

PART 4

THE GOOD, THE TRUE AND THE SUBLIME

Introduction to part 4

As I write this - in March, 2020 - we are in the midst of a global viral panic, our response to COVID 19. A virus will cause deaths and bring grief to many thousands but, at the same time, do we not frighten ourselves the more by demonising it? Microbial science tells us that a virus is an evolutionary agent. It encourages “horizontal gene transfer” and promotes genetic diversity. Viruses are organisms “at the edge of life”.

The medieval Black Death pestilence, by contrast, killed half of Europe’s population. And this may remain in our social or folk memory unconscious. But there are enough reasons to be fearful today. The real reason to panic is, as the Swedish schoolgirl, Greta Thunberg, insists on reminding the whole world, climate change and what our climate scientists are forecasting. Perhaps we prefer any distraction from this apocalyptic terror since we are in denial of death itself, the great taboo of our time. As Montaigne wrote: “to philosophise is to learn how to die”. Modern culture doesn’t teach us this.

But our fear may also arise out of the disintegrated nature of our culture. We live in two ideological cultures - science and the humanities - one of which is dominant in respect of practical knowledge, power and influence but not in terms of wisdom and human understanding. It is difficult to move beyond the apparent opposites of this cultural polarity, the two perspectives we have been stuck in. One way out is to think in terms of values and their integration. Instead of the “two” cultures we could focus on the “three” value spheres of ethics, science and aesthetics/art - how, in truth, they might form an integral unity.

At the same time we could focus on the essential questions, such as the one the physicist, Erwin Shroedinger asked in the title of his book, *What is Life?* Today the focus is also on the complementary question: What is Mind? Something the humanities and the arts are more qualified to contemplate. The great imponderables are how life evolved from matter and how mind from life, but today, what might also be emerging from all three.

I have divided Part 4 into four chapters, starting with an Ethics, founded on the principle of the uni-verse as an integral unity. This used to be called “God”, but today we think of it as an ecological Good. The anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, wrote of “the pattern that connects all things”, whether in all the species of nature, including ourselves, “Gaia” as Mother Earth, or the sense of a Spirit which runs universally through all things.

Chapters 14 and 15 focus on the changing perspective of science as a form of consciousness, not just an objective, empirical, factual knowledge. Humankind is in a new dialogue with nature which inspires us to dream of new ideas, before we submit them to examination. Truth - the quest of science - is then understood as something which evolves, as we ourselves do, with it.

The last chapter of Part 4 considers the third value sphere of the Beautiful, or Sublime. It is not just the natural world, or universe itself, which is sublime but *homo sapiens* too. For all our limitations and shortcomings we - humankind - are a sublime form, capable of a creativity and empathy beyond our knowledge. We may have invented and developed the means to destroy all life on the planet, but, in becoming aware of this, we can also realise the revelation within apocalypse.

