

Political Problem

Part 1 of 2

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I have been thinking of late concerning the political problem—in the fundamental sense, not in the partisan sense—as this is a concern to all of us; for whether or not we have the freedom to think and speak as we freely wish to do and whether, also, we have the freedom to orient to a religious point of view that seems true to us can be adversely affected by the actions of political government. Therefore, we cannot be indifferent concerning the form and practices of the political entity under which we live. It has seemed to me that we would do well to refer to the basis of our political institutions and to see how well they are founded and how well they have been conceived.

If we turn to the Declaration of Independence, we find one critical sentence which is of paramount importance. It is this sentence, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” But philosophy and moral considerations alone were not sufficient to achieve independence. This was achieved by the conducting of a successful war culminating in the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, and then, and then alone, with a subsequent treaty of peace, was a new nation born. This illustrates the sad fact that in that day, and even yet in our day, the determinant factor was not consideration of philosophy and morality but of force. And this is a fact that is of prime importance. This world has not yet reached the point where considerations of reason, justice, and righteousness are determinant upon the outer field. There is reason to believe that a time will come when such factors will be ultimately determinant, but still the law of force is the dominant one; and sufficient force in the cause of unrighteousness, unrighteousness could win upon this plane for at least a period of time. Nonetheless, we envisage a day when there may emerge a state in which righteousness, reason, and goodness will be determinant and force will become subordinate. I’ll not go into this subject at length at the present time as I have considered it elsewhere in a discussion of the position of Heraclitus,¹ but I introduce this as a passing note upon the facts of the situation; but, now, I wish to examine the implications and the faults, if any, implied in the sentence which I quoted. There are certain things for us to note in this sentence. First of all, it is essentially a metaphysical statement. It is not a determination of empiric science, and there are many features in it that may lead one to question its validity. I have known an individual who recognized this fact and took the position that while this sentence, the statement in the sentence, was questionable from a metaphysical point of view; it nonetheless expressed an ideal toward which one could work.

¹ See the audio recordings “Yoga of Love” and “Case Against Adversaryism.”

Let us now examine what is the ground or soundness of this statement. There are certain things that will come to our attention preeminently: first, the statement, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident . . .”—do we have self-evidence? That assumes a way of knowledge which may not in fact actually exist. These truths, if they are such, may indeed be invalidated empirically or by reason if one penetrates into the subject with sufficient thoroughness, but there is clear reason for questioning the validity of the conception of their being self-evident. First of all, if they were self-evident they would be universally recognized, and they were not so universally recognized when this country proceeded to achieve its independence. World history has shown that these ideas were not universally accepted. If they were self-evident, universal acceptance would seem necessarily to follow. The idea of self-evidence is one that was fundamental in Greek mathematics. It is primarily a mathematical notion. But in the later history of mathematics, certain of the supposed self-evident truths of Euclid were found to be less than necessary. I won’t go into the history of this, but simply remind you of the fact that it was found that a different assumption could be made in the case of the parallel line assumption and a consistent geometry could be built. Two such extraordinary geometries were built and one of them fit the facts upon which the theory of relativity was developed better than the Euclidean geometry did. All of which implies that we are not as sure of self-evidence as we once thought we were. In mathematical practice, self-evidence has been abandoned and in its place we have introduced the notion of fundamental assumptions. We do not assert that these fundamental assumptions are inevitably true, but what we seek to do is to see what follows given the fundamental assumptions; and that is the method upon which our mathematical structures now are built. But if the mathematical field is essentially a vastly simpler field than those fields that come under the general heads of politics, economics, and sociology, so that if self-evidence is inadequate in the simpler more clearly understood field, all the more does it appear that we cannot apply the notion of self-evidence to such a complex subject matter as that of political rights and organization.

Let us recall to our consciousness the critical sentence by quoting it again, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Certain features are immediately drawn to our attention and these are indicated by certain critical words: first of all, the word ‘created’ and ‘Creator’, the word ‘equal’, and then the three Rights called “Life, Liberty, and [the] pursuit of Happiness.”

First, with respect to the word ‘created’ and the word ‘Creator’: this implies the acceptance of a point of view that has been current in Christendom for some time. While Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, was in many respects a freed thinker, he here reverts to an orientation which, while it existed in the limited zone of Christendom, nonetheless, is not the only point of view possible, nor the only point of view maintained. Buddhism, for instance, would not view man as a *creation* by an extracosmic God. Creation is something like an invention or a fabrication, and there are very different points of view concerning the origin of man which contrast with this; and such points of view may be illustrated in this way. We may conceive of an ultimate which may be viewed as either personal or impersonal, or as both personal and impersonal as is done by Sri Aurobindo. Now, man can be viewed in the following

way—and this is a position that has been maintained seriously and is indeed highly philosophical; and it is claimed that it has been discovered through a method of research involving the use of functions of consciousness that are not generally available to all men, including our scientists—but the view that I present is this: that the ultimate, however viewed, produces a universe by a process of self-emanation involving an evolutionary development implying an involution before there is an evolutionary unfoldment; that the root source of all projects, as it were, itself in innumerable reproductions which are potentially infinite, at least, and these reproductions may be viewed as microcosmic copies of the original macrocosmic whole; that these may be called Monads, which, by reason of natural law, pass through all kingdoms of nature—the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, the human, and even kingdoms beyond the human—in a process of evolutionary unfoldment; that every microcosm has potential within it every feature that exists in the macrocosm; and, further, it is said to pass through these processes first by natural or autonomous impulse, and then later at the stage of the human evolution is further developed by self-induced efforts and the employment of self-devised means. Now, here we have a picture that is highly philosophical, capable of rich rational development that completely abandons the conception of man existing as a creation, but rather as a development.

Now we come to the next consideration, namely, the principle of being created “equal,” in the case of man. Here again, in the conception or notion of *equal* and or *equality*, we have a conception that is primarily employed in mathematics. Equality is the expression in the form involving an equal sign such as $a = b = c$, and so on, and it has two possible applications: in one of which only one feature of the entities on the opposite sides of the equal sign are considered equal in only one respect; and we also have the form in which they are equal in all respects. Thus, we could take cases like this where we have $2 + 3 = 4 + 1 = 5$. Manifestly, the different members of this equation are not equal in all respects, for $2 + 3$ is in certain respects different from $4 + 1$, and both are different from the single number 5. But they are equal in the sense that they have the same cardinality. This is the sense in which the notion of equality is employed most commonly in all algebraic usage. But we have the use of equality in the geometrical sense where we would say the triangle *abc* equals the triangle *def*. In that case, the triangle *def* can be superimposed upon the triangle *abc* and will be exactly the same in every respect—all angles are the same and the lengths of the lines are the same. Now, it is easy to show that the human being, both in his initial appearance and in his developed form is not at all equal in this sense. To be equal, all human beings would have to be of the same sex, they would have to be of precisely the same height, of precisely the same weight, and precisely the same shape, and have precisely the same features so that one could not be distinguished from another. Clearly, all men, all human beings are not created equal in this sense. But here we’re dealing though with only physical entity. Man is not simply a physical entity, he is also a psychical being, and for him to be equal psychically he would have to think precisely the same thoughts, to have precisely the same feelings, or the same qualities, and to have precisely the same kind of moral development, and so on. Manifestly, human beings are not, either initially or in developed form, equal in this sense. But can we pick out any respect in which they are equal in spite of the differences?

Our biologists tell us that all human beings belong not alone to the same family, the same phylum, and the same genus, but even that all are contained within the limits of

one biological species. However, there are variations within the species, such as the classification of varieties or the classification of races, and that there are differences on this level. But in the broad sense, the human being has a distinguishable anatomy and a characteristic physiology which differentiates him from other animals or other biological entities. However, the anatomy and the physiology does have a degree of variation within it so that there is not an exact equality or duplication among the various human beings on this wholly physiological and anatomical side. And again, considering man as a psychical entity, here we have a degree of variation far more massive than in the case of the physiology and anatomy. Consider, for instance, the man who is the creature that has just become an ex-animal in contrast to the human entity which has become a full Buddha. The just ex-animal human differs from the pure animal only in certain respects; in other ways, he is an entity with an animal nature. All of the processes that are studied by the biologists are characteristic of an animal being. In fact, man has been defined as “a plantigrade, featherless, biped mammal of the genus *Homo*.”² If this were all that he was, man would be just another animal. But something has come into the picture that leads to a deviation from pure animality even though animality at this stage may dominate. This we will find by a consideration of the psychical aspect of the being.

The human introduces a capacity lacking in the animal, and that capacity renders the development of language—the communication by symbols and signs that are not simply the sensuous signs of animal communication; a principle of abstraction has become possible with him. But in the earliest stages of this, as we observe it in the most primitive humans that we know such as the natives of Australia and the Bushmen of Africa, is very slightly developed. The animal being is, in the psychological sense, a sensuous being, not an entity that can operate on the conceptual level. And the distinction between the sensuous and the conceptual can be made in this way: the purely sensuous operates through perceptions which are in their most primitive form absolute, concrete particulars. A tree, for instance, is not, for this level of consciousness, a manifestation of *treeness*; it is simply a unique, concrete particular. At a little more evolved state, we have a development from this pure perceptive level, the emergence of that which is called variously the *recept* or the *generic image*, in which case we would have the capacity to recognize that another instance of a tree as falling under the general image of the tree as such. But we do not have the capacity to isolate *treeness*, which potentially has the capacity to comprehend a potential infinity of instances of particular trees. There is some reason to believe that the animals that have reached the highest level of evolutionary development, which is still less than that of being human, do have some sense of the recept or generic image, but not of the concept.

Now, certain studies of the more primitive humans indicate that the capacity for abstraction is very limited indeed. I’ve been interested in certain facts that have been brought out concerning the Eskimo that I find rather illuminating.³ In the Eskimo language, there is a tendency for a high order of differentiation, the notion of *treeness* is

² William Dwight Whitney, ed., *The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York: Century Co., 1911), 3601. The definition reads “. . . a featherless plantigrade biped mammal of the genus *Homo*.”

³ Sally Carrighar, *Moonlight at Midday* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959). See also the audio recordings, “Positive Law, Manners or Morals, and Freedom” and “Tantra & Zen,” part 4.

weak; the high, clear differentiation of particular qualities in a particular tree is reflected in their language. They do not tend to cover a vast range with one single word, but have several words to represent different stages of particularization in the various entities that may come under consideration—like trees, walruses, whales, and so forth—and for this there are a number of words used where we characteristically would use but one. This illustrates a strong orientation to the particular, the unique, and a weak orientation to the universal.

Now, as we go through the story of the development of man, we find him developing the capacity to think in terms of universals more and more by a process of progressively greater and greater abstraction until abstraction becomes so subtle that the abstractions conceived by the most keenly developed humans in this direction may be quite incomprehensible to the mass of human beings. Now, as we will note in the process of progressive abstraction a growth of comprehension, of extension, in the logical sense, in the use of terms; whereas in the most primitive form of conceptuality the extension is very limited, perhaps to a single entity alone.

Now, I submit that it is this power that differentiates the human *per se* from the animal *per se*; yet, nonetheless, the human being continues to carry with him the animal nature in many respects. Man, thus, would be an animal plus something more, and only gradually in the evolutionary process does this something more develop the capacity to dominance over the animal side. Man becomes progressively, not immediately at once, more and more human. Now, in the case of a full Buddha, we would have the development of the human dominance over the animal nature, which we may identify with the sensuous side of the being, until it becomes nearly, if not completely, a conscious, voluntary self-control, where the autonomous factors have become subordinate and perhaps completely eliminated so that every feature in the life is capable of conscious management—something which is not at all possible in the case of the animal, and only slightly possible in the case of the primitive, and only modestly possible in the case of the mass of human beings. But among the human beings, there would be those who are more advanced in the progress toward Buddhahood than others, though at present these are very few in number, and the latter would have capacities not existing, except only potentially, in all the rest. Now, in this sense, in the psychical development of the entity, we have a hierarchy of stages, and we cannot assert equality in them. There are vast differences. In fact, I would suggest that in the psychical sense, the evolution from the most primitive human, one who has just become an ex-animal, the distance to the most complete, full Buddha would represent a development far vaster than that of the development from the most primitive vegetable up to the most highly developed animal who is not yet human. We could not assert, validly, equality of capacity of all these stages in the progress.

I have referred to the biologist's definition of man, namely, "a plantigrade, featherless, biped mammal of the genus *Homo*." This definition could very well include the anthropoid ape and the bear when he walks upon his hind legs alone, for in that case he would be walking on flat feet—which is the meaning of plantigrade—he would have no feathers, and he would be a biped. Should we then extend the definition of man and the notion of equality to the anthropoid ape and the bear when he walks on his hind legs? Or should we make some other differentiation? Biologically, the classification is not

sharp. We could say that man does not begin to be human until he has advanced considerably beyond the most primitive human beings. There is obscurity here. The definition is inadequate, and I submit this as the more critically important definition: that the human being begins when conceptuality is introduced into the picture, namely, that when in addition to the sensuous equipment which animals hold in common with man, particularly in the case of the higher animals and the human being, there is introduced a way of cognition that is totally different from sensuality and is characterized by the capacity to think in terms of universals and not simply to cognize in terms of particulars. But in any case, we have a certain degree of indeterminateness as to when the human emerges. It is not something sharp and clear.

There is one feature in the statement of Jefferson which we have so far neglected. He did not say all men are equal as they actually exist empirically upon this world. He said they were born equal. He did not say that they did not become unequal in the development of their various potentialities. Just how he arrived at the conclusion that they were born equal is not clearly delineated, but there is a possible explanation of his statement by a consideration of the philosophic influences which he acknowledged as having an important effect upon not only his thinking but upon the thought of all the Founders who produced the development of this nation. He has acknowledged in his letters the influence of the political philosophy of John Locke, and Northrop, in the chapter on the United States in his volume *The Meeting of East and West* has developed this influence at considerable length.⁴ John Locke produced a political philosophy which stands in contrast to the most influential opposed political philosophy which was produced by Aristotle. Aristotle said that political government was a positive good; John Locke said, for reasons that were given, that political government is a necessary evil. And we can see the effect of this position in the organization of our government particularly in the principle of checks and balances expressing a fear on the part of the Founders that government would become a power that would oppress man if it were not curbed. But in John Locke's philosophy there was more than a political philosophy, he was also an epistemologist. In fact, he is perhaps the individual more than any other who introduced the importance of the epistemological problem. He was an empiricist and he maintained that man was born with a mind that was a *tabula rasa*, or blank tablet, and that experience wrote upon this tablet, as it were, and thus produced a development of knowledge which could be various and lead to inequalities in the degree of development; but the beginning was viewed as a state of a blank tablet, or a sort of zero state. So that when Jefferson spoke of all men being born equal, they were born equal as zeros, you might say.

Now, this epistemological conception led to a consequence that was ultimately developed by David Hume. That if this is so, then man could achieve only a record of sensed events just as pure facts without any knowledge of law interconnecting the facts, and that therefore it would be utterly impossible to have the development of anything more than a descriptive science, not of a theoretical science which involves the introduction of the notion of law interconnecting events or states of knowledge. Not only that, it would be impossible for a pure mathematics to develop and that there could not be

⁴ F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: Collier Books, 1966), 66-164.

any metaphysical knowledge. It resulted in a condition of complete skepticism or even nescience with respect to real knowledge.

This ultimately led to the contribution of Immanuel Kant, as I have pointed out repeatedly heretofore, and Immanuel Kant reestablished the possibility of a theoretical knowledge—the knowledge of the syntactical element which unites events or facts under the principle of law, rendering thereby possible scientific knowledge, pure mathematics, but not, so far as Kant was concerned, pure metaphysics. And the position of John Locke has been completely discredited, for it is manifestly true that by, and only by, a theoretical science is an applied science possible, and we have indubitable evidence that applied science exists. So the notion of man being born with a *tabula rasa*, a characterless blank slate, has had to be abandoned. In turn, Kant pointed out that though there may be no knowledge before experience, yet it does not therefore follow that all knowledge comes from experience.⁵ In other words, that on the occasion of experience an innate knowledge is brought forth.

Now the question arises: is this innate knowledge the same for all men? Or is this innate consciousness potential the same for all men? There is abundant evidence that it is not so.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Max Muller (New York: Macmillan, 1881), 1. The text actually reads, “But although all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises from experience.”