# A HOLY TRADITION OF WORKING

## PASSAGES FROM THE WRITINGS OF ERIC GILL

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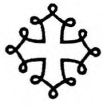

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# Preface to the *Angelico Press* edition (2021)

BY WENDELL BERRY

We live in an age of scientific and technological genius, as we have confirmed by a literature of self-congratulation. For the sake of this—as a payment in advance—we had to overrule any concern for long-term consequences, mainly because of our inability to foresee at any distance the consequences of the innovations made by this kind of genius.

We have not yet measured the full extent of the results of the decision, hardly by plebiscite, to burn the fossil fuels, which was the first step in our present direction. The step beyond that was also taken, on behalf of all of us, by a gifted few. The genius of the makers of the first atomic bomb was undoubted by themselves, and it was proven by their success: It worked! But it was soon evident from their very success that they had worked with a radically foreshortened sense of time and history, and, except in terms of the crudest, most immediate utilitarianism, they did not know what they were doing. After seventy-five years, we can only fear any further revelation of what they were doing. We know moreover that we now are living generations earlier in the just begun histories of the computer revolution and genetic engineering. The genius that has produced these inscrutable beginnings is itself a product of industrialism, its fragmentation and specialization of work. Under the rule of specialization, people trained to do one thing or one kind of thing produce a technological solution to one problem: to win one war, to speed one kind of thought, to protect one crop from one kind of pest. The aim is to produce a partial result, which forbids any thought or any fear of what might be the whole result.

The nearest to a whole result so far of this kind of work is a calamity exactly the size of the world, the

evidence of which is the world's rapid, increasing, and measurable destruction. It is this immense failure of industrially-directed, profit-oriented science and technology that defines our need, and the urgency of our need, for sciences that are limitable or reasonably predictable in their effects, from which we need not fear a chain reaction of ramifying and accumulating harms: the sciences, let us say, of ecology and of non-industrial agriculture and medicine, the aim of which is not victory or profit but health, various kinds of wholeness. Such sciences as these, because they submit to a universal standard that is not merely technical, immediately verge upon art, for they imply and require right ways of working, or work done with love in the service of goodness, truth, and beauty.

The manifest failure of the misdirected genius of industrialism, together with the consequently enlarged need for good work, defines newly and urgently the pertinence of the teachings of Eric Gill. Gill (1882–1940) was a Christian, a remarkably versatile artist, and a philosopher remarkable for his willingness to carry principles to the test of practicality. As a thinker, we might say, his genius was for applied culture. Or it may have consisted simply of his ability to see what was perfectly obvious: that the ways and values of the industrial world contradict at every point the traditionally prescribed ways of giving honor to God and Nature and Humankind.

The requirements of industry, Gill said, reduce workers to performers of mechanical functions in the making of parts of products. They do not choose their work, or work according to qualitative standards of their own. They have no need even to know what they are making, and often they do not know. They cannot show by their work their love of God or the world, or of the thing they are making or the user of the made thing. The working life of industrial workers is thus rewarded, not by their work, but merely by a paycheck and time off.

In his life and work Gill kept clear the connection, on the one hand, between art (in the broadest sense: a way of making anything) and economy, and on the other hand between art and religious faith. From so clarifying a standpoint, he saw plainly that, for the sake of the narrowest kind of efficiency resulting in profit, industrialism destroyed the integrity of both work and workers. The working life of the industrial worker was entirely predetermined, choiceless, a kind of slavery. And so Gill's thinking rests upon a principle that is fundamental and absolutely necessary:

> The test of a man's freedom is his responsibility as a workman. Freedom is not incompatible with discipline, it is only incompatible with irresponsibility. He who is free is responsible for his work. He who is not responsible for his work is not free.

# I
# First Things

1 It is no use, and no good, complaining about the world we live in and vaguely wanting something better, unless we are prepared to review the grounds of our life and its real meaning. CMA62

2 It is absolutely necessary to have principles, that is things that come first, the foundations of the house.

What we want to know is: what principles of common sense are relevant to the matter of human work. [. . .]

What principles are in harmony with divine revelation and in harmony with the conscience of man and the light of human reason? MM115

3 We have now to mount to higher planes and yet [. . .] we have to keep a firm and strong attachment to earth. While we attempt to grasp and to explain certain spiritual realities, we must not deny our bodily environment. WL108–9

4 We base ourselves upon the following affirmations: There is God. There is that which is not God – the spiritual and material creation, made by God out of nothing (nothing, strictly so called). This creation is a gratuity, and it is an expression of God's love for himself. AN291–2

5 In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth, and in the fullness of time – Man. God is a trinity of Persons: Father, Son and Spirit (these names indicate as nearly as words may, in the paucity of finite speech, the eternal relationship of the divine Persons; that the concatenation is hackneyed is no proof that it is without significance), and corresponding with the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are the

metaphysical categories, Truth, Goodness and Beauty, and all things are definable in terms of the Threefold Divinity who created them. Man therefore is to be defined in terms of the 'what', 'why' or 'how' of his existence.

The nature of man is likeness to God – for God created him in his image. He is a rational soul. The purpose of his existence is to know God, to serve God and to love God on earth and to be with him eternally in heaven. The manner of man's existence is incarnation. He is spirit and matter.

Man is, therefore, a creature capable of the knowledge, service and love of God. If he can know God he must have intelligence. If he can serve God he must have will. If he can love God he must have freedom. Nothing can love which is not free. The drawing together of things which are not free is properly called affection. Man is capable of love because he has free will. Freedom is not incompatible with discipline, it is only incompatible with irresponsibility.

The object of the intelligence is the true. The object of the will is the good. Therefore each of the two faculties, intellect and will, has its corresponding object. And freedom also has its proper object namely – love.

But though in thought these things are separable, in reality they are not so. Thus we cannot say of a thing: This is true but it is neither good nor lovely; we cannot say: This is good but it is neither true nor lovely; nor can we say: This is lovely but it is neither true nor good. In reality everything has a threefold significance, for everything combines in itself Truth, Goodness and Beauty, and everything may be defined by its intellectual content, by its moral content, or by its aesthetic content. The discovery of Truth is in answer to the question What (is it)? of Good to the question Why? and of Beauty to the question How? i.e. in what manner?

For as there are three persons in one God, so there are necessarily three qualities in every one thing: truth, goodness, beauty, and as the Holy Ghost proceeds from the

Father and the Son so beauty proceeds from truth and goodness. Beauty cannot exist by itself but proceeds from truth and goodness, as physical shape proceeds from Being and Purpose; and Love from Knowledge and Service. Beauty is not a quality in things independent of truth and goodness but is the exhibition of truth and goodness. It is perceived intuitively and the knowledge of it is developed by contemplation. AN65–7

6 It is unquestionable that when God looked upon His works He saw that they were good; and the word 'good' implies appreciation of forms as well as ends. [. . .] my view is that in God's all-seeing mind He knew that Final and Formal like Righteousness and Peace would kiss one another (Psalm 84) [. . .] What I do jib at is the suggestion of a dichotomy; a though God could give roses five petals, or butterflies suc and such pattern on their wings for any sort of separa reason, or vice versa that He could attend to the structure c things irrespective of *formal* results. LT472

7 The unity of the human race must be taken for granted. Differences between one person and another or between one race and another and between the people of one time and another are simply differences of emphasis. This being so, it is to be expected that all human beings and all races will look to the same end, and all differences of achievement are to be attributed not so much to differences of aim as to differences of temper and circumstance. These facts are the more important when the subject of discussion is, as in the case of the arts, a thing of which the achievement has been so various. [. . .]

Now the end of the human race, the end to which all activity is directed is the discovery and grasping of the real. However variously this aim may be described or pursued; however erroneous may be the conclusions of reason; however distasteful may be the material achieve-

ments of one people to a people of another time or place; nevertheless Reality, what is real and not illusory, is what is sought by each and by all. BLH208–9

8 God exists; He is a Person – the Personal Author and Ruler of all things. And *we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.* And we are made in His image – that is to say, we share in God's spiritual nature. We are rational beings and can deliberate and weigh the pros and cons of action; and having thus weighed, we can act freely. Whether or no we can do good of ourselves, we can certainly refrain from evil, even if we are to some extent – perhaps to a large extent – the victims of our physical and psychological *make-up.* We are, therefore, rightly held to be *responsible persons* and not automata obeying willy-nilly the forces to which we find ourselves subjected. And if we are thus children of God – for we are, in this religious view of man, more than just animals without responsibility (after all, you can punish a dog – but you cannot really *blame* him) – if we are children of God, then we are heirs also. We are called to some sort of sharing with God in His own life. We have what we call a *vocation.* We have, in fact, a destiny independent of our physical life on this earth. A destiny for which this physical life is a training ground and place of preparation [. . .] a place where we are *educated.* LE41–2

9 Some philosophy, some religion, is behind all human works and is their primary instigation. Without some philosophy, some religion, nothing is done, nothing made, because nobody knows what to do or what to make, nobody knows what is good or what is bad. It has been said that the Church exists in order that words may have a meaning; it is also true that without philosophy and religion there is no meaning in human action. AR20

10 In the end we find that there is only one being, and that we live only in him and by him.

Even so, truth is that which is knowable, and we know ourselves to be beings made for truth.

And the good is that which is desirable. Man is a being which desires.

In seeking to know things, we reach out to them in order to become one with them.

Prompted, provoked, moved, and stirred by desire, we reach out to things in order to possess them.

Thus we desire what we know; and only what we know can we desire.

The activity of desire we call will, and thus knowing and willing are two movements of the soul, of man himself.

And the will is free.

Knowledge is not free – we can only know what is, and there is no such thing as free thought – but willing implies choice, and in choosing we know ourselves to be free.

We know ourselves to be responsible creatures. We know ourselves to merit praise or blame. And we know these things in the unquenchable light of nature. CMA23

11 To the workman, the artist, the subject has always been all in all. Unless he know what he is making he cannot make anything. Whether it be a church or only a tooth-pick he must know what it is; he must have it in his mind before he can begin, before he can even choose his material or lay his hand on a tool. And what a thing is, what things are, and, inevitably, whether they are good or bad, worth making or not, these questions bring him without fail to the necessity of making philosophical and religious decisions. We may accept the conclusions of others, it may, indeed, be better that we should do so – provided 'we know in whom we believe' – but conclusions must be accepted or the workman can make no beginning. So far from it being true that religion and philosophy have no concern for the artist or he

for them, it is only when a religion and philosophy have become the unifying principle of a nation that any great works, whether steel bridges or stone shrines, are possible, and the decay of human art follows immediately upon the weakening of men's grasp upon the motives of action. BLH226–7

12 It is not that I am saying that the works of men [. . .] are good because there is this or that philosophy and religion behind them. I am saying more than that. I am saying that it is because there is this or that philosophy and religion behind them that they are there at all – that it is to this or that philosophy and religion that such works owe their very existence, their very being. AR16

13 It has been said*, and it is Catholic doctrine, that man is a bridge connecting the material and the spiritual. Both are real, both are good. God is spirit; man is matter and spirit. Man is therefore able to see, to present in material terms things spiritual and, conversely, though he cannot represent it, he is able to comprehend, though not fully, the spiritual significance of the material. He can show the spiritual in terms of matter, but he cannot show the material in terms of spirit.

The art of man, though ultimately unimportant, for, like all material things, works of art will return to dust, has therefore two claims to attention. In the first place, it is the only activity of which man is capable which is in itself worth pursuing and, in the second, it is man's sole abiding solace in this vale of tears. AN232

14 Action is for the sake of contemplation, the active for the sake of the contemplative. To labour is to pray.

*Cf. Nietzsche: 'What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal, a bridge leading from animal to beyond man.' But Nietzsche meant a sort of moving platform and taught no proper doctrine of the nature of man.

Work is the discipline (the yoga) by means of which 'body holds its noise and leaves Soul free a little.'

Recreation is for the sake of work. Leisure time is for the sake of recreation – in order that the labourer may the better return to work. Games are like sleep – necessary for the health of body and mind – a means to health, the health of the workman, the labourer, the man who prays, the contemplative. Leisure is secular, work is sacred. Holidays are the *active* life, the working life is the *contemplative* life.

The object of leisure is work. The object of work is holiness. Holiness means wholeness – it does not mean emaciate or emasculate. The holy man is the complete man – merry because 'he nothing lacks' – sad because of the sufferings, failures and penury of others. The holy man is the poor man; having nothing he possesses all things; the Kingdom of Heaven is within him. ISL92

# II
# *What is Man?*

1 It is necessary to agree as to the nature of man for obvious reasons. It is not possible, for any length of time, to keep canaries in hen-coops or lions in monkey-houses. Unless man's affairs are organized upon lines suitable to his nature he must sooner or later react against the false system.

But, outside the Church, those who have not achieved any agreement among themselves as to the nature of man are fond of supposing, and proclaiming, that such agreement is impossible. They assume that man's nature is constantly changing and that therefore a system suitable in one age is unsuitable in another, that the changes in forms of government and in conditions of work and employment are as much measures of the changes in man's nature (the thing they call 'progress') as they are indications of his unrest and dissatisfaction under unsuitable conditions. In answering such persons, we have not only got to satisfy them as to the truth of our fundamental doctrine that man's nature is now what it always has been – that man is man and not brute, nor ever was – we have also got to answer the question: why is it that, if man's nature is permanent and definable, he does not appear ever to have achieved a society as permanent as his nature? Why did not men, in the beginning, agree to live according to their nature and refuse to allow any change in their conditions? AN6–7

2 What is human, what is man? Man is matter and spirit – both real and both good. And what is this creature thus compounded? He is a person. That is the point, the first thing to be said, the first thing we know. And we know it first from our own experience of ourselves and of our

fellow-men and women and not because we have been taught it by scientific lecturers or read about it in books. A person, a being who knows and wills and loves, who is responsible for his acts and for the intended consequences of his acts; a being who, because he is responsible, is able to be damned, who merits praise or blame; a rational creature knowing, by the light of his nature, true and false, good and evil, right and wrong – not wholly or infallibly but sufficiently – and, above all, a creature who loves – not merely with the seeming obsequiousness of tame beasts which scarcely know or will, but with the willing devotion and self-sacrifice of beings who know in whom they believe. That is briefly what we mean by the word person. It is no philosophical invention, no abstraction, nothing which either microscope or telescope could reveal; it is that which we know ourselves to be. ISL152–3

3 Man is matter and spirit and it is the spiritual which determines man in his species. WL113

4 There is no before or after in spiritual matters. There is only being and non-being. If a spirit is, it is and there is no temporal or spatial beginning or end of it. You cannot say that the mind began with the body and ends with it. You can only say that the mind began to inform or determine or (figuratively) inhabit the body when the body began to be 'habitable' or patient of determination or of being informed. The body has a temporal and spatial beginning and end, but not the mind. And that is why it may be said: I *have* a body, but not: I *am* a body. My body dies, but I am not my body; I have a brain, but what it does is not me though it is of me.

[. . .]

While the body lives it conditions mentality. The mind is not a product of the body, nor is it subject to it; it lives in it and is liable to be enthralled. The saying of Christ: 'Before

Abraham was, I am', is, as nearly as human words will allow, a statement of the non-temporal, non-spatial nature of personality; and another example is the reply received by Moses when he asked the name of God: 'I am who am'. NB281–2

5 The ordinary man, 'the moral man' of the philosopher doesn't bother himself [. . .] with the abstruse difficulties of philosophical demonstration or proof; but he does not therefore throw away or reject or deny; on the contrary he affirms the common certainties of his experience. He knows himself for a person compounded of matter and spirit, and he looks to and yearns for personal immortality not as something fanciful [. . .] but as something obviously compatible with his compound nature. As the history of mankind shows, it is not belief in immortality that has been with difficulty instilled into him. The difficulty has been to get him to give it up. And the suggestion or the theory that such a belief has the nature of childish things to be put away with maturity has no foundation in fact for, as a child learns botany because it knows flowers, so men probe process because they know being. NB286–7

6 There is a thing called Man and there is a thing called Nature – nature environs man.

Is man one with his environment?

Is he *precisely* one with it?

That is the atheist affirmation.

I have assumed that we deny it.

It is in accord with all our experience to deny it.

Walk about in a place removed from civilisation – some bare moorland, or polar ice cap.

The common verdict of man is that in spite of his material harmony with his surroundings, his sharing in the life of birds and grasses, his dependence on air and warmth,

he also stands outside, above, beyond, independent and aloof.

This proves nothing – but we are not here concerned with proofs but with verdicts, with affirmation.

We affirm our nature, not by the faulty instruments of induction and ratiocination, but by the convictions of experience.

You know it is so. SS32–3

7 Man, whatever his origins, is a creature who knows and wills and loves, and if we find, up and down the world, creatures who are undoubtedly men and yet who are cruel and irresponsible and invincibly ignorant, we must assume [. . .] that such barbarity is a degradation, or falling away from nature. For to say that men are naturally barbarous is to say that human beings are naturally *inhuman*, which is absurd. SS97

8 What is man? Man is matter and spirit, or, to give the word *spirit* a more definite meaning, let us say, man is matter and mind. And by the word *mind* we must understand both intellect and will, and we must remember that those faculties are only separable in words; they are not separable in actuality. The will cannot function without the intelligence (you cannot will what you do not know), and the intelligence cannot function without the will (you cannot know even the smallest thing without a prompting of the will). WP14

9 And man is a creature who loves.

Faith is knowledge; by faith we know.

Hope and desire are fellows; we do not desire without hope or hope without desire. We do not will without hope or hope against our wills.

Faith, hope and love – these three; but the greatest of these is love.

By knowledge we possess things;
By will we reach out to them;
By love we draw them to ourselves that we may be possessed by them.

But perhaps we must distinguish here. The natural and instinctive attraction we feel towards things, whether of sight or sound, touch or taste or smell, is good; for these things are in themselves good, and to possess them, in due order, is necessary to a normal life. CMA24–5

10 It is man's special gift to know holiness. MM101

11 Holiness is moral integrity become an art, a thing admirable in itself, a thing made. Holiness like art is more than prudence, it is prudence become an end instead of remaining simply a means. Such is the holiness of the saints and there is always a certain gaiety about it, the gaiety of men set free. ACC132

12 All men have a nose for holiness. [. . .]

Holiness is the test – but you must train your noses. You must train yourselves to know the smell of Paradise. MM102–3

13 As Edward Johnston used to insist: 'Man is the consciousness of God' – that was the primary truth – i.e. that the universe arrived at consciousness by arriving at man, and the universe being a creation and therefore manifestation of God, the primary act of consciousness was consciousness of God. God was conscious in the universe by means of man, who, as it were, bounced the ball back to him. AU165

14 Therefore God is the only enjoyable being. [. . .] the author and source of all enjoyment.

And as God is the source of all enjoyment, to enjoy oneself is, actually, to share God's enjoyment. When it says: 'I have said you are Gods', and when it says: 'God created

man to his own image' (Psalm 81, 6; Genesis 1, 27), it means what it says – that we are 'sons of the most High' and 'if sons, heirs also'. Therefore when the child says: I am enjoying myself eating this lovely apple, it really means: God and I are enjoying ourselves – I am enjoying myself in Him and He through me. And when the child says this apple is lovely, it really means: I see this apple in God. WL111–3

15 The truth remains: man is matter and spirit – both real and both good, and escape is impossible. Salvation, the salvation of men, and that is to say the wholeness, and that again is to say the *holiness* of men, is not attainable by denying either side or component of his nature. The only question is: Which shall rule? And to this question there can be only one answer. Man is matter and spirit, but the primacy is of the spirit. [. . .] The primacy of the spirit is a fact of our experience. We know ourselves as persons and therefore as governed, ruled, ordered, and led (however often we have been or are misled) by our personal selves. We may and must allow its due weight to the physical and material world which conditions our lives, and all its geological, geographical, climatic, racial and economic forces and circumstances; but those things did not make us; they are simply the conditions under and in which we live. We neglect or deny them at our peril; but to deny our spiritual nature and its primacy is not merely dangerous, it is man's damnation. The integrity of the individual means exactly that – the realization of man's dual nature and the primacy of the spirit. ISL154–5

# IX

# Of Slavery and Freedom

1 That state is a state of Slavery in which a man does what he likes to do in his spare time and in his working time that which is required of him. This state can only exist when what a man likes to do is to please himself.

That state is a state of Freedom in which a man does what he likes to do in his working time and in his spare time that which is required of him. This state can only exist when what a man likes to do is to please God.

A man is a slave when between him and God who is the final cause is interposed another man as an efficient cause.

A man is free who is subject only to those causes which are called final. In as much as man is a material body he is subject to efficient cause – as a stone is moved by a kick, i.e. the kick is an efficient cause. In as much as man is a living spirit he is subject to a final cause – as when a man and woman are married at a church and not at a registrar's office, i.e. the Church is a final cause.

We are not slaves because we are subject to final causes, but only when we submit to another person as an efficient cause.

The test of a man's freedom is his responsibility as a workman. Freedom is not incompatible with discipline, it is only incompatible with irresponsibility. He who is free is responsible for his work. He who is not responsible for his work is not free.

Efficient management and 'scientific' organisation (e.g. the factory or servile system) are certainly conducive to the comfort of the worker (slave) and to his steady employment and security. There is not necessarily anything materially uncomfortable in a state of slavery and there is

not necessarily anything materially comfortable in a state of freedom.

That man is by nature free (i.e. by the will of God) is a religious affirmation (i.e. not to be proved – whether by reference to history, which, indeed, might easily be made out to show exactly the contrary, or by any other means). There is nothing to be said against slavery except that it is not the will of God. There is nothing to be said for freedom except that it is the will of God.

The service of God is perfect freedom. AN1–2

2 That a man may show the love of God in his work he must be free. A factory hand may show the love of God in his life or in his thought – he cannot show it in his work. The workman has as much right to make and to act upon an aesthetic judgement in his work as he has to act upon a moral judgement in his life, or as he has to make an intellectual judgement in his thought. He has also the right to choose the authority to which he will submit in any of the three spheres, but no man has the right to compel his submission. Only God has such a right, and God has given man free will! AN4–5*

*['The lowest order of Homeric society was the serf. Homer introduces us to one of them, the swineherd Eumaeus. His condition is not without honour: he is "famed" and his epithet is "divine". He is treated with respect by his lord, the king; he has the courage to retort to a nobleman and does so with impunity . . . We who have seen the caste system at work know that a serf receives honour, because he is a kind of priest and sometimes represents gods. We know that the record of that system is not one of unmitigated oppression, but on the contrary it can be far less oppressive than our industrial system. Its machinery works far more smoothly because it is amply supplied with the oil of etiquette. The lowest owe service which in theory they cannot refuse, but no one can compel them to render it with a will; they can only be heartened to it by giving them whatever honour is their due, . . . Their privileges have to be respected, and at the same time prevented from extending unduly. Heredity, so far from placing them at the mercy of their master, puts him in their hands; for you can dismiss a hireling but not a hereditary servant,

3 It is well nigh impossible to determine what human acts are not, in fact, determined.

The crux of the question of free will is the responsibility of men for the choice which follows deliberation. But it remains undiscoverable whether the choice really follows on the deliberation or was actually made before it and, if made beforehand, determined by habits, instincts and inheritances allowing no interference. In spite of this puzzle we know ourselves to be responsible and would rather be responsible than not. NB40

4 I am only saying that all must make a decision. And our decision involves *belief*. You must *believe* in responsibility or deny it. You may allow an unlimited – unlimited because undefined and undefinable – amount to the sphere of determined actions, while at the same time claiming that freedom and responsibility exist all the same. Or you may deny freedom and responsibility altogether. Whichever you do, you must believe; you cannot prove. NB41

5 What is wrong with men who disbelieve is not that they cannot but that they will not believe. The defect is in their wills. NB28

6 I do not so much *think* I have free will as *believe* it, and I act according to that belief whatever my limited powers of thinking may prove one way or the other. The word 'belief' is therefore a very much stronger word than 'think'. When we use the word 'think' we imply a possibility of error. But when we use the word 'believe' in its proper manner we admit no such possibility. To think is to use our powers of

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so if you want to reap peace and good service you must sow tact and good manners. Hereditary service is quite inconsistent with the ruthless industrialism of our times, and that is no doubt why it is painted in such black colours.' A. M. Hocart, *Caste*, (London, 1950) pp. 139–140.]

reasoning upon facts as known to us by observation or experiment or by hearsay, that is to say, information received. Thinking is obviously therefore liable to many kinds of error. [. . .] To say 'I believe' is, however foolishly or foolhardily, to rise to the affirmation of certainty. NB14

7 Man is a complete person. He has free will. [. . .] And because the will is free it may be perfect.

It is possible to be perfectly willing (that is why they say that 'the service of God is perfect freedom').

We cannot be forced to will what we do not will or to desire what we do not desire.

But it is not possible to be perfectly knowing. I might be perfectly willing to write this essay. I cannot say I know perfectly what I ought to say.

Hence emerges the [. . .] principle:

that will is perfectible, but not knowledge. MM119

8 But when we consider the question: Why do we do what we know to be wrong? It is not other people's wrong-doing that is in question but our own; and although the findings of science, of psychology and all the rest, apply to us as much as to other people, we know, we affirm, I know and I affirm that at the very core of our being, of my being, there is the fact of responsibility. We may not be able to say why such and such an appetite is so particularly strong, or such and such another so particularly weak, but we do know that we are creatures meriting praise or blame.

The question then: How did sin come into the world? is answered by saying: It came in with free will. If free will is a fact, then it explains the possibility of sin. NB218

9 It is significant that the rising of what we call modern science synchronized with the throwing off of spiritual authority. We have deliberately thrown off the 'easy yoke' and 'light burden' and have placed ourselves under the

hard taskmaster of immutable and impersonal 'laws of nature', and this has been done in the name of freedom. [. . .] The highest virtue we can attempt to claim is a stoical courage in the face of a meaningless concatenation of fortuitous circumstances. Such is the freedom of the sons of science.

[. . .]

Our fault has been that we sought freedom – we found an iron law of causality. We sought free-thought – we found psychological determinism. We sought free love – we found that we had lost Love itself. Dear silly sheep, we have lost the Shepherd and found only the wolves.

The only freedom we did not seek we have deliberately thrown away. We did not seek for freedom of the will. [. . .]

We have thrown away free will. We do not like to be held responsible. We like to be treated as animals, automatons. When the psychologist says, 'it is heredity, it is early environment, it is a complex', we applaud. When Augustine says 'it is sin', we deride. The word 'sin' has become almost meaningless; it has become a sentimental word like 'art'. [. . .]

As the idea of responsibility pervaded all men's works and all their deeds, so does our idea of irresponsibility. We have erected, as is natural, a system of industry exactly corresponding to our philosophy and depending upon it. *Actus sequitur esse*. We do not believe men are responsible; we have made them irresponsible. [. . .]

And in the world in which the man of money is king the workman is nothing but a tool. It is common knowledge: the workman is only a tooth on a wheel. What he makes with his hands is not his responsibility and its only concern to his master is its saleability. And as these irresponsible tools are the great majority of the population, they provide the biggest market for the sale of the things they produce. Therefore saleability is that quality in things which makes

them attractive to irresponsible tools. By the introduction of machinery the quantity of things made is increased a hundredfold and the responsibility of the workman reduced to nothing. His power to discriminate between good and bad is completely lost and in the end it has necessarily come about that the only things which it is possible to sell are those which no intelligent person finds it possible to buy. [. . .]

There is no remedy but that which man alone has power to apply. And every individual must first apply it to himself. He must reclaim the one freedom he has thrown away; and he must throw away all the other freedoms he has falsely claimed. He must reaffirm the freedom of his will and his consequent responsibility for all his deeds and works. He must reaffirm the reality of sin and himself a sinner. Then shall we be free – 'with the freedom with which he has made us free'. ISL11–7

10 The service of God is perfect freedom – perfect freedom is to be perfectly bound. God himself is perfectly free – he is perfectly bound to himself – he can be and love nothing but himself. And we are free when we are his, of him and bound to him. ISL10

# XI

# Tools or Machines?

1 First of all we must make it clear that we understand the distinction between *tools* and *machines*. SS102

2 The real distinction between tools and machines [. . .] is that tools are instruments by means of which we *do* things, but that machines are instruments for *making* things. NB88

3 As the machine demands in the operative a virtue of the will (conscientiousness and good will) or a sharp eye in the overseer, before the mechanical product can secure the technical perfection which is not only proper to the machine but its chief reason for existence, so the response of the craftsman's tool to the control of his hands demands in him a corresponding virtue. But this virtue is one of the mind, judgement. Those are in error, accordingly, who suppose that when the craftsman strives after technical excellence he is emulating the machine standard. And those are even more grievously mistaken who suppose that if the craftsman neglect his responsibility to exercise good judgement and skill in the actual performance of his work, the consequent lack of uniformity [. . .] will give to his work the vitality or liveliness which is characteristic of hand work. TY98–9

4 Here, perhaps, is the key to the problem. It is something to do with human responsibility: anything is a tool which you use to help you to do anything. Anything is a machine in so far as you help it rather than it you.

Thus, for the carpenter and the sculptor, a chisel is a tool.

But, at the other extreme, an automatic box-making apparatus is only a tool in a fanciful and deceptive sense,

for it does not help anyone to make boxes; it actually does the making itself, and the industrialist and his men help it to do so. The men help it by minding it and oiling it; the employer helps by keeping the men fed and warmed. The men, in fact, are simply sentient parts of the machine. They have no responsibility whatever for the form or quality of what the machine turns out. Nor has the industrialist any responsibility except in so far as he has it in his power to scrap the machine and get another if it does not make the kind of boxes which he wants.

[. . .]

Tools then are helps to men, but men help machines, and that is the difference.

Of course, the matter is complicated by the fact that there are innumerable sorts of apparatus, and that the line between tools and machines is difficult to draw.

[. . .]

Nevertheless, the distinction is clear in principle.

If you are responsible for the form and quality of the thing made, then whatever apparatus you use is a tool rather than a machine. And as that responsibility diminishes so the apparatus becomes more and more a machine until the point is reached when, as with the latest automatic machinery, the machinist has no responsibility whatever and becomes simply a machine himself, a robot, an instrument paid for by his employer as part of the cost of production. SS102–6

5 You can if you like, call tools machines or machines tools, but you cannot say there is no difference between doing things the way you intend and doing them the way the designer of the machine or tool intends. If I take a piece of iron and with my fingers and various tools (or machines if you prefer the word) shape that iron into the shape of a box, *because that's the kind of man I am* – that is one thing.

If I take a similar piece of iron and put it into one end of a machine (or tool if you prefer the word!) and it comes out at the other end a box, *because that's the kind of tool or machine it* is – that is quite another thing.

[. . .]

The test is always the relation between the work done and the man doing it. If the shape and quality of the things produced are matters for which the workman is responsible, that is one thing; if he is not responsible it is another. ACC115–6

6 [The] tool gives the maximum of control with the minimum of distraction. It is most important that the workman should not have to watch his instrument, that his whole attention should be given to the work. A sculptor does not see his hammer and chisel when he is carving, but only the stone in front of him. Similarly the hand press printer can give his whole attention to inking and printing, and hardly sees his press. [. . .] It is not a question whether machine work be better or worse than hand work – both have their proper goodness – it is simply a matter of difference. TY36–7

7 Whatever we may think of machinery in itself and as an agent for the production of things desired, we must remember its two-fold origin – the growth of capitalism and the dispossession of the peasantry. Machinery as has frequently been said, was not invented to make things better or even to help the workman. It was not introduced either by the workman or the designer of things to be made. Its origins were neither humanitarian nor artistic, but purely commercial.

[. . .]

The purpose of machinery was to save the labour which would have been required to make the vast quantities of things for which they envisaged markets and which, in the

absence of machinery, would have been altogether too costly to produce. That supply of labour was available. It had been made available by the landlordism which succeeded feudalism. What the avarice of merchants did not supply was supplied by the avarice of the new landed gentry. ACC80

8 It was perhaps inevitable that the history of machinery should be what it has been. It is difficult if not impossible to imagine any other chain of circumstances than those which actually occurred which could lead up to such an accumulation of capital as was necessary to make the invention and construction of machinery possible.* ACC79

9 It is perfectly possible to make good things by machinery. It is perfectly possible to make works of art in a proper sense of the word. But to bring this about it is necessary that the machines shall be owned and controlled by the designers of the things to be made. That is the thing which the historical introduction and ownership of machinery has not allowed. Machinery was not introduced by the workman in order that a different kind of thing, a machine made thing, might be made. It was introduced by men of business solely that money might be made and for no other reason whatever. ACC78

10 Machinery [. . .] does not, in fact, exist to make things at all [. . . but] to make the thing called profits. MM57

* 'The Protestant Reformation, for example, is far more a political than a religious event, and cannot be understood apart from the struggle of the rising bourgeoisie against the confinements of Feudalism. The Catholic Church in the Sixteenth Century was not only incomparably the greatest of Landowners, but was the ideological backbone of the feudal system, nationally and internationally. In England especially, the plunder of the Church played a big part in that primitive accumulation of capital without which the modern industrial world could never have come into existence.' *New English Weekly*, Jan 4, 1934, p. 285.

11 It is with reference to the things made that the question of machinery is chiefly of importance here. And it is precisely the things made which have been machinery's main failure. They have been failures for the simple reason that no man of business can afford to be disinterested.* Men of business are necessarily at the mercy of the undisciplined fancies of those who buy things and the undisciplined desire for money of those who advance the capital. Between the capitalist and the consumer the man of business is between the devil and the deepest part of the Atlantic Ocean. The growth and multiplication of joint-stock companies has developed in the investor a frame of mind morally indistinguishable from that of the usurer pure and simple. The spread of machine industry on commercial lines, and competition between rival manufacturers has brought it about that the buyer's fancy is the only test commercially applicable. And the buyer being, in the majority of cases, himself either a factory hand or a clerk in the business has no standards by which to judge the good quality of anything. ACC81–2

12 It might be urged, why all this to-do? Why not let the whole thing 'rip' as heretofore? [. . .] Why bother to do by reason what the process of time and man's natural tendency to the true and the good will do in any case? [. . .]

It is not true of human works that they are, like the dam of the beaver, the product of the blind instinct of animals. Man's works are primarily the product of his ideas and of

*[Disinterested', we would remind the reader, not 'uninterested'. Thus the workman is impartially free to consider only the good of the work to be done if he is to succeed as artist/maker. Moreover, 'it is the business of the artist to know how things ought to be made and to be able accordingly, as it is the business of the patron to know what things ought to be made, and of the consumer to know what things have been well and truly made and to be able to use them after their kind'. Coomaraswamy, op. cit, Vol. 1, p. 80.]

his imagination. Influences which have borne upon his mind have always changed the kind and quality of his works. It is indeed impossible to say at any point: here is the product of reason untouched by instinct; for man is an instinctive animal as well as a rational soul, and in any particular work reason and instinct impinge upon one another and the work is a product of both; moreover, man's consciousness is underlaid by his subconscious and acts which are not consciously reasoned are not necessarily simply instinctive. But to say that there is no need to appeal to reason, that things will right themselves without any such appeal, is precisely the doctrine which in four centuries of Protestantism has brought us to the present mess.
ACC113–4

13 Just as an ordinary sensible man may sometimes do silly things, so an admirable machine may be the instrument for making imbecilities.

And just as man may do unnatural things, things contrary to his nature, properly understood (for strange as it may seem to some philosophers, we hold, with Aristotle and others, that everything has its proper 'nature'), so a machine may be used, or even designed to make something contrary to the nature of machinery.

The simplest example of this kind of imbecility is the use of machinery to do what we call 'ornament' and the designing of machines to make 'ornaments'.

For, however little we recognise the fact, ornaments are 'in their nature' a kind of ikons. They are objects of worship; they represent what we consider, in however small a degree, lovely and lovable and holy. CMA50

14 If the use of ornaments is personal, so also is the making of them.

For the use of ornaments is a mental or spiritual one, and

the mental or spiritual is not patient either of dialectical exposition or of exact measurement.

It is therefore impossible to state precisely what shape or size is correct; it is only possible to give general rules.

Each separate image or ornament is only, and cannot be more than, an approximation to the truth, and thus all good art must be of its nature experimental.

I cannot say precisely how you can or should use an image of the God of Love.

You cannot say precisely how I can or should make one. You can and should give me directions; but you cannot say my prayers for me. CMA54–5

15 [Nevertheless] men may have pleasure in well-made factory products [. . .]. For though a good machine-made article does not exhibit all possible goodness – it does not, for example, exhibit the goodness of charity, of tenderness, of sweetness; in short, it does not exhibit the goodness of humanity – nevertheless it exhibits all the goodness that is possible to it, it being what it is – a sub-human production – the product of men who, willingly or unwillingly, have submitted to the discipline of the factory. [. . .] But sub-human things are not in themselves bad things. They may serve their purpose. And the man who sees them may see their functional suitability and be pleased by the sight.

And such functional suitability is, in its degree, holy. For it is logical and to that extent, it is good.

It fully satisfies the ratiocinative side of man's nature. For man is reasonable as well as wilful and, confronted by useful things, even if they are merely useful, he does not suffer the misery he suffers when confronted by the absurd, the illogical, the unreasonable. WL118–9

16 The whole of our trouble is the secularization of our life, so that we have descended to an animal condition of continual struggle for material goods. By sin – sin, that is to say,

self-will and self-worship – by sin man does not descend from the superhuman to the merely human, but from the superhuman to the sub-human. Strange fact! Man cannot live on the human plane; he must be either above or below it. The marvellous feats of our mechanized 'scientific' industrial world are not human feats. They are no more than the feats of highly intelligent animals and the more we perfect our mechanization so much the more nearly do we approach the impersonal life of bees or ants. AU282

# XIV

## *A Vision of Normal Society*

1 The activity of man is directed to an end. That end is contemplation – theologians call it 'the beatific vision'. Man's final end is God. All his activity in his earthly life is directed towards that end. The attainment of that end is the goal of all his doings. Art and prudence, religion and politics are only to be explained thus. There is no rhyme or reason otherwise in human life. Whatever is done, whatever is made, must be criticized as being in harmony with that end or as discordant with it. To set up a perfectly organized state is only reasonable if such a state is conducive to man's final beatitude. Human pleasure, the pleasure we have in good things, in using good things, knowing good things, seeing good things (and the word seeing includes all the other senses – but seeing is the best sense to name because it is the most obviously connected with man's rational nature) I say, the pleasure we have in good things is only explainable and only endurable if and when and because it is a foretaste of beatitude – it is a mark and a sign and promise of our divine destiny – our heavenly home. [. . .] all man's earthly activities are directed towards his final bliss. WL73–4

2 At the break-up of the medieval system two great disruptions were acting and inter-acting – the Reformation and the Renaissance. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the class of persons now called artists did not exist, nor was there such a thing as an architect's profession. There were simply various grades of workmen, skilled and less skilled, well known and honoured, or unknown and unhonoured. But the present distinction of classes among workmen was entirely undeveloped.

The modern distinction between the working classes, the middle classes and the upper classes was not to be found. There was a thing very different – different in its origins and in its effects. There was distinction of functions. There was no such thing as the gentleman as such or so called. The King was honoured as king, the Bishop as bishop, the Farmer as farmer, the Knight as military leader, the Mason as worker in stone, the Merchant as collector and distributor of goods, the Money-Lender as Jew, but no one honoured simply as gentleman or dishonoured as merely workman. It is unnecessary here to develop a treatise upon the social institutions and ideals of the middle-age. What is necessary is to show the effect of the loss of the Catholic mediaeval idea of functional distinction, as opposed to class distinction, upon the practice of the arts. And yet it must not be supposed that the idea of that time is something peculiarly either Catholic or mediaeval. It would be truer to say that it is simply humanly normal; that it was fostered by the Church rather than invented by her; that its almost complete victory was lost on account of sin and pestilence rather than by the uprising of other and equally good and normal things. AN226–7

3 It is an abnormal condition of things wherein we differentiate between ordinary workmen and artists. The normal differentiation is simply between one kind of artist and another. Thus in a normal human society a mason and a sculptor of images are simply different kinds of artist. The violent distinction of artist and not-artist could hardly exist among workmen in such civilisations as those of Rajput India or mediaeval Europe. Even in England the normal condition lingered up to the end of the eighteenth century, and in out-of-the-way places untouched by mass production and the factory it is still to be found. And, as among ordinary workmen, the makers of ordinary utilities, the

distinction between artist and non-artist does not normally exist, so in a normal state the distinction between art and 'fine' art is only made with difficulty, and is more of a philosophical distinction than a practical one. Sculpture and the making of furniture are both jobs in which due regard should be paid to the way the thing, image or table, ought to be made. And who will say that, whereas an image ought to be beautiful, a table need not be so? The conscious effort after beauty is categorically the thing which distinguishes the fine arts from others; but why deny such a conscious effort to one kind of workman and not to another? As practical people and people who suffer from the over-developed self-consciousness and introspection of modern 'artists', we may well complain that there is altogether too much talk about beauty. We may say: 'Look after goodness and truth, and beauty will take care of itself,' and, applying the Gospel, we may say: 'He that loseth his life shall save it,' as much in art work as in the work of salvation. AN281–2

4 The abnormality of our time, that which makes it contrary to nature, is its deliberate and stated determination to make the working life of men & the product of their working hours mechanically perfect, and to relegate all the humanities, all that is of its nature humane, to their spare-time, to the time when they are not at work. TY8

5 We artists represent the normal man, the maker of things. For us this age is less dazzling. And the modern world, though it give us titles and estates, though it pamper us and spoil us and flatter us, can only refuse us the one thing we hold desirable. It can give us an honoured place – it cannot, even if it would, give us an honourable job. AN191

6 Scientists have got to come off their high horses. The fact remains: art is a normal human activity as scientifically

controlled industry is not; for making things by human means for human use is the normal occupation of human beings, while the quantitative mass production methods which are the natural consequence of the scientific method are in their nature abnormal and sub-human. Art as a virtue of the practical intelligence is the wellmaking of what is needed – whether it be drain-pipes or paintings and sculptures and musical symphonies of the highest religious import – and science is that which enables us to deal faithfully with technique. As art is the handmaid of religion, science is the handmaid of art. LE15

7 This excessive subdivision [of mechanised production] is inevitable where profit-making is the motive. It is, however, the artist and the workman who are to be blamed, not the man of business. The man of business does his job very well. Certainly he has no right to be ruler, as he is at present, but it is our fault for allowing him to rule. And as good men must precede good law, and not vice versa, so the individual must revolt against the evil system and not wait until the many are prepared to revolt with him. AN98

8 My contention is that [. . .] we've got to make the best of modern conditions – no crying over spilt milk – and that the best will be made when all agree together to start with sheer reasonableness, continue with honesty, and let the end be what it may. LT209

9 I am only concerned to discover man, to disclose him. It seems obvious to me that if we could answer such a question as: 'What is man that thou art mindful of him?' and if our answer were generally accepted as the right one, and not only accepted but welcomed, we should not find the difficulty we find today in our multitudinous disagreement. Agree about meaning and the rest follows. A political form will be conceived to correspond with the accepted

end. Let man rediscover his norm and he will recreate normal politics and a normal society. It is the abnormal that must be planned beforehand – the bureaucracy, corporative or communist; the tyranny, military or capitalist. NB352

10 Though a unanimous society is primarily defined as one in which there is unity of mind among its people, and therefore unity of religious observance, mental unity is not its only characteristic. Religious unanimity pervades such a society in all departments of its life, and determines and colours not only social custom and behaviour, law and commerce, but also the whole business of agriculture, clothes, building and furniture, and from the meanest art of the crossing sweeper to the most final achievements of poets and architects, painters, sculptors and musicians, there is an indwelling conformity of mind pervading, informing and forming all things. Of nothing can it be said that it 'doesn't belong'. In such a society it is no more possible to discover a boot or a spade that is 'out of keeping' with other things than to find a religious or political opinion at variance with the communal mind. And in such a society this binding and informing power is a spiritual one. NB341–2

11 We deceive ourselves when we discover or think we discover a satisfying beauty in the works of even those societies which, moved by unanimity, are also moved by a unanimity of what seems to us the highest type, the most humane, the least barbarous. We may discover, and we do often discover, a beauty beyond our comprehension and beyond our emulation. We see the sculptures of Chartres or the paintings of Ajanta, Apollo of Tenea or the church of the Holy Wisdom at Constantinople, and, remembering that these works are as much the works of the whole civilisation in which they sprang as of the actual workmen who made

them, we are momentarily tempted to say: there, there was heaven on earth; there, there man arrived at fruition, at happiness, at fulfilment; O, that we were there ... But this is deception. Even such beauty is not our beauty, and we know that we would not return to any past century in the expectation of perfect happiness, nor find in any country delight unalloyed. Those works are not really what we desire; they are but reminders of it. They reflect or show forth the desirable reality, but they are not it. It is that reality which we must find, and, having found, portray. And that portrayal, though in the making of it we love it as a thing to be loved for its own sake (and thus even the maker of walking sticks or toothpicks, if he is to make them well, must make them as being images of the God and sharing the God's worship), is to be known simply as furniture, useful furniture, the fitting furniture of a civilisation directed heavenwards. Thus and thus only we shall escape the snare of desiring religion for the sake of art, for we shall no longer desire art. The artist will be simply the honest workman. NB346–7

12 Throughout human history culture has been the product of the work men did for their livings. BLH203

13 The Leisure State is founded upon a false angelism, a false notion of the fitness of men to enjoy themselves without the direct responsibility of each one to earn his living and that of his wife and children by his own work [. . .] It is the notion that matter is essentially evil and therefore work is essentially degrading. [. . .] that is the basis of our Leisure State – the release of man from his entanglement with matter. The highbrow exponents see it in highbrow terms – higher things, high art, beauty, contemplation ... Ordinary people are not thus constituted. For them it means simply a release from drudgery and insecurity, from slum-life and overcrowding, from underfed and unhealthy children. It

means more travel in motor-cars, at greater speeds, more racing, more football matches; in fact, more of everything but of that dreary business which industrialism has made of work – of which no one could be expected to wish anything but to see the last of it.

[This false notion] has no foundation in a generous spirituality. It is not the product of an overwhelming love of God, as though one should say with St. Paul: 'I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ.' Far otherwise! Here is no desire for the pure bliss of some beatific vision; here is nothing but a desire for release from drudgery and privation. [. . .] no idea more noble or even more human than to have a good time. For, don't you see, in the Leisure State people won't really love the 'good things' they will enjoy in such plenty. They won't love them in the sense that they will see them and use them as holy things, things in which and by which God is manifest. In reality they will despise everything. Things will be made only for passing enjoyment, to be scrapped when no longer enjoyable. [. . .] It is all a great illusion; the release from work does not and will not mean the love of a good life and of good things; it does not mean the City of God; it means, at the best, an impossible angelism and, at worst, an impossible aestheticism, the worship of the pleasure of sensation.
LE70–2

14 From one point of view the townsman is right. It is a lot of nonsense all this cackle about the beauty of the country. And the cackle would never have been heard if the towns had not become such monsters of indecency and indignity. The right and proper and natural development of human life unsullied by an insubordinate commercialism no more leads to ugly towns than to an ugly country side. On the contrary, the town properly thought of is the very crown and summit of man's creativeness and should be the

vehicle for the highest manifestation of his sensibility, his love of order and seemliness of dignity and loveliness. Man collaborates with God in creating – that, physically speaking is what he is for. The natural world, following, without the slightest deviation, the line of least resistance, blooms in a million million marvels of natural beauty. The beauty of flowers and trees and beasts and insects, the beauty of bones and muscles and crystals and clouds, is product of this unswerving but unconscious obedience. Man alone among created things can resist: man alone can willingly obey. Man alone can give thanks: man alone can respond and take a conscious and willing part in the universal creativity. Thus, properly thought of, man's works, alone of all material things, can have the spiritual qualities of tenderness and love, of humour and gaiety: and they alone can, on the other hand, have the qualities of wickedness and pride and silliness. AU231–2

15 Let us but understand this: Man knows himself as a being and not only as a doing and a becoming. Even the professing materialist knows it, though he will not admit it. And, so knowing himself, man demands inclusion in the author of his being, Being itself, God. And, as in the body, the members are subject to the head as directing, so in human society the members need a head to which they may be subject and a body of which they are the members. Men are the members of this body and they are beings. The head also must be a being [. . .] Therefore, as the head is the lord of the body, so Being itself, God, is the lord of all beings. And as man is incarnate, so it is fitting that Being itself should put on incarnation. And the Word was made flesh. NB353–4

# Epilogue

The end is the beginning and that, in the end, is what we shall discover to be the first thing which it is necessary to believe. What possible and desirable ends can fructify our imaginations and inspire a formality? I say God is man's final cause, and why should I let the reader off more lightly. He can do his own 'letting off', and the best way to make the burden light is to discover what the word God connotes and, in the process, to weed out all that it does not. I do not intend to let the reader off more lightly because all seemingly lesser burdens turn out to be more burdensome.
NB336