron had spoken of in 'The Prisoner of Chillon': 'Eternal spirit of the chainless Mind/ Brightest in dungeons, Liberty thou art!'. Whereas the Romantics gave way to despair, existentialism took a more stoical attitude. As Hemingway put it in *The Old Man and the Sea*: 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated'.

But Husserl's phenomenology had shown me the way out of the *cul de sac* of existentialism. The intentionality of perception means we are free. And if we are free, we are not helpless and passive. The passivity is a mistake, a fallacy.

Sartre and Camus had failed to recognise this. Sartre's most famous statement is: 'Man is a useless passion'. But how can we be useless if we are free? We can change our thoughts, change our lives, change the world.

More to the point, we can change our inner worlds.

This is why I feel *Beyond the Outsider* to be one of my most important books.

It begins by considering the fundamental human problem: whether we have to accept that life is meaningless. Eliot clearly thinks so in *The Hollow Men*; so does Samuel Beckett. Camus thought we should live 'without appeal' – that is, accepting that there is no greater meaning, and that this is our human lot. In a story called *The Natural History of the Dead* Hemingway argues that violent death negates all our human delusions about meaning and says he would like to see the death any so-called

humanist (i.e: someone who does not believe in God but believes that life is nevertheless meaningful) and see what noble exits they make. I refer to this attitude as 'unheroic nihilism'.

I then point out the inconsistencies of this attitude – for example, in Beckett's short play *Act Without Words*, in which all a man's efforts to reach something above his head are futile, because every time he tries to grab it, it goes up beyond his reach. Beckett is implying that fate is not merely indifferent, but malicious. So does Camus's play *Cross Purposes* (*Le Malentendu*), about parents who rob and kill their son – a sailor home from the sea – without realising who he is. But to say that life is not only meaningless but actively malicious is illogical and self-contradictory. Graham Greene, whose view of the universe is obviously jaundiced, admits that when in a dangerous situation in Africa, he experienced something he had not suspected he possessed, 'a love of life'. He seems to be unaware that this is tantamount to admitting that his usual grim view of existence is something to do with his perception rather than with the universe.

The real problem, I suggest, lies in the dullness of our senses, which keeps us a state akin to sleep. The Greek poet Demetrios Capetanakis remarks that at the beginning of the Second World War, he reflected: 'Well, it will be horrible, but if it will be so horrible as to frighten and wake up the mind, it might become the salvation of many'. But that proved to be untrue. 'Even war cannot frighten us enough'. And he goes on to suggest that Rimbaud subjected himself to a life of insecurity out of this desire to 'shake the mind awake'. He might have added that saints and ascetics subjected themselves to harsh disciplines for the same reason.

The problem seems to be the feebleness of the human mind. Or,

as I was to express it later: ‘Human beings are grandfather clocks driven by watch springs’. Schopenhauer says that life is a pendulum that swings between misery and boredom. We experience some anxiety or inconvenience, strive to overcome it, feel momentary relief as it vanishes, then forget to feel relieved and relapse into boredom. And if this is true, then we had better accept ‘unheroic nihilism’ as the truth about the human condition.

But H. G. Wells had another explanation for the unsatisfactoriness. Men like himself, he says – ‘originative intellectual workers’ – find normal human existence boring because they long for a more meaningful kind of existence. ‘We are like early amphibians, so to speak, struggling out of the waters that have hitherto covered our kind, into the air, seeking to breathe in a new fashion and to emancipate ourselves from… necessities. At last it becomes a case of air or nothing. But the new land has not definitely emerged from the waters, and we swim distressfully in an element we wish to abandon.’

In other words, we want a new kind of freedom than any animal has ever known.

The chapter that follows, ‘The Strange Story of Modern Philosophy’, seems to me one of the most important I have ever written. I begin by considering the ‘world rejection’ of Socrates, who tells his followers that since the philosopher spends his life trying to separate his soul from his body, his own death should be regarded as a consummation. And this is consistent with his belief that only spirit is real, and matter is somehow unimportant and unreal. This notion would persist throughout the next two thousand years, harmonising comfortably with the Christian view that this world is unimportant compared to the next.

Then came scientific thought, in the person of Galileo, who

introduced the spirit of experiment. He demonstrated that gravity makes all bodies fall at the same speed, and invented the telescope through which he discovered the moons of Jupiter. From then on, human thought began to take a more purposeful direction. In 1642, the year Galileo died, Newton was born, and within forty years, science had advanced further than in the previous two thousand.

In philosophy, a similar leap forward had taken place while Galileo was still alive. René Descartes attempted to bring into philosophy the same kind of certainty that Galileo had brought to science. Galileo had explored the heavens with a telescope; Descartes decided to examine the human situation through a kind of magnifying glass.

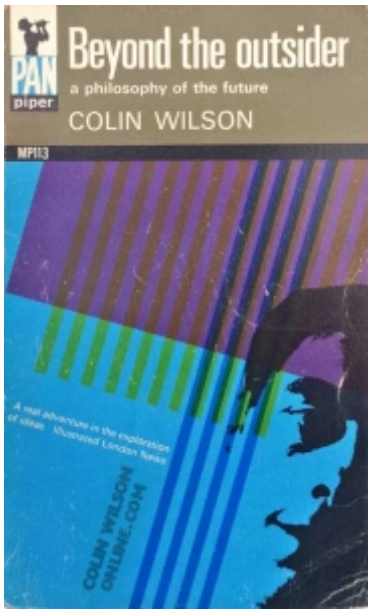
His new method of achieving certainty was simplicity itself: to doubt everything. After seeing some toy robots driven by water in the park at Versailles, it struck him the human beings are almost entirely mechanical; we need stimuli to make us do something. Of course, men could not be made of clockwork, because they have souls. (Descartes was a good Catholic.) But animals could be, and probably are, machines.

How do I know I am not a machine? Because a machine has no self-awareness. On the other hand, I can think, ‘therefore I am’. Such an assertion obviously leaves room for doubt. If some god could endow a washing machine with self-awareness, it would probably assume that it operates of its own free will, and would say ‘I think, therefore I am’. It would clearly be mistaken.

The British philosopher John Locke – who was 18 when Descartes died – recognised this. He did not actually argue that men are robots, but came very close to it when he said that we cannot know anything that does not come from our experience. There is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses.

When man is born, his mind is like a blank sheet of paper, a 'tabula rasa'. Everything he then learns arises from things that happen to him. So what we call the mind – all his thoughts, responses, reactions – is a 'construct', like a house built of pieces of Lego.

Plato thought that we are born with a certain knowledge already inside us.In the *Meno*, Socrates makes a slave solve a geometrical problem merely by asking him questions, and then argues that this knowledge must have been already in the slave's mind, and only needed bringing out. Locke denied this. Descartes had launched modern western philosophy with a dubious proposition, and now Locke continued it with an even more dubious one (for anybody who kept pigeons could have told Locke that they are born with all kinds of innate knowledge). This seems to be a typical characteristic of western philosophy: if someone makes a stupid howler, his successors try to justify it and carry the thing to even further lengths of absurdity, when common sense would suggest that they get their foundations right by going back to square one.



Paperback (UK) 1966

So it was perhaps inevitable that Bishop Berkeley should go a step further. If we can only know things through the mind, then why should we assume the outside world exists at all? Jam is not really sweet; it only produces a sensation of sweetness on the tongue. The sky is not really blue; it only produces a sense of blueness on the eyes. Perhaps objects only exist when we are looking at them, and when there is no one there to see them, they vanish. Or at least, they would if God was not there to see them.

This was obviously inviting some clever trouble-maker to suggest that, since there is no evidence that God exists, perhaps everything is an illusion? Which is more or less what the next 'great philosopher' did by carrying doubt even further. David Hume set out to reduce everything to materialism. The soul, which Descartes thought he had proved, is an illusion, because when I look inside myself, I do not become aware of 'the essential me', but merely of thoughts and sensations. So human beings are also made of Lego.

And when you look at things in this piecemeal way, they simply dissolve. Even cause and effect are seen to be an illusion, for 'every effect is a distinct event from its cause', and therefore 'cannot be discovered in the cause'. Perhaps God is pulling our legs when He makes a kettle boil on a fire; perhaps it is really supposed to freeze.

What Hume did was to sweep the world bare of all certainty, leaving philosophy looking like a landscape after the dropping of an H-bomb.

The philosopher who tried to repair the damage was the Konigsburg professor Immanuel Kant. And what he did was, in effect, to take a step backward to Bishop Berkeley, and make the mind the creator of reality.

He noticed the existence of what Husserl would later called ‘intentionality’ – that the mind makes sense of this chaotic world that surrounds us by imposing order on it. We divide things into categories – for example, everything I can see around me is either a liquid, a solid or a gas. We use clocks to impose order on the chaos of time, and measuring rodsS to impose it on space. We call things by words we have invented – that four legged creature is a ‘cat’, and that one a ‘dog’. You could say we invent space and time to make our world orderly enough to live in comfortably. It is as if we had invented a pair of spectacles that impose categories on the world.

Does that mean there is no ‘true reality’ behind all our categories? Yes, there is such an underlying reality, which Kant called the *noumena*, to distinguish it from the world of mere ‘phenomena’ that surrounds us. But since we can never remove the spectacles, we can never know this reality.

The dramatist Kleist was so upset by Kant’s bewildering variation on Bishop Berkeley that he committed suicide.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte

At which point one of Kant's followers, a now almost forgotten thinker called Johann Gottlieb Fichte, called a halt to the madness – at least, he would have done if anyone had taken any notice of him. What Fichte said was: why bother about this 'noumena'? If it is unknowable, we may as well forget it. In that case, man is left in a world created by his senses – just as Berkeley said. But if 'I' really created the universe, why do I not know that I did? There must be two 'me's', this everyday self who has no idea of who it is or what it is doing here, and another 'me' is actually a kind of god who has created this world.

Descartes sat in his armchair, or more likely lay in bed (he was notoriously lazy) and asked: What can I know for certain? He answered: Two things are certain – my own existence and that world out there. We call them the subjective and the objective worlds. Fichte said: No, there are three worlds – that world out there, and two 'me's', the ordinary me and the me who is behind the scenes creating the world out there.

The next question is: how could the ordinary 'me' began to explore the extraordinary world created by the 'other me'? And this, of course, is the true task of phenomenology, to which we shall come in a moment.

Fichte made one more comment that is of immense importance.: that the trouble with philosophy was that its attitude to the world is passive. But philosophy, he said (in *Addresses to the German Nation*) should regard itself as active, or at least as a prelude to action.

Expressed in this way, this sounds unexciting – as if it is merely an earlier statement of Karl Marx's statement that the business of philosophy is not to understand the world but to change it. In fact, it was really a blinding flash of insight: that Kantian philosophy turned philosophers into armchair theorists, so that

their whole attitude to knowledge was passive, when it should be active.

Consider these lines from Yeats' last poem *Under Ben Bulben:*

'Know that when all words are said
And a man is fighting mad,
Something drops from eyes long blind.
He completes his partial mind,
For an instant stands at ease,
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace…

The crucial line here, of course, is: 'He completes his partial mind'. For it implies that under normal circumstances, only a part of the mind is awake and active.

In *Poetry and Mysticism*, I comment:

'These are the visionary, mystical moments, when man 'completes his partial mind'. His everyday, conscious self is only a small part of the mind, like the final crescent of the moon. In moments of crisis, the full moon suddenly appears. Petty miseries and oppressions vanish…' (p. 156)

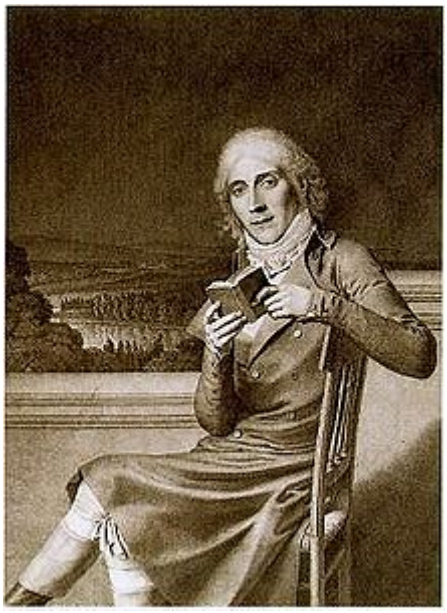
This is what Fichte meant when he said that man only knows himself in action.

But no one noticed Fichte's revolution, so no one tried to carry on his work – at least, until the end of the century, when Edmund Husserl came along

Instead, philosophy went back to Hume's bleak landscape, and set about completing the work of devastation.

Descartes thought men are machines with souls, and his successor La Mettrie developed this idea in *Man the Machine* (1748), which argues that the soul is a material part of the brain, and that all living beings are self-winding clockwork toys. He was followed by Etienne de Condillac, who followed Locke and

Hume is arguing that our mental life is merely physical sensations. Then came a group known as the Ideologues, of whom the leaders were Pierre-Jean Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy, who believed that the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile.



Maine de Biran

Until finally one of these ideologues, Maine de Biran, was suddenly struck by the thought that this is nonsense. When I exert my will solve some problem, it feels quite different from, say, writing a note to the butcher or making a cup of tea. In that moment I know I am not a machine.

In fact, there is a simple and obvious difference. It is true that I carry out dozens of activities that I do every day, in a 'machine-like' state, (even typing these words is to a large extent mechanical). But the thought that is behind the words must be non-mechanical, otherwise it will soon show in my writing. So we might say that the difference between a good writer and a bad writer is his degree of mechanicalness, and the difference between Wordsworth sonnet on Westminster Bridge ('Earth hath

not anything to show more fair…') and vast tracts of his later poetry makes us see the difference: one is written by a kind of robot, and the other by what you might call 'the real Wordsworth', the living man. I shall speak of this again later.

Unfortunately, French philosophers at the end of the 18th century were so intoxicated at being able to give a two finger salute to the Catholic Church – which had persecuted free thought for centuries – that they had no intention of conceding that man had an immortal soul. So no one paid the slightest attention to Maine de Biran's discovery that we have free will. And the next major French philosopher, August Comte, directed all his polemical powers at denouncing superstition (by which he meant religion), and declaring that man would never be free until he learned to live by logic and reason. He also regarded metaphysics –i.e. all attempt to deal with larger questions about man and the universe – as another form of superstition. Unfortunately, he was a poor advertisement for his religion of reason, for a disastrous marriage caused a nervous breakdown that drove him into an insane asylum, after which an unhappy love affair made him attempt suicide. In spite of which, his *Course of Positive Philosophy* had an enormous influence, and he even founded a 'Church of Humanity', which went on to become highly successful after his death.

In Germany, metaphysical philosophy showed that it still had plenty of life in it in the thought of G. F. Hegel, who also began as a sceptic and a rationalist, then had some kind of revelation in which he saw the 'Idea' as the ultimate reality from which all other things derive, including Nature and Spirit. Perhaps he was remembering St John's 'In the beginning was the Word'. This led him to a vision of history that has something in common with Toynbee's, in which all the miseries and torments of history

nevertheless drive man 'upward and on', towards the expression of pure spirit. There was something very vital and positive about Hegel's philosophy that aroused immense enthusiasm in his contemporaries, and led to a revival of interest in metaphysics. At a time when the world was almost ready to surrender to French materialism, it was Hegel who brought a refreshing new impulse of Idealism. If it had not been for an appalling tendency to write in incomprehensible abstractions, he would probably qualify as the most important philosopher since Plato.

The man who now seems to us to be one of the most original thinkers of the mid-century was totally unknown in his own time. Soren Kierkegaard, a brilliant but intensely neurotic Dane, might have been expected to regard Hegel as a fellow-spirit, since neither had the slightest inclination towards what the French called positivism. But studying Hegel at Copenhagen University put him off completely, since he felt this was all too abstract, and therefore had little to say to him as an individual. As a result, he developed an intense dislike of this philosopher who claimed to have answered every major question in the universe. It was Kierkegaard who first used the word existential (to mean the opposite of 'abstract') to explain his dislike of Hegel. When books like *The Concept of Angst* were rediscovered in the 1920s, they immediately found a large audience, because by that time everybody was suffering from it. Probably his best known statement is: 'Truth is subjectivity'.

Kierkegaard spent most of his short life (he died at the age of 42) in a state of depression, and collapsed on the day he went to withdraw the last of his money from the bank. In this sense he was typical of the romantics who, ever since Rousseau, had been complaining that they found life too difficult and unrewarding to be worth the effort. And this is why Fichte's

insight that there is a part of the mind that creates the world ‘behind our backs’ is so important. It suggested that if poets and philosophers knew enough about the hidden powers of that ‘other self’, they might find life less intolerable.

Nietzsche at 16

It was another ‘existentialist’ thinker. Friedrich Nietzsche, who glimpsed this truth and made it the basis of his philosophy. The son of a pastor, was sent to a military academy, then to university. It was when he was a student that the first of his two great revelatory insights occurred. It is related in a letter of 1865 to his friend Von Gersdorff:

‘Yesterday an oppressive storm hung over the sky, and I hurried to a neighbouring hill called Leutch. … At the top I found a hut, where a man was killing two kids while his son watched him. The storm broke with a tremendous crash, discharging thunder and hail, and I had an indescribable sense of well-being and zest. . . . Lightning and tempest are different worlds, free powers, without morality. Pure Will, without the confusions of

intellect—how happy, how free.'

The second episode happened some years later, during the Franco-Prussian War, when Nietzsche was serving as an orderly in the ambulance corps. He told it to his sister in later life, when she asked him once about the origin of his idea of the Will to Power.

For weeks Nietzsche had attended the sick and wounded on the battlefields until the sight of blood and gangrened limbs had swallowed up his horror into a numbness of fatigue. One evening, after a hard day's work with the wounded, he- was entering a small town near Strasbourg, on foot and alone. He heard the sound of approaching hoof beats and stood back under the wall to allow the regiment to pass. First the cavalry rode by at top speed, and then behind them marched the foot soldiers. It was Nietzsche's old regiment. As he stood and watched them passing, these men going to battle, perhaps to death, the conviction came again that 'the strongest and highest will to life does not lie in the puny struggle to exist, but in the Will to war, the Will to Power….'

By that time Nietzsche had already been a professor of classics at the University of Bonn for two years. Two years after this wartime experience, his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, interprets the Greek love of tragedy as an overflowing of sheer vitality, 'the blissful ecstasy that rises from the innermost depths of man, ay, of nature, at the collapse of he principium individuationis…', this very 'principle of individuality' that Kierkegaard had made the basis of his rejection of Hegel. And although forced to retire firm academic life by an illness that brought suffering for the remainder of his life, Nietzsche continued to affirm this principle of 'blissful ecstasy'. And when he was conceiving his most remarkable work, *Thus Spoke*

Zarathustra, he described his sensation of being ‘six thousand feet above men and time’. He would write later: ‘I have made my philosophy out of my will to health’.

This gives Nietzsche a very good claim to be the first thinker to have solved that basic problem of ‘Eternal Yes versus Eternal No’, and therefore to have solved one of the greatest of all philosophical problems. But his solution, like his reputation, was undermined by the fact that he did insane, probably as the result of venereal disease picked up from a prostitute.

I can explain his importance by referring to an essay I wrote at this time (1964), and included in *Eagle and Earwig*. It was about the half-forgotten novelist L. H. Myers, the author of a vast 4-part novel called *The Near and the Far*, which is fairly certainly a great, or near-great, novel. He committed suicide by taking an overdose in 1944, when he was 65.

The novel begins with one of the greatest symbols in all literature. Twelve year old Prince Jali, whose father has been summoned to a celebration by Akbar the Great, stands upon the battlements of a castle and looks over the desert, over which he has been travelling for six days. And as he is moved by a magnificent sunset, he reflects that there are two deserts: one of which is a glory to the eye, and the other of which is a weariness to the foot. And the former remains unattainable, for even if he ran out of the palace and towards the sunset, he would only get his shoes full of sand. If only one could somehow grasp the ‘promise of the horizon’, and somehow cross the desert on one great bound. If only one could somehow bring together the near and the far…

This, of course, is the ‘eternal longing’ that fascinated and tormented the romantics. Yeats talked of the waterfall ‘upon Ben Bulebn’s side/ That all my childhood counted dear…’ then says:

I would have touched it like a child
But knew my finger would have touched
Cold stone and water..

And concludes:
Nothing that we love overmuch
Is ponderable to the touch.

But Myers' 'near and the far' is arguably a better symbol.
But even as I was writing this description of 'the near and the far', I could see the solution. Myers was a true romantics; his friend L. P. Hartley, said that the thought of one of his characters walking down Piccadilly made him feel ill; he needed to set all his novels in strange and romantic locations. Myers was also rich, and an incorrigible philanderer; he never had to face the problems of life or 'pull his cart out of the mud', which meant that in spite of his intelligence he failed to see that his problem was weakness, lack of self-discipline. Nietzsche's Zarathustra was right. The real answer lay in strength, in 'great health'.
That is to say, the gap between the near and the far is not inherent in the nature of reality. 'If one were strong enough, healthy enough, it might not be necessary to trudge so painfully through the present.' In moments of happiness and intensity, the near and the far seem to come together.
Later in the 20th century, of course, it became apparent that what was wrong with Nietzsche was that this recognition of the need for strength sprang out of awareness of his own physical weakness, and that in the joy of the insight, he was moved to a glorification of ruthlessness. So the word 'Nietzschean' took on unfortunate overtones of cruelty that were far from his intention. But in its primary sense, meaning an overflowing of energy and

optimism, this is the solution to that problem of 'the near and the far'. I recognised this at the age of 19 when – as I have described in my autobiography – I had spent most of an afternoon making love to a girlfriend on a windy hillside in Derbyshire – we were on our way to the Lake District – and as we ran downhill wearing cycling capes that acted as windbrakes, experienced an enormous and total sense of exaltation, which I recognised as the answer to the self-divisions and miseries of romanticism.

This, then, is why I consider the contribution of Nietzsche as so crucial to that fundamental problem of romanticism.

As to that other problem, that philosophical hare set running by Descartes, I believe the solution lies in Fichte's insight of the 'two selves'. Elsewhere in *Beyond the Outsider*, I cite Tolstoy's story *Memoirs of a Madman*, in which a landowner, on his way to a distant province to buy more land, suddenly awakens on night with the recognition that this is absurd. He wants to buy more land when the real problem is that we all die. And in that moment he sees that all he has been taking for granted – his home, his family, his background – have been deceiving him into thinking he knows who he is. And he suddenly realises he doesn't. And he is overwhelmed by the question: 'Who am I? And the result is a religious conversion that leads his friends to assume he has gone mad. But he would say, of course, that it is the world that is mad.

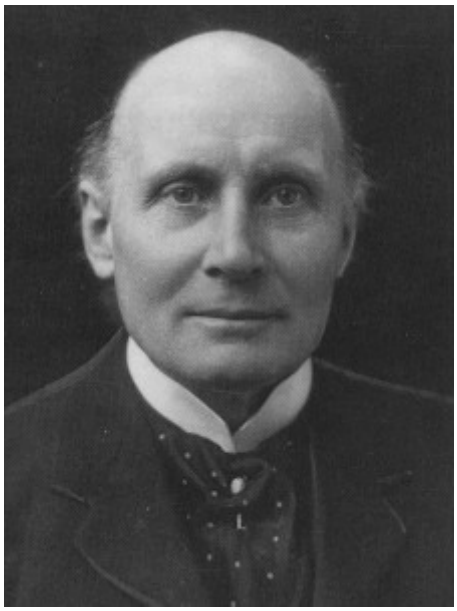
When we grasp Tolstoy's question, we can see what is wrong with Descartes. His unstated premise is as follows; 'Here am I, René Descartes, sitting in my armchair and asked what we can know for certain…' But he is failing to question his own identity, and this error will lead on to the errors of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Hegel and the rest. At least Kierkegaard and

Nietzsche were aware of that basic question 'Who am I?', which is the starting point of existentialism.

And in Chapter 3 of *Beyond the Outsider* I go on to propound the solution to that accumulation of errors. It was clearly seen by two great thinkers of the 20th century, Husserl and Whitehead. Whitehead began by returning to Hume, and pinning down the underlying fallacy. Hume argued that we have no true 'inner self'. He claimed that when he looked inside himself for 'the real David Hume', he only came across ideas and impressions, but noting like a 'self'. And he concluded – as the French 'Ideologues' would later – that all that can be found inside us is a 'stream of consciousness', a lot of scurrying thoughts whose only 'identity' is that they come one after another. This is the realisation that comes, he says, when you look at your inner self through a magnifying glass.

In a little book called *Symbolism, Its Meaning and Effect*, Whitehead points out that this method of looking at something through a magnifying glass is a good way of missing its meaning. If, for example, you looked at a great painting through a magnifying glass, you would only see the texture of the paint. If you look at a newspaper photograph close-up, you would only see disconnected dots. In both cases you are looking at individual trees and failing to see that they constitute a wood. In order to see the wood, we need to take a bird's eye view, to stand back.

So we have two kinds of perception: bird's eye and worm's eye, close-up and far-off. Both only give half of the truth.



A. N. Whitehead

Whitehead calls these two modes ‘presentational immediacy’ and ‘causal efficacy’. The first is easy to understand – what is in front of your nose, The second is more difficult. The example Whitehead gives is the words ‘United States’. You do not grasp these piecemeal: ‘United – that means held together. States – yes, that means states like Florida and California. Oh yes, that mean’s America….’ You see the two words as one, United States, and register that as ‘America’. Cause and effect blend into one.

Now Hume criticised causality by saying that every effect is quite distinct from its cause, and so is not ‘necessarily’ linked to it. Whitehead replies: When you grasp a ‘meaning’ they are not merely ‘linked – they are one.

We might say, then, that we have to ‘modes of perception’, which could be called ‘immediacy perception’ and ‘meaning perception’. When you are very tired and depressed, your meaning-perception becomes blurred (Sartre calls it nausea; the world dissolves into bits and pieces). But this is an illusion, caused by tiredness. On the other hand, when you are drunk and feeling jolly, the world seems to be all meaning. Then it is

your immediacy perception that becomes blurred; you cannot even get your key into the keyhole.

On the other hand, there are times – perhaps when you are feeling happy and excited on a spring morning – when the two modes of perception seem to blend together perfectly. You have a wonderful sense of meaning, yet your 'immediacy perception' is fully operational.

What happens then could be compared to the film *The Dam Busters*, in which the British planes had to drop bombs shaped like billiard balls that bounced along the Moener Lake and hit the dam at water level. The problem for the pilot was to know when he was at exactly the right height to drop them. The solution was to place two spotlights on the plane, one in the nose, one in the tail, whose two beams converged at exactly the right height. So when there was just one spot on the surface of the lake, he released the bombs.

According to Whitehead, our most brilliant moments of insight happen when the two beams – immediacy perception and meaning perception – converge.

This, then, is Whitehead's 'refutation of Hume', and it is a breakthrough in western philosophy because it provides new foundations. The question 'Do we have free will or are we robots?' becomes absurd. Instead, philosophy can get back to its proper business – 'understanding the universe'.

And what of that other question: of the 'me' behind the scenes, whose existence was recognised by Fichte?

This was the problem to which Edmund Husserl devoted his life. When he was at university, in the 1880s, philosophy was still struggling to throw off the toils of Bishop Berkeley, and the notion that 'meaning' is something created by the mind. John Stuart Mill, for example, argued that the feeling of logical

certainty is no more than that – a feeling – and that all logic can be therefore reduced to psychology. This notion is called 'psychologism', and in its broadest sense it holds that philosophy, logic – even mathematics – can be explained in terms of psychology. This outraged Husserl, for it implied that all truth is 'relative', and Husserl could see that philosophy is never going to escape from muddle and confusion while it accepted such vagaries. So his starting point was the acceptance that logic deals with objective truth, not with relative ideas.

His first major work, *Logical Investigations*, was a sustained attack on psychologism, and an attempt to show that philosophy should be nothing less than a science.

This, of course, is what Descartes wanted to do when he asked the question: 'Of what can we be certain?' Husserl gave Descartes full credit for this, and even entitled one of his most important series of lectures *Cartesian Meditations*. But, as we have seen, Descartes' problem was that he began with the wrong question: 'What can I know?' He was failing to ask who was this 'I' who wanted to know.

Let me try putting this another way. In her book about 'female outsiders' Alone, Alone, Rosemary Dinnage discusses Bertrand Russell's affair with Ottoline Morrell, and says:

'It is important to understand…that it was his underlying need to know whether anything could be established as true that shaped his whole mind… He himself felt that his search had made him into a 'logic machine', a 'spectator and not an actor', with a 'mind like a search light, very bright in one direction but dark everywhere else'.

What Russell had recognised was what Fichte had said a century earlier: that real philosophy demands an active attitude, rather than the passive one of the philosopher sitting in his

armchair. To 'know' something merely with the mind is hardly to know it at all. Our whole being is somehow involved in true knowing. And when this happens, knowledge has a 'weight' that is not found in merely intellectual knowing.

And this is also the essence of Husserl's revolution: that consciousness is intentional, that it is active, not passive. It is like a hand reaching out and grabbing things, not just a search light. And Russell's own career is a sad example of what happens when a thinker stayed in the 'Cartesian' attitude to philosophy. Russell spent his whole life asking: 'What can we know for certain?' And the result is oddly disappointing, for he never found a satisfactory answer.

But if, like Rosemary Dinnage, we remove our attention from Russell the thinker to Russell the person, we become aware of the consequences of his 'passive' attitude to philosophy – that is, he totally failed to bring his interior philosopher and human being into line. As his second wife Dora put it to Rosemary Dinnage: 'Bertie could behave rottenly'. Until he was a very elderly gentleman he continued to pursue women, and to behave like an adolescent. As a person, he remained deeply unsatisfying to all the women he got involved with, and was dumped innumerable times. (I imagine his lifelong desire to screw any attractive female, from 15 to 50, was due to a gloomy conviction in adolescence that a person so ugly and preoccupied with ideas would remain love-starved, and by the time he learned different, the neurosis was too deep to be unrooted.)

But how could a person like Russell have benefited from Husserl's phenomenology? In fact, we may as well open the question out and ask: How could anyone?

Let me start by quoting the French phenomenologist Paul

Ricoeur. He is talking about the 'reduction' or *epoché*, that method of 'standing back' and viewing things from a distance – rather like standing back from a large picture in an art gallery. 'By means of this reduction consciousness rids itself of a naiveté which it has beforehand, and which Husserl calls the natural attitude. This attitude consists in spontaneously believing that the world which is there is simply given. In correcting itself about this naiveté, consciousness discovers that it is in itself giving, sense-giving. The reduction does not exclude the presence of the world; it takes nothing back. It does not even suspend the primacy of intuition in every cognition. After the reduction, consciousness continuers seeing, but without being absorbed in this seeing, without being lost in it. Rather, the very seeing itself is discovered as a doing (*opération*) , as a producing (*oevre*) – once Husserl even says 'as a creating'. Husserl would be understood – and the one who thus understands him would would be a phenomenologist – if the intentionality which culminates in seeing were recognised to be a creative vision'.
But how?, the reader wants to ask. What is the trick of transforming ordinary perception into creative vision?
The simplest answer is: poets do it all the time, so do great painters like Van Gogh. Read Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, and you can feel the 'phenomenological vision'. Or look at a great painting by Van Gogh or Vlaminck or Soutine. When I was working in a tax office in Rugby in my teems, I remember my boss saying with disgust that he thought Van Gogh simply distorted everything he painted. He was missing the point: that Van Gogh was saying: 'This is how I see things when I put on my creative spectacles'. Rupert Brooke said that on a spring morning he sometimes walked down a country road feeling almost sick with excitement.

Brooke realised that he could bring on this feeling by looking at things in a certain way. And what was really happening when he did this was that he had somehow become aware that he could see more, become aware of more, by looking at things as if they possessed hidden depths of meaning. For it is true. He was becoming conscious of the intentional element in perception, that his 'seeing' was in itself a creative act.

We can suddenly begin to see what Ricoeur meant

Let me try putting his another way.

A normal young male feels spontaneous sexual excitement if he sees a girl taking off her clothes. He feels this is 'natural', like feeling hungry when you smell cooking. But supposing he is looking through an art book with reproductions of paintings, and he sees a picture of a model taking off her clothes. She is attractive, and he stares at the painting, and then – let us suppose – deliberately induces sexual excitement. How does he do this? In that question lies the essence of phenomenology. You could say that he looks at the picture, and deliberately puts himself in the state of mind of a man about to climb into bed with her. He ceases to see the picture from 'the natural standpoint' (this is just a picture) and deliberately endows it with a dimension of reality. And it can be seen that he is again 'putting on his creative spectacles'. In fact, the act of masturbation is a textbook illustration of intentionality in action.

The mind can deliberately change the way it sees things. Brooke tells how he can wander about a village wild with exhilaration. 'And it's not only beauty and beautiful things. In a flicker of sunlight on a blank wall, or a reach of muddy pavement, or smoke from an engine at night, there's a sudden significance and importance and inspiration that makes the breath stop with a gulp of certainty and happiness. It's not that the wall or the

smoke seem important for anything or suddenly reveal any general statement, or are suddenly seen to be good or beautiful in themselves – only that for you they're perfect and unique. It's like being in love with a person… I suppose my occupation is being in love with the universe'.

We can grasp what Ricoeur meant by 'the very seeing is discovered as a doing'. Brooke is so excited because he realises he can make himself see things in a certain way, and respond to them – just as an adolescent is excited when he discovers that this body can produce a heady brew called sexual excitement. And this is the very essence of phenomenology: you might say that phenomenology is a prosaic way of developing the mystical faculty.

These examples show that there is a creative way of seeing and feeling and that, to some extent, we can do it at will – or can easily learn the trick. What it amounts to, of course, is inducing 'the peak experience'. Chesterton's 'absurd good news'.

Again, I might cite Maslow's comment that when his students began to talk to one another about their peak experiences, they began having peak experiences all the time. They had simply learned the trick of 'putting on their creative spectacles'.

There is another vitally important concept in Husserl: the *lebenswelt*, or 'life-world', which Spiegelberg, in his classic work on the phenomenological movement, defined as 'the world as experienced by a living subject in his particular perspective' (p. 161). An illustration will make this clearer. Anyone can see that the world of Jane Austen's novels is so different from the world of Aldous Huxley that it is hard to believe they lived on the same planet; their two life-worlds are quite different. Of course, the only way of experiencing someone else's life-world would be to

be behind their eyes, but novels give a pretty clear idea of what I am talking about.

Speaking of the life-world, Spiegelberg says: 'The *Lebenwelt*, so Husserl thought, would yield a particularly revealing clue (*Leitfaden*) for the study of intentionality in action. Actually the some ninety pages devoted to this subject do not contain more than first indications as to the direction of this next step. Apparently even from here the approach to the 'mothers', the keepers of the key to the ultimate sources of being, as Husserl called them repeatedly in allusion to the well-known episode in Goethe's *Faust* (Part II) remained anything but easy. But whatever the *Lebenswelt* might contribute to the confirmation of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and to the unveiling of the hidden achievements of the transcendental ego, there can be no doubt that this was one of the most fertile ideas in the history of phenomenology after Husserl.' (*The Phenomenological Movement*. P. 160).

When I first read this passage more than forty years ago, it suddenly dawned on me that phenomenology is more than a plodding scientific method; that it is a method for the creation of 'visionary consciousness', of seeing things as Blake and Boehme saw them.

Let me offer a personal instance of the way in which I made use of this insight for the practical purpose of transforming my perception.

I had gone to Cardiff with my wife Joy to take part in a weekend of lectures. It all took place in a modern hotel that looked like a red-brick polytechnic, by the side of a motorway. It was not an inspiring place. And after breakfast on Saturday morning we glanced at the schedule, decided there was nothing we wanted to hear, and set out to walk into the centre of Cardiff and do

some shopping. It was a dull, cold day, and walking along by a concrete road with traffic roaring past was not conduce to the ‘holiday feeling’. But I reflected that perception is intentional, that I was stupidly allowing myself to collapse into the ‘natural standpoint’, and that this was a boring waste of time. So I proceeded to decline to allow my inner-pressure to sink; on the contrary, I began to concentrate my mind. It had the desired effect, and by the time we had walked under a motorway bridge and found ourselves a few hundred yards from the shops, I had begun to ‘see’ the world far more positively.

We wanted to buy something from the chemist; but as we were walking through an enormous Boots, Joy told me that she felt she had ‘flu coming on. At the start of a weekend that was intended to give her a break from housekeeping, this was about the most unwelcome news I could have heard. If she had told me ten minutes earlier it would have depressed me, but as it was, I concentrated my energies again , found her a seat, and went off to buy ‘flu medicine and cold cure. And because there seemed no point in returning to the hotel, since she was not feeling too low, we decided to go to the Municipal Art Gallery, where there was an exhibition of Gwen John. We did this, enjoyed the exhibition and the lunch that followed, then took a taxi back to the hotel, where Joy retired to bed, and I went off to a lecture.

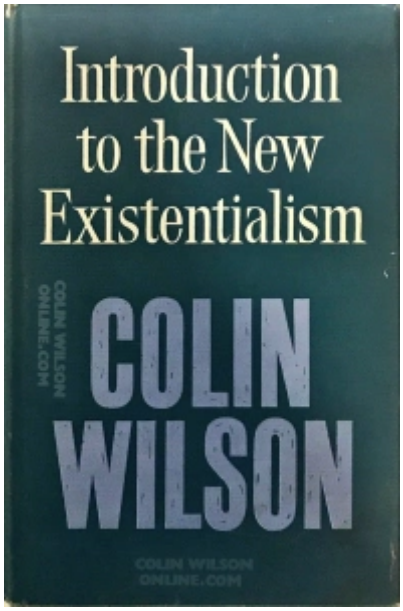
Joy’s ‘flu lasted the weekend, but prompt action had prevented it from getting worse, and by the time we travelled back to Cornwall the next day she was feeling a little better.

As to me, I noticed that from the moment I made this act of determined concentration, everything suddenly looked better, and things in general seemed to improve. If I had let myself stay in the negative mood, I am certain things would simply have got

worse. Refusing to accept the ‘natural standpoint’ made all the difference.

All this might help to explain why I feel that *Beyond the Outsider*, which is basically an attack on what has happened to philosophy since Descartes, is one of my most important books. (The other is *Beyond the Occult*.)

Introduction to the New Existentialism (1966)



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I regard this little book as a kind of appendix to the six volumes of the ‘Outsider series’. It is a conscious attempt to create what I have called ‘Romanticism Mark 3’ (bearing in mind that I regard Existentialism as Romanticism Mark 2). It was a statement of my own non-pessimistic existentialism. In *Beyond the Outsider* I had already spoken of Heidegger and Sartre, and tried to show that their gloomy view of human existence is not a genuinely logical consequence of their premises, but an expression of their personal temperaments. Sartre, for example, failed to see that if all consciousness is intentional, then Roquentin’s ‘nausea’ must

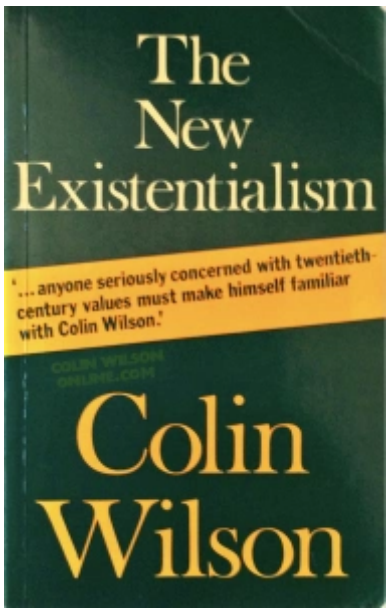
also be intentional, not a revelation of the meaninglessness of human existence. Similarly, Heidegger speaks in *Being and Time* (p. 173) [1] about the 'manifest burden of Being' and the 'burdensome character of Dasein' (human existence) as if this is something on which we are all agreed, failing to recognise that, for example, Nietzsche would simply declare that, as far as he is concerned, it is not at all 'manifest', and would go on to dismiss it as an expression of the kind of poor-spiritedness he condemns in Christianity.

I should mention that there is an important section in *The New Existentialism* on an interesting new concept in psychology called Transactionalism, for which Hadley Cantril was mainly responsible – it was Julian Huxley who told me about it. This could be regarded as a most interesting application of Husserl's insights (although, in fact the transactionalists were more influenced by Whitehead).

Transactionalism recognises that we do not simply 'see' things by opening our eyes. Perception is a transaction like buying a pound of sugar. I purchase my perceptions by 'paying' for them, and the coinage in which I pay is (a) energy, (b) preconceptions. Cantril and his colleague Adelbert Ames Jnr devised an ingenious 'trick room', rather like something one might encounter at a fairground.

I am led to a small peephole in a screen. I look through it, and see what appears to be an ordinary room. Standing in one corner is a small boy, and in the other, a tall man. There are also a couple of chairs standing somewhere near the rear wall. Now the man and the small boy advance towards one another. As they do so, they appear to change size, and when they reach opposite corners, their roles are reversed. The boy is now enormous, and the man has shrunk to half his size.

The secret is a trick of perspective. I assumed it to be a normal, square room because the wall facing me appeared to be an ordinary square. In fact, the wall was really sloping away from me, but the wall which I had assumed to be rectangular was actually trapeze-shaped, with one tall end and one short end. The short end of the trapezium was closest to my eye, so that it appeared to be exactly the same length as the long end, which was further away. The man seemed to be getting smaller because he was walking away from me; the boy seemed to be getting bigger because he was walking towards me. (The principle is the same as in photographing a man whose feet appear huge because they are close to the camera.))
Consequently I appeared to be looking at an ordinary rectangle
Sometimes, there are two windows in the wall, also trapeze-shaped, so that they also appear to be square. This can lead to startling effects; if a man's face looks at me first through one window, then, a moment later, through the other, it seems to me that his head has suddenly changed size.
The chairs in the room are also 'trick chairs', made with one leg longer than the other.



Paperback (UK) 1980

But here is the pay-off. Two of the subjects chosen to take part were a man and his wife. The man was highly distinguished and his wife's attitude towards him was one of love and respect. And when the husband looked through one window, then the other, his wife's respect for him prevented her vision from distorting him, and making his head. appear first large, then small, and she suddenly saw through the illusion, and she said 'Hey, those windows are different sizes'. This became known as the 'Honi effect' since he always called her Honi (i.e Honey).

Now if you really wish to test how far you have understood what I have been saying about phenomenology, then just imagine that some scientist has invented a device that you put on like a pair of spectacles, and which 'undistorts' the world around us, and creates the Honi effect on a massive scale; i.e. it removes all the prejudices and assumptions from your 'seeing' and allows you to see things as the 'really are'.

Here is the question. Bearing in mind how 'Honi' saw the trick behind the distorted room, whats difference do you think the inventor's 'undistorting' device would make to your perceptions? Let me add quickly that there is no single answer to that question. You could go on indefinitely imagining 'breakthroughs to reality' – like, for example, the breakthrough I have described in Cardiff when I declined to accept the evidence of my senses that I was in an utterly dreary situation.

Mostly, in fact, the difference made by the 'Undistorter' would be of this kind.

Amusingly, the great science fiction writer Stanley G. Weinbaum wrote a story about a pair of spectacles that would show things from other points of view, and I recommend it to all students of phenomenology. (It is called *The Point of View*). Similarly, C. S. Lewis wrote a delightful story about seeing things through other

people's eyes, called *The Shoddy Lands*, in which a professor has the strange experience of seeing the world through the unsophisticated eyes of one of his students' girlfriends.

And as a third example, here is a page from *Introduction to the New Existentialism* which deals with yet another literary instance of 'phenomenological distortion':

George Crabbe has a narrative poem called *The Lover's Journey* that would have delighted Husserl. It begins with the thoroughly phenomenological statement:

It is the soul that sees; the outward eyes
Present the object; but the mind descries.

The lover sets out to see his mistress, and as he rides along, everything delights him, and his reflections on the delights of nature are of the kind we find in Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* or Thompson's *Seasons*. He passes some gypsies, and reflects charitably that even if they are thieves and idlers, they are nevertheless 'merry rogues.' But when he arrives at her house, he finds a note saying that she has had to go to visit a friend, and asking him to follow. He sets out in a thoroughly black temper; now everything displeases him:

I hate these long green lanes; there's nothing seen
In this vile country but eternal green.'

The sight of a newly wedded couple emerging from church arouses cynical reflections. But now he arrives and meets his mistress, and instantly forgets his anger. They go off together, completely oblivious of everything but one another. The passing scenes arouse neither delight nor irritation; they are unnoticed.

These examples offer us a glimpse of how phenomenology could be used to transform our lives.

[1] This passage from Chapter V of *Being and Time* is indeed relevant to Wilson's arguments. Heidegger speaks of slipping into bad moods – "supposedly the most indifferent and fleeting in Dasein" (c.f. Wilson's concept of the 'indifference threshold' in the *Outsider Cycle*) and "the pallid, evenly balanced lack of mood [*Ungestimmtheit*], which is often persistent and which is not to be mistaken for a bad mood, is far from nothing at all. Rather it is this that Dasein becomes satiated with itself. Being has become manifest as a burden. Why that should be, one does not *know*". (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Blackwell, 1967, p. 173). Wilson's own thorough analysis of such moods demonstrate that they are very far from being "manifest". In *Introduction to the New Existentialism* (p.100) he notes that phenomenological analysis of such moods is useful as a 'practical discipline' because "once we have achieved the basic recognition that we are always perceiving the world through the coloured spectacles of some mood or other" we begin to realise that "the world is quite 'other' than we see it; it is 'out there', independent, indifferent to our moods".